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The Enduring Effects of Early Literacy Experiences:
A Retrospective Interview Study

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

Karen Suzanne Sigmon Anderson

May 2011

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Dedication

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and encouragement of my family and friends who supported me throughout my doctoral program.

To my husband, Chuck Anderson

To my sons, Paul and Davis Anderson

To my parents, Powell and Virginia Sigmon

To my sister and her family, John, Cathi, Ginni-Beth, Rachel, and Preston Gann

To my extended family, Edna Anderson, Fred and Ann Anderson, and Dave, Claudine, and Clara Hunt

And to my best friend, Katie Fox

Thank you!

Acknowledgements

Many people provided support that made this dissertation a reality. I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Anne McGill-Franzen, Dr. Thomas Turner, Dr. Gary Skolits, and Dr. Mike Keene for their time and devotion during my many years at the University of Tennessee. I am especially grateful to Dr. McGill-Franzen for spending many hours guiding me through the preparation of this dissertation. Finally, I am grateful for the individuals who unselfishly shared their time and memories for use in my study.

Abstract

This qualitative interview study was designed to understand how early literacy experiences continue to influence individuals as they become adult readers. The study utilized a case study methodology that allowed detailed descriptions of participants' recollections of early literacy experiences and descriptions of the participants' current reading habits.

The researcher, working from a constructivist paradigm, worked to find evidence to explore what features of early reading experiences might compel an individual to turn to reading again and again, or to choose to abstain from reading. The following research questions guided this study: *“What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?”* *“What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?”* and *“What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults?”*

Seven participants shared their earliest memories of literacy experiences, as rooted in family and school contexts, along with explanations of the uses of reading in their adult lives. The researcher employed a typological analysis to determine how participants' memories of early literacy experiences impacted their adult reading habits. The many facets of early reading experiences that influenced the participants' reading habits could be categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. Most individuals experienced a combination of positive and negative literacy experiences, and the nature of these experiences influenced the participants' adult reading habits in particular ways.

The results of the analysis supported prior research in the field about the influence of teachers and the importance of early literacy instruction, and highlighted in particular, the emotional impact of successes or perceived failure in learning to read.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter Introduction

Readers engage in literacy activity for a variety of reasons. Individuals vary in terms of their desire to devote time to the act of reading. In both my personal life and in my professional teaching experience, I have seen children and adults who love reading, as well as children and adults who loathe reading. I am curious about how young children can become motivated to read throughout their lifetime. I designed this study to understand how early literacy experiences impact individuals as they become adult readers. In this chapter, I will explain how I became interested in the topic of the study. I will also introduce my research questions, explain the purpose and significance of the study, and identify the limitations of the study.

Genesis of Topic

For many years, I have been interested in the differences between my husband's and my desire for reading. I read everything that comes into my house, from the cereal box during breakfast, to the textbooks I purchase for college courses. I cannot throw away a piece of mail or a newspaper without reading it first. In contrast, my husband prefers to bypass all reading materials unless they are of the comic variety. A Major in

the United States Army, my husband finally finished his first novel during a slow period during his second deployment to Iraq.

What makes one person devour books like candy, while another discards reading materials without a thought? Ross (2006) explained that,

People who do not find reading pleasurable tend to view book reading the way most people view preparing an income tax return: it is hard to do, done under compulsion, and requires long blocks of uninterrupted time. Confident readers, in contrast, find reading effortless. They say that they pick up a book whenever they have a few spare minutes and frequently carry books with them in case they have to wait in line (p. 4).

Reading is a skill that requires practice; those who enjoy reading are choosing to read, therefore, getting the most practice. In contrast, reluctant readers often can read but choose not to read. Reluctant readers find reading to be anxiety provoking, and often retain the non-reading habit permanently. Reading is a lifelong habit developed early in a person's life; thus, it is imperative that young children become motivated by the pleasure of the reading experience.

Ample research exists about effective reading teachers (Sherman, 2004). Early literacy experiences are integral to an individual's future success in school and beyond. Are there characteristics of pedagogy that influence an individual's desire to read far into the future? If so, identifying such aspects would be helpful information for currently practicing teachers and for parents of young children. This study explores the topic: what aspects of early literacy experiences continue to influence readers into adulthood?

Research for this study is based on transcripts of memories of early literacy experiences as well as explanations of reading habits and social and professional activities as described by adult readers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what aspects of early literacy experiences continue to influence and motivate readers into adulthood. Instructional practices change in response to changing attitudes toward reading instruction, and those frequently changing perspectives on reading instruction demand new instructional methods, materials, and techniques. Because practice is significant for reading development, it is important to recognize which aspects of early experiences are most valuable for creating lifelong readers.

This study utilized a case study methodology that allowed detailed descriptions of participants' recollections of early literacy experiences and descriptions of the participants' current reading habits. Data for the current study were gathered from interviews with adult participants who were asked to search their archival memories from their primary years and recall elements of their earliest literacy experiences. Additional interview questions invited participants to discuss their current reading preferences, both in personal and employment settings. What features of early literacy experiences could compel an individual to turn to reading, again and again, or to choose

to abstain from reading altogether? This study addressed the following research questions:

- 1) What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?
- 2) What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?
- 3) What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults?

The data from this study reveal that elements of early literacy experiences have a lasting impact on those interviewed. This study offers parents and educators additional perspectives based on feedback from former students who are now adults. Information from this study is viable for today's parents and educators. Examining data from this study will allow individuals to consider the importance of particular early literacy experiences in the lives of children and adults.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are offered to clarify terms presented in this study.

Case Study: An exploration of a bounded system, a case, over time using detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 1998).

Coding: Tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to chunks of data compiled during a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

External Auditor: An individual who has no known connection to this study, so that he/she may examine the findings as supported by the data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Generalization: A statement, used in a typological analysis, that expresses a relationship found in the particular context under investigation. Generalizations do not imply generalizability to contexts outside of the study (Hatch, 2002).

Informed Consent: A document, signed by the researcher and participant, which ensures protection of participants from any harm when participating in the study, and allows participants to withdraw from the study if desired (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

Interview: A data collection strategy used by researchers to explore informants' experiences and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hatch, 2002).

Interview Protocol: Open-ended questions that are designed to elicit responses from participants about their experiences and understandings of the phenomenon under investigation (Hatch, 2002, Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Multiple Case Study: Research that involves more than one case (Creswell, 1998).

Not-reader: A term to describe an individual who can read, but chooses to read only infrequently (Lockledge & Matheny, 1987).

Phenomenon: A particular situation or activity to be studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Review of Literature: A written account that involves identifying, locating, and analyzing documents containing information that is related to the research questions (Gay & Airasian, 2003).

Self-Efficacy: An individual's self-judgment of their ability to carry out courses of action required to achieve a goal (Putman, 2009; Klassen, 2010).

Struggling Reader: (also, striving reader or nonreader) An individual who has not acquired minimum reading ability despite having normal intelligence and despite having received adequate instruction (McCormick, 1994). According to Johnston and Allington (1991), these readers could also be called children-with-different-schedules-for-reading-acquisition or children-we-have-failed-to-teach-to-read.

Teacher: A person who has a vision for a student's future and has been given the authority and the responsibility to craft daily teaching practices to move toward a realization of that vision (Sherman, 2004).

Transcript: A recorded or written account of the conversation that occurred during the interview or other interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hatch, 2002).

Typological Analysis: A type of analytical process which initially requires a division of the data set into predetermined categories (Hatch, 2002).

Typology: Topics of interest which are used to form questions in an interview protocol. Interviews should elicit evidence about participants' perspectives on these topics of interest (Hatch, 2002).

Significance of the Study

“Reading is obviously related to the literacy of a nation, which in turn is related to the quality of life of its citizens” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004, p. 1). According to available research, a nation of readers would produce a nation of positive contributors to society. Thus, it is important to discover who is reading, and what elements of their early childhood experiences caused them to enjoy reading. Educators frequently evaluate instructional techniques based on the test scores of current students. Immediate feedback is certainly imperative to identify successful techniques or to determine those that need to be revised or dropped from the curriculum. However, the long-term influences of those early literacy environments are rarely considered. The quality of reading experience, regardless of other factors, may be a determinant in reading motivation and reading development. In order to achieve the primary goal of reading education, which is to prepare self-motivated and proficient readers, it is important to understand the reading experience. The findings from this study may be helpful to educators in devising a plan of action for motivating readers, and helpful for parents who are wondering how to encourage a lifelong love of reading in their children. This study combined with similar studies may help improve the overall quality and reach of early literacy experiences.

Rationale

Successful literacy “involves adopting dominant ways of being relative to literacy tasks encountered in school and society” (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 25). People pursue literacy for the opportunities it provides. Teaching a child to read is probably the best gift the educational system can offer.

Although education is a field employing constant evaluation and change, some activities have prevailed for generations. For example, educators often assign finding vocabulary words in the dictionary and copying the definitions. This frequently assigned task has several supposed benefits – to find meanings of new words, to practice using a dictionary, and to improve handwriting skills. Yet, the dictionary assignment remains a dark spot in student memories of the primary grades. It is not actually locating the word or even copying they do not like, but the fact that they do not understand the words they copy from the dictionary. Students in the classes race to be the first to finish the task, but have no better understanding of the words when the assignment is completed. At best, they have enough handwriting practice to make their fingers sore. Children might note disliking the task but might be unable to verbalize a reason for their response, making evaluation of the activity difficult. Adults, on the other hand, have had years to ponder the events from their early school years and are able to offer an opinion reflecting that contemplation. This study scratches the surface of a relatively unexplored area of research – the enduring long term effects of early literacy experiences.

Limitations

The data produced by this study were collected by questioning and carefully listening to participants who described their personal experiences as beginning readers and as adult readers. The results might have been limited by the researcher's ability to ask appropriate questions to elicit memories from participants about their early reading instruction. Findings were further limited by the participants' abilities to remember details of their early childhood reading instruction, and by their ability to clearly and truthfully articulate experiences. However, it was assumed that the information supplied by the participants was trustworthy, and that the participants had reliable memories of their experiences. The findings in the study were also limited by the researcher's and the participants' ability to make connections between early childhood reading experiences and the effects of those experiences on the adult as a reader.

This qualitative study included seven participants, selected by the researcher based on their desire to tell their story and their ability to remember details about early childhood reading experiences. Case study research must be bounded to permit intensive study of each case, and for this reason, it has limited generalizability (McCormick, 1994). It would be difficult to predict whether the participants in this study represented other adult readers. As a result, the data is not generalizable to other populations. In order to be generalized to a specific population, the number of participants would need to be significantly larger. These limitations should not imply the study is without value. The results of this study will add to the growing area of research

about early literacy instruction and the reading habits of adults. This study was designed to bring meaning and understanding to the participants' early literacy experiences and their current reading habits.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what aspects of early literacy experiences continue to influence and motivate readers into adulthood. Chapter one introduces the topic, defines the research questions, and explains the purpose and limitations of the study. Chapter two examines the related literature, including case studies of children and adult readers, and current research concerning reading instruction and reading motivation. Chapter three describes the research methodology and gives specific details about how the research was conducted. Chapter four presents written narratives about each of the seven participants in this study. Findings from the study, based on generalizations gleaned from the typological analysis, are found in chapter five. Chapter six summarizes the study and offers implications for future research.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

Chapter Introduction

What is literacy, and what defines a literate child or adult? A simple explanation is that print literacy involves being able to read words on a page and then attaching meaning to those words. Ross (2006) defined literacy in the following way:

To be literate is to be at home in a world that is thoroughly permeated by texts: job application forms, customs declaration forms, bus schedules, driving tests, operator's manuals, maps, restaurant menus, "best before" dates on perishable food, ingredient labels on packaged food, hurricane warnings running along the bottom of the television screen, birthday cards, advertising, and so on (p. 3).

Reading is more than an enjoyable experience. Readers remember information from books as they remember other life experiences. As with other experiences, persons remember from books "what we understand and what is significant to us" (Smith, 2004, p. 190). Readers become better readers by reading, and reading helps individuals improve their comprehension skills and increase their vocabulary (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Krashen, 2004). These increased skills enable readers to be more successful in other academic tasks, thus, reading generally makes individuals smarter (Smith, 2004).

The United States experienced widespread changes early in the twentieth century. The need for human skills fluctuated as profit was made from rapid-process

production facilities and technological innovations. The growth of consumerism, the rise of knowledge industries, and the increase of computer technology made communication with words and symbols imperative for profit making (Brandt, 2001). Literacy became vital to economic competition, and, as a result, literacy was a valued human skill.

Brandt explained the results of these changes:

Literacy became a key resource, a raw material, for the American economy of the twentieth century, and that in turn has had untold impact on the ways that literacy is accessed, learned, and rewarded- it affects the materials we use for literacy, the routes we have or don't have to learning it, the public meanings that are ascribed to it, the social inequities that cling to it. This is not to imply that people pursue literacy only as a job skill or that being literate ensures rewarding work.... It is to say that the powers of a basic mass literacy, which developed out of Protestant evangelizing and common schools of the nineteenth century, became an irresistible energy source- a public utility- that was harnessed for American capitalism in the twentieth century (Brandt, 2001, p. 188).

A review of literature related to literacy studies is impressive. Far-reaching studies examine the social and cultural dimensions of literacy in disciplines including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. This chapter contains a review of the related literature concerning the importance of early literacy experiences. Studies about the retrospective views of literacy experiences as remembered by adult readers are described.

Reading and Cognition

During its history as a field of inquiry, reading has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Researchers have examined the reading act, resulting in conceptualizations of skills and subskills, cognitive processes, and developmental stages. These fragments have been assembled into different models as new information becomes available through reading research. The result is a multiplicity of perspectives on reading. One practice that has remained virtually unchallenged as a means of improving reading ability and one whose positive benefits have been proven by research is that of persistently performing the act of reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Krashen, 2004). Reading practice has been shown to be a significant factor in acquiring literacy skills. Because reading practice is so important to the development of reading skills, finding ways to motivate individuals of all ages to read is a challenge of reading research.

In the Bible, Jesus delivered the parable of the sower, proclaiming, "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Matthew 13:12). This 'rich get richer and poor get poorer' principle, dubbed "Matthew effects," is described in the reading research by Keith Stanovich. Together with Anne Cunningham, these researchers have applied this concept to reading and found that good readers continue to read often and become even better readers, while poor readers spend very little time reading and thus do not improve their reading skills (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Cunningham and

Stanovich found that there is a huge difference in reading volume between avid and reluctant readers. Brandt (2001) summed up the discrepancies in reading by saying, "The rich get richer, the literate get more literate" (p. 169).

My dissertation research focused on researchers including Cunningham and Stanovich, researchers whose work revealed long term effects on individuals based on their frequent or not-so-frequent reading habits. Research supports the notion that individuals who engage in pleasure reading will experience higher incomes and increased job satisfaction when compared to their non-pleasure reading peers. "Reading has cognitive consequences that extend beyond its immediate task of lifting meaning from a particular passage. Furthermore, these consequences are reciprocal and exponential in nature" (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001, p. 137). The simple act of reading builds vocabulary and increases the ability to read fluently. There is a large and unique contribution that independent, out of school reading makes toward reading ability, aspects of verbal intelligence, and general knowledge about the world (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). It is important to provide all children with as many reading experiences as possible. Early success at reading begins a positive feedback loop, in which reading increases ability to read (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). "Intelligence has never been found to be an important factor in learning to read, although reading appears to contribute significantly to intelligence" (Smith, 2004, p. 307).

Allington (1977) found that children who attend remedial reading classes participated in an abundance of activities, but little reading was accomplished. In fact,

Allington (1977) found that a mean of only forty-three words in context was read by each student during a reading session. The primary focus of these lessons appeared to be isolated skills instruction instead of reading. Suggestions for increasing the number of words read in context during reading classes included allowing the reader to read material which they can read fluently, and engaging the reader in multiple readings of the same selection (Allington, 1977).

Literacy scholars explain that reading skills acquired in the primary grades affect children for the rest of their lives. Dickinson (1998) posited that reading and writing were important skills learned in primary grades. Theorists agree that the bulk of vocabulary growth during a child's lifetime occurs indirectly through language exposure rather than through direct teaching. Most speech is lexically impoverished, while print includes a variety of vocabulary, including rarer words, and therefore is a better vocabulary builder (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). This means that children will be exposed to a greater variety of vocabulary words from reading than from participating in conversation. Researchers posit that reading volume, rather than oral language exposure, is the prime contributor to individual differences in children's vocabularies. Children's books contain vocabulary that is not often found in oral speech. Cunningham and Stanovich found that the rarity of words found in children's books is greater than that in almost all adult conversation, and the words in children's books are more rare than those in prime time adult television. Thus, children will be exposed to a richer variety of vocabulary from reading books than from conversations or from watching television.

Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study of children from first grade until eleventh grade. The students were tested on literacy skills in first grade, and during the next ten years, any available standardized test scores were recorded. “This study showed us that an early start in reading is important in predicting a lifetime of literacy experience- and this is true regardless of the level of reading comprehension ability that the individual eventually attains” (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997, p. 146.) In summary, Cunningham and Stanovich found that reading will make you smarter.

The Role of Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Engagement

Motivation is responsible for reading engagement or for disengagement from reading, for the upward or downward spiral of achievement. “Reading motivation is the individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 405). Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) suggested that reading motivation consists of 11 dimensions of reading that fall into 3 categories.

The first category of reading motivation includes beliefs about competence and efficacy. Self-efficacy is a personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a particular task. Self-efficacy varies among domains, because children may be more motivated in one area than they are in another area (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Students whose self-efficacy for reading is low often

resist reading. However, the same students probably exert considerable effort and energy towards activities they like and for which they feel self-efficacious. Self-efficacy develops as a result of feedback from family, school, and community throughout the developmental years.

Providing clear goals for reading tasks and feedback on progress toward success increased self-efficacy and strategies for text comprehension. Those who have positive self-efficacy will be more willing to have a preference to attempt a challenge. An example of a challenge is more difficult reading material. Those who have a poor sense of efficacy may develop work avoidance, or the desire to avoid reading activities.

The second category of reading motivation focuses on the intrinsic or extrinsic purposes and goals children have for reading. Intrinsic reading motivation is an individual's enjoyment of reading activities that are performed for their own sake and pursued during free time. Intrinsic goals as they pertain to learning include curiosity, involvement, and importance. Curiosity is the desire to read about a particular topic of interest. Involvement refers to the enjoyment experienced from reading certain kinds of literacy or informational texts, also referred to as "getting lost in a book" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 407). Importance refers to the belief that reading is valuable.

Extrinsic goals are performance goals. They include recognition, reading for grades, and competition. Recognition refers to the pleasure in receiving a tangible form of recognition for success in reading, such as a reward. Reading for grades is the desire to be positively evaluated by the teacher. Competition is an extrinsic goal that is the desire to outperform others in reading. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation cannot be

considered opposites. Both can predict children's reading amount and frequency (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). One difference is that extrinsic motivation can result in a termination of the behavior by an individual once the incentive is received. For this reason, extrinsic rewards can lead students to become dependent on additional rewards and recognition in order to continue their reading.

The third category of reading motivation addresses the social aspects of reading. The social aspect of reading is the sharing of the meanings gained from reading with others. Compliance is reading to meet the expectations of others.

Students with high intrinsic motivation, a learning goal orientation, and high self-efficacy are usually active readers and high achievers. It is believed that motivational processes are the foundation for goals and strategies in reading. Students who read frequently improve their comprehension of text (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). A person who is intrinsically motivated to read and who believes that he or she is a capable reader will put forth effort to read more difficult texts, and they will seek out books that fulfill their intrinsic goals. "In sum, becoming an excellent, active reader involves attunement of motivational processes with cognitive and language processes in reading" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 408).

Research on reading motivation has been guided by the engagement perspective, which builds on theories of motivation, cognition, knowledge acquisition, and social development (Guthrie, 1996; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). According to Guthrie (1996), reading engagement is defined as the "motivated use of strategies for reading." His research suggested that engaged readers have deep-

seated motivational goals, which include being committed to the subject matter, wanting to learn the content, and believing in one's own ability.

Engaged readers focus on text meaning and avoid distractions. They are devoted to reading a variety of genres and they value the learning outcomes. Disengaged readers are inactive. They avoid reading and give minimal effort. They do not enjoy reading and they do not become absorbed in the literature. Engagement is related to self-confidence and command of reading and writing. Intrinsic motivation is to enjoy reading for its own sake. On-task behavior points to engagement. These are all motivational aspects of engagement.

“Engaged reading is strongly associated with reading achievement” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 404). Students with high self-efficacy are likely to be intrinsically motivated to read (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Engagement in reading may substantially compensate for low family income and educational background (Guthrie, 2001). Engaged readers can overcome obstacles to achievement, and they become agents of their own reading growth. “As students become engaged readers, they provide themselves with self-generated learning opportunities that are equivalent to several years of education” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 404).

Research on Pleasure Reading

Ivey (1999) conducted a qualitative case study to learn about individual middle school readers. The study took place in a sixth-grade classroom, and included students who had experienced success with reading and students who had not experienced success with reading. Ivey stated that other studies had found that young adolescents do not read as much as they had in earlier years, and that they develop negative attitudes toward reading as they enter the middle grades (Ivey, 1999). After observing the students in two sixth-grade classrooms, Ivey selected three students who were experiencing different levels of success with reading, and who were willing to share information about themselves as readers. The goal was to collect data that would capture the essence of individual students' reading. Each of the three individuals had complex reading habits. They could each perform well in certain settings and with certain materials, but their reading performance was inhibited within certain conditions. Ivey (1999) found that the students' book preferences were all distinctly personalized. Also, they preferred books that were not cognitively challenging. It was suggested by the researcher that middle school teachers must learn to recognize the reading activities that students consider relevant and valuable in order to increase and maintain students' inclination to read in school. Ivey stated, "In short, I believe that who middle school students are as readers and who they will become is shaped by the context of instruction" (Ivey, 1999, p. 177).

Ivey and Broadus (2001) studied 1,765 sixth-grade students in two areas of the United States. The students, who represented 23 schools, answered surveys consisting of open-ended, short answer, and checklist questions. From a 79% response rate, 31

students were selected for more in depth follow-up interviews. Researchers, who were assistant professors at state- supported universities, hoped to use the data from the surveys to identify general features of instruction that could work in many different classrooms, and to recognize practices of educators in middle schools that could help with student motivation.

The middle school students overwhelmingly selected free choice reading time and instructor read-aloud time as their favorite parts of the language arts class time. On the novels selected by the teachers, there was much dissention, with some students saying a particular book had them *hooked*, while others found the same title to be a negative reading experience. Overall, the students expressed their desire to choose what they read from interesting materials, to be given time to read the personally selected books, and to have opportunities to hear their teacher read aloud. The findings of this study might not appear profound, but it suggested that the difficulty lay in connecting free-choice reading and teacher read-aloud time to the curriculum goals (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001)

After hearing a suggestion that one positive reading experience, or one *home run* book, could establish someone as a reader, Von Sprecken, Kim, and Krashen (2000) questioned 214 fourth-grade students in three elementary schools in the Los Angeles area. Over half of the students said they became interested in reading after only one book, which they could still name. Krashen (2004) noted that many studies showed a strong relationship between poverty and reading scores, and determined that children from low-income families had little access to books, in school and out, compared with

children from high-income families. It was not surprising that schools with large numbers of poor children often had inadequate school and classroom libraries. Children without adequate environmental support to learn to read would depend on teachers to fill the instructional gap (Lockledge and Matheny, 1987).

Retrospective Studies of Becoming Literate

Sponsors of Literacy

An influential study of the changing conditions of literacy learning by Deborah Brandt (2001) is based on interviews conducted with 80 people living in Wisconsin. Participants were born between the years 1895 and 1985 and ranged in age from 10 to 98 years old at the time of the interviews. Brandt described the framework of her study:

This study follows in the tradition of life-story research, which is a loose confederation of historical, sociological, psychological, and phenomenological inquiry. This form of research serves multiple purposes and employs various methodologies, including the collection of open-ended autobiographical monologues, structured and less structured interviews, and biographical surveys. What these diverse traditions have in common is an interest in people's descriptions of their own life experiences." (Brandt, 2001, p. 10)

The interviews allowed participants to recall and share their earliest memories of accumulating literacy, and to share their perspectives on how literacy has affected their

lives. Brandt learned about how ordinary people learned to read and write, and how they have made use of that learning at various times in their lives. She focused on people, institutions, and motivations that contributed to literacy learning, both in school and in home environments. When describing her interview process, Brandt explained, “I devised an interview script by which I tried to lead participants through a chronological account of both ordinary and extraordinary encounters with writing and reading, lingering to explore their detailed recollections of the literal settings, people, and materials that animated their memories” (Brandt, 2001, p. 12).

Many of the adult participants recalled pleasant times of reading stories with their parents. Some participants could even remember exactly what books were on their parents’ bookshelves. Brandt (2001) discovered that reading was frequently understood as an important bonding activity for children and parents. Brandt’s interviews reinforced the notion that parents are the first teacher their children meet, and parents are the teachers that stay on the job for the longest time.

Brandt’s research focused on the acquisition of reading and writing skills. She discovered that reading was frequently understood as an important bonding activity for children and parents. Writing, however, was not encouraged. In fact, observable writing activity was often in the form of bill paying or corresponding with relatives, and children were not allowed to take part. Brandt added, “What most surprised me in the interviews was how differently people described the settings of early reading and writing and the feelings surrounding their early encounters with each” (Brandt, 1994, p. 461).

One individual remembered his mother reading to him every night, but commented that writing was seen as wasteful and, therefore, discouraged.

Brandt writes about an “analytical approach to literacy learning that I came to call sponsors of literacy” (Brandt, 2001, p.18). Sponsors of literacy are agents in a reader’s life who enable, support, teach, and model literacy. But while mentors are positive models for struggling readers, Brandt explains that sponsors of literacy can also withhold or suppress literacy in order to gain advantage by it. Sponsors of literacy were often identified by participants in Brandt’s study as powerful figures who gave of their resources to help the participants, but both parties benefited from the relationship. An example was churches, who would offer reading instruction to members so that the members would be better able to read the bible, thus helping the church to further its mission. Brandt explained, “sponsors seemed a fitting term for the figures who turned up most typically in people’s memories of literacy learning: older relatives, teachers, religious leaders, supervisors, military officers, librarians, friends, editors, influential authors” (Brandt, 2001, p. 19).

While there are many lessons about literacy that can be learned from the stories that the participants shared, Brandt offers a caution about retrospective studies. “Accounts of past events inevitably are rendered through the perspective of the present. People reflect on- indeed, refashion- a memory in terms of its significance for how things have turned out, whether in terms of personal circumstances or shared culture” (Brandt, 2001, p. 12).

Encounters beyond Print Literacy

Selfe and Hawisher (2004) interviewed 350 people by oral and online interviews. They explored the participants' literacy learning, taking into account the new technologies that developed in the last part of the 20th century. The data, gathered over six years, revealed how informational technology has (or why it has not) inched into the lives and homes of people in the United States. The authors of this study remind readers that, "We can understand literacy as a set of practices and values only when we properly situate our studies within the context of a particular historical period, a particular cultural milieu, and a specific cluster of material conditions" (Self and Hawisher, 2004, p. 5).

From the initial interviews, 20 individuals, ages 14-60 years old, were presented as case studies in the book, *Literate Lives in the Information Age*. These 20 participants were selected because they allow understanding into how personal computers came into homes, they grew up under different circumstances and with a 60 year age span, and they have stories that the authors related to on a personal level. The educational levels of these 15 women and five men varied, with 16 having high school diplomas and five holding doctoral degrees. This study, similar to Brandt's (2001) study, was grounded in oral-history and life-history research. A unique feature of

Selfe and Hawisher's research was to involve most participants as co-authors for the chapters about their lives (Selfe and Hawisher, 2004).

The case studies of these participants provided a life history of each individual, with an emphasis on when and how technology entered into their lives. Participants described their memories of first seeing a computer, or first having a computer in their school or in their home. Individuals discussed the ways in which they were able to learn more about technology, and how they used technology for their school or for their work. Many participants explained how they have become sponsors of technology literacy for a parent, a sibling, or a child.

Clearly, electronic media broadened the definition of *reading* beyond the confines of a bound piece of literature. Selfe and Hawisher (2004) noted that print literacy was only one of many literacies. Consider that in the 1980s, computers were rare and expensive; yet, in the first decade of the twentieth century, personal computers were commonly found in schools and homes. As new forms of literacy are invented, they join existing literacies instead of replacing them. Brandt (2001) called this lamination, or layering different forms of literacy. Traditional and new literacies coexist and overlap, and the effect might be different for different individuals. A literate 60 year-old individual, for example, may look different from a literate 20 year-old. Self and Hawisher (2004) said that from the years 1978 until 2000, literacy and computer technology became so linked in the minds of most people that, by the end of the century, many did not consider students to be fully literate unless they could communicate within electronic environments. In addition, Self and Hawisher (2004) remind us that literacies have life

spans. They emerge, compete, and fade depending on a complex combination of historical, material, and cultural factors. Research must consider new literacies when discussing the reading habits of different age groups.

Struggling and Striving Adult Readers

Achieving Failure

Peter Johnston (2000) selected three reading disabled adults to become part of his study. The participants, called by pseudonyms Jack, Bill, and Charlie, had struggled with reading problems throughout their lives. Johnston conducted a series of interviews to learn about their specific situations and the history that led to their reading failure. Johnston's research into reading failure identified two main differences between good and poor readers. The first difference is that poor readers process verbal information more slowly than others (Johnston, 2000, p. 265). According to Johnston, the differences in processing speed are difficult to change with literacy education. The second difference between good and poor readers that Johnston recognized entails mental processes that are used by readers. Good readers involve many strategic and metacognitive processes as they read, while poor readers rely on a very few strategies. The good news, according to Johnston's research, is that literacy education at any age can introduce disabled readers to additional strategies that will improve their reading skills.

Johnston cited Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on psychological research, and determined that an understanding of reading failure cannot come from isolated tests of an individual's reading skills. Instead, a researcher must examine the cognitive, affective, social, and personal history of the learner (Johnston, 2000). According to Johnston, "Until we can integrate the depth of human feeling and thinking into our understanding of reading difficulties, we will only have a shadow of an explanation of the problem and ill-directed attempts at solutions" (Johnston, 2000, p. 286). In Johnston's study, adults were chosen as participants because adults have access to more mental processes than younger children, and the adults can offer verbal reports about the past events in their lives. The adults' ages were 26, 43, and 45 years old, and their reading levels ranged from early kindergarten reading level to third grade reading level. None of the men had completed high school, but all were steadily employed. Each participant attended eight sessions with Dr. Johnston, where they completed various types of literacy assessments as well as introspective and retrospective interviews. The three adults expressed overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and confusion that were traced to each individual's earliest reading experiences.

The participants identified the approximate times in their elementary school years when they realized they were having difficulty reading. From those earliest times, each participant could recall specific coping strategies that were used to survive the educational environment that became a very negative experience. The participants wanted to avoid being labeled stupid, so they avoided reading whenever possible. They learned to listen to everything that was said by the teacher and other students, so they

could memorize the information. They sat in the front of the class and acted very kind to the teacher. Some students gained attention by becoming the class clown. One participant, Bill, recalled walking his teacher out to her car every day, and sitting in the front of the room so he would look like he was working really hard. He was so successful at charming his teachers that he ended up with a B average in his high school classes.

These participants knew that they were not having success with reading, but they would not ask for help, because they didn't want to be labeled as stupid. In fact, the longer they experienced reading failure, the more convinced they became of the fact that they, indeed, suffered from intellectual problems. Jack commented that he hated the end of summer vacation, because it meant he was getting into a new grade with a new teacher. His classmates already knew that he couldn't read, and when it was time for him to read, the other students would say, "He can't read," and the teacher would move on to someone else. Jack decided that he must be mentally retarded. According to Johnston, "thinking of yourself as having low intelligence is highly unmotivating and is probably the most detrimental to learning" (Johnston, 2000, p. 281).

Individuals who experience reading difficulty often avoid practice in reading. Without reading practice, they are unable to build on their existing reading skills. Their reading problems increase as a result of their avoidance of print. Johnston says that "Listening for oral instructions and bluffing are effective only for attaining short-term survival goals, but are self-defeating in terms of the long-term goal of learning to read" (Johnston, 2000, p. 271).

Society places a strong emphasis on literacy. Because it is expected for people to be literate, adults who are not literate are painfully aware that they are considered inadequate. The adults in Johnston's study took a preventative approach to their reading problem, which involved avoiding print in their lives. Charlie said that he often pretended he had forgotten his reading glasses. Bill said that whenever he was faced with a meeting that dealt with written information, he would arrive early to talk to others about the meeting agenda; therefore he would be able to participate in discussions when the meeting began. Charlie mentioned that he uses the prices on the gas pumps to determine which gas he should use in his car, but this has caused him to accidentally use diesel fuel. In all cases, the participant's family members were aware of their reading problems, and the family members helped by reading and typing reports when needed.

According to Johnston, reading failure can be linked to early instructional practices and to the failure to detect an inaccurate concept about reading. It is important to recognize and correct misconceptions or missing conceptions about various aspects of reading (Johnston, 2000). However, because disabled readers develop coping strategies that enable them to survive academic settings, they often do not receive appropriate reading instruction. Johnston explained that as adults, disabled readers become busy with their family and professional lives, and while they do not forget about their reading problems, they often do not seek reading help. Admitting a need for help requires adults to face the fact that they did not learn what others learned during their schooling years. They have come to believe that they are stupid, and that

the goal of learning to read is largely unattainable. The resulting anxiety that they feel can cause disabled readers to shut down and go blank. This is one reason why adults who do begin basic education courses experience a one in three dropout rate (Johnston, 2000).

The men in Johnston's study viewed learning to read as a long-term goal, but short-term goals and obligations continued to take precedence. Bill tried to improve his own reading skills by watching Sesame Street with his children, looking up words in the dictionary and struggling to gain meanings, and watching movies with subtitles. He also tried to read children's books to his own children, until his eight year-old began pointing out mistakes he was making. He stopped reading to his children then, but he knew he was going to have to find help with reading. Jack and Bill had each reached positions in their career that required more reading, and avoiding print was no longer possible. For Charlie, an upcoming promotion was requiring more reading for his current job, and his part-time Army Reserve job was suffering because he wasn't taking the written promotion tests. The men were drawn to the reading clinic, where Johnston was helping adults who were experiencing reading difficulties. The reading clinic was beneficial because it was free for the individuals, and they were able to work with tutors who really cared about their progress.

Participants in this study experienced a high level of anxiety when faced with a task involving reading. Johnston found that anxiety is often a problem with disabled readers. "The effect of anxiety in reading difficulty cannot be overestimated, although its circular causal properties are difficult to demonstrate" (Johnston, 2000, p. 278).

When given a new page of text to read, each man had a problem of scanning ahead to determine the difficult words that they were about to encounter, resulting in worry over the text even before the reading was started. Johnston learned that Bill was unable to employ strategies used by efficient readers. Instead, Bill reread sections of text, looked to his memory to form associations, and tried to use letter and sound relationships.

The individuals in Johnston's study received intervention through a university reading clinic. When they mentioned their participation in the clinic, they would use phrases including "going to see the doctor" and "getting help with dyslexia." By making their reading failure sound like a medical problem, they felt less self-conscious about receiving help. Johnston says that using a title like dyslexia has a liberating social value in separating the concepts of literacy and intelligence (Johnston, 2000). The participants reported being surprised at the number of friends and co-workers who also admitted having reading difficulties. As their reading skills improved, their confidence level also improved. Jack, who had decided he was mentally retarded, had blamed himself when his own children started having difficulty in school. But as his reading improved, he realized that he didn't have an intelligence problem. Only then did he wonder why he wasn't given better reading instruction during his elementary school years.

Society equates literacy with intelligence (Johnston, 2000). Teachers treat less able students differently from more able students. The struggling students feel extreme loneliness, thinking that no one else has a problem. Disabled readers who later learn that they can read must contemplate what might have been, if they had learned to read

at an earlier age (Johnston, 2000). Although it is possible to offer reading remediation to adults, a reading problem will be more difficult to address than if it had been detected during the early elementary years. Johnston asserted, “The consequences of such an emphasis on educationally modifiable components strongly suggest, in contrast to most current models of reading disability, that reading failure can be prevented” (Johnston, 2000, p. 286). Marie Clay’s (1972) research agreed with Johnston, finding that children who are experiencing reading problems can be identified within six months to a year after entering school. Early detection of reading problems allows educators the opportunity to offer intensive reading instruction to these students. Imagine how different Jack, Bill, and Charlie’s case studies would have been if they had been offered appropriate reading instruction during their earliest school years.

Successful Adult Dyslexics

Achieving Success

Striving readers were the focus of Rosalie Fink’s study, described in the book, *Why Jane and John Couldn’t Read- and how they learned*. Fink’s (2006) study involved carefully selected individuals who had struggled with severe reading difficulties, yet became successful in their professional and personal adult lives. The study was designed to answer these questions: What contributes to the resilience of these readers? What strategies do they use to overcome their reading difficulties?

Fink located participants by distributing notices about her planned study at various professional conferences, explaining that she was looking for individuals who had struggled with reading difficulties. Prospective participants were screened by telephone interviews, and a case history was taken. The selected adult participants were equal numbers of males and females who were all highly successful in their professions. Half of the adults had struggled with reading, and the other half had not struggled with reading. Case histories of the 66 striving readers confirmed that, as children, the individuals had failed to respond to interventions in reading, and were still experiencing reading difficulties through at least third grade. Most participants were white individuals from middle to upper middle class families, and all participants lived in the United States.

Data for the study was collected by face-to-face interviews with participants, any available diagnostic reports, information from parents or spouses, and information from public sources such as journal articles. Although Fink's initial questions did not focus on interest, she found that individual interest emerged from the data as a powerful result. The striving readers discussed in Fink's book told about struggles and frustrations, which ultimately turned into resilience and success (2006). Each participant had a different story, but the common theme was that each individual had a burning desire to know more about a favorite topic (p. 8). This allowed each reader to become familiar with the vocabulary and themes that were specific to their favorite types of books. These participants gained extensive practice within their area of interest, which led to increased fluency and the development of reading skills. The journeys of these

participants provided insights into the learning process of striving readers who overcame reading difficulties.

The case studies of each participant showed that, despite the many obstacles faced by these individuals, each had a passion, and that passion ultimately led to success both in their personal and professional lives. Individuals in Fink's study became skilled readers, but they still experienced difficulty with reading. They followed nonlinear developmental pathways, and some participants had not mastered skills such as spelling or decoding. Despite their struggles, these participants became highly successful, avid adult readers. Although the striving readers did choose reading for pleasure, they still did not report reading for pleasure as often as the readers who did not struggle with reading. The participants were successful in a wide variety of careers, all which required extensive reading. Those participants in this study who struggled with reading reported a frequency of work-related reading that was equal to those readers who did not struggle.

As a result of their cases, Fink developed the Interest-Based Model of Reading, which has these five components: 1) a passionate, personal interest that spurs sustained reading; 2) avid, topic-specific reading; 3) deep schema knowledge; 4) contextual reading strategies; and 5) mentoring support (Fink, 2006, p. 135). Fink explained, "Balanced teaching must include equal time for solid skills instruction and rich experiences with authentic texts" (Fink, 2006, p. 137).

Fink (2006) reminded, "We must not underestimate the abilities of striving readers, who may show enormous discrepancies between their high and low skills"

(p.80). Fink said that an individual who possesses a curiosity about a topic of interest will have an intrinsic motivation to read, because reading offers a way to learn more about the topic. "Interest is a generative force for all kinds of learning, especially learning to read" (Fink, 2006, p. 136). The key to a student's success, according to Fink, is to find reading material that is personally relevant to a child.

A Disabled Child Learns to Read

"Attention is a necessary state for learning" (McCormick, 1994, p. 173). The general conditions required for learning to read are no different than conditions needed for learning any other task; "the opportunity to generate and test hypotheses naturally and unconsciously in a meaningful context" (Smith, 2004, p. 213). Children learn to read by reading. Motivation places learners in situations where instruction is likely to have positive results.

A study of the importance of reading motivation was conducted by Sandra McCormick. McCormick (1994) explained that Peter, her case study subject, was a middle-class, Caucasian male who was eight years old when he began receiving services at a university reading clinic. Peter began attending one-hour sessions at the clinic because he was not experiencing success in reading. He was discontinued from the clinic at age twelve. During his time at the clinic, Peter received services from university students, who were supervised by a doctoral student and McCormick. Data collected included participant observation data, interviewing data, and measurement

data from tests and other procedures. Interviews with Peter's mother and classroom teacher were also conducted.

This longitudinal case study was designed to answer the question, under what conditions can literacy acquisition occur for non-readers? The research was framed within an interactive theory of reading ability and disability that predicts that reading failure and success can be attributed to both external and internal factors. This is different from theories that focus on reader deficits. "The interactive theoretical perspective of reading ability presumes motivation to be a key internal variable affecting reading success (p. 160)."

It was postulated that if motivation is important for reading achievement, then interventions that account for low levels of motivation should positively affect performance. "Fostering motivation is especially important in early stages of instruction with nonreaders because after years of impasse, they often have developed a host of avoidance behaviors to remove themselves from failure" (McCormick, 1994, p. 160).

Peter required special help with reading from the time he was in first grade. Peter's teacher noticed that Peter realized his classmates were doing better than he was, and this bothered Peter. When he began receiving services in the reading clinic, Peter was willing to participate, but he had a short attention span and would often allude to the fact that he was dumb. The first approach to instruction in the clinic was deemed ineffective and confusing for Peter, so another approach was introduced. Eventually, the reading clinic gathered enough information about Peter to customize the reading sessions for him. Peter required more repetition than was usually assumed for reading

instruction. Changing activities frequently and including many word games reduced boredom and secured Peter's attention (McCormick, 1994). The strategies used in the reading clinic resulted in Peter asking to take books home, which was an indicator of his satisfaction with his accomplishment.

Peter's attendance at the clinic was not consistent, and he did have some setbacks when he did not attend for a quarter. Despite the temporary loss of gains when he was not enrolled in the clinic, Peter continued to progress, becoming more confident as a reader. By the time the reading clinic services were discontinued for Peter, he was a fifth-grader (he had been retained in one grade) who was capable of reading seventh-grade material. Most importantly, Peter displayed confidence in all areas of his academic studies, frequently telling his tutors about accomplishments he was having both inside and outside the classroom (McCormick, 1994).

Peter's success with reading was a result of appropriate instruction that allowed him to gain entry into reading. "Despite a fairly long instructional history during which his confusions appeared unalterably resistant to instruction, it was possible to structure a learning environment that allowed reading behaviors to emerge" (McCormick, 1994, p. 172). This learning environment included individualized, one-on-one instruction designed to be most effective for Peter's specific needs. "External factors, when planned with consideration for internal factors, had an impact on reading attainment of a student whose learning growth previously had seemed obstructed" (McCormick, 1994, p. 174.)

Interaction Between Home and School Literacies

A study by Lockledge and Matheny (1987) interviewed over 200 adults, including those who enjoy reading and those who described themselves as infrequent 'not-readers.' The assumption of the interview study was that the development of a lifelong reader began with experiences in the home. It was found that many adults have positive early memories of reading with their family. These adults generally could not remember when they first could read, and they describe themselves as avid adult readers.

Lockledge and Matheny (1987) found that *avid* adult readers who did not have positive memories of home literacy experiences could remember specific teachers who encouraged them to love reading, while infrequent readers often attributed their negative feelings about reading to events that happened in the classroom. The adults who were not-readers had recollections of families that did things other than reading. These individuals felt guilty for taking time to read, and they described their memories of school experiences as dull, uninteresting, and unchallenging. The researchers asserted that the goal of reading teachers is to ensure that children have effective demonstrations of written language used for meaningful purposes. If students felt that classes were boring, books were boring, and teachers provided little encouragement, the individuals in this study developed real hostility toward reading and books. Teachers played an important role by the atmosphere they provided in their classrooms.

Participants in Lockledge and Matheny's study remembered reading classes that were embarrassing, as they required round-robin reading that would humiliate the readers who could not read as fast or as well as others in the class. The conclusion of the study was that parents who read produce families who enjoy reading. Additionally, when family literacy influences are not strong, the school had an important opportunity to make a difference. Whether or not the school actually can or will socialize children into the practice of literacy depends on many factors, one of which was taken up in a series of longitudinal studies by Compton-Lilly (2003; 2007).

Educators wonder from time to time about the progression of a former student or group of students, but teachers and children move and change schools, making it difficult to track individuals. However, educator Compton-Lilly followed the progress of some of her former students. Her research began as an attempt to understand and explain the ways that parents and children in one urban community conceptualized reading.

Literacy in the lives of urban first graders and their families was the topic of Compton-Lilly's dissertation, later published in *Reading families: The literate lives of urban children* (2003). For the study, Compton-Lilly randomly chose and interviewed ten children from her first-grade class, their parents, and siblings about their experiences with literacy at school and at home. To determine participants for her study, Compton-Lilly began at the top of her class list and called each parent until she had ten voluntary participants. Each parent contacted, with one exception, agreed to be interviewed. At the time of her study, participants resided in a northeastern midsized city with the 11th

highest rate of child poverty in the country. The school served an impoverished neighborhood and approximately 850 students. Consequently, the school experienced high student mobility rates, and a variety of instructional programs that often rotated in and out of the school.

The purpose of the study was to explore the reading and school experiences of the children and their families, to evaluate the way in which cultural practices related to reading instruction, and to learn about the effects of reading initiatives on urban families (Compton-Lilly, 2003). The theoretical framework emphasized both the sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects of learning to read in an urban school. One goal of the research was to devise a theoretical model to situate children's concepts about reading in larger contexts, including a variety of sociological and cultural factors. The contexts included reading practices at home and in school, socioeconomic and political contexts that defined participants' experiences with reading, various discourses that circulated concerning reading, and participants' personal life experiences with reading. The researcher used qualitative methods, including interviews, transcripts and field notes, and samples of children's work. The data revealed the way in which literacy was situated within the lives and experiences of people.

Compton-Lilly (2007) explained her study as an in-depth look over time, As educators and researchers, we work with children for a few months and attempt to make sense of their experiences. A few months or perhaps a school year are often the parameters of our teaching and researching efforts. This [research] is about what we learn when we

expand those parameters and follow students and their families over time.

(p. 2)

The researcher's personal experience as a teacher in this community led her to posit that the beliefs of other teachers in the school had stigmatized the families. Compton-Lilly hoped to go beyond common assumptions and gain a richer understanding of the literate lives of the students and their families. Like other studies of children's school experiences, findings from Compton-Lilly's study led to a better understanding of the school environment experienced by urban children (Compton-Lilly, 2003).

The interviews examined the cultural practices in individual homes and the community and the researcher discovered that the urban parents were very interested in their child's education. They valued education, specifically reading, with one parent commenting that reading was a skill children needed for survival. Although the families faced many hardships, they found time to help their children with academic tasks. This finding contrasted with the assumptions held by many of the teachers who were colleagues of Compton-Lilly. Many of the other teachers stereotyped the parents in the community as being unconcerned about their children and as being too reliant on the school system for their child's entire education.

Compton-Lilly was fortunate to be able to continue her research after completing the initial study. The second phase of the study occurred four years later, when she interviewed nine of the ten families from the initial study. Overtime, the families participated in two additional interviews and this data became the basis for *Re-Reading Families: The literate lives of urban children four years later*. Data collection and

analysis became an ongoing process as the children progressed toward high school. Compton-Lilly was awarded a grant allowed her to interview the families again when the children were high school students. “Longitudinal qualitative research is critical if we are to understand the schooling experiences of children” (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 8).

A broader look at literacy in various cultural settings led Compton-Lilly to a discussion about discourses. A discourse is usually defined as a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role (Gee, 1996). Individuals use various discourses depending on the situation they are in and whom they encounter. In school environments, Compton-Lilly identified certain dominant, or mainstream, discourses in literacy learning, such as sounding out words, paying attention, and testing. For example, parents and students know that a decoding strategy for unfamiliar text is to sound out the word. However, in Compton-Lilly’s interviews, she found that few parents knew what that meant, and students rarely used this strategy when reading unfamiliar words. Still, students and their parents referenced the methodology often.

According to Compton-Lilly, negative discourses exist among and create divisions between groups. Examples of discourses provided by the researcher were observable in interactions between teachers, students, and parents. School settings generally involve unquestioned practices, such as parents being invited to the school for teacher-led conferences and teachers providing advice on ways in which parents can

help their children with academic tasks at home. “These routines are assumed to lead to student learning and have become the repertoire that parents and teachers rely on to guide their interactions with each other” (Compton-Lilly, 2003, p.22).

In Compton-Lilly’s study, some teachers and the public accepted stereotypes about families, such as assuming that minority families or poor families do not value reading or do not have the skills necessary to help their children in school. In poor urban communities, parent training sometimes involves *experts* telling parents what they should be doing (Compton-Lilly, 2003). Educators may form negative opinions about students that come from circumstances dissimilar to what the educator considers normal. Certain groups of parents, particularly those in minority groups, may assume teachers do not want to help their child. They may perceive that teachers have low expectations for their child and for other students with similar backgrounds. These attitudes may foster a sense of distance and distrust between teachers and students. Parents and teachers may pull away from each other and, in many cases, school failure is blamed on the child and the family (Compton-Lilly, 2003).

Compton-Lilly proposed that some children have an advantage because their home discourse, or primary discourse, aligns with the discourses they confront when they enter school. The ways they act, interact, value, and think are consistent with the discourses they encounter in the classroom. In contrast, other groups of students (in Compton-Lilly’s research, African American and Hispanic) usually do not learn dominant discourses at home. Instead, the discourses these students learn at home become their primary discourses, and the dominant discourses they learn at school serve as

secondary discourses. The primary discourses the children bring to school are useful and productive in making sense of the world. Nevertheless, they are different, and not always accepted at school. “While my students are unquestionably capable of mastering mainstream ways of talking, thinking, valuing, interacting, acting, reading, and writing, they have a much more complicated trajectory to negotiate” (Compton-Lilly, 2003, p. 27). According to Compton-Lilly, because of advantages that some children enjoy, standardized tests for young children were more indicative of children’s access to mainstream discourse than they are measures of children’s learning.

The importance of learning to read is a dominant discourse that was generally not challenged (Compton-Lilly, 2003). Compton-Lilly found that the first graders that she interviewed wanted to learn to read in order to advance to the second grade. These children did not describe reading as pleasurable or valuable, but as a defense against failure. Both parents and students interviewed by Compton-Lilly believed that not knowing how to read was a source of embarrassment. Parents wanted their children to learn to read so that they could survive in society. By *survive*, the parents indicated they wanted their children to be able to read to secure jobs, to read signage and other written materials, and to have adequate literacy skills to enjoy reading for pleasure.

While some urban teachers severely judged the parents of their students, Compton-Lilly found that many urban parents were working hard to ensure that their children were successful in school. The parents expressed a great deal of interest in their children and particularly in their children’s success in learning to read. Parents noted their children as smart and capable of academic achievement. They supported

their children with tasks like reading to them and providing educational games and materials. Some parents interviewed for Compton-Lilly's study blamed schools for passing children who could not read. Other participants blamed the students. They expressed frustration with the younger generation for not learning how to read even as they continued to attend school. They said schools passed them for athletic reasons or because they caused trouble and the school wanted to move them along. They did not blame the inability to read on personal failings, parental neglect, or low intelligence (Compton-Lilly, 2003).

Research on out-of-school settings was summed up beautifully by Hull and Schultz (2001). The difference between school and non-school settings should not be viewed as distinct boundaries, but, instead, learning should be viewed as occurring both in and out of school. Growing concern over poor school achievement by minority students led researchers to look beyond the classroom to consider what elements of the students' culture might be contributing to difficulties in school. Findings indicate that children came to school differently prepared to learn, resulting in failure for some and success for others (Hull & Schultz, 2001). Hull and Schultz referred to the ethnographic research of Heath (1983), who conducted a study of three communities, an African American working-class, a Caucasian working-class, and a racially mixed middle-class community, over a decade. Heath found different uses for language in each community, and the middle-class children, whose language was similar to the teachers, were the most successful in school.

Literacy was learned in the home, in the community, and in the classroom. As teaching styles and teacher personalities vary, so do the backgrounds of the children. Communication with parents is imperative; however, many teachers and the general public accept stereotypes about families, such as assuming that minority families or poor families do not value reading or do not have the skills necessary to help their children in school (Compton-Lilly, 2003).

Summary

This chapter began with an overview of research focusing on how reading habits affect an individual on a long-term basis. Cunningham and Stanovich (2003) found that it was important to provide children with many reading experiences, because reading increases the ability to read. Positive reading experiences lead to self-efficacy, or the personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a task. The importance of motivation and engagement for reading achievement was also discussed.

Several retrospective studies about literacy were summarized. Deborah Brandt (2001) explained the changing conditions of literacy based on interviews with individuals who were born between the years of 1895 and 1985. Brandt introduced sponsors of literacy, or agents in a reader's life who enable literacy (2001). Selfe and Hawisher's (2004) study extended the research to include the literacies of technology, which have slowly found a way into homes and schools across the United States. Each of these studies added valuable information about literacy from the case studies of participants.

Struggling and striving adult readers were the focus of Peter Johnston's (2000) study. Johnston found many reasons why adults who have reading disabilities do not choose to obtain help; however, case studies of participants highlighted improvements after the adults received intervention. Fink (2006) studied successful adult dyslexics, and found that even with severe reading difficulties, these individuals became successful in occupations that required extensive reading. These studies showcase the fact that it is difficult to be an adult with a reading disability, but there are factors beyond reading ability that motivate individuals to overcome challenges. McCormick (1994) described work with a struggling reader named Peter. Although Peter experienced reading difficulties, he found success in reading after he attended several years at a reading clinic. It is hoped that Peter's story will turn out like the participants in Fink's (2006) study.

The participants in Compton-Lilly's (2003) study were from minority populations and they were poor. Still, the parents valued education, and they felt that it was extremely important for their children to learn to read well in order to survive in this society. Although the families faced many hardships, they found time to help their children with academic tasks. Educators are charged with meeting the needs of all students. Attention must be paid to the social and cultural resources that are accompanying children to school, and ways of incorporating that background in order to build bridges. Case studies of past experiences of students can offer models to help initiate these changes.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe what adults remember about early literacy experiences and what they report as influential even in adulthood. This chapter will describe the methods used to address the following research questions:

- (a) What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences;*
 - (b) What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults; and*
 - (c) What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults.*
- The chapter also explains participant selection process, data collection and analysis procedures, and the limitations of the study.

Methodological Approach and Researcher Bias

The creation of knowledge can occur in a variety of ways but for the current research, a qualitative approach was appropriate. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 3). For this study, research questions are based on retrospective memories of literacy experiences, with a systematic analysis resulting in relevant themes concerning influences of early literacy experiences.

The topic of the current study, adult memories of early literacy instruction, addresses a subjective, personal experience. The study was designed to learn about the relationship between retrospective memories of childhood literacy instruction and literacy experiences in the lives of adult participants. Part of the genesis of the study was my awareness of the array of people who helped shape my life, beginning in my early childhood. Many people and experiences affected my growth into the person that I am today. As a child, I loved school. I loved learning and applying that knowledge. When I was young, I did not believe that I would grow into a teacher, but my love of learning combined with my love for children naturally progressed into a teaching license from a liberal arts college.

I enjoy experiencing the different ways in which children learn. I understand that various personalities affect the academic experiences of children, and I am aware that changes in a child's life influence the child in many ways. As a practicing teacher, I wondered why some children seemed to acquire reading skills effortlessly, while other children struggled with every written word. I had compassion for those individuals who did not have a positive experience in school, and I wanted to know what specific memories individuals had about their early literacy experiences. I present this description of my personal background to clarify the ways in which researcher bias could enter the study. Although I was not with my participants during their early literacy experiences, I had personal experiences, which might hinder examining the data from a neutral position. However, it is important to note that Hatch (2002), stated that "it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective" (p. 15).

Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) do not consider the personal beliefs and experiences of the researcher to be a hindrance in the study. Instead, they say that a researcher enters the scene expecting that certain events, problems, and relationship will be important. As the research continues, some of these predetermined ideas will prove to be significant, and others will be of little consequence.

Research creates or extends the knowledge base. Researchers must determine an appropriate approach for framing a study. "Researchers are a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are not to be taken inseparable" (Hatch, 2002, p. 10)

Framing of the current research is within a constructivist paradigm because new knowledge must connect to that already known, keeping in mind that the truth can appear be understood in different ways, through different viewpoints, and at different times. Ontologically, "constructivists assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). In the process of interaction between humans, multiple explanations will surface, all of which have possible value.

Epistemologically, an individual must ask what can be known, and what is the relationship of the knower to what can be known? Following a constructivist paradigm, epistemologically, knowledge comes from collaborating with others and the awareness that, at any given time, different people understand experiences in different ways.

Hatch (2002), explained that following a constructivist paradigm, "researchers and the participants in their studies are joined together in the process of co-construction" (p. 15).

To maintain the goals of the study and the constructivist paradigm, a qualitative interview format was best suited for the methodology of the current research.

McCracken (1988) said that interviewing is “one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing” (p. 9). Data collection by other sources, such as a survey, would not have produced the quality of rich responses that were necessary to answer the research questions. Interviewing is a powerful way to help us understand our fellow human beings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The study design incorporated interviewing and relied on introspection because memories of reading were personal experiences not directly observable by the researcher. The interviews gathered subjective knowledge that may increase understanding of how early literacy experiences influence adults’ reading habits.

The research questions in the current study involve individual human memories, human emotions, and human thoughts. A particular phenomenon, early literacy experiences, was being investigated by examining participants’ memories. Additionally, the adults were asked about their current experiences with literacy in their adult lives. According to Hatch (2002), the product of a constructivist paradigm “is often presented in the form of case studies or rich narratives that describe the interpretations constructed as part of the research process” (p. 15-16). Thus, a multiple case study approach was most appropriate for gathering data for the research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described case studies as follows:

In a social process, together they bend, spin, consolidate, and enrich their understandings. We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience. The case researcher emerges from one social experience, the observation, to choreograph another, the report. (p. 442)

Case study research involves examining each individual case to learn about a predetermined phenomenon as it can be observed and understood in each bounded case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Multiple cases are studied to strengthen the findings. Each case is examined one at a time, and the analysis results in a synthesis that includes all cases. Each individual case contains unique information, but each case contributes to an overall understanding of the phenomenon. Ultimately, the researcher contributes to the field of research in two ways. First, the researcher teaches what has been learned from the case study research. Second, the researcher provides material for others in the form of descriptive narratives. This allows readers to vicariously experience the happenings and draw conclusions, which may or may not be the same as those of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In these ways, case study researchers assist in the construction of knowledge.

Genesis of the Study

In fall, 2004, I designed a proposal for an interview study as a requirement for a Qualitative Research class. The proposal introduced a study that would answer questions I had about adult reading habits, including their memories of early childhood literacy experiences. The proposal underwent multiple revisions in subsequent years. As the idea for elongating the study began to form, I asked people about their early memories of literacy experiences. I talked about my research plans with friends and family members, and I encouraged them to share stories about their literacy experiences. Some individuals simply said they did not remember learning to read, while others launched into story after story about their early home and school experiences. I wanted to learn more from the individuals who remembered their early literacy experiences.

Selection of Participants

It was important for participants to have enduring memories of their early literacy experiences in order to contribute to this study. Hatch (2002) said “informants are selected for interviews because they have some special knowledge that the researcher

hopes to capture in his or her data (p. 104). My participants represent a convenience sample because, with the exception of one participant, they were already known to me and were easy to access. However, it was necessary for participants to both have and to be willing to share recollections of early literacy experiences.

As I worked to refine my research goals, I entered into discussions with other friends, many of whom are educators. They offered suggestions, and some friends told me stories of their own early childhood experiences. I took those suggestions and considered their stories. Then, when talking with other friends and family members, I asked some open-ended questions about early literacy experiences. Although I found that some individuals had few, if any, memories of their early literacy experiences, there were many people who surprised me with the vivid memories that they divulged. Their responses allowed me to begin a list of names of those individuals who were willing to share valuable stories, both positive and negative, about their early childhood literacy experiences. Using a snowballing technique, those individuals referred friends or family members based on prior shared experiences of early literacy. As the study continued to take shape, I kept a list of possible participants. This list was slowly developed after many conversations about my research ideas with friends and family members.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a case as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). In the current research, each case includes adult memories of early childhood literacy experiences, as well as stories about their current personal and professional reading habits. Case study research often involves

small sample sizes. Marshall (1996) said, “An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question” (p. 523).

Many months passed between identifying the first possible participant and the time when I began interviewing. When I was ready to conduct interviews, I first selected five people from my list, and contacted the individuals to see if they were willing to participate. I followed the advice of Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who recommended that “the researcher examine various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn” (p. 446). These five individuals, who were very willing to participate, had particularly captivated me with the stories that they shared, as well as the role that literacy plays in their personal and professional adult lives. I wanted to hear more of their stories, and I felt that they could contribute unique information to the study.

I began interviewing with my initial selection of five participants to whom I assigned the following pseudonyms: Preston, Joe, Amy, Fred, and Kim. I was in the process of interviewing when I had a conversation with Ellen. At 89 years-old, Ellen (pseudonym) had amazing recollections of her early childhood experiences. I decided to interview Ellen because her memories, at nearly twenty years older than the next oldest participant, created a unique case to be studied. She became the sixth participant.

I previously knew six of the seven eventual participants. The seventh participant, Beth (pseudonym), learned about the study from a mutual friend, and asked to be included. After talking with her and learning about her educational experiences, I

selected her as the seventh participant. Beth's educational experiences, unfortunately, included negative memories which she quickly linked to her current adult reading habits. It was clear that she had considered the effects of early literacy experience on her adult reading habits even before I had asked the first interview question, and she was eager to tell her story.

My first five participants offered opportunities to learn about the phenomenon of early literacy experiences. The final two participants provided additional unique contributions. Demographically, they were the oldest and youngest participants. One surprised me with her vivid memories of her educational experiences, even at almost ninety years old. The other surprised me by asking to be part of my study. Multiple cases allowed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In the analysis that follows, I have discussed the participants in chronological order by age, beginning with the oldest participant. The interviews were not conducted in this order. Preston, whose recollections of early childhood experiences encouraged the creation of this study, was the first to be interviewed. His interview was quickly followed by an interview with Joe and an interview with Amy. The oldest participant, Ellen, was the next to be interviewed. Each of these four interviews was conducted in person, either at the participant's home or in my home (Preston and Ellen at their homes, Joe and Amy in my home.) The three participants who were interviewed by phone were the last three interviews, in this order, Kim, then Fred, and finally, Beth. For the purposes of organization, the participants are listed in chronological order by age

during the analysis of this study. From oldest to youngest, they are Ellen, Preston, Fred, Kim, Joe, Amy, and Beth.

I realized that I could learn some important things from any case, but did not have time to interview every individual. I did not interview everyone on the list of potential participants. Instead, I selected the individuals that captivated my attention through their specific memories of their literacy education. The seven participants represented varied educational backgrounds from high school graduates to those who completed graduate school. The stories that each individual shared allowed me to understand the literacy experience from their point of view. I gathered an appropriate amount of data, sufficient to answer the research questions from interviews with seven participants.

Participant Demographic Information

In the previous section, I described the participant selection process. In summary, the requirements for participating were that individuals were over age 18, that they could offer vivid memories of early literacy learning, and that they were willing to be part of the study. The most important criterion for participation in this study was that participants could share memories of their early experiences with literacy. It was important to identify participants who would be able to recall information related to the research questions. The participants were a diverse group that did not represent any

larger population. The participants were all known to me prior to the study, with the exception of Beth.

The participants ranged in age from twenty-one to eighty-nine years old and lived in North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Indiana. Participants' names were changed to pseudonyms throughout the study to protect their privacy. Table 3.1 summarizes the demographic information that was collected for each participant. Demographic data included their age, gender, birthplace, location of their schools, highest educational level completed, occupation, marital status, and current state of residence. In addition to the demographic data, participants were also asked about special classes that they attended during their academic experience, and they were asked about transitions that happened in their young lives, such as moving schools, moving houses, or being retained in a grade at school. This information could affect the literacy experiences of the participants. The stories told during the interviews generated significant data related to the study questions.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographic Information (Participant names are pseudonyms)

Participant	Age at interview	Gender	Birthplace	Education location	Education Highlights	Highest education completed	Occupation	Marital status	Current residence
Ellen	89 (3-5-1920)	Female	Roanoke, VA	Urban; railroad community; Roanoke, Virginia Public schools	No kindergarten	Business College	Retired from Telephone company	Widowed	Vinton, Virginia
Preston	69 (8-31-1939)	Male	Granite Falls, NC	Rural, farming and furniture community; Granite Falls, North Carolina, and Hudson, North Carolina Public Schools	No kindergarten	Associate's Degree + Company Management training	Retired from Railroad as Vice President of Environmental Affairs; Retired from National Guard as CW-4 helicopter pilot	Married	Newton, North Carolina
Fred	40	Male	Wenonah, New Jersey	Urban; New Jersey Public schools	Special education	MD + OB high risk specialty	Practicing high risk OB/GYN in Indianapolis, Indiana	Married	Indianapolis, Indiana
Kim	35 (10-22-1973)	Female	Kingsport, TN	Suburban, industrial community; Sullivan County, Tennessee Public Schools	Gifted Education	Master of Divinity	Pastor	Divorced	Riner, Virginia
Joe	25	Male	South Korea (adopted into USA at age 4 months)	Suburban, diverse population/ Morristown Tennessee schools, private, then public		One semester of college	Army Reserve Soldier (E-5) and construction worker	Single	Morristown, Tennessee
Amy	25 (2-26-1984)	Female	Boulder, Co	Urban	Special Education/ repeated 3 rd grade	Some Community College courses	Stay-at-home mom	Married	Gray, Tennessee
Beth	21	Female	Alabama	Rural, Alabama public schools	Repeated 7 th grade	Some college	College student	Married	Fayetteville, North Carolina

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection began, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the Office of Research at the University of Tennessee. “The researcher must adhere to legal and ethical requirements for all research involving people” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40). The Institutional Review Board is charged with reviewing research proposals to be sure that no mental, physical, or emotional injury will result from an individual participating in a study. Additionally, participants should not be deceived, and all information shared by the participants must remain anonymous and confidential.

Data collection was accomplished by conducting semi-structured interviews. A structured interview format asks all respondents the same questions, with little room for variation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A structured interview would have adversely limited participant discussion, because participants would not have been able to talk about issues that were outside the boundaries of the pre-established questions. In an unstructured interview, the researcher “attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 653). I was interested in gathering information about early childhood experiences from each participant, but I was not able to anticipate the variety of memories each participant would want to share about their early childhood experiences. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews

allowed freedom for participants to broach topics outside the boundaries of the questions presented, while ensuring coverage of the initial topics.

The interviews were conducted in person or, if geographically impossible, by telephone. Four interviews were conducted in person, and three conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes for each participant. Participants responded to additional clarification questions in person, by telephone, or by e-mail. Participants chose the locations for the interviews to ensure their comfort. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the participant or of the researcher.

Informed Consent

Participants understood the research topic and the types of information they would provide before the interviews took place. When I contacted each individual to ask them to participate in an interview, I explained the types of questions I would be asking and informed the participants that the initial interview would take about an hour. This ensured that those who volunteered were not being manipulated and were truly interested in adding to the study.

Interviews began with a general explanation of the research study. Consent forms were provided to participants, and the issues of anonymity and confidentiality were explained. Participants gave consent to participate in the study when they signed the consent form. A copy of the informed consent form is located in Appendix A. I provided an informed consent to those who I interviewed in person, and mailed an

informed consent form to those who were interviewed by telephone. Participants each signed the informed consent form. There were no gatekeepers. This voluntary selection process created a limitation to the study because only those who wanted to talk about their experiences were selected to participate in the study.

Participants also gave consent for the interview to be recorded, using either a micro-cassette recorder or a digital recorder. I recorded the first two interviews using a micro-cassette recorder. When I began transcribing these first interviews, I realized that the sound quality of the recording was not good. The recorder picked up background noise and static, making it difficult to hear the participant's words clearly. I purchased a digital recorder, which had less background noise and less static, and recorded the remaining five interviews with the digital recorder. I established rapport by explaining the study and sharing information related to early literacy instruction.

Interview Protocol

“Descriptive questions are designed to get informants talking about the particulars of a social scene with which they are familiar” (Hatch, 2002, p. 104). The design of the interview protocol encouraged participants to provide responses that would provide answers to the research questions. (See Appendix B for the complete interview protocol.) Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to answer the research questions, but offered the freedom for individuals to discuss other issues of interest. “Semi-structured interviews invite interviewees to express themselves openly

and freely and to define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 40).

Although the primary area of interest was early literacy experiences, it was important to obtain a brief life history from each participant. The life history information was woven into the responses to the interview questions, and provided patterns in evidence that were helpful when making interpretations from the data (McCormick, 1994). Table 3.2 lists the interview questions used to solicit answers for each research question. Additional questions, unique to each interview, were also asked to provide additional information and clarification.

The interview protocol ensured that the same type of information was obtained from each participant. In order to ensure that my questions were effective, I followed guidelines presented by Hatch (2002). Hatch recommended that questions be open-ended and clearly written, and that the questions be designed to generate answers that relate to the objectives of the research, while respecting the participants for the knowledge that they possess. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to tell stories about their home and school literacy experiences during their early years, and about their reading experiences and preferences during their adult years. Although each participant responded to the same set of questions, the incoming data allowed continuous refinement, resulting in additional questions for some participants.

Table 3.2

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Source (Interview Protocol)
What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?	What is the first thing you remember about reading? Can you describe a typical day at your elementary school? You may have had some interesting experiences both at home and at school when you were learning to read. Can you tell some stories about learning to read? Can you describe specific books that you remember reading in school? Think about the teachers you had in elementary school. How did those teachers influence your reading instruction?
What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?	When did you begin to think of yourself as a reader? In what ways did your early reading experiences affect your desire to read today? I'm interested in your reading preferences now. How have your reading interests and habits changed in adulthood?
What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life?	What books have you enjoyed reading as an adult? What would it be like for you if you could not read? How is reading important in your career?

While conducting interviews, I was careful to maintain a conversational tone to avoid the appearance of a checklist approach, and the participants had ample time to respond without interruptions. Careful and concentrated listening created additional questions specific to the individual participant, which provided a wealth of information not specifically elicited by the interview protocol. When necessary, I requested clarification and pursued the topic until reaching understanding. Recording the interviews ensured accuracy of data collection. The recording continued until the participant ended the session, in order not to miss important afterthought information remembered at the end of the interview. My personal literacy experiences contributed to the genesis of the study, but were not part of the data collected.

As the interviews continued, each participant contributed responses to the interview questions. Although the participants had unique experiences, their recollections and stories resulted in emerging themes that became evident after the third interview. For example, several participants eagerly talked about a parent or other adult reading stories to them when they were very young. It became evident that sharing reading time with an adult was a significant memory in the lives of several participants. Subsequent interviews confirmed this information, and provided additional data to answer the research questions. A collective case study approach allowed multiple participants to provide answers to the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Interview Process

I transcribed the audio recording of each interview to Microsoft Word[®] software. I chose to transcribe the interviews myself so that I would have more familiarity with the data. With the exception of eliminating excess words such as “ah” or “um,” I transcribed the interviews verbatim. As an example, I have appended a complete transcript of Kim’s interview (See Appendix C).

The interview transcriptions allowed thick, rich descriptions of each participant’s early literacy experiences and current reading habits to be compiled into individual participant narratives. Each narrative was unique, but each can be compared with narratives from other participants. Several participants raised issues about the effects of their early literacy experiences that I had not considered. Compiling the narratives was an important early step in the analysis process. By creating a story from each participant’s data, I was able to develop a better understanding of the participant’s experiences with literacy both during their early years and as adult readers.

After the narratives were completed, I emailed or mailed copies of each narrative to the participant. The names on the narratives were pseudonyms, and I explained to the participants that their real names would not appear on any document except for the informed consent form. I requested that the participants review the completed narratives to verify that the information was accurate. This was important for establishing trustworthiness of the study. Participants had the opportunity to accept, reject, or add to the information that I had presented based on their interviews. The

participants seemed surprised at how much I learned from our interviews. Amy commented, “Yes, it was all correct. I can’t believe I told you all of that.” Another participant, Fred, who did not enjoy reading, said, “The narrative looks fine. I wish you had sent me an audio file so I didn’t have to read it.” Yet another participant, Preston, felt that I had not correctly represented his parents’ role in his education, so he provided additional information to clarify what I had written. Ellen, the oldest participant, enjoyed her narrative so much that she shared it with her family members.

Data Analysis Procedures

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended that early data analysis should include identifying themes, issues, and questions after each contact. For this study, data collection began with the first interview and continued throughout the transcription and analysis process. Data analysis focused on participants’ answers to the interview questions, as well as additional follow-up information. A list of emerging themes began with the first interview when the participant spoke of wishing his teachers had encouraged him to read books about topics that were of interest to him. Others reported wanting to choose books of interest to them instead of having to read teacher selected books. Thus, student selected books was placed on my list of emerging themes. Each interview was transcribed within one week of completion of the interview. After transcribing the interviews and asking follow-up questions when needed, I identified emerging themes, which later were used as typologies for the analysis.

Typological Analysis

A typological model, as defined by Hatch (2002), assisted in analyzing the data. This analytical framework enabled me to organize the data to show patterns and generalizations. In a typological analysis, the researcher has an idea of the topics that will be addressed before data collection begins. “The topics that the researcher had in mind when the study was designed will often be logical places to start looking for typologies on which to anchor further analysis” (Hatch, 2002, p. 153). The purpose of the typological analysis was to divide the data into groups or categories so as to better understand the phenomenon under study. Additionally, the explicit instructions that were provided by Hatch (2002) were invaluable as I worked through the analytical sequences. As I indicated above, themes that emerged as I transcribed the interviews and reflected on the experiences of the participants constituted my initial typologies, which I further refined throughout the analytical process. The following section explains the typological process.

Steps in Typological Analysis

(Hatch, 2002, p. 153)

1. Identify typologies to be analyzed
2. Read the data, marking entries related to your typologies
3. Read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet.
4. Look for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies
5. Read data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of your patterns
6. Decide if your patterns are supported by the data, and search the data for nonexamples of your patterns
7. Look for relationships among the patterns identified
8. Write your patterns as one-sentence generalizations
9. Select data excerpts that support your generalizations

Typology Identification

This study was designed to learn about adults' memories of early literacy experiences, as well as the current literacy habits of the adults. Typologies are major topics or predetermined categories that were intended for discussion in the interview protocol. The identification of typologies was made easier by the list of emerging

themes that had been developed as I transcribed the interviews. Typologies needed to be categorized so that all collected interview data would fit into at least one category. Identified typologies relating to memories of early literacy experiences were *instruction*, *school environment*, *home influences*, *books*, and *emotions related to early literacy experiences*. Typologies relating to adult literacy habits were *literacy habits in personal life*, *literacy needs in professional life*, and *emotions related to literacy in adult life*.

Once the typologies were identified, I reread the transcripts, considering one typology with each reading. The interview transcripts were printed out and read individually, in order to search for all evidence relating to a particular typology. One color of crayon was used to underline the segments that fit each typology. For example, all interview segments that had to do with instruction was outlined in blue. After all seven interviews were processed for the first typology, the step was repeated for the second typology, using a different color of crayon. In many cases, data fit in more than one category, so there are multiple colors on the hard copies of the interviews.

In addition, the interview segments for each typology were lifted from the interview transcripts and copied in another Microsoft Word® file. This was accomplished by using dual computer screens. One screen displayed the interview, and the other screen displayed the new file that held the information for each typology. This allowed data that support each typology to be easily identified. Hatch (2002) did not require for a typological analysis that the interview segments be both color coded and lifted into a word processing document. However, I found that doing both steps allowed me to look at the segments as they related to the whole data set (color coded) as well as making

an easier-to-reference set of excerpts in a Microsoft Word[®] file. The word processing files were stored, using the title of the step in the analytical process, under a folder I called 'Analysis.'

I examined the interview transcripts multiple times. Yin (1993) explained that, in order to collect, analyze, and synthesize data, a researcher must be able to be a detective because the sources of evidence are likely to intermingle. Extensive examination of the transcripts allowed for explicit presentations of key evidence in the form of direct quotes from interviews. These direct quotes were placed on the typology pages for each participant. There were eight identified typologies, and seven interview transcripts, so the result was 56 typology segments.

Creation of Summary Sheets

After the data were highlighted by typologies, the main ideas for each typology were recorded on summary sheets. Microsoft Word[®] software aided creation of the summary sheets, which were divided by participants and by typologies. There were eight typologies and seven interview transcripts, resulting in 56 summary sheets. These segments were brief summaries of the collections of excerpts that were compiled by typologies. They were not interpretations of the data, but instead were summaries intended to make the interview segments more easily located, identified, and manipulated (Hatch, 2002). This was the first phase in the analysis process that required slight data reduction. Summarizing the participants' stories was difficult at first,

because I didn't want to lose any of the information they had shared. However, I realized that this step in the analytical process was necessary to be able to continue the analysis.

Creating summary sheets made it easier to continue the analysis by looking for patterns, relationships and themes within each typology. Patterns refer to regularities found in the data, relationships are links found in the data, and themes are concepts that run through all or most of the data. Hatch (2002) explained, "at this point, you are not trying to "verify" that the pattern, relationship, or theme is worth reporting. This is the stage for identifying possibilities to be checked out later" (p. 156). Each summary sheet was read again, and the possible patterns were recorded on a separate list. This reduced the data again, paving the way for the next phase in the analysis.

Coding Interview Segments

The next phase was to read the interview transcripts again, this time coding entries according to the patterns identified. This further organized the data. In order to accomplish this, I first had to decide which codes to use. I determined that each typology would have a different prefix to the code, followed by a few letters that would represent the statement. For example, the typology called *instruction* was abbreviated to **Instc**, and the following letters would represent the statement about instruction. Thus, **Instc/tch** is a code that represents participants' memories of their teachers.

Coding was accomplished using a laptop computer and an auxiliary monitor. One screen held the codes, and the other screen displayed the interview as it was being coded. Coding was very time-consuming, and required concentration as I did not want to miss any important information. As in other phases of the analytical process, there was overlap with many interview segments being coded with several different codes. (See Appendix D for the codes that were used to represent patterns, relationships, and themes in this analysis).

Examining Patterns and Searching for Non-examples

In this phase of the analysis, it was necessary to examine the patterns in order to decide if the patterns are supported by the interview segments. At this point, it was also necessary to search the data for non-examples of the patterns. Unfortunately, not all data excerpts fit neatly into the identified categories. Searching for non-examples was a systematic process that required reading all of the data set, while searching for contradictions (Hatch, 2002). If non-examples were found, they had to be explained, or the findings would have to be changed.

In the data for this study, several non-examples were found. One example is the adult reading habits of participant Amy. One generalization originally stated, “*The positive influence of a family member by helping a participant with academic tasks continues to motivate and inspire adult readers.*” Although this statement was true for the other participants who had recollections of the positive influence of a family

member, it was not true for Amy. Her difficulties with school related tasks were evident from her interview. Amy had support and encouragement from her parents, and she acknowledged that her mother helped her with multiple academic tasks. But, as an adult, Amy was neither motivated nor inspired to read. During this step of the data analysis, non-examples such as this had to be explained. In this case, the generalization was changed to a more neutral statement, “*The role of home influences on literacy preferences is multi-faceted, and includes influences of family members, transitions that affected participants, and home expectations of participants.*” In the findings section, this non-example, like other non-examples, was explained.

Construction of Visual Displays and Determining Relationships

The final steps in the typological analysis involved looking for relationships among the patterns that had been identified, and then expressing those patterns as one-sentence generalizations. This process involved examining the previous patterns, relationships, and themes that had been analyzed separately, and finding relationships among or between the categories. At this point in the analysis, I chose to create visual displays of the data by typology.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe a visual representation as a data display that “presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action” (p. 91). At first, I resisted creating a data display, because as I browsed the suggestions in the research manuals, none of the data displays seemed

appropriate for the data of my study. I changed my mind after I read an excerpt by Miles and Huberman (1994) which stated that it didn't really matter what the visual representation looked like or what it was called. The important issue is what the visual representation "does for your understanding of your data" (p. 240).

To create data displays for the data in my research, I regressed back to a time when I taught first grade. One of the graphic organizers that I taught my students was called the bubble map. I found that bubble maps, created using Microsoft Office PowerPoint 2007[®], were a wonderful way for me to organize the data in a visual display. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that "the researcher typically moves through a series of analysis episodes that condense more and more data into a more and more coherent understanding of what, how, and why" (p. 91). To create the bubble maps, I first used the seven participant summaries for each typology, and I condensed these seven summaries into one summary sheet for each typology. I created eight pages of patterns, themes, and relationships, with each page representing one of the eight typologies. The resulting summary sheets were condensed into eight bubble maps, with one representing each of the eight typologies. The eight bubble maps successfully represented the summary sheets in categories that made the patterns stand out (See Appendix E to view the bubble maps). This step required even more data reduction, but after they were complete, the bubble maps were an excellent visual representation of the entire data set.

Forming Generalizations

Turning many pages of data into a page of one-sentence generalizations was both challenging and rewarding. Each phase in the typological analysis had helped to reduce and organize the data, and the generalizations became clear as the data was analyzed and synthesized. The resulting generalizations “are special kinds of statements that express relationships found in the particular contexts under investigation” (Hatch, 2002, p. 159). I studied each generalization to be sure that all pertinent interview segments would fall under at least one generalization. The generalizations were revised until they adequately represented the findings.

Hatch (2002) explained that constructing sentences forces a researcher to organize thinking in a way that can be understood both by the researcher and by others who will read the study. It is also a very helpful transition into writing the findings from the study. My intention is that the ten generalizations listed in the findings section will accomplish the task of pulling the whole study together.

Summary of Typological Analysis

Hatch (2002) explained, “[T]he outcomes of a well-executed typological analysis will be a set of one-sentence generalizations that capture the patterns, relationships, and themes discovered in the data and a collection for data excerpts that support the generalizations identified” (p. 229). The generalizations and related data excerpts that

were determined to be the most significant are shared in the findings section of this document. Hatch (2002) recommended including data excerpts that allow readers to hear the voices of participants. Using the previously coded data simplified the accomplishment of this step (see Appendix F). The identification of generalizations and related data excerpts was the concluding element of the analysis.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

It is important to establish the trustworthiness of data and conclusions drawn from qualitative studies. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) said, “Once all information is gathered, synthesized, and reported, a case study researcher should confirm the findings of the study before disseminating a final report” (p. 66). The following methods established trustworthiness in this study:

- Rich, thick description
- Triangulation (artifacts)
- Member checking
- Peer reviewer/ external auditor

Rich, Thick Description

Participant responses to interview questions resulted in a large amount of data, which was carefully transcribed from an audio file using Microsoft Word[®] software. After multiple reviews, I compiled the transcripts into written narratives, which included rich, thick description and detailed images of the participants in the study. The narratives are presented in Chapter Four. Writing the narratives helped the analysis because they allowed me to “become” the participant for the duration of the narrative writing experience. This was helpful for the analysis. Because most of the participants were acquaintances and because I have personal early literacy memories, there was potential for researcher bias. Although my previous experiences as a student and as a teacher provide valuable background for this study, I attempted to keep my prior experiences and orientation from influencing the interpretation of the data in the study.

Triangulation (Artifacts)

Triangulation involves using multiple sources to provide corroborating evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Examining evidence from different sources further defines a theme. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that “triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (p. 444).

For this study, triangulation among different data sources included interviews and interview transcripts, member checking, and books and magazines discussed by

participants. The interview data that was collected depended on the specific memories of each participant. Artifacts, including books that the participant owned or remembered reading in early childhood, supported the interview data.

As part of the analytical process, I generated a list of each book or magazine that the participants mentioned in interviews. Although I was not able to obtain these books and magazines from the participants, I purchased many of them to read. Examining the books allowed another view into the literacy lives of the participants, as well as reinforcing the information offered by the participants about the books they remembered from their early literacy education. Participants who spoke about books and magazines did not generally give a lot of detail or information about the reading materials, but rather they simply recalled reading "*National Geographic*" or remembered a parent reading "*The Giving Tree*." Obtaining particular books and magazines confirmed the recollections that participants shared about these written materials. In some cases, such as with Ellen discussing "*Baby Ray had a dog*," the source is no longer in print. However, I was fortunate to find a reprinted copy of this publication, and was able to confirm the story of Baby Ray. These artifacts added another dimension to the information collected in the interviews and allowed triangulation of the data.

Member Checking

I compiled individual narratives for each participant, which they verified for accuracy. “Perhaps the most powerful strategy to confirm a report’s findings is to share the results with those examined in the study” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 66). Participants read the narrative, and provided feedback about the accuracy of the account. This also gave the participants an opportunity to offer additional information about their literacy experiences. Member checking is also an important ethical practice. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) remind researchers that “it is important for targeted persons to receive drafts revealing how they are presented, quoted, and interpreted and for the researcher to listen well for signs of concern” (p. 448). Participants in this study received the narratives warmly. One participant provided two additional pages of information to clarify some points. Another participant noted she shared her narrative with her family members. This technique of member checking is the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer Reviewer/ External Auditor

During the data coding process, an auditor ensured the objectivity of the coding process. The auditor, who protected the validity and reliability of the data, was someone with knowledge of the research topic but without a vested interest in the outcome of the research. The auditor I selected is a reading specialist, currently working as an interventionist in a local public school. She read the interview transcripts and identified common themes. The auditor was unaware of the themes I had already identified.

According to Creswell (1998), this procedure allows an auditor to examine the process and the product of the account, providing a sense of inter-rater reliability to a study. When the peer reviewer had completed the review of the interviews, she provided me with a list of the themes that she had picked out, both in individual interviews, and collectively. Although we identified many of the same themes, there was an theme that I had overlooked. This was the influence of the traditions and ethics of the participants' families on the participants' education. I was thankful that this was brought to my attention. Because my auditor had read all of the interview transcripts but was an outsider to the study, I was able to talk with her on several occasions about particular theme formation.

Summary

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine the retrospective memories that adults had of their early literacy experiences, and to learn about the current reading habits of adult participants. In this chapter, I described my methods for conducting this qualitative research study. Because the research questions had no observable answers, the stories of participants constituted the data I analyzed for patterns and from which I developed explanatory theory or generalizations. The data sources included interviews, transcripts of interviews, and artifacts, including copies of publications remembered by participants.

This chapter described the rationale for the research methodology, the selection process for participants, the data collection process, the data analysis procedures, and the methods for establishing trustworthiness. Hard copies of the analysis, as well as the transcripts, will be stored for at least three years after completion of this research. In the next chapter, interview narratives are presented. The interview analysis, results, and findings are in discussed in chapter five.

Chapter IV: Narratives

Introduction

This interview study was designed to examine aspects of early literacy experiences that continue to influence and motivate readers into adulthood. Interviews were conducted with adult participants to learn about early literacy experiences and current reading habits, both in personal and employment settings. In this chapter, I present the narratives that introduce and describe the participants in this study.

Seven participants were interviewed. I credit Preston with giving me the idea for the study. About ten years ago, Preston and I had a conversation about his school reading experiences. I was amazed at his memories, and the details that he was able to provide, even after half a century has passed. Our conversation was the beginning of this study. When I began selecting participants, Preston was first on my list.

I have known Kim for more than fifteen years. I have been intrigued by her intelligence in terms of relationships with other people. I was curious about her experiences with early literacy, and wondered how those experiences might have impacted her adult life. She was very willing to participate in an interview. Other participants were not as familiar to me, but were chosen based on repeated conversations where they would discuss events that occurred during their early childhood. Joe often discussed his teachers. Fred and Amy both talked to me about their experiences with special education. These individuals were very accommodating when I asked if they would participant in an interview. Ellen was an unplanned

interview. Just after I started interviewing participants, I had a conversation with her about her memories of early literacy learning. It was as if I had opened a floodgate. Ellen began telling me many stories about her childhood. I quickly obtained permission and grabbed my recorder, and began to listen. My final interview was with Beth. Although I had never met Beth, she had heard about my study from a mutual friend. She asked her friend to provide me with her contact information so that I could interview her for the study.

I could continue with interviews, as the list of people who are willing to be interviewed is growing. However, the diversity of this group of seven is adequate for obtaining information necessary to answer my research questions. I appreciate those who allowed me to conduct interviews with them. They displayed courage in sharing intimate information about their early childhood experiences and their responses to those experiences.

The age range of the participants was from twenty-one years old to eighty-nine years old. Three participants were male, and four were female. Each participant had moved only once or less during elementary school years, and the educational backgrounds included schools from New Jersey, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas. One participant attended gifted classes during elementary school, while two participants were in special education classes in elementary school. One participant repeated seventh grade, and one participant repeated third grade. The diversity of these participants continues into their adulthood. Current states of residence are Indiana, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina. Ellen and Preston are

retired, with Preston retired as a vice-president of a Fortune 500 company. Fred has recently completed a fellowship in a high-risk medical field and is a well-educated physician, and Kim is a graduate of a School of Theology and is a Minister. Joe is in the military, and Amy is a stay-at-home parent. All of the participants have taken some college courses, and three participants- Joe, Amy, and Beth- are still hoping to finish their Associate's Degrees. Beth is the only participant who is currently taking college courses.

As would be expected, these participants also have varying reading abilities. The data presented in the interviews included comments which revealed the participants' personal reading histories. These histories included limited early memories of pre-literacy, such as oral reading by parents, siblings and grandparents, favorite books, and the desire to be able to read by themselves. The participants came to school from environments in which they had developed predispositions- positive or negative- toward books and reading.

Participants came from families ranging from one child to five children. Of the families with multiple children, the participants did not recall receiving academic help from older siblings, nor did they remember offering help to their younger siblings. One exception was Kim, who delighted in reading story books to her younger sister. The oldest two participants did not have any kind of formal pre-school, and both started school as first graders, with no memory of their parents reading to them at home. Preston, born in 1939, said, "Sad as it may be, I never remember my Dad or my Mom reading with me or doing any school work with me. They were too busy trying to survive

to be involved with what the kids were trying to learn.” In contrast, Kim, who was born in the mid 1970’s, said, “I remember every night, usually my Mom, but sometimes Dad, would go into my bedroom with my sister and me and read stories to us.” This participant remembered hearing fairy tales and stories from her Mother’s school primer. The youngest participants, born in the 1980’s, had contrasting memories of childhood reading. Joe said, “As far back as I can remember, my mom read to me,” but Beth said, “I don’t remember my parents reading with me. My Dad worked a lot. My mom didn’t work, but she didn’t really do that much with me.”

Later memories included recollections of reading lessons in elementary school, stories from primers or other books that were used in school, and feelings of pride or frustration from early reading experiences. It is apparent from participant’s comments that schools, and especially individual teachers, have a major role in conferring labels such as “good reader” on children. The rewards of being a “good reader” in school included being allowed to visit other classes to read to other students. Participants who had positive memories associated with early reading instruction recalled the pleasure derived from listening to others read books to them, they remembered favorite books with nostalgic affection, and they remembered feeling success with early reading lessons. These participants felt that their reading development was valuable and fulfilling. Other participants had memories of early reading instruction that were negative in nature. They recalled teachers who were not concerned with their accomplishments in the reading classroom, parents who were too busy to spend time reading books with them, and general frustration at the reading instruction process.

Some participants remembered being eager to learn to read because it was an adult skill that they wished to master and because they wanted to read on their own instead of relying on someone to read to them. Participants remembered pretending to read before they actually acquired the ability. The participants could not recall the precise time when they transitioned from not knowing how to read to being a reader. One participant could not ever recall a time when she could not read. Participants reported memories of various learning strategies that were used at home and at school during their reading instruction.

Case Study Narratives

In the section that follows, I describe each participant in more depth. I've described each in descending order of age, beginning with Ellen, the oldest participant in the study. Each participant shared unique information relating to their early literacy experiences and their current reading habits. Their diversity in age, geographic location, and interests resulted in a variety of responses to the interview questions. However, there are some common themes that each participant discussed, and in these overlapping responses, I find answers to the research questions.

Ellen

The oldest participant, Ellen, was 89 years old at the time of our first interview. Ellen had always lived in the same rural railroad community in Virginia. Ellen was born in 1920. She was the youngest of four children, including three girls and one boy. Ellen's father, who ran a saw mill and worked for a railroad, died of a heart attack when she was only a year old, leaving her mother to take care of four young children. Ellen's mom had multiple jobs. She worked at the silk mill, she was a seamstress, and she worked at a drug store. In addition, the family kept boarders in their home to bring in more money. Ellen explained, "If you wanted to eat, you had to work," because there was no help like welfare or food stamps available.

Ellen's siblings did not finish high school. They went to work as soon as they could so that they could help out. Ellen said, "I can remember my mother going to market on Saturday morning, and I would go out to meet her and help her carry those big ol' heavy bags of food home, you know? We couldn't do that now.... I mean, we wouldn't." Ellen was married before her mother had a car, so they had to walk almost everywhere. Ellen says their choices were to walk or ride the street car or the bus. She remembered her grandfather coming up and bringing the family butter and eggs in a two-seat buggy with one horse. When her grandfather got ready to leave, Ellen always wanted to ride with him. He would let her ride a short way, and then he would say, "Get out Girly, and run on home!"

Ellen's earliest school experiences were in a grammar school. They did not have kindergarten then, so the first year was called the primer year. After the primer year, the students attended grades second through twelfth. Ellen said that they had wonderful teachers during grammar school. A lot of teachers had always lived in the area. Ellen explained that the teachers managed their classes with discipline. The students were expected to be quiet in school and to study. If students misbehaved, Ellen remembered that the teachers "didn't fool with them." They sent them to the office. Although Ellen couldn't remember how many students were in her class, she described the classes as "Big, because at the time there was only one grammar school in that area."

Ellen remembered black boards that had erasers. A reward for students who were good was to get to go outside and clean the erasers. Ellen does not remember ever having homework, except for learning how to spell words. Ellen loved the spelling bees at school, and says she "stood up pretty good." Another activity that Ellen loved was reading. She had memories of a primer reader that had a story about Baby Ray. Ellen remembered that the story began with these words, "Baby Ray had a dog. The dog is little." She said that they read this book over and over again. Everyone in the class read the same book, and if they were good readers, they would then take this book and go to other classes to read to other children in the school. Ellen remembered that she got to read to other classes in the school, along with her friend Virginia.

Recess was held outside in a dirt area. Ellen said that there was no grass or even concrete. She remembered that the boys would have marble games at school.

They would draw their circles, in the dirt for marble games, and Ellen would play with them. Ellen said that they had one hour during the school day to eat lunch. There was no cafeteria, but there was a big house with a lady who would fix lunch and they could pay her. Almost everybody was running home, Ellen said, probably because most of the children did not have money to pay for lunch. For Ellen, it was about twelve blocks home, and they would go home for lunch. If it was raining, Ellen's mom sent lunch with her to school.

Ellen did not remember getting any academic help at home, despite the fact that she had two older sisters and one older brother. As Ellen explained, they did not learn at home. "You were supposed to learn at school. From what I was told, I didn't know anything" (when she started school.) Ellen didn't know what a library was for years. When she was in high school, Ellen remembered that the library was a far distance from her house. In the summer time, she would go to the library and bring back as many books as she could carry. There was an old man that drove a pick-up truck, and sometimes Ellen remembered that he would drive her to the library, and she would walk all the way home with all those books. Ellen would read all the books, then take them back and get another batch. She joked that she must have read everything they had.

Ellen said that at home, they didn't have books. People came by selling magazines, and they did have an occasional magazine. Ellen said that if her mom had the money, she would buy a magazine. She does remember the "Grit" magazine. When she got older, there was a series book that was published every month. Ellen's sister was working and living at home, and she would buy the book every month, and then let

Ellen read it. Ellen explained that they came door to door with that, and if you wanted to know what the story was about, you had to keep buying it every month. When her family was finished with them, they gave them to other young people in the neighborhood.

One specific memory that Ellen recalled is that the year she graduated, the school had taken out the eighth grade, so her graduating class had two classes graduating at once. She said she was part of the largest graduating class, because two classes graduated together as a result of the elimination of eighth grade. For several years, the students just skipped eighth grade and went from seventh to ninth. Then the school decided they did need eighth grade, so they put it back in.

Ellen said that she didn't have many chores at home. She remembered that the older kids had more chores than she did. On the weekends, Ellen would help her mom bake. Her mom would put the ingredients in, and Ellen would mix them. She also washed old jars for canning. Ellen was the youngest of four children, and she was the only one who graduated from high school. She said that the other children all quit school to help their mom. When Ellen was fifteen, she started working at a printing shop. The printing shop paid Ellen to glue things together. Ellen enjoyed working and being able to contribute to her family.

The family valued education, and Ellen was very proud when she became the first person from her family to graduate from high school. She remembered the graduation exercises vividly, and she was filled with pride as she described the line of students who were waiting for the graduation ceremony to begin. After graduation,

Ellen took a job at a telephone company. Because of her diploma, Ellen was making more money than her siblings. One of the first things she did was buy a new stove for her mom. Ellen said that the day she bought that stove was one of the happiest days of her life. She could finally help her mom.

Ellen also earned a certificate from taking night classes at National Business College. She attended the business college at night, because she was still working full time during the day. Ellen was married in 1941, and she had her son in 1943. She continued to work, which was unusual for women in the 1940's. Ellen describes how she would come home from work and help her son with homework while she cooked dinner. Ellen remembered washing dishes while a spelling book sat on the counter next to her, and she would call out spelling words to her son. She said it was difficult for both of them, but she says, "You can do anything if you need to!"

Ellen kept her job at the telephone company for forty-two years, and during those years, she enjoyed promotions which put her in charge of other employees. She said that there was a lot of reading involved, as every month new information would come in. She was responsible for reading the material and making sure that others understood the information. Ellen is retired. Her husband died about twenty years ago, so she lived alone. Reading was an enjoyable hobby for Ellen. Her neighbor made frequent trips to the library, and brought books for Ellen to read. Ellen said she will ask her when it is due back because she is afraid she won't have time to finish it, but then she will sit in her glassed-in porch and finish it before she goes to bed. She said if she gets a good book, she just can't wait to finish it. Ellen also subscribed to magazines, and she said

she gets a whole stack of magazines every month. After reading the magazines, she explained that she passes them to her neighbor, and then her neighbor gives them to someone else.

Preston

Preston was born in rural North Carolina in 1939. As the third-born of five children, Preston remembered that his parents were extremely busy with running a farm and taking care of a large family. Preston's childhood was spent on a farm with his siblings, roaming the wide open spaces and playing in the creeks and in the woods. He remembered spending most of his time outside. The children were expected to take care of themselves, and they had multiple chores that they had to do on the farm.

Preston explained that he grew up during the depression and war years. There was little or no money for anything other than bare necessities. Anything that was needed for the war effort including gasoline, oil, tires, and metal products was rationed. Households were given ration tickets, and they had to be careful to not use up their ration allotment before they were given more tickets. Small farms used oxen, mules, and horses for farm chores and for transportations, saving their small gasoline allotments for necessary automobile trips.

Preston's childhood home was heated, as was the case in much of rural American in the 1930's and 1940's, by one wood-burning stove in a living or family room. Wood for home heating was harvested from farm or local forests, cut and split

with hand saws and axes by family members, including children. The remainder of the house, including the bedrooms, received only residual heat. On the coldest nights the rooms without the stove were only slightly warmer than the outside temperature. Home insulation was virtually non-existent, and Preston explained that if there were any homework assignments, they were accomplished while huddled around the stove. Lighting in the room consisted of one or two one-hundred watt hanging light bulbs. Family members had to rotate their bodies frequently because the side away from the stove would get cold. Preston described how they would take turns standing in front of the fireplace and turning their bodies because one side would be warm and the other side cold.

When you consider the environment that Preston was born into- lots of farm work and dimly-lit housing with poor insulation- it is easy to understand why reading wasn't valued in their home. Besides a Bible, a few pamphlets, and an occasional magazine, there were no reading materials in their home. Preston did not remember his Dad reading at night, and he said that his Mom didn't read either. Instead, they were always doing something physical, like sewing, that was of value to the family. The only thing he remembered his parents ever reading was the Bible or a Sunday School lesson. Preston described a time when he was around six years old, and he was taken into the home of his grandfather. This grandfather had died before Preston was born, and his family was cleaning out the house so they could sell it. Preston said that his grandfather had been the local druggist, a dentist, and a school teacher. Preston remembers walking into this house and "feeling flabbergasted" because there were

books everywhere. He was not accustomed to seeing so many books, and this vision of books made a lasting impression.

There was no preschool or kindergarten when Preston was a child. He started school as a six year-old first grader. Preston did not remember anyone working with him on academic tasks before he started school. He said that the children were expected to learn at school, not at home. When he started going to school, Preston remembered feeling frightened that he couldn't do what was expected, and that he wasn't doing as well as the other kids in his class. He remembered that during the first year of school, he continued to feel like everything was too hard for him, and that he wasn't going to be able to keep up.

Preston didn't remember having very much interaction with other children besides his siblings before he started school, and this could have been a part of why he felt behind at school. He said that he felt like the other kids could understand everything that was being taught. Preston explained that he learned to memorize information so that he could get the questions right, but he still didn't feel like he understood. It was a surprise to him when he found out that he was getting good grades. He learned that he was doing as well or better than average, and he slowly got over his fear of school.

Once he got over his fear of school, Preston said that he enjoyed school, and he remembered spending the school days with the same teacher during his early years. One of his earliest school memories was learning to say and write the alphabet. He said they often participated in spelling bees, and although he remembered doing very well in the spelling bees, he said that he is not a good speller now.

Reading instruction in Preston's early years consisted of reading poems and stories over and over again. The repetition helped the students to memorize the words, and Preston could still recite some of the early reading passages he learned in school. One in particular was the poem, *Jack and Jill went up the hill*. Preston had never heard this poem before he started school. He remembered reading the poem and relating to it, because like Jack and Jill, he played on hills and valleys, and he was familiar with wells. He understood what it meant to fetch a pail of water, and because he understood the meaning of this poem, he liked it and remembered it. Preston told me that he was always better able to remember a story or poem if he could relate to it. Others that he remembered reading included *Peter Cottontail*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

The reading materials that Preston used in school were books that were labeled, "first grade reader," "second grade reader," and so on. Preston said that the readers were signed out to the children for the school year, and everyone in his class received the same book. One requirement was that students had to stand up to read a line in front of the class. Preston found this to be very intimidating, but he remembered that it happened frequently. As he got older, Preston remembered that they began to go to the school library. He would often read a National Geographic magazine in the library. He liked learning about other parts of the world, so he enjoyed the articles in that magazine. Preston also remembered that the Reader's Digest Book of the Month club started sometime in the 1950's, and he would read some of those books in the library.

When Preston was about twelve years old, he bought himself a used bicycle and began to pedal out in the countryside to deliver the Grit newspaper. The Grit was

published monthly, and it was a compilation of everything that had happened in the United States and the world during the last month. Preston said that this was about the only news that rural people could get in these years. Preston remembered that his father always bought a Grit magazine from him. They were fifteen cents, and Preston got to keep five cents from each copy. He explained that sometimes he would pedal for more than a mile to deliver a Grit magazine to a home, but usually people did buy them because there was no other news available.

Preston said that his parents did little to nothing in terms of helping their children with school work. He said, "Sad as it may be, I never remember my Dad or my Mom reading with me or doing any school work with me. They were too busy trying to survive to be involved with what the kids were trying to learn." Although their participation was minimal at best, Preston recalled that they were supportive of everything the school required, and he said that "you would be in serious trouble if you came home with bad grades." Although Preston admitted that he sometimes wanted to drop out of school, he said he stayed in school because he had a great deal of respect for his parents, and they expected him to graduate.

Preston was quick to defend his parents' lack of involvement in the education of their children. Preston explained that both of his parents were from large and moderately successful families who were active in community affairs and supportive of improving educational opportunities. Preston's parents were proud high school graduates, and they insisted that their children complete high school. Preston explained, "Not many of my classmates at school had parents who had graduated from

high school, because in those years where they lived, there were no high schools.” If a student wanted to attend high school, they had to go to a boarding school called an academy, and their parents had to have enough money to pay for the schooling and boarding. Preston said that, unlike today, there was no taxpayer support for students to go to boarding school. Fortunately for his parents, a high school was established in their local community four years before they started high school, so they both became high school graduates. His parents were married during the beginning of the depression, and basic survival became all consuming. According to Preston, children of his generation were taught self-sufficiency, determination, and the value of hard work.

Preston described the people in his neighborhood as rural, blue collar, working class. He remembered that his family, like most other families around him, lived in a small home. In the evenings, all five children and their parents would sit in a room that was about twelve feet by twelve feet. One single stick bulb lit the room, so if someone needed to do work or read, it was done in a poorly lit room with other conversations going on. Preston explained that when it was dark outside, all seven members of the family sat in this small room. Preston and his brother would play with homemade toys or sharpen their knives. His sisters played with dolls, and his mom would sit in a chair and sew coats for her children or clothes for the dolls. They did have a radio, and Preston remembered that his father would listen to country music on the radio. Preston remembered a lot of commercials on that radio, but not a lot of news. It was about 1950 when his family got a telephone, and about 1953 when they first had a television. Preston remembered that the arrival of the television changed things. Before the

television, there would be some family chatter in the living area in the evenings, and the radio was sometimes turned on. But the television created a new source of entertainment for the family in the evenings.

Preston did succeed in graduating from high school. His parents could not afford to send him to college, so he worked and made enough money to attend a two-year technical college called Gaston College. Preston experienced feelings during his first year of college that were very similar to his first year of grammar school. Being from a small, rural, town, he felt inadequate around students coming from the big city of Charlotte, North Carolina. He didn't think he could express himself clearly and he again worried that he would not be able to keep up. But again, he slowly got over his fears and realized that he was doing fine in his college classes. He graduated with a two-year degree and entered the workforce.

Preston was drafted into the Army and became a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. Once again, he had feelings of inadequacy when attending the military training courses. And again, he was successful. In fact, he transferred to the Georgia National Guard upon returning from Vietnam, and spent the remainder of his military career as a respected flight instructor. He began working for a railroad for his civilian career, and he slowly worked his way through the ranks, retiring as one of the vice presidents for the railroad. Preston explained that there was an abundance of reading required for his job. He took a speed reading course and became a fast reader, but he found that this became a problem with his work. His job was highly technical, and when he used his speed reading skills to read the technical information, he would miss important facts.

Later, someone would question him, and he would realize he had not read carefully enough. Over time, he lost his ability to speed read, but he maintained his reading skills to keep up with his frequently changing work responsibilities.

As a retired adult, Preston spends his days working on his one hundred-acre farm. He feeds cattle, repairs fences, bails hay, and rebuilds antique cars. The work ethic that was instilled in him as a child growing up on a farm is still with him today, and he said that he prefers to be outside, working with his hands, instead of sitting still with a book. Preston explained, "I like to see things accomplished. I like to see things finished. Reading, I guess, accomplishes enrichment of the brain." Reading was something that Preston chose to do when he could not be working outside. Every evening, Preston said he can be found inside, reading a book. He preferred history, especially 17th and 18th century history, and he said that once he starts a book, he can hardly put it down. Preston said that he likes historical fiction, and he still reads the Reader's Digest condensed books, just like the books of the month that he read in the school library. He enjoyed magazines about antique cars, aviation, and space exploration. Preston said that reading for pleasure allows him to savor the words. He said that he re-reads favorite books. Preston estimated that he reads between fifty and one hundred books each year.

Preston believed that it was a teacher's responsibility to get the reading habit instilled in students. He believed that it was most important to get students into reading what really interested them, and that this was the key to adapting reading to other areas. Preston remembered that he was interested in science and history from a very

young age, and he wished that his teachers had encouraged him to read more about those subjects that were most interesting to him. He said that if someone had a desire and a passion to learn about something, they would then learn that there was a wealth of information available in books.

Fred

Fred was a forty year-old physician who lived in Indiana. Fred grew up in a New Jersey home with his parents and sister. When Fred was in kindergarten, he remembered trying to do the exercises that the teacher had assigned. From the time he first began pre-reading exercises, he remembered having difficulty “getting it.” His sister was only a year older than him in school, and she was very successful with academics. Because the work was so easy for her, she often made fun of him for his struggles. Fred remembered feeling angry and frustrated because he couldn’t understand what he was supposed to be doing.

Although Fred and his sister recognized his struggles in school very early, his parents and teachers didn’t seem to realize that he was having trouble. For several years, Fred was passed along in school, even though he knew he could not read. It was his mother who finally pushed his teachers to get him additional help. His mom visited the school for a parent/ student day, and the children were taking turns reading. When Fred took a turn to read, his mom realized that he was not reading as well as the other third graders. Although his third grade teacher did not believe there was a

problem, Fred's mom pushed for an evaluation. He began special education classes for reading in the fourth grade.

Fred had very clear memories of his fourth grade teacher. She was a patient person who recognized that he had difficulty with reading. During part of the day, Fred attended the special education class and received help with reading. He remembered being with one other child in this class. By the end of fourth grade, Fred was feeling more confident with his reading skills. He said, "I remember that when I could read, I felt better about myself."

Although Fred was grateful for the help he received in the special education classes, he would later come to resent the stigma that was associated with being "special." He was very successful in math, and during the fifth or sixth grade, Fred remembered that the school conducted IQ testing to identify students for the accelerated classes. Fred scored very high on the IQ test, but he was not allowed in the accelerated classes because of his special education needs. Fred explained, "I always felt like I was a little dumb. So a big part of my motivation to achieve has always been to prove that I really am pretty smart."

Fred continued to have difficulty with literacy tasks at his New Jersey school. During high school, Fred had a science teacher who also worked with adults who were dyslexic. He recognized Fred's difficulty with reading, and spent a lot of time during that school year working with Fred. The fact that this teacher shared with Fred that he worked with adults who had similar reading struggles made Fred feel better about himself, and he really appreciated this teacher.

Fred said that his spelling has always been terrible, and he has always been a very slow reader. Fred compensated for his slow reading by skipping words, but he said that even when he tried to skim or skip words, he still was slower than an average reader. He also explained that he re-reads frequently, because when he reads something the first time, it often does not make sense. When I asked Fred if he thought his parents realized that he was having difficulty with reading before the third grade, he told me that those years were very busy for his parents, because his sister was dealing with some significant health problems. In addition, Fred said that his father most likely had a learning disability also, as he had repeated a grade in school and had barely managed to graduate from high school.

Fred successfully completed high school, and continued on to college as a music major. He said that he spent a lot of time trying to figure out what he wanted to do, and he stumbled into the health care field while he was in college. While working on his music degree, he took a job in what he described as the lowest level of health care worker. He found that he really enjoyed this job, and he wanted to pursue the health care field. Fred is now a medical doctor. When I questioned Fred about why he chose a profession that so clearly requires a lot of reading, he said he never considered the amount of reading that would be required. Instead, he explained, “that decision, was made based on someone who was working in the field in a level that required no reading.”

Fred said, “I have always compensated for my poorness in reading by picking up most of what I need to know by listening to lectures.” He was diligent in attending his

medical school lectures, and he recorded them so that he could listen again. Fred believes that being an auditory learner has been his primary compensation method. The only class that he did poorly in during medical school was during a time period when he became sick with Mono and could not attend every lecture. Fred completed his medical training and became an Obstetrician/Gynecologist, but he was still not finished with his education. He chose to continue with additional training, and he has recently completed a Fellowship on Maternal Fetal Medicine.

During his most recent medical training, Fred was pleased to learn that there were DVDs that reviewed the information he was learning. He was able to use DVDs to study. Fred explained that reading was still not his favorite part of his job, but he has found that technology offers unique ways for him to stay current on medical research and treatment, without extensive reading. For example, he said that he uses the computer frequently to get brief updates, and he uses an Ipod Touch to run applications on such issues as drug interactions. Fred believed that technology is a huge help to him and to others in the medical profession.

It was very clear that Fred's challenges in school provided a drive and determination that has helped him become a successful medical doctor. I was curious about how Fred's reading struggles have impacted his relationships with his patients. Fred explained that it is sometimes hard to communicate with patients. Some patients cannot read, and some patients cannot speak English. As an OB doctor, Fred is charged with making sure the patients know how to take care of themselves and their unborn babies. Giving someone a pamphlet or even an appointment card is useless if

they can't read or can't understand the English language. Fred must determine how to communicate effectively with his patients, and his personal situation has made him more compassionate toward his patients.

Fred was forty years old at the time of his interview, and he did not often choose to read for pleasure. He explained to me that it is very hard work for him to read, so there is no real pleasure in reading. He said he does occasionally read something of his choosing, but there is so much reading required for his work, he usually prefers to do something that is a little less challenging than reading. But, he said, he does not avoid reading completely. He loves reading restaurant menus to decide where his family is going to go out to eat, and he still writes music, which requires some reading. I asked Fred if he wished things had worked out differently for him in terms of his educational experiences. Fred said, "I like the person that I am now, and I probably wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't gone through that hard stuff when I was younger."

Kim

Kim was born in 1973. She grew up in a community in rural east Tennessee, and has moved a few times, but remains living in southern states. Kim was a single woman who lived alone. At the time of her interview, Kim was a pastor of two small churches in east Tennessee. She had a passion for reading, and her profession required a large amount of reading. Kim recalled how her love of reading was cultivated

by the many hours that her mother and father spent reading to her. Every night, Kim's mom or dad would read to her. She remembered fairy tales and stories of morality. Kim's mother had a primer from her school days, and she would read stories from that book. Reading with mom or dad was a special time of the day for Kim. She remembered that her mom or dad would tell stories at night also. Two of the most common stories they told were about the birth of Jesus and Noah's Ark.

As long as she can remember, Kim has been a reader. She cannot remember not knowing how to read. Kim likened this to her Christian life, telling me that she never remembers not being a Christian. Kim believed that "what made me fall in love with reading was the way it took my imagination places." She remembered looking at illustrations in books and imagining herself in the midst of the stories. Kim reminisced about visiting her grandmother, who was a principal and a teacher, and practicing her alphabet, writing the letters on a big lined tablet that her grandmother kept in the dining room.

By the time Kim started kindergarten, she had already learned many pre-reading skills. The local schools were over-crowded, so Kim's kindergarten year was spent in her home church, but in the first grade, she moved to a new elementary school. Kim remembered that the new school was a scary experience, but a wonderful teacher helped her feel comfortable. Kim embraced her school experience, explaining that she loved spelling, reading, music, and especially art classes. One specific memory was that the worksheets were copied by mimeograph machines in the 1970's, and the purple

ink would rub off on her fingers. Kim said that most of her teachers made her want to learn and learn.

In the fourth grade, Kim began taking gifted classes, and she loved the gifted program. Because she had to leave her regular classroom to attend the gifted outreach program, she began to feel like an outcast when she returned to the classroom. Kim felt that the other children in her regular classroom treated her differently as a result of her leaving the classroom. She loved the program and had so much fun with the activities, so she continued to attend the gifted classes. Kim said that she decided she was not going to worry about what other kids thought about her leaving the class.

Kim remembered that the students began to change classes during the fifth grade, and changing classes, paired with an assignment to a male teacher's classroom, scared Kim. From elementary school through graduate school, Kim remembered that her teachers really affected her desire to read. Occasionally, such as in the sixth grade, Kim remembered teachers who were not motivating. Kim said that "always, how much I put into the class, and how well I did in the class, had to do with how much I liked the teacher." Kim did not respond well to teachers who yelled or who didn't appear to care about the students. One of Kim's eleventh-grade teachers seemed condescending, and Kim remembered waiting until the last minute to finish work for that particular class, even if the assignment was interesting.

Kim was a very perceptive individual who understood the value of education at a young age. In the eighth grade, Kim was not assigned to the teacher who had a reputation of being the hardest grammar teacher for that grade. Instead of being

grateful for the easier class assignment, she felt like she was missing out. In the ninth grade, Kim was placed into the grammar class of the teacher who was rumored to be the toughest in the school. She was thrilled to be in this class because she knew she would learn grammar! Teachers who incorporated projects into course work were very motivating to Kim. She loved assignments that allowed her to expand her learning by working independently on an individual project, especially when the topic was self-selected. One high school reading class required students to choose an author or playwright to learn about for the whole year, culminating in a presentation. Kim has fond memories of learning about Henrick Ibsen, and she could still tell about what author some of the other students chose. Another high school teacher asked students to find vocabulary words in any reading material that they were reading outside of the classroom. Kim enjoyed this activity, and said that, years later, she can come across a vocabulary word in a reading selection and think back to that teacher's literature class.

Kim continued to read during her years in college. Undergraduate classes required a variety of books, and attending seminary resulted in "mega, mega reading." Kim described the seminary reading experience as "grabbing the meaning quickly and moving on. I couldn't savor the wording." College reading experiences helped Kim realize that she could sometimes read things that were not enjoyable, but were helpful. She also began to see that some literature gives voices to those who had previously not had a voice, such as women. Seminary allowed Kim to be with like-minded people who read the same things and talked about the same issues. Kim found that transitioning from seminary to being a full-time pastor was very isolating. One way Kim dealt with

this isolation was to join a reading group for women clergy. That reading group was a “social lifeline,” and helped Kim pay attention to current literature.

Although Kim loved to read, she explained that she has come to realize that reading is an obstacle for some of the people in her church congregation. She has found creative ways to help her parishioners enjoy the Bible and related written works. Kim attributed some of her success with leading reading activities in her church, such as children’s activities and Bible studies, to the way that her parents and her teachers taught her to read, and how she built on those reading skills while reading to her sister. Kim’s youngest sister was born when she was fourteen. Kim enjoyed story books, and was glad to have her sister as an excuse for reading the books. She practiced different voices and learned to make the story exciting for her sister, even though her sister couldn’t yet read. In her current occupation, Kim said that she uses her oral reading skills on multiple occasions every week.

Kim acknowledged that her parents created a culture of reading in their house, and she realized that the young adults she often pastors did not enjoy similar home environments. The community where Kim was a pastor at the time of her interview included at-risk and impoverished individuals. She said “they saw school as their work, and they saw parents who hated work and avoided work, so they saw no use in going to school, and they resented it.” Kim believed that when these young adults neared the age of about twenty, they finally began to realize the value of education, but by then it was too late. Kim has learned that the young adults she works with are not rooted in the Bible. They don’t know about the characters, and they are not comfortable finding

verses. Kim did not spend lots of time reading Bible verses with this group. Instead, she chose books that would serve as entry points to understanding the characters and plot in the Bible. She found that the individuals were not comfortable reading to themselves or even looking at the books, but they would become engaged in the reading if she read to them. One class member even brought in an ipod with the story on it, and the group was engaged in listening that way. With the young people in her congregation, Kim learned that they will not respond to voicemails, emails, or letters. However, they will communicate by texting on a cell phone. This concerned Kim, because she did not think that the young people possessed effective communication skills.

Kim noticed at each of her church assignments that an individual's educational level affected their ability to get into the readings. She learned to adapt her teaching so that it worked with the reader and the non-reader. Kim used lots of repetition in her teachings. She utilized a number of different translations of the Bible and different ways of telling the stories in order to reach a number of different people. Kim explained that some of the older people in her congregation "just can't hear it unless it is from the King James" version of the Bible. However, the younger people "need it in over-simplified language." Kim was always trying to preserve the essence of what the original scripture said, and put it into words that people can understand.

The studies that Kim planned were often short-term studies, and she observed that some adults engaged well with the readings, while others just struggled along. Individuals often tried to cover up the fact that they cannot read. Kim described a man

who was a member of one of her previous churches. He was illiterate, but she didn't learn this for a while because he had the Bible memorized. He could tell what the Bible said and what it meant, but he couldn't locate the chapter or the verse. He was frustrated and embarrassed by the fact that he could not read, but "he could still engage with people, hold his own in a Sunday School class, and even teach others."

Church music was another area that required consideration of reading ability. Kim explained that the struggling readers were not comfortable with singing from a hymnal. Many of the people in her congregation enjoyed the older hymns which they have memorized over the years, but the younger individuals were more comfortable with praise type songs, which typically repeat a short chorus frequently. They liked to hear a worship leader sing the chorus, and then they could sing it back. Repetition created comfort for those who struggled with singing words out of a book or off a screen.

Kim's interview revealed a supportive childhood filled with individuals who nurtured her growth into a Christian and a reader. Her transition from child to adult followed an almost seamless path as she took her learned skills as a reader into her profession as a pastor. Kim said, "Reading for me is something that grows me. I've always enjoyed learning. So, whether it's from a book, or an article on-line, or in a magazine or newspaper, I find it terribly interesting. I love the way that the internet has brought news and stories to people, accessible to people, when we otherwise would have not heard those stories, because there are a lot more people collecting and dispersing them."

Joe

Joe was a single male who was twenty-five years old at the time of our first interview. Born in South Korea, Joe was adopted into the United States when he was four months of age. Joe's description of his parents illustrated how they showered him with love and support. Joe remembered that his mother frequently read to him, and he loved books. When Joe was about three years old, his mother began reading a series of books to him called *Cowboy Small*. Joe loved these books and still has pleasant memories associated with them. He remembered that he continued to love the cowboy theme during his elementary school years, and once during kindergarten, he dressed up like a cowboy for something at school. In the first grade, Joe fondly remembered taking a trip to a dairy farm. Even as an adult, Joe usually walked around donning a pair of cowboy boots.

Joe's mother continued to read to him at home, and Joe remembered that he had memorized words on the pages of the books that were frequently read to him. If his mother read the words incorrectly or skipped a page, Joe would stop her and tell her what the page said. He acknowledged that he had memorized the content of the books from so many readings, but at the time, he believed that he was reading the books.

Joe attended a private school for kindergarten, and moved to a different building, but still in a private school, for first grade. For these two school years, Joe remembered that the ability levels of the small group of students were similar. He recalled feeling

very confident about his abilities as a learner, but he remembered that the other students were also very capable. Joe called the private school that he attended an “elite” school, and he said that they were a very close-knit and very intellectual group of students. Joe remembered that the students participated in group reading activities, spelling exercises that included spelling tests every week, and handwriting practice. For handwriting, the students had to copy words and write out sentences. Joe hated handwriting. He said, “It was my worst subject because I never took the time to sit down and write out anything. I would rather read it.” Joe said that he still does not have neat handwriting.

Joe continued to read both at home and at school, and while in first grade he remembered picking up the book, *Goodnight Moon*, and reading it to himself, just like his mom had read it to him many times before. Reading and writing were part of every school day, and Joe recalled that he continued reading cowboy books, but also read mystery books, books by the author Shel Silverstein, and series books about the *Berenstain Bears*. One of his favorite books during first grade was *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein, and Joe remembered reading this book over and over again. Some of the books that he loved were in his home, some were in his classroom, and others were checked out during occasional trips to the library. Joe never struggled with reading, and he considered himself an independent reader by the time he was in second grade.

Joe’s kindergarten and first grade years were spent at a private church school, but in second grade he began attending the public elementary school. He stayed in this public school for the remainder of his schooling. He found the public school to be a little

scary at first, but he had friends from his church who were already going there. During second grade, Joe remembered seeing a dry erase board for the first time. He also recalled participating in a spelling bee for the first time, learning vocabulary words, and beginning to write in cursive.

Sometime around Christmas of his second grade year, Joe began to realize that he was more of an advanced reader than most of his classmates. His teacher noticed this too, and when the class visited the library, she would encourage Joe to choose books from sections with more advanced reading levels. Because his teacher encouraged him to read at higher levels, Joe went to the library every week and picked out novels that were in the section for the fifth grade students. It was in second grade that Joe read his first *Hardy Boys* book, and he read books from this series until he was in the fifth grade. Joe said he was very lucky with the teachers that he had, and he says that they all made an impact on his life.

Joe described himself as a brilliant student who sailed through school, including advanced classes in high school. His academic success resulted in a full, competitive scholarship to a college. Joe began college, but he found it hard to focus on the classes, and he lost his scholarship after only one semester, then quit going to that college after one more semester. He tried another semester at a community college, but left that college also. He couldn't pinpoint the reason that he didn't stay in college. Joe said, "I don't know if it was the professors that I had, or just the material was too repetitive for me because I had been in the advanced Engineering classes and the advanced math classes and I just didn't want to hear it again. I'm not sure what it was."

At the time of his interview, Joe was a part-time soldier in the Army Reserves and worked various construction jobs. He said he still loves to read, sometimes completing a book in one day. During a year-long deployment to Iraq and Kuwait with the Army Reserves, Joe estimated that he bought and read thirty books. He found that reading “took me away from where I was. It took me into my own little world and I could visualize every detail that the books were giving me.”

Joe did not believe that reading was a popular hobby with people in his age group, and he said that he is excited when he meets someone who shares his book interests. He doesn't borrow books from the library, but preferred to purchase them in book stores. His favorite types of books were marketing, political, science fiction fantasy, and mystery. Joe said that mystery books were encouraged by his teachers, but the science fiction genre was not. He believed that teachers “need to encourage more of the fiction reading for young kids. Sometimes with the fantasies, [kids] just need to let their imaginations run. It helps you grow as a person, in my opinion.”

Of all the participants, the interview with Joe left me the most perplexed. He seemed to have all the “ingredients” necessary for a lifetime of success- supportive parents, good teachers, and academic promise. Yet, even after earning a competitive scholarship to college, he did not complete his college education. Joe hasn't yet decided what career path he wants to pursue, but he does hope to return to college one day.

Amy

When selecting individuals for participation in this research, I looked for people who could share positive as well as negative memories of literacy experiences. Amy was a participant who struggled academically in school. Amy was born in 1984. Even before Amy started kindergarten, her family knew she was having learning problems. At the age of three years old, Amy still was not talking, so she began attending pre-school. Amy received speech help in pre-school, and she remembered that she would have problems pronouncing letters like R and S. Amy remembered riding a little yellow bus to get to her pre-school.

Amy was placed in special education classes for part of the day during elementary school. In kindergarten, she recalled that she couldn't do a lot of things that the other kids were doing. One skill she remembered struggling with was saying her alphabet. Amy's Mom helped her after school each day, but she experienced difficulty in keeping up the pace with the other students in her class. From the time she was in kindergarten, Amy knew that she was learning differently than other students. She did not understand what was wrong with her. Amy watched her sister, who was two years older, come home and read books without any trouble. Amy knew that her sister's teachers were proud of how well her sister was reading, and she wanted to be able to do well, too.

Amy often left her regular classroom to go to the special education classes. She felt very comfortable in the resource rooms. She liked the teachers, and she was able

to get help on worksheets and tests that were very difficult for her to complete on her own. She also received help with her speech. But Amy remembered the way her classmates looked at her when she left the regular classroom, and how they made fun of her when she returned. Although she knew she needed to leave the room to get help, she hated feeling like she was the special one. She didn't want to be different. When Amy was in the third grade, the decision was made to have her repeat the grade. Her parents told her that she needed more time to learn. Amy didn't mind repeating third grade, because she really wanted to be able to do the things that other kids in her class could do. When she was in fourth grade, however, she was still reading first grade material. She continued to go to special education classes, which forced her to miss time in her regular class.

Amy said that her fourth and fifth-grade teachers were both very patient, and they tried to work with her. But, she said, there were twenty-five to thirty students in those classrooms, and the teachers were very busy. She began to feel like the teachers didn't really care about her. The other students kept making fun of her because she had to leave the classroom to get help, and Amy said she endured a lot of "torture." Amy's fourth and fifth-grade teachers gave her a choice of leaving or staying in the classroom to take tests. Amy said that she didn't want to have to go to another room for help, but she said if she stayed in the classroom to take the test, "I had more anxiety. I would just stare at it, and it would take forever. And if I was on a test, reading, writing, taking longer than the other kids, I myself just felt really dumb." Amy's family was a great

source of support during these years. Even her older sister was very protective over Amy, trying to keep other students from bothering her.

Amy remembered that her Mom spent a lot of time helping her with her school work. When Amy had to read a book, she would read the words, but she didn't understand the book. Amy explained that she would sometimes read a passage in a book five times, but still not know what it was saying. She wondered why she couldn't read like everyone else. Her struggles in reading resulted in her spending a large amount of time working on school work after school was over for the day. When Amy came home from school, her Mom would re-read books and other work with her, helping her with comprehension. Amy remembered her Mom reading every book that Amy needed to read for book reports, then helping Amy understand the plot and the timeline of the book, so that Amy could complete the assignment. Amy remembered that sometimes her family members would try to help her with homework, and Amy would just break down and cry. She said, "There were some days when I would just sit down and get my work done. And there were other days when I would be stressed and I would cry, and then I needed to get the stress out, and maybe three hours later I would sit down and do it."

For Amy, school memories included time spent in special classes, modifications to work in regular classes, and always feeling like she was being singled out for her inability to learn as quickly as her classmates. Her biggest complaint about her school experience was probably the amount of time she spent away from her regular classroom. Amy explained, "I liked the [resource] teachers, but I didn't like going out of

my classes all the time, and the kids staring at me, and making fun of me.” She attended speech classes frequently, which required her to leave her regular class. And any time that a test was given, Amy left the room to get modified tests, or she stayed in her regular classroom and was given a modified test. In addition, Amy said that once or twice a year, she was pulled out to complete assessments, so the teachers could see how she was progressing in math and reading.

When I asked Amy if there was one school year that was better than others, she replied by telling me that her eighth-grade year was probably the easiest. This was because in eighth grade, she moved to a new school. For a short while, the other students did not know about her learning problems, and Amy was just like everyone else. Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for the other kids to realize that Amy’s tests didn’t look like their tests. The tests might have been written just for Amy, or a multiple choice test would have two answers already crossed out. Her classmates learned that Amy was on a different level.

The high school years brought more challenges to Amy. There were even more books to read. Amy tried to read the books, and her mom often read out loud to her. But Amy said she felt stupid because she always needed her mom to read to her, even in high school. There were some books that she was not able to finish, and when it was time to take the test, she had not read or had not understood all of the required reading. Amy said, “I would just sit there when we took the test, and I would either try to cheat off the person next to me, or just write whatever on it. And to this day, I still don’t know how I passed Biology, or English.” Amy was not interested in going out with friends on

the weekends, or about having a boyfriend. She explained, “All I wanted to do was pass all my classes, pass my tests, and just graduate high school.” Amy did realize her goal, but she was on a different graduation level, so she was not required to take all of the high school courses that college- bound students needed to complete for graduation. One example was that Amy was not required to take foreign language classes, or a Chemistry class. And although it made it easier for Amy to graduate because she didn’t need to take as many classes, she would still have to take those missing classes in order to get a college degree.

While in high school, Amy chose a physical education elective called sports training. Although she failed the entrance exam, they allowed her to become a trainer. Amy learned how to treat a hurt ankle, or to apply bandages when needed. She was able to meet people, and she could get away from the struggles of schoolwork by helping out on the football field or the basketball court. Amy remained a trainer during her eleventh and twelfth-grade years of high school. She also was an elementary school teacher’s assistant, which meant that she spent part of each school day helping at an elementary school. Amy enjoyed the elementary school so much that she continued to help out after she graduated from high school. Amy explained that she was going to school at night, but during the day she would have nothing to do at home except watch television, so she chose to help at the elementary school. She spent her time grading papers and playing with the kids on the playground. Amy said she just tried to be a good influence on the kids.

Amy still wasn't sure why she had trouble reading, and as an adult, she mostly avoided reading. Amy said she tries to read the Bible, but she cannot comprehend what the words are telling her. So, she said, "I mainly throw reading out because it has been hard on me and I just don't want to deal with it." She has been told she has a learning disability, and she knows that she has difficulty staying focused and with comprehension. Amy still has difficulty with spelling, and she said that there are still some people who make fun of her. She tried to make a joke of it, saying things like "I meant to spell it that way." Amy explained, "I've always had that fear of not knowing what people are saying about me or behind my back, just because I had that fear when I was younger."

When I asked Amy what might have made her educational experience easier, she thought about it and said, "Maybe if I had had a good role model, somebody who was a little older than me in my life, helping me get through some things." Amy has three siblings, so her parents were very busy with work and family. Amy wished that a volunteer could have stepped in to help her and other learning disabled students. She believed that the teachers have too many requirements placed on them, and she says that the teachers "are not really focusing on the individual kids or their needs or just giving them some love." Amy worked part time at a day care center, and she said that some of the teachers there are even too busy to notice when the children are having trouble at home.

Although Amy did not have a positive educational experience, she did take some classes toward an Associate's degree. Amy could still receive help in college in the

form of modified testing. But, Amy explained, “The thing is, I want to try to actually try to do something myself, without someone helping me.” She said, “It’s been hard, but it was always hard when I was younger, to come out of a class, go to a different class and get help on my work. It’s always been hard.” Amy was not taking classes, but, like Joe, she said that she plans to complete her degree eventually. Amy said that she needs about five more classes to finish her associate’s degree. She says, “For me, that would be a big accomplishment.”

Beth

The youngest participant, Beth, grew up in Alabama and graduated from high school in 2006. Beth was twenty one years old when she participated in an interview. At the time, Beth lived in North Carolina. Although I had never met Beth, she learned about my research from a mutual friend, and she was the only participant who initiated the contact with me to be included so she could tell her story. Beth’s recollections of school experiences included an abundance of worksheets, extensive memorization of facts, and an emphasis on the Accelerated Reader program. She had many negative feelings about the methods that were used during her school years, and she hoped that other children would not have to endure similar experiences.

As a child, Beth spent a lot of time with her great-grandmother, who was a retired elementary school teacher. Beth’s father worked a lot, and even though her mom didn’t work, Beth does not remember spending a lot of time with her mom. When Beth was

very young, she remembered her great-grandmother reading the comic section of the newspaper to her, and encouraging Beth to read a few words on the page. As Beth grew, it was her great-grandmother who helped her with her reading and her school work. Beth lived on the same farm with her grandparents, and she stayed with her grandparents a lot. She remembered her grandmother helping her with her handwriting. Beth did not remember ever seeing her parents read, and she did not remember her parents helping her with school work.

When I asked Beth about the first thing she remembered about learning to read at school, she responded by talking about word memorization and workbooks. She explained that the workbooks were used to teach the students what the letters looked like and how to pronounce the letters. There was a focus on memorizing how words looked and how they were spelled, but not very much phonics instruction. Beth remembers that her literacy instruction included reading out loud some during third and fourth grades, but she said that a lot of students struggled when they were asked to read out loud. Eventually, the teachers stopped asking the students to read out loud.

Despite Beth's dislike of the activities in elementary school, she remembered that the teachers were very nice, and her grades were good. Beth learned to read with the books about Dick, Jane, and Spot. She remembered that some of her teachers took the time to read out loud from books. One of these books- read during her third grade year- was *The Little House in the Big Woods*. After hearing this story, Beth became interested enough to read the entire series. Another memory that stood out for Beth was when a local author, Herbert Burton, came to her school to read from his book

called *The Adventures of Dixie North*. The book was about an orphan, and Beth enjoyed the fact that the author came to their school.

Beth stayed in the elementary school through the fourth grade. The students changed schools for fifth grade, and Beth remembered that this was when she started having problems in school. While in fifth grade, Beth was sent to in-school suspension for not returning a signed note to school. She began to feel like the teacher was targeting her. Beth believed that the visit to in-school suspension caused her to have a bad reputation among other teachers. She remembered feeling like the teachers just were not being nice to her. There were other problems in the school. It was rumored that the school's principal touched kids inappropriately, so Beth didn't want to be around him. Beth wished she could transfer to another middle school.

The Accelerated Reader program began when Beth was in fourth grade. This program required students to choose a book to read from a list of books. After they read the book, the students were tested on their comprehension skills by taking a multiple-choice test on a computer. During fourth grade, Beth's teacher encouraged reading for Accelerated Reader points, but did not force the students to acquire points. Beth remembers that in elementary school, you could get candy for Accelerated Reader points, and if you got enough points, you could have lunch with the principal. In fifth grade, Beth moved to middle school, and the teachers there made the students' reading grades dependant on their Accelerated Reader points. Although Beth did enjoy reading, she explained that the books she wanted to read were not the books on the Accelerated Reader list. In fact, she said that the Accelerated Reader list was a very

short list. Beth read books such as Stephen King and other fiction books, but there was no Accelerated Reader test available, and thus no credit given for those books. Beth believed that the focus on Accelerated Reader really pushed kids away from wanting to read.

By the seventh grade, Beth became so upset with the focus on Accelerated Reader that she stopped participating. Her refusal to work resulted in the failure of seventh grade. When I asked her why she failed seventh grade, she replied that she simply shut down and refused to do anything. Beth repeated the seventh grade in a different school, and then returned to the original school again for her eighth grade year. During her fifth grade year, Beth had wanted to transfer to a different school. She got her wish when she repeated seventh grade in a different school, but she learned that the other school wasn't a happy place for her either. Beth said the school had a very impersonal feel to it, and she felt like the teachers did not care about her.

Beth eventually graduated from high school, but she still has negative feelings toward the school system. Beth, a young adult, said that she loves to read, and she reads frequently. But she still struggles with pronouncing words correctly when reading out loud. Beth said she prefers to not read out loud, but if it is necessary, she wants a chance to read the material to herself first. She blamed the school system for her lack of confidence with reading out loud.

Beth still said that she enjoys Stephen King novels, and she also enjoys books including *Wicked* and the Harry Potter series. Beth has re-read stories that she read as a child, such as *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and she said that she enjoys them more now

than when she was a child. One book that Beth read while she was in high school was called *The Great Gatsby*. Beth said that she hated reading that book while she was in high school, but she has re-read it, and loves it now. Beth was currently working on her Associate's Degree at a local college. She was hoping that her time in college would be a more positive experience than her memories of her days in middle and high school.

Reflections of Narratives

The participants in this study shared generously of their time, their memories of educational experiences, and their feelings about how those educational experiences have impacted their adult lives. As I read and then re-read the transcripts of the seven interviews, I became very familiar with each participant. I began to wonder what would have been different in the lives of these participants if one of more variables in their past were changed. For example, I wonder how Amy's educational experiences would have been different if she had spent all of her school day in special education classes. And I wonder if Kim would still be successful when reading to children if her parents had not read to her every night. It became clear to me that there are a great number of variables that contribute to each individual's growth process. My findings do not present a complete account of each participant's memories. Of the information that was shared with me, I chose the excerpts that best represented the experiences of the participants.

Chapter V: Findings

Introduction to Generalizations

In this chapter, I develop understanding based on the archival memories and descriptions of current reading habits shared with me by participants. The following section explains the generalizations that I developed from the typological analysis conducted on the interview data. Figure 5.1 summarizes the research questions and the related generalizations.

The generalizations are statements that express relationships about the nature and influence of participants' early literacy memories. These statements are formed from the relationships in this study; these are not generalizations that would apply to other studies. It should be noted that although the generalizations are divided into three sections, many of the generalizations actually overlap into each of the three research question categories. It is my belief that these generalizations allow for an understanding and representation of the complete set of interview transcripts, including non-examples for certain generalizations.

Research questions and related generalizations



Figure 5.1

Methodological Considerations

Qualitative research includes the following steps: identifying a research problem, reviewing literature, selecting participants, data collection, analyzing and interpreting data, and reporting and evaluating research (Gay & Airasian, 1992). Designing a study that will elicit responses to selected research questions requires careful design of the interview protocol. In Chapter III, Methodology, I provided a table (Table 3.2) which linked research questions with the interview protocol questions. I believed that the protocol questions would elicit responses to provide adequate evidence in response to the research questions. It was only at the completion of the analytical work that I realized that research question two might not have been adequately addressed in the study. Research question two asked, *What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?* One interview question, designed to encourage participant discussion of this research question, stated, *In what ways did your early reading experiences affect your desire to read today?* Participants told me about their early experiences with reading, and they told me about their adult reading habits. In their interview responses, most participants did not make a link between their early reading experiences and their adult reading habits. The analytical work revealed responses to address each research question, but, in retrospect, I wish that I had asked more questions that would have led the participants to look back and make more connections between their early reading experiences and their adult reading habits.

Generations of Readers

In this study, changes over time are very recognizable in the context of home environment, school environment, and instruction. Age was not a consideration when I selected adult participants for this study, but age was a factor in the resulting interview responses. The oldest participants, Ellen and Preston, shared certain responses that were different from the responses of the younger five participants. Ellen and Preston are separated in age by twenty years, and there is an almost thirty-year spread between Preston and the next oldest participant, Fred. The youngest five participants, starting with Fred and ending with the youngest participant, Beth, represent another twenty-year span.

The themes that are related to the changes over time include home environment, school environment, and instruction. Both Ellen and Preston remembered a home environment where school was valued but not actively supported by family members, chores were necessary, and parents worked multiple jobs and multiple hours to ensure the well-being of the family. Ellen and Preston were born before children's literature was widely available in homes, and they have very few memories of reading materials in their homes, with the exception of the Bible, a few pamphlets, and an occasional newspaper or magazine. They do not have memories of their parents or other family members reading to them. Ellen said, "My sisters say I didn't know anything when I started school. None of us did. We learned at school."

Ellen did not remember ever having homework. Preston rarely remembered having homework, and he said that if a family member did need to work on an academic task at home, it was difficult because living conditions were not conducive to quiet work time. Instead of spending time after school on homework, these participants remembered that they had chores that were required of all family members. Ellen recalled having fewer chores than her older brother and sisters, but she did remember helping her mom with baking, carrying in groceries, and washing jars that were used for canning. Preston remembered that his family farm required constant work from family members, especially the boys. Preston said, "We had all kinds of chores that we would do until it was after dark."

The school environment that Ellen remembered had black boards and dirt playgrounds, but no libraries. Ellen said, "I didn't know what a library was for years." Preston did remember visits to the school library, but he does not remember being allowed to take books home. Ellen remembered playing marbles with the boys on the playground and running home from school during her lunch break. Both Ellen and Preston remembered that, although their parents did not help them with academic tasks, they did expect them to do well in school. Preston said, "They were very supportive as far as requiring you to do everything that the school system required, and you would be in serious trouble if you came home with bad grades." Preston summed up his opinion by saying, "Children of the depression and World War II were taught self-sufficiency, determination, and the value of hard work, which apparently made up for deficiencies in formal early childhood education."

Interviews with Fred, Kim, Joe, Amy, and Beth revealed no mention of the word 'chore.' These participants may have had chores, but if so, they did not choose to make home responsibilities a part of their interview responses. Difficult living conditions were never mentioned by the youngest five participants. Ellen and Preston both talked about the fact that their parents held multiple jobs to help with family expenses. With the exception of Beth, the youngest participants did not discuss the work habits of their parents.

The school environment and instructional methods that were remembered by the younger participants included extra classes such as foreign language, art, music, physical education, and library. Participants remembered trips to the library for self-selected books that were then taken home to be enjoyed. Younger participants did not find it necessary to run home for lunch, because a cafeteria was located in the school.

Homework was mentioned by several of the younger participants. Most participants did not have negative memories of homework. Amy was the exception. Amy explained, "There were days when I would get really stressed with homework. And someone would try to help me, but they wouldn't help me the way that the teacher taught me, and I would just break out and cry."

Academic support was very different between the oldest two participants and the younger five participants. Each of the younger five participants mentioned an adult in their lives, mainly a parent or grandparent, who read to them and worked with them on other academic tasks. Kim, born in the 1970's, was a lucky member of a family who treasured reading. Kim said,

I remember every night, usually my mom, but sometimes Dad, would go into my bedroom with my sister and me and read stories to us. I remember fairy tales and stories of morality. My mom had a primer from when she was in school, and she would read stories out of that book. I remember it being a special time, reading with Mom. My Mom and Dad, as you've already observed, created a culture in our house where I never thought of myself as a non-reader.

Joe said that his mom read the same cowboy book with him so many times that he could tell her if she skipped a page. Amy depended on her mom to help her with the abundance of reading that she could not complete on her own at school. And although Beth, an only child, said that neither of her parents spent a lot of time with her, she did have a grandmother, a retired elementary school teacher, who helped Beth with reading.

Participants who were born in the 1960's and later also remember that their parents were involved in their school experience. Fred said, "My mom observed me reading during a parent/student day when I was in third grade. She realized I needed help, and pushed to get me help." Amy, who experienced difficulties with academic tasks, said "Mom and Dad were supportive of me. They had to go to lots of meetings about me at school."

The participants in this study represented a 68-year age span. The oldest participants remember a childhood where school and home were clearly separate. They don't remember reading at home, and they don't remember chores at school. In contrast, the younger participants experienced a more blended early childhood

experience. Parents spent some time in the school, and academic tasks such as reading were encouraged at home.

The Nature of the Influence of Early Reading Experiences

The following sections provide evidence to respond to the following research questions, *“What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?”* *“What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?”* and *“What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults?”* The interview responses to the first question allowed participants to share stories about their memories of early literacy experiences, both at home and at school. Participants were asked to reflect on how these experiences impacted their adult reading habits, and these responses helped to determine the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits. Finally, participants were asked to discuss their reading habits in relation to their social and professional life.

As these findings will show, there are many facets of early reading experiences that influence the reading habits of adults. The participants in this study had various experiences at home and at school, which can each be categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. If a child’s literacy influences are positive experiences, we can expect that the individual will engage in reading on a lifelong basis, and we can assume that the individual will become a positive influence on others throughout their lifetime.

If, on the other hand, an individual has negative literacy experiences at home and at school, we can expect that the individual will retain those negative feelings and choose not to engage in reading during their adult life.

Of course, these two categories are not all-inclusive. Most individuals experience a combination of positive and negative literacy experiences as a result of home and school influences. The challenge for parents and educators, then, becomes a challenge of providing adequate positive experiences for each individual, which will in essence, move the scale to the side of positive experiences, resulting in avid lifelong readers.

The following sections highlight the specific memories that participants shared in their interviews. These memories form the negative and positive influences on participants' lifelong reading habits.

The Influence of Home

The role of home influences on literacy preferences is multi-faceted, and includes influences of family members, transitions that affected participants, and home expectations of participants. Children were exposed to literacy in home environments when they observed family members using literacy in their lives. Some participants remembered specific events that happened during their childhood, such as transitions, that may have affected their academic instruction. Other participants remembered family members who encouraged them, both in literacy learning as in other academic

tasks. The influence that caring adults had on the participants in this study continued to motivate and inspire the adult participants.

Matheny and Lockledge (1986) conducted case study research and found that the influence of the family was important on the development of the adult lifelong reader. In families with a positive influence on literacy, reading was incorporated into family rituals and supported through avenues such as parent-child involvement and shared family hobbies. The researchers posited that when the family had a strong positive influence for developing literacy, the participants responded by becoming voracious adult readers. The admitted not-readers in Matheny and Lockledge's (1986) study usually, but not always, described families which provided negative or neutral influences toward literacy development. In my study, Kim and Joe were the best examples of participants who remembered a strong family influence towards literacy. These two participants remembered reading as an activity that was part of the ordinary routine of their daily family lives. As in Matheny and Lockledge's (1986) study, both of these individuals are self-described avid adult readers.

Kim was blessed with an extended family that shared reading and writing experiences with her. Kim remembered going to her grandmother's house, and she recognized that her grandmother used several activities to help Kim with basic reading skills, even before Kim was old enough to be in school.

My Dad's mother was a principal and a teacher. A lot of times when we went to Grandma's house, there was this library table in the dining room. In the right hand drawer, she had the big lined tablets that we could practice our alphabet

on. I remember her pulling me aside to work on the alphabet and to read a book. She would also have me sit on her lap, and there were these *I Spy* cartoons -- like there was a hidden banana or something -- and while we would do that, she would have me look all over that funny page paper and she would point words out to me. So, although I didn't know it at the time, I was already making connections between the letter A on that piece of paper that I was drawing on, and Look! There's the letter A on the funny page that Grandma is working with. I was three or four years old when those things were happening. I have a picture of me doing it. I know that she was working with me on basic skills toward reading then.

Kim experienced a family transition when she became an older sister at age fourteen. She was given opportunities to share her love of reading with her baby sister. Kim said,

My youngest sister was born when I was 14. I was starting high school at the time. I remembered how much I enjoyed story books, and I was so glad to have an excuse to take those story books out and read them to Emily. I remember getting to the point where I was able to read orally very well. I could get into different voices. I could make the drama build. I could speak it in a way that would get her excited even though she wasn't actually reading from the page. She could feel the emotion of it.

For Kim, the influence of a baby sister propelled her to experience literacy in a new way.

Joe was also fortunate to have a mother who read to him often. He recalled “As far back as I can remember, my mom always read to me, so this started even before kindergarten. At about 3 years old, Mom started reading *Cowboy Small* to me.” Joe continues to enjoy reading in his adult life.

Joe experienced a transition when he changed schools in the second grade. He had attended a private school for his kindergarten and first grade year, but he moved to the public school for second grade. Joe said, “It was kind of scary, at first, because I was going to the public school.” But sometime after Christmas break, Joe realized that he was a more advanced reader than most of his classmates. Joe believed that his reading skills were advanced because his mother read to him frequently when he was very young. Both Kim and Joe are examples of how family influences can affect lifelong reading habits of adults. Matheny and Lockledge (1986) found that when the family has a strong positive influence for developing literacy, the influence of the school is relatively unimportant.

In Preston’s family, the influence on literacy development was neutral. His parents valued education, but they did not participate in literacy activities. When Preston was a child, he explained that there wasn’t as much emphasis on formal education as there is today. Preston’s parents were two of the few people in the area who had graduated from high school, and they insisted that their five children get a high school education. One event that Preston vividly remembered is visiting his grandfather’s house. Preston’s grandfather had been a druggist, a dentist, and a schoolteacher. The grandfather had died before Preston was born, and his family was

preparing to sell the house. In Preston's house, there was a Bible and a few pamphlets and magazines. But in his grandfather's house, there were books everywhere. Preston said, "I was just not accustomed to books." Although Preston had very few memories of his parents reading, and no memories of his parents encouraging him to read or reading to him, this positive literacy memory of a house full of books has stayed with Preston.

Preston's early childhood memories included a family move when he was in the third grade. His family moved to a farm, and there was a lot of work that had to be done to maintain the farm. When he arrived home from school, he immediately began his chores, or sometimes he would play in the fields and creeks with his brother. There was rarely any homework, and there was generally no discussion of school issues. Preston said, "I loved the farm. I loved the chores. School was... I never hated school, but I seemed to prefer being on the farm. I preferred being a big man on the farm to being a student at school." Lockledge and Matheny (1987) found that if time was not allocated for reading during childhood, then the adult reading would have feelings of guilt toward reading. This appears to be the case with Preston, who, as an adult reader, says that "Reading is something I do when something more pressing is not required. More pressing are activities that accomplish something today."

Even if the immediate family influence on literacy development is neutral or negative, a child can gain positive home experiences from a member of the extended family. Although Beth does not remember her parents reading to her, she had a grandmother who spent time with her, teaching Beth to love reading. Beth's grandmother was a central influence to her literacy development. This was very

fortunate for Beth, because she didn't remember her parents spending time with her, and her school experiences did not result in positive memories. Beth said,

My great grandmother was a retired Elementary teacher. She always took the time to focus on my reading and help me with my studies. Every night I stayed with her (which was often since she lived next door). She would read the comic section of the paper to me and urge me to read a few words. I don't remember my parents having much of a part of it. I don't remember seeing my parents read.

As an adult reader, Beth says that she doesn't like going anywhere without something to read. She has favorite series books and favorite authors, and she also enjoys re-reading books from her childhood.

The role of home influences on early childhood experiences cannot be ignored. It is clear that for these participants, their families were important influences on their literacy development, and their attitudes toward learning. Home expectations made a difference in the way that literacy was viewed by the participants in this study. Transitions, such as moving houses, changing schools, or experiencing a death in the family, influenced the children who were affected by these transitions. The family members, including parents, siblings, and extended family members, helped to shape the child. Each of these influences may have positively or negatively affected the adult literacy preferences of that individual.

The Influence of Teachers

The participants in this study remembered that they felt good about themselves and wanted to learn more with teachers they called wonderful. Participants had memories of not feeling motivated or engaged in a class led by a teacher who was perceived to be ineffective. Many teachers were remembered because they were especially kind, compassionate, and patient. Some teachers were remembered for the ways that they encouraged their students to want to learn more, or for recognizing that a student needed additional assistance. Other memories of teachers triggered negative memories of boring instructional experiences or impolite teachers.

Matheny and Lockledge (1986) found that avid readers who remembered limited literacy experiences in their families almost always remembered a teacher who was responsible for their love of reading. "It seems that when family influences toward literacy are not strong, the school has a chance to make a big difference" (Matheny and Lockledge, 1986, p. 6). The participants in the current study had many positive memories about their teachers.

Ellen appreciated her teachers because they were strict. She said, "We had real good teachers. They made us be quiet in school and study. We had discipline." In a study by Poplin, Rivera, Durish, Hoff, Kawell, Pawlak, Hinman, Straus, and Veney (1992), the authors studied highly effective teachers in urban schools, and found that the teachers were all strict. The researchers said, "These teachers believed their

strictness was necessary for effective teaching and learning and for safety and respect” (Poplin, et. al, 1992, p. 41.) Ellen also mentioned that many of her teachers had always lived in that area, and several that she remembered had never been married. These teachers demonstrated a commitment to the students and the community, and this commitment resulted in a positive influence on Ellen’s voracious reading habits.

Kim liked most of her teachers, but some were more memorable than others. Kim said, “I had a truly wonderful teacher in first grade. She made me want to learn and learn and learn and learn.” Kim also learned that sometimes first impressions of teachers could be incorrect. Kim recalled, “In second grade, I had Ms. Umberger, and she was a loud lady. I was scared of her before I ever ended up in her classroom. You could hear her hollering all the way down the hall. But I found out that I liked her because she was interested in helping us grow and learn.” Kim entered school having already experienced positive literacy development at home. The positive experiences of her teachers strengthened her love of learning and literacy even more.

Kim’s status as an avid adult reader can be linked to positive early influences of both home and school. Similarly, Joe experienced positive home and school literacy influences. Joe’s memories of great teachers began with a special second-grade teacher. Joe said,

My second grade teacher encouraged me to read at higher levels. When we went to the library, and she noticed that I was a more advanced reader, she said, ‘Why don’t you come over here and take a look at these books instead of staying

over there with the rest of your classmates?’ I was very lucky with the teachers that I had. These teachers all made an impact on my life.

Fred had negative experiences at school, but he reflected on two teachers who recognized that he needed extra help in school. He explained, “In fourth grade I had Ms. Raulston. She realized I had a problem. She got me into a special education class.” Fred also remembered a very supportive high school teacher. Fred described this teacher, “I had a teacher in high school who was a science teacher who worked with adults who were dyslexic. He saw how much trouble I had with letters and words and told me that he thought I was dyslexic. He did a lot of work with me to make me feel better about myself while I was in his class. We called him Mr. I.” Although Fred did not describe himself as an avid adult reader, he has entered into a profession that requires a large amount of reading, and he has experienced success in his professional life. It is possible that these two special teachers were instrumental in his adult successes.

Like Fred, Amy struggled with educational tasks, and her overall memories of school are negative. Despite a negative school experience, Amy had some good memories of her teachers. Amy said,

It was hard because a lot of teachers didn’t have the patience to work with kids with special needs and learning disabilities or other things. I remember my fourth grade teacher and my fifth grade teacher. They would try to work with me. I liked my teachers a lot.

The teachers in the study by Poplin, et. al (1992), were respectful of their students. The students could sense that their teachers were optimistic for their futures. Participants in the current study experienced effective teachers like the ones described in Poplin, et. al's (1992) study. Beth and Kim also remembered the teachers who they disliked and considered ineffective. Beth said that her middle school teachers were "horrible." Kim explained,

In eleventh grade, I had another teacher I didn't like. And always, how much I put into the class, and how well I did in the class, had to do with how much I liked the teacher. I remember not being motivated to do work in her class. She had cool projects, but I didn't like her! She was condescending. It was the first time I ever put things off and waited until the last minute to do things. I don't remember much about that class except I hated it.

In the examples above, participant Beth had only negative memories about her middle school teachers. Beth explained that her teachers were uncaring and her school had a very impersonal feel to it. Beth was similar to some of the participants in Matheny and Locklege's (1986) study who said that, "They didn't care, their parents didn't care and they felt that the teachers didn't care" (p. 5). Participant Kim, in contrast, had overwhelmingly positive memories of both school and home influences, with only an occasional reference to an unpleasant teacher. As adults, both Beth and Kim describe themselves as avid readers, but there are differences in their described reading habits. While Kim embraced all types of reading materials, including materials that she

“disciplined” herself to read in order to be of benefit to her, Beth only reads books that she deemed pleasurable.

Teachers were remembered for the positive ways that they encouraged students and influenced their desire to learn. Teachers were also remembered for their condescending attitudes and the fact that they didn’t realize when students needed extra help. In most cases, the teachers who made a positive or negative impact on participants were the ones that the participants remembered in their interviews. The teachers who did not stand out in either way were generally not remembered, or at least not discussed in interviews. Fred demonstrated this when he said, “I had a really good teacher in fourth grade. I don’t remember my teacher’s names up until fourth grade, but in fourth grade I had Ms. Raulston.” The importance of the teacher-student relationship can be seen with the impact that the teacher made on the student’s life, even as remembered years later.

The Influence of Pull-Out Classes

The summation of the experiences of an individual’s childhood impacts the individual’s adult life. In the case of someone like Joe, who had a happy and successful academic experience, the resulting statement sounded like this: “I would not be who I am today if I hadn’t had the same experiences that I had when I was that age. I enjoyed every bit of it.” Joe represents an above-average student who recalled that he progressed without incident through his elementary through high school years. Some

children face struggles, however, as they require special assistance in school. For these children, the challenging encounters that they had with teachers or other students are not forgotten when they reach adulthood. Pull- out classes were appreciated for the benefits they provided, but loathed for the stigma that resulted from leaving the regular class.

Most of the participants in this study did not feel that they suffered during their academic experiences. But for Amy, struggles with reading and other academic tasks forced her to endure some difficult situations. Amy talked at length about her memories of school.

For me, it was just hard to know that my sister who was two years older than me, that in first grade, she could read sentences, and she could read a book straight through. She could come home, and her teachers were proud of her that she could do this, but for me, I struggled with reading, writing. Sometimes I still do, but I just let it go.

Amy was well aware of her difficulty with academic tasks from the time she was very young. The issue was magnified when other students ridiculed her for the fact that she had to have extra help. Amy said, "I was going to the resource classes. I liked the teachers, but I didn't like going out of my classes all the time, and the kids staring at me, and making fun of me. That was one hard thing." Amy had mixed feelings about the special classes. She needed help, but she had to endure the comments from other students.

I liked going [to resource] because I got help on my work and I needed it, like help on my tests, or maybe it was just finishing a worksheet. But overall, I didn't feel comfortable going because of the looks I would get and people making fun of me when I left my class and when I would come back to class. I felt different. I think preschool through third or fourth grade I went to speech, and that was the same thing, but I had to get help somehow. I got made fun of a lot because I wasn't as smart as them or I had to go get help.

Amy remembered the students who made fun of her. She explained that she still gets her feelings hurt sometimes when friends realize that she can't read well or pronounce words correctly. When she was working on her Associate's Degree, Amy was eligible to receive special services because of her learning disability. Amy said, "but, the thing is, I want to try to actually try to do something myself, without someone helping me. Although it has been hard, but I want to prove to myself that I can try." At the current time, Amy is not taking classes and has not completed her Associate's Degree.

Fred realized from a very young age that he was not catching on to reading. Like Amy, Fred had an older sister who was not experiencing difficulty in school. Although Fred knew he was having difficulty in school, his teachers did not seek extra help for him until his mother pushed for additional help. In fourth grade, Fred began attending special education classes for part of the day. Fred said, "I don't remember if I liked going to the class or not. I remember that when I could read, I felt better about myself."

Fred struggled with reading, but he was a very intelligent child. Fred explained,

Later, they did IQ testing, and I placed very high in my class. They had these accelerated classes for the smart kids in my school for 5th and 6th grade. They wouldn't let me in those classes because I had been in a special education class. I always felt like I was a little dumb. So a big part of my motivation to achieve has always been to prove that I really am pretty smart.

The feelings of not being "as good as" the other students stayed with Fred. He has continued his education, working to prove that he is a capable individual. Today, Fred says, "I like the person I am now, and I probably wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't gone through that hard stuff when I was younger."

Kim also experienced teasing from other students when she left her classroom to attend classes for gifted students, but she loved the classes enough to endure the responses from the other students. Kim explained,

I started in an outreach program for gifted students in 4th grade. I tested for it in 3rd grade. I remember leaving the class for this program, and the other kids treated me differently because I was leaving. I felt sort of like an outcast when I came back in each week. Eventually, I got to where I didn't care how they acted, because I loved the program and had so much fun and learned so much. So I decided it was their problem and not mine.

Participants expressed a desire to "fit in" with their classmates by keeping up with the academic tasks that were required of them. In some cases, the need to attend special classes required participants to leave their classrooms for a time during the school day. Attending pull-out classes created a conflict, as the instruction was needed,

but the other students sometimes made fun of the participants who had to leave their classrooms.

Shoho, Katims, and Wilks (1997) conducted a survey study which was designed to investigate the perceived feelings of alienation among high school students with learning disabilities. The study, which is further explained in the next chapter, found that students who received pullout academic support reported significantly higher levels of alienation than the students who were fully included in the regular classroom (Shoho, et al. 1997). Attending to the needs of students in the regular classroom setting appeared to minimize perceptions of alienation among the participating students with learning disabilities.

In the current study, participants Fred, Kim, and Amy each received instruction in the form of pull-out classes. Of these three participants, Kim's pull-out instruction was for gifted instruction. Although she dealt with feelings of alienation as a result of leaving her classroom, she knew that she was leaving the room for a positive reason. Fred and Amy, in contrast, were receiving instruction because they were experiencing learning disabilities. The negative feelings of alienation from leaving their regular classroom, combined with the knowledge that they had to leave the room because they needed extra help with reading, influenced their adult reading habits. Sentiments expressed by other students or teachers, such as insults because an individual had to leave the regular classroom for some part of the day, continue to resonate in that individual's adult life.

The Influence of Reading Materials

Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer (2006) explains that finding a book that is of interest to a child is one of the best ways to motivate that child to read. Participants in the current study had unique preferences for enjoyable reading material, and they reported positive memories of books that they enjoyed and could relate to. The ability to self-select reading material was especially appreciated, and created more positive memories. Series books, chapter books, and magazines were popular with participants, who knew that they would enjoy the new installments of a previously read series as they were published.

For Ellen, who was born in 1920, reading materials were rare and expensive. Still, she said,

We had an occasional magazine, and people came by selling magazines. If Mama had the money, she would buy one for us. We got the “Grit.” [magazine] And, when I got older, there was a series book that was published every month. My sister was working and living at home, and she would buy the book every month, and then let me read it. They came door to door with that, and if you wanted to know what the story was about, you had to keep buying it every month. When we were finished with them, we gave them to other young people in the neighborhood.

Ellen’s description of the series book explains how individuals are drawn in to a story, creating a desire to read the next installment.

Ellen had wonderful memories of reading library books,

When I was in high school, the library was up on Elm Wood Park, well, still is. In the summer time, I would go up there and bring back as many books as I could carry. Mamma said she had never seen so many books. And there was an old man that drove a pick-up truck, and sometimes he would drive me to the library, and I would walk all the way home with all those books. I'd read them all, then take them back and get another batch. I must have read everything they had.

Preston, who was born nineteen years after Ellen, remembered reading experiences at school that were relevant to him, and that enticed him to want to read more. He said,

I remember very vividly, things like 'Jack and Jill went up the Hill to fetch a pail of water.' That was part of the early reading process, those kinds. And some of them really related to me because, at that time, we lived in an urban area, but we were more rural people, and we played on the hills and valleys and when they said Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water, that I could relate to, because we did the same kinds of things. And those were early books that related to something that I understood, seemed to be remembered more than anything else. If I couldn't relate to it, I don't remember it, basically.

Preston also remembered looking at books in the library. He explained,

We generally had a period to go to the library. I remember one of my favorites then was a magazine called National Geographic and I always tried to check out a National Geographic when we had library time because I was interested in

other parts of the world, so I would read those articles. I like history. I like history of all kinds.

He said, "It seems that the Reader's Digest book of the month club started way back in the 50's, so I read some of those books."

There were few reading materials in Preston's home. He remembered the Bible and a few pamphlets and magazines. Preston also remembered the newspaper, called *The Grit*.

There was a small newspaper called *The Grit*. *The Grit* was published monthly, and it was a compilation of everything that happened in the US and a little bit about the world during that month. It was about the only real information that rural people in our community got.

Kim enjoyed books that she personally selected. Kim described how her appreciation of visual arts from an early age contributed to the beginning of her love for reading. She explained,

I think that what made me fall in love with reading was the way it took my imagination places. When I was little, I think I evaluated the quality of a book by the illustrations, and that had to do with the visual artist that was forming in me. Even now I probably do that because of how I'm drawn to certain books by their covers and how some turn me off. Those illustrations help me imagine myself into the midst of those stories. I got to become the Country Bunny, and I got to become Liza Lou. And now, when the world spins so fast, you can pick up a book, and just get lost in that book for just a little while, if it is the right book.

Kim established herself as an avid reader from a very young age. Several series came to mind when she was reminiscing about books that she loved to read. “I remember the *Berenstain Bear Books*, the *Beatrice Potter* books.” “I also remember the *Pat the Bunny Books*,” Kim said. Another avid reader was Joe. As a child, Joe enjoyed chapter books so much that his mother had to ask him to stop reading. He explained,

There were times in elementary school, when I would check out a book, like the *Hardy Boys Mysteries*, and I would wake up in the middle of the night, turn on my lamp, and just start reading. Mom would come in. ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m reading.’ ‘You need to get some sleep!’ ‘Ok.’ And I’d go immediately back to reading because the story had captured me so much, I had to know what was going to happen next.

Joe also said, “I remember reading the *Black Beauty* books, and I read the *Tarzan Books*.”

Joe explained that his love of reading began when, as a young child, he was allowed to read books of his choosing. Joe said,

The book that stands out the most from that year is *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. I remember reading it over and over and over. Also, *Goodnight Moon*, was another one that I would read over and over, and that is really when I began to develop my love of reading.

I asked Joe what books he chose from the library, and he said, “What I did check out were books similar to *Goodnight Moon*, and *The Giving Tree*. Oh, and *Berenstain Bears* in first grade, I loved them!”

Participants expressed frustration at the requirements imposed on them by teachers who insisted that they read specific books. These books were not always developmentally appropriate for the participants' reading level, or they were not of interest to the participant. Amy and Beth described negative feelings that came from being required to read particular books. Amy's difficulty stemmed from her struggles with reading. Amy said,

Most of the books were just what the school provided for that certain grade level.

There were certain books we were supposed to read. In 11th and 12th grade, I had not read all the books, so when we took the tests, I had not read the book or had not understand the books.

Perhaps Amy would have experienced success if she had been encouraged to read books that were of interest to her, and in the range of her reading ability level.

Beth's reading frustrations came from the focus on the Accelerated Reader program, which required tests on particular books in order to gain points. "Some of the fourth grade classes in my school made the grades dependent on the AR points. I don't think they are allowed to do that anymore, but it really turned people away from reading." During Beth's seventh-grade year, she said,

I failed reading, because everything depended on AR points in seventh grade. I didn't read any of the books that they had for points. I read Stephen King and other fiction books, but not books that counted for points. So because everything depended on the AR points, that brought my grade down.

If Beth had been able to earn Accelerated Reader points for the books she read by self-selection, she likely would have earned a passing grade for the reading requirement.

For some individuals, reading series books and magazines may have been the only materials they chose to read outside of school. Fred, who admitted that he does not read for pleasure, said, “I read through the *Fletch* books once and read the whole series quickly.” And even though Beth didn’t like being forced to read books that were her teachers’ selections, she did remember that “a lot of my teachers took the time to read aloud from a selected book. In third grade, my teacher read *The Little House in the Big Woods* --thus peaking my interest and I read the entire series.”

As the participants have explained, there is a kind of addiction that forms when children or adults begin reading a series of books or magazines. The characters, story line, and overall development allowed readers to become part of the story. When new installments were published, they had familiar characters and settings, causing readers to get excited at the opportunity to read new volumes in the series. Even those participants who were not avid readers could be drawn into a series that was of interest to them, which encouraged literacy growth.

Preston summarized the importance of enjoyable reading materials when he said,

The teacher has a responsibility for getting the reading habit going. I don’t know how they do it, but they must make sure the student gets into reading what really interests them and that will be the key to adapting reading to other areas. They have to have a desire and a passion for what they are reading and once they got

that, they would learn that there is a whole lot of information out there. I don't know how you do that. If someone had learned early on of my passion of science and history, they probably could have encouraged me to do a lot more reading about that, and even of other information. Because once you get interested, you can broaden out a little bit.

The Importance of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's capabilities to achieve an outcome. Self-efficacy does not describe actual ability level, but instead, it is a situation-specific term that relates to self-belief about capabilities (Putman, 2009; Klassen, 2010). Students who possess a strong sense of efficacy are intrinsically motivated, and they will often challenge themselves with difficult tasks. Self-efficacious students recover quickly from setbacks, and do not blame external factors for their mishaps. Individuals with low self-efficacy believe that they cannot be successful in particular areas. Individuals with low self-efficacy will avoid challenges, believing that their poor performance is related to lack of ability, and a result may be disappointing academic performance (Putman, 2009). The emotional impact of successes or perceived failure in learning to read was especially important to the participant's future reading habits. Some participants described low self-efficacy when describing struggles with academic tasks. Other participants displayed a strong sense of self-efficacy as they discussed their feelings of confidence about their abilities.

Traditionally, children are placed into classes with other children who are the same age. Some participants in this study experienced fear when they realized that they could not read as well as the other students were reading. For Preston, this poor sense of efficacy was only a perception, and he later realized that his fears were not warranted. For Fred and Amy, their initial realization that they were not experiencing success with academic reading tasks continued to be an important issue. For these individuals, the fear did not subside.

Four participants expressed feelings of fear and intimidation concerning reading related experiences. These feelings were clearly expressed by Preston, who said, “I remember, I guess it’s the normal terror- I guess you would call it terror- of being frightened that I couldn’t do what was expected, that I wasn’t doing as well as the other kids. I remember that very distinctly in the first grade.” Preston described how he felt frightened that he wasn’t going to be able to keep up, and surprised when he found out that he was doing as well or better than average. As time passed and Preston continued to do well in school, these fears subsided, only to resurface again and again when he embarked on a new challenge. Preston said that when he began at Gaston College, he thought, “My goodness, I can’t keep up with these people, and come to find out, and the same thing when I went in the Army, I did as well or better than most.”

Fred also experienced a feeling of fear when he realized that he was not keeping up with his classmates. Fred said,

I don’t remember what the reading exercises were, but I remember my sister giving me a hard time because I wasn’t getting it. My sister is just one year

ahead of me in school. She had just been through it and it was easy for her. I felt angry and frustrated that I wasn't getting it.

Amy was never able to become confident with school related tasks. Amy said,

In kindergarten, I remember that I couldn't do a lot of things that the other kids were doing. I remember that I couldn't say my ABC's, so I was a little bit behind.

I remember that when I was in third grade, I had to take it over. I got held back.

Unfortunately, Amy continued to struggle with reading.

When I was in fourth grade, I was still reading first grade stuff. That was hard, to know that I really wasn't up to level with my age group because I was so far behind that it was hard to catch me up. It was just, for me, just difficult to know that I'm not like everybody else. I wondered why I can't read like everybody, why can't I do well on tests?

For Amy, as for other struggling readers, reflecting on school experiences brings up memories of fear. It is unfortunate that students remember being afraid that they could not do what other students could do at school. This phenomenon of low self-efficacy is destructive to the student's academic success, because a negative self-belief results in minimal effort and low levels of intrinsic motivation (Putman, 2009).

McCormick (1994) found that nonreaders appear to assume that they are unable to learn, as an effect of recurring failure. Each failure lessens their belief that future success is possible- "Consequently, their problems of limited word learning skill are compounded by their unwillingness to persevere when tasks are challenging or even to attempt reading activity at all" (McCormick, 1994, p. 160).

Interviews also revealed that some participants had a very strong sense of self-efficacy. A strong sense of self-efficacy has been linked to increased levels of motivation, willingness to try difficult tasks, and higher achievement (Puttman, 2009). To find evidence of efficacy in interviews, it was necessary to read 'between the lines' of interview transcripts. For example, Ellen displayed positive self-efficacy toward her academic education when she proudly talked about the graduation exercises, describing how she remembered how everyone lined up on the street for graduation. Ellen was the only child in her family to graduate from high school.

Kim's interview was full of enthusiastic responses to her early literacy experiences that demonstrate her strong sense of self-efficacy in academic areas. For example, Kim said, "In Sunday School, I remember how proud I was to be able to read a verse out loud when the teacher would ask me." Kim also displayed self-efficacy in her willingness to try difficult tasks. She attended an outreach program for gifted students during elementary school. Kim also stated that, in her eighth grade year, she did not have the grammar teacher who was rumored to be the toughest. She said, "I knew I was missing out, and I didn't like that at all. But then, in ninth grade, I had the hardest grammar teacher. Boy, did I learn my grammar."

Kim attributed her oral literacy abilities to the instruction she received from her parents and teachers. Kim's sense of efficacy was evident when she explained,

I remember getting to the point where I was able to read orally very well. I could get into different voices. I could make the drama build. I could speak it in a way

that would get [my sister] excited even though she wasn't actually reading from the page.

For Kim, a strong sense of self-efficacy with literacy tasks encouraged her to confidently practice her oral reading skills, read a variety of materials, and embrace the projects that were assigned in her classes. Each success led to greater self-efficacy. As her high school experience ended, Kim was confident about her ability to succeed in higher education. Her successes in college led to success in seminary, which led to a feeling of confidence about her role as a pastor.

Joe was another participant who described a strong sense of self-efficacy with academic tasks from the time he was very young. Joe briefly experienced fear when he began attending a public school. Joe said, "It was kind of scary, at first, because I was going to the public school. It changed. At that point in time, especially after Christmas break, I realized that I was more of an advanced reader than a lot of my classmates." For Joe, the fear of being in a new school situation was quickly replaced by confidence that he was doing very well. Joe always remembered being a very confident reader. He told me that, while he was in second grade, his class went to the library on a weekly basis, and "I would check out a Hardy Boys book or I would check out a novel that was a whole lot more advanced than what a second grader should be able to read." Joe also said, "At that point in time, I realized that I was more of an advanced reader than a lot of my classmates." These statements are evidence that a Joe possessed positive self-efficacy as related to literacy tasks.

The descriptions that Joe provided of himself as a reader paint a picture of an individual who retained a positive sense of self-efficacy throughout his educational experience and into his adult life. What is not clear, however, is how self-efficacy influenced his decision to attend, but not complete, his college education. Joe continues to be a confident adult reader, explaining the variety of genres that he likes to read, and telling me that he recently completed a 600-page book in one day.

One participant, Fred, is an interesting example of how self-efficacy can fluctuate. Although Fred had difficulty with learning to read, he experienced success when he began receiving special education assistance in the fourth grade. Fred said, “I remember that when I could read, I felt better about myself.” Fred’s self-efficacy was beginning to improve, but only for a short time. Fred said,

Later, they did IQ testing, and I placed very high in my class. They had these accelerated classes for the smart kids in my school for 5th and 6th grade. They wouldn’t let me in those classes because I had been in a special education class. I always felt like I was a little dumb. So a big part of my motivation to achieve has always been to prove that I really am pretty smart.

When Fred was in high school, he described a teacher who recognized that Fred was experiencing difficulty with reading. Fred said, “He did a lot of work with me to make me feel better about myself while I was in his class.” In Fred’s case, a fluctuating sense of efficacy appeared to influence him to aim for higher achievement.

Putman (2009) said that how well a person thinks he or she will do on a completion of a task influences how well he or she will actually do. In my interviews, the

sense of self-belief, or efficacy, is evident from conversations with most participants. Kim's interview is an example of how positive self-efficacy can propel an individual to higher achievements, while Amy's interview showcases how an individual with poor self-efficacy might experience struggles that extend well beyond the academic classroom. But there are other participants, such as Preston, Fred, and Joe, whose influence of childhood self-efficacy on adult literacy habits was not so crystal clear. For these participants, it is important to explore other factors that may have influenced their early literacy experiences.

Participants' Adult Reading Habits

The origin for engagement in personal and professional reading can be traced to early literacy experiences. Participants who describe themselves as avid readers report a positive impact from reading in their adult lives. Participants read in their professional lives to remain current in their field and to meet the needs of their employment.

Ellen's case study revealed neutral influences of reading development at home, but positive literacy influences from school. Ellen was the youngest of four children. When Ellen was only a year old, her father died. This transition was important in her life. Suddenly, Ellen's mom had to work several jobs to support her family. As Ellen explained, "Mama worked at the silk mill, she was a seamstress, she worked at a drug store, she did everything. We didn't have welfare or food stamps. If you wanted to eat,

you had to work.” The death of Ellen’s father resulted in a family move, which was another transition. Ellen remembered that her siblings all quit school to work. Ellen continued to attend school, but she did take a job at a printing shop when she was fifteen. Ellen said that her family never asked her to quit school. As a result, she was the first child in her family to graduate from high school. She was extremely proud that she accomplished graduating from high school, and she took a job that paid more than her siblings were making. Soon, she had earned enough money to buy her mother a new stove, and Ellen said that day was the happiest day of her life. Ellen, who worked as a supervisor for a telephone company, said, “Every month something new would come in, and you had to read it so you could teach the new ones coming in.” Ellen also recognized that reading helped her to stay current in her profession. After high school, Ellen took a job at the telephone company, but attended National Business College at night. She earned a certificate from National Business College, and that propelled her even further in her job. As an avid adult reader, Ellen said that she frequently sits on her porch and reads books from the library, and that she gets “a whole stack of magazines every month.”

Preston prefers to be working outside, but in the evenings, or when the weather does not allow him to be outside, Preston loves to read. He said, “Any time I sit down to rest I like to read something.” Preston enjoys history, and he said that “Once I start a new book, I usually can’t put it down, so I read it every free hour I have.” Preston’s explanations of the discoveries about early civilizations were proof of the amount of knowledge he has gleaned from his reading habit. Preston’s case study included

positive and neutral literacy influences. In considering the nature of the influence of his early experiences, it is plausible that Preston could have become a not-reader as an adult, as he clearly expressed his preference for working outside. The strength of his motivation, perhaps driven by the teachers who introduced him to texts which were interesting to him, such as *National Geographic Magazine*, has influenced him to continue to read in his adult life.

Fred's case study revealed negative school literacy experiences, as Fred struggled to improve his reading skills, and negative home literacy influences, as a result of his sister's illness. Fred attributed some of his academic difficulties to the fact that his sister experienced significant health problems. Fred was having a difficult time with reading during his early elementary years, and his sister was only one year older. Fred said that when she first got sick,

It first altered her behavior and then it started making her have seizures. And when it was altering her behavior and before the seizures started, the school did not respond in a good way. So there was some negativity between the school and my family already.

Fred believed that the teachers in his school might have been more negative toward him because of his sister's illness. In addition, the home environment was probably filled with anxiety with a sick child in the home. Fred explained,

There were a lot of bad things going on in my family back then. I think I turned out ok, so I can't say that I wish things had been different. I like the person I am

now, and I probably wouldn't be the person I am now if I hadn't gone through that hard stuff when I was younger.

Fortunately, Fred experienced some positive literacy influences. During his interview, Fred mentioned two teachers who had been helpful to him, as well as his mother, who was instrumental at getting him additional reading assistance at school. Although Fred did not describe himself as an avid reader, he provided strong evidence that he does appreciate the benefits of reading. In addition to the fact that he does occasionally read a fiction book, Fred mentioned that he uses reading skills to write music, he enjoys reading stories on the internet, and he spends hours reading menus to decide where he wants to take his family to eat. Fred explained,

I don't often read for pleasure because it is hard work for me to read. I do read occasionally. I've read the *Lord Of the Rings*. So I do read occasionally for pleasure, but I have to read so much for work, and reading is such hard work for me, that when I do get to do something for pleasure, I choose to do something that isn't as much work as reading.

Fred is an example of a reader who has overcome negative experiences of early literacy influences. Despite the negative influences of his early literacy experiences at school and at home, Fred has experienced success in both his personal and professional life.

Kim had wonderful memories of her parents and grandmother reading with her, as well as teachers who intensified her desire to learn. Kim's positive home experiences and positive school experiences resulted in an avid adult reader. "Reading

for me is something that grows me,” Kim said. “I’ve always enjoyed learning. So, whether it’s from a book, or an article on-line, or in a magazine or newspaper, I find it terribly interesting.” Kim explained how books that she would choose to read helped to grow her as a person during her graduate school years,

One thought is that sometimes there are books that I feel like I ought to be reading. I discipline myself in reading those because I know I need to learn them, even if they are not necessarily enjoyable reading. They are edifying, and I am glad after they are finished. In seminary, we were able to listen to other voices like African-American voices, Women’s voices, Asian voices, Latin American voices, and the voices of the disabled. So, as an adult, I have a much broader interest in reading, and I’m interested in engaging in reading someone that I have not heard their story before. I love Southern Women’s literature. I love Appalachian Literature and stories. I like to escape, but I can’t do too much of that because I have to be disciplined too.

Like Kim, Joe’s case study showed positive literacy influences from both home and school. Joe enjoyed reading with his mother when he was a young child, and when he was in school, he experienced academic success and felt like he was a more advanced reader than many of his classmates. His teachers encouraged him to read books on his reading level. As a result of the positive school and home influences, he continues to enjoy reading as an adult. Joe said, “I’ve been a reader ever since second grade. I’ve always read. In fact, when we were deployed, I think I bought and read 30 books during that year.” [Deployment to Kuwait/Iraq in 2005] Joe’s love of reading

provided comfort when he experienced the volatile environment associated with a war zone. Joe enjoys meeting people who have similar interests in types of books, like science fiction and mystery. He said that he usually reads for at least thirty minutes every night, but that he has been known to complete a 600-page book in one day. Joe explained, “There are some books that I will buy, and I have some free time, and I will read and read and read. I won’t realize how much time has passed.”

Amy recalled negative school experiences with reading. When Amy was a student, she never felt like she could read as well as other students in her class. She needed help from special education teachers and from her parents, and even with this help, she did not enjoy reading. In Amy’s family, there were four children, so Amy’s parents were very busy. Amy was appreciative of her parents, and the time that they spent with her as she struggled through school. She said, “My Mom was supportive all through school. And my Dad was supportive of the tests I would do, the different levels and accomplishments.” But Amy’s parents could not provide enough positive literacy support to overcome her negative school influences. Amy also wished that another mentor had been present to help her through her difficult school years. She explained,

Maybe if I had had a good role model, somebody who was a little older than me in my life, helping me get through some things. Because it was rough having three siblings and your mom not always being able to help you with whatever situation you are in. I just had to figure it out on my own at times and go on.

As a result of her early childhood experiences, Amy became a volunteer at an elementary school during her high school years, and she continued on as a volunteer

after she graduated from high school. Amy said, “I would help grade papers, play with the kids on the playground, just try to be a good influence on the kids, which I wanted when I was younger, but didn’t have.”

Amy has not forgotten how tough school was for her, and she is trying to make the path a little easier for children who are experiencing what she experienced as a student. Amy says, “I feel that at times if there could be different people who could volunteer or be mentors to kids who maybe have a learning disability or special needs or maybe just anybody. That is what I try to do now. It is always a good influence for someone who is younger to have someone older than them always there to help if they need anything.”

Amy does not read in her adult life. Amy said,

I choose not to read. Although I should start reading, but I still feel that I won’t understand what it is saying. I do read the Bible, but I don’t comprehend the whole story and all that it is trying to tell me. I don’t sit there and meditate on what it is trying to tell me. I mainly throw reading out because it has been hard on me and I just don’t want to deal with it.

The youngest participant in this study, Beth, experienced negative literacy influences at school, and neutral literacy influences at home, with an important exception of a very involved grandmother. The grandmother’s influence is probably the reason that Beth still reads for pleasure in her adult life. Beth enjoyed reading series books and books by her favorite authors. She kept some of the books that she read when she was a child. Beth said, “I still have books I read as a kid, like *Wrinkle in*

Time.” Beth did not enjoy all of the books she was asked to read for her classes, but as she got older, she re-read the books and discovered that she enjoyed them. “I feel like I get more out of them now than when I was younger. Even the simple stories like *The Velveteen Rabbit*. I read it now, and it is just amazing! It just has such good morals in it. When I was in high school, I read *The Great Gatsby*, and I hated that book. I just re-read it, and I loved it. Also, *Catcher in the Rye*, I re-read that one.”

As in other areas of this interview study, Kim showed insight when she continued her discussion about reading with this observation:

It is wonderful to have the power to read, but our culture has shifted. A lot of people would rather watch a movie than read a book. They will wait for it to come out as a movie. They miss so much.... So when this [book] is turned into a movie, there is so much depth and richness that is left out of a movie simply because you can't do it [in a movie]. So if our culture is focused on storytelling via movies and TV, people miss out on a lot.

Kim was an avid reader, and she had learned so much from what she has read that she was sad for those individuals who chose not to read. An adult individual's choice to read or not to read was impacted by the culmination of literacy experiences in that individual's past. The participants in this study experienced a combination of positive, neutral, and negative literacy experiences as a result of home and school influences. The emotional impact of successes or perceived failure in learning to read was especially important to the participant's adult reading habits.

Spreading the Influence

Many professionals, including participants Fred and Kim, were required to deal with clients, such as patients, students, or parishioners, on a daily basis. Not all clients were literate, and awareness was necessary for professionals to determine the reading ability level of the client, and then to decide how to adequately assist the individual who was not capable of reading everything that was given to them.

Professionals at the start of their careers may not realize that they need to give attention to the reading ability, as well as the native language, of their clients. As Fred learned, this becomes an important part of certain professions. According to Fred, in his medical practice,

It is hard sometimes to figure out how to communicate with someone on their level, and reading is a piece of that. We have all these little pamphlets, and we think it is wonderful to hand them out, because we can't go over everything in a ten minute office visit, but if someone can't read, it doesn't really do them any good. The first time I really realized that was when we had a large influx of Spanish people, a large percentage of Spanish immigrants. We thought we were giving them pamphlets that they could read, but they couldn't read them. So it does affect our ability to take care of a patient. If you have a limited amount of time to see a whole bunch of patients, and if one of them can't read, that takes one of the ways of communicating with them away. Even giving them their

appointment- you give them their appointment card, but if they can't read, they don't know what it says. It certainly makes it hard.

Every child can benefit from an individual who encourages a love for reading. In Kim's work, she has been a pastor to young adults, and she has observed that some of these individuals did not have an individual who encouraged them to love reading, or academics in general. Kim said,

I don't think these young adults [that she works with] grew up in situations like that. They saw school as their work, and they saw parents who hated work and avoided work, so they saw no use in going to school, and they resented it. It is only when they reach the age of 19 or 20 or 21 that they realize, 'oh man, I needed that school. I needed that reading.'

Kim has used these experiences to influence the individuals that she works with in her ministry. "I remember getting to the point where I was able to read orally very well," Kim said.

That experience has helped me in the way I work with reading with children, youth, and adults now in terms of reading the Bible and spiritual materials. So the way Mom and Dad and those early teachers taught me to read when I was little helped me work with my sister and develop my style for oral/aural reading, and I use this skill every week, multiple times every week.

Kim reflected on the importance of awareness of literacy with adult members of her church. She explained,

That is another interesting thing to tell you about how reading affects my ability to work with people in the church. I had a guy in my last church who was illiterate. It took me a while to figure this out, because he had the Bible memorized. He knew the Bible better than most anyone who would read the Bible every single day. He could tell you what it said and what it meant, but he couldn't locate the chapter and the verse. I know he was frustrated by not being able to read. I know he was embarrassed by it. But it was something that he had worked himself past. He could still engage with people, hold his own in a Sunday School class, and even teach others.

In addition to recognizing and responding to members of the church who are illiterate, Kim learned that she must use different approaches to teach church members, based on the age, background, and literacy level of the members. She explained,

I guess the other thing that comes to mind is that I've offered short term studies in churches for years. When you use a book-based study, how that affects how people learn is an interesting thing to watch. For instance, this year, I've read the book called *The Shack*, by William P. Young. I did it with two groups of adults in the spring, and it was really interesting to watch how some of the adults engage so well with the story, and how others just struggled along. I'm also using this book with young adults and we are doing it differently. We don't just discuss and then look up a verse here and there. For the most part, the young adults are not rooted in Bible. They don't know what it says, they don't know who the characters are, they don't know the plot development. *The Shack* has proven to be an entry

point for some of them, although I'm pretty clear that not all of them in the room are very literate, even though they are old enough to be high school graduates. This particular community includes at-risk and impoverished individuals. If I will read for them, or if someone else in the room will read for them, they will get engaged. But they are not comfortable looking at the books. One of the class members even brought in an ipod with the story on the ipod, and they got engaged by listening to the story that way. So for them, if I focus my teaching only through reading, then reading becomes an obstacle.

Kim described a non-intrusive method for introducing the sermon topic to the non-reading members in her congregation. She said,

I do use the same story with the children in worship that I use with the adults. I think it helps the kids understand the story, even though they may not be able to process it all, and I think it gives the grown-ups an entry point. I think that helps people who are a little less quick to ease into it. And, I think it helps the non-readers to anticipate what we will be talking about when we read the scripture and when we have the sermon, because they heard what happened with the kids.

As Kim has acknowledged, some professions require attention to the reading ability of clients.

So I am mindful of that when it comes to reading in my churches. My city church is fine when it comes to printed text being in a bulletin that they need to read and respond to, or if they need to read something out of a hymnal, they are fine

singing or reading out of the hymnal. The country church responds better to praise chorus type songs, and I'm not trying to over-generalize, because the older people love the older songs, but the young people who struggle to read really like the repetition of the praise chorus songs. They can hear the person line out the music and they can then sing it back. They may not know the words if you have to look in a book or on a screen. The country church is much less comfortable with reading out of a hymnal or a bulletin. I think it has to do with educational level, and bottom line comfort with being able to read or not.

Fred and Kim are two participants whose professions required them to understand and respond to the reading needs and abilities of their clients. Although Ellen and Preston did not discuss reading abilities of their clients, they both did reference the fact that they were responsible for reading relevant job information and helping other employees understand the information. Joe, Amy, and Beth were young participants who have not yet experienced a need to understand literacy skills of others in their workplace. While the other participants did not discuss this issue, it was clear from the two participants who did offer insight into this topic that this was an important issue for those who held certain professional roles.

As these participants have shown, adults recognized the importance of literacy in their professional lives. Jobs did not remain stagnant, but were constantly changing to embrace new technology and knowledge. Reading allowed employees to keep up with the changes happening in their professions. In addition, participants who held particular professional roles found that they had to understand and respond to the reading needs

and abilities of their clients. In this way, the participants were able to become a positive influence on other readers.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what aspects of early literacy experiences continue to influence and motivate readers into adulthood. In this chapter, I described the generalizations that relate to the following research questions: *“What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?”* *“What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?”* and *“What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults?”*

Interview responses showed that early literacy experiences impacted an adult individual’s desire to read. Although each participant had unique memories of their early childhood literacy experiences, the analysis resulted in patterns that were then synthesized into statements, or generalizations. The generalizations were further explained in the findings, and they included memories that participants shared about their early literacy experiences, interactions with other students and adults, and experiences in their adult lives.

Adults remembered that they were more motivated to read when they were able to choose books that were of interest to them, and reading series books or magazines encouraged additional reading by participants as new volumes were published. Literacy

learning was influenced by caring individuals, including teachers and family members, who encouraged participants to love reading. Adult participants remembered and appreciated the teachers who cared for them when they were students.

Participants had early memories of being afraid that they could not do what the other students could do in the classroom. These fears often went away as the students became more confident learners; however, the adult participants had not forgotten how it felt to be afraid at school. Adults also remembered how it felt to be singled out to leave the classroom for special classroom. The sentiments expressed by other students or teachers, such as insults because an individual had to leave the regular classroom for some part of the day, continued to resonate in that individual's adult life.

The participants in this study were adults who had been employed or were employed at the time of their interview, with the exception of the youngest participant, Beth, who was in college. Joe and Amy were young participants who had not acquired an abundance of employment experience. Soon after participating in this study, Amy had her first child, and stopped working at a day care center in order to stay home with her daughter. Ellen and Preston were retired. Fred and Kim were both employed in professions that require contact with clients. The adults recognized the importance of literacy in their professional lives. Additionally, individuals acknowledged that some professions require attention to the reading ability of clients. Literacy was important to individuals of all ages and in all types of careers. In the following chapter, I will conclude the study with a discussion of how the findings relate to the research on early

literacy instruction. I will suggest implications of the study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Implications

One of the great tragedies of contemporary education is not so much that many students leave school unable to read and to write, but that many graduate with an antipathy to reading and writing, despite the abilities they might have (Smith, 2004, p. 191).

Our schools strive to provide all children with effective literacy instruction, yet many children and adults choose not to read. What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits, and how do these reading habits affect the social and professional lives of adults? Participants in this study represented a 68 year age span. Their varied experiences across this time period highlighted dimensions of early literacy related to both home and school reading, and the influence of these experiences align with the research literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The purpose of this study was to find evidence relating to the phenomenon of early literacy experiences from case studies of adult participants. The following three questions guided my research:

- 1) What specific memories do adult readers recall about early reading experiences?
- 2) What is the nature of the influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits as reported by adults?
- 3) What is the nature of the influence of lifelong reading habits on social and professional life as reported by adults?

I begin the chapter with an explanatory theory of how memories influence lifelong reading habits, as related to the growth of seedling into a tree. The chapter continues with a discussion of possible implications of the generalizations or relationships I discovered as I sought to understand the early reading experiences of the study participants.

Exposition on the Tree

The influence of early reading experiences on lifelong reading habits can be demonstrated by the image of the Literacy Tree (Figure 6.1). The roots of a tree draw up nutrients and water, which is necessary to give a tree life. These nutrients nourish a tree as it grows from seedling to mature tree. Without the appropriate nutrients and water, a seedling cannot develop an adequate root structure, and therefore will not grow to develop a strong trunk, branches, or leaves, which are necessary for the process of photosynthesis. Similarly, the roots of literacy draw on experiences, both positive and negative, that give life to a developing individual. The roots of the Literacy Tree illustrate the contextual home and school influences that young people experience during their formative years.

A healthy trunk provides stability and protection to the tree. Without a healthy trunk, a tree is likely to become diseased, damaged, or entirely broken. Healthy trees can adapt to their surroundings, continuing to grow and develop despite obstacles that may form in their way. For example, a tree growing next to a barbed-wire fence does

not stop growing because of the fence. Instead, a healthy tree will adapt, even with negative influences, a tree will grow around the obstacle. The trunk of the Literacy Tree represents the efficacy of the developing individual. Just as a tree uses nutrients and water to grow a healthy trunk, so does a reader develop habits influenced, at least in part, by early literacy experiences. These experiences affect the individual's self-worth, or feelings of efficacy. Positive experiences provide rich nutrition for enhancing the structure of a tree. Negative experiences may have a weakening effect on the structure of a tree. If a tree is healthy, it can overcome negative influences and emerge with greater strength. Likewise, an individual reader may overcome literacy obstacles with positive self-esteem as he or she moves forward with motivation and determination. A passion for learning and a rich literacy environment provided by home or school can nourish an individual to excel, even when challenges intrude on developmental processes.

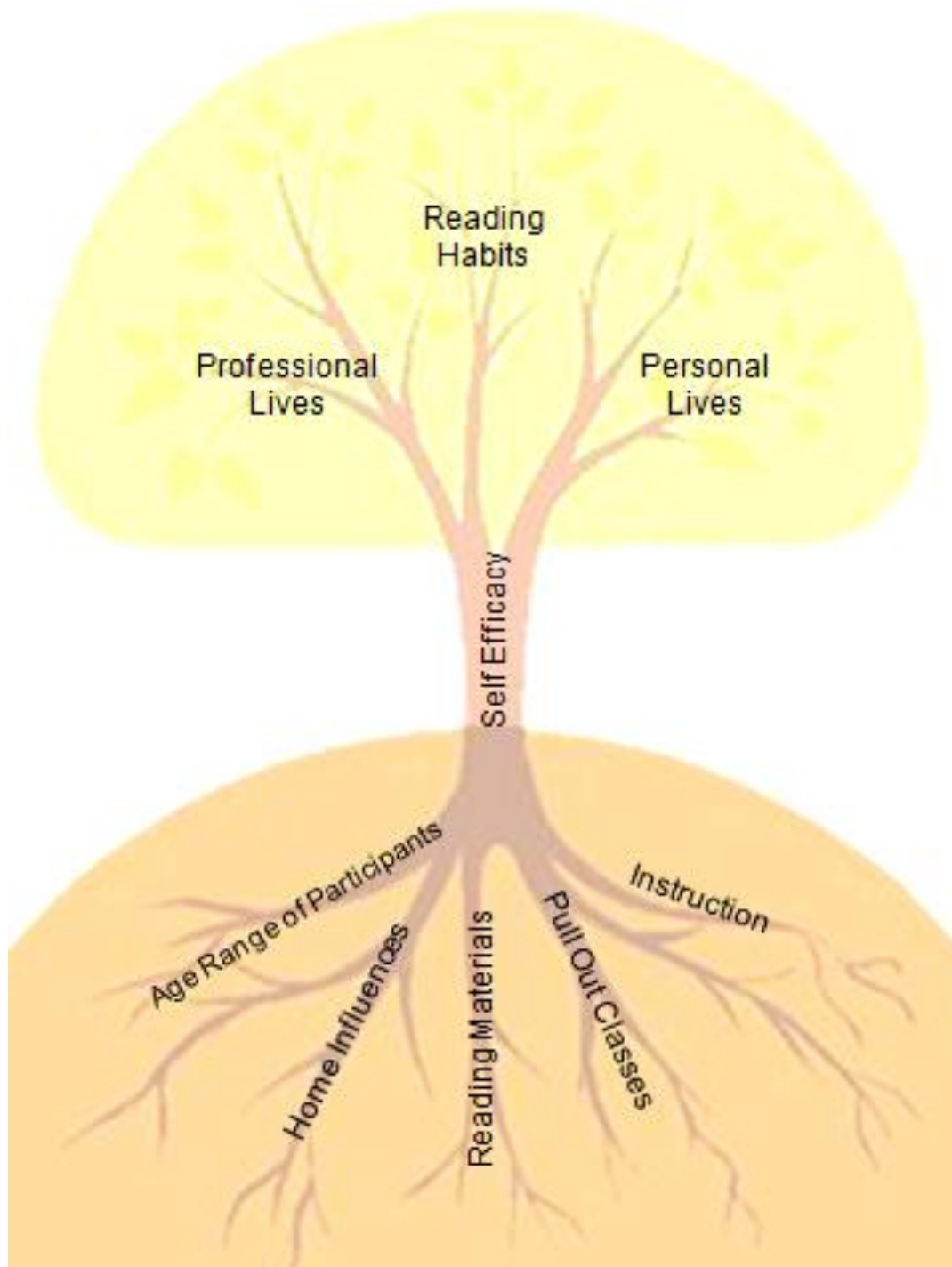


Figure 6.1

Recollections of Literacy Experiences

Participants in this study represented a 68 year age span. Although years had passed since they were in elementary school, they all had memories about their early literacy experiences, both at home and at school. Varied experiences across this time period highlighted dimensions related to the home and school reading environment. It has been said that the only thing that is constant in life is change. This was true for the participants in this study, who experienced transitions in their school environment and home environments. Families moved and schools and teachers changed. Siblings were born and relatives died. How did these experiences affect children over time, and how did children make sense of these experiences? “Longitudinal qualitative research is critical if we are to understand the schooling experiences of children” (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 8).

Brandt says, “Literacy is so much an expectation in this country that it has become more usual to ask why and how people fail to learn to read and write than to ask why and how they succeed” (Brandt, 2001, p. 1). Being literate is correlated to educational success, employment opportunities, and lifetime income (Planty, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Reading leads to experiencing and accessing knowledge, which leads to many opportunities, including pursuit of higher education, which can lead to higher paying employment with more opportunities for advancement. In discussing research in the field of literacy, Coyne (2004) stated, “One of the most salient and compelling conclusions to emerge from this knowledge base is the vital and

cumulative consequences of establishing or failing to establish beginning reading skills in the early grades” (p. 90). As this study and related research has shown, early literacy experiences influence the reading habits of adults. It is imperative for educators to determine effective ways to positively influence the lifetime prospects of adults through literacy.

The Central Role of the Teacher

Sherman (2004) said, “The teacher is someone who has a vision for a student’s future and has been granted the authority and given the responsibility to craft daily teaching practices to move toward an actualization of that vision” (p. 119). Given that responsibility, educators and other stakeholders in the field of education, such as parents and future employers, should be concerned about the effectiveness of teachers. There are, in fact, ample studies of teacher effectiveness retrieved from recent research. There is no one best, ideal way of teaching. It is not the methods used that are most significant but, instead, it is teachers, their knowledge, and their relationship with the students that is most important.

Teaching is a moral endeavor that “can yield either extraordinary positive results or serious negative consequences” (Sherman, 2004, p. 117). According to Sherman (2004), there are opportunities for teachers to influence students by providing encouragement and support, or the teachers can conduct themselves in ways that are opposite. When describing responsive teaching, Sherman explained,

Such intentionality requires the teacher to capture the essence of each student's personal learning space, recognize the uniqueness of that space, and enter it with respect and understanding. The teacher seeks to become part of that space to advance the student's learning (Sherman, 2004, p. 119).

In one study of pre-service teachers, a survey question asked what was meant by a *really good teacher*. The top five reported characteristics of a really good teacher were "caring/understanding/warm/friendly, ability to relate to children, patience, ability to motivate students, and ability to maintain discipline" (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004, p. 73). The same study asked second grade students to describe what made a good teacher. The young students responded that good teachers were "caring, patient, not boring, polite, and organized" (Murphy, et al., 2004, p. 78). The attitude of the teacher is also important. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) found that effective teachers offer compliments that make learners feel a sense of accomplishment in their work. When this praise is authentic, teachers can foster self-efficacy in their students. Guthrie (2001) said that a coherent classroom successfully fuses these qualities. Participant Kim in the current study talked about one teacher whom Kim perceived as condescending. Kim, who was an above-average student, said that because of this teacher's attitude, she was not motivated to do work for her class.

Similarly, Deanne Camp (2007) surveyed 242 participants, ranging from first graders to graduate students. The surveys were designed to learn about the reading habits of the participants, and not surprisingly, found that teachers have a huge influence on the reading habits of all of the age categories that were surveyed. Further,

responses from participants supported the notion that acquiring the reading habit has positive benefits that continue throughout life, including academic progress and social development (Camp, 2007). Advanced literacy is an intellectual skill and social habit that depends on many factors, including educational, cultural, and economic factors (NEA, 2004).

Alienating Instructional Practices: Pull- Out Classes

Children in elementary school acquired skills to help them understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read. Learning to read, for most children, can be compared to climbing a ladder; the children move progressively upward in skills like climbing higher rungs. The elements of reading are learned and pieced together in a seamless fashion so that reading becomes automatic. Early success at reading begins a positive feedback loop, in which reading increases ability to read (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). Reading teachers have a difficult task because many readers do not follow this traditional pathway. For these children, the elements of reading never seem to mesh but remain partially independent, causing difficulty with fluency and comprehension. These children appeared to benefit from early, intensive reading instruction, which included explicit phonics instruction and reading text with a high percentage of decodable words.

Children with disabilities have been placed in normal classroom environments in the United States for more than twenty years. As a result of The Education for all

Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and its reauthorization, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, students identified as having a disability are required to be placed in regular classrooms unless their individualized education plan (IEP) specifies other arrangements. This movement of including children with disabilities in regular classrooms, also called inclusion, signals a philosophical change for educators (Shoho, et al. 1997). Inclusion classrooms require the regular classroom environment to be reorganized to fit the learning needs of all students, both general and special education. The goal of an inclusion classroom is to create learning communities that appreciate and respond to the diverse needs of all students.

As children progress through elementary school, their extrinsic motivation tends to increase, as well as their focus on performance goals (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Children's efficacy beliefs and their competence become closely tied to their performance indicators. For some children, this leads to a growing realization that they are not as capable as other children, thereby reducing their motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 408). In the current study, three participants, Fred, Kim, and Amy, had memories of attending pull-out classes. For Fred and Amy, these remedial classes helped them with reading skills. Kim attended a pull-out class for gifted students. Each of these participants appreciated the academic assistance that was gleaned from the pull-out classes, yet each participant remembered being stigmatized by their classmates for leaving the confines of the regular classroom. Both Fred and Amy described the feelings of inadequacy that they felt because they had to leave their regular classroom to receive help in reading.

There is abundant research to confirm the benefits of individualized instruction, which is often provided in the form of pull-out resource classes. Torgesen (2000) analyzed the results of five reading intervention studies and concluded that by intervening early and systematically, using effective methods, a significant percentage of young children at risk of experiencing reading disabilities can catch up to their peers who are not at risk. These interventions provide valuable opportunities for students, yet pull-out classes are unfortunately causing children to experience feelings of alienation.

Shoho, Katims, and Wilks (1997) conducted a survey study which was designed to investigate the perceptions of alienation among high school students with learning disabilities. The study assessed seventy-six students who were assigned to either a fully-inclusive classroom or assigned to a classroom which included pull-out resource room placements. Alienation, which includes the constructs of isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness, explains the disjuncture between one's expectations and their actual experiences. Isolation is defined as a feeling of being alone. Students who feel isolated experience a lack of connection to others in a given environment. Normlessness refers to a person who does not feel a part of the environment within a given context. These students both perceive themselves, and believe others perceive them, as being different in a negative way. Students who feel powerless believe they cannot affect the decisions of others. Powerless students often give up at the first sign of resistance or failure.

The results of the study showed that students with learning disabilities who received pullout academic support daily for 45 minutes a day reported significantly

higher levels of alienation than the students who were fully included in the regular classroom (Shoho, et al. 1997). The students with learning disabilities who were not pulled out of their regular classroom felt greater control over their learning environment than similar students pulled out for remedial support services. The students in the inclusion classroom also reported feeling less stigmatized and more connected to the students in their regular classroom than the students who were assigned to the remedial classrooms. The practice of full inclusion appeared to minimize perceptions of alienation among the participating students with learning disabilities. Shoho, et al. (1997) cited research by Banerji and Dailey (1995) who found that full inclusion found improved self-esteem, and in some cases, improved motivation among included students with learning disabilities.

The alienation of students who attend pull out classes is an issue which needs to be addressed by school leaders (Shoho, et al. 1997). Some researchers doubt that regular schools and inclusion classrooms will ever be able to provide an appropriate education for all students with disabilities, particularly those identified with emotional and behavioral disorders (Shoho, et al. 1997). Educators should embrace the challenge to create learning environments which minimizes students' perceptions of alienation.

Students come to school with a wide variety of individual capacities, interests, and special circumstances, each at a different point of instructional need. Our sensibilities tell us, therefore, that the outcomes of schooling will be different- not necessarily better or worse- for every student. It is the responsibility of teachers

to make sure that these differences do not result in some students having less of an opportunity to live well (Sherman, 2004, p. 124).

While it is evident that children require individualized instruction, the model used to deliver this instruction must be evaluated. The model may be inefficient if the effects are negative on the students. Although the research presented here dealt with students with learning disabilities, the feelings of alienation are not isolated to students who attend special education. Participant Kim was a gifted student who was pulled out of classes due to her high intelligence, yet she felt alienated from the other students in her class. And a participant in Selfe and Hawisher's (2004) study described herself as a star student who was always on the outside of school activities. This participant, Karen, frequently moved due to her father's military career, and she always felt different.

Shoho, et al. (1997) suggested that one possibility to neutralize the stigmatizing effect of resource services is to offer support services to all students on an as-needed basis. If all students had access to resource support services on an as-needed basis, the perceptions of alienation may be reduced or eliminated.

Getting Books into the Home: Nurturing the Reader

The road to reading begins early in a child's life. Pleasure reading should be introduced to very young children and nurtured throughout their elementary and secondary schooling. A study by Lockledge and Matheny (1987) tested the assumption that the primary motive to become and remain a reader originated at home before

children began school. The participants identified themselves as *avid* or *infrequent* readers, and they were asked to describe their earliest memories of reading. Many of the self-identified avid readers remembered their earliest reading experiences as happening during their pre-school years with their families at home. Early memories of favorite books were reported, and stories were remembered that were read to them by a particular individual, such as a grandparent, a parent, or a sibling.

The avid adult readers in Lockledge and Matheny's (1987) study described their families as warm, loving people who liked to share experiences, such as playing and studying, with others. The avid readers continued to enjoy reading as adults, and reported spending large portions of their leisure time reading newspapers, magazines, and books of all kinds. The importance that the family attached to literacy practices, in general, had an important shaping influence on the ways in which individual family members approached literacy learning.

Most participants in the current study had similar recollections of their family experiences. Ellen, who is an avid adult reader of books and magazines, shared stories of her sister buying a series book that they all read and enjoyed. Preston had few memories of his family members reading, but he recalled times when they would sit in the small den of their home together. Kim had memories of reading with her sisters, her parents, and her grandmother. Joe and Amy both remembered their mothers spending time reading with them, and Beth remembered that her grandmother spent a lot of time with her. Of these participants, Amy is the only one who does not enjoy reading in her adult life. Amy's negative school memories overflowed into her home memories, where

her mother had to spend many hours helping her with school-related reading tasks. Instilling a love for reading in children must begin long before they step into a classroom. Routman (1996) explained that certain environmental factors were common to almost all early readers. Among those factors were reading aloud to children, often reading the same book repeatedly; the opportunity for children to see a role model, such as a parent or sibling, reading; and the availability of a wide variety of reading materials, including storybooks.

Getting books into the homes of young children was the goal of performer Dolly Parton when she started the Imagination Library in Sevier County, Tennessee in 1996. In 2000, the Dollywood Foundation expanded the program to other communities, and by the end of 2007, the Dollywood Foundation was mailing books to children from birth to five years old in communities in forty-three states, the District of Columbia, and Canada (<http://dollysimaginationlibrary.com/howworks.php>). By the time participating children turned five years old, they would have a library of sixty books from this program alone. Communities identified young children who were eligible to subscribe to the program. The books were free, and every child five or under who lived in that locality could enroll. The Imagination Library, along with educators and agencies such as the International Reading Association, choose a library of 60 books to be used each year for all enrolled children ages newborn to five years of age. The funds for the program, which averaged only \$28.00 per child per year, are raised by the individual localities.

Local community studies found that families reported reading with their children more often after they began participating in the Imagination Library program. The

Tennessee Board of Regents released results of a study of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library participants. The 320 kindergarten teachers and over 150 pre-kindergarten teachers surveyed in Tennessee affirmed that the students who participated in the Imagination Library were better prepared for school than those who did not participated in the program (<http://dollysimaginationlibrary.com/howworks.php>). Children who enjoyed the gift of a new book every month were learning valuable lessons about bound material and a strong start in becoming literate. Early reading experiences helped children develop the desire to learn to read.

Instructional Practices that Promote Reading

Quality reading instruction in the primary grades is the best defense against reading failure, overcoming even the effects of childhood backgrounds that might increase the risk of reading difficulties. A study by Torgesen (2000) found that early intervention by qualified educators could help children identified at risk for reading disabilities catch up with their peers. Torgesen conducted an analysis of the results of five recent reading intervention studies. Each of these studies had implemented carefully designed beginning reading instruction with students at risk of reading disabilities. The immediate benefits of interventions were clear. Torgesen (2000) calculated that three quarters of primary school students at risk of experiencing reading difficulties can catch up to their average-achieving peers through effective,

comprehensive reading interventions. Less obvious, however, was whether those children would continue to have success with reading.

The kinds of experiences children have in school will influence their motivation (Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Teachers can structure their classrooms to create opportunities for engagement. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) explain that certain instructional practices impact engagement processes and learning outcomes. Teachers who work with their students to create learning goals contribute to their students' self-efficacy. Students work harder to achieve goals when they think that their teachers want them to understand the work, not just get the correct answers. Students who are learning-goal oriented are more likely to be more highly engaged than other students.

Real world experiences are intrinsically motivating (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading motivation can be increased when texts and books are connected to stimulating activities. Teachers who offer choice to their students are promoting motivation by allowing student control (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Children seek to be in command of their environment, instead of being manipulated by others. As students perceive that teachers respect them enough to provide well-designed choices in reading instruction and in other areas, students increase their effort and commitment to learning.

According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), students are more motivated to read with their classrooms contain single-authored books which are matched to the interests of the reader. The number of interesting books of this type in a classroom is often not very substantial, but students who are fortunate to have book- rich classrooms fare well.

Once given interesting texts, it is important for students to be given time to read. “A profusion of trade books in a classroom has little benefit on motivation or achievement unless it is accompanied by sufficient time designated for text interaction” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 413.)

Teachers who read-aloud remained a major motivator for young adult readers. In the current study, several participants mentioned books that they remembered because their teachers read aloud. Participant Beth explained that after her third grade teacher read *The Little House in the Big Woods*, she became interested and read the whole series. According to Cunningham and Allington (2007), both elementary and college students reported they wanted to read what their teacher read aloud in class. Reading aloud positively impacts vocabulary growth and comprehension (Routman, 1996).

Most children develop the reading habit between the ages of 8 and 11. Reading aloud to older children provides the motivation for them to read at the critical point when they have the literacy skills to take advantage of that motivation. (Cunningham & Allington, 2007, p 14)

Much can be learned about what helps a child become a reader by talking to children and adults about their reading experiences. Case studies of striving readers in prior research and the adult participants in the present study repeatedly show that having free choice of reading materials resulted in more reading. Readers chose books that were of personal interest, which resulted in increased knowledge of the topic and vocabulary involved and led to better reading skills. The readers in the current study expressed their desire to choose books that were of personal interest. The range of

interesting material varied, from Joe explaining that he enjoyed cowboy books when he was young, to Beth stating that she wanted to read novels by author Stephen King when she was in middle school. Both Preston and Kim described a myriad of genres that they enjoyed reading, while Fred had a more limited selection of reading material.

Media specialist Leslie Preddy (2007) identified three types of readers, noting that these categories are not static, and that individuals may shift between reading preferences. Resistive and struggling readers are those who have not had success with literacy experiences. Apathetic and reluctant readers possess the skills that are necessary for reading, but their experiences have not resulted in the desire to read. Effective and motivated readers have acquired both the skill and the desire to read often.

According to Preddy (2007), it is the responsibility of educators and parents to increase the amount of time that students spend as effective and motivated readers, thus creating lifelong readers. "One must understand what makes an effective reader in order to create reading addicts" (Preddy, 2007, p. 24). Identifying the traits that effective readers use can assist educators in helping struggling or reluctant readers as they move toward becoming motivated readers. Effective readers are often capable of reading more than one thing at a time. They re-read either for entertainment or for information. Effective readers keep reading materials near them at all times. They know that they do not have to finish everything they start, or that they might want to try a particular book again months or even years later. Avid readers recognize the joy that

comes getting lost in a good book (Garan & Devoogd, 2008). Effective readers possess many different types of reading material, and they read for many different reasons.

There is general consensus among many literacy experts that there are many benefits from allowing children to read self-selected books at school (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Gambrell, 2007; Krashen, 2001). Many researchers, including Routman (1996) and Krashen (2004), advocated free voluntary reading and reading for pleasure in any genre, including romance novels and comic books. Reading practice was found to be a significant factor in the acquisition of literacy and in the development of mature reading skills. Reading skills improved as individuals read, especially when learners had a choice in the selection of reading materials. Research supported the notion that allowing students uninterrupted time to read selections of their choice resulted in gains in reading achievement. Interestingly, the subject areas robbed of instructional time in order to provide time for sustained silent reading did not show declines in test scores.

Krashen (2004) repeatedly pointed to free voluntary reading as the best method for increasing reading motivation for all children. Krashen did not find evidence of a decline in interest in recreational reading during adolescent years, or even of negative attitudes toward reading, unless the reading material was teacher selected. Krashen posited that reading was a powerful incentive for reading.

Stahl (2004) recommended that students spend 15 to 30 minutes of each day reading books of their own choice. Stahl believed this to be an essential component of reading instruction. Allington (1977) stated that “the best way to develop reading ability is to provide abundant opportunity for experiencing reading” (p. 60). Opportunities to

read independently during the school day have various titles, but similar goals of encouraging children to actually read. SSR, or Silent Sustained Reading, involves students reading a book, usually of their own choosing, for 15 to 30 minutes each day. With SSR, some teachers choose to allow students to read books of their choice, without monitoring or instruction from the teachers. Other teachers monitor the types and number of books read during SSR time, and may administer assessments. (Garan & DeVogd, 2008, p. 337) Independent reading times may also be called Daily Independent Reading Time (DIRT), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and SQUIRT (Super Quiet Reading Time). Allowing independent reading time during the school day emphasizes the importance of reading. “Our society values books. Certainly, it would be a betrayal of those values if we did not promote or allow real books and real reading in schools” (Garan & DeVogd, 2008, p. 341).

Branches of a tree: Lifelong reading habits

A healthy tree produces healthy branches with many leaves, productive in their contribution to the important goal of photosynthesis. Unhealthy branches wither and break, causing the leaves to have difficulty with growth. The positive influence of early literacy experiences on a literate human adult creates a prospering individual, successful in personal and professional pursuits. Most participants in the current study were avid readers, and these adult readers had experienced success with their families and in their professional lives.

Despite growing competition from electronic media and other technologies, reading remains a popular pastime. Americans read novels, short stories, poetry and plays. Pleasure reading for Americans also includes magazines, newspapers, and comic books. In addition to reading, Americans participate in literature by listening to live or recorded readings of novels, plays, and books (NEA, 2004). Some people report that creative writing is a pastime for them and others enjoy finding literacy information on the Internet. In self-selecting materials, adults opted for a wider variety of reading to mesh with their interests. In a study by Cuban (2001), for example, women tended to read popular culture materials. Cuban found that women turned to books for love, pleasure and comfort. Reading offered an escape from their normal routine.

Pleasure reading could enhance the lives of individuals, employers and society in general. "Pleasure reading can take many forms- reading a novel or nonfiction book, a scientific magazine, a poem, or the Sunday paper online- but in any form, pleasure reading enriches our lives in countless ways" (Gambrell, 2008, p. 18). Readers are rewarded by the rich variety of literary works available. The participants in my study mentioned a variety of reading materials that they enjoyed, from popular fiction to magazines (See Appendix G). Those participants who liked to read said that reading reduced feelings of isolation, expanded their imagination, and allowed escape.

Avid readers enhance society in many ways, including their participation in cultural events and volunteer organizations (NEA, 2007). The *Reading at Risk* survey found that reading for pleasure was related to an increase in volunteering and charity work. Readers were more likely than non-readers to vote, participate in volunteer

activities, attend cultural events and plays or watch sports. National data shows that habitual readers are even more likely to exercise (NEA, 2007). In short, pleasure reading increased the likelihood that an individual would fully participate in society in positive ways.

Research revealed that less proficient readers and those who did not read often were more likely to drop out of school, have higher unemployment rates, and engage in criminal activity more frequently than readers (NEA, 2004; NEA, 2007). Most occupations require at least minimal reading for employees. Even a position such as a janitor requires reading labels on chemicals or other supplies. In Peter Johnston's study of adults with dyslexia, it was found that disabled readers developed coping strategies that enabled them to survive in a literate world. Johnston explained that as adults, disabled readers became busy with their family and professional lives, and while they did not forget about their reading problems, they did not seek reading help (Johnston, 2000). The men in Johnston's study viewed learning to read as a long-term goal, but short-term goals and obligations continued to take precedence. However, the participants were forced to obtain reading help when jobs required a level of reading of which they were not capable. Jack and Bill had each reached positions in their career that required more reading, and avoiding print was no longer possible. For Charlie, an upcoming promotion was requiring more reading for his current job, and his part-time Army Reserve job was suffering because he wasn't taking the written promotion tests (Johnston, 2000).

Adults become comfortable with their jobs and do not want to take a risk, such as to further their education, even if taking a risk will get them to move ahead in their job. Negative past experiences influence the individual's decision to not obtain help. "When failure is attributed to lack of ability, little motivation for goal attainment is seen. Furthermore, expectancies based on past failures are believed to adversely affect task persistence, risk-taking, and other achievement-promoting behaviors" (McCormick, 1994, p. 160). The importance of positive and effective early literacy experiences is clear. Lacking literacy skills, according to Ross (2006), "means being shut out of jobs and opportunities; conversely, being able to read and write is a ticket to ride" (pp. 3-4).

Concluding Comments

The influence of early literacy experiences on adult literacy preferences has implications for the next generation of readers. Like a tree dropping seeds to produce more seeds, a literate adult has a responsibility to encourage the love of literacy for future readers. When adults became parents, experiences from their own education became important for their children. Applied to formal learning, experiences could include teachers, materials, and instruction, other students in the classroom and the physical environment of the school building. Experience, though grounded in past events, was subject to constant reevaluation and multiple interpretations (Belzer, 2004, p. 43). In the case of adult learning, Belzer found that "experience is conceptualized primarily... as an accumulation of events, information, and knowledge that forms a

reservoir from which the learner can draw” (p. 44). In Belzer’s study, adult learners studying for a GED were interviewed about their past experiences with school. Many entered the program with negative past experiences. Still, these adult learners were disappointed or frustrated when the adult learning classes did not fit their view of *traditional* school. Even if they had negative memories of homework, chalkboards, and tests, they expected those elements to be part of their adult learning classes.

Past experiences impacted how parents viewed their child’s teacher and school in general. According to Bloome (2000), home and community literacy practices could be complementary or non-complementary to school activities, depending on past perspectives of the individuals involved. Non-complementary practices occurred when there was opposition between the school and groups of individuals, such as cultural groups. Compton-Lilly (2003) noted that the lack of understanding between teachers and the families that they serve sometimes creates distrust, which eventually leads to school failure. Bloome proposed that African American students might reject school practices because they differed from what they were taught at home and in their cultural communities. Since parents were important teachers for their children, this opposition to school practices could be detrimental to students, both in the primary grades and as they grew. In order to break the cycle, school literacy programs must address the cultural diversity of the families of their students.

In a study by DeCusati and Johnson (2004), parents were asked to volunteer in their children’s classroom. Before the volunteer program was implemented, parents filled out surveys about their previous experiences with reading. The responses to the

surveys created interesting data to compare previous experiences with the observable characteristics of classroom volunteers. Parents who had positive experiences with reading when they were students were more likely to enjoy reading to their own children, and these parents became confident classroom volunteers. In contrast, the parents who reported less than positive school experiences were less likely to become involved in their child's school as a volunteer (DeCusati & Johnson, 2004).

In the current study, we can conclude that Kim will share her love of literacy with the family members of the clients that are known to her. Children who spend time with Kim will receive positive literacy influences. Conversely, Amy will remember her negative literacy experiences, and will probably not choose to read to the children who are in her realm of influence.

Retrospective studies allow a look back through time, to sort and rethink what is meaningful to the participant. This study encouraged ideas for future study. If a study was conducted with only participants who attended pull-out classes, would their responses be similar to Fred's or Amy's responses? A phenomenological study could focus on adults who were in special education classes during their elementary school years. Certainly, the intensity of the negative emotions and isolation felt by the participants who struggled with reading was one of the most unsettling aspects of my study. Other ideas are for case study research about early literacy experiences, with participants who have something particular in common, such as only with participants who attended a particular school

The ability to read and write was once thought of as a duty to God, but could be viewed as a duty to productivity (Brandt, 2001). Literacy practices begin in the home and are supported by educators, hopefully cultivating a love for and an ability to read that can be nurtured through school and beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Research

Participant Informed Consent Form

The Enduring Long Term Effects of Early Literacy Instruction: An Interview Study

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is designed to construct knowledge about the long-term effects of early literacy instruction.

Involvement in the study:

The study will involve interviews with individuals who are over the age of eighteen and who volunteer to participate. Initial interviews will consist of eleven questions and will take between 30 and 90 minutes to complete. Interviews will take place in a location and a time chosen by the participant. The interviews will be audio taped and later transcribed to a computer file by the researcher. If other information is needed, follow-up interviews may be requested.

The transcriptions will be used to provide data for the study. The researcher plans to publish any significant findings the study may generate. This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment for a doctoral dissertation. Participant's names will never be used in any shared versions of interviews, and identifying information will not be revealed in the published research.

Risks:

There are no identified risks from participating in this study. Participants may withdraw from this study at any time.

Benefits:

This study exposes parents and educators to additional perspectives about literacy instruction based on the feedback received from students who are now adults. This study combined with other similar studies will help to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of early literacy classrooms.

_____ **Participant's initials (Page 1 of 2)**

Confidentiality

The information received from interviews, including audio recordings and written transcriptions of interviews, will be kept confidential. Data will be securely stored in a safe deposit box in the home office of the researcher and will only be available to the persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to this study.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher at this e-mail address: kander10@utk.edu or at this telephone number: (423) 926-6810. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Consent (Page 2 of 2)

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The interview will begin with an introduction, purpose of study, and explanation and signing of consent form. (Note: These are questions for a semi-structured interview. The following questions may not all be used in each interview.)

Interview Protocol

1. What is the first thing you remember about reading?
2. Can you describe a typical day at your elementary school?
3. You probably had some interesting experiences both at home and at school when you were learning to read. Can you tell me some stories about learning to read?
4. Can you describe specific books that you remember reading in school?
5. Think about the teachers that you had in elementary school. How did those teachers influence your reading instruction?
6. When did you start to think of yourself as a reader?
7. In what ways have your early reading experiences impacted your desire to read today?

8. I'm interested in your reading preferences now. How have your reading interests and habits changed since you've become an adult?
9. What books have you enjoyed reading as an adult?
10. What would it be like for you if for one reason or another, you could not read?
11. How is reading important in your career?
12. Is there anything else you want to tell me about reading?

Appendix C: Interview With Kim

Interview with Kim

Question: Tell me about your earliest memories of reading.

Answer: I remember every night, usually my mom, but sometimes Dad, would go into my bedroom with Melissa (sister) and me and read stories to us. I remember fairy tales and stories of morality. My mom had a primer from when she was in school, and she would read stories out of that book. I remember it being a special time, reading with Mom.

Question: What do you remember about a typical day in your elementary school?

Answer: Well, I started kindergarten in my home church. The schools were overcrowded, and all the kindergartens were gathered in local churches. As a first grader, I moved to the new elementary school. I remember that being a very alarming time for me. I was excited to be in the big school, but I was a little disoriented because I had been at the church for my 3 year-old, 4 year-old, and 5 year-old classes. I had a truly wonderful teacher in first grade. I remember coming in to school and sitting down at my desk. I remember prayer time when I was in the younger grades. By the time I finished elementary school, it was changed to a moment of silence. I remember saying the pledge of allegiance, and I really remember (I think) what the classroom looked like. I remember the things that were hanging on the wall, and the cubbies in the classroom. I remember play time and going to the cafeteria.

I don't remember any specific lessons, but I remember the worksheets made by the mimeograph machine. The purple ink would rub off on my fingers. I remember the big, lined writing tablets. I remember going to the library and checking out books. We had to write our names on the card to check out books. (A few years ago, my mother was working in the library as they were changing from cards to digital cataloging. She was able to get one of the original cards where I had signed my name when I was in the second grade.) My favorite subjects were probably spelling and reading. I loved art and music.

Art class was always my favorite, but I didn't consider it an academic subject. Maybe because the teachers didn't always treat it that way. We didn't always go to a separate room, but sometimes we did. If you asked me to pick a favorite academic subject during elementary school, I would say spelling.

I remember the shock of 5th grade, when we had to start changing classes. One specific reason I didn't like it was that I had a male teacher for the first time, and I didn't like having a male teacher. He was creepy looking, a bit like Templeton the Rat in the animated version of *Charlotte's Web*.

Question: You probably have some interesting stories from when you were learning to read, either at home or at school. Do you remember any specific stories?

Answer: I remember a book by Mercer Mayer called *Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp*. I loved that book. I wanted to check out that book from the city library all the time. I remember really being drawn to books by the way their covers looked. If the book had a good appearance on the outside, and then I opened it and liked the way the pages looked, I was going to check out that book and read it whether the story was good or not! I remember the *Berenstain Bear* Books, the *Beatrice Potter* books. As I got older, I remember reading Greek and Roman mythology, and I remember reading about Harriet Tubman. (Follow up: Kim looked up that series that she couldn't think of.) They were called the *Value Tales* Series. She particularly remembers these:

- *The Value of Understanding: The Story of Margaret Mead*
- *The Value of Believing in Yourself: The Story of Louis Pasteur*
- *The Value of Determination: The Story of Helen Keller*
- *The Value of Helping: The Story of Harriet Tubman*
- *The Value of Truth and Trust: The Story of Cochise*

I started in outreach program for gifted students in 4th grade. I tested for it in 3rd grade. I remember leaving the class for this program, and the other kids treated me differently because I was leaving. I felt sort of like an outcast when I came back in each week. Eventually, I got to where I didn't care how they acted, because I loved the program and had so much fun and learned so much. So I decided it was their problem and not mine.

I also remember Pat the Bunny books, and a book called *The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes* (by Heyward and Flack). I loved it because it was about a rabbit who helped her babies learn, and still she went on to do amazing, wonderful things. *Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp* was that book by Mercer Mayer that I loved.

Question: Do you remember any specific teachers and what impact they had on you with reading?

Answer: My first grade teacher was great. She made me want to learn and learn and learn. I don't know which teacher taught me to read. I don't remember a time when I didn't read. That is probably because Momma and Daddy were always reading to us. Momma used to buy comic books and bring them home for us. I remember reading Archie and Jughead and Betty and Monica. In second grade, I had Ms. Umberger, and she was a loud lady. I was scared of her before I ever ended up in her classroom. You could hear her hollering all the way down the hall. But I found out that I liked her because she was interested in helping us grow and learn. I can't remember specific lessons that the teachers taught, but I do remember that they made me want to learn more.

When I started reading Roman and Greek Mythology, I started learning Latin words, and I loved this. The more I learned these root words, the more fun it was to learn other English words.

Question: You have a great memory. I think the reason you don't remember when you learned to read is that your parents always treated you like a reader. They bought you books, they read with you, and they always treated you like a reader. The transition from not being able to read to being a reader was so gradual and seamless that you can't remember exactly how or when it happened.

Answer: Yes, it is like my Christian life- I never remember not being a Christian. With reading, I never remember not being a reader. I remember that Momma and Daddy would tell us stories at night and we would beg them to tell us more stories. Two key stories they told were of the birth of Jesus and Noah's Ark.

I also know that how much I love reading was affected by how much I loved my teacher. I was scared when I got to first grade. And I was scared of Ms. Umberger because of all her yelling. I was scared of her until I figured her out. Third grade, I had Ms. Helvey. I thought she was wonderful. Fourth grade, I had Ms. Lambert, and she was wonderful. Sixth grade reading and literature class was pretty awful. I remember pulling my hair on my arms to stay awake in Mrs. Martin's class. Momma told me to pull my arm hair to stay awake. I also would pull on my eyebrow hairs. In seventh grade, my teacher was awesome! Mrs. Halperin incorporated projects into everything, and the projects made everything so much more fun. I remember there was a big "My Buddy" doll that was very popular, and she would bring in that doll and somehow incorporate that into the lessons.

I remember we had a Team A and Team B at our school, and the other team had a much better grammar teacher during the 8th grade. I knew the other team had a better teacher, and I knew I was missing out, and I didn't like that at all. But then, in 9th grade, I had the hardest grammar teacher: Mrs. Bogart. Boy, did I learn my grammar. We never tested just on one lesson. We learned and tested on adjectives. Then we learned nouns, testing then on nouns and adjectives. We tested always on the units we'd already completed to keep us fresh and to carve good grammar into our brains. While 9th grade was very hard, the next year, when I took Latin, I was able to do Latin translations and Latin grammar without a lot of trouble. I went on to take Latin for a total of five years in High School and in College. I think I did well because of how hard the 9th grade grammar teacher was.

Then, in 10th grade we returned more to reading. It was an American Literature class. Mrs. Wing was my teacher and she was wonderful. I remember an activity where we were given vocabulary words and we had to find them in some literature we were reading outside the classroom: a novel, another subject, a magazine. I still think about that when I see one of those words in something I read today! As for what we were reading that year, I remember reading "The Red Badge of Courage," and I remember not liking it at all. By the way, every summer prior to my 9th-12th grade

years, I had to read lots of books for my advanced English classes (English referred to Reading/Grammar/Literature combined). I recall some, but not all of these.

In 11th grade, I had another teacher I didn't like. And always, how much I put into the class, and how well I did in the class, had to do with how much I liked the teacher. I remember not being motivated to do work in her class. She had cool projects, but I didn't like her! She was condescending. It was the first time I ever put things off and waited until the last minute to do things. I don't remember much about that class except I hated it.

I remember reading the classics. Ms. Reed (my 12th grade teacher) took a different approach and had us read one playwright or author for the year. It was our special project to work on while we did the rest of the coursework. In the Spring, we would do presentations, and it involved a visual aide, and a paper. I did mine on Henrik Ibsen. I still love Henrik Ibsen. He wrote "A Doll's House," "Ghosts," and many more plays. I remember a classmate presenting on one of the Bronte sisters. Isn't that wild that I still remember that?! I'm almost 36 years old, and I can still remember what I did when I was 17. I was 16 when I started that class.

I am sorry to say I took no reading classes in college. I read quite a bit in college. I guess Great Books was the only reading class I took all four years. I liked most of the Great Books we read, but I hated *The Princess of Cleves*. I loved *Pride and Prejudice*. I'm glad I read *The Inferno*. I knew the story of *The Odyssey* already because of the Greek and Roman mythology I had done. I did not like Homer's version. Seminary is where I did mega, mega reading. I had to learn a different strategy for doing that reading. I couldn't savor the wording. I had to grab the meaning quickly and move on.

Question: In what ways did all of those earlier reading experiences impact your desire to read today?

Answer: I've been thinking about this. My youngest sister was born when I was 14. I was starting high school at the time. I remembered how much I enjoyed story books, and I was so glad to have an excuse to take those story books out and read them to Emily. I remember getting to the point where I was able to read orally very well. I could get into different voices. I could make the drama build. I could speak it in a way that would get her excited even though she wasn't actually reading from the page. She could feel the emotion of it. That experience has helped me in the way I work with reading with children, youth, and adults now in terms of reading the Bible and spiritual materials. So the way Mom and Dad and those early teachers taught me to read when I was little helped me work with Emily and develop my style for oral/aural reading, and I use this skill every week, multiple times every week.

Question: Can you think of any other ways that your reading habits have changed now that you are an adult?

Answer: One thought is that sometimes there are books that I feel like I ought to be reading. I discipline myself in reading those because I know I need to learn them, even if they are not necessarily enjoyable reading. They are edifying, and I am glad after they are finished. Another thing, Emory & Henry College had a knack for helping us listen to those who had previously not had a voice: Women authors, black authors, etc. In seminary, we were able to listen to other voices like African-American voices, Women's voices, Asian voices, Latin American voices, the voices of the disabled. So, as an adult, I have a much broader interest in reading, and I'm interested in engaging in reading someone that I have not heard their story before. I love Southern Women's literature. I love Appalachian Literature and stories. I like to escape, but I can't do too much of that because I have to be disciplined too.

Coming out of seminary, there's a factor of isolation that happens socially. You are living in a fishbowl, and you are used to living with all these other people who are studying the same things and talking about the same things, and now all of a sudden you are in a totally different role as a pastor. One of the ways we cope with that as clergy women was to have a reading group, a clergy women's reading group. We met for a couple of years until a number of us had to move out of the area. That reading group for me was not only a social lifeline, but it kept me paying attention to current literature. Most of it was fiction, and they were things that shaped me, but I would not have read them if someone hadn't told me about them. One of those is *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant. You read about these people in the Bible. This is the story of Dinah, who was raped. This was the sister of the 12 children of Israel, also called Jacob. It backs up and it gives you the story of the women about whom we know so little: Sara and Leah and Rachel. Powerful stuff, not just because it is from the Bible, but because it is inventive and creative. It took someone who had not had a voice and gave them a voice.

Question: Are there other books that you have enjoyed reading as an adult?

Answer: Anita DiAmant, *The Red Tent*; Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer*; and *The Poisonwood Bible*; an author named Xinran wrote *The Good Women of China*; *The Secret Life of Bees*, several things by author Kathleen Norris.

Question: What do you imagine your life would be like if for some reason you could not read?

Answer: I think I would be getting books on tape or DVD. I think I'd learn Braille if I had the capacity. I think that the culture in Biblical days was orally/aurally-oriented. They were storytelling. You have somebody sit in the center of a circle with probably a fire nearby, and they tell these awesome stories. That is how everything was passed down. Somewhere along the lines, somebody learned to write, and they put all that stuff down. Later, they invented the printing press, and all this stuff became so much more accessible to common people.

It is wonderful to have the power to read, but our culture has shifted. A lot of people would rather watch a movie than read a book. They will wait for it to come out as a movie. They miss so much. For an example, right now “Harry Potter” is out in the theaters. That book series was so popular, but so controversial when it came out. I read it to see what all the hoopla was about and I found it was wonderful! J.K. Rowling did all the things that I love with linguistics. She used root words and Latin roots to help kids stretch their vocabulary. So when this is turned into a movie, there is so much depth and richness that is left out of a movie simply because you can’t do it. So if our culture is focused on storytelling via movies and TV, people miss out on a lot. You know, even if I couldn’t read from the page, I don’t think a movie would be nearly as satisfying. I think I would find books on tape or DVD. If I was blind, I would miss seeing the way the letters are formed and shaped on a page. That may sound silly, but I would miss the printed page. If I lived in a different generation, I probably would have been a typesetter because that seems like so much fun. To form the letters, and then form the words that form the papers and books.

Question: Can you think of anything else that you want to tell me about reading?

Answer: Reading for me is something that grows me. I’ve always enjoyed learning. So, whether it’s from a book, or an article on-line, or in a magazine or newspaper, I find it terribly interesting. I love the way that the internet has brought news and stories to people, accessible to people, when we have otherwise would have not heard those stories, because there are a lot more people collecting and dispersing them. I think that what made me fall in love with reading was the way it took my imagination places. When I was little, I think I evaluated the quality of a book by the illustrations, and that had to do with the visual artist that was forming in me. Even now I probably do that because of how I’m drawn to certain books by their covers and how some turn me off. Those illustrations help me imagine myself into the midst of those stories. I got to become the Country Bunny, and I got to become Liza Lou. And now, when the world spins so fast, you can pick up a book, and just get lost in that book for just a little while, if it is the right book.

Question: As a minister, your occupation would be difficult if you couldn’t get into the reading.

Answer: That is another interesting thing to tell you about how reading affects my ability to work with people in the church. I had a guy in my last church who was illiterate. It took me a while to figure this out, because he had the Bible memorized. He knew the Bible better than most anyone who would read the Bible every single day. He could tell you what it said and what it meant, but he couldn’t locate the chapter and the verse. I know he was frustrated by not being able to read. I know he was embarrassed by it. But it was something that he had worked himself past. He could still engage with people, hold his own in a Sunday School class, and even teach others.

I guess the other thing that comes to mind is that I've offered short term studies in churches for years. When you use a book-based study, how that affects how people learn is an interesting thing to watch. For instance, this year, I've read the book called *The Shack*, by William P. Young. I did it with two groups of adults in the spring, and it was really interesting to watch how some of the adults engage so well with the story, and how others just struggled along. One of the men told me at the start of the study, "I started a book a few years ago that the preacher thought we ought to read, and I never have finished it. But this one, I've read over half the book in one week and I'll have the other half finished next week." (With four weeks left to go in the study!) I'm also using this book with young adults and we are doing it differently. We don't just discuss and then look up a verse here and there. For the most part, the young adults are not rooted in Bible. They don't know what it says, they don't know who the characters are, they don't know the plot development. "The Shack" has proven to be an entry point for some of them, although I'm pretty clear that not all of them in the room are very literate, even though they are old enough to be high school graduates. This particular community includes at-risk and impoverished individuals. If I will read for them, or if someone else in the room will read for them, they will get engaged. But they are not comfortable looking at the books. One of the class members even brought in an ipod with the story on the ipod, and they got engaged by listening to the story that way. So for them, if I focus my teaching only through reading, then reading becomes an obstacle.

My Mom and Dad, as you've already observed, created a culture in our house where I never thought of myself as a non-reader. I don't think these young adults grew up in situations like that. They saw school as their work, and they saw parents who hated work and avoided work, so they saw no use in going to school, and they resented it. It is only when they reach the age of 19 or 20 or 21 that they realize, "oh man, I needed that school. I needed that reading."

So I am mindful of that when it comes to reading in my churches. My city church is fine when it comes to printed text being in a bulletin that they need to read and respond to, or if they need to read something out of a hymnal, they are fine singing or reading out of the hymnal. The country church responds better to praise chorus type songs, and I'm not trying to over generalize, because the older people love the older songs, but the young people who struggle to read really like the repetition of the praise chorus songs. They can hear the person line out the music and they can then sing it back. They may not know the words if you have to look in a book or on a screen. The country church is much less comfortable with reading out of a hymnal or a bulletin. I think it has to do with educational level, and bottom line comfort with being able to read or not.

I've noticed this in each of my churches, how someone's educational level affects their ability to get into it. So I have learned to adapt my teaching so that it works with the reader and the non-reader.

Young people today don't seem to know how to spell but they know how to use that abbreviated texting language- I wonder how this is going to affect worship. For instance, "Be Right Back- BRB," well, that looks like no word in the English language. I

wonder how they are going to be able to interact with scripture text if they only know a texting, instant-messaging language. I'd say that's their predominant language, other than oral communication. Why do I say that? They don't respond to emails, voicemails, letters, or other written stuff very much. But they communicate via text. Want to communicate with some age 12-25? Text.

I remember something else about reading in elementary school. We used to have a file folder box that had these reading lessons in it. You used colored pencils, so this appealed to the visual person in me, and I think it might have been called SLS. You could go and pull out a worksheet behind the number the teacher told you, when other students had not finished their work. You would do these reading quizzes with these colored pencils. I enjoyed these.

In Sunday School, I remember how proud I was to be able to read a verse out loud when the teacher would ask me to read, "Kim, read verse 13." I also remember how fun it was- and this was early elementary - Kindergarten, first or maybe second grade Sunday School- you had to sort out these papers for the whole month. I loved those papers. They were illustrated and had stories connected to what we were learning in Sunday School that morning.

Here's what I love about the lectionary- not all churches or denominations use the lectionary- but I love the idea that a kid goes to Sunday School, learns a lesson, goes to Big Church and hears the same story by the Pastor because the Pastor is using the same sermon for the adults in Big Church. So, lo and behold, the same story is repeated several times. That helped me learn Bible more than anything, that repetition. I remember when we had children's church (a class during the worship service for elementary aged children), they would carry the theme through into the class as well. I loved those papers, I loved being able to read verses, and I loved how the same story was told throughout church that day.

Question: Do you use this technique now?

Answer: Well, I'm not involved in the planning for Sunday School. But I do use the same story with the children in worship that I use with the adults. I think it helps the kids understand the story, even though they may not be able to process it all, and I think it gives the grown-ups an entry point. I think that helps people who are a little less quick to ease into it. And, I think it helps the non-readers to anticipate what we will be talking about when we read the scripture and when we have the sermon, because they heard what happened with the kids.

I don't expect people to necessarily remember from one week to the next what we've been doing, but I expect when I hit them with a cue the next Sunday morning that it will stir something in at least one person's memory. And usually I will see one- or maybe five or six- looks of recognition. I'll know that something carried over. I've thought about this, too. The translation issues can be either an entry point or a stopping point. I remember growing up that the pastor used the King James Version, and then later, we used the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. I remember being asked to read from it and the archaic language – thou, thee, thither - was really difficult.

I did not want to do it. But when we switched to the New Revised Standard Version, which is much more grammatically similar to the way we talk, even though it is a little more formal, I was much more comfortable. Today, I believe the case is that it is important for me to use a number of different translations and ways of telling it in order to reach a number of different people. Some of the older people just can't hear it unless it is from the King James. The young people need it in (over-)simplified language. There is a translation of the Bible called the Contemporary English Version and one called the New Century Version that do that very well. There is another one called The Message that takes the scripture and doesn't try to change it, but it tried to get the essence of what the original scripture said, and put in words that people can understand. It works really well for some people.

I was thinking also about my younger days of reading and learning. My Dad's mother was a principal and a teacher. A lot of times when we went to Grandma's house, there was this library table in the dining room. In the right hand drawer, she had the big lined tablets that we could practice our alphabet on. I remember her pulling me aside to work on the alphabet and to read a book. She would also have me sit on her lap, and there were these "I Spy" cartoons -- like there was a hidden banana or something -- and while we would do that, she would have me look all over that funny page paper and she would point words out to me. So, although I didn't know it at the time, I was already making connections between the letter A on that piece of paper that I was drawing on, and Look! There's the letter A on the funny page that Grandma is working with. I was three or four years old when those things were happening. I have a picture of me doing it. I know that she was working with me on basic skills toward reading then.

Appendix D: Codes For Patterns, Relationships, Themes

Memories of Early Literacy Experiences
Instruction

Instc/ Tch	Teachers were remembered if they were wonderful or ineffective. Teachers who were “just ok” were not remembered or mentioned.
Instc/Tch/In	Reasons mentioned for teachers being ineffective included a condescending attitude, too many students in the class, not motivating, and not able to recognize the needs of the students.
Instc/Tch/W	Teachers who were called “wonderful” were described as caring and patient. They realized that some students needed extra help, they incorporated fun projects into the curriculum, and they made students want to learn more.
Instc/sp	Special classes included gifted education and special education. Although these classes were helpful and appreciated to the students who were placed in the classes, there were also problems with students making fun of the students for leaving the regular classroom.
Instc/meth	Instructional methods that were remembered by participants included accelerated reader, worksheets, spelling bees, and writing the alphabet.
Instc/rd	Reading instruction was often remembered as repetitious reading from a standard reader. Students remembered teachers who read out loud or didn’t read out loud to the class, and the requirement that students read out loud (or not read out loud) in front of the class.
Instc/lib	Although not all participants were able to use a library in their elementary grades, the library was a positive memory for several participants.
Instc/age	The oldest two participants reported never having homework, while the younger participants who remembered homework had negative memories of the homework.

Memories of Early Literacy Experiences

School Environment

Scl Env/py	Participants remembered physical attributes of the school, including erasers, cubbies and desks, different kinds of boards and erasers, playgrounds, and cafeterias.
SclEnv/Rec	Recess was mentioned by several participants. The oldest participant remembers a dirt playground and playing marbles.
SclEnv/Rt	In addition to recess, daily routines that were recalled included lunch, roll call, the pledge of allegiance, and prayer time, or moment of silence.
SclEnv/str	The grade structure changed over time. The oldest two participants did not have kindergarten. The elementary grades used to be called grammar school.
SclEnv/tch	Most participants remembered having the same teacher all day during elementary grades, with class changing starting around fifth grade.
SclEnv/sp	Younger participants remembered special activities like field day and field trips.
SclEnv/clc	Other classes that were discussed included gifted education, special education, French, Art, Library, Music, and P.E.

Memories of Early Literacy Experiences

Home Influences

Hme/Par	Parents were mentioned in every interview. Some memories of parents included the jobs that they held and their reading habits.
Hme/rd	Some participants reported that their parents read to them, or didn't read to them.
Hme/help	Many parents were reported as being supportive of school, and some helped with homework, while others did not help with homework.
Hme/sib	Participants had between 0 and 4 siblings. Two participants recalled their siblings making fun of them.
Hme/phy	The physical environment at home was not mentioned often. When it was, the attributes that were remembered included a crowded house with no place to read, or a place to study, like a desk.
Hme/Ext	The extended family was important enough to be mentioned in several interviews. Participants discussed grandparents and family that lived nearby.
Hme/Trans	Transitions that were important to participants included moving homes, changing schools, and the death of a parent.
Hme/Act	After school activities were discussed by several participants. These activities included playing outside, reading, chores, and employment.
Hme/chr	The oldest two participants discussed the chores that they did at home.
Hme/age	The younger five participants never mentioned chores.
Hme/Lit	The oldest two participants talked about difficult living conditions, including crowded houses, rationing, and all members of the family having to work. These issues were never mentioned by any of the five younger participants.
	Literacy materials that were remembered in the participants' homes included magazines, newspapers, comic books, and books such as series books and the Bible.

Memories of Early Literacy Experiences

Books

Bks	There were many books mentioned by participants. In this typology, I did not distinguish between books of early literacy and books in adult lives.
Bks/hab	Literacy habits included reading for pleasure, re-reading books, and choosing not to read for pleasure.
Bks/typ	Types of books read included non-fiction and fiction books. Participants mentioned children's literature, series books, and standard readers.
Bks/non	Non-fiction books that were remembered by participants included history, women's literature, and Appalachian literature.
Bks/fic	Fiction books that were mentioned included fantasy books.
Bks/chld	Children's books, including series books, such as Berenstain Bears, and specific genres, such as cowboy books, were positively remembered by several participants.
Bks/etc	Other literacy materials that were read and remembered included pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, and menus.
Bks/rlt	Participants remembered books that they enjoyed and could relate to.

Memories of Early Literacy Experiences

Emotions related to experiences

EyEmo	No participant ever said the word “bored” during an interview.
	Many feelings were discussed by participants.
EyEmo/good	Participants expressed feelings of confidence about their reading ability and their good grades.
EryEmo/enj	Feelings of enjoyment included memories of farming, spelling bees, graduation exercises, reading, learning, and enjoying books.
EryEmo/ne	Several participants expressed a need to prove their intelligence, a need to keep up with classmates academically, and a desire for a role model.
EryEmo/fer	Feelings of fear were recalled about issues such as teachers, changing schools, other students gossiping, and the struggle to keep up academically.
EryEmo/dis	Participants expressed specific dislike over the issues of Accelerated Reader and handwriting practice.
EryEmo/ln	Feelings of inadequacy included being intimidated when reading in front of the class, angry at siblings who were successful at school, and frustrated when the academic work was not understood.
Ery/Emo/ss	Participants believed that they gained more from self-selected reading materials
EryEmo/con	Contradictory feelings were mentioned. These are listed below:
EryEmo/lik	Liked gifted education, but didn't like the feeling of being an outcast because of leaving the regular classroom.
EryEmo/hlp	Liked the help in Special Education classes, but didn't like leaving the class and being made fun of by other kids.
EryEmo/nd	Needed help with academics, but desired to succeed without any extra help.

Adult Literacy Habits

Personal Life

AdtLf	Adult participants discussed reading habits in their personal lives.
AdtLf/rd	Reading materials that they discussed included magazines, computers, and books.
AdtLf/Bks	Books were obtained from the library or bookstore, or given for gifts.
AdtLf/whn	Participants read in the evenings or in the middle of the night, with a book club or on a military deployment, or sometimes until the book is finished.
AdtLf/use	Uses of reading include employment, escape, re-reading a book, savoring, writing music, extending imagination, and for education.
AdtLf/not	Several participants expressed reasons not to read. These included the difficulty of reading and preferring to do other things, like farming or other outside activities.

Adult Literacy Habits

Professional Life

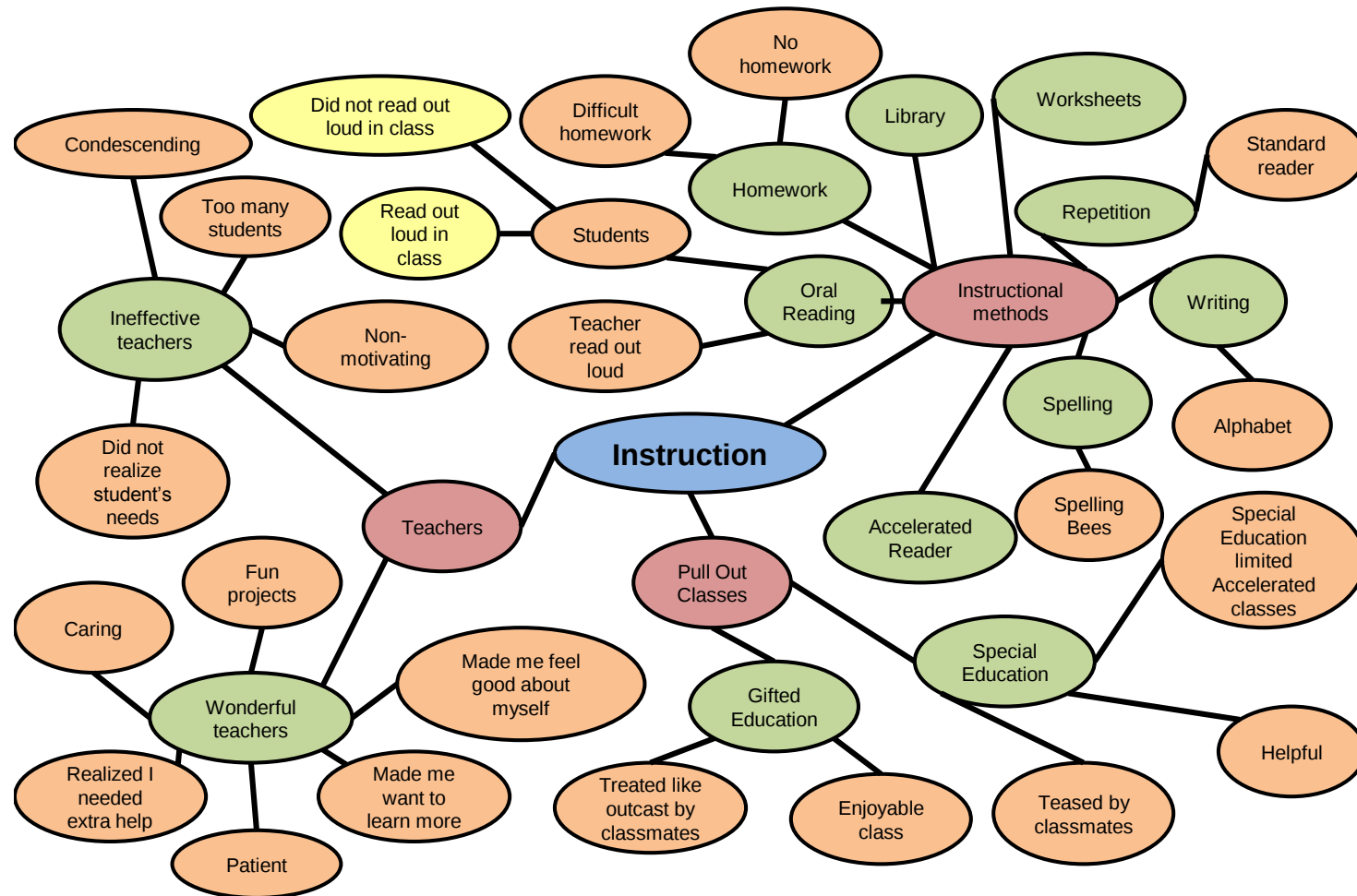
Prof lf	Reading in adults' professional lives is multi-faceted.
ProfLf/ed	The participants ranged in educational obtainment, from some Associate's Degree courses to advanced training after medical school.
ProfLf/rd	Participants noted that reading was required to remain current in their occupation, to teach new employees, and to read orally to clients.
ProfLf/ex	The youngest two participants did not have employment experience.
ProfLf/emp	Employment represented by these participants included a physician, a pastor, a homemaker, a military member, a student, a person who worked for the telephone company, and a person who worked for the railroad and was also in the military.
ProfLf/ret	The oldest two participants are retired.
ProfLf/imp	An important part of literacy use was the relationship with clients. Participants said that some clients are illiterate, and for some clients, reading can be an obstacle.
ProfLf/cl	Participants feel that they must communicate on the client's level, to include reading skills.

Adult Literacy Habits
Emotions related to literacy in adult life

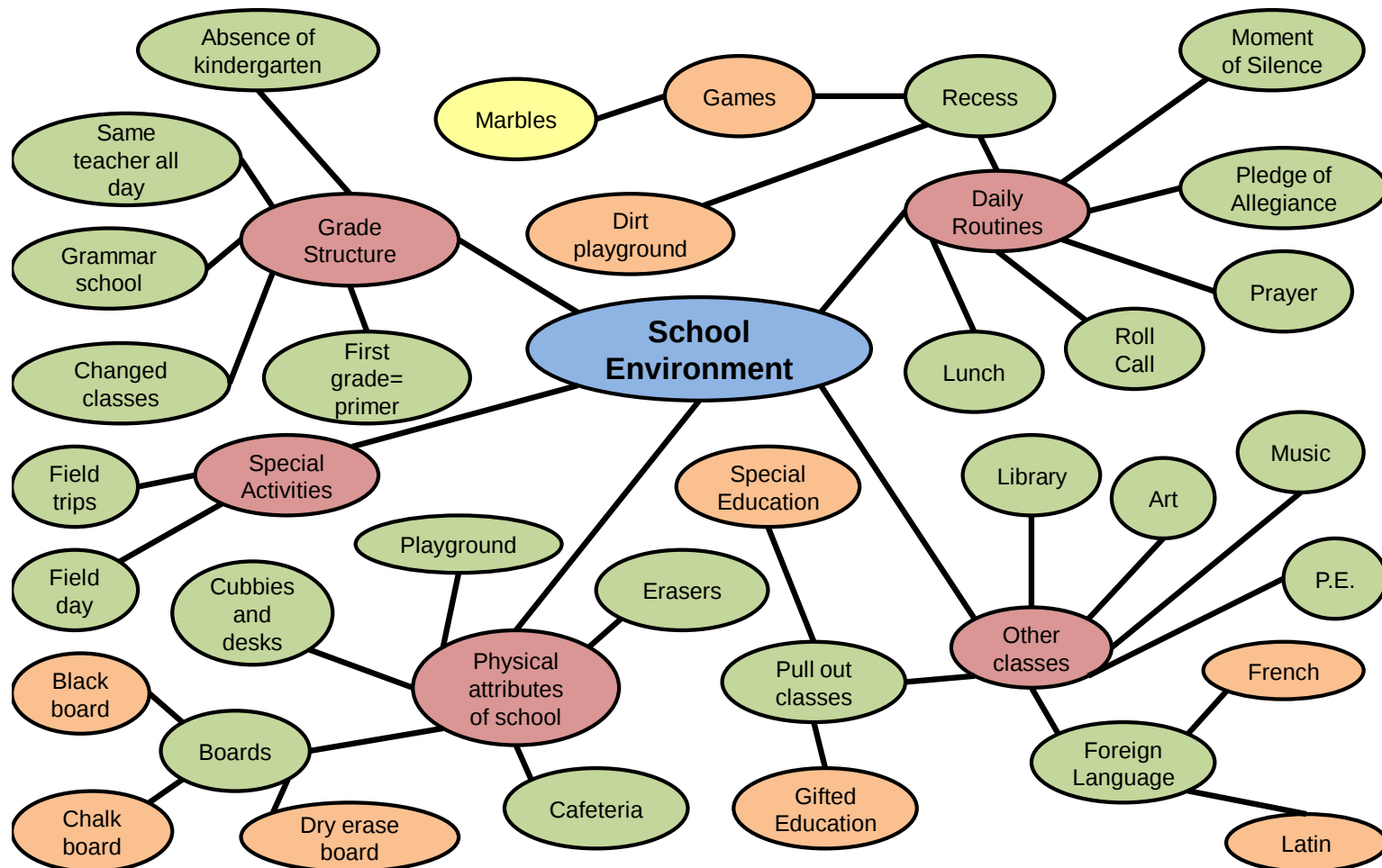
AdtEmo	Adult participants appreciate reading for the opportunities to savor text, enrich their brains, allow escape, expand imagination, and reduce feelings of isolation.
AdtEmo/not	Reading is not always a chosen activity. For some participants, they choose to do something else besides reading. Some participants report that reading is too hard.
AdtEmo/nec	Participants say that reading is necessary for performing job responsibilities and for writing music.
AdtEmo/Fic	One participant said that teachers should encourage fiction writing.
AdtEmo/bks	One participant likes her husband to tell her about books he has read.
AdtEmo/sad	One participant thinks it is sad that some people don't want to read.

Appendix E: Bubble Map Data Organizers

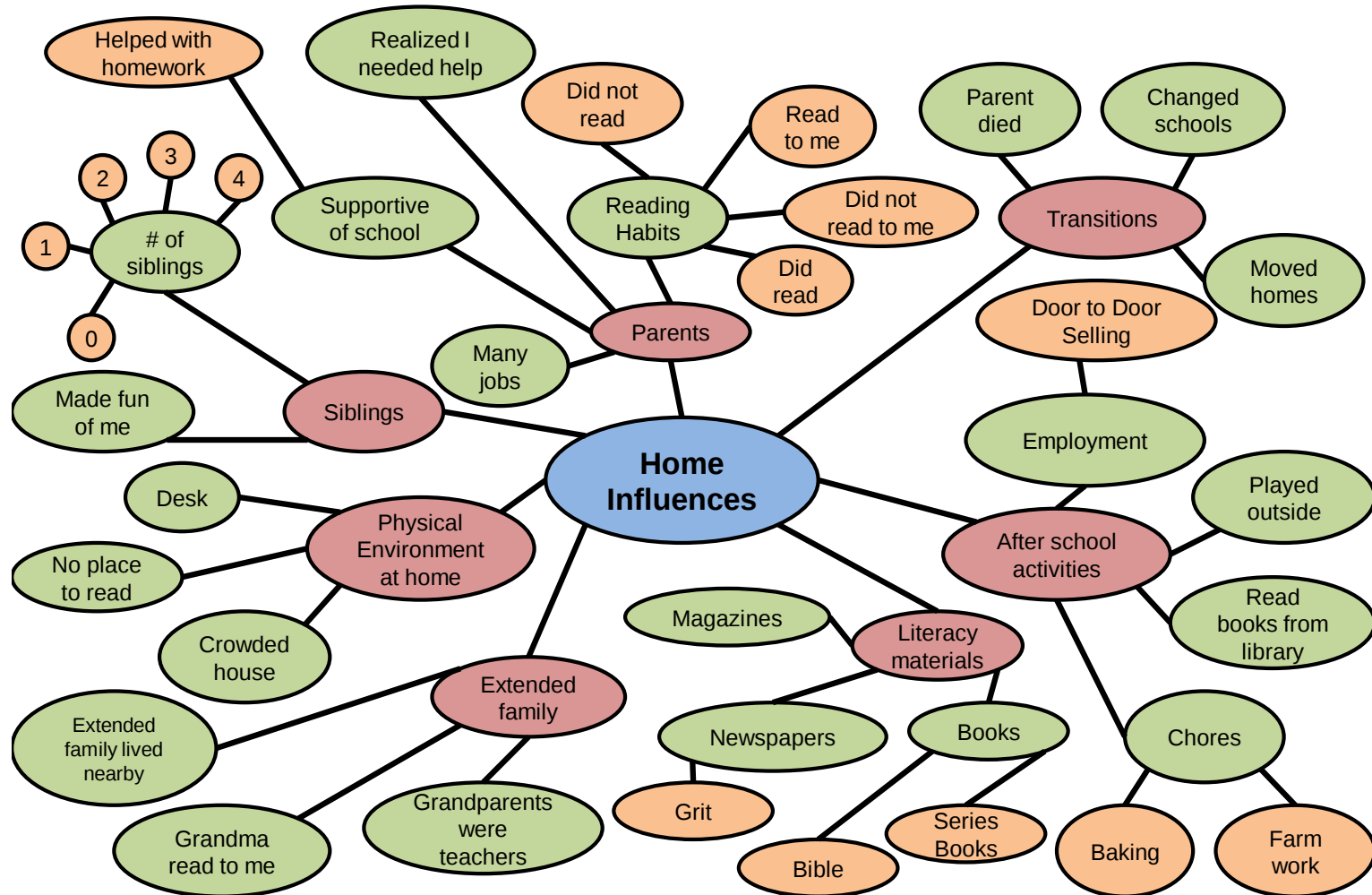
Memories of Early Literacy Experiences: Instruction



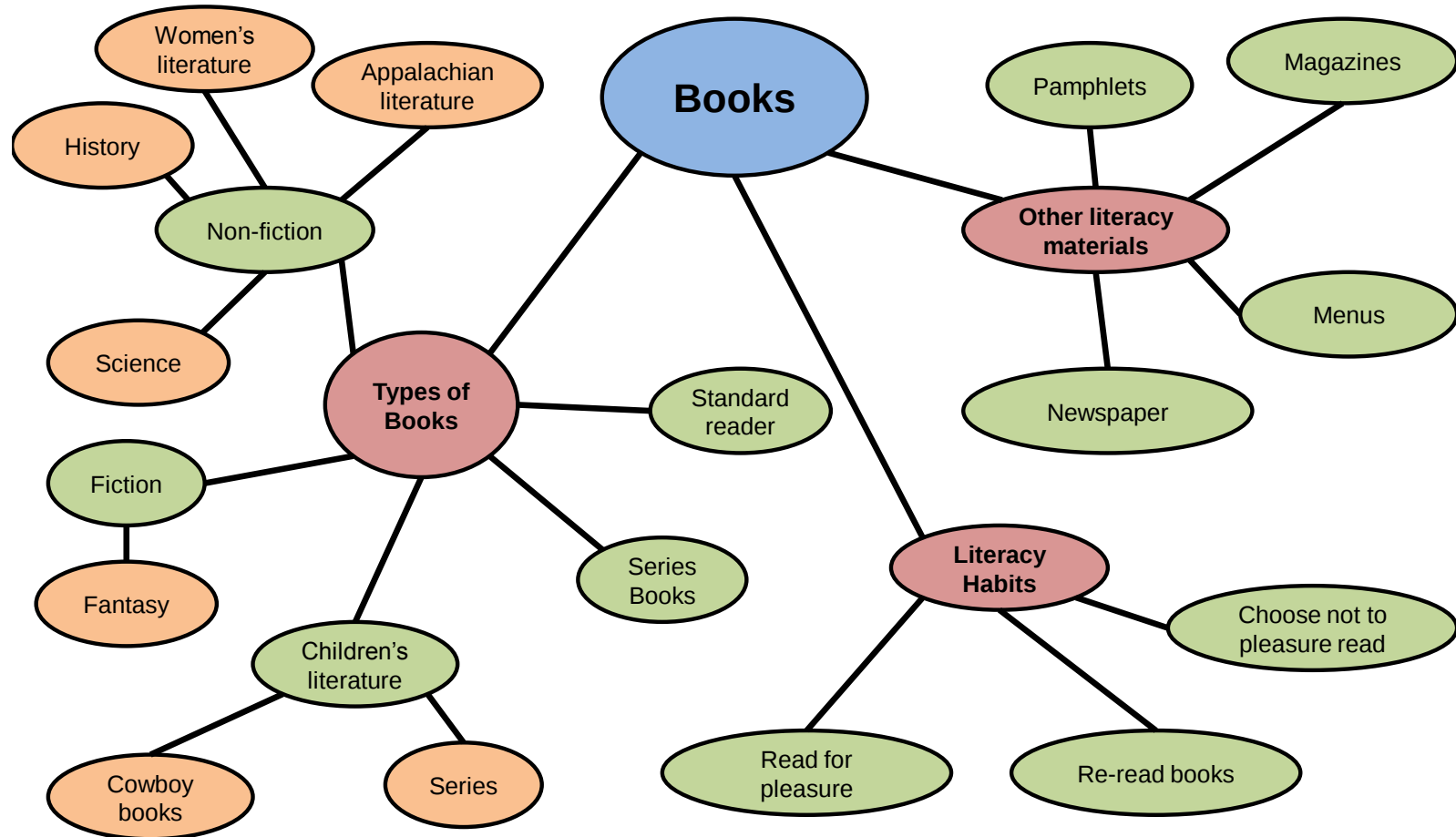
Memories of Early Literacy Experiences: School Environment



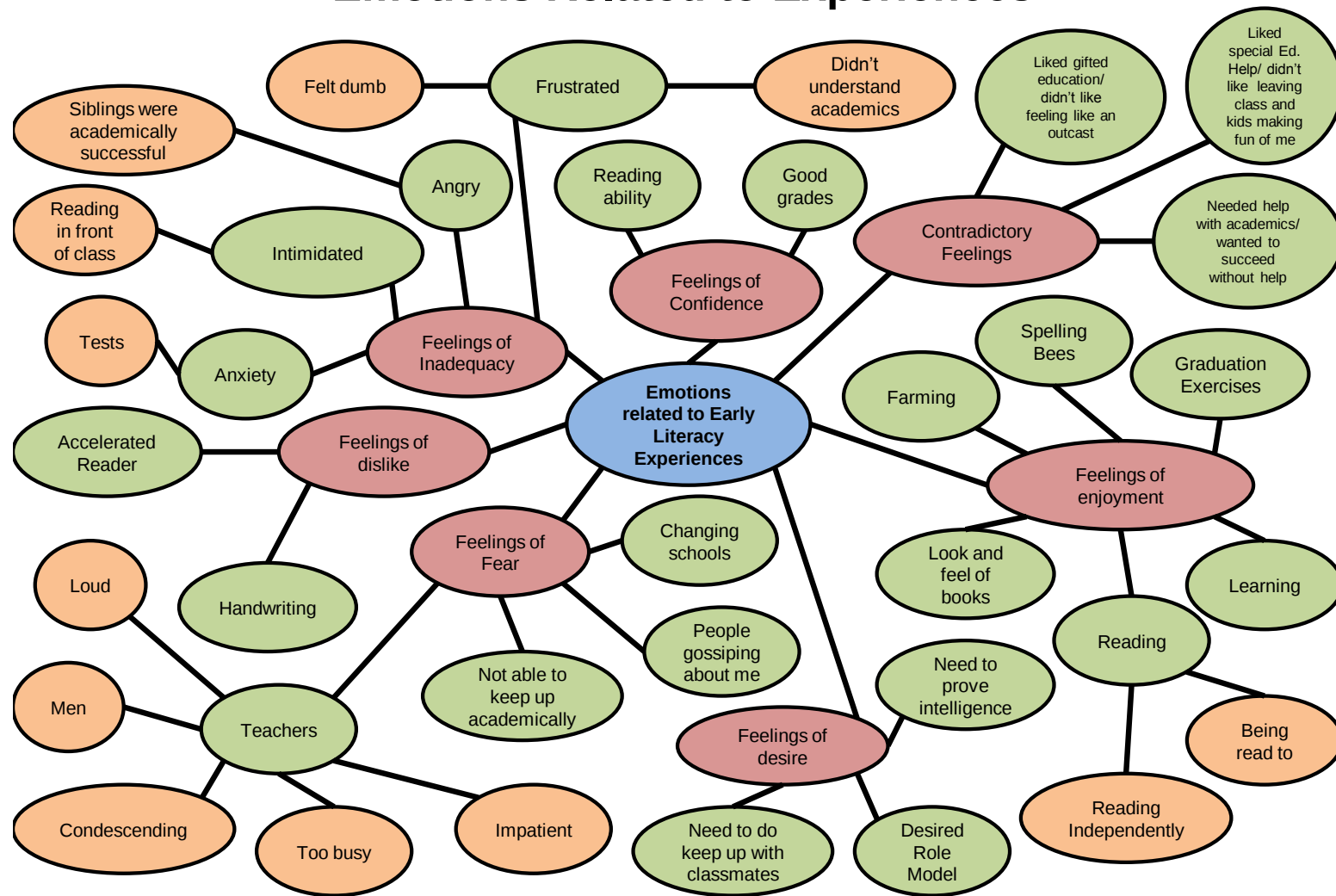
Memories of Early Learning Experiences: Home Influences



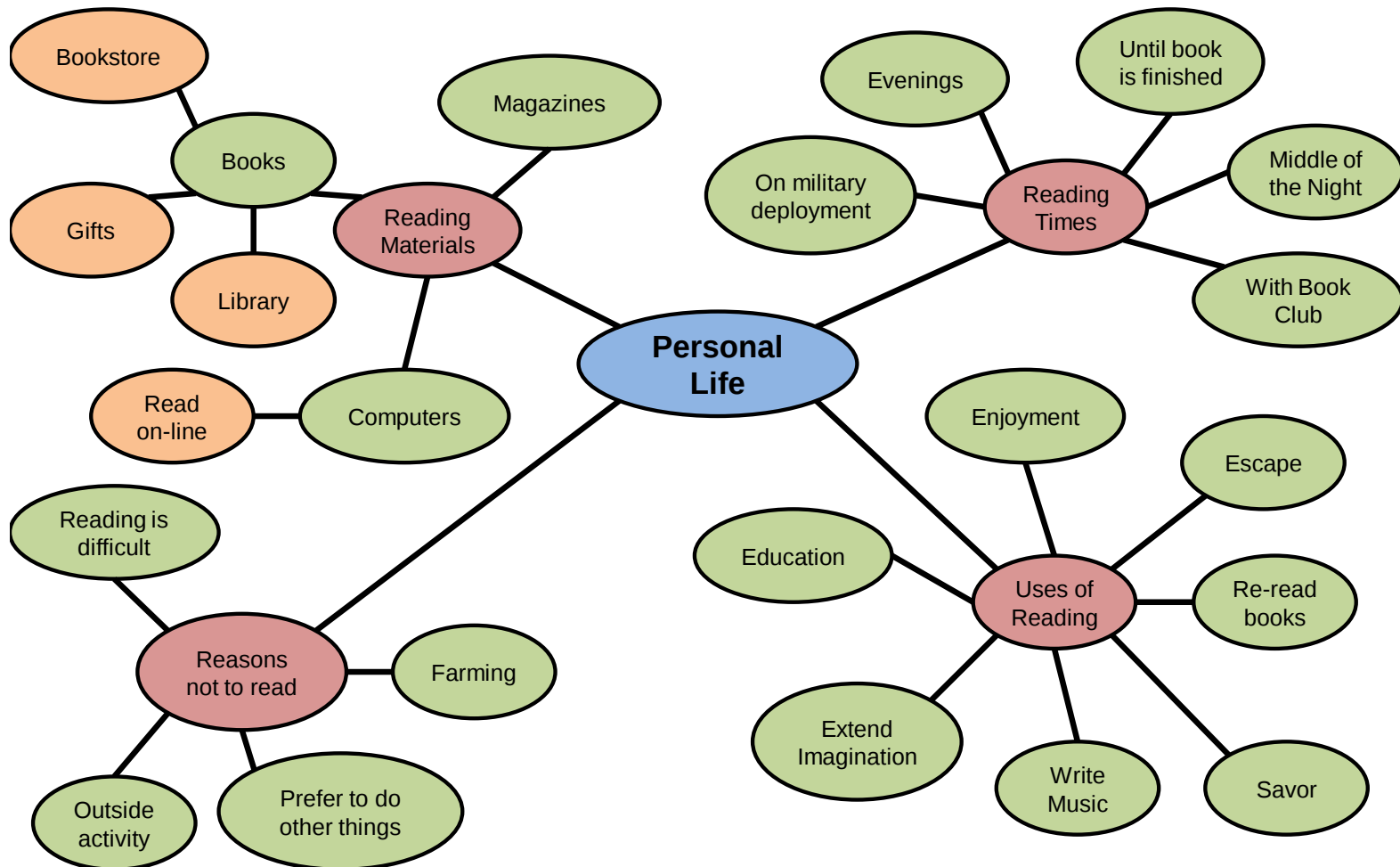
Memories of Early Literacy Experiences: Books



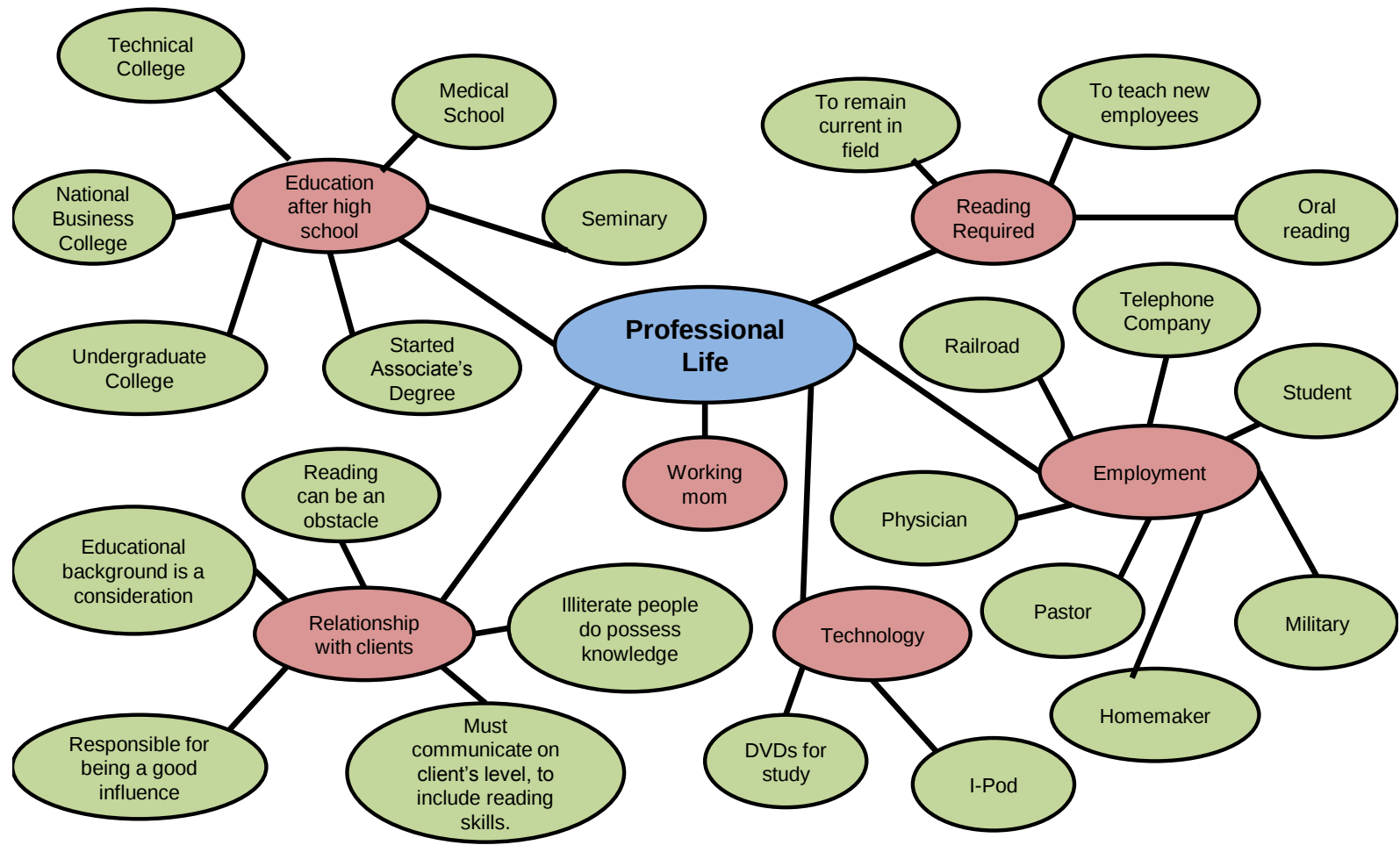
Memories of Early Literacy Experiences: Emotions Related to Experiences



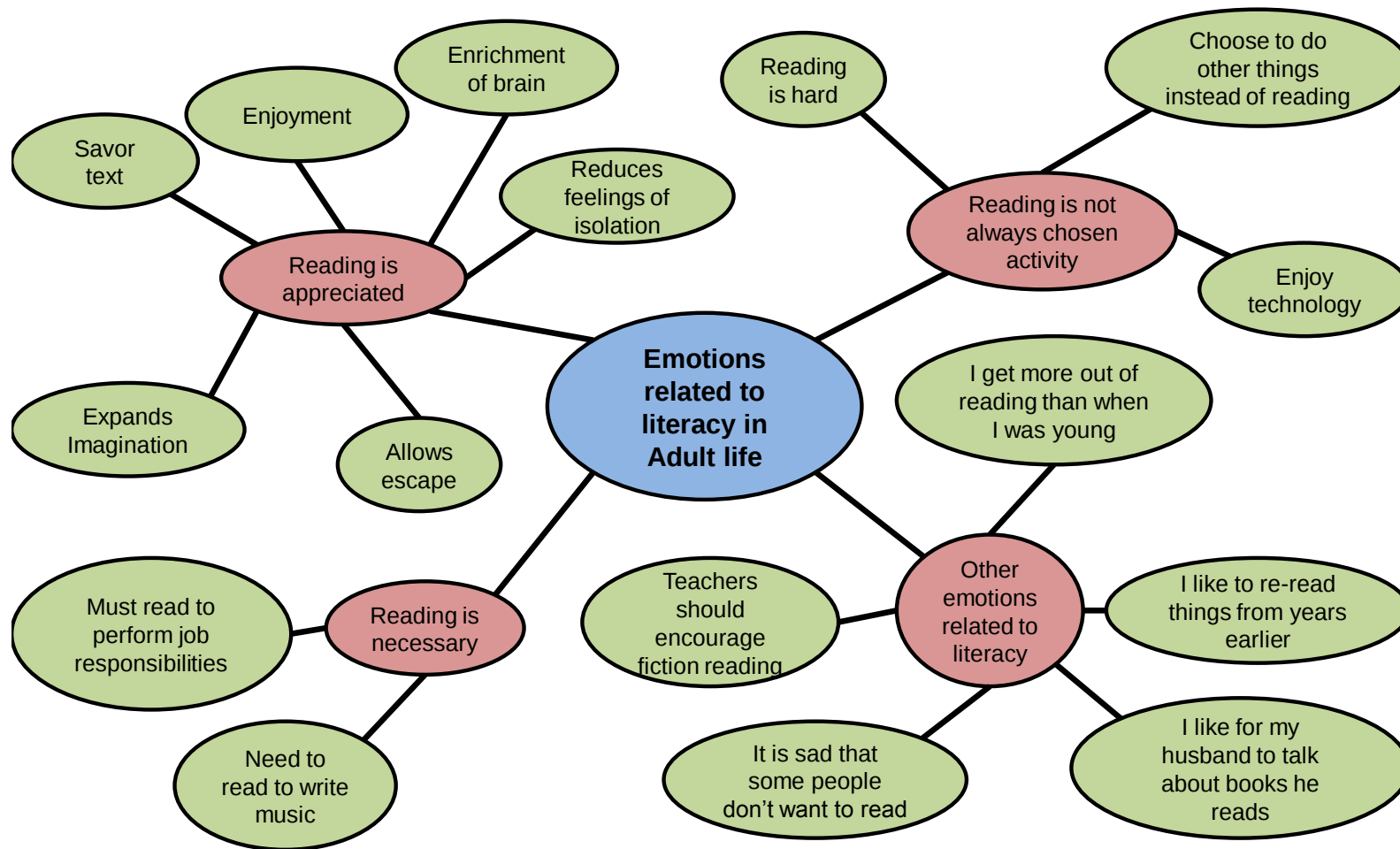
Adult Literacy Habits: Personal Life



Adult Literacy Habits: Professional Life



Adult Literacy Habits: Emotions related to literacy in adult life



Appendix F: Analysis: Link generalizations to codes

Typological Analysis: Link generalizations to established codes.

Codes		Generalizations
Hme/Par; Hme/rd; Hme/help; Hme/sib; Hme/phy; Hme/Ext; Hme/Trans; Hme/Act; Hme/chr; Hme/age; Hme/Lit	1	The role of home influences on literacy preferences is multi-faceted, and includes influences of family members, transitions that affected participants, and home expectations of participants.
Instc/Tch; Instc/Tch/In; Instc/Tch/W	2	Participants remembered that they felt good about themselves and wanted to learn more with teachers they called wonderful. Participants had memories of not feeling motivated or engaged in a class led by a teacher who was perceived to be ineffective.
Instc/sp; EryEmo/lik; EryEmo/hlp; EryEmo/nd	3	Pull-out classes were appreciated for the benefits they provided, but loathed for the stigma that resulted from leaving the regular class.
Instc/lib; Bks; Bks/hab; Bks/typ; Bks/non; Bks/fic; Bks/chld; Bks/etc; Bks/rit Ery/Emo/ss	4	Participants had unique preferences for enjoyable reading material. Participants remembered books that they enjoyed and could relate to. The ability to self-select reading material was especially appreciated.
EyEmo; EyEmo/good; EryEmo/ne; EryEmo/fer; EryEmo/In; EryEmo/lik; EryEmo/hlp; EryEmo;nd	5	The emotional impact of successes of perceived failure in learning to read was especially important to the participant's future reading habits. Some participants described low self-efficacy when describing struggles with academic tasks. Other participants displayed a strong sense of self-efficacy as they discussed their feelings of confidence about their abilities.

AdtLf; AdtLf/rd; AdtLf/Bks; AdLf/whn; AdtLf/use; AdtLf/not; AdtEmo; EdtEmo/not AdtEmo/nec ProfLf; ProfLf/ed; ProfLf/rd; ProfLf/ex; ProfLf/emp; ProfLf/ret; ProfLf/imp; ProfLf/cl	6	The origin for engagement in personal and professional reading can be traced to early literacy experiences. Participants who describe themselves as avid readers report a positive impact from reading in their adult lives. Participants read in their professional lives to remain current in their field and to meet the needs of their employment.
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Appendix G: List of Books Mentioned in Interviews

Reading Material	Participants
<i>The Adventures of Dixie North</i> , by Herbert Burton	Beth
Archie and Jughead Comic	Kim
<i>Baby Ray Had a Dog</i> : Primer Dick and Jane reader; Spot reader Standard Reader	Ellen Beth Preston, Joe,
Beatrice Potter books	Kim
Berenstain Bears Series by Stan and Jan Berenstain	Kim, Joe
Betty and Veronica Comic	Kim
The Bible	Preston, Kim, Amy
<i>Black Beauty</i> by Anna Sewell	Joe
<i>The Boxcar Kids</i> by Gertrude Chandler Warner	Beth
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> by J. D. Salinger	Beth
<i>The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes</i> by DuBose Heyward	Kim
<i>Cowboy Small</i> by Lois Lenski	Joe
<i>Fletch</i> by Gregory Mcdonald	Fred
<i>The Giving Tree</i> by Shel Silverstein	Joe
<i>Gone with the Wind</i> by Margaret Mitchell	Joe
<i>Goodnight Moon</i> by Margaret Wise Brown	Joe
<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald	Beth
The Grit Magazine	Ellen, Preston
<i>Hardy Boys</i> Series by Franklin W. Dixon	Joe
Harriet Tubman	Kim
<i>The Hobbit</i> by J. R. R. Tolkien	Joe
<i>Jack and Jill</i> Poem	Preston
<i>Liza Lou and the Yeller Belly Swamp</i> by Mercer Mayer	Kim
<i>Little House on the Prairie</i> Series by Laura Ingalls Wilder	Beth
<i>Lord of the Rings</i> Trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien	Fred, Joe
<i>Maniac McGee</i> by Jerry Spinelli	Beth
National Geographic Magazine	Preston
<i>Pat the Bunny</i> by Dorothy Kunhardt	Kim
Reader's Digest Book of the Month	Preston
<i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> by Stephen Crane	Kim
Series Book published each month and delivered door to door	Ellen
Stephen King (author)	Beth
<i>Tarzan</i> by Edgar Rice Burroughs	Joe
The Value Tales Series by Spencer Johnson	Kim
<i>Velveteen Rabbit</i> by Margery Williams	Beth
<i>Wrinkle in Time</i> by Madeleine L'Engle	Beth

Vita

Karen Suzanne Sigmon Anderson was born in Georgia, and attended public schools in Gwinnett County, Georgia, until a family move to Virginia in 1988. Karen graduated from Lord Botetourt High School in 1990, and began studies in the fall of 1990 at Emory & Henry College. In 1994, Karen graduated Cum Laude from Emory & Henry College with a degree in Interdisciplinary English, and a teaching license to teach Pre-K through eighth grade.

Karen began her professional career teaching sixth grade in Cumberland County, Virginia. After one year of teaching, Karen moved to Fort Benning, Georgia with her soldier-husband, and completed a Master's Degree in Education and Administration at Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia. While working toward completion of this degree, Karen taught prekindergarten in a Georgia State Lottery funded classroom.

A military move to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in 1997 allowed Karen to teach inclusion in first grade in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, Clarksville, Tennessee, for three years. In the spring of 2001, Karen completed an Educational Specialist Degree in Education at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee.

After the birth of her first son in 2000, Karen's family relocated to Maryville, Tennessee. Karen stepped out of the classroom to be a full-time mom. In Fall, 2001, Karen enrolled in her first PhD class. As Karen worked to complete a PhD in Literacy Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, her family experiences included the birth of a second son, one move to Johnson City, Tennessee, and three deployments of her husband to Iraq with the US Army.