This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

Toward a Definition of Aliteracy among Community College Students

presented by

Raelyn Agustin Joyce

has been accepted towards fulfillment of the requirements for

Ph. D. degree in English

Stephen N. Tchudi
Major professor

Date 30 May 1991

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF ALITERACY AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

Raelyn Agustin Joyce

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1991

ABSTRACT

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF ALITERACY
AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY

Raelyn Agustin Joyce

A survey of the literature on aliteracy demonstrates the need to define the term precisely. Much of the literature laments the "problem" of aliteracy without explaining what it is and without citing evidence that it exists. The aims of this study were to define and explicate aliteracy; to determine the accuracy of claims that aliteracy is widespread; to find out to what extent aliteracy exists among community college students; and to explain the implications of alitercy in the light of new, comprehensive definitions of literacy.

To explicate aliteracy, I reviewed the literature on literacy, literacy instruction, aliteracy, and topics related to aliteracy (e.g., reading reluctance). Using questionnaires, I conducted a survey of students at Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) and interviewed nine students who through their answers showed aliterate tendencies.

Defined as a condition of having skills in reading but not utilizing these skills, aliteracy, like literacy,

needs to be viewed as a complex, multi-dimensional, and contextual phenomenon. It represents a pattern of thinking and behaving towards print. Aliteracy is a continuum, involving these components: attitude toward reading, reading behavior, types of text read, motivations for reading, intensity of motivations for reading, and reading ability. These components, each a continuum, interact with each other to form a configuration that may be highly individual, leading to the conclusion that there are many types of aliteracy.

The results of the survey suggest that the KVCC sample is similar to the American adult population: a very high percentage read newspapers, magazines, <u>or</u> books, but almost half of the sample did not read books and showed aliterate characteristics (they tended to have a negative attitude toward reading, read less, read fewer types of texts, have fewer motivations for reading, have lower intensity of motivations for reading, and have lower self-perceived reading ability.) A conclusion of the study is that students who showed aliterate characteristics <u>viewed themselves</u> as people who did <u>not</u> like to read, especially <u>books</u>, and as people who avoided reading. Their negative view of reading and poor perception of themselves as readers seemed to have come from school reading experiences.

To my mother, Efigenia Soriano Agustin (1900-), an untiring reader and writer.

Since she learned to read and write (from the first wave of American teachers who went to the Philippines in the start of this century), her literacy has been her hallmark. She became a teacher after only seven years of formal schooling and received commendations for her exemplary teaching.

She became a mother of eleven children. Her days were arduous as she helped earn a living for her family. But her nights were devoted to Bible-reading, meditation and learning. As her youngest child, I have vivid memories of her reading and writing by kerosene light at all hours of the night, to wake up before we did at dawn to start another busy day.

She had a dream that each of her children would receive the education that she didn't have. On behalf of her children, all of whom have earned college degrees, I thank her for her dream. Without her groundwork, this dissertation could never have been written.

t

M
V
p

w
i
G
J

p
r
a

c

S
a
t
t
t
s
l

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the writing of this dissertation:

President Marilyn Schlack, Vice President Helen McCauslin, and Dean Betty Chang and others at Kalamazoo Valley Community College for their encouragement and support of my work.

The instructors at Kalamazoo Valley Community College who invited me into their classes and allowed me to administer the survey to their students: Pat Baker, Marlin Gerber, Robert Haight, Doug Howe, Nick Meier, Sadie Miles, Julie Moulds, Natalie Patchell, and Dick Phillips.

The students at Kalamazoo Valley Community College for participating in the study. I especially want to thank the nine students who, in willingly talking about their lives as readers, helped me understand the nature of aliteracy.

Keith Kroll and Ellen Brinkley for the rides, the conversations, the faith, and the fun that we shared.

The members of my guidance committee: Professors Stephen Tchudi (chair), Diane Brunner, Sheila Fitzgerald, and Marilyn Wilson--not just for the helpful comments on the dissertation but also for the support and encouragement they have given me as a doctoral student. My special thanks to Steve Tchudi, whose manifold talents as teacher, scholar, researcher, and editor have inspired me and made possible the speedy completion of this dissertation. His interest and confidence in my work has meant much to me.

Finally, my family--my husband Dick and children Rebecca and Andrew for their love and support. Dick has helped in countless ways. His unfailing patience and willingness to help at all times has sustained me throughout the writing of this dissertation.

LIS

LIS

CHA

CHA

CHA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTI

CHAPT

CHAPT

CH

AP

AP

LI

Tab

1

2

3

LIST OF TABLES

Figu

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

LIST OF FIGURES

Ge

ex
li
de
ni
ri
co
ly
al
li

Ba

ha
l
re
e

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

eral Statement of Purpose

In this dissertation, my goal is to clarify and licate the concept of aliteracy through a review of the erature and through a study of community college stu-ts. More specifically, I will develop an extended defi-ion of aliteracy, identifying its indicators and catego-s. I will determine if aliteracy exists among community lege students and, if it does, to what extent. Final- I will discuss the significance and implications of teracy in relation to new, comprehensive definitions of eracy.

kground and Rationale

The motivation for this study grew from comments I e received from community college students in children's erature classes over a period of seven years. Asked to ond to a local newspaper editorial contrasting illit-cy and aliteracy (the latter defined as having the

ab
ve
ti
as
re
th
ha
ot
of
al
te
ap

wo
us
po
ac
th
la
l
l
m
t
r
C
c

.lity to read but choosing not to), students have re-
ıled in journals, in class discussions, or in conversa-
ɔns with me that they do not like to read. Comments such
"I never read unless I have to." or "Reading has never
ally interested me." are typically voiced by about a
ird of the students in each children's literature class I
ve taught. One student remarked that she was jealous of
her students in the class who talked about the pleasures
reading because she herself had never felt any. Almost
l of these students had never before encountered the
rm, but many of them have admitted that "aliterate"
plies to them.

Although they are too new to be in the dictionary, the
rds "aliterate" and "aliteracy" are increasingly being
ed not just in the professional literature but in the
pular media as well. Only a handful of sources have
tually used these terms, but a greater number have cited
e problem of people who can read but don't, using such
bels as "reluctant reader," "non-reader," "illiterate
terate," "literate non-reader," or "non-reading
terate." Similarly, many policy and curriculum state-
nts on the teaching of reading have stressed the promo-
on of life-long reading habits and the encouragement of
creational reading. The National Academy of Education
mmission on Reading (1985), for instance, states: "In-
easing the proportion of children who read widely and

wi

in

re

wr

th

ar

po

Ra

of

Wh

or

th

th

Hi

"i

po

cl

sa

fo

le

ch evident satisfaction ought to be as much a goal of struction as increasing the number who are competent aders" (p. 15). Likewise, Thomas and Loring (1979) ite, "True accountability in education . . . mandates e development of students who not only can read, but who e willing to read widely because they value reading as a sitive and worthwhile process" (p. xi).

tionale for Defining "Aliteracy" and Other Related Terms

It is fairly common to hear remarks that vast numbers "illiterates" exist in America. But we need to ask: at do these numbers mean? How do we define "illiterate" "literate"? Many scholars have noted the elasticity of e word "literate." Hillerich, for instance, observes at

> . . . literate has no universally accepted definition. It may refer to degrees of proficiency with print, ranging from the formation of a personal signature to the interpretation of a written passage; or it may reflect no proficiency at all, representing nothing more than a duration of time spent in a building called 'school.' (1976, p. 50)

llerich also cites the contradictory meanings behind the lliteracy" figures. UNESCO, for example, in 1965, reted that 50 percent of the world's population had been assified "illiterate." "Illiteracy" in these figures, ys Hillerich, "may mean anything from one who has no rmal schooling, to one who has attended four years or ss, to one who is unable to read or write at a level

ne

(p

di

ab

ci

te

th

ab

di

li

de

Le

ha

vi

ca

po

ea

ha

ca

ac

gi

ex

de

to

be

essary to perform successfully in his social position" 51).

This proliferation of meanings stems in part from the fferent standards used in measuring literacy (e.g., ility to sign one's name, time spent in school or profi-ency with print). Another source of confusion is the ndency to interpret "literacy" as a dichotomy, following e simple dictionary definition of "literacy" as the basic ility to read and write. The tendency to view literacy as chotomous has persisted, even after the term "functional teracy" was introduced to define more precisely the gree of literacy needed for functioning in society. vine (1982) points out that "literate" and "illiterate" ve been used to make inaccurate distinctions about indi-dual abilities. A flagrant example of the confusion used by the use of these terms occurs in the title of a pular book, Kozol's Illiterate America (1985). In an rlier book, Prisoners of Silence (1980), which did not ve as dramatic an impact as Illiterate America, Kozol refully explains the difficulties of trying to measure ult literacy. He questions, for instance, the use of ade levels as a yardstick, saying that nobody knows actly what a grade level means; if grade levels were rived from tests, we need to know which test, where it ok place, who took it, and what it tested. In his later ok, he is considerably less precise in his use of the

te
pl
"s
re
he
wi
at
of
no
ra
re
la
ur
in
t
Ko

"
re
"
S
s
a
w
b
s

rm "illiterate," giving it a range of meanings. He ex-
ains that he uses "illiterate" to refer to those who
carcely read at all," and "semiliterate" to those "whose
ading levels are unequal to societal demands." However,
writes: ". . . for the sake of unencumbered prose, I
ll combine both categories in the single phrase 'Illiter-
e America.' This does not indicate a loss of recognition
the spectrum that extends from the marginal ability to
ne at all" (p. 11). Taking this eye-catching but inaccu-
te label "illiterate," he stamps it on 60 million people,
presenting more than one-third of the entire adult popu-
tion (p. 4). The problem is that, faced with this title,
suspecting readers would interpret "illiterate" as the
ability to read and write, according to the common dic-
onary definition, and fail to see the "spectrum" that
zol has intended to convey.

Still another source of confusion is the way in which
lliterate" has been used to refer to lack of interest in
ading or to a decline in book reading. Jacobs' speech
eaders--an Endangered Species? A Shamefully Illiterate
ciety" (1985) offers an example. The speech is not about
ciety's inability to read and write or about illiteracy,
stated in the title. The speech is mainly about people
"have no will to read" or who "have no will to read
oks" (these two notions are used interchangeably in the
ech).

co

Ja

cl

Are

lit

ty'

lab

Bus

cam

in

rea

By

we

we f

who

mean

thes

Tchudi (1980) depicts the confusion surrounding the
:ept of literacy in describing the future of Johnny and
, "the anti-heroes of every newspaper or magazine arti-
on literacy" (1980, p. xii):

> If Johnny and Jane pursue the traditional track through the schools (and college), their story will pretty much end here. After their last diploma, their bout with literacy will be over: No more grammar, no more books, no more teachers' linguistic hooks. They will settle into suburbia and watch a lot of TV. They will never touch a pencil except to write a grocery list and never pick up a book unless it has already been on TV. They will raise kids, and sooner or later, somebody will say of those kids, "What's the matter with them? They can't even read and write! (p. 74)

Johnny and Jane (and their kids) <u>illiterate</u>, <u>minimally</u>
<u>rate</u>, or <u>aliterate</u>? Tchudi draws attention to socie-
inability to make clear distinctions between these
ls. To cite still another example, is Mrs. George
's widely heralded pet project as First Lady truly a
aign to "erase illiteracy," as it has been referred to
ıe popular press? Or is her real goal in promoting the
ing of children's books the reduction of <u>aliteracy</u>?
ailing to see the distinctions between these concepts,
ıy fail to understand the true nature of the problems
ce.

On the surface, the relatively small number of writers
ıave used "aliteracy" seem to agree on the general
ng. But a closer look at the ways in which they use
terms would reveal some obfuscation. A publication

enti

mesc

alit

"ali

who

latt

be r

not

read

sper

rela

say

amou

has

inst

ing

evic

Equa

tior

pape

read

type

ate,

less

itled Aliteracy: People Who Can Read But Won't (Thim-
ch, 1984), which came out after a 1982 conference on
teracy in Washington D.C., gives two definitions for
iterates": "people who can read but won't" and "people
can read but don't." The former involves attitude; the
ter implies behavior. While attitude and behavior may
related, it is important to recognize that the two are
the same. People who have negative attitudes toward
ding and who say they don't like to read may actually
nd a considerable amount of time on school- or job-
ated reading. Conversely, people who like to read (or
that they like to read) may actually spend a negligible
unt of time reading.

The tendency to equate aliteracy with non-book reading
also been apparent in the literature on aliteracy. For
:ance, Mikulecky, Shanklin, and Caverley (1979), point-
to aliteracy as the real problem in America, use as
dence figures showing a low amount of book reading.
ting aliteracy with non-book reading raises the ques-
ı of what the role of other types of material--news-
rs, magazines, and documents--is in literacy and why
ing of books is privileged over the reading of other
s of text.

Because of the heavy stigma associated with "illiter-
" Robinson cautions us from using it loosely and care-
ly to label people (1990, p. 13). The same can be

sai
tha
try
con
ate
Lab
con
our
mus

be
rea
the
bec

Res

tio

are

ser

den
thi

d about aliteracy. It has been called a "menace" worse n illiteracy, which "is all but wiped out in our coun- " (Thimmesch, p. 31). A participant in the aliteracy ference I had previously mentioned refers to the aliter- s and illiterates as occupants of the "social basement." eling and, worse, mislabeling have serious and damaging sequences. For this reason alone, we must be precise in definitions of "illiterate" and "aliterate," and we t exercise great care in how we use them.

A comprehensive and clear definition of aliteracy will useful to educators. It will help clarify goals for ding instruction and help teachers better understand problems they face as they help students of all ages ome successful readers.

earch Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following ques- ıs:

1. What is aliteracy? How should it be defined? What its indicators and categories?

2. To what extent are claims about aliteracy and its ousness as a societal problem accurate?

3. Does aliteracy exist among community college stu- s? If it does, to what degree? What is the nature of aliteracy?

l

L

st
mo
ac
in
ac
st
wh
wa

ha
t
pu
re
be
pu
My
th
re
st

4. In the light of new, comprehensive definitions of iteracy, what are the implications of aliteracy?

mitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations:

1. The survey of community college students elicited udents' reports of their reading habits, attitudes, and tivations. Since reading is perceived as a desirable tivity in this society, the tendency to exaggerate read-g activity or report attitudes more favorable than they tually are is inherent in studies of this type. In this udy, it was virtually impossible to find out if and to at extent overstatement occurred because reading behavior s not observed directly.

2. The interview procedure that I used in this study s certain features, one of which is inherent in qualita-ve research and others of which may be unique to the esent study. One feature that is inherent in qualitative search is allowing free and spontaneous interactions ween the interviewer and the interviewees in order to rsue questions and explore issues as deeply as possible. use of this approach created the possibility that during interviews the interviewees might have changed their ponses as a result of the interaction. However, this dy is unlike other forms of qualitative or ethnographic

rese
ipar
view
repo
each
amou
the

thei
and
do n
effe
sugg
of c
alit

Orga

exam
tion
rev
topi
read
4, a
inte
Comm
sion

earch in that it did not include observations of partic-
nts in natural settings. I conducted in-depth inter-
ws with participants in different school settings and
orted on the results of the interviews by summarizing
h interview. The length of the summary varied with the
unt of information that I received and my judgment of
relevance of the information to the research questions.

3. In the survey the students are asked to report on
ir perceptions of the origins of their reading attitudes
habits. In presenting and interpreting the findings, I
not intend to reach conclusions about the causes and
ects of aliteracy. However, I consider their answers
gestive of causes and effects especially in the context
bservations and conclusions made by educators about
eracy as a problem.

nization of the Study

This study consists of several stages. In Chapter 2, I
ine literacy as a concept and explore its many defini-
s from a historical perspective. In Chapter 3, I
iew the literature on aliteracy and related
cs--reluctant readers, reading habits, and reports on
ership surveys. I describe the methodology in Chapter
nd, in Chapters 5 and 6, I present the results of the
rviews and survey that I conducted at Kalamazoo Valley
unity College (KVCC). Finally, I discuss the conclu-
s and implications of the findings in Chapter 7.

for
Fir
lit
or
edu
def
the
ing
as
with
pre
defi
and
ate
pres
char
hist
supp
each

CHAPTER 2

LITERACY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ALITERACY

A broad understanding of literacy is important in
nulating a definition of aliteracy for many reasons.
t, as a historical exploration of literacy would show,
racy has received many different definitions. Whether
ot and to what extent we see aliteracy as a personal,
ational, and societal problem, would depend on our
nition of literacy. Second, the ambiguity surrounding
term "literacy" has added to the difficulty of develop-
a precise meaning for aliteracy. Related concepts such
lliteracy and functional illiteracy have been confused
aliteracy. Educators need to have a fuller and more
ise understanding of literacy in order to develop a
ition of aliteracy. Third, understanding how literacy
iteracy instruction have evolved would help us evalu-
he state of literacy and literacy instruction in the
ent. As Tuman points out, "We may not be able to
e any of these conditions readily, but without the
rical understanding of them we can hardly know what to
rt and what to oppose when contending factors clash,
proclaiming itself to be the champion of literacy"

(
e
c
n
p
i
W
o
i
r

Li

m
Li
t
"T
li
il
an
32
co
ed
ge
en
Anc

man, 1987, p. 172). Further, it is important to consid- new perspectives on literacy and their implications for structing a definition of aliteracy. Research in commu- ation, cognitive development, linguistics, and anthro- ogy have contributed insights and perspectives on how ividuals read, write, learn, and communicate. Paris and son (1987) have noted the diversity of this "explosion research" and the difficulty of integrating the find- s. Nevertheless, the perspectives generated by this earch are crucial to our understanding of aliteracy.

racy: Multiple Meanings

A historical exploration of literacy will reveal the meanings that it has had in the last two centuries. racy scholars and historians have stressed the impor- e of an adequate historical understanding of literacy. range of meanings attaching themselves to the term racy and to the related terms literate and terate is at once an interesting semantic phenomenon barrier to clear thinking about the topic," (1987, p. Robinson notes. That literacy and literacy education and a high priority in this society is common knowl- However, as Tuman points out, "While there may be al support for literacy education today, it is never ely certain what is being supported" (1987, p. 169). raff (1987) writes: "Modern societies tend to show

t
i
t
i
3

o
f
e
a
m
"
w
t
r
6
l
c

W
n
E
m
"L
to

:he importance of literacy without defining or understand-
ng it. Consequently, literacy by itself is over valued and
aken out of meaningful contexts, creating pressures that
ncrease the difficulties of learning useful skills" (p.
93).

"Literacy" is a relatively recent word. The first use
f the word cited in the Oxford English Dictionary came
rom a work published in the 1880s (Ohmann, 1985). Howev-
r, the adjectives "literate" and "illiterate" have been
ound longer. Before the nineteenth century, "literate"
eant "Acquainted with letters; educated, learned";
lliterate" meant "Ignorant of letters or literature:
thout education" (Oxford English Dictionary). The adjec-
ves did not indicate "a line that divided those who could
ad and write from those who could not" (Ohmann, 1985, p.
5). The noun "illiteracy," which meant "ignorance of
tters; absence of education," was in use before "litera-
."

In tracing the history of the usages of "literacy,"
lliams (1977) explains that "literate" was an adjective
rmally associated with "literature," which came into the
glish language from French and Latin (Latin "littera"
nt letter of the alphabet) in the fourteenth century.
tterature" meant "a condition of reading: of being able
read and of having read" (p. 46). This meaning is

clos

atur

defi

poli

in t

with

teac

Fass

Amer

read

appli

suppo

liter

new m

have

did r

therm

readi

copyi

›se to the modern sense of literacy. Further, "liter-
ıre" was not limited to imaginative works, as it is
ined today, but included historical, philosophical,
itical, and scientific works.

Ohmann (1985) contends that the influx of immigrants
the later part of the nineteenth century and the concern
n finding a way of educating them led to an emphasis in
ching the rudimentary skills in reading and writing.
s (1989) describes the education of the majority of
icans in the nineteenth century:

> Except for the extremes of those who received no schooling and the very few for whom schooling was a fundamental part of professional training or an expression of elite status, the large majority of Americans received little more than the fundamentals of literacy and the rudiments of what was believed necessary to the exercise of responsible citizenship. (pp. 40-41)

Thus, from its earliest known meaning of being widely
and being civilized, a standard of literacy that was
ied only to a limited elite, whose culture valued and
orted wide reading (Goodlad, 1984; Graff, 1987),
racy by the end of nineteenth century had developed a
meaning. It became a word used to separate those who
the basic skills of reading and writing from those who
not; literacy became dichotomous (Graff, 1979). Fur-
ıore, as taught in the schools, reading meant the oral
ng of a simple, familiar passage and writing meant
ng (Langer, 1987, p. 1).

s
l
c

su
co
me
sc
za
le
bu
an
th

co
of
th
ty
in

Historians like Gerald Graff (1987) explain that a ft in thinking toward reading, especially the reading of erature, occurred in this country in the late nineteenth tury. According to Graff:

> . . . the idea had hardly arisen that the literature of one's own language needed to be taught in formal classes instead of being enjoyed as part of the normal experience of the community. Literary culture was already a flourishing part of the extracurricular life of the college and the general community. College and town literary and debating societies, college debating clubs, student literary magazines, undergraduate prize competitions, and frequent public lectures and reading constituted an informal literary education of impressive proportions. (p. 19)

Graff describes the advent of literature as a college ect, saying that it "coincided with the collapse of the unal literary culture and the corresponding estrange- of literature from its earlier functions in polite ety, where it had been an essential element of sociali- on" (p. 20). The educated class, with its wealth, ure time, and culture, was gradually displaced by the ness and industry-dominated class, which wielded more more political power. Hence, the literary values of elite class became less and less tacitly shared.

Robinson (1985) comments on the way "literature" has to mean "a set of procedures for interpreting a body ecially privileged texts" and "the specialization of oncept of reading to the narrower professional activi- criticism, a shift from reading as learning to read- is the exercise of taste and sensibility" (p. 489).

A
E
t
e
i
r

t
d
u
t
l
c
o
c
c
u
r
i
e
f
t
r

G
f

ccording to Robinson, "it is literacy thus defined that nglish departments strive most energetically to institu-ionalize" (p. 484). (Chambers [1969, 1983] and other ducators have reasoned that literary criticism as taught n many English classes does not promote interest in the eading of literature and in reading as an activity.)

The methods used in teaching literature in the nine-eenth century colleges probably did not encourage stu-ents to read on their own. It was taught with methods sed in teaching the classics: through recitation and as a ool for teaching such subjects as grammar, rhetoric, gic, and elocution. Graff also reports that in the lleges of the 1800s, authorities discouraged the reading books because they "feared that reading too many books uld only encourage student unorthodoxy" and "create nfusion in the students' minds" (p. 27). Instead, the e of a single textbook was promoted. Although oral citation is no longer the today's dominant mode of teach-g literature, it is enlightening to learn where the hasis on a single textbook or a reader could be traced m. One thing is certain: the instructional practices of 1800s in no way stressed voluntary or recreational ding.

In his study of literacy in the nineteenth century, ald Graff (1977) notes that commentators of that period nd members of the middle and lower classes guilty of not

u
a

c
p
s
d
o
a
R
w
s
t
t

a
m
S
t

lizing their reading skills in much the same way that terates are faulted today.

> Despite the literacy claimed by members of the society, commentators concluded that in practice literacy was insufficiently used. Its value was barely recognized; available time for reading was not seized. Individuals, it was felt need to be told to read, told how to read, and told why to read. (p. 294)

As Graff has maintained, the influences of the old leges of the 1800s are evident in the curriculum and agogy of our schools today. The subsequent alienation of dents from literature, Graff charges, "was in some ree a result of the system's failure to make the rituals the intellectual life intelligible to those who did not eady presuppose them" (p. 108). Graff finds support in dolph Bourne who argues that "the old college education for a limited and homogeneous class. It presupposed al and intellectual backgrounds which the great majori- of students today do not possess." Bourne also reasons

> . . . the idea of studying things "for their own sake," without utilitarian bearing, is seductive but implies a society where the ground had been prepared in childhood and youth through family and environmental influences. (p. 108)

In their historical exploration of literacy, Resnick Resnick trace the influence in American education of ods of teaching reading in nineteenth century Europe. ssing Protestant-religious instruction at first and eventually civic-mindedness, these methods had as

eir goals the "the mastery of a very limited set of escribed texts" and the development of "fluent oral aders" (1977, p. 382). With the rise of child-centered eories of teaching, stressing "the importance of intrin- c interest and meaningfulness in learning and the intro- ction of standardized group testing during World War I" . 381), a new standard of literacy emerged--the ability understand an unfamiliar text through silent reading ther than simply declaim a familiar one.

According to Tuman, the teaching of reading as a ent activity was a major educational innovation. Tests d to determine how well students were reading were eloped in response to it. With the growing influence science in education, written standardized tests started be used, beginning with the first intelligence test en to army recruits in World War I (Resnick and Resnick, 7; Applebee, 1974). In 1918, a general intelligence given to army recruits used two forms: the Alpha for recruits who could read English and the Beta for those could not. Of those given the Alpha, it was found that ercent could not read well enough to understand the , a finding which alerted people to defects in the ing instruction. This led to the growth in the 1920s raded and standardized achievement testing. The first dardized reading achievement test, the Courtis' stand- zed silent reading test, appeared in 1915. This and

o
a
(
a
p

o
i
w
p
t
p
a
s

"p
g
e
l
r
g
s

other achievement tests that followed were never validated, and examinations of them revealed significant anomalies (Applebee, 1974, pp. 90-91); however, they formed a part of a testing movement that has remained strong until the present.

Graff, Applebee, and other historians help us see the origins of some of the teaching practices that have become institutionalized in our schools. Graff laments the way in which, throughout the history of literary instruction, pedagogical approaches have continued to exist long after the cultural and social reasons for using them have disappeared. In Chapter 3, I cite the numerous literacy scholars and educators who suggest that such practices may harm students, making them unwilling readers.

As Resnick and Resnick explain, "we have seen a pattern of rising literacy expectations," starting with a general population that could not read, to a mass literacy effort to produce readers who had oral mastery of a very limited set of prescribed texts through oral reading and recitation, to a goal of silent reading for the purpose of gaining information applied to the entire population of students in this century. Resnick and Resnick contend that

> . . . this high literacy standard is a relatively recent one as applied to the population at large and that much of our present difficulty in meeting the literacy standards we are setting for ourselves can be attributed to the relatively rapid extension to large populations of educational criteria that were once applied only to a

> limited elite. The result of this rapid expansion is that instructional methods suitable to large and diverse populations, rather than small and selected ones have not yet been fully developed or applied. Further, not all segments of our population have come to demand literacy skills of the kind that educators, members of Congress, and other government officials think necessary. (p. 375)

'he new literacy standard based on silent reading empha-
ized private meaning and gaining new knowledge. With this
ew concept of reading as a silent activity came the empha-
is on measuring how well people read. After several
ecades of preoccupation with testing reading ability and
erformance, we have started to express concern about
hether people actually use their reading ability. Whereas
reviously we might have simply assumed and hoped that
eople who learned to read would use that ability, now we
re starting to turn that assumption and hope into a stated
xpectation or even a standard of performance.

Note, for instance, the following statements made in
e last decade by literacy scholars. Writing about adult
teracy, Harman (1989) comments:

> An aspect of literacy that has perhaps not been adequately emphasized is that literacy skills are only as valuable as the uses to which they are put. Universal literacy--itself an elusive goal--is not equivalent to universal reading. Unapplied and unutilized literacy abilities alone have no intrinsic value. . . .
>
> Policy, programs. and research should all begin grappling with the fundamental issue of literacy activity, in addition to their preoccupation with illiteracy. (pp. 99-100)

ilarly, Guthrie and Seifert (1983) write:

G

P

S

"r

ly

(E

Pr

Th

in

> A certain achievement implies that a student has the capability for understanding certain types of material. The student has potential for learning, but these achievements do not imply action. A high score on a test or a high measure of reading ability neither guarantees nor prevents the student from engaging in reading activities that will lead to knowledge, self-awareness, or respite from daily tensions. Although most educators honestly assume and fervently hope that achievement will lead to good ends, the real point of teaching is action. Merely to endow students with a potential that is never realized would be a profound error. (p. 499)

thrie and Seifert (1984) reason that "an underrated,

entially fruitful criterion of education is readership."

> Having attended an institution in which learning to read is the central mission, do students continue reading for social purposes afterwards? A standard for teaching is that graduates will not only acquire the capability to read, but they will choose to read for psychological, political, occupational or domestic purposes. (p. 57)

an (1984), likewise, describes the "literate person" as

one who knows <u>how</u> to read, but <u>one who</u> reads: fluent-

responsibly, and critically, and because he wants to"

1). Further, the National Assessment of Educational

ess (1985) issues this statement:

> If our schools are successful, students will develop the skills necessary to read a wide range of materials. They will also develop the interest and motivation to read frequently and widely on their own. (p. 37)

glish Coalition Conference in 1987 issued the follow-

tement:

at they [students] <u>be</u> readers and writers, ividuals who find pleasure and satisfaction in

> reading and writing and who make these activities an important part of their everyday lives, voluntarily engaging in reading and writing for their intrinsic social and personal values. (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford, 1989, p. 3)

According to Stanton (1968), "lifetime reading habits re the utilitarian and recreational use of reading roughout a person's life, with emphasis placed upon the dea that these habits must play a dual role" (p. 38). e expectation that students read for both utilitarian and creational reasons and find pleasure and satisfaction in ading and writing appears to be a part of the "pattern of sing expectations." However, the fact that some educa-rs have articulated this expectation, even turned it into policy statement, does not mean that it is a value shared roughout the educational system and the general public. haps with time it will become widely adopted and imple-ted.

Many contemporary literacy scholars have elaborated on definition of literacy as a cognitive ability. For ance, Oxenham writes, "The most important use of lit-y, perhaps the most unexpected to those who invented nd, as we have seen, often the most neglected, is its ion as a technology of the intellect. Literacy . . . een the major enabling technology in the development ason, logic, systematic thinking and research" .pp. 132). Likewise, Soltow and Stevens comment teracy, by implication, is a "mind-expanding skill,

that it is valuable in information processing and aids the individual in the making of decisions and the sharing of power" (1981, p. 7). The assumption that the acquisition of literacy bestows cognitive or mind-expanding powers on individuals has been questioned by some scholars. In their study of literacy among the Vai people in Liberia, Scribner and Cole (1981) conclude that cognitive skills are not a result of literacy but of schooling. Pattison (1982) is one of those who reason that the kind of literacy valued in American society, mechanical literacy, does not bring about cognitive growth. He argues that "much of the concern about literacy in America grows out of a mistaken belief that mechanical literacy ought to complement the acquisition of certain rational skills that make the good citizen, but the fact is that the mechanical habits of reading and writing are not sufficient for the development of the critical mind" (pp. 176-7). Langer (1987) conceives of literacy not as "the act of reading and writing" but "a <u>way</u> of thinking and speaking." She explains,

> Reading and writing as low level activities can involve little literate thought, and using literate thinking skills when no reading and writing has occurred may use a good deal of literate thinking. It is the way of thinking, not just the act of reading and writing that is at the core of the development of literacy. (p. 3)

Current notions of literacy have been broadened to include new technologies such as aural and electronic. They are not restricted to reading and writing or

print. Langer calls literacy "a way of thinking, " and ltung (1981) considers it a way of dealing "with words a social setting, not merely to read and write them" (p. 0). Tchudi writes, "A more satisfactory coined term ght condense 'language competency,' including oral, int, and non-print forms to create 'languacy,'. . . . In ' event, one can see that 'literacy' can be defined only only of one takes into account the broad functions of guage in people's lives" (1980, p. 15).

An important dimension has been added to the concept literacy with the growth of ethnographic research on eracy. This is the view that literacy is a social and tural construct that cannot be separated from the con- t in which it exists. "Evidence from cross-cultural earchers, anthropologists, and ethnographers remind us literacy is not a set of decontextualized cognitive ls," comment Paris and Wixson (1987, p. 45). And er writes, "The practices of literacy, what they are hat they mean for a given society, depend on context. are embedded in a cultural way of thinking and learn- d although they may appear stable in the short run, re ever changing, reflecting the growing and changing f thinking and doing enacted in the population at (1987, p. 5). Heath (1985) has complained that has viewed context as a variable, and not as "the r learning, which it is" (p. 2). Heath (1980)

ur
ce
us
in
ac
in
er
do
li
as
an
75)

fo
in
pa

(Ka
re
my

ges researchers to recognize the complexity of the con-
pt of literacy, to devote attention to its functions and
es, and to understand that "literacy has different mean-
gs for members of different groups, with a variety of
quisition modes, functions, and uses" (p. 132). Comment-
g on the value of Heath's ethnographic research on lit-
acy, Bleich writes that Heath's study "urges us to aban-
the idea of literacy as a trainable skill and to estab-
sh the principle that attention to literacy in any of its
pects entails attention to the community, the culture,
the process of language acquisition" (Bleich, 1988, p.
.

In "The Ethnography of Literacy," Szwed (1981) argues
the need to study contexts, maintaining that literacy
olves five elements: text, context, function, partici-
ts, and motivation. He says:

> . . . what a school may define as reading may not take account of what students read in various contexts other than the classroom. A boy, otherwise labeled as retarded and unable to read assigned texts, may have considerable skill at reading and interpreting baseball record books. Or a student who shows little interest or aptitude for reading may read Jaws in study hall. The definitions of reading and writing, then, must include social context and function (use) as well as the reader and the text of what is being read or written. (pp. 304-5)

Literacy as a "life-long, developmental" process
emek, 1988, p. 480) has also gained recognition in
nt literacy studies. According to the National Acade-
f Education Commission on Reading (1985), "skilled

r
i
f
b
i
n
a
i
s
l

i
s
T
w
d
e
S

s
a

eading is a lifelong pursuit. Becoming a skilled reader
; a matter of continuous practice, development, and re-
nement" (p. 18). Neilsen (1989) writes: "Literacy,
yond the rudimentary ability to encode and decode words
print, is a process of learning to participate fully in
cessary and personally important social, intellectual,
d political contexts. It is a lifelong process of learn-
g to read and create contextual signs in print and in
ciety. Literacy has many houses, each of which we can
arn to make our home" (p. 10).

The notion that "literacy has many houses" or that it
a "plurality," consisting of "configurations," has
arted to receive wide support in literacy studies.
lor (1990) urges educators to study the actual ways in
ch they and their students use literacy in their every-
lives through literacy "digs." In this manner "lit-
cy configurations" of individuals can be explored.
ed (1981), likewise, writes:

> Indeed, one might hypothesize the existence of <u>literacy-cycles</u> or individual variations in abilities and activities that are conditioned by one's stage and position in life. What I would expect to discover, then, is not a single-level of literacy on a single continuum from reader to non-reader, but a variety of <u>configurations</u> of literacy, a <u>plurality of literacies</u>. (p. 305)

Langer (1987) notes the changes that definitions of
ol-based literacy have gone through, starting with "the
ity to read a simple, familiar passage aloud, to the

ab
th
mi
ar
"f
re
sc
Na
li
ri
er
ap
sp
si
in
co

"s
pu
er
cy
th
ta
an
ly
fr

ability to answer literal questions about the passage, to the understanding of word and sentence meaning in an unfamiliar text--a progression from rote to functional performance . . . " (p. 1). She adds that, while in the 1970s, "functional literacy, the ability to participate in the reading and writing demands of everyday living in modern society, was considered essential," in 1986, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress undertook a literacy survey of young adults, aged 21 to 25, the criteria for literacy changed again--"not as a set of independent skills associated with reading and writing, but the application of particular skills for specific purposes in specific contexts. . . . This view marks an end to the simple dichotomy between literate and illiterate citizens in favor of a literacy profile, based in a variety of contexts and uses of literacy" (pp. 1-2).

Anzalone and McLaughlin (1983) have created the term "specific literacy" to refer to the designing of a special purpose literacy activity instead of a general adult literacy training in developing countries. "Specific literacy" is a progression from "functional literacy," defined as the "level of competence needed to meet day-to-day literacy tasks" (p. 5). Functional literacy, according to Anzalone and McClaughlin, is ineffective for the needs of the rapid-changing Third World nations, which would benefit more from "specific literacy." To implement "specific

l
n
R
o

d
l
p
o
t
o
c
t
t
l
a
M
d
s
b
o

d
S
t
M

literacy," "training is planned around activities which do not primarily, or even secondarily, promote adult literacy. Rather, training focuses on content areas related to development which demand specific literacy skills" (p. 1).

Writing on "the lack of consensus on how best to define literacy" because of the "differing views about literacy's social purposes and values," Scribner (1988, p. 72-73) argues that "ideal literacy" is a combination of all three: literacy as "adaptation" (emphasis on functional value in daily life), literacy as "power" (emphasis on literacy as a means for human liberation and social change), and literacy as a "state of grace" (emphasis on the special powers, e.g., cognitive ability, attributed to those who are literate). She states that ". . . ideal literacy is simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self-enhancing" (p. 81). Noting that Anzalone and McLaughlin "have coined the term 'specific literacies' to designate such special-interest or special purpose literacy skills," she writes, "The road to maximal literacy may begin for some through the feeder routes of a wide variety of specific literacies" (p. 81).

Willinsky (1991) has coined the term "New Literacy" to designate a broad view of literacy that is similar to Scribner's notion of "ideal literacy." Willinsky reasons that literacy is not just a cognitive process but also a means of gaining social and cultural power. He explains

hat "New Literacy" is an umbrella "under which I can ather and examine an array of innovations in the teaching nd researching of reading and writing . . ." (p. 5), nnovations that he believes encourage not only personal evelopment and transformation but also social involvement nd change. His notion that literacy should promote self-ransformation and social change is similar to that of man (1987), who argues that to be literate is to compose d comprehend texts that embody "new modes of being" (p. 5) and to gain the power to change oneself and the social rld.

omotion of Basic Literacy: Consequences

In addition to the general confusion over the differ-t meanings of literacy, controversy exists over which e of literacy should be promoted. Many scholars contend t, despite the rise of new and more comprehensive defi-ions, the definition of literacy still being supported society is the basic ability to read and write. They that our schools' prevalent mode of teaching reading as lls is proof that we are promoting mechanical literacy, ead of a higher form.

Many educators are critical of this emphasis, which claim, as I will explain in chapter 3, has led to the lem of aliteracy. I will now summarize the arguments

c
g
c

u
p
A
p
T
e
a

le
ex
at
on
te
re
al

f literacy scholars who have drawn attention to the inade-
uacies of this notion of literacy and to the consequences
f promoting it.

Since the beginning of this century the public has
sed "literate" and "illiterate" as labels that separate
eople who can read from people who cannot. Beach and
pleman (1984) explain why this definition is both sim-
istic and problematic, by comparing reading with cooking.
ey imply that there are varying abilities, uses, and
joyments of reading as there are varying abilities, uses,
d enjoyments of cooking.

> The often-heard charge, "Johnny can't read," is a little like saying that "Johnny can't cook." Johnny might be able to read the directions for constructing a radio kit, but not a Henry James novel, just as Johnny may be able to fry an egg but not cook a Peking duck. In discussing reading in the schools, we must recognize that reading involves as wide a range of different types of text as there are different types of foods. And, to imply, as does the slogan, "Johnny can't read," that reading is a single skill suited to all types of texts does not do justice to the range of reading types. (p. 115)

The emphasis on the acquisition of basic literacy has
to a number of results. On the positive side, some
erts claim that almost universal literacy has been
ained in this society. On the negative side, the focus
now to read has spawned instruction that stresses decon-
tualized skills rather than the total experience of
ding. As Wilson states, a "possible explanation for
eracy is that schools focus on subskills instead of on

the global reading act, an approach that might rob our children of some of the enjoyment of reading" (Thimmesch, 1984, p. 4).

Dixon points out that although basic literacy "fitted n era when initial literacy was the prime demand" (1967, . 1), it is too narrow for the demands of our time. A umber of scholars contend that the emphasis on basic iteracy has resulted in the neglect of higher literate kills (Langer, 1987 ; Tuman, 1987, Pattison, 1982, Heath, 985). Tuman writes that ". . . the real threat to lit-racy may be that the verbal meanings in written texts seem ncreasingly irrelevant to more and more people who have e coding skill, but not the compelling motivation to terpret them" (p. 4). He says that "one problem we face that the rates of 'literacy' may appear to be growing at e very time when actual ability of students and the pulation at large to read and write symbolic texts is in cline, and perhaps most troubling of all, the two trends y be related" (p. 170). In his study of the state of teracy in the nineteenth century, Graff makes a similar int by saying that "a statistically high level of litera- possession may in fact obscure attention from a lower litative level of ability to use that literacy" (1979. 270). He cites the case of Sweden, which in the middle the nineteenth century had a high literacy rate, based the ability to read well orally, but this ability did

r
c
i
b
I
s
l
a

r
c
"
b
h
t
(
e
f
t
l

ot include understanding what was read. Heath (1985) ontends that the focus on basic literacy skill prevalent n our schools does "not in reality provide access to the roadest possible range of perceptual and cognitive skills. f we push only literacy skills, we guarantee that the chools will not take responsibility for helping develop iterate behaviors [which she defines as a way of thinking nd behaving]" (p. 17). Similarly, Harman (1987) writes:

> The problem of generating literacy consciousness poses a challenge possibly greater than that of teaching literacy. It is one that has never been squarely faced and about even less is known than the problem of illiteracy. The numbers of people who are capable of reading but don't is as baffling a problem as the numbers of people who are unable to read. It is certainly possible that the two phenomena are linked: nonreading literates certainly do not inspire illiterates to acquire reading habits. (p. 100)

Pattison (1982) asserts that not all Americans who can ad and write use their skills productively, partly be- use their education has not equipped them to do so. lmost all Americans can read and write. Thus we seem to equal. But very few Americans possess discipline in the bits of language necessary for its advantageous use, and ose who do effectively control the many who do not " 82, p. 181). Pattison contends that two kinds of lit- cy are fostered by our schools: a high literate training leaders (students in high track classes or elite insti- ions) and mechanical literacy for followers (students in track classes or community colleges.)

(19

seco

Robi

"has

dent

memb

thei

reme

lite

writ

prom

the

have

atti

chap

empha

vatic

about

probl

This view is shared by Goodlad (1984) and Robinson 1985). Goodlad has found that in most elementary and econdary school language arts programs,

> . . . lower track classes tended to emphasize the mechanics of English usage, whereas high track classes were likely to stress the intellectual skills of analysis, evaluation, and judgment especially through literature. The low track classes were unlikely to encounter the high status knowledge dealt with in the upper tracks and normally considered essential for college admission. (p. 205)

obinson argues that stressing literacy as basic skills as harmed all students much, but most of all those stu-ents whom we characterize as most needful of help. . . . mbers of racial, social, and linguistic minorities, for eir children most numerously populate our lower track and medial classes" (1985, p. 485).

Scholars have explained the consequences of defining teracy as the basic or mechanical skills of reading and iting. The issue of which concept of literacy is being omoted, basic literacy or a higher literacy, impinges on e concept of aliteracy. Many scholars and educators who ve written about aliteracy, reading reluctance, and titudes toward reading (topics to be reviewed in the next apter) assert that still another consequence of the hasis on basic literacy is a loss of interest and moti-ion to read--in a word, aliteracy. Moreover, decisions ut the nature of aliteracy--what it is, whether it is a blem and, if it is, how serious--depend in part on

on
li
on
be
in
of
of
ex
in
ev
ni
ac
fu
ha
On
th
an

Li

be
(1
th
li
to
Co

one's definition of literacy. If the prevailing notion of literacy happens to be the basic ability to read and write, once that skill is learned, then the goal of literacy has been reached. What happens after that point is largely inconsequential. However, with the new, broad definitions of literacy, what happens after one has learned the basics of reading and writing is enormously important. As Tchudi explains, literacy is "a process of discovering and knowing," and "The fully literate person uses language in every part of his or her life, not just as a tool of communication, but as a medium for knowing " (p. 75). Literacy, according to Tuman (1987) and Willinsky (1991), is a powerful tool. In their broad definition, to be literate, is to have the capability to change ourselves and our society. On the basis of these definitions, we have to conclude that the use of one's literacy is critical to the individual and to society.

Literacy and Schooling

The relationship between literacy and schooling has been explored by researchers and scholars. Cook-Gumperz (1986), for example, states that although people tend to think of literacy as a product of schooling, historically literacy came first. Before mass schooling, literacy used to be "pluralistic," "home-based," and "hard-to-estimate." Cook-Gumperz explains that in the eighteenth century, there

was a "multiplicity of literacies," "a composite of different skills related to reading and writing for many different purposes and section of a society's population" (p. 22). However, in this century literacy began to be associated with a "single, standardized schooled literacy" (p. 22), which Cook-Gumperz describes as "a system of decontextualized knowledge validated through test performances" (p. 41). Our current notion of literacy as consisting of many literacies seems to be a return to the old definition of literacy, as she has explained it.

Maintaining that literacy had social and recreational value for people, Gumperz-Cook cites Robert Altick's 1957 study of mass reading, which gives examples of how workers in earlier times incorporated reading into their work life--for instance, a good reader would read to other workers while they worked (p. 24). In the twentieth century, "the popular cultural force of literacy was brought under the control of schooling" (p. 29). "Schooled literacy was thus differentiated from everyday uses of literacy. What was learnt through schooled literacy was no longer a part of a local common culture, so that ordinary people had less control over their own cultural products" (p. 31). Furthermore, schooled literacy using testing created "a new division in society, between the educated and the uneducated (or schooled and unschooled); and a new form of increasingly powerful control which could be exerted through the

c
R
s
p

t
p
s
b
t
L
l
n
"a
u
m
a
t
"t

r
e
l
d
r

curriculum" (p. 27). (Pattison [1982], Goodlad [1984] and Robinson [1985], cited earlier in this chapter, discuss some ways in which the schools, through curriculum and pedagogy, exert control, favoring some groups over others.)

Following a similar vein, Willinsky (1991) describes the "popular literacy" that followed the invention of the printing press, a literacy that "predates the emergence of systematic schooling" (p. 177). Willinsky traces the beginnings of New Literacy (which is explained earlier in this chapter) to the popular literacy of earlier centuries. Like Cook-Gumperz, he points out the effects of schooled literacy, but he goes a step further by advocating a set of new approaches to literacy instruction and by encouraging "a form of reschooling" (rather than "deschooling," a term used by Ivan Illich). His work summarizes the ideas of many literacy scholars and educators who have written about the negative effects of the "bottom-up" approach to teaching reading and writing and who advocate a holistic "top-down" model (pp. 68-69).

Educators have expressed concern about the gulf separating school reading from the real functions of reading in everyday life and about the effects of this separation on learners. Purves (1984), for instance, describes some of differences between reading as taught in the schools and reading as experienced outside of school:

> . . . an individual outside of school may purchase or borrow a novel, read it, and put it down

He
ex
co
of
do

Ra
re
re
pr
le
ar
go

> or perhaps recommend it to a friend, saying something like, "You ought to read this; it is good." In school that statement would not be accepted as proof that the individual has read and understood the novel. Reading the novel in school involves a series of complex activities before, during, and after reading to demonstrate something called comprehension or appreciation or understanding. The individual must be prepared to answer oral or written questions about the content, structure, or implications of the text, must be prepared to produce oral, dramatic, or cinematic reenactment of the different types of text on demand, shift subject matter and style every 45 minutes or so, have the reading interrupted, and particularly read texts that deal with subjects of little interest written in style that may be opaque or downright incomprehensible. I remember observing a class of high school sophomores and being told that two girls "couldn't read." The class was dealing with contemporary poetry; the two girls sat in the back reading a magazine about film stars and discussing an article intelligently. They could read but they could not or would not do school reading. (pp. 82-83)

Here Purves implies that school reading has standards and expectations quite different from those in real life. He concludes that although they can competently read materials of their own choosing, the girls "could not or would not do school reading."

In an article "In search of the 'good' reader," Razinski (1989) contrasts the definitions of the "good reader" for <u>students</u> and for <u>adults</u>. For students, a "good reader" is usually defined in terms of a level of reading proficiency and later in terms of ability to use reading to learn in the various subject areas. However, these standards are abandoned when students become adults. To be a good adult reader, according to Razinski, is to be "active,

v
w
w
s
R
t
'g

te
ti
mu
ha
ou
pr
re
ti
gr
in
ty
th
li
re
in
sc
"t

voracious readers," to visit the library often, to read without being told, and to talk about what they have read with others. To bridge the gulf between student or school-based definition and adult or real life definition, Rasinski says that the ". . . 'good' reader in school needs to be reconceptualized to be congruent with the adult 'good' reader" (p. 85).

Heath (1980) argues that school approaches to the teaching of reading are incongruent with the actual functions of reading in real life and that, consequently, we must find means to bridge the gap. An ethnographer, Heath has added greatly to our understanding of reading in out-of-school contexts. Because reading habit surveys provide only a limited picture of reading habits, Heath recommends the use of such ethnographic tools as participation and observation in the lives of individuals and social groups. Her own study of the functions and uses of reading in an all-black working class community produced seven types of uses of literacy, a list that does not include those usually emphasized in "school-oriented discussions of literacy uses: critical, aesthetic, organizational, and recreational" (p. 129). To Heath, the value of the gathering of such information as the uses of literacy in out-of-school context is not to make judgments but to show that the extent to which physiologically normal individuals

learn to read and write depends greatly on the role literacy plays in their families, communities, and jobs" (p. 130).

Heath has written extensively about the differences between definitions of reading developed by policy-makers and the actual functions and uses of reading in people's lives (p. 123). In the schools, "a student's success is measured by a sequenced move through the hierarchy of skills and it is believed that acquiring these skills, i.e., learning to read, is necessary before a student is reading to learn" (p. 131). A view of literacy that stresses reading to learn at the same time that students are learning to read is an alternative to this approach, according to Heath. She provides an example of a first grade teacher whose teaching is governed by this philosophy that he or she explains to children:

> Reading and writing are things you do all the time--at home, on the bus, riding your bike, at the barber shop. You can read and you do everyday before you ever come to school. You can also play baseball. Reading and writing are like baseball and football. You play baseball and football at home, at the park, wherever you want to, but when you come to school or go to a summer program at the Neighborhood Center, you get help on techniques, the gloves to buy, the way to throw, and the way to slide. School does that for reading and writing. We all read and write a lot of the time, lots of places. School isn't much different except that here we work on techniques and we practice a lot--under a coach. I'm the coach. (pp. 130-131)

According to Heath, the "teacher's approach to reading enabled these students to define themselves as readers and

writ

dend

ing

as a

in t

size

tion

know

many

as a

sona

impl

lite

as l

recr

in s

infl

teac

defi

with

writers by their community norms and to grow with confidence into being readers by school criteria" (p. 131).

One way, then, to bridge the gap between school reading and real life reading is for the schools to use reading as a tool for learning. The definition of literacy implied in this approach is not a narrow definition that emphasizes the mechanical skills of reading, but a broad definition that recognizes the role of language as a means of knowing and of dealing with the world. Heath (as well as many literacy scholars today) has conceptualized literacy as a lifelong process of learning to participate in personal and social activities involving language. Heath implies that home literacy can be broadened by school literacy through teaching strategies that stress reading as learning. Thus, though their homes may not support the recreational, aesthetic, or other uses of reading stressed in school-based discussions of literacy, students can be influenced in using reading for these purposes by good teachers.

Some problems created by "schooled literacy" (as defined by Cook-Gumperz) and by the pedagogy associated with it will be discussed in the next chapter.

e
o
a
s
c
t
M
p
l
a
a
c

t
l
a
r
o
t
t

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I will review the literature on aliteracy and reluctant readers and compare these two concepts on the basis of what has been written about them. I will also review the literature on reading habits and readership surveys to determine the accuracy of the often-repeated comment that the amount of reading has declined and that the American society is becoming a non-reading society. My final goal is to construct an appropriate, clear, and precise definition of aliteracy based on a review of the literature. I will show the meanings that have become associated with the concept, noting where contradictions and ambiguities exist. I will also identify indicators or components of aliteracy.

The literature on reading reluctance is more extensive than that on aliteracy, which is a newer and less established term in the professional literature. The concepts are similar: both have been used to refer to people who can read with varied degrees of ability but who either do not or choose not to read. However, no attempt has been made to compare the studies on these two topics and to show how the concepts are similar or different. Some differences

d
e
s
m
a
t
t
t
i
w
l
r
c
t
c
t
a
b

L

w
h
m
r
l

do exist in the ways these terms have been used. For example, the term "reluctant reader" tends to be applied to school-age children, whereas "aliterate" tends to be used more with adults or the general public. Most of the literature on reading reluctance, furthermore, draws attention to inadequate reading skills or disabilities that impair the desire to read or cause children to avoid reading. It tends to approach reading reluctance as a school-related, if not a school-caused, problem. On the other hand, those who have written about aliteracy have not focused on the level of reading skills but on behavior (avoidance of reading) and attitude (a dislike for reading or a disinclination to read or a disinclination to read books.) They tend to assume that the level of reading ability is not a crucial factor in the aliteracy of individuals. Most of the literature both on aliteracy and reluctant readers have a practical thrust: to offer suggestions and remedies after briefly identifying the problem.

Literature on Reading Reluctance

Farr (1981) defines the reluctant reader as a child who "is unable to read and unwilling to try because of a history of unsuccessful attempts or is able to read but not motivated to do so " (p. 3). Cianni (1981) refers to reluctant readers as those "who function at a frustration level and those who have an aversion to reading." He

c
o
t
m
h
i
r

t
t
t
t
q
r
t
S
p
p
w
i
w
c
a
7

r
t

claims that "young people who can't read (anything) are far outnumbered by young people who can read (at least some things) but don't" (p. v). Joseph and Wittig (1980) maintain that "the capable reader who chooses not to read has no advantage over the person who is incapable of reading" (p. 3). They stress the importance of promoting reading as a recreational activity.

In "Motivating Reluctant Readers," Johns (1978) identifies two major types of reluctant readers. There are those who are reading below grade level on standardized tests, have some trouble with reading and avoid reading and those who are reading at or above grade level, can read quite well but choose not to read. He presents school-related and home-related reasons for "students' reluctance to use books for pleasure and for information" (p. 70). School-related reasons include reading difficulties and poor instruction. Among home-related factors mentioned are parental indifference to reading and excessive television watching. Johns stresses that the "end or goal of reading instruction should be to produce students who <u>can</u> read and who <u>want</u> to read." He offers teaching suggestions for changing "the student's behavior and attitude from one of apathy to one of self-satisfaction and involvement" (p. 71).

Thompson (1987) discusses the characteristics of reluctant readers, citing definitions of the term given in the professional literature. Among the characteristics of

re
"p
re
in
in
in
re

th
fr
ma
co
be
"p
Ca
cr
po
(1
re
an
so
pa
re

sy
co

reluctant readers are a lack of motivation resulting in a "permanent non-reading habit" and anxiety about reading. A reluctant reader may be a capable reader who lacks interest in reading or a reader who is hampered by inadequate reading skills. Thompson recommends strategies, such as reading aloud to children, to use in the early stages of their reading development.

Nolan and Craft (1976) define reluctant readers as those who have a reading disability which makes reading frustrating. Consequently, they develop "personality maladjustments," including "a crippling negative self-concept" (p. 387). The article offers approaches that have been found to be successful with this type of students. In "Motivating Reluctant Readers to Become Mature Readers" Casteel (1989) presents instructional techniques for increasing motivation to read and to help students develop a positive attitude toward reading. Howell and Sylvester (1983) address the problem of reluctant or unmotivated readers by conducting a study of reluctant readers in third and fourth grades. The children participated in an after-school program in which adults read aloud appropriate paperbacks. The results showed increases in motivation and reading skills.

Holbrook (1982) reviews the materials in the ERIC system that "address the problem of reluctant readers: the causes and indications of reading reluctance, some broad

approaches to reading instruction that will introduce children to reading in a positive manner and alleviate potential problems, and finally, sources for specific activities to encourage young children in early reading efforts and reengage those students already exhibiting problems of disinterest." Holbrook says, "Young people who cannot read at all are outnumbered by young people who can read (poorly or well) but don't. The latter, who choose not to read, for whatever reasons, have little advantage over those who are illiterate." That "reading never attracted the student's attention enough for him or her to develop adequate reading skills" may be a cause of reading reluctance. Holbrook states that one factor that contributes to the problem of reading reluctance is that "learning to read is a risky business." A child who reads aloud and is corrected by a teacher in front of the whole class, feels frustrated and discouraged. Repeated experiences of this kind result in anxiety over reading itself. Other causes cited are the emphasis on isolated skills in teaching reading, inappropriate reading materials, and labeling of students by putting them in reading groups, causing them to become self-fulfilling failures.

Several books by prominent scholars in English education have addressed the problem of reading reluctance. Two books that focus on reluctant readers come from England, suggesting that the problem is a major concern in that country as well. Written by Aidan Chambers, Reluctant

R
d
r
c
r
w
l
q
4
r
h
t
t
o
k
t
h
t
N
o
t
r
e
c
t
a

Readers (1969) and Introducing Books to Children (1983) discuss the reasons why some students do not learn to like reading, especially the reading of literature, and criticize specific instructional practices that create reading reluctance. He writes, "Reluctance. . . occurs in those who have the ability to read without any mechanical problems but have no inclination to read except what is required by way of work or everyday normal life" (1969, p. 4). The students might have begun school with a desire to read, but "a good deal of this willing response has been heavily damaged or at least disabled" (1969, p. 4). Among the reasons for reading reluctance is the "the belief that there are certain books which children, whether they like or enjoy them or not, must be made to plod through in a kind of literary pilgrimage." Chambers reasons: "But if they are made to do so without liking what they read, then how far have we (and they) gone? How much nearer have we taken these young people towards the goal of true literacy? Not far, I think, and we may have helped them take a step or two away from it" (1969, p. 66). Chambers maintains that "the most reluctant readers are also book-besotted readers" (1969, p. 13) because they have to read books in every school subject. As a result, "all but the most avid child readers will want to escape from books and reading in their leisure time" (1983, p. 37). Further, because books are used primarily as sources of information, students

l
p
t
t
L

t
a
v
A
(
p
t
g
t
p
r
m
t
f
a
f
g
c
s
s

learn that there is only one way to read. Chambers' particularly astute observations about the causes of reluctant reading will be brought up again in the discussion of the findings of this study in Chapter 6.

Literature on Aliteracy

The emphasis on the practical and on giving suggestions to alleviate aliteracy is evident in the following articles, which define and discuss aliteracy as a concept very similar to reading reluctance. In "An Antidote for Aliteracy: Aliteracy--People Who can Read But Won't" (Sullivan, 1985), the antidote for aliteracy is an approach to literature that teaches the reader to ask questions about the work so that he or she becomes more engaged and stimulated. In "Teaching Freshmen Non-Readers, the A-literate Majority," Tanner (1987) addresses the problem of "seventeen and eighteen year old freshmen non-readers" who "outnumber those who read as college students must and as educated citizens should." He contends that they are "the middle-American norm." They read strictly for utilitarian reasons, such as reading road signs and appliance directions, and "they see no place in their lives for reading as an opportunity for intellectual stimulation, growth, or enjoyment." The author argues that the teacher can help the students find ways to like reading. He gives some general suggestions for writing teachers to turn students into self-motivated readers. In "Aliteracy: What

S
c
i
a
c
e
t
m
d
T
b
t
w

M
a
f
p
e
e
r
e
a
t

M

Students Can Do to Keep Johnny Reading," Decker (1985) considers aliteracy, "the ability to read but the unwillingness to do so," a major problem in American society. It affects all socioeconomic classes. Among the social changes that have contributed to the problem are the influence of television on reading motivation and comprehension, the changing structure of the American family, and state minimum competency requirements. Decker offers solutions derived from reading instruction in Greece and New Zealand. They include the deemphasizing of basal readers, of workbooks, and of competency testing. She also suggests that the teacher model good reading behaviors and encourage written expression of ideas.

An important work on aliteracy is Aliteracy: People Who Can Read But Won't, a report on the conference on aliteracy sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington D.C. in 1982. The papers compiled in this volume express concern over aliteracy. Part of the intent of this volume seems to be to encourage a more systematic investigation of aliteracy by raising theoretical and practical questions: whether aliteracy exists and if so, to what degree, what its nature is, and what can be done about it. The work raises more questions than it answers.

In "Aliteracy and a Changing View of Reading Goals," Mickulecky (1978) writes about aliteracy in relationship to

changing perspectives on literacy goals. He expresses concern over the trend to create a sense of a "crisis" and to emphasize extremes when people raise problems related to literacy. He criticizes the tendency to hurriedly create simplistic but politically expedient solutions on the assumption that any action is better than none. Mickulecky points out that concern with illiteracy has brought about an emphasis on the teaching of basic skills and a lack of concern over aliteracy. He contends that because of higher literacy demands resulting from changing job expectations, the ability to continue learning must be stressed as much as the ability to read. This means that aliteracy and illiteracy need to be dealt with simultaneously.

Winkle (1988) cites statistics from readership surveys indicating that "people are becoming aliterate in increasing numbers throughout all age groups in our society" (p. 40). She also discusses possible causes of aliteracy suggested by the literature on reading: instructional methods and materials used in the teaching of reading and home environment of the child. A third possible cause is low reading ability. However, Winkle points out that "while there is support for the idea that reading ability and aliteracy are related, there is more support for the idea that reading ability is not a <u>cause</u> of aliteracy" (p. 41). Low reading ability may cause a child to lose interest in reading, but it may not by itself be a cause for aliteracy. However, the less interest a child has in

reading, the more he avoids it; the more he avoids reading, the less reading improvement occurs. Winkle cites the heavy emphasis on basal readers and on achievement test scores as a possible cause of aliteracy. ". . . [M]any students find little or no pleasure in reading when it is presented as a series of skill and drill lessons year after year" (p. 43). Winkle also contends that research has indicated that the home environment of children strongly influences their reading habits, mentioning educational and economic levels of parents and family size as among those sources of influence. She maintains that research does not support the popular notion that television-watching has a strong effect on reading habits.

Weaver (1989) argues that the "traditional basal reading programs used in the majority of our schools have focused on teaching reading as skills, instead of developing literacy in a broader sense" (p. 3). Because the basal reading programs reflect a "transmission" model of education as opposed to the "transactional" model, educators have labeled students as failures "when we might more appropriately consider our programs as failures instead, given the untenable assumptions upon which they rest" (p. 5). Furthermore, the students who do succeed "frequently . . . join the swelling ranks of the aliterates: those who can read but rarely choose to" (p. 5).

Without using the terms "reading reluctance" or "aliteracy," several authors have addressed the problem of students developing negative attitudes toward reading as a result of their school experiences. In The New Hooked on Books (1976) Fader discusses reasons why American schools have created "unwilling readers and writers" (p. 79). One reason is the emphasis on teaching reading and writing as "merely the means to the end of school success" so that once that success has been reached, children no longer see any purpose for reading. Fader also blames reading reluctance on "our failure to give students reading materials that touch their lives" (p. 204) because of our "exaggerated emphasis on quality," on the rampant use of readers and anthologies, which he calls the "surrender of inspiration to convenience" and on the use of oversimplified and uninteresting textbooks. Fader's solution to the problem is the "saturation and diffusion" of reading materials attractive to young people--paperbacks and magazines--in every English classroom. Fader is also critical of the emphasis on reading strictly for information and school purposes.

Smith (1983, 1986) has taken a clear and strong stand against practices that make reading unnecessarily difficult and unpleasant for learners, saying that "the only way to learn to read is with confidence and enjoyment" (1983, p. 20). He is severe in his criticism of "inept" teaching: "If we succeed at all, it can be reasonably predicted that the student will not want to practice what he or she has

l
d
e
i
p

(1
us
wo
co
ag
dr
pr
to
we
ne
li

Sc
Na

learned or will do so reluctantly" (1983, p. 8). Smith decries the reduction of reading and writing to drills and exercises, creating students who "will only read and write if they are required to do so, and then reluctantly" (1986, p. 15). Smith further says:

> Instead of constantly testing students to monitor how well they read and write, it would make more sense to check on how frequently they engage in these activities or on what students think about them. Students who leave school interested enough in the subjects they have been taught to engage independently in activities related to those subjects always have a chance to learn more. But there is no hope for students no matter how well they have 'achieved' who graduate thinking that all school activities are a bore. . . . (1986, p. 263)

Trelease's bestseller The New Read-Aloud Handbook (1989) addresses reading reluctance and aliteracy, without using either term. He points out that the "reading is work" mentality perpetuated by many classrooms can be counteracted by regularly reading aloud to children of all ages. He writes: "It is imperative that we let our children know there is something more to reading than the practicing, the blendings, the vowel sounds, something more to it than the questions at the end of the chapters. And we must let them know this early, before they have permanently close the door on reading for the rest of their lives" (p. 8).

In "Developing Lifelong Readers in the Middle Schools," Barmore and Morse (1979) cite surveys by the National Opinion Research Center showing that Americans

read fewer books than citizens of England, France, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, that many adults in the United States have never read an entire book, and that "approximately ten percent of the population read roughly eighty percent of the books." Furthermore, they write,

> Many college students do not read one book a year, and many people cannot even think of a book they would like to read. Such facts suggest that we are not developing in our schools students who are enthusiastic, consistent readers as adults. Few if any children come to school with a negative attitude toward reading, but an uncomfortably large number of students do not like to read by the time they reach middle level schools. The numbers are proportionately higher by the time a student has graduated from high school. (p. 75)

One cause for reading avoidance cited is early school failure resulting from children not reading at the grade level defined for their age. Because they feel they cannot read, they learn to dislike reading. "Aversion leads to avoidance and skill development slows down or ceases" (p. 75). Another contributing factor is the students' tendency to read only for grades or for approval of teachers and parents. "Once they are on their own the central motivation for reading often disappears. Such students become the American adults who feel that reading is a chore rather than a source of pleasure or vehicle for learning for the rest of one's life" (p. 75). The authors blame practices in the teaching of reading and literature in the middle schools, practices that create or reinforce negative

attitudes toward reading. They suggest specific strategies that will foster positive attitudes.

Wilson (1985) argues that testing has a negative impact on students' attitudes toward reading. She contends that testing "all but ignores the personal experience of reading--the value of readers' personal responses and interpretations as they connect prior experience to the text to make sense of it and to give it personal relevance. And it is these personal experiences with literacy that are the very foundation of life-long reading and writing habits." (p. 13). She writes that the focus on the so-called "literacy crisis" and on teacher accountability has produced "unwilling and uninterested readers and writers."

In sum, these educators point to aspects of literacy instruction which they believe produce unwilling readers and learners. They criticize the aims and methods of reading and literature programs, criticisms that I will bring up again in later chapters.

Attitudes toward Reading

Because aliteracy has much to do with attitude toward reading, I will present in this section some studies on attitudes toward reading. Despite the widely recognized importance of the role of attitude in reading achievement, some scholars have noted the lack of studies to support this belief (Alexander and Filler, 1976; Fader, 1976). Purves (1972) has called attention to the need for studies

that "should not look at cognitive growth only, but at attitudes and reading habits as well" (p. 107). According to Alexander and Filler (1976), because "research suggests that attitudes tend to be 'unique, personal, and highly unpredictable,'" (p. 1) and "because the number of studies is limited and the findings are, at times, contradictory" (p. 64), it is difficult to make valid generalizations about the relationship between reading attitude and such variables as reading achievement. Mikulecky, Shanklin, and Caverley (1979) report that new means of measuring attitude have made "research in the measurement of reading attitudes and motivations more feasible" (p. 12). They cite research suggesting that the "student frequently leaves school with negative reading attitudes and habits that influence younger siblings and the next generation" (p. 12). To break this cycle, educators might focus on improving reading attitudes and ability, rather than on test scores. They conclude that "little is known about adults' attitudes toward reading or how these attitudes might be improved to provide better models for the children and thus break the cycle" (p. 12). The research in reading attitudes and motivations by Mikulecky et al. has contributed a great deal to the present study.

On the relationship between reading attitudes and achievement, the National Academy of Education Commission on Reading (1985) writes: "Predictably, poor readers have

u
d
f
a
(
p
r
i
s
(
a
o

R

t
o
o
a
a
m
p
t
(
s

o

unfavorable attitudes toward reading. What is not so predictable is whether lack of proficiency in reading stems from unfavorable attitudes or whether it is the other way around. Probably the truth can lie in either direction" (15). Van Allen (1965) stresses the importance of building positive attitudes and habits in developing successful reading experiences. He argues that "if the reading habit is to mature and positive attitudes toward reading are to support reading practices throughout a person's life . . ." (p. 6), then teachers should consider "the feelings and attitudes of learners to be as important as the development of skills . . ." (p. 5).

Reading Habits and Readership Surveys

All the surveys cited in this chapter have acquired their information by asking respondents how much or how often they read. Sudman and Bradburn (1982) have pointed out that some behaviors may be overreported because they are seen by subjects as socially desirable (p. 32). Some authors reporting on major surveys of reading habits have mentioned the possibility that because reading is generally perceived as a socially desirable activity, the people in the surveys might have exaggerated their reading activities (Nell, 1988). Therefore, the results of these surveys should be examined with this possibility in mind.

Lampert and Saunders (1976) discovered in their survey of high school students in Massachusetts that there were

students who saw themselves as non-readers and who expressed low interest in reading although they scored almost as well as "readers" on reading tests and received satisfactory grades. They conclude that "the labels 'reader' and 'non-reader' may reflect students' perceptions of themselves, rather than measurable skill differences" (p. 34). They also report that among their subjects, "a variety of attitudes and levels of reading skill can be found among a group of non-readers who typically do not receive much attention in research or curriculum planning: the skilled non-readers, students who can read well but who perceive themselves as non-readers" (pp. 34-5). Lampert and Saunders, however, discovered that "the 30% who said that they did not like to read books, do, in fact, read: 50% read the newspaper more than ten minutes a day, magazines one to two hours a week, and novels occasionally" (p. 35). In other words, individuals who say they don't like to read may actually do a fair amount of reading, especially when all kinds of reading are counted.

Because students at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh had been telling their reading teachers that they disliked reading, Taylor (1978) conducted a survey of freshmen in college composition classes to find out their attitudes toward reading, their perception of their ability, and their reading habits and interests. Her survey showed that out of 492 students, 59.3 percent stated that

t
r
r
v
H
r
t
n

v
d
l
i
p
m
h
p
c
d
O
d
f
d
p
h
p
t

they enjoyed reading, 11.6 percent said that they disliked reading, and the remainder indicated they were neutral to reading. She interprets these results as "heartening in view of the previous negative input from the students. However, the neutral and negative numbers were larger than reading teachers want to find" (p. 11). She also concludes that "the students are reading more than was believed but not the quantity that teachers desire" (p. 13).

Other small-scale studies have been conducted to verify the accuracy of claims that large numbers of children and adults are aliterate. These studies are generally limited to specific geographical areas. Heather (1982) interviewed 40 English school children five times in a period of one and a half years to find out what types of materials they read and how much they read. She summarized her findings by saying: "I found that young people do read, probably more than teachers think they do" (p. 4). She cites another British researcher (Merril Brown) who conducted a similar study and arrived at similar results. Only one pupil in the each of the two studies could be described as a "complete non-reader." Both studies had four pupils who were "non-book readers." She reports great differences in the numbers of books read from pupil to pupil and concludes that "mean scores of the number of books read are not a very useful indicator" (p. 5). She points out that "reluctance to read often means a reluctance to read English literature" (p. 7) and that "reading

tak
of"

stu
on
rea
eac
hen
act
(pp
rea
pre
tha
tha
the
by
the

tha
wit
It
Che
sur
sio
exp

takes place all the time which most teachers are unaware of" (p. 4).

Anders and Cardell (1978) surveyed junior high school students, college students, and adults in Tucson, Arizona on their perceptions of their reading abilities and their reading habits. They report that "the average member of each of the population groups perceived that they comprehended more of what they read, enjoyed reading more, and actually read more than the average person their own age" (pp. 6-7). These researchers conclude "the amount of reading done by these groups was a good deal greater than predicted" (p. 8) and that "perhaps people are reading more than has been previously thought" (p. 9). They also found that "the more these subjects read the more diversified their reading became. This diversification was accompanied by an increase in positive feelings toward reading and their abilities as readers" (p. 9).

The comment that aliterates exist in vast numbers or that they outnumber the illiterates has often been made without substantiation or reference to research findings. It is significant to note that the few who attempted to check the accuracy of comments of this type by conducting surveys of specific populations have drawn similar conclusions: that the problem is not as serious as they had expected or as the public has assumed.

T

c
p
a
d
a
n
f
a
A
e
a
d

l
c
l
s
l
h
b
i
p
b
R

The Extent of Aliteracy in Society

The question of whether there is a firm basis for the claim that aliterates comprise a large segment of the population, even outnumbering the illiterates, needs to be addressed. The answer would depend in part on how one defines "illiterate" (what degree of illiteracy?) as well as how one defines "aliterate" (a non-reader or a non-book-reader, for instance?). An examination of the findings of major surveys of the reading habits, attitudes, and motivations of nationally representative samples of the American population gives some clues to the answer. However, the data are difficult to compare because they do not ask the same questions and because those who report on the data focus on different aspects of the surveys.

The Book Industry Study Group (BISG) conducted two large-scale surveys of representative samples of the American adult population (16 years and older) in 1978 and in 1983. According to reports on the findings of the 1978 study (Library Journal, 1978, Book Industry Study Group, 1978; Cole and Gold, 1978; McEvoy and Vincent, 1978), about half (55 percent) of the American public can be called bookreaders (they reported that they read one or more books in the last six months). Six percent can be called complete non-readers (they reported that they did not read books, magazines, and newspapers in the last six months). Further, 39 percent reported that they did not read books

bu
of
in
th
no
po
cr
di
to
63
ti
th
te
th

sa
in
pe
wa
da
ma

but read magazines and newspapers. A total of 94 percent of the American public read books, magazines, or newspapers in the last six months. These findings were replicated in the 1983 survey (Boorstin, 1984). However, Lehr (1985) notes that the 1983 survey shows that 96 percent of the population read books, newspapers, or magazines, an increase of 15 million from the 1978 survey. Lehr finds it disturbing that the percentage of young people, aged 16 to 21, who were readers declined from 75 percent in 1978 to 63 percent in 1983. Lehr also notes that magazine circulation had gone up to 92 percent since 1954 and that, despite the decrease in the number of daily newspapers in the last ten years, newspaper readership is higher. Lehr concludes that

> The picture of reading in the United States appears bright--with several dark areas. Americans may spend 11.7 hours a week reading (BISG), but they spend 16.3 watching television and 16.4 listening to the radio. If 56% read books, 44% do not. While individuals at all educational and occupational levels do some reading, most reading was utilitarian, with little done for pleasure or mental stimulation [Guthrie and Seifert. EJ 236 210]. (p. 171)

Sharon (1973-4) reports on a survey of a national sample of 5,067 adults, 16 years old and older, conducted in 1971. His goal was to determine the time the average person spends reading on a typical day. Each respondent was asked what he had done hour by hour on the previous day, and the total time spent on reading all kinds of material (including job-related reading) was derived from

these data. Sharon found that the average person spends an hour and 46 minutes reading on a typical day. However, people differ greatly in the amount of reading that they reported: 6 percent read 8 hours or more, 45 percent read 2 hours or more, 71 percent read 1 hour or more, and 6 percent read for less than 5 minutes. The average adult spends 76 minutes daily on non-job-related reading, with newspaper-reading as the type of reading most commonly cited. Sharon concluded: "The results indicate that reading is a ubiquitous activity of American adults."

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducts yearly assessments of representative samples of 9-, 13-, and 17- year olds. Despite the difficulty of comparing results because different parts of the assessments are highlighted by interpreters, it is useful to review those relevant aspects that have been reported. In 1981, for example, it was found that 10 percent of each age group reported that they did not read at all in their spare time (Langer, 1984). In the 9-year-old group, 81 percent reported that they enjoyed reading very much, while among 17-year-olds, only 42 percent said that they enjoyed reading very much. In other words, they liked reading less as they grew older. In a 1986 NAEP assessment of history and literature administered to a national sample of 17-year-old high school students, it was found that 17 percent said that they never read on their own (Ravitch and Finn, 1987),

an increase of 7 percent from the 1981 survey. In 1985 an NAEP survey was conducted in a representative sample of American young adults, age 21-25. Kirsch and Jungeblut (1985) report that at least 85 percent said that they read newspapers, magazines, books or other documents regularly.

A survey of the amount of time spent reading and the reading achievement of fifth graders in "a middle-class area of a small city" in Illinois was conducted by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988). Comparing the findings of their survey with those of other surveys, they state: "It can be confidently concluded that the typical child in the middle grades reads less than 15 minutes a day out of school. The amount appears to be considerably less than this in the United States, maybe as little as 8-12 minutes per day when all types of reading material are included, and maybe as little as 4-5 minutes a day when only books are counted" (p. 299). According to the authors, the study "revealed truly staggering differences between children in amount of out-of-school reading" (p. 296).

When Guthrie and Siefert (1983) interviewed seven individuals from different occupations on their reading activities, counting all types of reading, they concluded that in the community that was surveyed the typical wage earner reads at least 2.5 hours per day; much of that time was spent in reading short documents. They also report that contrary to popular belief that nonskilled workers are non-readers or read only documents required by work, their

fi
"p
en
th
al
Ho
co

Ne
wr
ci
It
BI
ad
th
mo
as
Ze
co
ti
Ho
wh
de
co

findings suggest that they read for other purposes such as "political awareness, social development, aesthetic experience" (p. 508) as well. These findings are consistent with those of Sharon, who found that the average adult spends almost two hours a day reading all kinds of material. However, these findings cannot be generalized beyond the community in which the study took place.

Reporting on the state of reading in three countries, New Zealand, the United States, and Iran, Guthrie (1980) writes that in New Zealand, 69 percent of the population cites book reading as a form of recreation they engage in. It is the "most frequently cited" form of recreation. The BISG surveys have determined that 55 percent of American adults are book readers (this means that they had read at the time of the survey at least one book in the past six months.) If these two figures are comparable, we need to ask why there is much more interest in book reading in New Zealand than in the United States. To compare the two countries in terms of their cultural history and instructional practices is outside the scope of this dissertation. However, earlier in this chapter, I cited Decker (1985), who examined instruction in New Zealand and found that it de-emphasizes the use of basal readers, workbooks, and competency testing. Indeed, as I have shown earlier in

th
ca
cl

Na
re
fr
de
gr
19
ma
th
re
li

At
le
im
ar
ha
la
co
co
mi
ac
de

this chapter, a considerable number of educators are critical of the use of these very methods in American schools, claiming that it produces uninterested readers and writers.

Robinson (1980) reviews research, particularly the National Opinion Research Center data, to determine if readership of newspapers, magazines, and books has changed from 1946 to 1977. He reports that daily newspaper reading declined starting in the 1950s, with the age 10-29 age group showing the largest drop. However, between 1970 and 1980 the frequency of and time spent reading books and magazines increased. Because this increase did not offset the decline in newspaper reading, Robinson concludes that reading appears "to be a less prominent feature of daily life for all ages" (p. 141).

In an extensive study entitled Adult Reading Habits, Attitudes, and Motivations: a Cross-Sectional Study, Mikulecky, Shanklin, and Caverly (1979) attempt to answer important questions about adult reading habits, attitudes, and motivations. Among those questions is whether changes have occurred in the total reading time of the adult population over the past 50 years. Despite the difficulty of comparing data gathered by surveys because of the lack of consistency in the kinds of questions asked, they determined that since 1923, the trend shows "an increase in adults' total reading time per day. This increase emerges despite the influence of television" (p. 32). Whereas

Sharon found that adults averaged 76 minutes on non-job-related reading, Mikulecky, Shanklin, and Caverly found that by the end of the 1970s, the average adult was reading 85 minutes (Harste and Mikulecky, 1984, p. 63).

It appears that no clear and definite conclusions can be drawn from these results. The answer to the question of how serious the problem of aliteracy is in this society depends on whether the interpreter views the findings from the debit side or the credit side. Does he or she consider the glass half-empty or half-full? Should we be alarmed at the 44 percent who indicated in the 1983 BISG survey that they have not read a book in the past six months or rejoice over the 56 percent who indicated that they did? If one considers all types of reading, not just bookreading, the results are more favorable--a total of 96 percent of the American public read books, magazines, or newspapers, according to the 1983 BISG survey, a slight increase from the 1978 survey. Further, Mikulecky et al. have found in the past 50 years a pattern of increase in the average adult's total reading time per day. Nevertheless, there is the disturbing trend discovered by the NAEP surveys of school children liking reading less as they grow older. As Lehr indicated, there are bright areas in the picture but several dark areas as well.

In

va
st
th
19
di
in
ca
co
bu
b
u
o
p
a
o
S
l
a
b
a
w

Indicators of Aliteracy

Reading Attitude and Reading Behavior

Many studies report that being able to read is highly valued in this society. For example, 95 percent of the students at ages 9, 13, and 17 reported in 1979-80 that they considered being able to read "very important" (NAEP, 1981). However, whether people actually like to read is a different matter. Attitude (disliking of reading) is an important indicator of aliteracy. Another important indicator is behavior (avoidance of reading). The two most common definitions of "aliterates" are "people who can read but won't" (implying attitude) and "people who can't read but don't" (implying behavior). These definitions are usually used interchangeably; attitude and behavior are often not separated. This view of aliteracy ignores the possibility that people who say they don't like to read may actually do a fair amount of reading, whether for enjoyment or not. Such an instance occurred in the Lampert and Saunders study (1976), where they found that students who labeled themselves "non-readers" actually read magazines and newspapers several hours a week and occasionally read a book. Moreover, people who say they don't like to read may actually spend a considerable amount of time reading at work or at school.

readi

peopl

book-

among

alite

ing e

readi

count

and I

Here

read

to c

crea

Book Reading

Distinctions between the reading of books and the reading of other kinds of material tend to be blurred when people discuss aliteracy. Low interest in and avoidance of book-reading are often real causes of concern, especially among book-lovers. Hence, there is a tendency to equate aliteracy with non-book reading. A bias toward book reading exists in the following discussion of the difference in reading habits between highly developed and developing .pa countries. Blurring the definition of "non-reader," Barker and Escarpit, (1973) write:

> Almost certainly, even in the most highly developed countries, a fairly large proportion of those who are able to read never read books, or rarely do so. Paradoxically, this proportion is probably higher in highly developed countries, where schooling for all has made learning to read an obligation, than in countries where progress in development is in fact measured in terms of the literacy rate and those who can read are very highly motivated to do so. In the Netherlands where reading is very widespread, a survey in 1960 indicated that 40 percent of the subjects interviewed did not like reading. In East Pakistan, on the contrary, a sample survey made in 1963-64 among 145 families of government employees of all levels revealed only 53 non-readers out of a total of 488 persons over the age of 12, that is, barely 10.9 per cent. (p. 107)

Here "non-reader" applies both to those who don't like reading and to those who don't read books.

Contending that it is "unscholarly" and "dishonest" to charge the United States with illiteracy or even decreasing literacy, Mikulecky et al. (1979) say,

> However, this nation might be accused of "aliteracy." Even though most students who pass

Becau

Harri

to co

ing.

other

read

ing

"bool

than

itse

areas

59).

in t

quan

maga

high

read

alit

impo

vari

> through our educational system are able to read to some degree, surveys indicate that declining numbers of individuals regularly choose to read or want to read. Though survey information varies widely on this issue and may be sometimes questionable, it consistently reflects a nation with a large number of intentional non-readers. (p.3)

Because they support this contention with figures from Harris and Gallup polls relative to book-reading, one has to conclude that they equate aliteracy with non-book-reading. However, book reading is only one type of reading; other types need to be considered.

Range of Texts Read

Some studies suggest that the range of texts being read or not read should be taken into account in determining reading activity. Cole and Gold (1978) report that "book readers demonstrate more heavy reading involvement than non-book readers in nearly all areas. This manifests itself in both the leisure reading and work/school reading areas, and cuts across all types of reading material" (p. 59). In other words, book readers are also heavy readers in that they read more than non-book readers in terms of quantity and time. They are also more likely to read magazines than non-book readers, and they read a slightly higher number of magazines and newspapers than non-book readers. Book-reading is indeed an important indicator of aliteracy, not because by its nature it is more valuable or important, but because it implies a higher volume and wider variety of reading.

reasc
one r
plea
choos
and
who
plea
"vir
read
only
read
plea
othe
read
rang
find
(197
impo
for

read
impa

Range and Intensity of Motivations for Reading

Still another indicator of aliteracy is range of reasons for reading. Most discussions of aliteracy favor one reason for reading: reading for personal enjoyment and pleasure. They maintain that an aliterate is one who chooses not to read except for utilitarian or for school- and job-related reasons. However, Cole and Gold (1978), who report on the 1978 BISG survey, say that "reading for pleasure is more common than work/school reading" and "virtually all readers engage in some type of leisure reading. . . . Almost no one reads for school or work only" (p. 59). Additionally, heavy book readers tend to read both for information and pleasure, but reading for pleasure is a more dominant motivation for them. On the other hand, the main motivation of non-book readers is reading for general knowledge; they tend to have a narrower range of reasons for reading than book-readers. These findings were replicated in the Mikulecky et al. study (1979). The Mikulecky et al. study also stressed the importance of measuring the intensity of the motivations for reading.

Reading Ability

As I have mentioned earlier, while the literature on reading reluctance tends to focus on a reading problem or impairment that may cause reading reluctance, most users of

the t
suffi
do so
of de
readi
for t
ed, t
is no
BISG
prese
amour
the
news
read
137)
exce
news
"app
exam
from
nint
by "
illi

read
NAEP

the term aliteracy assume that the aliterate person has sufficient ability to read but simply lacks the desire to do so. They tend to stress that aliteracy is more a matter of desire than of skill. In her review of the literature on reading, Winkel (1988) states that "while there is support for the idea that reading ability and aliteracy are related, there is more support for the idea that reading ability is not a cause of aliteracy" (p. 41). Analyzing the 1978 BISG results, McEvoy and Vincent (1980) reason that the presence of basic skills "has regulatory influence on the amount and nature of book reading" (p. 140). They say that the six percent who did not report any reading of books, newspapers, or magazines in the past six months did not read "because of an apparent absence of such skills" (p. 137). However, they offer no evidence for this inference except to say that the non-readers, who did not read any newspaper, magazine, or book in the past six months, "appeared to represent the least 'privileged' group. For example, over 60 percent of the group had not graduated from high school, with one-third having completed less than ninth grade" (p. 136). They do not explain what they mean by "absence" and "skills." (Are these people completely illiterate? What kinds of skills do they lack?)

The positive relationship between reading ability and reading volume has been documented by many studies. The NAEP survey of young adults (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1985)

sh
in
po
le
wh
in
le

co
st
la
ac
ne
ac
i
r
t
d
l

showed that those who read more scored higher in the reading assessment. Likewise, Walber and Tsai (1984) found a positive relationship between frequency and amount of leisure reading and reading achievement. Greany (1980), who surveyed a sample of Irish children in primary schools in 1976 found reading attainment a strong predictor of leisure reading. He states,

> The positive relationship between time devoted to book reading and reading attainment supports the findings of two recent British studies (Maxwell, 1977; Whitehead et al., 1975). The positive relationship between time spent reading comics [including magazines] and reading attainment suggests that, despite the impoverished language which is a feature of many of the popular comics, a certain level of reading competence seems to be associated with comic reading. (p. 354)

Maxwell (1977) also acknowledges the value of reading comics and magazines relative to reading achievement in his study of children between 8 and 15 years of age in Scotland. He found that students with the highest reading achievement read more books and more ephemera (comics, newspapers, and magazines) than students with lower reading achievement. However, the reading of books, not the reading of ephemera "is what distinguishes classes of higher reading standard from the others" (p. 60). Pointing out that ephemera is "of a fairly high level of content and discussion" (p. 57) and does not necessarily require a low level of reading ability, Maxwell states,

> It is likely that reading in school is done more slowly and meticulously, but the average pupil appears to do more to lay the foundations for recreational reading in later life outside the

clas
schoo
ing c
kept
subst
(pp.

Two i

between an

(1981) con

and 18, fo

ing that

lowest. H

tional su

three cou

Zealand s

20 percen

found th

of readin

countries

sion amon

and parti

general

cited for

mentione

Anderson,

of fifth-

reading l

the fifth

second t

> classroom than within it. Whether it is the school's duty to encourage and develop the reading of such material is debatable, but it must be kept in mind that such reading constitutes a very substantial part of the pupil's reading activity. (pp. 58-9)

Two important studies have focused on the relationship between amount of reading and reading achievement. Guthrie (1981) compared reading comprehension in two age groups, 14 and 18, for New Zealand, the United States and Iran, finding that New Zealand had the highest scores and Iran the lowest. He then used data from six national and international surveys to determine the reading volumes of the three countries and found a similar pattern, with New Zealand surpassing the United States in reading volume by 20 percent, and Iran showing the lowest reading volume. He found that "reading comprehension achievement and volume of reading were highly associated" (p. 20) in the three countries and that "the proficiency of reading comprehension among students at two age levels is highly correlated and partially accounted for by the volume of reading in the general population." He adds that the most frequently cited form of recreation in one survey was book-reading, mentioned by 69 percent of the population. Likewise, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found in their study of fifth-graders that "the amount of time a child spends reading books is related to the child's reading level in the fifth grade and growth in reading proficiency from the second to the fifth grade. The case can be made that

reading h

reading pr

It is

a cause a

read prac

because o

heavier a

That

reading,

major stu

Irish fif

bles whic

in virtua

attainmen

to spend

more tim

17-year-o

found th

own, 23

Similarly

1980), 58

as oppose

cent of t

to 46 pe

were non

reading books is a cause, not merely a reflection, of reading proficiency" (p. 301).

It is reasonable to argue that reading volume is both a cause and an effect of reading proficiency: people who read practice and strengthen their reading skills, and because of their good reading skills they tend to engage in heavier and more sustained reading like book-reading.

Gender

That gender is a significant predictor of leisure reading, especially book-reading, is the conclusion of many major studies. In his study of the leisure reading of Irish fifth graders, Greany (1981) found that "two variables which emerged as strong predictors of leisure reading in virtually all of the analyses were gender and reading attainment" (p. 353). His study revealed that girls tended to spend more time reading books, and boys tended to spend more time reading comics. Reporting on a survey of 17-year-old high school students, Ravitch and Finn (1987) found that among those who say they never read on their own, 23 percent were boys and 10.6 percent were girls. Similarly, in the 1978 BISG survey (McEvoy and Vincent, 1980), 58 percent of the females read books and periodicals as opposed to 42 percent of the males. However, 54 percent of the males were periodicals-only readers in contrast to 46 percent of the females. Among the males, 53 percent were non-readers, and among the females 47 percent were

non-reade

likely t

white" (

lecky, S

that gend

write tha

demo
tors
tion
tend
adul
grou
dict
the

The stud

had poor

signifi

women .

enjoymen

somethin

McE

integrat

the amou

claim t

However,

the most

odical-

leisure

etc.)" (

non-readers. The heavier volume book-readers "were more likely to be women, between the ages of 21 to 49, and white" (McEvoy and Vincent, p. 136). The study by Mikulecky, Shanklin and Caverly (1979) confirmed the finding that gender is a strong predictor of reading habits. They write that

> demographic variables are not useful as predictors of reading habit. Even education, a traditionally effective predictor of reading competence, is only mildly effective as a predictor of adult reading habits. . . . The only demographic group to prove individually effective as a predictor of adult reading habits and attitude was the gender of the reader." (pp. 41-2)

The study's findings also indicated that "men as a group had poorer total reading attitudes than women" and "had significantly narrower variety of motivations than women . . . they read less for recreation and personal enjoyment than women . . . but more to find out how to get something done" (p. 34).

Reading in Relation to Other Activities

McEvoy and Vincent (1980) maintain that the ability to integrate reading with other activities in life influences the amount and kind of reading that people do. Many people claim that they do not read because of lack of time. However, McEvoy and Vincent found that book readers "were the most involved of the three groups [book-readers, periodical-only readers, and nonreaders] in a wide range of leisure activities (active, passive, social and individual, etc.)" (p. 137). Those who read periodicals only were more

active th
suggest t
narrower
One
competiti
studies
relations
revealed
readers,
the same
found in
relations
comics o
explains
televisio
355). Gu
Zealand
the readi
Ind
lack a
pleasure
toward a
affect t
conditio
be tempo
habits o

active than those who did not read at all. These results suggest that aliteracy implies a tendency to engage in a narrower range of activities, of which reading is just one.

One of the activities that has been perceived as a competition to reading is television-watching. Several studies have found that television has no significant relationship with book-reading. The 1978 BISG survey revealed that non-readers spent more time watching TV than readers, but book-readers and non-book readers spend about the same amount of time watching television. Greany (1980) found in his study of Irish fifth graders no significant relationship between television and time spent reading comics or magazines and time spent reading books. He explains this finding by saying that "children accommodate television without dropping other leisure activities" (p. 355). Guthrie (1981), likewise, found in his study of New Zealand students that television-watching did not decrease the reading volume.

Individuals who can read may at one time or another lack a desire to read or temporarily stop reading for pleasure. In other words, all readers have tendencies toward aliteracy. The circumstances of one's life can affect the amount and type of reading that one does. The conditions that affect attitudes and amount of reading may be temporary or longlasting. Often, surveys of reading habits or discussions of the results of these surveys fail

to consid
influence
ity in a
adults to
Greany ha
activitie
However,
different
swing. O
stop read

Char
book-rea
readers,
their own
(1979)
students
ment tha
and "had
research
more abl
have hig
and Sher
students
found a
of time
fied and
for an e

to consider that the time in which the survey is given can influence the results. Most surveys measure reading activity in a specified time period. For instance, Sharon asked adults to describe what they had read the day before, and Greany had students keep a diary of their out-of-school activities in three specified days of a one-week period. However, students' summer reading habits may be quite different from their reading habits when school is in full swing. Or a person who is too busy with a new hobby may stop reading or not read as much for a period of time.

Chambers (1983) contends that the heavy emphasis on book-reading in the schools has helped create reluctant readers, "book-besotted" students who balk at reading on their own or scorn recreational reading. Mikulecky et al. (1979) found that "adults employed full time or as students . . . read less for relaxation and personal enjoyment than did other groups according to employment status" and "had the poorest attitude toward reading" (p. 34). The researchers explain this finding by saying that "groups more able to select their own reading material appear to have higher attitudes toward reading" (p. 34). Carlsen and Sherrill (1988) analyzed the reading biographies of students enrolled in adolescent literature classes. They found a group of students who stopped reading for a period of time while pursuing other activities; they also identified another group of students whose non-reading went on for an extended period and who admitted they could not be

called "r
latter gr
hooked on
at a cert
cover rea
eracy may
pending c
son's lif
assessed.

As m
differen
adulthood
survey c
France s
common a
survey s
31 indic
Most sai
had lost
Barker a

The
lif
mos
lac
The
cen
sud
end
of

called "readers." Carlsen and Sherrill described this latter group as students who wrote that "they were never hooked on reading," or they became unenthusiastic readers at a certain period in their youth" or "they did not discover reading until college or adult life" (p. 137). Aliteracy may be short-lived or permanent--more or less--depending on the time and circumstances surrounding a person's life while his reading habits and attitudes are being assessed.

As many studies have revealed, aliteracy may occur at different points in a person's life, in childhood or in adulthood. However, Barker and Escarpit (1973) say that a survey on book-reading among youth in Switzerland and France shows that "lack of interest in reading is not so common among youth" (p. 108). They also cite an Italian survey showing that out of 160 who were non-readers, only 31 indicated they had never been interested in reading. Most said they had been readers when they were young but had lost the reading habit. Concluding from this finding, Barker and Escarpit state,

> The problem, then, is one that arises in adult life, particularly among young adults who are most apt to lose their reading skills through lack of practice. This is a general phenomenon. The cultural activity of childhood and adolescence, supported by the educational system, is suddenly interrupted when schooling comes to an end and often abandoned for lack of another form of support. (p. 108)

Barker ar
books wit
which ma
Their con
"that ari
Lampert a
who have
students.

Toward a

As
have mov
dichotomy
of liter
configura
family l
multi-di
tions' a
us that
text, co

The
best be
but of r
continua
behavior
reading,
my, and

Barker and Escarpit mention "the tendency to associate books with school work" as just one of the many stereotypes which may prevent people from reading" (pp. 109-110). Their conclusion that losing the reading habit is a problem "that arises in adult life" contradicts the findings of Lampert and Saunders (1976) and the observations of those who have written on reading reluctance and aliteracy among students.

Toward a Comprehensive Definition of Aliteracy

As I have explained in chapter 2, literacy scholars have moved away from simplistic notions of literacy as a dichotomy or even as a single continuum. They now conceive of literacy as "literacies"--a plurality, involving many configurations. Taylor (1980) says ethnographic studies of family literacy have suggested that "literacy is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon" and that "no two 'configurations' are exactly the same" (p. 12). Szwed (1981) reminds us that definitions of reading and writing should consider text, context, functions, participants, and motivation.

These ideas lead us to conclude that aliteracy can best be defined as a condition of having skills in reading but of not utilizing these skills. It involves a number of continua relative to attitude toward reading, reading behavior, types of text read, reasons or motivations for reading, and reading ability. Aliteracy is not a dichotomy, and neither are its components. For example, attitudes

can range

behavior

Furthermo

behavior

distincti

Conc

behavior

"Which co

perceive

amount o

contend t

ing/non-r

person w

occasiona

aliterate

fests its

ing and

The

reading

important

a higher

reading.

reasons

definiti

ing alon

We shou

can range from mild dislike to hatred of reading, and behavior can vary from occasional to complete avoidance. Furthermore, while we need to recognize that attitude and behavior are related, we must maintain the necessary distinctions between them in defining aliteracy.

Concerning the relative importance of attitude and behavior in aliteracy, we need to deal with the question: "Which counts more--attitude or behavior?" If people who perceive themselves as non-readers actually do a fair amount of reading, can they be considered aliterate? I contend that the degrees of liking/disliking and of reading/non-reading need to be considered. In other words, a person who shows either a mild dislike of reading or an occasional avoidance of reading may be a mild or occasional aliterate. On the other hand, extreme aliteracy manifests itself in both a very negative attitude toward reading and a total avoidance of reading.

The range of texts read and the range of reasons for reading need to be considered as well. Book-reading is an important indicator in that book readers tend to engage in a higher volume of reading as well as a wider variety of reading. They also tend to read for a wider range of reasons than non-book readers. However, in building a definition of aliteracy, we should not consider book reading alone as some discussions of aliteracy are prone to do. We should consider all types of reading and count all

reasons f
for pleas
ability t
on aliter
ship betw
Therefore
attitude

The
behavio
ability--
needs to
attitude
range of
developm
soning f
their re
of that
study.
esting,
reading
ing. The
do. An
become a

reasons for reading, not just leisure reading or reading for pleasure. Furthermore, although the role of reading ability tends to be ignored or slighted in the literature on aliteracy, many studies have found a positive relationship between amount of reading and reading proficiency. Therefore, one's level of reading ability may affect one's attitude toward reading and reading volume.

The possibility that these indicators--attitude, behavior, texts, reasons for reading, and reading ability--do interact with each other and in multiple ways needs to be kept in mind as well. For instance, a negative attitude may limit the amount of reading people do, the range of texts read, the reasons for reading, and the development of their reading ability. Pursuing this reasoning further, individuals who dislike reading may limit their reading to textbook-reading, and only a small amount of that. Their sole reason for reading then may be to study. Because textbooks are generally dull and uninteresting, reading textbooks may reinforce their beliefs that reading is dull and unpleasant and that they dislike reading. The more they dislike reading, the less reading they do. And the less reading they do, the less skillful they become as readers.

In

followed

this stu

design a

ments an

sis.

Research

Thi

followin

def

era
acc

col
Wha

def
tio

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will describe the steps I have followed to answer the research questions that have guided this study of aliteracy. I will discuss the research design and the rationale for it, and describe the instruments and methods used in the data collection and analysis.

Research Questions

This dissertation proposes partial answers to the following questions:

1. What is aliteracy? How should it be defined? What are its indicators and categories?

2. To what extent are claims about aliteracy and its seriousness as a societal problem accurate?

3. Does aliteracy exist among community college students? If it does, to what degree? What is the nature of this aliteracy?

4. In the light of new, comprehensive definitions of literacy, what are the implications of aliteracy?

Research

To p
cy, this
summary c
represen
literatur
aliteracy
and to c
identify
These go
tion giv
at Kalam
eracy ex
extent.
characte
cy. The
prongs.
a precis

Rationa

Th
by the
tions.
Kantor
whether
should

Research Design

To provide a clear and accurate definition of aliteracy, this dissertation has used a three-pronged approach. A summary of the literature on aliteracy and related topics represents one prong. The goals of the review of the literature are to determine the accuracy of the claim that aliteracy is widespread and serious problem in this society and to develop an operational definition of aliteracy, identifying its indicators, components, and categories. These goals were achieved in Chapter 3. Using the definition given in Chapter 3, I conducted a survey of students at Kalamazoo Valley Community College to find out if aliteracy existed among community college students and to what extent. I also interviewed nine students who had aliterate characteristics to learn about the nature of their aliteracy. The survey and the interviews are the second and third prongs. Through these three approaches, I hoped to develop a precise and comprehensive definition of aliteracy.

Rationale for Survey and Interviews

The choice of methodology for this study was governed by the axiom that the research must fit the research questions. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984, p. ix) and Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz (1981, p.295), decisions on whether to use quantitative or qualitative methodologies should be based on the goals of the research. Defining

aliteracy
searchers
To disco
communit
questionn

Resp
give inf
informat
used gui
intervie
give ans
ing for.
provide
question
method
subjects

The
senting
relative
summari
sample
surveye
communi
would v
pared.

aliteracy by finding out how reading theorists and researchers have used the term was a necessary first step. To discover to what extent aliteracy is a problem among community college students, I conducted a survey, using questionnaires that students answered while in class.

Respondents in surveys asking for self-reports tend to give information that is socially desirable and conceal information that is not. Other studies of this type have used guided interviews and diaries. The presence of the interviewer in guided interviews might lead a respondent to give answers that he or she feels the interviewer is looking for. Questionnaires and diaries, on the other hand, provide privacy which may encourage more honesty. I used a questionnaire for that reason and for its efficiency as a method of collecting information from a large number of subjects.

The closed-ended portion of the questionnaire, representing the quantitative aspect of this study, provided relatively objective data that could be easily compiled and summarized. It also allowed for comparisons between this sample and other segments of the population which have been surveyed by other researchers. Any similarities between community college students and the general adult population would validate the methods used in the studies being compared.

The
key-infor
sent the
the inte
nation c
understa
tions of
The in-
that cou
naire.
the pict
findings

Researc

Th
strateg
cording
prevale
"If a t
tion t
Althoug
a singl
enriche
Wh
cerned
ings, t
meanin

The interviews of nine students, who may be considered key-informants (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 119), represent the qualitative portion of the study. The purpose of the interviews was to get additional information and explanation of the questionnaire answers and to gain a fuller understanding of the reading habits, attitudes, and motivations of some of the students who took part in the survey. The in-depth interviews provided additional information that could not be obtained through a closed-ended questionnaire. The depth of information gained helped flesh out the picture and offer valuable clues on how certain survey findings should be interpreted.

Research Methodology Assumptions

This study has used quantitative and qualitative strategies for gathering data, a methodology, which, according to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), has become more prevalent and is a sound approach to research. They state, "If a theory is valid, it should be amenable to substantiation through a variety of data-collection strategies. Although many theories develop primarily through the use of a single approach to data collection, they are generally enriched by broadening the data-collection base" (p. 59).

While the quantitative portion of the study is concerned with reliability or the replicability of the findings, the qualitative portion is focused on discovering the meaning of the data and providing a valid interpretation

(Rist, 1

enable t

an empat

interpre

by the s

students

answers

particip

simply i

The

searche

Accordi

few mod

percept

into th

qualita

pure et

tool co

intervi

search.

Th

enable

means

called

triangu

the et

(Rist, 1977, p. 45). As Rist explains, qualitative methods enable the researcher "to get close to the data, to develop an empathetic understanding of the observed, to be able to interpret and describe the constructions of reality as seen by the subjects, . . ." (Rist, p, 45). By talking to the students, I was able to find out what they meant by their answers to the questionnaire, in other words, to learn the participants' meanings from their perspective rather than simply imposing my perspective on the data.

The acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the researcher is an integral part of qualitative research. According to Goetz and LeCompte, "Ethnography is one of the few modes of scientific study that admit the subjective perception and biases of both participants and researcher into the research frame" (1984, p. 95). Although the qualitative procedure used in this study cannot qualify as pure ethnography, it makes use of in-depth interviewing, a tool common in ethnographic research. This tool allows the interviewer's perspectives to become a part of the research.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled me to cross-check the data gathered through one means with data gathered through another means, a process called triangulation. As Goetz and LeCompte (1984) notes triangulation "assists in correcting biases that occur when the ethnographer is the only observer of the phenomenon

under in
of the u
the poss
the rese

Survey

I c
on sabba
at Kalar
a total
Communi
(Englis
to Reac
Childre
include
develop
in the
other c
ware (
102),
(Law Er

Select

I
sample

1
t

under investigation" (p. 11). Another possible advantage of the use of both methodologies, according Rist (1977), is the possibility that, through the juxtaposition of the two, the researcher will "see new and different things" (p. 48).

Survey

I conducted the survey in September 1990 while I was on sabbatical leave from my position as English instructor at Kalamazoo Valley Community College. Eight classes, with a total of 219 students, participated. Four were in the Communication Arts department: Developmental English (English 098), College Writing (English 101), Introduction to Reading Skills (Reading and Study Skills 101), and Children's Literature (English 242). They were chosen to include students at different levels of college, from the developmental to the advanced level. To ensure diversity in the sample, I administered the survey to classes in other departments of the college: Microprocessors 1/Software (Electronics 215), Principles of Sociology (Sociology 102), Introduction to Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Law Enforcement 101), and Human Relations (Business 207).

Selection of Subjects

In selecting subjects for this survey, I sought a sample that met the following criteria:

1. Different levels of classes, from developmental to advanced.

2.
tec

3.

4.
sur

5.
sur
vie

Co

Subjects

17, 1990

Pilot St

A

ter to

questio

then ir

negativ

parts c

analysi

to answ

tions,

questi

studen

whether

whethe

approa

was re

2. Different programs, including business and technical areas.

3. A mixture of males and females and of ages.

4. Instructors' permission to administer the survey during class time.

5. Students' consent to participate in the survey and, if asked, to be available for interviews after completing the questionnaire.

Consent for the study was obtained from the Human Subjects Committee at Michigan State University on April 17, 1990.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in the spring 1990 semester to test the initial questionnaire I had developed. The questionnaire was given to an English class at KVCC. I then interviewed two students in the class who indicated negative attitudes toward reading. After the pilot study, parts of the questionnaire were revised to permit easier analysis of the data. Open-ended questions asking students to answer in essay form were changed to closed-ended questions, giving them a list of answers to choose from. The questions that were changed were questions that asked students to evaluate themselves as readers, to explain whether reading is easy or difficult for them, and to state whether they think reading is important. Through this approach, the number of open-ended, essay-type questions was reduced from four to one, allowing for more efficient

analysis
ty of m
survey
informat
view set
to inte

Construc

Th
percept
attitud
or mo
abiliti
led me
tions o
in the
Nation
(Sudmar
stateme
were a
tude M
58-61)
ments,
suitab
variet
readin
throug

analysis of the results. Questions on variety and intensity of motivations taken from the Mikulecky et al. (1979) survey were also added. Realizing the range and depth of information that students can reveal in an informal interview setting, I decided to increase the number of students to interview, from four that I had planned, to nine.

Construction of the Questionnaire (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the survey was to find out students' perceptions of their reading behavior or habits, reading attitudes, the types of materials they read, their reasons or motivations for reading, and their reading abilities--elements which my review of the literature had led me to conclude are involved in aliteracy. The questions on reading behavior (what is read and how often) used in the present survey were adapted from surveys of the National Opinion Research Center and the Gallup Poll (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 58). Eight of the fifteen statements used in the Likert-type question (question 8) were adapted from the Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure (Mikulecky, Shanklin, and Caverley, 1979, pp. 58-61). (Slight modifications were made to make the statements, which were designed for a telephone survey, more suitable for a written questionnaire.) The questions on variety and intensity of motivations for reading, types of reading, and self-perceived reading ability (questions 9 through 13) were also taken from that study.

Res
maintain
desirabl
would h
nothing
gain the
mation
tions,
relativ
Questio
recreat
then a
month,
easier
magazin
counter
I asked
newspap
title
about.

Q
reader
and ne
tion
spare
book

Researchers (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982; Nell, 1988) maintain that because reading is perceived as socially desirable, individuals who report on their reading activity would hesitate to admit that they have read little or nothing or would exaggerate their reading activity. To gain the students' trust and willingness to divulge information about their reading habits, attitudes, and motivations, I began the questionnaire with questions that are relatively easy to answer, requiring yes and no answers. Question 1 was intended as an ice-breaker, asking what recreational activities the students had engaged in. I then asked the students what they had read during the past month, using the phrase "Did you happen to" to make it easier for them to say "No" if they had not read any books, magazines, and newspapers (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982). To counter the tendency to exaggerate their reading activity, I asked students to name titles of books, magazines, and newspapers they had read. If they could not remember the title of a book, they were asked to write what it was about.

Questions 2 through 7 are questions often asked in readership surveys. Question 2 asked what books, magazines, and newspapers students had read in the past month. Question 3 asked how often they read for enjoyment in their spare time, and question 4 asked whether they had read a book "all the way through" and, if they had, when? In

questio
types o
read re
these q
of this
as dete

T
ure stu
(state
(state
f, g, h
readin
also a
as rea
they r
speed
was in
tions
readi
curren

I
const
attit
for t
range
ly a
point

questions 5 through 7, students were asked to indicate the types of magazines and the titles of newspapers that they read regularly (on a daily or weekly basis) if any. I used these questions so that I could compare the reading habits of this sample to those of other segments of the population as determined by other surveys.

The statements in question 8 were designed to measure students' perceptions of the general value of reading (statements a and l), personal attitudes toward reading (statements b, j, and k), reading behavior (statements d, f, g, h, and o), and attitudes and behavior concerning book reading (statements c, e, i, and n). The questionnaire also asked students to indicate how they rated themselves as readers and, compared with other people their age, how they rated themselves in terms of their comprehension and speed of reading (questions 9, 12, and 13). Question 10 was intended to measure variety and intensity of motivations for reading, and question 11 cited different types of reading and asked students to indicate which types they currently engaged in.

Individual items of the questionnaire were combined to construct the different components of aliteracy. Personal attitude toward reading was measured by adding the points for the answers to questions 8B, 8J and 8K. The answers range from "strongly disagree," given 5 points, to "strongly agree," given 1 point, and "no opinion," given 3 points. Likewise, self-perceived reading ability, was

measured

The num

measure

for each

"very l

(indica

Intensi

son's

ranging

combini

ranging

Qu

student

reader

enced

commer

studer

perspe

demog

educat

race.

Interv

naire

and a

measured by adding the points for questions 9, 12, and 13. The number of reasons or motivations for reading was measured by using question 10, A through E, with 1 point for each answer of 1 or 2 (indicating that the statement is "very like me"). No point was given to answers 3, 4, and 5 (indicating that the statement is "very unlike me"). Intensity of motivation was measured by combining a person's responses to question 10, A through E, the score ranging from 5 to 25. Types of texts read was measured by combining answers to question 11, A through E, the score ranging from 0 to 15.

Question 14 is an open-ended essay question asking students to try to explain what had made them the kinds of readers that they were and who or what might have influenced their reading attitudes and habits. The written comments provided a fuller picture of the nature of a student's aliteracy and its origins, from the student's perspective. The final part of the questionnaire asked demographic questions relative to sex, age, amount of education, whether a fulltime or parttime student, and race.

Interviews

Nine students who indicated through their questionnaire answers extremely negative attitudes toward reading and avoidance of reading were chosen as subjects for inter-

viewing
intervi
enjoyme
for enj
or "st
read."

Al
a fast
library
were 4
ized i
an int
schedu
reques
questi
themse
anyth
asked
the q
viewi
thoug
what
thoug
to as
they
would

viewing. For example, of the nine students who were interviewed, eight indicated that they "never" read for enjoyment in their spare time and two stated that they read for enjoyment "less than one time a week." All "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement "I like to read."

All of the interviews, except one (which took place at a fastfood restaurant) were held in empty classrooms, the library, and lounges on the KVCC campus. The interviews were 45 minutes long on the average. I used a nonstandardized interview format (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), following an interview guide but not adhering to a predetermined schedule of questions. I generally started each one with a request for additional explanations of their answers to the questionnaire. As an opener, I asked them to describe themselves as readers, and I allowed them to talk about anything that related to that general question. I also asked them to clarify specific answers they had written on the questionnaire. One of the main thrusts of the interviewing was to ask for additional explanation of why they thought they were the type of readers that they were and what aspects of their school and home environments they thought might have influenced them. Another objective was to ask them how they felt about the amount of reading that they were doing and if they thought their reading habits would remain the same or change in the future.

My

to test

therefo

and pu

interac

I trie

judgmen

reading

their

reader

relati

brary,

would

atmosp

of the

record

ed due

immedi

Data A

C

studen

of al

into

the m

third

compa

My main goal was to probe for additional information, to test hunches, and to explore issues. As interviewer, therefore, I did not remain uninvolved. Instead, I probed and pursued questions as far as possible, and I encouraged interaction between the students and me. At the same time, I tried to maintain, verbally and non-verbally, a non-judgmental and neutral stance toward the students' views on reading. I wanted the students to feel free to disclose their real thoughts about reading and about themselves as readers. I believe that conducting the interviews in relatively neutral areas like empty classrooms, the library, and the cafeteria rather than in my office, which would have accentuated my role as a teacher, added to the atmosphere of collegiality and trust. I tape recorded all of the interviews, except two, and transcribed the taped recorded conversations. The two that were not were recorded due to malfunctioning equipment I recalled in writing immediately after the interviews.

Data Analysis

On the basis of their answers to the questionnaire, students were assigned a score for each of the components of aliteracy. For each component, the scores were grouped into high (for the top third of the range), middle (for the middle part of the range), and low (for the lowest third of the range). Using these groups of scores, I compared the scores of book readers on each of these compo-

nents t

extent

I

person'

nents a

survey,

tionna

Additio

the su

the ni

from t

questi

readin

data f

arrive

concl

Howev

these

repres

Answe

quest

liter

ter

exter

nents to those of non-book readers to determine to what extent KVCC students are similar to the adult population.

I made inferences about the extent and nature of a person's aliteracy from his or her scores on these components as well as from answers to other questions in the survey, for instance those in the beginning of the questionnaire that pertain to reading habits and behavior. Additional information given through the essay portion of the survey was also considered. Finally, in the case of the nine students whom I interviewed, information gained from the interviews was added to the data supplied by the questionnaire to form a fuller and clearer picture of their reading attitudes, habits, and motivations. By combining data from these different sources, I posited that one can arrive at a profile of a person as a reader and draw some conclusions about the extent of a person's aliteracy. However, judgments about a person's aliteracy based on these data can never be final and absolute since they represent only a part of reality.

Answering the Research Questions

In Chapter 3, I described the answer to the first question, "How should aliteracy be defined?" from the literature on aliteracy and related topics. In that chapter I also answered the second research question, "To what extent are the claims about aliteracy and its seriousness

as a s
reports
the Am
questi
compar
studen
survey
nature
I used

C

views.
and o
those
7 wil
tion,
of ne

as a societal problem accurate?" basing the answer on reports of surveys of nationally representative samples of the American adult population. In answering the research question, "Does aliteracy exist among KVCC students?" I compared the findings of the present survey relative to the students' reading habits to the findings of the national surveys. To answer the research question, "What is the nature of the aliteracy among community college students?" I used the results of both the survey and the interviews.

Chapter 5 will contain the summaries of the interviews. Chapter 6 will present the findings of the closed- and open-ended parts of the surveys and will integrate those findings with the results of the interviews. Chapter 7 will conclude the study by answering the research question, "What are the implications of aliteracy in the light of new, comprehensive definitions of literacy."

Th

of the

nity C

with r

result

interv

T

becaus

charac

read

enjoyn

inter

use p

Profi

magaz

inter

He l

ever

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEWS

This chapter and Chapter 6 will present the findings of the interviews and the survey of Kalamazoo Valley Community College students. After summarizing the interviews with nine students in this chapter, I will analyze the results of the survey as well as the findings from the interviews in the next chapter.

The following students were chosen for the interviews because they showed through questionnaire answers aliterate characteristics: they reported that they didn't like to read and that they never read for enjoyment or read for enjoyment less than once a week. Their willingness to be interviewed was another reason they were selected. I will use pseudonyms in referring to these students.

Profiles of Nine Students

Bob

Although Bob, a 19-year-old student, regularly read magazines and a newspaper, he wrote on the questionnaire, interview, he explained that he had book reading in mind. He liked to read about sports and got Sports Illustrated every week. He also indicated in the questionnaire that he

did a "
a week
Countin
read mo
these m
books.

Bo
himself
what h
the "s
magazi
to rea
n't do

A
averag
averag
hensi
head
learn
get t
stuff
estec
this
estat
on r

did a "moderate amount" of newspaper reading. A few times a week he would buy The Detroit News on the way home. Counting magazine and newspaper reading, he said that he read more than two times a week for enjoyment. Outside of these materials, he said, "I never read anything else. No books. No nothing."

Bob seemed to have a clear, unqualified image of himself as a person who did not like to read. When asked what he disliked, he answered that he didn't like any of the "school stuff like books . . . ," but he liked sports magazines and the Reader's Digest. He said, "If I'm told to read for school, I probably wouldn't mind, but I wouldn't do it just for the heck of it."

Although in the questionnaire Bob rated himself an average reader, average in comprehension and even above-average in rate, he admitted he had difficulty with comprehension: "It's hard for me to read and bring it in to my head the first time around on most things when I have to learn it." He said that he could read words, but could not get the meaning behind them. This applied to "school stuff" only. When he read material in which he was interested or of which he had some knowledge, he didn't have this problem. For instance, he wanted to go into the real estate business so he had been reading books and pamphlets on real estate. He had no difficulty reading them.

Bob
novels
zines.
their r

As
did, Bo
heard i
it. S
future
of rea
pleasu

L
class.
for e
respon
and th
of sc
answe
ent p
sport
each
subs
usual
somet

Bob said that his mother was an avid reader of romance novels and newspapers, and his father read sports magazines. His brother and he had taken after their father in their reading habits.

Asked how he felt about the amount of reading that he did, Bob said, "I probably could be reading more because I heard it's good for you. It relaxes you. Still I don't do it. Still I don't read that much." He said that in the future he probably would read more but only "research type of reading like for my job. I probably won't read for pleasure any more [than I do now]."

Lee

Lee was an 18-year-old student enrolled in a reading class. In the questionnaire he answered that he never read for enjoyment and that he didn't like to read. He also responded that he usually didn't read unless he had to, and that he thought reading was not that important outside of school. He appeared highly aliterate from his written answers. Talking to Lee, however, I got a slightly different picture. He said that he subscribed to two monthly sports magazines and that he read a couple of articles in each issue. He occasionally read Time, which his parents subscribed to. He read the local newspaper every day, usually reading the headline story, the sports section, and sometimes the classified ads.

Le
reading
backs t
he had
er, hi
Usually
think,
"Most
book h
really
he nev
er, wh
childr
refere
Arbut
proble
if he
parent
novel
below
ardiz

was T
read
by re
him t
of h

Lee also talked about paperback books he had enjoyed reading for English classes. He said that he liked paperbacks that are about 150 to 200 pages long. Altogether, he had about five positive experiences with books. However, his other encounters with books had been unsuccessful. Usually, after a couple of chapters into a novel, he would think, "I just don't think I can read this." He added, "Most books aren't that interesting to me." He recalled a book his friends in junior high school had told him was really good--Phantom Toll Booth. It was very thick, and he never finished reading it. (This novel by Norton Juster, which is 256 pages long in paperback, is described in a children's literature textbook as "heavily burdened with references that will daunt many readers" [Sutherland and Arbuthnot, 1991, p. 280]). Lee said that he had no problem reading textbooks; he usually understood them, and if he didn't, he could ask for help from his teachers or parents. He said that it was hard to ask someone about a novel that he or she had not read. Lee considered himself below average as a reader. He said that he disliked standardized achievement tests and did poorly in them.

One book that Lee recalled having read with pleasure was The Pearl. His mother, a school teacher, got him to read the novel when he was in the seventh or eighth grade by reading parts of the first two chapters and encouraging him to read the rest. Lee's mother read to him during most of his childhood and continued reading to him after he

learne
read,
He sai
"If sh
much a
I
mother
mothe
reade
exten
If it
him,
that

resp
char
reco
show
one
the
into
caus
trie
high
that

learned to read. She would tell him about a book she had read, he would read the book, and they would talk about it. He said, "I like this." He said later in the interview, "If she didn't do that, I don't think I'd be reading as much as I do."

Lee was one of six students I interviewed who had mothers who read a great deal at home. Three of these six mothers also tried to influence their children to become readers. Lee's mother seemed to have succeeded to some extent in persuading him that book reading is worthwhile. If it hadn't been for books his mother had introduced to him, he would not have had the positive memories of books that he described.

However, despite those positive experiences, Lee responded on the questionnaire with answers that would characterize him as a typical aliterate. The picture I reconstructed from those answers and from the interview shows a person who, despite of his perception of himself as one who doesn't like reading and avoids it, has experienced the pleasures of reading and is struggling to turn himself into a reader. Lee said that he'd like to read more because reading "might make me a better person." He had tried to read at least one book every year since junior high school, but he said, "I wish I could find more books that are as good as the ones I've liked."

To
to des
mother
read."
about
to pic
one by
liked
"I ca
keeps
me ti
read
night
just

He sa
that
that
don't
his t
you
text
that
reme
I do
ther

Tom

Tom was an 18-year-old law enforcement student. Asked to describe himself as a reader, Tom talked about his mother, "My mom is a teacher and she likes to push me to read." Tom explained that in the summer she would borrow about five young adult books from the library and ask him to pick one that he would like to read. He would choose one by reading the first five pages of each book. If he liked the way it started, then he would read it. Tom said, "I can only read a book if I can associate with it or it keeps me lively so I can pay attention 'cause reading makes me tired. If I want to go to sleep, I just grab a book and read it. But some books, you know, you can stay up all night and read. I like that, you know, if I can read books just like that."

However, Tom said that he hated reading school books. He said that the reason he answered in the questionnaire that he didn't like to read was that "most of the stuff that I read or that I'm told to read is school stuff and I don't like to read it." Tom said he disliked reading all his textbooks, except for one law enforcement book "because you can learn information that is useful." But the other textbooks he called "boring" and "hard to read." He said that he had trouble concentrating on, comprehending and remembering what he read. "When I read out of a textbook, I don't take it in real well. But if I read it out loud, then I remember it. Sometimes I have to go over it and

over it
said th
to do,
trate a
In
didn't
it does
he sai
force
but I'
look a
once s
read
the e
broug
guess

more
said,
can

scho
idea
read
tion

over it and over it, so I can remember it," he added. He said that if he could tell English teachers what they need to do, he would tell them to teach students how to concentrate and remember what they have read.

In the beginning of the interview, Tom said that he didn't like the way his mother pushed him to read. ". . . it doesn't work," he said. However, later in the interview he said, " I don't know what I'd be like if she didn't force it on me. Maybe I won't read at all. I might have, but I'm not really sure. It helps if she's forcing me to look at this book, to read the first five pages, because once she has done that, then she doesn't have to tell me to read the [rest of] the book because [now] I want to." At the end of the interview, he said, "If my mother hadn't brought me those books, I would never have read them. I guess it was pretty good that she did."

Tom didn't think that in the future he would read more than he did at the present. However, he may read, he said, ". . . if I can find a good book. I don't know how I can find them."

Like Lee and Bob, Tom mentioned some difficulties with school reading; Tom had trouble concentrating and retaining ideas. What is the connection between self-perceived reading difficulties and their reading habits? This question cannot be answered solely on the basis of information

gathere

cussed

S

planne

KVCC.

she n

subscr

bough

ads.

poor

poor

She

came

gathered from these interviews. However, it will be discussed more in connection with the next two students.

Sue

Sue, a 37-year-old business administration major, planned to start her own business when she finished at KVCC. She confirmed her answer in the questionnaire that she never read for enjoyment by saying that she didn't subscribe to or read magazines, and when occasionally she bought a newspaper, she mostly looked at the classified ads. She said,

> I don't like reading I think in part because sometimes there are a lot of big words, and my spelling isn't that good. My comprehension of words isn't that great. I've got to sit there and figure out how to pronounce the words and it just makes me think it's boring. It's too much trouble.

While she said she didn't like to read because of her poor ability to recognize words, she also said that her poor spelling was caused by lack of reading.

> I know my spelling is affected by reading. I know my spelling is very bad, and I know that if I was to read more, I'd pick up more. When I came back to school in January, I was forced to read books and stuff, and I was reading more. My spelling was better because I was looking at the words and remembering them. And then after I slacked off this summer, my spelling slacked off too. So I know reading does affect my spelling, and I know it's helpful, but it's just something that I have to force myself to do.

She said that her reading ability has improved since she came back to school. Still she said, "It's nowhere as good

as I w

it use

T

readi

"When

taught

basica

have

and i

she w

teach

she s

didn'

magaz

it n

scho

one-

came

elem

and

I co

that

exam

[he

int

she

as I would like it to be, but it's a little bit better than it used to be."

The reason she cited for her present attitude toward reading was that she never read as a child. She said, "When I was a child I was never enforced, or asked to, or taught to just read. I can read, but I don't like to read basically. . . . it's just like anything else in life, you have to make a habit of it, whether you're young or old, and it's just something I never picked up." She said that she wasn't encouraged or discouraged by any particular teacher. "This is a problem I've always had in my life," she said. "I did it [reading] in school just enough, but I didn't do any outside reading at home or free reading of magazines [and] books. So I think that's why I don't like it now because I wasn't made to do it as a child." At school she said, "I enjoy doing things with my hands or one-on-one than I have reading about things, so when it came to reading I didn't comprehend as well as I did."

In contrast, her 17-year-old son, when he was in elementary school "loved to read. You'd give him a book, and he would just read, read, read. He was very smart, and I could see that his grades reflected his reading. I know that it's very important to read just by watching his example, and I know it's very important for the young girls [her two younger daughters, ages 5 and 8] to read and be interested in reading." Knowing the importance of reading, she had tried to encourage her children by reading to them

and bu

referr

just c

I
t
c
s
t
v

She

readi

might

was k

"I pl

need

more

busi

was

year

She

coul

I g

tha

joy

not

som

and buying them a set of The World Book Encyclopedia. She referred to the encyclopedias as "a thousand dollar set just collecting dust." She said,

> I give the kids the books and say, go look through them, but as far as me taking the time off to read to them stories, I know I have to start young by reading to them in order to help them when they get old to enjoy reading more, but when I start reading to them and they start fidgeting, then I just close the book and stop reading.

She felt that she had a "tendency to discourage" their reading because she didn't read to them as much as they might want or need.

Sue seemed to read only for utilitarian reasons. She was keeping her textbooks, instead of selling them, because "I plan on going back to them and getting the information I need." She thought that her future would require of her more reading of this type. She would need to read more business-related brochures and pamphlets.

When asked if there was any time in her life when she was interested in reading, she described an experience ten years ago when she was a secretary and was "totally bored." She explained, " I had nothing to do, so the only thing I could do was to read. So I happened to pick up a book and I got interested in it and I couldn't put it down. And that was one of the very few times in my life that I enjoyed reading. Only when there's no other option, there's nothing else to do, so I was forced to concentrate on something like that, then I find myself reading." She said

that t
intere
type A
stirs
chapte
down.
respo
leisu
ronme
jail,
be my

the
score
scale
(on
in t
and
self
aver
rang
nai
and
fir
dur
dau

that that experience "made me think I could probably be interested in something. I'm an impatient person myself, a type A personality. And unless I can find something that stirs my interest right away, if I have to read through a chapter or two to get my interest [going], then I put it down. So it's got to be interesting to begin with." In response to my question whether she would read more for leisure in the future she said, "If I'm in a closed environment with nothing to do, like when you get locked up in jail, then I'll think of a book and read, but it wouldn't be my first choice."

In her questionnaire answers, Sue scored low, if not the lowest, on almost all the aliteracy components. She scored the lowest on attitude toward reading (on a 3-15 scale, she scored 3) and on variety of motives for reading (on a 0-5 scale, she scored 0). She had the lowest scores in the medium range for intensity of motives for reading and types of reading engaged in. Her highest score was in self-perceived reading ability (she considered herself average), where she fell in the upper part of the medium range. It is interesting to note that in the questionnaire, Sue indicated that reading was not a useful activity and that it was not that important outside of school. At first these answers appeared to contradict what she said during the interview about the importance for her young daughters "to read and be interested in reading." However,

in the
readin
readin
busine
busine

B

skill
answe
readi
ates
choos
frust
prono
ly, u
langu
woul
perc
beha
lead
abil
cycl
comb
in c
pers
they
to

in the interview, she did put considerable emphasis on reading for school. For Sue it appears that the value of reading was tied to schooling. Because she wanted to own a business, in the future she saw the need to read more business-related material.

Because Sue rated herself as average in reading skills, I would have concluded from her questionnaire answers that she had no serious problems connected with reading and that she was one of those stereotypical aliterates who can read presumably without any difficulty but who choose not to. However, Sue did say that she found reading frustrating because of her poor ability to recognize and pronounce "big words." (In the interview she spoke fluently, using a varied vocabulary, and seemed at ease with oral language.) If she read more, her word recognition skill would undoubtedly improve. But, again, a predominant perception that she didn't like to read affects her reading behavior. It is indeed a vicious cycle of poor attitude leading to reading avoidance leading to limited reading ability leading to poor attitude, and so on around the cycle. The cycle might have started with any one or any combination of these components. But once the cycle starts in childhood, it seems to go on into adulthood, leading the persons concerned to think that it will never change, that they will continue the cycle of reading only what they have to and of avoiding reading for pleasure.

A

the qu

younge

for s

[and]

consi

"I ca

done

rerea

[than

Altho

that

consi

texth

inte

sinc

didn

ment

but

airp

beca

ago.

ing

at

pap

Ann

A 33-year-old mother of a 2-year-old boy, Ann wrote on the questionnaire, "I never spent time reading when I was younger, [and] didn't often get my assigned readings done for school. I don't remember any influence on my reading [and] that's probably why I don't like to read." She considers herself below average in reading skills. Why? "I can sit and read, and read, and read, and when I get done there's nothing there. . . . I find myself having to reread. When I read, I feel that I'm reading more slowly [than I should] and I'm getting lost in what I'm reading." Although she didn't have much difficulty reading a novel that she had finished reading in the preceding month, she considered herself a slow reader, whether she was reading textbooks or reading a novel.

Ann wrote that she never read for enjoyment. She interpreted reading for enjoyment as reading books, and since, except for this novel she just finished reading, she didn't read books, she thought she never read for enjoyment. She didn't read magazines and newspapers regularly, but about two years ago she subscribed to a magazine on airplanes. (Because of her dad's interest in flying, she became interested in it and took flying lessons six years ago. She wanted a career that combined flying and marketing, her major.) She read magazines now only when she was at a doctor's office; she didn't subscribe to a newspaper. I asked her if she considered magazine reading as

readin
ing i
artic
throu
a few
cle,
curio
arti
chil
neve
since
brou
read
went
beca
were
put
be
sad
tha

tim
a
rea
mot
sh

reading for enjoyment. "Only if I find something interesting in it," she answered, and she did find interesting articles to read occasionally. Usually she just "flipped" through the magazines. When she was at her sister's house a few days before, she saw a newspaper and found an article, which she read "because it stirred my interest and curiosity." She expressed surprise that she read the whole article. Recalling reading only one book as a child--Charlotte's Web--she said she started others but never finished them. The only other book she had read since elementary school was a mystery novel that her mother brought her. "It took me over half a year until I finally read it," she said, but she read it every night before she went to bed and finished it in two weeks. "I was amazed because I never thought it would catch my interest. There were nights when I was just real tired and I didn't want to put it down, and I forced myself to stop because it would be one o'clock in the morning. . . . It was really kind of sad that I finished it. It was over and I was real amazed that I had such an interest in it."

She said that her mother read mysteries in her free time. She remembered her father reading to her when she was a child, but she didn't remember any of the stories he read. She didn't have any friends who read books. Her mother didn't try to get her to read, until last year when she brought her the mystery novel that she wrote in the

quest
mothe
were
stres
mothe
where
in re
more

the
of t
the
a bo
that
lott
reme
her
her
rea
rea
why
cou
Uni
tex
tal
re
pi

questionnaire she had read in the past six months. Her mother didn't encourage reading when she and her sister were young, but now she sends books to Ann's son and stresses the importance of reading to him. Before her mother was married, she had her own television program where she read to children. With her mother's involvement in reading, Ann was surprised that she herself was not a more interested in reading.

Because Ann had indicated that she had read a book in the past six months, one would have concluded on the basis of that answer alone that she was a book reader (following the BISG surveys, this study designates those who have read a book in the past six months as book readers). However, that was the only book she had read "maybe since Charlotte's Web," and Charlotte's Web was the only book she remembered reading as a child. Ann repeatedly said that her being a below-average student in school was a result of her lack of reading. She said, "I think my feeling for reading is what affects my reading for classes because I really have to sit down and force myself to read. That's why I don't think I get much out of it." Ann was taking a course called "Learning to Learn" at Western Michigan University. It taught strategies for reading and studying textbooks, and she liked it very much. She said, "I think taking this class and learning more about another kind of reading is going to make a difference. I hope that it picks up my interest and my skills in reading."

R

intere

to rea

year-

ing a

hopir

like

she

enjoy

ly m

fami

Bett

pape

recu

read

reco

that

fin

lau

chi

lea

she

mor

Regarding her son, Ann said, "I hope he takes a better interest in it [reading] than I do. I know it's important to read to him everyday, but I don't."

Ruth

Asked to describe herself as a reader, Ruth, a 30-year-old student, said that she wasn't interested in reading and never had been. She read only for school. "I'm hoping that while I'm in school, I'll start learning to like to read, maybe even love to read," she said. Although she wrote on the questionnaire that she never read for enjoyment, she said in the interview that she read a monthly magazine, Guidepost and other magazines on Christian family living once or twice a week. She had subscribed to Better Homes and Gardens but she did not read the newspaper regularly. Because her husband was in the hospital recuperating from injuries from a car accident, she started reading a book written by Barbara Mandrell about Mandrell's recovery from injury incurred in a car accident. She found that interesting, but she was frustrated that she couldn't find much time to read it. She read the book between laundry loads or when her two own children and the four children she babysat for were taking naps. Asked what she learned about herself as a reader from reading these books, she said that she found out that she liked true stories more than love stories or fiction.

I

who c

choos

adequ

anyth

"A lo

call

long

she

didn

for

"enj

remi

read

a wh

and

not

a f

to

me.

She

120

rea

say

in

fi

Ruth appeared to fit the stereotype of the aliterate who can read, who has no difficulties reading, but who chooses not to. Ruth felt that her reading skills were adequate: "I read well. I don't have any problems reading anything. It's just trying to find the time." She added, "A lot of people would call me active or hyper. I don't call myself that, but I like to keep busy and to sit too long drives me nuts, so I like to run around a lot." When she answered the questionnaire, she indicated that she didn't like to read and that she read less than once a week for enjoyment. For both questions, she was referring to "enjoyment reading, I don't do enough of that." When reminded about the magazine reading she did, she said she read for enjoyment, one to two times a week, "but still not a whole lot." By "a whole lot," she meant "sitting down and reading a book of a couple hundred pages. That's just not like me." Like the others I had interviewed, she had a firm and definite image of herself as one who didn't like to read or didn't read for enjoyment--"that's just not like me." However, the book she was reading was 400 pages long. She had been reading it for about five days and had read 120 pages. The experience of reading this book made her realize she liked to read non-fiction and also made her say, "Like the book I'm reading right now, it's just driving me nuts. I'd just love to crawl up in a couch and finish reading. I'm interested in seeing what happened to

her, h

spare.

repli

She

were

She

book

coul

boo

enj

her

inf

chi

the

en

le

to

her, how it all turned out. I just don't have an hour to spare."

Asked about what influenced her reading habits, she replied,

> I think a lot of it was my parents; they never enforced sitting down with a book to study. We were never made to study so therefore I never studied. If I didn't have to, I wasn't going to, so I think that might have been a lot of where it came from and I find myself doing that with the boys [ages 5 and 9]. I don't have them read enough. I don't have enough time to sit with them to read to them. They enjoy being read to, but the 9-year-old has a hard time sitting down and reading a book. I think a lot of it goes back to your childhood--what you saw in the home. My parents never read a lot.

She added her parents read the newspaper but that there weren't a lot of books at home when she was growing up. She remembered that they had National Geographic but not books. Throughout her schooling, she read as little as she could--"just to get by." After high school, she read a book about a Vietnam veteran, a true story, which she enjoyed. This was the only book she could remember from her past.

Like Sue and Ann, Ruth was concerned about how she was influencing the reading attitudes and habits of her own children. She feared that she was bringing up her children the way she herself was brought up. "I'm hoping that I'd enjoy reading because I'm back in school . . . I'd like to learn so much, and I know that a lot of that is just going to come from reading."

I

infor

were

inter

read"

put d

Mandr

"And

for r

Joe

req

ave

"So

fau

the

at

war

Ruth's main motivation for reading seems to be to get information. Her two positive book reading experiences were with non-fiction books. However, at the end of the interview, she described a friend who "used to hate to read" but now read Danielle Steele books that she "can't put down." This friend had told her to finish the Barbara Mandrell book, so she could read it, too. Ruth concluded, "And she used to hate to read . . . . maybe there's hope for me."

Joe

Joe, a 19-year-old student, said,

> I don't really spend a lot of time on reading. Maybe I should spend more time. I know it's important. I have no enthusiasm to sit down and read a book. I've never read a novel. I just don't. I lose interest. I think I just don't retain it like I should. And that bothers me a lot of the time because I know that once I get to college--I'm in college--it requires a lot of reading, so it's frightening sometimes to think about what I'm going to do, but I guess I'll manage through it.

Since he was in his third semester at KVCC, I asked Joe how he felt about the amount of reading he had been required to do in college thus far. His reply: "About average." I asked if it was manageable, and he answered, "Sometimes it isn't because I work outside and it's not the fault of the school. It's my fault, I guess. I feel that the reading requirements out here are all right." Living at home where he was helping his parents run a business, he wanted to move to a place where the atmosphere was more

conge
inter
him a
selli
ed i
sure
real
clas
opin

know
inst
to
If
abo
qui

thr
als
bus
tha
"I
ok
go

se
he

congenial to studying. Asked if he had found a course that interested him, he said that he didn't know what interested him at the present, but he planned to go into marketing or selling. He was taking sociology, but he was not interested in it and was just content to pass the course. "I'm sure sociology or philosophy is important, but I don't really have to get deep into it, so if I can pass this class [sociology], that's all right with me. That's my opinion."

It appears that Joe valued reading in the abstract--"I know it's important." However, he could not cite any instance when he felt that reading was personally important to him. His main use for reading is "getting knowledge. If you read articles, you get knowledge." He was concerned about his reading habits because he anticipated more required reading in his future college courses.

Joe did not subscribe to magazines, but he "browsed through" Time and Newsweek in the dentist's office. He also "previewed" publications about dogs (for his parents' business) but only to get ideas for advertising. He said that he read the newspaper to find out what was going on. "If you can call that reading for pleasure, I guess that's okay. I'm doing that to gain information about what's going on in Kalamazoo and other areas," he explained.

From his elementary school years, he remembered a second grade teacher reading Superfudge. He liked it, but he didn't read other books after that because he was more

inter
schoo
"were
quire
expla
what
scho
alwa
how
that
list
read
come

tio
hen

Ask
thi
soc
exp
fo
en
be

interested "in getting out in the playground." In high school he read To Kill a Mockingbird and Animal Farm, which "were all right." He read them "because they were required. Otherwise, I never would have read them." He explained that he didn't read the books entirely: "I read what was enough to get by with the assignment." A high school librarian once tried to get him to read books. "She always had a book and was always reading and would tell me how interesting it was. And we would talk about it and that's about it. But she tried." This librarian had a list of recommended books for people who didn't like to read. The books were out in a special cart and "you can come and take them any time." He never tried any of them.

Joe rated himself a below average reader in his questionnaire; he also rated himself below average in comprehension but average in speed. In the essay part, he wrote,

> The reason I don't like to read is because I can never understand what I've read the first time through. Therefore, I have to read it again. and that is too time consuming.

Asked what materials he was referring to when he wrote this, he answered "textbooks," like his accounting or sociology textbooks. He said that he could not recall any experience when he felt interested in the material and found it more understandable. If he had such an experience, "it probably happened so long ago that I don't remember. Like I said, I usually don't read a lot of things."

read
schoo
atti
"jus
word
by h
plea
to r
to h
inte
pare
home

he
can
enj
tol
pli
sup
rea
gu
re

wr

It appears that Joe's attitudes and beliefs about reading had been based on the reading he had done for school. School reading consisted of textbook reading. His attitude toward required reading was that he would read "just enough to get by with the assignment." In other words, perhaps except for Superfudge that was read to him by his second grade teacher, he had never experienced the pleasure of reading a book. (I did keep trying to urge Joe to remember other books he had been exposed to. He seemed to have told me all that he could recall at the time of the interview.) His home life had not nurtured reading. His parents never read much, and with a business run from their home, they were constantly busy.

Talking about his feelings about himself as a reader, he said, "I don't want to feel that I'm illiterate, that I can't read, because I know that I can read. I just don't enjoy it. I just don't know what you call that." When I told him about the word "aliterate," he said that it applied to him. At the end of the interview, he said, "I suppose if I spend the time, I'd probably learn to enjoy reading. If I had time to spend, I can probably do it. I guess practice is what you need, isn't it? The more you read, the better you get."

Ron

Ron, a 36-year-old part-time student in electronics, wrote on the questionnaire that he "never" read for enjoy-

ment

that

avera

so a

scri

arti

larl

othe

ski

tio

cou

tar

usi

ple

ly

br

we

bo

co

ment and that he "strongly agreed" that "reading is not that important outside of school." He rated himself below average as a reader.

> I am this kind of reader because I never really enjoyed it. I always enjoyed playing sports or doing other things other than reading. I have learned over the years that you do have to read your required reading in school in order to understand and keep up with your class. For me to relax I like to just do it, not read and understand fantasies.

Ron clearly felt that he didn't like to read, saying so a few times during the interview. However, he subscribed to three sports magazines, and read one to two articles in each issue. He also read the newspaper regularly, reading the sports page first, then looking at the other pages to see if they are interesting. Sometimes he skipped the other sections and read only the sports page.

Ron had defined "reading" when he answered the questionnaire as "novel-reading." Asked why magazine reading could not count as reading for pleasure when done voluntarily, he decided that he did read for pleasure and that, using the same argument, "everyone" read for enjoyment and pleasure.

Ron named several persons he knew who read constantly: his wife, who read romance novels, his mother, his brother, and a friend "who reads about 3 or 4 books a week." However, Ron had read only two books in his life, both by Tolkien, and this took place when he first went to college (he quit college after a year). He said that he

enjoy

the t

caus

ques

not

cons

and

he c

pape

reac

he

The

fil

rea

as

inc

he

sch

rec

Br

sa

bo

ch

ne

ta

enjoyed these books, but he never read the third book in the trilogy. He had not read another novel since.

He considered himself below average as a reader because he did not read as much as other people. In the questionnaire he also "strongly agreed" that "reading is not that important outside of school." This answer appears consistent with his statement that he didn't like to read and that he read only what he had to for school. However, he completely ignored the reading of magazines and newspapers, which he obviously did regularly. When asked about reading at work, at first he said that he read nothing, but he later acknowledged that he read computer writing. Therefore, Ron actually read more than he thought when he filled out the questionnaire. He realized that he actually read for pleasure several times a week, instead of "never," as he answered in the questionnaire.

Ron's reading habits seem consistent with his upbringing, which stressed reading for information. He said that he didn't recall anyone ever reading to him at home or in school and didn't remember any children's books. He did recall having magazines, newspapers, and The Encyclopedia Britannica around the house when he was growing up. He said that he felt "only a little guilty" about his non-book reading, and he didn't expect his reading habits to change. He expected to get most of the information he needed from newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and talking to people.

abou

elec

answ

indi

also

(He

they

samy

skil

int

of

war

sa

ca

th

th

in

Keith

While the other interviewees expressed misgivings about how little they read, Keith, a 31-year-old student in electronics, seemed to flaunt his non-reading habits. His answers in the questionnaire caught my attention because he indicated not only that he never read for enjoyment, but also that he never read magazines, newspapers, and books. (He was among the 1.4 percent "non-readers"--those who said they didn't read books, magazines, and newspapers--in this sample.) Yet he rated himself above average in reading skills. He wrote the following in the questionnaire:

> Reading is definitely not a priority with me. Reading is very time consuming as compared to other forms of information, such as television. I believe my reading skills are above many people who read all the time, but reading is not efficient so I don't do it!
>
> Television or video programs designed to take the place of reading is a far better source of information and knowledge.

When I first called Keith's house to ask if I could interview him, his wife answered. I told her the purpose of my call and the topic of my project. When she heard I wanted to talk to her husband about his reading habits, she said that she and he always talked about his reading because he never read and she thought it was important for the sake of the children that he read.

Keith told me that he was just named vice president of the engineering company that his father owned. When he was in high school, he never took a book home, yet he graduated

with
foun
ring
teac
tio
dec
awa
tro
ic.
row
the
he
whe
sta
was
ex
di
ha

in
He
re
he
i
r

with almost a 3.5 average. When he started college, he found his courses easier than high school courses. Referring to the students in the class, he said, "It was like teaching kindergarteners." There was far too much repetition, and he himself needed to be told only once. He decided then that college was not for him. Having been away for 12 years, he was back in college taking an electronics course. In this course, his attendance was erratic. But although he had just missed three classes in a row, he said that when he got back, "I'll know exactly what they're talking about." He was taking this class so that he would learn to work with people he employed; ". . . when they're doing something a certain way, I would understand." He didn't expect to pass the course because he was not trying to. To pass the course, he had to put in extra time to meet the laboratory requirements, and he .pa didn't have the time. Although he bought the textbook, he had never opened it.

Keith said, "I've never read a book in my life. That includes textbooks. I learn from watching and listening." He only read if "it's definitely required that I read." He read technical information that he had to know. Now that he was vice president, he has to learn how to be a manager, instead of being solely an engineer, so he had been reading articles and booklets about management. "If I find

an a

what

read

actu

beir

watc

acti

for

for

and

his

th

di

"v

on

in

to

wa

as

fo

T

an article, like in the Reader's Digest, that is exactly what I want to read, then I read that."

According to Keith, there was no place for pleasure reading in his life. He said, "I think it's a big joke to actually read for enjoyment. . . . I can't imagine that being fun." He liked to watch movies, but he did not watch much television. He didn't consider himself a very active person. He liked to sit on his work bench and work for hours.

> I call [it] playing around with a circuit. And I just want to see how it works, how it reacts to certain conditions. I am alone then. I want to work from seven at night to two in the morning, so that I can do that without interruption. And that's how I get the most work done.

When he was about twelve years old he started working for his father. "He started me fixing some tape recorders and things like that when I was growing up." He described his father as someone who went to college and did the same thing he did. He thought it was a waste of time and didn't finish. But, according to Keith, his father is "very good" and used to consult for Sony and RCA. "He is one of the top people in the video industry." Keith's main interest is in toys. "After we sell this company, I want to design and build toys. Really neat ones. I've always wanted to do that." He had worked for two other companies as an "engineer." While he was employed by one company for two and a half years, he worked on about 20 projects. Two years after that when he went back and introduced

himse

find

his

just

degr

ever

gett

was

elec

had

ansu

yea

th

[la

A

ev

sc

wa

fa

wi

himself to the men working there, they were surprised to find out that he was so young. They thought that, because his name was on many projects, he was in his sixties.

Keith didn't believe a person can become an engineer just by attending college. He would have had a college degree if he thought it helped. But he said, "I knew everything they were teaching me, and all I was doing was getting the grade." He mentioned a friend's daughter who was going to Michigan Technological University to become an electronics engineer. He asked his friend if his daughter had ever taken apart a tape recorder or fixed it. The answer was no. Keith felt that when she got out in four years, this person would not be a true engineer:

> She's going to know whatever was in a book written by someone who read whatever was in his books. It doesn't make any sense. I think that's probably why I excel in what I do because I don't rely on what I read in a book. I'm learning all the time. I'm still learning.

Keith said about his three children: "Fortunately, for them, in this world, they need to not be like me [laughter]." The oldest is 14 years old and is a "straight A student." Keith told his son, who worked for four hours every night on his homework, "If you graduate from high school with a 4.0 average, I'll get you a Porsche." Keith wanted him to go to Harvard to become a lawyer, perhaps the family business lawyer.

I asked him how his reading skills could develop without practice. "I don't know," he replied. He thought

that
when
book
of t
he h
sion
to '
more
woul

int
be
mor
lis
adv
It
res
his
ab
be
to
as
af
di
lu
T

that he read faster than his wife, who was a salutatorian when she graduated from high school and who always read books. He had written instruction manuals and other types of technical material. He said his spelling was good and he had been complimented for being able to write "professionally." His boss at Humphrey Products used to ask him to "rewrite" the boss's reports "so that they would sound more professional, with the big words. And I did. So you wouldn't think I'd be able to do that."

Keith is indeed very different from the others I interviewed. His reasons for not reading did not appear to be related to his reading ability. They seemed to have more to do with his preferred learning style: learning by listening and watching. In his field, he had been able to advance to the position he was in through that method. It's interesting to note that with Keith taking on new responsibilities as vice president of his father's company, his reading interests had expanded. Now he wanted to learn about "new concepts in management." One could say that before this point, Keith felt no need to learn about other topics because he was narrowly focused on electronics. I asked him how he got information about politics and world affairs. "From TV," he replied. But he said that he didn't watch the news regularly. "Like I said, I'm just lucky. I just happen to turn on the TV and there it is. The next five minutes if I watch it, I catch up on the

whole Iraqi situation." He said he also listened to the car radio, going to and from work. Keith appeared satisfied with whatever he could pick up from brief periods of television watching and didn't feel the need to learn more.

Like the other nine students, for Keith reading was for getting information. However, while the other students indicated that the value of reading is largely tied to college, Keith had no use for college. So having no use for college, he had no use for reading. Unlike most of the other students who had enjoyed reading some books, Keith seemed to have never had an enjoyable experience reading a book. He said that the idea of reading for enjoyment was "ridiculous" and "a big joke."

Most of the students expressed ambivalence toward reading: they didn't like it, but they "knew" it's important. They felt frustrated by it, but they wished they could read more. Those with children wanted them to enjoy reading more and to read more than they did. The only hint of ambivalence Keith showed concerned his children's reading. "Fortunately," he said slowly, as though choosing his words very carefully, "for them, in this world, they need to not be like me." And he appeared proud of his son who spent four hours doing his homework every night. He wanted to reward and reinforce the very behavior that he himself had said had no use for.

view
ics
coll
opti
play
sys
stu
mat
cor
kno

Dis

co
th
al
qu
al
id

t
o
r

I believe that Keith had such adamant and extreme views about reading partly because he was in the electronics field. His company made video systems for schools and colleges. A system his company had developed used fiber optics and ran 40 video cassette recorders and laser disk players. Keith explained that an instructor could have a system like this under his or her disposal. He said that studies have shown that children, who already are "acclimated to learning from TV anyway" learn from this. One can conclude that Keith's beliefs about reading reflect his knowledge of and faith in modern electronic technology.

Discussion

These interviews provided information that helped me correctly interpret the questionnaire answers. Some of the information gained from the interviews significantly altered the reading profile that I had gotten from the questionnaires. Listed below are notions on the nature of aliteracy that I have derived from these interviews. These ideas will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

Students' Perceptions of Themselves as Readers

All of these students had a strong perception of themselves as people who did not like to read and who read only what they had to. Actually, they read more than they realized or indicated on the questionnaire. Their tendency

to underestimate their actual reading seemed to be a result of their belief that they didn't like to read.

Students' Views of Book Reading

For most of these students, the perception that they did not like to read is rooted in their book reading experiences. They had defined "reading" as "book reading" and, in some cases, as textbook reading. Although many of them had had a few pleasurable experiences with book reading, the experiences seemed to have been too few and far between to have made a mark on their thinking. The negative, frustrating experiences, mostly with textbooks, had made a stronger impression on them.

School Reading

School reading appeared to have had a strong hold on the attitudes these students have toward reading. The belief that book reading is dull, frustrating, time consuming--and that it is work--seemed to dominate their thinking. This belief seemed to have blotted out the more pleasant experiences they have had with reading.

Home Environment

Many of these students appeared to be following the reading patterns set at home. Some mentioned the lack of

parental encouragement when they were children as the reason why they didn't learn to like reading. Some referred to the absence of books and the presence of informative materials, such as newspapers, magazines, and encyclopedias. The types of reading materials they had in the home while they were growing up might explain why they mainly read for information. Some mentioned that their mothers read books, but their fathers read newspapers and magazines. In these instances, the children seemed to have been influenced by the fathers' reading habits. Two students had mothers who tried to help them become interested in book reading, and these admitted that if it hadn't been for their mothers, they would not have read the books they read. However, the mothers' influence on their reading was limited and did not turn them into avid readers. Other factors appeared to have affected their reading attitudes and habits.

Reading Ability

While these students reported that they didn't like to read and never or rarely read for enjoyment, only half of them rated themselves below average or poor as readers. The other half considered themselves average, except for one (Keith) who rated himself above average. However, again except for Keith, all mentioned a "problem" in reading or difficulties in reading textbooks. Among the problems mentioned are inability to concentrate and comprehend,

poor retention, and poor spelling. In addition to a misunderstanding of the reading process implied by citing "poor spelling" as a reading problem, these problems may not be real reading problems. They may be normal difficulties associated with having to read material that is poorly written or that is uninteresting and unfamiliar to the reader. In other words, the problem might lie mostly in the text and not as much in the reader.

Reasons for Reading

When they read, these students read for information. They did not see themselves as readers for pleasure. Hence, even those who read magazines and/or newspapers at least once a week, reported that they never read for enjoyment.

Students' Attitudes Toward Their Reading Habits

Most of the students reported that their reading habits and attitudes had a negative impact on their lives. They said that their school work and grades have suffered because they didn't like to read their textbooks. All, except for one, stated that they believed reading is important and that it is important to read. Hence, they expressed various degrees of discomfort about their perception that they didn't like to read. The wished that they read more, wished that they liked reading more, and wished that they were better readers. They also felt that they would be better readers if they read more. Those who had

children said that they wished their children would like reading more and would be better readers than they.

When asked if they expected their reading patterns to change in the future, almost all said that they would like to read more. "Would they read more for pleasure?" I asked. Those who had enjoyed reading a few novels or non-fiction books said that they would like to find more interesting books to read or to read more for enjoyment. However, most said that they didn't expect to engage in pleasure reading. Because they have learned to entertain themselves in other ways (through sports or television watching), starting recreational reading seemed alien to them. Although they might wish they read more or they might like reading more, the kind of reading they could imagine doing more of was the kind of reading they were used to--informational reading.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter will consist of two parts. The first part will answer the question, "Does aliteracy exist among community college students?" The answer will be based on the findings of the closed-ended portion of the survey. In the second part, I will attempt to answer the question, "What are the extent and the nature of the aliteracy among Kalamazoo Valley Community College students?" using the results of both the closed- and open-ended portions of the survey. The findings of the interviews, which I summarized in Chapter 5, will be incorporated in the discussion.

Aliteracy in American Society

In Chapter 3, Review of the Literature, I offered answers to the research question, "To what extent are claims about the extent of aliteracy as a problem in this society accurate?" I reviewed reports on small- and large-scale surveys of the reading habits of many segments of the American population, from elementary-age children to adults. I based my conclusion about the extent of aliteracy in the United States primarily on the reports on surveys of nationally representative samples of school-age and

adult populations. Among these are surveys of the Book Industry Study Group (BISG) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). I also used the findings of other major surveys, such as those by Sharon (1973-74), by Mikulecky et al. (1979) and by Anderson et al. (1988).

I concluded from the findings of these surveys that there are bright and dark areas in the picture, borrowing a metaphor from Lehr (1985). One's interpretation of the extent of aliteracy in this country would depend on where one's eyes are focused. Those who have chosen to look at the bright areas have concluded, as Sharon has, that reading is a "ubiquitous activity" in American life. After all, 96 percent of the public read books, magazines, or newspapers (Boorstin, 1984), and the average person spends an hour and forty minutes reading on a typical day, with 76 minutes of that time devoted to non-job-related reading (Sharon, 1973-74). Also more than half (56 percent) of the adult population are book readers, according to the BISG surveys.

Trends, especially concerning the reading attitudes and habits of students, represent the dark areas of the picture. For example, according to NAEP findings, children report that they like reading less as they grow older and that almost half of the 17-year-olds chose reading a book as their least favorite form of recreation. And the study by Anderson, et al. revealed that the typical American fifth grader reads "maybe as little as 8-12 minutes per day

when all types of reading material are counted and maybe as little as 4-5 minutes a day when only books are counted" (p. 299). If one were to focus on these trends, one has reason for saying that aliteracy is a problem in this society.

Likewise, one could focus on the almost half of the adult population who are not book readers, according to the BISG surveys, and conclude that, because, compared to book reading, non-book reading tends to be accompanied by a lower amount of reading, more negative attitude toward reading, fewer types of texts read, fewer reasons for reading, lower intensity of motivations for reading, and poorer reading ability, this large a percentage represents a serious problem.

There are murky areas in the picture as well. In separate investigations of whether or not reading activity has declined over several decades, Mikulecky et al. (1979) and Robinson (1980) have drawn contradictory conclusions. Mikulecky et al. report "an increase in adults' total reading time" (p. 32). In his analysis of daily reading habits of Americans, Robinson, on the other hand, concludes that reading appears "to be a less prominent feature of daily life for all ages" (p. 141).

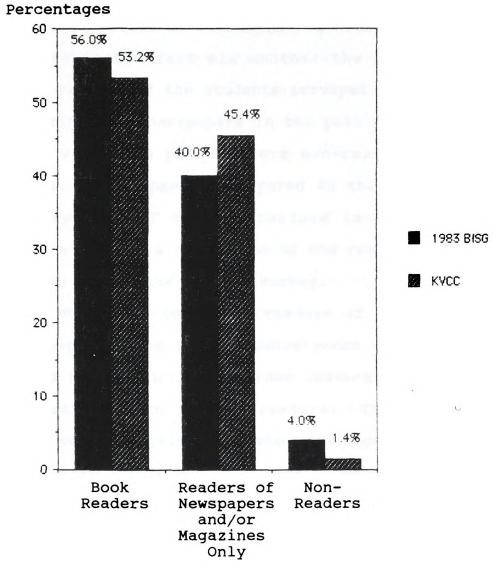
In brief, aliteracy is or isn't a problem depending on which studies one examines.

Aliteracy among Kalamazoo Valley Community College Students

To ascertain if aliteracy exists among community college students, I will compare the results of a portion of the present survey to the survey findings cited above. In answering whether aliteracy exists in the American adult population, I had primarily used figures that relate to reading habits and to types of texts read because the reports of nationally representative surveys have no figures available on the other components of aliteracy. Consequently, I will use the findings in this study relative to those two components in determining whether aliteracy exists among KVCC students.

Reading Habits

The results of the KVCC survey show that KVCC students' reading habits are similar to those of the American adult population. In the BISG survey 55 percent had read at least one book in the last six months (they were referred to as book readers). In the KVCC survey, 53.2 percent read at least one book not required for courses in the past month, and 54.3 percent had completed reading at least one book within the last six months (these two very similar figures represent the "book readers" in this sample). In the BISG survey, 39 percent read only magazines or newspapers in the past six months; in the present survey 45.4 percent read only magazines or newspapers in the past



1983 BISG = based on the numbers of respondents who reported reading books, newspapers and/or magazines only, or none of these materials <u>in the previous six months</u>. KVCC = based on the numbers of respondents who reported reading books, newspapers and/or magazines only, or none of these materials <u>in the previous month</u>. (N=219)

Figure 1 Comparison of BISG and KVCC Results

month. The 1983 BISG survey showed that 96 percent of American adults were readers of books, magazines or newspapers in the last six months; the present survey shows 98.6 percent of the students surveyed are readers of books, magazines, or newspapers in the past month. Hence, in the BISG survey, 4 percent were non-readers of books, magazines, or newspapers, compared to the 1.4 percent who are non-readers of these materials in the present survey. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the results of the 1983 BISG survey and of the present survey.

While the number of readers of books, magazines, or newspapers among KVCC students seems very high, it must be noted that a portion of these readers are occasional readers rather than regular readers. The numbers are lower when we count only those who read magazines and newspapers regularly (on a daily or weekly basis). In this survey, 62.1 percent say they read magazines regularly, compared with 88 percent who say they have read magazines in the past month. Similarly, 82 percent say that they read newspapers regularly compared with 92 percent who say that they have read newspapers in the past month.

Non-Book Reading

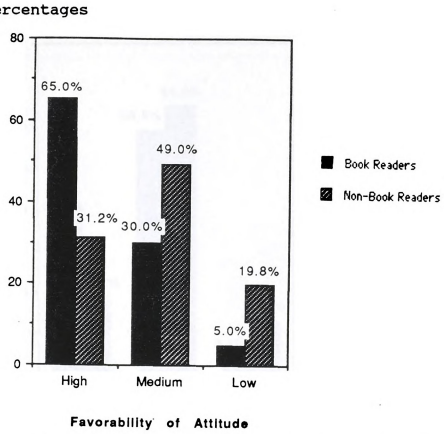
Although the percentage of non-readers of books, magazines, or newspapers in the K.V.C.C. sample is a mere 1.4 percent, the percentage of non-book readers is 45.4 percent. As shown in the literature review, non-book

reading is important indicator of aliteracy in that it usually implies the following characteristics: lower amount of reading, more negative attitude toward reading, fewer types of texts read, fewer reasons for reading, lower intensity of motivations for reading, and lower reading ability. We can expect, therefore, that 45.4 percent (slightly less than half) of the K.V.C.C. sample, who indicated that they were non-book readers, would tend to have the characteristics listed above. Figures 2 through 6 show that this expectation is correct.

Figure 2 shows that book readers in the sample tended to have more positive attitudes toward reading than non-book readers. Figure 3 shows that book readers tended to read more types of texts (books, magazines, and newspapers) than non-book readers. We see in Figure 4 that book readers tended to have a greater variety of motivations for reading than non-book readers, and in Figure 5 that book readers tended to have a higher intensity of motivations for reading than non-book readers. Figure 6 shows that book readers tended to view themselves as better readers than non-book readers.

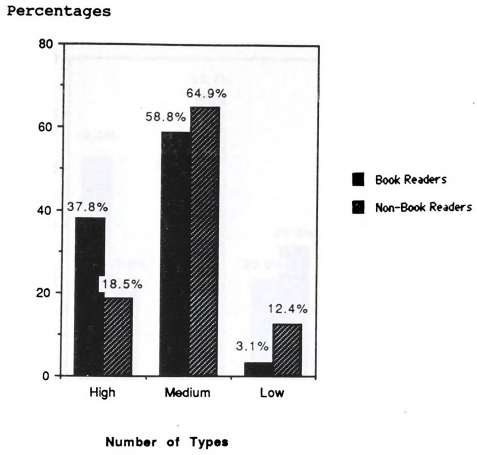
The Nature of Aliteracy Among KVCC Students

In the following section, I will discuss important findings from both the survey and the interviews concerning the nature of aliteracy among KVCC students.



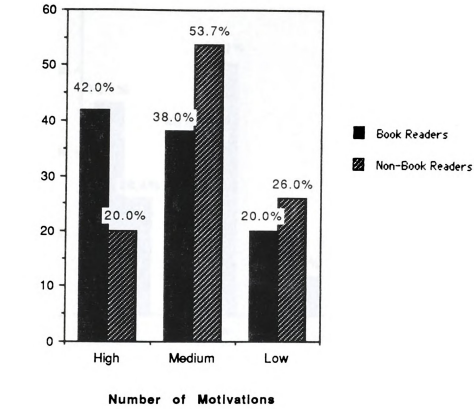
Book readers are those who said they read a book all the way through in the previous six months. High attitude means a scale score of 11-15; medium attitude means a scale score of 6-10; low attitude means a scale score of 0-5. The difference between book readers and non-book readers produced a Chi square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n=219)

Figure 2 Attitude toward Reading



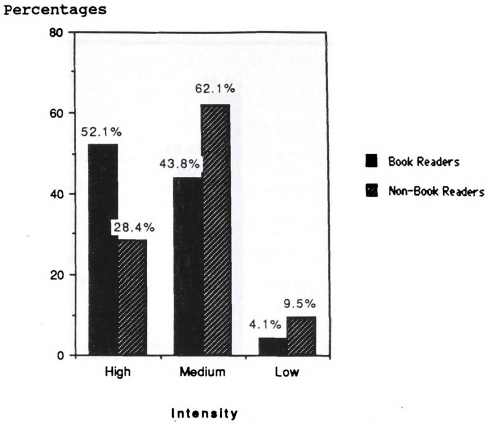
Book readers are those who said they read a book all the way through in the previous six months. High number of types means a scale score of 11-15; medium number of types means a scale score of 6-10; low number of types means a scale score of 0-5. The difference between book readers and non-book readers produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n-219)

Figure 3 Types of Texts Read



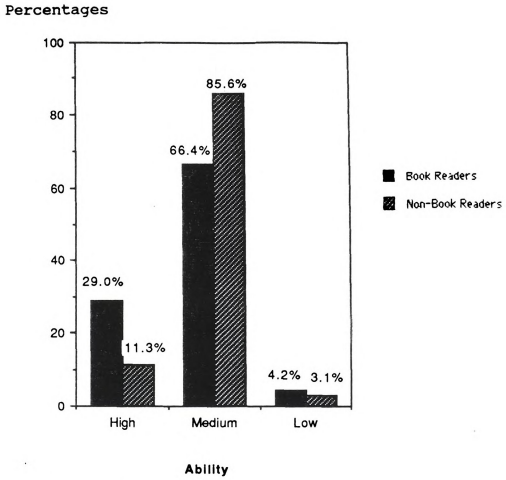
Book readers are those who said they read a book all the way through in the previous six months. High variety means a scale score of 4-5; medium variety means a scale score of 2-3; low variety means a scale score of 0-1. The difference between book readers and non-book readers produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n-219)

Figure 4 Variety of Motivations



Book readers are those who said they read a book all the way through in the previous six months. High intensity means a scale score of 19-25; medium intensity means a scale score of 12-18; low intensity means a scale score of 5-11. The difference between book readers and non-book readers produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n=219)

Figure 5 Intensity of Motivations



Book readers are those who said they read a book all the way through in the previous six months. High ability means a scale score of 12-15; medium ability means a scale score of 7-11; low ability means a scale score of 3-6. The difference between book readers and non-book readers produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n=219)

Figure 6 Self-Perceived Reading Ability

In the essay portion of the questionnaire, the students were asked to respond in writing to one question: "Why do you think you are the kind of reader that you are today? What or who might have influenced your reading attitudes and habits? For example, can you recall past experiences, whether they occurred at home or at school, that might explain why you feel the way you do about reading?" Of the 219 participants in the study, 10 (4.6 percent) did not answer the essay question. Those who did wrote answers that range in length from a few words or a phrase to several sentences. Students' answers to the essay question in the questionnaire will be summarized and incorporated in the following discussion of significant findings that have emerged from the total data.

Student's Perceptions of the Influences on Their Reading

Although this study is not primarily concerned with identifying the reasons why students read or don't read, the essay question that dealt with that subject (question 14 of the questionnaire, a copy of which is in the Appendix) produced interesting and potentially significant findings. Not all the students answered the question, and not all the answers were pertinent to the question asked. Neither can the answers be taken as complete explanations. The following discussion focuses on the students' perceptions of what or who had influenced them as readers.

The "reasons" or "influences" cited by the students can be categorized as extrinsic or environmental and intrinsic or personal. Home- and school-related influences fall under extrinsic or environmental. Reading skills and personal traits, such as a sense of curiosity or having learned to read early, belong to the intrinsic or personal category. These categories are used purely for descriptive purposes. By grouping the influences in this manner, I do not intend to imply that they are mutually exclusive; evidence points to an interaction among the different types of influences. In other words, a person might have learned to read early because of parents who read to him and provided him with books to read. Some responses written by the students list just one type of influence while others list more than one. More often than not, a combination of reasons or influences are implied by the comments. Whenever I cite students' responses in the discussion that follows, I cite them in full, so that the reader may see the complete response given to the question.

Table 1 presents extrinsic and intrinsic reasons, showing that extrinsic reasons were cited five times more often than intrinsic reasons.

The students' comments may also be categorized into positive and negative comments (see Table 2). The vast majority of comments are positive, attesting to the willingness of those who have favorable attitudes toward reading and/or who read a considerable amount to share their

Table 1 Reasons for Reading

Extrinsic or Environmental Reasons	Times Cited
Parent(s)	84
Teachers and teaching methods	36
Grandparents and other relatives	10
Friends	9
Boring textbooks	9
Lack of interesting reading materials	3
Librarians	2
Total	153
Intrinsic or Personal Reasons	
Problems or difficulties with reading	18
Learning to read at an early age	5
Preference for sports and active pasttimes	4
Preference for television and movies	3
Total	30

views about why they liked to read or why they read as much as they did. The majority of the positive comments concern the home environment and the contributions of parents and other family members toward the formation of an interest in reading. Generally, when one or both parents are mentioned as a positive influence, at least one other factor is mentioned as well--for example, the availability of books or an encouraging teacher.

Home Environment

Almost all of the written answers to the essay question (question 14) show a combination of factors that encourage a person to like to read and to become a reader. For example, in addition to regularly reading to the child, a parent might also buy books for her or take her to the

Table 2 Positive and Negative Influences on Reading Behavior

Positive Influences	Times Cited
Parent(s)	65
Teachers and teaching methods	26
Grandparents and other relatives	16
Friends	10
Reading a lot as a child	9
Learning to read at an early age	5
Librarians	2
Total	133

Negative Influences	
Lack of parental support	19
Personal problems or difficulties with reading (e.g., dyslexia, poor concentration and concentration, slow reading, poor vision)	18
Poor teachers and teaching methods	10
Boring and ineffectual textbooks and reading materials	9
Not reading as a child	9
Preference for sports and active pasttimes	4
Preference for television and movies	3
Lack of interesting reading materials	3
Parents pushing reading	3
Total	78

library. Of course, parents are more likely to do this if they themselves are readers. Seeing their parents read has encouraged these students to read as well. For some students, encouragement has also come from friends and from extended family members, like aunts and grandparents. Their comments suggest that these readers lived in an environment that supported reading.

> I'm the kind of reader that I am today because of the encouragement I received as a child. I can remember being read to by my mom, seeing her read, and of course going to buy books. I also remember fondly one reading teacher whom I really loved. The teachers in middle school who read aloud to classes always impressed me.
>
> ***
>
> I think one of the reasons I enjoy reading is because I grew up being read to. My parents read books a lot to me, my teachers, and other relatives. I also saw my mom read almost every night and she still does! She taught me that reading relaxes you and can be very enjoyable!
>
> ***
>
> My parents valued the ability to read. When I was young, regardless of how badly I had behaved, my mother could always find an excuse to buy a book for me when I wanted one and encouraged me to read for school assignments and personal enjoyment.
>
> ***
>
> I think I was influenced by my parents. Since I was very young my mother spent a lot of time reading to me. As I grew older they would buy me books and take me to the library and help me find the type of book I was interested in. I was always encouraged and sometimes rewarded for finishing a book.

Like some of the students I interviewed who cited lack of parental support, some respondents described homes in which reading was not encouraged.

> I wasn't pushed as a child to develop my interest in reading. It was always easier to turn on the television. My parents rarely read to us and there wasn't much of a reading selection in the house while I was growing up.

***

> I do not like to read very much. I am trying to read a book right now for pleasure. I think I missed that in my childhood. My mother hates to read and my father never does. I want to read more because I am lacking in that area. I like to read once I get started. I always feel I don't have the time.

Likewise, as in the interviews, mothers who read a lot and father who didn't were cited. In the cases below, the father's influence prevailed:

> I am an average reader. My mother reads a lot, my father doesn't read much. I don't either because I do too many things.

***

> Books just never interested me. I always found something else to do: Playing sports and some other kind of activity. I'm not sure who influenced me the way I'm about reading today. Possibly my father because he couldn't read very well, and at a young age everyone likes to be like their father. I've just always read what I had to get by. But now I find it more important to read.

Compared to the number of references to home environment as a source of influence on reading interests and habits, the number of references to not following parental or home influence is small (about 10 citations compared to over a hundred citations on both the positive and negative

influences of the home on the students' reading interests and habits). The following student wrote that even though her parents were not readers, she became interested in reading. However, she didn't say how she became an avid reader.

> I enjoy reading for relaxation. Most of the time reading text books is not very relaxing. Once I start reading a novel I have a hard time putting it down. My family has never been the type that everyone reads books--in fact I've never seen my parents pick up a book but both are very successful people with no time to read. So I guess I'm the black sheep. They never stressed the importance of reading. I just do it for enjoyment.

On the other hand, although the following respondent had parents and friends who read, she didn't develop a "passion" for reading:

> I'm not sure why my feelings for reading are so poor. My mother and father read and many friends also do. I just do not have a passion for reading. My reading skills are good, like I said there just isn't a passion there for reading.

A few responses suggest that some parents might have used methods that discouraged reading. For instance, the parents might have "pushed" reading too hard so that a child rebelled or might have forced on children materials they were not interested in. This respondent cited her speech impediment combined with being forced to read aloud to her mother as the reasons why she hated to read.

> Maybe because when I was young, I was forced to read aloud to my mom. I always hated it, and I was slow in reading and pronouncing the words. I had to have 3 years of speech class to learn

> how to speak, and I've always felt self conscious of the way I talk. [This person indicated in other parts of the questionnaire that she didn't like to read and never read for enjoyment.]

School Environment

Next to parental or home influence, schooling was cited as a second major source of influence. Respondents cited the positive influences of teachers and schooling both generally and specifically. An example of a general, rather vague, comment is "My teachers back in grade school made us read a lot, so I think it carried over all the years of my years in school." Then there are comments that state exactly what a teacher did. In the following instance, the respondent was influenced by specific books that his teacher read to his class:

> The books that my fourth grade teacher read to my class inspired me to read the same type of book. Most of the time she would read the first book in the series, i.e., "tales of the 4th grade nothing, 7 chronicles of Narnia, the house with a clock in its walls."

The following respondent wrote that having been given the freedom to choose books she could read increased her interest in reading.

> I think I've always liked to read but I remember that in a fifth of sixth grade class we were allowed to choose the books we wanted to read and I was very excited about it. I liked most novels that we were required to read [for] classes but not as much as the ones I chose.

Some students wrote comments that reveal disappointment or disenchantment with their educational experience both in general and specific ways.

> I believe my reading habits were influenced by my education through high school. I disliked the educational process and desired to learn what was of interest to me through other channels (i.e. personal reading).
>
> ***
>
> I believe if my past English teacher would have taken the time to show the enjoyment of reading instead of showing the job it takes to get reading done I might be a better reader.

The following respondents identified themselves as "poor readers" in school who suffered from such school practices as constant skills testing and lack of free choice in reading:

> I used to be a very poor reader. We were always tested for skills in grammar in junior high school. I felt very pressured and could not read fast enough. Consequently, I disliked reading and never did so on my own.
>
> After I married, I began reading a few novels for entertainment while my husband was out of town. I really began to enjoy it when I could do so at my own pace. Now I read all the time and love it. Plus my speed has greatly improved.
>
> ***
>
> I was a poor reader in elementary school--so I hated reading. I was forced to read certain books for school. I did not enjoy reading until I got out of high school, when I had a lot of time on my hands and found material that interested me.

Interestingly, for many students, reading interest was sparked by an opportunity to read what they wanted. With the free reading came enjoyment because they found material they were interested in.

Many respondents who did not enjoy reading while they were in school, where reading for pleasure was not

stressed, learned to enjoy it at a later age. Having discovered leisure reading on their own, they are able to separate what they didn't enjoy from what they did. Respondents who enjoyed reading pointed out the difference between school-required reading and self-chosen reading:

> I'm not especially fond of reading textbooks because they are boring a lot of times. However, I do read them and try to understand what I've read. I only started reading for pleasure two years ago. It is enjoyable and relaxing. When I was in elementary school, reading for fun was not encouraged.
>
> ***
>
> Probably because we as students are always required to read textbooks throughout a class and that's not much fun. Reading what you want to read is a lot more fun than reading what you have to.

On the other hand, students who didn't enjoy reading appeared to consider reading as a monolithic activity and were unable to distinguish types of reading. For instance, some of the students I interviewed made blanket statements about reading such as "I don't like to read" or "I don't enjoy reading." Only when given the chance to talk about what they liked or didn't like were they able to identify the materials they did enjoy reading, such as magazine articles.

Perhaps, as Weaver (1989) and Neilson (1989, p. 70) have suggested, students have internalized the definition of reading implied by their classes. They have learned to define "reading" in terms of school reading, the reading of textbooks and other school materials. As one of the

persons I interviewed (Tom) explained, he answered the questionnaire the way he did (saying that he didn't like to read and never read for his own enjoyment) because "most of the stuff that I read or that I'm told to read is school stuff and I don't like to read it." In the following written comment, a respondent explains her negative attitude toward reading in terms of what she did for school.

> I never really wanted to read. For classes I would read the questions the teacher gave us, skim and find the answer. I would never obtain any information from the reading.

Perhaps, given the chance to explain this answer, the student would be able to say more about reading she did enjoy. Nevertheless, from the answers of those "lucky souls" who were able to discover pleasure reading largely on their own, educators, such as Chambers (1969), Fader (1976), and Smith (1983, 1986), are justified in their criticisms of the schools. Such criticisms, as explained in Chapter 2, are directed against the overuse of textbooks, the overemphasis on utilitarian reading and the corresponding neglect of pleasure reading, the forcing of "good books" on students, and the constant testing for discrete skills.

Reading Attitudes

Like the students surveyed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 1981), KVCC students believe

that reading is important in the abstract. Reading is highly rated by the students: 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "reading is a useful activity." However, asked to respond to the statement "I like to read," only 80.4 percent agree/strongly agreed with the statement, 14.1 percent disagree/strongly disagreed, and 4.1 percent had no opinion. When asked how many times they read for enjoyment in their spare time, 13.7 percent said "never," and 21 percent said "less than once a week."

As Table 3 shows, "liking to read" is significantly associated with "reading for enjoyment." Those who reported that they liked to read also tended to read more frequently than those who say they didn't like to read.

However, liking to read is not synonymous with choosing to read for enjoyment. Some students answered that

Table 3 Liking to Read vs. Reading for Enjoyment

Reading for Enjoyment	"I Like to Read"		
	Disagree or Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree	Total
Less than once a week	34 79.1%	42 23.9%	76 34.7%
Once a week or more	9 20.9%	134 76.1%	143 65.3%
Total	43 100.0%	176 100.0%	N=219 100.0%

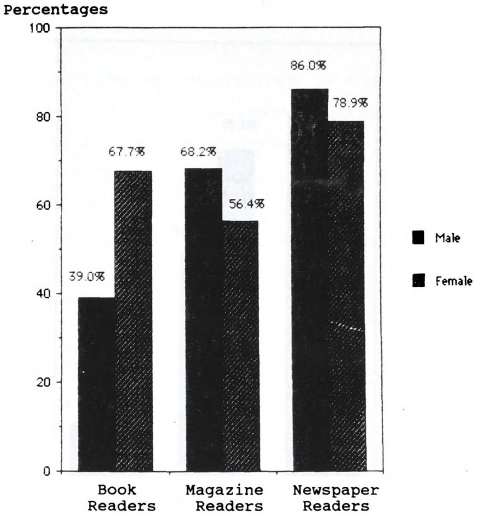
they never read for enjoyment or read for enjoyment less than once a week even though they reported that they liked to read. They represent 19.2 percent of the sample. Considering that the respondents are students, one can say that the amount of reading required of students might have affected the amount of recreational reading that they engaged in.

Gender as a Predictor of Aliteracy

Many studies have found gender to be a strong predictor of reading habits and attitudes. That finding is confirmed by the present study. As Figure 7 shows, females reported reading more books than males: 67.7 percent of the females said they had read a book, wholly or partly, in the past month, compared to only 39 percent of the males. However, slightly more males than females regularly read magazines, and slightly more males than females regularly read newspapers.

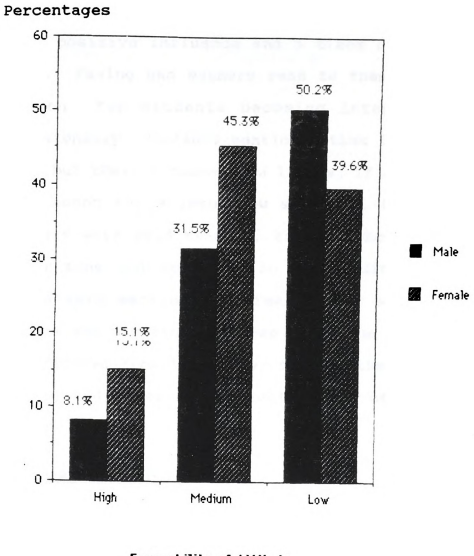
Further, females reported more positive attitudes toward reading than males, as Figure 8 shows.

Mothers appear to be more influential than fathers on students' reading attitudes and habits, judging from the answers to the essay question. Mothers were cited as a positive influence 22 times and as a negative influence 2



The difference between males and females for book reading produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. The differences between males and females for magazine and newspaper reading were not statistically significant. (K.V.C.C. sample, n=219)

Figure 7 Gender and Reading Behavior



The difference between males and females produced a Chi Square with $p<.01$. (K.V.C.C. sample, n=219)

Figure 8 Gender and Attitude Toward Reading

times. Fathers, on the other hand, were cited only 6 times as a positive influence and 5 times as a negative influence. Having had mothers read to them was an often cited reason for students becoming interested in reading. Occasionally, students mentioned that their mothers read a lot, but their fathers read little, if any.

Among the 9 interview subjects, 5 stated that their mothers were avid readers, some of whom tried to interest their sons and daughters in the reading of fiction. Fathers were mentioned 3 times mainly as readers of newspapers and magazines. These findings are consistent with the figures from the survey showing that females read more books, and males read slightly more newspapers and magazines.

Reasons for Reading

Among the indicators of aliteracy discussed in Chapter 3 is the tendency to read for only one reason rather than for several purposes. Students who are avid readers show an awareness of different purposes for reading. Note, for instance, the variety of purposes for reading and types of reading material (fiction and non-fiction) implied in the following written responses from obviously avid readers:

> As a young child I always read a lot of books. I had a wild imagination and needed to read to satisfy this. My Grandmother encouraged me. She would always buy me new books, new

> stories. When I got older, I still had the need or drive to read. I need a variety of books, a need to learn about lots of different things or different areas of knowledge.
>
> ***
>
> I enjoy reading. I like to know what's going on. I read for pleasure and educational purposes. My parents, high school teachers, influenced my reading habits.

Students who didn't like to read tended to be less aware that there is more than one type of reading or more than one purpose for reading. They tended to make blanket statements like "I don't like to read." or "I never read for enjoyment." However, when I asked some of the interviewees what they did read, they mentioned materials, such as articles relating to their hobbies and interests, which they said they enjoyed reading. Students who reported that they didn't like to read and that they avoided reading appeared less capable of making distinctions between types of reading.

Among the students I interviewed, reading for information seemed to be the most prevalent, if not the sole, reason for reading. The said that they read primarily for school, and because school reading stresses reading for information, their reason for reading is usually to get information. However, most of them read magazine articles on their own, and these students said that they enjoyed reading these articles. Perhaps they viewed magazine reading as purely reading for information and did not

consider the pleasurable elements in the reading experience. Again, because they perceived themselves as individuals who did not like reading, they were not able to see the distinctions among reading experiences. In contrast, a respondent, who wrote that he liked to read but preferred informational materials, also wrote that reading for information and reading for pleasure could overlap. His answer implies he was aware that there are different reasons for reading and that he realized that because he derived pleasure from reading informative materials, the distinctions commonly made between reading for pleasure and reading for information are artificial. (Reading theorists would describe his awareness and ability as metacognition [Weaver, 1988, p. 23].)

Some of the interviewees, like Sue, did not see a place for recreational reading in their future. Sue said that she would read a book if it happened to be the only option available to her, such as if she were put in jail, "but it wouldn't be my first choice." She would not read for pleasure because she preferred other ways of entertaining herself. Still, she wished that she read more, but more of the same type of reading, informational or utilitarian reading. But if she disliked this kind of reading and had developed a habit of avoiding it, what is the likelihood that she would read more? It seems that the prospects for change are nil for these students. Perhaps some will develop new interests, as Keith did, when he

became vice president of his father's company and started to read articles on management. And perhaps some will continue to read articles in magazines and/or newspapers on topics that interest them <u>and</u> continue to avoid books.

Some of the interview subjects had experienced pleasure reading a few times and spoke about their reactions to these experiences. Three who could recall one book that they enjoyed reading as adults expressed surprise at how interested and involved they were in their reading. They indicated that they didn't experience any of the problems they usually had when they read textbooks. Among these problems were not keeping their minds on what they are reading and not understanding new words. Most of those who had had pleasurable experiences with books expressed the wish that they could find more interesting books to read.

Some respondents wrote comments indicating that they had learned to read for pleasure on their own. As one student wrote, "High school and college have forced me into the habit of reading what I have to. I'm still working on improving my reading for fun or just for pleasure." Comments such as this show that a pattern of reading only what one has to or reading only for school can be broken. However, for those who have a strong perception that they do not like to read, the pattern may be harder to break.

Types of Texts Read

Some users of the word "aliterate" have used it to refer to non-book readers. Non-book reading by itself cannot be equated with aliteracy because to do so is to deny the importance of other types of text and to minimize the role of other components, such as attitude. Some people who like to read may not be book readers. For example, 5 students who answered the essay question cited a preference for magazines and/or newspapers, indicating that they liked to read, but they liked to read magazines and/or newspapers, not books. The following student wrote that he liked to read, but his reading difficulties had caused him to limit his current reading to magazines:

> As I was growing up I was a slow reader and hated to read, especially out loud during class. I took reading classes that did help. In college I read books (text) every day and the more I read the faster I get. Reading takes practice. Maybe someday I'll enjoy reading books but now I'll stick to magazines.

In Chapter 5, I stated that many of the interviewees who reported that they didn't like to read and that they never or rarely engaged in pleasure reading based those answers on their feelings about book reading. In the survey, 30 students (13.7 percent of the sample) said that they never read for enjoyment; of the 30, 12 students (36.7 percent of those who never read for enjoyment) indicated that they regularly read both magazines and newspapers. Only 2 students (6.7 percent) of those who never read for

enjoyment did not read magazines <u>or</u> newspapers. Why didn't some of these students consider magazine or newspaper reading as reading for enjoyment? In interviewing 9 of these 30 students, I learned that 7 of the 9 had book reading in mind when they answered the question. In fact, they did read newspapers and/or magazines regularly. However, they disliked book reading, a dislike which colored their perception of reading in general. On the basis of these finding, one might infer that some students read more than they thought and that they liked to read more than they thought.

<u>Reading Ability</u>

As I explained in Chapter 6, reading ability has generally not received enough attention as a component of aliteracy. It has been assumed that aliterates are people who are not hampered by poor reading skills. This perception partly comes from the common definition of <u>aliterate</u> as a person who has the ability to read but doesn't or won't read and the dichotomous meaning given to "ability to read" (i.e., a person either <u>can</u> read or can<u>not</u>). Therefore, since almost all people "can read," it follows that those who don't read much don't read because they prefer not to. Little attention has been given to the role of reading ability in a person's lack of desire to read. Many studies have shown that a positive relationship exists

between reading ability (as measured by standardized tests) and reading volume; the more people read, the higher their scores in achievement tests. Book readers, who tend to read more than non-book readers, generally receive higher test scores than non-book readers.

In the present study, students' reading ability was self-rated rather than measured by tests. Students rated themselves as readers on a continuum from "poor" to "excellent"; they rated their reading comprehension and speed in the same way. The findings of this survey support other surveys that have found that reading ability and reading volume go hand in hand. In this study, as Figure 6 shows, those who read more tend to regard themselves as better readers than those who don't read as much.

Reading difficulties constitute a major group of intrinsic reasons the students gave for not reading. Of those who answered the essay question, 9 percent wrote that they experienced reading difficulties such as poor vision, dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder, slow speed, poor comprehension, and limited vocabulary. Roughly a third of these students report that despite their difficulties they like reading. Some wrote that they tried to read more to overcome their reading problems. About two-thirds of those who cited reading difficulties indicated that their difficulties caused them to dislike or avoid reading. The student who wrote the following comment said that he liked

to read despite his reading difficulties. However, obviously his reading difficulties limited or hampered his reading.

> I like to read but because I don't read very well, it makes it hard to keep reading or even to get the reading done. The problem comes from grade school. I never learned to read very well or spell.

Among the students I interviewed, four considered themselves below average or poor readers, four thought of themselves as average readers, and one indicated he was an above average reader. However, most of the students I interviewed, including some who considered themselves "average," mentioned a problem or difficulty with reading. They described such difficulties as poor word recognition, difficulty in keeping their minds on what they are reading, and slow rate of reading. These students said that their difficulties resulted from lack of reading and/or caused them to find reading unpleasant and to read less.

As Winkle (1988) explains, while poor reading ability may not by itself cause aliteracy, it may discourage a person from reading. The less a person reads, the less likely he will develop his skills. Most of the students I interviewed seemed to realize this. They thought that their dislike of reading had negatively affected their reading ability and their school work. The National Academy of Education Commission on Reading (1985) says,

> Predictably poor readers have unfavorable attitudes toward reading. What is not so predictable is whether lack of proficiency in reading stems

> from unfavorable attitudes or whether it is the other way around. Probably the truth can lie in either direction. (p. 15)

To understand a person's aliteracy, therefore, it is important to consider the role that reading ability plays in his or her reading. Although by itself it cannot be considered a cause of aliteracy, poor reading ability can start the cycle of disliking reading and avoiding it, leading to further deterioration of reading skills.

It is important to note that most of the interviewees' difficulties applied to textbook reading. Some stated that they didn't have as much difficulty when they read material that interested them. One of these students, for instance, had been reading pamphlets and books about real estate because he wanted to be a realtor. He said that he had no problem reading these materials because he had some idea what they were about. In other words, some of these difficulties might have resulted from having to read material that was poorly written (as many textbooks are) and material that is unfamiliar and uninteresting to them. Every reader, regardless of how fluent, competent, or experienced, has experienced similar difficulties when reading material that is not well written or material with which he or she is not familiar or knowledgeable. We have reason to conclude that some of the problems described by these students might have resulted from school practices such as the use of uninteresting, poorly written textbooks. Furthermore, they might have been caused by simply lack of

reading--resulting in limited exposure to certain types of reading material and in insufficient background knowledge and schemata to understand these materials (Weaver, 1988, p. 17).

The real danger may lie in the attitudes and beliefs that students who are daunted and frustrated by school reading acquire about reading and about themselves as readers. The students I interviewed considered themselves people who didn't like reading. The more they didn't like to read, the more they avoided reading. Although most of them actually read more than they thought (and perhaps liked reading more than they thought), their reading was limited and they felt inadequate as readers and as students.

Multi-dimensional Nature of Aliteracy

Intrinsic reasons, such as a personal preference for learning by doing rather than by reading and other idiosyncrasies, are often cited with extrinsic reasons for not reading. For example, the following students wrote that their inclination to be active (intrinsic) may be the result of their "lifestyle" or home environment (extrinsic).

> I don't care to read. For a lot of times I think it's boring. Reading makes me tired. I think my lifestyle has a lot to do with it, because I like to always be active. I learn better by doing things than by reading.

***

> Reading was never a big interest in my life. When I was growing up I enjoyed being with my family and friends most of the time. When I was reading I was alone and small things would distract me. I always wanted to "do" things not just sit around reading. Reading was boring to me. Maybe I never found anything to read that interested me.

In most of these responses, a number of "reasons" or "influences" are cited, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to separate them. When different "reasons" are cited, I believe it is reasonable to assume that they are to be interpreted as multiple, not as single, isolated reasons. For instance, Sue, a student I interviewed, said that she thought that the biggest influence on her reading attitudes and habits was that she was not encouraged to read on her own at home or at school when she was growing up. However, she also said, "I enjoy doing things with my hands or one-on-one than I have reading about things, so when it came to reading I didn't comprehend as well." These influences--lack of encouragement and modeling of reading, preference for learning by doing rather than by reading, and poor comprehension--seem inextricably linked. It is impossible to separate them and to say which had a stronger effect.

Sometimes contradictory answers are given, making the analysis even more complicated. Hence, additional information offered in other parts of the questionnaire should be considered. It is only when we take into account all the

information available that we can have confidence that the picture or profile we are trying to reconstruct is an accurate one. Any part of the questionnaire responses interpreted by itself may lead to inaccurate conclusions. Furthermore, the questionnaire answers often do not provide a complete or clear picture. The following response combined with other information taken from the questionnaire, illustrates the different components of aliteracy interacting in a person's life:

> When I was little I really didn't read very much so I never got in the habit to read very fast. Also when I read I can't comprehend what I have read because I am easily distracted. My parents might have influenced my reading habits. I guess the reason I don't like reading is because my teachers at school would give me homework to read and it would be about 20 or more pages. Plus I would have other homework on top of that. I just couldn't comprehend all of the reading so I thought it was a waste of time.

Here we can see <u>reading behavior</u> (reading little when young), <u>reading ability</u> (slow speed and poor comprehension), and <u>attitude to reading</u> (negative--"it was waste of time") interacting to produce a configuration that might make us conclude the person is "aliterate." We might expect this student to dislike reading and to avoid reading, especially book reading. However, the picture isn't that simple. Her other answers in the questionnaire said that she liked to read (this seems to contradict what she wrote in the paragraph above) and that she had read a book in the past six months (she is a "book reader," in this study). She also said she read two newspapers regularly.

However, she rated herself below average as a reader; she rated her comprehension also as below average and her speed of reading as poor. Despite her difficulties with school reading, she said she read for enjoyment one-to-two times a week. The picture or profile of this student resists categorization. It is easier to say that it is unique to this individual.

Aliteracy is a result of the interactions of the different components. We can compare readers and point out similarities and differences, but at the end we have to acknowledge that each reader is unique. The push and pull of any number of elements can result in a reading configuration that probably only that particular reader has. Hence, Taylor's comment (1990, p. 4) that a person's literacy may be as unique as his or her fingerprints appears to be valid.

Finally, the answer to the question "Is this person aliterate?" is not a simple one. Assessment of a person's literacy or aliteracy entails looking at different components, judging the degree to which each component operates, and analyzing the various ways in which they interact and influence each other. It entails familiarity with people's lives--knowing the person well enough that one's interpretation of their answers is based on an adequate understanding of their experiences and perspectives on reading.

It is possible to determine the extent of a person's aliteracy, but we must explain and qualify our answer.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND SPECULATIONS

Much of the literature on aliteracy and reading reluctance has focused on giving practical advice and recommendations on how to alleviate aliteracy among young people. Additionally, most educators and social commentators who have written about aliteracy have relied largely on common knowledge or anecdotal material about aliteracy. Without defining aliteracy or explaining with some precision what they mean by it, they have made pronouncements and recommendations about the "problem" of aliteracy. Furthermore, many have bemoaned the "decline" of reading, and the "swelling ranks of aliterates," without offering conclusive evidence that aliteracy (whatever it is) does exist and to what extent it does.

In this study, I have attempted to answer important questions about aliteracy, using theoretical and empirical methods. Partly because the term is too new to be in the dictionary, there was a need to define "aliteracy" precisely. To know how aliteracy should be defined, I broadened the scope of the study by reviewing the literature on the history of literacy and literacy instruction. I derived an operational definition of aliteracy from the literature on aliteracy and related topics. I also conducted a survey

of community college students using questionnaires, and I interviewed nine students who showed aliterate characteristics.

My goals in this chapter are to discuss the meanings and implications of the findings presented in Chapter 6 and to answer the research question, "In the light of new, comprehensive definitions of literacy, what are the implications of aliteracy?" To accomplish these goals, I will compare popular beliefs and assumptions about aliteracy with the findings, conclusions and implications that have emerged from the review of the literature on literacy and aliteracy and from the survey and interviews. I will conclude by recommending some approaches that educators can take to reduce aliteracy and by suggesting some topics for future investigation.

Popular Beliefs about Aliteracy versus Findings of the Study

Those who complain about aliteracy generally represent the views of readers or people who have vested interests in reading--they are in publishing or in education. They usually cite the "decline" of reading activity or the "rise" of aliteracy in society, implying that there was a time in this country's history when people read more, wrote more, knew more and participated enthusiastically in literate activities. Tchudi (1980) explains that no "golden age" of literacy ever existed. Rather, as I have shown in

Chapter 2, a look at the history of literacy has revealed that definitions of literacy have changed and expectations for literacy have increased since the 1800s.

Further, it is not unusual to encounter the remark that aliterates abound at all levels of society. For instance, in the aliteracy conference sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Wilson referred to the "multitudes of people who read nothing. They do not buy newspapers, they do not read newspapers, they do not buy books, they do not read books. They are reading nothing . . . ." (Thimmesch, 1984, p. 18). Generalizations such as these need to be challenged. While it is true that there are people in this society who read nothing or almost nothing, they represent a tiny fraction of the population--4 percent, according to the Book Industry Study Group survey (this survey measures only the reading of books, magazines, and newspapers). Researchers who have tried to measure how much time people spend reading have concluded that reading is a "ubiquitous activity" in American life (Sharon, 1973-74). They have found that people did read something--if not books, then magazines, newspapers, documents, advertisements, signs, computer printouts, and other job-related materials. Sharon even concludes that the average adult spends an hour and 46 minutes reading in a typical day. Out of that time 76 minutes are spent on non-job-related reading. One might

conclude from these figures that complaints about aliteracy are unwarranted. As I have concluded in Chapter 3, the results of readership surveys are contradictory. The decision as to the extent of aliteracy depends in part on where one looks, at the bright spots or at the dark spots in the literacy picture. The fact that about 96 percent of American adults and about 98 percent of the students in the KVCC sample said that they read newspapers, magazines, <u>or</u> books is a bright spot. However, like the American adult population, almost half of the KVCC sample did not read books and tended to show aliterate characteristics. In brief, we need to base our conclusions on the extent of the problem of aliteracy, not just on quantifiable survey figures but also on a fuller understanding of literacy and aliteracy. We need, furthermore, to base our decisions on aliteracy on a thorough understanding of the lives and perspectives of the individuals whom we would label aliterate.

Many educators and commentators lament the effects of television and see television as the villain in the "rise" of aliteracy. As Chapter 3 has shown, no significant relationship has been found between television watching and amount of time spent in reading. Likewise, the view that people who don't read are simply too busy to read, implying that those who read are not busy, has not been borne out by research. Book readers tend to participate more in leisure and community activities than non-readers and non-book

readers. This heavier involvement in other activities has been found among both adult and school-age book readers.

Misconceptions about literacy have influenced popular notions of aliteracy. Literacy experts now stress that literacy is a complex, multi-dimensional concept, not a dichotomy as our society has come to view it. Partly because of the vast number of people who are "literate" (popular meaning: have the basic ability to read), the number of those who appear unwilling to use their skill seems large. In effect, we have created another word to separate, this time those "who can and do read" from those "who can but don't or won't" read. Just as the meaning of literate has been simplified to a dichotomy, so has the meaning of aliterate. When we say that an aliterate can read, we imply that there is a standard separating those who can from those who cannot. And when we say, that an aliterate does not or will not read, we imply that there is a level of reading activity or willingness to read that we can all accept. What those levels are or should be no one has ascertained. "Who deserves such a label?" and "Are we using it too loosely?" are good questions as well.

As a result of the dichotomous meanings given to aliteracy, it has been assumed that aliterates have the ability to read, that their only problem is that they don't or won't. In Chapter 3, I cited studies that proved that reading ability and reading volume or time spent in reading

are significantly related. This suggests that reading ability does play a more significant role in aliteracy than we have assumed.

The comprehensive definition of aliteracy used in this study includes six components: reading attitude, reading behavior, types of texts read, range of reasons for reading, intensity of motivations for reading, and reading ability. These components interact with each other in multiple ways. Figure 9 shows these components as circles which overlap. When only two circles overlap or only two components are present, then aliteracy is slight. However, when all the components are present as shown in the middle, where all the circles touch, aliteracy is extreme. Each of these components is a continuum, interacting with the others to form a configuration that may be highly individual. For example, a person who reads nothing but romance novels may be considered partly aliterate even though she reads voraciously. Why? In terms of the components of aliteracy, she reads only one type of material, she reads only for one type of reason, her motivation for reading may not be strong, and her reading ability may not be adequate for other types of reading.

In her book The Making of a Reader (1984), Cochran-Smith stresses the complex and multi-dimensional nature of literacy. To study literacy, she suggests, a researcher has to examine "many layers of context"--"both a larger educational context and an almost limitless number of

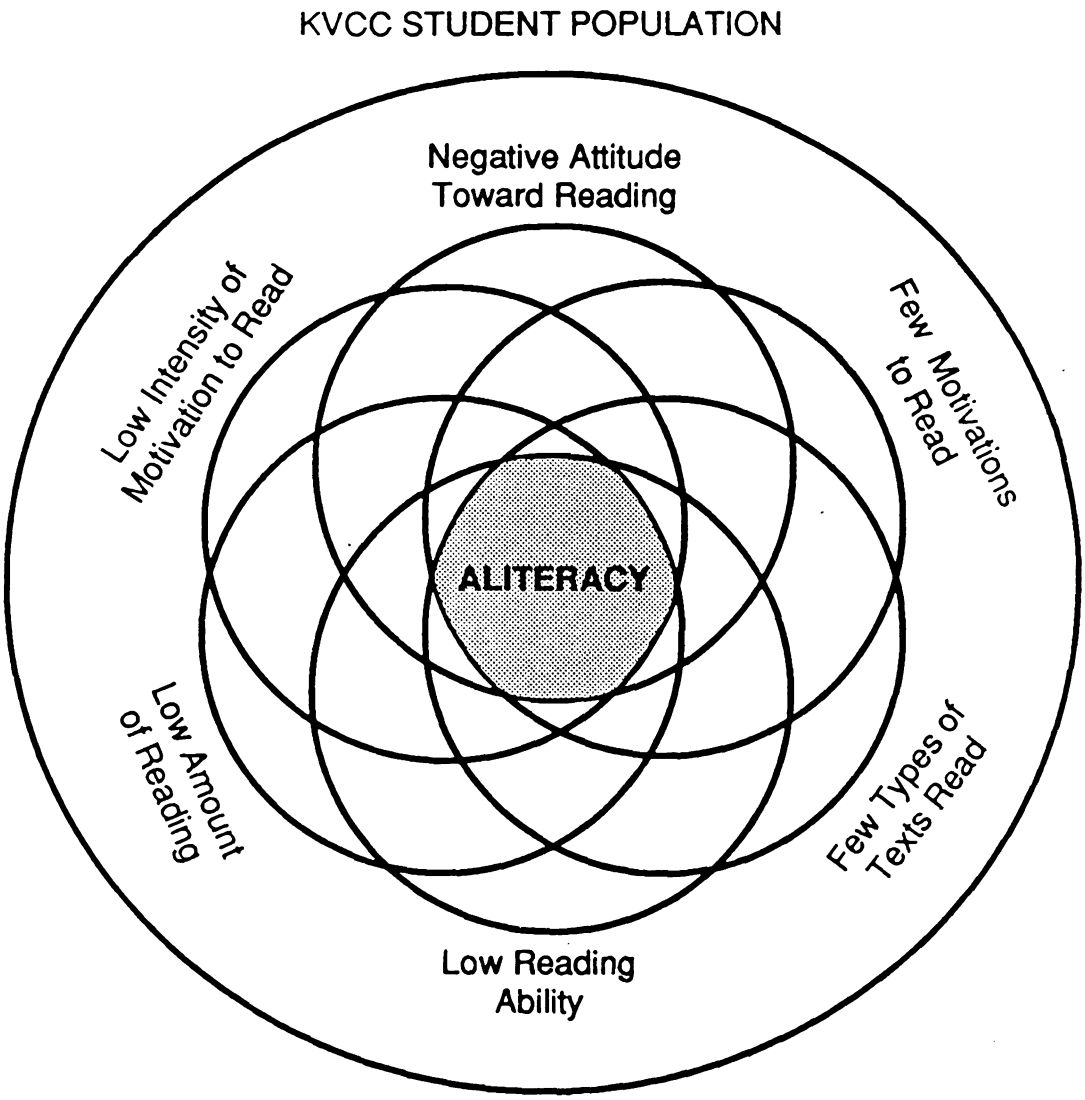


Figure 9 Overlapping Components of Aliteracy

social contexts" (p. 256). It is important to recognize that although in the present study I have stressed the multiple components of aliteracy, what the survey and the interviews have revealed about students as readers is probably only a partial representation of what is there. There is a great deal more to the reading experience and to being a reader than the survey and interviews covered. For example, in terms of types of texts read, I only asked about the reading of books, newspapers, and magazines. I did not inquire about other materials read such as documents related to jobs, hobbies, church, and other personal and community activities the students may participate in. I did not inquire about the actual time spent in reading or the number of pages read, although I did ask how often students read books, newspapers and magazines. I asked students how many types of texts--books, magazines, newspapers and others--they read, but I didn't ask what types of books and what types of newspapers they read. I did not inquire about the nature of involvement in the reading, whether superficial (such as the scanning of a newspaper) or deep (such as the emotional, intellectual, analytical, and aesthetic involvement required in the reading of certain fiction or non-fiction books). In other words, there is an almost infinite variety of reading experiences, which no study, no matter how in-depth, can fully explore.

Bleich (1988) says that literacy is as individual as religion, and Denny Taylor (1990) reasons that it is as unique as one's fingerprints. One develops different lit eracies in different contexts, consonant with the roles one plays in society--for example, as a voter, student, consumer, member of the city planning committee; or according to one's personal goals and needs--for example, as a moviegoer, television-viewer, hobbyist, or fiction-reader. In the pilot study I conducted prior to the main study, I talked to a female student who reported that she "hated to read." When asked if she read anything, she told me that she read the Bible regularly for a Bible-discussion class at her church. She actually read more than she revealed in the questionnaire, and the Bible is at least one text that she liked to read. Just as scholars today are arguing that there are multiple literacies, we can conclude that there are multiple aliteracies.

Furthermore, just as literacy is a dynamic <u>process</u> that never stands still and is impossible to capture in its totality, so is aliteracy. Cochran-Smith writes about the process of "documenting children <u>in the process</u> of becoming literate: we can see their emerging and developing literacy as it occurs in everyday situations" (p. 256). The same process could be observed in the lives of the students as well, a process that did not reveal itself in the survey but in the interviews. During one of the interviews, Ann, a mother of a young child, talked about her desire to see

her child grow up to like reading more than she does. Because I am a children's literature teacher, I told her that a course in children's literature could expose her to variety of books she could read to her child. She said that she was interested in taking the course, and the next semester she enrolled in one of my children's literature classes. Now she is reading more books than she has ever read before. She reports to me from time to time verbally and in her response journal that she is interested in and enjoying the reading children's books. However, she was behind in reading the children's literature textbook--at first because it was "harder" to read but later because she found herself so interested in the material that she had to read slowly to absorb it. My discussion with her during the interview about her reading habits and attitudes might have made her aware of what kind of a reader she was and led her to find ways of becoming a better, more willing reader. And the process of becoming more or less literate (or more or less aliterate) continues for her, just as it does for the other students involved in the study. The study I have conducted is finite; the students' lives as readers are not. What a study can capture is only a fraction of reality.

One of the major findings of the present study is that aliterates <u>view themselves</u> as individuals who do <u>not</u> like to read and who <u>avoid</u> reading. This self-perception is

critical in aliteracy, a self-perception that is based on dichotomous meanings for "reader" (one either is a reader or is not). Many of the students who reported that they never read for enjoyment in reality read newspapers and/or magazines on their own. Yet, because they had viewed them selves as people who did not read and did not like to read, they failed to acknowledge the ways in which they did to some degree like to read or read for enjoyment. For instance, Ruth said in the beginning of the interview, "sitting down and reading a book of a couple of hundred pages. That just not like me." Yet, at the time of the interview, she was engrossed in a book that was 400 pages long and feeling frustrated that she was not finding time to read it. And, like the other interviewees, she had completely ignored the magazines that she regularly read and did not consider this type of reading as pleasure reading. We can conclude that in reality those who are viewed as aliterates do like reading more than they report and do read more than they report. It would be more accurate, however, to say: they do not like to read as much, do not read as much, do not read as wide a range of texts, do not have as many different reasons for reading, are not as deeply motivated to read, and/or are not as adept in reading as those who are more avid readers.

These students had not given themselves enough credit for what they did read and for the extent to which they did read for pleasure. One could say that they had a poor

image of themselves as readers. Those who had indicated through their questionnaire answers that they valued reading as an activity (as most people in this society do) felt uncomfortable about the discrepancy between their belief about reading and their perception of themselves as readers. Furthermore, as pointed out in Chapter 6, students in this survey who didn't like to read tended to rate themselves as poorer readers than those who liked to read. Those whom I interviewed tended to believe that their reading habits and attitudes had affected their schooling, had led to lower grades, and had made them less competent students. One student remarked that if he read more perhaps he would be a "better person." Feelings of guilt and insecurity also tend to be associated with their low perception of their reading ability.

How did these low perceptions of themselves as readers come about? One explanation lies in the way they defined "reading" and in what they thought a "good reader" or a "poor reader" is. Purves (1984) and Heath (1980) have written about the differences between reading as taught in the schools and reading as practiced in real life (see a more detailed treatment of this topic in Chapter 2). Purves contends, for instance that school reading demands a series of complex activities (such as answering oral or written questions about the text) before and after reading while reading outside of school may simply consist of

choosing a book one likes, reading as much of it as one likes to, and maybe telling a friend, the book is worth reading. Rasinski (1989) writes that among students a "good reader" tends to be defined in terms of reading proficiency as measured by tests and later in their schooling in terms of ability to read textbooks in various school subjects. This definition contrasts with the definition of a "good reader" in adulthood: one who reads constantly and perhaps talks about what he or she reads with others.

It seems that the students who thought of themselves as relatively poor readers judged themselves in terms of school reading standards. The frequent testing of students's reading ability throughout their schooling may have contributed to the belief that they are deficient readers. According to some educators who have written on reading reluctance or aliteracy, children who do not read at the grade level "appropriate" for their age are treated in ways that make them feel anxious, frustrated, and discouraged about reading. For instance, they are asked to read aloud and their mistakes corrected in front of other students; they are labeled as "slow" or "remedial" and put in reading groups, where they become self-fulfilling failures. This study's findings appear to support the contention that school reading goals, such as the emphasis on teaching

discrete reading skills and frequent monitoring of students' reading proficiency using standardized tests, are misguided and have unfortunate results.

These students also seemed to compare themselves with those who are "good readers," whom they defined as people who read books all the time, people who can sit for hours at a time and devour whole books. Some of the interviewees compared themselves to the most avid readers they knew and assumed that because they didn't read three or four books a week, they did not like to read or were not good readers. In a sense, their definition of a "good reader" is an idealized one; a "good reader" to them is a person who is competent in all types of reading, perhaps a person who reads a continuous text in a linear fashion, reading every word, and a person who can read textbooks with good comprehension and retention.

Rosenblatt (1978) defines two types of reading--efferent and aesthetic. The purpose of efferent reading is practical, to get information or knowledge from the text, while the purpose of aesthetic reading is enjoyment of the experience of reading. The belief that reading is only for the gaining of knowledge seems to be associated with aliteracy. Furthermore, because schools stress reading for knowledge (efferent reading) more than reading for pleasure (aesthetic reading), many people think that reading is something only done for school purposes and not for its inherent value. In visit to an optometrist's office over

spring break, my eight-year-old son went through the routine vision tests involving the reading of letters of the alphabet projected on a wall across the room. The optometrist quipped, "You don't have to read. You're not in school!" The remark amused me and also made me think: I wondered how many children and students take it seriously and actually apply it. Children learn from what they hear and from what they are taught. As many educators I cited in Chapter 3 have contended, our schools tend to stress reading to meet school requirements such as passing tests and receiving grades and deemphasize the personal uses and values of reading.

Because of the prominent roles that attitude toward reading and reading ability seem to play in aliteracy, I have developed a model that shows the relationship between two components and other components of aliteracy (see Figure 10). Poor reading ability can be the cause or the effect of a negative reading attitude, just as reading attitude can be the cause or the effect of poor reading ability. In this model, reading ability and attitude toward reading have more prominent positions than the other components because they seem to start the cycle of aliteracy. Both low reading ability and negative attitude toward reading may result in few motivations for reading, low intensity of motivations for reading, low amount of

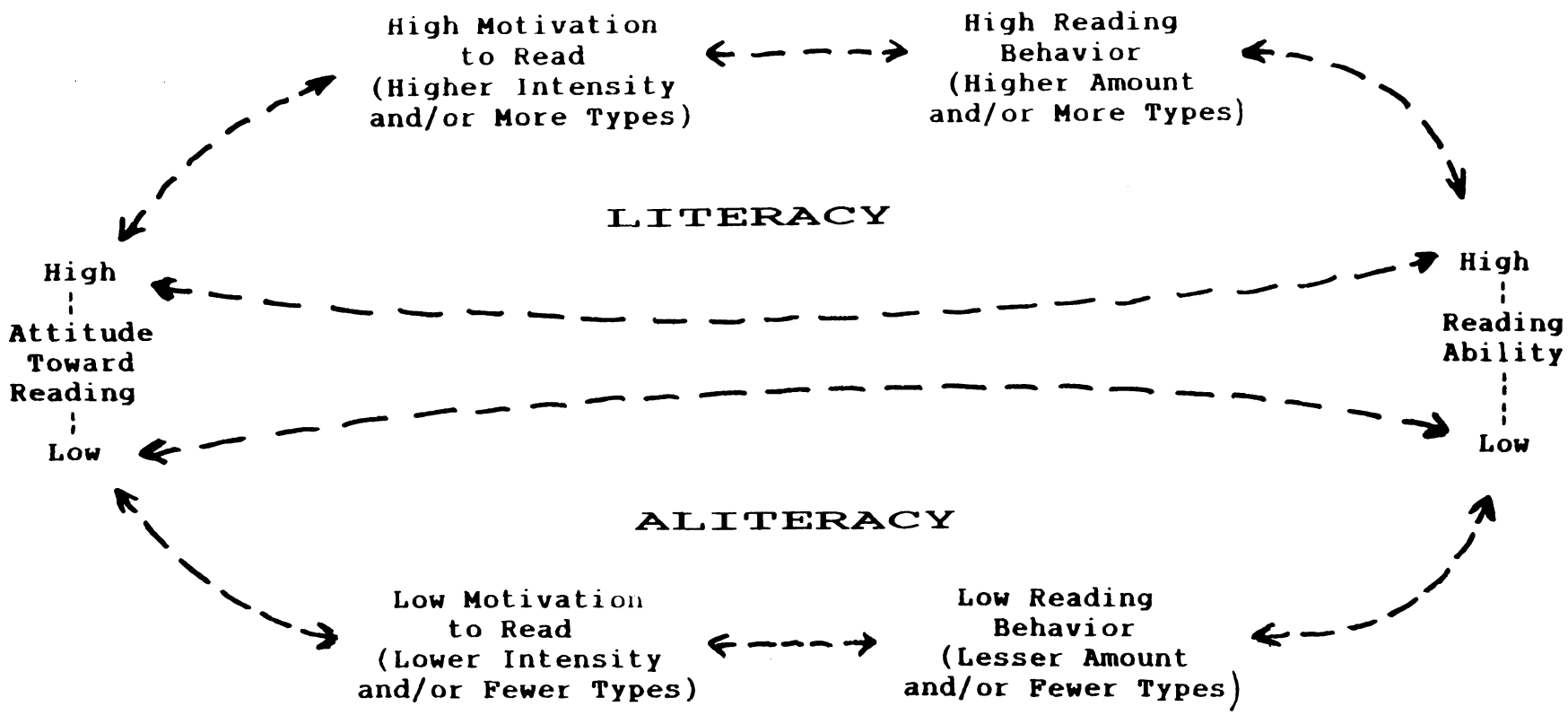


Figure 10 Components of Literacy and Aliteracy

reading and few types of texts read. These other components, in turn, influence reading ability and attitude.

The model also shows the flip side of aliteracy, which might be called, for want of a better word, literacy. However, I must point out that, technically, aliteracy represents only an aspect of literacy. It applies only to print. Literacy, as I have explained in Chapter 2 is a broader concept that goes beyond the technology of reading and writing to include a way of thinking and behaving. We can say that aliteracy is a way of thinking and behaving toward print.

Aliteracy is a contextual phenomenon. People's reading habits and interests are affected by different circumstances such as time, place, people they are with, and events they take part in. The time (whether or not it is vacation, for example) in which a survey is conducted can affect the answers given. Is aliteracy a short-term or a long-term condition? In Voices of Readers (1988), Carlsen and Sherrill distinguished between students who stopped reading temporarily as a result of activities and students who had not been reading or had not been interested in reading for a long period. Lampert and Saunders (1976) de scribe a similar group of high school students, who perceived themselves as "non-readers" and as people who did not like to read (although 30 percent of them did read newspapers, magazines, and occasionally novels). The

findings of the present study suggest that it is a long-term (more or less) condition and a definite mindset about reading. The students I interviewed, who viewed themselves as individuals who did not like to read and who did not read for enjoyment, reported that they had that attitude and behavior since childhood. All of them could not recall a time when they were interested in reading or when they read more than they read today.

Aliteracy may reflect a negative attitude toward literacy, specifically toward literate thought and behavior. It may reflect a tendency to avoid information and may be a part of a general pattern of information avoidance. Studies in newspaper readership (Fedler and Taylor, 1978; Poindexter, 1979; Sobal and Jackson-Beeck, 1981) have identified the characteristics of non-newspaper readers. They tend to come from low socioeconomic and educational backgrounds and to consider themselves members of the lower class. They tend to be very young or very old and "to be less active and less involved with their neighbors" (Fedler and Taylor, 1978, p. 303). They have also been found to be less involved politically because they are less likely to have voted (Sobal and Jackson-Beeck, 1981, p. 13). They have been described as "information-poor" (Scherer, 1989, p. 184). Because of the characteristics that cluster around these non-newspaper readers they tend to be considered truly disadvantaged. Mass communication research has also found evidence to support the theory that

a relationship exists between uses of the media: "Heavy users of one medium are likely to be heavy users of another" (Scherer, 1989, p. 184). Some studies have found that many people tended to read newspaper accounts of events that they have already heard on radio or television. Other studies have shown that with growing dependence on television for information, there is less intermedia usage except for usage of newspapers and magazines (i.e., newspaper readers also tend to be magazine-readers).

In Chapter 3, I cited studies that show that book readers tend to be readers of magazines and newspapers; in fact they tend to read slightly more magazines and newspapers than those who only read magazines and newspapers. Book readers also tend to be active in other recreational and community activities. All these findings suggest that aliteracy, if accompanied by these conditions, is a real cause for concern. If a person's lack of interest in and avoidance of reading is part of a general pattern of information avoidance and uninvolvement with other people, then aliteracy is probably detrimental to that person and to society.

Mass communication research lends support to the arguments expressed by Baroody (Thimmesch, 1984) in the following statement:

> Literacy has two critical functions in a pluralistic society. First, it knits a people together, giving them a common culture. Of equal importance, literacy provides people with the

> intellectual tools used to question, challenge, understand, disagree, and arrive at consensus. In short, it allows people to participate in an exchange of ideas. A democratic institution is weakened when fewer and fewer citizens can participate in such an exchange. Aliteracy leads inexorably to a two tiered society: the knowledgeable elite and the masses. It makes a common culture illusory or impossible; it erodes the basis for effective decision making and participation in the democratic process. (p. ix)

Additional studies (Sobal and Jackson-Beeck, 1981, p. 10) have also revealed that an atypical group of non-newspaper readers exist, and they differ in characteristics from the typical group. They tend to be middle-aged and to belong to the middle to upper socioeconomic groups. They also tend to have more education. They report lack of time and lack of interest in reading the content of newspapers as the reasons for not reading newspapers. This group I would designate as partly aliterate, but whether their aliteracy is part of a general pattern of information-avoidance and social uninvolvement is not explored in the studies. Perhaps they are similar to the students in the present study who reported that did not like to read and did not read on their own. Perhaps they are future versions of these students.

Not enough information is available on the use of other media and involvement in other activities on the part of the participants of the present study, so I cannot draw any definite conclusion on the extent to which K.V.C.C. students' aliteracy signifies information avoidance or social uninvolvement. However, during the interviews, I

did not get the impression that the interviewees spent a lot of time watching television. Perhaps, because of all the negative opinion expressed in the mass media about excessive television watching, they did not want to admit that they watched much television. Research suggests that people tend to underreport television watching (as they tend to overreport reading). Keith, the non-reader, who said that he didn't read books, magazines or newspapers, said that he didn't watch much television either. When asked how he found out about what was going in the world, he said that he was "lucky" in that he could catch news headlines on occasions when he did watch television briefly. It is doubtful that Keith is able to gain much information through such means. One might ask if his tendency to avoid print might put him in the category of "information-poor."

At the 1982 aliteracy conference in Washington D.C., questions were raised that the educational experts and representatives of the publishing business present did not or could not answer in a conclusive way. Among these questions are: "What is the value of reading? What are we losing if we are not reading? What happens if we do not have a reading population?" (Thimmesch, 1984, p. 18). The research cited above offers partial answers to these questions by suggesting that those with aliterate characteristics tend to be "information-poor" and tend to avoid

political and social involvements. Another question raised by a member of the audience was "What does reading give us that is of some social advantage that cannot be obtained through other media?" (p. 22). There is social prestige attached to reading, as shown in people's tendency to overreport their reading activities. One answer suggested by the research in newspaper readership is that those who do not read also tend not to use other media and that they become social isolates. Their avoidance of reading and other sources of information may imply that they tend to avoid literate thinking. Hence, in some people, aliteracy may truly be the opposite of literacy.

What is the future for victims of aliteracy? Can a person's attitude toward reading change? How hard or easy is it to change? Some people who have aliterate characteristics may not want to change their reading attitudes and/or habits. From the perspective of aliterates, aliteracy may be not as serious as those who read and support reading imply. Some students of children's literature who read the editorial on illiteracy and aliteracy (which I referred to in Chapter 1) remarked that they considered aliteracy not as bad a problem as illiteracy. They contended that aliteracy is a matter of choice, and if one satisfies one's informational and recreational needs through means other than reading, what's wrong with that? Keith, one of the students I interviewed, argued that his needs for recreation and information were being satisfied

by movies, radio, and television. To him the idea of reading a book was "ridiculous" and "a big joke." He was proud of his lack of interest in reading and found no need or reason to change. The other interviewees, who considered themselves deficient as readers because of their lack of inclination to read, showed varying degrees of interest in changing their attitudes and habits. Despite their wish that they read more, some were realistic enough to say that they probably would not read for enjoyment more than they did. If the need and opportunity for reading arose they would read more. But they would read for information. For instance, one student would "need" to read more about how to run a business and another student would read more about real estate. And even Keith, whose interests had widened because of his new position in his father's company, mentioned reading a Reader's Digest article on management. Two students who, through their mothers' intervention, had read novels with enjoyment, said that they wished they could find other books equally interesting. However, their motivation to find these books for themselves seemed low. A belief that they didn't like to read and that reading is work (probably because of lack of skills, which in turn is affected by lack of reading) would take a combination of forces to overcome.

A negative reading attitude plus relatively weak reading skills lead to a self-concept about reading that is

tenacious and hard to change. The results of the present survey have enabled me to understand better the findings of a study that I did in a class a few years ago. After a few semesters of teaching children's literature, I sensed that students who reported negative reading attitudes in the beginning of the course seemed to become more positive in their view of reading toward the end of the course. Consequently, I conducted a study in which I tried to compare students' reading attitudes at the end of the term to their attitudes in the beginning, using a Likert-type questionnaire. Despite the behavioral and attitudinal changes that I had observed among many students, the results of the survey showed a disappointingly low improvement in attitude. One reason for the low improvement may be that, in the beginning of the term, the students might have exaggerated their reading activity and reported reading attitudes that were more positive than they actually were. The findings of the present study offer another explanation: negative attitudes reinforced by the other components of aliteracy, especially weak reading skills, are not easily reversible. It probably takes repeated and prolonged positive experiences with reading (one semester of a course cannot do it) in addition to self-motivation, a desire to change and a host of other forces to effect a measurable change.

Some of the answers students gave to the question of what influenced their reading attitudes and behavior revealed that these students, who didn't like to read or didn't read for enjoyment when they were younger, had learned to like reading and to read more as they grew older. Some wrote that they discovered pleasure reading for themselves after they left school. Some blamed teaching practices used in the schools for their lack of inclination to read. The most revealing answers have come from those who have developed more positive attitudes toward reading; they appeared to have more to say and to be more willing to discuss the influences on their reading habits and attitudes than those whose attitudes toward reading were more negative. (The latter might be more reticent because, viewing reading as a socially desirable activity, they were embarassed about their habits and beliefs about reading. They might also lack metacognition or understanding of their reading processes and experiences.)

Recommendations for Educators and Implications for Classroom Teaching

On the basis of the findings I have presented, I would like to recommend some approaches that may lead to a change or reversal in attitudes toward reading. Since my study involves community college students, these approaches tend to be more appropriate for older students than younger ones.

1. We need to encourage students to examine their beliefs and assumptions about reading. We need to help them identify misconceptions about reading or misunderstandings about the reading process. Because they tend to think that reading is a monolithic activity, with no differences from one reading to the next, we should stress the different types and purposes of reading. We also should help them understand the real nature of their reading problems. (One of the interviewees described her problems in reading in terms of oral reading--she could not pronounce words--and in terms of writing--she could not spell words.) They need to consider the possibility that their problems with reading textbooks may be a result of the features of the text, and not of their reading ability. Their idealized view of the "good reader" as someone who is proficient in all types of reading should be challenged. They need to be aware of the false dichotomies in their thinking of reading: that readers are either "good" or "bad," that people either "love" or "hate" reading, or that reading for information is in opposition to reading for pleasure (some pleasure-readers prefer non-fiction to fiction). They need to disabuse themselves of the notion that reading for pleasure only applies to book reading; certainly reading covers a multitude of texts, including magazines and newspapers and a multitude of reasons and purposes (as Heath [1980] and Taylor [1990] have demonstrated in their research).

2. We need to educate people about aliteracy. Since it is not yet in the dictionary, most people are not familiar with the term. As a term and concept, however, it designates a condition that most people seem to be aware of, either in themselves or in other people. Writing about his life as a college student, Trimmer (1990) says, "I was 18 and illiterate, or more precisely aliterate. I could read but preferred not to" (p. 157). When people find out what I am writing about in this dissertation, many of them (they tend to be women) say that they have family members who are aliterate (they tend to be men). As a label for individuals, "aliterate" may heighten people's anxiety about their literacy level and about their status in society. Readers are prone to lumping aliterates with illiterates and to assuming that they are socially inferior. As a label, "aliterate" needs to be used with extreme care and not applied loosely. As the present study has shown, aliteracy is a complex, multi-dimensional, and contextual phenomenon, which has different meanings and implications for different people. If used as an adjective for people, it must be used with qualifications and explanations.

However, as a label, "aliterate" does not seem to have the stigma "illiterate" carries. My students, for example, appear willing to use the term to describe themselves. Pattison (1982) claims that it is <u>illiteracy</u> that people in this society are nervous and embarrassed about. At the

very least, the existence of the term "aliteracy", if used accurately, might help educators and the public understand the exact nature of the literacy problems this society faces. By telling people about aliteracy as a concept, we give them the means to identify a condition or problem that they know exists and perhaps lead them to find solutions to it.

Currently we find Mrs. Barbara Bush waging a campaign to erase illiteracy, despite evidence that true illiteracy has been almost totally eliminated in this country and that probably the "real enemy" is aliteracy. People magazine recently described the First Lady's pet cause as "studiously uncontroversial" (1990, p. 88). Certainly, no one in this society would disapprove of the elimination of illiteracy. Would the public support as enthusiastically a campaign to reduce aliteracy? If we share Pattison's as sumption that the culture does not value full and comprehensive literacy, we will argue that they would not. The schools (and the public) may be satisfied with basic literacy because it is politically safer; to foster full literacy encouraged by wide reading may lead to the kind of "student unorthodoxy" that schools of the 1800s feared (Graff, 1987) and create citizens who think critically and who question the status quo. In other words, aliteracy has political implications, which may not be fully acceptable to society, especially to those who hold authority and power. For this reason, a campaign to eliminate aliteracy

may not garner the kind of support that Mrs. Bush's illiteracy project has received.

3. We need to help students become aware of the consequences of aliteracy, one of which is the deterioration of reading skills from lack of use. Because the respondents in the present study are students who are forced to read for their classes, the deterioration may not happen as long as they are reading. However, once out of school, their reading competence will tend to decline, if they continue the pattern of reading avoidance. Most of the interviewees reported having difficulties with reading comprehension. Their comments support research findings indicating that students lack higher comprehension or literacy skills (e.g., National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1985). According to the socio-psycholinguistic or transactional theory of reading, these students lack the schemas needed to understand the content and structure of various texts (Weaver, 1988). The research findings are conclusive: the more people read, the better they read (and the more they understand.) Reading proficiency is significantly related to reading volume. Knowing that aliteracy leads to a deterioration of reading ability, people might be compelled to read more.

4. We need to stress that members of the next generation may be influenced by today's aliterates. According to the

research on the role of the home environment in reading, the children of aliterates are likely to be affected by their parents' reading habits. Parental or sibling modeling has a strong influence on children's reading. Smith, Smith, and Mikulecky et al. (1978; found in Mikulecky et al., 1979, p. 12) suggest that poor modeling of reading at home starts a "vicious circle." The children are influenced not to read and to dislike reading; consequently, their reading ability does not develop from lack of reading. At school they get help in improving their skills, but the poor reading habits remain. They pass their classes, but the lesson they learn is that reading is mainly for school. Once out of school, they abandon reading, and the cycle continues. Their model is reproduced below (Mikulecky et al., 1979, p. 12). (See Figure 11.)

5. In stressing the influence of aliteracy on future generations, we should at the same time persuade parents to use proven methods of breaking the cycle of aliteracy. One of these is reading aloud to children using children's literature. The benefits to children of parents reading aloud to them have been documented by many studies (see Trelease, 1989 and Kimmel and Segel, 1983). However, the benefits to parents have not been stressed or researched as much. When parents read to their children, they are bound to improve their reading skills at the same time that they help their children become better readers. Because of the

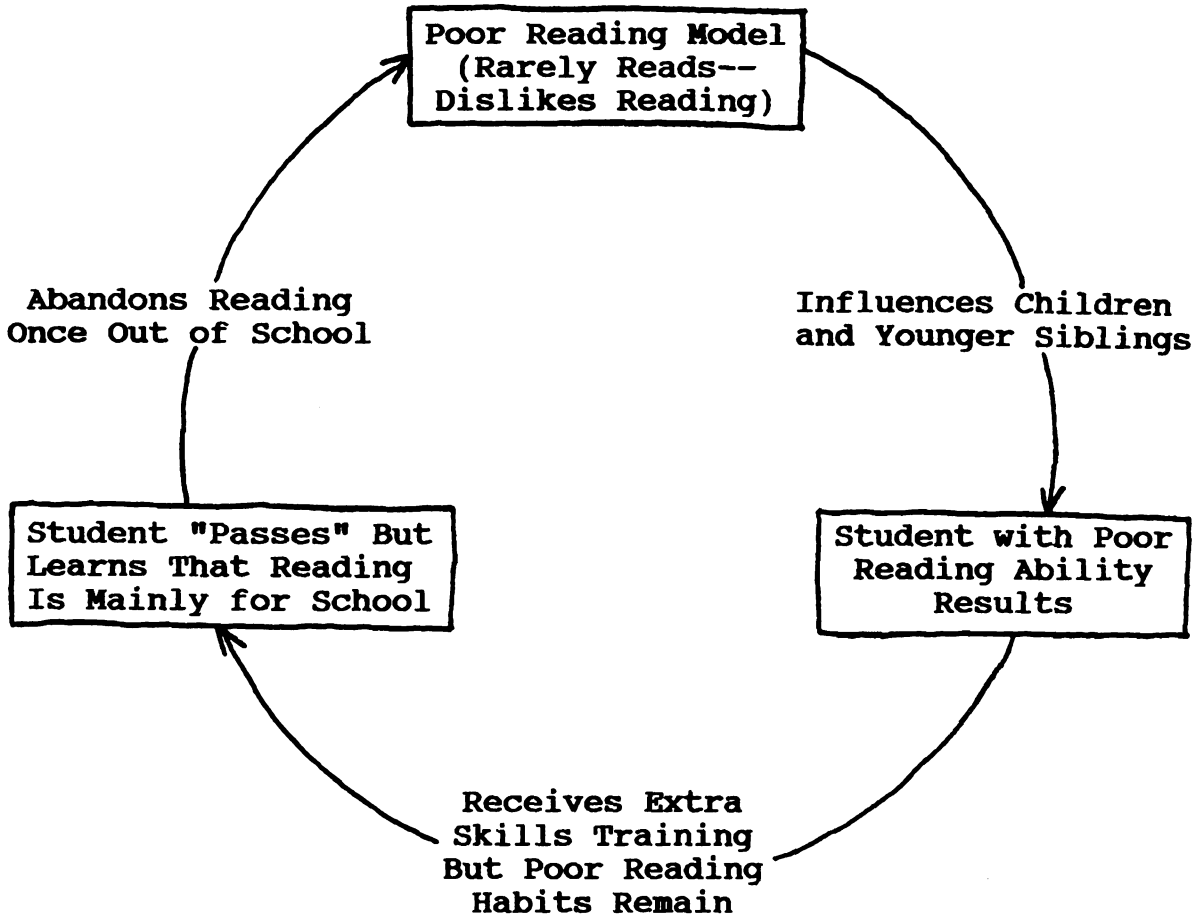


Figure 11 "A Vicious Circle: Nonreaders produce non-readers" (Mikulecky, et al., 1979)

length, accessibility, and appeal (of illustrations and text) of children's books, they make great reading for parents. A mother taking children's literature recently told a class I was teaching that her own reading ability and interest in reading increased as a result of reading aloud to her son. We need to emphasize that reading aloud to children may not only increase reading skills but may also bring about more favorable attitudes toward reading. Many children's books are attractive, lively, and engaging; it is easy to get hooked once one starts reading them. Because reading attitude and reading ability are intertwined, reading aloud to children by parents may be a powerful force in reducing aliteracy. It benefits two generations of readers.

6. As educators, we should find effective methods of increasing interest in reading outside of school. An approach that I would put at the head of a list of recommended methods is the use of independent reading programs, which allow students to choose what they want to read from available materials. In Chapter 6, I quoted answers written by students who learned to enjoy reading on their own after they left school. These comments reveal the importance of being able to choose what one wants to read and the positive effects of choice of reading materials on attitudes toward reading. In pioneering research conducted at Ohio State University, independent reading programs were

found highly successful (Schatz et al., 1960). Likewise, in Hooked on Books (1976), Fader documents his success in using an independent reading program at a school for delinquent boys. Teachers from primary schools through college who have allowed students to choose the books they want to read have reported marked improvement in attitudes toward reading. As a teacher of children's literature, a course in which I allow students to choose books they want to read, I have found the following statements to be true of college students as well:

> When children are free to choose their own material and free to read, they set goals for themselves that surprise most adults. They read for a purpose and for different purposes. Reading is important to them. Their enthusiasm is genuine. They have a real desire to improve their ability to read and comprehend material of increasing difficulty. (Schatz et al., 1960, p. 69)

7. We need to discuss with students, other educators, and the public what we know about the origins of aliteracy. It is important to attend to students' explanations of the origins of their reading attitudes and habits. As I have explained in Chapter 6, their answers coincide with educators' explanations about the possible causes of aliteracy. As educators, we should be concerned about the evidence that points to aliterates as "hidden failures of education" (Cullinan, 1989, p. 6) and to aliteracy as a by-product of our teaching practices. We defeat our own purposes if as we teach children to read, we also teach them to dislike

reading. Aliteracy, in other words, is a result of education that "disables" rather than "ables" (terms used by sociologist Robert Bellah [1989] in a speech on higher education). At the same time, I believe that it is useful for educators to be aware of the cultural forces that have helped shape literacy instruction as we know it today. This knowledge will help us better understand some root causes of our literacy problems and perhaps keep us from unnecessarily castigating ourselves for our "failures." A knowledge of history will also help us identify the weaknesses and flaws in our goals and methods and lead us to seek solutions.

8. Teaching practices that have been known to turn students away from reading should be abandoned and replaced by approaches that encourage reading. One approach that has been repeatedly criticized by students who take classes in children's literature is the excessive and misguided use of critical analysis in high school English classes. Students talk about excruciatingly boring and "meaningless" hours of class time devoted to "dissecting" a Shakespeare play or a Dickens novel. Furthermore, the teachers who use this approach tend to assume there is one correct reading of a text. They do not give enough consideration to the students' idiosyncratic interpretations, a sure method to silence students and to make them read passively and with little personal involvement. Many more junior high, high

school, and college English teachers should be exposed to the reader response or transactional approach to reading (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1983). This view of reading validates the students' personal and spontanous responses to a text. A host of teachers who have used reader response strategies have observed and documented improvements in students' reading attitude and interest in literature (see Corcoran and Evans, 1979).

9. School authorities and others responsible for choosing textbooks and materials for the classroom need to be aware the effects of these books and materials on students. This study has demonstrated the harmful effects of dull, poorly written textbooks on students' attitudes toward reading. Not only do students lose interest in reading as a result of having to read dull textbooks year after year, but they also tend to blame themselves for their lack of interest. They tend to think that the inadequacy lies in them rather than in the textbooks. They develop a self-concept that they do not like to read and that they are not "readers." This self-concept leads to low skills because they avoid reading, and the cycle goes on. Because books are our main vehicle for teaching, we must make it our primary consideration for choosing books whether or not they would appeal to our students. Our textbooks and materials must promote literacy, not discourage it.

10. As teachers of English, we need to view ourselves more as teachers of reading, with the primary responsibility of helping students become better, more interested readers, than as teachers of "literature." I agree with Brown (1987) who writes that the main aim of a literature teacher should be "to develop . . . [students] as readers and responders to literature" and "to encourage those who do read to read more and those who don't read to begin reading" (p. 97).

11. A major criterion for evaluating the success of reading and literature programs should be how much students are reading on their own in school and out of school (see Smith, 1986, p. 263). As stated in Chapter 1, Guthrie and Seifert (1984) stress that ". . . an underrated, potentially fruitful criterion of education is readership."

> Having attended an institution in which learning to read is the central mission, do students continue reading for useful purposes afterwards? A standard for teaching is that graduates will not only acquire the capability to read, but they will choose to read for psychological, political, occupational or domestic purposes. (p. 57)

Furthermore, reading avidly is the prevalent standard in determining in out-of-school settings who good readers are. Adopting this standard in our reading and literature classes will make school reading more congruent with real life reading and give more credibility to our programs.

12. As educators, we need to base our teaching aims and methods on a comprehensive definition of literacy--not as

the mechanical skills of reading and writing but as a life-long process of learning to read and write different kinds of texts for different purposes. Neilsen (1989) defines literacy as "the process of learning to participate in necessary and personally important social, intellectual, and political contexts" and as "a life-long process of learning to read and create contextual signs in print and in society" (p. 10). Knowing that people do not read texts unless they are necessary or personally meaningful, we should stress the personal and social uses of literacy.

We must remind ourselves and others that as new needs and situations arise, people may find reasons for reading. For instance, a person starting a new hobby may be compelled to find information in books or magazines. Or realizing that he or she is somewhat aliterate may make a person read more. At my college, one of my colleagues who found out the subject of my dissertation made a point of telling me a few weeks later that he was trying to watch television less and to read more. People who realize that they are aliterate or verging on being aliterate can change if they need to and if they want to. They are not doomed to a life of reading avoidance. Understanding that literacy is a complex, life-long complex of learning to read and write different texts allows and encourages people to personally take control of their own literacy, to redirect

their energies and time into areas they want to explore, learn about, and experience through reading.

13. Educators should be literate role models for students. I recently read in a student's journal that a male math teacher in a school where her father teaches "bragged" about not having read a book since he finished college. As a teacher, he has the capacity to influence hundreds of students--toward reading or away from reading. We must, as educators, examine our beliefs and assumptions about literacy so that we ourselves can better understand why we have the reading habits and attitudes that we have. We need to learn about how we can influence and guide our students to become more literate.

14. Ultimately, educators have to take the lead: in redefining literacy to include its broad uses and functions, in persuading the public to share this definition, and in initiating changes, not only in our own classrooms and schools, but throughout the educational system--from preschool through graduate school. Our primary aim should be promoting literacy at all levels to ensure that aliteracy does not have a chance to take root. Understanding aliteracy from a historical perspective, reviewing the literature on aliteracy and related topics, and analyzing the findings of the present study have led to the unavoidable conclusion that crucial changes in school goals and practices need to be made. A decade ago, Tchudi (1980) wrote

about Johnny and Jane, the "fictional anti-heroes of every newspaper and magazine article on literacy," who can read and write but who would rather not. "After their last diploma, their bout with literacy will be over . . . " (p. 75), Tchudi says, expressing concern about the condition of aliteracy without using the term. Calling for sweeping changes in education, he writes in ABCs of Literacy (1980): "Literacy instruction cannot be improved without a major overhaul of both its aims and its methods and without a drastic alterations of teaching conditions" (p. xiii). And he added, "The time is right for dramatic changes in literacy instruction" (p. xiv). The time is right for all of us in education to make these demands again--on behalf of present and future victims of aliteracy.

Future Research

The combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods in the present study has proved to be particularly appropriate and productive. Quantitative tools enabled me to compare my survey findings with those of similar surveys. They make possible future comparisons of the results of this study with the findings of similar studies. The similarities in the findings help demonstrate the validity of the methods used in the surveys being compared. Likewise, the interview results provided the means and directions for interpreting the findings and drawing appropriate conclusions, adding to the validity of the quantitative

measures. The data the interviews produced also led to a more thorough understanding of aliteracy. Because of what the interviews contributed to the study, more follow-up interviews of the respondents might have been fruitful. I believe that a methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative tools is appropriate for investigating other questions on aliteracy and literacy.

This study has raised questions about different aspects of aliteracy and literacy for future research. The following is a partial list of questions that need further investigation:

1. How do people with aliterate tendencies conceptualize the reading process? Their definitions of reading and their approaches to reading different texts can be further examined and understood.

2. How do avid readers differ from people with aliterate tendencies? The areas that need exploration include: their definitions of reading, their conceptualizations of the reading process, and their approaches to reading different texts.

3. What can we learn from people who disliked reading when they were in school but learned to like it on their own or after they left school? (They seem to have a greater awareness of their conceptualizations of reading and to be more willing to give information than those who are showing

more aliterate characteristics.) Approaches and methods they have used that have brought about a change in their attitudes toward reading can be identified and explored.

4. Why do the males in our society lag behind the females in reading? Why do more males exhibit aliterate characteristics than females?

5. To what extent do people who exhibit various degrees of aliteracy use other media for recreation, information, and intellectual stimulation? More specifically, if people dislike reading and generally avoid reading as a source of information, to what extent can they be categorized as "information-poor"?

6. Is there a counterpart for aliteracy in the area of writing? What is the relationship between aliteracy and its writing counterpart?

7. When parents read aloud to children, what are the effects on parents' reading skills and attitudes?

8. What are the effects of various reading assessment methods on aliteracy? For example, what is the relationship between standardized testing and aliteracy? What are the relationships between different criteria for assessment and aliteracy?

9. What definitions of reading are implied in our goals and approaches to English and reading instruction?

10. What is the relationship between aliteracy and the use of such approaches to literature as critical analysis and reader response?

Finding answers to these questions will enhance our understanding of literacy and aliteracy. In this study I have attempted to demonstrate the extent, nature, and implications of the problem of aliteracy among community college students in this country. In addition, we need to know about aliteracies among other groups and compare them with what we have discovered about aliteracy among community college students.

Answers to these questions need to be shared with the public, for whom literacy, if not aliteracy, seems to be a major concern. Through understanding the problem, parents, educators, and the public can work together to make aliteracy a less disabling force in individual lives and in society.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Students:

I am asking you to answer questions about the reading that you do at school and at home. Your participation in this study will add to our understanding of the reading habits and attitudes of community college students.

As you complete this questionnaire, please remember that there are no right and wrong answers. As long as you are responding to the questions honestly, your answers are correct.

Your answers and your participation in this study will not affect your grade in this class. If you do not wish to participate, please tell your teacher now. If you wish to participate, please sign your name on the bottom part of this sheet. After you have completed this questionnaire, you may be asked, at a future date, to respond to additional questions. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Thank you for your help!

Raelyn Joyce
KVCC Instructor

I have chosen to complete the questionnaire.

Name _____

Course Title _____

Instructor _____

1. First, I'd like to get a general idea about the specific kinds of things you do for recreation or to relax. I have a list of activities people sometimes do. Please think over the past month since _____.

As you read each activity, please circle "yes" if you have done it this past month and "no" if you haven't. Did you . . .

a. Go to a movie?	Yes	No
b. Dine at a restaurant for pleasure?	Yes	No
c. Engage in a sport like bowling or fishing?	Yes	No
d. Read for pleasure?	Yes	No
e. Go for a walk or hike?	Yes	No
f. Watch television?	Yes	No
g. Go to a theater or concert?	Yes	No
h. Go window shopping?	Yes	No

2. Now I have some questions about reading for pleasure. Many people have reported that their schedules are too busy for them to find time to read for pleasure. Please think over the past month since_____.

a. Did you happen to read any magazines?	Yes	No
b. Did you happen to read any newspapers?	Yes	No
c. Did you happen to read any book, either hardcover or paperpack (not including required reading for courses)? If you have started but not finished a book, that counts too.	Yes	No

If you have read or started to read a book, what was it about?

_____

What was the title, if you can remember? _____

_____

If you have read other books, please list their titles or what they were about: _____

_____

_____

3. How often do you read for enjoyment in your spare time? (Put a check before the right answer.)

____ Never
____ Less than 1 time a week
____ 1-2 times a week
____ More than 2 times a week

4. When, as nearly as you can recall, did you last read any kind of book or a paperback (not required reading for courses)--all the way through?

Write the month and year:_____

What was the book about?_____

_____

What was the title, if you can remember?_____

_____

5. Do you read magazines regularly--on a daily or weekly basis? Yes No

(If no, please skip question #6. Go on to question #7.)

6. If you read magazines regularly, which of the following types of magazines do you read regularly--on a daily or weekly basis?

Newsmagazines, such as Newsweek or Time Yes No

Household or family magazines, such as People, Good Housekeeping, Reader's Digest Yes No

Sports publications, such as Sports Illustrated Yes No

Personal health, self-improvement, or fashion magazines Yes No

Hobby magazines Yes No

Religious or church magazines Yes No

Business or trade magazines Yes No

Others:_____

7. Do you read at least one newspaper regularly (on a daily or weekly basis)? Yes No

Please write the titles of newspapers that you read regularly:

_____

_____

8. Please indicate how you feel about each of the following statements by indicating whether you--strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or have no opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
a. Reading is a useful activity.					
b. I like to read.					
c. My friends would be surprised to see me buying or borrowing a book that is not required for class.					
d. While waiting in a doctor's office, or in an airport, or in a supermarket, I find myself leafing through magazines or paperback books.					
e. I think reading books takes too much time and concentration.					
f. Even though I'm a very busy person, I always somehow find time for reading.					
g. One of my first impulses is "to look it up" whenever there is something that I don't know or whenever I'm about to start a new task, activity, or project.					
h. I usually don't read unless I have to.					
i. I find myself giving special books to friends and relatives as gifts.					
j. I choose to read non-required books and articles fairly regularly (a few times a week).					
k. Sometimes I find myself so excited about a book or an article or a story, I try to get friends to read it.					
l. Reading is not that important outside of school					
m. When I was young, I read a great deal about certain topics.					
n. When I find an author I really like, I sometimes try to read the other books written by that author.					
o. I usually do all the required reading for courses.					

9. As a reader, I consider myself:
(Please put a check above the right answer.)

____ Poor ____ Below Average ____ Average ____ Above Average ____ Excellent

10. Now, please rate from "Very Unlike Me" to "Very Like Me", on a scale from 1 to 5, your reasons for reading.

a. I read--to find out how to get something done.

Very Like Me ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 Very Unlike Me

b. I read--to keep up with what's going on.

Very Like Me ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 Very Unlike Me

c. I read--to discuss what I have read with friends.

Very Like Me ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 Very Unlike Me

d. I read--for relaxation and personal enjoyment.

Very Like Me ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 Very Unlike Me

e. I read--to study for personal and occupational advancement.

Very Like Me ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 Very Unlike Me

11. How much of the following types of reading do you do these days? (Put a check above the right answer.)

a. Job-related reading ____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

b. Textbook-reading ____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

c. Light book reading ____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

d. Magazines ____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

e. Newspapers ____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

f. Others (Please specify.):_____

____ A lot ____ A moderate amount ____ A little ____ None

12. Compared to other people my age, my understanding or comprehension of things I read is--

_____ Poor _____ Below Average _____ Average _____ Above Average _____ Excellent

13. Compared to other people my age, my rate or speed of reading is--

_____ Poor _____ Below Average _____ Average _____ Above Average _____ Excellent

14. Why do you think you are the kind of reader that you are today? What or who might have influenced your reading attitudes and habits? For example, can you recall past experiences, whether they occurred at home or at school, that might explain why you feel the way you do about reading? (Please don't worry about spelling, grammar, or mechanics when you write. Just write as though you were talking to another person.)

15. So that I can see how your opinions compare with those of other people, I would like a few facts about you.

a. What is your sex? ____Male ____Female

b. In what year were you born?_____

c. What is the highest level of education you obtained?

____ Elementary school or less

____ Some high school

____ High school graduate

____ Some college

____ College graduate

____ Post graduate degree

d. Are you presently . . .

____ a full-time student

____a part-time student

e. Are you . . .

____ White/Caucasian

____ Black/African-American

____ Oriental

____ Hispanic

____ Native American

____ Other:_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

APPENDIX B: APPROVAL FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH INVOLVING
HUMAN SUBJECTS (UCRIHS)
206 BERKEY HALL
(517) 353-9738

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824-1111

April 17, 1990

IRB# 90-151

Raelyn A. Joyce
1920 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Ms. Joyce:

RE: "A STUDY OF ALITERACY AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
IRB# 90-151"

The above project is exempt from full UCRIHS review. The proposed research protocol has been reviewed by another committee member. The rights and welfare of human subjects appear to be protected and you have approval to conduct the research.

You are reminded that UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year. If you plan to continue this project beyond one year, please make provisions for obtaining appropriate UCRIHS approval one month prior to April 17, 1991.

Any changes in procedures involving human subjects must be reviewed by UCRIHS prior to initiation of the change. UCRIHS must also be notified promptly of any problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects during the course of the work.

Thank you for bringing this project to my attention. If I can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

John K. Hudzik, Ph.D.
Chair, UCRIHS

JKH/sar

cc: S. Tchudi

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

Alexander, J. E. and Filler, R. C. (1976). Attitudes and reading. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Anders, P. and Cardell, D. (1977). Self-perceptions and reading habits of adolescents, college students, and adolescents. (ERIC Report No. ED 149 324)

Anderson, R., Fielding, L., and Wilson, P. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. Reading Research Quarterly, 23, 285-303.

Anzalone, S. J. and McLaughlin, S. D. (1983). Making literacy work: the literacy approach. Amherst, MA: Center for International Education, University of Massachusets.

Applebee, A. (1962). Tradition and reform in the teaching of English. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Barker, R. and Escarpit, R. (Eds.). (1973). The book hunger. Paris: UNESCO.

Barmore, J. M. and Morse, P. S. (1979). Developing lifelong readers in the middle schools. In J. L. Thomas and R. M. Loring (Eds.) Motivating children and young adults to read (pp. 75-83). Phoenix: Oryx Press.

Bleich, D. (1988). The double perspective: language, literacy, and social relations. New York: Oxford University Press.

Book Industry Study Group, Inc., The (1978). The 1978 Consumer Research Study on Reading and Book Purchasing: a study inquiring into the nature of reading and book buying habits of the American public. Darien, Connecticut: Prepared by Yankelovich, Skelly and White for the The Book Industry Study Group.

Book industry study finds U.S. still is a nation of readers. (1978). Library Journal 103, 2466.

Boorstin, D. J. (1984). Books in our future. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress.

Brown, L. (1987). Rendering literature accessible. In B. Corcoran and E. Evans (Eds.) Readers, Texts, and Teachers (pp. 93-118). Upper Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton Cook.

Carlsen, R. G. and Sherrill, A. (1988). Voices of readers: how we come to love books. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Casteel, C. A. (1989). Motivating reluctant readers to become mature readers. Reading Improvement 26, 98-102.

Chambers, A. (1969). The reluctant reader. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Chambers, A. (1983). Introducing books to children. Boston: The Horn Book Incorporated.

Ciani, A. J. (1981). Motivating reluctant readers. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Cochran-Smith, M. (1984). The making of a reader. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company.

Cole, John Y. and Gold, Carol S. (1978). Reading in America. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress.

Corcoran, B. and Evans E. (Eds.). (1987). Readers, texts, and teachers. Upper Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton Cook.

Cullinan, B. E. (1989). Literature and the child. 2nd ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich.

Decker, B. C. (1985). Aliteracy: What teachers can do to keep Johnny reading." Journal of Teacher Education, 37, 55-58.

Dixon, J. (1967). Growth through English. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Faas, P. S. (1989). Outside in; Minorities and the transformation of American education. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Faar, B. (1981). Building language experiences for reluctant readers. In A. J. Ciani (Ed.), Motivating reluctant readers. (1981) Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

Fader, D. (1976). The new hooked on books. New York: Berkeley Publishing Company.

Fedler, F. and Taylor, P. (1978). Broadcasting's impact on selection of news stories by readers. Journalism Quarterly, 55, 301-305, 333.

Galtung, J. (1981). Literacy, education and schooling--for what? In H. J. Graff (Ed.), Literacy and social development in the West: a reader (pp. 271-276). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goetz, J. P. and LeCompte, M. G. (1984). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research. New York: Academic Press.

Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school; Prospects for the future. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Graff, G. (1979). The literacy myth; Literacy and social structure in the nineteenth-century city. New York: Academics Press.

Graff, G. (1987). Professing literature: an institutional history. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Graff, H. J. (1987). The legacies of literacy; Continuity and contradictions in western culture and society. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University.

Greaney, V. (1980). Factors related to amount and type of leisure reading. Reading Research Quarterly. 15, 337-357.

Guthrie, J. T. (1980). Reading in New Zealand: achievement of volume. Reading Research Quarterly. 17, 6-27.

Guthrie, J. T. and Seifert, M. (1983). Profiles of reading activity in a community. Journal of Reading. 26, 498-508

Guthrie, J. T. and Seifert, M. (1984). Measuring readership; rationale and technique. Paris: UNESCO.

Harman, D. (1987). Illiteracy; a national dilemma. New York: Cambridge Book Company.

Harste, J. C. and Mikulecky, L. J. (1984). The context of literacy in our society. In A. C. Purves and O.Niles (Eds.). Becoming readers in a complex society. Eighty-third yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Heath, S. Brice. (1985). Being literate in America: a sociohistorical perspective. In J. A. Niles and R. V. Lalik (Eds.). Issues in literacy: a research perspective (pp. 1-18). Rochester, New York.

Heath, S. B. (1980). The functions and uses of literacy. Journal of Communication, 30, 123-133.

Heather, P. (1982.). Young people's reading: a study of the leisure reading of 13-15 year olds. (ERIC Report No. ED 225 130)

Hillerich, R. L. (1976). Toward an assessable definition of literacy. The English Journal, 65, 50-55.

Holbrook, H. T. (1982). ERIC/RCS report: Motivating reluctant readers: A gentle push. Language Arts, 59, 385-88.

Howell, J. F. and Sylvester, T. A. (1983). Improving reading motivation. (ERIC Report No. ED 227 454).

International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English. (1989). Cases in literacy: an agenda for discussion. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

In the eye of the storm (1990, October) People. pp. 86-88.

Jacobs, H. C. (1985). Readers--an endangered species? Vital Speeches of the Day, 51, 446-448.

Johns, J. L. (1978). Motivating reluctant readers. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 11, 69-74.

Joseph, S. and Wittig, D. L. M. eds. (1980). Reading remedies for involving the reluctant reader. (ERIC Report No. ED 192 276)

Kaestle, C. F. (1988). The history of literacy and the history of readers. In E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll and M. Rose (Eds.) Perspectives on Literacy. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 95-126.

Kantor, K. G., Kirby, D. R., & Goetz, J. P. (1981). Research in context: Ethnographic research in English education. Research in the Teaching of English, 14, 293-309.

Kazemek, F. E. (1988). Necessary changes: professional involvement in adult literacy programs. Harvard Educational Review, 58, 464-83.

Kimmel, M. M. and Segal, E. (1988). For reading out loud! New York: Delacorte.

Kirsch, I. S. and Yungeblut, A. (1986). Literacy: profiles of America's young adults. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service.

Kozol, J. (1980). Prisoners of silence; breaking the bonds of adult illiteracy in the United States. New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation.

Kozol, J. (1985). Illiterate America. Garden City, New Jersey: Anchor Press.

Lehr, F. (1985). A portrait of the American as reader. Journal of Reading, 29, 170-173.

Levine, K. (1982). Functional literacy: fond illusions and false economics. Harvard Educational Review. 52, 249-66.

Lampert, K. and Saunders, E. (1976). Readers and non-readers: What's the difference? English Journal, 65, 34-38.

Langer, J. A. (1984). Literacy instruction in American schools: problems and perspectives. American Journal of Education, 93, 107-32.

Langer, J. A. (1987). A sociocognitive perspective on literacy. In J. A. Langer (Ed.). Language, literacy, and culture: issues of society and schooling (pp. 1-20). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Maxwell, J. (1977). Reading progress from 8 to 15; a survey of attainment and teaching practices in Scotland. UK: National Foundation for Educational Research.

McEvoy, G. F. and Vincent, C. S. (1980). Who reads and why? Journal of Communication, 30, 134-140.

Mikulecky, L. (1978). Aliteracy and a changing view of reading goals. (ERIC Report No. Ed 157 052)

Mikulecky, L. J., Shanklin, N. L. and Caverley, D. C. (1979). Adult reading habits, attitudes, and motivations: a cross-sectional study. Monograph in Language and Reading Studies. Bloomington, Indiana: School of Education, Indiana University.

National Academy on Education Commission on Reading. (1985). Becoming a nation of readers: the report of the Commission on Reading. Washington D.C.: The National Institute of Education.

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (1981). Reading, Thinking, and Writing: Results from the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature (Report No. 11-L-01). Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States.

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (1985). The reading report card: Progress toward excellence in our schools. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service.

Neilson, L. (1989). Literacy and living; the literate lives of three adults. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

Nell, V. (1988). Lost in a book; the psychology of reading for pleasure. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Noland, R. G. and Craft, L. H. (1976). Methods to motivate the reluctant reader. Journal of Reading, 19, 387-392.

Ohmann, R. (1985). Literacy, technology, and monopoly. College English, 47, 675-89.

Oxenham, J. (1980). Literacy; writing, reading, and social organization. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Paris, S. and Wixson, K. (1987). The development of literacy: Access, Acquisition, and Instruction. In D. Bloome (Ed.). Literacy and schooling. (pp. 35-54). Norwood, NJ.

Pattison, R. (1982). On literacy; the politics of the word from Homer to the age of rock. New York: Oxford University Press.

Poindexter, P. M. (1979). Daily newspaper non-readers: why they don't read. Journalism Quarterly, 56, 764-770.

Purves, A. C. (1984). The potential and real achievement of U.S. students in school reading. American Journal of Education, 93: 82-106.

Ravitch, D. and Finn, C E., Jr. (1987). What do our 17-year-olds know? A report on the first national assessment of history and literature. New York: Harper and Row.

Resnick, D. P. and Resnick, L. B. (1977). The nature of literacy; a historical exploration. Harvard Educational Review, 47, 370-85.

Rist, R. C. (1977). On the relations among educational research paradigms: From disdain to detente. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 8, 42-49.

Robinson, Jay. (1985). Literacy in the department of English. College English, 47, 482-98.

Robinson, Jay. (1990). Conversations on the written word: Essays on language and literacy. Portsmouth, Hew Hampshire: Boynton-Cook.

Robinson, John. (1980). The changing reading habits of the American public. Journal of Communication, 30, 141-152.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). The reader, the text, the poem. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1983). Literature as exploration (4th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association of America.

Schatz, E. E., Utterback, R., Wilsberg, M. E., and Frazier, A. (1960). Exploring Independent Reading in the Primary Grades. (Study of Independent Reading Bulletin No. 2). Columbus: The Ohio State University.

Scherer, C. L. (1989). The videocassette recorder and information inequity. Journal of Comunication, 39, 94-103.

Scribner, S. and Cole, M. (1981). The psychology of literacy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Scribner, S. (1988). Literacy in three metaphors. In E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll, and M. Rose. (Eds.). Perspectives on literacy. (pp. 71-91). Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Sharon, A. (1973-74). What do adults read? Reading Research Quarterly, 9, 148-169.

Sloan, G. Davis. (1984). The child as critic: Teaching literature in elementary and middle schools. New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, F. (1983). Essays into literacy. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

Smith, F. (1986). Insult to intelligence: the bureaucratic invasion of our schools. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

Sobol, J. and Jackson-Beeck, M., Newspaper nonreaders: a national profile. Journalism Quarterly, 58, 9-13, 28.

Sudman, S. and Bradburn, N. M. (1983). Asking questions: practical guide to questionnaire design. San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers.

Sullivan, J. L. (1985). An antidote for aliteracy--people who can read but won't. (ERIC Report No. ED 255 934)

Sutherland, Z. Monson, D. L. and Arbuthnot, M. L. (1991). Children and Books. (8th ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Szwed, J.F. (1981). The ethnography of literacy. In E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll, and M. Rose. (Eds.). Perspectives on Literacy. (pp. 71-99). Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Taylor, D. and Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). Growing up literate: learning from inner-city families. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books.

Taylor, D. (1990). Teaching without testing: Assessing the complexity of children's literacy training. English Education, 22, 4-74.

Taylor, M. (1978). Are college students reading? Wisconsin State Association Journal, 23, 11-15.

Tchudi, S. (1980). The ABCs of literacy: a guide for parents and educators. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thimmesch, N. (Ed.). (1984). Aliteracy: People who can read but won't. Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Thomas, J. L. and Loring, R. M. (Eds.). (1979). Motivating children and young adults to read. Phoenix: Oryx Press.

Thompson, M. E. (1987). What happens when readers do not read? The problem of reluctant readers. (ERIC Report No. ED 286 165)

Tanner, R. (1987). Teaching Freshmen Non-readers, the A-literate Majority. (ERIC Report No. ED 280 076)

Trelease, J. (1989). The new read-aloud handbook. New York: Penguin Books.

Trimmer, J. (1990). Telling stories about stories. Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 17, 157-164.

Tuman, M. C.)1987). Preface to literacy: an inquiry into pedagogy, practice, and progress. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Van Allan, R. (1965).Attitudes and the Art of Teaching Read ing. Washington D.C.: National Education Association.

Venezky, R. L. Kaestle, C.F. and Sum, A.M. The subtle danger: reflections on the literacy abilities of American young adults. Princeton, NJ: Center for the Assessment of Educational Progress.

Walberg, H. and Shiowling T. (1984). Reading achievement and diminishing returns to time. Journal of Educational Psychology, 76, 442-451.

Weaver, C. (1988). Reading process and practice; from socio-psycholinguistics to whole language. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Weaver, C. (1989). Basals and Reading Instruction: Do they promote or thwart literacy? Michigan English Teacher 40, 3-9.

Williams, R. (1977). Marxism and Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Willinsky, J. (1991). The New Literacy: Redefining reading and writing in the schools. London: Routledge.

Wilson, M. (1988). Testing and literacy: a contradiction in terms?" In J. D. Beard and S. E. McNabb (Eds.), Testing in the English language arts: Uses and abuses. (pp. 12-16). Rochester, Michigan: Michigan Council of Teachers of English.

Winkle, A. W. (1988). Research on aliteracy: why Johnny doesn't read. Ohio Reading Teacher, 22, 40-47.