





This is to certify that the  
dissertation entitled  
"Orpheus and Galetea on Campus: Low level  
literacy skills in community college aspirants"

presented by

Duane Castanier

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Doctorate degree in Curriculum, Teaching,  
and Educational Policy

David F. Sabau  
Major professor

Date 8/8/00

**PLACE IN RETURN BOX** to remove this checkout from your record.  
**TO AVOID FINES** return on or before date due.  
**MAY BE RECALLED** with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
16-17 23 2006		

ON ERELU



**ORPHEUS AND GALETEA ON CAMPUS:  
LOW LEVEL LITERACY SKILLS IN TWO COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASPIRANTS**

**By**

**Duane Castanier**

**A DISSERTATION**

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

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Teacher Education**

**2000**

## ABSTRACT

### ORPHEUS AND GALETEA ON CAMPUS: LOW LEVEL LITERACY SKILLS IN TWO COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASPIRANTS

By

Duane Castanier

This dissertation investigates the literacy biographies of three adult learners (two of whom I worked with at the community college) who have struggled with the apprehension of literacy all their lives, finding that the *cost* of literacy outweighs the consequent gains. Combining personal interviews and ethnography, I meet and work with these subjects, as well as many other developmental reading students, as they are involved with their continued education, hoping to enhance their literacy skills so as to pursue their various goals. Their levels of literacy are remarkably different, but they share a common feature, or problem--to attain literacy too often means sacrificing a part of themselves too dear to lose.

Using Sylvia Scribner's *Literacy in three metaphors* (1984) to situate these learners in a literacy field defined by teachers, theorists and The Literate, I mine their rich literacy biographies so they can eventually find their own place in the realm of literacy, defining it, conceiving of it, working with it, and eventually, continually, struggling with it. Proffered often as a gift with promises of panacea by The Literate to the 'illiterate', or those who struggle with literacy, Brady, Gale, and Cain reach for this offering, but too often find the *cost* too high for them to apprehend it as they desire.

This study provides theorists and practitioners with a new slant on their gift, one that flip-flops the common notion of the passive, grateful recipient. Even as Scribner suggests new ways to approach the literacy education of these

and learners.

These read-

transcripts and

educational the-

ness adventure

feature, which

education.

But it m-

transcripts and

able to resolve

education of the

and literature

and why S-

literature and

subjects.

adult learners, they themselves make stunning contributions to the nature of remedial reading instruction by way of the words and events of their lives. The transcripts and events are supplemented with rich offerings from a variety of educational theorists, especially those concerned with reading and its more critical aperture. But there is a strong reliance too on the cultural capital literature, which helps explain initial causes for a compromised literacy education.

But ultimately, the focus of this study rests squarely on the three participants and their self-concepts and notions of literacy and how they are able to resolve, or not, their persistent difficulties in these matters. This is an exploration of the intriguing literacy lives of these three people, but more, of the adult 'illiterate' in general. Delving into this study, it becomes all the more apparent why Street (1995) insists upon using quotation marks around the word '*illiterate*,' and why the word holds such meaning for and power over the three students.

**To Joyce and family**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without a doubt, I had a very supportive committee and worked within a very generous academic community. No appeal was ever ignored and a meeting was always welcome. As dissertation director, David Labaree was steadfast, insightful, challenging, yet encouraging. His courses, along with those from other committee members, helped tremendously to set the foundation for the dissertation.

Again, all along, the committee members were wonderful to me and my efforts, but especially in particular ways. Steve Weiland set the standard for what eventuated as 'literacy biography' and he helped me to reach for that standard; continually, his thoughts and insights regarding the work helped me understand it better.

Susan Floiro-Ruane was a continual support, in very pertinent courses and several individual meetings, all of which influenced my work, but especially the difficult job of ascertaining Galetea's essence and the development of Chapter 4.

In addition to offering continual support and advice, Anna Neumann's notes on the dissertation from our Defense meeting was my guide throughout the revisions. I believe the revisions strengthened the study tremendously; Anna Neumann's influence was invaluable.

I continually kept a poet's vigil as I wrote, a vow I had made to myself, but one I would have maintained anyway because I knew a poet would read the work. Laura Apol was more than a muse. The coursework I had with her, the research we did together, the conversations we shared, served to influence all my work.

Doug Campbell's Research Practicum course and his patience and

rights through

ness of this stu

Dane D.

Joerstad and

"David

ter Cheryl Ros

and continua a

Finney

Patron D. Cas

rose, Deacon

insights throughout the course and beyond, helped provide and nurture the roots of this study, especially as applicable to Orpheus.

Diane DuBose Brunner was exceedingly helpful in helping me understand and work through elements of a difficult final chapter.

If David Labaree is the most obvious beacon in my academic pursuits, then Cheryl Rosaen is my 'anonymous deacon,' representative of her unselfish and continual assistance and that of this university's academic community.

Finally, I owe the humblest acknowledgement and appreciation to Franklin D. Case of Eastern Michigan University, my original adviser, director, muse, beacon, deacon.



Chapter 1  
The Commu  
Greece or Can  
Can Warrant  
Myths Study  
The role of the  
The story can  
Determina re  
stitutional pos  
Ones and G  
before the my

Chapter 2  
Looking the L  
To have and ne  
connection with  
primary an inte  
Teachers and  
A One-way stre  
Bonds and pow  
The achievement  
Another achieve  
Literacy in three

Chapter 3  
The Thorsen Br  
roduction. The  
The Thorsen  
The beginning  
So we deal on  
There are no ch  
Roseblatt's Poe  
Literacy cuckoo

Chapter 4  
Gael's Story A  
Annam...  
After constrai  
Rescue Fears  
Eating Gale  
Vassallo Char  
Thasabe  
degenerate

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter 1

The Community College: The myth of reading's last frontier? Orpheus and Galetea on Campus.....	1
Claim, Warrant, Evidence.....	2
Why this study matters.....	7
The role of the community college in this drama.....	10
The siren call.....	13
Departmental repercussions.....	15
Institutional costs beyond tuition.....	18
Orpheus and Galetea on campus: The myths re-told.....	21
Beyond the myth.....	27

### Chapter 2

Locating the Literacy Landscape: Lost in the (ter)rain.....	29
To have and have not: The developmental reading student's lack of connection with books.....	31
Intimacy: an integral part of literacy acquisition?.....	34
Teachers and the institution and Reading.....	38
A One-way street: Literacy, not literacies.....	39
Politics and power in pedagogy and literacy.....	47
The achievement gap: No reason to assent.....	51
Another 'achievement gap' perspective.....	57
'Literacy in three metaphors'.....	63

### Chapter 3

The Trickster: Brady's Story.....	69
Introduction: The story of the research data.....	69
The Trickster!.....	71
In the beginning was the Word.....	78
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly.....	93
There are no children here.....	98
Rosenblatt's Poem.....	106
A literacy cuckoo's nest!.....	120

### Chapter 4

Gale's Story: A matter of survival.....	130
Ain't makin' it.....	132
Further constraints: the role of cultural capital.....	139
Residue Fears.....	146
Educating Gale.....	151
Mississippi Changes.....	157
Thirdspace.....	169
Gale Incarnate.....	177

<b>Chapter 5</b>	
Between the Masks.....	184
Introduction: Saving face.....	184
Hyde and seek.....	189
'The garbage and the flowers'.....	191
Negotiated destiny.....	193
'The remembered hand'.....	200
The crossroads.....	201
Cain by way of Scribner.....	204
Cain's Story: White Tail Strategy.....	205
A defining moment.....	207
Louisiana dregs.....	208
Lessons before leaving.....	213
'Build on the small things'.....	215
'Break(ing) the link'.....	217
'Anonymous deacon'.....	223
'Response-ability'.....	228
Promises rendered.....	235
The 'collective creative'.....	239
'The old hero's journey'.....	248
'Positive Psychology'.....	252
 <b>Appendix A</b>	
Chapter Notes.....	258
 <b>Appendix B</b>	
What the story might tell.....	266
 <b>Appendix C</b>	
The research site: The settings for data collection.....	271
 <b>References.....</b>	<b>281</b>

Very c

learners with

W. L. M. P. e.

very low level

costly is this g

Illustrat

Skills Departm

Reading Depea

developmenta

message from

H. S.

Ma

ne

Go

na

ba

Win e o

derstable, the

forming a sym

developmenta

reviewed at

the team of m

specifically like

to Opreus, wh

to use her aga

to course the na

to use the anor,

## **Chapter 1: The community college: The myth of reading's last frontier?**

Orpheus and Galetea on campus!

Very often theorists, teachers, The Literate view literacy as a gift that adult learners with low levels of literacy skills accept gladly, with the promise that this will turn their life around. In this study I show why some aspirants, adults with very low levels of literacy skills, do not or cannot accept this gift so readily, so costly is this gift to them.

Illustrative of this, as I consider students and their fate in the *Academic Skills Department* (a recent designation: formerly known as the Developmental Reading Department) at Webber Community College<sup>1</sup> where I have taught developmental reading for several years now, I am reminded of a pivotal passage from *The Great Gatsby*.

His heart beat faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.

(Fitzgerald, 1925; p.112)

While one person is enhanced, blossoms, gains a new life no matter how perishable, the other loses, becomes mortal. The tuning fork, his link to divinity, if only in a symbolic way, is muted. Such are the relative fates of two developmental reading students from the community college whom I interviewed at length, Brady and Gale. Extending Fitzgerald's imagery a bit into the realm of mythology, which he was wont to do upon occasion, I more specifically liken Brady, who dropped out not far into his first semester at WCC, to Orpheus, who dared to retrieve his wife from the Underworld of the dead, only to lose her again when he disobeyed the edict of the gods in escorting her

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the names of all institutions and persons and cities in this study are fictitious so as to maintain the anonymity of those involved.

home and G  
Pygma or s  
to a woman  
contrasting  
other in im  
interesting  
regarding the  
the story of  
students dea

The co  
have a far mo  
be the case  
examine and  
times the ma  
figure As B  
gements, the  
the gray" (p. 8

And wh  
with this st  
familiar with  
cultural capita  
relational or  
crossing a g  
to be create  
and also show  
1995 so nice

for a more e  
Lorenz A

home, and Gale, who is taking best advantage of the courses' many benefits, to Pygmalion's creation, Galetea, whom Venus transformed from a lifeless statue to a woman.<sup>2</sup> How could two people in the same literacy story realize such contrasting fates, such that one, Orpheus-like, loses his cherished goal, and the other, in imitation of Galetea, transforms her existence remarkably? It is an interesting tale, involving more than mythology, but unfortunately, several myths regarding the role of the community college in literacy education. Ultimately, it is the story of the personal costs attending a literacy education and how the two students deal with these.

The costs that I allude to and upon which I focus throughout this study have a far more dramatic effect upon the students than is typically considered to be the case. In fact, the students in large part are unaware of the costs I examine and yet these costs determine aspects of their identity; indeed, at times, the masks the students assume determine aspects of the costs they endure. As Brunner (1998) reminds us, when it comes to matters of masks and identities, "the world is often portrayed as black and white, yet most of us live in the gray" (p.8) in the 'drama' she assumes identity to be (p.56).

And when it comes to investigating the costs these students must deal with in this study, much of the drama is indeed enacted in the gray. We are familiar with costs of an institutional kind, and these I will recount by way of the *cultural capital* literature throughout this study. And in the face of these institutional deterrents, the student encounters costs of a personal kind, often choosing a given route, or course of action, based upon these considerations. I will delineate some of these shortly from a recent article by Libby Bay (1999), and also show some of the less obvious costs, as MacLeod in *Ain't No Makin' It* (1995) so nicely details with the Hallway Hangers. These too I will investigate a

---

<sup>2</sup> For a more elaborate rendition of these two myths, please see Note 1 for this chapter in Appendix A.

water. But

his respect.

My car

at the commu

are certain 'a

subjects in 'a

hope them to

Once a

attainment the

and The Liter

Rejecting the s

away from the

And again, on

to the gift, the

merent for o

responses to

Johns

ter who hav

recognizes th

that incorpo

lectors too of

the reading o

Elora and in

responses" (p

Johnso



bit later. But again, the costs I am most concerned with are more insidious. In this respect, they inform my research claim and warrant. (2)

### **Claim, Warrant, Evidence**

My claim is that in my research, in working with and interviewing adults at the community college with very low literacy skills, I have noticed that there are certain factors (costs) that inhibit the acquisition of literacy for these students. In fact, these costs are often as strong or stronger than the factors that impel them to gain literacy.

Once again, this contention flips the usual perspective of literacy attainment that is promoted by educators and reading and educational theorists and The Literate as a much sought-after, but just as important, unalloyed, gift. Rejecting this gift out of hand, or giving in to constraints that compel the student away from this gift, runs contrary to the typical notion of literacy achievement. And again, one of the reasons for this is that these costs, these alloys attached to the gift, that I delve into are related to but go beyond the institutional costs inherent for certain students in the educational setting and the students' responses to them.

Johnson (1985) gives voice to this proposition in his study of three adult men who have guarded their secret of functional illiteracy for years. Johnson recognizes that a case study offers the only true picture of reading failure and that it incorporates the individual's goals, motives, and personal situations, factors too often left out of a non-reading analysis. Further, the author illustrates that reading deficiency results "from a combination of conceptual difficulties, rational and irrational use of self-defeating strategies, and negative affective responses" (p.155).

Johnson courts psychological and social causes as accounting for 'some

proportion of  
third and kind  
conceptual p  
anxiety (a ps  
whereby the  
have referred  
type-literate  
incompetence

this point in the  
literacy (and  
those shared  
education (the  
Johnson's pa  
that perpetua  
of the proce  
nforms my r

My re

working I ha  
whom I have  
and compete  
of numerous  
terate cultu  
of literacy.

The e  
interpretation  
address this  
develop, thro

proportion' of reading disability. The three readers he studied read at a second, third, and kindergarten level. He organizes their literacy difficulties in terms of conceptual problems and strategies (these two relate to the process of reading); anxiety (a psychological factor); and attributions (a socio-psychological factor whereby the reader tries to explain his failures to himself). These factors, which I have referred to as costs, include the shame attending their disability in a hyper-literate society; remediation viewed as an admission of failure and incompetence, if not an unattainable goal; the recognition that to gain literacy at this point in their lives might indicate (and indict) years and years of wasted literacy (and life). Related to this point is one indicative of Brady's fears and those shared by MacLeod's (1995) Hallway Hangers: if the adult actively seeks education/literacy and fails, then what is left of their already thin self-esteem? Johnson's participants and Brady are victims of a maddening cycle of failure that perpetuates and assures their illiteracy, anxiety, and unrealistic perception of the problem. This is a difficult diet for intelligent, competent adults, which informs my research warrant.

My research warrant then is that when intelligent people (for there is nothing I have seen in the people with whom I have worked, especially the two whom I have interviewed most extensively, to suggest they are not intelligent and competent persons and students) reach adulthood and cannot read in spite of numerous opportunities (after all, we live and do commerce daily in a hyper-literate culture and society), there must be factors (costs) that impair their quest of literacy.

The evidence to support my claim and warrant of course are the interpretations I derive from Brady's and Gale's extensive transcripts. Let me address this point further. It must be understood that the interpretations I develop, though rooted in the participants' transcripts, are influenced too by

extensive fe

north and w

development

some cases a

occasions (i. e.

of these and

have taught a

underestimat

developmenta

the better to n

and memories

Brady and Ga

Let me

secondary par

working in a

the or so I 'g

sessions (as a

missed a coup

excuses. I pas

relationship (s

fed notes. try

learned for the

as contact with

But mea

department too

unpleasant m

pass or the tu

extensive field notes derived not only from close contact with Brady for over a month and with Gale for over a year, but from contact as well with many other developmental reading students with whom I worked and/or interviewed, in some cases as many as a dozen times (i.e. Lacey), or only on a couple of occasions (i.e. Vivian and Sylvia; please see Appendix C for further discussion of these and other students), not to mention the students in the several courses I have taught across several semesters. But their impact on this study cannot be underestimated, since they helped me understand better the wide range of developmental reading students and the attributes they might share and helped me better think through some of the key concepts of this study, such as costs and memories and others, by either comparing them to or contrasting them with Brady and Gale.

Let me provide a concrete example of the work of the field notes and the subsidiary participants conjoining to influence the shape of this study. In working initially with Brady, I was alerted to the notion that he was slow to trust me (or so I figured) since he held back on some work during our tutoring sessions (as an example, he was at first hesitant to write in front of me) and missed a couple of scheduled meetings, but not without seemingly good excuses. I passed this off as jitters common to the incipient stages of such a relationship (student to tutor). But between sessions with Brady, I was taking field notes, trying to reflect upon what had transpired at one meeting, even as I planned for the next. This continued, the note-taking and reflection, even as I lost contact with Brady.

But meanwhile, I worked with and observed other students in the department too, either as an instructor or tutor. And I spotted some of this bothersome mistrust in others, along with occasional 'diversionary' tactics in class or the tutoring sessions (similar to Brady's ploys) meant to conceal some

perceived deficiency (from their point of view) of their aptitude or performance. It was not until I was closely reviewing Brady's transcript that a certain reference to a troubled boy in his son's classroom, where Brady often helped out the teacher, offered me insight into the previously noticed aspect of Brady's initial mistrust with me. It was then that certain field notes connected with various proclivities and peccadillos in other students that I had experienced and I saw more clearly some of Brady's (and other students' too) behavior and recountings as more than just expected mistrust, but as a sort of 'con,' a mask. Later, I refined this insight and its attendant intuitions into the notion of (Brady as) trickster, a huge piece of Brady's identity as I reckon it. Then I was better able to understand other aspects of Brady's transcript and educational and literacy experiences based upon the trickster association.

I will discuss this in much depth later and I will reconfigure the interpretations of Brady and Gale to show even more how these costs are so linked with the students' identities that they continually impair Brady's acquisition of literacy and held Gale back for over two decades in accomplishing her most cherished dream and even yet have a certain hold on her to this day.

Brady and Gale are remarkable examples for we meet them at different stages of their development, at different points in their struggles with literacy and the costs, all too often unconscious, that beset them and their goals. But in analyzing their transcripts and working with the field notes and my personal experiences with them, these students provide wonderful data for students and educators alike to heed, for they show that of course the individual may be inhibited and blocked by institutional and societal constraints, but that agency, the individual's influence in their own life, is still an important player in the script. To dramatize this even more, I ultimately enlist the unique biography of Cain,

yet another a  
that either B  
and reenters  
seem to put  
have a strate  
was able to  
avoid calam

Before

the commun  
been that so  
educational  
are to insti  
his research  
the teracy  
stitution and  
social condit  
or that equiv  
themselves to  
who called  
that make the  
that for the  
assistance to  
the stud  
along the

One of

yet another adult grappling with literacy, whom we find on a plateau different than either Brady or Gale. Though encumbered with a host of costs in his long and relentless pursuit of literacy and beset with many obstacles that would seem to put him at irrevocable loss, Cain, like Odysseus, seemed to always have a strategy, or plan, to surmount these difficulties. And like Odysseus, he was able to take full advantage of the kindnesses and offerings of others to avoid calamity and keep his goals in focus.

### Why this study matters

Before we embark upon a discussion of the key and multifaceted role of the community college in this work, I want to elaborate upon a point made earlier that speaks to the contributions a study such as this one can make to the educational research pool, especially to the smaller pond of literacy education and its instructors, students and curricula. I have already alluded to the idea that this research indicates the powerful impact that agency does and should have in the literacy education of students seemingly so dependent upon the institution and instructors to realize effective change in their educational and social condition. Again, this notion coincides with the contention posited early on that equivocates literacy as an unalloyed gift that students fall over themselves to receive. Instead this research shows literacy as a much more complicated offering that indeed has innumerable strings and ribbons attached that make the 'gift' highly problematic for these students to merely accept. Too often for these students their lone source of power, of agency, is found in resistance to education in general and literacy in particular. The trick is to allow and help students to realize that their agency can be so much more effective in gaining literacy as opposed to resisting it.

One of the ways Gale achieves this realization is by way of memories.



That's the  
the past for  
Gale uses m  
memories so  
1998 reati  
that...unrom  
nscriptions o  
most force se  
and for this re  
associated.

From w

with the who e  
adventure is ne  
extremely impo  
teracy skills a  
research litera  
teracy progr  
spot this res

And th

teracy biograp  
strong link bet  
ast informs th  
"educational a  
"998 caveat  
effectiveness w

...the no sc  
...the no sc  
...the no sc  
...the no sc

That is, the participants' memories are a vital part of this research as we probe their past for insights into their present dilemmas. It is fascinating to see how Gale uses memories to rectify the contemporary while Brady eschews memories so as to insulate himself from the past haunting his present. Brunner (1998) neatly summarizes Gale's strategy regarding her past when she states that "...unromanticized memories may light the way to transgressing status quo inscriptions of identity and difference. Thus the liberation of memory may be the most fierce secret disturbed in those openings between masks" (p.16). For Gale and for this research, memories form a dramatic aspect that simply cannot be discounted.

From what has already been stated, it can be seen that this study deals with the whole person, not just the student, even though the investigative aperture is necessarily narrowed by its unrelenting focus on literacy.<sup>3</sup> This is an extremely important point because it offers the student/person with limited literacy skills an authentic reflection of themselves that is seldom found in the research literature. And this study offers a rendering not only of these persons' literacy plight, but too, their strengths and convictions and talents and agency. In short, this research gives voice to their person as well as their dilemmas.

And this point ties in so well with memories because in pursuing the literacy biographies of Brady, Gale and Cain, this work magnifies the very strong link between early education and later educational achievements, even as it informs the instructor of adult literacy of possible pitfalls in current instructional assumptions. And it cautions such instructors to heed Delpit's (1988) caveat of becoming wedged in pedagogical boxes that limit their effectiveness with each student's needs. Pursuing Delpit's contention further,

---

<sup>3</sup> I will offer not so much a biography of Brady, Gale and Cain, as a literacy biography. That is, events in their lives will be proffered primarily in terms of their significance to their literacy education, or the costs involved with this pursuit. Though this is necessarily limiting, the literacy biographies provide more than an adequate synopsis and rendering of key aspects in their lives.

she recommen  
respected. Th  
for educat  
important part  
attracting the  
teracy, tech  
surprising an

Even th

necessarily  
complex and  
many ways th  
teracy, biograp  
and others co  
and product e  
among those  
be described a  
persons in our  
exercise these  
gives added c  
ever when pre

Especially

the virtues s  
research dema  
those persons s  
teracy. This s  
relationships a  
ever of the nat

she recommends that the student's expertise must be recognized and respected. This study elaborates upon these students' expertise and reaffirms that for educational efficacy the instructors of such students are indeed important partners. This note is made all the more manifest by continually arbitrating the cultural capital literature from a host of theorists, especially literacy theorists, providing a unique and very interesting marriage with often surprising and insightful messages.

Even though a literacy lens is used predominantly throughout this study, it necessarily must be a wide and agile lens to cover the immense terrain, complex and complicated, that literacy is seen to be for all involved. In a way, in many ways, though I focus mainly upon Brady and Gale and then Cain, their literacy biographies are universal in that they compel us to reflect upon our own and others' circumstances and insecurities and literacy abilities and latent gifts and proclivities in a different way than is usual. It is seldom admitted, but even among those with supposed literacy talents, too often this relationship can best be described as one between intimate strangers. That is, there are many persons in our society with strong literacy skills who nonetheless do not exercise these talents unless dictated by school, or some other necessity. This gives added dimension to the contention that literacy is not an unalloyed gift, even when presented on the proverbial 'silver platter.'

Especially for the instructor of adult literacy in the community college and other venues is it necessary to be circumspect as regards literacy, for this research demands we re-think our stance and commitment to literacy and to those persons seeking it and to re-think too our pedagogical repertoire and its efficacy. This study flips not only the usual contention of literacy as an unalloyed gift, but flips also the notions of expert, of the instructor/student relationship, and even of the nature of literacy itself.

In this  
college campus  
that campus  
community of  
institution for  
much as the  
the door the

Let me

Coone Har  
reconfigured  
and having  
Oertly West  
seems to es  
among an

Pursu

to Brady, Ga  
sized and  
and literacy  
Coone. The  
but merely  
exercise de

In our  
satisfaction  
size the  
study.

In this work, so much of the literacy dilemma plays out on the community college campus, itself a complex and complicated terrain. But before we visit that campus, it is important to address one point further. That is, even though the community college is the more dominant setting, I did not research the institution (or the institution of the public schools, another prime setting) so much as the people involved with the institution. This in itself casts a different hue upon the notion of expertise for this study.

Let me explain. In a recent series of ads for *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, Colonel Harlan Sanders, its long-time spokesperson, but deceased, is reconfigured as an animated character touting the company line. In one of the ads, having made all sorts of claims about the product, he seeks to assert his identity (lest the animation leaves anyone bewildered) but more importantly, it seems, to establish his authorial and authoritative voice. He does so by dancing a short jig and in rhythm to the music claims that "I can do that; I'm the Colonel."

Pursuing this image minus the music and jig, in this study, when it comes to Brady, Gale and Cain and their literacy pursuits, how these pursuits were stalled and re-activated and why, what this portends for education in general and literacy education in particular, I want to claim that in many ways I am the Colonel. This is not to diminish the many other officers enlisted for this research, but merely to say that if I take a seemingly unusual liberty with an hermeneutic exercise, please hear me say that "I can do that; I'm the Colonel."

#### The role of the community college in this drama

In pursuing my research, I sought to talk to people who despite an unsatisfactory educational experience, still viewed education as a way to realize their goals. This is why the community college setting was so important to my study, not only because Shaw (1997) claims that "the community

college...emerges as the battleground on which the ideological debates framing...changes in remedial education policy get enacted" (p.286), but too, because the individual's enrollment (Brady and Gale) in the college signals their aspirations.(3)

But let's look at why the community college is so important to the aspirants with whom I worked, taught, and studied. Labaree (1990) offers an analysis of the community college seen in the final stage of the twentieth century. Looked at through the lens of mixed goals, democratic and market in nature, Labaree argues that the community college is the new high school and the last college.

On the one hand, the community college is best understood as the new comprehensive high school of the late twentieth century...it embodies both the successes and the failures that characterize the historical development of the high school. The same contradictory mixture of public and private purposes that spurred the rapid growth of the high school has helped to produce the extraordinary expansion of the community college (p.205).

But on the other hand, the community college can be seen as the last of the colleges in the sense that it is the latest spin of higher education to allow students to pursue "the social goals of political and economic development and...the private goal of individual status attainment" (p.205). But it is the last of the colleges too because it is the lowest of the forms of higher education, coerced by market pressures to remain a two year institution and to maintain as its largest focus its vocational programs.

...during its relatively short history, the community college has quickly taken on four major functions--college preparation, vocational training, general education, and community education--that have expressed the same mix of sociopolitical and market purposes that shaped the history of the old people's college, the American high school, during its much longer institutional existence (p.221).

But the community college is unique too in its very democratic stance, "...opening its doors to virtually every adult within commuting distance and offering to serve as the medium for fulfilling a wide range of social and political

needs in the  
education  
is important  
ready and  
not without

But S

the commun  
that seeks to  
research the  
preparing s  
onced s  
institution v

se  
t  
n

Tr s

when stud  
after tra  
wonders +  
year col e  
growing m  
year insti

But

work with a  
any other c  
teracy sk  
diversity m  
these asp re



needs in the community” (Labaree, 1990; p.231). No other institution of higher education is willing to do this. In addition, the community basis for this education is important too, for it provides a setting for the pursuit of these aspirations in a friendly and familiar and supportive environment, one in which the student need not uproot his diurnal existence.

But Shaw (1997) jumps in to problematize the identity and generosity of the community college by focusing on the debate current in educational policy that seeks to locate all of remedial education at the two year institutions. Citing research that shows that one of the community college's primary functions--preparing students to transfer to four year colleges and universities--has dwindled significantly (p.287), Shaw claims that access to one post-secondary institution very well may abnegate access to another.

...the trend toward placing remedial education solely in the community college sector represents real reductions in educational opportunity, especially for the minority and disadvantaged students who disproportionately enroll in these institutions (p.287).

This is because attaining a baccalaureate degree is much more difficult when students start “their post-secondary education at a community college rather than at a four year institution” (p.287). By the end of the article Shaw wonders if the community college will regain its status as a pathway to a four year college and provide the “disadvantaged students who are tracked into the growing maze of remediation in the community college” access to these four year institutions (p.295).

But without a doubt, Shaw's concerns aside, the students I sought to work with at Webber Community College would have been denied access to any other college besides a community college. Their extremely low level of literacy skills would have been way below a generous minimum level a university might require for admittance. But the community college welcomes these aspirants, in fact, offers programs in literacy aimed directly at their needs.

It was in the  
universe and  
overcome the  
attress of  
Gale in such  
the element  
abound to  
them. At the  
were they all  
should have

I do not

be reading of  
abilities and  
part-time in  
concerned with  
and education  
and individual  
understanding the  
classrooms.

Labaree

ing schools. It

though do not  
enough a clear  
for the part  
the public school  
strongly accurate  
the second grade  
of the "own  
the encourage

It was in this spirit that pervades the community college atmosphere--a spirit of universal access and welcome--that I looked for students who aspired to overcome their deficiencies in literacy. Ironically, it was in many ways the antithesis of this spirit--academic rejection and exclusion--that put Brady and Gale in such dire literacy straits.<sup>4</sup> That is, they were not necessarily welcome in their elementary and middle and high school classrooms; they were considered a burden to be tolerated then passed on to another level so as to be done with them. At the community college, they find a sort of academic hostel, a classroom where they are accepted and given the attention and scholastic nurturance they should have been provided years ago.

I do not use these terms--hostel, nurturance--inadvisedly. For certainly the reading courses at WCC are small, safe (that is, the students and their abilities and voices are respected), supportive, sensitive. The faculty, full and part time, insist upon this and carry it through nicely. They are genuinely concerned with the success of the students and have the necessary experience and education to be effective instructors for these courses. But their efficacy, on an individual, as well as general basis, is continually compromised by the myth undermining the promise, as well as by other factors prominent in their classrooms.

#### The siren call

Labaree has written elsewhere (1989) that the original goal of American high schools, that of *democratic equality*, that is, that public high schools should

---

<sup>4</sup> Though I did not research these various institutions nor interview pertinent teachers who might verify such a claim, I make this statement, and others similar to it (in chapters 3 & 4 especially) in part upon the participants' perception, if not their outright claims in some instances, as to the tenor of their public school education. In many instances, however, it is possible to make fairly seemingly accurate inferences, if not indictments, based upon the premise that two students with first or second grade reading levels were passed on almost to high school graduation and quit school of their own volition. Many times, the facts, if only implicitly, speak for themselves. At times, then, I encourage the facts to speak more explicitly.

serve to ec

alternat

perspective

idea of the

access, that

staggering a

awards with

Let me

action to m

colleges rega

They have es

mathematics

advance se

but that st

student must

grade leve

department st

range from a

more stringent

problem for the

Six's Departm

permission fro

not without a

But other

terna college

recommendat

it not enroll in

serve to educate citizens in the Jeffersonian model (4), has deteriorated in the latter half of this century to equal access (p.16). Unfortunately, from this perspective regarding the Academic Skills Department and its students, the idea of the community college and its 'democratic stance' is more myth, equal access, than fact, or substance. Like Jason on the high seas of literacy, these struggling aspirants heed the siren call of a safe port, but instead find a harbor awash with broken promises.

Let me explain. Webber Community College has an explicit policy, in addition to the implicit one described above, that pertains to all community colleges regarding their stance on 'open access' and 'academic excellence.' They have established courses in developmental reading, writing, and mathematics aimed at the low skills student. When a student scores low on an admittance skills test, an ATB (*Ability to benefit*: A federal designation) hold is put on that student, and according to college policy, in reading, for example, the student must complete certain developmental courses until they reach a given grade level in reading (the college mandates this be an 8.1 grade level; the department strives for an 11.9 grade level. Several area community colleges range from a reading grade level of 10.0-11.5 to have the ATB hold removed, a more stringent policy than that of WCC, hence at least an outward show of concern for the education of the student such as Brady).(5) But the Academic Skills Department has long complained that students, with implicit, if not explicit, permission from college counsellors, by-pass the courses dictated by the ATB hold without any repercussion of an institutional sort.

But other repercussions abound, including the notion, derived from an internal college study, that 'underprepared' students who enroll in one of the developmental courses "persist longer and perform better" than students who do not enroll in these courses. Also, from that same study it was determined that

a remedy  
persistence  
Academic S  
Trustess to  
boundary st  
the Bounda  
more often  
nature").

Is the  
deal out of  
students n  
assistants,  
discussing  
student ne  
subject to  
students b  
fair the p  
Basic Re  
ATB no d

No  
these stud  
genuinely  
becoming  
adventure is  
promising

a remedial reading course was the second highest predictor of student persistence, just behind cumulative GPA (ASAC, 1997; p.8). Basically, the *Academic Skills Department* conducted a presentation to the WCC Board of Trustees to plead with them to enforce their own policies regarding these *boundary* students (the term is borrowed from Mike Rose's metaphor, *Lives on the Boundary* (1989), which is further explained by his insightful comment that "more often than we admit. a failed education is social, more than intellectual in nature").

Is the reading department 'manufacturing' its own myth, or making a big deal out of a minor problem. Judge for yourself. Since 1990, almost 40000 students have enrolled at the college with almost 20% of these, about 7500 aspirants, subject to an ATB hold in reading. So it is no small figure we are discussing. But even more revealing, is that in the Fall of 1996, the WCC student head count was about 10500 students. Of these, almost 1400 were subject to an ATB hold in reading. This included almost 600 of the 3100 new students that semester who were placed on the ATB hold in reading, showing that the problem is not diminishing. But how many students were enrolled in 'Basic Reading' courses that semester out of the almost 1400 who were on the ATB hold? Just over 12%, or 171 students! (ASAC, 1997; p.12).

#### Departmental repercussions

No wonder the department is concerned that the college policy regarding these students is not enforced, but is in fact, blatantly abused. The faculty is genuinely concerned that the hopes and futures of these aspirants are becoming unnecessarily impaired. In a way, the community college from this aperture is perpetuating the seemingly hazardous work of the public schools, promising yet failing to educate boundary students, especially in the sensitive

and viola

The

development

next stage

by no mean

education

but the de

and conce

passes to

obligatio

be as per

Age

described

oriented in

concentra

students

the one B

49, for t

genera s

and Bue

instructio

enunciate

narratives

the clas

and presc

a suppose

road, an



and pivotal area of literacy.

The figures do not show how many of the 171 students enrolled in these developmental reading courses succeeded, either tested out or went on to the next stage in the program, but to be sure, Brady, though not a common case, is by no means alone in his dropping the course and his dreams of a college education. The invisible effects of the neglect of this all-important policy is that it puts the department in an untenable situation--it must expend so much energy and concentration on 'marketing' its courses for survival, then executing these classes to the best of their abilities, that it necessarily detracts from their other obligations, including fine-tuning their curriculum and instruction. (6) This may be as pertinent a reason for Brady's demise as any other factor, or cost.

Again, let me explain. Currently, the department practices what may be described as a 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum. That is, it is a general, skills-oriented format that insinuates that a lot of reading creates a better reader and concentrates on improvements in comprehension and vocabulary skills, for all students. Although there are some adjustments made in the most basic course, the one Brady dropped, due to the very low reading level of the students (1.0-4.9), for the most part general instruction is not aimed at individuals, but at a general student audience. These methods are reminiscent of what Meacham and Buendia (1999) describe as the *modernist* approach to literacy and literacy instruction. That is, the curriculum (as distinguished from the instructors) enunciates attributes of objectivity and universality en route to 'totalizing narratives,' narratives which seek to transcend human differences in terms of race, class, gender, culture (p.510). This is just what a general, 'one-size-fits-all,' prescriptive curriculum does: lumps students together under the umbrella of a supposed range of reading skills, asks them to memorize the same vocabulary words and familiarize themselves with the same components of a

paragraph

the same to

This

may be mo

had rather

sensitivity to

loss. And m

however lat

community

the institut

attitude in te

department

curriculum a

not assist a

with her ame

needs to suc

And :

the curricu

gives the c

study insis

s due to the

causes for a

But se

students. like

they go to wh

the departme

that mean for

paragraph, as if their experiences and goals and literacy insufficiencies were all the same too.

This style is ameliorated by the aforementioned small class sizes (which may be more a product of a small clientele limited by disrespect for the ATB Hold rather than design), the supportive and safe atmosphere, and the sensitivity the instructors show the students and with which they assume their jobs. And many students, like Gale, do indeed improve their reading skills however laboriously, some markedly, and are able to pursue a regular community college curriculum with more confidence and ability. But to be sure the institutional costs imposed by the college regarding their laissez-faire attitude in terms of the ATB hold and their lack of apparent support for the department, and the costs (to the students) created by the department's general curriculum aimed at enhancing literacy skills, however seemingly necessary, do not assist a determined achiever like Gale to succeed on a level commensurate with her ambitions, nor ultimately engage Brady on a level and in a way that he needs to succeed, or at least persist with the opportunity for success.

And it seems that the department's approach to reading remediation, their curriculum, looks largely at skills and other reading process factors and ignores the compelling influences of reading disabilities that Johnson (and this study) insists form a substantial basis for persistent illiteracy. Again, part of this is due to the time constraints already detailed. But it still remains that viable causes for a student's continued reading failures are ignored and unallayed.

But several other questions still persist from all this. What about the students, like Brady, who do not successfully complete remediation? Where do they go, to whom do they turn? And what if the Board of Trustess complied with the department's request and enforced the ATB policy stringently: what would that mean for instruction in these suddenly larger and more plentiful courses,

arguably a

philosophical

and support

differences

ignore the E

perspective

already a w

And what co

nerse? Tra

why is this s

enough at We

Lobby

community c

students at n

and Returns

and insecurity

status. In her

these student

transition bac

Lobby Bay ad

336.

Workin

author describ

come, be se

these student

arguably an increase of over three hundred per cent? Would the same philosophical approach work? Would the courses still be as small and as safe and supportive and sensitive, even as the curriculum diminishes human differences? As matters now stand, what about these students on ATB hold who ignore the Basic Reading courses altogether? But more importantly from my perspective, and the question I would like to address, what costs, hazards, already await the individual literacy learner, those embedded in the institution? And what costs does the individual learner already levy against himself, or herself? That is, Brady and Gale have evaded literacy all of their adult lives-- why is this so and do these circumstances necessarily change because they enroll at Webber Community College?

#### **Institutional costs beyond tuition**

Libby Bay knows about non-traditional students returning to the community college years after graduating high school. She researched these students at her New York college and wrote about this study in "Twists, Turns, and Returns: Returning Adult Students" (1999). She documents the difficulties and insecurities these students face in their return to academics after their long hiatus. In her write-up, she looks at these challenges, but too, the satisfactions these students experience and discusses what the college can do to ease the transition back into school for these learners. Before discussing her findings, Libby Bay admits: "If anyone has stories to tell it is the returning adult student" (p.306).

Working mostly from mailed surveys and some brief interviews, the author describes students (mostly female and white with a largely affluent income) beset by trepidations, who for various reasons dare to return to school. These students worried about compromising their responsibilities, about the

time constraints school--even part time--would exact. Bay was surprised to find little indication of family resistance to these students' return to academics (as we will see was not the case with Brady), though it played a small part in the lives of some of the students she interviewed.

But though few found the coursework too difficult, many of the students felt a math and English anxiety, an insecurity about basic skills. This and other factors made them and the author wonder about the support system available at the college for such students, or more, how such systems could be activated and accessed.

Not just these students, but almost all of our students come to our campuses with baggage. The need for counseling services is heightened when the baggage has accumulated over many years (p.308).

It was not unusual for the students Bay included in her study to be honor students, but still students who worried about their academic performance, who suffered stress relative to their return to school, who would welcome support services to help acclimate them to their new venture. For many of these students, their trepidation was accented by the idea that they perceived the "community college as the place for another chance" (p.309). The students Bay interviewed responded to questions about why college was not an option upon graduation from high school. Money was often a factor, but so too were a lack of confidence, a lack of direction, a dissatisfaction with academics in the public schools, and the need to experience life a bit more before being tied to coursework (pp.307-08).

Throughout the article, money and tuition and school debts and depleted savings pop up as recurrent themes, tied directly to the students' perception of school and its costs. More implicit in the study are the costs that these non-traditional students endure and have endured for a number of years--a dearth of self-esteem and of their perception of their abilities, of confidence. Some see

school as risky, a venue in which they apply for a final chance to recover their life--but what if they don't make it? What if in fact this community college is merely an extension of a bad public school experience?

These latter costs were not emphasized in the article and the reader assumes that some may have been isolated responses from a small percentage of those questioned. Again, Bay worked with an audience who was largely relatively affluent white women, competent academically, who were non-traditional because of their age. Reading this account, it becomes apparent that many of the students have nothing to fear (academically), except fear itself.

But what about the non-traditional student who has legitimate cause for concern in their return to the community college? That is, what about the student who has never been successful in the public schools, in fact, looked upon school as occasions of derision and scorn? A member, not of the dominant culture, but a minority who was throughout his academic career seemingly expected to fail. A hopeful student who measures the costs of community college not in dollar signs, though that is too often a factor, but in other ways that though remotely akin to some of the costs incurred by Bay's students, would be largely unfathomable to them. (7)

When several of Bay's respondents mention a lack of confidence in their abilities to achieve in school, or that the prospects of continuing school meant a continuation of the embarrassment (p.307), most are speaking in the past tense, as a newly graduated eighteen year old. I wonder how many are like Brady, an eleventh grade drop-out with minimal literacy skills; a 30 year old black man working itinerant jobs, married and responsible for four young children? What special costs does he envision as he tries to fill out the application to Webber Community College in Treetops, a hub of midwestern higher education?

To be sure, Webber Community College offers support services to the

non-traditional  
not all of the  
informal  
educators  
stigmatized  
that genera  
competent  
to the edge

Brady  
educational  
cultural cap  
and a litera  
and the p  
college. La  
biographies  
know it  
literacy and  
a does to s  
understood  
context for

When  
year old, ma  
during his ju  
eventually  
any grade le



non-traditional student such as Brady and Gale and in large measure, most if not all of these services emanate from the Academic Skills Department in an informal manner. But in many ways, such support is offered from generous educators to deficient students/readers, who perhaps once again feel labelled, stigmatized, marginalized, 'found out.' This type of support is far different than that generated by Bay's study for non-traditional adults deemed to be competent. The competencies of Brady and Gale are more a side issue, pushed to the edge by their overriding deficit, the focus of their return to the classroom.

#### Orpheus and Galetea on campus: The myths re-told

Brady and Gale's stories are not only very interesting, but too, educationally provocative. That is, they not only confirm many aspects of the cultural capital literature, but too, sponsor many questions in terms of literacy and a literacy education, remedial and developmental reading and instruction, and the plight of and the costs encountered by adult students returning to college. Later, in chapters three and four respectively, I examine the literacy biographies of Brady and Gale in great detail and render analyses of them. But for now, it is helpful to offer brief sketches of their biographies pertaining to literacy and education especially, since the second chapter occasionally alludes to significant aspects of their transcripts. Too, that chapter is better understood with a notion of their histories in mind, thus providing a particular context for the more general contentions of the chapter.

When I interviewed Brady extensively several years ago, he was a thirty year old, married Black man with four children. He had dropped out of school during his junior year, very likely because he had too much integrity to (eventually) accept a degree he could not read. He had not been retained at any grade level and though threatened with it early in his academic career, he

had not been an official Special Education student. A very articulate, adept, and competent man, he worked at a variety of odd jobs over the years to help support his family; it was not unusual for him to quit a job, such as driving a truck, due to literacy constraints (i.e. he admitted he could not read the road signs fast enough).

Brady's elementary grade years were spent in a school heavily impacted with minorities (about a 50% Black population) during the early '70s when cultural dissonance, school readiness, and cultural awareness and acceptance of other cultures were not common school jargon or practice. As Rist (1970) so aptly describes it, students, even beginning students, were judged by their cultural capital, or lack of it, by their speech patterns, their clothing, their demeanor, their body odor. And of course, by their race. Since then, others have shown that these boundary students (who are created in the society and the classrooms) are, like Brady, competent, adept, articulate in their own fashion, and do not, as supposed, suffer deficits, but are merely different from the dominant culture's 'model' students (i.e. Anyon {1981}; Cazden, {1988}; Delpit, {1988}; Heath {1991}). But Rist (1970) shows how the students with 'low' cultural capital, those predicted to do poorly, eventually did so, the consequence of being treated as failures, what he called a 'self-fulfilling prophecy.' Even today, Treetops, Brady's home district, is grappling with a devastating *achievement gap* between its white and Black students, that has persisted from its roots in the early '70s.

Another feature often attributed to working and lower class students, especially boundary students, in the schools is that of resistance to education (i.e. Anyon, (1981); Erickson, (1984); Kohl, (1991)). Though Brady recalls sheepishly that he was not immune to 'horseplay' in the classroom, the more prevalent notion that comes through probing in this direction is that he resisted

the embarrassment, humiliation and shame that attended his not being able to 'do' school well, especially as regards reading, a large part of the early grades' curriculum. In order to defend himself against these continual occasions of degradation, Brady eventually built up a complex defense system, what I have likened to African folklore's *trickster* mechanisms, that helped him evade the humiliating circumstances, but with it, the learning and literacy too, even as he maintained as best he could 'normal appearances' (Goffman, 1970). Since so much of Brady's persona, as I see it, resides within the trickster realm, a brief sketch of the trickster in a few pertinent cultures and how these relate to Brady will be offered. But later, in Chapter 3, a much more extensive look at the trickster will be given.

In speaking of the trickster, I hearken back to the African and West Indies folk tales and myths and eventually the American imports of these tales that tell of a certain folk-hero.

This funny fellow is a rogue, a wise and loveable trickster [speaking of Anansi].  
He is a shrewd and cunning figure who triumphs over larger foes (McDermott, 1972).

Brer Rabbit is an American version of the same, "the funniest and most effective trickster of all, and he remains our best example of how the small and weak can often outwit and thereby triumph over the large and powerful" (Rees, 1967). And this is how I relate the idea of the trickster to Brady in one very important sense, who in dealing with his educational woes and their attendant potential for humiliation, used his tricks as "a sort of passport to survival in a far-from-ideal world" (Bennett, 1994). And just like the trickster, whose cunning at times boomerangs on him, Brady's tricks, meant to minimize his conspicuous lack of literacy and the shame he knew accompanied this, concurrently managed to evade an eventual acquisition of literacy and learning, since the retention of the former, the trickster strategies, precluded the apprehension of the latter, learning to read. Again, this is a large feature of Brady's developed

persona

As

so as to

any grade

gad to be

re) upon

boast that

energy a

of the tro

conquer

a son of

re treat

remode

that in o

which he

includes

feared a

too con

l

reading

finches

classro

re ca

and h s

accepte

(

studen

persona, for it is tied in such an integral way with his personal cost of education.

As a consequence of his evasion strategies and ability to 'play the con' so as to maintain a semblance of normal appearances, he was not retained at any grade level in school (as was alluded to before, teachers probably were glad to be done with him and pass him on). But more importantly, he came to rely upon these strategies so much in his social and work lives, that he could boast that few people in his acquaintance knew of his inability to read. All his energies and intellectual prowess had gone into fortifying this complex schema of the trickster mask. So much so, that when it came time to set goals and conquer his literacy difficulties, Brady faced a severe cost in returning to school, a sort of emotional tuition not publicized in the WCC bulletins. Confronted with the reality of a classroom and an instructor, not only was he transported, reminded of previous unpleasant memories, but he realized, if only intuitively, that in order to truly learn this time around, he would have to relinquish that which had been his most valuable ally, his nest of strategies and defenses. Included in the cost of his possible re-education, was the notion too that his wife feared a new, educated Brady, because he might then find his family and her too confining, too pedestrian to fit in his educated aperture.

Like Orpheus, the past haunted Brady. On the verge of the threshold leading to the beginning of a new life, Brady entered the classroom and flinched. He looked behind him and saw the humiliating experiences of classrooms past and his goals dissolved and disappeared, wraith-like. He left the classroom and returned to his former life, deprived now of his wife, after all, and his family, but too, his hope, his dream, anchored now only with his adopted persona and his normal appearances.

Gale, like Daisy, blossomed during her first year as a community college student. And like Galetea, she was enabled to trade in the clay of her old life for

a new beginning, a new life. Reviewing the events of Gale's life of clay, one wonders at the remarkable transition. Certainly, for Gale, education proved to be Pygmalion, a sculptor she had been seeking since she was a child, someone to chisel away the terrible classroom experiences that clung to her like a nightmare, to release the competent individual she knew resided within.

To listen to Gale relate her story, it is difficult to imagine her as a reticent early elementary student in Mississippi in the early '60s, like Brady, trying to figure out ways to fend off the humiliation of her school ignorance and seeming ineptitude. For now, she speaks with a wisdom and surety that belies this too humble scholastic beginning, where, as Gale puts it, "you get whipped at school and whipped at home" for seemingly arbitrary reasons. Even as a child she wanted desperately to learn, to read like the others in her class, to go to the blackboard as they did and perform mathematics and various literacy tasks. Miraculous deeds in the eyes of a seemingly inept child. But she never did learn in that situation in the deep South, save, as did Brady, to avoid as best she could the attendant embarrassment of her incapacities.

Eventually, upon entering high school, Gale moved to Treetops and attended high school there for two years, but it was more of the same. A counselor virtually laughed in her face at her ignorance of history, especially Black history. Since her mother worked days, Gale avoided school as much as she could get away with it, and took to drink and drugs to assuage her sinking self-concept. Eventually, she dropped out in the tenth grade, only to return, and drop out in her junior year. For over twenty years her life was dominated by alcohol and drugs, during which time she had four children whom she knew she was continually neglecting due to her own problems.

When she arrived on campus, she was attended with a reading level of barely fourth grade, this after just completing her G.E.D. But she was also

attended by a deep hunger for learning and a yearning to rectify some of her past mistakes and some of her past. She had been 'clean' for several years after her first year at the community college, a year in which Gale studied and performed mightily, a huge challenge for someone who had not been successful academically in her entire life.

But her determination made up for her prior inadequacies. And her resolve for the future gave ample warning that she was not to be deterred. Continually during our interviews she reflected on her past, on her early struggles with schooling that established the pattern that was to rule her scholastically for so many years. This was reminiscent of Brady's pre-occupation with his early years of schooling. But unlike Brady, for Gale, these experiences became incentives and she set about her college career as if intent upon salvaging the memory of the shrinking, little girl who was her self, as if the little girl, the memory, or its wraith, implored the woman to gain for her some type of resuscitation, or redemption. This seems to highlight Gale's ambition--to compensate now and in the future for every failure the little girl had to endure. The little girl was helpless, vulnerable, admits Gale, squelched by an insensitive educational system that merely tossed aside those who did not keep up. Today, Gale gains strength, and life, from those prior, long-ago weaknesses that emerged as a consequence of a rigid educational institution and inflexible, myopic teachers. Though her vision is trained straight ahead, towards a bountiful future, Gale cannot help but look back at what preceded these events. But not as Brady and Orpheus did, but as Galetea might, in her joy at the promise of a new life, made even brighter by the looming clay shadow of the past that will forever be etched in her memory.

### Beyond the myth

It is so interesting to note, even in these brief literacy biographies, the sharp differences between Gale's and Brady's approaches to literacy and the reasons for these, their goals and aptitudes for them, their various constraints and how they reconcile them, or not. But it is interesting to note too that had Brady not left his first classroom at WCC, Orpheus and Galetea might have shared the same classroom and the same curriculum. A curriculum that dissolves human differences, dissolves too individual constraints and goals and aptitudes. It also ignores meaning and the social aspects of reading. The instructor has an answer key to questions posed by the narratives in the textbook. Like the 'New Critic' (Meacham & Buendia, 1999; p.511) approach to literature spawned by the modernist tradition, the author's meaning rules and is to be yanked out whole by the fisherman/student and displayed, trophy-like, as an indication of comprehension.

What exactly is this brand of literacy that students like Gale and Brady encounter in the community college's developmental reading classes? And does it in fact ameliorate already overwhelming costs they must tolerate, or in fact, does this brand of literacy and its manufacturing process, invite even more such costs? Is this brand of literacy and its process ripe for the adult 'illiterate' and will it fit their needs, alleviate previous reading difficulties, and allow them to grasp literacy with the firm grip of a citizen in a democracy and a potentially worthy employee?

Already we have shown that the community college in general and Webber Community College in particular is beset by certain factors that already constrain the developmental reading student, that prove costly to him. And we have shown that these costs are and can be manifold, not isolated examples of a system gone awry: they are in fact inherent in the system. In general, the



promise to

la's Gael

pro"ered a

ephemera

comm ss d

reading o a

genera? C

promise the community college extends seems to be a myth. For now, Brady fails; Gale seems to succeed. For now. But if in fact other promises--the literacy proffered and its guarantee--are mythical, might not Gale's small victories be ephemeral, her enthusiasm and success eventually expire? This is our next commission: once in the sanctuary of the community college's developmental reading classroom, is the student safe from the myths that plague the college in general? Or do these broken promises permeate even this shelter?

## Chapter 2: Locating the Literacy Landscape

### Lost in the (ter)rain

And so the younger one [in learning to read] was launched on the perilous journey, crossing the bridge that can never be recrossed (p.88).

Once in a while I take my castoffs down and turn their pages for exercise, stroke them a bit. They have the slightly dusty, forlorn patina of people seldom held or loved, while their neighbors stand upright with self-esteem, for having been known, partaken of intimacies. I am regretful but my heart is hardened (p.7).

How are we to spend our lives, anyway? That is the real question. We read to seek the answer, and the search itself--the task of a lifetime--becomes the answer (p.13).

-Lynne Sharon Schwartz, 1996; *Ruined by Reading*

One of the more remarkable episodes in my brief career as a developmental reading instructor occurred innocently enough during a vocabulary review for one of the 'higher' level courses in the Academic Skills Department. (1) On this day, the students, a dozen or so, had (supposedly, to one degree or another) reviewed the 20 vocabulary words and accomplished the attendant work sheets. My routine was to review the words, then go over the worksheets for which the students are graded, ask for any outstanding questions, then administer a quiz regarding these words. Too often, some of the students learn the words for the day then fall below a 70% on their Unit Test two weeks later.

But on this particular day we were looking at a word with which several of the students were having trouble understanding. In what I thought was a nice pedagogical move, I compared the word's meaning to another vocabulary word we had studied a month earlier. This was too much for Carey; she blew out her frustration with a heavy sigh and feigned a momentary cry. Spotting this, I asked her to explain her reaction so that the other class members might learn from her perspective. Usually reticent, she demurred and regretted her brief display. She was a young woman, just out of high school, with limited reading skills and a

low self-confidence who had aspirations for further college and a good job someday. But I insisted (though I had insisted before, she usually stuck to her reticence). This time, Carey drew a deep breath and looked at me. This point obviously troubled her a great deal. I braced for the worst. She stammered.

“Why are there so many words?”

“What?” is all I could manage. I was stunned. Her query was not posed with vengeance, nor anger, nor vehemence. There was a cry in her voice. She truly wanted to understand why the language could not be more simple and accommodating, why the need for so many words if they were in fact, as I intimated continually that semester, akin in definition to other words. I admit that I explained the language poorly that morning

I used words like ‘nuance’ and ‘context’ and ‘deeper meanings’, but I’m afraid I left Carey still frustrated, still vexed with a vocabulary list that seemed unnecessarily long and superfluous. But I have been thinking of Carey’s powerful question ever since. If nothing else, I gained a deeper appreciation for the students who inhabit these classes, a much better understanding of the landscape they patrol. And I’ve wondered, for a long time, why it is that Lynne Sharon Schwartz (1996) and others like her, for certainly she is not an anomaly, have such a deep and abiding, rich and romantic love for and appreciation of words, such that she regrets there are not more with which to turn a phrase or conquer the ineffable. To her, this is a source of eternal frustration and vexation. She recognizes the power of words; she believes in their beauty, their versatility, their depth. She embraces them; possesses them as best she can. Schwartz believes in words, while Carey is miffed there are so many. Why is this? And what does it mean for the developmental reading student and her pursuit of literacy? Is this another encumbrance to their realization of literacy, another cost? Or is it in fact perhaps the harshest cost of all? I would like to

investiga  
identify s  
words fr  
coordina  
consequ

To

Tr

is some  
act. mo.  
no g. v  
ether. l.  
st. do  
testam  
et. bac  
bus p  
aff. n.  
care n  
with o  
perso  
reced  
S-e e  
treac  
treac  
treac  
crea

investigate this proposition even as I roam the bumpy literacy landscape and identify several of its features and show perhaps that Carey's distance from words, from the language, from literacy, as is Brady's and Gale's, might be a conditioned response to literacy and learning, an arranged one with consequences for their pursuit of literacy.

To have and have not: The developmental reading student's lack of connection with books

The title to Lynne Sharon Schwartz' brief testament, *Ruined by Reading*, is somewhat ironic. That is, she by no means believes a person is ruined by this act, though she does admit that a girl can get sick from reading (p.91) and that if no girl was ever ruined by reading, then, on the same token, she was not saved either (p.114). It is assumed that the title is playing upon that old Victorian shibboleth that certain things can ruin a girl. Indeed, Schwartz' piece is a testament to her love of reading, though the book begins with a challenge to the efficacy and purpose of reading, even beloved as it is. She spends the hundred plus pages detailing events from her youth and adulthood that confirm this deep affinity for reading. She explores numerous books and dramas and poems (I dare not say 'text,' for the author abhors and eschews this word: "What is wrong with being unabashedly a novel or a poem?" P.108) and authors by way of personal and scholarly anecdotes, immersing the reader in a highly literate reception that demonstrates her own uncanny immersion in the act of reading. She explores reading too, her brand of it, whereby she admits that she did not "read for the story, only for the taste" (p.65), confirming what she stated earlier, that she enjoyed, no loved, reading so much she practically licked the words off the page (p.24). As can be seen, the author demonstrates too a very literate and creative imagination and displays a zest for words. She lives her love.

But what is most fascinating about this love affair between Schwartz and

reading is that it is so entwined with every aspect and moment of her life. "We should theorize this way (about books we have read) every waking hour" (p.82). And it is truly reading that the author loves, not so much the books, though she states that "(t)here were some books I wanted to possess even more intimately than by reading" (p.66). This *intimacy* that Schwartz feels with reading and wants to enhance even more, is a feeling intrinsic to her, represented and exercised by way of books, the word, but a connection that surpasses the page.

...in the end, even if all my books were to vanish, I would still have them somewhere, if I had read them attentively enough. Maybe the words on the page are not even the true book, in the end, only a gateway to the book that recreates itself in the mind and lasts as long as we do (p.85).

Ultimately, reading is the gift, reading is the key. The pages are in a way absorbed, translated by way of Rosenblatt's (1978) *transaction*, and stored, no, cherished in the mind and body forever. The impression, the lasting impression, transcends the book itself. Relishing the idea of the book upon its consumption is more the 'real' book in this beholder's eye.

As I read Schwartz' pledge of allegiance and love to reading, I was continually reminded of Carey and Brady and Gale and their 'perilous journey.' I have remarked often these past years as an instructor in the developmental reading classes at Webber Community College, that the students indeed lack an affinity with reading, with words, with books. And I sadly wondered what our classes were doing to amend this lack of connection, but simply treating reading like a mechanical process--step one, step two, step three; proselytizing the joys of reading via personal anecdotes and plentiful, well-placed placards and posters, and assigning the students 1000 pages of 'outside' reading from books they choose in a kismet fashion, in many cases, Romances, that do not necessarily 'show off' the language well. It is not unusual to see book reports on texts from which movies have been made and I (and other instructors too) wonder if in fact the book was read, or watched. Their writing skills too are so

on that

outline is

could read

report) A

be ns. te

at key th

Br

programs

functional

convert

second

design

needs

the nat

read

not of

search

empe

post

read

st. co

read

as

here

exce



low that it is difficult to determine if they have read the book (and the book report outline is so feeble that the department offers that in many cases the student could read the jacket and a few pages from the book and mimic an acceptable report). And I hesitate to quiz them on the books personally for fear they would be insulted by the insinuation. Given their low reading abilities, it would be unlikely that they could answer our inquiries very well.

Brodkey (1991) asserts that too often in literacy campaigns and programs--and from her description, community colleges--literacy is defined as functional literacy and that "most functional literacy materials define literacy conventionally as a set of reading tasks, and reduce reading to lockstep decoding procedures and multiple-choice comprehension questions...Curricula designed from such materials define the functional illiterate as someone who needs to learn how to follow instructions" (p.165). And Nespor (1991) describes the nature of reading that emerged from a community college's developmental reading course that he studied: "Reading' was thus presented as the activity, not of constructing meanings or using written texts for practical purposes, but of searching for fully formed and unambiguous 'generalizations' supposedly embedded in the texts by their authors" (p.185).

The mechanical process, 'lockstep procedures,' the proselytizing, the posters, the reading assignments for the sake merely of reading, the thin and meager soup of a book report, the suspicions--the developmental reading students have seen these all before and have maintained their distance from reading. And this is a big part of the problem of the students' inability to read well--not only the distance, but the worn-out strategies and approaches to literacy that seldom take the individual and her life and sensibilities and experiences into account.

Neuman et al (1998) realize that "literacy is not something that can be

'done' to

B.

prepacka

are used

s and the

in a low

gaining

A.

moder

de gntu

create in

Tarren

involve

howeve

invoking

T

realistic

scholar

participa

'done' to people" (p.250).

In contrast to prepackaged curricula and predetermined objectives, [literacy] programs need to engage participants in their own education, connecting literacy--the discourse practices and the ways of using language--with real-life social issues and concerns in the community (p.250).

But again, this lack of connection, this 'lockstep procedure' curriculum, prepackaged and predetermined, is a cost that Brady and Gale and their peers are used to, that they have seen throughout their academic careers, such as it is, and the institution and instructors have been very efficacious and generous in allowing the students to accept the blame for their apparent failure in not gaining literacy from such programs and approaches to literacy.

Intimacy: an integral part of literacy acquisition?

At one point in *Talking Voices*, Deborah Tannen (1989) discusses the importance of emotion in terms of oral and written communication. (2) In a delightful and fascinating chapter meant to delineate three strategies used to create *involvement*--repetition, constructed dialogue, and details and imagery--Tannen examines this idea by describing an example of academic writing using involvement strategies that are more common to fiction. Throughout the chapter however, she underscores the tight connection between emotion and thought. Invoking Friedrich (1986), she explains that

...images work through the individual imagination to create involvement. The invoking of details--specific, concrete, familiar--makes it possible for an individual to recall and a hearer to recreate a scene in which people are in relation to each other and to objects in the world. In this way, and by a kind of paradox, the individual imagination is a key to interpersonal involvement, and interpersonal involvement is a key to understanding language (p.166).

The academic writing in the chapter that Tannen describes is vital and realistic and meaningful because the author, who is describing transactions at a scholarly conference on cybernetics, is able to "bring readers closer to the participants and their ideas by creating a sense of immediacy and intimacy"

(pp 169-170)

emotion

involvement

Ta

cognition

acoustic

in WOOD

between

reading

emotion

words a

her and

just ma

Carey v

suspici

than

and re

needs c

espec

how so

and c

(pp.169-70). She (the conference rapporteur) purposefully seeks to join emotion and thought, recognizing this marriage as a necessary component of involvement, meaning and understanding.

Tannen extends this notion of “the inseparability of emotion and cognition” (p.170) by pointing to another researcher’s work with literacy acquisition.

Heath (1985) explains that learning to read is not merely a matter of acquiring decoding skills. Children learn to read when written materials are integrated in their lives, when they know they will find themselves in situations requiring them to talk about what they have read. Similarly, to be motivated to read, children need models of literate adults with whom they feel intimate. It is the human intimacy, or involvement, that gives motivation and meaning to the acquisition of literacy...(p.172).

I find Tannen’s and Heath’s points to be terribly relevant to the students in WCC’s Academic Skills Department. Harken back to the sharp contrast between Schwartz and Carey in their approaches to and involvement with reading. What defines Carey’s perspective is very much a seeming lack of emotion, an impersonal relationship to language and literacy, a tossing aside of words and meaning like spent matches. But to say that there is no emotion in her, and others in her situation, relations to reading, would be inaccurate. It is just that the relationship is one born of frustration and anxiety and suspicion. Carey was not so much angry with language for its redundancy, as she was suspicious, worried that the complex layers of language were an attempt to thwart her literacy efforts.

Brady offers special insight into this tenuous relationship with language and reading too. Describing one of his visits to his son’s school, where he often helps out in the classroom, an unusual venture for a working class parent, especially one with such low literacy skills (Lareau, 1987), Brady talks about how some of the kids in this second grade classroom cower when he begins to hand out the books for a reading assignment. He focuses upon one child in

particular.

But as I passed those books out you could see the change in his attitude when it is time to sit down and everybody in the class studies one page and like the teacher's standing..."O.k., who wants to do the first problem?" (p.21).

Of course, the students in question are afraid of being called on, but afraid more of the shame and humiliation that attends their limited literacy skills. To them, unlike Schwartz, reading is not a time of anticipation and joy, but one of dread. As a child, Brady admits to having books in his home and that his mother would buy the children books, but he eschewed the practice of reading. "But I just never read, [though] I would have books" (p.28). When the emotional association with books is such a negative one, it is no wonder that these students' responses to reading is marked by a necessary, self-defensive insouciance.

Yet Schwartz so much embraces literacy, reading, words, that her love is often described in terms of oral anticipation and gratification. Her first encounter with fairy tales was a delightful meal. "They tasted bitter and pungent, like curries" (p.24). And though her father disapproved of the young Lynne Sharon reading at the dinner table, an uncivil act in his mind, she found few acts "so completely satisfying. The two infusions, food and words, intermingle" (p.64). Remember, Schwartz did not read for the story so much as the taste (p.65), so that a survey course in literature made her want to "sample every century and take every course, like a greedy person at a buffet" (p.81). But in truth, reading and books enhanced all Schwartz' senses, for what is undeniable about her connection to literacy is that emotion and cognition are continuously at play.

Heath alludes to this connection as 'interpersonal,' but one's affinity to books and reading may be 'intrapersonal,' if you will, recognizing all the while that reading is a social act that is difficult to isolate to the individual. But too, the intimacy that Heath speaks about in terms of a conduit from one individual to

another to facilitate reading, may carry over to the act itself. That is, if intimacy may be a part of learning to read, of embracing reading, then it must certainly be transferrable to the individual's approach to reading and the manner in which they cherish books and words and language. And I think Heath intimates this at the end of her brief passage--the intimacy is interpersonal, but it becomes intrapersonal in terms of acquiring literacy.

Or not. What is striking about Carey's stance towards reading and words and books, as is many other such students, is its 'impersonal' attitude. Smith (1988) might contend that Carey feels no 'ownership' with reading or with books, that kids are always learning from a very young age, and that reading should be just one more activity learned in their life. In this way then, reading should bear an 'organic connection to the rest of the reader's life' (McCormick, 1994; p.32). But Carey and many others are missing this 'organic connection', are indeed strangers to the act, to the book, to the word.

But the question that riles this study, is why is that feeling missing on the part of many of the students encountered in the Academic Skills Department? Why are/were they deprived of this organic connection and can it be yet established? Can there be, perhaps, an adult form of emergent literacy, replete with intimacy? These matters are addressed implicitly in the ensuing literacy biographies of Brady and Gale, but it is important to look at them now in a more general way. In doing so, we will further explore the literacy landscape of American society and its classrooms. And too, hopefully, we will come to see that for aspirants like Brady, intimacy in terms of reading is a moot point, considering his difficulties in acquiring literacy, or is it? Given a fertile ground for the establishment of this intimacy with literacy at a young age, could Brady's literacy story have been far different? And are community colleges, like WCC, obviating any chance of its students gaining an intimacy with literacy by

pursuing

El

these st

they do

tees Th

and Ga e

to conio

appropri

readers

resemb

style, b

would-

an imp

exclud

the a

perso

perce

the

of (

Ca

an

the

the

the



pursuing their skills approach to the instruction of developmental reading?

### Teachers and the Institution and Reading

But, in a way, I am as culpable as others of limiting literacy in terms of these students and of casting them in an essentialist shadow, when I ask why they do not share the intimacy with books and reading that another person feels. That is, simply, I contend that one of the greatest costs students like Brady and Gale face throughout their lives in their struggle to attain literacy is having to conform to a very narrow definition of what literacy is and how it is to be appropriated and used. I seem to further narrow that vision when I intimate that readers should embrace literacy as does Schwartz, that their reading should resemble hers. But my point is not one of what should be in terms of reading style, but what should be in terms of opportunity. Sadly, I believe that many would-be readers are deprived not only of the opportunity to gain or to choose an intimacy with reading, to avail themselves of it, but worse, deprived of, or excluded from participation in the act itself. Many readers could take it or leave it (the act of reading). But they have no difficulty with it, are not encumbered personally, socially, or in terms of employment by it, so their non-intimate perception of reading is viewed as a stylistic feature--like wearing a hat or not--rather than as an impediment to be lumped with all the others clogging the path of literacy to the boundary student.

Meanwhile, Webber Community College holds up a dual lens in their classrooms. On the one side, the joys of reading, the intimacies to be anticipated, are expounded, not only by way of the posters alluded to before, but by recommendations for the outside reading, by personal anecdotes on the part of the instructors, and by the texts and their readings that are used (many show literacy and life success stories). On the other side, that very technical,

skills-or

(from po

the texts

phrases

with the

reading

are a gr

mechan

mean ng

student

and the

promote

array of

more in

reading

grore

interac

is a

cat

3 be

7.8

cos

rea

is

skills-oriented, lockstep approach to reading is evidenced not only by the claims (from posters and anecdotes) for better employment opportunities, but more, by the texts that break reading down in pieces, to paragraphs, to sentences, to phrases, to words, so that the student can study these pieces, familiarize herself with them, put them back together when in the act of reading, then show their learning and understanding in dubious quizzes and tests, that wittingly or not, are aligned with a political and ideological stance. That is, that reading is mechanical and skills-based and can best be learned that way; that the meaning of a passage, or story, or book, is embedded in the pages and it is the student's task to yank the correct meaning from that text even if it (the process and the meaning) make no sense; and that the single Literacy that is being promoted, however it is identified, happens to be appropriate to the diverse array of students who inhabit these courses. And this is what I want to explore more in terms of the questions and contentions surrounding intimacy and reading: the political and ideological aspects of literacy that are so often ignored, the literacies that go continually unrecognized, and the thin slice of literacy that is in fact promoted.

### **A One-way street: Literacy, not literacies**

Street (1995) provides a brilliant venue for such a discussion throughout his book, *Social Literacies*. Responding to various literacy programs and campaigns that seem to boast a monolithic concept of what literacy is and how it is best acquired and then what this means to the recipient, Street addresses three areas pertinent to this study in that they convey a subtle though persistent cost to the adult 'illiterate' and too, help us understand better the distance to reading and schooling with which many of these students seem to be burdened. His ideas also give us a better picture of the educational classroom the

boundary student endures and what it portends for their participation in the literate culture. The three areas to be examined are briefly: a.) the 'great divide' theory, which situates the adult 'illiterate' and others' (especially teachers and instructors) impressions and perceptions of them; b.) the notion of multiple literacies and their cancellation by a single Literacy and the construction and production of stigmas that characterize the 'illiterate'; and c.) the 'pedagogization' of literacy, in which this single, dominant Literacy is valued and reified, marginalizing all others. Of course, we will see that these three areas overlap and that they are all imbued with notions of power and ideology which serve to enhance some people, some students, while marginalizing others, all under the umbrella of literacy and literacy instruction.

Street succinctly defines the 'great divide' theory: "'illiterates' are fundamentally different from literates" (p.21). Kintgen et al (1988) tells us in what ways they are supposedly fundamentally different. In their introduction to *Perspectives on Literacy*, they state that this theory "suggests that literacy affects the ways members of a society think: literate thought is conceptual, non-literate thought, concrete. As opposed to their non-literate counterparts, literates engage in abstraction, generalization, systematic thinking, defining, logos rather than mythos, puzzlement over words as words, and speculation on the features of the language" (p.xii). Street adds that this has social ramifications too, in that social groups lacking in literacy, but living in a mostly literate country, will be perceived as being disadvantaged, 'backward,' and that the lack of literacy is the cause of this. But when properly infused with the panacea literacy, social mobility follows, along with economic and political equality (p.21).

But Street and others (i.e. Shannon, 1993) know that linking the acquisition of literacy skills to employment, as community colleges are prone to do if only as a marketing ploy, is a false connection. He states in no uncertain

terms th  
employ  
ethnic  
depriva  
to job ad  
sons ip  
mama n  
literacy e

Bl  
for adun  
have low  
younger  
the tra  
school  
certain

divide  
ration  
aspect  
of the  
entw  
's g  
litera  
'grea  
come  
P 16  
the r

terms that studies (i.e. Graff, 1979) show that when it comes to securing employment, literacy takes a secondary role to issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, "that the lack of literacy is more likely to be a symptom of poverty and deprivation than a cause" (p.18). Street also claims that literacy tests connected to job applications provide more a gatekeeping function than a true indication of skills (p.18). Brodkey (1991) situates this literacy/job connection best when she maintains that "(i)lliteracy does not explain unemployment any more than literacy explains bureaucracy" (p.165).

Beyond this myth, the 'great divide' theory has tremendous ramifications for adult non-readers because it provides a built-in rationale for instructors to have lower expectations for such students. But such can be damaging to other, younger students too, who may be classified as a group to share some or all of the traits of the non-literate, or oral culture, especially in the first years of formal schooling when children enter the classroom as part of an oral culture, though certain of their counterparts are already skilled in certain literacy practices. (3)

But Street maintains that these distinctions popularized by the 'great divide' theory are in fact myths, results more of early research emerging from an 'autonomous' view of literacy, that is, one that studies literacy in its technical aspects, not taking into consideration social context. Of late, a contrasting view of literacy, the 'ideological' model, whereby researchers see literacy as entwined with cultural and power structures in a society and realize the "significance of the socialization process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants" (p.29), has ameliorated some of the distinctions of the 'great divide.' But many of these newer research views in this area, in fact, contends Street, are but softer versions of the same autonomous viewpoint (p.160). But in contrast to the research that seems to validate the outcomes of the 'great divide' theory, Street sees these supposed 'illiterates' indulging in

and possessing “(p)lay on figures of speech, skill in rhetoric, as well as the ability to develop and appreciate different genres” and other traits and skills that they are not supposed to have (p.22). Indeed, Scribner and Cole (1988), after extensive research with the Vai, a West African traditional culture, and their varied literacy practices, had to conclude that their studies suggest “that the metaphor of a ‘great divide’ may not be appropriate for specifying differences among literates and nonliterates under contemporary conditions” (p.70).

Ogbu (1988) neatly reinforces this point in his discussion of the educational travails of the contemporary African American student in an article into which we will delve shortly. Eschewing the notion that the school failure of Black children is due to their emanating from an oral culture, he points out that their school problems as regards learning are far different from those of the “members of the so-called oral cultures of small-scale societies and immigrants into the United States from residual cultures of more complex societies” (p.241). These children from an oral culture, Ogbu maintains via the pertinent research, upon the introduction of schooling, find their cognitive and linguistic or communicative capacities moving closer to those of middle-class populations of more advanced, literate societies. Addressing the problem more directly, Ogbu succinctly asks of the supposed ‘great divide’ backers: “Why, then, after generations of school attendance by blacks and centuries of interaction with whites, haven’t their cognitive and communicative strategies changed to those of the white middle class?” (p.230).

But Street’s observations regarding the “supposed illiterates” play and facility with language (as well as Scribner and Cole’s and Ogbu’s conclusions) are not recognized or attributed to certain persons and groups, but especially to the adult non-reader because the ‘autonomous’ researcher neglects the social implications of literacy regarding these individuals and teachers view them too

other

inter

second

are neg

are

boast a

acquired

recogn

single

states

and ca

by tech

by

steps

what

indiv

Peop

camp

when

div

here

St

Grea

St

and

and

Se



often from a single perspective, the classroom lens, when, as Street asserts, "(l)iteracy itself varies with social context" (p.23). And this segues nicely into the second area of Street's discussion, the idea of multiple literacies and how these are neglected even as the 'illiterate' becomes unfairly stigmatized.

Responding to various literacy programs and campaigns that seem to boast a monolithic and self-assured concept of what literacy is and how it is best acquired and then what this means to the recipient, Street suggests instead the recognition of "the multiplicity of literacy practices rather than assuming that a single Literacy has to be transferred in every Literacy Campaign." Further he states that "questions regarding which literacy is appropriate for a given context and campaign is itself a political question, not simply a matter of neutral choice by technical 'experts'" (p.14).

These recommendations of course may be extrapolated to other literacy sites, besides literacy campaigns, i.e. schools and community colleges, but what they signal, distressingly, is a lack of recognition of 'local' literacies, of individual and community competencies and ways of doing and knowing. "People are not 'tabula rasa,' waiting for the novel imprint of literacy, as many campaigns [and schools] seem to assume" (Street, 1995; p.15). Especially when the common fruits of literacy--some of those suggested by the 'great divide' theory and especially, enhanced employment--are overblown. "Lack of literacy skills may...be less of a handicap in daily life than is often represented" (Street, 1995; p.18). But what is not less of a handicap to these people is the great burden the stigma of illiteracy provides.

And Street recognizes that the rhetoric of such literacy campaigns and programs perpetuate, if not construct and produce, descriptions and attitudes and beliefs that characterize and stigmatize the 'illiterate' such that the stigma becomes more oppressive than the lack of literacy competence. And the point of

content

idea the

single

and sk

of in me

and wa

necessa

and dec

power a

succeed

introduc

previous

situated

Pa

crampio

why at s

construct

and...to d

contention in understanding the problem and the people affected by it is the idea that the 'illiterate' is gauged against an arbitrary standard defined by a single Literacy, a single literacy concept, completely ignoring the competencies and skills that the individual might bring to the literacy table.

It is not only meaningless intellectually to talk of 'the illiterate,' it is also socially and cultural damaging. In many cases it has been found that people who have come forward to literacy programmes because they think of themselves as 'illiterate' have considerable literacy skill but may be needing help in a certain area (Street, 1995; p.19).

But of course this person has been conditioned and stigmatized to think of himself in an inferior manner, as incompetent, as having no skills, as a lost and wandering soul waiting for the literacy messiah. But this conditioning is not necessarily a feature of adulthood. Oftentimes the groundwork for this stigma and debillitating self-concept has been set some time before.

This is what the third point addresses--how schooling, beset by factors of power and ideology in terms of literacy, sets the stage for certain students to succeed even as others are necessarily shoved to the margins. Street introduces this discussion, a continuation really of what we have looked at previously, by posing a question that penetrates to the heart of an ideologically-situated literacy.

...how is it that one particular variety [of the multiple literacies] has come to be taken as the only literacy? Among all of the different literacies practiced in the community, the home, and the workplace, how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalize them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate? Non-school literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling" (p.106).

Responding to the issue and debate regarding *cultural literacy*, which champions a single literacy, spearheaded by Hirsch (1987), Street wonders why at school and even at home, "dominant conceptions of literacy are constructed and reproduced in such a way as to marginalize alternatives and...to control key aspects of language and thought" (p.106).

literacy

literacy

usage of

envs of

teachin

an ideol

reading

at

male a

inva da

literacy

rather th

comes a

domina

the wide

of peda

domina

literacy

which o

interac e

by peop

literacy

socia c

model is

Street sees this occurring by way of what he calls the 'pedagogization' of literacy, the mechanism which spawns the meanings and uses of this dominant literacy. By his use of 'pedagogy' Street is deviating from the common, narrow usage of the term which signifies "specific skills and tricks of the trade," and envisions a broader concept, one that portrays the institutional aspects of teaching and learning. "(P)edagogy in this sense has taken on the character of an ideological force controlling social relations in general and conceptions of reading and writing in particular" (p.107; italics in original).

Based upon a modern, western literacy, "with its emphasis on formal, male, and schooled aspects of communication," this dominant literacy not only invalidates, or destroys other literacies and their features, but infuses this school literacy with "western assumptions about schooling, power, and knowledge rather than being necessarily intrinsic to literacy itself" (p.110). Of course, it comes as no surprise that Street asserts that this single version of literacy, dominant as it is in the schools, is reflective more of power and dominance in the wider society than necessarily merely a school-related matter. The process of pedagogization helps tremendously to sustain these power relations and dominance in school and society, in part by permeating the home-based literacy instruction which further damages community and local literacies, of which of course there are initially large distinctions (between school and local literacies). This occurs because an 'autonomous' model of literacy is assumed by people--even against their own experiences--in which they conceive of literacy as a "separate, reified set of 'neutral' competencies, autonomous of social context." Procedures are established; social roles too, and this literacy model is disseminated, then internalized (p.114).

The construction and internalization of the autonomous model of literacy is achieved by a number of means...the ways in which language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients; 'metalinguistic' usages--the ways in which the social

divide

expecta

camag

commu

instead

the ex

the in

the for

interna

signat

unbekn

author

and kno

E

have no

of con

na the

of do

part of

the can

is lede

bureau

used to

processes of reading and writing are referred to and lexicalized within a pedagogic voice as though they were independent and neutral competencies rather than laden with significance for power relations and ideology; 'privileging'-- the ways in which reading and writing are given status *vis-a-vis* oral discourse as though the medium were intrinsically superior and, therefore, those who acquired it would also become superior...(p.114).

So what we have witnessed along this One-way street is the "great divide" theory, labelling and situating the 'illiterate' not only in terms of academic expectations, but in terms too of his competencies. This becomes further damaging and costly to the 'illiterate' (4) when they are robbed of their local and community literacies and personal ways of doing and knowing and given instead an imposing single Literacy to learn, which all too often goes contrary to their experiences. And the pedagogization of literacy helps distance even more the 'illiterate' (again, this occurs at a very young age also, so that it is fair to say the "forming 'illiterate'") from literacy by the process of acceptance and internalization of this monolithic Literacy. The would-be learner, already stigmatized, must feel all the more disabled and incompetent when for a reason unbeknownst to him, he cannot successfully integrate the dictates of this autonomous model of Literacy in to his life and experiences and ways of doing and knowing which have been steadily compromised and disaffected.

But for some learners, this Literacy very much fits their experience. They have not been disenfranchised from the social realm nor the academic. Instead of continually being denigrated, implicitly or publicly, the messages they receive hail their achievements, real and potential, and their competencies. Their ways of doing and knowing are pretty much congruent with the school's. These are part of the political and ideological aspects to which Street alluded in his tour of the dark side of Literacy. Taylor (1996) addresses the power with which literacy is laden when she describes people burdened, no, ravished by toxic, bureaucratic texts. "If you have power and privilege in society, literacy can be used to maintain your social status. You can use print to your advantage and to

the disc  
print an  
burden  
with po  
use the

for som  
discuss  
perspec  
speaks  
route to  
ways o  
of a gr  
disco  
a part  
from  
astr  
can  
tem  
pos

of  
"p  
E  
1



the *disadvantage* of others....Injustice and prejudice are maintained through print and are a permanent part of our national psyche...Their stories [the burdened and ravished] provide us with the opportunity to consider how those with power and privilege in American society take control of official texts and use them to their personal advantage” (pp.10-15; emphasis in original).

### Politics and power in pedagogy and literacy

Gee (1987) has addressed this idea of Literacy being more accessible for some learners than for others in his essay, “What is Literacy.” In fact, his discussion resonates well with Street’s, save that Gee offers the linguist’s perspective to this topic. So instead of talking about ‘multiple literacies,’ Gee speaks in terms of *discourses*, which he defines (he offers several definitions en route to his definition of ‘literacy’) as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, of acting” that places oneself as a member of a group (p.21). In fact, he uses the metaphor of an ‘identity kit’ to represent ‘discourse,’ replete with appropriate costume and instructions as to how to play a particular role that others will recognize. Like Street, Gee does not stray far from the notion that discourses, like literacies, “are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society” and that this can lead to the social goods of power, money and status (p.22). In this way he terms the power-laden discourses the ‘dominant discourses’ and those that possess these as the “dominant group” (p.23).

Other definitions that Gee promulgates pertinent to his ultimate definition of literacy are those of ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning.’ The former he sees as a “process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error” (p.23). This process occurs in natural settings and is meaningful and functional to the receiver; he wants to gain this acquisition so as

to be able to function well in this natural setting. Gee uses control of one's first language (our primary discourse) as an example. In this way, Gee states, we all develop our primary discourse in different ways based upon the context in which it is developed and the experiences in the service of that development. Thus, a mainstream middle class child uses English to make sense of his world differently than do say, Black children. But, Gee cautions us that "(s)o-called 'Black Vernacular English' is, on structural grounds, only trivially different from standard English...these [Black] children use language, behavior, values and beliefs to give a different shape to their experience" (p.25).

'Learning' is distinguished from 'acquisition' in that learning "is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching" (p.23), though this (teaching) person need not be officially designated a teacher. Learning is characterized by explanation and analysis and the learner gains a meta-knowledge of the matter. Gee further specifies that acquisition is associated with performance, and learning with understanding. "(W)e are better at what we acquire, but we consciously know more about what we have learned" (p.24). Also, Gee asserts, certain cultures value acquisition more than learning, while others value teaching and learning over acquisition. Though he does not specify at this point, the reader guesses that the acquisition culture may be likened to the working class/oral culture, while the other might be the more affluent/literate culture (p.23). Here Gee enters into a discussion of 'secondary discourses,' those we acquire after the socialization process through a combination usually of acquisition and learning, but again, the two are valued differently by different people due to their different functions and thus are related to power and politics.

...acquisition is good for performance, learning is good for meta-level knowledge...Acquisition and learning are thus, too, differential sources of power: acquirers usually beat learners at performance, learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it, that is, at explication, explanation, analysis and criticism (p.24).

of sec

(p.25)

language

content

domina

to the s

says G

both be

them to

man's

para e

mean

equita

teach

accu

o'fe

com

cost

exp

Re

in

and

With these definitions in hand, Gee goes on to define literacy as “control of secondary uses of language, i.e., uses of language in secondary discourses” (p.25). He then defines ‘dominant literacy’ too as control of a secondary use of language used in what Gee refers to as ‘dominant discourse’ (p.26). Now Gee’s contention is that usually secondary discourses are learned. But with the dominant group, or ‘mainstream students’, so parallel is their primary discourse to the secondary discourse proffered by the school, that in fact (research shows, says Gee), “they are acquiring these literacies through experiences in the home both before and during school, as well as by the opportunities school gives them to practice what they are acquiring” (p.26).

The learning they are doing (these mainstream middle class kids), provided it is tied to good teaching, is giving them not the literacies, but meta-level cognitive and linguistic skills that they can use to critique various discourses throughout their lives (p.26).

But the acquisition route to literacy is not open to children from non-mainstream homes, whose primary discourse and experiences do not run parallel to the literacy provided by the school. Not only does this incongruence mean that the children must learn literacy, that is, if it is tied to good and fair and equitable teaching, but such learning does not allow them to “use this learning-teaching to develop meta-level skills since this requires some degree of acquisition of secondary discourses to use in the critical process” (pp.26-27).

So, even though they come about it from different directions, using different discourses, both Street and Gee find the boundary student compromised in terms of literacy merely because of their orientation, inheriting costs and setbacks in the acquisition of literacy from the very beginning of their experiences. And the costs only continue to exacerbate their frustration with literacy learning, including the notion that encumbered with such disadvantages in trying to grasp and embrace a literacy that is so contrary to their perceptions and experiences, these children/students have little chance of gaining an

intimate connection with literacy. (5)

It cannot be overestimated how invaluable an advantage the dominant group of students has over the non-mainstream students when it comes to developing “control” of this secondary discourse, or literacy. This control, or lack of it, influences every aspect of the student’s early education. Teachers and administrators value and draw conclusions and create expectations for learning based upon these linguistic cues. A non-mainstream child who stumbles in this regard, reverting necessarily back to primary discourse patterns for academic ‘survival,’ may very well appear to be inept, socially and academically.

Especially when Rist’s ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ kicks in and the student’s self-esteem and self-concept suffers and he begins to perceive himself as inept. Meanwhile, the middle class/affluent student is performing swimmingly in terms of this control of the secondary discourse, an easy conversion from their primary discourse based upon learning and most importantly, acquisition too.

Gee contends that ‘intimates’ are an integral part of the acquisition of our primary discourse, but that the secondary discourse is usually attained in institutions surrounded by ‘non-intimates’. In the scenario Gee depicts in this essay, so similar are the two discourses for the middle class/affluent group, that it is not unreasonable to envision a carry-over of the influence of the intimates from the primary discourse acquisition to the attainment of the secondary discourse, thus providing a marvelous opportunity for these students to gain in fact an intimacy with literacy. Alas, for the non-mainstream student, this connection is stifled, snapped. The distance between their primary discourse and the secondary discourse they are asked to assume is indeed characterized by that awful distance symbolized by the switch from intimates to non-intimates. And of course, an intimate affinity with literacy is very remote, given that these students are hard put to procure this Literacy, let alone embrace it well.

It is interesting to note that at the end of his article, Gee makes some practical suggestions based upon his theoretical positions delineated earlier. One of the more interesting of these deals with the 'best' way to gain (and master) literacy such that one is able to acquire it rather than learn it. Regarding this, he alludes to 'settings' which must (or are more prone to) foster acquisition, rather than learning, and admits that "(t)his is certainly not liable to be a traditional classroom setting...but rather natural and functional environments, which may or may not happen to be inside a school" (p.27). However vague, this is interesting fodder for the community college to gather since they are charged with assisting the boundary students pursue literacy after their initial attempts.

#### **The achievement gap: No reason to assent**

It is unfortunate that the problems identified by these theories and theorists (i.e. by Street and Gee and others) are in fact played out in school districts in America. But Foucault reminds us that the political spin to the 3 R's has long been on the educational agenda, in America and elsewhere.

Education may well be...the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the power it carries with it..

(Kintgen, Kroll, & Rose, 1988; p.273).

As an example, Treetops, Brady and Gale's home school district (Brady was born and raised in Treetops while Gale moved there in high school from Mississippi; too, it is the home of Webber Community College), has suffered with an achievement gap for a number of years between its Black and white students. In the latter part of the 1970s, when Brady was in elementary school, Black students were continually being underserved by the school system, especially in those schools heavily impacted by minority students, such as

Nathan  
person  
lawsuit  
against  
was st  
mecha  
district  
dissona  
succes  
Engish  
without  
be acc  
country  
indeed  
ordere  
a'evia  
a serio  
addres  
district  
exper  
cross  
and to  
exist  
popu  
ma ns

Nathan, Brady's elementary school which was 50% Black (Zweifler, 1994; personal communication). This problem culminated in a nationally prominent lawsuit brought by the Student Advocacy Center and Ruth Zweifler (its director) against the school district. They sued on behalf of the minority population which was struggling to succeed academically, but legal maneuverings and mechanisms distilled this suit to focus on only several students attending the district's most affluent elementary school. And the issue centered not on cultural dissonance per se, or other reasons as to why these students were not successful academically, but instead on the relatively new notion of Black English. Do these students have the right to use Black English in the school without suffering academic repercussions and should some of their instruction be addressed in Black English?

Though prominent in headlines in Treetops newspapers and across the country for several weeks, the case was resolved when the court ruled that indeed the students had been discriminated against linguistically. The judge ordered the school and the teachers to undergo certain sensitivity training to alleviate this situation. But this ruling, besides bringing attention to the fringes of a serious problem in Treetops and other urban educational sites, did not address the real problem of the majority of the non-mainstream students in the district, nor was any real purpose served in focusing on a handful of experienced teachers and administrators who happened to be caught in the crossfires of this dilemma. The seminars to address the problem were a sham and to this day teachers still resent being singled out for a problem that if it did exist (they maintain), was least evident in their school with a miniscule minority population and a cadre of excellent, sensitive teachers (6).

But today, this achievement gap and the implicit underserving of non-mainstream students persists as much as ever in Treetops. It has received a lot



of after  
heights  
assess  
and As  
scored  
facade  
district  
known  
the best  
indeed

proper  
adm n  
a'sat's  
compa  
better  
again  
Tree:  
Cauc

Tree  
2704  
200  
200  
200  
200  
200

of attention the past few years when the problem escalated to unimagined heights. It culminated not long ago when the state-mandated educational assessment tests showed not only the familiar gap between the Black and white and Asian students, but indicated sadly that Treetops's Black students had scored lower than Blacks in larger and supposedly more troubled (academically) and poorer urban districts across the state. For a city and a district that prides itself upon being a "liberal, integrated college town...(a) place known for its good minds and goodwill...(a)nd excellent public schools, among the best funded and best performing in the state" (Tilove, 1999; p.B1), this was indeed a bitter consequence.

As an example of the 'gap,' a quick look at reading scores betrays the problem. The percentage of Black fourth graders in the district (the test is administered only to fourth, seventh and tenth graders each year) who received a 'satisfactory' ranking on the reading portion of the 1997-98 test was 28.7% compared to 72.1% by the ubiquitous 'others.' The seventh grade scores were better. Thirty-seven per cent of the Black students received a satisfactory score, again compared to about 72% by others. In terms of grade point average for the Treetops high schools, the Black population averages a score of 2.06, while the Caucasian GPA is 2.94 (Tilove, 1999; p.B2).

Throughout the course of the many articles that have been written in the *Treetops News* regarding the achievement gap, many reasons have been proffered as to the cause of the problem. Low expectations from teachers and administrators; internalized inferiority on the part of the Black students; a cultural dissonance and a lack of understanding by the (mostly) white teachers towards the Black students such that the teachers 'allow' them to fail; the notion that the 'gap' is so prevalent and persistent that every Black child is seen by teachers to be a part of it; the competition to succeed is so high, especially among the white

parent

Back a

the Ba

do loc

as be

in Tree

lower o

reason

membe

sons s

for a b

s tra

exan

s no

wte

cum

son

s-

ion

to

Le

2

parents who aspire for the best colleges for their children (and as one long-time Black administrator said in capturing the perception of these parents towards the Black student population: "We want you to do well, but we don't want you to do too well" {p.B1}); and at times, of course, the problem is seen as racial, seen as being laced with racism.

There are socio-economic reasons too for the persistence of the gap, but in Treetops, the middle class Black students are being outperformed by the lower class white students ( p.B2). Indeed, it is a complex dilemma with a host of reasons for its existence and persistence. One long-term Black school board member-parent in the district recounts the time when she was infuriated with her son's teacher for some obvious slight and hurried over to the school prepared for a battle with the white teacher.

"This district broke my heart...I was all prepared to go up there and punch some white woman in the face and I walked up there and turned around and had to walk away because it was a black woman who had taught my kid that he was not smart" (Tilove, 1999; p. B2).

What is so surprising regarding the achievement gap and its discussion is that there is hardly any mention of the ideas proffered by Street and Gee (for example), or even the notion that students choose to 'not learn' (Kohl, 1991). It is not uncommon for non-mainstream students to not participate in learning when they feel such would be acquiescing to a 'white man's world and curriculum' of which they are an afterthought at best. The peer pressure is sometimes great to not succeed academically in these circumstances. And I am sure there is this element at work in Treetops's achievement gap complex. But too, individuals may take it upon themselves to not participate in the learning, as Kohl depicts in his book, *"I Won't Learn From You! The Role of Assent in Learning."* (7)

Believing that "learning what others wanted you to learn can sometimes destroy you," Kohl claims that 'not-learning' consists of an active, often

inger

teach

first of

part of

is one

learn

perform

surround

subord

we'll be

Ha Wa

situat

which

des g

refuse

young

interac

avoid

to be

mate

ingenious, willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching. It subverts attempts at remediation as much as it rejects learning in the first place” (pp.10-11). Kohl sees not-learning as a conscious endeavor on the part of some individuals to refuse “to be molded by a hostile society” and that it is one way they have found to preserve their self-respect and identity.

To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger’s world (p.16).

Considering the Black students in the Treetops school district, not-learning does not seem a far-fetched notion to explain some of their academic performances. They are well aware of the achievement gap and the discussions surrounding it and know that in many ways they are expected to fail, or be subordinate academically. If that’s what’s expected, they might be saying, then we’ll be sure to give it to them (teachers, parents, administrators). Like the Hallway Hangers in MacLeod’s *Ain’t No Makin’ It* (1995), they assess the situation and decide that they do not want to compete in this sham of a race, which has meaning for some students, the mainstream ones, but little for them.

They had consciously placed themselves outside the entire system that was trying to coerce or seduce them into learning and spent all their time and energy in the classroom devising ways of not-learning, short-circuiting the business of failure altogether. They were engaged in a struggle of wills with authority, and what seemed to be at stake for them was nothing less than their pride and integrity (Kohl, 1991; pp.16-17).

This description is so reminiscent of Brady and his trickster mechanisms, designed to ward off the humiliation and shame that attended his inability (or refusal) to access literacy, at least the Literacy that was proffered to the very young student. Brady did not come from a home or environment devoid of literacy and models of literacy. His niece, who lived often with his family, was an avid reader. Brady points to the fact that his friend down the street worked hard to become an engineer, so how could it (his lack of literacy skills) have been a matter of socio-economic status and the low-income neighborhood in which he

**grew up (Brady asks)? And as much as Brady craved gaining literacy skills as an adult, I doubt very much he consciously refused to learn as a child and neglected to mention this during our many conversations (even though he has suppressed, I believe, much of his early schooling due to the embarrassment that must have swirled around his desk).**

**But it is feasible to suppose that the young student, in the early 70s, not far removed at all from civil rights activism, especially in liberal Treetops, and amidst all the scholastic turmoil that would eventuate in the infamous court case, sensed that this Literacy that was foisted upon him was remote from his experiences and values, that it perhaps suffocated him, the suffocation that threatens integrity, not to mention identity. Without a doubt, Brady expended much time and energy and craft in honing his trickster skills to have survived over ten years of schooling with such low levels of literacy skills, at least in terms of how the school defines and interprets literacy skills. And without a doubt, Brady's local literacies, his more personal affiliations with language gleaned from his living room and backyard and neighborhood, were neglected, squelched, prohibited perhaps in allegiance to the Literacy of Nathan school and its pedagogization. Now Brady suffers the consequences of academic inflexibility and his responses to it. He may not have consciously sought to not-learn, but not learning was the result of his scholastic career. It is indeed an immeasurable cost in terms of the balance sheet of his life and his frustrated pursuit of literacy.**

**Deciding to actively not-learn something involves closing off part of oneself and limiting one's experience. It can require actively refusing to pay attention, acting dumb, scrambling one's thought, and overriding curiosity. The balance of gains and losses resulting from such a turning away from experience is difficult to assess (Kohl, 1991; p.13).**

### **Another 'achievement gap' perspective**

**John U. Ogbu (1988) investigates the root causes of America's Black achievement gap from its inception in a most direct and comprehensive manner. Tracing the social and school histories of African Americans over the centuries, Ogbu proceeds to dismiss the most common causes proffered for current school failure among Black students. Not that the theories he eschews have no validity, he just finds them wanting, either incomplete in their explanation of the problem, or off the mark in their assumptions. He recounts and eliminates such perspectives on the problem as the 'deficit' theory, then the 'difference' perspective which evolved from the former, both of which we have discussed above, and eventually the 'mismatch' hypothesis, akin to that which has already been alluded to as 'cultural dissonance' as it appears in the classroom (pp.228-229). Ogbu then goes on to dismiss the notion of the pertinence of the 'great divide' theory.**

**Before he introduces his perspective regarding this persistent issue in American education, Ogbu delineates the types of minorities in the United States. He discusses three groups of minorities, referring to one group as 'autonomous minorities' and uses as example the Jews and Mormons. He sees them as numerical minorities who, despite experiencing some prejudice, are nevertheless not necessarily subordinated in 'systems of stratification,' nor subordinated economically or politically.**

**The 'immigrant minorities'--the Asian population is an example in our contemporary society--are those minorities who come to this country on a voluntary basis and are free to leave without much political or economic loss. Though such minorities may experience discrimination, Ogbu states that they "have not experienced such treatment as an ingrained part of their culture and thus have not been disillusioned to the same extent" as other subordinate**



minorities (pp.232-33).

These subordinate minorities are in fact 'castelike minorities,' including African Americans, Chicanos and Indians. These people have been subordinated by force or conquest and incorporated into the society involuntarily and given an inferior status socially, politically, economically. Ogbu further distinguishes the castelike minority from what is referred to as the 'lower class' by explaining that the latter is assigned such a position based upon 'achieved criteria,' that is, their education, jobs, behavior and income. Too, there is prominent in society "a built-in ideology which encourages lower-class people to strive for social and economic self-betterment " (p.233). This ideological incentive, Ogbu maintains, is strong enough that white Americans view this country in terms of opportunity and believe that success may be gained through effort and education.

He contrasts this with the castelike minority (Ogbu focuses squarely on the African American) who is assigned his position in society not on an 'achieved criteria,' but an 'ascribed' one that is based largely on skin color. There are few options to escape that designation and thus does caste give class among the Blacks in America even more disadvantages: "a white lower-class American is only lower class; a Black lower-class American is also faced with a job ceiling and other caste barriers" (p.233). Anticipating MacLeod (1995) and his *Hallway Hangers* and *The Brothers*, Ogbu admits that for the past 30 years "civil rights legislation and other efforts have raised the job ceiling and somewhat reduced other racial barriers, but they have not eliminated these barriers altogether" (p.234). In fact, Ogbu uses affirmative action and other such programs to prove his point: if Blacks in this country were not so oppressed, these competent people would not need such help in achieving social and educational and economic opportunity and equity.

Amer

more

be ma

affect

school

emon

enviro

know

enviro

insur

p.23

group

part

of the

con

expe

econ

read

For

Prov

Order

This brings Ogbu to his perspective on the Black achievement gap in America, what he calls a 'cultural ecological' explanation that he considers more pertinent than those he has dismissed because it allows a connection to be made between "the school or learning processes *and* societal forces...which affect school curricula, classroom attitudes and efforts, and various activities of school personnel and other members of the educational system" (p.234; emphasis in original).

Cultural ecology is the study of institutionalized and socially transmitted patterns of behavior interdependent with features of the environment...It does not deal with the overall physical environment, but with the effective environment, that is, those aspects that directly affect subsistence quest... and physical survival. In modern societies the effective environment is primarily the bureaucratized industrial economy (p.234).

But in order to take advantage of the offerings of the effective environment, a population must be equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge and strategies that allow for the proper adaptation to this environment. "Childrearing and formal education are culturally organized to insure that children in a given population meet these criteria for adaptation" (p.235). School then, from one aperture, is viewed as a training field and test grounds for "allocating and rewarding individuals in society's status system, particularly in the economy" (p.235).

And therein lies the rub, argues Ogbu, who declares that indeed it is part of the local white epistemology that economic opportunities and advancement coincide with educational achievement. But, this is not part of the Black experience in America, people who for centuries have been allocated the economic leftovers despite competence and educational achievement. Ogbu reaches back in history to provide an intriguing example of this discrimination. For years, during the growth and urbanization of the south, Blacks were provided an 'industrial' education so as to be able to handle service jobs in order to cater to the dominant culture. "But when many desirable factory jobs

began to require special training, Black school curricula began, ironically, to emphasize classical and academic [which was long denied them] rather than industrial education, which was now offered to white schools” (p.237).

So Ogbu finds that though Blacks were afforded some education prior to emancipation and then increased education, still their literacy rates declined. He cites three overriding reasons, among others, why this is so. One is that Blacks have had to fight for every increased access to public schools as if this access was not their right. Another reason is that too often this education for Blacks has been inferior and separate and :generally based on white perceptions and stereotypes of Black status in society and especially in the economy” (p.236). Then, a third reason: because Blacks do not share this White perception, they do not accept the education that has been designated for them. Ogbu concludes then that education was designed to exclude Blacks from social and occupational equality; they could not compete for desirable employment positions because education acted as more a disqualifier than a credential.

Ogbu need not go back in time to offer examples of this; current situations, including the one in Treetops, are testimony to his argument. He indicates that even ‘subtle mechanisms’ still act to ‘track’ the white and Black students to different economic outcomes and futures. He points to the inordinate number of Black students labelled as educationally ‘handicapped.’ A recent article in the *Treetops News* cited this disparity from a district survey that showed that 16% of the Black student population were in special education programs, compared to 8.4% of the non-Black student population (Rioux, 1997; p.A1). This and other such ‘subtle mechanisms’ lead Ogbu to contend that black students respond to these inequities and the nature of their responses further damage their school achievement. These responses need not be associated

with a

Brady

'caste

blacks

and ag

'Black

ssues

bas in

summ

instru

legim

Thus

resou

by the

the n

exper

e"ons

stand

overd

notion

benef

from

string

of the

a favo

with a given time frame; they seem valid responses to inequities on the part of Brady in the 1970s as they do for the contemporary Treetops Black student.

Before detailing the three responses he cites, Ogbu reminds us that “castelike minorities do not usually accept their subordination passively and that blacks have been fighting since emancipation for more and better schooling and against the job ceiling” (pp.237-38). Given this, it is not unexpected to find “Black school conflict and mistrust” as the first response offered. Among other issues past and present that cause the Black students and parents concern are bias in testing, tracking, textbook bias, and biased counseling (p.238). Ogbu, summarizing a report on the same material, concludes that this conflict with and mistrust of the schools do not allow the students or parents to accept as legitimate the school’s “goals, standards, and instructional approaches” (p.239). Thus their co-operation may be limited as well as their adherence to rules and requirements for academic achievement. The mistrust of the Treetops schools by the leaders of the achievement gap reform is neatly evidenced by staging their meetings at a local church, not on school property.

The second response Ogbu mentions is the bitter disillusionment experienced by Blacks over the ‘job ceiling’ and by implication, academic efforts. They have seen for years and years their competence and academic standing compromised and belittled by access to jobs for which they are overqualified. And again, civil rights actions and programs only reinforce the notion that a Black education is of little value by itself. Without these mandated benefits, they realize they “have fewer opportunities than Whites to to benefit from education” (p.240). Recall how one speaker in Treetops noted how stringent is the competition for the academic credential, especially among many of the white students and parents who realize that this credential is a passport to a favored university and then to a favored position in the job market. Black

parents teach the  
compromised by  
even unemployment  
twice as good to  
window of oppor  
their only source

Finally, O  
many Black stud  
strategies' that a  
creates two types of  
conventional' econ  
increased progr  
usually collective  
benefits. But this  
gaining higher e  
favoritism as op

The second  
involves 'pimpin'  
social resources  
economic and s  
action and/or cli  
difficult to imagi  
student caught i  
Treetops achiev  
final premise.

We have  
and skills  
learning  
strategies  
consequ

parents teach the same message, argues Ogbu, but their words are compromised by their own and others' in their community underemployment, or even unemployment. As a consequence, the Black student feels he must be twice as good to achieve half as much. Given this disillusionment with the small window of opportunity, the Black students' academic failures may be seen as their only source of resistance, of power.

Finally, Ogbu argues that given this dire situation in public schools for many Black students, they must develop what they see as suitable 'survival strategies' that are too often incongruent with the requisites of schooling. He cites two types of such strategies for survival. the first is to increase the conventional economic and social resources by promoting and advocating for increased programs that render employment and social rewards. These are usually collective efforts aimed at enhanced civil rights and consequent benefits. But this activity also often infers what Ogbu terms 'clientship,' that is, gaining higher economic status by way of compliance, or white patronage, favoritism as opposed to merit.

The second type of survival strategy is the less conventional one that involves 'pimping' or 'hustling' and exploits non-conventional economic and social resources. Thus, within the Black community it is generally accepted that economic and social advancement via the 'legitimate' route requires collective action and/or clientship in addition to educational success (p.241). It is not difficult to imagine then how daunting, if not unfair, school looks to the Black student caught in this cultural and institutional web. Ogbu, as if addressing the Treetops achievement gap, summarizes his cultural ecological perspective's final premise.

We have suggested that survival strategies may require knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are not wholly compatible with white middle-class teaching and learning behavior. We have also suggested that children learn the survival strategies during preschool years as a normal part of their cultural learning; consequently, the potential for learning difficulties may already exist



when ch  
difficult  
school  
become  
attitude  
including

In a mos  
student's diffic  
pressure at sch  
pressures are  
by their 'slang  
the Black care  
and employm  
Black speech  
research of a  
were aware o  
indeed comp  
oppositional

So ve  
(and elsewh  
educational  
their potent  
urban distric  
seem the m  
students, wh  
submit to the

Street a  
Black English

when children enter school. Whether and to what extent those difficulties arise depends on the individual child's experience in school and the classroom. We suspect that insofar as children have become competent in these survival strategies they may lack serious attitudes toward schooling and toward academic tasks in general, including test taking (p.241).

In a most recent work, Ogbu (1999) further complicates the Black student's difficulties in school by showing how it may be that the student feels pressure at school to speak and perform in a 'White' manner, yet those same pressures are exerted at home also to maintain their Black identity (symbolized by their 'slang' English). Ogbu refers to this contradictory message posited by the Black caregiver, that is--learn proper English at school for the sake of social and employment advantage, but at home and in the community maintain your Black speech and behavior, your heritage-- as a 'dialect dilemma' (p.168). His research of a California Black community showed that none of the participants were aware of their contradictory message given or received, but that it did indeed complicate the school experience for Black students and reinforce their oppositional attitudes and behaviors towards White systems, including schools.

So very likely, given Ogbu's scenarios, the Black student in Treetops (and elsewhere, of course) enters school already at a disadvantage, not only educationally perhaps, but too, attitudinally, which probably further hampers their potential for educational achievement. Too often, then, especially in large, urban districts, the second set of survival skills and strategies outlined by Ogbu seem the most fitting and appealing and accessible to many of the Black students, who, like Brady, opt to drop out of school rather than continue to submit to the continual humiliation that marked their school career.

### **'Literacy in three metaphors'**

Street and Gee pin their ideas and theories on examples like the Treetops 'Black English' court case of twenty years ago and the district's current dilemma

involving the  
more directly  
pronouncement  
problems that  
the survival  
perception, the  
referred to as  
shortly.

From  
education, es  
but subject to  
why certain in  
reading. Retu  
realize that B  
proffered in so  
experiences a  
elementary ci  
in the miseduc  
monolithic trea

Scribe  
in a single Lite  
that the purpos  
purposes fluid.  
dimensional stu  
approaches sho

What is  
some  
adaptiv  
meanin  
approac

involving the achievement gap. Ogbu does the same, only seemingly much more directly and in a more comprehensive manner. Too, especially in his final pronouncements, Ogbu seems to be implicating Brady in his discussion of the problems that beset Black education in America today. Ogbu's delineation of the 'survival strategies' sound a lot like Brady's story, his attitude, his perception, the mechanisms he worked out to survive in school, what I have referred to as his 'trickster' strategies, which will be discussed in depth very shortly.

From Ogbu and the others that preceded him, we realize that literacy education, especially for some students, is not necessarily a simple proposition, but subject to a host of complex variables. Street and Gee offered their 'take' on why certain individuals within certain populations grow up estranged from reading. Returning to their propositions before indulging in Brady's story, we realize that Brady is but one voice in the testament that a single Literacy proffered in some if not most American schools is insufficient to cover the experiences and attributes that a vast array of students bring to their early elementary classrooms. Too much is neglected and wasted and compromised in the miseducation of many of these students when literacy is given such a monolithic treatment.

Scribner (1984) is another theorist who addresses the problems inherent in a single Literacy. She posits 'literacy in three metaphors;' that is, she claims that the purposes for literacy are manifold, and the boundaries between these purposes fluid, and yet we approach literacy education too often as a one dimensional study with obvious goals, when in fact the pedagogical approaches should match the multiplicity of literacies.

What is *ideal* literacy in our society? If the analysis by metaphor...contributes some approach to that question, it suggests that ideal literacy is simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self-enhancing...recognition of the multiple meanings and varieties of literacy also argues for a diversity of educational approaches, informal and community-based as well as formal and school-based

(1984; p.18; emphasis in original).

Scribner (1984) provides literacy with interesting perspectives from which to situate my research. That is, she offers literacy some dimension, some depth, so that we are not simply talking about reading and writing. The three metaphors she uses for literacy are literacy as Adaptation, Power, and State of Grace. It might be said that Scribner complicates literacy. If that is so, then it is good that she does so, especially as regards perceiving the boundary students in the community college in search of literacy. The approach has to be more complex than addressing their reading deficiencies, as if they at one time did not fail miserably in gaining literacy, as if they did not spend many succeeding years not gaining literacy, as if there is no history to their relationship to literacy. When in fact, of course, there is. But first, Scribner's points.

Literacy as Adaptation is akin to what we recently call 'functional literacy', popularly referred to as the minimum level of literacy needed to function in the society. But Scribner points out that this has been a fluid level which has been on the rise, especially in recent years. How do we determine what a person needs in terms of literacy to 'make it?' What is 'making it?' Brady functioned quite well with his first grade reading level, far below what would be an acceptable functional level today, so well in fact that he boasts that those closest to him--bosses, friends, peers--were unaware of his reading deficiency. Scribner wonders if it is "realistic to try to specify some uniform set of skills as constituting functional literacy for all adults?" (p.9).

Some experts maintain that the concept of functional literacy makes sense only with respect to the proficiencies required for participation in the actual life conditions of particular groups or communities...(in fact) a contrary view, popularized by McLuhan is that new technologies and communication media are likely to reduce literacy requirements for all...One possible scenario is that in coming decades literacy may be increased for some and reduced for others, accentuating the present uneven, primarily class-based distribution of literacy functions (pp.10-11).

Scribner concludes her discussion of 'adaptation' by asking a very interesting and often ignored question: "To what extent do adults whom tests assess as functionally illiterate perceive themselves as lacking the necessary skills to be adequate parents, neighbors, workers?" (p.11). That question was in a way answered indirectly by a member of the developmental reading faculty at WCC when, bemoaning the actions of counselors who advise students to ignore their entrance test results and register for any classes they choose, thus by-passing the developmental reading curriculum, alluded to the fact that they are dooming these students to certain failure--mostly from an economic point of view that has repercussions for all aspects of their life. Literacy is that important! Of course we know that Street debunks such rough-hewn pigeonholes and claims that the stigma attached to these serves only to convince the 'illiterate' that they are as inferior as others say they are and do indeed need the saving graces of the community college's developmental reading program.

But I use this idea also to introduce Scribner's Literacy as Power, which looks upon the common notion that literacy holds transformative powers. That is, education and literacy are the surest ways for a working or lower class person to change their status, or as Scribner describes it, this metaphor "emphasizes a relationship between literacy and group or community advancement" (p.11). "Not to be literate," she heralds the common refrain, "is a state of victimization" (p.12). But she equivocates this perception, maintaining that studies show that in fact "the relationship between social change and literacy education...may be stronger in the other direction" (p.12). That is, contrary to what many reading faculty might believe--that strength in literacy can translate into social transformation--Scribner cites advocates who suggest "a more action-oriented approach that views community mobilization around practical, social, and political goals as a first step in creating the conditions for

collection  
more e  
for se  
from a s

we

for

Plan

and

and

and

and

and

and

and

and

and Se  
definite  
very we

collective literacy instruction and for educational equity” (p.12) might prove more effective. This is indeed what Gee probably had in mind when he asked for ‘settings’ outside the traditional classroom to help ‘illiterates’ gain literacy from a stance of acquisition.

Cain’s checkered literacy biography, presented briefly in Chapter 5, fits well with Scribner’s Literacy as Power. His unusual movements in the work force, his post-retirement vocations, and his extraordinary sensitivity to and awareness of the disadvantages he endured educationally, in terms of employment, and socially and how these impact other African Americans, casts him well as a player in this phase of Scribner’s literacy scheme. Throughout his adult life, Cain may be seen as a teacher in the sense intimated by Gee, one who is involved with learning and teaching others, but not necessarily in a traditional classroom setting. Indeed, he sought to be a model for those less fortunate than himself; his latest advocacy elevates him to a position in which he can serve these two functions of model and teacher. In his small way, Cain tries to enact literacy as power and to share it with his community.

In defending her Literacy as a State of Grace Scribner believes that “the term sounds elitist and archaic, but the notion that participation in a literate--that is, bookish-tradition enlarges and develops a person’s essential self is pervasive and still undergirds the concept of a liberal education” (p.13). Again, Scribner proposes this aspect of literacy, then complicates it, wondering how pervasive this notion is across various and diverse communities and cites the technologists who insist that written literacy is a soon to be extinct cultural artifact. Yet, the attainment of literacy often coincides with increased self-esteem and self-respect, especially in an adult, who very well might see this goal as a definite plateau of self-enhancement. Indeed, this particular form of literacy fits very well with Gale’s literacy history and her aspirations concerning literacy



attainment and consequently, her self-concept, that is, what literacy means to her and what it can do for her.

In her concluding remarks, Scribner answers her own question as to what is 'ideal' literacy in our society: "...simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self-enhancing" (p.18). Given this, she calls for literacy programs that incorporate this extensive view of literacy, "a diversity of educational approaches, informal and community-based as well as formal and school-based" (p.18). She offers no clues as to what this might mean. But that is where my study comes in with Brady's voice and story. (8)

### Chapter 3: The Trickster: Brady's Story (1)

#### Sarah Byng

Who could not read and was tossed  
Into a thorny hedge by a hill  
Some years ago you heard me sing/ My doubts on Alexander Byng.  
His sister Sarah now inspires/ My jaded Muse, my failing fires.  
Of Sarah Byng the tale is told/ How when the child was twelve years old  
She could not read or write a line./ Her sister Jane, though barely nine,  
Could spout the Catechism through/ And parts of Matthew Arnold too,  
While little Bill who came between/ Was quite unnaturally keen  
On 'Athalie,' by Jean Racine./ But not so Sarah! Not so Sal!  
She was a most uncultured girl/ Who didn't care a pinch of snuff  
For any literary stuff/ And gave the classics all a miss.  
Observe the consequence of this!/ As she was walking home one day,  
Upon the fields across her way/ A gate, securely padlocked, stood,  
And by its side a piece of wood/ On which was painted plain and full,  
BEWARE THE VERY FURIOUS BULL  
Alas! the young illiterate/ Went blindly forward to her fate,  
And ignorantly climbed the gate!  
Now happily the bull that day/ Was rather in a mood for play  
Than goring people through and through/ As bulls so very often do;  
He tossed her lightly with his horns/ Into a prickly hedge of thorns,  
And stood by laughing while she strode/ And pushed and struggled to the road.  
The lesson was not lost upon/ The child, who since has always gone  
A long way round to keep away/ From signs, whatever they may say,  
And leaves a padlocked gate alone./ Moreover she has wisely grown  
Confirmed in her instinctive guess/ That literature breeds distress.  
(H.Belloc, 1951; pp.45-51)

#### Introduction: The story of the research data

Rosenblatt (1978) helped to redefine not only how we read a text, but how we read the various texts of our world. She established reading as a 'transaction' among reader, text, and author. What eventuates from this transaction, for the reader, is his 'poem', Rosenblatt's interpretive product derived by the reader from the text. Thus her title: *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. Her theory of transaction favored no particular piece of the necessary triangle in the reading act. For years the author (the Romantic tradition) was pre-eminent; then the text (the New Critic influence) held sway over the process. Out of Rosenblatt's studies a third tradition has emerged, the *reader response* theory.

But Rosenblatt insists that this approach to reading does not celebrate

the reader  
must be  
This does  
do, else I  
before the  
part of the  
the reader  
say. Words  
written by  
the reader  
substantial

So I

my own 'po  
interpretatio  
events past  
a version of  
Brady contr  
to reshape  
will argue th

That

researcher  
by what has  
into Brady's  
excursions i  
than is typica  
emergent lite  
where do the

the reader nor the reader's 'anything goes' interpretations. Indeed, the 'poem' must be derived from the text, shown to proceed from it, be validated by the text. This does not mean that various interpretations do not emerge; of course they do, else literary criticism would be a dull and hollow exercise. But whereas before the author or the text held domain over an equivocal interpretation on the part of the reader, Rosenblatt has leveled the odds and given some power to the reader. So much so, that she maintains given a dispute over the meaning of say, Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal," even were a letter discovered written by the poet himself defining his intent in the poem, the interpretation of the reader that differs from the author's own is just as valid if it can be substantiated by way of the text! (p.117).

So I carry Rosenblatt's vision with me as I proceed on the construction of my own 'poem.' In the pages that follow, Brady's story is revealed by way of my interpretation of his words via interviews, his story, his interpretation of his life's events past and present. Hopefully, I will be able to use Brady's words to shape a version of his literacy life that is not only 'truthful', but insightful too. But if Brady contradicts my interpretation upon reading it, I will not apologize nor seek to reshape it if the 'poem' emerges from his own text with legitimacy. Instead I will argue the hermeneutic necessity of intersecting lives.

That brings up another very interesting aspect of this research, that is, the researcher does not exist in isolation either (of course all of this is substantiated by what has already been expressed). Even as I sought details of and insights into Brady's literacy endeavors and the costs he encountered, my own such excursions into literacy replete with costs surfaced in more pronounced ways than is typical. I was very conscious of and reflective about my own past emergent literacy and its unique development. Again, the question arises, where do these elements fit in the research and in the story that emerges from

the research  
vistas? Of  
in a way, v  
as to beco  
as to unde  
the dynam  
of this stud  
Brady, and

Lew:  
the connota  
to him. Inde  
accused him  
have failed t  
evil, but trick  
original).

But I  
throughout h  
that will not  
ascribing the  
mythologica  
in this neces  
general over  
think Brady  
the trickster  
We m

the research? What apertures widen involuntarily, even as we focus on other vistas? Of course these questions relate to the very nature of research, which is in a way, what this project is all about: not only it seems, engaging in the act so as to become more facile with its apparatus, but too, to engage with research so as to understand its very nature as best we can. Even as I come to understand the dynamics of the interview process and the important ethnographic aspects of this study and the data that this process engenders, so too I come to know Brady, and undeniably, I come to know the researcher more intimately too!

### The Trickster!

Lewis Hyde (1998) thinks the appellation 'trickster' too confining for all the connotations this mythic figure must carry, let alone all the activities ascribed to him. Indeed, some have attributed to this character traits of the devil, if not accused him of being the devil. "Those who confuse the two do so because they have failed to perceive trickster's great ambivalence. The devil is an agent of evil, but trickster is *amoral*, not *immoral*" (Hyde, 1998; p.10; emphasis in original).

But I get ahead of myself with this. I wanted to indicate that trickster throughout history and mythology possesses many traits for each given culture that will not seem to fit Brady at all. And that is fine, for the point I make in ascribing the designation to Brady is that he fits certain key aspects of the mythological trickster and in this way he wears the title well. What I intend to do in this necessary explication of trickster and his various renderings is offer a general overview of the myth, then particularize the picture and show where I think Brady and his responses to literacy failure throughout his life coincide with the trickster legend.

We might be surprised at the extent of the trickster myth, that is, how

prevalent

Hyde indi-

"all of the

p.8)-- eve

today.

Ad

that Henr

and read

of his 's;

culture. I

help from

that Gat

Eshu, be

In

especia

*Confide*

appear

"reader"

his var

versa

prevalent it is in many cultures and what figures are deemed to be tricksters. Hyde indicates that trickster is found in many places and a variety of cultures-- "all of the canonical tricksters operate in patriarchal mythologies" (Hyde, 1998; p.8)-- even contemporaneously. Hyde locates trickster in very diverse settings of today.

They appear...in Native American winter storytelling, in Chinese street theater, in the Hindu festivals celebrating Krishna the Butter Thief, in West African divination ceremonies. African tricksters traveled west in the slave trade and can still be found in African-American storytelling, in the blues, in Haitian voodoo, and so on (p.9).

Additionally, Hyde, in discussing another matter later in the book, reveals that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. used Eshu, a Yoruba (West African) trickster figure and reader-of-hidden-meanings, in a convoluted manner to arrive at the basis of his 'signifyin' monkey,' also a hermeneut, of African-American vernacular culture. In the story that Gates uses to establish this connection, Eshu receives help from monkeys who served as advisors to him during his quest. Still, the link that Gates concocts puzzles Hyde, who wonders "why a monkey, rather than Eshu, becomes the trickster" (p.112).

In addition to these, Hyde sees the trickster in America as the 'con' man, especially as he appears in literature and film (p.11). He cites Melville's *The Confidence Man* as a rich example. In this story, Hyde posits, the protagonist appears "in a series of masks and roles, never as himself" (p.53), such that the reader wonders as to his true identity, or even if he has one, so 'seamless' are his various masks and personas (p.53). But this is probably pretty typical of the versatile, chameleon-like trickster.

With some polytropic characters it is possible that there is no real self behind the shifting masks, or that the real self lies exactly there, in the moving surfaces and not beneath. It's possible that there are beings with no way of their own, only the many ways of their shifting skins and changing contexts (Hyde, 1988; p.54).

Hyde ascribes trickster identities to such diverse, and perhaps



unexpected

two-day old

popular sub

Anansi (or /

of these. Zc

irrepressib

Africa who

generic nam

Kwaku Anan

Notic

referred to k

mystique, to

is the myth

duplicity, co

It is

discovered

make man

or coercion

residents,

unexpected, figures as Coyote, Mercury, Prometheus, and Hermes (who as a two-day old baby, stole Apollo's cattle and hid them from him). Too, they are a popular subject of children's literature with many well-defined characters. Anansi (or Ananse)(2), an Ashanti spider trickster, is one of the more prominent of these. Zomo the rabbit is a popular West African children's figure and the depreciable Brer Rabbit was one of those brought with the slave trade from America who grew up in America. Some of the tricksters however go by merely a generic name, such as spider, coyote, rabbit. McDermott's (1972) description of Anansi is typical of the those portrayed in children's literature.

Anansi is a folk-hero to the Ashanti. This funny fellow is a rogue, a wise and loveable trickster. He is a shrewd and cunning figure who triumphs over larger foes. An animal with human qualities, Anansi is a mischief maker. He tumbles into many troubles (no pagination).

Notice the contradictions in the author's description, what Hyde has referred to kindly as trickster's 'great ambivalence.' But that is part of trickster's technique, to not only be ambivalent, but to be and do so purposefully. "Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and contradiction, contradiction and paradox" (p.7). Too he is a 'border-crosser.'

Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. ..We constantly distinguish--right and wrong, sacred and profane, male and female, young and old, living and dead--and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities (p.7).

It is a given that trickster is a boundary-crosser, Hyde admits, but he also noted that trickster will create a boundary if the purpose suits him, or will manifest a distinction previously unknown to get his way, a sort of bribery or deception. Thus did the gods in certain mythologies, previously earthly deities, relocate to heaven from something trickster did.

Trickster is thus the author of the great distance between heaven and earth; when he becomes the messenger of the gods it's as if he has been enlisted to solve a problem he himself created. In a case like that, boundary creation and boundary crossing are related to one another,

Th  
tricksters  
definable  
passes th  
seize him  
leading o  
dusk, the  
Hyde arg  
(p.8) in  
sustains  
uncover  
trickster  
fashion  
(p.8)--ye  
paradox  
cultures  
of trick  
mytho  
trickst  
(1994  
and, i  
so lon  
and i  
wond

and the best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found--sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms (pp.7-8).

These are some of the characteristics that prompt Hyde to refer to tricksters as the 'lords of in-between': just when they seem apprehendable, definable, understandable, they are off again to quench some appetite. "He passes through each of these [locations, as well as attempts to 'place' him, to possess him] when there is a moment of silence...He is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and the crossroad at the edge of town...He is the spirit of the road at the fork, the one that runs from one town to another and belongs to neither" (p.6). Hyde argues that tricksters are "regularly honored as the creators of culture" in spite of their disruptive behavior, for the author believes that such a culture maintains a culture that can "make space for figures whose function it is to subvert and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on" (p.9). So the trickster lies and deceives and cajoles and outwits others in a shameless manner in so as to satisfy his many appetites--for sex, food, his attraction to dirt and the dark, yet serves too as an integral part of the culture's existence. This is the paradox of trickster; perhaps one reason why they have pervaded so many cultures' mythologies and persisted for so long.

But this is an appropriate point to shift the primary focus to Brady in terms of trickster, to explain why I have him associated with this elusive figure of mythology. Perhaps one of the most obvious connections is that Brady, like many tricksters, too often winds up the foil of his own tricks. Earlier, I alluded to Bennett who speaks to the notion that trickster "sometimes over-reaches himself in his quest to everyone's amusement, is caught and punished. But it is never for long that he cannot soon wriggle himself free to star in the next story, trickish and mischievous as ever" (Author's note: no pagination). Hyde provides a good example of this though with not so amusing consequences for

coyote. h

Ag

classroom

literacy, t

these. h

world" (E

'natural c

jungle s

his scho

embarra

perceive

with try

h

trickste

meal to

from th

classro

others

chord

coyote. He retells an Apache story from Texas that involves Rabbit and Coyote.

Rabbit came to a field of watermelons. In the middle of the field there was a stick figure made of gum. Rabbit hit it with his foot and got stuck. He got his other foot stuck, then one hand and then his other hand and finally his head. This is how Coyote found him.

"What are you doing like this?" asked Coyote.

"The farmer who owns this melon patch was mad because I would not eat melons with him. He stuck me on here and said that in a while he would make me eat chicken with him. I told him I wouldn't do it."

"You are foolish. I will take your place."

Coyote pulled Rabbit free and stuck himself in the gum trap. When the farmer who owned the melons came out and saw Coyote he shot him full of holes (pp.19-20).

Again, Brady felt the need early on in school to maneuver and respond to classroom situations in a trickster manner. Faced with educational, especially literacy, failures and the consequent shame and humiliation that attended these, his trickster ways were "a sort of passport to survival in a far-from-ideal world" (Bennett, 1994; no pagination). Undersized and overmatched, relying on 'natural cunning' to compensate for 'bulk or strength,' he took "on the laws of the single-handed" (Bennett, 1994; no pagination). As a result, throughout school career, a lot of energy and creative intelligence went in to evading harassment, but too, education and literacy. The consequences of a received mis-education were far too intimidating for Brady to concern himself trying to do school well.

Hyde addresses this issue too in his discussion of an epizon, or parasite hunter figure, who is able to avoid the capture, but too often misses out on the food. Others, whom Hyde refers to as bait-thief tricksters, separate the trap from the meat and satisfy their hunger (p.22). Brady's approach to the epizon situation allowed him to hone one skill while missing out on many others. Hyde's description of the epizon and his various positions strikes a chord that resounds too loudly in Brady's literacy biography.

**A parasite or epizon...feeds his belly while standing just outside the conflict between hunter and hunted. From that position the bait thief becomes a kind of critic of the usual roles of the eating game and as such subverts them, so that traps he has visited lose their influence...**

here trickster feeds himself where predator and prey meet, but rather than entering the game on their terms, he plays with its rules (p.22).

Again, this was a survival technique that Brady felt he had to adopt, but he did not become adept enough at it so as to eat well, as does the bait thief, not good enough to mimic the satiation of his hungers. Later on in life however, at the community college, he is still wary of educational traps and rather than putting aside as best he can his suspicions, or separating as best he can the reality from the supposed trap, he chooses to evacuate the area. No longer playing with and muddying the rules of education as he did as a trickster child, he now surrenders to them and flees, returning to the shadow play that is the essence of his self-esteem.

Without a doubt, throughout his public school career, like a trickster, he disrupted the rules and the flow of the game. Like Rabbit and Coyote in the melon patch, teacher and student probably often played a silent match of hide-and-seek to see who would get the gum trap, or the melons, or the phantom chicken. The teacher had all the power, but if she sought to maintain 'normal appearances' in the classroom, then she had to give a little to Brady, to allow him to keep up his appearances. Others may have witnessed these exchanges, but to keep the audience at a minimum, Brady needed a little bit of latitude. If the teacher tried to claim all the power, then Brady might expose the game, his intentions become palpable, not just symbolic, and his influence might career out of control.

In this way Brady is a bit of the epizoon in his desperation to control as classroom contingencies that affect him as best he can. Unfortunately, his minimum feeding he is able to accomplish does little to satisfy his hunger for education and literacy, which becomes more evident as he grows older. It is this ability to work with or create contingencies as a sign of the intelligence (p.97). In Brady's case, this sign may well have been a

limiting device. He admitted that when the teacher probed the class about a given topic, perhaps one of the more standard situations in a conventional classroom, he would go in to his trickster mode to make himself inconspicuous, at retaining as much as possible 'normal appearances.' The teacher, probably well aware of Brady's insufficiencies, and not wanting to allow his disruption to flow beyond her containment, most likely indulged him in this retreat. Thus Brady might imagine himself free to roam the melon patch, when in fact certain things were stuck to the gum trap, even as he privately salivated at the thought of the incoming chicken.

Shortly, I delve in depth into Brady's transcripts, offering a rendering that seeks to maintain a course true to the turnpike shaped by his words. But I am aware that the hermeneutic process is a shifty proposition, especially without the help of Eshu's monkeys. I see a certain sign, interpret it, and alter my opinion accordingly. Another sign, another step. Eventually, at some point, I see Prometheus. But so does Hyde, only he is on a far different path. In an Interlude not far from his book, entitled "The Land of the Dead," Hyde, reminiscing on the details of his own history, is led to imagine an Orpheus who "walked into the underworld and turned to look back at Eurydice (but) it was not doubt that moved him but resentment. Who is she to have made him charm old Charon with song, to pacify that three-legged dog guarding the distant shore? Who is she that he should be drawn into this hopeless enterprise?" (p.89). He doubts his own earlier interpretation, conceding that " (p)erhaps there is resentment in the stories, but the makers of those stories knew a wider range of feeling than that" (p.89).

But his musing does make one wonder and it directs a fugitive light on a familiar story. Brady the trickster: a compelling yet elusive and shifty character like the myths. At times so fitting, at times, remote. Hyde maintains that



"tricksters in general begin by muddying high gods" (p.90) and that trickster stories are anti-idealist--"they are made for a world of imperfections" (p.91). In these descriptions we can see Brady, as a youngster, as an adult, inadvertently juggling deities of an educational sort to save his own hide. He is the involuntary order-crosser: literate/non-literate; student/non-student; powerless/power-used; incompetent student/cunning trickster; educational epizone/educational orphan. Too often, the response to this disruption in the rules is made as though he did live in a perfect world, when in fact, all Brady was doing was showing that his world was a little less perfect than we make ours out to be.<sup>5</sup>

In the beginning was the Word...

The public school classrooms are too often inappropriate stages for original students, or to extend Rose's image, 'boundary children,' where the arena of growth and possibility are in stark tension with a dreary and relentless escape of social conditions fraught with scholastic disrepair (Rose, 1989). In *My Lives on the Boundary*, Harold Morton mounted this stage carrying a piece of paper indicating his 'high average' reading ability; several years later, school bureaucracy and concerned, but impotent teachers, had reduced this student's part with a papier-mache likeness that meant that he was in a sense, excluded from the school, pushed farther away from the possibilities of the teacher-student relationship and further towards the instrumentation of the clinic" (Rose, 1989; p.123). The sheer weight of

---

<sup>5</sup> I make the core of my interpretations from Brady's words and from extensive field experiences with him and other developmental reading students. Also, interviews with such as Ruth Zweifler, director of Treetops's Student Advocacy Center, inform my work and creative efforts. At times, as stated earlier, in dramatizing Brady's story, much like Hyde with his myth, I venture into gray areas of interpretation, especially regarding persons and events I have not researched. But certain facts speak for themselves and help inform this too--Brady completed 10 years of schooling and boasted a meager first grade reading level; he was retained; he was not in Special Ed though he was threatened with this often enough; at Treetops public schools during a period in which they were accused of and sued for discrimination against African-Americans in their system; the achievement gap of today in Treetops is an extension of that period; Brady has suppressed most early classroom memories.

Harold's file, infused with the plaintive cries from teachers and varying specialists of "No, no, not us!", belies and overwhelms Harold's own, weak-voiced supplications that seek to point out the social disadvantages he brings with him to school.

Kids do come to school with all sorts of linguistic differences, and some kids, like Harold, arrive on our doorstep with big problems. But what happens at school can then further define the child as unusual or marginal. Our approaches to language and literacy as often as not keep us from a deep understanding of difference and problems--and possibilities...[especially for] those who are already behind the economic and political eight ball (Rose, 1989; pp.127-28).

Rose was the only person or teacher who deigned to read Harold's story, a voluminous text that accumulated, sought to displace him in school, and the text that told the tale of his social imprisonment.

Compare Harold's miserable and damaging emergent literacy education with that of Paulo Freire's. The Brazilian reflects that as a young pre-schooler he used the world as his pedagogical tool, a convenient and wonderful *tabula rasa* on which he inscribed his own experiences and identity. "I learned to read and write on the ground

of the back yard of my house, in the shade of the mango trees, with words from my world rather than from the wider world of my parents. The earth was my black-board, sticks, my chalk" (1991; p.141).

In so doing, components of literacy--texts, words, letters--were articulated in the song of the birds--tanager, flycatcher, thrush, in the dance of leaves blown by the strong winds announcing storms...(p.140). Thus, in the world, the young Freire's experiences and identity were formulated and confirmed so that eventually he used the various stages of that world for his transition to the world of the word, an easy transition. Though economically poor, like Harold, Freire's 'school' did not confiscate and systematically structure his life and experiences so that these bounds choked off his development as a literate person. No, his idyllic classroom provided immeasurable opportunities for literacy development that Freire sees as an ideal stage for literacy development.

These two very different literacy narratives are important for this study because they are reminiscent of Brady's own struggles with literacy. This will be explained shortly. But too, these anecdotes capture well the enigmatic, contradictory nature of this very complex person and his literacy problems and history. It was not long with Brady that I gained insight into his difficulties with literacy, but too, his dilemmas with the institution of school. I use the term 'plausible distracters' to signify the institutional response to Brady. This notion grew out of a brief sketch developed in an early interview with Brady that introduced the context of the term. Immediately I appropriated it because I realized plausible distracters, with its metaphoric power, apprehended much of the tension inherent in Brady's drama.

On our first meeting on the first of April, the director of the Webber Community College developmental reading program, Jan, and I were interviewing Brady, this potential participant for my research, this potential Webber Community College student (he was to begin a developmental reading class the first of May) and we were listening to his ideas regarding his literacy difficulties. He mentioned the reading test that is administered to all candidates of the developmental reading program that he had recently taken.

Brady: And like on that test you gave me for instance I could um for instance I could read the test and it would say like um on the where I had to read and choose um for instance what that word meant or something like that, I would read these words and I would say well uh I saw this word in the sentence so I would assume that that would be...

Jan: The answer...

B: The answer. Instead of saying well maybe that word was in the sentence but that is not the word I'm looking for, you understand.

J: They specifically make reading tests to catch you up on things like that.

B: Yeah, right, o.k., I never knew that, but that's the type of problems I have (pp.3-4).

Jan's response to Brady was that such tests try to 'catch you up on things like that.' For Brady and others like him, it was not at all unusual to be victimized

by the institutional ploy of plausible distracters. Its most common form is as a standardized test strategy in which a plausible, but incorrect, misleading answer is provided among the multiple choices, meant to distract the test taker from the correct answer. I recognized right away that this described quite well in a metaphorical way the unfortunate, yet common institutional response to Brady and these boundary students, that is, to show or prove their educational effectiveness by way of a sanctioned, but in many ways unfair, educational strategy meant to trick those already at a disadvantage scholastically.

Jan's insouciant description of test ploys and Brady's mild surprise at discovering the existence of distracters in tests, then his hesitant acceptance of them, belies the ethical dilemma at the center of education's institutional employment of such devices. They usually are not meant to trick the knowledgeable test-taker/student into incorrect answers (Wiggins, 1999; 199), but where does that leave unsuspecting border students like Brady who need help and support, not chicanery when it comes to affirming their learning and knowledge. Wiggins takes test makers and educational institutions to task for our unending reliance on deception in testing."

Every test that provides a full range of possible answers from which the student selects involves chicanery--legal trickery--on the part of the test maker. The student must choose between answers that are (and mean to be) similar in appearance, though only one is correct (or 'best'). We rarely consider the morality and the efficacy of such a practice, however, despite the fact that the very term used to describe those other possible answers--the 'distracters'--alerts us to the test maker's deliberate deception...we *routinely* deceive young students by providing misleading answer options at their and our moral and intellectual peril (pp.117-119; emphasis in original).

Wiggins understands that at times the uncertainty inherent in such tests is "essential for ferreting out our real understanding...[but] [w]hat is the point? There are some guidelines for knowing when such deception is warranted and when it threatens students' respect for the assessor and, by implication, their *being assessed*" (pp.118-119). It is "morally objectionable," asserts

Wiggins, to evaluate a student's understanding of an issue based upon a lone, tricky question. This can be prevented by "more explicit design standards for the use of such test strategies" (p.120). Wiggins understands the complexities involved with student learning and knowledge and how these are influenced by tests and by teachers who embrace too readily and too easily the technical expertise of the institution.

[T]here is an *unavoidable* ambiguity to mere answers, even if blackened in finality by a #2 pencil: we do not know why the student selected a correct or incorrect answer. A correct answer might be due to irrelevant or lucky thinking; an incorrect answer might hide a thoughtful and apt response that, if pursued, would change our judgment as to the student's knowledge. Tact is a moral description of the obligation to validate our test results by exploring the reasons for answers. Being tactful in the assessment or testing relationship itself...is far harder than it appears. But it is essential that we become more tactful in assessment if our aim is to learn what the students really know and to induce the student to care to know and reveal more (p.109; emphasis in original).

But, this is seldom the case. For students like Brady, caring to know and trying to reveal more was a precarious exercise at best. In this regard, school was way too costly. It took its toll.

So it's like it just, you know, I would want to do it [school and its work] real bad, but the more I would want to do it, the harder it would become, you understand what I mean? Have you ran into that type of problem? (p.5).

It was not long I saw that Brady had to respond to this situation as he lived it--the 'tactless' institution and its plausible distracters meant to 'catch up'-- with a strategy of his own, once he realized he was incapable of following school as it was prescribed. He seems lost and disoriented emotionally as an adult; imagine his confusion as an elementary student.

It's just with the reading [that I have great difficulties]. Um, I think that one of my problems is that I never learned the vowels, um, I never had the chance. I never took the time to really sit down and say, um, here's a silent 'e' or something like that. I don't mean if someone asked me what are the vowels. I mean, let's say I would have to guess. I mean I know two or three but I'd have to guess the other. I mean like those types of problems I have right now...long words would get me. But like I said, that might be a problem because I don't know the sounds of the vowels, you know. ...It's time for me to go to a different level and you know, get other help [with vowels and reading] you know what I mean? (p.4).

This was his concession as an adult. But his sole apparent strategy as an elementary student seemed to be to spend his energies and intelligence on evading detection of this supposed incompetence, hence avoiding education in general, literacy in particular. To do this, Brady developed a repertoire of strategies in school (eventually outside of the classroom too) to offset his alleged inability to learn, but more importantly, to deflect the shame and humiliation that accompanied this apparent incompetence. For Brady had become convinced that his reading problems were due to "something within" (pp.17; 25) and that he wasn't "as smart as the other kids" (p.20). Recall that he claimed that the stigma of non-reading is more hurtful than the alleged illiteracy. One of these strategies Brady employed was to play it as though everything was fine with him in the classroom.

Goffman (1971) catalogs this strategy as something we do very often, probably without even being aware of it. He calls it maintaining 'normal appearances.' Of course this is a subjective phenomenon, based upon our perception of what constitutes normalcy. But when we see our normalcy threatened, or sense that it might be threatened in a given situation, we act to normalize either the situation or our role in it. This from Brady's perspective. But a teacher must make a decision too--does she call Brady out on his scam or does she do her part to maintain 'normal appearances' for reasons of her own.

In many situations there are agents of social control such as store managers, school teachers, and the like, whose job in part is to protect the setting and its users and to maintain proprieties--at least certain proprieties. Suggestions that misconduct is occurring are what constitute for them signs that readiness is required, if not sudden effort, that is, that there is a cause for alarm (Goffman, 1971; p.240).

Goffman also considers another of Brady's strategies in his classroom when he (Goffman) alludes to the 'con' involved in maintaining normal appearances in some situations. More specifically, I liken this evasive action as part of the trickster, the African folk-lore con is an example, who through

cunning and wit not only survived, but survived well, and was able to control his unpredictable environment even though he was weaker than the other members of his society. But what stands out in these devices, no matter what label is applied, is that Brady spends a lot of energy and exerts a lot of intellectual force in evading education and literacy, in maintaining normal appearances. Even after he elected to drop out of school after his tenth grade year, Brady spent the next years still 'in the con,' using his energies and intelligence and imagination to evade education and literacy, rather than attain it. Indeed, he was proud of the fact that so few people, acquaintances, fellow workers, friends and family, knew of his literacy troubles. He knew which situations to avoid that might threaten exposure, or if caught in one, just as in school, knew how to control it so as to avoid detection.

Appropriating the institutional ploy of plausible distracters to help situate Brady in his educational dilemmas as a young boy and even as an adult, I have gained me an understanding of the duplicity of the act, however necessary in decision making, and how in a way, school and literacy failures make all of those who are involved respond in a duplicitous manner, or, as has been noted above in the discussion of the trickster, act to disrupt the school's learning, whether this be for good or subversive. I imagined that Brady perhaps was not unlike Harold in when he first entered school--an unsuspecting, fairly intelligent kid whose only expectations were that he entrusted his academic well-being to the school system that promised to care for him. Instead, for some reasons, their responsibility for him is heavily compromised. The teachers and other specialists, in this case, and very likely in Brady's case, sought to disavow responsibility for the child's failures and to pass the onus of his education on to some other specialist, hence the sheer weight and size of Harold's file, which became increasingly distorted with time and with the seemingly plausible explanations

the  
lit.  
de  
Ha

un  
an  
de  
no  
by  
res  
so  
Ha  
at  
ac  
ma  
ev  
se  
Hy  
ha  
neg  
inte



the teachers and specialists used, in Brady's case, to evade the real issue of a little boy, failing miserably in school, not knowing what is going on. Brady's own description of this, looking back on it decades later, is poignant and pertinent to Harold's case.

Yeah. Each year they [the teachers and specialists] cared less. Like for instance, you would go to class and you would be sitting in there. The easiest thing for that teacher to say to you is I am going to stick you in a Special Ed class so that you can get better help. But the way they go about it they don't say Special Ed, they say a class to help you out, you understand? They don't use the real word of what they are saying. They're trying to hide what they are, you know, their responsibility in doing their jobs (p.32).

It is obvious from this excerpt and others that follow that Brady is not an intelligent person. In fact, he seems blessed with higher order thinking skills and a perceptive grasp of human relations. Indeed Jan, who has worked with developmental students for many years, was highly impressed by Brady; she noted his articulate and perspicacious manner especially. I too was impressed with these immediately and as I got to know him better, by his sense of responsibility, his sensitivity, and his circumspect demeanor and judgement. But somehow, as academic and literacy failure seemed unavoidable, Brady (and Harold) were abandoned as real people with real problems and in Brady's case at least, much of his intellectual energy is spent not in school-impelled academic pursuits, but in setting up 'cons' and other trickster mechanisms to manage school tasks in the only way he knew how, that is, by faking them, usually to evade them as best he could, and to find a way to maintain his esteem and self-concept in the light of his apparent failings. Recall too that it attributes the ability to work with contingencies, as Brady so very often does during the school day to avoid the shame and yet manage to survive over 10 years of schooling, as a sign of one aspect of trickster's nature.

Again, this tension between Brady and the institution, in the form of

teachers and tutors and specialists and the administration and various policies, including that of plausible distracters which too often further marginalize struggling students like Brady, is prevented from becoming unmanageable because, I suspect, both sides seek in their own way to maintain 'normal appearances,' else how would Brady have been passed on with such low skills credentials. Even as Brady seeks to deflect attention away from his literacy consequent academic failings, the institution uses plausible explanations in a way that allow Brady to proceed from grade level to grade level without upsetting the classroom teacher and denting too obviously pertinent school policies. Consider that Brady's plight may not have been at all singular for the school and the district, for Nathan, Brady's elementary school, was one of three elementary schools in the district with close to a fifty per cent, mostly poor, Black student population. Consequently, Special Education was more a threat, an alternative if you will, than a practical alternative. And retention only guaranteed Brady aggrieved teacher another year of the same difficulties. Brady soon learned to become inconspicuous in the classroom and eventually learned that conflict reduction was best accomplished by evading the conflict entirely.

The first part of Brady's development as trickster and his subsequent use of such mechanisms as a means to mimic 'doing' school work so as to avoid teacher discipline and, in his eyes, humiliation, is nicely evinced in his relationship with a young first grader, Carnie, whom Brady recognizes as having some of the same literacy problems and developing some of the same strategies as he did as a young student. He met this boy while visiting his son in his own son's classroom, something Brady does quite often. Brady's responses to Carnie bring up memories of his own elementary school years. Finally Brady has difficulty recalling.

**Brady:** Because I go up and talk to him and I work with him and stuff. But just a lot of things I see reminds me of myself...Um, we passed out, I passed out all the books...But as I passed those books out, you could see the change in

his attitude when it is time to sit down and everybody in the class studies one page and like the teacher's standing: "O.K., who wants to do the first problem?" So I mean I see that type of stuff.

Researcher: And you remember that's how you felt?

Brady: Right. That's how I felt when it came time. You would sit there and think you would concentrate more on hopefully that he won't ask me. You understand what I'm saying? ...Just let me sit here and be able to be like a baseball on the lawn, you know? (pp.21-22).

So instead of feeling able to ask directly for help, a probable breach of 'normal appearances' in Brady's classroom, since such an eventuality might mean discipline, or humiliation, or a veiled threat of Special Education, Brady spent much of his elementary years ducking assignments, or holding his breath, trying to be inconspicuous, like that lost, forlorn baseball on the lawn! Even when he did make an endeavor to do the work, he was so unpracticed at 'doing' school, that he admitted during our talks that it would not be long he'd find himself far behind the rest of the class.

We recall the Rist (1970) study in which the teacher's low expectations of and inattention to certain seemingly low-achievement students doomed their academic success and efficacy early on in their schooling, way before their actual performance, or lack of it, had confirmed such suspicions. Of course the expectations were based upon appearance (low social class status and physical signs such as darkness of skin, or hair type, poor language skills) and word-of-mouth (from other teachers who may have had a sibling in class previously) and school records that confirmed their low social standing (free lunch program; problems on welfare; parent education). Later, their decreasing self-esteem, heightened on by repeated 'failures' in the classroom, coupled with their own low expectations of themselves, evolved into a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' that insured continued decline in academics with no intervention on the part of the teachers or specialists or tests required. That is, after a short while, the students themselves began to be convinced of their 'bad press' and reputation and acted accordingly. This helps explain in a way a question posed by the Freire

anecdote in relation to Brady: even if this student's literacy education was compromised by school and the complex politics of social class status and race, even why was Brady not able to develop literacy skills as a member of a highly literate society?

It may be posited that the mechanisms Brady learned to cope with his inadequacies in school, he transferred to his private life, even though these things need not have had such harsh consequences in the private sector of his life. Whatever, though Brady had plenty of opportunities to enrich his literacy life at home, he eschewed this activity. Unlike many families of the lower working class with a single parent (when asked about his father's occupation during his interview, Brady's answer was that 'he did not live with us.') who live in low-income neighborhoods, Brady's home was print rich. His mother bought books and provided playing cards that his siblings took advantage of, but Brady did not.

Brady: Um, yeah, they (his mother and other family adults) have always bought books, I just never took interest in them you know. My niece who lived with us, she is the same age as I am, she grew up with us, she always read—I just never got into it.

Researcher: All your brothers and sisters read?

B: Uh huh.

R: Parents?

B: Yeah, they always read newspapers, they always have. It's just right now I was in the library over there and I felt like I saw some books so I wanted to see 'cause I have been watching the hockey game and stuff so I got a couple little books on the best of hockey, the history of hockey, and I got another one more in the car. But I am trying to get into this--it is just it seems harder and harder...I don't know. I just wasn't into it (reading)... It's like I used to buy myself comics, but I never read them. I just used to look at the pictures (pp.27-28).

Unlike Freire, Brady probably saw the earth and the trees and birds and for purposes other than connections to literacy. In some social class levels of society, it is probably understood by playmates and peers that one avoids reading--this may even be rewarded and applauded--but it is difficult to imagine a society so much print and other literacy media as imbues our society, that even a child who eschews literacy, would not pick up on some pertinent aspects of it.

Es

It's almost as if one had to work at not becoming literate.

In a way, this perspective may help to explain Brady's non-development in terms of literacy. Freire worked at becoming literate in his back yard. His society of friends and things and his tiny culture assisted him in this endeavor. He experienced a poetic emergent literacy, one that matched his sensibilities and sensitivities. Brady was acclimated in a different way than this. At a young age he entered a community school that was over 50% African-American. Many of these students were drawn from the low-income housing situated down the street from Nathan elementary. A few years later, a prominent court suit is levied against this district by a woman, the director of the Student Advocacy Center, who claimed that the Black students of the district were underserved educationally, especially in those several schools, of which Nathan was one, that were 'heavily impacted' racially. Even after the court case was settled and the district strove to meet the terms of the verdict, these did not address the idea of instruction, and how that might be amended to best serve these marginal students (interview with Ruth Zweifler; 1997).

White teachers far outnumbered teachers of color in the district. This was one of the primary concerns of the Student Advocacy Center in regards to these students. But the court's verdict of 'sensitivity training seminars' for these teachers (eventually the locus of the suit became an almost all-white school where teachers had to undergo this minimal and uncoordinated training. The schools with the heavy Black population were not affected by the court's verdict) was a sham and did not address the very issues that created the learning issues originally--including the idea, as posited by Heath (1991), that teachers' understanding of minority cultures is abysmally lacking and teacher education, in-service as well as pre-service, must address this problem. Finally, as Zweifler points out, in terms of instruction.

Brady enters this point in his local history an unsuspecting, poor, lower working class kid from the nearby projects hoping to learn to read and write. But eleven years later he opts out of school, still unable to read or write with even minimal proficiency, such that over twelve years later, when he applies for the developmental reading program at Webber Community College, his reading proficiency is gauged to be in the first grade range. In the meantime, this intelligent, sensitive person has formulated complicated means to avoid the terrible costs of literacy, including the humiliation and embarrassment and punishment that attends illiteracy in the schools and in society. Most likely he has formed networks among his friends to help him occasionally 'beat the system' in school and jump any hurdles in his private life relating to literacy. More and more, the notion that literacy learning is secondary to his coping mechanisms that deflect literacy situations becomes reified in Brady's mind and he expends tremendous intellectual and physical energies to maintain this play within a play.

Brady [talking about his employment history]: ...you know just doing stuff that doesn't pertain to reading. You know I have always thought of myself as um avoiding the reading.

Researcher: Exactly, did you um did you ever try to fake it as you were going through school or life in terms of not letting people, not letting on to people that you have trouble reading?

B: Yeah, I think most people that know me wouldn't even believe it because... They wouldn't believe it because I do so many things that are um that most people that you consider intelligent would be doing (p.12).

And this is as it should be--Brady's deficiency kept a well-guarded secret--for the practice and the time he has not put into literacy development has instead gone into honing and refining his trickster persona, his ways of mimicking, in his mind, the intelligent. Indeed, Brady's instructor in his class at WCC, Jill, was quite impressed with his language skills and articulation which very much belied his reading test results (private communication).

This idea of Brady's twenty-five year development of his non-literate skills

nicely captures the tension that pervades his biography--that of the past in many ways dictating the present, the idea that enacts Wordsworth's "the child is father of the man" principle. Brady as child (Harold Morton) is neatly juxtaposed to Brady as adult (Freire, the adult teacher, emerging from a very natural and spontaneous pre-school, teaching literacy skills to illiterate adults with methods derived from that outdoor school) who, still seeking to avoid the repercussions of illiteracy, utilizes skills enhanced with years and years of effort and intellect. But the idea of the illiteracy is just as insufferable now as it was when Brady attended elementary school and the experiences caused him to suppress or repress many of those memories.

Brady [in response to inquiries about his early education]: Actually I don't uh I don't remember school...um, I think it was more the reading has always been a problem to me so as a little kid I really did everything I could to avoid it.

Researcher: Did you read as well as you do now when you were a little kid? Because I thought you did an excellent job with this paper.

B: I don't think I did. I never...maybe I can remember having little sessions like this in high school and junior high.

R: But not in grade school?

B: No.

R: Did you do the work with other kids? Do you remember?

B: I remember that...no, I didn't. It was...

R: Did you have to read when you were in grade school. Do you remember?

B: Yeah, I remember that but I didn't have to, no. Um in grade school what they did is they would sit down and write on the board and stuff like that. I never really since my grade school days. I don't really remember even trying to remember. I can't remember much about it. Maybe it was something that I have always tried to block out but I don't remember it and like 7th and 8th grade I kind of remember those because they were sort of, kind of, they were real difficult for me because I was entering junior high and they did in junior high they wanted you to read out loud and...

R: You avoided that?

B: Right, and I probably did on classes like that I probably never showed up, you know...

R: Knowing that you might be embarrassed?

B: Exactly... (p.15).

The idea of Brady's past is continually infringing upon his consciousness today. In this latest excerpt, I went on to ask Brady about more elementary grade memories, trying to jog his recollection of these difficult past events. But he neatly avoided this, whether purposefully or not, and went into a lengthy



c

P

g

V

b

n

t

c

j

d

-a

fo

cu

a

c

in

cu

fo

su

na

im

loc

me

be

give

discussion of present family problems. But this connection of the past with the present works both ways. It is a busy track! I asked him about his future plans given that he might succeed in enhancing his literacy skills with classes at WCC. It was not long he was remarking upon some past events, the idea that because he had time on his hands--a lack of free-time resources in his neighborhood environment and the fact that he skipped school so often to avoid the humiliation of illiteracy--he was often in trouble. Nothing major, just continual scrapes and minor skirmishes with authority and neighborhood hi-jinks. But very soon, he used this as an opportunity to return to the present to discuss his own son's classroom (p.20).

This trait, this continual exchange of the past and the present, and others--a developed (adult) memory to compensate for a lack of literacy, and other forms of coping strategies--are very reminiscent of traits attributed to an oral culture by Kieren Egan (1987). He posits that the people of oral cultures past and present are no less intelligent or deficient thinkers than people of a literate culture (who often look upon the members of an oral culture as inferior in intellect and thinking skills--the great divide revisited!). But those of the oral culture instead develop communication and learning skills to fit their purposes for civic and private life. In so doing, they rely more heavily upon certain skills, such as memory and memory aids--rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, synecdoche, narrative construction--in their diurnal life. Egan maintains that his study has implications for early childhood education, where he asserts, teachers often look upon the oral manifestations and skills and attributes of children (oral members as part of a literate society, already pre-literate perhaps) as deficits to be filled in with literacy.

Regarding Brady, it must be wondered what encouragement he was given, or if in fact he was treated as a literacy failure (even in his pre-literate, first

gra

sci

he

ill

mo

of

wa

lea

sta

ap

du

an

co

a

u

n

e

grade classroom) and not encouraged to develop the skills he brought to school, his local literacies, so as to accomplish his literacy development. Today, he does appear an intelligent, articulate, critically thinking adult. (3) His illiteracy stands as sort of an anomaly to the person I have worked with these months. *In the beginning was the word...* For Brady, it is unfortunate that in terms of his literacy development, it is still the beginning, twenty some years after it was to have started. And for Brady, the 'word' has never been made flesh. At least not in a literate sense. Not yet.

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly...

F. Scott Fitzgerald's tragic tale of a man's past continually setting the stage for his present life, even as it compromises those advances, seems an appropriate counterpoint to Brady's story. Gatsby's tale, with its single-minded purpose, impelled in many ways by social class depravity suffered as a child and other measures of compensation, makes us take heart with Brady's conviction to 'turn his life around' via his literacy training. Gatsby did not accommodate this reform. He allowed himself to be driven to extreme and unrealistic measures by the dictates of his distant and near past. Gatsby rejected the child within him, going even so far as to change his name to distance himself from the pain of his youth. Brady embraces his past, works within its ebb and flow, even as he evades the powerful, unpredictable eddies that swirl in secret wait, seeking to swamp him. He denies neither himself nor his past, his heritage, having given his son his own name.

It is not coincidental that Fitzgerald posits Gatsby's father in the last scene and commissions Carraway to return to his home, a sort of reconciliation with the past that is at tension with the present throughout the book. Brady equivocates educational research that keeps uneducated parents with painful

S

1

S

W

li

9

w

d

p

m

p

s

a

tr

a

s

T

a

to

es

B

of

ex

a-

Sy

school memories on the outside of their kids' education looking in (i.e. Lareau, 1987 and Connell, 1982) by continually visiting his children's classes, so much so, that his son's first grade teacher encourages his visits, so helpful is Brady with the class. This is where he met Carnie, the young boy whose struggles with literacy reminds Brady so much of his own troubles at that age. In this young first grader, Brady sees himself incarnated, does not deny the vision, but seeks to work with it, even as he works with his own past, his own literacy and school deficits. Fitzgerald worked with the image of incarnation in *Gatsby* too, but his portrayal fed Gatsby's illusions, while Brady's association with it is a realistic means to help a child and help himself come to grips with his own intrusive past.

But with Brady's story, there is no doubt that his life's early events have shaped his life today. There is no denying that what Brady has practiced since an early age--the disavowal of literacy in exchange for the trickster mechanisms that provided him some measure of comfort then and even self-esteem now--is a significant part of his story. But it has significance for his future too in that it serves as a sort of prophylactic to attempted literacy learning and success. These coping strategies and life without literacy is so much a part of Brady's life and consciousness and intellectual and learning constructs that a move towards literacy seems to make him uncomfortable, as if it threatens his long-established framework for diverting literacy and especially, his sense of himself. Brady does not deny this.

The idea that Brady might feel uncomfortable pursuing literacy because of his well-ingrained habits and perceptions, was one of the first notions I explored after having worked with Brady for even a short time. I spoke to Jan and Jill about this. I had referred to Brady's apparent 'approach-avoid' syndrome in meeting with me for the tutoring sessions. He usually had a good

ex

dir

in l

to l

me

out

it o

pas

app

link

sche

regard

largely

pointed

experie

excuse, but still I wondered about his conviction to change his life in this direction. Upon discussion, it was pointed out that this seemingly small change in his life might in fact be of monumental proportions to him and to those close to him and might arbitrate his behavior and determination. This made sense to me and I figured the best way to explore this notion would be to ask Brady outright about this notion. His honesty and forthrightness surprised me, even as it offered the first clues of how well-connected are the events and lessons of his past to the motions that define his life today. We had been talking, appropriately, about his past education, when this conversation emerged, linking his wife's insecurities (as Brady perceives it) about his returning to school with his concomitant classroom stress and doubts.

Brady: Um, like now I'm going through a change with my wife. We are not really together because I don't know, I think she, uh, felt like the change in me is part of my attitude towards them, you know. She thinks that if I don't know, she knows that I'm intelligent about a lot of things. She thinks if I get book intelligent that uh, there will be nothing there, that I would leave the family.

Researcher: You'll change?

B: Right.

R: So drastically that you would leave her and the family?

B: Right, so I mean I'm going through a little stage with that too.

R: So she is kind of against you coming to college?

B: She said she's not, but when like when I go through these stages when I had to get these papers, she kind of gave me a hard time. I mean you know like every time I tried to get into reading and writing it's always been something, you know, that makes me not want to do it, you know. Because since I've started this whole process I have been having a hard time with my wife, because she's always saying that I'm just gonna, like I said, that we're not really together, but she's saying that I'm just gonna leave her and the family completely, you know. Like that type of stuff, it makes it hard. I've always had a hard time every time, but you know, it seems like every time I try to get into this, the book aspect of the life, I've always had a problem (p.16).

I asked Brady about prior endeavors and their consequences in this regard, and he started to talk about former tutors, whom I gathered had been largely ineffectual, encouraging, but with little success. When he read with me, I pointed out to him various strengths and strategies he brought to the reading experience with which I was impressed. He had not heard those things before;



inde

grac

that

to be

was

meet

intera

class

and t

prob

and d

May.

instru

that w

he we

day, th

indeed, had considered himself a depleted reader with little or no saving graces. He concluded his long explanation with a significant statement: "Just that type of stuff. I don't know, all my life, I always run into problems when I want to be smart or know more" (p.16). I asked Brady how much of these 'problems,' was in fact resistance on his part for whatever reason.

Brady: I agree with you there [my assertion of his resistance]. I mean I totally agree because when I first started getting into this, you know, I wasn't, I'm talking right now with [about] you and Jan and everybody, I wasn't seeing my wife. And when I went back to her, it seemed like I didn't see you no more for a week or two. You know. I don't know.

Researcher: So you see some parallel there...some correlation.

B: Yeah. Exactly. Not her fault or anything, or it's just, it might be something that subconsciously I've always went through in my life (pp.16-17).

It was then I asked Brady directly about the topic of conversation from my meeting with Jan and Jill, that is, regarding the comfort he might feel being the literacy evader, and how difficult it might be to change.

Researcher: I think maybe that if your wife presents some road blocks to this [his attempts to improve his literacy], you might present some to yourself subconsciously.

Brady: I agree totally. I've thought about that last night because of the fact that it is, I mean, now I found myself now. I go out finding things that I would like to read, you know. I do sit down and look at them and read them and um, yeah, I totally agree with you on that. It's something within me that makes me not want to try even harder (p.17).

I went on to remind Brady how important this up-coming (at the time) class was to his literacy future, and how important it was that he attend classes and the reading lab and keep in touch with the instructor (Jill) regarding problems and concerns. He agreed that he should and would do these tasks and do them well. And he meant it. Indeed, he did show up for class the first of May, but on Monday told me that no one else showed up, including the instructor. Of course, right away I checked this out with Jan. I was a little peeved that when Brady makes an effort, it is not reinforced, but thrown back at him as if he were in elementary school again. But as it turned out, Brady had the correct day, the correct room number, but the incorrect building. So he entered his

second week of class already well behind the other students. We spent our weekly meetings working on his homework, which he had saved for this time, not attempting to do this work on his own, though he had done some reading lab assignments on his own.

It was at this time that Jill called me at home with legitimate concerns about Brady's progress, including his haphazard attendance. I had gone through this with him, this 'approach-avoid' behavior. But once we had come to know one another better, and perhaps he had gained some trust in me, he went out of his way to attend our sessions. I told Jill about these experiences and assured her Brady would be an exemplary student. On our latest meeting however, Brady admitted having skipped class the week before (these habits are so difficult to squelch) because he was entertaining the idea of quitting his WCC endeavors. When we left our session, I believe I had convinced him to stay with the program, to consider the future consequences of his present successes. But even as I write now I am haunted by the knowledge that he quit his class not long after my conversation with Jill assuring her of Brady's resolve. I suspect he abandoned his dreams because of constructs too old and comfortable to budge and the many diurnal excuses he can re-shape to fit his evasion tactics.

Of course these diurnal nuisances that serve to sway Brady from his resolve are very legitimate to him, very disconcerting and troublesome. He is a sensitive person who misses his kids, misses the family circle, the reinforcement and succor from his wife. Recently, he confided to me that it is difficult for him to wake up alone, when he is used to waking up surrounded by five people. Of course these are very real circumstances and feelings and consequent thoughts that Brady experiences and deals with that serve to undermine his best literacy intentions. I asked him where he would go with his enhanced skills

in literacy in a few months. His vision was kept necessarily limited.

Brady: [I'll take in college] Any course possible. But I know that is not my long term goal at this time. My long term goal at this time you know, I'm trying to make it a short term goals seeing that the course is ten weeks [long]. I am making ten weeks goals. My first ten weeks which has started two weeks ago I want to finish this course and finish every assignment in the course. There is an assignment a week. So if I make it to the lab at least twice a week I should be able to finish on time. Whether it is right or wrong that is my goal. I am not concentrating so much on the right being right as I am forming myself into doing it.

Researcher: Getting it done.

B: It's like when I wake up every morning at 5:30a.m. to go to the gym, you know. I had to train my body to do that. Now I haven't done it for the last two months so I have to start all over again. I mean it is the same thing.

R: So you train your mind that way.

B: Right.

R: Sounds like a good plan.

B: I hope it works. That is all I can say...I am a little tired, my wife called at four o'clock in the morning. You know, just always something...(p.30).

In many ways, Brady's talk sounds like someone preparing for a fall. His confidence level is low in terms of accomplishing even these smallest goals. "Just always something." An anthem for his adult life's frustrated attempts at literacy, about really many years ago when he first learned how to evade the consequences of non-literacy. In this way, he fits in well with Fitzgerald's rhythmic, hypnotic refrain: *So Brady beats on, a boat against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.*

There are no children here

Kotlowitz (1991) derives the title for his book, *There Are No Children Here*, from a comment made by the mother of the 'two boys growing up in the other America,' upon whom the story is based. When she realized the author wanted to write about her children and the children of the projects, she protested that indeed there were no children here, since they had witnessed far too much to be children anymore. In fact, in Kotlowitz' compelling description of life on the South side of Chicago's wrecked and impoverished 'communities,' death and diurnal turmoil and the stench of depraved human existence and the

infiltration and infestation of drugs and gangs and a fast-receding 'normal' community relentlessly took its toll on even the strongest child, such as Lafayette.

His face masked his troubles. It was a face without affect, without emotion. Sometimes he appeared stoic or unamused. In an adult, the hollowness of his face might have been construed as a look of judgment. But in Lafayette it conveyed wariness. Even in its emptiness, it was an unforgiving face. He was an unforgiving child (Kotlowitz, 1991; p. 55).

Ironically, if a young boy were to retain his childhood for any extended period of time, such as did Pharoah, Lafayette's younger brother, this brief reprieve was bought at the expense of Lafayette's sacrifices and those of his mother, LaJoe, who surrendered more of their own souls so as to sustain the younger boy's illusions of leading a 'normal' life for a little while at least. But eventually, irrevocably, the serpents of a suspended childhood would slither about Pharoah's feet too.

Brady's involvement with his own kids and those with whom he comes in contact is very reminiscent of Lafayette's protective and paternal stance towards his younger siblings and friends and relatives. But for Brady, the interaction with children allows him also to get closer to his own past, his often suppressed childhood memories, and to advance his literacy development. In many ways, Brady's affiliation with children, especially his own, is to insure that they indeed do have a childhood and one that is more enjoyable than not, and more literate than his own. He is their best advocate.

I have already described Brady's association with Carnie, the young student with literacy difficulties who provided Brady not only a conduit to his own past, but a way to get close to his own literacy development even as he tried to help the troubled youngster meet his scholastic and personal challenges.

Brady: I always go to my son's [class] you know. I went up Friday. I watch a

lot of the little kids in the class. I watched the difference in some of them the way they read and it reminds me of myself, um, how I was when I was their age, six and seven years old. I would be in first grade and the other kids could read and I couldn't read. You know, that type of stuff.

Researcher: Did they act the same way you did?

B: Actually they do.

R: Did they respond the same way, I mean?

B: Yeah, they do. Like for instance, there is this little boy [Carnie] that is in my son's class and, um, he's really bad, but I think me and my wife, we always talk about it.

R: Bad reader or bad behavior?

B: Both...I think most of the problem is from his parents. But, um, my parents, I never went through stuff that he goes through with his parents. Um, but his reading and his writing kind of bothers him. I can tell because he has a little tutor and all that. But at the same time he wants to learn more, but there is all these confusions in his life. Being six or seven years old, that's a bit much for him to handle. I mean, just stuff like that reminds me of myself.

R: Do the teachers help him?

B: They try.

R: Do they understand him the way you understand him?

B: I don't know. I don't know (pp.20-21).

Brady is at heart a very sensitive and gentle person who has a great affection for children. He and his wife of almost 10 years have four children ages nine to infant. All but the youngest child attend elementary schools in Brady's home town; the oldest child, a girl, is enrolled at a school different than the younger kids, since their school goes only to grade three. He is very concerned about their education, not unusual at all for a loving parent. But it is unusual that he takes such an active interest in their education, such a participatory interest, especially for a person with his scholastic experiences, low-level reading ability, and low social class status (Lareau, 1987). It is interesting to listen to Brady speak about his kids, because in several ways they ignite his drive to learn to read better. And as with Carnie, their brief histories are indelibly tied in with his own; he uses his past school experiences to respond to his kids' education and is always learning for his own (literacy) purposes by events he observes in their lives. Notice how Brady's own story slips easily in and out of relevance to his own kids' experiences.

Brady: ...I've always had the will to want to read, but I never had the know-how.

Researcher: Now what happened when other kids were gaining these

[literacy] skills in the third grade or second grade or fourth grade, where were you and what were you doing and did you know then that you had a problem with...that you were behind?

B: I've always known that...I've always known that and it has always bothered me and, um, coming up...

R: Do you think the teachers tried to help?

B: Actually I don't um...I mean my whole schooling career, I've always...Well, just like for instance I've noticed me going up to the schools for the last nine years with my kids..I've noticed how the teachers aren't uh good with the students--they are there to get paid more or less, do you know what I mean, like for instance my daughter, my nine year old...

R: Where do they go to school?

B: Blaine School and all that, but when she first started going to school, she couldn't read but she got in third grade and she got with this one teacher who was really good because of the fact of uh she was uh not uh so relaxed, you know what I mean, she was more or less like, uh, um...

R: Pushed her a little bit?

B: Yeah, right. And I don't think I have had enough pushing or maybe I did and I just uh didn't pay attention, you know, um, I really don't know...Um, I was always like you know, I was saying to you a second ago, I've noticed just by going to school with my kids that they are doing the same thing to the students now that they did back then where they would throw 'em in Special Ed and...As a sign of not being able to keep up with the rest, they throw 'em in Special Ed...you know, and that has always bothered me...you know, and that is why I want to be able to learn for myself [literacy, to read and write] so I can teach my own kids (p.9; p.11).

Brady is an advocate for his children, not only out of the parental responsibility that he takes so seriously, but because, being uncertain about the causes of his own low literacy skills, he does not want to negatively influence his children's education. In our first interview, he explained that his parents read, his siblings read, the niece who was his own age and shared his environment with him, read well too. it was only he who faltered in this critical learning of literacy. "I've noticed with my son, he's real good at everything, but he is slow on the reading part. You understand where I'm coming from? I don't know if it is heredity or what it is, but like everyone else in my family, no one else has that problem" (p.2). Behind Brady's concern looms the shadow of a history ready to repeat itself. By countermanding his own literacy problems, he figures he can help control the favorable destiny of his kids' literacy, not only by tutoring them in their studies, but by erasing the threat of an inherited literacy jinx.

Our interviews are littered with Brady's descriptions of occasions of reading with his kids, or taking them to the library, or engaging in other activities with them. I call the house and Brady is absent. He has just taken a son to baseball practice. Or he is out bike riding with another child. His separation from his wife and his consequent reduced time spent with the kids (Brady proudly explains how he believes in the family dinner, how it is a time of union and bonding and togetherness) serves more than as another hurdle to his literacy attainment. It is a very real feature of his life that wracks him emotionally and does indeed take away his concentration from his literacy endeavors. After all, his goals, his future, his future literacy goals, are entwined tightly with his children. He once confessed to me in a private moment that I could not tape lest I insensitively undervalue the depth and power of his mood, that he would rather not see his kids at all than see them on a limited, wife-controlled basis. But the next meeting was filled with anecdotes involving his interaction with his children.

But his love and concern for children extends beyond his immediate family. Even when he visits the classroom of one of his children, he is there as an ambassador for all children.

Researcher: Do you work with the kids when you go in there [the classrooms]?

Brady: Yeah, I always work with those kids. I, you know some of them are smarter than me, I mean.

R: Have you thought about going to school here for a year, getting some good [literacy] skills down...and becoming a teacher's aide?

B: No, I've never thought about it.

R: You'd be great at it.

B: That's something...I've always got along with kids. I've always, my oldest kid is nine and she's always wanting me to come to school. You know, I mean I get along great with people, you know. I don't have a problem with kids--they're all the same. You know I treat everybody with respect...So I mean like I said, teachers have always told me to come to class. I've always went on trips. I mean, I've never had them type of problems, you know, getting along. It's the problem I have with books, you know what I mean? (p.22).

Even in his engagements with literacy, in reading about kids, Brady learns about them, even as he learns about himself. In reading *The Bluest Eye*,



the same sympathetic glance and tone he uses with his and other kids were evident. His understanding of human relations and his ability to get along with others are traits probably developed and tempered , at least in some part, by the continual school conflict which made him a more sympathetic and sensitive observer and person. Too, these traits may simply be part of his nature, attributable to his upbringing--what he implies was a healthy and supportive family situation during his youth.

Besides the Morrison novel, Brady and I discussed another reading, one of those inauthentic short short stories inserted in developmental reading texts so as to generate inauthentic questions related to that text . Together, we read the story then answered the several questions following it. The story dealt with Cliff Evans (Todhunter, 1975), an unfathomably unfortunate school boy who had suffered years of educational and individual neglect at the hands of impersonal and institutionalized educational personnel. The narrator of the story, a teacher who once had Cliff in his class, is trailing the school bus one morning, when it suddenly stops and ejects a woeful Cliff Evans (who had obviously, we learn later, asked the driver to stop the bus). Amazingly the student collapses to the ground and dies, supposedly due to this squandered attention and affection. The teacher, who is commissioned to tell Cliff's parents about his demise and consequently reviews his history, much as Rose did that of Harold Morton, resolves to never let a student leave his class until he has made a genuine, personal connection with the student.

I wondered, upon completing the assignment, if Brady recognized any connection to Cliff's story and the details of his own life. Brady was quick to make a comparison, citing the impersonal nature of later schooling; his being shunted from class to class for apparently no academic reason, merely to be done with him; the chain of Ds that defined his report cards; the loneliness and

humiliation

fact that wh

his schools

Brady

There

next c

the 19

little a

Resea

Your

B. De

saw th

up so

they c

Yanc

kids s

So B

concern for

improved lit

genuine affe

candidate fo

CNN a lot to

becoming a

who are sho

recalls whe

trespassing

and person

battles. Eve

conceiving c

Brady's tale

in the down

crime, drugs

Towa

humiliation of educational failure. He felt a kinship with Cliff Evans, save for the fact that whereas Cliff was a social refugee, Brady was a more popular figure in his schools.

Brady: And that is how it goes and how I remember it too. Each teacher would say "here is a passing grade of 'D'", just to get you through. And you would go on to the next class and you would have just as hard of time. You know, I went all the way up to the 11th grade. No one, my thought is how can a person make it in school knowing as little as I know. If I wanted to I could have graduated and not knowing nothing.

Researcher: Do you think, just like Cliff, as you went on, you got worse in school? Your confidence went lower?

B: Definitely. I agree. I can comprehend that whole story. And that is how it is...I saw that [the teachers giving up on Cliff, and of course, himself] as a way of messing up society. 'Cause if you think they've done that to me, how many other kids have they done that to? And I think that is one of the reasons why towns like [nearby] Yancy have so many problems. Because the teachers aren't dealing with teaching the kids, so all they do is go out and sell drugs. What else is there for them to do? (p.32).

So Brady's social concern is evident too, blending well with his care and concern for children and youth. It is a shame that he cannot read well, for an improved literacy, combined with his innate sense of psychology and his genuine affection for people, especially kids, would make him a remarkable candidate for a number of jobs in social services. As it is, he admits to watching CNN a lot to keep up with current events. One of his fantasies involves someday becoming a lawyer, more to help disadvantaged people like himself and those who are short-changed educationally, than to have a well-paid career. He recalls when his illiteracy created trouble for him--not being able to read a 'no trespassing' sign for instance--and he realizes if others are caught in this social and personal trap, that they will require an advocate to help fight their legal battles. Even though he can well imagine a career as a lawyer, he has difficulty conceiving of the idea of being an aide in a school classroom. This is where Brady's talents would be most beneficial, where he could act as an intervention in the downward spiral of unfortunate kids, headed towards a life of illiteracy, crime, drugs, too-early adulthood.

Towards the end of *There Are No Children Here*, Kotlowitz describes a

scen

rain!

inter

my:

yea

a p

goi

La

'run

por

en

de

for

dre

tra

sto

de

of

un

so

Ge

an

un

inte

him

unr

scene where the boys are out walking around after a rain. Pharoah spots a rainbow and because he has been allowed to sustain his youth due to the intervention of others, becomes excited and chases it, hoping to find the mythical treasure at the rainbow's end. Even Rickey, a few years older and light years more hardened than Pharoah, agrees to commit to the quest, more out of a protective stance with Pharoah, than a belief in fool's gold. Rickey knows that gold is accessible only by ripping it off the necks of unsuspecting strangers. But Lafayette does not pursue the rainbow, this ephemeral dream. His childhood is 'running on empty,' and he has no inclination to hope. It is a sad and compelling portrait of lives shown in relief, in various stages of flux; one child reaches for an enticing dream, another cautiously straddles the invisible and delicate demarcation between childhood and adulthood, and the last stands alone, forsaken by everyone and everything about him, wondering from where his next dream or next hope will come. Kotlowitz, a latter-day Keats, showing lives transfixed by the vagaries of a fickle destiny.

This is where Brady fits in. He is perusing this misplaced museum and stops in front of this overgrown vase. He 'reads' the story Kotlowitz has depicted. Though an annotation explains the scene on a placard near the foot of the urn, it is inaccessible to Brady. But still his heart reaches out and understands the meaningful movement within the still life. He interprets the scene and recoils a bit in humiliation and shame, sorrow and sympathy. Generations inhabit the portrait. His own youth is depicted next to that of his son and Carnie. The oral culture sidles up to the literate culture. They both understand the relief in their own way. Taking a step closer, Brady is able to interpret the depiction in yet another manner. The three figures represent himself at various stages, moods, themes of his life. They emanate from or unravel from a central core. He yet pursues and believes in that core, his own

rainbow. He  
son, even a  
He chases  
says "I und  
life's depict  
his pain.

Each

cannot think  
morning, wh  
the narrow  
afternoon a  
sudden and  
reminiscent  
adventures  
manicured  
and eateries  
nuances of  
iambic pent

I rea

Stratford wa  
Rosenblatt  
Poem. No.  
a simple tra  
terms of rea  
expression

rainbow. He chases it when he picks up a book on hockey and reads it to his son, even after nagging thoughts of his literacy inadequacy in the sixth grade. He chases it when he spots an aggrieved Carrie and extends his hand and says "I understand." How many ways are there to read an urn, a scene, one of life's depictions? Brady is fluent in all of them but one. And that is the source of his pain.

### Rosenblatt's Poem

Each summer, I visit the Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario. I cannot think of a more literate exercise in so many ways! I get up early in the morning, when the fog has barely lifted, and standing on the bridge spanning the narrow river, a Wordsworth sonnet is enacted. I am certain to read in the late afternoon along the Avon River. But, absorbed in the work, looking up of a sudden and noticing the ferocious storm clouds swirling in from the north, it is reminiscent of the Lakes District and the young poet's descriptions of his adventures along the River Wye. Poetry and literacy abound! From the manicured gardens littered with Shakespearean evocations, to the small shops and eateries, the city, the area, the atmosphere is imbued with the literate, with nuances of intellectual engagement, of the sensitive and relentless beat of iambic pentameter. All this without even setting foot inside a theater!

I read Ondaatje's *The English Patient* one summer amid the revolving Stratford weather of wind and sun and clouds and rain. I was reminded of Rosenblatt's 'reading as transaction' as presented in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*. No, I realized, reading is not a narrow, single engine train moving along a simple track at the speed of read (In many ways this is all we teach, ever, in terms of reading in the early grades--decoding. And then, 'read with expression!' As if in some way that puts life into the train and the track, as if

meaning is  
from the en  
intersection  
freeways in  
mimics our  
Using  
question re  
already kne  
up' with the  
time, I was  
and the ide  
signs that p  
lingered wit  
*Patient*, of  
affair with K  
that especia

Index  
reading. Co  
summer riv  
our percept  
emotions, li  
Brady's rela



meaning is being constructed. At most, it emits a small, ephemeral, smoky chug from the engine's stack.). Instead, in reading, there is traffic. Mental traffic! Busy intersections and rollicking curves in the road and freeways piggy-backed upon freeways in some absurd concrete and metal testament to modern living that mimics our mind's activities during the serene reading of a slow-paced novel.

Using this image, I am reminded of Brady's immediate response to my question regarding his purposes for reading, why does he seek literacy. I already knew he wanted to help his kids in this endeavor, if not, in a way, 'keep up' with them in their reading progress. But expressed differently at a different time, I was curious as to his response. He spoke in largely functional terms then and the idea of him using literacy to negotiate the various and fleeting traffic signs that passed by in the commission of his (former) job as truck driver lingered with me. In contrast to this, I recall one of the sub-stories of *The English Patient*, of which I was particularly enamored, the story of the English patient's affair with Katharine. There were two scenes, built very closely to each other, that especially impressed me.

She stopped reading and looked up. Out of the quicksand. She was evolving. So power changed hands. Meanwhile with the help of an anecdote, I fell in love.  
Words, Caravaggio. They have a power (p.254).

...and then...

She had always wanted words, she loved them, grew up with them. Words gave her clarity, brought reason, shape. Whereas I thought words bent emotions like sticks in water (p.238).

Indeed, we have different purposes for reading, different notions of reading. Consequently, when we pick up the same volume along the same summer river, we emerge with different 'poems.' Words. Powerful tributaries of our perception and our culture that can delicately invoke love or ruthlessly bend emotions, like fragile sticks caught in a tumultuous current. Words. What is Brady's relationship to this power? Are they rich markings on a page, like stick

figures try:  
element in  
poetically,  
baseball or  
rather than  
feel the pa  
meaning?

Is it  
community  
in the 'imm  
nothing bu  
desperate  
sees it as t  
key to his i  
knowing th  
key to litera  
his illiterac  
Notice in h  
prominent  
question r  
did when

figures trying to signal some obscure message? Do they have a metaphoric element in his mind? Or are they yet two dimensional? Often he uses words poetically, with a power, a beauty, that poets might envy. Like his image of the baseball on the lawn, or the poignancy of his wishing to be labeled 'Special Ed' rather than 'illiterate,' and though I had to think about what he meant, I could feel the pathos of his expression. What is Brady's poem, its rhythm, its deepest meaning?

Is it foolhardy to consider that Brady could be a member of the Stratford community? As we shall see from the ensuing transcript segment, he believes in the 'immersion' theory of literacy development, where he would be free to do nothing but concentrate on literacy and academics. Often, this comes off as a desperate measure of a man who so very much wants to become literate, who sees it as the key to turning his life around. In the meantime, he pursues some key to his illiteracy, like a literacy detective who ransacks the small apartment, knowing that it is here somewhere. Let's look at Brady's view of immersion as a key to literacy. In a sense, this strategy circumvents the idea of understanding his illiteracy, of ignoring that particular key, and going after the literacy itself. Notice in his discussion how the idea of the evasion of literacy is just as prominent as the notion of apprehending literacy. Initially, he responds to my question regarding if he looks at his literacy problems differently now than he did when we first met months earlier.

Brady: Actually, I do. I think, um, although I have been doing it [practicing literacy—one of my key formulas for his literacy success], but not as much as I should be. I think one thing that you said is correct. Um, not enough text. I believe that and um the other thing I believe is wrong is I guess confidence. I really don't know exactly. I'm just, these are things you pointed out to me that I said maybe he could be right, you know what I'm saying? Those are the type of things [the cost of literacy is so high for him] uh, I think once I can catch all my bills up [these costs even are expressed at times, as costs] I need to get glasses because, just for instance, when I was reading that I would go down a row, you know what I mean?...

You know, I really can't say I don't know [the key to his literacy difficulties], um, because when I was younger I did have tutors and stuff. It wasn't, I don't know,

I really couldn't tell you the true thing. I think um a person like what I always thought of as I got older the only real way I would learn how to read would be um, how the university takes people and how they study them and work with them on a 24 hours basis. I think then I would be, I would become very strong in that reading because I would be doing it 24/7 you know. Instead of having to be worrying about bills all the time, all the time, I mean, um, the biggest handicap I have is uh, the problems of my success in life I think. Which is reading. If I could do that, I probably wouldn't have the bills so much because I would be able to make money you know. I would be able to do, you know, a lot of things that I want to do and not always have to sacrifice like I think in life I do a lot of sacrificing because of um, the way I have to live the work I have to do...I think a lot of that would be much easier on me if I could just read it and do it myself. Because there is a lot of stuff that I know that I've wanted to do in life where I would have to say I wouldn't dare take that chance (pp.24-25).

Entwined dramatically with the conviction of the marvelous possibilities of literacy are his evasion tactics prompted in part, or highlighted, by several costs, the continual constraints of literacy. For people who linger and stroll near the Avon River, entertaining diverse thoughts of a poetic nature, this is difficult to understand. But his evasion network, bound and bonded by costs of literacy, work many functions--they are not just convenient excuses to put off learning skills that may disrupt the comfort level of a struggling adult. No, they work too, as they always have, for well over 20 years, to forestall the pain that comes with being different, with being judged incompetent, with persistent failure. Indeed, Brady's persona, developed by his trickster strategies and the costs of literacy that he continually tries to keep at a comfortable distance, may keep much of the world ignorant as to Brady's reading disability, but he is always aware of it. As a second grader he did things to explain to himself the reasons behind his continual academic failures and the shame that attended these. He tried to mitigate the pain and the notoriety of his incompetence.

But having spent a great deal of time with Brady the months prior to his course and during the time he was actually enrolled in the class, 'incompetent' is one of the last adjectives I would use to describe him. Yet imagine how he felt after our early morning session, as we made small talk walking down the stairs from the reading center and he turned to go see a WCC adviser about a

financial aid

Opening the

incompetent

person, keep

he is a de

motions tow

carry the sa

twenty year

a larger rea

the unrelen

immersion

but compe

keep his h

But

of literacy

those stu

reading a

onus of i

twenty-f

student

is more

the wat

billis wo

toward

literacy

that of

financial aid form he had filled out incorrectly due to his literacy difficulties. Opening the door to the adviser's office is, in Brady's mind, an admission of incompetence. His meetings with me speak to his failures. Brady is a bright person, keenly aware of his difficulties and what they imply. At the same time, he is a deeply sensitive person who does understand the nuances of his motions towards literacy. Does he perceive these with hope? Or does he in fact carry the same elementary grade baggage as he strives for self-enhancement twenty years later? No, his strategies in dealing with these problems operate in a larger realm than as secret-makers. They serve to insulate a proud man from the unrelenting shame and embarrassment that continually attend his day. The immersion theory and others posited by Brady as an answer to his problem are but compensation 'smoke and mirrors' spawned by this insulated persona to keep his hopes alive.

But immersion is not such a far-fetched strategy regarding the acquisition of literacy. It is often used in kindergarten and first grade classrooms so that those students on the verge of their emergent literacy might perceive print and reading and writing as a 'natural' part of their everyday lives. But Brady fixed the onus of immersion on a force outside his control, in this case, a fabricated, twenty-four hour service university. His logic does not recognize the role of the student in even such a full-time university service. As I see it, to him, immersion is more like a swimming metaphor, whereby the university would throw him in the water, and though he might risk sinking, they would never let him drown. His bills would be paid; he'd be en route to literacy acquisition, the first stroke towards financial and life stability.

From the first day we met, I witnessed Brady trying to come to grips with literacy. More than that, he tried to figure out why he was so besieged by skills that others accomplished seemingly so easily. Might it be dyslexia, he

wondered

social/env

This

can be pol

failures. T

conversati

integrity, t

grade bec

could not

integrity.

that he h

loss of c

that is c

sealed s

lose, to

able. Pa

inferior

these b

and its

and is

things

some

wondered, or do I need glasses? Is heredity a factor? He considered the social/environmental angle and rejected it with his own curious logic.

Brady: I think one [possible key to his illiteracy] is where I grew up. I mean I just can't use my neighborhood as an excuse, because, uh, my best friend, you know, is a college graduate. He is an engineer; he, uh, has his own license for engineering, you know. People hire him to do what they do. I mean this is my friend for 25 years. I met him when I was three or four, so I can't say it's because of the neighborhood or nothing like that. I wouldn't want to go that far. I think, like I said, I think it is something within me (p.25).

This conclusion is not surprising. No matter what realistic interventions can be pointed to, Brady will, in the end, accept the responsibility for his own failures. This is evinced continually throughout his transcript and repeatedly in conversation and deed with me. He is not an excuse-maker. Part of it is his integrity, the same honesty that made him quit school finally in the eleventh grade because, among other things, he knew he could not accept a diploma he could not read. But part of this responsibility for blame probably lays beyond integrity. It is not unlikely that part of it is the process of enculturation to illiteracy that he has undergone for so many years. The stigma. Part of this process is the loss of confidence, to which he has already alluded. Part of it is the pressure that is certain to bubble up, like steam seeping somehow through a tightly-sealed steel container when heat is applied. As I see it, he has way too much to lose, to risk, to easily drop the guise of the insulated persona, even if he was able. Part of the make-up of his literacy disguise is an embedded sense of inferiority due to past and continual literacy failures. Of course, as time goes on, these become more than that--life failures, family failures, whatever illiteracy and its consequences touches. So he accepts small and remote challenges and is able to boast in deference to his feelings of inferiority that he does a lot of things that intelligent people do.

Contrasted to Brady's apparent willingness to concede that "it is something within me," this key to his literacy difficulties, is the idea that in fact



this key m  
and seem  
is troublin  
reading c  
problem is

It is  
he is defic  
away. We  
goes back  
teachers t  
problem,  
aspects o

Bra  
go  
bo  
yo  
th

H  
making  
key to f

strateg  
probie  
in this  
some  
squa

this key may be 'out there.' Indeed, often in our discussions he would look up and seem to be trying to detect the problem visually in the distance. At times this is troubling to him and impels his active search for answers, such as taking a reading class. At times he voices this frustration. "I want to figure out what the problem is, why it's getting like that, you know what I mean?" (p.2).

It is later on that his frustration builds in trying to get close to reasons why he is deficient in literacy. He feels he is so close sometimes, and then, it slips away. We had been discussing his children's schooling and his disdain (this goes back and forth between disdain and a more neutral feeling) towards teachers then and now. Ultimately, the conversation always turns to his problem, to his frustration at not being able to put his finger on the tangible aspects of his deficiencies.

Brady: I've always experienced it, um, just for instance when I stand out there, when I go out there I can read some of that stuff out there, for instance, if you have a book, I can read to you right now and you probably understand what I was saying, you know. And it's, I know, I just **can't find the key to the problem. If I find the key** to the problem, I think I will be more successful (p.9; my emphasis).

He echoes these same sentiments later on, again in conjunction with making strides, but whether he means in terms of literacy, or that literacy is the key to financial and career and life stability is uncertain.

Brady: So I'm lost--so I would just say the hell with it [we had been discussing his middle school education] and just leave it alone. So, I mean, those types of things I do remember, um, so I never really, this is all new to me, **but I think that if I get it, if I could get it, I could get everything right in my life** (p.15; my emphasis).

Brady is very much caught up with trying to solve his dilemma, as if this strategy is removed from the hard work that it takes to overcome his literacy problems. In so doing, he goes back and forth in terms of how he views his role in this dilemma. At times, he is the victim--shoddy schooling, family matters, something physical--awaiting reprieve. At other times, he lays the blame squarely in his field, but even then, the answer, or the promise of one, this

redemption  
and now H  
it was he v  
avoid the  
the idea of  
evident.

And  
the consec  
spends mo  
trying to ov  
towards th  
pursuing th  
improve hi  
Though he  
in this chas  
the true da  
he is certa

I use  
to read. Th  
(please see  
advanced i  
her ability t

redemption, may be forthcoming. We had been discussing his past schooling and now he was ready to shoulder the blame for his failures. He mentioned that it was he who chose to skip classes. But I reminded him that he had done so to avoid the embarrassment of being singled out as a deficient learner. But again, the idea of there being an accessible key to his literacy problems someplace is evident.

Brady: That part I haven't figured out yet [I had just called him on the notion of skipping school--that it seemed to be a legitimate way to handle the institutional deficiencies]. You with me on that? That part I haven't figured out yet. Because, like I said, I sort of in sixth grade for instance [he goes on to relate how during some tests--i.e. spelling--he never stood a chance.], I couldn't even comprehend...They just give it to me and say, "here, just do this." You know more of the pressure type thing. I don't know--I really **haven't figured all that out yet**. I mean, I never really thought about why I don't do it [read]. I just think about it...you know what I mean (pp.18-19; emphasis added).

And in some ways, this looms as one of the most potent and interesting of the consequences of his evasion strategies, indeed an added cost: that he spends more time and energy on trying to figure out why he cannot read, than in trying to overcome the difficulty. Again, this is part of his complex web that goes towards the make-up of his trickster persona--he expends intellectual energy pursuing this key. That is his true quest, it seems, at times, as if the answer will improve his life's situation and erase years of having lived with this demon. Though he has not come up with a consistent answer yet, there is little pressure in this chase; he does not risk that much in trying to solve this conundrum. No, the true danger lies in his snuggling up to literacy. This is an endeavor of which he is certainly afraid.

I used a swimming metaphor earlier to parallel Brady's attempts to learn to read. That is not an unwarranted image. Recall that I had interviewed Vivian (please see Appendix C) in the beginning of this study and that I found her to be advanced in her literacy progress, compared to Brady and Sylvia, especially in her ability to deal with the vicissitudes of school and school chores on her way

to literacy  
me that V  
that WCC  
swimming  
through th  
shallow en  
swim, but  
towards th  
of sinking  
demanding  
swimmers

But  
the comp  
attached t  
literacy fa  
confidenc  
feelings o  
school de

So  
me to go  
mean" (A  
his insist  
by a dist  
distrust  
beginnin  
new lev  
figuring

to literacy development. But I was surprised a few months later when Jan told me that Vivian was failing her regular credit English class. It was then I realized that WCC's developmental reading program and its caring instructors are like swimming trainers. They are skilled personnel who attempt to lead the students through the roiling waters (to them) of literacy. But in fact, they never leave the shallow end. The students are nurtured and encouraged to paddle and try to swim, but this is all fostered in a very safe environment. But get them out towards the deep end of regular education and their instructors, and the threat of sinking becomes very real, the challenge of literacy takes on unusual and demanding aspects, and instead of nurturance and safety, these fledgling swimmers find hurdles and hazards.

But again, much of this perception of life at 'the deep end' is a residue of the complicated persona created by evasive mechanisms and the awful stigma attached to 'illiteracy'. If Vivian responded in any way as did Brady to her literacy failings throughout her schooling, then when it comes to literacy, her confidence level is quite low and attempts at literacy bring out concomitant feelings of shame and distress and inferiority learned early on at their grade school desks.

So even Brady, who entered WCC with the conviction that it was "time for me to go to a different level and you know and get other help, you know what I mean" (p.4), did so with unspoken trepidation, with doubts that overshadowed his insistence upon personal competence. This lack of confidence is attended by a distrust of teachers, tutors and classrooms. The lack of confidence and the distrust combined in Brady's case to cause him to be very erratic with our beginning sessions in terms of attendance. Already, he wanted to bail out of that 'new level.' Brady had come to WCC because he was making little progress figuring out literacy problems on his own. His dual focus of learning literacy and

learning a  
decided to  
with the la  
they were  
often gave  
his history

If B  
always run  
problem in  
the distrust  
ways, retu  
learn how

His  
that he w  
need to c  
of what y  
appropria  
realms is  
would no  
differenc  
had no a

learning about the whys of his literacy difficulties was becoming frustrating. He decided to allow someone to help him with the first task, even as he wrestled with the latter. So he had to put aside his distrust of tutors and the feeling that they were insouciant participants in his literacy education who like teachers, often gave only perfunctory attention to the student. Brady delineates a little of his history with tutors and voices his first reactions to me.

Brady: The last time I tried [to get tutoring] I was with the university students and it was like a study period and um I was going, and it's like, like what we're doing. I find what we're doing a little more interesting just from the last two times I met with you from all my other different experiences. Like when I read to you, you stopped me and told me some things that I never realized until just then when you said them. I mean that type of stuff I think helps me as far as wanting to and knowing that I'm on the right track and stuff like that. I never all the times I've tried to read, I never had no one say this you know, is what's happening here. This is what I think you know. I've always had people say, "well, just keep trying and you'll get it" or you know...all my life, I always run into trouble when I want to be smart or know more (p.16).

If Brady has an anthem regarding his literacy endeavors, it is indeed "I always run into trouble when I want to be smart or know more." This situates his problem in the very middle of his costs; it captures the lack of confidence and the distrust that accompanies his efforts to improve his literacy skills. In many ways, returning to the metaphor of the pool, Brady's problem is one of trying to learn how to swim without the water, or at best, in the shallow end of the pool.

His lack of confidence is astounding when it comes to literacy. The idea that he was anxious to show me early on how 'well' he could read was more a need to communicate his competence, to tell me that "I'm not a dummy, in spite of what you may think, tutor." This betrayed his lack of confidence. More appropriately, his confidence level and utter lack of self-assuredness in literacy realms is evinced by the idea that when taking messages over the phone, he would not write out the name or address for fear he would misspell it. "What difference does it make?" I asked him. "You are the only one who will see it." He had no answer. To have an answer would have been to admit to his utter lack



(he thinks

But

were in fa

fact using

indicate no

reading p

F

Mo

certain wo

read! But

confidenc

aloud. He

make. Bu

his proble

could see

foremost

mentally

as that tr

fails to n

conditio

a sappi

V

grade r

double

(he thinks) of personal resources that he brings to the literacy class.

But in spite of all this, I was impressed with his reading. His many errors were in fact miscues that 'made sense,' miscues that showed that Brady was in fact using strategies during his reading. Goodman used the term 'miscue' to indicate not an error in reading, but a slip caused by the mental traffic that reading provokes.

Reading isn't simply recognizing words in succession. Something propels you forward as you read, helps you to anticipate so well what's coming that you simply use *cues* from the print to move constantly towards meaning. Your brain is not a prisoner of the senses; it's in charge of the process! It sets up expectations and instructs your eyes to glide over the surface of the print, using that input to make sense of the text (Goodman, 1996; p.40; emphasis in original).

Most of Brady's miscues were those where he anticipated (correctly) certain word formations and meanings. He was busy on several levels as he read! But once he stumbled with a word, or did not recognize one, his confidence sunk even lower and he was hesitant to risk, to make another error aloud. He blamed this on not knowing his vowels well and the sounds that they make. But of course, this was but a minor evasion technique to shift the focus of his problem from something truly 'inside me' to a more acceptable explanation. I could see that the lack of confidence too often gave way to grave doubts, and foremost of these doubts, I fear, is Brady's suspicion that indeed he might be mentally impaired, a true Special Education case, though he was not classified as that throughout his schooling. More to the point, to me it seems that Brady fails to make literacy progress because of his fear of failure and his well-conditioned response to that fear and failure--feelings of distrust, inferiority, and a sapping of confidence.

It is not surprising that in the beginning of his class, Brady tested at a 1.5 grade reading level! I would have suspected his grade level reading to be double that on bad days. But the test result is understandable, given that once

he thinks  
reliving un  
teasing w  
his perce  
at one po  
frustration  
sessions.  
reading m  
quickly at  
budge tod  
these wor  
the interes  
paragraph  
he would  
absent the  
it is easy  
frustrated  
may even  
decided n

But

developm  
was so in  
skills and  
literacy c  
simple re  
for a few  
saw him

he thinks he has erred, his confidence and composure break down, as if he is reliving uncomfortable episodes from early schooling where reprimands or teasing were the consequences of his inadequate attempts at reading, or from his perception, the fear of these consequences. The instructor, Jill, told me that at one point on the test it looked like he had just given up. Brady has a low frustration threshold and will 'duck' the situation to save face. During our sessions, once he knew I was on his side, once he knew he had made some reading mistakes, he hesitated with the ensuing sentences, looking up too quickly at me for help with words that he could certainly handle. But I would not budge too easily and insinuated by expression that he should try to figure out these words first. Only then did he dig in and aggressively try to read the text. In the interest of time, occasionally I would suggest that I read every other paragraph, explaining that I was modeling the reading for him. But most often he would have none of it and insist upon confronting the challenges himself. But absent the support, alone in a room of strangers with problems such as his own, it is easy to imagine him losing his concentration, becoming too easily frustrated, and approaching the test unrealistically. The 'giving up' on the test may even have been his way to salvage pride--he didn't flunk it so much as he decided not to pursue it.

But he has done this before, that is, made a verbal pledge to literacy development without following up on it actively. After the first day we talked, I was so impressed by his articulation and thoughtfulness and metacognitive skills and the little reading we had done that I suggested if he suffered any literacy deficit, it was merely practice. He agreed and consented to follow a simple regimen of reading for ten minutes a day then writing about that reading for a few minutes. To that end, I bought him a notebook and pen. But I never saw him with the notebook and pen after that, and he was honest about his

abstinenc

Bra

before he

leave the

self-consc

had starte

wrote free

he did not

abbreviat

the only p

memory t

tactics

unnece

perpet

which

low-le

in the

an an

him.

kids.

abstinence from any literacy practice out of the ordinary.

Brady is especially fearful of writing. It took urgings across six weeks before he deigned to write a sentence or two for me. Even then I volunteered to leave the room for five minutes so he could accomplish this task (I felt he was self-conscious about his efforts in this regard. Later on, of course, once class had started, he practiced literacy on his own to accomplish his homework and wrote freely in front of me the one word answers to the worksheets). Recall that he did not write out phone messages to himself (but instead used one-letter abbreviations), fearful that he might misspell a word, even though he would be the only person to look at that message! He also developed and relied upon his memory to compensate for his aversion to writing messages.

Brady: But if I don't remember, it's a little more difficult...So it's like my wife and I have a problem with women like to talk on the phone [Brady claimed this was the primary source of his marital difficulties--his wife hung out too much on the phone with lady friends, to the neglect of family and family duties.] so with that pad [Brady had bought himself a tiny pad] I take that pad and um say it's 9:00, Connie has called. O.k. so I can't spell 'Connie' so I would put 'K' and then maybe if I remember, I would come back and put the next letter you know somewhere down the line. But I know that I have a problem so I would do is [try to sound] out the letter, the initials of the name in the person and then I would uh, put my mind remembers who that person is. I might have 10 initials on there but I would know what those initials stand for (p.4).

In this and in so many other ways, Brady is trapped (his compensatory tactics work well enough for him to believe most of the time that literacy is unnecessary and thus he feels he can eschew the pursuit of literacy. But he is perpetually ambivalent about this, but faces strife and pressures no matter which course he pursues). It's not as if he is apathetic towards literacy and his low-level skills. He is enrolled in the community college, has sought tutorial help in the past, and ponders his literacy predicament continually, looking for a key, an answer to this enigma. His aspirations and his singular focus in a way entrap him. He feels pressure from many realms to achieve literacy--indirectly from his kids, indirectly from his wife (he knows she 'flipped' the bills this Winter when he

was un-

course e-

injury, he

job that o

trap tight

"I

wife with

knows to

uneasy a

attended

built up c

of the lite

and writin

class is U

and of co

tension?

that redu

So he re

It

Shakesp

spontane

him a ric

creates h

wavers.

Yancy (a

someday

to Stratf

was unemployed), but most directly from himself for personal and family and of course employment reasons. If he is laid off or loses a job due to a sustained injury, he regrets his literacy failings (he told me) because he cannot secure a job that does not rely on the physical. But when he pursues literacy actively, the trap tightens because then pressures abound.

"I always run into trouble when I want to be smart or know more." His wife withholds support for his endeavors, fearing she might lose the Brady she knows to 'book-learning'. His own past begins to recoil, bubble up, sending uneasy and painful reminders of former failures and the humiliation that attended them. His low self-confidence, which he has probably surreptitiously built up over the months in preparation for this endeavor, wanes once the reality of the literacy pursuit confronts him in the form of applications and instructors and writing and reading assignments and tests. The prospect of success in class is unimaginable when it is difficult to get past the syllabus. The pressures and of course, costs, mount from all arenas. What to do? How to alleviate the tension? Most likely Brady recalls the coping strategy learned in middle school that reduced his anxiety--skipping classes and avoiding the source of the pain. So he retreats, coming up with plausible reasons for doing so.

It is ironic that Stratford and its customs and environs are a testament to Shakespeare, a poet who celebrated people like Brady--unpretentious, spontaneous, honest, loyal, absorbed with integrity. These possessions make him a rich man. Yet he searches for Stratford's treasure--the Word. Daily, he creates his own poem, yet he is uncertain as to its validity. He doubts; he wavers. He shudders when he considers the havoc that illiteracy wrecks upon Yancy (a nearby city) in the form of drugs and neglect of youth and perhaps someday upon the university city in which he lives. If he could, Brady would go to Stratford to immerse himself in the Word, in the hopes that he would emerge



literate. H

Th

when Mc

valiantly

stayed on

the institu

this, McN

them in r

out of th

leave if

such tha

human

I

cuckoo

of his c

from th

his exp

and re

McMu

at leas

neces

prese

Ratch

accom

literate. He seeks the river and his own, personal John the Baptist.

### **A literacy cuckoo's nest!**

The denouement of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), occurs when McMurphy suddenly realizes that the several patients he has been trying valiantly to liberate, had been free to leave the institution at any time. They stayed on for the security and companionship the place afforded, because in the institution, their 'insanity' was accommodated, even expected. Discovering this, McMurphy slumps, thinking his efforts a waste of time. But he had liberated them in many ways, in more important ways perhaps than merely letting them out of the nest. He had offered them the emotional and perceptual assets to leave if they so chose to do so. Besides that, he demystified Nurse Ratched such that they no longer feared her, but saw her as a human being fraught with human frailties, like themselves.

In so many ways Brady's literacy struggles have occurred within a cuckoo's nest, both public and private: the institution of school and the confines of his own trickster mechanisms, that even now seem so much like a refuge from the threat of literacy. All his life, Nurse Ratched, real or imaginary (from his expectations) have beat him down such that he is almost inured to failure and resides comfortably within the resort of his evasions. There has been no McMurphy to 'educate' him in the protocol necessary for literacy apprehension, at least for its realistic pursuit. But indeed, these are two of the several directions necessary to enable people like Brady to overcome the past and gain a literacy presence in their world today. That is, we must change the image of Nurse Ratched and provide in a way a surrogate McMurphy. Let me explain.

Many educators have recognized the need of late for schools to better accommodate the marginal student. In many cases, such as Brady's, the

student is  
school. S  
more un  
social and  
cases we  
Ratched.  
otherwise

Th

one of cu  
informs t  
Education  
regardin  
commu  
educate  
reticene  
margin  
intentic  
educat  
educa  
how th  
These  
based  
educa  
studen  
power  
strate  
struct

student is already marginalized by the larger society by the time they enter school. So it is obvious that these kids need more attention, more tolerance, more understanding than the student who enters school equipped with 'proper' social and cultural capital (i.e. Bourdieu, (1986; 1977)). But in fact in many cases we have been giving them less of these supplies and in turn, like Nurse Ratched, have been 'blaming the victim' for his travails, that is, punishing or otherwise ostracizing the student for his academic inadequacies.

This is where Delpit (1988) comes in. She sees the problem not solely as one of cultural dissonance, but too, as one of power. This perspective of course informs the title of her work: *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*. Among Delpit's several observations regarding the instruction of marginalized children, was that too often communication between Black and white educators and thus between educators and students would break off and atrophy. This helps explain the reticence on the part of dominant culture teachers to offer skills instruction to marginal minority students. Delpit accuses the white educators of good intentions compromised by a lack of understanding when it comes to the education of minority students (cultural dissonance and power). Because these educators feel their intentions are so liberal and magnanimous, they fail to see how their approach to and instruction of these students can possibly be lacking. These circumstances Delpit connects with her notion of the 'culture of power', based upon five tenets. The first three are stanchions of the sociology of education: that issues of power are enacted in the classroom (teacher over students; some students over others); that those participating in this 'culture of power' abide by certain rules and codes (linguistic forms and communication strategies); and that these power structures in the schools reflect the power structures as they are manifested in the larger society. But her final two notions

of 'the culture of power' are even more pertinent to this discussion: that those not in power may more easily acquire power if explicitly told the rules and codes, and that those in a position of power are least aware of it, hence the problems of communication and insights into minority cultures on the part of dominant culture educators (p.282).

We can see where Delpit is going with all of this. Her stance comes down to this: even a liberal viewpoint and good intentions (what we had supposed to be the formula for an equal education for all) on the part of instructors unfamiliar with a given culture can result in equivocal instruction that perpetuates the marginalization of the 'different' students. And Delpit is very definite concerning how educators should address the problems confronting these students with the culture of power: these students should be taught the codes needed for full participation "in the mainstream of American life" and taught simultaneously that this power, these codes, are in fact arbitrary (1988; p.296). This is accomplished by the teacher's expert knowledge shared with the student, who is recognized as having his own 'expertness.' But the teacher need not rely upon only his/her own resources. Delpit urges educators to consult with the adults who share the culture of these marginalized students: parents, other teachers, members of the community, so that their expertise becomes part of this educational equation. This was a strategy taken up way too late in Treetops during the course of the achievement gap, and then implemented once suspicions and bitterness and wariness had been sown in any remaining common ground.

Regarding this communication, this abnegation of the 'silenced dialogue,' Delpit reminds us that we not only see and listen with our eyes and ears, but too with our hearts and minds, and most importantly, through our beliefs. This is the largest assignment a teacher must confront--the challenge to "learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order

to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness. In other words, we must become ethnographers in the true sense" (1988; p.297).

What Delpit recommends then is a teacher contrary to Nurse Ratched, one who perhaps through in-service training, but more through a self-education gained by listening to others and including others in the curriculum formation for their classroom, including the students, gains instructional insight into the culture and needs and 'idiosyncrasies' of the marginalized student. In this way, these students might gain more attention, more tolerance, more understanding and feel a part of the classroom, not a refugee seeking anonymity and relief from the tension of continual failure.

Heath (1991) shares many of these views too. She sees marginalized children continually undercut by the structures of schools and classrooms that value and favor one culture over another. More than diminishing their education, she asserts, this devalues their cultural heritage and ways of working, making them less attractive for jobs that otherwise might be well suited to their skills and knowledge. Heath suggests that instruction as well as the codes must be shared. That is, classroom teachers must learn to incorporate alternative instructional methods and strategies in their teaching that recognize and value other cultures' language usage and ways of learning and appropriating knowledge, and not just those of the already valued dominant culture. Rather than relying on short answers and essays and standardized tests, alternative methods to instruction and evaluation should be incorporated into their existing instruction so as to identify needs of and approaches to all students' learning, not just one segment, or culture, of the classroom. "The goal is *not* to use this knowledge about minorities' ways of using language and habits of learning to tailor classrooms to fit the daily habits of each minority group" (p.21; emphasis in original), but to be aware of and employ other options

of instruction that cut across all cultures and facilitate learning.

...studies point out that cross-cultural differences in behaviors fundamental to schooling--such as language use, habits of critical thinking, concepts of time and space, gender relations, and valuations of written information, should serve primarily as evidence that the language and thought skills valued by the school do not come naturally with developmental growth (p.21).

These must instead be recognized and nurtured and given the understanding and time and space in order to develop and grow. Traditional instruction and evaluation and perceptions of students admit to very little of this, especially as regards the marginalized student. We can see Brady and his shortcomings and his educational failings in much of this discussion. In order for him to 'get better,' and for students like Carnie to succeed academically then, Delpit and Heath focus upon the teacher and teacher training that will hopefully allow the teacher to educate the student more on his own terms, that is, incorporate his experiences and cultural heritage in the instructional format and value the strengths and skills these students do bring to the desk, including their local literacies, and not immediately reduce them because their attributes do not fit the norm. Like Delpit, Heath offers a commission to teacher education and research: to learn more about alternative language use and the learning styles of other cultures; to provide occasions for teachers to "observe, analyze, and consider the implications of alternative ways of learning and displaying knowledge in classrooms" (pp.20-21). Though much research has been focused upon classroom learning, very little of it, Heath asserts, has been aimed at the language and learning of students like Brady and Carnie. Ruth Zweifler's point exactly concerning the problems in Treetops. Such research would add to the repertoire of knowledge about language and learning already gained, but most of this comes from observations of students already valued in the classroom. Integral then to the understanding and dissemination of this knowledge are pre-service and in-service components that allow intending and

practicing teachers to observe exemplary and diverse instruction and to integrate these observations into their own thinking and teaching by way of analyses and reflection.

Brady was never averse to assuming at least part of the blame for his failed literacy. And by no means, in this discussion, are teachers indicted as the sole reason for a failed education. My point, and I think perhaps Delpit's and Heath's too, is that teachers are in a very sensitive and influential position to alter a student's educational direction. The more aware they are of their power and the resources available to them, the more favorably they may influence an education.

I keep repeating Brady and Camie as examples because I also want to emphasize that these commissions and strategy recommendations are not necessarily aimed at only the public school teacher, the teacher at Nathan or Blaine who sees up to half of her students walk into school from the projects down the street. No, though this is important and necessary. It is just as important to consider Brady's current teachers and tutors. The primary sites for these teachers and tutors are the community college and the community adult education centers. But there are differences in the students these teachers approach, and this is how this research can add to and enhance the research and recommendations of Delpit and Heath. Let me attempt to dramatize these differences and how I see them acted out in the adult classroom, based upon my close contact with Brady, but too, informed by scores of students across several years' experiences in developmental reading classrooms.

The elementary public school teacher approaches the marginalized student, Camie (or Brady, 1975), and seeks to work with him in terms of literacy in ways that coincide with his (the student's) experiences and individual knowledge and skills. Camie, at his age, is yet open to education, at least



vulnerable to it, for his evasion techniques are in the developmental stage. He has not yet come to rely upon them in so many ways. They have not yet formed his public persona.

But Brady is different. At his age (30+) he has experienced manifold academic scenes and sites and more and more he has endured them and sought refuge in the haven of his insulated persona. In truth, in spite of his pronouncements to the contrary, he is not open nor is he vulnerable to education, at least not all of him. Yes, he desperately seeks literacy for many reasons that have become sharply defined over the years and continue to gain definition each year. But at the same time, he views the institution of school with suspicion, as a cuckoo's nest, replete with Nurse Ratched, and fellow inmates that verify his incompetence, and learning strategies and approaches that make him feel all the more dumb and uneducable. Even if the institution is Webber Community College with a developmental reading program whose mission and goals and courses show a genuine concern for student success, an anathema to Nurse Ratched, Brady still will not trust it, at least not initially, because he is not prepared to let down his guard (his evasion strategies) and submit to the educational therapies he has endured for far too many years. As Barton (1994) intimates, Brady needs to be educated to be educated; he has to learn how to learn.

The birds in *Cuckoo's Nest* had their own set of avoidance techniques that kept them constrained; the prohibitions exacted upon them by their strategies were far more effective than any restraints Nurse Ratched could issue. In fact, they played into the hands of Ratched, who gained her true power from the birds' self-made constraints. Such is the case with Brady too. Literacy is accessible to him; even without teachers or an academic setting he could attain it with proper diligence and regimen and exactitude. But like that invisible

fence that keeps animals from exceeding the bounds of their yard, Brady has constructed an invisible fence that keeps him in his yard, away from the fruits of literacy, hanging voluptuously on the vine not a foot or two away. That fruit will forever remain a dream to him, an illusion, so long as his academic self-confidence remains insulated, so long as his academic self-concept is defined by the past, so long as his literacy motivations loom in the shadows of his trickster persona, which has provided Brady with a safe and guaranteed nest. He is afraid to leave that nest.

It seems to me that educators feed right into his evasion tactics, merely by doing their job. It's sort of like a stimulus/response activity. A literacy education stimulus is perceived and Brady responds according to the program he has learned so well. He has been conditioned to distrust, evade, escape even as he continually makes moves towards that stimulus. He wants it but he can't have it. Even as he seeks the key to his 'disability' outside himself, he does not realize that the answer may very well lay within him, as he once depicted. But what he depicted was in fact an internal deficit, a natural disability, which scares him to death. What in fact lies within him is the source of his literacy failings, his trickster mask and motions, his identity compromised by this conditioning that makes him stop suddenly at his own invisible fence.

In order to take wing or to break through that invisible barrier, Brady must be educated (if even autodidactically if possible) to realize that some of the constraints he faces are of his own making. When it comes to the costs imposed by his trickster persona, Brady has to realize there is no Nurse Ratched, there are no bars, the nest is open, and McMurphy is but a metaphor for his own diligence, regimen, and exactitude. If he wants it, McMurphy might say, all he has to do is go after it. Only he can stop himself. But the costs to him are so large and looming, so daunting that it is difficult to demystify these constraints

and suffer the insight that he, Brady, creates these monsters as a residue of his best defense. There are plenty of other costs, especially sociological, with which he must contend, that it is unfortunate that his way of dealing with these perpetuates others as well.

But as educators, we too often treat the symptom, 'illiteracy,' not the cause. The alcoholic continually re-admits himself for treatment, but the institution (hospital, or program, or agency) treats but the symptoms, and the causes--low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, no self-confidence emanating from past event(s)--remain intact, powerful, in control. So long as these persist, so will the alcoholism or some other coping strategy, some other defense.

Brady is similarly vulnerable. He has insulated his fears and feelings with a nest of tricks and they do the work to keep opponents that might harm him (from his perception of course) at bay. Only when he realizes that this haven is in fact his prison, that it is a self-created nest of delusional comfort and security, will he be able to leave it, to have the strength to trust his own resources against these seemingly overwhelming costs, to make strides towards literacy.

But he need not do this alone. Indeed, this very research is a call to flight, a reveille to recognize and discover McMurphy within us. This research intends to show Brady that he can trust the instructor. And taking their cues from Delpit and Heath, that instructor is in fact trustworthy. But too, this research points out that the reasons for 'illiteracy,' or a very low level of literacy function are manifold, not easily defined. And they are accessible only through the ecology of the whole student (Barton, 1994), not a piece of him, not just the literacy part. that the person hands over to an instructor to fix, like a client his car to the mechanic who then repairs the damaged water pump. That's what got us in this fix to begin with, it seems. Only a part of the student, a part of Brady was recognized, and that spoke to his deficits. For some reason then, as so often

happens and has happened (i.e. Rose (1989); Delpit (1988); Anyon (1981); Rist (1970)), teachers were hesitant to eschew the traditional pedagogy for one that even might help Brady grasp what other students found so easy to gain. It may be that we hesitate to deviate from the instructional norm because we fear the consequences. But what more inappropriate consequences are available than to have a frustrated and slowly sinking Brady leave school of his own volition not three semesters from gaining a diploma, then have him wallow in the misery of illiteracy at the age of thirty, even as his kids gain literacy day by day. No, whether a public school teacher, a community college instructor, or a university teacher of teachers, it is apparent that we must change; we must dare. Brady accepts much of the blame for his 'illiteracy'; we must recognize, it seems, our part too and seek to reform it.

But most important, we have to realize the prevalence of Brady's problem in the population. We have to admit that Brady is not an aberration anymore, but perhaps similar to many capable persons who for one reason or another were victims of a compromised education. Then to explain this incompetence, the competent person, Brady, perhaps Carnie, creates a nest of evasive tactics that insure his marginalization for a long while. As educators, we want to work to recognize these aspects of the ecology of the troubled student and help them to help themselves. Then perhaps like the Chief, they can give voice to their muted literacy and eradicate the myths of the Nurse, the nest, and the fence. Then truly, perhaps, for Brady, the *Word* may finally become *Flesh*.

## Chapter 4: Gale's Story (1)

"Sometimes...I feel like I don't have all the ingredients a person is supposed to have" (Jane Hamilton, *The Book of Ruth*: p.46).

Perhaps I asked too large--  
I take--no less than skies--  
For Earths, grow thick as  
Berries, in my native town--

My Basket holds--just--Firmaments--  
These--dangle easy--on my arm,  
But smaller bundles--Cram.

(Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*: p.167)

If you really hear everything I said you get a pretty good idea what kept me away [from school] for so long and why it didn't work out too well. Because here you are tracing a person with a lot of emotional [baggage] and there's a problem, you know. And that's my story. I know there's probably different people out there with different reasons why they do what they did. And how they felt about school. My personal story and how it went for me, you know.

(Gale; p.16--transcript)

### A matter of survival

Though similar to Brady in many ways in terms of the structural constraints that beset her early apprehension of literacy and her subsequent failure to gain literacy as an adult, Gale's response to these obstacles and how they impacted her life, were far different and dramatic than Brady's. Like Brady, Gale suffered early on and often with the humiliation and embarrassment of academic failure. Yet she did not lose hope that she might be able to perform academically like the other students in her class. But when she traded her Mississippi classroom for a Michigan educational venue, in Treetops, the humiliation became unbearable.

I went to Hoover High School [in Treetops] and when I got to Hoover High School I was immediately embarrassed by what I didn't know. I was especially embarrassed when they found out I had no idea about Black history because the counselor more or less laughed in my face and you know, when he saw that I had had American history and didn't know anything about Black history. So um then the kids would make fun because I was just fresh from the South so I didn't make friends that easy (p.2).

It was at this point that circumstance and fate conspired to alter Gale's

literacy and life for a long, long time. During this time, she surrendered her education to the costs that continually plagued her in school and became hostage to the habits that narcotized her for almost a quarter of a century.

...when I found an out [from the continual humiliation of teachers, counselors and peers] in which was through smoking marijuana and drinking, you know, I tended to float that way so I didn't feel that I learned anything when I came to Michigan (p.2).

Gale 'floated' on this high wave of drugs and drink from the time she learned to use this combination to assuage the pain of being different until finally, nearing forty and suffering the deleterious affects of this 'miserable lifestyle', not only personally, but too, in terms of her family and relationships, she checked herself into a local drug program and purged herself of these poisons.

But in a way, the drugs and alcohol were necessary to not only mitigate the day to day pain and travails Gale suffered, but to keep at a distance painful memories of the past and the concomitant feelings of inferiority. During one of our discussions, a vivid collage of affliction betrayed the pain that eventually resulted in the pain relievers that unfortunately served to reinforce Gale's waning self-concept.

No, the drugs and the alcohol confirmed to me that I was nothing and never going to be nothing and I deserved the pain that I was feeling... You know, I felt like gee, you know, because that is what I was told from my mom, I'm nobody, I'm nothing, I don't care, you know...It [the drugs and drink] made me feel like I didn't have to be anything better...It was an escape. You know, from reality. from anything that should be or has to be (p.6).

Like Brady, Gale's perception of the exorbitant costs of literacy is and was intricately fused with her identity. Without a doubt, some of her biggest obstacles to literacy attainment were her inability to attain literacy. That is, her responses to initial educational and literacy failure set the stage for a lifetime of struggles to gain this elusive skill, even as she felt diminished that she could not. Gale's story upon this stage may be segmented into three Acts: dealing with

the fear and humiliation; a search for support and role models; and assuming the mantle of responsibility for her own life and education.

Unlike a Shakespearean stage, Gale's drama and its Acts are not neatly parceled. The major elements overlap and entwine; some, like education and literacy, the major characters, never leave the stage. As an example, when queried about her commitment to get 'clean' and what role school played in this scenario, Gale's response was quick and definite. "It was a matter of survival for me...Yeah, it was to help me feel better about myself...School was going to give me something I never had and wanted" (pp.12 & 15).

It [education] means survival—survival and that ranges from being able to get a good job and afford to take care of my children, you know. It means [the] best mood possible for me; it means self-esteem. It means meeting, not just knowing, people that are doing good, but being a part of their group. Belonging to the group that is doing something with their lives. having a place I can appreciate being a part of. It's just survival all the way around for me (p.19).

How did Gale go from a 'miserable lifestyle', replete with drugs and alcohol and denial and wretched repercussions to a committed student and parent who views survival as not only a life free from drugs and alcohol, but one that includes membership in the club, the literacy/health/benevolence club? It is an intriguing story to be sure, one that depicts Gale's journey from victim of life's circumstances and the costs of literacy, to a person working on self-enhancement in spite of these. But as with so many cases of a failed emergent literacy, the first Act finds the stage cluttered with structural constraints that continually work to undermine the protagonist. Let's quickly review some of these factors and silhouette Gale's role within them.

Ain't makin' it

We have already discussed at length some of the structural constraints--those embedded in the structure of the society to disadvantage certain

individuals and groups--that obviate, or hinder the non-literate in gaining literacy. Macleod (1995) and Bourdieu and his theory of cultural capital, along with a few other theorists, are introduced at this time to act as a sort of bridge between the stories of Brady and Gale. In many ways, the constraints, or costs, to literacy have been similar for Brady and Gale. It is their individual responses to these constraints that determine the nexus of the literacy story. Though MacLeod may seem to have more pertinence for Brady, his major themes of cultural capital and 'social reproduction', the 'achievement ideology' and 'levelled aspirations', fit well with Gale's dilemma too.

Both subjects are African Americans from working class homes. Both Gale and Brady found little classroom support for their literacy difficulties. Both participants dropped out of high school as they neared graduation, in their eyes, the disenfranchisement and humiliation swamping the hollow degree. Both aspired for literacy to make a difference in their activities, but well into adulthood, both Brady and Gale still struggled to make literacy an integral part of their diurnal lives and their life with family. So these theorists will be presented with a focus on Brady initially, but eventually, the lens will incorporate Gale's story solely.

Jay MacLeod, in *Ain't No Makin' It : Leveled Aspirations in a Low-income Neighborhood* (1995), discusses in part the Hallway Hangers, a group of disenfranchised young men growing up in the projects in a northeastern American inner city. They gain their name from their pastime of hanging around a certain hallway in the housing development, talking and drinking and bemoaning their fates to pass their time. Their tribulations and perceptions of these have pertinence for Brady's story (and of course Gale's).

In his discussion of the social reproduction and consequent leveled aspirations of his subjects, MacLeod counterpoints the Hallway Hangers with



The Brothers, a group of largely Black youth (the Hallway Hangers are all Caucasian save for one member). His argument is that the Hangers' disdain of the myth of meritocracy is their only alternative, else they would indict the lives of their brothers and fathers who have failed before them. That is, if the Hangers' profess belief in the myth, they concede that society offers a level playing field for all participants, regardless of race, or in their case, social class status. But then how are they to explain the consistent and continual social and employment failures of their fathers and brothers without condemning their effort and abilities? No, their only alternative as they see it is to see the system as rigged against them, the lower class, and especially lower class whites who do not benefit from social programs designed to help minorities, even as it discriminates against and punishes them. Thus they can commiserate with each other the unfair and haphazard social system that promotes others in their situation (i.e. The Brothers, by way of Affirmative Action) over them.

The Brothers on the other hand, do not have to forsake meritocracy. They believe in its ethic because they can blame the past failures of their elders and siblings on a social system that slighted minorities in this country, especially the African-Americans. So they hold out for higher aspirations and success on the job market, since the society and social systems have obviously changed in their favor (as they see it).

MacLeod's discussion of these two groups, especially as their lives relate to school, helps us to situate Brady and Gale better in this discussion. We locate them caught somewhere between the Hallway Hangers and The Brothers. Like The Brothers, Brady has never abandoned what MacLeod terms the 'achievement ideology.' But like The Brothers, who struggle to attain even mediocre success in school, Brady's beliefs and aspirations and performance do not coincide. MacLeod refers to "a wealth of empirical evidence" (p.99) to

explain the low achievement of The Brothers, and later, I will delineate a part of that wealth relevant to Brady and Gale, concerning, in concert with MacLeod, issues of race (culture), social class, and cultural capital.

But unlike the Hallway Hangers, who look upon "...[t]eachers as the agents of repression...especially difficult...to tolerate" (p.108), Brady has maintained a more realistic perception of teachers. Like The Brothers, he sees them as instruments to success in school, but admits, such as in the case of his nine year old daughter who was struggling in school, that sometimes they don't 'push' enough to help the student succeed. He admits that was part of the problem in his own case, but too, as he often does, he accepts most of the blame, instead of laying it on the teachers.

Yeah right And I don't think I have had enough pushing or maybe  
I did and I just uh didn't pay attention, you know um I really don't know...(p.9)

And like The Brothers, Brady still believes in the achievement ideology, in an open system in which he can compete, in spite of his utter lack of success in school, his very low reading ability, and his failure to pursue literacy with any consistency.

No not for that reason, for the fact that I know that I should be reading much better. Like I said I have always wanted to be a lawyer, I always try to know the law, you know, things like that I want to do. I always could have done, I wouldn't even have to do a case. Just knowing that I could do that would make me feel better, you know what I mean. I guess just opportunity, knowing that you have the opportunity to is what makes me feel better about a lot of things (p.18).

Gale too bases much of her renewed life on education and much of her education on the achievement ideology. She is a bit older than Brady and has perhaps suffered more hardship, so often, her pronouncements are tinged with a bit more realism.

I don't know what I would have done this year particularly without it [education; coursework]. Losing my husband and it has definitely kept me off the drugs, just the fact that it's something that I want and I'm pursuing and it gives me something to look forward to. It's a goal I'm working at. It's like I replaced it with drugs. I replaced the drugs with

going back to school. I'm just grateful that there is hope for people who want to go back to school. That they do have grants and things like that where you can go back for the adult education that I went through where I was able to go back and get my high school diploma (p.9).

And Gale's aspirations can be as dramatic as Brady's too, but again, Gale tempers her dreams with the day to day realism that a hard life has taught her. She wants to accomplish, she does not want to quit, so she continually adjusts her goals to fit the probable. In this way, she is more realistic than Brady and The Brothers.

I thought about being a psychiatrist. It's like even now the fear when I look at the curriculum guide to see what you've gotta go through to be a psychiatrist, you know, all the sudden this fear comes even though I'm here today at school and I'm saying maybe I won't be that. Only because of that challenge and all that work. But I say well I'll take it one step at a time. I'll go for an associates degree for now and see how it goes. Because I get really scared when it comes to learning and tend to just quit. And that's what I don't want to do is quit...my struggle today is to not quit. Because each day I get up it is the same: "O, I don't have to go to school, forget it." That's always there with me (pp. 16-17).

But perhaps one of the strongest connections of MacLeod's study to this research is his depiction of the Hallway Hangers' attitudes regarding school and the achievement ideology in terms of a 'cost-benefit analysis' (p.105). That is, the Hangers do not look at school as completely irrelevant to them or their futures, just that 'upward social mobility is not worth the price of obedience, conformity, and investment of substantial amounts of time, energy, and work in school' (p.105).

Brady's and Gale's cost of education, of the pursuit of literacy, is tied to a bundle of emotional tuitions that threaten their tenuous self-esteem and social and personal standing such that Brady is not at ease until he has relieved this tension and anxiety by quitting the pursuit and Gale, as evinced above, has to continually guard against this easy way out--quitting--and convince herself daily to keep up the struggle. Years ago, for Gale, there would have been no choice either--she merely would have resorted to drink and drugs to swamp and

swallow any obligations and goals. For the Hallway Hangers, ostensibly, their largest cost of education is just that--a monetary consideration. For them, the biggest cost of schooling is the fact that while they are in the classroom, they are deferring income from full-time work (p.105). But like Brady and Gale, they experience an emotional tuition too.

...the prospects of failure in school and the accompanying feelings of inadequacy are further reasons not to invest themselves in education; the potential threat to self-esteem is another item on the cost side of the equation (p.107).

But MacLeod admits that for the Hallway Hangers 'little of their self-esteem is tied up in school; academic performance has less effect on their sense of self' (p.106). For the Hangers, the cost of self-esteem in education is more a potential, should they choose to invest themselves in education and its ethos of achievement. They look at it in their version of intellectual endeavor and conclude that no, education is not worth the cost for a number of reasons, including the idea that if they decide to put themselves 'on the line' educationally, they know they will just be slapped down, as has been the pattern all their lives.

And this is the implicit crux of MacLeod's study, one which he did not emphasize. In school as in so many situations, the Hallway Hangers opt out of the competition. Certainly, there is a bit of intellectual tenor to their decisions and were it not for their racism, MacLeod might even concede that these fellows possessed a critical consciousness. But what finally kept them at bay, out of the running, was an intuition or suggestion that were they to commit to something, invest in school, in education, and fail, as had been the outcome for so many of their endeavors, then their already precarious self-esteem might be dealt blows from which they could not recover.

Can the plight of Brady's and Gale's confrontation with literacy have been so different? From the beginning of his educational endeavors and

subsequent school failures, though cognizant of seemingly uncaring teachers and a slanted social system and a lack of advantages with which to begin school well, he has blamed himself much more than he has blamed these other factors. And with that perspective, he always knew that if he perhaps tried harder, or found that elusive 'key' to his reading problems, he could succeed and realize his dreams. School was for Brady what the Hallway Hangers feared it might become, a venue for shame and humiliation and embarrassment. Brady stuck it out for a long time. But to insulate his fragile self-esteem and in order to even stay in school, he had to devise strategies that allowed him to do so, that allowed him to play the game. After a while, these strategies, this nest of trickster mechanisms and techniques, became an integral part of Brady's identity, so much so that he took pleasure and pride in 'convincing' his peers and work mates and friends of his literacy. Unfortunately, then, to pursue education and literacy meant to abandon this large aspect of his identity.

For Gale, the threat of school and its attendant humiliation and embarrassment was overwhelming, so much so in fact that she gave up her life to evade this pain. The drugs and alcohol she turned to in high school did not enhance her self-esteem, in fact it pounded away at it. But at least it was she who was doing the pounding, not others. If she were indeed to sink out of existence, then she would be the one to control at least this much. She still saw and felt the humiliation and shame that she had lived with for most of her life.

I felt like the other kids understood what was being said [in the classroom] and I didn't and because of this then I was a dummy. And so I felt like if I asked [for help] or raised my hand then everybody was going to laugh and everybody would know that I didn't know. So I didn't raise my hand. I acted as if I knew and I knew I didn't know (p.2).

So even as a youngster, like Brady, Gale played the game, the 'con,' and bided her time until she could take more definite action in high school in Treetops. "I went to school for probably two years and realized I could probably

get away with skipping school and then eventually not going because my momma had a day job" (p.2).

Regarding the Hallway Hangers, MacLeod states that "[t]heir unwillingness to partake of the educational system stems from an assessment of the costs and benefits of playing the game" (p.107). For Brady and Gale, way too often, this pursuit was not a game. Nor could they coolly make an assessment based upon personal costs and benefits. To them, this quest for literacy was always met by threats to their identity and self-esteem. This was a huge cost to pay for something they had managed to live without for such a long time.

#### Further constraints: the role of cultural capital

Listening to Gale as an adult involved with education and literacy, her survival, her perspective on her early school years is quite impressive. Though she may be unaware of the meaning of cultural capital, she displays tremendous sociological and educational acumen. She may not express it as eloquently as the sociology professor, but she knows as a youngster that she was swindled, that she did not receive her fair share of advantages.

Well because I was older and didn't know what the kids my age knew being older [when she first arrived at Hoover High school from Mississippi] and I really felt out of place. I really feel that where I needed the help immediately was at a much younger age. Because you know, uh I remember being very interested in learning in the third grade and even the first grade. I remember so well and I just don't know what went wrong. I think something between home and school went wrong (p.3).

Most often marginalized students suffer not from a lack of cultural capital, but rather ultimately suffer because the cultural capital they do possess is not valued, if even recognized, by the schools. Indeed, this notion forms the basis for Delpit's declaration that issues of power are evident in the classroom and that participation in this power is governed by codes and rules that determine

this culture of power (1988; p.282). If cultural capital is the “general cultural knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next” (MacLeod, 1995; p.13) then it is not that the boundary students like Gale and Brady enter school devoid of cultural capital, it is that their cultural capital-- “their manners, norms, dress, style of interaction, and linguistic facility” (MacLeod, 1995; p.100)-- is not recognized as valuable by the schools and is usually not conducive to ‘doing’ education in the manner the schools usually require. This reiterates Cazden’s and Heath’s points regarding cultural dissonance and the idea that differences, not deficits, exist in these boundary students. Stating it thus provides a convenient way to describe that which separates the advantaged student from the disadvantaged student in so many ways, and as a way to cite goals in terms of literacy and general education for the boundary student. But in a deeper way too, cultural capital situates students within the institution which by its very nature already confers privilege and standing on those with a certain type of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) cites cultural capital as one of the several forms of capital that

“account for the structure and functioning of the social world...[and] [i]t is remarkable that the practices and assets thus salvaged from the icy water of egotistical calculation...are the virtual monopoly of the dominant class” (p.242).

Thus does cultural capital merge with social capital, providing certain dominant groups with special ‘membership’ in the society, “which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu, 1986; pp.248-49). This ‘credit’ and advantage is extremely useful in certain institutions, especially school. In this way Bourdieu ‘hit’ upon the notion of cultural capital in attempting to explain the uneven scholastic successes enjoyed by children from different social groups. He saw academic achievement as a commodity purchased in the academic market due to the

membership and credit extended to certain dominant groups. Educational failure or compromise then in no small measure was attributed to the reverse proposition--a lack of the 'proper' cultural and social capital offered marginalized students insufficient exchange value in the schools and society (Bourdieu, 1986; p.243).

Bourdieu's insights regarding cultural capital have been very important for educational studies since he so well articulated an educational factor that took the onus in many ways off the debilitating notion that saw "educational success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes" (1986; p.243), and endowed educational research with a necessary cloak of cultural and social conditions.

If Bourdieu was able to establish *a priori* that the institution of school is predisposed to advantage some kids over others, then educational researchers who followed were able to use this notion to study how this advantage is perpetuated in the schools and affects learning. A brief account of several such studies demonstrates the deleterious impact a lack of proper cultural capital can have on marginalized students during and after their school life and how literacy is such a large factor in this equation. It is best to recall the words of Crawford and Chaffin (1986) regarding 'muted group theory' and literacy before we embark further on this discussion. They posit that in certain situations, especially school, groups exist in asymmetrical power relationships, for our purposes, the dominant or advantaged culture, over those of limited cultural capital, such as minorities and children of poverty, even working class students. In this way language and the norms for its use are controlled by the dominant group.

Members of the muted group are disadvantaged in articulating their experience, since the language they must use is derived largely from the perceptions of the dominant group. To some extent, the perceptions of the muted group are unstatable in the idiom of the dominant group. In order to be heard, muted group members must learn the dominant idiom and attempt to articulate within it, even though this attempt



will inevitably lead to some loss of meaning. The experiences 'lost in the translation' to the dominant idiom remain unvoiced, and perhaps unthought, even within the muted group (p.21).

With this idea in mind, we examine several studies where the institutional factors inherent in school compromise the education and status of children already behind what Rose called 'the economic and political eight ball.' We have already looked at Rist (1970) and his study which showed students of low social class and little cultural capital (that is valued) arbitrarily compromised educationally almost from the moment they stepped into the schools and how this immediate marginalization had long-term effects on the educational careers of these students.

MacLeod (1995) latches on to notions of low social class and cultural capital continually undercutting the boundary student educationally even if they have not given up on the school's achievement ideology. He claims that Bourdieu underestimated this ideology's power to "mystify structural constraints and encourage high aspirations" and he points at The Brothers as examples. But again, as in the cases of Gale and Brady and students like them, The Brothers are in a way doomed from the start because their 'ways of knowing and showing' are not valued by the institution.

They [The Brothers] blame themselves for their mediocre academic performance because they are unaware of the discriminatory influences of tracking, the school's partiality toward the cultural capital of the upper classes, the self-fulfilling consequences of teachers' expectations, and other forms of class-based educational selection (p.126)).

This remarkably compressed passage neatly summarizes much of what has been asserted in terms of Rist and Heath and Cazden and even Bourdieu regarding the factors that continually marginalize students like Gale who enter the school with high expectations, albeit disadvantaged, and instead of getting the help necessary to insure their academic success, are instead assigned an educational chute that guarantees their social reproduction. But in spite of

MacLeod's neat summary, I will offer a few more examples of how unrecognized cultural capital and low social class status continually serve to disenfranchise certain students educationally who, like Gale, find the eventual retrieval of literacy and their lost education a very costly affair.

Lareau (1987) relies heavily on Bourdieu to inform her study of parental involvement in the schooling of working class and middle class students. Recognizing with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) that "schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of the society" and that "schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula" so that "children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements," Lareau focuses more upon the habitus, that is "the structure of schooling and family life and the dispositions of individuals" (p.74).

Her study shows that contrary to popular belief, the working class parents *do* indeed care about and place great value upon their children's education. But circumstantial factors, such as work obligations, lack of transportation, and child care duties often obviate a closer relationship with the schools and teachers. But more importantly, the parents' low cultural capital regarding schooling past and present, not to mention their probably unpleasant school experiences, make them reluctant to participate actively in their child's education. This serves to frame an attitude on the part of these parents that the well-educated teacher is responsible for the student's education and no help or interference is needed from them. This attitude also effectively closes off the most common avenues of communication with the schools, further decreasing their participation in the day to day schooling of their children. Today, many minority parents are very active in addressing the decline of their child's education in response to the widening achievement gap, but such intervention was unheard of twenty-five and thirty

plus years ago when Gale's education was compromised at home and at school.

Well when you get whipped at home and whipped at school and then you are only told to go out and play or go to bed you know and that is not very much attention from the teacher or the parent. And somewhere down the line you're lost there because as a child I feel if you don't know how to do something, the only way to learn is to see someone do it, or ask how you do it. And if you aren't seeing anyone doing it and you're afraid to ask, you're sorta stuck (p.3).

Of course this lack of involvement and communication with the schools and teachers serves to compromise potential educational benefits usually afforded by such activity, such as that enjoyed by the other students and parents.

Middle class parents, in supervising, monitoring, and overseeing the educational experience of their children, behave in ways that mirror the requests of schools. This appears to provide middle-class children with educational advantages over working-class children (Lareau, 1987; pp.82-83).

I would be remiss in concluding this section without referring to the work of Anyon (1981), for her study anticipates the contentions of Cazden and Heath, Delpit and MacLeod. She shows that the differential curricula, referred to in Lareau, is a very real occurrence in the schools and is very much based upon social class. In her studies of elementary schools from the working, middle, affluent professional, and executive elite classes, the author depicts how as much as the schools vary on the outside in terms of style and neighborhood and grounds--the working class school has a rough asphalt playground compared to the lush campus of the executive elite school--so do the curricula vary within the schools. In the working class schools where the curriculum is 'imposed,' common denominator pedagogical strategies match the low expectations the teachers share concerning the students and their learning. The teachers portray the students as lazy and listless and care more about maintaining order than about student learning. The students are force-fed a curriculum that in no way resembles the experiences of the children. Basals and fragmented, isolated

facts and skills and “knowledge of ‘practical’ rule-governed *behaviors*” (p.12) dominate in these classrooms, where the students learn that resistance to this pabulum knowledge is the only power they have and the only available strategy at their disposal to keep school life interesting. Anyon is distressed that these working-class students

“...were not offered what for them would be *cultural capital*--knowledge and skill at manipulating ideas and symbols in their own interests...The absence of traditional bodies of knowledge and ideology may make these children vulnerable to alternative ideas; the children may be more open to ideas that support fundamental social change” (pp.32-33; emphasis in original).

This eventuality has been referred to as ‘accidental transformative education,’ a much less desired outcome than change promoted by way of a “critical understanding of the world or of their situation in the world” (p.32). This latter route is unlikely, given that these working class kids were not taught their history, nor did they learn of the pride associated with their working class’ continual struggle in the face of economic oppression that sought to rob their dignity. Thus we see these students at the lower rung of the social and cultural ladder, further compromised educationally by the institution of school that values a higher social standard, by the school’s teachers and curricula who share this bias, and by the lack of involvement on the part of their parents and guardians, who too, are unwitting victims of this social and cultural discrimination. It is given this devastating scenario that causes Anyon and Delpit to worry about the social reproductive consequences of such an education and what their limited and narrow learning holds for their future.

Yes, today, some parents of marginalized students, more parents, are expressing their concern to the schools, but even so, achievement gaps persist, and now, as much if not more than ever, exiled students like Gale and Brady, Galetea and Orpheus, arrive at the doorstep of the community college, insufficiently educated, beset with costs of which they are hardly aware, limited

literacy in hand, seeking another opportunity to recoup their life.

### Residue Fears

On a recent *Ally McBeal* episode (it was a repeat from the 1998-1999 season that aired 9/27/99 on the Fox network) the title character was quite emotionally involved in the court case with which she was currently working (that is, even more so than Ally is prone to be). For much of the show, Ms. McBeal was distracted and behaved in an erratic manner, often flipping fantasy with reality, even in the courtroom. In a defining moment for this particular show, Ally is alone in her bedroom entertaining a romantic(ized) notion of marriage, the crux of the court case. Inexplicably, the bedroom was suddenly cluttered with images escaping from Ally's past. Supposedly, these scenes had been safely tucked away by Ally, so painful were they to her. But the images were relentless, flashing back to a young Ally, perhaps 9 or 10, unwilling recipient to the painful noise created by a shouting match between mother and father. The young girl's stoic reaction told the viewer that this was not an uncommon occurrence in the McBeal household.

But still, the child tried to drown out the deafening words, coming to the girl and the viewer as a series of harsh yet unintelligible exchanges. She turned on the radio. Still the words penetrated her hearing. She played then with other noises at her disposal--a record player, the television set--yet the harsh hum of horror persisted. She shrank to a sitting position and covered her ears. Still...She moved into the closet and assumed the position, hands over ears. The look of recognition and alarm on the older Ally was one of pained horror as she visualized the child that was herself, yet could do nothing, now or then, to stop the noise, the pain, the suffering, realizing that the marriage of her parents had little romance, or romantic love at its foundation.

Gale has had such moments. That is, she has been bothered by images from her past of the girl she once was and the pain and suffering--the fears--that the girl endured. But unlike Ally, these did not come to her of a sudden, long-hidden secrets surfacing like a drowned body during the rainy season. No, Gale carried them with her, a steady attendant, like a cumbersome purse, or a scar, a reminder of who she was, of who she is, and what she could or could not do. For a long while, for over twenty years, these images created the thirst and the need for drink and drugs. Instead of a radio and a tv--marijuana and vodka. These images of the lost child, the child abandoned without recourse, in the home, in the classroom, in the spaces between home and school, provoked perhaps Gale's thirst and appetite--so costly were these images to her-- but too, eventually, proved the reasons and impetus to correct a life badly misshapen.

Often in her discussions of her past, Gale conceived of these events in terms of fears, fears that reside within her even today. And like Brady, even when discussing the present, Gale's past, like her shadow, is only a breath away, an easy slide from the mention of fear to her troubled childhood. We envision the little girl, Gale, wondering about herself, curious as to why she has to be so different, why she is so often apart, alone. Gale had been talking about her current fears regarding math, 'especially math' (as opposed to fears about other curricular subjects), when she fell easily into a fascinating anecdote from her past that once again isolated the child, even in a roomful of children.

I remember uh I was raised by my grandmother and she has a fourth grade education and my mom uh when I was around her I never seen her reading or she never read to us so I think that has a lot to do with [not] reading. But on the other hand, my mom's twin sister--that was a part of her punishment for her children--was to make them read. And I would always when I would go visit my aunt when she would get upset with one of the children, she would say, 'Now get in here and sit down and read a book' and they all had to sit there until they read a whole book. And to this day her children every time you see them they have a book in their hands and they're reading...I was just wondering, was I to be so different, you know, my aunt never told me to read when she got upset with me, but she always made her own kids read, you know. I don't know (p.1).

In her mind, Gale always stood at the margins, on the outside, looking in, treated differently than others, even within her own family. These feelings and perspectives already signal the existence of costs, for Gale, the adult learner, as well as the little girl, in terms of literacy attainment. This is not to be underestimated. Gale, like Brady, felt a strong connection to her past in terms of her adult life, only she remembered it quite well. She took lessons from the past, came to understand herself better as an adult eventually from issues experienced as a child. Gale's insights regarding her past did not exclude even understanding the school culture in terms of her development, or non-development. She felt as a child and understood as an adult the ramifications of her poor scholastic performance. She understood too that such a performance was beyond her ken, or control, or her deepest wishes, but this did not obviate the slow accumulation of social forces that continually swept her up and set her back, that compromised her as a student and person, and of course, continually levied costs against her perhaps ever gaining literacy and an education. Gale's own words express this most eloquently.

[When queried about the kids who could do school and those who could not]:  
It seems like those kids played with one another and the ones who couldn't do it played with one another and so I never...a negative aspect in school, that was it because it seemed like it had a lot to do with how I made friends and the friends I made. And usually the friends that didn't weren't quite capable of learning as myself wasn't doing that good, were kinda rotten children. Opposed to how I felt inside. I wasn't a rotten person but this was all I could get because this is what was available to me. Because the ones that were halfway decent about themselves normally hung out with people that were doing ok. I don't know where I fit. I didn't fit anywhere because I wasn't necessarily a part of the people that had a problem with learning but with doing other bad things to other people and I don't think like those people. I just had a problem with learning, but then I couldn't hang out with the person makin' the As and the Bs either because they saw me as a person that could not learn. Couldn't keep up in class. I guess the negative part for me in school was not knowing what to do with those feelings (p.19).

These are insightful comments. They show Gale being situated--again at the margins, again as a misfit-- as a result of her poor scholastic performance, a situation that would follow her through the grades and only become

exacerbated when she broached new territory and new peers at Hoover High in Treetops years later. Again, peers who would either ridicule her, or have nothing to do with her due to her scholastic ineptitude, or peers who would take her in, even though secretly, she was not like them, did not feel as they did, did not want to do the rotten things they did. So just as Lareau talks about the middle class parents gaining advantage for their children through networks they establish among other parents and the schools, the same holds true among students and their peers. Their own network system includes and excludes, gains scholastic advantage or fixes it such that teachers and counselors right away peg you (Gale) as being part of some group, some clique that is resistant to learning and a troublemaker inside and outside of class. Indeed, this is a tremendous cost to incur at such a young age and have to pay taxes on for the rest of one's life. No wonder, when reflecting upon school years later, Gale can seemingly coolly state that "I remember criticism a great deal in school" (p.3).

But what she remembers too, in fact it punctuates her school career, is the fear that attended school with her. And like the cost of being caught between where she wanted to be and where she had to be that pursued her throughout her schooling, the fear plagued her incessantly too. It was just not the typical fear of math or English common to many students, but a continual fear of failing that pervaded her every school hour. She feared the repercussions of failing--which probably induced or insured failure--as a child; as an adult this was a prominent feature too, because she reasoned, "I felt like I wouldn't be able to learn because if I could learn, why didn't I learn some of the things I wanted [to] before?" (p.12).

Another aspect of the fear is akin to a fear Brady carried with him too. That is, he so desperately wanted literacy because he sought to quell the doubts that the literacy 'sins' of the father might be visited upon his kids. Gale



shares those same fears. Already she sees a grown son leave school early, as she did, with no promise of returning. Now, her late elementary grade school daughter is her focus of attention. "It's like my daughter is telling me now, things like, 'everybody gets it but me, mom. I just don't understand what the teacher is saying'" (p.12).

Even though my daughter can read pretty good, she still thinks she can't read and I'm not quite sure where that's coming from. I mean, did somewhere when I was using did I imprint this on her or just again wasn't there with her [to reassure her]...I guess I need to find out why she thinks she can't read that well and maybe try to make her comfortable at it you know wherever (p.8).

If in fact now Gale is able to help her daughter and grown son, provide them with support and an example from which to gain strength and succeed, it was not always that way. As Gale intimated, too often, way too often, on drugs and alcohol, she was not there for them. It was she who was searching for that support and example even as she ignored her kids. And always, fear was a companion, as a child, as a 'using' adult, as a 'clean' adult, in school, and even out of school.

Yeah, I feel uh more or less fear—it's tied in with fear and I hate to really stress on the word 'fear' because of my age now and my awareness of life and knowing that there is nothing to fear. But something does trigger it and it does take me all the way back to the learning stage, the very early part of the learning stage, where uh I felt totally isolated and just, just fearful...It goes back to I feel like the same person trapped in the 7 year old body (p.4).

In the face of humiliation and shame and fear, Gale seldom played the 'con,' save to maintain 'normal appearances.' She sensed that the teachers knew her situation and would not call on her, or put her on the spot unnecessarily, unless she strayed from the unspoken rules of decorum. She admitted that teachers "back then they had the system where they would chastise the kids and rip them if they got it wrong, so you were hoping you didn't get called upon" (p.13). But even so, Gale met the pain and the unavoidable criticism head-on, until, like Brady, she was of an age to take matters in to her

own hands and skip school and then eventually leave school.

But Gale lived with the fear and the shame of her isolation; the drugs and alcohol served to dull the pain, but not obliterate it. In fact, they reminded her of her shortcomings, of her failings that she so feared. But she never forgot, or repressed these feelings and memories, as did Brady, nor safely lock away these memories as did Ally McBeal. No, she lived with that seven year old and her complaints of educational incompetence on a day to day basis. An unwanted companion, an unwanted reminder, costs, to be sure that postponed for years her attempts at literacy, at education, but Gale never forsook her.

On the ensuing episode of *Ally McBeal* (again a repeat from the 1998-'99 season that aired on the Fox network 10/3/99), the title character is still suffering the affects of the court case that made her examine unwanted terrain in her life. She suffered; she was yet distracted and erratic at work and at home. But not once was the little girl, Ally as a child, seen, nor alluded to. Already forgotten. Not a part of the contemporary landscape, perhaps repressed again, perhaps just too much trouble. But Gale did not forget, or perhaps, could not forget in spite of herself. She figured for a time that her problems could be solved if she met someone who could mentor her, support her, as parents and teachers were supposed to have done but never made the effort for whatever reasons. She thought such a person might help her change.

### **Educating Gale**

In *Educating Rita* (Columbia Pictures, 1983), Rita (nee, Susan: she changes her name to signify the change she hopes to experience via education) is a mid-twenties working class Englishwoman, a beautician, who has been resisting her electrician husband's commission to conceive a child. Of a sudden, what Rita hopes to conceive instead of children is an academic stint

unto self-enhancement. Indeed, she agrees with her professor, Frank, that she is having an 'affair' with literature, or academics. Inspired by Rita Mae Brown (from whence she chooses her new name) and her *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1977), Rita starts to gradually acclimate herself to the academic scene. She sits in on some classes; she writes papers for Frank and discusses them with him in his office (in the English tutorial style) and even begins to argue with him in a critical vein regarding some of the readings. She fortuitously experiences a performance of *MacBeth* and is all the more transformed and determined to change, to shed her working class self and be the student. After a while, Frank invites her and her husband to a little party he has at his house.

Now Denny, the husband, refuses to go, peeved at his wife for her dalliance with academics and for continuing to take birth control pills (which he discovers accidentally). So while Rita prepares to attend Frank's party, Denny hits the local pub with friends and family. Trying to convince herself she belongs to this (academic) club, Rita's resolve wanes the closer she gets to Frank's house. Finally, peeking in the windows at the well-dressed and glib gathering, she gains a mental picture of herself and agrees with the symbolism--she is not one of them; she is in fact on the outside looking in and will always remain so. She scribbles Frank a hasty note and leaves it on his windshield (a light rain soon washes away the ink, as mutable as her resolve). The next scene shows Rita reluctantly, yet feigning eagerness, yes, joining her husband and neighbors and his family at the pub, once more an entrenched member in that club, the escape from which seems ever further away.

But it is the look on Rita's face, the anguish of realization of being an academic outsider, of having to 'settle,' of not being good enough, that announces this true cost of re-education. Gale spent much of her life wanting to belong, to be a part of the group that went to the board to solve math problems,

or volunteered to read aloud in the classroom. But like Rita, Gale was continually on the outside, looking in at the others that she envied and admired and aspired to be like. She too had to settle, for groups and cliques that spoke to her inadequacies, not her true feelings and proclivities and latent talents. More than ever, she wanted to belong to the literacy club, but more than that, to the social club that embraces children because they want to be treated in a human and humane fashion. Gale did not enjoy much of that and the longing is evident in her voice, as is the recognition that she has to struggle to maintain even a semblance of self-esteem.

O yeah, I wish that my childhood could have been different. I wish that I could of started out on the right foot. I think that I could [have]. I almost want to say that I could have been somebody today. But I don't want to say that because that's just like saying I'm nobody. It would be most definitely easier to say that I'm nobody than to say I'm somebody. But I'm going to take the harder route and say that I am somebody and just trying to become more better at being a mother and being a human being on this earth, you know. Try to make each day a good day, try to put my best foot forward at whatever I do (p.9).

Seemingly Gale is beginning to understand that she must become responsible for her own well-being and growth. This is something Rita knew that took Gale half a lifetime to discover, or at least acknowledge:

If you want change, you've got to do it from the inside...I'm beginning to find me. It's great...it might sound selfish, but all I want for the time being is what I'm finding inside me...I see him [Denny] looking at me sometimes; I know what he's thinking: he's wondering where the gal he married is gone to (Columbia Pictures; 1983).

Change and understanding and insight regarding that change, emanates from inside the person. But for Gale this change was postponed because she was 'using,' her way of fending off the suffering that came with the territory. But probably not a day passed that Gale did not wish for change, or try to figure out how this might be actualized. But too, there was the image of the seven year old girl that still beckoned. This image haunted Gale, as if the wraith was asking, "how can you go about self-enhancement without resolving my distress?" So

the change was pushed back. Gale knew, or eventually figured out, that she could not care for her own kids (let alone the child that bothered her so) if she was filled with self-loathing. Did the route to change, to self-love, wend its way through Mississippi, through that tiny schoolhouse and small classroom where sat the little girl, abandoned in her small desk?

But before she could address this issue, Gale tried the more surface changes. She figured if she could cozy up to knowledge and self-assurance and self-reliance, then some of that might fall her way. So she sought the mentors and models and examples that had been sorely missing in her life before, as a child, as a way to perhaps escape this 'miserable lifestyle'. To show with what little regard Gale considered her childhood models and her homelife, when asked if she thought she might succeed in today's schools and with today's teachers, with their sensitivity to cultural differences and their commitment to not letting students fall by any wayside, Gale's response was direct and certain.

Not and have had the same upbringing. The same parents. The same things that went on as a child. If those things hadn't been the same, then I wouldn't be the same (p.13).

Recall that it was Gale's philosophy, in spite of whippings at home and at school for what a person did not know, was that "as a child...if you don't know how to do something, the only way to learn is to see someone do it or ask how you do it" (p.3). But Gale was 'sorta stuck' because there were no ready models for her. It was much easier to whip the child and send her outdoors than to tutor, or instruct, or demonstrate. But she did not give up on her notion that if she could not attain literacy, or intelligence as she conceived of it, then the next best thing was to embrace this in another, in spite of the consequences, or the ill fit.

Well it's because I always admire the people that were at a certain level with intelligence and uh with book learning and I always felt that I weren't quite good enough to be with those people because of my lack of knowing and learning...and what really got me was the men in my life had to be the men

that knew they're [smarter than myself]....that was very good in math and that was very good in reading. That was the men that I chose in my life, but not necessarily was those good relationships for me. I had to find out that what was it I got out of the relationships that I were in and it boiled down to the fact that they could read good and they knew math so I thought what better way to better my life than for me to learn these things for myself. That actually what I saw in them is what I wanted to be with me...But what I look for in other people because it was lacking in myself. So I had a real hard time with that (p.5).

As can be seen from these comments, Gale never lost hope that someday she might be the one somehow gaining knowledge and learning. Even as she sought examples for her life of people 'in the know,' she always measured herself up to them and wondered "why was I to be so different?...what do I do with the feelings?...where is my opportunity?...why should I have to walk around and feel this way? [like her mother's dummy]." Her conversation is littered with phrases that catch not so much the envy, or the coveteousness, of knowledge and knowing, but the longing. She did not want to take away from anybody, she merely wanted to join them. "There was one thing that stuck in my head from childhood and that was 'Gee, I wanted to be like that person,' you know? That she or he can do it and I can't--I want to do it" (p.6).

But of course, attendant with those forays into these possibilities, the remembrances of wanting to be in that special group, came the ubiquitous feelings emanating from the image of herself as a seven year old--incompetent, lost, reviled. And she would be set back again. Then, even the propinquity to smart men in bad relationships would not enhance her at all, but truly exacerbate these feelings.

I've always admired people that were very smart and that were in school. And I always felt very low self-esteem because I wasn't, you know, a part of that group. And part of it had to do with me not thinking I was [smart enough to belong]. Me feeling like less smarter than those people. I was admiring them, but...I felt like they were superior over me (p.11).

In *Educating Rita*, the title character had the benefit of Frank, her assigned professor, and his tutorial. Frank allowed for and cherished Rita's voice and experiences in his meetings with her, thus allowing, as Anyon

implies, Rita to gain some much needed cultural capital in terms of her scholastic endeavors. Frank always respected Rita and put away his professorial power, treating her as much as he could, as an equal. An hour into the movie (Rita has now been a student for perhaps a year), a half hour past the point where Rita felt like an outsider at Frank's party and was afraid to ask for admittance into his literature club, another significant scene occurs. Rita and Frank are casually strolling down a campus lane chatting. They choose a park bench and continue that conversation. Rita has changed internally, as the viewer soon learns, but her outside appearance has changed too. Her hair color and style is different, more fashionable, as is her attire. Her speech is more distinctive and pronounced and she is obviously more self-assured. Now it appears (to the viewer) that Frank is more a peer, than a superior.

Rita has asked Frank to suggest a poet she might study. Frank muses for a time, then comes up with whom he thinks is the ideal poet for the situation and begins to recite a favorite selection from that poet. But soon Rita joins in the recitation and Frank looks sidelong at her and is astonished to see that Rita is quoting the poem from memory. The poet was Blake and though he was not on the list of poets to be covered as of yet in her curriculum, the summer course instructor was a 'real Blake freak' and shared his love of the poet with the students. But Frank is diminished. No longer will he be able to play the mentor to this woman who has gained so much, including the necessary cultural capital, in such a short time.

But Gale probably never had the advantage of a true intellectual and kind-hearted mentor as did Rita. Gale's models were perhaps more synthetic intellectually than Frank and by Gale's own admission, too often misfits in terms of their relationship with her. And she was not involved in an academic tutorial, but with a sinking life, often a deep sleep from which she only occasionally

awoke and only finally when she returned to school of her own volition, at her own risk. No, from the onset, Gale had to confront her challenges alone.

When I mentioned that my parents, like my grandmother, my mom, they never really sat down with us and helped us with any homework. Or asked us if we had any. And you know if we needed help, they were unable to deliver. So um it was mainly just--out there. I don't think the teachers understood a lot of times that was what was going on at home. That, and we didn't know how at the time I think to speak up and let the teachers know: 'I don't understand and I don't have the help at home, could you help me?' You know (p.13).

The teachers Gale encountered throughout her public schooling were not exemplary. Far from offering help, or understanding, or recognizing the need in the little girl, they were always ready to provide a whipping in Mississippi and to laugh in her face in Michigan. At best, they left her alone, sparing her at least some humiliation. "But so I don't know. Maybe I thought that in my head that the teachers knew where I was at and decided not to put me on the spot. Because, somehow, I think they really did [know where I was at]" (p.13). After years and years and years of pain and grief, doubts and drugs, ill-fitting mentors and strife and empty bottles, Gale found a way to change. Maybe it was due to her youngest son, born physically afflicted due to fetal alcohol syndrome, or maybe it was the incessant image of the seven year old child, beseeching her (adult) self to take the necessary risks in order to change.

### Mississippi Changes

In *Quantum Creativity*, Pamela Meyer (1997) tells of Amy, a harried housewife and mother of two. A frustrated concert pianist, she resented diurnal duties that left her no time for herself. Her life had become an awful burden. Finally, after months of struggling with these difficulties, her responsibilities, the woman "accepted them as boundaries and found ways to work within them" (pp.161-62).

Meyer asserted that this woman's story "inspires me, reminding me that I



have choices; if she can do it, I, too, can allow the boundaries to free me” and see “the play of possibilities within boundaries” (p.163).

When we acknowledge what is, we can use it to our advantage. This is not unlike the addict’s journey through early recovery. For the addict abstinence is a set of boundaries which ultimately frees the individual from the grip of addiction (p.163).

Oftentimes, recognition and acceptance of boundaries are the incipient steps to transformation. In Amy’s story, Meyer makes a pertinent connection to Gale and her struggle to enact change in her life. The story of a fellow Mississippian, William Faulkner, and his transformative process, has interesting connections to Gale’s life and her continual battles. Faulkner’s life was often misshapen by drink as he, like Gale, sought the sense in the boundaries imposed by life’s circumstances and the frustrating constraints of language and literacy. Faulkner found the limits of language and its apprehension as problematic as did Gale. For both the author and for Gale, once they redefined the confinement of boundaries, the alcohol was superseded by ‘the play of possibilities’ within these limitations.

In 1926, two years after being removed as a scoutmaster for drinking, William Faulkner, then almost twenty-nine, published his first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*. The next year, his second novel, *Mosquitoes*, was published (Blotner, 1994; p.749). During this time, Faulkner supported himself from the generosity of his father, freelancing for newspapers, selling short stories and picking up odd jobs, such as lacquering a brass horn for five dollars (Blotner, 1994; p.207).

Faulkner had to do this, for his novels were neither critical nor financial successes. At the recommendation of a friend, Faulkner’s father did not read *Soldier’s Pay* and thought that his “son’s writing counted for little” (Blotner, 1994; p.207). Also, it is maintained that Faulkner spent more time working on and revising his next published novel, *Sartoris*, “than on its two predecessors” (Blotner, 1994; p.204). Indeed, Warren (1966) claims cryptically that “[a]s a

novel, *Soldier's Pay* is no better than it should be" (p.1) and later on, diminishes the novel with a well-placed 'even':

Faulkner's tale is one of the anguish of time, the tension of change.  
Even in *Soldier's Pay* (1926), the theme is there...(p.251; emphasis added).

But the 'tension of change' is something Faulkner knew intimately, for it was not long, his novel-writing took on a different tenor. Blotner (1994) captures well the slow but definite transformation occurring within Faulkner at this time.

The few people who knew the real Bill Faulkner, the complex man beneath the facades with which he concealed and protected himself, would not have been surprised at this gesture of tenderness [which Blotner had just described] toward childhood, innocence, and suffering. What they could not have known was that these same elements were combining in his mind...to produce what would be his first--and to many his greatest--masterpiece (p.208).

*The Sound and the Fury* was published in 1929, marking, along with *Sartoris*, the first of the Yoknapatawpha novels and the first of several masterpieces over the next dozen years. But what change occurred in a writer such that he went from two novels of mediocre stature to works that would awe the literary world for over half a century and more? Pilkington (1983) contends that Faulkner merely picked up on the cultural and literary trends of the time, a sort of natural progression.

The similarities between Faulkner's themes and those of his contemporaries demonstrate convincingly that despite the rather narrow focus of his fiction upon life in north Mississippi, Faulkner was very much a part of the pattern of the national literary scene and responded to the same subjects that occupied writers in other parts of the country. To a degree, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha was a literary microcosm of the 1920s (pp.xi-xii).

Of course, this does not explain why Faulkner followed this pattern with such stunning success, with such monumental and unique works. Cowley (1966) implies Faulkner was waiting, as did others, for "the spirit and the voice," his true poetry (p.45). Warren implies too that timing is of the essence in this change. He sees Faulkner deeply affected by the events of World War I, especially in a South still reeling from the Civil War, a sort of cultural shock that,

for Faulkner, was sandwiched with the Depression and the incipient events of World War II (pp.4-5). Hardwick (1966), in a light introduction, alludes to Faulkner's madness, but there is a hint of irony in her tone, as if a tinge of madness is a prerequisite for such a transformation, in order to create such masterpieces as *Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom! Absalom!*.(p.226).

But it is left to Blotner, Faulkner's most prodigious biographer, to confront this question, but even his notions are conjecture and offer no special insight. He quotes Faulkner, in referring to this time during which *Sound* was created, as saying: "One day I seemed to shut a door...between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write" (p.212). Blotner refers to the difference in Faulkner as an "immense leap in technique" and alludes to the author's struggles with "difficulties of an intimate nature," facts he gleaned only years later from a French translator (p.212). The biographer speculates that these struggles may have been provoked with problems experienced with his recently divorced fiancée and her young children and how these affected his art.

...it is not hard to imagine how difficulties and anxieties would have made his writing an escape, and how these difficulties would have provided something else: an intensity and a sense of immediacy which would go directly into the rendering of the poignant life of his beleaguered character, his 'heart's darling,' Caddy Compson (pp.212-13).

As unsatisfying as this portrayal is in capturing the dramatic and unexpected turnaround in an artist's craft, it is even more disappointing when the enormous chasm that separates his first masterpiece from his first novels is considered. But that chasm, told by words and their arrangement and unique syntax and punctuation and presentation on the page, is no larger than the chasm that divides Gale's life before her decision to opt for survival and the time afterwards. Fashioned by her own words, we have seen this Mississippian plumb the depths of human existence, plunge headlong into a seemingly

**inexorable tide of destruction, only to emerge at some distant point a new person, a Galetea fashioned by the unseen hand of some remarkable Pygmalion.**

**Very likely, this metamorphosis was gradual, a change that occurred over a lifetime of misery. Probably, not a day went by that Gale did not wish for change, make a vow to grab a difference, strategize a course in which to pursue a new direction. But what is most remarkable is that her hope, however small and ephemeral, was sustained throughout the over twenty years of her ordeal. And eventually, something, someone, somehow acted the role of Venus and allowed a fresh breath of life to be blown into her stoned existence.**

**In searching for the drama in Faulkner's story around 1928, the intimate struggles that create change, Blotner finds nothing that might compare to Gale's own travail that certainly could have been the final ignominy for her, causing her perhaps, instead of opting for rejuvenation, to end her misery permanently. Several years before Gale admitted herself to a local drug program with the small hope that she could become clean and whole, her son Cameron was born. It would be almost a year before Gale could hold this baby, for he was born three months premature, weighed just over two pounds, and was hospitalized all of that first year of his life due to his frailty. Now, ten years old, Cam "can't hear or speak. he can't see out of one eye. He has cerebral palsy and can't walk by himself" (Wahlberg, 1997; p.C1), all because of Gale's substance abuse. Cam has fetal alcohol syndrome. Gale laments this predicament.**

**When you have a child like him, the pain is even greater because it's something you've done...You have to deal with the reality of your mistake. I face it every day (Wahlberg, 1997; p.C1).**

**Of Gale's four children, Cam is the only one to be so affected. Her substance abuse peaked during her pregnancy with him, when she "would**

drink and smoke straight from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep" (Wahlberg, 1997; p.C1). But if indeed Cam's afflictions served as a reveille for change for Gale, then it took her five years of seeing and hearing this call to act upon it.(2) Without a doubt, Cam's birth and subsequent maladies deeply affected Gale and it is safe to assume that she was so entangled with her substance abuse that it took that time to disentangle herself so as to enroll in a drug program. Too, Cam's afflicted presence might have initially so affected her that Gale indulged in her escapes even more.

But it is feasible too, that Cam reminded Gale of her own childhood, when she so desperately needed aid and attention and none were forthcoming from her mother. Gale, long critical of her upbringing, of the poor exemplars and caretakers in her life in Mississippi, may have glimpsed herself cast in that role of negligence, seen a struggling Cam as herself and realized she had better alter her lifestyle else even the cause of her own afflictions would seem spurious. That is, Gale would be forced to admit that she suffers from the same negligence she feels is good enough for her own kids.

This troubled her a great deal, the idea that she was acting no better towards her own kids than her caretakers did to her. When finally she gained her GED and started taking classes at WCC, Gale could evaluate this position from a more objective viewpoint and talk about some of the reasons that she felt spurred her to seek an education.

My children, you know, not being able to sit with them and help them with their homework had a lot to do with it [getting clean and seeking an education]. And knowing how much I love them and not showing [it], not able to show love because I couldn't show love to myself. And um knowing the best way to teach them would be the example that I set for them. So I chose to go back to school so when I tell them it's so important and that's the way to go, that they also see that example in myself (p.6).

But the influence of one's childhood on the adult is a conviction of which Gale is well convinced. It is so much a theme in her own story and interpretation

of that story that it belies in a way her own conclusion that follows and dramatizes all the more how much a role it might have played in Gale's choices to turn her life around.

I think it [childhood] has a lot to do with who we are. I think things that happen as a child, in my case, the sexual abuse and the running away from my mom and being raised by my grandmother and living with an aunt with 12 children. I was just fortunate that she let me stay the night there. Just a lot of things. I think childhood has a lot--your childhood, the way that you were brought up-- has a lot to do with who you are and the things that you do in life. I don't think it has--it necessarily has to hinder you from where it is you want to go when you recognize what you want to do (p.9).

But it is that recognition that is so difficult to ascertain. For Gale, it took her almost all of a quarter of a century to overcome the effects of her childhood in order to proceed to the next plateau of her choosing. But when she did, like Faulkner, it was a masterpiece she contrived. What is even more remarkable is that education was such a big factor in Gale's turnaround. This speaks all the more to the seven year old in the adult and the need to not forsake that child who so yearned to be academically competent with the other kids.

I plan on trying to make sure that I've always got a book to read. I plan to do that as a treat for myself and also as practice for myself. Because I think reading is very important. And like I said, the one thing that keeps me interested in reading and learning how to read is that I remember in the second grade, in the third grade when I said, 'O I wish I could do that' and I feel like if I keep trying and I work harder each time, or never give up, that one day I will be able to do that (p.8).

In many ways, it was the same Gale of Mississippi, the seven year old in the almost forty year old body, who returned to school in Michigan after years of having 'been asleep all this time.' She still had the same fears and apprehensions, the same dearth of self-esteem, the same need to seek succor and example in others. But a few things had changed from the child. Her experiences had taught her that no one would be forthcoming to take her hand and lead her. And she realized the fears would always be a prevalent part of her life; now, she had to take the risk to achieve. She was willing to take the

risks and to take the humiliation too, if that's what the situation dictated.

"I felt if I told someone [i.e. an instructor, a counselor] that my self-esteem was low and what my fears were that maybe it would help me, because I had nothing to hide" (p.12).

But always Gale came back to her childhood. It haunted her; not so much the accoutrements of the past, but the remembrance of the little girl who still sat neglected and forlorn in a lower elementary, Mississippi school desk, waiting to be accepted, to be competent, to be a part of the group. If not that, then she waited to be at least retrieved. And Gale knew this, or at least sensed it, knew that if she were to become whole at any time in her life, or at least make an attempt to do so, then she must, in a Faulknerian maneuver reminiscent of *Absalom! Absalom!* and so many of his Yoknapatawpha novels, resolve her past, retrieve the little girl who had been forsaken and include her in the quest for competency.

Yeah, I think maybe at one time I was stuck, you know, I was stuck with some unresolved feelings of childhood. A loner, and all the abuse and all of those things had a lot to do with [not] learning in school. Because if you're a child in school and you're hungry, or you have pain caused by whatever reason and only you have that and only you know you have that, you have not told anyone about this pain, or said, 'I'm hungry, I didn't eat this morning,' it's a heavy load to carry and you haven't much room to listen to what's going on around you, or to even have the will to listen. You can't learn is the bottom line. I was not able to learn sitting out with my heart broken, or my feelings hurt and not understanding why as a child. For such a long time I carried that with me, that pain and that hurt from the seven year old. And I think it did play a big part in giving in to drugs and not doing well in high school. Because I still never told anyone what was hurting and why, you know, what happened (p.14).

During her rehabilitation program, Gale worked towards and received her GED. Then she enrolled at Webber Community College and worked diligently to raise her skill levels in math and literacy, taking basic courses, or in the case of the reading classes, non-credit courses. But this did not daunt her, nor did she find them a waste of time. Often Gale encountered obstacles during her reading classes. She struggled with concepts and ideas and vocabulary

that her peers seemed to learn in stride. So she worked harder, spending hours and hours on her homework, while others labored minutes and minutes. And yet her reading level was slow to rise. She fell below the expected reading level for the mid-level course, but did such a fine job with the day to day aspects of the course, that she was passed on to the higher level reading course.

During this time, she still had responsibilities that she now took very seriously. Her son, Cam, needed attention. Her daughter wrestled with school difficulties and self-image. Her husband was dying. It would have been so easy for Gale to quit--recall that this was a temptation too readily available to her each morning--but she meant to counteract her past history, to start new trends, to finish what she started. When her husband did die, she wavered in her commitment to school, but found in her education the wherewithal and the meaningful distractions (from her woes) necessary to continue. It was rare that Gale was not prepared for class, or was not the first to volunteer an answer or an idea.

Having passed her reading requirements--again she fell short of the reading level expected for the higher course, but passed her coursework well and took a course for credit in the Academic Skills Department to have her ATB hold lifted--Gale embarked on the difficult task of taking coursework in her field. Too often, once the students leave the safety and care of the Academic Skills instructors and are forced to swim in the waters with other students in higher level courses, they falter. They find that the instructor expects them to keep up with the work; they realize they will not be forgiven certain inadequacies due to a slower reading rate than the top students. They are hard put to transfer all they learned about reading in previous semesters to the psychology lesson, or their math homework. The augmented reading and writing in such courses take its toll.



But Gale, again showing remarkable perseverance, worked harder than the average student to maintain her standing in her courses. And as she advanced, she found the learning easier, that eventually, some of the basic knowledge she learned in the non-credit classes was beginning to 'click,' to make sense. "I'm finding that I'm catching on and it just feels so good, you know?" (p.20).

But she is more at peace with herself. Gale realizes that it does no good to punish herself for past sins if she hopes to amend the future. In this way she is able to attend to Cam without guilt, or at least, minimize it greatly. She is able to provide an example, one she never had, and a helping hand to all her children. She can make definite plans regarding the future and future employment. No longer is she bothered by Mississippi failings in the form of a deprived little girl. Now, the girl is with her, satisfied, performing, competing, succeeding. In many ways, the incarnation--the taking upon herself of her past so as to resolve it and face the present with a more complete identity--is accomplished.

I could no longer blame things on my past. I got to the point I ran out of excuses. I had to say I took a look at myself in the mirror and do some soul-searching and ask myself one of the greatest questions: do I want to be happy, you know, and I wasn't happy the way things are [were]. And I think wanting to be happy with myself, with my life, you know. And for my children and with my children because you can't love no one until you love yourself--it's just the bottom line. And what was going to make me love myself was be happy with myself and be happy about the things I've accomplished, you know? And what I could do for someone else that makes me happy (p.19).

Relating Gale's turnaround, her imaginative journey across time and space to Mississippi to retrieve and rectify in a symbolic way her past, to that other Mississippian, Faulkner and his own turnaround, is not a difficult chore. Walter Brylowski (1968) incorporates many of the ideas discussed above regarding Faulkner and the author's incredible transition from mediocre novelist to one of the century's best. But he believes in a more linear approach to

understanding the writer and his metamorphosis. That is, instead of analysing Faulkner according to periods, or types of novels, such as the Yoknapatawpha series, he feels “a consideration of the novels in the chronology of their publication is more revealing of the author’s intellectual growth, if not of his artistic success” (p.222). Brylowski sees Faulkner’s middle period, with *Go Down, Moses* and *The Fable* thrown in for good measure, as the best manifestation of his artistic greatness, what he calls a time in which Faulkner was a “poet of creative intuition.” In this way, Faulkner did not do away with logical reasoning so much as he transformed it “to make it serve the needs of his intuition” (p.222). This was evinced in Faulkner’s remarkable language and syntax which was distorted so as to reject logical, discursive reason and allow his ‘intuitive reason’ to breathe (p.222). Brylowski sees this as an evolution in Faulkner’s thinking and seeing; it was not a departure from earlier works, but more a growth, a maturity of previous understandings.

Whereas the early novels focused upon a problem of evil that was merely social and called forth a rather shallow evaluation, the novels of the middle period are centered on a more metaphysical concept of evil, essentially mythic in that it is emotionally centered and given formulation through the narrative mode rather than centered in any objective quest for knowledge through an explicitly philosophical mode. The glib handling of a misguided society operating in terms of an inadequate value system with the author conspicuously present as the representative of a norm of values is forsaken for a direct presentation of a personal, emotional vision of man’s estate (p.60).

But the source of Faulkner’s transformation continually plagued Brylowski, who, even though he understood the dynamics that shaped the writer, pondered the fiery ignition that might have so inflamed the man that his changes seemed like a rocket’s thrust in an age of small planes. He figured Faulkner might have been inadvertant witness to a lynch mob, stringing up some unfortunate soul (personal communication; November, 1978). But whereas Brylowski submits to the single event theory, I understand Faulkner’s changes much as I do Gale’s, that is, as a slow process across many years and

experiences. I see the young Faulkner sitting on a barrel of nails in the local hardware store at the turn of the century, absorbing tales of a once-proud South, now ravaged by the aftermath of war, especially the multi-faceted guilt and shame and ignominy, the legacy of every southern white male child.

The moral guilt is equated with the exploitation of the land and of the Negro. The apparent cosmos of the antebellum period, the golden age, was wiped out in the chaos of the War and the suffering compounded by the Reconstruction. The suffering persists into Faulkner's historical present and the moral searching for culpability remains. This is not a complex, intellectual reading of the history of the South, but Faulkner is not an intellectual writer. It is an emotional and mythic reading of history...(Brylowski, 1968; pp.39-40).

Faulkner, like Gale, suffered his costs which affected his literacy. The voice evident in his first three novels is not the voice that resounds in the ensuing works. That voice, as I see it, was born of a vision gained by staring, drink enhanced, into the Oxford darkness well into the night, "searching for culpability." Faulkner was tortured by his ignominious inheritance; he suffered his own 'garden of olives' for many years. But instead of a hanging or some other monumental event, I think Faulkner, like Gale, eventually figured 'it' out over time, was able to see a semblance of order amid the chaos and found within it, a definition of his own life and a way to say it.

Gale, encumbered and diminished by her own costs to literacy and education, suffering a chaos born of these costs and her responses to them, probably spent many a drink-infested evening and early morning trying to penetrate the darkness, herself looking for culpability and ways to deflect blame. Her darkness, like Faulkner's, incorporated many miles and many years and experiences and people. In some ways, their lives and costs and visions overlap, entwine. Gale's early education and emergent literacy were victims of the tardy remnants of Faulkner's and those before him, Sutpen's, culpability and legacy. Though divided by culture and time and miles and miles of experiences, both children of Mississippi, Faulkner and Gale, suffered debilitating setbacks

and costs to their literacy and growth. But both persevered and through remembering and a suffering born of imaginative forays across years and the space that inhabited those years, were able to transform their worlds and subsequently their literacy.

That is where we go next with Gale's story--to submit it to the scrutiny and aperture provided by Edward Soja's *Thirdspace*. Pratt (1998) succinctly sums up this work as "an invitation to think beyond oppositional binaries and in different ways about space and spatiality" (p.192). This invitation is accepted and used to help reconfigure Gale's transcript and to assist in exploring deeper various aspects of her literacy story in a way and with a metaphor that extends our usual perception, that stretches our ordinary understandings.

### Thirdspace

On a recent segment of a regional talk show (3), the host was inquiring of his guest, Judge Robert Bork, about his recent newspaper article which attacked presidential hopeful George W. Bush's credentials to be president. The host mentioned that retorts to his article have depicted people who think like Bork in danger of being excluded from the swirl of future political activities and reduced to the sidelines. Bork's reply was that a lot of noise can be made from the sidelines.

This brief anecdote depicts nicely one aspect of Edward Soja's (1996) notion of *Thirdspace*. In referring to bell hooks, whom he uses as a model of *Thirdspace* in practice, Soja writes:

As Black intellectuals, hooks and [Cornel] West have been multiply marginalized, made peripheral to the mainstreams of American political, intellectual, and everyday life, but they have also consciously chosen to develop this *marginality*, as hooks puts it, as a space of radical openness, a context from which to build communities of resistance and renewal that cross the boundaries and double-cross the binaries of race, gender, class, and all oppressive Othering categories...they obtain a particular centrality--and an abiding globality--in their purposeful peripheralness, a strategic

positioning that disorders, disrupts, and transgresses the center-periphery relationship itself (p.84; emphasis in original).

So it is that certain people and groups have used their marginality as a space from which to announce their side of the 'story,' often in contrast to "master narratives' and 'totalizing discourses' (4) that limit the scope of knowledge formation" (pp.3-4). Burdell and Swadener (1999), in a recent reflection upon and critical review of certain books, allude to Soja in this context.

These recreations, acts of remembering, and repositioning of both public and private selves allow for the creation of new categories which, like Soja's (1996) notion of a 'thirdspace,' are spaces of possibility that transcend more typical oppositional and narrowly proscribed categories of being, knowing, and developmental growing (p.22).

Of course Soja's notion of *Thirdspace* is much more complicated, but Burdell and Swadener capture well an aspect of his theory. Basing his ideas upon work by Henri Lefebvre (1991) (5), a French 'metaphilosopher,' Soja states his purpose simply, before embarking upon a most complex and convoluted journey in the exploration of *Thirdspace*.

My objective...is to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography (p.1; emphasis in original).

Throughout the book, the tension between modernism and postmodern and poststructural notions is considered. Thus does Soja delve in to what he calls 'thirling-as-Othering,' a critical strategy whereby he tries to "open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices" (p.5). Thus, the original binarism is not discarded, but in fact restructured, reconceived (but not merely synthesized) so as to accommodate the third choice, opening up new possibilities.

*Thirdspace* too can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the 'real' material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality (p.6; emphasis in original).).

Soja's argument in the book is that for too long spatial thinking has involved the binarism of the physical/mental: spatiality is seen as concrete forms to be measured and analysed, mapped; or abstract notions that seek to represent space and its significance socially. Too, spatial thinking has languished as the property of too few disciplines whose association to this type of thinking is obvious--architecture, landscape design, geography, to name a few. Soja, by way of Lefebvre, but too, his own long-time work in this area, critically investigates these tendencies and offers another approach, another possibility of spatial thinking and includes many more disciplines in doing so.

As Lefebvre notes, others have chosen alternative transdisciplinary perspectives--language and discourse theory, psychoanalysis and the window of the unconscious, literature and critical historiography--to thread through these complexities [of the modern world]. Lefebvre, however, was the first to explicitly do so through space, or more specifically, the (social) production of (social) spatiality (p.57).

Thirdspace is "a third existential dimension...provocatively infusing the traditional coupling of historicity-sociality with new modes of thinking and interpretation" (pp.2-3). In so doing, it has implicated other disciplines, ones seemingly unconnected to such matters of space and spatial thinking. Education in particular has confiscated some of the ideas inherent in this fascinating venture. Dressman (1998), in "Literacy in Other Spaces," nods to Soja and too, Michel Foucault's perspectives on space, to frame a complex and interesting argument, conceiving of the school library as Foucault's (1986) heterotopia. (6) He argues that curriculum integration, especially as regards literacy and language arts, for so long a goal of a faction of educational practitioners and theorists, yet so difficult to implement on an efficient and sustained basis, may actually run contrary to our (students') cultural and spatial

imaginations. Instead he implores all concerned parties to explore the possibilities too often overlooked in the 'fragmented' curriculum (a thirdspace strategy to be sure) and offers up his notion of a 'juxtaposed' curriculum in the absence of an integrated one. Later, Dressman (1999) invokes spatial thinking and the spatial imagination in his discourse regarding 'good' teaching and concludes by alluding to "wasted' curricular spaces" that he thinks may be wisely used as a sort of thirdspace.

In an era of increasing centralization and program accountability within schools, it is by cultivating an ironic appreciation of one's circumstances and of the resources of time, text, and territory at one's disposal...that spaces are made and found for innovative and reconstructive practices that may engage the intellects of teachers and their students and allow them to remain agents of their own academic and professional destinies (p.508).

In a way, Dressman's commission to teachers and students may be construed as the sort of wake-up call Gale determined for herself. Indeed, there are occasions in Gale's transcript and her transformation of remarkable associations with Edward Soja's Thirdspace. Earlier, Gale's unusual turnaround was likened to an incarnation. That is, borrowing from the Baltimore Catechism of my youth, Gale, retaining her adult nature, took to herself the nature of (the memory of) that seven year old girl and in so doing, created the opportunity for a transformed nature to emerge. This opportunity was possible of course because by 'adopting' the little girl of her insufferable childhood, Gale was able, in a way, to resolve the past. By linking this transformation with Soja's Thirdspace, the idea of the incarnation is not being abandoned, but rather recast, reconfigured in more spatial terms. In this way, Gale's past and her present are united to form a third nature--Gale transformed, or Gale incarnate. In both explanations, the seven year old Mississippian plays a most prominent and dramatic role in Gale's metamorphosis.

In fact, Soja relies upon the works of bell hooks, especially her "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" from *Yearning: Race,*

*Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990) throughout his book to evince Thirdspace in practice. In this selection from the essay, what hooks describes is very akin to Gale's experiences in what has been termed an 'incarnation.' Like hooks' example, part of the key to Gale's truly inexplicable transformation was her refusal to forget either her past, or the central figure in her past.

Throughout *Freedom Charter*, a work which traces aspects of the movement against racial apartheid in South Africa, this statement is constantly repeated: *our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting*. In much new, exciting cultural practice cultural texts--in film, black literature, critical theory--there is an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation (p.147; emphasis in original).

In reviewing her transcript, much of which of significance has been shared in this brief literacy biography, Gale's re-emergence into the world of the awake and the living, this newly-created space, is not characterized so much by control as it is by a determination born of resolution and the 'redemption' (of the past) to which hooks refers. That is, she is still fearful and she yet distrusts her unbelievable change and educational and personal goals on almost a daily basis. But whereas before, when fretful, or insecure, or immobilized with low self-esteem, she would hearken back to the image of the little girl lost and forlorn and incompetent in that elementary classroom and be convinced that indeed she should be worried and unsure of herself and belittled, now, the girl's awful plight resolved, corrected, if by nothing more than a fragile conviction that not all that happened to create this miserable lifestyle was her fault, Gale was in a position to at least fend off these unrealistic impulses until her daily 'small victories' gave her strength. In a very real sense, Gale's life in the present was transformed, re-articulated as hooks describes it, as evinced by so much of her transcript where she seems to truly have reconciled herself with her past and explained to herself what had happened to the little girl who bore the brunt of



the pain, without recourse.

Recall that Gale admitted that going back to school was terrifying, because if indeed she could learn, then why was there no evidence of this from her past, from her earliest school days, from that period of time which proved to be the source of tremendous obstacles and costs in her life. But now, instead of letting this impulse and memory dominate her, Gale was prepared for the worst, yet ready to risk this, strengthened by having sorted out her past, explained it, and its stranglehold on her.

**"When I decided to go back [to school], I said it is o.k. if I fail" (p.15).**

This is something the little girl could not have said for herself. Now Gale states it because given the circumstances (back then), truly it would have been all right to fail on an empty and distressed stomach. And Gale has the courage to apply that same caveat to her present endeavors because she knows there are fates far worse than setbacks at school. Sick of being pushed around by life's circumstances, by the memories of failure and reluctance to participate--in the classroom, with others, in life--Gale professed a new outlook. "I decided to take responsibility for myself and um, to go out and do the things I wanted in life, you know" (p.14). But again, this remarkable change in large measure was facilitated by her embracing her past, represented by the supposedly unqualified child, instead of hiding from its shame, or forgetting, or repressing it altogether.

From the time Gale was a seven year old, and eight year old, and nine year old student, supposedly uneducable and incompetent amidst a group of competent others, her fondest wish was to be a part of that group, to belong to the club of competents, and not to that 'confederacy of dunces' to which she was exiled.

I just remember the boy in the first grade that I had a crush on. All through school, all through elementary I had this crush on him and I thought that he

knew that I didn't know how to read and somehow that bothered me through the years, you know. And today, every time I go home, I go by and see this guy--he's been married and everything, you know. And we are just friends today, but I remember how he was really smart in school and how I always thought maybe one day I could get smart and go back and...So it's kind of crazy (p.18).

It is quite apparent that there is and was an intriguing spatial aspect to Gale's biography and to her 'miserable lifestyle.' The Mississippi-Michigan connection takes precedence. What happened to Gale in Mississippi was unforgivable and yet it endured. When she put some distance between herself and her past by coming to Michigan as a teenager, she hoped for a new and better life that might cancel out her previous experiences. But when the counselor laughed in her face at what he saw was her remarkable ignorance, the space between the two states melded and they became one. The Mississippi experiences were validated. Gale was once more incompetent. The image of the seven year old child was re-born and ruled her perception. It was not long she was vacating the space of her affliction--school-- and trying to mitigate the pain of its lessons with what were to be her companions for the next twenty plus years, the twins of a spiralling decline, drugs and drink.

Gale's perception of her life and her seemingly insurmountable problems were imbued with a definite spatial quality. Already Gale has mentioned how she thought "something between home and school went wrong" (p.3). This is a terribly insightful comment. But as a teenager, her world had expanded. Now something between Mississippi and Michigan went wrong and what was hoped to be such a huge space between the two states had now dwindled to the size of a painful memory.

Throughout her transcript Gale imagines her dilemma across the years and across the miles often in spatial terms. Indeed, in her discussion, she uses the expression, "somewhere down the line," several times to convey her thoughts and feelings. In these instances, Gale is usually depicting themes that

arise continually in her pre-transformation days, the ideas of being lost, or stuck, of being directionless and wandering aimlessly when not stuck. But even then, her way, her goals, are obfuscated by unexpected barriers that convey familiar themes as well as spatial notions.

I didn't have support um from anybody and I didn't really try hard enough  
I think. I got a message somewhere down the line [that] you're nothing and  
you'll never do it. I don't know, somewhere I had these thoughts in my head  
about myself that there is no need in trying because you won't be able to do it  
anyway. And to me [that acted] like a road block or, um, a wall between me  
even thinking about trying to do it because I've already told myself I'm not  
going to be able to do it (p.12).

Gale's vague language signals the feeling of being lost, of being in a fog, sleepwalking, consumed in a way by an aimless search. But once Gale decides to change, to risk her life such as it is in favor of a new life--her language is more direct and her vision is more directed. "But once I decided to take the risk somewhere in my life, I decided to take a risk and perhaps I've gotten older" (p.12). The age reference, again a common expression, shows all the more Gale's awareness of the inability of the little girl to make a difference in her own life, making it incumbent upon the adult version of Gale to find her way for both of them. This vantage point clarifies a little Gale's nebulous comment cited earlier when in talking about how the child influences the adult, instead of taking the expected track that states that early suffering creates a miserable life-style for the adult, Gale stated "I don't think that it [early setbacks] has--it necessarily has to hinder you from where it is you want to go when you recognize what you want to do" (p.9).

Once her transformation was underway, Gale was able to discern more readily and more exactly where it was she had to go to not only not be lost or stuck, but know what to do with the feelings that accompanied these conditions. "I don't know where I fit. I didn't fit anywhere..." (p.19). In a very real way, before, as a little girl and as the adult trapped at times in the consciousness of that little

girl, Gale's difficulties were--"it was mainly just out there" (p.13)--conceived of spatially and in that space too often she was lost and stuck and speechless, an object at the disposal of circumstance, fate and others. But when it was time to change, when the hour had come--a risky venture, she realized, no matter how she imagined it--Gale was able to actualize this transformation because, as hooks suggests, she was able to articulate it.

Still, she conceived of her plight and life in spatial terms, but now she was less and less lost and stuck and speechless. Gale believes in the power of language in this regard, as she implies when talking about her oldest son, now in his early twenties, perhaps returning to school some day. When asked if he had indeed returned to the classroom, Gale answered, "Not quite. But just to hear him speak of it in the way, and that tone lets me know that it's a possibility--if he can say it and he can think it, then it's possible he might do it" (p.7).

And I want to suggest that Gale's remarkable transformation, her incarnation, was a matter of language and articulation serving to resolve the past and impact the present. But a matter too, as Soja might contend of Gale as he did of hooks, of the *praxis* of Thirdspace, of journeys to places both real and imagined, "an alternative mode of understanding space as a transdisciplinary standpoint or location from which to see and to be seen, to give voice and assert radical subjectivity, and to struggle over making both theoretical and practical sense of the world" (p.104).

### Gale Incarnate

Hooks has already testified to the idea that the past may be revisited, reclaimed, redeemed, resolved through memory and language, through a 'different mode of articulation' that reconstructs the past in terms of the present, that signals a change in identity as well. How is one able to speak a new life

without being a new, or different person?

Macedo (1991) broaches this idea of the power of language in our diurnal lives and in shaping our perception. In discussing the political aspects of literacy in Cape Verde, he delineates his notion of the approaches to literacy at the disposal of schools and organizations as they promote literacy. Then his argument takes an unexpected turn.

While these approaches may differ in their basic assumptions about literacy, they all share one common feature: they all ignore the role of language as a major force in the construction of human subjectivities. That is, they ignore the way in which language may either confirm or disconfirm the life histories and experiences of the people who use it. (p.153).

The author's use of 'human subjectivities' here is interesting. How do we interpret this, especially in relation to our purposes regarding Gale? He has been talking about how the new Cape Verdean government's approach to literacy has in a way further harnessed the people and their ideas, their liberation. And yet, in the context in which the phrase is used, there is a connotation of language as a liberatory tool, as a way to shape identity as the user sees fit. Again we come back to the long-standing notion of structure versus agency in social power relations.

Soja, by way of Foucault, noted this chameleon aspect of 'subject.' Speaking in terms of cultural politics and the struggle for or against hegemonic power, Soja describes Foucault's perspective on one of the three elements involved with this struggle, subjection (as opposed to domination and exploitation).

Subjection...has two expressions, reflecting the double meaning of the word *subject*: subject to control by and dependency on someone else, usually implying some form of submission, and subject to asserted identity and self-knowledge, i.e. individual or collective subjectivity (p.88).

These thoughts depict Gale's plight and transformation quite well. That is, at given times in her life, Gale enacted the terms of each definition of 'subject.'

Indeed, her life early on and up until several years ago may well be defined by submission. As a child she submitted to circumstance and fate and the whimsy of others. Later on, she sought out others, supposedly as examples, but in fact, as latter day oppressors, to allow her to submit to the drugs and alcohol upon which she was so dependent. Ever so slowly, eventually, she began to question and challenge her colonization. Perhaps tired of wallowing at a Mississippi school desk, sick of being laughed at, fed up with the shame and inferiority that attended her lifestyle, Gale opted for change. Her ride may have been made easier by the cultural climate of the times, much like one critic depicts Faulkner's evolved writing as a microcosm of the 1920s. Gale may have been able to ride the cultural wave, become in a way a microcosm of the 1990s' cultural struggle against colonization and hegemony. But the incipient stages that wrought the larger transformation must have started in Gale's mind, in her memory, in her re-articulation of her life. Macedo reinforces the idea of the power of language by referencing Donald, who in this piece and in the succeeding one, imagines language as Soja might, with spatial properties.

[L]anguage is one of the most important social practices through which we come to experience ourselves as subjects...My point here is that once we get beyond the idea of language as no more than a medium of communication, as a tool equally and neutrally available to all parties in cultural exchanges, then we can begin to examine language both as a practice of signification and also as a *site* for cultural struggle...(p.155; emphasis in original).

He goes on to say in another article (Donald, 1991) that language has political importance because it is ideologically charged, powerful--"its meanings shape our perceptions and our experience of the world."

Our consciousness is formed by the languages we encounter, where and when we encounter them, and our relationship to them. These relationships are possible because language actually constructs places for 'I', 'me', and 'you' within the symbolic world it signifies (p.222).

Stated this way, it can be seen how easily the power structures may shift once one realizes that the user may reconfigure the spaces of encounter. That

is, though she had been marginalized all her life, Gale-as-object somehow finally figured out that indeed she could become Gale-as-subject and move the 'I' and the 'you' about as if pieces on a chessboard. Language and thought gave her that power. Of course, as Donald warns, this is done within cultural exchanges, so that even as Gale moves closer to the center, another piece suggests she should be on the outskirts. But now at least Gale did not submit. She was yet fearful, yet apprehensive, but now she knew she had some power, some control over her own life. Nevermore would she be colonized, nor submit to the whims and wishes of others without her consent.

In the Preface to her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks describes the marginalization she was forced to undergo as a Black American living in a small Kentucky town. The railroad tracks signalled their (her) marginality. "Across these tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in..." Across the tracks, the marginalized could work as maids, janitors, prostitutes, but only jobs in a service capacity. "We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin. to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town."

Gale probably faced some of these social edicts in the deep south growing up in the early sixties, but what stuck with her, what made her stuck, was a similar sort of marginalization, the tracks and tracking that defined her as uneducable, as incompetent. This defined her for a number of years as she lamented and suffered with the idea that she did not fit, that she could not belong, that she was destined to suffer, powerless, the fate of the colonized girl.

Because it was powerlessness, you know. I was powerless over the drugs I was taking. I was powerless at the time over having the will and desire to want something. ...[The power of others was] control over me and what I do and don't do. The choices that I make...Before I felt hopeless in the choices I would make. I was sort of stuck, blinded by the light, you know...[But then I] talked it out, you know, and had a different perception

of it...Once I started fighting for my life, you know, I gained a little bit of power. I find myself gaining more and more power and then I was able to go back (p.15).

The 'going back' brings us back to Soja (and Lefebvre) and Thirdspace and his 'real-and-imagined-places.' The 'going back' signals that Gale's re-articulation had to make its way through that small Mississippi school house and the spaces between school and home and her grandmother's house. Slowly, in the memory and the re-thinking, Gale gained a little power. Then more as she began to resolve her past and watched as her present position changed as a result.

Soja states that Lefebvre believed that space was completely intelligible, "open to the free play of human agency" (p.63). This describes Gale-as-subject, using her own resources and devices to make a difference in her life. "Approached this way," states Soja, interpreting Lefebvre, "social space comes to be seen entirely as mental space...that is decipherable in thoughts and utterances, speech and writing, in literature and language...in logical and epistemological ideation" (p.63).

What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a *design* (in both senses of the word). The design serves as a mediator—itsself of great fidelity—between mental activity (invention) and social activity (realization); and it is deployed in space (Lefebvre, 1991; pp.27-28; emphasis in original).

Thus for Gale, unlike Brady, was the 'word made flesh.' The incarnation was complete. By way of memory and articulation, Gale was able to resolve her past and begin to create a new identity, starting with the notion of subject, not object. This notion and that of the incarnation and of its connections with Thirdspace can not be more explicitly represented than through Gale's own words as she describes her present work as a peer facilitator at a local drug clinic even as she attends school.

It is so strange because I sit in there with the professionals and facilitate the groups. Some of the group members were people who I got high on



drugs with and all of the sudden I remember when I was sitting over there with them and now I'm sitting over here with staff, you know, it's amazing (pp.20-21).

Gale's delight and amazement at finally beginning to gain her fondest wish, that is, to belong to the group that is doing something worthwhile, to be a member of the group that is competent and caring and sharing, represents a very long and convoluted journey. In so doing, in engaging in her unique transformation, Gale was able to conquer the costs that had beset her all her life, that had obviated her education and membership in the club of her hopes. Hooks captures well in a neat summary all the pain and risk that served as precursor to this latest eventuality of joy and choice.

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as the site of resistance--as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (1990; p.153).

Next we will look at the possibilities that await Brady, how he might grasp his subjectivity and agency and make strides towards the elimination of the many costs, structural and personal, that prevent him from achieving his cherished dreams. But then we will meet Cain and discuss his personal journey to self-determination and the costs encountered on the way and how they have affected his literacy education and the attainment of his goals. His literacy biography provides a remarkable contrast to Brady and signals a further discussion on the avenues available to Brady and those in his situation--adults with low levels of literacy in retreat from the traditional classroom. This perspective implicates the community college with Brunner's (1998) notions of identity compromised by the politics of essentialism and her auto/biomythography as a critical classroom intervention I feel is especially

pertinent to Brady in his on-again-off-again quest for literacy. Bakhtin's (1993) concept of 'self-in-other/other-in-self' is especially important to this discussion.

## Chapter 5: Between the Masks

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. *Ecclesiastes*, 9, 10.

Myth infused with autobiography suggests, I think, a point of contingency. It suggests the inscription already always present because of universal narratives, and it suggests the fictive possibility of recreating self/selves. The latter especially announces the impossibility of narrating a precise identity. -Diane Brunner. (1998). *Between the Masks*. p.60.

i couldn sleep las nite cause i kept dremin it and i dont want dreem it cause im jus walkin to somewher but i dont kno wher its at an fore i get to the door i wake up an i want to rite in the tablet las nite but you aint got no lite in yer but the moon so im ritin this mornin soon is sunup but now i done fogot what i want to say -Notes from Jefferson's diary. Ernest J. Gaines. (1993). *A Lesson Before Dying*. p.227.

### Introduction: Saving face

Throughout the making of this study, I was concerned with many problems and features attached to the adult learner and their literacy shortcomings, not the least of which were the irrepressible costs that continually plagued these students. If in fact literacy is such an unalloyed gift, then why did so many of the developmental reading students experience such problems in attempting to apprehend it? To explain this in terms of the elementary student I merely enlisted the cultural capital literature and other sociological tenets and theorists. But then I bumped up against an even more perplexing question: why did the costs for these students persist well into adulthood? And even more onerous, why did these costs hold such sway with the aspiring students that they effectively blocked the apprehension of literacy for so many years?

More specifically, once I had detailed the costs incumbent upon Brady and Gale that kept them at bay from literacy for such a long, long time, I wanted to know why Brady had cowered from his seeming determination to change his life, while Gale engineered the agency to drastically transform her life and literacy status.

Working with Cain's literacy biography, forthcoming shortly, helped a great deal, since I came to understand that truly it was the student's response to constraints that determined whether or not they became a cost and how dramatic that cost might be. I recall a long ago episode of *Lost in Space* in which the Robot and the little boy, Billy, were separated from the spaceship on a foreign planet. Continually as they tried to rejoin their family and cohorts, they were besieged by inexplicable obstacles and horrendous creatures that not only stalled their progress, but threatened to extinguish it. But the Robot computed that these obstacles were in fact illusory, given life and credence only by Billy's fears. Once the boy understood that and believed it and worked with courage to struggle through the various challenges, the obstacles automatically evaporated.

But it was not until I encountered Brunner (1998) and her ideas concerning identity and the politics of essentialism that the lessons derived from Cain's transcript and Billy's plight began to make sense. That is, I realized then that so much of Brady's and Gale's problems in terms of literacy were related to identity. Pursuing Brunner's metaphor, the costs that so afflicted Brady and Gale were in large part created by the masks they assumed in response to educational and in particular literacy travail.

Recall that Street placed a great deal of emphasis on identity and the masks we adopt when he stated unequivocally: "The *stigma* of 'illiteracy' is a greater burden than the actual literacy problems..." (1995; p.19; italics in original). He was referring to adults who come to literacy centers seeking help, convinced they are completely devoid of literacy skills; they perceive themselves and their lives in terms of this tag. A little further on, Street recounts literacy acquisition throughout history and in discussing a bygone era comments on a literacy/identity connection, a 'literate mentality,' that has

pertinence today for those attempting to apprehend this 'gift.'

[T]he shift [to a 'literate mentality'] involves a way of thinking, a whole cultural outlook, an ideology, rather than simply a change in technical processes....A shift of this kind did not happen simply: it involved profound changes in people's sense of identity and in what they took to be the basis of knowledge (p.31).

For Brady and Gale and others in their position as they try to maneuver the community college's offerings, this shift is so much more complicated. Already stigmatized, already essentialized ("[W]e should ask not what are the 'essential meanings' in a given culture, but how do specific meanings claim authority against competing ones and how are these marginalized?" [Street, 1995; pp.4-5. ]), they must work through their individual defenses--the identities they wear to combat constraints and stigmas--even as they attempt to grasp literacy.

In *Between the Masques*, an article by Brunner (1997) that spawned the book of the same title (but variant spelling), the author compares identities to shadows that are manufactured by varying perspectives (of light, in this case), even as she tries to dispel the myth that identities are fixed and unchanging, but in fact multiple, even though we are too often essentialized by the value markings of identity, thus stigmatized.

Identities are much the same [as shadows], that is, various angles of perspective and value can create images that violate, thus scarring both the body and the spirit. Indeed, we are frequently seen not as fluid bodies with functional anatomies nor as the dwelling place of the spirit but as fixed images (perhaps media representations) that are spatially bounded in categories of race and gender (p.168).

Brunner brings up several interesting points in this passage that coincide with and extend Street's ideas regarding essentialism and identity (the stigma and developing a literate mentality). Even though we are multiply identified (Brady was simultaneously husband, father, son, brother, worker, exercise enthusiast and more) , too often the politics of essentialism reduce these

meanings to a single image (Brady was too often stuck with a self-concept of 'illiterate,' or, as I think he saw it, 'incompetent'). This is aided by the hegemony proffered by 'media representations' (a prolific source of master narratives) that compel the marginalized person to believe in their fixed identity to the exclusion of others. Thus, Street recognizes a wealth of literacy skills and (other) competencies in people who come to the literacy centers for help, but they think of themselves as merely 'illiterate,' because of the stigma (pp.18-19). Due to this, Street "argue[s] for a more culturally sensitive analysis of literacy transfer and a greater attention to the power relations embedded in literacy practices" (p.16).

Brunner serves this purpose too, but also proffers pedagogical insights as to how this sensitivity and attention can be accomplished (this will be discussed later). But just as important is Brunner's elaboration of Street's insinuation of identity as a key component in the acquisition of literacy. Again, much of the identity work is situated around the politics of essentialism which rely heavily upon master narratives and consequent stigmas, or 'fixed images.' Brunner discusses the seeming necessity of adopting various masks in an attempt to save face and circumvent these images and stigmas. We think of Brady continually posing and masking--at work, with friends and acquaintances, at public gatherings--to convince others he is literate by his 'intelligent' demeanor.

Masques can, indeed, provide a sense of invisibility, covering public and private identities. Shadows that emerge as dream-like figures...seem to suggest the importance of continuing to masque 'true-real' identities. Masques make it seem as if one is living without borders; masques help one to survive the border lands of consciousness if not the physical border land. Improvising with masques makes it possible to live not as a refugee but as one who might be free. But masques confuse. They provide a sense of what is. What appears is what counts. Masques make it possible to avoid looking inward...

Brunner, 1997; p.177).

Given this, Brunner states one of the primary goals of her study: "This

project, therefore, aims to complicate any view of identity that suggests it is reducible to any single perspective, any absolute" (1998; p.8). Thus she states further, "the world is often portrayed as black and white, yet most of us live in the gray" (p.9).

Eventually Brunner offers the classroom as a site for students to (practice to) shrug off the masks of master narratives, ones adopted unwittingly, and by way of various pedagogical strategies, a venue where students can become more aware of themselves and the insidious politics of essentialism. Then they are able to act with (more) agential control over their lives. As it is, Brunner sees our 'true-real' living as existing 'between the masks.'

...I find the social constructions of identity so palpable as markers of identity that I perceive that the difficulty of their unmasking relegates most of us to living between the masks. I do not agree that locating identity between performances positions difference outside identity so much as it recognizes the constraints of social masking and reclaims agential control. In other words, I do not resist the notion that I am of a particular bloodline, yet, simultaneously, I do not perceive that is the extent of my identity. Moreover, it is not the idea of essence per se that I quibble with; rather I find deeply problematic the politics of essentialism or the way in which persons, ideas, and phenomena are reduced to a single perspective and then hierarchicalized (p.8).

This is why Brunner and her ideas are so important to this study, because she speaks to and for Brady and Gale and those whose progress and growth and development are unnecessarily impeded by not only fixed images emanating from essentialist politics, but too, by the 'power relations' embedded in so many social acts, including literacy practices, that so bothered Street as well. Though we will discuss shortly only one of her core pedagogical strategies, auto/biomythography, it is Brunner's thesis and sensitivity to the marginalized that resonate most clearly with this work, her belief that indeed one can gain jurisdiction over one's life in spite of attempts to incorporate and reduce one's life as part of a master narrative.

I do not perceive that the notion that suggests identities are multiple

and shift between performances...signifies the lack of materiality; it gamers instead social agency for the possibility of changing one's material reality...Moreover, it may be impossible to know or theorize the 'real' person behind the constructed masks...so, in fact, maybe only the statements one makes provides any clue at all to one's identity.

Do I find this a pleasant state of affairs on the eve of the twenty-first century? Yes and no. I find it symptomatic of many of the social ills that plague this period, and I find notions of contingency and the provisional a refreshing possibility for undoing the fixed perceptions of the way the world works (1998; p.9).

And that is where we head next, to explore some of those 'refreshing possibilities'. Hyde will examine contingency and the provisional and essentialist politics by way of the trickster lens. I will apply his lessons to Brady's life to show how these might unsettle fixed perceptions of his (Brady's) own and of his world and the way the world looks at him. Again, this is why Cain's literacy biography is so pertinent--as a contrast to Brady's situation, it is a small study in social and personal impediments and how these may be solved by a blend of contingency and agency. Cain is a master of developing strategies to maintain his self-concept in a world that would love to fix him in a single image. But he would have none of it, and seemingly, unlike Brady, would never settle for a sing of himself, especially one proffered by strangers.

### Hyde and seek

It is difficult to consider Brady's literacy plight for very long without hearkening back to the trickster and his world that Lewis Hyde so eloquently depicts in his several portraits. But not just trickster in his application to Brady in particular, but to the wider trickster, the one who roams the length and breadth of the earth and firmament, not just the school's corridors and classrooms. For if Brady was trickster in the classroom, then certainly that role, that mask, had implications for his posture and identity once he left the classroom. But more than that, as Hyde so brilliantly portrays, trickster does not act unimpeded and



aloof in his travels and journeys and escapades, but rather, he is continuously interacting with forces and structures and traps established and set by others who inhabit the earth and patrol the heavens. By those who make the rules and those who seek to uphold them. In fact, it is difficult to think of trickster in isolation, a solitary figure, pensive or allegro; that is, it is difficult to think of the personal trickster. The true trickster requires the traps and trappings of a world crammed with the social and the cultural, such that these arbitrate the personal.

That is the trickster who comes to mind when Brady and his literacy biography is pondered: the one who acts and performs in a real world with very real constraints and prohibitions. The one who relies upon wit and cunning and border-crossing and shape-shifting perhaps, or even luck, to overcome these impediments so he can fulfill his design then scamper to another destination to disrupt and connive and yet sustain. Recall that Hyde saw trickster's role as one who sustains culture, even as he confronts it, disrupts it, critiques it.

That is the trickster and his world I would like to discuss so as to offer Brady and his dilemma a wider context, a larger easel upon which to roam. Just as Gale was eventually transported from the confines of her small, Mississippi classroom and her cramped Michigan quarters, diminished by drugs and alcohol, by the rich offerings of Soja's *Thirdspace*, so too hopefully Brady's aperture may be enlarged and enhanced so that we have a better notion of what plagues him and thus perhaps too, a better idea of how his literacy might be enhanced. Hyde will set the stage for this investigation, this widening of the lens regarding Brady's plight. Then Cain's biography will be cast upon the landscape, offering dimension and contrast. Finally, Brady's station, and by extension, those who find themselves in a similar dilemma, will be examined by way of Diane Brunner's *Between the Masks* (1998) in an attempt to recast it and gain a different perspective to his literacy difficulties. It is then that we will return

to campus, to the community college, for certainly, that is still the location of much of the work to be done with Brady and Gale and so many others.

### **'The garbage and the flowers'**

When listening to commercial radio early in the year 2000 it is difficult to not be inundated with the ubiquitous William Shatner and his incessant pitches for "Priceline.com." He finds all sorts of ways to convince customers they can achieve inexpensive hotel rooms and airline fares for accommodations that ordinarily imply a dearer cost. One of his latest ads (late Winter, 2000) rises in pitch as he gets carried away with the many price reductions possible and all that the discounts still purchase. Whereas before the average consumer had to suffer exorbitant prices for first class travel and beds and foodstuff and in-room liquors, now all of these luxuries are available at prices that fit the more modest pocket. Announcing this disruption in the normal state of consumer affairs, his emotions surge and his voice trembles with restrained fervor and reaching a climax he suddenly pauses and in a low tone, as if sharing a secret, confides that indeed the King is dead!

Shatner has provided the listener not only a means to perhaps save money, but too an implied universe in which all of this takes place. It is a rule-oriented universe that includes categories and hierarchies, in this case based upon monetary considerations. Certain luxuries are reserved for certain people. The others get the leftovers. But acting as trickster, Shatner claims to have reversed the fates of this world and now everyone can partake of the riches and luxuries implied in first class air travel, exclusive hotels, elegant dining rooms and in-room Cadillac luxury.

His universe is not unlike the one that Hyde creates but the latter is not so narrow; money is a consideration, or the exchange value, but power and

privilege hold as much sway. Hyde's universe forefronts power and privilege while our contemporary world shows money as the symbol of the elite, or in Shatner's case, the advantages that can sidestep money. Indeed, power and privilege and the attendant prestige have always been the domain of the dominant, with money usually in attendance too; that is why Hyde's world and our contemporary world are so similar once we see beyond the glare of gold.

Again, these are similar creations, but not exact replicas. For one, Hyde's concept of heaven and earth and their interplay recognizes tricksters and their cunning devices, while for us, the trickster figure is on television (i.e. the *X-Files* or *Pretender*), or in jail, if he exists at all. But just as important, Hyde infuses into his worlds the charm and mystery of accident and chance, contingency (often induced by trickster), while our imagination tries to control as much as feasible the haphazard.

This control is accomplished largely by categorizing and involves the Aristotelean notion of 'essences,' that is, traits characteristic of certain things that allow membership in a given category.

An apple is a fruit, that's essential, but whether it's ripe, green, bruised, wormy, on the tree, or in a bag--all this is accidental. Accidentals are changeable and shifting; essentials are stable. The real significance of a thing lies with its essences, not with its accidents (Hyde, 1998; p.97).

But 'apple' was an easy one; problems abound when cultural terms are categorized, such as 'jazz' (or as Hyde argues: "Why is a single drop of black blood so powerful? Why not say one drop of white blood makes a person white?" [p.99]). Returning to Shatner's universe, the same problems arise in terms of people when they are further categorized, say, as 'deep pockets,' or 'modest pockets,' and these differences are perceived as essences.

Of course, in this discussion Brady is always relevant; we need only recall Street's (1995) assertion that the "*stigma* of 'illiteracy' is a greater burden than the actual literacy problems evident in such cases" (p.19; italics in original).

In this instance, Brady's 'illiteracy,' its supposed essence, overwhelms his human essence and he is thrown upon the garbage heap of humanity, hence the stigma.

Yes, Hyde claims that every category has its garbage heap. The danger for the dominant, or as Hyde says, 'the classic sensibility,' is if the garbage returns with a claim for inclusion, for having been unfairly excluded. He uses the wonderful example of a skilled iris gardener (quoting from John Cage's {1961} *Silence*). For many years this gardener improved his iris garden by tossing out the more common varieties. Then he was made aware of a magnificent iris garden nearby. Asking after the garden, he discovered it belonged to the man who collected his garbage (pp.98-99).

If the irises in the garbage are beautiful, then beauty itself is contingent...  
In creating cultural categories we give shape to this world, and whoever manages to change the categories thus changes the shape. One kind of creative perception is always willing to take coincidence seriously and weave it into the design of things...More conservative minds deprive coincidence of meaning by treating it as ...garbage, but the shape-shifting mind pesters the distinction between accident and essence and remakes this world out of whatever happens...the intelligence that takes accidents seriously is a constant threat to essences, for in the economy of categories, whenever the value of accident changes, so too, does the value of essence  
(pp.99-100).

Hyde conveys these ideas and explores them further by way of two tricksters--the Icelandic figure of Loki, who continually played with the gods and created 'disruption and repair.' The other trickster is Eshu, whom we have met previously, from Yoruban mythology. Both of these tricksters and their mischief have lessons for Brady's story.

### Negotiated destiny

Loki cuts a large swath in much of Norse mythology, but one story in particular, gleaned from Hyde's account, is especially pertinent. It is necessary to know that Loki is considered a 'cataclysmic change-agent' to understand his



motivation for his work against Baldr, the “Pure One of the Norse pantheon. Handsome and good, he is associated with the sun” (Hyde, 1998; p.100). But Baldr has dreams which prophecy some fatal harm to befall him. So his mother, Frigg, travels the heavens and the earth exacting oaths from everything and everyone not to harm her son. When this is accomplished, the Aesir (the assembly of Norse gods) amuse themselves by throwing arrows and darts at Baldr and watching as they drop just short of him, immune as he is to death (p.100).

But Loki is curious and a bit annoyed at Baldr’s supposed agreement with death, so disguising himself as an old lady, he interrogates Frigg about her many oaths. It seems that there is a plant that grows west of Valhalla that she did not commit to the oath, thinking it too young. Loki retrieves this plant, the mistletoe, and shapes a poison dart from it and tricks the blind god Hod into throwing it at Baldr. Loki guides his hand and the dart is true and slays the renowned god. Loki is eventually caught and subjected to horrible punishments and imprisonment, but eventually his release (as did his imprisonment) culminates in dramatic cultural changes for the Norse nations (pp.103-05).

The big question Hyde poses in terms of this particular account is “Can essences be protected from accidents?” (p.105). To his way of thinking, the fulcrum of the story, the question, and the cultural and national repercussions are wrought by Frigg’s desire to control the contingency of her son’s predicted death (p.105). Were she to succeed in this, Hyde argues, the world that we know would cease to exist, for the ‘good life,’ life as we know it, requires “the touch of disorder and vulnerability that Loki brings” (p.106). When Loki is shackled, “the world collapses, when he--and disorder--returns, the world is reborn” (p.106).

That is why I say that the real trouble in the tale starts with Frigg’s compulsive oath-taking, for in that we have the end of the balance

between control and contingency...It would be better to learn to play with him [Loki], better especially to develop styles (cultural, spiritual, artistic) that allow some commerce with accident, and some acceptance of the changes contingency will always engender (pp.106-07).

And that is the point regarding Brady and his fate: all his life he has taken contingency very seriously, too seriously (but not as Loki does, who believes in it, but like Frigg, who fears it), and the concomitant control he has exerted over his life's circumstances, or tried to, has narrowed his life and its opportunities. As a youngster, his daily educational trials must have been abhorrent to his imagination. Recall that he has suppressed many of his memories associated with early schooling. He developed his trickster mechanisms in order to control as best he could contingency. As a grade schooler, that was a difficult task; as a student in the middle school, he had more options, more control--he could avoid the situations that promised to demean him, or demonstrate his inadequacies to others, by skipping classes.

I can't remember much about it [his grade school experiences]. Maybe it was something that I have always tried to block out, but I don't remember it. And like 7th and 8th grade I kind of can remember those because they were...real difficult for me because...they wanted you to read out loud...and I probably did [skip school] on classes like that--I probably never showed up, you know? (p.15).

But even if he stuck around and gave the lesson a shot, he was in no position by junior high school to keep up with the class and not far into the lesson he "would just say the hell with it and just leave it alone" (p.15). He does recall that in the sixth grade he participated in spelling tests--at least he was there while the other kids took the test. But the words to him were incomprehensible.

I used to sit there and we used to have spelling tests and I could sit there and it would seem like those words were not even--I couldn't even comprehend (p.19).

But the trickster, the shape-shifter in his own realm, is continually at work. A few minutes later, Brady, ignoring my pursuit of his sixth grade spelling test and the teacher who let him pass on it, in both senses of the word, follows his

own idea of sequence and recounts a recent experience with his son.

Like for instance, though, I went up to my son's school last week...and he and I sat down and I read him a book. I mean, I really don't know--it's something I can't tell you about (p.19).

But the control that marks Brady's life is evinced not only in these isolated acts, but just as much, in the attitude that compels them, in his masking and posturing in these performances that display his identity (Kristeva, 1992). Why could he not talk about the experience? Was it too valuable, hence ineffable? Or was it such a sharp departure from his ordinary safety and control that he felt uneasy to discuss it further, lest the risk-taking engendered by the experience career beyond his grasp? But this is not new for Brady; he has pursued books of interest on his own. "I found myself now, I go out finding things that I would like to read, you know" (p.17). With this, there is no pressure, few contingencies. But school is a different matter; his classroom is a magnet for his alarms, for his fears about school and his personal life and how it impacts his scholastic goals.

I sit down and look at them [books that interest him] and read them and um yeah...it's something within me that makes me not want to try even harder (p.17).

That 'something,' at least in the classroom, could very well be the fear of the unknown. Those fears could be mitigated if he had some control, but in a new classroom, with a new teacher, in a course the content of which hearkens to the core of his supposed incompetence and history of failure...it is a costly venture to Brady to even go to class. I advise him to not get discouraged, but approach his homework a little bit at a time so it does not seem so overwhelming. But it is the pressures he feels that are overwhelming, pressures assured by his utter dependence on another person (the instructor) for his classroom security.

"That's what I'm trying to do," he responds to my advice. "It is just the fact that it is new to me [the homework and the worksheets]. I want her [his instructor]



to help me just to kind of, you know, not to push me so hard--let me get into it” (p.29).

I further advise him to talk to the instructor, to share his fears with her, explain his apprehensions and ask for her help with this. But again, he sidesteps this issue and talks about how he is “into it as far as the mental part” (p.29). But the example he uses to illustrate this commitment involves declining a movie with friends so as to spend some time in the reading lab (p.29). But that proves his commitment in an arena where he has some control. The ‘mental part’ of the classroom is altogether different.

A moment later, Brady brings up once more the hockey book he read to his son, another example of how he is infusing literacy into his life outside his own classroom. It was an easy book to be sure that Brady shared with his young son, who might not have even known if his father changed words or even the storyline. But for a person who has trouble even writing a note when he is alone for fear he will misspell it, reading this small book to his son was a very daring act for Brady as well as a tender one. But of course, he did it on his own terms, with control, with no pressure.

He is indeed a shape-shifter, but not like Hyde's tricksters, performing in a vast and complex world. Brady is adept at controlling and reconfiguring the miniature circumference of his own world, but outside of that, shorn of control, he is an insecure and suspicious participant, lacking confidence in himself and faith in that outside universe. This combines to keep Loki in chains and it constrains Brady's opportunities for literacy growth as well. Of course, this in turn handcuffs his life's opportunities, keeps him on a very narrow employment track and obviates any real chance at succeeding in school.

It took him weeks to gain a trust in me so as to finally start making almost every appointment we set for ourselves at the beginning of our tutoring

sessions. Then once finally acclimated to each other, Brady reluctantly enters the uncontrollable arena of the classroom replete with contingencies galore--a new teacher, expectant peers, reading challenges, memories of classrooms past. Inadvertantly or not, he misses the first class because he is in the right room number, wrong building (p.27). But once he finds the correct classroom, the teacher right away senses his apprehension and reluctance. He holds back, does not participate fully, does not demonstrate the skills and knowledge the instructor senses Brady possesses. I encourage him at every opportunity as we meet on the days when he is not in class. He does his homework sporadically. His heart isn't into it; his errant home life is a distraction. His goals remain very short term, as if he cannot trust anything but the very immediate future. Regarding his minimal educational goals, Brady says: "I hope it works [his meager educational plan]; that is all I can say" (p.30).

Brady vacillates. He is excited about the class at one meeting; the next he is discouraged because he is falling behind a bit. He is enthusiastic to show me the reading lab and what he does there. Then a bit later is disappointed when it is closed for the day. He speaks about dropping the class. I get his word that he will try to ride it out. I know once he gets used to it, he will do well. But I am reminded of an exchange during our first meeting. I congratulated Brady on his daring to return to school and on his great attitude to solve his literacy problems. His response was terse and cautious, too cautious.

"Well. actually, that attitude just came recently" (p.8).

It was mentioned earlier that much of Brady's behavior (and attitude) during this time was akin to someone preparing for a fall. But as I reflect on that now, I realize that Brady was too comfortable in his controlled environment and way too uncomfortable in an arena in which the control was not his. No preparation for a fall was required; he had spent many years prior to this

occasion arranging his failure in any endeavor in which contingency ran amock. He could not, would not, let his guard down, make himself vulnerable; of course, these are almost the definition of risk-taking.

In talking earlier about the constraints and costs that kept the literacy fruits of Brady's desire just a few feet away from his dare-to-reach, as if there were one of those invisible fences reigning him in, it is not to be construed that the control that he so much needs to exert in any way overrides or nullifies these costs. On the contrary, this control is merely a global name for his trickster mechanisms and it stands as the receptacle for all his costs of literacy. These constraints, structural and personal, have been subsumed under the strategy of control. They have not disappeared, or lost their strength; they are just packaged differently as Brady becomes ever more adept at arranging the furniture of his life. Unlike Gale, who pretty much sat in her elementary classroom desk and suffered all the 'slings and arrows' her lack of literacy skills provoked, Brady took a much more active role in his suffering. Like Frigg, he hoped to control the impact of the darts and arrows thrown his way, to make them fall just short of the target. He wanted to be immune to suffering. But now, because of this control, exerted for many years, the suffering is more insidious. Hyde's words echo incessantly.

.It would be better to learn to play with him [Loki], better especially to develop styles (cultural, spiritual, artistic) that allow some commerce with accident, and some acceptance of the changes contingency will always engender (Hyde, 1998; pp.106-07).

It's as if Hyde's remarks were aimed directly at Brady. But unfortunately, like the darts of the gods not made of mistletoe, they fall helplessly short of their target.



### **"The remembered hand"**

Hyde shares another story which has pertinence to Brady and his situation. Again focusing upon accident and control, or in this case, habit seen as control, Hyde tells how the artist, Marcel Duchamp, created a piece he called *Three Standard Stoppages*, by holding "three meter-long pieces of thread outstretched and let each one fall in turn" (p.122). Hyde explains.

Turning things over to chance, letting them fall as they may, means in this case 'forgetting the hand,' which in turn means, first of all, getting away from the hand's acquired and habitual gestures. More figuratively, it means eluding habit in all its forms, and eluding the constant repetition that habit forces on us (Duchamp didn't want to spend a lifetime painting the same canvas over and over, which is what he thought most painters, slaves to the remembered hand, had to do). Forgetting the hand promises freedom from one's own taste both good and bad, an escape from the rules of causality, and a way to avoid perceptual routine (p.122).

Brunner (1998) explores the notion of 'body literacy,' as do other theorists (i.e. Butler, 1993; de Certeau, 1984), as a significant factor in identity and self-concept. She argues that the representations of music, film and literature, pervasive and seductive, prove to be an important pedagogic site for making and contesting meanings (closely paraphrasing p.18).

{R}epresentations tend to define the 'order of things' and are perhaps the body's most important teacher (for example, teaching how to eat, dress, act, what to think, how to speak, and in general, how to be in the world)...Students' performance narratives show them either consciously or unconsciously giving voice to skin as they peel away layers that make visible diverse locations of identity (p.18).

Perhaps no body part signifies literacy as do the eyes and the hand. For Brady, his 'remembered hand' is an appropriate metonym for the 'stigma' and accompanying shame and humiliation. It is the hand that hesitantly scribbles out a few letters to construct a telephone message, or refuses to do the same, or holds back in abeyance when I ask him to write something for me. It is only after I leave the room that he is able to jot down a very brief note. It is the 'remembered hand' that reluctantly picks up a book, if at all, or with trepidation turns the page to unknown challenges and occasions for supposed

incompetence. In fact, the 'remembered hand' for Brady is an appropriate metonym for literacy, which in turn incorporates the stigma and the shame. The 'remembered hand' in Brady's case 'knows' and thus avoids; it is the brain of memory and control. Habitually, it rules the contingent, including or omitting as needed, providing a very narrow turnpike for its owner's opportunities and risks.

I am suggesting that bodies are not merely receptacles for social inscription; they also sign. They are not only spectacles; they also participate in the writing of culture—not so much as passive spectators but as actors in the social drama of life (Brunner, 1998; p.99).

Brady's hand is repeatedly, like Duchamp's greatest fear, painting the same canvas over and over. It may take on a different hue, portray a different location, but the theme, the message, the meaning is the same. But this need not be the case. Again, like Duchamp, Brady must 'forget' the hand and let the strings fall where they may; indulge in play and daring and a kismet fate. This may sound as though it's easier said than accomplished, but it may be that an awareness alone of this control and habit that rule his life and the advantages to be gained from risking to abandon these, might make a difference in Brady's worldview. There is after all, precedence in the mythology and narratives of his heritage.

### The crossroads

In the Yoruba part of Nigeria in West Africa, the people "believe simultaneously that fate is binding and that fate may be altered" (Hyde, 1998; p.116). Even though the Yorubans believe that much if not all of a person's fate is fixed, they also believe that this destiny is subject to an individual's will, or effort, or chance and accident, which is where Eshu, the Yoruban trickster, comes in. He is the arbiter of fate in many ways, the one who can make a difference either way in a person's destiny (Hyde, 1998; p.117).

To gain insight into their uncertain fate, the Yorubans go to Ifa, the name of the method of divination and of the god who knows about fate (Hyde, 1998; p.109). The Ifa divination in practice is similar to the Chinese practice of I-Ching, but instead of throwing yarrow sticks or coins, the Yoruban diviner casts palm nuts (which originally Eshu procured from the sixteen monkeys by persuasion and chicanery--again the basis for Gates' 'signifyin' monkey'). Given the order of the thrown palm nuts, one of thousands of narratives from an oral literature is called for which supposedly has pertinence to the inquirer's fate. Hyde asserts that the relationship of Eshu and Ifa is a close and genuine one, even though on the surface it looks as though Eshu, portrayed as accident, is opposed to Ifa, or destiny.

Out of the friendship of Ifa and Eshu...we get no tragic opposition...we get rather, the creative play of necessity and chance, certainty and uncertainty, archetype and ectype, destiny and its exceptions, the way and the no-way, the net of fate and the escape from that net (Hyde, 1998; pp.116-17).

Eshu's prominence in all of this--a person's fate, supposedly fixed, yet able to be arbitrated by accident--cannot be underestimated. "I think of luck as the disposition of chance," writes Hyde, "and of Eshu as the force that can turn that disposition sunny or sour" (p.118). And again, a bit later, as if talking about Brady: "Perhaps, if its disposition were right, a chance event could change his lot in life" (p.118).

Eshu, like many tricksters, likes "to hang around the doorway," or as Hyde puts it, "sites of contingency, places where people might bump into something unpredictable" (pp.124-25). This is anathema to Brady, who avoids the crossroads and other such sites because of their contingency, their proclivity for attracting the unexpected, the accidental, the coincidental. Control is best maintained near the exit, but with a back to the wall, where contingency is limited. But then, so are opportunity and possibility. Brady searches for the key to his literacy dilemma. Perhaps there is such a key, but if there is, he

unwittingly uses it to lock himself in (to his narrow universe), inadvertently locking himself out (from literacy and other opportunities). Too, he locks out Loki and Eshu. And he locks out Duchamp's lessons and attitude regarding habit and the remembered hand.

Hyde recounts how Duchamp's work, *Large Glass*, "a famously complicated painting executed on sheets of glass" (p.123), was shattered in transport. The artist restored it as best he could, but years later, looking at it, he pointed out the symmetry of the cracks, their almost 'curious intention' of which he was enamored. Of this, Hyde's remarks again sound like a reveille to Brady to forsake the remembered hand, throw away the key and his seeming obsession with it, and allow for some shattered glass to define the mirrors and windows of his life.

In this case [Duchamp's *Large Glass* episode] the coincidence doesn't happen to him, he makes it happen. He becomes the crossroads where things that habit has assumed must remain apart may meet (p.123).

Brady need not become the crossroads, merely hang out there occasionally. In this way, he might break the pattern that has defined his life and his stalled literacy acquisition. But of course Brady knows, or intuits, that the costs incurred in dropping his guard, relaxing his control, would be tremendous. Part of that is because his management techniques have become so costly that to face a contingent world shorn of the masks of his control, or at least with different masks, seems intolerable, impossible to him. But what does it take to give up control? What characteristics, what traits? We have already looked at the allowance for contingency as one of these. Cain's extensive literacy journey offers insight into ways to feel comfortable with contingency, with sharing control at the crossroads.



## Cain by way of Scribner

Cain was first introduced earlier in showing how Scribner's three metaphors of literacy neatly embrace Brady, Gale, and Cain. But as Scribner (1984) reminds us, an 'ideal' literacy in our society is one that is "simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self enhancing" (p.18). She derived this model from her study of other cultures, including the West African Vai culture, but recognizes that in our hyper-literate society, the boundaries between these literacy metaphors are very fluid and spill over one into the other. Thus, though Brady is more aptly placed in 'literacy as adaptation,' or functional literacy--recall that he wanted desperately to be able to 'do' literacy, to perform diurnal tasks on the job and otherwise, such as reading street signs in a timely manner and other such functions as a first step to an improved life--he also has dreams of becoming a lawyer so that, given this new-found power, he might help others who are pinned to a similar situation.

Gale yearned very much for the literacy that would prove her worth, the literacy that "enlarges and develops a person's essential self" (Scribner, 1984; p.13), so that she might be a member of that literacy and benevolence club that for so long excluded her. And yet, the enhancement Gale felt as a fledgling counselor, sitting opposite the people with whom she used to get high, was akin to a literacy power that enabled her to help those people, to show that she 'made it' and so can others stuck in her former situation. In her lesser moments, when doubt and misgivings racked her spirits some mornings, Gale prayed for even the blessings of a functional literacy that would help her make it through the day and its educational challenges.

Cain was affiliated earlier with 'literacy as power,' yet it was a sort of functional literacy pursuit that impelled him to a nearby university's college of education to seek tutoring help in reading. And though he is presently retired

and enjoying various pensions, he still makes his way to graduate classes several times a week, not only to enhance the power inherent in literacy from his point of view, but to gain that 'literacy as a state of grace,' that bestows upon the beholder a sort of benediction that announces and uplifts their esteem and worth.

But 'literacy as power' is the place Cain best resides. The transcript of his literacy endeavors will bear this out. Throughout his life he has been an advocate for others less fortunate than himself, seeking the rewards of literacy as much for others as for himself. Indeed, his life has taken turns (of course, at times unwittingly) to demonstrate this. Scribner debunks the notion that literacy will mobilize the disadvantaged to "claim their place in the world" (pp.11-12), but shows that when "(m)asses of people have been mobilized for fundamental changes in social conditions...rapid extensions of literacy have been accomplished" (p.12). Cain is testament to this on an individual basis.

### **Cain's Story (1)**

#### **White Tail Strategy**

Riding my mountain bike on a recent, unseasonably warm late-Winter day in my rural 'neighborhood,' I encountered a herd of white tail deer about a quarter mile ahead, starting to cross the lonely, narrow dirt road. But the lead deer picked up my scent, or saw me and stopped and all eight of the small deer headed back into the meadow and bounced away in retreat. But it was not long I spotted them again less than a half mile up the road. They must have bounded swiftly along the perimeter of the meadow until they found a crossing that suited them again.

Already the four that I had seen on and near the road previously were crossing the country road, but again my presence deterred the other deer and

they stood at the edge of the meadow, looking at me and at their more daring running mates, waiting at the edge of a wooded gully across the road from them. Though I heard nothing, again slowing down my pace and watching one group then the other, the lead deer seemed to be giving instructions to the deer stalled on the other side of the road. Instructions completed, the lead deer ran deep into the gully, and eventually out of sight. The other deer, now assured of their mission, bounded away in the direction I was travelling, following the curvature of the road. I soon lost sight of them too. Besides myself, only a barking dog, restrained by a backyard fence, was witness to this drama.

As I pedalled faster and reflected upon the brief experience, the plight of the deer merged with my previous thoughts of my study and its participants, usually a common deliberation on such rides. I saw that the deer had encountered what for them were constraints to their diurnal activities. One of these was largely structural--the slowly encroaching building development on their neighboring eco-system and habitat which made it necessary for them to risk midday excursions through fields populated, if only sparingly, by homes and barns and fences and inordinate traffic. The other constraint was more random--my pestering intrusions which caused them to alter their course and their immediate plans.

But I was immediately impressed by the deer when I first thought they had run away upon initially seeing me. In fact, they had retreated, but with a strategy. Their first strategy was not completely successful, but they were quick to contrive a second one when once again I played mischief with their route. However deterred, the deer did not seem to be discouraged by the complications I provided them.

I realized that this experience with the white tail reflected Cain's literacy history in many ways. That is, throughout his life Cain has encountered barriers

and costs that have threatened his education and literacy and life's goals, short and long term, or those set for him by his mother. But like the deer, in seeming retreat, Cain was not deterred, but was in fact engaging in reconnaissance so as to devise a strategy with which to proceed. In the face of continual constraints throughout his life, Cain has been able to respond with strategies and resources provided by his own contrivances, but also, by a determined and loving mother and family and community.

### **A defining moment**

As graduation from his Louisiana Catholic high school approached, Cain cherished one dream above all else. That was to continue his education that had begun in such a faltering manner. But more than that, his aspiration was to attend a small, private, liberal arts college in Minnesota. No doubt this wish had emerged from the college resource materials the nuns and priest at his high school provided. Perhaps they knew how unrealistic such a goal was for Cain and even regretted that the small pamphlet announcing the college had not been expunged before the vulnerable student discovered it. For though he attended a private parochial school that included among its students some few middle class families, Cain and his mother most certainly were not to be ranked in those numbers. No, the state university was a more appropriate aspiration for the ambitious dreamer, but even that, they knew, might be beyond his means.

But Cain did not work, or even aspire, without strategy. He was well aware of his and his mother's social position, but he had a plan. If only he could find an 'angel' to finance his first year at the college, Cain knew that he could work from then on out to muster the funds necessary to continue his schooling at St. John's. And Cain had such a backer in mind too. His father had not lived with the family since Cain was very small, but had remained in the vicinity. Though their contact had been sparing, there had indeed been some contact

and Cain knew his father was concerned about his son's future. He would approach his father about investing in him for that first year, confident that his dad, though recently re-married and possessing some means, but not 'well off,' might feel the urge to compensate him for his family absence by sending him to the Minnesota college for his continued education (Events dramatized from a conversation with Cain on 10/21/98 and from pp.1 & 2 of the transcript).

I hung in school until I completed high school and graduated. Upon graduating, I knew that I was somewhat ill prepared for going on to college...we [Black Americans] were charting new waters [educationally]. Um those who went to other parts of America representing the Black community [knew there] was a need to present the best of who we are and what we are. And they chose the ones who had the greatest academic abilities. So the intrinsic abilities was somewhat overlooked. And even in family upon graduation when I got to see the father who came to this graduation exercise who were rarely in my life, um, I asked him would he sponsor me to going to college. He considered it and said he would get back. He did get back. I shared with him the college that I wished to attend and the cost factors...I had in the early times of my life an understanding that people learn better in certain environments. The two colleges that I have chose were exclusively all male. They were remote from Louisiana and I hoped that it would afford me the opportunity to be away and break the link and I would have to really concentrate on my own (pp.1 & 2).

This in many ways represented the pivotal episode in Cain's life. And it seems a very unlikely and different scenario in terms of discussing the costs of education for the participants of this study. But though in this case the apparent cost for Cain of education and literacy came down to dollars, he had already surmounted many obstacles, both structural and social, to even make it to this point, but again, not without strategies and not without help. And to be sure, given the climate in which Cain lived, the climate of the culture and the society during the forties and the fifties and the sixties for Blacks in Louisiana, those costs would by no means mitigate.

### Louisiana dregs

It seems a world and centuries apart, the racial discrimination and tension and inhumanity that permeated the twenty years that Cain spent in

Louisiana. Slavery may have ended over one hundred years ago, but not the power that one people exerted over another and not the attendant shame and humiliation and frustration. In his compelling recording of oral histories and travel memoirs, Randall Kenan (1999) roamed the turnpikes and back roads of America to understand what it is to be a Black in contemporary America. Alluding to New Orleans today, he tells of how the “massive Mississippi ends its 2,348-mile journey here, bringing the dregs of the American continent along with it” (p.504). He goes on to recount aspects of New Orleans not usually associated with the city from those most remote from it. The sad tone of his description may be attributed to the seeming insistence of the city and the state to continually lag behind the rest of the nation in at least attempting to confront and to bridge and to reduce racial injustices. Thus, his words, a lamentation, are also an echo, heard too often in Louisiana across the decades.

Life for average black folk in New Orleans is rough. The projects...are perhaps some of the most crime-ridden in the nation; gang warfare is alive and real there, as if it hopscotched its way over the great middle. Across the Mississippi in Angola Prison, once one of the scourges of the American penal system, are still hundreds of black men whose proportion to white prisoners screams for examination. Under-employment is high. And, not only are relations between blacks and whites, generally speaking, regressive compared to places like Atlanta or Memphis or Charleston or Savannah, but also there still exist rigid color codes and color barriers between light-skinned and dark-skinned folk. New Orleans has had several black mayors. I defy you to find one as dark as I am. Coincidence?

When John A. Williams visited the city in 1962 [the year Cain graduated belatedly from high school], he said he had been disappointed, for he suspected it might be a better place than other southern cities. He recounts episodes of dealing with segregation that are almost comic in their absurdity--almost. Nowadays, sadly, conditions for too many black folk in New Orleans are worse than in Jackson or Birmingham or Charlotte or Little Rock. Some might say that's not saying much, but the gains in those other cities are significant; the gains in New Orleans should simply be greater (p.505).

Cain was born in Illiad, a rural city in northern Louisiana. Abandoned by his father shortly after his birth, Cain, an only child, was raised by his hard-working mother and her extended family. His first school was a makeshift one, located in the nearby Baptist church which sat between plantations. The ‘teacher’ was a young lady with insufficient education who had to juggle six

grades of black students in this surrogate classroom.

I was born in the state of Louisiana in a social climate [this is Cain's euphemistic shorthand for all the social injustices that pervaded that area during that time and before and after] that for myself and those who followed the African history in this country [he did not complete his thought here)...where education was devalued. My first encounter with school was a school in a church with six grades and one teacher who was a little older than myself or some of the students. She did not have a complete college education and as I look back, she was ill prepared to confront the task that was at hand... Um, early in the process I began an avoidance--I was struggling [with school] and it didn't seem to have any value. I played hooky and uh I got good at it and all this time that it crept up is was when the marking period, the report-- I would take my lumps there and eventually, after three years in that process, my mother says "O.k., we're going to make a change" (p.1).

The school and the would-be teacher and Cain's response to it are so reminiscent of the descriptions of Ernest J. Gaines (1993), a prominent African American novelist who uses the fictional St. Raphael Parish, a southwestern Louisiana rural district where he grew up, and Bayonne, the fictional counterpart to his small home town of New Roads, as the setting for most of his works.

That is the milieu about which Gaines writes: a few white planters, a multitude of blacks. It is a feudal world [set in the late 1940s], an antebellum world; a world where, in the middle of the twentieth century, little has changed. That stasis had been shocking when I first read Gaines's work. In its outward dress, the world of these characters did not seem, at first, no different from my own rural background, but then there were layers (French, Catholic) and the sense of time having stood still for all these people living not too distantly from slavery. And then the introduction, as if an anachronism, of something quintessentially modern...which unnerves and angers (Kenan, 1999; p.510).

Talking to Cain on the verge of the twenty-first century it is difficult to gain and maintain the perspective that his life and educational experiences began amid the wardrobe and language and customs that are to be found usually only in history books, or a novel such as *A Lesson Before Dying*, or as anomalous incidents in some Southern nook, far from the commerce of a modern world that supposedly has progressed beyond racial subservience and segregation and lynchings. Not only does Gaines offer the reader a wonderful snapshot of those

times in Louisiana and a realistic taste of the flavor of the period, but as Kenan states, too often something 'quintessentially modern' is posited and the contrast between Louisiana and the not too distant South and the rest of the nation is suddenly too vivid.

This is true especially when it comes to education. These few glimpses from Gaines and Kenan provide a small insight into the unbelievable constraints that confronted Cain and his peers educationally and socially every day of their lives. Gaines' description of Grant Wiggins' classroom eerily parallels Cain's own educational roots. The only difference of course was that Wiggins, in the novel, was college educated and ably prepared for his pedagogical mission, unlike Wiggins' Iliad counterpart whose youth and insufficient education hampered her classroom pursuits.

My classroom was the church. My classes ranged from primer to sixth grade, my pupils from six years old to thirteen and fourteen. My desk was a table, used as a collection table by the church on Sundays, and also used for the service of the Holy Sacrament on the fourth Sunday each month. My students' desks were the benches upon which their parents and grandparents sat during church meeting. The students either got down on their knees and used the benches as desks to write upon, or used the backs of their books upon their laps to write out their assignments (1993; p.34).

But even if a person aspires to something better than what is promised most Black men in the South, as did Grant Wiggins who gained a college education, the fruits of such endeavors were rewarded with more mistrust, humiliation, and subservience.

He looked over her head at me, standing back by the door. I was too educated for Henri Pichot; he had no use for me at all anymore...I had come through that back door against my will, and it seemed that he and the sheriff were doing everything they could to humiliate me even more by making me wait on them...Inez [the Black maid] left the kitchen as soon as the white men came in. I tried to decide just how I should respond to them. Whether I should act like the teacher that I was, or like the nigger that I was supposed to be. I decided to wait to see how the conversation went. To show too much intelligence would have been an insult to them. To show a lack of intelligence would have been a greater insult to me (pp.21, 46, 47).

These are devastating indictments against the American ideal of equality



and even more devastating when we consider the costs the schoolchildren endured for decades and decades. This was especially true for Cain, a keen observer, sensitive to such slights and insults, but who received unlikely support from his mother and extended family to pursue his aspirations. And it is too easy to claim that fortunately such a period of discrimination has passed, but Kenan, in a conversation with Louisiana State Senator Don Cravins, rebukes that notion. Though Cravins' words may reflect many urban educational settings, keep in mind the tendency of Louisiana to persist with their racial traditions of injustice. He is discussing with the author the notion that Louisiana politics and politicians have always protected their own and the powerful, yet most recently a grass roots initiative, spurred by support from the media, has demanded a change in these practices.

"I know the future will demand that we go back and reinvest in people. For a lot of reasons. Number one is, we have a generation of kids that we have basically lied to and told that they can do a lot of things, and they find that once they get into the system, they can't be part of it because there's really nothing there to offer them" (1999; p.507).

In a way, Cravins' words show an improvement--years ago, during Cain's youth, not only would there not be anything to offer him, but even had there been, it would have been deprived him anyway.

Even most recently, Louisiana's attention to and care for its youth is suspect. Louisiana was given the inauspicious distinction of being the state where children's lives remain "riskier, harder, and poorer than anywhere else in the country" ("Louisiana children", 2000). This from a child advocacy group that follows the well-being of American children. The report referred to the year 1997, though claimed that Louisiana has 'lingered' near the bottom of this category for the decade the group has been tracking these data ("Louisiana children", 2000).

### **Lessons before leaving**

**It is not unlikely that Cain might have suffered the fate of many Black males in Gaines' novel upon entering adulthood--that is, be subjected to menial servitude, wind up in Angola prison, or suffer an early death, had not a Catholic priest ventured into Illiad one day, took note of the abhorrent educational conditions for Black youth in the area, and determined to open a school for them. This was just about the time Cain's mother was becoming fed up with his repudiation of a meager and unsatisfactory school environment. Already working hard as a day laborer in white peoples' homes, when finally the priest opened up an elementary school (first he started a middle and high school, where the larger needs prevailed), Cain's mother, who herself only possessed an eighth grade education, secured some night work too so she could yank her son from his spurious educational setting and pay the tuition for him to attend the new Catholic school. She thus depended upon members of the community and her family to help attend to the boy as she worked extended hours (p.1).**

**Cain's early schooling at the Baptist church had been so poor that the nuns and priest in his new school were forced to put the older, larger boy in a younger class so as to catch up on his basics. This is why he was to eventually graduate a few years later than is usual. His stumble-start educationally was to haunt him all his life; note his application at the large university's college of education for assistance in reading only a few years ago. Cain laments this lack of literacy proficiency, its persistence, and how it compromises even today his scholastic efforts.**

**It [his poor literacy beginning] carried on for one thing in the mental dynamics. It grew and it materialized [his persistent limited literacy proficiencies] and it is something one can envision and truly identify and I still toy and struggle with that. Where others comprehend and they were more fluent in certain aspects, especially reading and public speaking, [for me] getting up and taking on new uncharted text and just fluently expounding on it [remains difficult to do]. And they can go back and they can dissect it and they can get a comprehension**

of a large volume, where, you know, I still struggle. You know I have to make sure—I meticulously break it down and I can't go too far without at least reflecting on what I had [just read] (p.3).

With the support of the nuns and the priest and his mother and her relatives, Cain applied himself in the new school and tried to overcome some of the educational deficits he had sustained early on in his scholastic career. A few years later, in the fifth grade now, Cain was approached by the owners of a supermarket he frequented on his way home about being a bag boy. Realizing this was a way to gain spending money and perhaps help his mother with funds too, Cain beseeched his mother for permission to work. With her, as always, education came first. So long as he maintained his school work, he had her permission to work at the store (Personal communication: 10/21/98).

Illustrative of Cain's mother's independence and self-sufficiency and concern for her son is an anecdote he shared. The summer before he secured his job in the grocery store, Cain joined his aunts and cousins in the fields one hot July day to pick snap beans. For his strenuous work and debilitating efforts he earned three dollars, which went into a community pool from which his mother reluctantly shared. She reminded him that he need not engage in such strenuous and slavish enterprise since she worked two jobs to pay their bills and provide him the luxury of an education. Though Cain knew money was still tight, the two domestic jobs notwithstanding, he never ventured back into the fields. But he remembered and appreciated from this experience the struggles and fortitude of his near family who worked so diligently and selflessly to maintain these close connections and health (Personal communication: 2/17/99).

**'Build on the small things'**

Indeed, upon graduation, Cain was at a crossroads. He had important decisions to make. But fortunately for him, in large part, the crossroads had been largely of his own making. He had researched the two private, all-male college academies and had fixed upon the Minnesota institution as his preference. In this he was not to be deterred. If he was to receive the financial help he needed, it would have to come from his father. His mother's side provided other benefits, intangibles--support and encouragement and guidance. From his absent father he needed some money to continue his education, which he now valued highly.

I shared with him the college that I wished to attend and the cost factors and he says "That's too much. That costs too much; you have to go to a state college"...My father, like I said, he did not value education or that monetary outlay that was needed. ...I had matured. I was older than most of my peers in the graduating class. And uh I had worked at least since the fifth grade where I was receiving a weekly salary. And I didn't feel that knowledge was void of a price. And he didn't want to pay the price I would. And I even said, "Hey, loan me the money and I will reimburse you." Even with that, it came back a negative. "No, you have to attend the state college" (pp.2; 5-6).

Again, even upon graduation, Cain was a keen observer of the social and cultural terrain. He had been silent witness to many injustices. When the priest first attempted to start his high school, the parish suddenly sold off the few remaining buildings available for such a school so as to frustrate the priest's efforts. This was not lost on Cain. Nor did he have any illusions about the state college where Blacks were concerned. Those with the strength and fortitude to persist and graduate still were not accorded the respect the credential supposedly carried in terms of employment, nor even given the due associated with Scribner's literacy and education as a 'state of grace.' He had seen and heard this from acquaintances, friends and relatives. Enhancement might only come if a more genuine educational credential were earned, such as one from a private school in Minnesota, in the North. To Cain, standing then at the

crossroads, the state college was a small thing, the private Minnesota college a large credential that might make a difference (Personal communication: 10/21/98).

But Cain was not caught at this pivotal moment in his life without a strategy. He realized that his father might well turn down his request for a loan, so when this did in fact eventuate, he did not hesitate to turn to his next alternative, the military recruiters. Again, in this, Cain received unusual support. Concerned faculty at his high school, led by the priest, warned the recruiters to offer their kids something more than just guns--include a worthy education in their service too. Cain took the mandatory tests and talked to a battery of recruiters before deciding to enter the army.

I had weeded out those military organizations where you had to spend a lot of time prior to getting an education that you can use in the civilian and secular life. The army said that my EL scores and some other scores are high, however there were some low scores too so they recommended that I pursue EL, which is electronics. I accepted, I signed the papers (p.2).

He entered the army and went to electronics school and enjoyed a successful on and off military career that spanned over two decades (he left the army intermittently for civilian work on a couple of occasions, but returned each time), finally retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer. He then worked for several years successfully in managerial positions affiliated with electronics until his civilian retirement, where now he serves as a deacon in a Catholic church and attends classes for a graduate degree in Pastoral Ministry, having secured a bachelor's degree in Theology after almost twenty-five years of part-time schooling.

To fully appreciate Cain's biography, especially from the point at the crossroads upon graduation that set his life on a course divergent from the route he desired, it is important to understand the dynamics of his strategy. Without a doubt, Cain's observations regarding the state college and the worth of its

credential for a Black man in the sixties were appropriate. This view, in his mind, was justified further when years later, working at the university to which he applied for tutoring help in reading at an even later date, Cain met a man from Louisiana who eventually became a good friend and mentor. Mr. R had applied for a job in the northern city in which this university is located, but was denied the position because his Louisiana state college education was deemed unacceptable. He was told he needed the equivalent of two years of schooling. Of course, as Cain explained, white men with lesser credentials were too often offered such positions.

Not to be deterred, Mr. R went back to school and gained a Masters degree and Doctorate and tremendously enhanced his employment opportunities. But when Cain bemoaned the fate that awaits Black men, even in northern social and employment circles, the patient and tolerant Mr. R told him that one must build on the small things in order to enhance their lot in life (Personal communication: 10/21/98). This eventually gave Cain pause. He wonders if indeed he did not bypass this sage advice at the crossroads of his life when he chose an army career instead of building upon the education he had already accumulated, as small as it might have seemed to him then. But again, to understand Cain's choices, it is necessary to appreciate his strategy for these in a deeper sense.

### **'Break(ing) the link'**

The military or private school/state school were not Cain's only options that dramatic summer of 1962. Recall that he had worked since the fifth grade at the supermarket, each year his responsibilities appreciating with his experience. The owners of the store, upon hearing of Cain's school dilemma and the fact that he was considering enlisting in the military, offered to purchase

two more stores in the vicinity--one to be managed by their son, the other to be managed and co-owned by Cain (Personal communication: 2/17/99). But Cain passed on this generous offer, his ostensible reason being that he was quite aware of the hours such a position would exact weekly and did not want to subject himself to that servile position, somewhat akin to the snap beans episode of his youth. The manager of such a store was in effect in a slavish relationship with the store--it fed him, provided housing and other rewards, but too, it controlled one's life.

But recall Cain's explanation of his first choices for college. "They were remote from Louisiana and I hoped that it would afford me the opportunity to be away and break the link" (p.2). Initially I interpreted this to mean that he wanted to be on his own, to test his skills and talents without guidance and control. This is not an unusual bid for many graduating seniors. But Cain's situation and seemingly plain statement probably were packed with much more meaning than that.

MacLeod (1995) reminds us of how entwined are structural and cultural constraints and individual agency.

To what extent are the Hallway Hangers and Brothers victims of a limited opportunity structure, and to what extent are they victims of their own flawed choices?...Structure and agency are inseparable. Individual agents... are always structurally situated, and thus human agency is itself socially structured. Social structures reach into the minds and even the hearts of individuals to shape their attitudes, motivations, and worldviews. Structural determination is thus inscribed in the very core of human agency (p.255).

MacLeod uses the metaphor of an individual being pushed, pulled, or jumping to illustrate these various constraints working with and against human agency. Talking about one of the young men MacLeod studied, he asks, "Is Super pushed into crime by the forces of social reproduction? Or does he jump as a matter of individual choice?" Attempting to work as best he can with these structural forces and constraints, MacLeod shows that Super was also pulled by

forces and constraints, part of the braiding of structure and agency. In the end, MacLeod is forced to conclude “that Super was *pushed into jumping*” (p.255; emphasis in original).

Earlier I intimated that Cain’s costs of education, especially as related to literacy, had culminated upon graduation to actual monetary considerations. Of course that was entirely simplistic. I also stated that Cain worked with strategies in mind and implied that his decision that summer was one born of agency, or that Cain had indeed ‘jumped’ into this choice. Again, that is too facile a rendering. Given MacLeod’s explanation that structural forces and constraints are intimately entwined with human agency, Cain’s determination over thirty-five years ago can be seen more as something he had to do. In many ways he was pushed to jump into the army.

Let me explain. Already Cain had graduated two years later than expected because of the special circumstances and encumbrances he encountered as a Black youth in rural Louisiana. This was the price he paid (as well as his mother) for a ‘better’ education than the one afforded by the church schooling with an unprepared student teacher. And from this decision Cain and his mother received what was expected: a better education indeed, but one still lacking in many respects. It was an education suited especially for the state university as the next step. That is, Cain, admittedly, still suffered literacy and educational deficits imposed by his shaky educational beginning. “I knew that I was somewhat ill prepared for going on to college” (p.1). Even had his father financed his first year at a college in Minnesota, it is unrealistic to suppose that Cain might have been eligible for such a college. That too was a cost inflicted upon him by his circumstances.

But in truth, the continuing education was but one option to Cain’s primary goal, which was not in fact continued pursuit of education--that was



secondary. His first goal was to find an activity 'remote from Louisiana' (read the South) and secondarily, then, become an educated man. Thus the offer of his own business by his friends and employers was in effect another shackle, another cost that would sentence him to many years of hard labor in a self-made prison within hailing distance of Angola.

Embedded in his goal to become remote to Louisiana, was an opportunity to 'break the link.' On the surface that appears a universal statement denoting a child's wish to join the parental (adult) world, nullifying the parental perception of him as a child. But Louisiana disparages universals. It was not until I read Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* that I was able to detect a deeper resonance to those words. I have already alluded to the likely fate of many Black men in Louisiana, that is, be subjected to menial servitude, wind up in Angola prison, or suffer an early death. Jefferson, the young man in Gaines' novel who is wrongly and hastily accused of murder and sentenced to die (it is Wiggins' charge to teach him a lesson before then--that is, how to be a man when confronted with death. At his trial, Jefferson was likened to a hog in terms of intellect and consciousness and esteem), reinforces the terribly low expectations that pummel these youths throughout their lives. Jefferson is responding to Wiggins' incipient lessons about how to live and die.

"Yes, I'm youman, Mr. Wiggins. But nobody didn't know that 'fore now. Cuss for nothing. Beat for nothing. Work for nothing. Grinned to get by. Everybody thought that's how it was s'pose to be. You too, Mr. Wiggins. You never thought I was nothing else. I didn't neither. Thought I was doing what the Lord had put me on this earth to do...Now all y'all want me to be better than ever body else. How, Mr. Wiggins? You tell me" (p.224).

But even if one were perspicacious enough to suppose that the Lord had put them on earth for reasons other than to be subservient, such did not guarantee anything but more misery; it was still necessary to escape Louisiana. Matthew Antoine was the long-suffering teacher to Grant Wiggins in the

plantation school. An acerbic old man now, he and Grant are sharing a glass of wine, not to celebrate Wiggin's first year of teaching at the church school, but more to warm him (Antoine) and to denounce Grant's career choice and especially, its location.

"To flight," he said, raising his glass..."I can't tell you anything about life. What do I know about life? I stayed here. You have to go away to know about life. There's no life here. There's nothing but ignorance here. You want to know about life? Well, it's too late. Forget it. Just go on and be the nigger you were born to be, but forget about life. You make me tired, and I'm cold. The wine doesn't help" (pp.64; 65).

When we meet Wiggins, the seasoned teacher, he has assumed some of the bitterness of his former teacher, who warned him he (Grant) would "visit my grave one day and tell me how right I was" (p.65) about Louisiana and life and leaving. But Wiggins had taken Antoine's painful counsel and throughout the years complicated it, expanded upon it, and now he wrestles with this legacy from his former teacher, so much so that when Jefferson's godmother and his own aunt compel him to visit Jefferson in jail and submit himself to the humiliations rained on him by the situation, the sheriff, and other men of power, he states with caustic humor: "Years ago, Professor Antoine told me that if I stayed here, they were going to break me down to the nigger I was born to be. But he didn't tell me that my aunt would help them do it" (p.79).

But then Wiggins goes on to try to explain to his girlfriend one evening why he thinks he must leave. It is his complicated and expanded version of Antoine's heartache. And this gets close to what I think Cain meant when he alluded to 'break(ing) the link.' Wiggins refers to it (this burden) as a circle; but Cain, in his worldview, envisions a chain, a shackle that holds him back and binds him to previous generations and their lot in life.

"We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves. So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious circle--which he never does. Because even though he wants to change it, and maybe even

tries to change it, it is too heavy a burden because of all the others who have run away and left their burdens behind. So he too must run away if he is to hold on to his sanity and have a life of his own...And for Irene [his student teacher] and for others [i.e. Jefferson's godmother and Grant's aunt] there in the quarter, it's the same. They look at their fathers, their grandfathers, their uncles, their brothers--all broken. They see me--and I, who grew up on that same plantation, can teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. I can give them something that neither a husband, a father, nor a grandfather ever did, so they want to hold on as long as they can. Not realizing that their holding on will break me too. That in order for me to be what they think I am, what they want me to be, I must run as the others have done in the past" (pp.166; 167).

Unwittingly, Wiggins' aunt and Jefferson's godmother had given Grant a dictate that like Hod's guided mistletoe dart, hit the heart of the teacher's life's dilemma and made him struggle and wrestle, as much as Jefferson, with basic notions of identity. The same may be said of Cain in terms of the expectations proffered him by his father and perhaps his aunts and mother--he had been groomed to rise above their station, but first, other things must be in place before that ascension was possible.

In truth, though the crossroads Cain approached that summer of 1962 in Illiad, Louisiana was of his own making, as always, parts of it were beyond his control, given to chance, a kismet fate, the Eshu factor. He came prepared; he had researched the college and once turned away from that option, he researched the military options well and made a wise choice in that arena. But what on the surface appears to be agent-sponsored was, in many ways, so susceptible to the powerful forces of structure and culture. To enlist MacLeod, Cain was indeed pushed to jump. As much as he loved and embraced education at any cost, his first priority was to escape Louisiana.

In all the time I have known Cain, he has been most pensive and solemn and disconsolate when recalling that pivotal crossroads and the direction he chose to take. Not that in any way it was a regrettable choice, for certainly Cain has enjoyed a full and successful life and continues to do so to this day. But two things I think gnaw at him yet. The first is that the direction he

took automatically invoked a long detour to what he and many members of his extended family consider to be his true calling. Had he built on the small things, even beginning with the state college, that detour may have been minimal. Instead he has had to sublimate this calling through the several jobs he undertook throughout his careers, civilian and army. This is what we will address in the next section.

The other source of his dejection in this matter is one less obvious and one not so easily mended. I believe Cain was inspired to do well, pushed as it were throughout his life, at least initially, not only by the very structural forces that aim to pin a Black man in the South to the mat, that is, he was determined to show these forces that this man was not about to be pinned, but more, by the symbolic rejection of himself and his goals and his dreams by his father. Of course I can't know exactly how this affected Cain and influenced his life, but I did see in his eyes the huge burden that many states removed and decades of leaving could not lift.

#### **'Anonymous deacon'**

Indeed Cain has conducted much of his life in the doorways and crossroads. Contingency has been a continual companion to the boy and man, allowing him, forcing him to hone his strategies. For aside from shirking the duties inherent with even the Baptist church school of his humble educational beginnings, Cain has never had to duck these challenges. He had inordinate support from mother, family and friends to confront these and eventually was reinforced too by his own wherewithal learned from the perpetual lessons of that remarkable community. Eshu bestowed upon Cain wonderful benefits and played havoc too with aspects of his life. Consider his convoluted journey to become a deacon of the church, a commission for which Cain, it is thought, was

destined to achieve.

Cain has a very early recollection of an aunt introducing him to a group of relatives as 'Our next pastor.' And another aunt, fairly recently, as usual, inquired of him what he has been involved with in the church and how has he helped the community (Personal communication: 2/17/99). In the Fall of 1962, had Cain been able to actualize his dream, very likely attendance at that small college would have been an incipient step to the ministry, or priesthood. Or even a state college education might have afforded the same result. But as it was, Cain's life took unexpected turns that summer and his ministry work was done as an adjunct to other duties for the next thirty-five years.

One of the theorists Cain encounters in his graduate studies coined the term 'anonymous deacon,' referring to the host of dedicated people who devote their time and services to others on a regular basis. This is a most appropriate term to describe Cain and his life's work. Whether in the army, or the federal prison system where he worked as a maintenance supervisor, or his several other jobs, Cain was the indefatigable anonymous deacon.

One thing that I have in my experience in the military and in my civilian life, uh dealing with people who have problems in reading because I've experienced it so I can empathize with them greatly. My experience working for corrections where we have a functional illiteracy rate from 55% to 65%. And in my job I met these people and they had value. And when I interacted with the prison workers or even in the military where I had subordinates that uh I was responsible for, if I found out they had a shortcoming I devised schemes that would not cause them any more harm or anxiety or stress. I strive for private forums to help with their problems and where I was not uh capable, I sought out others that were amiable to their needs and that would not diminish their dignity. Because this is one of the greatest things when you get my age, you know you have a lot invested in who you are and the journey you are on. And anything that threatens that will cause you to retrench, to go back and seek a state of isolation. And you devalue the very tools that will enable you to become what you should be and by having those private settings which are non-threatening affords the individual to concentrate on educating and opening up the mind...You realize they have a problem and you talk with them in a private forum because for me working in prison or in the institutions where we incarcerate people was not just for the money. It was an opportunity to help others who had strayed from the path for whatever reason...I use my life as a model to establishing programs for others to learn (pp.3-4).

Throughout the 1970s, Cain helped found and sustain a Black professional men's club that purposefully served as models for Black youth. Service oriented, the members visited and spoke in the schools on career day and for other occasions, and otherwise served as advisors and mentors for Black youth. Based upon his own experiences and the support he received and well aware of the manifold constraints that beset minority youth in our society throughout the nation, Cain realized the value of the assistance his men's group proffered these kids. This was the very reason Cain tried to serve as mentor in his other capacities too. He wanted to minister to them support and esteem even they figured they did not deserve, having been well rehearsed from the messages of a duplicit society. Cain knew that it is important for these kids and others who struggle to help themselves, to tough it out, to not let the structural forces ruin them. But sometimes in these battles, another type of push is needed, that of a more intimate, beneficent kind that would allow these people to ultimately rely on their own agency. In a way, Cain's commission was a lot like that of Grant Wiggins, the difference being that Cain gladly hoisted his cross while Wiggins played the reluctant Simon (Personal communication: 2/17/99).

The role of the anonymous deacon influenced Cain's life in another important way too, I think. Even though he helped as best he could those whom he perceived to be in need, especially when that need demonstrated itself as a literacy problem, Cain, all his life, was subjected to constant literacy afflictions himself. But because he acted as minister, as tutor, as advocate for so many people, it allowed him not only the esteem, but too, the special insight and courage to face those struggles himself in his own college courses. He could put aside the usual humiliation and embarrassment that accompanied such failings, especially in an advanced college course, content in the notion that regardless of his seeming literacy shortcomings, he possessed a certain

(tutorial) standing with literacy that did indeed empower him and in fact, endow him with a 'state of grace.' But still, the pangs of his faltering literacy were poignant.

Well, when you approach certain texts which is foreign and new [problems will ensue all the more]. Like psychology and sociology and even theology which was relatively new to me when I embarked in on it. There are words that is truly foreign--their origin is Greek, or French and Latin and uh they're not the four letter words. They're normally around a 10-12 letter word...and when I encounter them I have to search for meaning and a dictionary is always a part of my journey...[I have special problems with ] pronunciation, uh decoding the words, being a slow reader. When I would get to a word that was unfamiliar it would sort of take all the gusto out of my being. And even now, the fluidity I have in reading is not something that I'm proud of. I would rather have it more fluent (pp.8-9).

In spite of this, Cain occasionally mounts the pulpit and reads the Epistle or Gospel on a given Sunday in front of a packed church and even expounds upon it. He ministers to the sick and the shut-ins, counsels the engaged prior to matrimony, and performs dozens of other chores he probably was meant to exercise throughout his life, had not social constraints and forces and the meddling of the playful Eshu intervened.

And throughout his life, Cain was cognizant of this proclivity towards and affiliation with the ministry. He tells a story in his wonderful narrative style, slow and easy and rich in detail (an interesting contrast to the more stensorian tone and style he employs with the Gospels) of an event that occurred many years ago. He was en route to the fort where he was to be stationed for a few months when he stopped in New Orleans to visit his father. Ignoring the elder's advice to 'top off' his gas tank before he left the city (gas was quite expensive at this time and was often allocated) Cain found himself running on empty and still a good way from his destination. He stopped at several stations that Sunday, but they were either closed or out of gas. He finally found one open and with a sufficient supply of gasoline, but they took none of the several credit cards Cain carried. But the lady in charge invited him to fill his tank and pay the next time

he passed through. However surprised at this, Cain took advantage of the offer.

It was a month later when Cain took a small detour to repay the lady. He arrived before the station was open, waited in his car for her to drive up and make her preparations for the day's business, then went in and repaid the money he owed.

"I suspect you probably thought you would never see that money again," Cain said.

"O, no," she shot back, "I figured you to be a minister and had no doubts you would return" (Events dramatized from personal communication: 2/17/99).

This typifies people's reactions and responses to the gentle Cain. Recall that I was prompted to help him due to his seeming benevolence and graceful demeanor. Another time (again a story Cain tells with relish and an easy remembrance, as if it happened yesterday instead of twenty-five years ago), driving through a summer storm past dusk in a rural area outside Chicago, Cain pulled over to the side of the road to wait out the slanting rains. But he was soon asleep at the parked wheel and awaking very early the next morning, he found his car stuck in inches of sludge. He trudged a mile to a farmhouse. There the man radioed a friend who owned a service station and giving him Cain's location, was on the scene a half hour later, tow in hand. He pulled Cain's vehicle out of the mud, had him follow him to his station where, at the man's behest, Cain filled his tank and hosed the mud off his car. When it came time to pay, the man told him the price of the gas. The tow and the wash were given to him, the man said, a gift to be passed on to others when he found someone in trouble. The man wanted to give to Cain, but he knew that Cain wanted to give in return.

There is an aura about Cain that is reminiscent of Hyde's universe. Eshu may play with his fate, but he protects it too, and guides it. Cain's destiny, his



life, is a nice combination of agency and contingency. This relationship is fortified by faith and trust in his own powers and abilities and strategies to withstand obstacles. But too, he evinces a faith and trust in the whims of the crossroads and doorways, in contingency and accident, and the conjoining of agency and these forces. After all, Eshu would never harm anyone who ministers so well, nor lead him too far afield.

### **'Response-ability'**

Reflecting upon the three literacy biographies, those of Brady, Gale, and Cain, we are struck by several points. One is that these students were unfortunate enough to have had their education compromised at a very young age and consequently, their literacy development was stalled, since literacy is such a large factor in early education. Another salient point is that this compromised education had tremendous repercussions for their early and adult lives, indeed, even today. We have indicated for each student the tremendous constraints that challenged them early and continually throughout their lives, one building on the other. That is, the early social constraints to schooling compromised their education, then that compromised education created and presented constraints of its own.

Perhaps the most overwhelming residue of this process for these students was the cost to literacy attainment levied by these multiple constraints. For each person, these costs are different. The reasons for this are wide and varied, but again, much of the construction of the costs comes down to how the students perceived and responded to the constraints that inhibited their literacy development. Though she was discussing the similarities of reading and writing for a writer and the writer's imagination, Toni Morrison's (1993) words resonate well for Brady, Gale and Cain when she delves into the complexities and

complications inherent in the social acts of reading and writing and the role of the imagination in these acts.

Both [reading and writing] require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability (p.xi).

Because Morrison speaks of social acts, the hazards she cautions against may occur in our reading and writing of the world as well as the text (Freire, 1991; Shannon, 1993). This is what I meant when I stated that the individual costs to literacy were dependent upon the three students: in many ways their 'response-ability' ultimately determined their costs and the degree to which it bankrupted or not their development and identity, whether it sabotaged their imagination, locked the gates to their imaginative world, and/or polluted their imaginative vision. As Gale's literacy biography indicates, we can write a script for our lives only in terms of what we can imagine ourselves being and becoming.

Unfortunately, again, the three students were constrained at a very young age, so that their response is focused not so much on individual responsibility, but on their ability to respond, which in great part is determined by the assistance each received in confronting these challenges. But even mentoring, or modelling, or encouragement and the like, are subject to the individual perception and arbitrated by other factors, so that even when Cain received inordinate support from mother and extended family, was this any match for the sham of an education proffered at the Baptist church? Did this extraordinary assistance nonetheless affect his perception of himself in terms of his school failings? How did this then shape his imagination and his self-concept? His identity?

Brunner (1998) has already depicted the multiplicity of masks, of

identities, and how they shift sometimes beyond our control. In the following excerpt, the author reinforces how tentative is identity to an educated adult well aware of purpose and direction and intimates how slippery identity can become to a struggling child/student with lesser advantage.

On any given day I am privileged to be who I need to be even if that sometimes feels like a burden of representativity--a masking of the self I think I know but can't fully grasp, a self mostly known in the eyes of someone else. Sometimes I can be who I want to be, who I think I am, and/or who I might be--if only...I am forever aware of how privilege and marginality marks, even scars, identities (pp.3-4).

As Brunner states, we create masks to fit who we want to be, but very often, who we need to be. And these may change dramatically quickly depending on the circumstances, says Brunner, who believes so much in the ever-changing masks that when 'authenticity' was mentioned in terms of identities, she figured that by the time the word was spoken, the speaker may have already assumed a different mask! (Personal communication: 2/1/00).

In terms of this idea then, and in an attempt to better understand the reactions and response-abilities of Brady, Gale and Cain as young people struggling with their lives, I explore one of the fascinating aspects of *Ain't No Makin' It*, that is, MacLeod trying to make sense of his many characters' identities. After inundating the reader for many pages about the constraints faced by the Hallway Hangers and how these have shaped their lives and attitudes towards family and work and school, MacLeod (1995) posits that in many ways their identities developed to accommodate many of the costs they endured in terms of structural constraints and their responses to them.

However, the entrepreneurial criminal careers of the Hallway Hangers have not been governed by economic rationality alone. The Hallway Hangers are not cool cost-benefit analysts. Their actions on the job market...are inextricably linked with their emergent social identities, with their sense of who they are...the street is an extension of their schooling (p.179).

What is readily apparent in reading *Ain't No Makin' It* is that indeed the

Hallway Hangers are host to a multitude of identities, dependent upon which mask is called for at any given time. Slick, one of the Hangers' leaders, demonstrates this well.

Slick: ...You use drugs, you get a sense of fucking balls. You know what I mean? You're not yourself. You're somebody that you really want to be (p.177).

The tension between their macho street image and the tenderness and devotion demanded by parenthood is felt by other Hallway Hangers as well [including Slick] (p.191).

Slick: I feel like I was robbed. I look at people and I say, y'know, I could be doin' what this guy's doing. If I had a college degree or something. But how was I gonna go to college?...You've just got to deal with it the best way you fucking can. Believe me, I was pissed off about it, and I still think about it to this day. I shouldn't be this dirty. Look at how filthy I am, working with my hands, blisters all over me and shit. I should be working at an office with a tie and nice suit on (p.252).

Slick is caught in the same gum trap in the melon patch that holds Brady (and at one time or another Gale and Cain). That is, his response to the constraints that challenge his development creates costs that make it improbable for him to imagine and attain a better life. But there is good reason for his and the others' responses--Slick feels that his life is virtually on the line. Like Brady, he was more than able intellectually to succeed in school and society, but to do so became a matter of risk and safety. Slick's already fragile self-esteem did not want to gamble that he might fail in school if he gave it his full effort, further damaging his self-concept even as he alienated his only perceivable support system and master identity, the Hallway Hangers and their way of life. So he (and the other Hangers) adopted identities that rescued and boosted their self-esteem but of course put them at odds with their aspirations, abilities, and truer identities (MacLeod, 1995; pp.113-116). Slick, like Brady and Gale and Cain, in the awful glare of overwhelming constraints, chose masks that would allow him to save face. But the cost too is great: a sabotaged imagination, locked imaginative gates, and a polluted imaginative vision.

Gale and Cain found ways eventually to surmount many of these

encumbrances, however taxing, however costly. We have looked at, from several perspectives, how Gale was able to resurrect her life, but what of Brady and his predicament? Is he lost? Is Carney destined to mimic Brady's journey? To address these questions and offer another perspective on those students who are early on disadvantaged educationally, I will look briefly at Brunner (1997; 1998) and her works which I think have special pertinence to the problems discussed in this study, especially since so many of these difficulties with literacy settle in the region of identity, which forms the center of much of her vision.

Brunner's work, *Between the Masks*, is well informed by cultural studies, performance and narrative theories, and notions of critical pedagogy. In a way, she sets the stage in her classroom for students to critically understand and reflect upon their station and that of others and how it has been and is influenced by master narratives.

I depend on an interplay between critical theory, culture studies (of which public education is one culture), and critical pedagogy...Overlapping discourses...of everyday performances (life), of political performances (positionality), and of staged performances (theater) are presented in the shifting and intersecting emphases with/in my teaching project...In this manner, culture studies becomes [sic] an important pedagogical site of both resistance and desire; it teaches students about themselves through the study of representations, identity, and materiality; it teaches them how to proceed as culture workers towards the transformation of school and society (pp.33-34).

In this regard, *Between the Masks* was written for and is about agency and how individual agency can indeed overcome structural constraints (Personal communication: 4/22/99). Because of her emphasis on agency and because she posits a theory of disruption in the classroom by way of a critical pedagogy, I find her views intriguing for this study. But even more to the point, her work understands Gale's transformation and Brady's dilemma. She sees and knows how Brady is stuck and offers a classroom-based means to undo the grip the politics of essentialism have on people, but especially those like Brady,

who have been hierarchicalized to the lower rungs of society.

It is my contention that the community college's developmental reading courses should be a site not only for students to gain reading skills, but for making significant strides also in developing an understanding of and perspective on the constraints and costs of their literacy endeavors, structural and personal. In short, these students should be assisted in exploring their 'unquiet self' between the masks, even as they develop a critical awareness of structural systems and dominant ideologies. And regarding identity and transformation for these community college students, the goal of the reading courses would do well to mimic Brunner's syllabus as stated early on in *Masks*:

...the strategy I refer to is a critical pedagogy of narrative-performative inquiry, that is, I begin where the student is, strategize with the student ways to proceed, and always connect the personal struggle to learn, grow, transform consciousness, and so on, to wider political processes and social movements (p.37).

But more than just exploring these ideas of constraint and how we become fixed by a single, essentialized perspective and identity, it is necessary also to help the students strategize in terms of their lives, that is, assist them in learning to read and re-write the world from their point of view. MacLeod (1995) does this for Slick in his narrative of disruption, *Ain't No Makin' It*, but this is not the same as if Slick had taken his life by the mask and made some decisive changes on his own.

Had Slick been born into a middle-class family, he probably *would* be sitting in an office with a suit and tie on. Had his peer group been into Shakespeare and square roots rather than beer balls and bong hits, Slick might not be so blistered and dirty. Finally, Slick would be in better shape had he made different choices himself (p.253; emphasis in original).

Already MacLeod applauds Slick's and the other Hangers' perceptions for their critical bent in coming to terms with the structural constraints that distort their situation. But "...the Hallway Hangers' racism, among other factors, impedes the formation of any sort of critical consciousness" (MacLeod, 1995;

p.149). But if they stall in this transformative venture because of their attitudes and perceptions eventually, it is again a matter of 'saving face' and their esteem, accomplished through identity making, their response-ability.

Although the Hallway Hangers' capacity to see through the dominant ideology is not politically empowering, it does allow them to maintain some semblance of a positive identity (p.149).

But as with Brady and his trickster persona, the identity the Hangers' adopt so as to save face also works to ultimately restrict and cut off any chance at a critical consciousness and thus, any probable opportunity to get themselves in 'better shape'. Even though, as MacLeod maintains, the Hangers' disrupt the dominant ideology, the master narratives, they are in no critical position to re-write their stories so that they are where they want to be socially, culturally, personally.

By turning the achievement ideology upside down, the Hallway Hangers reject the official, authorized interpretations of their social situation; in so doing, they become free to create their own cultural meanings (p.149).

But their own interpretations resonate with Slick's lamentations. In order to change this to a legitimate re-write, the Hangers would have to abandon their masks that save face, come to understand how their attitudes and perceptions and beliefs sabotage their imagination, and work to re-shape their identity between the masks. Brunner (1998) reinforces that this is a risky and agent-sponsored exercise.

That identity is a performance fraught with masking and posturing may be true. What I perceive to be most interesting is what happens between the masks, where the unquiet self attempts "to crack the mask and thrust out (Anzaldua, 1990, p.xv). This [work]...calls into question the "project" of identity-making/marking as a self-reflexive, self-referential moment, historicizing it against readings that suggest the most likely "place" of identity practice is between the masks, a place characterized by psychic more than social fragmentation and a subjectivity that is unquiet (p.94).

This is why Gale's incarnation is so remarkable, even if it was in effect, a quarter century project. It is so very difficult to accomplish personal transformation and agency on one's own. Gale's story demonstrates how

helpful was formal schooling at the community college in her own life's changes. It provided her structure, perceivable goals, esteem tied in to the achievement of those goals--a social context in which to test out new ideas and abilities.

But her case is highly unusual; far too often, the current community college settings for developmental students provide more an additional site for failure and continued frustration than for unexpected gain and change. But my point is that this need not be so. The developmental classroom could be, should be a venue, a stage for personal insight and transformation, for the awakening of and pursuit of agency. But instead, these classrooms too often signal a dead-end to an aspirant's educational goals. Let's review briefly the current state of the community college educational setting.

### Promises rendered

Recall that I quibbled with Webber Community College's developmental reading curriculum. Based mostly upon my several years' experience as an instructor and tutor on WCC's developmental reading staff, I found the curriculum, described earlier as 'one-size-fits-all,' as inauthentic and thus remote to the students' experiences and expertise (Delpit, 1988). Too, it did little to engage or enhance the students' cultural capital (Anyon, 1988). It too often created a passivity and silence in students that Caulfield (1991) so brilliantly depicts in his plea for a more student-centered, 'problem-posing' (Freire) pedagogy. Unwittingly, the developmental reading curriculum focused on the students' deficits in the pursuit of reading and vocabulary enhancement, rather than offering a course content that would enhance literacy even as it informed the students academically, socially, culturally. Of course, what I refer to is a more critical literacy and pedagogy, such as that proposed by Brunner (1998).



Critical educational strategies...are useful in helping to construct a critical site for negotiation and therefore resistance to the politics of essentialism...performance narratives can be regenerative in their abilities to *awaken* students to the ways in which their histories, cultures, ethnicities, and the like overlap (Brunner, 1998; p.54; -emphasis in original).

But recall too that the problems facing the community college are wider than the developmental classroom. After Labaree (1990) nicely set the historical and contemporary community college campus stage, Bay (1999) showed the problems non-traditional students face socially and academically in returning to school and called upon the community college to offer better support programs to help them become better integrated into the campus and classroom. Though Bay was not referring to developmental students who would face even tougher challenges than the 'typical' non-traditional student, Shaw (1997) did include the developmental student in her lens that focused upon some of the more dramatic problems these colleges face, especially that of successfully ushering community college students into four year academic institutions.

Let me introduce two other theorists/researchers who elaborate upon the problems that confront the community colleges, thus compromising the educational success of the students, but especially the developmental student, who would seem to need even more support and indulgence. 'Promises rendered' is such an apt phrase to capture Dougherty's (1994) discussion of the debate that swirls about the community college campus. The one side sees the phrase to mean that the community colleges fulfill their promises, interpreting 'rendered' to mean 'provided.' But the opposing side fixes upon the 'rend' embedded in the word and focuses upon aspects of promises that have been torn apart. The debate involves for the most part three points of contention.

Now in its 'fifth generation' since its inception...the community college is beset by controversy over its impact, origins, and future. Should it continue as a comprehensive institution, offering vocational training , adult education, and university preparation, or should it shed one or the other of these dimensions? If it should narrow its role, which function

should become central? (Dougherty, 1994; p.5).

But more dramatically, the college's critics see it as a breeding ground for continued educational tracking and social injustice, thinking it an institution founded by the more elite and privileged factions of society, especially those connected to private industry, for their own gain and benefits. These critics admit that the college does let in "otherwise excluded students, [but] the community college fails to deliver the educational and occupational opportunity it promises" (p.6). This opportunity, more often than not, resides in the promise the college makes to its students to prepare them for four year academic institutions. But Dougherty asserts that the supporters' and critics' barbs have often missed their mark and too often the target is clouded by insufficient delineation.

Despite the vigor, and occasional vitriol, of the debate between the community college's defenders and its critics, surprisingly little territory has changed hands between them...The critics, arguing that three-quarters of the community college's students wish to get a B.A., note that less than a fifth succeed. The defenders, believing they are repulsing this charge head-on, counter with the argument that the community college allows more students to enter higher education than any other institution. The problem with both claims is that they actually lie at an oblique angle to each other: both, or neither, may be right. The community college could be very good at allowing student access to higher education and yet be poor at helping them achieve a baccalaureate degree...On some questions, its defenders and critics are both correct. On others, they are both incorrect. And in all questions, they are incomplete (pp.6-7).

Of course, this portrayal of the debate and the college's problems sets the stage for Dougherty to offer necessary insight and comprehension. "The purpose of this book is to resolve the debate between the critics and defenders of the community college" (p.7). This author takes a global perspective on the issues confronting the community college, but another researcher, Doherty (1984), did his work within the developmental reading and writing classrooms at Piedmont Virginia Community College. Entitled "The Developmental Reading and Writing Student: A Snapshot," Doherty's study provides a grim and hazy

picture.

The purpose of his study was to examine the connection between performance in developmental English (reading and writing) and the college-level English course at PVCC. The hazy part is that besides indicating a clearer demographic for the typical PVCC developmental student, his limited study was unable to offer significant dialogue as to what the data suggested in terms of performances by students in the two areas of academic endeavor. The grim aspect of his research is that which reinforces what has already been alluded to in this study: that students in need of a developmental education are more numerous than expected; that minorities make up a disproportionate amount of these numbers; that too many developmental students fail to make it past their developmental courses; the percentage that does succeed in the developmental courses, goes on to meet some success in college-level English, but again, all too many such students do not succeed nor persist in their education.

[Commenting on the "Final Academic Status for Developmental Students" in his study:] While those in good standing account for the highest percentage of students [41%], 56% are either on academic warning, academic probation, or took no college level courses. While 44% seem to have made academic progress, 56% have experienced difficulties. It is especially noteworthy that 13% never progressed beyond the developmental stage...Students quite often needed to repeat a course to receive a Satisfactory grade (p. 14).

At times, Doherty's snapshot is extremely grim and hazy, such as when he confesses that "[i]t is impossible to adequately determine the overall effect of developmental English instruction. While on the one hand it could be instrumental in helping many students to perform successfully in college work, it might also do them no good at all. The actual effects are probably somewhere between these two extremes" (p.32). One of the researcher's largest concerns and conclusions was that as many as one half of the developmental students

were 'relatively unsuccessful' at PVCC. "The probability of being successful decreases as the number of unsuccessful developmental courses increases" (p.33). Though this seems fairly obvious, it is important to keep in mind that behind these statistics are real masks and faces, Brady, Gale, Carey, Vivian, some day perhaps Carney.

But Doherty does not lose sight of the human aspect of his research. One of his final suggestions echo one of this study's primary concerns regarding the developmental courses.

It would be most useful to the instructors to know what skills each student needs to better individualize the instructional process (p.32).

In this regard, Doherty is more concerned with accurate measurement of student beginning and ending course skills, a more technical function of the curriculum. I argue for an individualized instructional process that is more student-centered in that it respects the student's strengths and expertise; one that is more critical in aspect so that the student is able to begin to shape a critical consciousness; and a course content that is authentic and meaningful to the student and allows him to develop critical thinking strategies, even as he enhances his reading and vocabulary skills. Brunner's example, centered around auto/biomythography and narrative-performative strategies, is one of many such strategies that may be integrated into the developmental classroom for these purposes.

### The 'collective creative'

I do not think that Brady's response to his 'illiteracy' was atypical. That is, he armored himself against the dreadful repercussions of this situation and tried to conceal it as much as he could, not only from the public, but in a way, from himself too. Recall that the participants in Johnson's (1985) study responded in

much the same manner. Shame is a common companion in such excursions, especially as the person gets older.

All of this--the defensive armor, the concealment, the shame--make it all the more difficult for the 'illiterate' (I use Street's quotation marks for this designation, for I believe with him that this person has many more literacy skills than they suspect, but swayed by the 'stigma,' they feel devoid of any such skills) to overcome the literacy skills deficits they confront. There are only so many ways this may be done. An autodidactic approach is seldom feasible, given not only the usually low self-esteem of the student, but too, their lack of any understanding as to how to organize such a learning regimen. Recall that Brady was hard put to accomplish the few simple literacy tasks I asked of him on a daily basis. Usually, futility breeds further futility in this case.

For the most part then, it is left up to the community college to help the adult 'illiterate' gain literacy skills and competence (Shaw, 1997). But such a venue usually runs contrary to Brady's (and others in his situation) defensive mechanisms, concealment, and shame--all of which situate the person/student as a 'loner,' isolated from other social stations because of the stigma of 'illiteracy.' In a classroom, in this social situation, the 'illiterate' has to share, in a way, manifest their incompetence.

And typically, the community college's developmental reading courses do little to countermand this isolation, which by now, to Brady and others, is a well-practiced, if not comfortable, disposition (but not one to flaunt, or advertise). That is, the students usually study and test in a singular manner, typical of so many classrooms in all schools. The course content announces their deficits and failures: It is a reading skills development class aimed at readers with low levels of literacy skills. Though reading is part of the content, the reading is too often inauthentic pieces of little interest or meaning to the students. Too, they

are inundated with notions of 'main idea,' 'inferences,' and 'transitions,' and the like, concepts that more skilled readers 'acquired' (Gee, 1987) early on in their literacy careers. To Brady and others, no doubt, trying to understand and learn these ideas now creates a completely different notion of and approach to 'reading' in their minds. Too, such exercises are not facile, even for an experienced reader. I had to read the pertinent chapters carefully (but more the contrived questions at the end of the chapters) to make sure I understood well the ideas as presented regarding features of reading and composition and structure that I had acquired long ago and took for granted, having not really thought about them much. It was not the concepts involved that were so difficult, rather the inauthentic approach to reading and understanding text that I found intellectually numbing. Such practice is bound to confuse and further alienate Brady from ever thinking he has a chance to conquer this seemingly convoluted act of reading.

I wonder, why cannot a developmental reading course be more in tune with the classroom design that works for so many young emergent readers? That is, reading is established as a 'natural' part of one's activities, interpreting and making meaning from signs and notes and letters and whole texts of all kinds, including cereal boxes, telephone books, ads, lyrics, comic books, baseball cards, headlines and the TV guide. Seldom are purposes for reading necessary--curiosity is a common one, such as when a child scans a cereal box--but authentic purposes are established when necessary. But if the course content is 'real' and meaningful and interesting to the student, then the purposes for reading are evident.

In this way, reading and vocabulary skills could easily be enhanced in a community college developmental reading course that focuses upon children's literature/family literacy, or urban education/sociology of education, or

community problems/resolutions. In this way, the course content does not point out the student's incompetence, merely his interests. The content is authentic and meaningful and yet allows more than sufficient opportunity for reading, discussions of those readings, including the more technical aspects of main idea, if the situation arises, and provides a fertile and continual site for vocabulary development.

But too, the student is learning a content that is real and useful for their own purposes and enhancement. And certainly, by including a critical component (which all of the above examples invite), the student is able to develop not only critical thinking skills, but may begin to develop a critical consciousness that will allow him to puzzle through and understand the 'stigma' on his own terms and begin to see that his past failures were in a way, 'rigged,' not all his fault, nor due to his supposed incompetence. I believe that if a student is genuinely interested in the course content and that content has meaning for him on a very personal level, such that he can see his growth and understanding, then such factors as vocabulary and study skills and main idea and others will evolve as part of the process, instead of being the process.

Brunner (1998) establishes courses within her university's English department that have pertinence for the type of developmental reading classroom I have outlined. These courses are often based upon narrative-performative strategies where texts (of all types) are interpreted and analysed through a critical aperture by way of discussion and written work, culminating in a collective narrative to which all students contribute, rehearse, and perform.

But what is even more ideal (for my purposes) about these courses, other than the critical aspects and the unusual performance pedagogy, is that the theoretical framework for these narrative-performative strategies is embedded in ideas that encourage a social consciousness, rather than an isolated one. As

alluded to previously, the central concept in this is Bakhtin's 'self-in-other/other-in-self' relationships. Brunner explains how this concept applies to resisting the politics of essentialism, the centerpiece of her critical pedagogy, and consequently, resisting master narratives that seek to continually limit and define us, even as she makes a convincing argument for this type of critical component in the classroom.

Bakhtin says that love is the only thing that will keep us from continuing to *fix* or 'absolutize' the world in a dichotomy of self/other. Love here is a mutual respect that produces an intimacy that requires that we take time to (cognitively) know the particulars of one another's life...Because it is often easier, then, to reduce people and/or ideas to a simplistic perspective than to take the time to know someone/something, taking steps to resist the politics of essentialism is everyone's business. It should especially be the work of teachers...[as] a part of educating for a democratic citizenry that has both voice and vision. Such teaching requires a content strategy as well as a democratic process in the classroom. Critical theories and cultural materials combined with a critical pedagogy is the form and content that I find work best. But teaching for change is not limited to [this], for curiosity and imagination often gives [sic] rise to in(ter)ventions not yet conceived (pp.15-16; emphasis in original).

Brunner further explains 'self-in-other/other-in-self' as not so much a perspective one consciously decides upon, but rather, "[a]ccording to Bakhtin, this is already a part of our language, our thinking, our way of being in the world...language itself is a collective creative, shot through with the meanings, perceptions, inventions of all language users--it's where the notion of dialogism comes from...word itself is a two-sided act and implies layers upon layers of meaning, not pure lexicon, but ideology also" (E-mail communication; 3/5/00).

In terms of "educating for a democratic citizenry that has both voice and vision," Brunner states that the methods and pedagogical approaches may vary and are in fact numerous, given the dexterity of the imagination and curiosity. So explaining Brunner's narrative-performative strategies is not so important as it is to discuss the theories that frame it, theories that I find particularly relevant to Brady's predicament. Because Brady's world-view is so individual, isolated,



self-absorbed, participating in a course like Brunner's would allow him to see how much he does indeed share with others in terms of experiences and perception and that he does in fact have some control over his circumstances. When it comes to students creating individual narratives for a collective script, it is highly important to begin by understanding the myth of 'individualism.'

Brunner relies upon Maxine Greene (1995) to help her show that even when writing about personal and private circumstances, the individual cannot escape the 'shaping influence' of social contexts. "To shape a life is to place it in a context, to imagine its direction, to see it as a 'quest'" (Brunner, 1998; paraphrasing Greene, p.55). All of this, Greene asserts, proceeds by way of dialogue, which is where we again meet Bakhtin and dialogism and the 'self-in-other' relationships.

Kristeva (1986) neatly summarizes these ideas when she states through Brunner (1998) that "autobiographical writing is as fictive as much as fiction is drawn from personal experience. Because experience is social, what is personal cannot be separated from what is public; therefore there is no narrative that is precisely personal" (p.55).

Brunner thinks that this 'complex relationship' between the personal-public makes narratives as she uses them a unique mapping strategy for 'undoing the proper' (de Certeau, 1984). Interestingly, what Brunner often encounters in her classroom are students who hold out for their individualism in their narratives and their class responses, but these are too often arbitrated by cultural scripts that the students have unwittingly co-opted, or by which they are unduly influenced. But Brunner sees this as an excellent opportunity for further disrupting these master narratives.

Examining with students the gaps their identity rituals reveal creates a possibility for further critical inquiry, critical knowing-- what I perceive is the basis for critical practice that acts in the wider public to disrupt hegemony, to displace the proper (p.56).

And this is the continual work of the course and of the class, to examine narratives and beliefs and values and to hold them up against what is supposedly proper, 'the way it is,' the way things 'have to be.' Thus, the 'stigma' may fall under this lens and deep scrutiny, as well as the lives it affects. But no one is in the spotlight, given the idea of 'self-in-other' which in a way, puts everyone in the same boat. That is, it makes the student realize that he is a reader of all texts--worldly as much, if not more, than print--and to that end he indeed shares an intimacy, not only with other readers, but with the Word. In this way Brunner is confident in expounding upon her classroom strategies as much, much more than collecting a series of personal essays and making them read as a collective script.

[A] revised view of narrative practice goes beyond simply placing stories side-by-side; it also circulates various readings of lived experiences that show self acting with and against culture and then examines performative scripts against directive if not pre-scriptive texts as an act of transforming consciousness and claiming agency, rendering fixed meanings and identities problematic (p.58).

Note that in discussing Brunner's classroom strategies and critical pedagogy that very often we are talking about identity as well. This is extremely important for Brady who is so absorbed in his identity of 'illiteracy,' one foisted upon him, that it seems to dictate every aspect of his life. As an example, let's examine his break-up with his spouse of many years. The trigger, if not the centerpiece of their quarrel, according to Brady, was that she hung on the phone too much with friends to the neglect of other duties. Now as trivial as this may sound, it threatened Brady to the point that the couple eventually separated. I think this speaks to his low self-esteem and even paranoia born of his 'illiterate' tag (as if he suspected his wife and the others were talking about him, making fun of him).

It was during this crisis in their marriage that he sought literacy help at

WCC. This measure in a way seems as a last gasp attempt to rectify his life and identity so that he would have some grounds for his objections to her phone behavior. I do suspect that if indeed Brady had been well on his way to achieving literacy that this dispute would not have escalated into a separation. I see it more as a problem with his identity than with a bump in the marriage that could not be discussed and resolved. I think Brady continually sees himself, in this and other matters, as acting from a position of weakness, including classroom participation, so eventually, ultimately, something unrealistic is bound to happen (he quits school after a short trial effort; he walks out on his ten year marriage over phone habits).

Brady admitted that his relationship with his wife was entwined with his quest for literacy. During our first meeting, when we were discussing his literacy habits, he used her phone usage as an example of his literacy practice--taking phone messages (p.4). Later, he confessed that she was against his going back to school and this caused further friction in their relationship. Then I suggested that his literacy pursuit met opposition not only from his wife, but caused him to resist it too.

I agree with you there. I mean I totally agree because when I first started getting into this, you know, I wasn't, I'm talking about right now with you and Jan and everybody, I wasn't seeing my wife. And when I went back to her, it seemed like I didn't see you no more for a week or two. You know, I don't know (p.16).

As so often happened in our discussions, Brady retreats or gives up when it is time to chase an idea critically. I think this not only due to a lack of practice in this regard, but more, that he is resolved to a certain fixed identity and to not understanding this, or questioning it too well. It is much easier to pursue a literacy 'key,' remote from notions of identity, than it is to pose and confront the tough questions regarding self-concept. At least it is too difficult to do so on his own. Given a college course that was dedicated to such inspection,

one with a collective creative, there is no telling what 'pat' assumptions might be in jeopardy.

The literal staging of performative actions creates a site for wearing a different mask...the complex of practices that occur during these performative rehearsals...have as their goal the further structuring of of a site for critical negotiation (Brunner, 1998; p.57).

Now it is way too easy for Brady to avoid internal debate, to acquiesce to the fixed identity with which his life has been labelled and hierarchicalized and to ricochet back and forth among life's emerging crises, even as he purports to be making strides towards literacy, or at least, figuring out the 'key' to his literacy failures. But as can be seen from his comments above, literacy courses and endeavors are too often mere deflectors in his pinball activities. A critical element is quite necessary in his life, one where the myth of individualism is expunged and thus one where he can examine his condition without becoming too self-absorbed.

It is not then the importance of the personal story or the public script as a separate construct but the integral relationship each bears on both the self-other complex and wider contexts to untell the metanarratives of culture that is germane to this discussion (Brunner, 1998; p.57).

Keep in mind that such a critical course does not pin the student in a contrived spotlight and ask them to examine their life as one might be asked to undress publicly. No, the student 'bumps' into self/other revelations and insights and ideas, just as he might bump into reading and vocabulary enhancement by poring through and discussing and writing about, say, an essay from hooks' (1990) *Yearning*, or Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark*., or even a complex and intriguing picture book such as Sendak's (1981) *Outside Over There*.

As I understand the basics of Brunner's course(s), these pertinent texts are read (there are ways and strategies that may be employed which 'allow' a developmental student to understand and make meaning from even more difficult texts than these, though I submit, given the pertinence and interest to the

student, such strategies might be superfluous.) then discussed in terms of relevant social and cultural phenomenon and experiences. As these probings accumulate, so does the critical faculty and more and more the student sees relevance to his own life in many of these texts, worldly and other. Then it comes time to create a personal script--Brady may choose to depict how he felt about the 'key' to his literacy before the course and now--which gradually is formed into a collective script by way of discussion, negotiating and rehearsal. In this way, the personal is continually arbitrated by and melded into the public, the self/other relationships. The personal/private is but one jewel on the collective crown that is worn and owned by all.

#### **'The old hero's journey'**

Brunner's *auto/biomythography* (her extension and version of Audre Lorde's (1982) *biomythography*--"the notion of 'myth' added to forms of narrative inquiry can be a code-breaking genre. Adding *auto/*...further illustrates how we architect the self with/in communities of difference and likeness and how biography is also a self-in-other/other-in-self form [Brunner, 1998; p.60]), indeed performative narratives, "vignettes that are autobiographical, biographical, and mythological can...articulate new relationships that do more than blur distinctions; through social imaginations *auto/biomythography* may oppose old dualisms...[and] may be seen as human resignification, not resignation" (p.60).

What a brilliant way to express the potential for performative narratives in the classroom: a condition that Brady needs for his life and that we may recognize as the transformative episode in Gale's story, when she thrust out the mask of an old label to which she had been resigned for so many years and began to create her own meanings for her life. And again note that we are yet

working with a collective creative, one that in combining autobiography and mythmaking “diffuses the idea that autobiography is the precise personal story of one’s life; autobiography suggests instead a collective representation of a self in a world” (p.61). Brunner elaborates as to how the self is embedded in the other in this strategy.

Additionally, placing autobiography in the context of mythmaking changes the confessional nature of self-authorization. Though autobiography may have the capacity to situate one within a historical context, it tends to focus on one’s plight as the victim rather than the change-maker; it tends to focus on the self-contained life as if lived in isolation, not with/in community. Mythmaking relies on more than self; a new mythos can rely on on self-in-other/other-in-self. More to the point, mythmaking relies on the human capacity for extraordinary thinking (p.61).

For way too long it seems, Brady has been on a literacy quest pursuing ‘the old hero’s journey’ (Aisenberg; 1994), neglecting “concerns with community, and [with] negotiating human relations” (p.64). He has challenged the windmills of contingency in the role of victim, eschewing that of ‘change-maker.’ He has protected his hero’s garb and habits to the detriment of his learning and his life’s opportunities. Little has ‘worked’ in his life to alter these circumstances, because they (tutors, courses, instructors) have been relegated to unrealistic roles in his continuing myth. Instead of nurturing his social imagination (Brunner, 1998; p.63) so as to create new opportunities, instead the imagination has atrophied, denying access to new possibilities and ways of seeing and being in the world.

But we see from Doherty (1984) that Brady is not alone in this situation, though he may think he is. Many developmental students fail to make it educationally beyond a course or two, and even if they do ‘graduate’ to other college courses, their persistence rate is low. Doherty bemoans how many developmental students are at-risk on the community college campus and how unlikely are their educational chances given an episode or two of failure.

Doherty further cites how many developmental students have to repeat a course to finally succeed at it. Then, not long thereafter, they drop out. Again, there may be various reasons for this, but like Brady, it is not difficult to realize that these students may very well lack not only the self-esteem and confidence, but the social imagination to know that their lives may be transformed and that they can be instrumental in these changes, enacting their agency.

But of course Brady (and the other developmental students) needs help in this. In a way he is the victim, but that is not the perspective to take to undo this condition. It is better to develop an understanding of his plight and of those in his community and to work to “reconceptualize new situations/images for wider communities” (Brunner, 1998; p.63). The community college is an ideal site to begin this new quest. The developmental reading classroom would provide an even better, more particular stage for this transformative work. But the course must be critical and seek to reach the whole person/community, not isolated individuals. Recall that Brady has suppressed much of his early school memories. Brunner, in describing auto/biomythography, begins with the release of these memories. In fact, much of what she delineates in this regard sounds as though she is speaking directly to Brady and his plight and recommending to him a syllabus.

The liberation of memory is the goal of this narrative-performative strategy and bridges the place from which to rearticulate identity and difference, unearthing ideological assumptions that reveal learned complicities in the perpetuation of essentialized identities. In the process of attempting to map new myths, we may develop... an ability to articulate the obstacles that stand in the way of reaching our desired goals, to see these obstacles as problems that tend to be socially rooted, and to pose alternatives in a public arena (p.83).

Later, Brunner celebrates the :“collective auto/biomythography, now a play created from parts of individual narratives” (p.124). She celebrates too the unity of the class, an exemplar of cooperative learning and collaboration. The result of their efforts, the collective auto/biomythography, “was important...not for

what it confirmed, but for what it questioned" (p.124). Performing on a stage before peers and parents, this substitute for the course's Final used a "variety of performative styles--mime, dance, and some traditional acting and dialogue and the like...[as] students dramatized self-discoveries through a coming-of-age motif" (p.124).

But Brunner's joy in these fruits of a critical pedagogy and baby steps towards personal and social transformation are tempered by the realization that the institution of school and its departments and even her colleagues do not truly make space for such transformative practice and do not value them as is necessary for true change and resignification (closely paraphrased, p. 126).

I assume the potential for transformation, even revolutionary moments occur each time we create a place for imagining the unimagined, saying the unsaid, being that which has not been--re-signifying our politicized subject identities. *But success is never guaranteed.* For the drives, the passions, the subjectivities that might lead to revolution seem, with little doubt, in this society the least valued and most often silenced (p.127; emphasis in original).

Brunner's cautions about schools in general and the university in particular, resound even louder in the developmental classroom, where traditional pedagogy seems less likely to be set aside for a more critical approach. Part of this is of course due to the same institutional reasons that spur Brunner's tempered joy above. But in part this may be due also to instructors' low expectations of their students. A traditional approach to developmental education has been far short of successful (Shaw, 1997; Doherty, 1984).

But is a more critical pedagogy a viable option? Again, Brunner implies that her colleagues might not appreciate teaching for transformation ("Indeed, how is such [critical] work valued in our departments, our universities, and by our colleagues?" [p.126]). But even if a community college developmental instructor did figure such an approach might do no worse than that which preceded it, would they think their students capable of the challenge of such a



course? Auto/biomythography and other performative-narrative strategies aside (Brunner did say that critical strategies are not limited), are developmental students prepared for and capable of building and sustaining a critical consciousness? I suspect their (usual) background of literacy and educational failings, continual shame and humiliation, low self-esteem and confidence, would make them ripe for change and understanding the socio/political dynamics of culture and education (One of Delpit's contentions in her 'Culture of Power' is that those with power are least aware of it, while the powerless are quite aware of where the power resides.). Interestingly, the developmental students' supposed failings and weaknesses are in a way their very strengths in this regard, their unique cultural capital. And repeatedly this study has recommended developmental courses that target the students' expertise and strengths.

### **'Positive Psychology'**

When he assumed the APA presidency in 1997, Martin E.P. Seligman was distraught to discover "that about 95% of research on human emotion focused on the negative--a bleak gallery of scientific portraits of depression, anxiety, marital strife, violence and prejudice." Taking the 'prevention of mental health problems' as his chosen banner during his tenure, Seligman began promoting this idea of "a new movement in psychology...[that searched] for the 'why' and 'how' of human strength." Now, there is a sizable cadre of such researchers who vie for annual prizes meant to support and promote such 'positive' research. In terms of this year's winners, if "there's one thread that runs through the work...it's a healthy challenge to popular myths" (Elias, 2000; p.6D).

For example, the top winner (the prizes are research grants plus a

personal use bonus) “has done work that suggests positive emotions--amusement, contentment--can speed physical recovery from the potentially heart-damaging effects of fear and anxiety” (p.6D). Another did work to challenge the myth that optimists are indeed “amiable (probably IQ-challenged) Pollyannas who shield themselves from bad signs and aren’t prepared when trouble strikes” (p.6D). Another did work to overturn the notion that “[e]mbarrassment, shame and teasing are all best avoided” (p.6D).

The pertinence of this report to this study is manifest: besides the fact that these individual research studies in a way point indirectly at the developmental student and Brady and Gale and Cain, the positive psychology movement itself coincides with tenets of the prime recommendation of this work. As an example, it was not until Gale had come to terms with many facets of her existence that she was able to even begin her marvelous transformation. That is, she indeed stopped blaming and resenting and depending and instead looked to herself for answers and change in resolving some of her problems. But in order to take risks, Gale had to be willing to fail, had to have the humor and peace of mind to know that she could survive such an ordeal. She had to see herself in a less dramatic light and allow her more positive emotions to hold sway in her life.

Brady allows for little humor in his life, or positive emotions that might guide him through a period of risk-taking, or a field of contingencies. He assumes the dramatic mask and persona to match the rigors of his life. Unlike Cain and his more graceful, benevolent aspect, one that expects all to turn out well, Brady continually braces for the worst, seemingly eschewing more positive emotions for a time of triumph. But of course, as the research on positive emotions indicates, it is such emotions that breed success, so once again, Brady is undone by his response to his inexorable costs to literacy.

The second research point, that optimists “are amiable (probably IQ-

challenged) Pollyannas who shield themselves from bad signs and aren't prepared when trouble strikes," unfortunately indicts Brady also. In so many of his endeavors, Brady's main concern is to 'come off' as competent, intelligent. He conceals as best he can his 'illiteracy,' so that observers will not consider him 'IQ-challenged,' a designation he despises. Very likely, he quit his truck driving job, not because he was so much hindered in this by his low level of literacy skills, but more, that this might eventually lead to his detection. Though he often puts up a 'brave front,' Brady is far from optimistic about his literacy progress, or prognosis. This is evidenced by his only occasional quests for literacy and then, only when this quest can be used more as a 'move,' or maneuver to counteract some other event in his life, such as when he sought a developmental reading course in response to troubles with his spouse.

His unrealistic approach to literacy is indicated too by his obsessive search for a literacy 'key.' Does he need glasses? Is he dyslexic? Well, these points would be quite easy to countermand--he need merely be tested for these and either adjust to them or dismiss them as influences for low levels of literacy skills. And unlike the participants in the positive psychology study, Brady is not prepared for the unexpected, or 'trouble.' He is constantly vigilant against contingency, but only so as to avoid it or flee from it--not to deal with it, or confront it so as to open up his life to unexpected opportunities.

In Gale's literacy biography we find a person also continually wary of trouble, but who again, is content to deal with the unexpected as best she can and accept failure as a part of human existence. Already fortified by positive emotions, Gale finds it easier to maintain an optimistic glance each day that she experiences success. Contrasted to her 'miserable' existence of a few years ago, Gale has every reason to be optimistic. Now, she is a mother and guide to her kids; she is self-reliant. She is continually gaining confidence in her

intellect, her talents, and her ability to respond well to problems. And she does not demur from 'reading' 'bad signs,' as evidenced by her very realistic appraisal of her daughter's scholastic difficulties.

And of course, the embarrassment and shame and potential for teasing are worn by many developmental students as a mantle throughout their educational careers. Like Baldr by way of Frigg, Brady repelled and avoided most of these occasions as best he could, while Gale often took them, stuck them out. It was she who eventually became strengthened by these attacks and developed relationships and ideas and insights that helped turn her life around. It is easy to imagine Cain in this role too, assuming the short-term setbacks, much like Odysseus, in order to implement a long-term gain strategy. Brady still avoids these occasions and flees the developmental classroom at the first signs of contingency and humiliation.

But all along this study has supported the notion that so often, transformation is not an isolated effort, that it is so difficult for an individual to accomplish on his own, even given unusual agency. In this case, the community college's developmental classroom is the likely collaborator, only it has been shown that it is best if the tactics used to educate these students change so as to insure a more successful educational experience. For a long time in classrooms, the disadvantaged suffered educationally because instructors 'blamed the victim' for their travails and failings, instead of understanding the deeper sociological context of their situation.

Now it seems more appropriate to keep in mind that these students are in many ways victims, but to approach them educationally as students with unique expertise and strengths and cultural capital that will benefit their education and educational progress. Like Seligman, educators must tire of the research that continually depicts failure and complaints, when in fact embedded within that

same research is latent evidence of strength and promise.

That should be the continual commission of our developmental education curricula, to contrive courses that recognize the positive in its students, their abundant strengths and expertise, and eschew any practices or strategies that seek to indicate failings or weaknesses or supposed deficits. We have seen enough research (Street, 1995; Gee, 1992; Ogbu, 1988; 1999) to know that indeed these students are victims of socio-political maneuvers and essentialist politics, but despite their grim biographies in which they have lived out stigmas and fixed identities, they are still students replete with tremendous gifts and talents and potential.

Literacy is not so much our gift to them, but more, incipient restitution. But know that they will see it as a commodity with strings attached. A developmental reading course that veers from the typical, one that is critical in nature and eschews the common perception of these students as deficit-ridden and sees them as exemplars of unique strengths and expertise, will allow them to develop a critical consciousness that will not only help to demystify their problems and costs, but provide them the opportunity to apprehend literacy on their own terms, for their own uses and purposes.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Chapter Notes**

## **Notes from Chapter 1:**

(1) A brief review of these two myths is in order. These synopses are gleaned from Hamilton (1969).

Orpheus could play the lyre with a talent the gods envied. Growing up in Thrace, the most musical of all cities, no one could match his rich talent. "There was no limit to his power when he played and sang. No one and nothing could resist him (p.103)." Indeed he could move rivers. He sailed with Jason on the *Argo* and saved the ship and crew from the lure of the Sirens by distracting them with his music. Eventually he was able to woo his love, Eurydice, who could not resist his song, but their joy was ephemeral. Stung by a viper as she walked the meadow with her bridesmaids Eurydice died, throwing Orpheus into over whelming sorrow.

But he used his music to pursue her into the Underworld of the dead and even the protectors of the dead could not resist his musical pleas. They agreed to allow his wife to accompany him back but he was given one condition--at no time could he look back at Eurydice during the difficult climb. Throughout the tortuous climb he played his music of joy and celebration and never once looked back. But emerging into the sunlight, Orpheus flinched, turned to make certain his love was still behind him, and watched as wraith-like, she disappeared with a pledge of love and a faint farewell.

Pygmalion, a woman-hater from Cyprus, was yet a most talented sculptor. Ironically, he chose as his life's work to sculpt a statue of a woman. He worked on this for many years, perfecting his creation to the point he fell in love with it. Indeed, he kissed its marble lips and courted it in any way he could. Finally, at the feast day celebration of Venus, he implored the sympathetic goddess to deliver to him a maiden the equal of his creation; Galatea. But Venus knew what Pygmalion truly wanted and when he went home and kissed his life's creation, she blossomed for him with warm lips--Galatea was alive!

(2) Here I borrow from Booth *et al* (1995) to organize my research in this way. They contend that an argument consists of a claim, evidence (grounds that support the claim), and a warrant (a general principle that explains why you think your evidence is relevant to your claim). "The warrant of an argument is its general principle, an assumption or premise that bridges the claim and its supporting evidence, connecting them into a logically related pair" (p.90).

(3) In her article, Shaw (1997) indicates how much of the educational community distinguishes between remedial and developmental education. The former "re-teaches skills that students were exposed to but did not learn" while the latter provides skills that students were not previously taught." In a more definitive example, a 'developmental' curriculum provides support services, such as classes in study skills and time management, that 'remedial' education does not (p.287).

(4) Labaree refers to 'democratic equality' as a political goal "according to which the high school should serve the needs of a democratic society" (p.14), that is, an educational focus "on the political and moral training of future citizens



(p.14).” By evolving instead into merely equal access, the community college inadvertantly, as Shaw supports, compromises already marginalized members of the society and community, i.e. Brady and Gale, offering in many respects, the silhouette of an education that usually dead-ends at the community college graduation, if not before.

(5) This fact and the ensuing information in this section was informed by a report compiled by the Academic Skills Advisory Committee (ASAC) of Webber Community College for a presentation to the WCC Board of Trustess on 4/22/97.

(6) Indeed, the head of the Academic Skills Department of WCC gets roughly one half the release time to perform such duties as do other department heads in the college. This became a point of contention with the administration recently, culminating in the resignation of the Academic Skills’ department head from that position. For over a year an interim head from the English department was appointed, a caretaker to be sure (since, in effect, the three full time instructors continued to run the department), but this dramatizes the tenuous position of the student in all of this squabble.

(7) By no means do I seek to minimize the plight of the students in Bay’s study--they have legitimate concerns that should be addressed in a legitimate manner. I use them to counterpoint students in this study whose plight and ‘stories’ have been too long neglected.

## **Notes from Chapter 2:**

(1) For the basic, reading enhancement classes, there are currently three offerings, all non-credit courses that seek to up-grade the students’ reading skills. Participation in the classes is based upon reading progress determined by a pre-course reading test, usually a Nelson Denny. The reading classifications for the various courses run roughly reading levels 1-4.5= basic course; 4.5-7.5+ intermediate course; 7.5-11.9+ advanced reading course. Ideally a student advances the several grade levels during each course so as to be ready for the next course. But Gale, for instance, was able to move on from the intermediate course to the advanced course, even though her intermeidate post-test was below the 7.5 level, because she (academically) passed the intermediate course (all three courses are graded pass/fail). Upon occasion, a student ‘passes out’ of the ATB hold after the intermediate course by scoring above the 11.9 level on the course’s post test. perhaps indicating not so much a great leap in reading ability, but an inordinately poor pre-test.

The intermediate course and the advanced course are the same course save for the latter uses vocabulary and reading pieces that are a bit more difficult. But briefly, the twice a week classes alternate between studying 20 vocabulary words and reading various pieces designed for such classes (attending the vocabulary and comprehension lessons), in addition to examining such basics as ‘vocabulary in context,’ ‘main idea,’ ‘transitions,’ etc. In addition, a thousand or so pages of outside reaidng (usually novels) are

required with attendant book reports. Too, there is lab work that coincides with the vocabulary and other instruction.

(2) I realize that I am taking a very narrow slice of Tannen's meaning and intent in this discussion of 'intimacy' in relation to literacy. Others have extended the idea of 'involvement' as a central part of other discussions (i.e. Street, 1995; Ch.8).

(3) Of course, I am referring to Brady and other African -Americans here who are too often disadvantaged in the classroom for reasons other than intellectual. I will explore these in greater detail in discussing Brady's literacy biography, and at greater length in this chapter too when I look at the current state of Brady's school district. But Victoria Purcell-Gates (1995), in *Other People's Words: The Cycle of low Literacy*, delineates problems that the 'other' minority suffers educationally, the white, urban, Appalachian student. Purcell-Gates writes: "Urban Appalachians have been called the 'invisible minority,' a term that reflects both the general lack of knowledge about them outside of the cities in which they reside and the fact that they are overwhelmingly white and thus are not recognized as a minority in a political climate that equates 'minority' with 'people of color'" (pp.16-17). And yet their dropout and absence rates in school are higher than other groups and they experience learning problems in the classroom as much or more than other minority groups long associated with such academic difficulties.

(4) The 'illiterates' are not the only disenfranchised group that Street mentions in his discussion of the autonomous model of Literacy marginalizing others. More specifically, he brings up various ethnic and immigrant groups who are shorn of their local literacies by this process of pedagogization and too, how women have become marginalized: "The invisibility of women's literacy (along with much of their social activity) is a product not only of patriarchal society but also of dominant definitions and concepts of literacy" (p.108)).

On the other side, the more damaging aspects of this single Literacy can be seen in Taylor's (1996) work, *Toxic Literacies: Exposing the Injustice of Bureaucratic Texts*. "Through documented legal procedures Cindy has been discarded by society. Hospital rules and regulations have been used to hide the fact that Sam's life is considered expendable. Medical reports have been used to provide a rationale for the mutilation of Laurie's body and the dismemberment of Kathryn's mind. Toxic forms of literacy control their lives" (p.9).

(5) Gee talks at length about language acquisition (our primary discourse) and acquiring it surrounded by *intimates* (these he defines as "people with whom we share a great deal of knowledge because of a great deal of contact and similar experiences" {p.25}). Gee roams into Heath territory in terms of intimacy when he discusses how in gaining secondary discourses (including literacy) this is almost always done in terms of institutions beyond the family and thus amidst non-intimates. But Heath figured that if intimates acted as

models in this process that this would facilitate the accessibility of literacy to non-mainstream children. Again, Heath's proposition seems easier to accomplish by a mainstream student whose transition from home to school is so much smoother than that of the non-mainstream child. As an example, with the fruits of recent research in hand, Ogbu (1999) states that "[p]roper English is like an 'alien dialect' [to many black children] heard and used only on certain occasions and outside the home and community" (p.166). He tells too how their Black English, or slanf English, is "the dialect they learn from people with whom they are most intimate" early on in life at home and in their community (p.166). Thus the transition from home to school in terms of language and dialect is a very difficult one for many Black children/students.

Gee uses interesting examples to depict a primary discourse developed and used among intimates as opposed to to a secondary discourse developed and used among non-intimates. He says telling your mother you love her is a primary use of language, while telling your teacher you do not have your homework is an example of the secondary use of language. He ends on an interesting note: "...sometimes people must fall back on their primary uses of language in inappropriate circumstances when they fail to control the requisite secondary use" (p.25). It is easy to depict Brady or Gale in these circumstances for much of their schooling.

(6) This perspective was communicated *via* personal anonymous correspondence with teachers from the affluent school that was the target of the lawsuit and reinforced by a dissertation on the subject. These sources requested anonymity because the experience of the late seventies court battle and subsequent verdict calling for 'sensitivity' training was so painful. One teacher in particular was reluctant to talk and never did so, even when every two or three years someone like me (a graduate student doing research for a related project) made such a request. Why s/he talked with me I do not know, but the pain and humiliation of the event were manifest.

(7) The 'achievement gap' discussion and subsequently Kohl's notions regarding 'not learning' are pertinent, not only because Brady (especially) and Gale attended the Treetops schools and it shows the tremendous added cost with which they were burdened in striving for literacy, but too, it is interesting to note Kohl's ideas, for there may exist a bit of 'not learning,' if only unconsciously (which contradicts Kohl's definition of 'not learning'), in adults who have trouble accessing literacy. As an example, Brady may have 'sensed,' or intuited, that the Literacy to which he was exposed and expected to learn was not akin to his experiences and values and perhaps without expressing so consciously, 'chose' to not learn this literacy, or to intuitively resist it, though his reasons for doing so may not have been available to him consciously.

(8) I follow the lead of Behar (1993) who, in telling Esperanza's story, "tried to keep Esperanza's voice at the center of the text" by using a 'novelistic style' and a 'dialogical style' (p.13). Too, I look at a researcher's telling of an informant's story in much the same way as does Behar when she alludes to

Cervantes' example: "An historia thrice born in translation--what an apposite metaphor Cervantes bequeathed to us for thinking about the hybrid stories that anthropologists produce in collaboration with the people who agree to let their words be borne across borders" (p.17). I explore both these points and more related to the telling of Brady's story in Appendix B.

### **Notes from Chapter 3:**

(1) I interviewed Brady several times during the Spring of 1996, leading up to his reading course at Webber Community College which began the first of May. We met as tutor to student perhaps over 20 times across seven weeks; at some sessions time was set aside for a taped interview from prepared questions. At times I did not use the tape recorder, thinking it insensitive to do so given the particular topic of discussion, but took extensive notes following these meetings. Once Brady dropped out of school, this ended our regular meetings, though we did stay in touch for almost two years by way of infrequent phone conversations. The transcript from the tape recorded sessions rendered over 30 single space pages; double spaces were used to separate the researcher's question, or comment from Brady's responses. The pages of the transcript correspond to the following interview dates: pages 1-14: 4/1/96; pp.15-19: 4/8/96; pp.20-23: 4/22/96; pp. 24-25: 5/6/96; pp.26-30: 5/17/96; pp.31-32: 5/20/96. Additionally, I took many pages of field notes regarding our meetings, their planning, and other matters related to this participant. Brady stopped attending the class shortly after our final formal interview.

(2) Anansi is sometimes referred to as 'Aunt Nancy' in African-American lore. Hyde (1998) speculates that though he has found several instances of female tricksters that perhaps a wider search might yield more. But he cautions that a true trickster has a long and elaborate career of tricks, not a few episodes, as many of the supposed female tricksters possess (p.338). Part of the reason too for the trickster as male is that they often reside in patriarchal mythologies and Hyde says that "it would seem that patriarch's prime actors, even at the margins, are male" (p.8).

(3) MacLeod claims that the Hallway Hangers are on the verge of a critical consciousness--that is a good understanding of their social position and how it impacts their aspirations and efforts. But this critical perception, he claims, withers in the glare of their racism which not only ultimately blinds them to key insights, but subjugates them as well (p.187). Brady's predicament is remarkably similar: his intelligence and critical awareness are also compromised, in his case by his strict adherence to his trickster/evasive mechanisms which work to keep him trapped in his non-reading persona.

### **Notes from Chapter 4:**

(1) I met Gale in the Fall of 1996, when she enrolled in the mid-level (4.0-7.5 reading level) course I was teaching at Webber Community College. We worked closely together during that semester; indeed I was impressed by her commitment to a course that thoroughly challenged her and took the time to ask

questions regarding herself and her life whenever the opportunity arose. The following semester I taught the next level reading course and urged Gale to take it with me. It did not require much coaxing. We had developed a fine rapport from the previous class and her fears and inhibitions concerning college courses was evident and so it made it easier for her to take this course from someone she knew well. So we worked together closely during the semester again, when I finally interviewed her formally at the close of the semester (4/27/97: pp.1-9). That was followed up with another formal interview nine months later (1/16/98; pp.10-21), though we did keep in touch infrequently via telephone in the intervening time and communicate to this day with an occasional phone call. Gale's transcripts rendered twenty-one pages of single space pages, though a double space was used to indicate the researcher's question/comment and Gale's response. Of course, these pages are supplemented with eight months of observations garnered from our class time together.

(2) In all of our meetings and interviews, our discussions before or after class, Gale never mentioned her afflicted son. It was only when I called her to arrange a second interview that Gale alluded to participating in some conference at Webber Community College that she offered any mention of her son. And then, she did not discuss the nature of the panel with which she was to participate. I figured she served as an example of a student overcoming great costs in her education as the focus of her participation. It was only several days later when I read the Wahlberg article in the *Treetops News* that I realized Cam's plight.

(3) Bork was interviewed on *The David Newman Show*, WJR-760 am Detroit, during the first segment of the 11 o'clock hour on Wednesday, October 19, 1999.

(4) Meacham and Buendia (1999) define 'totalizing narratives' as those "explanations which attempt to transcend human difference such as race, class, gender, and culture" (p.510).

(5) Soja states that "(w)ithout ever using the specific term, Lefebvre was probably the first to discover, describe, and insightfully explore Thirdspace as a radically different way of looking at, interpreting, and acting to change the embracing spatiality of human life" (p.29). And also of note regarding this exemplar: "Lefebvre was one of the first to theorize *difference* and *otherness* in explicitly spatial terms" (p.34; emphasis in original).

(6) Dressman explains that Foucault contrasts heterotopia with utopia, "highly political and primarily social spaces designed within the constraints of one or more well-meaning tyrants' imaginations" (p.281), whereas heterotopias "are textured spaces that exist in the real world" (like hospitals, gardens, zoos, museums, motel rooms and all sorts of vehicles, and of course libraries and school libraries: places that we visit as opposed to inhabit; and places that focus

not on social needs so much as accommodating individual needs and wishes) (pp.280-81).

### **Notes from Chapter 5:**

(1) In March of 1998, Cain inquired at the Department of Education at the university where I study, about gaining some tutoring in reading. The secretary with whom he talked knew that I was one of the few graduate students who was 1) interested in tutoring such students and that 2) this related to my dissertation work. I agreed to meet with Cain for an interview. I found an African-American man of average height, stocky, in his late-fifties, early-sixties. He explained his situation and though it did not appear that he would prove a resource for my dissertation as I understood it at that time, I agreed to work with him, so sincere and genial did I find him. Beginning with a meeting on 3/24/98, we have met about a dozen times, the meetings averaging about a little less than an hour and a half. At first we met in empty university classrooms, or offices, but as we became acquainted, the meetings shifted to my home, just as accessible to Cain as the university. Indeed, after a while, the tenor of the meetings changed from a strict tutoring session and discussion of literacy and literacy aspects, to more like two good acquaintances meeting to discuss their lives and the events and meanings that surrounded them. Literacy and especially reading were always beginning and ending themes, but in between we roamed many miles of experiences.

There was but one formal interview (I did not use a tape recorder at any of our tutoring sessions, but took extensive notes, which became less extensive as the nature of the meetings changed) during our time together. That took place on 8/18/98 and yielded eleven pages of mostly 'thick' conversation by Cain (I had learned by then as an interviewer to allow the participant to speak as he wished upon posing a question, or direction. Cain was very forthcoming and of course articulate. Thus the transcript, especially the first eight pages, is primarily Cain's responses to my few questions and probes).

We are still very much in touch; in fact we met 1/19/00, as much as friends as student to tutor and even more recently I called him concerning attending a Mass when he might be giving the gospel and even more recently to clarify some parts of the transcript.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **What the story might tell**

Initially I wanted to pursue this research so that it culminated in a biographical narrative. My graduate studies had aligned me with this method and I was intrigued by the idea of what this approach might afford in terms of widening the aperture into adult literacy problems, added insights into these problems, and understanding the literacy difficulties from several perspectives.

Bruner (1990;1991) insists that we make meaning out of the events in our lives, construct our realities, by way of narrative. The 'domain' of human interaction is organized by us in terms of 'stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on' (Bruner, 1991; p.4). We create these 'versions of reality' as we 'read' our world on a daily basis so that it makes sense to us, gives it the meaning we require of it. And again, the individual is not narrating his life events in isolation, but rather is one of a host of life's 'authors' who daily construe their realities.

What creates a culture must be a 'local' capacity for accruing stories of happenings of the past into some sort of diachronic structure that permits a continuity into the present--in short, to construct a history, a tradition, a legal system, instruments assuring historical continuity if not legitimacy...One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common, I would want to argue, is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual autobiographies depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities (1991; p.19-20).

This then, is an indication of what impels my choice to approach this research as if I were to construct a biographical narrative. We share a social history, cultural 'tool kits.' Just as we depend upon one another in life's mundane circumstances, so too, upon occasion, we ask others to help us construe our story. Of course, therein lies a problem--how can another, an outsider as it were, hope to with any verisimilitude derive an accurate account of another's life's journey, even one as narrow as a literacy history. But we do it all the time in our own interpretations of our own lives, in the narratives we create to explain our realities. We include others in our deliberations, make assumptions about their role in our lives, and place them in a certain category



so as to please our story. But in a research setting, the researcher, the 'other author,' hopes to 'get at' the other's story by way of the other's words, the other's interpretations. Problems abound, obviously. But so too do fascinations. This biographical narrative is in a sense an interpretation of an interpretation. But again, it is asked, what implications can this fascinating method have for the research problem?

I mentioned that I approached this research 'as if' I were to construct a biographical narrative. This is no longer necessary, that is, I am not compelled, as I might have been before, to try out this method in the write-up of the research. No, but what I have learned, what I have been engaged with in this domain of human interaction, has offered me the same material, the same data necessary to construe such a biography. Whether or not I do so depends upon what I feel and think will be the approach that yields the best and most revealing story. Biography works within certain constraints, just as other forms of writing work with different constraints. I want to use whatever form of writing, *genre* as Bruner would have it, that is best able to afford a continuity between the participant's past and his present, that affords the historical version that best relates the participant's literacy story.

A friend recently attended an International Reading Association conference where a speaker asked the researcher to 'check out' his/her findings and interpretations of these findings with the participant. At first glance, this seemed a plausible tactic. But as I review Bruner and think about this research and its story, I wonder if in fact the individual is the best person to interpret a 'thick' history of his story. Certainly, we construe the discrete events in our life as best we can to suit our realities, but is not a combination of these events, a complicated combination of these events, one that connects the past to the present, a different matter altogether? In a way, this hermeneutic exercise

moves outside ourselves and more into the domain, if you will, of literary criticism, into the dynamics of reading, social reading, of managing the author, the text, and the reader. Yes, we can legitimately use the third person it seems when considering our reading of events in the past, our reflections on these events, for we do become, it seems, the *object* of our reading, of our study. "The child is father of the man," asserted Wordsworth, giving our character of our past, ourselves to be sure, but not our selves either, an objective character outside ourselves. In a sense, as we review our past, we are another person reflecting upon events remote to our present stories, just as the researcher is such an observer.

Bruner (1990) eventually eschewed traditional psychology in favor of the dynamics he claimed resonated in 'folk psychology.' This new psychology resided in the domain of "social beliefs and procedures--what we think people are like and how they must get on with each other" (1991; pp.20-21). To deny the possible legitimacy of a researcher's story of another, even without the other's *nihil obstat*, is to deny indeed at least folk psychology, if not traditional psychology.

Fascinating too in this study of another's literacy history, this interpretation of an interpretation, is the idea that in fact the reader of this study is indulging in what amounts to an interpretation of an interpretation's interpretation! But again, to deny the legitimacy, or even the necessity of this strategy, is to deny the rationale for our very existence, for this is what we do each moment of our lives in the enactment of our lives. We become angry because we respond to, interpret, another's behavior, words, intent, often, perhaps, in a second hand way: "He said that she said..." When we blush at a novel or cry at a movie, we are indulging in the same phenomenon, giving credence to our interpretation of another's interpretation. I find the act of the

research and the analysis of its data as fascinating an endeavor as I do the human interaction. The latter is a story and the former is that story derived from the story. Psychologists, poets, researchers, readers--we all do the same thing; we are in the business of reality construal and accrual.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **The research site: The settings for data collection**

Brady, an almost 30 year old African-American male, and I met regularly over a period from April through the beginning of June, at a community college, Webber, in Southeastern Michigan. Though I was quite familiar with the college since it is in the community in which I have lived and worked for a number of years, I had little occasion to frequent it before this study. Brady had arranged to take a developmental reading course at Webber Community College (WCC) in the first of May, the beginning of their Spring semester. The director of the reading program, Jan, with whom I had made the arrangements for this research practicum, introduced Brady to me in the hopes that he might be an appropriate candidate for this study, but too, that he might gain some pre-class instruction through the tutoring which I volunteered to do as part of the program. I also met Jill, Brady's instructor for the class he was to begin in May, and other members of the reading department of this college.

Initially, I had hoped to interview several WCC students for the purpose of this study. To this end, I talked to Sylvia, an African-American woman the same age as Brady, who in fact, as it turned out, had attended the same elementary school as Brady, and in fact had been his classmate for several years! I interviewed her twice. The initial interview established that she was a long-time sufferer of epilepsy and took medication because of this. Indeed, she came across as listless and sluggish during this interview of about twenty minutes, distracted and not at all forthcoming. That is, her answers were terse and often required further inquiry to gain a small amount of information. What did strike me about the interview though, was that Sylvia seemed unconvinced of her literacy problems, even though she had been placed in the developmental program due to very low literacy test scores, had attended WCC sporadically since high school graduation (!), accumulating barely a handful of credits and these with very low grades, and had not ever worked outside her parental home

due in large part to her illness.

I wanted to discontinue pursuing Sylvia as a participant for this study, due in large part to the epilepsy and the medication which could have easily been blamed as a primary cause of the low-level literacy skills (Sylvia had never been retained in school nor been classified as a Special Education student). But the second interview gave me pause, for Sylvia was in a way transformed. No longer was she listless and unresponsive, but much more energetic, alert, and forthcoming with information and responses to my inquiries. Still, she disclaimed any awareness of a literacy problem to any great degree (but she realized she was not an expert reader or writer) and pointed at her diurnal habits of magazine and newspaper reading and letter writing as examples of her (limited) proficiency. I was curious about this stance on her literacy and other facets of her biography, but soon after this second interview, Sylvia's mother took ill and she begged out of participating in the study. I think Sylvia's reluctance to participate was the larger factor in her decision, but we did not meet after that, though Brady did allude to her during one of our interviews.

Vivian is about a mid-twenties African-American woman whom Jan and Jill thought might be an appropriate candidate for this study. Her literacy skills were a bit higher than Brady's and Sylvia's; she seemed to take a more active, energetic role in her approach to literacy development (both Sylvia and Vivian were engaged in developmental literacy classes when I began this study). That is, she did not seem to be daunted by the assignments or by the fact that she struggled with literacy. We worked together for over an hour one day, working through questions she was asked to answer from her textbook regarding a short story she had read. I believe Vivian would have been an excellent participant for this study, but our schedules were in conflict and we had to terminate our

meetings after the initial session.

But Brady turned out to be such an excellent participant that I realized an in-depth study of his literacy history would be quite sufficient for the purposes of this dissertation. By this I mean that from the first interview I had with him (Jan was in the room for the first 15 minutes too), I could tell that he was a very articulate, thoughtful person who did not shy away from the opportunity to discuss his past and present literacy circumstances. He knew I sought to use a tape recorder for the minutes when we would discuss issues I brought up after our tutoring session. He did not object to this at all, nor did it seem to inhibit him in any way. In all of our subsequent meetings, Brady has been co-operative and forthcoming, consistent (towards me) in mood and temperament. On one occasion, personal problems caused his mood to be one that I can best describe as 'riled.' He did not want to meet, which I assured him was all right, but we did end up talking for quarter of an hour anyway. Many interesting ideas came out of that very honest conversation, but I did not tape that particular interview, since I felt it would have shown insensitivity on my part to turn on the tape recorder in light of his troubled condition. I did make extensive field notes once we had separated (though I did this at all of our meetings to capture not only my thoughts regarding the session, but too, our work together before the tape recorder went on for the actual interview minutes).

All of the interviews took place at WCC in empty classrooms, or at a desk at the end of a deserted hallway near the developmental reading library (which has since been relocated, as well as has the department's offices been relocated), a small room with a couple shelves of reading materials for students to use. But to say that WCC was the *site* of the data collection is misleading, for more appropriately, the true site of this study was indeed Brady's cognition and memory, his apprehension of current events in his life and his recollection of

things past. Whenever we met, Brady and I were continually working on several levels. We were concerned about the present, but the present was always arbitrated by the past. The past was always a factor and at times seemed to displace present circumstances.

One time, Brady talked about an experience he had at his son's school (Brady has been married for almost ten years and has four children with his wife, who is white and literate, having graduated high school and taken several community college credits. She operates a day care out of their apartment.). In discussing his imaginative involvement with this particular student who was struggling with literacy, Brady, as did I, hearkened back to his past events that not only informed his perception of this child, but I am certain, made him rue again his own lack of literacy development. Of course, I probed his past with him in terms of this recent experience, hoping to unlock some of the doors to his past that for some reason (repression?) remained inaccessible. But though we used this incident at the school as an entree to other rich ideas, the past yielded treasures stingily, hoarding its secrets with tight fingers. This episode does show however, the relentless entwining of the past with the present in our on-going dialogue.

Also, though we were talking at a particular site (WCC) that took on added importance the closer we drew to the start of the new semester, we were always transported to other levels, other sites, classrooms and neighborhoods outside WCC, in the near and distant past. Brady's recent history proved quite pertinent of course to his literacy aspirations and these goals too were imbued by past events. Through conversation, we imaginatively entered classrooms, observed teachers, analyzed events, focused in on feelings. We were continually transported!

The WCC research site took on added meaning for me as the study



progressed. I became more comfortable in its buildings and rooms, got to know the few people I had worked with a little bit more. Jill called me at home once the semester started to go over some relevant observations regarding Brady and to ask my opinion regarding some of these. On one occasion, Jan and I talked at length in her office about Brady, the dynamics of his literacy history, and literacy and developmental reading in general. Indeed, it was during this conversation that Jan, who has obviously been in the community involved with education for a number of years, redefined for me my notion of Nathan elementary, the school Brady and Susan attended as youngsters. I had substitute taught in the school in the late eighties, early nineties, and remembered it as a multi-cultural institution with devoted teachers and a concerned administration. As I recall, whites definitely outnumbered Blacks and other minority populations. But Jan alluded to a school that was a majority of African-American, and I realized I should investigate the demographics of the school during the early and mid-seventies when Brady was beginning his education at Nathan, since this might be a factor in reconstructing the circumstances of his failed literacy education.

As a result of Jan's inadvertent 'lead,' I contacted Ruth Zweifler, the director of the city's Student Advocacy Center since its inception in the late-'70s. Ruth impelled the notorious court action of the late 1970s against the city schools' administration, claiming that Blacks were underserved educationally in the school system. The suit focused on one school, one with a largely white population with about a dozen African-American students, and eventually broke down to a Black English debate due to legal maneuverings. I had interviewed Ruth about this case several years ago for a graduate project and did not hesitate to call upon her again, feeling she had more intimate knowledge of marginalized students in this city's schools over the last quarter century than

most people affiliated with the schools.

But unfortunately, though she tried mightily to recall specific concerns with Nathan during the seventies, she could come up only with general recollections of the school being 'heavily impacted' with Black students. Nathan was indeed one of the schools that fed her original concern with the education of Black students that led to her seeking legal action. She expressed regrets that even though her actions and the suit had brought about certain physical changes, i.e. racial redistribution in the city's schools, instruction was never properly addressed by the district so that the concerns Delpit expresses above continued to prevail in Nathan and in the city's other schools.

At her prompting, I went to the district's administration building and secured copies of the *Racial and ethnic tabulations by school* for the period of the early seventies to the early eighties. During this time when Brady attended Nathan elementary, indeed African-Americans outnumbered the white students, which was the case in a few other schools in the district too. What this implies in terms of Brady's education is equivocal, but it certainly does provide a different picture of Nathan than the one I entertained from the beginning of the study. A recently-built low-income housing project, inhabited by a great number of African-Americans, fed the students into Nathan elementary during the early 1970s. Brady's family was one of these apartment dwellers. His views on his neighborhood and early schooling are interesting and revealing.

Once my work with Brady was completed (or came to an end due to his abdication from the classroom), my affiliation with WCC did not end. Indeed, it was enhanced. I started teaching classes part time there in the Fall of that year. That is when I met Gale, whose reading pre-test indicated her a viable candidate for the middle level course I taught that semester. But I did not consider Gale as a candidate for this study until later, when I realized that she

was an excellent student who tried mightily to succeed in spite of numerous obstacles. As it turned out, she took the next level course, taught during the Winter semester at WCC with me also.

Over the length of these two courses I came to know Gale quite well as an exemplary, if struggling student determined to allow school to make a difference in her life. In time, we talked about more personal matters, especially as they impacted her coursework, and in the next several months I interviewed her twice at great length in an empty WCC classroom. Like Brady, I found Gale a very bright and articulate person, whose misfortune it was to have had her early education compromised to such an extent that it had deleterious repercussions for much of her life. She was always very honest and forthcoming in her interactions with me and proved to be a most fascinating individual and student.

For a time after my interviews with Gale, I continued to teach part time at WCC, or if I did not teach during a given semester, I tutored on a regular basis students from Jan's classes. I was looking for a third candidate for this study, though I was not convinced a third person was necessary, given the rich transcripts derived from my work with Brady and Gale. But I did work with a student named Lacey on a regular basis for much of one semester. I had met her before and seen her in the various developmental reading classes. Though I did not interview her formally, I took very extensive notes on our work together. Her literacy levels were much higher than Brady's and on par with Gale at her best. She was a confident young white woman, a few years out of high school, who was taking 'regular' coursework even as she completed the non-credit developmental coursework. Though I did not use Lacey for this study, it was encouraging to realize that working with students on a personal and individual basis yields results with strong academic ties. That is, Jan had confided to me

once I had started working with Lacey, that she thought her perhaps Learning Disabled in some way. After a while, once we became comfortable with each other, I subtly and discreetly probed this possibility with Lacey. She was taken aback. Like Sylvia, she considered herself a competent student with literacy difficulties. She explained her version of these difficulties to me that morning.

Her parents has immigrated to the United States from Romania just a year or so before her birth. At her birth and during her first years, their English was poor at best, however improving. Even a few years later, during the time of Lacey's more prominent emergent literacy, their English was still 'broken.' Lacey figures that she was given a setback with this modeling of English with intimates with limited English proficiencies and that the public schools did little to help her overcome this deficit.

Not long after working with Lacey, I was approached by a staff member in the education department at the university where I was involved with my graduate work, about tutoring a man who had come to her seeking assistance in reading. I agreed to interview him to see if he fit my few qualifications for this study. When I met him for the first time over a year and a half ago, Cain was an almost sixty year old Black man, married with two grown sons, retired, who was taking courses at a nearby college to help him with his post-retirement career as a deacon in a local Catholic church. At the time I did not foresee him as a viable candidate for this study, but agreed to work with him anyway, so personable and interesting was he. We met several times at the university and then several times sporadically at my home (he lived in a city equidistant from my residence and the university town, where the Catholic church also was located). Finally, I did interview Cain formally for the purposes of this study a couple of times and think he will be a pertinent addition to this work, though Brady and Gale carry the brunt of the load.

Let me make a note pertinent to this point regarding the participants. I have always considered this study largely an interview one, with a smattering of relevant historical data included. But my committee members were quick to adjust this perspective, pointing out correctly my invaluable experiences, observations, and field notes with not only the primary participants, but numerous other developmental reading students. This informed my perception and perspective tremendously, allowed me a much wider aperture to the problems discussed than would otherwise be available, and added tremendous depth to my understanding of the transcripts and field notes involving Brady, Gale, and Cain.

And this final note: too often in the academic world of teaching and research we work with theories and ideas. Slowly the human aspect of education and educational reform recede as we try to work with paper and pages of data and research and publications. Working with Brady and Gale and Cain and the others has re-humanized this activity for me and at the same time helped me realize the goals of this research--that indeed the causes of and reasons for adult literacy in the United States are a complex and involved set of dynamics, often arbitrary, often involving issues that have plagued our democracy and our democratic education since its inception.

## REFERENCES

## REFERENCES

- Academic Skills Advisory Committee: Presentation to the WCC Board of Trustees.* (1997, April 22). Academic Skills Department.
- Aisenberg, N. (1994). *Ordinary heroines*. New York: Continuum Publishing.
- Anyon, J. (1981). "Social class and school knowledge." *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11, 3-42.
- Anzaldua, G. (1990). *Making face, making soul*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Bakhtin, M. (1993). *Towards a philosophy of the act* (Vadim Liapunov, ed., Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist, trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barton, David. (1994). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bay, Libby. (1999). "Twists, turns, and returns: Returning adult students." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*: 26, 3, 305-312.
- Behar, Ruth. (1993). *Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza's story*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Belloc, H. (1951). *Selected Cautionary Verses*. Harmondsworth-Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Bennett, Martin. (1994). *West African trickster tales* (Retold). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blotner, Joseph. (1984). *Faulkner: A biography*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club.
- Booth, Wayne C., Colomb, Gregory C., & Williams, Joseph M. (1995). *The craft of research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). "Cultural reproduction and social reproduction." In Jerome Karabel & A.H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp.487-511). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1986). "The forms of capital." In John G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp.241-258). New York: Greenwood.

- Bourdieu, Pierre & Passeron, Jean-Claude. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Translated by Richard Nice. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Brodkey, Linda. (1991). "Tropics of Literacy." In Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (eds.), *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (pp.161-168). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Brown, Rita Mae. (1988). *Rubyfruit Jungle*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Bruner, Jerome. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, Jerome. (1991). "The narrative construction of reality." *Critical Inquiry*, 18, Autumn, 1-21.
- Brunner, Diane DuBose. (1997). "Between the masques." In William S. Penn (ed.), *As we are now: Mixblood essays on race and identity*. (pp.168-180). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brunner, Diane Dubose. (1998). *Between the masks: Resisting the politics of Essentialism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Brylowski, Walter. (1968). *Faulkner's Olympian laugh: Myth in the novels*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Burdell, Patricia and Swadener, Beth Blue. (1999). "Critical personal narrative and autoethnography in education: Reflections on a genre." *Educational Researcher*: 28; 6, 21-26.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex.'* New York: Routledge.
- Cage, John. (1961). *Silence*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.
- Caulfield, Peter J. (1991). "From Brazil to Buncombe County: Freire and posing problems." *The Educational Forum*, 55(4), 1-12.
- Cazden, Courtney B. (1988). *Classroom Discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Connell, R.W., Ashenden, D.J., Kessler, S. & Dowsett, G.W. (1982). *Making the difference: Schools, families, and social division*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.
- Cowley, Malcolm. (1966). "Introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*." in Robert Penn Warren (ed.), *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays* (pp. 34-45). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.



- Crawford, Mary & Chaffin, Roger. (1986). "The reader's construction of meaning: Cognitive research on gender and comprehension." In E.A. Flynn & P.P. Schweickart (Eds.), *Gender and reading: Essays on readers, texts, and contexts* (pp.3-30). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (Steven Rendall, trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Delpit, L.D. (1988). "The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children." *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 280-298.
- Doherty, Frank. (1984). "The developmental reading and writing student: A snapshot." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. (ED269045)
- Donald, J. (1991). "How illiteracy became a problem (and literacy stopped being one)." In Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (eds), *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (pp.211-27). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Donald, J. (1982). *Language, literacy and schooling*. London: Open University Press.
- Dougherty, Kevin J. (1994). *The contradictory college: The conflicting origins, impacts, and futures of the community college*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dressman, Mark. (1998). "Literacy in other spaces." *Language Arts*: 75, 4, 277-86.
- Dressman, Mark. (1999). "Mrs. Wilson's university: A case study in the ironies of good practice." *Language Arts*: 76, 6, 500-09.
- Egan, K. (1987). "Literacy and the oral foundations of education." *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 445-472.
- Elias, Marilyn. (2000, May 16). "Positive thoughts, positive results: Prizes reward psychologists for challneging negative myths." *USA Today*, p.6D.
- Erickson, F. (1984). "School literacy, reasoning, and civility: An anthropologist's perspective." *Review of Educational Research*, 54, 4, 525-546.
- Fitzgerald, F.Scott. (1927). *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Foucault, Michel. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. ( A.M.Sheridan Smith: Trans.). New York: Harper.

- Friedrich, Paul. (1986). *The language parallax: Linguistic relativism and poetic indeterminacy*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Freire, Paulo. (1991). "The importance of the act of reading." In Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (Eds.). *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (139-145). New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Gaines, Ernest J. (1993). *A lesson before dying*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gee, James Paul. (1992). "What is literacy?" In Patrick Shannon (ed.), *Becoming political: Readings and writings in the politics of literacy education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gilbert, Lewis. (1995). *Educating Rita*. Culver City, CA.: Columbia Pictures.
- Goffman, Erving. (1971). *Relations in public*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goodman, Kenneth. (1996). *On reading*. New York: Heineman.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the Arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Graff, H. (1979). *The Literacy myth: Literacy and social structures in the 19th Century City*. London: Academic Press.
- Hamilton, Edith. (1969). *Mythology: Timelesstaes of gods and heroes*. :New York: A Mentor Book--New American Library.
- Hamilton, Jane. (1988). *The book of Ruth*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hardwick, Elizabeth. (1966). "Faulkner and the South Today" in Robert Penn Warren (ed.), *Faulkner: A collection of critical essays* (pp.226-230). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Hauben, Lawrence & Goldman, B. (1975). *One flew over the cuckoo's nest*. New York: HBO/Cannon Video.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. (1985). "Being literate in America: A sociohistoric perspective. *Issues in Literacy: A Research perspective. Thirty-Fourth Yearbook of the National reading Conference*, ed. by J.A. Niles and R.V. Lalik, 1-18. Rochester, NY: The National reading Conference, Inc.
- Heath, S.B. (1991). "The sense of being literate: Historical and cross-cultural features." In R. Barr, M.L.Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*, Vol.II, New York: Longman.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. :Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

- hooks, bell. (1990). *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics..* Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, bell. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center.* Boston: South End Press.
- Hyde, Lewis. (1998). *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, myth, and art.* New York: North Point Press.
- Johnson, Peter H. (1985). "Understanding reading disability: A case study approach. " *Harvard Educational Review: 55, 2, 153-176.*
- Johnson, Thomas, H. (ed.). (1960). *The complete poems of Emily Dickinson.* Toronto: Little, Brown & Co.
- Kintgen, Eugene R., Kroll Barry M., & Rose, Mike (eds.). (1988). *Perspectives on literacy.* Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Kohl, Herbert. (1991). *The role of assent in learning.* Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions--Thistle Series.
- Kotlowitz, Alex. (1991) *There are no children here: The story of two boys growing up in the other America.* New York: Doubleday.
- Kristeva, J. (1992). *The Samurai.* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1986). *The Kristeva reader.* (Toril Moi, ed., Leon S. Roudiez, trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Labaree, David. (1990). "From comprehensive high school to community college: Politics, markets, and the evolution of educational opportunity." *Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization, 9, 203-240.*
- Labaree, David. (1989). "The American High School has failed its missions." *MSU Alumni Magazine, 7, 1, 14-17.*
- Lareau, Annette. (1987). "Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital." *Sociology of Education, 60, 73-85.*
- Lefebvre, Henri. (1991). *The practice of space.* Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Lorde, Audre. (1982). *Zami: A new spelling of my name (A Biomythography).* Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.
- "Louisiana children remain most at risk in U.S." (2000; June 20). *The Ann Arbor News, p.A6.*

- Macedo, Donaldo. (1991). "The politics of an emancipatory literacy in Cape Verde." In Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (eds). *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (pp.147-59). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- MacLeod, Jay. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations & attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview.
- McCormick, Kathleen. (1994). *The Culture of Reading & the Teaching of English*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- McDermott, Gerald. (1972). *Anansi the spider: A tale from the Ashanti*. New York: Henry Holt and Co..
- Meacham, Shuaib J. & Buendia, Edward. (1999). "Focus on research: Modernism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism and their Impact on literacy." *Language Arts*: 76, 6, 510-516.
- Meyer, Pamela. (1997). *Quantum creativity: Nine principles for a life of possibility*. Chicago: Yezand Press.
- Morrison, Toni. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Nespor, Jan. (1991). "The construction of school knowledge: A case study." In Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (eds). *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (pp.169-188). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Neuman, Susan B., Caperelli, Billie Jean & Kee, Cara. (1998). "Literacy learning, a family matter." *The Reading Teacher*: 52, 3, 244-252.
- Ogbu, John U. (1999). "Beyond language: Ebonics, proper English, and identity in a Black-American speech community." *American Educational Research Journal*: 36, 2, 147-84.
- Ogbu, John U. (1988). "Literacy and schooling in subordinate cultures: The case of Black Americans." In Kintgen, Eugene R., Kroll, Barry M., & Rose, Mike (eds.). *Perspectives on literacy* (pp.227-242). Carbondale and Edwardsville Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ondaatje, Michael. (1993). *The English patient*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pilkington, John. (1981). *The heart of Yoknapatawpha*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Pratt, Geraldine. (1998). Review of *Thirdspace*. *Economic Geography*, 74, 192-94.

- Purcell-Gates, Victoria. (1995). *Other people's words: The Cycle of low literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Randall, Kenan. (1999). *Walking on water: Black American lives at the turn of the twenty-first century*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Rees, Ennis. (1967). *Brer Rabbit and his Tricks*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks for Children.
- Rist, Ray C. (1970). "Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education." *Harvard Educational Review*, 40, 411-451.
- Rose, Mike. (1989). *Lives on the boundary*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Rosenblatt, Louise. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem*. Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rioux, Paul. (1997; December 20). "Special education trends disturb officials." *Ann Arbor News*, pp.A1, Back Page.
- Scribner, Sylvia. (1984). "Literacy in three metaphors." *American Journal of Education*, 93, 1, 7-22.
- Scribner, Sylvia & Cole, Michael. (1988). "Unpackaging Literacy." In Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose (eds.). *Perspectives on literacy* (pp.57-70). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Schwartz, Lynne Sharon. (1996). *Ruined by reading: A life in books*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sendak, Maurice. (1981). *Outside over there*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Shannon, Patrick. (1993). "Developing democratic voices." *The Reading Teacher*, 47, 15-23.
- Shaw, Kathleen M. (1997). "Remedial education as ideological battleground: Emerging remedial education policies in the community college." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*: 19,3, 284-96.
- Smith, Frank. (1988). *Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read*, 4th edn., Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Soja, Edward W. (1997). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Street, Brian. V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. New York: Longman Publishing.

- Tannen, Deborah. (1989). *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Denny. (1996). *Toxic literacies: Exposing the injustice of bureaucratic texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Todhunter, Jean Mizer. (1975). "The Cypher." *Today's Education*, March/April.
- Tilove, Jonathan. (1999, July 11). "Closing the gap." *The Ann Arbor News*, pp.B1, B2.
- Wahlberg, David. (1997, October 26). "Living with the consequences: Mom sees how drinking while pregnant hurt son." *The Ann Arbor News*, pp.C1, C2.
- Warren, Robert Penn, (ed.). (1966). *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Warren, Robert Penn. (1966). "Faulkner: The South, the Negro, and Time." in Robert Penn Warren (ed.), *Faulkner: A collection of critical essays* (pp.251-271). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Wiggins, Grant P. (1999). *Assessing student performance: Exploring the purpose and limits of testing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARIES



31293020488411