

UPON BECOMING A READER -- A HIGHWAY TO TRAVEL:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE AND LIFE
EXPERIENCE OF A READER

by

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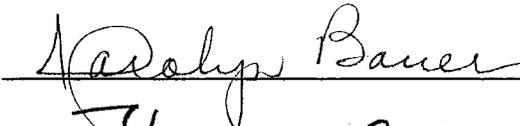
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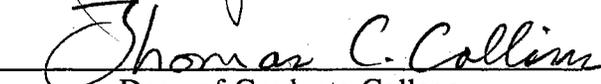


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This study is dedicated to my parents, Homer and LaVerna Johnson, who lovingly set my course on the reading highway--so many years ago. It is dedicated, also, to my husband Robert and to my children whose love, faith, and patience have enabled me to follow the road to this ultimate destination.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

Reading is a highway to travel that you'll never regret taking.

--Hal, age 74
Study Participant

Call me a reader. Many of my earliest memories are associated with words dancing darkly across crisp, white sheets of paper. Fairy tales, romances, biographies, and best sellers competed with headlines, comic books, features, and advice columns for my reading attention. A steady progression of print marched and meandered through the labyrinth of my mind.

Someone once said that the difference between us now and five years from now is the people we meet and the books we read. So I was formed, perhaps, as much from characters in chapters as from living human beings, as much from fiction as from fact.

That I could read became an accepted reality for me. Like breathing, reading was a natural, almost unconscious act most of the time. I am...therefore, I read. Even after I entered the field of education and became a secondary language arts teacher, the obvious truth that some students engaged actively in reading and others did not was less a problem to be explored than a challenge to be met.

Decisions regarding materials I requested students to read and skills I demanded them to practice dictated each day's agenda. Dozens of routine teaching tasks preempted any systematic pondering of questions concerning what kind of literacy experiences were

shaping and influencing the reading habits--or lack of them--in my students. And yet, when there were moments free from the madness of teaching, I wondered....

Purpose of Study

“To do research is always to question the way we experience the world...We want to know that which is essential to being” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5). These words provided the bridge from thoughts about my own reading experiences to questions about the reading experiences of others. I knew I wanted this to be my area of inquiry. The purpose of my study became, then, to investigate the nature and life experience of a reader, as perceived by individuals who read frequently and enthusiastically by personal choice. The study was designed to portray and interpret the lives of individuals as they became readers, as they developed their reading practices, and as they drew the parameters of their lives.

The study proposed that description of the reader’s nature and life experience would contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of literacy and reading, and that this increased understanding could have implications for educational design, practice, and research.

Research Questions

David Bloom (1994) suggested that researchers must begin by asking what it is that students learn when they are reading. This study believed that we must also ask what it is that happens because individuals are reading. The study sought, specifically, to

investigate the nature and life experience of a reader. In that effort, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) What activates the decision to read? Is it personal desire and decision? Is it natural phenomena? Is it imposed construction?
- (2) What makes up the world of a reader? What experiences and influences, if any, are essential to creating that world?
- (3) What does it mean to be a reader when making choices and decisions, not only about reading, but about other life experiences, as well?
- (4) Are there shared characteristics and other commonalities found among those identified as readers?
- (5) Can understanding of any existing shared characteristics and commonalities offer insight and direction for research?

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter One includes an introduction, a purpose of study, the research questions, a plan of organization, definitions of significant terms, and background of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of relevant literature. The review focuses on books and materials related to the field of literacy, the value of reading, reading pedagogy, and reader characteristics.

Chapter Three describes the chosen methodology of the study, including rationale for qualitative research and the long interview method of inquiry. A detailed explanation

of data analysis procedures is presented, also.

Chapter Four introduces and describes the individuals participating in the study. Data are presented through description and exploration of essential themes that emerged from the life story texts produced from conversations with the study participants.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions and significant findings derived from the analysis process. Implications for curriculum study, classroom pedagogy, and further research are offered.

Definition of Significant Terms

This study deemed it important to define the significant terms “literacy,” “reading,” and “reader” for purposes of consistency and replication. The process followed in attaining these definitions and the definitions themselves were explained in this section.

Literacy

What constitutes a state of literacy has changed with historical times and social conditions. In early day America, the ability to read and write one’s own name was all that was necessary to have achieved the requirement for literacy. Socially, literacy was equated, oftentimes, with years of formal education and scholastic achievement. The currently favored term, “functional literacy,” coupled literacy with economics. To “earn” this label, one must have had acquired workplace reading and writing proficiency.

In recent times, however, some researchers have speculated that there was more to

literacy than the mastering of isolated communications skills (Sensenbaugh, 1990). Rexford Brown (1993) called for a “new literacy of thoughtfulness,” moving beyond mere reading and writing ability into critical and creative thinking and lifetime skill-building and learning. With an even broader lens, Frank Smith (1988) viewed literacy as “not a set of skills or a finished state, but an attitude toward the world” (p. 355).

This study considered all these descriptions of literacy and, then, created a working definition based upon the ideas of these cited researchers. The following was this study’s definition of literacy:

Definition: “Literacy--a thoughtful seeking of meaning from the written word and an attitude toward the world, thus created.” The study, then, sought to determine if this definition was exemplified in the words and the life actions of the study participants.

Reading

To define the term “reading,” words of educational researchers were again consulted. A study of Steltenkamp (1993) stressed the importance of examining a broader context of reading. R. C. Anderson urged educators to be concerned with increasing the proportion of children who engaged in reading with satisfaction as well as with competency (in Cramer and Castle, 1994). In a similar vein, Miller (1987) identified two things that distinguished what he termed “genuine acts of reading.” These were pleasure and satisfaction. This study considered it appropriate to accompany its “broadened” definition of literacy with a more specific explanation of reading. The following was the study’s definition of reading:

Definition: “Reading--pleasurable and satisfactory interaction with the printed word, as perceived by the reader.” The study, then, used this definition to examine the study participants’ reading activities, motivations, emotions, and attitudes.

Reader

For purposes of this study, the term “reader” was defined according to advice taken from Max Van Manen’s study on researching through the lived experience. “Don’t take for granted a meaning. Search in the ‘lifeworld’ for lived-experience material that might yield something of its fundamental nature” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 53).

Accordingly, this study drew its definition from the “life-experience material” of two of the study participants. The following was the study’s definition of reader:

Definition: “Reader--someone who reads regularly, not simply out of necessity, but out of desire and for enjoyment. A reader takes time out of life to read.” The study used this definition as a “measuring stick” by which to determine if the study participants were, indeed, such readers.

Background of the Study

Several months before I formally began this study, I was contacted by a mother of a fifth-grade student who attended a school at which I had presented several seminars on the subject of newspaper use in the classroom. She was concerned because her son’s teacher was not using newspapers in any of the class learning activities. The young man missed the interaction with print materials that extended beyond the subject matter of his

traditional textbooks. “He reads the newspaper every day, from cover to cover,” she said.

Was this young man exemplifying the study’s definition of reading? Wouldn’t it be insightful to understand what caused him to seek out these printed messages that went beyond the confines of the classroom and the dictates of an assignment? Would his motivation be traced to influential figures at home? At school? Were there pivotal events in his life that created the personal drive to read materials that were not part of his regular school requirements? Anderson and Stokes, in Awakening to Literacy (1984) cited other researchers when they found that book reading, story time, and other book-related activities were not the only source of literate experiences for children. Goelman, Oberg, and Smith (1984), on the other hand, stated that children come to perceive reading in terms of the materials and tasks they encounter in school. Later, however, Smith (1986) stated that, most often, literacy is accomplished, not as a result of instruction programs, at all, but simply through association with literate people.

In an investigation of why writers engage in the act of writing, Smith (1986) asked professional writers what made them first write. “They all mentioned a person; they mentioned a teacher who believed that writing was worthwhile and shared that belief with others” (p. 170). A question similar to the one posed by Smith to writers was asked of readers by Jim Trelease (1989). After visiting with students in numerous classrooms, Trelease always finished his visit with a question about what students were currently reading “outside of class.” Often the answer he received was simply the silence of stares or puzzled demeanors. But he noted that in, perhaps, one out of ten classrooms the response was different. Students in these classroom responded with enthusiastic

shoutings of titles. Trelease discovered that the common denominator among the reading classrooms was a teacher who modeled enthusiasm for reading and who shared that enthusiasm by reading aloud to the students. Charlotte Huck (1993) supported Trelease when she said that the enthusiasm of the teacher was vital for student learning.

I, too, wondered about differences. Was there anything different about the lives of enthusiastic readers? From where or from what had the young newspaper reader and others like him found their motivation? Was it the print materials they encountered outside of the classroom? Was it classroom activities and teacher behaviors? Was it a reading role model, whether at home or school or elsewhere? Questions like these began to give shape to my previous vague wonderings about why readers read and what readers were like. These questions began to point out the direction for my own research study.

Sometime after this particular experience, I had a conversation with a very philosophical young man in his mid-twenties. I was intrigued by the way he analyzed his own reading activities. "Reading is an investment of time and energy," he said. "We have to make decisions about when and where to read. It takes time to choose the materials for reading. And then you have to stay with the reading long enough to create your interest or to begin to make some sense."

What motivated and influenced this reader to make such an investment of time and energy into reading? Why were some individuals more willing to make that investment than others? I began to wonder about readers as decision-makers.

Writer and artist-in-residence Sandra Soli believed the decision-making process

was a conscious one begun early in life. “Children have to decide very young whether or not they are going to be communicators, whether they are going to participate in life or just let it happen to them” (in McShane, 1994, p. 34).

Soli’s comment and the additional questions I had been asking myself brought focus to my plan for study. At least one phase of the investigation would seek to understand the decision-making processes of readers and the choices they made for how, when, and what to read.

A third significant conversation provided the final impetus for organizing my proposal and formulating my questions for research. This time, a teacher and I were chatting. She began speaking with great enthusiasm about a particular class of high school students she was instructing. “They’re all such readers!” she exclaimed. “And it makes such a difference in the discussions we have. They’re broad-minded. They have an awareness of people and of the world.”

The teacher echoed words of author Walter Anderson (1990) that I had recently read. “The ability to read...can affect how we perceive the world, giving us genuine personal power”(p. 3). Her words reinforced the previously cited Frank Smith explanation of literacy as an attitude toward the world. This was beginning to be exciting! What did we really know about readers like the ones in the teacher’s class? What were their lives like? How much were their actions and their attitudes affected by their encounters with text? I believed that these were questions worthy of investigation.

That was how it began. Added to my own years of classroom experiences and hundreds of meaningful encounters with students of my own were these provocative

conversations with a parent, a young adult, and a teacher. The direction of my study was clear. So, it was time to begin a new phase of my own reader journey. I was going to walk the path of teacher-researcher, seeking out those who could help me toward my destination of understanding.

I knew that the life of a reader was not the number of books checked off a school reading list. I knew that it was not the height of the stack of best sellers resting by a bedstead. And I knew that it was not the number of minutes spent staring at pages of print. But what did constitute the life of a reader? That was the question for study.

My proposed investigation of enthusiastic readers offered what I believed was a logical and consistent framework for arriving at greater understanding of the nature of a reader and of the reader life experience. It was with great anticipation--and some trepidation--that I sought entrance into the lives and minds of eight, very diverse, individuals who held in common the fact that they were readers.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

I can almost chronologize my adult life by the books I've read. They certainly aren't the sum total, but they've had a very large effect on the way I think and the way I act....

--Filippe, Age 27
Study Participant

Following the introduction, this chapter of significant literature review was divided into five sections. These sections were (1) literacy, (2) the value of reading, (3) the pedagogy of reading, (4) the reader, and (5) the conclusion.

To initiate an investigation within the vast body of knowledge known as literacy was to risk drowning in a sea of rhetoric, debate, opinion, and conversation concerning what was right or wrong, necessary or unnecessary, valued or worthless in literacy research, practice, and pedagogy of times past, times current, and times yet to come. And there was still more to be said. "Despite several decades and many millions of dollars expended in concentrated worldwide research, the teaching of literacy continues to be of widespread concern. There is still a good deal about literacy that remains to be understood" (Smith, 1984, p. v).

My own reading in the field of literacy and reading research had covered a professional lifetime. Leisure reading, pursued from personal interest, was interspersed with occasional bouts of intense reading, fueled by a particular instructional need or student problem. During one such bout, I encountered what to me were very worrisome

words by Phillip Jackson (1992):

A review of curriculum research in writing and reading indicates that, although there have been important developments in theory and pedagogy, through the 1980's there was little change in the received curriculum--in the curriculum the students experience on a day-to-day basis in their classrooms (p. 687-688).

Why was educational practice lagging behind the findings? Were the findings written in layperson language for practitioners to read? Were the findings of the practical value needed for educators to "plug into" classroom strategies? These questions drove my survey of the literature.

Another chilling statement added impetus to my reading. "...in American schools...we don't empower kids, we don't nurture literacy" (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1993, p. 3) What about all the rhetoric on child-centered classrooms and successful reader programs? Was the central figure--the learner--being omitted from the educational formula? What did research reveal about the reader? Was anyone listening to the voice of the reader as a messenger of truth and reality? The review of literature in this chapter sought to answer these questions.

Literacy

Literacy is a political, social, economic, and cultural issue. "We cannot separate literacy from experience, culture, and tradition" (Fingernet, 1991, p. 10). "Literacy empowers!" (Anderson, 1990, p. 5). Freire recognized the power within the political aspect of literacy (in Shor, 1987). Having the ability to read has been a necessary step

toward making decisions and sharing control. Learning to read has given access to information and has led to participation as citizens in a political society. In addition to the political power of literacy, Vygotsky referred to the personal power that was established through literacy. He identified language as the means by which people systematized their own perceptions, shaping, limiting, and expanding meaning of words through their individual and collective experiences (in Shor, 1987).

The potential of literacy as presented by Freire and Vygotsky called for literacy programs in education to be designed for active, engaged learners with opportunities to understand the nature of written language.. Vygotsky (1962) emphasized socialization with opportunities to confront issues of significance as an important motivating factor for adult literacy. Frank Smith addressed the social and cultural aspects of literacy when he identified necessary attributes as “the ability to make full sense and productive use of the opportunities of written language in the particular culture in which one lives”(in Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1984, p. 142). Jackson (1992) noted the difficulty, however, of transferring such philosophy into practical application:

Recent theory and research suggest that the classroom is a social community, with its own values, behaviors, and ways of thinking , and that literacy involves learning to read, write, and think in ways that are appropriate to that community. Much research is needed before they (these notions) are incorporated into conceptualizations of curriculum (p. 716-717).

Statistics abounded from studies on literacy, or more accurately, illiteracy, as it related to economics and to the American culture. An estimated 27 million adult Americans have been labeled “functionally illiterate” (Segal, Thurston, and Haessly, 1992). This term was applied to those unable to read, write, or comprehend simple

mathematics well enough to function fully in the modern day workplace. Of all juveniles who came before the courts, 85 % were reading handicapped. Non-readers made up 60% or more of all prison inmates. Illiteracy cost American businesses and taxpayers billions of dollars each year. On average, a non-reading adult earned 42 % less than a high school graduate who read (Chazin, 1992). Of the 159 members of the United Nations, Larrick (1987) reported the United States as ranked 49th in level of literacy.

These numbers presented the negative. But there were also the “positives” that presented literacy as thriving in America. “Only two percent of 1990's seventeen year olds scored in the National Assessment of Educational Progress’s two lowest literacy levels. It is clear from these data that ‘illiteracy’ is not a major problem for this population and that the overwhelming majority of America’s young adults are able to use printed information to accomplish many tasks that are either routine or uncomplicated” (Kibby, 1995, p. 17). Depending upon what aspect a survey was investigating, results were presented that substantiated almost any claim in regard to the state of literacy in this country.

Many researchers considered it more important, however, to determine what was meant by literacy and which understanding of literacy was most worthwhile to promote. In a study based upon more than 650 hours of interviews and observations, Brown (1993) reported: “None of the school districts we studied in the United States was committed to fostering, on a wide scale, the kinds of activities known to lead to a literacy of thoughtfulness” (p. 233). A literacy of thoughtfulness for Brown included more than the ability to read and write, but also the abilities to think critically, creatively,

systematically, and evaluatively. This was the concept of literacy that he believed most valuable to promote.

An even more immediate issue for study than literacy abilities or definitions, according to some researchers, was Americans' desire for lifetime literacy. Lanham (1993) stated the question as not whether students would be reading difficult, great, or relevant books, but whether they would be reading any books at all in the future.

Major questions concerning literacy were addressed at a symposium of fourteen leading literacy researchers, who met at the University of Victoria to share papers and discuss early childhood literacy. Even from this focused body came no single definition of literacy, no description of how pre-school children acquired literacy, and no set of guidelines for how reading and writing should be taught. The general consensus was that literacy was too complex an issue for simple analysis (Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1984).

More recently, however, definitions of literacy as a complex and multi-faceted concept have been offered. "Achieving literacy in today's society is a necessary and difficult goal. It means being able to evaluate much of what is read. It needs to develop more attributes than basic reading ability" (Dagostino, 1994, p. 96). The National Center for Family Literacy (1993) expressed literacy in terms of social contacts. "For children who are exposed to the written word at an early age, literacy is a medium of shared experience where adult modeling and practicing of reading and writing infuses their lives" (p. 1).

Sensenbaugh (1990) identified a common theme in documents he surveyed as "seeing literacy as more than just being able to read and write; it is the ability to

comprehend, interpret, analyze, respond, and interact with the growing variety of complex sources of information” (p. 562). This corresponded with Brown’s literacy of thoughtfulness, already cited in the literature. According to Brown, he drew the name “literacy of thoughtfulness” from his analysis that this kind of literacy involved “both the exercise of thought and a certain amount of caring about other thinkers in past and present communities” (Brown, 1993, p. xiii). Smith (1984) indicated that this more complex attitude toward literacy could best be fostered in an “environment of inquiry and opportunity for teachers and students alike” (in Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, p. 359).

This survey of literature on literacy found that literacy has been a subject of vigorous investigation in the past, and it continues as an issue of current concern. Also obvious was that literacy research of the future promised the pursuit for increased understanding of what was meant by literacy and how a more complex understanding of literacy could be promoted in educational practice.

The Value of Reading

A fundamental question to explore, at this point in the literature survey, was whether or not it was important that humans become literate beings--whether or not it mattered in any significant way that people read. “Improving literacy habits and love of literacy is clearly an integral part of the solution and central to the world most of us want to inhabit” (Cramer and Castle, p. 254.) “A goal of developing a love of reading should be a priority in curriculum” (Cramer and Castle, 1994,p. v).

Preceding these more current statements were the eloquent words of James

Russell Lowell:

Have you ever rightly considered what the mere ability to read means? That it is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought and fancy and imagination? To the company of saint and sage, of the wisest and the wittiest at their wisest and wittiest moments? That it enables us to see with the keenest eyes, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voice of all time?" (In Bohle, 1986, p. 337).

Juliet Schor (1994), speaking on the use of leisure time in America, found that at the top of American's list of activities producing a feeling of worth and pleasure were spending time with family and reading. Miller (1987), previously cited in this study, also found pleasure a significant quality of reading. Secretary of Education Richard Riley (1994) stated that children who grew up reading for fun were on the road to success when it came to learning. "Love of literacy makes life richer....(It) helps ensure that our educational efforts are not lost....One-sided education that ignores the fostering of positive reading habits and attitudes is a potential danger to us all (Cramer and Castle, 1994, p. 253).

Bissex (1994) implied that the value of reading was found, not in the ability to know words or even, necessarily, to comprehend meaning, but in "making reading an instrument for entering possible worlds of human experience--drama, storytelling--in order to bring it as close as possible to forms in which children already know spoken language best" (in Cramer and Castle, p. 200).

Kline (1984) spoke to this importance of relevance in reading:

With very few exceptions, there is nothing inherently good about reading. Neither is there anything inherently bad about reading. What, why, and how somebody

reads is a whole lot more important than whether or when...Reading is good if it puts people and their ideas and feelings together --with themselves or with others (in Cramer and Castle, p. 14-15).

The literature suggested, strongly, that reading was a worthwhile, valued endeavor and that it had the potential for creating pleasure and satisfaction and even wisdom, especially when it was relevant to the reader's own creative and constructive needs. How, then, was the valued goal of promoting literacy and fostering love of reading enacted philosophically and practically in school curriculum?

The Pedagogy of Reading

Assuming, then, that schools considered it exemplary and important to develop individuals who found reading worthwhile and who engaged in it frequently, the next area of literature to research was studies on how this was being accomplished. Questions of what the literature revealed as standard philosophy and practice and what the literature revealed as most important to educators of reading needed to be asked.

Historically, and into present time, the development of readers has been a core curriculum goal of American education. "Reading invariably comes first on everyone's list of basic academic skills" (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1993, p. 24). These researchers recommended that any credible model for the "genuine refreshment of American schools had better start with a solid plan for teaching reading" (p. 2).

In 1992, The United States National Reading Research Center conducted a poll of International Reading Association (IRA) members in the United States to determine research areas that teachers considered most important. Four of the top ten areas were

related to reading motivation. The number one priority was creating interest in reading, followed by increasing the amount and breadth of children's reading, developing an intrinsic desire for reading, and exploring the roles of teachers, peers, and parents in reading motivation (in Cramer and Castle, 1994).

If a number one priority of curriculum in schools was found to be reading education and if teachers themselves called for research in areas of reading motivation and reading promotion, why, then, were there so many negative reports in the media and in educational studies about the readers emerging from the nation's schools? Were the areas of study in research and were the practices most commonly used in the name of literacy in the classrooms the ones that were needed to promote a literacy of thoughtfulness and an appreciation of reading? And were the philosophies being espoused and the practices being conducted congruent?

Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) believed that there had been too much research emphasis placed upon the logistics of schooling rather than upon the content and processes. Reasoner, as long ago as 1976, said that the statement "We want children who not only know how to read, but who do read!" was not consistent with practices in the teaching of reading. More recently this belief was echoed by Cramer and Castle (1994): "For many years, the idea of helping young readers to develop positive attitudes about the pleasure and value of reading has been an often-stated, but all too frequently neglected goal of reading instruction" (p. 4). Dewey (1938) believed that it was not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience. Everything depended upon the quality of that experience. The question was, what was the quality of the reading experience for

students?

Smith (1986) believed that the “realities of the educational system and the human brain are in conflict” (p. ix). Larrick (1987) asked how children could master oral language without any formal educational program and, yet, fail to master written language despite years of instruction. Bissex (1994) found problems of reading to be more a function of the way reading was taught than of the difficulty of reading, per se (in Cramer and Castle). He also pointed out that the way in which reading was taught “prevents equipping children to be their own teachers to the degree we know them able to be. We prevent children from using their natural astuteness as problem-solvers through the way we teach them”(p. 195). Larrick (1987) quoted Frances Clark Sayers as saying, “In an effort to enliven and enrich the business of teaching reading, the mechanics of reading has encroached upon the ultimate purpose of reading, the art of reading” (p. 184).

“Common sense tells us that children improve their reading ability by reading” (U.S. Department of Education, 1987, p. iv). Lee and Croninger (1994) stated that the more a reader reads, the more efficient skill application becomes. In a study of familial and psychological effects on students’ reading achievement, Lui (1993) found that time spent reading had a significant and direct impact on reading achievement. Yet, with all these findings directly supportive of the value of promoting time spent in reading, Fielding and Pearson (1994) reported one of the most surprising findings of classroom research of the 1970's and 1980's was that children actually spent only small amounts of time reading text. The average elementary school child spent only seven minutes a day reading silently. At home, one-half of all fifth grade students spent only four minutes a

day reading (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). Brown (1993) blamed the lack of actual reading time on "...mumbo-jumbo, making diacritical marks and learning a mental language about phonics," which took up time that could be spent in reading (p. 192).

Smith (1989) believed that many students left school with the basics of reading skills well-learned, but "with no inclination ever to pursue these activities voluntarily...." (P. 354). He feared they had no understanding of what literacy could actually do for them. Smith was a participant in the University of Victoria early childhood literacy symposium which declared that a more important question to ask than how children learned to be literate was why schools taught as they did? (Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1984).

For years, the attention of reading research and reading education had been dominated by the great reading methodology debate. Studies by researchers and mandates by legislative bodies extolling and dictating phonetics or basal readers or whole language as the reading method of choice consumed time and energy with little left over to devote to what Guthrie (1995) called "placing a higher priority on nourishing students capabilities and dispositions for choosing to read instead of just learning to read" (p. 21).

George Lorimer, as long ago as 1886, when asked which reading method was best, replied, "Everyone must carefully feel his way to his own method" (in Jones, 1985, p. 264). Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993), in their assessment of what was best practice in reading instruction believed that the theoretical construct of "Children learn to read the way they learn to talk, and schools ought to operate accordingly!" most

fundamental (p. 34). Appes (1987) believed that self-directed learning was a key element of a learning society. Aunt Addie Norton of Eliot Wigginton's *Foxfire* experience expressed the same sentiments in "down-home" terms:

I tell you one thing, if you learn it by yourself, if you have to get down and dig for it, it never leaves you. It stays there as long as you live because you had to dig it out of the mud before you learned what it was (in Wigginton, 1986, p. ix).

The power of self-direction was evidenced in these comments. It was the political power of Freire's adult literacy proposals. It was a self-creating, self-releasing power derived from choosing a direction and finding the means and strength to proceed in that direction. Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy (1987) believed that this power was absent in many school reading programs. They found students and even teachers in positions of powerlessness during reading instruction. In their review of basal reader programs, they found that this powerlessness was an accompaniment of instruction with basals.

Smith (1984) stated that it had been a belief among educators in authority that "success would result from delivering to children the right amounts of the right instruction at the right time--with constant monitoring and quality control" (in Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, p. vii). "Schools assume that children do not learn from direct interaction with their environment, but that this interaction must be initiated and mediated by the teacher. The teacher selects, organizes, and calls children's attention to information they need to learn" (Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1994, p. 89).

"Natural functions of the human mind like questioning, seeking order, monitoring self, are also functions that educators regard as their domain, to the point that children

often abandon them when in the classroom” (Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1984, p. 99). Dewey (1938) had referred to this same lack of learner control. “How many students were rendered callous to ideas, how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way learning was experienced by them?” (p. 26). Cody (1983) said, “It is rather ironic that at the time when a book has its greatest impact, the child is almost completely at the mercy of adult choices” (p. 1).

Educators have voiced the value of fostering a positive attitude toward reading, but McKenna (1994) warned, “Unless a teacher appreciates how attitudes develop and understands what conditions they can be expected to change, reading instruction will be unlikely to realize its potential for shaping attitudes in positive ways” (in Cramer and Castle, p. 18).

Gosy (1994-1995) believed teacher philosophy in reading education needed to be revised (in Bintz and Dillard). Smith (1984) urged that revision should take into account that one important role of education was to “affirm each child’s inner teacher” (in Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, p. 101). Fielding and Pearson (1994) contended that revision must include components of (1) large amounts of time for actual text reading, (2) teacher-directed instruction in comprehension strategies, (3) opportunities for peer and collaborative learning, and (4) occasions for students to talk to teacher and to one another about their response to the reading (p. 62). These researchers and others were advocating more student-centered, student-directed learning situations.

The question of just how much time should be devoted to actual text reading was addressed by Fielding and Pearson (1994). “At present time, research offers no answers,

but we recommend that, of the time set aside for reading instruction, students should have more time to read than the combined total allocated for learning about reading and talking or writing about what has been read” (p. 63). Charlotte Huck (1987) agreed with the need to allow children more time with actual text. “Research now proves that the more literature children are exposed to and the earlier they are exposed, the better will be their reading scores” (in Larrick, p. 188).

Other researchers have voiced agreement with Fielding and Pearson’s belief that time for readers to talk, in relevant ways, about reading is a necessary component of reading education. “For a person to sustain newly achieved literacy habits, occasion to talk about what has been learned from the literacy experience and opportunities to see that this literacy can extend to institutions outside the school are needed” (Goelman, Oberg, and Smith, 1984, p.114). Allen (1994), in a study of literature group discussions in the elementary classroom, found that with a supportive teacher, a small social group and an interesting text, children could use talk to engage in productive literary meaning-making.

Brown (1993) found that all too often, however, the language of the classroom was not relevant talk about text, but rather a language about the process of teaching. He termed it “talkinbout” (p. 234). “Talkinbout” was an abstract language, an adult reconstruction, after the fact, of an experience that the student was not allowed to have first-hand. Brown described it as a language of work and technique, about effectiveness, but not about truthfulness or rightness. He believed “talkinbout” left little room for critical or creative thinking. Instead, it was oriented toward achieving some narrowly

defined success. In many classrooms, this success came from a test score or a grade.

The review of reading instruction literature revealed a number of studies that called for further research in the areas of reading motivation, reading inspiration, and lifelong reading promotion. Many studies pointed out the need for greater congruency between reading research findings and educational practice. The field of reading research, overall, proved to be a controversial area to explore, with dissent among researchers and practitioners alike as to what reading methodology would produce the greatest results in reading mastery and reading promotion.

An important point had need of consideration at this point. Despite the controversy that continued to rage in philosophy and in practice, each year there have been many individuals who were part of the educational system who graduated as avid and lifelong readers. They developed and thrived as readers, even though those around them may not have. What made the difference for them? If little time was allotted for reading at school and if the average child used leisure time for activities other than reading, what experiences, encounters, and, perhaps, even accidents influenced those who chose to change those “average” time allotments? What could be learned from researching the lives of these readers that might prove insightful for less enthusiastic readers? How could curriculum and classrooms be impacted by discovering more about the lives and thoughts of these readers?

Nancy Atwell (1987) talked to her students about reading. She listened to what they told her about their reading lives and reading needs. And then she made a simple decision to allow her students to read--in school. Her reasoning was, if they read in

school, the habit might carry over to the outside world, as well. Donald Graves, in assessing the worth of Atwell's plan, said that her students were known far and wide for their travels from bookstore to bookstore, in search of good books to read. In fact, they read an average of 35 books a year (Atwell, 1987). This was in vivid contrast to statistics cited by Woiwode (1992) that reported nearly 60% of all adult Americans as reading one book or less a year (in Cramer and Castle, 1994). Riley (1994) reported that 90% of third and fourth graders hadn't read a book for the last six months.

Some researchers wondered how knowledgeable educators were about studies like Atwell's and statistics like those cited here. Brown (1993) believed that most practitioners carried on their daily activities with little awareness of what research studies revealed. Jackson (1992) believed that the day-to-day curriculum was relatively unimpacted by theoretical developments of most recent research. To discern what other researchers had explored within this area of literacy, the final section of this literature survey reviewed findings that directly related to the reader-text dynamics. The findings of research that spoke about the reader and about reader characteristics were especially relevant to the questions this study sought to examine.

The Reader

In reviewing the relevant literature on literacy and reading, my quest for understanding, ultimately, focused upon the reader--that central figure who lay at the heart of the purpose for reading research. It was important to know what research revealed about readers and what readers said and revealed about themselves.

Moorman and Thomas (1994) believed that “the student who can read, but choose not to, is probably the most crucial concern confronting educational institutions today” (p. 309). Smith (1989) emphasized the lack of regard for the central figure of the reader when he said, “The ways in which reading and writing are frequently promoted, taught, and researched destroy the literacy that we are trying to create and discriminate against those whom literacy is supposed to liberate and enlighten” (p. 353).

Although test scores measuring skills of reading remained stable over the long term, which indicated that the majority of children, at least, learned how to decode, the fact remained that educational practices were not creating a “nation of mature, effective voluntary, self-motivated, lifelong readers” (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1993, p. 22). These researchers believed that those readers who were becoming self-motivated readers were not just receiving and absorbing a system that existed outside of them, but rather they were constructing a system that was new for themselves. “Ultimately, it must be the reader who creates the meaning, not the text or the teacher” (Gambill, 1990, p. 495).

In creating a composite portrait of the nature of a reader and of reader needs, several researchers provided input. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) believed that role models were of great value for readers. “Students need to learn how skillful, experienced readers manage the process of constructing, creating, and higher-order thinking” (p. 25). Dagostino and Carifio (1994) found openness of mind and receptiveness as necessary qualities of readers if they were to advance beyond basic skill ability. Riley (1992) found a reader characteristic to be that of a sense-maker.

Lee and Croninger (1994) listed characteristics of the “proficient reader” as the

following: (1) applies prior knowledge, (2) sees reading as sense-making, (3) uses structural knowledge, (4) self-monitors, (5) uses a variety of strategies to find meaning, and (6) engages in a wide variety of reading.

Steltenkamp (1993) characterized the “enthusiastic reader” as having: (1) frequent interaction with print, (2) positive and consistent home influence toward reading, (3) supportive reading atmosphere among their friends that helped adjustment with classroom reading demands, and (5) development of extensive prior knowledge in past reading experiences that are used for subsequent reading experiences.

Helfeldt and Henk (1990) found that successful readers routinely employed self-questioning, as they rephrased information, sought relationships among ideas, and summarized as they attempted to construct meaning and make sense of the written text. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1992) assessed “good readers” as those who interacted with a wide variety of materials on their own and who shared their experiences with family and friends.

Although these studies show many similarities in their presentation of characteristics belonging to readers, it was interesting to note that each had a different term with which to designate that reader. Used as terms being described were “proficient” readers, “enthusiastic” readers, “successful” readers and “good” readers. A definition for what was meant by the term “reader” had not been addressed clearly. Van Manen’s (1990) reminder that definitions cannot be taken for granted, but must be drawn from the lifeworld seemed forgotten. Van Manen urged educational researchers to use as their fundamental model textual reflection or the lived experience and practical actions of

everyday life.

The International Reading Association, in its Annual Review of Reading Research, summarized more than 1000 research reports in a recent year that were related to literacy or literacy instruction. Few of these studies actually examined how children became literate in circumstances that were not artificially manipulated (Smith, 1989, p. 356). Harris (1990), in a study of students learning to read in a whole language classroom, called for further support from naturalistic research. Schubert and Ayers (1991), as they studied the teacher-lived experience, urged those who hoped to understand teaching to turn at some point to the teachers themselves. This same strategy could be applied to those hoping to understand reading; that is, look to those involved in the activity to the greatest degree--look to the readers.

In the review of the literature, few studies were discovered that actually followed that strategy. "Students are a rich, but often untapped resource for teachers who want to find ways to support them in becoming more engaged in literacy learning" (Oldfather, 1995, p. 21). Gosy (1994-1995) found that, while children were often asked reasons behind their reading habits, they were rarely asked about the thoughts that arose while they were reading (in Bintz and Dillard). Rosenblatt (1994-1995) found a need to focus on, or at least, not exclude the total context of the reader-text transaction (in Bintz and Dillard). Van Manen (1990) called for the "borrowing of other people's experiences and their reflections on these experiences in order to come to a better understanding of the significance of an aspect of human experience" (p. 62)

Conclusion

During this review of the literature of literacy and reading, two basic themes emerged: (1) the field of literacy and reading formed the “backbone” of curriculum, and was an extensively researched area, and (2) the field of literacy and reading continued to have need of exploration and investigation, especially in areas that spoke with the voice of the reader.

“We need a different frame, an altered angle, if understanding people is our aim” (Schubert and Ayres, 1992, p. 154). Exploring the experience of readers and reflecting upon what gave meaning and direction to their lives presented the authentic text for this study of the life experiences of readers. The analysis of the text and its essential themes provided the meaning, the significances, and the implications for future educational practice, curriculum study, and further research in the field of reading.

CHAPTER THREE

THE METHODOLOGY

I realized last year that I was only thinking in one sort of aspect. I remember some books in my English class the teacher was reading. I'd think, "I never met people who think this way." Then I realized there was a lot more out there that I hadn't been subjecting myself to.

--Eddie, Age 18
Study Participant

John Marshall (1973) noted that education and philosophy of education must attempt to develop a logical and consistent framework through which the educational process may be fully viewed. The qualitative research project presented here chose the long interview process to draw forth the authentic "lived" text from individuals in their natural setting.

Chapter Three included the rationale for qualitative research and the long interview, explanation of the method of participant selection, a list of the study assumptions and limitations, the interview procedure and the interview questionnaires, and the method used for analysis.

Qualitative Research and the Long Interview

Gordon (1989) found the greatest value of qualitative research to be its ability to look beyond the "what" to the "why" and "how." Miles and Huberman (1984) called *the* hallmark of qualitative research the fact that it "goes beyond how much there is of

something to tell us about its essential qualities” (p. 215). Mary Lee Smith (1987) described the essence of qualitative research as its context of sensitivity. “ What sets it apart is the belief that the particular physical, historical, material, and social environment in which people find themselves has a bearing on what they think and how they act. Learning...involves personal and interpersonal histories” (p. 175).

Qualitative research requires the investigator to become immersed in the daily life and in the natural setting chosen for study. The participants’ perspectives must be valued as they are sought and recorded. Description relies upon the primary data of the participants’ own words as they relate their experiences and reflect upon them. The research conducted in this particular study sought to understand, describe, and analyze meaning found within the lives of readers who had been selected to participate in the investigation. The data were presented through the language of the participating individuals. The study proposed that this type of research offered the greatest potential for presenting the reader reality as it had been lived by the practicing reader. It was believed, also, that this type of investigation had potential for providing conclusions and inferences for educational practice and further educational research.

Wolcott (1990) cited this approach to research as an opportunity “to regard our fellow humans as people instead of subjects and to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research among rather than on them” (p. 19). Chomsky believed in observing and analyzing behavior in natural setting without artificial management of what the learner had to do, with the goal of comprehending what went on in the mind when learning occurred (in Pinker, 1994).

According to McCracken (1988), qualitative research does not “survey the terrain, it mines it” (p. 17). He found it most useful and most powerful when utilized to discover how respondents saw the world. “This method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world” (McCracken, p. 9). The worldview of individuals who were actively engaged in the reading process was a major focus of this study.

The method chosen for “mining the terrain” of the human experience was the long interview. McCracken (1988) promoted the long interview as the method of choice when cultural categories, assumptions, and themes were objects of investigation. He termed it “one of the most powerful techniques in the qualitative methodology” (p. 7). McCracken cited Miller, Manning, and Maanen’s observation that the long ethnographic interview had deserved attention for some time (p. 5). Studies that seek clearer understanding of belief systems and practical experiences with the goal of expanding understanding of educational philosophy and procedure may justifiably focus the investigation upon the practitioners themselves in their natural setting.

Casey (1993), in a study of life histories of women teachers, pointed out the value of life experiences as learning tools for the future. “Life history is important here since in many ways its task is to give history back to people in their own words. In the process, by giving the past back, it helps us in making our own futures”(p. xv). Although focused upon readers rather than teachers, this study, too, sought to impact future development of other individuals by giving the voice of the reader practitioner the opportunity to be heard.

Postman (1985) promoted the value of the spoken word itself as evidenced by the reliance upon oral testimony in courts of law. “Testimony is expected to be given orally, on the assumption that the spoken word...is a truer reflection of the state of mind of a witness” (p. 19). Casey (1993) further validated the power of the spoken word. “Each word is a little arena for the clash of and crisis-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces” (p. 27). Vygotsky (1962) called the word “a microcosm of human consciousness” (p. 153). For this study, the words of those who read and the descriptions they presented of their own life experiences provided insight into the interaction of these social forces.

To enter into the story of someone’s life, that is the secret of true knowledge. “Human wisdom is the aggregate of all human experience, constantly accumulating, selecting, and reorganizing its own materials” (Edwards, 1961, p. 730). Yet, how was this gathering of wisdom to take place? For someone to answer the question “Who am I?” or “What does my life mean?” was to provide no thing or all things. “Name, rank, and serial number!” The military answer revealed nothing—and that was its purpose. To shed no illumination. To present no truths, but the most obvious and innocuous.

But what about the “Who am I?” and “What does my life mean?” answers explained in the high school English class. “We know characters in a story by what they say and do, what others say about them, and what the author chose to reveal,” explained my literature teacher. Her bit of literary analysis provided the key to the entrance into the individual lives of this study, as well. They had been chosen because others had said

that they were readers. They were encouraged to reveal themselves through their own words and through the life actions those words represented. As “author, “ I added to their stories the observations and assumptions I received from time spent with the participants and from my analysis of the interview text. The results, with apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning became: “How do I know you? Let me count the ways!”

The Study Participants

“Phenomenological research uses samplings which....focus on the individual...in order to understand the full complexities of the individual’s experience” (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p.75). Since the goal of this study was to garner understanding of the complexity of the reader life, the long interview was chosen as the method best suited to this purpose. The research focused upon the gathering of descriptions of reading experiences, processes, influences, decisions, and emotions from eight individuals. The decision to use eight participants was founded in McCracken’s (1988) advice: The first principle is that ‘less is more.’ It is more important to work longer with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. For many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient” (p. 17).

The eight subjects of the study were selected by recommendation of my own friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who had received the message that I was in search of individuals who read--frequently and enthusiastically by personal choice. Because I was interested in having the data reflect, if possible, a variety of educational methods and a gamut of personal experiences, I chose subjects from a wide range of ages.

The chosen subjects included two males and one female all of elementary school age, one male and one female of high school age, one male of young adult age, one female of middle adult age, and one male of older adult age. Demographic and biographical information on each individual has been presented in Table I. Each participant was assured of anonymity and was given a pseudonym for use in the study. These pseudonyms have been listed in Table 1 and were used in description and explanation throughout the study.

Table 1

Participant Demographic and Biographical Information

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Birth Order	Current Family Status	Current Job Status
Adam	Male	7	White	Eldest of 2	Lives with both parents	Elementary Student
Betty	Female	9	White	Only Child	Lives with both parents	Elementary Student
Chad	Male	11	White	Only Child	Lives with mother	Mid-School Student
Dawn	Female	16	White	Eldest of 2	Lives with both parents	High school Student
Eddie	Male	18	White	Eldest of 2	Lives with both parents	High school Graduate
Filippe	Male	27	Native American	Eldest of 3	Single	Laborer / Student
Gayla	Female	46	African American	Fifth of 11 (Eldest girl)	Divorced	Customer Service
Hal	Male	74	White	Youngest of 5 Only son)	Married	Retired Salesman

Information concerning educational background of the participants and their parents has been presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Educational Background of Participants and Participants' Parents

Name	Participant	Participant's Mother	Participant's Father
Adam	Entering 2nd Grade	College graduate	College graduate
Betty	Entering 4th Grade	College hours	College graduate
Chad	Entering 6th Grade	College hours	Unknown
Dawn	Entering 12th Grade	High school graduate	College graduate
Eddie	Entering College	College hours	College graduate
Filippe	Bachelor's Degree One year post-graduate	College graduate	College graduate
Gayla	High school graduate vocational courses	Sixth grade completed	Sixth grade completed
Hal	High school graduate junior college	Fifth grade completed	Eighth grade completed

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The assumptions on which this research study were based included the following:

- (1) Learning is an on-going process of life.
- (2) Experiences garnered through reading are inseparable from the life of the reader and are enacted, consciously and unconsciously, in life choices and decisions.
- (3) Shared experiences through authentic language can be part of the learning cycle for other individuals.
- (4) Particulars of the human existence tend to illuminate larger issues and are,

thus, significant.

This study was not designed to prove that any one particular reading methodology was most effective or that certain educational practices and techniques produced higher achievement scores in reading. It attempted, rather, to present, through language true to the participants, the nature of a reader and what it meant to be a reader and lead the life that a reader lived. The study sought out the significances and implications gained from greater insight into the reader life.

It was acknowledged that in any situation where individuals reflect upon their own experiences and draw upon their memories as the primary source of information interpretation, based upon more recently acquired knowledge, can take place. It was believed, however, that because of the variety of questions asked and with the generous amount of time devoted to the interview process, valid data were accumulated.

The participants were not chosen to represent all who read. They were examples of some who read, frequently and enthusiastically by personal choice. As such, they had potentially insightful stories to relate and experiences to share that were later examined for “truth” as these individuals knew the truth to be. This study looked for wisdom from those who “did”—from those who “were.” “The principal value of oral history is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories with selectivities and silences which are intrinsic to its representation to reality” (Casey, 1993, p. 13).

According to McCracken (1988), it was important to remember that , although the individual participants were not chosen to represent some part of the larger world,

examples from the lived experience were certainly transferrable. An important learning avenue for all humans has been the imitating of those who proved capable and those who were showed expertise at what they did. One of the earliest forms of education was the apprenticeship model, which provided opportunities for the inexperienced and ignorant to learn from the experienced and knowledgeable. The “experts” did not necessarily represent all in the field, but each was one example of success.

Studying the lives and listening to the words of readers who had frequently and enthusiastically engaged in the activity by personal choice offered to this study opportunities for apprenticeship and modeling and for insight and further implications.

Interview Procedures and Questions

Each subject participated in a minimum of two interviews conducted by the researcher. Sessions were held in the homes or classrooms of the participants, the office of the researcher, and a private meeting room at a public library. Signed permission forms were received from parents of the three youngest participants. Verbal permission was received from parents of the two teenaged participants. All participants signed consent forms allowing the data to be used for this research. (See Appendix A.) All participants were assured of anonymity and were told that pseudonyms were to be used in all of the data notes and in the research paper. Several questions were addressed to a parent or teacher of the three youngest participants, for purposes of verification and clarification. Interviews were recorded on audio tape. A verbatim transcript of each interview was prepared. Most of these were completed by an outside source. (See

Appendix C for representative transcripts.)

Questions for the interviews were formulated, based upon the goal of accumulating sufficient data of the participants' reading experiences and life attitudes for credible analysis of meanings, significances, and implications. Enough flexibility was maintained in the interview sessions for participants to have sufficient opportunities to "tell their stories" in ways that were comfortable for them. They were encouraged to draw upon their own understanding of how they saw and experienced the world through and because of their reading experiences. Each participant completed a background survey questionnaire for use in the biographical portions of the study. In the case of the youngest participant, questions from the survey were asked by the research and the participant's responses were written on the form by the researcher. A copy of this survey was included at the back of the study report. (See Appendix B.)

Questions of a biographical and rapport-building nature initiated the first interview. Since it was of prime importance for the participants to feel comfortable with the interview format, as much time as seemed necessary was allotted to this early stage of questioning. "The application of the social sciences to the study and improvement of contemporary life depend upon the intimate understanding of the respondent" (McCracken, 1988, p. 10).

Key terms, important for later data analysis, were included in several of the questions. Key terms for this study included "reading," and "reader." Following the first interview session, terms which had been employed frequently by the participants were identified by the researcher as "key" and were included in the second set of interview

questions to elicit more commentary about these issues or ideas. These terms included “browsing,” “enjoyment,” “imagination,” and “my own/a new world.”

The questions used for each interview have been included here. Adjustments were made, at the time of questioning, to meet the level of understanding of the younger participants and to follow the story lines of the participants.

First Interview Questions

Section One--Rapport: Beginning questions were of an introductory and rapport-building nature. The final questions in the introductory section were as follows:

1. Talk about your hobbies and free time activities.
2. List words you would use to describe yourself so that someone would know the “real” you.

Section 2--Reading: These questions focused on past and present reading experiences.

1. Talk about when you first realized you could read.
2. Describe your early reading memories.
3. Talk about what prepared you to be a reader.
4. Explain how you learned to read.
5. Talk about what you choose to read and the reasons behind your choices.
6. What goes on within your mind as you make your reading choices?
7. What happens to you and within you while you’re reading?
8. Compare when you read to when you watch television or movies.

Section 3--The Reader: These questions sought to gain insight into the nature of the reader himself or herself.

1. How would you define a “reader?”
2. Someone pointed you out to be as a reader. Describe how you feel about that.
3. Talk about yourself as a reader.
4. What influences and experiences have made you a reader?
5. Talk about how being a reader has affected your life.
6. In what ways do you believe you would be different if you were not a reader?
7. Has reading affected the way you look at the world? Explain.
8. Finish this sentence: “Reading is....”
9. Is there anything else you’d like to say about reading or yourself as a reader?

Second Interview Questions

1. Talk about what imagination and “creating your own world” have to do with your reading.
2. How do “browsing” and “freedom to choose” relate to your pursuit or enjoyment of reading?
3. Talk about meaning that comes to you from your reading.
4. Talk about your reasons and purposes for reading.
5. Talk about what has made you want to or decide to spend time in reading.
(How much time do you spend reading? Where do you read?)
6. Talk about any memories you might have of experiences that could have been

or were detrimental to your reading life.

7. How are reading and thinking related for you?

8. Finish this: "Here are some things I believe or know about myself:"

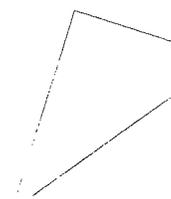
9. What is important to you in life?

10. Is there anything else you could say that would help me understand what has made you a reader?

Method of Analysis

To gain insight into a mind, an inner world, was the goal of this study, with its long interview form of data gathering. The belief was that if the researcher were alert to not only the words of the participants, but also the impressions, implications, and even the silences and incomprehension, both obvious and the subtle messages would be available from which to form the substance of the text and to create the data for analysis. According to Rudestam and Newton (1992), the primary issue was making sense of the data. The challenge, then, was to change the volumes of interview data, gained from the probing and the listening and the observing, into workable material from which insight might emerge. "...to evaluate the data for informational adequacy, credibility, usefulness, and centrality is a major phase of the investigation (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 118).

To this end, the words of McCracken (1988) proved helpful. "The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informed the respondent's view of the world, in general, and the topic, in particular" (p. 42). A question asked by Van Manen (1993) concerning what statements or phrases seemed



particularly essential or revealing provided additional direction. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggested it was the task of the researcher to determine whether or not the data were useful in illuminating the questions being explored and whether or not they were central to the story that was unfolding about the particular phenomenon being studied.

A thematic analysis of data was decided upon and used for this study. As suggested by McCracken (1988), the objective of such analysis was to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that form the participants' views of their worlds and, for this study, their views of the world of readers. Marshall and Rossman (1989) believed that the worldviews of the participants, eventually, formed the structural framework for the presentation of the data and its significance. It was the uncovering of the participants' essential worldview beliefs and attitudes that finally revealed the themes that this study sought.

This study used as its primary method of data analysis McCracken's (1988) five-stage analysis process. The process, as outlined by McCracken, was as follows:

Analysis Process:

Stage One: Create observations from each useful utterance without relating to other aspects of the text. This process was for sorting out the important data from the unimportant.

Stage Two: Develop the observations in regard to themselves, to other textual evidence, and to the review of literature. The goal of this stage was to play out as fully as possible the implications and the possibilities of the utterances and observations.

Stage Three: Examine the interconnection of the observations. This was the stage of refinement with general properties of the data beginning to emerge.

Stage Four: Scrutinize the collective observations to determine patterns, themes, consistencies, and contradicting. This was a time of judgment-making, of arranging hierarchically, and of prioritizing.

Stage Five: Analyze the patterns and the themes. This was the period of gathering together and drawing inferences, implications, and conclusions.

A secondary method of analysis suggested by Rudstam and Newton (1992) supplemented this five-stage approach. The Rudstam and Newton approach used stages called “unitizing” and “categorizing.” In the early stages of analysis, this involved isolating all helpful and significant information from the text onto individual note cards. This was followed by organizing these individual units into categories that seemed to relate through similar content. Rudstam and Newton recommended following the categorizing with the composing of propositional statements that acted as “rules” for entry into each category, with these statements eventually distilling into one word “essences” of the categories.

According to Miles and Huberman (1989), to identify a theme or pattern meant to isolate something that happened frequently and consistently in a specific way (p. 215). The themes should pull together many separate pieces of data. The analyst must then be alert to those things which have commonalities and those thing which seem to fit together, in some way, as well as those things which do not seem to fit. The ultimate goal of this analysis process was to allow all the richness of the gathered data, with its

personality and perspective, to be portrayed in a final presentation of essential meaning.

These were the plans and this was the advice I took into my analysis process. I set out to discover the “essences” of the data. In my initial state of ignorance, that sounded simple enough. I began with the typed transcripts of the data. I chose, objectively as possible, the useful utterances and isolated each one onto a separate note card. A letter designating the speaker was assigned to the top of each card for later reference to the transcript, if necessary. Creating these “units” resulted in hundreds of note cards, each with its own significant piece of information, insight, or quote. What did it mean to be a reader? What was the nature of a reader? I asked these two questions repeatedly as I made the note cards and then as I progressed to the stage of analyzing each separate unit.

This time, the cards provided the “reading matter.” Keeping in mind the significant literature that had been reviewed, I looked for the way each card addressed central issues and questions raised by the participants. What did these bits of information have in common with each other? Which words were being repeated? I began to make separate piles of the cards: personal data, biographical facts, home, school, people . Most of the cards fell quickly into a specific stack. A few that didn’t seem to align themselves in any particular way were noted and set in a separate pile. At this point, the separated piles of cards numbered fifteen or so.

Turning the piles into categories was the next step. Were any general properties beginning to emerge? As I re-read the cards of each pile, I looked for ideas and quotes of interconnectedness. I looked for key words, similar comments, and, again, I separated contrasting thoughts and those that “stood alone.” I began to know many of the quotes

by memory. At this point, each comment still connected me to a particular participant. I reviewed notes from months of reading studies and materials about literacy and reading. How did the words and ideas I had before me relate to what researchers had said. Were there themes that other studies had identified that were emerging here, too? New piles were created--fewer this time. Broader themes like "influences" and "thinking processes" had emerged that gathered and separated the earlier categories of "people," "school," and "home."

In the next stage, I considered once again the pieces of knowledge and the general categories, represented physically by hundreds of data cards. There was a chronological pattern emerging, evidenced by the data, on early reading memories and influences, later reading experiences and influences, and mature reading experiences and decisions. The realigning began once again. Fewer piles were needed to accommodate this new theme plan. Cards were beginning to lose their ties to particular participants. There was a more general "feel" about the data in front of me, now.

Using the themes of "Early Reading Stage," "Developmental Reading Stage," and "Mature Reading Stage," I wrote a proposition for each. These statements were to be the "passwords" into each category. I read each card and compared it to the proposition that stated the qualifications for the three themes. Any card that met the conditions for entry was placed in the appropriate theme pile. It seemed to work. The few cards that didn't seem to fit became a fourth category of "Everything Else." I had it! Or so I believed, at the time. The stage of analyzing all these separate units into these four categories hadn't been all that formidable. I was ready to change each categorical label into a meaningful

title that represented the essence of the theme, which, in turn, epitomized the spirit of the reader experience and the reader nature.

The essence? The spirit? Was that what my four categories presented? For some reason, the one-word titles proved difficult to produce. Essence. What was an “essence,” anyway? I sought out the trusty Webster. “Essence: the fundamental nature or quality; the inward nature or true substance of something”(Merriam Webster, 1974, p. 246).

My categories seemed more structural than fundamental. They sounded more exterior than interior. They indicated the patterns on which lives were based, but they delivered few messages about life itself. I realized that I had not yet captured the meaning of a reader life. I had not discovered the fundamental qualities that formed the essences.

Once again, I returned to my notes from the literature and, then, to the data cards. It was during the re-reading of the cards that a particular quote leaped out at me. “When I don’t know the meaning of something, I look at the sentence or the paragraph or the chapter. Pretty soon I figure it out for myself.” One of my youngest readers had spoken those words. Look to the sentences, the paragraphs, and the chapters for meaning was what she had said. That was the key. To discover and describe the culture of a reader, I had to allow the words of the participants themselves to lead the way. I had to look at each utterance for its own meaning--not the meanings I had attempted to assign to it. I had to set aside my preconceived notions and my own beliefs about reading. The time had arrived to play “follow the leader” with my readers. For the first time, I was going to view meaning through the window of my reader’s experience, not the window of anyone

else's. "My readings were inaugural, as I claim all true reading is" (Miller, 1987, p.i).

The essence! I returned to the cards with as open a mind as I could possibly bring to the analysis. I actually shuffled the cards, realigning the physical in hopes of discovering the spiritual. It was the spirit of a reader, the spirit of the reader life, that I sought. I searched for the central, meaningful, and major ways the words of these readers related and connected. And, finally, this time the essences that had eluded me emerged. Perhaps, a different researcher, at a different time, might have discovered different messages, but that could be accounted for in the words of one of my participants: "Even when I finish a book and you finish that book, too, we have not read the same book."

I finished the process of discovering the themes. What once had been pages and pages of transcribed tapes, hundreds of individual information units, and numerous lists of categories, presented themselves in four white towers of notecards, each one representing some facet of the fundamental nature and essential qualities of a reader. The final stage of analysis lay now in analyzing how these themes revealed readers as they made meaning of their own lives and as they observed the world through their own personal lenses. The eight individuals of the study had opened themselves up, originally, to my scrutiny. They now invited others to seek understanding through examination of the intricacies of their life experiences. Their stories unfolded in the fourth chapter of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYZING THE DATA

My friends and me play the game after I read the book. Like my friend will be the knight, and I'll be the dragon.

--Adam, Age 7
Study Participant

What did it mean to be a reader in this age of electronics and fiber optics and all the other benefits and conveniences of the modern life? What characteristics or influences within the natures and experiences of certain individuals caused them to live within the world of these complexities yet still choose reading as an important aspect of their existence. This study sought clarification and insight into these natures and experiences by examining the lives of eight individuals who had chosen, frequently and enthusiastically, to commit time for reading.

Van Manen (1990) termed this method of research as attempts to “reflectively bring into nearness that which tends to be obscure” (p.32). He said this was the study of existential meanings which attempted to describe and interpret these meanings with depth and richness and to understand the meanings as they were lived out daily. The readers who participated in this study reflected upon texts, individuals, and incidents as they relived for the researcher the methods, motivations, and maneuvering of their reading lives.

The goal of this study was then to present the essences of these life stories. The

discovery of the essences took time, patience, and , ultimately, humility. As researcher, I had to relinquish control and to recant my notions before the themes divulged themselves. This chapter was devoted to exploration of the meaning and implications of these themes through description, narration, and words from the readers' own texts. The chapter was divided into seven sections: (1) introduction of the participants, (2) explanation of the themes, (3) theme one, (4) theme two, (5) theme three, (6) theme four, and (7) a conclusion to the analysis

Introduction of the Participants

“As persons, we are uncountable, incomparable, unclassifiable, irreplaceable” (W.H. Auden, in Lupton, 1937, p. 190). And from such uncountable, incomparable, unclassifiable, irreplaceable persons come wisdom and understanding. With detailed descriptions of the personal insights presented by selected individuals, this study sought to further the understanding of readers as they interacted with the world and as they formed their own particular viewpoints about that world.

The participants numbered eight. They were eight individuals who had been identified by others as fitting the specifications of ones who read frequently and enthusiastically by personal choice. Three females and five males were chosen, ranging in age from seven to seventy-four years. For the sake of anonymity, each was given a pseudonym which was used through the discussion and the data displays.

Adam

When I first met Adam, I was struck by his air of dignity and solemnity. His teacher had mentioned how excited and happy he was after I had arranged my meeting with him. He hid his emotions well. As we walked down the school hallways, only the slight smile playing with the corners of his lips indicated his pleasure. He showed me the way into his school library, pulled up two chairs to a table, and, on his hands and knees, found the electrical outlet I needed for the tape recorder. Adam, at age seven, was a very competent and courteous individual. This first visit took place during the last few days of his first-grade school year. Adam attended classes at a parochial elementary school in a city of approximately 40,000 inhabitants. This city had been his place of residence since birth.

At the first interview, Adam seemed at ease from the very beginning. At our second interview, which took place in the living room of his own home, he was restrained while his mother was in the room with us. As soon as she excused herself, he relaxed and spoke as freely as he had during the first interview. Adam's responses flowed easily with a confident grasp of the questions, most of the time. The few times he didn't have an immediate answer, he did not become flustered or nervous. He took time, when he needed it, to think, or he simply stated that he didn't know what that question meant. He listened attentively, seldom interrupting, although, at times, he was anxious to begin his answer.

Adam's vocabulary was well-developed and his memory for detail, especially of

books he had read, was sharp. A favorite word was “humongous.” He used it to describe everything from his favorite dragons and dinosaurs to a hamburger he had eaten, recently. As he spoke, his hands and legs swung freely, and he smiled often. Sometimes, he jumped from his chair to do his rendition of a moment from a story plot that he was detailing.

Adam was left-handed like his mother. He lived with his younger sister and both his parents. His father owned and operated a billboard business, the products of which were referred to occasionally in his early reading history. His mother had worked outside the home most of his early life, but was presently a full-time homemaker. Adam had a favorite aunt who traveled extensively and who sent him books from her various travels. When I met him for our second interview, he was reading from one of those books, a Shel Silverstein book of poetry.

Adam described his free-time activities, in addition to reading which he mentioned first, as riding his bike, using a computer, and playing sports. As he phrased it, “I’m good at a lot of things. I have a lot of talents.”

Adam said he first began reading when he was two or three years of age. He talked about pictures his father had taken of him when he was very young “reading” a magazine. His mother had told me that when he was almost three years old, he had a favorite book about trucks, specific kinds of trucks. One day when they were driving in town, he noticed a truck just like one in the book. “Mom,” he hollered. “Look, it’s a ‘trencher’!” His mother believed that was when he first realized “what books could teach you.”

During our first interview, I told Adam he had been described by someone as a reader. “How does that make you feel?” I asked him.

“Good,” he responded, “because I love to read!”

Betty

Betty was one of the most self-composed, well-mannered nine-year-olds I had ever met. Our first session was held at her school; the second at my office. On both occasions, she met me with a big smile and an air of pleased anticipation. Although her voice was soft and her body was quiet most of the time, both became animated when she described some of her reading experiences. She responded quickly and spoke rapidly.

Betty attended a parochial school and was completing third grade when we first talked. She was born in another state, but had come to her present home when she was about three years old. She was an only child and lived with both of her parents. Her father was an engineer, and her mother worked with the public school system's outreach program. Betty said she liked outdoor activities as well as indoor ones. She mentioned that playing basketball, being with her friends, and, of course, reading were her favorite activities.

Betty told me she wanted to be an author when she grew up. As she put it, "Whenever I finish reading a book, I think, 'Boy, would I like to be able to write like that and make somebody as happy as they made me.'"

Betty's vocabulary was well-developed. She used words like "obnoxious" when describing her dog and words like "compete" and "identify" when talking about some of her school activities. She was familiar with the language of print, using terms like "classical" and "novels." She described herself as "pretty, twinkly, with blue yes-- because my eyes look just like my daddy's--and tall and intelligent and careful." She

explained “careful” as “I’m careful of a lots of things. Like, if I’m doing something at school or spelling a word, I’ll be really careful and take my time to make sure I’m doing it right.” Betty frequently used the words “happy” and “enjoy” in regard to her reading experiences.

As she talked, Betty related conversations with herself that took place when she read. Interestingly, this was a technique used by many of the readers I interviewed. They “reported” conversations with themselves and with people and ideas within the texts that they read.

At a very early age, Betty ‘s father taught her to spell her last name, which was long, to the tune of the Mickey Mouse “spell-out” jingle. Her name fit the rhythm and the length of the melody. She said she first knew she could read the summer before kindergarten, and her mother verified it.

When I told Betty she had been described by someone as a reader she said that it made her happy to know that. “Some people, I feel sorry for them because they don’t really know how to read, and I think it’s a wonderful thing to be able to know how to read.”

Chad

Chad was an extremely businesslike eleven-year-old. Among all the participants, his sense of humor was the least developed. Life seemed serious business for Chad. The first time we met, he was dressed in a suit and tie for the occasion, even though our interview took place during his regular school day. He crossed the room with his arm

outstretched to shake my hand. We talked in his fifth-grade classroom while his classmates attended another activity. He spoke expansively and, sometimes, with considerable volume. When his classmates returned to the room, his manner changed, perceptibly. His voice softened and his final answers were brief. Although he had expressed pleasure at being interviewed, he preferred talking to me when his friends were not around. He told me that one year of his education had been spent at a private school, but he had left because, in his words, “The kids didn’t approve of me.” Being accepted by his friends was important. This had not kept him from engaging in a great deal of reading, even though he related experiences of being teased because of it.

Chad lived with his mother. He related few facts about his father, only vague stories of his father’s living in another country. His mother’s parents resided near his home and were his chief caretakers when his mother worked at her job as benefits person in a local business.

Chad’s vocabulary was extensive, but he occasionally misused words. In his free time, Chad reported that he liked to travel, draw, play the piano, and read. He was an avid newspaper reader, reading, especially, about politics. Chad described himself as one who liked to do things quickly. “I’m just like my grandfather when we go someplace. Zip, zip, zip! Let’s get home!”

When I asked him what he thought about being described as a reader, he said, “It makes me feel good that people recognize that I like to read a lot and when people say that, it makes me think.”

Dawn

Dawn and I met, first, at her school and, later, at a meeting room in a public library. She was a serious-looking, ultra-modernly-dressed young woman who spoke with an insight into life that seemed far beyond the experiences of her sixteen years. Her humor was evidenced in the many times she laughed at her own words, but her passion about reading was the most memorable aspect of our sessions. Her opinion about the expectations of education in regard to students reading activities were definite. “We’re just coddling people. Kids say, ‘Reading is too hard.’ ‘It’s boring.’ ‘I don’t like to read.’ “Well, that’s too bad. Do it anyway!”

Dawn was involved in competitive speaking activities at her school and spoke with great awareness of current events and international political issues. Her vocabulary was sophisticated and her knowledge of authors and books was wide-ranged. She was born in the West, but moved to the Central States before her first year of schooling and had resided there since then. She lived with her younger brother and both her parents. Her parents owned and operated together a small town grocery store. Dawn worked there on weekends and in the summer. Her mother’s goal was to someday get a college degree. Dawn, herself, had plans for attending a college in the East and, eventually, becoming a teacher.

Dawn’s ideal free day involved time spent writing her pen pals around the country, time spent reading, and time spent just sitting in quiet solitude. She described most of her friends as readers. “If one of us reads a really good book, we have to talk

about it. Sometimes, we'll talk over an hour about a book right there on the phone."

Dawn 's view of herself was paradoxical. "I'm everything and nothing. I'm a totally contrasting person. I'm out-going, but then I'm shy. I want to go out with friends and listen to rock music, but I also want to sit quietly by myself and listen to public radio. I get bored easily....I need new things, new music, new books, new movies, new television's shows."

When asked her thoughts on being described as a reader, she said, "Thank you for calling me that! I think it's probably true. But, then, some of my class members say, 'Oh yeah, she's a reader. She's a bookworm. Go away.'" Sometimes I'll be happy about it and sometimes I'll get defensive. Like 'What do you mean?' Of course, I'm a reader! If you were, maybe you wouldn't be like that!" She laughed.

Eddie

When I interviewed Eddie for the first time, he had just completed his last week of high school. Graduation was only a few days away, so he was busy and excited. He graciously agreed to our session, though, and gave me his complete attention as we talked. The second interview was conducted during the summer before he left for early college activities.

Eddie lived with both parents and a younger brother. His father was a science professor at a local college. His mother worked there, also, in the business office. He said that, although, his father read scientific material and his mother enjoyed what he termed "light reading," neither were avid readers. He laughed at his own description of

his brother's reading activities. "I don't want to go so far as to say that he's almost illiterate, but he does not enjoy reading and he does not do it well."

Eddie's language usage was vivid and descriptive. He often used analogies and referred to conversations with himself "held" after encountering a particularly interesting piece of text. Words he used to describe himself included "resourceful," "intelligent," and "creative." He called his outlook on life as "different" and "not going with the flow." He was witty and humorous, often poking fun at himself. Yet, he was very serious about religion, education, and ethical and moral issues. An ideal day, besides cleaning his room--this was said with a laugh--was finding a brook in the country, roaming, fishing, or reading.

His response to being described as a reader was "I don't have any particular feelings about that, but I know that it is something that I enjoy."

Filippe

Felippe, in his twenty-seven years, had traveled a great deal of the world. Born in middle-America, he moved to nearby state when he was two. There, he attended all of his public education years. He had graduated from a seminary college in another state and had done post-graduate work for one year in an Eastern university. He had spent time in Canada and Haiti with church-related projects, had toured the Holy Lands, and had served for almost three years with the Peace Corps in Africa. He was currently residing in Southeastern United States. He had been raised with a younger brother and sister and both parents. His father was a partner in a construction company and his

mother was a teacher.

Filippe was left-handed. He was of Native American descent and had been spent a considerable amount of time during his adolescent years involved with Native American historical and cultural activities. He spoke seriously and philosophically about the importance of reading in his life, but he had a great sense of fun, as well. Although he spoke about his enjoyment of outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, and hiking, he said that most of his free time, now, was spent with music, films, and books. He described his current reading as “good” literature, for the beauty of the language and artistic expression and books of philosophy and religion. “I think there’s such a thing as noble subject matter, which lends itself to a higher kind of thinking.”

Filippe described himself as a conscientious person, intellectually committed, and almost trapped into a driving need to seek understanding. “I’m someone who has been very affected by information that I’ve processed through reading and through experiencing on my own--things wider than the confines of the world that I was brought up in.” Dawn and Eddie, too, had made specific reference to moving beyond the “world” in which they had been raised. They both attributed that attitude to encounters with text that had opened their minds to other lives and other parts of the world.

Filippe’s answer to what was important to him was “Just the big question.” He was on a mission.”That’s it. That’s all I think about, really. And I don’t think of it as a frustrating endeavor. I find it to be rather life-giving. I value the pursuit in itself, and I’m, also, not so sure that you can’t get to the bottom of it.” He laughed.

When asked to respond to being described as a reader, he said, “I’m glad that I

have been influenced and have had the opportunity to do quite a bit of reading because I think that in reading you can experience worlds that you wouldn't otherwise experience.

I'm glad that I read."

Gayla

Gayla was a forty-six year old African American woman, divorced, and living with two grown sons. Initially, she seemed surprised that I wanted to interview her and was concerned that she wouldn't give me "good enough" answers. Her keen sense of humor quickly diminished her diffidence, and she relaxed and talked easily. Gayla's whole life had been spent in one small community. She graduated from a public high school, but spent her kindergarten year at a local parochial school. "Not very many Black kids got to go to kindergarten," she said. During second grade, her previously segregated school became integrated. After high school, she completed several classes at a local business school and then began a job as a line worker at a factory. She worked there until the factory closed two years ago. At the urging of her sons, she enrolled in vocational classes and was currently working in a customer service and telecommunication job. The transition had been a very "scary" time for her.

Gayla grew up in a family of eleven children. She had four older brothers; she was the oldest daughter. Her parents both worked a variety of jobs including cleaning and yard work. Her father had his own sanitation truck, as well. Both parents had a sixth-grade education and both spoke strongly about the need for their children to have a better education than they. Gayla's father "preached" the value of reading and writing.

He was a devoted newspaper reader and Gayla soon developed the habit, herself.

Gayla described the most important things in her life as her sons, her family, her job, and herself--to be happy. "I'm not completely happy. There's a lot missing out of my life. But I'm working on it." She believed it was hard to know "the real me." She said it was hard for her to let others know her feelings and that she had a temper. In talking with Gayla, it was apparent that she was determined to attain a happy life for her family and herself. "I feel that I can function in this world. I have certain goals that I've set for myself that I have accomplished."

When I told Gayla that she had been described as a reader by one of her co-workers, she exclaimed, "Great! Especially when I know that I had problems with reading when I was young, and I still have problems with some kinds of reading. It makes me feel good that somebody would say that."

Hal

At seventy-four years of age, Hal's sense of curiosity and his "love-affair" with learning were alive and well. In a soft, thoughtful voice, he spoke of a "hunger" for knowing and a fascination with a wide variety of subject matter. He had the descriptive talents of a natural storyteller and seemed sorry when our sessions ended. He enjoyed having an audience. His sense of humor was one of the characteristics most apparent during our conversations. He enjoyed telling what he termed, "old war stories" and referred frequently to the influence his army schooling had upon the way he read. The military taught him, he said, to read for meaning, for detail, for retention.

Hal was born and raised in Central United States. He spent six years serving in the military during World War II before returning to his home to raise his family, develop his career as a salesman, and finally semi-retire. He had a high school education, military training in office skills and record keeping, and, later, almost two years of college business courses. Referring to his professional career, he said, “Anyone can be in the sales business.” He paused. “Well, maybe I did have rather a natural calling, if anyone can be born to do the selling. I know one thing in sales. You have to be accepted by all that you talk with.”

His father, who died when Hal was fifteen, was an influential figure in his life. Although his father had only a grade school education, Hal remembered him as one who read the newspaper every day and shared the information with his son. His mother attended school through the eighth grade. His parents worked hard to raise a family during the days of the Great Depression. They had a small grocery business, did some farming and raised a small herd of dairy cows.

In his state of semi-retirement, Hal still serviced some of his long-time customers. He golfed, occasionally. He visited. He talked. He read. Hal’s description of himself was self-deprecating. “I’ve always enjoyed a bit of humor. I’ve been accused of being a funny man--my language and such. I’m a run-of-the-mill person, I suppose.” Then he added, “If you would know me, I’m one to learn more, to keep reading and keep learning.”

He described his feelings at being labeled a reader as , “I feel complimented. I may not be one of those, though.” Hal was thoughtful, humorous, and humble.

The Eight

Although these eight participants had been chosen for the one characteristic they had in common, that is, they had been identified as readers, several additional commonalities emerged early during the interviews. Although their ages spanned several generations, their home lives had similarities. Most were either the oldest child or the only child in the family. Those that didn't fit that description were either the oldest of a particular gender or the only one of that gender. Almost all had been raised or were being raised in homes with parents or other significant adults who appreciated learning and modeled reading. Almost all exhibited signs of well-developed senses of humor and extensive vocabularies, even the youngest participants. They used the word "enjoy" when referring to reading, and they were pleased, in varying degrees, at being identified as readers. These similarities were apparent early in the data gathering. Other commonalities, discussed throughout this chapter, emerged as the data were analyzed more thoroughly.

These eight individuals were the participants of the study. They were introduced here, at some length, so that they might be perceived as living, breathing persons reliving their personal histories for others to know them more fully. As Hal remarked, "To read is to have some mastery of the words so that the words will make that subject come alive to you." For this study, mastering the words used by the participants so that the subject of their lives "came alive" was the gateway into the life and nature of a reader.

To complete these formal introductions, participant definitions of "reader" have

been presented in Table 3. The definitions had several ideas and words in common. These readers believed it important to devote time to reading, not necessary excessive time, but regular time. These readers indicated that gaining and making meaning was crucial, and yet, the word, “enjoyment” dominated their definitions. Reading as a voluntary activity, because readers chose to read, was important to them. Many of these ideas and words used in their definitions were incongruent with what the research literature revealed as standard practice for reading pedagogy in many educational settings.

For example, Cramer and Castle (1994) believed that developing positive attitudes about the pleasure and value of reading was a stated but not practiced goal of reading education. Fielding and Pearson (1994), as well as other researchers, reported that in many educational settings little time was devoted to opportunities for students to engage, meaningfully, with text. Frank Smith (1989) believed that because of reading education methods, the desire to read, voluntarily, was not being fostered. The reader words cited in the following table emphasized pleasure in reading, opportunity for reading, and personal pursuit of reading as essential.

In these definitions of what it meant to be a reader, the readers of this study revealed what was important in a reader’s life. Understanding of whether these participants were readers like the ones they described , and, if so, how they became such readers was sought through further exploration of their words and life experiences.

Table 3

Participant Definitions of a Reader

Participant's Name	Definition of a Reader
Adam	Unclear response.
Betty	"...being able to pick up a book and being absorbed in it. Just not really wanting to put it down."
Chad	"When you say 'reader,' it means 'READER'-- someone that just love books, could care less for anything else in the world except books--when they're reading."
Eddie	"Someone who has a widespread vocabulary.... They just enjoy the language itself. And someone who just enjoys reading for the sake of it."
Filippe	"I don't think that just someone who can make sense of words on a page is necessarily a reader....In the end, a reader is someone who reads regularly, not simple out of necessity, but out of desire--for enjoyment."
Gayla	"Somebody that can and does read and knows how important it is to read."
Hal	"A reader would be somewhat like an eater--a digester of the subject, who not only wants to, but is able to take it in, receive it--to the maximum good."
Dawn	"A reader enjoys it because that's what they want to do, not something they have to do. Readers take time out of their lives to do it."

The Themes

"The essence of something is constructed so that the structure of the lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a heretofore unseen way" (Van Manen, 1990, p.39).

Wolcott (1990) urged that such essences be discovered and revealed with sufficient context, and yet, without being mired in everything that might be described. He believed the secret was to accumulate a great deal of data, discard most of it, leaving only those words and ideas most relevant and meaningful. Understanding this significant data, he believed, led to the maximal understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Chapter Three of this study presented, in detail, the procedures of analysis that allowed meaningful and significant data to emerge for the thematic constructions of Chapter Four. Miles and Huberman (1984) described a qualitative researcher as one who worked, “to some extent by insight and intuition” (p. 216), and, yet, one who was open to not only evidence of the expected pattern, but also that which was disconfirming. Chapter Three explained how I, as a researcher, had begun with my own ideas of what the themes might be. As I labored to make the data “fit”, I realized it couldn’t and wouldn’t work that way. But when I allowed the data to lead me in determining the direction of the inquiry and to guide me in constructing the themes, progress was made. Finally, through this analysis process, four themes emerged as congruent portrayals of the essence of the reader nature and life. The themes were (1) power, (2) ritual, (3) thoughtfulness, and (4) worldview. They reflected the successes, the struggles, and the issues that created the day to day lives of readers. They were the essences--the fundamental qualities--of the reader spirit.

The theme of power was dramatized in phrases like “I wanted to read,” and “I decided...I saw...I knew...I tried” From these, the realization emerged that readers achieved power from and because of encounters and experiences related to text. They

had constructed their own methods of learning how to read and how to develop reading skills. They gained strength from following their own reading motivations and their own choices of reading materials. They grew more powerful as they overcame obstacles and frustrations placed in their reader paths.

The theme of ritual was discovered within the pattern and structure that readers assigned to their reading actions and experiences. This theme was revealed through words like, “always,” “continually,” and “every time.” They were introduced to ritual, early on, by influential individuals in their lives. They created their own ritualistic behaviors to sustain and bring order to their encounters with text.

The theme of thoughtfulness emerged and signified an affirmation of Brown’s (1993) literacy of thoughtfulness. These readers used words like “recollect” and “reflect.” They used imagination to create their “own world” or “new worlds” as they read. They compared types of writing and evaluated styles of authors. They analyzed text for both perceived and assigned meaning. They described critical and creative encounters with text.

The theme of worldview emerged as readers talked about looking to text for insight into the past, for realization of the present, and for understanding of the future. They spoke of the world as diminished in size, but expanded in opportunity and possibility. They were “not satisfied.” They searched for novelty and knowledge. They gave examples of how their choices and their attitudes had been impacted by persons and ideas within the texts they had read. To assist understanding of how the four themes emerged, representative comments were presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Representative Comments of Themes

Power	Ritual	Thoughtfulness	Worldview
"There's a certain amount of freedom and power that comes from being a literate person."	"My grandma read the newspaper every morning....And she would read it for me."	"I'll sit there, and I'm no longer myself. I am this other person...."	"I believe I have a different outlook on life than some people."
"...I guess, there is that sort of an empowerment."	"It's something I've always done--I always will do. It's ingrained."	"The thoughts jump off the page and there's no conscious process...."	"I understand more and, therefore, I'm less judgmental."
"Reading makes me feel like I can go places anytime I want to."	"It's a habit....It just comes to mind: 'Book!' So I get one."	"A part of you colors everything you read."	"It's become a little more important to me to find other things rather than just following"
"If you want to know something, and you believe in your own ability to find it, to read it....That's not a small power there."	"Grandmother every morning would read to me, and I'd always wake her up, saying, 'Grandma, come on. It's time to read.'"	"You know you've gotten something out of it that nobody else did. It's yours."	"You go on to become a better professional or better person than you would normally be, and that can come through your reading."
"...I found that people were impressed that I could read, so I did it more, so they would be more impressed."	"As I'm reading, I'm always building a list of what I want to read next."	"Everytime a person reads a book, he or she interprets it differently."	"I don't have to take somebody else's word for it."
"...I saw people reading...and I decided I wanted to do that."	"Every night, she (mom) had this little Bible book...and every night she would read to me...."	"My mind is fixed on what I'm reading, and it's like nothing else is around me."	"How pivotal is it to stumble across some new idea that really transforms the way you think about people and the world?"
"...I was glad that I knew what the words meant by myself."	"I found blue cards were in the non-fiction books. That became my line, 'Blue is true.'"	"I just keep reading, and pretty soon I'm in it."	"If you read enough,. you see there are these millions of viewpoints..."

This study explored the four themes in detail in order to show the complexities of the reader nature and the interrelatedness of the lives readers lived with the texts they

read. The examples included from reader conversations were offered as insight into the themes and rich in the details of what it meant to be a reader.

Knowledge of the reader world, revealed by the study participants, formed the centrality of this investigation. These individuals had stories to tell. “There are whole different types of people you can learn from. They have in their minds that which makes up a great total mind, that you can listen to and receive information from.” These words from Hal, as he spoke of great authors and great personalities from fiction and non-fiction, were fitting commentary, also, for what was learned from the study of reader lore. These readers had, within their minds, a totality of experience ready to be shared with others for insight into the reader nature.

Theme Number One: Power

“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives” (Madison in Apps, 1994, p. 14). When he spoke those words back in 1822, James Madison might not have been speaking, specifically, of literacy, but he, no doubt, knew that knowledge often came through the printed text and with that knowledge came certain powers. The ability to read, to comprehend that which has been read, and to act upon that meaning has always given the reader certain advantages. Freire (1993) was only one among many researchers who called attention to power attained from being able to read. The readers of this study knew about the power of reading and sought out that power. Eddie:

I think it's always given me a sense of superiority. In high school, I've always kind of looked down on a lot of my fellow classmates. I guess there's a sense of smugness, which may or may not be a good thing. I guess there is that sort of empowerment.

Filippe equated power with freedom and believed it was derived from a reader's confidence in his or her ability to obtain value from the printed word. He said:

There's a certain amount of freedom and power that comes from being a literate person....Once you develop a level of confidence in your approach to a book where you realize that if you want to know something, you believe in your own ability to find it, to read it, and understand it and remember it, that's not a small power there!

In simpler words, Betty expressed this same belief that the reader had personal power. "(Reading) just makes me feel like I can go places anytime that I want to."

By their own accounts, these readers believed they could be endowed with power by reading, and they self-initiated opportunities to achieve that power. Dawn told a story of her own efforts to be in control of the reading situation:

My first memory of reading is running to my grandmother's room at 5:00 a.m. with my copy of Alexander and the Wind-Up Bear. With two-year-old stubbornness, I would demand that she read it to me. My mother tried to block my path with gates, but I always found a way. I would not give up my before-breakfast reading sessions.

Participants used "I" statements as they talked about early stages of their journeys toward becoming readers. Seven-year-old Adam remembered seeing the letters "z-o-o" on one of his father's billboards and figuring out what the letters meant and then, later, encountering the same set of letters in a book. He made the connection. Chad commented on thoughts he had during sessions when his mother was reading to him: "I always thought, 'Boy, that would be nice if I could read these to myself.' That's how I

started (to read).”

As she recalled similar reading situations with her mother, Dawn remarked that she began to “pick up” on the words and she discovered she liked doing that. Betty’s words provided a chronicle in the reader quest to self-initiate the reading process:

I saw people reading, and they looked happy, and I decided that I wanted to do that....My mom and dad really liked to read and they kind of wanted me to read, too. And so, I just decided to start reading....My mom used to read me storybooks all the time, and one day I picked up the book of Ping, and I just started reading it....I learned by just slowly looking at words and being able to identify them and pretty soon I was able to read a sentence and then a paragraph and, finally, a book....I kept on reading and reading and I became familiar with the words and then I put them together and pretty soon I could read fast....I felt happy and excited because I knew what the words meant by myself.

Although not all participants’ stories of self-initiation involved an adult reading to them, each did speak of significant adult, confirming Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde’s (1993) call for role models for readers. Eddie’s decision to read came after listening to phonetic records supplied by his parents. Others like Gayla and Hal and Chad remembered adults sharing information from the daily-read newspapers. Each remarked that these examples sparked a desire within them to know for themselves.

Soli (in McShane, 1994) said that children decide at a very young age the role they want to play in the communication process. She called them decision-makers. These readers confirmed her words. They were involved in making decisions about behaviors and about emotions they wanted as their own. They initiated actions to achieve their desires.

When questioned about reading instruction at school, participant responses were, surprisingly, similar. They didn’t remember. They either sketched vague, undefined

stories, or they offered a theoretical possibility of what method might have been used. Hal, whose dim memories of school days might have been attributed to the number of years that had elapsed since then, was supported in his “forgetfulness” by the youngest participant whose answer was equally vague. Adam initially began by offering several examples of phonetic activities that he and his classmates practiced, but ended with the comment, “Sometime in kindergarten, I just started learning it.”

After speculation on a possible phonetic background, Philippe qualified his “guess” by saying, “I don’t really recall the experiences of learning to read all that well....In retrospect, it just seems like it was always the case.” Dawn’s words echoed Philippe’s. It was something she could always do.

But if memories of knowing how they learned to read were incomplete, details of realizing that they could read were vivid. Adam:

Once when I was only four-years-old, I was riding down the street, and I saw my dad’s billboard, and it was the first time I knew what it was. I went, ‘Dad, that said South. That’s where you work.’ And he went, ‘That’s the first time you’ve seen that billboard.’”

Adam said that he knew then he was reading. Other participants cited similar experiences with words in books they were being shown or even in newspaper headlines.

Of great interest here was the reader’s disregard for reading methodology. This was in opposition to education’s avid pursuit of the “best” methodology. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) had talked about research emphasis upon school logistics. Sayers (in Larrick 1987) had stated that the teaching of reading mechanics had obscured the ultimate purpose of reading, which was to read.

What was important to the readers in this study was that they could read. This denoted a different attitude about reading. And attitude is the inspiration for action. A different set of educator and learner behaviors may be at work when the emphasis in reading education is upon the method to achieve the end, rather than the end itself. The readers of this study watched others model the knowledge and enjoyment that came from encounters with text. They wanted those ends for themselves. They initiated whatever actions were necessary in order to achieve the desired goal of becoming successful readers.

Researchers like Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, and Murphy (1987) reported on the powerlessness that was created when one particular reading methodology, in the case of their study, the basal reader, controlled the pedagogy. Smith (1984) and others called attention to the absence of the power of self-direction in many school settings. The readers of this study confirmed Zelman, Daniels, and Hyde's (1993) assessment that children learn to read like they learn to talk--with naturalness, by being exposed to the language environment, by choosing to claim the power within that environment for their own, and by initiating the necessary procedures to achieve their desires.

The readers of the study not only labored to initiate reading capabilities, they discovered their own best methods for reinforcing and perfecting their skills. Adam explained that it was easy for him to read now, but that it hadn't always been that way. He frequently used the words "patience" and "practice" to explain his success. He talked about practicing at reading, over and over again, and patiently sounding out words that were unfamiliar to him while thinking about word and meaning.

While Adam's preferred procedures involved phonetics and practice, Chad's and Betty's method was to work within context. Betty:

I just wanted to find out what happened, so I thought I could make up my own word to go there and just keep on reading. If I couldn't pronounce a word, I went back and started the sentence all over again and put in my own word and then kept on reading....Sometimes if I'm reading a book and there are lots of words that I can't understand, I'll just come back to that book later.

Dawn persisted when her reading became burdensome because of self-pride. She explained, "I've started this. I'm already into the book. I'm not going to quit. I can finish this, even just to say that I've read it."

An insightful comment by Filippe revealed what these examples had in common: When readers were free to experiment with their own best learning styles, the results were, for them, worth the effort. Filippe:

A pivotal point, I think, is psychologically establishing confidence in reading, so that you're the one in charge. It becomes a source of enjoyment and a source of knowledge that, while it requires energy and involvement and time, it is no longer disproportionately difficult.

There is a proverb that states, "Adversity introduces us to ourselves." And so it was with these readers. In the midst of their attempts at self-initiation and self-determination with reading, they encountered obstacles and frustrations. These came from both the educational establishment and their own peers. Dawn talked about both. "My first grade teacher didn't like me very much," Dawn said. "She thought I was not really reading and that I was immature, because I was always asking, 'Why do I have to do this?' She said I didn't belong in first grade." Another example from her school frustrations was the time in tenth grade she was assigned to read The Adventures of

Huckleberry Finn. “I read that in fourth grade!” she protested. She solved her problem by bringing her own books to school. As soon as she had read the assigned material, she read what she wanted to read.

Dawn talked of times when classmates attempted to intervene in her involvement with books. Dawn:

Daily, in my seventh-grade English class, I’d go in, sit down, and read. Then two boys would grab my book and throw it in the trash can. Then, as I retrieved my book, they would harass me and ask me why I was bothering to read. They couldn’t understand that I liked to read.

She mentioned being called a bookworm and, at times, becoming defensive. Yet, her desire to read enabled her to fight the battle. “What do you mean? Of course, I’m a reader. If you were, maybe you wouldn’t be like that!” Her words revealed the fighting spirit that fueled her determination to be a reader.

Many of Gayla’s frustrations were created by early reading skill difficulties and by a curriculum where Black culture was given only a cursory nod. Gayla:

I remember in first grade that I did and I didn’t like to read. I didn’t like class reading where we’d sit around in a circle and each child had to read aloud. I didn’t feel like I could read very well, and I would embarrass easily. So, I wouldn’t read. Sometimes they’d have to call my parents....We really didn’t have a choice about what to read....The only thing about Black history was slavery....I couldn’t tell you what Tom Sawyer was about....I couldn’t stand that book. The teacher read it to us. I can remember being so tense because I knew one of those words (degrading) was coming up. I blocked out all about Tom Sawyer or any book like that.

Gayla’s memory of obstacles created by her peers were vivid ones. “I remember stumbling over this one word. It was a two-letter word. I could hear this kid say, ‘Oh, she’s a dummy!’”

Filippe believed that reading was not actively supported by very many teachers nor by the school system, per se. Dawn's word for the lack of reading expectations in school was "Pathetic!" Eddie's comments provided a commentary on the absence of empowerment of students by educational institutions. Eddie:

Most of the classes I was in, we'd try to get a conversation going (about reading), and the teacher would shut it down. The comment was "You are here to learn, not to talk." ...In some classes, the teacher would say, "There's a time for conversation, and there's a time for just reading straight out of the book and accepting what it says." ...What is education but thought-control? Educators are telling us this is the way it is!

Eddie concluded with a story about being teased by classmates because he wore thick glasses and read so much. His final words gave insight into a commonality of these readers. They were willing to fight against what could have been disabling forces. "I'd try to stop reading," he said, "but there was always that draw." The decision to read and to continue reading was his. Something he derived from reading empowered him to continue the process. Dawn said readers enjoy reading because that's what they want to do, not something they have to do." Smith's (1989) fear that students left school able to read, but without realization of what reading could do for them was not evidenced by these readers. They had met and overcome situations like those pointed out by Smith (1984) where children in school were often presented what education decided was the right amount of instruction with monitoring and quality control. These students persisted in their right to read, self-directed and self-motivated.

What gave them the strength to persevere? At least, part of that answer was revealed in their own descriptions of powerful influences from events and individuals in

life and in print. Philippe said, "I'm committed to it intellectually, now. But there was a critical time in high school, early, when I re-discovered reading as truly enjoyable and valid. Somehow I read a few good books and fell in love with it all over again and that was pretty key!" This re-discovery phenomenon Philippe attributed, at least in part, to two teachers. One was a ninth-grade English teacher who read aloud to the class frequently and with great animation and humor. The other was a high school teacher of humanities and English who assigned outside readings from a long list of possibilities and then conversed with each student about the readings. He remembered his classmates, as well as himself, reading childhood tales, modern classics, and other memorable volumes missed, somehow, in earlier reading years. The offering of long, varied lists of choices and the informal discussions afterwards were cited by Philippe and other participants as crucial in their reading histories.

These readers were willing to be guided, which they viewed differently from being directed or forced. Chad explained, "Maybe if the teacher would say, 'I recommend this book,' then I'd probably have gone out and looked at it to see if I wanted to read it." Eddie, too, recognized the reader acceptance of leadership and guidance as long as freedom to choose was not eliminated totally. "It seems as though as long as you think you have the choice, you're going to be willing to read it. Maybe a teacher who wants the students to read about a certain period of time could have a lot of selections about that period and let the students choose." He mentioned a specific teacher who did that, telling the students, "I'd like for you to read all of these books, so I'll be happy with whichever ones you choose."

Dawn believed another important factor in guidance had to do with the establishment of value. Reading requirements were not the issue for her if she believed in the worth of the required selections. She mentioned a particular class. "I was reading things of value that they wanted me to read....As long as they wanted me to read 'real' literature, something that is important, then it's just great!"

All of the readers talked of important individuals within their lives who had endowed them with either the desire to discover or had encouraged them to read. The words "key figures" were used. Filippe said, "Just a couple of key figures made the difference." For Hal, that key figure was his father.

My father would tell me stories of what he read of the current events. He'd pass them on to me in a good way--a complete way. I caught on to the desire to inform myself of what was going on, through reading. He introduced the thought and brought on the desire of my wanting to learn....

Gayla's key figures were her father and an eighth grade teacher. Up until that time, Gayla had suffered embarrassments about reading and had tried to hide her difficulties from even her family. She said, "This teacher saw right through me. She broke down those walls. She made me face that I had a learning problem as far as reading. She was a gentle, gentle person. When that teacher helped me, it was a whole new world."

Almost all the readers named at least one influential person in their home setting and in their school setting. Each individual described someone who offered guidance, encouragement, and leadership, but who left the power of choice and decision with the reader himself or herself. Chad described his grandfather's encouragement: "He keeps

telling me, ‘I’ve got lots of books here. Come get some if you want.’” He talked, also, about a teacher whose favorite “trick” when reading aloud to the class was to stop at a point of great excitement or action. “And you can’t think all day long because you want to know what’s going to happen. What’s it going to be?”

One of Dawn’s key figures was her mother. A quality of gentleness in leadership and guidance was revealed. “She encouraged me to read. She always told me, ‘You can do anything you want. If you want to read, read. If you don’t want to, I’m not going to force you, but I think you’ll enjoy this if you do....”

It was interesting to note that even though the participants talked about key figures who read aloud, offered them materials, and suggested choices, none ever identified this as a strategy that caused them to read. Each example described the creation of an environment where the reader was guided and encouraged, but where the reader remained the central figure of control and decision-making. Research did not report much of this kind of non-controlling leadership in formal learning situations. Goelman, Oberg, and Smith (1984) talked about typical school situations in which the teacher was the control figure, selecting, organizing, and pointing out information to be learned. Dewey’s query of how many students lost the impetus to learn because of the way learning was experienced by them was a valid one. The readers of this study encountered individuals who impacted their lives, but who left them empowered. The experiences of these readers indicated that empowerment was an important issue.

In addition to being empowered by certain key individuals in their lives, the readers of the study drew power and confidence from text. As they searched for meaning,

they received inspiration and life-impacting messages from specific individuals and ideas within the materials they read. These “messages” influenced life actions. Adam spoke of the transfer of book power to life power. “(There are things) that I can’t do, but I try to do them when I’m reading. Like if someone’s not in karate and they want to be in karate, they can pretend like they’re a Ninja when they read.” He spoke of how he and his friends took these power roles into the games they played after reading.

For Dawn, the power came from becoming the creator of meaning, especially in the realm of fiction. Dawn:.

It’s an exercise for the imagination. You’re not just handed everything....Fiction, to me, is almost more real because you can do anything you want with fiction....You can create from scratch. You can build up something that wasn’t there before, and you can do whatever you want to with the characters and make them how you want to make them--how you feel they should be.

Unlike Dawn, Hal found the power of the reading from reality, not make-believe. “It’s the transfer of knowledge that ultimately can be used over and over.” Filippe believed the effect and influence of reading reached beyond both imagination and reality. It reached into the human spirit. Filippe:

Reading a work of Mahatma Ghandi, while it’s not a great work of literature...it’s more than just reading for information sake. It has a moral effect on the reader...and when it’s digested through the written word, it has a particularly powerful effect because of the amount of time spent digesting it and ruminating on it.

These and other reader commentaries revealed the power of textual encounters on their creative, functional, and spiritual lives.

Readers viewed the print medium as a more powerful force than television or

movies. Hal termed reading as less limiting. Philippe agreed: "I think video and movies restrict the amount of imagination, whereas reading may give a definite scenerio or certain information, but your mind is free to shape it and experience it very personally." Chad, Adam, and Betty saw themselves involved as creators with print versus recipients of the creative efforts of others in movies and television. Dawn agreed. She viewed the difference as being an insider rather than an outsider. "When I watch television, those are the characters. It is this world that somebody has created and that I'm observing. I have no creative input, but I do when I'm reading a book."

Readers mentioned the power of print's "portableness"--it's capability for being used anywhere, anytime that they chose. Betty described it as something she could do whenever she wanted. "And I think that's great!" she exclaimed. The power that came from making choices and initiating action was evidenced in these comparisons. Although most of them watched and enjoyed television or movies, those activities did not seem to consume the amount of time in their lives that reading activities did. Their preference, more often than not, was to be involved in the meaning-making process of print.

Personal involvement and self-determination extended beyond choices of when or where to read. The participants expressed a need and a desire to choose the books and materials that they were to read. Betty noted that she had this freedom and that it was important to her. "My parents couldn't really say anything (about reading choices) because they told me that whatever I wanted to read, I could....I can't really think straight if I'm reading a book that I don't enjoy."

For Philippe, choice was critical:

I think what's critical for me is my choice of reading. Because of limited time, I have to choose carefully what I'm going to read....there are too many books to be read in a lifetime. We have to be choosy,...so there's a lot of choice that goes into what I read.

Filippe spoke, also, of the excitement he derived from making these choices.

"Sometimes I like being in between books almost as much as I like being in the middle of a book." Deciding what to read next became a quest for him. He recalled visits to the school library during his early school days. Students were allowed time to "browse." "That's the first time I remember being excited about finding new stories that I wanted to read," he said.

"Browsing" emerged as a key word from the interview text. Freedom to choose was equated with time to browse. For Hal, browsing was an introduction to new, unthought of subject matter. Hal:

When you go into a library, you do the browsing. And quite often, it's suggestive. As you browse a bit, you might end up checking on a subject that you didn't have in mind when you went into the library. It's a process of some elimination. There (might be) a subject that I thought I wanted to read about, yet, I keep browsing, and I might eventually select another subject over that one....I think browsing is healthy.

Some of the readers valued decision-making within the contents of books. Chad enjoyed the choose-your-own-adventure books. "That sort of puts you in the detective's place where you have to choose well," he said. Betty took control of both the quality of the writing and the content of the plot. She became the "author." "In some stuff that I read, some parts of it aren't as good as they could be, so I just put in my own words. And if there's something I don't really like, I just picture it in a different way. I'll go back and

re-read it and put in my own words.”

These readers possessed a personal drive to read and to choose their own reading materials. They were open to suggestions of others if they assessed the suggestions as worthwhile, but they sought freedom to pursue their own reasons for reading. These reasons were varied, but valid, as perceived by the judgment makers themselves--the readers.

Filippe considered himself a more serious student when he pursued the reading himself as opposed to that which might be required by a certain curriculum in which he was enrolled. “Even though I might be reading similar materials, the simple fact that it’s my own agenda and my own bibliography makes it a completely different thing.”

Dawn viewed pursuing her own reading desires as an opportunity to read what she considered worthwhile. She, like Philippe, felt pressured by the number of books waiting to be read, and she wanted to “get on” with her personal reading list. “There are thousands and thousands of important books out there, but there are some to me more important than others. Those are the ones that I would like to read.”

Hal agreed. “I believe that I’m rather motivated a bit more in a selection that I would choose, as compared to maybe some that other authorities might suggest or require.”

The readers discussed how satisfaction from reading was curtailed when choice was removed. Betty believed she wouldn’t read as much if she couldn’t have the books she enjoyed. Gayla talked about the diminishment of comprehension when required materials didn’t interest her. She said, “I don’t know half the time what I’m reading

then. My mind is not in it, and neither is my heart.”

Eddie talked about being “forced” to read certain materials. For him, this was fine if he was the one doing the “forcing.” “When I force myself, it’s saying to myself, ‘Okay, you’ve read enough of that (other material). It’s time to try something else.’ But, if someone else is forcing you to do the reading, you do it rather grudgingly.”

These readers were cognizant of their motivations for reading, which they had evaluated for significance and worth. Eddie acknowledged that the attention he gained from being able to read at such a young age spurred him to read. He openly sought opportunities to exhibit his skill. Impressing his teacher and classmates was an early motivator. Motivations had changed, now, but ego had played a part at one point in his life.

Adam had very specific and immediate reasons for reading. It provided the information he wanted. “ When I climb a tree, I like doing things like getting caterpillars up in it and taking some dead leaves and moss. Then I read science books to figure out about all that stuff.” Adam was also a baseball fan and subscribed to a magazine that provided statistics on his favorite teams. He reported reading the magazine because , “It tells you like how many hits he’s did and how many ‘caughts’ he’s did.” He loved to impress his father with his knowledge.

But Adam’s motivation to read for information was driven by more than his immediate interests. He told of reading a series of books on magic because he had considered becoming a magician when he grew up. He now considered himself a prime candidate for the astronaut life, at some future date. He had been following the progress

of the space station so he would be ready if he had the chance to go there.

Betty was a woman in tune with feelings--her own and those of others. She often used words like "happy" and "enjoy" in reference to reading experiences. She noticed that people often looked happy when they were reading, and she felt the same way. Several of the participants connected the word "enjoyment" to one of the reasons they read. Chad read, "just for fun." Then he qualified it, and said, "For information and fun."

Many of Gayla's early reading experiences had been unpleasant because of her difficulties with word recognition and from her embarrassment at being required to listen to book material that she found demeaning. One of her later motivations to read was to learn more about Black history and culture.

Younger readers mentioned that they "practiced" their reading because it helped them do better at school and get better grades. Several readers tied reading to vocabulary growth and to ability to speak more intelligently with others. Hal outlined his own history of reading motivation. It began as an entry into more satisfactory interactions with others and developed into a quest for growth and self-development. He had given this subject a great deal of thought. Hal:

I believe it comes down to personal motivation. When I first started reading, it was a time-passing thing or someone might have said to me, 'Have you read this?' And I recall my early answers were, 'No, I haven't.' I began to wonder, 'Should I?' And I began to think, in my brief make-up of time, 'Although I don't have to take the lead, I don't have to bring up the rear, either.' I think that's what reading is all about--self-satisfaction.

I have along the way known that I've been hungry, yes, hungry for knowledge. Not knowledge for its own sake, to go and use at that moment, but to help you

become that more complete person.

Hal believed that this kind of motivation, the desire to know, the drive to be inquisitive, was not automatic. It was something that was self-initiated. "I think you can make yourself curious....You can make yourself want to delve and pursue."

Recent research on reading instruction has called for deeper investigation into the areas of reading motivation and reading inspiration. Few studies have been conducted that consulted readers as the source of knowledge about these subjects. Oldfather (1995) called students an untapped source of insight for teachers in the classroom. The participants of this study knew their reasons and goals for reading. They acknowledged their desires for both immediate and long-range gains in educational accomplishment, social interaction, and knowledge attainment. They recognized, also, that reading offered them an avenue for pleasure and self-satisfaction, two qualities Miller (1987) identified as essential for meaningful reading. These readers believed the sentiments that Hal voiced: "Reading expands your horizons....Life wouldn't be as exciting without it!"

During the analysis of the study data, "power" had emerged as an essence of the reader nature, as constructed within the experiences related by the participants. The readers of this study were all self-teachers. Bissex (in Cramer and Castle, 1994) believed in the power of children to be their own teachers to a much greater degree than adults allowed them to be. Decisions enacted by the study readers indicated an ability to construct their own systems of learning--not ones imposed from the outside. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993) termed this kind of reader as "self-motivated." The self-

directed learning activities these readers created and carried out gave credence to Smith's (1994) call for revision of reading instructional practices in such a way that students' "inner-teachers" would be empowered.

The readers I interviewed viewed themselves as self-created, self-developed readers who had been aided in their efforts by guidance from key figures who encouraged and invited them to learn. They believed they had grown more powerful from encounters with influential ideas and figures within the texts they sought out by personal choice. Their stories indicated individuals who initiated, managed, and fostered their own reading efforts. Because the ends that they sought were relevant and meaningful to them, they had invested the time and effort necessary to be successful at the reading process. "I think the amount of energy and focus that you bring to reading is in direct relation to what you can get out of it," said Philippe.

The life stories of these readers indicated that a valid and pertinent area for future research would be in increasing understanding of how readers recognize and attain the power that accompanies self-taught, self-directed reading.

Theme Number Two: Ritual

Institutions of learning, by word and by deed, have indicated that they view themselves as creators of reading ritual. For schools and other formal instructive situations, generally meaningless ritualistic activities have been prescribed in the name of reading experience. These have been accompanied by an attitude of control over what readers were allowed to initiate and determine on their own. Institutes of learning have

seemingly failed to recognize the potential of self-created, meaningful ritual in the lives of readers. Smith (1984) indicated that because of this pattern of action and attitude, learners have been misled into perceiving reading as only those events educationally prescribed.

Institutionally derived skill and drill procedures did not resemble, at all, the ritual of reading described by the readers of this study. They identified rituals introduced to them by significant individuals in their lives, and they recalled rituals created by themselves to accommodate their own reading needs.

Miller (1987) recognized the creation of ritual in regard to reading as an event in the world. "It takes place as an event in a certain spot and turns that spot in a certain sense into a sacred place, that is, into a place which is inaugural" (p. 53). The readers of this study used ritual, not just as a "reading event," but, also, as nourishment and support for their reading lives. The theme of ritual emerged as an essence of the reader nature as readers spoke of habits and practices and "daily doings" cultivated and preserved by themselves and others. These patterns accompanied decisions on what to read, when and where to read, and with whom to read. The readers were aware of the importance of ritual in their lives, although they did not use the term "ritual" itself. It was evidenced, rather, in the language of time and place.

Introduction to their own reading rituals began, for these readers, with the modeling of ritualistic behaviors by others. Adam remarked that he noticed his father "usually" reading the newspaper in the evening and "always" going to bookstores. Adam visited bookstores frequently himself, now. Betty's identifying phrase for ritual was "all

the time.” She watched her parents reading “all the time.” They “drifted off” into the books they read “all the time.” “Drifted off all the time” was a phrase she used, first, to describe her parents’ involvement with text, but, later, to describe her own reading involvement. Chad’s grandparents “always” read the newspaper “every” morning; they “always called his attention to pictures in the paper, and they “always” read him the stories of significance for him. A major event for Chad, now, was his own daily reading of the newspaper from “cover to cover.” His story was similar to Gayla’s, whose parents were the newspaper readers and to Hal’s, whose father was a daily newspaper reader. They, too, “always” read and “always” talked about the reading to their children. The experiences these readers revealed how rituals observed became rituals practiced. Ritual modeled by others had been chosen by them as meaningful for their own reading lives.

Patterns of storytelling sessions and classroom “read-alouds” emerged from the readers’ experiences. Adam and Betty both retold tales of parental escapades and family history, learned from repeated story sessions with their mothers and fathers. Chad’s bedtime tales were his grandfather’s World War II recollections. Philippe spoke of his own grandfather’s storytelling expertise and of nightly reading session performed by both of his parents. Dawn recalled giving her grandmother the morning wake-up call. “Come on, Grandma,” she’d say. “It’s time to read.”

Chad’s memories of his and his mother’s reading rituals were detailed. “Every night she had this little Bible book that had stories in it, and every night she would read to me one or two stories from that. I always loved to listen to those.”

The readers told of primary teachers, but others as well, who read aloud to the students. A fifth-grade teacher and a ninth-grade teacher were mentioned, specifically. The number of such events recounted and the details with which these events were relived indicated the importance of their place in the reader life. These were stories of influential figures in their lives who modeled reading ritual and who initiated rituals in partnership with the potential or novice readers in their care.

These readers developed their own individual rituals, as well. Chad and Eddie were dedicated cereal box readers with a method to their madness. Eddie described his as a morning habit that began early in childhood. "When I was younger, I always read the cereal box. I'd start at the front, go to the side, and next, the ingredients. Then, I'd turn it around for whatever was on the back....For something to do, or just because I could. I'm not sure which."

Chad termed his whole reading behavior as a habit, of sorts. "It's a habit. I think, 'Oh, let's go get a book.' It just comes to mind: Book! So I go get one....That's how it always was with me and books."

Eddie described a similar relationship with reading. "If there's a book there, I just pick it up. I can't help it....I've even tried to figure out why I would rather plop down on the bed and read than do something else. I'm not sure. I can't imagine what it would be like not to read."

Eddie and Philippe both talked about incidents that indicate that because reading rituals are often personal and solitary, they could be misunderstood by others. Eddie's mother, who failed to appreciate his reading dedication when other things needed to be

done, called it a lack of responsibility--not knowing priorities. Philippe's experience referred to his time in the Peace Corps in an African village where he was the only person who had the ability to read. "They considered it very strange that I would want to be alone for awhile each afternoon to read. Their lives were completely social, while I had my books."

Readers established patterns that dictated "browsing" habits and facilitated book selection. Hal, who was primarily a non-fiction reader, had discovered long before that the secret to locating non-fiction books at his hometown library was the blue card in the pocket. "So, that became my line," he said. " 'Blue is true.' I've almost always stayed with the non-fiction. There's a lot of them on the market. I never did run out."

Adam's pattern involved looking at all the books in the science section of his school library and then the kids books and then the chapter books. For Eddie, the ritual began with a title. "I look at titles. Titles are always interesting." His pattern for browsing was to pick up a book, flip it open and read the flap. Then, he usually put it back with no further contact. As he said, "I just wanted to see what it was about."

Filippe had given considerable thought to his ritual for book selection. "When I look for a book, there are always either books that I have on a list or that I've intended to read for some time. It's been years since I've been without more titles on the list than I can possibly read....I read primary texts, first. If my interest continues, then I read the secondary texts.

Reader rituals specified time and place. Philippe reported, "I don't read massive amounts of books, but I read every single day. It fills the majority of my free time. There

are always more books that I want to read than I have time for. Almost all my free moments are spent reading.” Gayla, too, read daily, as often as possible. She mentioned always taking books with her on trips or anytime she was going to be in the car.

Filippe was comforted by the reliability of reading patterns. “There’s something about carrying an old book with you that you can throw in the front seat of the car. I read in many different places, at many different times. Almost asleep in bed? I read there. You can read everywhere. That’s a key to it.”

Dawn told of reading rituals established with her friends. “Most of my friends are readers. “Sometimes, instead of renting a movie, we’ll get copies of the same book and read together, stopping to check each other’s progress and to discuss reactions.”

Adam, the youngest, recognized the importance of preserving the reading habit through ritual. “When you finish a story, it’s really fun because you think of that story when you grow up and you can tell it. Then all those kids will think it’s fun, and it just passes on--like if the kids heard the story, they’ll pass it on to their kids and their kids will pass it on...and on...and on down.”

Ritual, as observed and then initiated by these readers, gave structure and continuity to their reader experience. Ritual strengthened their decisions to read, to read at certain times and places, and to make their choices of what to read. They found comfort and support within the rituals of their reading lives. Ritual emerged as an essential element of the reader life. Perhaps, the most significant aspect of ritual in the reader life was its role in preserving reading as an activity of choice for these readers--beyond the classroom hours, beyond the formal education years. The words of the more

mature readers of this study indicated their regard for reading as a lifelong pastime. The enthusiasm of the younger readers implied that they, too, viewed reading as essential in their lives. Their experiences suggested that ritual was a fundamental quality of the lifelong readers.

Recognition of the importance of ritual in the reader life was not reflected in the survey of significant literature, however. Other than Smith's (1984) comment concerning schools creating ritualistic behaviors that students associated with reading, the subject was not explored in studies read by this researcher. The significance these study participants place upon ritual would suggest it as an area for further educational research.

Theme Number Three: Thoughtfulness

"The value of a reading lies in its difference and deviation from the text it purports to read" (Miller, 1987, p. 118). For such a reaction to occur, readers must come to text ready to be meaning-makers, visionaries, analysts, interrogators and evaluators. Rosenblatt (1994-1995) called it a transaction "in which meaning emerges from a continuing to and fro relationship between a reader and the signs on a page, each conditioning and being conditioned by the other" (p. 11). Miller (1987) termed an act of reading as including, "sensation, perception, and, therefore, every human act" (p. 58). Vygotsky (1962) called each word a "microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 153). His description indicated a belief in the potential for readers to "author" the texts they encountered.

The individuals of this study reacted to the words they read with new

interpretations, unique emotions, evaluative responses, and insightful perceptions. This was a valid statement, regardless of the age of the participant. A difference in sophistication of language and content was obvious, but even the youngest readers of this survey related experiences that portrayed these thinking processes in action. A literacy of thoughtfulness, as defined by Brown (1993), was revealed in the words they used to describe their transactions and interactions with text. Dawn compared her role of reader to a builder. “Even the best book is dull if you don’t try to put something in for yourself--of yourself--and build the world, build the characters....”

Essential in acts of reading for these readers was the potential for achieving oneness with the text. Philippe described it as “the point where the thought-processing from what is being read becomes an unconscious, automatic action and the thoughts ‘jump up off the page.’” Gayla termed it an “integration” where she became the character in the story. “I just put myself right into that place--past or future. Adam provided the example to accompany her description of “integration.” He said, “Like if I was reading a book about a dragon, I would be one of the dragons....I can imagine that other dragon isn’t there, and I’m the dragon.” These readers were describing an absorption into text to the point of unconscious involvement.

Eddie did not believe such complete loss of self was possible, however. He, like Rosenblatt (1994-995) described it as more of a “back and forth” process. “I know when I’m reading, if I come across something that sets me thinking, I’ll go, ‘That’s an aspect of humanity I’ve noticed. People do tend to do that.’ So I’m always finding something in the book that will set me thinking.” His point was that, usually, he was aware of the mind

movement from text to thought and back to text.

Identifying with figures in the reading was a common experience among all the readers. It didn't matter whether these were figures from fiction, figures from history, or figures from current times. Hal's fascination with Albert Einstein included becoming a part of Einstein's world in his ability to "see" Einstein at work. It carried over into his own life by creating within him the desire to explore the field of mathematics, never before one of his best study areas.

Dawn described becoming so totally absorbed that she felt like she was no longer sitting in place, reading, and she was no longer herself. She offered an example of a recently read book that was set in Germany at the turn of this century. She described experiencing the character's doubts, empathizing with his philosophy, and sharing his thoughts. "Now I just started Brave New World," she said, "So I'm going to be somebody totally different for awhile."

For Betty the process of immersion was gradual. For Gayla, it was almost instantaneous. "I just put myself there. I want to be that character or feel like that character. Instead of her, it's me. It's me in there." She added that for a certain amount of time, the text became her reality. "This is what's happening. This is real. This is now."

The readers discussed the emotional involvement and emotional "carryover" that accompanied text involvement. For Gayla, the text removed her from the concerns of daily living. "I can be upset and nervous, and if I can get a book and read, I calm down and get my mind off of whatever was bothering me." Other readers found their emotions

reflecting the emotions of the characters they encountered in the text. And several revealed that those emotions were not easy to set aside when the story was completed or the book was closed. Betty remarked that after reading a sad book, "I'll be kind of sad, because I'm still in the book." Chad agreed, even if the mood were happy or funny.

These readers agreed in their assessment that level of involvement, for them, was more intense with print than with movies or television. The sense of oneness they had remarked about was not so easily achieved there. Philippe believed the electronic medium to be a more passive activity, requiring less input from the individual. He attributed that to what he called a "greater personal investment" on the part of the reader. "Even if you were very captivated by a movie or show, the experience was still very brief--temporal. Whereas, you take a book, and if you're carrying it around for a week or longer, not always reading, but ruminating on it, the material kind of revolving in your brain--that's a completely different experience."

For Adam, the difference was a matter of "authorship." "Like you can watch television, and they're telling you a story, but (when you read) you're telling the story and it's much better."

These readers viewed themselves as partners in the writing process. For Philippe, the line between author and reader was often lost. To explain how they became "authors" or "co-authors", they used words like "used my imagination," or "created my own world." One of the values they discovered when they brought their imaginations to the text was the enhancement of reading enjoyment. Philippe believed that certain texts encouraged the use of imagination and, thus, were most effective in capturing the

attention of young readers. “When my interest in reading was first sparked, imagination was pretty integral to why I read or why I found reading enjoyable. It helps create the commitment to reading.”

Betty agreed. “I think that it’s (imagination) is something everybody should be happy to have because you can go anywhere if you have your imagination.”

Readers offered numerous examples of how they used imagination to enhance text or create their own new text. Adam’s examples were as simple as making a teddy bear come to life or the Easter Bunny “hop as high as a giant.” But, his examples also exhibited more complexities. He told a story in which he changed details like making a character known as “Lunchsnatcher” like his tuna sandwich instead of dislike it. He “rewrote” the endings of books that didn’t have his desired dragon-battle outcome. He teacher mentioned that one of Adam’s favorite kinds of books was the create-your-own adventure books. Adam’s favorite method of “attack” was to find the ending he wanted, and then work backwards until he arrived at how it all began. Use of imagination for enhancing or changing text was not just a device of the young readers of the survey. Philippe talked of imagination as continuing to be a part of his interaction with fiction stories. Hal, while relating a favorite Einstein story, remarked, “I could just see the pages and pages and pages of the figures, of the formulas that started his creation of the theory.”

When asked where they thought their imaginative powers originated, most of the readers agreed that they were based upon prior experiences. Eddie’s example was in using his own hometown as the setting for many of the Steven King stories he read. Gayla talked of characters that reminded her of herself or someone she knew. “Then I put

them into it. I can see their faces in there.” Dawn described it as, “A part of you colors everything you read.”

Even though they attributed imagination to experiences and settings in their own realities, several of the readers used the phrase “whole new world” or “my own world” to describe imaginative encounters with text. This world was not exactly the world created by the author. Nor was it the actual world in which they lived. It was explained as a created world, drawn from both text and reality. Dawn called it, “Just the world I build inside my own mind....I build on what the author already said.”

From the numerous examples they cited, these readers clearly viewed themselves as interpreters and creators of text. They felt no constraints to follow the dictates of the author. They enlivened and changed text when it suited their purposes. Eddie spoke to this directly. “What the author was thinking when he wrote it isn’t going to be the same as what you’re thinking of when you’re reading it, so you can always change it if you want.” He remarked that this was not the case in movies, which were “all set down.” He believed the story became “your own” during the process of authorship.

Betty knew she was in charge of text. “If I get myself into a book and I think, ‘Well, this is not what I would do,’ I just put in what I would do.”

Hal viewed himself more often as a partner in the creative process than as sole author. He called it “supplementing” the meaning beyond what was intended by the author. Dawn described it as each person having a slightly different view of what really happened in the text so that each interpretation was different. These readers’ willingness to create meaning and to enter each reading experience with openness was reminiscent of

Miller's(1987) belief that each reading was "inaugural."

As they quested to create meaning, these readers sought, also, to apply to life the meaning they took from text. They used words like "think," "reflect," and "question." These words from their lips revealed the processes of their minds.

These readers spoke often of purpose. Hal stated, "I believe you read with a purpose in mind. For me, I think the thing was to read to learn. Despite the sixty-five years separating their ages, Betty's assessment of reading purpose was similar to Hal's. "When you read, you have to think about what's happening, so you can remember it when you need it. Then when you get to another chapter, you'll know what they're talking about." She, too, was reading to learn and to retain. She, too, was becoming a "thinker."

For Filippe, reading was thinking. "It's a direct experience with text. I approach the written word as a thought. I don't see letters. I don't see pages. The thought just comes up whole."

Dawn's response was an echo. "I think...therefore, I read...therefore, I think...."

Reflection was part of the reading process for these readers. Although Miller (1987) called clearheaded reflection on text difficult and rare, these readers engaged in the process consistently and purposefully. They reflected consciously. "You can make the subject come to life by having that motivation to pursue meaning, to give thought to it as you read, to re-digest and review it," said Hal. "If I get to something that is weird, I just stop and think. I think about that, then I go on," said Chad.

They, also, reflected unconsciously. "I 'put it in the back of my mind'," Adam

explained. "It just happens because now I'm used to it. I used to have to go back and look at what happened when I was littler because I couldn't remember. But now, I just remember it."

Eddie spoke of both conscious and unconscious reflection. "I know there have been times when I've read something that pops out. I'll put the book down and think about it while I do something else. Other times, I'll just keep reading and the thought stays in the back of my mind. I'll pull it out later."

Dawn recognized that this reflective process sometimes produced delayed textual understanding. "I didn't understand Les Miserables, when I read it. But now, I realize the reason the book was so long is that he had so many essays--social, political, religious--and when I was reading it, I didn't understand that. Now I see the depth of the book." Noticeable with these readers was that, regardless of age and years of reading experience, the purpose and process of reflection was similar. They used reflection as an important method for extending and making relevant the meaning of text.

Asking questions--before, during, and after reading--was a part of the literacy of thoughtfulness exhibited by these readers. Hal connected his fascination with Einstein to the need to question. "My fascination with him would be because of his philosophy of asking 'Why?' and then delving into it." Hal lived out this same philosophy in his own life. His stories were filled with the "Why's" that directed his reading behaviors. He described the questioning process as a cycle. He read because he had questions. Then the reading caused thinking which created new questions.

Dawn described her own questioning techniques. "I usually question things, you

know. ‘Why is it like that?’ ‘What could I do to change that?’ ‘What if someone had done something differently?’”

The readers of this study were questioners. They asked, “Why?” They asked, “Why not?” They asked, “What if?” Their questions, at times, led to new meanings and new areas of understanding. On other occasions, the questions led to more questions. This intense interaction with text seemed to be a natural process with them. As Dawn said, “You get to the point where you can’t really help it.” Hal believed if you read long enough and diligently enough, you might one day know enough to ask a question.

Ultimately, by thinking, reflecting, and questioning, these readers discovered the process of evaluating. They evaluated the prowess of the writers they read. They evaluated the depth and worth of the meaning they took from text. Eventually, they told of arriving at greater understanding of self and others, which is the purpose of evaluation.

Betty was one who evaluated the writer’s ability to involve her in the story. “After I read the first chapter, I’ll think about what happened and think about the possibilities. I’ll say, ‘This is a good way to start a book.’ Or I’ll say, ‘I don’t like this book. It doesn’t have a good start to it.’” Betty had definite ideas about what made this “good start” to which she referred. For her, it was a first chapter that left her wondering what could happen next, with several possibilities to that question.

Dawn and Filippe evaluated the worth and value of the work itself. They believed in a certain nobility of subject matter, Dawn described it as “having literary value or being worthwhile.” She purposely sought books that she or others had determined met these standards. Filippe equated “noble subject matter” with understanding of the human

condition. “These are writings about subjects that affect our human behaviors and our relations to others....While all reading is valuable, I would make judgments as to some types of reading that are nobler in essence.”

These readers evaluated the relevance of text to life. Eddie believed such relevance could be discovered even within the pages of his favorite science fiction stories. “Lots of people say, ‘It’s just sci-fi. It’s not actually going to happen.’ But, science-fiction is about theocracy, the working of politics, genetics, all sorts of things that can actually happen.”

Dawn discovered relevance within texts that increased her understanding of world events and issues. Dawn:

Something will happen in the world that parallels what’s happening in a book I’m reading. While normally, I might say, ‘I don’t understand that.’ But, through the books I’m reading, I think, ‘Okay. This was the motivation for that. This caused that string of events to happen.’ Things make more sense in the outside world if I have something (in my reading) to base it on.

Film maker David Grubin (1995) commented upon the difficulty of creating visuals for a documentary he was making. He said, “There is no visual equivalent for the word, because the word has so many resonances and so many levels of meaning” (p. 6B). Like Vygotsky (1962), he viewed each word as an individual world that could be discovered and identified by the reader or the user. The readers of this study proved to be thoughtful perusers and pursuers of text, finding within words their own understandings, assessments, and applications of meaning. Thoughtfulness emerged as an essence of the reading nature.

Theme Four: Worldview

In one of his works of poetry, William Butler Yeats wondered if it were possible to tell the dancer from the dance. In seeking to understand the nature of the reader, I asked a similar question. Was it possible to separate the reader from that which had been read? The inter-connectedness of one with the other was most apparent in the examination of worldview--the fourth theme to emerge from the reader data.

Miller (1987), in reference to the merging of reader and text, said, "Reading, too, turns empty spaces into a locus where something unique and unforeseen has occurred, has entered into the human world, and where it will have such effects as it will have" (p. 53). When the readers of this study set aside the printed pages, the text continued to live on within them, making and re-making their beliefs and their life philosophy. Readers, then, "authored" with their lives other pages and other chapters to the stories they had read.

"Books are our passports to other worlds, other people, other ways of thinking, other lives. From reading, we can learn and understand the world around us better, and we can grow as individuals." These were the words of a sixteen-year old girl named Dawn, one of the participants of this study. She and the other participants had a vision of themselves within the world. They read. They reflected. They related text to life. They sought to capture the vision.

The worldview of a reader, as evidenced in the interview text, was discussed in this chapter in three phases: (1) as the reader recognized the power of text and its effects

upon daily life; (2) as the reader organized and re-organized thinking about self, and (3) as the reader expanded perceptions of society, the world, and life.

Adam was a believer in the power of reading. His belief was evidenced in the very practical ways he applied text to his life. Adam:

When you read books, afterwards you may want to play the game you imagined (in the book). Like when I was reading a book called Wonder Kid Meets Evil Lunchsnatcher, when I got home I asked Mom if I could cut up one of her scarves and make a mask like Wonder Kid. I wanted to be a Super Hero, like the kid in the book wanted to be.

Dawn, too, recognized the direct application of text to life. “For one thing, it’s expanded my vocabulary....But, then, it also gives me insight into other things like I personally don’t know how it feels to be in an absolute rage where you want to kill someone, but through reading, I can get some glimpse of what it’s really like.”

Eddie found that reading provided a “shortcut” to problem-solving. “Maybe after a certain period of time, we might have been able to come up with that thought, even if we hadn’t read the book, but the book was a gateway to help us achieve it sooner.” Gayla phrased it succinctly. “I’d hate to think what my mind would be if I didn’t read anymore.”

Hal and Filippe had well-developed philosophies related to the application of text to their lives. Hal said, “Knowingly and unknowingly, I’ve used the sum total of all that I’ve read in making my decisions....Reading is a contributing part of what you are and what you will be.”

Filippe continued the theme. Filippe:

I think reading is a valid way of broadening your worldview. Who knows what

kind of unconscious, deep unconscious effect it's had on a number of things.... You meet people and places and ideas that you couldn't have otherwise. That's the whole point in contemplating the fundamental aspects of our existence and nature. If these are the kinds of things we're reading--exposing ourselves to new ideas--it can't help but affect the way we think and act.

These readers analyzed themselves in terms of their reading. Betty said, "I wouldn't be the person I am right now...." Gayla found independence through reading. "I can understand what's going on in the world. I don't have to take somebody else's word for it."

Hal saw reading as life-altering. Hal:

I don't believe we are born to be what we are. You work and you acquire additional ability through reading about the experiences of others and then you apply that to yourself. You go on to become a better professional or a better person than you would normally be. That can come through reading.

Eddie pointed out the challenge that he had discovered was an accompaniment to exposure to new ideas. "A friend and I were talking. We're actually kind of envious of the people that can just take it as read and who don't have to wrestle with it. As a reader, I'm always leaving myself in a bit of a turmoil." Yet, even through "turmoil" and challenge, he spoke of how important it had become for him to discover new ideas and to not just accept the expected ones without, at least, contemplating their essence.

Henry James believed, "The whole conduct of life consists of things done which do other things in their turn...in an endless chain of consequences" (in Miller, 1987, p. 102.) Eddie had discovered this universal truth.

Dagostino and Carifio (1994) determined that openness of mind and receptiveness

were necessary qualities of readers. The readers of this study exhibited those qualities. They looked through a lens of greater understanding and more open-mindedness because of what they described as significant encounters with text. They believed the world became smaller and their lives richer from their reading experiences. Dawn described it as an “opening up, getting a wider understanding of the world, seeing things differently than I would have seen them.”

Eddie recognized the effects of text on his receptiveness of viewpoints different from his own. “If you read enough, you see that all of a sudden there are these millions of viewpoints, and they don’t always agree....I’m always gaining a little more knowledge. Always changing or adding to my perceptions of the world and people....”

Hal not only commented upon the effect of reading in his own life experience, but admonished those who might not take advantage of what text had to offer the human condition.

Hal:

I think reading puts us in a place to appreciate the progress that happens around us. Today, we cannot use the excuse that it (reading material) is not available. Everything that can make us more complete than what we are, more successful--it is available. And if we don’t acquire it, it will be us at fault.

As one more window through which the worldview of these readers might be glimpsed, Table 5 has presented each participants’ completion of the open-ended statement, “Reading is....” No two responses were the same, yet each one added to the understanding of the complexity of a reader’s response to text.

Table 5

Reader Response to “Reading is....”

Participant	Response
Adam	Reading is imagining.
Betty	Reading is slowly going into a book into the past or into the future.
Chad	Reading is not just fun. It's information!
Dawn	Reading is exploration. You can see anything you want. You can go to different countries, exploring their values.
Eddie	Reading is an escape--not a negative. People just want a little more, and reading offers that.
Filippe	Reading is one way of discovering art and beauty that can be expressed through language. It's very close to our center as human beings.
Gayla	Reading is enjoyable. Relaxing. Just a joy in knowing that I can read what I want.
Hal	Reading is an open door which you walk through to a wider, deeper world of tomorrow, that could make you a more complete person than you are today.

From a student journal in the book Inside Out comes the statement: “She had been turned inside out by the reading she had been doing” (Martusewitz and Reynolds, 1994, p. 2). The lives of the readers of this study were impacted by the texts which they encountered. They described “inside out” experiences of their own that caused them to question their complacencies and review their perspectives. Worldview was an essence of the reader nature--in thinking and in doing.

Conclusion

Power, ritual, thoughtfulness, and worldview. These themes emerged as the nature of the reader, based upon revelations from those who spoke truth, as they knew the truth to be. They had discovered their truths through experience and reflection. As these themes were explored through the words of readers, the study sought to determine if these speakers exemplified the definitions of “literacy,” “reading,” and “reader” as this study so defined them. The findings of this investigation was that they had done so. As thoughtful seekers of meaning, they imagined and reflected and questioned and evaluated. From their interactions with text, their attitudes and perspectives were impacted. The words of their stories represented lives of literacy.

The study participants explained “reading” in a variety of ways, as seen in Table V. “Enjoyment” and “self-satisfaction” were stated or implied in the words they used to describe the parameters of reading, as they understood them to be. According to the definition of reading used in this study, they had been engaged in countless acts of reading.

The study definition of “reader” was created from the words of two of the participants. Numerous examples from the reader lives verified that these were individuals who read from their own desire to do so, and that they committed time from their lives to devote to the act of reading. They spoke of the enjoyment that reading gave them. This study believed that each had earned the title of “reader.”

The first assumption of this study was that learning was an on-going process. The

participants in this investigation, although varying in age from seven to seventy-four, all exhibited characteristics of curiosity, creativity, and perspicacity. They identified personal quests for knowledge and fulfillment. They had little need of externally imposed requirements to shape their learning behaviors. Hal reviewed a lifetime of learning that had spanned seven decades and then said, "I've been thinking about looking more into mathematics. I think I'd like to know more about that--just for the sake of knowing, I guess."

Chad had read every book on United States Presidents that his school library had to offer because, "Someday I'd like to be President!" and he was going to be prepared with a solid base of knowledge. Gayla, in her forties, had begun a whole new chapter in her career life. It was scary for her. She said, "I'm achieving my goals...but I'm not completely happy. There's more things I want to do...." These words and many more that came from the stories of these eight individuals were "microcosms" of wisdom from those dedicated to learning.

Hal addressed the first assumption, without even being asked. "I don't think we should ever tire or discontinue education. Life itself, to the last day, is a continuing process of education. We need to gain as much as we can out of it."

The second assumption of this study was that experiences garnered through reading were inseparable from the life of the reader and were enacted, consciously or unconsciously, in life choices and decisions. The examples provided by the participants that showed text interacting in their lives were numerous. Only a few were included in this written report. Adam lived out his reading in "real life" adventures with his friends.

Betty said she wouldn't be the person she was if she didn't read. These readers expressed their desire to grow, to search, to never become complacent. Dawn said, "I have to have new things around me." Philippe said, "A reader's world is very large. You could never leave this room again, and you could experience all of history and all of the known world through books." These were individuals who openly admitted that text had affected their lives.

The third assumption was that shared experiences through authentic language can be a part of the learning cycle for other individuals. Both Dawn and Eddie expressed the need that they felt of discussing the meaning of text with others. They had, at times, felt stifled in school settings where authentic discussion was not promoted or not even allowed. They sought it among their friends in informal situations. Gayla, Chad, and Hal related that one motivation for reading, for them, was to be able to talk with others, to share ideas, and to be credible in conversations. Adam and Betty, as young as they were, came to the interview sessions with avid interest in talking about reading. They were pleased that someone wanted to listen to their words. They looked forward to the opportunity to talk about something that was important in their lives. Philippe, as a student of philosophy, spoke at length about language--its glory, its beauty--its authenticity. One by one, during the interviews, these individuals had shared meaningful experiences with me through the medium of conversation. If sharing meaningful experiences was important for them, could it not be true for others? Because their stories, recorded in this study, constitute a "living" text from which insight can be drawn, their shared experiences could become part of the learning cycle of others. It was to that end

that this study was conducted.

The fourth assumption of this study was that particulars of the human existence tend to illuminate larger issues and are, thus, significant. In one of his reflections on how encounters with text had influenced his world view, Eddie stated, "It is important not to grow apathetic. To always want a little bit more--a little something else--to not be satisfied." A goal of research has been to illuminate and to explore. The mind of the reader offered a territory ready for illumination and exploration. Research admitted that the central figure in education had too long been ignored. An issue of significance, addressed by this study, was what can be learned from the individual's life wisdom. Eddie's words sound a gong for the researcher and the practitioner. There can be no apathy in seeking educational gain for learners. They must be offered a little bit more--a little something else than they've received before. Educators must not be satisfied with that which has been.

Victor Nell (1994) spoke eloquently of the reader, the text, and the essences that were created as they became one:

Paired wonders of reading: the world-creating power of books and the reader's effortless absorption that allows the book's fragile world, all air and thought, to maintain itself for awhile. Within it readers acquire peace, become more powerful, feel braver, and are wiser in the ways of the world" (in Cramer and Castle, p. 41).

This study discovered that the eight participants were, indeed, wise in the ways of the reader world. The nature of the reader and the reader life unfolded as they told their stories. The words have been recorded here in hopes that their reader wisdom might

become part of a new text, one written by those who read now and dedicated to those who will read someday.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELEVANT FINDINGS

In reading, we can learn to understand the world around us better. This enables us to understand ourselves. Then we can grow as individuals.

--Dawn, Age 16
Study Participant

Chapter Five of this study was divided into the sections of (1) Conclusions, (2) Implications for Educators, (3) Implications for Parents, (4) Implications for Research, and (5) Reflections.

Conclusions

Adam was a bright young man of seven. He lived in a world inhabited by dragons and dinosaurs and "Lunchsnatchers." His demeanor was cheerful and eager, his language vivid. He spoke with relish about karate chops and sword swoops and Cardinal baseball. His experiences with print were few compared to others in the study, but they were sufficient for him to realize the power that words bestowed upon his life. "I read really fast," he said, "because I wasn't saying the words. I just kept them in my head." Adam was a reader.

Betty was a happy child. It was in her nature to please others. She spoke of friends and family members who enjoyed her company because she never yelled and she never argued and she never pouted. Yet, within her was a determination to read what she wanted to read, when she wanted to read it. She rewrote text to suit her own

specifications, and she read stories of teenage life--because she wanted to be ready. She said, "I really like reading. I like being able to have something other than education and a family to look back on." Betty was a reader.

At age twelve, Chad was a politician. He especially loved "those Democrats!" His vision was clear. Read, learn,...and someday be President. He had read the stories of those who walked that path. He knew the way. Friends were important to him, and sometimes he feared losing their approval. But not enough to forsake reading. "When I listened to my mom reading me books, I always thought it would be nice if I could read those to myself. That's how it started!" Chad was a reader.

Dawn was a paradox--by her own description. She was a small town teenager with big city dreams. She knew what she wanted: To travel east, meet new people, experience new settings, read new books. She spoke eloquently of lofty ideas she had encountered in books and scathingly of petty actions she had endured in reality. "I become totally absorbed in a book. I'm no longer myself. I am this other being." Dawn was a reader.

Eddie was a seeker of truth. He had discovered the wisdom of other cultures and other religions. His willingness to embrace or, at least, consider their lessons, discomfited some around him, especially his parents. Reading had added controversy to his life, as well as enjoyment. He loved science fiction and fantasy, but stretched himself with philosophy and history. He was leaving for college--a new city in a new state--and he was ready. "This last year or so, I've tried to expand my horizons." Eddie was a reader.

Filippe was a scholar. Libraries and bookstores and print filled back rooms were his havens, but the world was his home. He'd been there, done it, seen it, and tried it, but not in any jaded way. He just loved adventure. He embraced life. Following the admonishment of one of his most respected authors, Henry David Thoreau, he was "sucking the marrow." He had humor, but his life was a quest for answers. "I can almost mark the dates in my life by the books that I've read." Philippe was a reader.

Gayla was an achiever. The way had been difficult, at times, fraught with frustrations that tested her mettle. She hadn't been a reader at age three like Adam and Betty. She hadn't been an "A" student like Chad and Dawn and Eddie. She didn't have the philosophical mind set of Philippe and Hal. But she knew what she wanted: A better life for her sons and herself. And she believed the way to achieve that goal was just as her daddy had said. She had to read and she had to learn. She laughed at her troubles. She laughed at herself. She didn't quit. She kept on following her father's advice. "I've come along way. When that teacher helped me to read in the eighth grade, it was a whole new world." Gayla was a reader.

Hal! How can the richness of a man's life and the quickness of a mind be captured within the boundaries of a few simple sentences? He was a jokester, a storyteller, and a prophet. Seven decades of life do not guarantee wisdom, but, in Hal, those years had been driven by a hunger for knowledge that was never satisfied. "I think you can make yourself curious, make yourself want to delve into all those things you've heard about." He attributed this yearning to know to his father and to his military training, but Hal made the quest a personal one, and he traveled the "reading highway"

with a zest and sense of determination that years did not diminish. Yes, Hal, too was a reader.

Implications for Educators

As we in education seek to develop greater understand of how learners make meaning and how they determine relevance, we must affirm that the purpose of increased understanding is to benefit students in their journeys to personal fulfillment. As we who are classroom practitioners increase our capacity to recognize learner needs and strengths, we must increase our impact upon decision-making procedures concerning educational outcomes in curriculum and pedagogical development. It is not enough to acknowledge that administrators and teachers often know what should be done, but bemoan the lack of time or authority that turns this knowledge into established practice. Theoretical know-how must become schoolroom reality if it is to serve any worthwhile purpose.

Lip service has been offered again and again to the educational priority of developing critical, lifelong readers. "Improving literacy habits and love of literacy is ...central to the world most of us want to inhabit" (Cramer and Castle, 1994, p. 254). Yet, schools continue to practice dreary textbook seatwork and mundane workbook skill-drills, which, according to literature already cited in this study, find little success in producing individuals who read up to or beyond the requirements of the classroom.

Oldfather (1995) supported the notion that new and compelling questions be asked in educational research and that students be tapped as a resource for answering those questions. The intent of this study was to ask new questions. Its plan was to gain

answers to those questions by listening to the voices of the ones most involved, the readers themselves. Its hope was to heed the messages they delivered.

One of the most thought-provoking implications for educators that emerged from this study's exploration of the reader life was that its eight participants were readers, not by the grace, gifts, or gropings of others, but by their own initiative and desire. That they could read was very important to them. How they achieved that end was of much less concern. These readers delivered a message. The message had to do with attitude. McKenna (1994) warned that if educators do not understand how attitude develops and what conditions attitudes can impose, it is unlikely that positive change will occur in the classroom.

"Attitude is everything!" I had a student who ended a speech about her favorite restaurant with that line. I thought she had made a mistake. She meant, "Atmosphere is everything!" I thought. But she had said exactly what she had meant. The restaurant she described had a mission to provide the best dining experience possible. In order to do that the owners and management created a plan. At the center of the plan was a living, breathing, human being called the customer. The owners did not focus on how to make the most money or how to cut the greatest costs or how to stay in business the longest time. Instead, they surveyed the citizens who lived in their city and the guests who came to visit. "What pleases you most?" "What makes you happy and comfortable?" "What are your favorites?" "What do you like?" These were some of the questions they asked. Then with answers in hand, the clever owners proceeded to offer a memorable dining event that fit the nature of the customers they now knew well.

The analogy is not subtle. The reader-learner is the “customer” of education. Yet, how often do researchers and practitioners consult this central figure? What might happen within the educational experience if educators changed their standard question of “How can we?” to “What if they?” or “What do they?” John Dewey emphasized experience, experiment, purposeful learning, and freedom. He urged educators to be aware of the capabilities as well as the needs of those under instruction. He called the ideal aim of education the creation of power of self-control.

Too often, in reading education, especially, the emphasis has been upon the methodology instead of the motive. Purveyors of reading instructional products, spouting volumes of information on the “best” reading materials available at the “right prices,” have overshadowed what should be the fundamental source for knowledge about what is best for readers: the readers themselves. The participants in this investigation pronounced, by word and deed, that a specific methodology of instruction was not nearly as important as a welcoming, encouraging climate that promoted curiosity and validated inquiry. There was not one single best way to learn to read for these readers. Repeatedly, questions regarding how they had learned to read were brushed aside to speak, instead, of the more important matters--like what they read or why they read or with whom they read. And, most of all, these readers wished to speak of how their minds had been inspired by ideas they encountered and of how their lives had been changed because of them.

The participants in this study were cognizant of their own capabilities and motivations. They realized the power derived from experiencing and experimenting

freely on their own. With the guidance of a few significant individuals who nurtured and supported them, they became directors of their own learning. Their attitude was one of “I can and I will--if others will promote me, respect me, and encourage me.”

We who are involved in curriculum and instruction must examine the attitudes that drive our actions. We must probe, insightfully and honestly, in order to discover what our attitudes really are--not what we profess them to be. We must ask ourselves probing questions, the answers to which may prove disturbing. Do we labor to develop instructional capable readers at the expense of fostering dedicated, lifelong readers? Do we sacrificed the joy and discovery of reading on the altar of skill-building and test-taking? Does imposition rather than invitation dominate our thinking and dictate our behavior? If the answer to any of these questions is in the affirmative, it's time we began to listen to the voice of the learner.

As educators, we must seek to develop an attitude that respects and protects each student as a responsible member of the learning team. Then, we must live out this attitude by fostering experiences that allow readers to be leaders in their own learning experiences, providing not just one methodology, but a variety of learning possibilities; offering not just artificial “teacher talk,” but valid opportunities for relevant communication.

Another finding from this study for educators to consider, thoughtfully, was that ritual was an essence of reader life which has seldom, if ever, been identified and explored. Several lists of reader qualities and characteristics provided by researchers suggested open-mindedness and receptiveness as essential. They suggested that teacher

support in environments conducive to fostering the love of reading was a vital ingredient of the reader life. They pointed out the need for relevant discussion with peers and educators.. All of these findings were valuable and were supported and confirmed by the experiences of readers in this study. The themes of power, thoughtfulness, and worldview, identified as essential to the nature of readers by this study, were addressed by a variety of research studies that centered on ways to empower students and to promote critical thinking. In none of these, however, was the potential value of ritual in the reader life examined.

Brown (1993) suggested that if we want to create change, often, it's the most obvious things that have to be brought to attention. Patterns and habits are, by their very nature, so much a part of daily life they go unnoticed. That is both the danger and the strength of ritual. Ritual is subtle and ordinary. It is absorbed into the fabric of life and performed routinely and unconsciously. But, these characteristics of routine and non-consciousness give ritual its place in the nature of readers. As discussed in Chapter Four, the readers of this study created their own personal rituals that helped dictate the common occurrences of day to day reading activities. Historically, routines have enabled humans to cope with stress and frustration and unforeseen events. Reader routines served those same purposes. Ritual seemed significant, especially, for the promotion of lifelong reader habits. By creating behavior patterns that made reading natural and comfortable, readers insured the longevity of "the reading habit" in their lives. By examining more fully the place ritual has within the life of a reader, researchers and practitioners may gain understanding of how to encourage lifelong reading habits. Helping students establish

rituals within their early reading lives has the potential of preserving reading as an activity of choice, long after the doors of the school classrooms have swung closed.

One revelation emerging from this study was particularly disconcerting. It was that, at least in the minds of these reader participants, schools did not actively support literacy. Dawn pointed out that if, for example, you were a basketball player, the support of the entire student body and the majority of the faculty was vocal and viewable, but, not so, if you were a reader. A stated school goal might have been to promote reading, but she saw little indication that the goal was addressed. Philippe remarked that during his entire public school experience, except for a few teachers, school personnel never actively supported or promoted reading. Although researchers have identified reading as the “core” of curriculum, these readers were unable to discern its importance in the daily school schedule. The implication of this is dramatic, and it is important. The attitudes that educators believe they convey and the attitude students actually perceive may create two very different and distinct impressions. And, as always, actions do speak louder than words. Students will believe that reading is a valued activity and worthwhile in its pursuit when school organizations and school personnel devote as much time, attention, and promotion to that endeavor as they do to athletics and other non-academic facets of the curriculum.

The participants of this study relayed examples of low expectations for student reading habits and of the small amounts of time actually required for reading at school and at home. They bemoaned the lack of meaningful opportunities to talk about texts, which they all considered an important extension of the reading experience. When, in the

typical school day, were there opportunities for meaningful discussions about thought-provoking ideas encountered by students in their reading? According to these readers, there were very few, if any, such necessary opportunities!

As I listened, I reflected on my own teaching experiences. How effectively had I modeled my own love of reading for students? How often had I actively and enthusiastically promoted reading as a worthwhile and meaningful activity? How guilty had I been of using “talkinbout” language instead of the real language of books and of student reactions to them? The readers of this study spoke of key mentoring figures in their lives, some of whom were from their schooling experiences. But, the message of the need for greater support was clear. The examples they cited of classroom experiences, positive and negative, verified that what educators do is often much less influential than what they allow, what they make possible, and what they encourage. Education must be about the enthusiastic promotion of learning by the messengers, modelers, and mentors that enter the lives of students. This is the most thought-provoking and most important implication for educators that emerged from this study!

Implications for Parents

One of the most important commonalities among the participants of this study was the presence in their lives of at least one encouraging, mentoring adult. These participants were not, necessarily, members of families with two well-educated, affluent parents. They did not all have a mother or father who read to them or who provided bookshelves filled with books for them. They came from a variety of backgrounds and

conditions, with diverse daily living conditions and routines. But, for each, there was, at least, one adult who modeled the importance of reading and of education and who talked and shared information with a child. For Chad and Dawn, it was a grandparent who always had a book nearby and who always had time to share it with a waiting child. For Hal and Gayla, it was a father who read the newspaper nightly and shared its information. For Filippe and Eddie, it was parents who read stories to them or provided those stories electronically. For Betty, it was a mother and father who “lost themselves” in the world of print, and for Adam, it was a father who told stories of family and of growing up in another time and place.

Each of these significant adults created moments of intellectual inquiry and reading enjoyment for the young people in their care. None did it in particularly extraordinary ways. They, merely, commented upon what they were reading or they read aloud or they related a personal story. They did these, seemingly, insignificant actions consistently, and they made a difference. An interest was sparked. A mind was awakened. A journey was begun. The family experiences related by these participants were memorable ones for them. They were catalytic moments that lit the fires within them for future reading endeavors and investigations of their own.

This is the implication for families, derived from this study. No matter how small the family grouping. No matter if it is an extended family or a single parent. Time taken to model the value of reading and to share the wisdom available in the printed word can take root and develop into a fully grown quest for knowledge and lifelong learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

In Awakening to Literacy, Frank Smith (1984) called for more study in the area of children who achieve literacy before formal instruction. Readers in this study revealed a natural inclination and desire to become readers. They were self-driven and self-directed. Even the youngest readers in this survey could speak explicitly and insightfully about their reading experiences. There was wisdom within their words. More studies from the reader perspective on how readers are born, raised, and nurtured is indicated.

The participants in this study were recommended because they were individuals who read, frequently and enthusiastically. Yet, other commonalities within their lives were discovered. The parallels among their birth order and family support groups were distinct. Most were the eldest sibling or the only child. All had reading support from a parent or a grandparent. How significant are these factors? Are there characteristics or responsibilities that accompany these birth order positions and these family groupings that can be identified? Are there ways that school settings can supplement or supply comparable experiences that may be absent in the lives of many students? Further study in this area is indicated.

Readers in this study identified at least one significant adult from early life who helped create an atmosphere of inquiry and an appreciation for print. When children come to school without having had such an influential presence in their lives, what can be done to provide that missing element? Mentoring is a concept used most often in secondary educational settings today. However, investigation into the role of mentoring

as a learning readiness factor and as an important part of elementary educational experiences might prove insightful.

The readers in this study spanned several generations. Their commonalities, however, were seldom affected by age. Further intergenerational studies might offer interesting insight into the reader experience.

Researcher William Ayers (1992) said that if our aim was to understand people, then investigations must search for a different frame from which to perceive the world. Further studies into the various aspects of readership would do well to search within the context of the reader life, to listen to the reader story, and to view the world through the reader window.

Reflections

The final chapter of this exploration of the reader nature and life has yet to be written. Its authors will be those researchers and educators who seek further insight into the reader experience. The journey taken into the reader life offers advantages beyond the findings significant for education. The personal benefits are great. For me, what began as an necessary project became a joyful endeavor. The eight people who participated in the study became my partners and my friends. I have been amazed by the wisdom of life within a seven-year-old, and I have been inspired by the zest for life within a seventy-four year old. I have been impressed by individuals, some youthful in age and some youthful in spirit, who have such great tolerance and deep respect for the different and the extraordinary. I have been cheered by their jokes and urged forward by their kindly responses. As I searched for understanding, they became my messengers and

models. As I reflected upon what I had listened to and learned, they became my mentors. As I sought to organize and write this paper, they became my source and my inspiration.

I respect them. I applaud them. I thank them. And I wish them well on their continued journeys along the reading highway.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

“I, _____, hereby authorize or direct _____, or associates or assistants of his or her choosing, to perform the following treatment or procedure:”

1. The procedure will consist of interviews concerning the participant’s role as a reader. Interviews will be used to compile data for a study investigating the life experiences of readers.
2. Each participant will be interviewed on a minimum of two occasions, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All sessions will be tape recorded and a verbatim transcript made of each tape.
3. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for purposes of confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used in all discussions and in all written materials dealing with the interviews.
4. There will be no discomforts or risks to the participants.
5. Information collected through the interviews may be used in scholarly publications.
6. All audio tapes, transcripts, and consent forms will be kept in a file cabinet in the researcher’s home office.

This investigation is being done as part of an investigation entitled:
 UPON BECOMING A READER--A HIGHWAY TO TRAVEL: AN INVESTIGATION
 OF THE NATURE AND LIFE EXPERIENCE OF A READER.

The purpose of the procedure is to compile data for analysis to be used in
 compiling a dissertation study.

“I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to
 participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at
 any time without penalty after notifying the researcher.”

“I may contact _____ at telephone number _____. I
 may also contact University Research Services, 001 Life Sciences East, Oklahoma State
 University, Stillwater, OK 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700. Contact person at
 University Research Services: _____”

“I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and
 voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.”

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m./p.m.)

Signed: _____
 (Signature of Subject)

 (Person authorized to sign for subject, if required.)

“I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject
 or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.”

Signed: _____
 (Signature of Researcher)

Appendix B

Participant Biographical Form

Interview # _____ Date _____

Place/location of interview _____

Time of interview: Start _____ End _____ Tape # _____

Interviewee _____ Gender: M F

Present position _____ How long: _____

Previous work experience: Location: How long:

Education--School: Location: Degree/Year: Dates:

Parent Education/Occupations: Mother _____

Father _____

Birth Order: _____ Marital Status: _____ Number of Siblings: _____

Hobbies/Leisure Time Pursuits: _____

Appendix C

Sample Transcript

First interview of participant called Hal, age 74. Transcript begins after the gathering of biographical details.

Question: During your free time, what do you like to do?

Answer: Golfing. If you can list reading as a hobby, I've done quite a bit of that. That was a carryover from my army service. At least, it certainly introduced me to reading and paying attention to the subject.

Question: What words would you use to describe yourself so that someone would know you--the real you?

Answer: Well, I've always enjoyed a bit of humor. I'm not necessarily a comic, and certainly not organized, but I've been accused of being a funny man, at times--my language and such. I'm a run-of-the-mill person, I suppose, but, at the same time, I've always appreciated current books.

Question: When did you first realize you could read? How did it happen?

Answer: I think first you've got to have some motivation to pursue reading, to establish reading habits, as I might have done early-on. I believe early motivation for me in reading was to be interested in certain subjects along the way. Then read, research, follow through on the need for insight into certain things of interest. I did a lot of following the military careers of several people, for example.

Question: Could you go back further, to your earlier childhood, when you first had reading experiences?

Answer: I'm not sure that I paid enough attention in my early history of reading, although, as time permitted I did read. Chores, and books weren't always available--no city library--so....Beyond that, I recall being a bit curious and wanting to read about certain subjects. Certain stories I recall in the eighth-grade or a little before.

Question: Did you know how to read before you started your formal education?

Answer: I think my father had a bit of a hand in that. Because I think it was a carry-over from his interest. Perhaps, my mother did as much as she could, although I think it was my dad that was instrumental in catching my attention. I recall he'd read certain things and then he'd tell me the story about it, which inspired my interest into that. He might have introduced the thought and brought up the desire of my wanting to learn what was going on round about me.

Question: Do you have memories of his reading? What he read?

Answer: He'd tell me stories of what he read of the then current events from the newspaper. He'd pass them on to me in a good way--seemed to be a complete way--and I caught on to the desire of informing myself of what was going on--through reading. I think I was inspired to read by way of my father.

Question: You said your mother did what she could. What are your memories of that?

Answer: I think that the books that we had, she'd now and then say, "Son, here's a story that you should read." Not that she'd read it to me, but she would call my attention

to it.

Question: You've been described as a reader by the local librarian. She said you open the library and close the library. What do you think prepared you to become a person that someone describes as a reader? What kind of influences made you that way?

Answer: I suspect it was inward motivation. Finding out. I particularly liked the sciences. Mr. Einstein is quite attractive to me--for his philosophy. He was a mathematician and a philosopher. Those two together made him a complete man.

Question: What do you think influenced you to want to read?

Answer: I think curiosity. I think you can make yourself curious about all things that you've heard about. The things around you. You can delve into them. Pursue them. Even though you won't necessarily have a career about all the things you read, you can be a more rounded person by bringing in, through your own knowledge, the various subjects and experiences from other people you've read about.

Question: What created that kind of curiosity within you? Does everybody have it?

Answer: I think it's part of me. I don't believe everybody does have it--meaning the desire to delve into subject matters. I think that biographies of people seemingly gets into this people category. I've looked into their books--studied their minds.

Question: In looking back into your earliest reading days, can you recall and talk about how you were taught to read? By what methods and procedures?

Answer: If I had any formal procedures--formal education on how to--I can't really recall it. I believe, again, it comes down to personal handling of the reading. I

think, also, it includes any additional motivation you might have that makes you want to read in order to learn. There needs to be some interest to pursue to read through the years. I think the general underlining episode, for me, was to read to learn. I tried to be a thinker as I read, or tried to be an interpreter or a see-er, if you would.

Question: What do you mean by that?

Answer: Make that subject come to life as much as you can--get the feel of it.

Question: How do you do that?

Answer: I believe you have to have, again, an inward motivation in your mind to pursue meaning--to give thought to it as you read, to re-digest, review it. On certain things, that's what I did.

Question: Can you describe what goes on in your mind in order to do the kind of reading-thinking you're describing?

Answer: I believe you have to read with a purpose in mind. Even your anticipation of the outcome of it, you continue to think about. And then, the result--the outcome of the subject you're reading about. In other words, you try to anticipate the full story as you read along.

Question: Would you describe yourself as involved, as you read?

Answer: Yes. Be involved for the reading sake. Put yourself in the place, if you could, of any of the participants. I recall, regarding Mr. Einstein, how he was so carried away from that which was around him while he read that his wife mentioned, at times, he did not act like she was even in the room. He was completely absorbed in his reading matter. Maybe that's the extreme, though, and the average reader would not reach that

depth.

Question: Even though you said he was the extreme, do you find any commonality between Einstein's reading world and your own inner world when you read?

Answer: Yes, there could be some there. I'm not able to make a very noticeable parallel to Einstein; (laughs) nevertheless, that's the mode in which you need to be able to get the most out of the reading.

Question: Explain your fascination with Mr. Einstein.

Answer: My fascination with him would be because of his philosophy of "Why?" and then delving into the subject, rolling up his sleeves and getting in there.

Question: When you go into a library or bookstore, how do you make your choices and decisions about what you're going to read?

Answer: When you go into the library, you do the browsing. And quite often, it's suggestive, as you browse. Then you might end up checking about a subject that you didn't have in mind when you went in. I think browsing is healthy. It offers some suggestions to you, if you don't have a particular item you're going for.

Question: What do you mean by "browsing?"

Answer: I think browsing would mainly include serious thoughts you might have as you look at the different subject matters because they are there in front of you, written by people of some degree of renown, and they are there for you. Certain authors would suggest certain subject matter that they're qualified to write about, and so, you go and see what he or she has to say about the subject of interest to you.

Question: What do you read, primarily--non-fiction? Fiction?

Answer: Always non-fiction. I found out one day that the blue cards in the library books stood for non-fiction: Blue was true! I never was a fiction person. I didn't have the appreciation of the imaginative powers as they put them into the books. Yet, I'm sure that novels would be interesting, too. But I always stayed with non-fiction. There's a lot of them on the market--so I never did run out!

Question: Compare when you read to when you watch television or a movie.

Answer: I sometime try to place myself in the proximity of the writer or the actor, and look upon it as some kind of challenging--how I might deal with that situation. I think you might be less limited by reading. Ordinarily, television might be most impressive because it's the audio and the visual--complete communication, as much as you'll ever need. But, in the reading, why, one could have some imaginative ability to complete it--to see it in a little different light--even as you read it--than the t.v.

Question: How do you define a reader? What does it mean to you to be a reader?

Answer: I may not be one of those. I'd say a reader would be one with a motivation to learn of the subject he's pursuing at the time. To read would be to have some capability, some mastery of the words, but, so that the words will come alive--the words will make that subject come alive to you--or would motivate you to the maximum degree of interest.

Question: You've been described as a reader by several people. What do you think those people meant by that? How does it make you feel to be described that way?

Answer: I think I would feel complimented. I think a reader would be somewhat

like an eater--a digester of that subject--not only want to, but be able to take it in, receive it to the maximum good as you read it. Find out, because you are reading to learn, find out the ultimate result of that subject through your reading.

Question: You read much now, but have you always read a lot? When do you remember starting to read so much?

Answer: I believe that when I first started reading it was a kind of time-passing thing, or someone said, "Have you read this?" or something. I recall my early answers were, "No, I haven't," or "No, I didn't." I began to wonder, "Should I?" And I began to think, in my brief make-up of time that, although I didn't have to take the lead, I didn't have to bring up the rear either--so, I began to read.

Question: Did you read much as a child?

Answer: Not very much. I don't recall that I did. But, I think I really turned on in the later years of high school and in the military. During my years from 18 to 20, I think I did quite a bit of reading then. However, much of my reading was yet later to come about because of my increased desire--fierce desire--to know about things that I read at that time.

Question: Tell me how being a reader has affected your life.

Answer: It sure has affected my life...because it brought about some independence on my own--mature thinking, if you will. The sum total of all, the composite, the volume of all your reading--you put that together, use that as you make your decisions, as you work and live. I think it makes you, not necessarily just an independent thinker, but a person who can use these other things to his advantage to promote yourself--up beyond

what you are. I think we should all strive up towards perfection, not that we will attain it, but we should go onward and upward. I don't think we should ever tire of or discontinue education. Life itself, to the last day, I would say, is a continuing process of education. We need to gain as much as we can out of it.

Question: How do you think your life would be different, if you were not a reader?

Answer: It would be less exciting. (Laughs.) I say exciting, but I mean, it wouldn't be as complete. I believe, knowingly and unknowingly, I have used and I am using the sum total of all that I've read in making my decisions. I believe that some of my decisions are being made directly through my reading.

Question: Do you have an example of what you mean by that?

Answer: Many things. The example of choosing a career, early on. I don't believe we are necessarily born to be what we are. For example, I don't think I was necessarily born to be a salesman, but, you can work at that and acquire some additional abilities through reading about the experiences of others and then apply that to yourself and go on and become a better professional or business person than you might have been. That would be through reading. I think reading is a contributing part of what you are and what you will be.

Question: Has reading affected your view of the world, and, if so, how?

Answer: Yes, it sure has affected my thinking. Reading expands your horizons. You can, possibly, anticipate some things that could happen and are happening. I think, as you approach these things, that which we have read opens up your thinking to where

you can have a question. Yes, you can even ask a question. So I think reading will put you on a place to appreciate the progress that does happen round about you.

Question: Finish this sentence: "Reading is...."

Answer: Reading is a challenge. It's an open door in which you could walk through to a wider, deeper world of tomorrow--that could make you a more complete person than you are today.

Question: Is there anything else you'd like to say about yourself as a reader or about reading?

Answer: Yes. I would like to say, especially to the youngsters coming on, don't turn down a chance for reading. Make yourself inquisitive. Get the answers to the questions that come into your mind. Keep those questions in the foremost part of your mind and search out the answers. Try to find a motivation for pursuing the subject you're reading about. Reading is a highway to travel on in your life that you'll never regret taking.

Question: Go on, with this, just a bit more, if you would.

Answer: I keep coming back to this word "motivation." Motivation for doing--for reading. Motivation for pursuing a certain subject. That's what I've done--not nearly enough, but, my, my....Motivation got in there early on. I've even thought of taking a second look at mathematics. That's terrible! (Laughs.) But, here again, I'm thinking--to have a deep motivation, so you can learn as you read. Is there a reason for your reading? Yes, there is. I want to find out. To have a better knowledge--a more complete knowledge. And I'll admit, I haven't had a keen enough desire or enough motivation to

get up to here (gestures to neck) in knowledge but, I have, along the way, known that I've been hungry--yes, hungry--for knowledge. Not knowledge, for its sake, but to go out and use it--to become a more complete person.

Question: That's great! You should have been in the classroom--sharing this with young people.

Answer: I wish as a youngster, I would have got with it! Big. I wish I had. But, now...how quickly age 50 can come. Then 55, 60.... You have to get with it--to get busy!

Question: You have such curiosity. Where did it come from?

Answer: If that came from inward--but, I suppose not. I've got to give somebody else credit. Again, probably my father had some further end in mind--to create my motivation for further knowledge. But that's way back there, where it was hardly required. It wasn't even taught. But today! You cannot use as an excuse today that it's not available or taught. Everything that can make you a more complete person than what you are--more successful--it is available. And, if we don't acquire it, it will be us at fault. Reading is the platform. And you've got to have that platform to spring from. That's what reading is. That's what reading does. Reading, as such? No. Reading, for what? Yes.

VITA

Verna June Taylor

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: UPON BECOMING A READER--A HIGHWAY TO TRAVEL:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE AND LIFE
EXPERIENCE OF A READER

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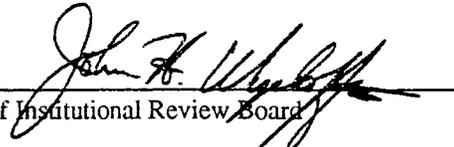
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