DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 500 CE 064 435

TITLE	Life at the Margins: Profiles of Adults with Low Literacy Skills. Contractor Report, Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime.
INSTITUTION	Tennessee Univ., Knoxville. Center for Literacy Studies.
SPONS AGENCY	Congress of the U.S., Washington, D.C. Office of Technology Assessment.
PUB DATE	Mar 92
NOTE	348p.; For related documents, see CE 064 323 and CE 064 432-438.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC14 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Literacy; Blacks; Differences; Hispanic Americans; *Illiteracy; *Individual Characteristics; *Individual Needs; Literature Reviews; Profiles; *Regional Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	African Americans; *Appalachia; *California

ABSTRACT

As part of an ongoing assessment on adult literacy and the new technologies, this study profiled the similarities and differences among Appalachian and Californian adults with low literacy skills. Two teams of researchers each profiled six adults with low literacy skills. The study population was selected so as to reflect a diverse mix of ages, genders, social and ethnic backgrounds, and literacy skills. Despite their great diversity, the 12 persons profiled had all been marginalized economically and culturally by society, had faced hard times, expressed a strong desire to become more self-reliant, hoped to improve their literacy skills and thereby obtain a better life for themselves and their children, and shared common strategies for overcoming their illiteracy (including the building of social networks and use of "readers"). Differences among the native and nonnative English speakers profiled were found in relation to the following areas: uses of technology, impact of first language usage, connections between English-as-a-Second-Language literacy, and family relationships, and the clarity of cultural identity possessed by nonnative speakers in contrast to the white and African Americans profiled. The implications of these differences for literacy education were discussed. (Appended are a literature review with 75 references, reflections on the research, and biographical sketches of the researchers.) (MN)

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LIFE AT THE MARGINS: PROFILES OF ADULTS WITH LOW LITERACY SKILLS

Center for Literacy Studies
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Contractor Report

Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime

March 1992

This contractor document was prepared for the OTA assessment entitled *Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime*. It is being made available because it contains much useful information beyond that used in the OTA report. However, it is not endorsed by OTA, nor has it been reviewed by the Technology Assessment Board. References to it should cite the contractor, not OTA, as the author.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The world of adults with low literacy skills in the United States is largely unknown territory for most of us. The research base is slim indeed. We know little enough about what most adults read, how they use literacy in the various domains of their everyday lives and how literacy interacts with technology. We know still less about how adults with low literacy skills lead their lives in a print-based society, especially that great majority of those adults who are not enrolled in literacy programs.

The current national concern about adult literacy is based in part on the assumption that technology is changing rapidly in our society, that it needs to change rapidly in order for our economy to remain competitive with that of other countries, and that *literacy skills are essential to learn to use technology efficiently*. Behind such assumptions lies little solid information. Do people with low literacy skills use the new technology that is becoming commonplace for members of the educated middle class: VCRs, computers, video games, microwaves and ATMs? Are they affected by changing technology at work? How do they learn to use it, and are their literacy limitations a barrier to their use of new technology? The research on these questions has not been done, yet public policy is being influenced by assumptions about the answers.

This study set out to use qualitative research to give us some insights into how adults with low literacy skills use literacy and technology in their everyday lives. The study was shaped in part by a review of the limited research and theory relating to everyday literacy and technology. This literature review (in **Appendix A** of this report) raised an number of important issues. We reviewed theoretical perspectives on literacy, and especially reflected on two competing concepts of literacy: functional and social-contextual concepts. We reviewed some of the key issues and pedagogical approaches in both adult basic education (English literacy) and English-as-a Second-Language (for non-native English speakers). And we focussed especially on those few studies that exist of literacy in everyday life -- a series of ethnographic studies, some workplace studies of reading and writing on the job, and studies of "practical problem solving" in everyday and work life. The review offered three major insights which were important in shaping our study.

1. The deficit perspective is challenged

Pioneering ethnographic research by Fingeret and others shows that to lack literacy skills is not necessarily to lack other skills.[1] It is often assumed that low-literate adults live impoverished lives, socially and culturally as well as in terms of literacy. In contrast, these

[1] Hanna Arlene Fingeret, The Illiterate Underclass: Demythologizing the American Stigma, Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1982; Linda Zeigahn, "The formation of literacy perspective" in R.A. Fellenz and G.J. Conti (Eds.) Adult Learning in the Community, Bozeman, Montana: Center for Adult Learning Research, Montana State University, June 1990; Sheryl Gowen, "Eyes on a Different Prize:" A Critical Ethnography of a Workplace Literacy Program, Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgia State University, 1990.

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few ethnographic studies depict adults who are strong and resourceful, skilled and knowledgeable. These studies suggest that to lack reading skills is not necessarily to lack other skills: indeed the adults Fingeret and Zeigahn studied had many other skills and cultural knowledge, and led full social lives. They were respected community members.

Similarly, research by psychologists into practical problem solving in everyday life shows people creating sophisticated solutions to familiar problems, in which literacy plays only a small and selective role. Literacy texts are only one source of information, and one that can often be circumvented in familiar contexts.

2. The Importance of Context

Careful reading of existing research on literacy, shows the importance of context in literacy use. To view literacy as a generic set of skills which can be measured in standardized tests would be to ignore the research showing how much more skilled workers are at reading job-related materials than at general reading tests.[2] Recent developments in cognitive science demonstrate how much more accurate people are at mathematical operations contained in everyday problem solving than in pencil and paper tests.[3] Together, these two bodies of research indicate that knowledge and processes are intertwined. When the process (literacy as skill) is separated from the knowledge (everyday context), everyone may look much less skilled than they really are.

Different literacies exist in different aspects of people's lives -- work, home, shopping, school. The demands and uses of literacy in one domain may be very different from those of another. In particular, the research by Sticht, Mikulecky and others underscores the differences in workplace literacy demands from those of school-based literacy.

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[2] Including Thomas Sticht, Reading for Working, Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization, 1975, and Functional Context Education: Workshop Resources Notebook, San Diego, CA: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc., 1987; Sticht and L. Mikulecky, Job Related Basic Skills: Case and Conclusions, Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1984; L. Mikulecky, "Job literacy: The relationship between school preparation and workplace actuality," Reading Research Quarterly, 17, 1982, p. 400-419, and "Preparing students for workplace literacy demands," Journal of Reading, 32, 1984, p. 253-257; Mikulecky and Jeanne Ehlinger, Training for Job Literacy Demands: What Research Applies to Practice, Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, 1987, p. 4.

[3] Sylvia Scribner, "Thinking in action: Some characteristics of practical thought," in R.J. Sternberg and R.K. Wagner (Eds.) Practical Intelligence: Nature and Origins of Competence in the Everyday World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; R.K. Wagner and R.J. Sternberg, "Tacit knowledge and intelligence in the everyday world," ibid.; Scribner, "Studying working intelligence," in Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave (Eds.), Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 9-40; along with other contributors to these two volumes.

3. Strategies for Dealing with Limited Literacy

The existing ethnographic research also suggests there are a number of different ways that people with literacy limitations have found to meet literacy demands in their everyday lives. These may include resistance (refusing to read work-texts, for example, not because they are unable to read, but because the texts are associated with power relationships). They may include using members of social networks as "readers," or using technology to take the place of literacy (tape recorders, for example, instead of writing memos, telephones instead of letters). Strategies may include spouses and children serving intermediary roles in relation to certain aspects of the outside world. Literacy may surround them, but adults with low literacy skills develop strategies to deal with their reading limitations.

These insights together led to some defining characteristics of our research. Because of them, we determined:

- to examine individuals' lives as wholes, to focus not only on their literacy limitations -- what they <u>cannot</u> do -- but also on their strengths -- what they <u>can</u> do in other aspects of their lives;

- to try to understand people's lives within their own context -- of family, community, region and culture -- and to look at different domains of their lives -- work, community, home and family;

- to seek an understanding of the strategies which people use to meet literacy and technology demands they encounter in their daily lives.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is clear that the existing research base on everyday literacy, especially among adults with low literacy skills, is very small, and raises many more questions than it resolves. We know less than we should about how adults in different kinds of communities and cultures actually use literacy. We know little about the demands that changing technology place on adults with low literacy skills. We do not know much about how they use technologies such as computers for literacy purposes, since most of the ethnographic research was done before the widespread introduction of computer-based technology into our society.

Our understanding of the expectations and aspirations of adults with low literacy skills is also very limited. We know that only a small proportion take part in adult education programs, but we do not know much about the factors that affect their decisions about further education. We know little about their expectations for their own and their children's literacy, or their attitudes toward technology.

This study makes a contribution to the knowledge base about adults with low literacy skills through a series of profiles using ethnographic methods of twelve such adults in two

areas of the country. The profiles focus particularly on their uses of literacy and technology in the various domains of everyday life. The study was shaped around a series of research questions posed by the Office of Technology Assessment:

1. *How do people use literacy in their everyday lives? What literacy practices are employed by adults of different backgrounds and life experiences in their homes, workplaces, and communities?*

2. *How do technologies other than those used for literacy expand or diminish the role of literacy in these adults' everyday lives?*

3. *What expectations and beliefs do these adults hold about literacy and other technologies used for literacy?*

4. *Are the perspectives and expectations of those with limited literacy skills at variance with societal demands? What are those demands, and who is making them?*

5. *What kinds of incentives would lead adults to further their own literacy skills and knowledge? What barriers stand in their way?*

6. *How does the use of literacy and technology impact social relationships?*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research begins with a phenomenological worldview that is based on valuing and exploring the meaning people place on their life experiences. Humans make sense of their worlds through categorizing and theorizing. People engage in a continual process of constructing and modifying and interpreting meanings in their social interactions with others. We are interested in trying to understand the meanings, constructs and categories that people use to make sense of their worlds from their perspectives. Qualitative researchers attempt to get at these understandings by observing and talking to people in their natural settings with as little disruption to those settings as possible. In this study we wanted to uncover and discover the meaning people make of their experiences rather than impose our constructs on them. Therefore it was necessary to use the qualitative research methods of participant observation, ethnographic interviews and archival data collection to capture rich descriptions

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of individual lives. Methodologists such as Spradley, Goetz and LeCompte, Yin, McCracken, Erickson, and Marshall and Rossman guided our research.[4]

We began the project by building our research teams -- one in San Francisco and one in Knoxville. The individuals on these teams were carefully chosen on the basis of their understanding of qualitative research methods and their experience in the communities from which our research participants were selected. As you can see from the biographical sketches of the researchers (Appendix C), most had formal training and all have experience in qualitative research methods. For example, all the Appalachian profilers had taken at least two graduate courses in qualitative research methods and ethnographic field methods under Professor Bennett deMarrais and other methodologists at the University of Tennessee. Most of the Californian researchers are graduates of or graduate students in the adult education program at San Francisco State University, and have taken qualitative research courses taught by Professor David Hemphill and others.

Researchers on both teams were familiar with the community contexts in which we asked them to work. For example, Loida Velazquez has completed extensive study on migrant populations with particular attention to the role of adult education in their lives. She has conducted case studies of migrants, has testified before congressional committees and is currently completing a dissertation on migrants in the southeastern states. Of Puerto Rican origin, and bilingual in Spanish and English, she is deeply immersed in the community which she studies. The other researchers are similarly grounded in their knowledge and experience in community contexts. We were able to utilize this collective expertise to determine the types of individuals we wanted to profile and used the researchers' community contacts to locate these participants.

The research process began in our initial team meetings at the two sites (Appalachia and California). Each of the research teams would profile six adults with low literacy skills. The teams discussed possibilities for the kinds of people we might profile. We sought diversity in age, gender, social and ethnic backgrounds and literacy skill. The initial team meetings were used to investigate possibilities for participants from all the different communities represented by the researchers. After we gained consensus on the six types of individuals per team who would be studied, researchers used their community contacts to identify adults who had the particular characteristics we were looking for.

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[4] J.P. Spradley, The ethnographic interview, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988; and Participant observation, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980; J.P. Goetz and M.D. LeCompte, Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research, Orlando: Academic Press, 1984; R.K. Yin, Case study research: Design and methods, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989; G. McCracken, The long interview, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988; Fred Erickson, "Qualitative methods in research on teaching," in M.C. Whittrock, (ed.) Handbook of research on teaching, 3rd edition, New York: Macmillan, 1986, pp. 119-160; C. Marshall and G.B. Rossman, Designing qualitative research, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989.

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For example, the Appalachian team profiled two white Appalachian men (one rural and one urban), two African American women (currently urban), one rural Appalachian woman and a rural Mexican-American woman migrant worker. The ages of these individuals ranged from twenty-six to forty-one years and their literacy skills varied from very low to close to high school proficiency.

The diversity in the California profiles was achieved in this same deliberate way. The team profiled a young Latino man and an older woman, both of Central American origin, a female refugee from north-eastern Africa, two Southeast Asian men and a female emigre from Byelorussia, in what was then the Soviet Union. Their ages ranged from 17 to 53, their English speaking proficiency ranged from minimal to fairly fluent, and their prior educational backgrounds ranged from only nonformal education to a master's degree.

The early meetings of the research teams also were used to provide similar research bases for the researchers. Although all were trained qualitative researchers, we used our meetings to discuss ways of gaining access to participants, research strategies, interview techniques and specific ethnographic interview questions. We worked to ensure that we were coming from similar understandings in regard to this particular study. We were all committed to the phenomenological theoretical underpinnings described above. The teams at each site met regularly throughout the course of the research to review research questions, data collection progress and analyses of the data.

We began with a pilot profile, to see if our planned methods could provide a holistic picture of our participants. The methods worked well, and the pilot helped us refine our research questions, strategies and interview schedules. We found that a series of informal conversation-like interviews and formal audiotaped interviews with each participant elicited a wealth of information about educational histories, work histories, family relationships and uses of literacy and technology. A majority of the interviews were conducted in English, but some were conducted in the person's native language, in which the researcher was fluent.

Each participant was interviewed at length several times over the course of the three month research period. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, but Nura Tola's were conducted in Oromo, David Wong's in Cantonese, Alicia Lopez' and Maria Reyes' were conducted in Spanish. In each case, this was also the first language of the researcher, or he/she was very fluent in that language. The place for the interviews also varied. Some people were interviewed entirely in their homes, others in their places of work (or education programs), others in several places.

The experience for each researcher working with his or her participant varied according to the relationship that developed between the two individuals and the comfort level of the participant with the research process. The type of interviews also varied along these lines. For example, Kathleen Bennett deMarrais talked with Les Willard informally for hours at a time over the course of three months. She still continues to talk with him regularly. However, since he was uncomfortable with more formal taped interviews, this strategy was

kept to a minimum. He participated in only one two-hour taped interview. Similarly, David Wong did not wish to be tape recorded, and instead the interviewer took extensive notes.

Other participants agreed to be audiotaped on several occasions for lengthy formal interviews. Nura Tola agreed to be audiotaped only after she had "practiced" the interview prior to the taping. For most of the others, several interviews were tape recorded, and other conversations and/or participant observations were writtem up in field notes. Despite some variation among the different participants, the researchers were careful to address the major research questions agreed upon in initial meetings. We were all successful in spending enough time with our participants so as to gain sufficient understanding of the meanings they gave to their experiences and to provide a holistic view of the complex lives of these individuals.

Researchers used participant observation in different ways, according to the unique situations of the people profiled. Some researchers were able to observe in work situations, others in home settings. In some cases, participant observation was considered to be too intrusive for the respondents.[5]

In addition to the interviews with our participants, several researchers also interviewed others who could give them relevant background information. One researcher interviewed a restaurant manager about the literacy demands on waitresses; another interviewed a local agricultural extension agent concerning literacy and farming; another contacted local agencies for background information on electrician's licensing requirements.

Researchers also used a checklist of everyday literacy activities developed by the research teams. They obtained a variety of kinds of archival data, including restaurant tickets, a high school diploma, church bulletins and other reading material.

The database for each person we profiled consists of: a) a set of fieldnotes taken by researchers throughout the data collection process; b) transcriptions of audiotaped interviews with each person; and c) archival data related to literacy uses each person. The fieldnotes include notes about conversations with the people profiled which were not audiotaped, about the participant observations, and the researchers' reactions to interviews and observations. The researchers noted questions they needed to explore further or concerns they had as they progressed through the data collection phase.

As data collection was being concluded, each research team met again to compare and analyze their findings. We began to define and discuss common themes and differences among participants, and to look for missing data in the profiles. Based on a series of such discussions, individual researchers finalized their data collection. They analyzed their

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[5] For a more detailed discussion of the research process, see Appendix B. Reflections on the Research, by Kathleen Bennett deMarrais.

individual findings using methods of constant comparison and analytic induction,[6] and wrote drafts of their profiles. These drafts were read and commented on by other members of each research team, before final revisions.

Based on the discussions of each research team, and more detailed analysis of the individual profiles, a small group of authors wrote an overview section for each group of profiles, and a synthesis of findings and conclusions from the two groups of profiles.

In considering the value of these qualitative profiles and the ways in which they can be used by both scholars and practitioners of adult education, we need to look more broadly at qualitative case study research. Clearly, we cannot take twelve case studies, despite their richness, and generalize to a larger population. Although we attempted to profile a variety of participants according to their ethnic, social class, age and gender categories, we do not intend for these profiles to be representative of any particular population. As in most qualitative research, the case studies here can be used to both generate theory and test theory. Yin argues that case studies:

> *... are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample," and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization).*[7]

We believe that the profiles presented here can be compared to the current literature and theories on adult literacy and can be used to challenge some of the theories from that literature as well as raise new questions for researchers to explore through both qualitative and quantitative methods of scholarly inquiry.

As a research team, we have tried to take care to establish a high degree of internal reliability [the degree to which other researchers, given a set of previously generated constructs would match data in the same way as we did] by using multiple researchers, low inference descriptors, verbatim quotes, mechanical recording and peer examination of our data as suggested by Goetz & LeCompte. These measures have also enabled us to achieve validity in the study. We believe that through our in-depth interviewing, careful record-keeping, data triangulation, multiple researchers and heavy reliance on our participants' voices, we have captured authentic representations or reconstructions of their lives.

THE RESEARCH TEAMS

The **Principal Investigator** for the project was Kathleen P. Bennett deMarrais who is currently an assistant professor at the College of Education, The University of Tennessee,

[6] See Goetz and LeCompte, op. cit.

[7] Yin, op.cit. p. 21.

Knoxville. Bennett deMarrais was trained as an anthropologist of education at the University of Cincinnati. She brings a knowledge of qualitative methodologies (particularly ethnography) to the research project. In addition to developing a program and teaching courses in qualitative and ethnographic research at the University of Tennessee, she is a regularly presenter and consultant on qualitative research methodology. She has published classroom ethnography of ability-grouped reading with urban Appalachian first graders and ethnographic research on Yup'ik Eskimo storyknifing. Her recent book (co-authored with Margaret LeCompte), The Way Schools Work addresses some of the issues of social class, ethnicity and gender issues related to schooling.

The **Project Director** was Juliet Merrifield, Director of the Center for Literacy Studies, and adjunct faculty in the College of Education, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Merrifield was trained as an anthropologist at the University of London, and has a D.Phil. in Politics from Oxford University, England. She has more than twenty year's experience in both qualitative and quantitative research, in both Britain and the Appalachian region of the United States. Among the research projects which she has directed at the Center for Literacy Studies are an ongoing longitudinal study of quality of life outcomes of participation in adult literacy programs, and a survey of displaced women textile workers on the effectiveness of retraining and remedial education programs. She is currently teaching a class in the Department of Technological and Adult Education on case study research.

The **California Coordinator** was David Hemphill of San Francisco State University. Hemphill is Associate Professor and co-director of the Center for Adult Education. He is the author of texts on training immigrant population in job-related skills. He has fifteen years experience as a practitioner and program coordinator in a community-based program for immigrants to study English and find jobs. He teaches courses and conducts research in areas including: multicultural education, qualitative research methods, program planning and adult teaching methods.

The following is a list of our research teams. Please refer to biographical sketches in **Appendix C** for more detail regarding the qualifications of each of these researchers.

Appalachian Profilers:

Mary Beth Bingman
Kathleen deMarrais
Faye Hicks-Townes
Loida Velazquez
Connie White

California Profilers:

Mari Gasiorowicz
David Hemphill
Tom Nesbit
Chui Lim Tsang
Sally Ianiro
Lensa Gudina

Principal authors of the Appalachian Overview section were Juliet Merrifield and Mary Beth Bingman; and of the Californian Overview section, David Hemphill. Juliet Merrifield was principal author of the Synthesis, with major contributions of ideas and analysis from

David Hemphill, Mary Beth Bingman and Kathleen deMarrais. Report production was by Linda Fleming; Connie White and Lachelle Norris assisted with copy editing and production.

THE REPORT

The report has three main sections, following this introduction. The first section reports on the group of six profiles from the Appalachian region, with an introduction to the region and the people, the series of profiles, and an overview of the findings from this group. The second section reports on the six profiles from the California Bay Area, again with an intr

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THE APPALACHIAN PROFILES

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INTRODUCTION: THE APPALACHIAN CONTEXT

Appalachia is a region of contrasts: poverty amidst a wealth of natural resources; environmental destruction amidst spectacular natural beauty; chronically low education levels in a population skilled in survival, with a strong cultural heritage. To the superficial eye, it can seem a region in which time has stood still. Yet appearances mask dramatic changes over the last hundred years, and especially in the last forty.

In the 1950's, when some of those we profiled were born, a massive population exodus from rural Appalachia took place, as coal mines were mechanized, and thousands of families left for factory jobs in the cities of the North. In the 1970's, as a short-lived boom hit the area, many migrants returned to the communities which had never ceased to be "home." By the eighties, the boom was over, jobs again were in short supply, but the northern cities too were in decline. With no place to go, many families have stayed, living in trailers or in old frame houses, getting by as best they can.

While the urban Appalachian areas have always had a broader economic base than rural areas, they too have undergone significant change in recent years. Their manufacturing base in textile and furniture has eroded. Cities like Chattanooga and Charleston dependent on a large industry have also seen it decline. In place of manufacturing, the service sector has grown, and cities like Knoxville have become retail sales and distribution centers.

Two of our profiles are set in southwestern Virginia, a mountainous area with an economy based on coal mining, forestry, farming, and factory work. In a remote corner of the state, far from interstate highways and the state capitol, it is an area easily overlooked. While the families of the area have traditionally farmed, nowadays few can survive entirely by farming. Many drive great distances to work in coal mines or factory jobs. The area is poor, incomes are low, lives are often hard, yet people choose to remain. They stay for the natural beauty of the land, the kinship support networks, the opportunity to raise gardens, to trade goods and labor, for their strong ties to the land and community. The two people we profile, both white, are typical of others in their area.

Tom Addington is a 27 year old white landless farm laborer. He lives with his wife and three young children in a four-room frame house in rural Scott County. His main wage-earning job is in cutting tobacco, which he does as part of a crew. He also does other seasonal farm work and gathers ginseng for sale. He has neither a car nor a driver's license. He dropped out of high school at seventeen, when he remembers taking 9th or 10th grade subjects. His current reading level appears much lower, probably around third grade level. His family is very important to Tom, and he loves being a Dad.

Marcy Osborne is a quiet white woman of forty, who lives with her mother and son in the small town of Gate City, the county seat of Scott County, Virginia. Her family is almost raised: her last child is in his senior year in high school, her daughters have married and left home. She works twelve hour days as housekeeper and assistant to an elderly woman. Although she left school when she was in seventh grade, Marcy is a reader -- of *True Story*,

local newspapers, *Reader's Digest.* On the whole, her literacy is sufficient for her needs. Apart from the time a floor buffer ran away with her when she worked as a school janitor, technology also presents few problems for Marcy. Whatever she has been able to afford, she has been able to master.

Three of our profiles are set in the city of Knoxville, in east Tennessee. Lying in the broad Tennessee Valley, between two mountain chains, Knoxville is an Appalachian city. It is far more white than most Southern cities (with a nonwhite population in the city of 16 percent). Many of its white inhabitants have ties with the mountain areas. Knoxville's history and economy have been bound up with Appalachia through trade, and as the headquarters and finance center for coal companies. Despite the presence of the main campus of The University of Tennessee, the headquarters of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and nearby the massive weapons installations at Oak Ridge, Knoxville still often seems like an overgrown small town.

Yuvette Evans is a twenty-six year old African American woman, mother of two, who lives in public housing in an inner-city neighborhood of Knoxville. At the time of interview she worked as a part-time waitress, but lost that job when a customer complained she did not refill his iced tea quickly enough. She left school without a diploma in twelfth grade, and has been in and out of adult education programs. She took the GED test one time, and scored quite high, although she did not pass. Her son is in Head Start, and she values the help that program is giving him. She wants very much to make a better life for herself and her children. She has no fears of technology, and readily programs her telephone, uses a computerized pre-register at the restaurant, and fixes her interviewer's tape recorder.

Les Willard is white, 36 years old, and lives with his wife and two children in a small frame house in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Knoxville. He has a high school diploma, but many problems with reading and writing. He works as an electrician, but because of his literacy difficulties, cannot get the license that would enable him to earn more. As a result, his life is dominated by work. He often works evenings and Saturdays, as well as his "regular" 40 hour a week job. Les is in many ways the "caretaker" for his own and his wife's family, and takes pride in his ability to *"hold up."*

Lisa Bogan was born in rural Mississippi, but has been living in Knoxville since 1973. A 37 year old African American woman, mother of two children, Lisa graduated high school in Mississippi but says she stopped learning in the sixth grade. Both literacy and technology present some difficulties for her, and she has tried adult basic education classes to upgrade her skills. Of all the people we profiled she has been the most involved outside home and family. Lisa is very active in her church, and sings in the choir. She votes, attends PTA meetings, and talks with teachers. Before she lost her house because of an alcoholic husband's debts, she was on close terms with her neighbors.

Even though Appalachia is conventionally regarded as primarily white, all areas, both rural and urban, have small African American populations. Increasingly, too, the region is

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becoming temporary, sometimes permanent, home to other minorities. In particular, the Appalachian areas that still have significant agriculture see regular movement of migrant farmworkers. Mainly Mexican American, with some African American, Haitian and other groups at times, the migrant farmworkers move in largely invisible streams through the region. East Tennessee, southwest Virginia, and western North Carolina all are home at times to migrant farmworkers.

Maria Reyes is a Latina of Mexican origin, born in Texas, who at the time of interview was trying for a more settled life in a small town in North Carolina. Participating in several adult education programs, Maria had hopes of finding a community, of bringing her family together, of a good job away from the fields. At forty-one, living in a trailer park with her two sons, and often her two grandchildren, Maria's education essentially ended with the third grade. All but her youngest child (now in fourth grade) also dropped out of school. Maria's first language is Spanish, although she is not literate in Spanish. Her oral English is clear, but she has difficulties with some reading, and especially writing. Yet she is not intimidated by the demands of technology; *"I have yet to find something that I could say I have tried and could not do."* She rejoiced in the opportunity to use a computer in a JTPA work experience program.

These profiles give us some insights into the lives of adults who have varying levels of difficulty with reading, writing and math. The people interviewed took the time to share with us their joys and sorrows, the difficulties they have overcome, their hopes for their children. They talked about the place of literacy in their everyday and work lives, about their use of technology, and what they can and cannot handle. These are voices seldom heard. We are privileged to hear them.

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TOM ADDINGTON

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TOM ADDINGTON

By Beth Bingman

Tom Addington is a twenty-seven year old farmer, or more accurately farmworker, since he doesn't own land and is paid wages to work for other people. He lives with his wife and three young children in a four-room frame house on a farm in Scott County, Virginia. He left high school without graduating and reads with difficulty.

TOM ADDINGTON

Tom Addington is a family man. As he thinks about his life and what he hopes to do, his plans are made around meeting the needs of his children. While he is not entirely satisfied with his own situation, he believes he can "move on."

His children are five, three, and two years old and he seems to both like and enjoy them. During these interviews his children were always around, and Tom told of taking them fishing and on walks through the woods. His children seem to be a motivating force in his life.

> *I like being called Dad and stuff like that. I love my kids, very much. I'm glad I've got them and they're healthy and stuff. And I guess the biggest majority is taking care of them. I don't mind that too bad 'cause if a man's gonna amount to anything he's got to get out here and work for it. If he ain't got no kids at all, he's got to. It ain't gonna be reached down to him, I don't think.*
>
> [Question: Has any of it been hard?]
>
> *Oh yeah. It's about hard, well, it's kindly hard on me every day 'cause, you know, I never know where I'm gonna get ahold of the next penny at. And I know they need something all the time. I've just got to get out there and look and see where it's at.*
>
> *I look forward to moving on now. I got a family of my own I gotta try and take care of them, maybe satisfy them. If I don't end up with a lot myself, I'd just like to see them be happy and get what they want.*

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Scott County, Virginia

Tom was born in Scott County and has lived there most of his life. Scott County is in the far southwestern corner of Virginia, bordering Tennessee. While it is a rural county with fewer than fifty people per square mile, it is counted as part of the Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol Metropolitan Statistical Area. The 1990 population (23,204) is down nearly 2,000 from 1980. Many people leave the county for work each day in Kingsport or the mines of other Virginia counties. At the same time there are 4,000 farms in Scott county.

Most of these are small, under 100 acres, and most farmers work at another "public" job. Many of the poorest people in the county work as farm laborers either for wages or for rent and "on shares" (share-cropping).

There are three high schools, one in the county seat and the other two rural, one middle school, and eight elementary schools. A vocational-technical school in Gate City serves the entire county and there are community colleges in three adjoining counties. The median educational level in 1980 was 9.3 completed years of schooling. The county has many of the problems typical of the Appalachian region. There is no hospital. Housing is often substandard. Many families live below the poverty level.

The county is beautiful, bordered on the north by Stone Mountain and High Knob and by the Clinch Mountain on the south with ridges and valleys between. Both the Clinch and Holston Rivers flow through the county. Gate City, the largest town and county seat has a population of 2,200. The five other towns are much smaller. Most people live on the 445 miles of secondary roads which crisscross the county, 345 miles of which are unpaved.

Tobacco

In order to understand the context of Tom's life and his uses of literacy and technology, one must understand something about the cultivation of tobacco. Tobacco has been the primary cash crop in this county for many years. In 1990, over five million pounds of burley tobacco were grown on the 3,735 farms in Scott County with tobacco allotments. An allotment, established under the agricultural stabilization programs of the 1930's, gives the landowner the right to sell a certain number of pounds of tobacco. The average Scott County allotment is 1,600 pounds, about the amount which can be grown on a half acre. These allotments can be leased to another grower, but cannot be transferred from one farm to another. Most full-time farmers lease allotments and/or grow "on the shares" with a landowner. In 1990 burley tobacco sold for about $1.70 a pound.

Tobacco is a labor intensive crop. It is also second only to cotton in the amount of pesticides used in its production. Although much of the way tobacco is grown has changed little over the years, the pesticide use in particular makes it a very "modern" crop that takes work nearly year round. In this area it is grown in small fields often on hillsides. Growers use tractors to prepare the ground and to pull the setting machine, but most of the work is done by hand. In the fall or winter, beds are prepared for raising the plants. A bed usually measures 100 feet by nine feet. The ground is carefully prepared by plowing and disking, then raked smooth and sterilized by covering the bed with plastic sheeting and releasing canisters of gas under the plastic. This gas, methyl bromide, kills both insects and weed seeds. In the early spring, the bed is fertilized and sown with tobacco seed nearly as fine as dust. Two teaspoons will sow a bed which will produce enough seedlings to plant an acre field. After the seeds are sown, the bed is covered with tobacco cloth, either cheesecloth or a nonwoven synthetic substitute. This protects the tender plants from too much sun or cold

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and keeps out any stray seeds and insects. The young plants grow in the bed for about six weeks until they are about a foot high.

In the meantime the fields are prepared with a tractor, by plowing, disking, fertilizing, and disking again. When the fields are ready, the plants are big enough, and danger of frost is past (usually in May), the fields are set or planted. The plants are carefully pulled by hand and put into baskets or boxes. At the field, they are planted with a tobacco setter pulled by a tractor. This process involves several people, someone to drive the tractor, two people to sit on the setter, and usually one or two people who follow behind on foot and reset any plants the machine failed to plant. The setters ride facing backwards and lay plants onto a device which cuts a groove, drops the plant in, waters it, and covers the roots with soil. The mis-set plants are "pegged in" with a stick with flared end.

After the fields are set, the farmer maintains the beds for a time in order to have plants to replace any that die in the field. The fields are cultivated three times by tractor and twice by hand when the plants become too tall to plow. This keeps the weeds down. Tobacco plants can grow as high as six feet and have leaves up to two feet long. When the tobacco gets "head high" it is sprayed to prevent the growth of suckers, new shoots from the sides. These suckers used to be removed several times by hand, but now the suckering is done chemically with MH30, a growth regulator. Late in the summer the tobacco is "topped." The top leaves and flowers are cut out to keep the plant from getting taller. When the leaves begin to turn yellow, in the late summer, the tobacco is ready to cut. The tool for this is a tobacco knife, a short square blade on the end of a handle, or a machete. The stalk is cut at the base and then speared onto a stick. The tobacco sticks, about four or five feet long are cut usually from oak and reused for years. A conical seven-inch spear point is placed on the end of the stick and the tobacco stalk is speared onto the stick. Each stick will hold about six to eight stalks. These sticks of tobacco are left in the field for 3-5 days to lose some of their moisture and weight.

Once field-cured, the sticks of tobacco are loaded on to a wagon and hauled by tractor to the barns. Burley tobacco barns are fairly open buildings with rows of rafters, four feet apart and about six feet over each other. Hanging tobacco is a group endeavor. One person stands on the wagon and hands the sticks of tobacco up to others scattered throughout the barn. They hang the sticks across the rafters, starting at the top of the barn and working downwards until the barn is filled. Tobacco in this county is air cured and hangs for about two months until it dries and turns from greenish yellow to reddish brown. It is then ready to strip.

When the tobacco is cured, the sticks are taken down. This has to be done when it is "in case", damp enough not to crumble. People, often entire families, take the stalks from the sticks and strip the individual leaves from the stalks. The leaves are graded by size and color. Until recently, "hands" of each grade were tied together with another leaf and loaded onto baskets. Today most tobacco is baled, packed into a box and tied with string into hundred pound bales. It is not always graded. The bales are loaded onto trucks and taken to

the tobacco warehouses in town where they are sold, usually in time to have the money for Christmas and to pay property taxes on the land. The fields are plowed and planted in a cover crop.

The House

I followed the directions I'd been given to Tom's house and found it without any trouble. It was *"the second white house you see after you don't turn at the forks of the road, down in a sinkhole with tobacco and cattle around the house, a mile or mile and a half off the Far Hollow road"*. The Addingtons live in a white frame house set down off the road. The driveway isn't paved, but the road is. Tobacco is growing around the place, but the yard is good sized and mowed. The two or three riding toys in the yard made me think I was at the right place. Frieda had told me there were three children. The mailbox on the road, handmade of plywood and tin, had no name or number.

The kitchen was neat with a counter with a sink, a stove, and a refrigerator. Cereal boxes were lined up on the counter. The room seemed a little bare, and I don't remember a table or chairs. We went into the front room where there are a couch and an arm chair, a book shelf, a low table and a television (black and white, I believe) on a stand. The news was on. On the walls were a calendar from a local business and a paper heart with the word "Todd" and a large framed print of a painting of Jesus kneeling in the garden. On another print, I believe of an animal, Tom had cut out places in the paper and put in arrowheads to form a design. The table was decorated with plastic flowers.

We talked the first time in the front room or living room and later on the porch. The covered porch is the full width of the house and an old living room suite (couch and two chairs) provides plenty of seating. The porch faces down the valley and has a good view.

LIFE HISTORY

Tom's parents, twin brother and five older sisters all still live in the county. His father has worked at various things -- logging, mining, construction. When Tom was seven the family moved to Toledo, Ohio where his father worked in a Campbell soup factory. But the family returned to Virginia after three or four years, because of the tornados Tom recalls.

Most of Tom's life is taken up with work. Tom's activities outside his family and work are limited by lack of transportation. He sees his wife's family often because they just live "down the road," and he gets together with his own family for an occasional cookout. He watches a little television, a baseball or football game when he gets the time. *"I guess when I go ahuntin', that's the biggest fun I've had. Biggest majority of the time I'm always doin' something or other, piddlin' around the farm, maybe buildin' a fence or something."*

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WORK HISTORY

Tobacco farming is the work Tom is most involved in. He helps his landlord, and also works for a friend on a crew which hires out to other farmers to help with the most intensive tobacco work. In addition to work in tobacco, he helps put up hay and may "*dig a little herb*" (ginseng) to sell to local dealers. At present he is paid by the hour or in exchange for rent, but he hopes to be able to raise a crop of tobacco on shares next year:

> *Right now I just work in other people's, but next year, if nothing don't happen, I'll be araising on the halfs. Round here it's hard to make a living. And most people around here lean on tobacco and stuff to make it. And I believe I'll try next year to try to get myself started on it, some 'baccer, and go from there you know, maybe build myself up. Cause I don't, well, I worked on a couple of public jobs. It didn't last long so I'd rather just do farm work.*

The "public jobs" he has done include trimming trees and spraying right-of-ways for a tree company and loading trucks at a local tobacco warehouse.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Tom dropped out of high school when he was seventeen and "taking ninth, tenth grade subjects." He started school in a Scott County elementary school, went to school in Toledo a few years, and came back to Scott County. He dropped out of one of the rural high schools where he was in a special education class.

We talked quite a bit about his school experiences, and why he did not learn to read. He puts a lot of the blame on the schools.

> *I wasn't learning nothing, they just passed me to get rid of me. They'd send me down on the ball field, rake the ball field off or tell me to go to sleep or something or other. They never would try to learn me how to read or nothing like that. Seemed like they didn't have enough patience so I just quit goin'. I wasn't learnin' nothin'. They wouldn't try to learn me nothing so I just quit goin', I just quit goin'. They ought to took their time 'cause I was willing to learn. They ought to took their time to learn me but they didn't seem like they cared that much.*

At the same time, he also questions his own abilities. Although he feels he is good at math and remembers getting an "A" on math in school, he describes himself as "*slow about learning*" and doesn't seem sure about why he can't read.

> *You know I was willin' to learn. I was willin' to learn how to read, grow up to be you know maybe something better than what I am now besides doin' farm work, maybe you know be on a public job makin' good money, something like that, doin' carpenter work or something. But it just seems like it wasn't for me to learn how to*

read or something or other. You know it bugs me every now and then, and then I don't know what went wrong. I'm slow, I'm slow about wantin' to learn how to read or somethin'. I ain't got the patience for it now but back then when I was goin' to school, you know I was wantin' to learn. I don't know. It just went downhill.

I could blame the teacher for some of it and I could blame some of it on myself. Sometimes I'd go up and ask the teacher how to do this and sometimes I wouldn't. So I guess it works both ways there. If I had it done over I guess I'd probably made them learn me. I don't know if I could've made them or not but I'd have tried.

Tom has had positive school experiences. I asked him if there was a difference in the schools in Ohio and Virginia.

They's a lot of difference. Up there they seem like you know they care. They would try to learn you if it took them all day to learn you one word. They seemed like they, you know, want you to learn.

He also spoke about taking guitar lessons in school in Ohio and that he thought if he had stayed in Ohio "*I'd be aplayin' just about anything.*"

Tom has had some schooling as an adult when he spent seven months in Richmond a correctional institution after he was "*in a little bit of trouble.*" There he had classes in math, English, science, and spelling.

They'd sit there, they'd have six or seven of us in a class and they'd learn us how to read. But when I left from there I just had a third grade average. You know before I went there I thought I had maybe a little bit bigger average, but come to find out I just had a third grade average. But I was alearnin', I was learnin' real good. You know I took spellin'. They tried to learn me how to spell words. They was really wantin' to learn me how to read.

But when he came back from Richmond he "*had a wife and child by then and it was time to start doin' a little bit of something and I forgot all about it, readin', something like that.*"

Since his time in Richmond, Tom has not been involved in any adult education although he was approached by Frieda about literacy tutoring. But he hasn't felt like he has the time and

I'm kinda bashful you know 'cause I just won't let anybody come in and try to learn me to read, something like that, 'cause I know it makes them angry and I get angry and just don't want to do nothing.

At the same time, although he recognizes that, "*There's more out there than just me that can't read, so I shouldn't be ashamed of that,*" he would like to read better.

> *I'd like to read. I'd like to know more, like to pick something up and just go ahead and read it. But I just pick something up and look at it and lay it back down. I can read a little bit, but far as a big old long word or something or other, I don't know what that is. They's a lot of words I know. Take these little old kid books or something or other like that, I can pick them up and about read them. But you take a newspaper or something or other, I pick it up, they'll be words I don't know how to read. It wouldn't take much that I could learn how to read 'cause I know quite a few words. I could learn how to read, I think, pretty easy if I had the time and patience and somebody who could teach me.*

EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY

Tom is not a nonreader, but he reads poorly. He says the only writing he does is when he signs his name.

> *There's a few signs I could read. If I see pop in the store, I know what name of every kind of pop and stuff like that. Maybe candy bars, all the candy bars. But as far as pickin' up a paper that's got writin' on it, they may be a few words I can read on it. My wife writes me a letter, you know I can read that pretty good. They's a few things I can read. Big words mostly what I got problems with 'cause I don't try to sound them out or try to piece them together. And when I come to a big word I just pass it up and go to the next word. If I know it I'll say it and if I don't, I just keep goin' on.*

While Tom does not read much himself, literacy has a place in his family. His wife went to the eighth grade and does read. She reads books to the children easily and fluently. She does word-find puzzles from a puzzle book. She helps Tom by reading the occasional piece of mail other than the expected light or hospital bills.

> *Well like if I go to the post office and I see a bill, I about know where my bills are going to come from. But if I see something in there different, that bugs me cause I don't know where it's from or like that. I always just bring it here and let the old lady read it and if she says something she says it and if she don't I don't pay it no mind.*

The reading material in the home includes a few children's books and coloring books, Betty's puzzle books, and a large Bible. "*I used to pick it up every now and then and read. I don't pick it up now. I should. I guess if I'd sit down you know, I'd probably learn it quick.*"

Getting A Good Deal

Math ability helps Tom when he shops. He usually goes to the grocery store twice a month. He goes because he thinks he can get more for their money than his wife.

> *I look at the prices and stuff on it. You know they got, say in the meat aisle or something or other like that they'll have the prices on one thing. And the same meat'll be down right below it or above it have a different price on it, and I just go by, you know from there. But most of the time, you know, if I want it bad enough, I just go ahead and get it. I don't care for her going shopping and stuff, but it seems like she don't get as much. For the same amount of money.*

To a large extent Tom operates in a cash economy. He has never had a bank account and doesn't file a tax return except to get low income credit if he's been paid by someone who withholds. The family does receive food stamps and help from the WIC program for food for the children. He used to buy on credit at local stores which will carry an account for customers, but has stopped.

> *I ain't got no credit, at no stores. I used to have, but I stopped 'cause, you know I stopped it 'cause these little old stores now, they'll run it more up on you than what you're really gettin. And I just quit, quit foolin with it.*

Getting Around

Lack of transportation is probably the most immediate problem resulting from Tom's lack of literacy. While he has owned vehicles, he traded them because he was never able to get a driver's license.

> *You know I ain't got no transportation. I guess that makes it harder on me than anything 'cause there ain't no transportation. I ain't never had a driver's license. I went tried it once, failed it and ain't never been back. The woman read me the questions, but I ain't never read the book and I just went down there and tried to get them and I never got them, so you know that embarrassed me and I just ain't never been back to try for 'em. Maybe one of these days I'll get 'em.*

In an area where the only public transportation is school buses and the shopping town is twenty miles away, not being able to pass the driver's license test is a serious problem. To shop or go to the doctor or visit their child's school, Tom and Betty must catch a ride with a family member.

TECHNOLOGY

The technology Tom encounters in his personal life is limited because he lives and works in a rural area, but primarily because he is poor. When asked what equipment in

addition to the television and stereo he has in his home he answered, "*a stove, refrigerator, a washing machine,....clock.*" The washer is a wringer washer that can be filled by hand since there is no water and no bathroom in the house. The television antenna is a coat hanger. The house is heated by a wood stove. Other family members have VCR's; none have cable television.

In his work Tom operates various machines -- tractors, tobacco setters, front-end loaders, chain saws. He is involved with the technology of agricultural chemicals to some extent, mixing and spraying. But, he seems to have had little or no encounter with computerized technology beyond, perhaps, his sisters' VCRs. Local banks don't have cash machines and in any case he doesn't have an account. He does not use credit cards. He doesn't have a telephone. The farm equipment he uses is relatively small and unsophisticated. They don't own a microwave. In many ways Tom is involved with the technologies of earlier times. These are perhaps technologies which do not require much in the way of literacy, but it is probably not lack of literacy which has limited Tom's involvement with more contemporary technology, but lack of income.

LEARNING TO WORK

The work Tom does involves skills such as how to drive a tractor or spear tobacco. It also involves technical knowledge. He knows what needs to be done to grow tobacco and in what sequence these steps are taken. He uses agricultural chemicals and determines how much of what he needs. He has skills as a mechanic. He gardens and knows his environment as a hunter and an herb digger. In none of these areas did his knowledge come from literacy and schooling. He does identify situations when more reading ability would benefit his work, but he has been able to work at farming for sixteen years.

Tom talked about how he learned about farming and how he deals with situations where reading would be helpful.

> *Well, what I've learned, I've learned off of other people. Cause I don't read nothing like that, can't read, so what I've pretty well learned I learned off other people. I've helped a lot of people and people showed me how to do stuff like that.*
>
> *Well, in a way you know if I had to do it myself I guess I'd be ahurtin'. But I always have somebody there to read. I guess at a lot of stuff 'cause that's the way I go about doin' it. I guess, you know, about how much you should need and all this 'cause I've done it for a while. I usually come out bein' about right.*
>
> *My daddy taught me a lot about mechanics and I can work on just about anything. Well, that's another good thing I like to do besides farm work, I like to work on vehicles and stuff.*

He expects help from the friend he works for if he grows his own crop next year.

> *We were raised up [together] and we get along pretty good. He helps me and I help him and I learn a lot from him, you know. He reads, stuff like that. Next year I'm gonna put some [tobacco] out, maybe swap work or something with him.*

The local agricultural extension agent, Russell Martin, affirmed some of what Tom said about how less literate farmers learn to do their work. "*Many of the people that don't read, they listen and put it up in their brain.*" When a new procedure is introduced the agents hold demonstrations around the county. Often the less literate farmers stand at the back of the crowd and watch without saying anything or asking questions. But after the demonstration they may be the only ones who can really explain the procedure. Martin seemed quite impressed with the ability of these farmers to remember. "*They've got it upstairs, using human computers.*" He commented on how skillfully many nonliterate farmers could handle numbers. "*They can beat a pocket calculator.*" He also noted that while these less literate farmers adopted new practices, "*a number will be one, two, three seasons late*" and some suffered economically because of this. This might particularly be the case when conditions change quickly as in blue mold infestations.

I asked Martin about safety in use of chemicals when people can't read the labels. "*What I have found so far is that the people who can't read are more careful.*" He thought that they could recognize a word like Ridomil the way "*we might recognize a Chinese character*" and know what is in a container. Later he restated, "*People who don't read and write are more careful than those who do.*"

In addition to demonstrations and use of media, Martin seems to count on word of mouth in education of farmers, literate or not. He spoke of spending the previous day with four or five farmers who will then talk to 25 or 30 more and spread the word. He follows the classic agricultural extension approach in taking advantage of informal information-sharing networks. "*There are 3,000 or so growers in this county. You can't go a mile without seeing somebody do something.*" So people learn by example from each other. He also uses a lot of analogy when he talks. When he was explaining the importance of having the soil in the bed loose, he compared it to trying to mix something into packed brown sugar.

Mathematical Ability

Tom seems to have the ability with math that Martin noted. He believes he learned from his father.

> *I picked it up I guess off my dad 'cause he'd sit around and the kids come in from school, they'd ask him math questions. I'd be sittin' over there and I'd listen and just caught it off him. I just took right off on that.*

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For example, he explained how he determines the number of sticks to charge a farmer for after he has cut a field.

> *Well, you count one row, we always count one row, and if you got, say, 100 sticks in a row and you got 20 stick-rows, that's be 2,000 sticks. And we always go like that.*

But while Tom seems able to use mathematics, he is vague about time. He doesn't remember the months to plant and he seemed unsure about how long ago, even in terms of months, something happened.

CIVIC ACTIVITY/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Although he was aware of a local election Tom doesn't vote. He no longer attends church.

> *I used to go to church. And the preachers wasn't right so I quit going to church. I enjoyed it now, I enjoyed church and stuff. I believe in it. But, the churches I went to, they'd always come back and try to pull me up by the arm, try to pull me up there [to the altar], and that's not right. And if God wants you to be saved He'll let you know when the time's ready.*

FAMILY LITERACY

Tom and Betty are concerned about their children's education. Betty reads to them and Tom tells them stories. They have taught the oldest child who is in kindergarten to write his name. He also counts to ten and recognizes letters. Tom says the children watch Sesame Street "*all the time*." Once when I arrived they were sitting on the porch after Tom had worked all day in tobacco looking as the oldest child showed them the papers he had brought home from kindergarten. These were worksheets which included connecting dots to form a picture and circling all of a particular shape. One sheet the teacher had put "-1" on the top of a page where the child had failed to circle a square. Tom reminded him gently, "*You gotta start lookin' there son, you missed one.*" They see a better education as important to their children's future, and do what they can to encourage them.

MARCY OSBORNE

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MARCY OSBORNE

by Beth Bingman

Marcy Osborne is a forty year old white Appalachian woman with a rural background, who now lives in the small town of Gate City, Virginia, and works there as a companion and housekeeper for an older woman. She is divorced and has three children, the youngest in his senior year of high school. Marcy herself dropped out of school in the seventh grade. However she is able to read most of what she wants and has taken GED and nurse's aide classes.

MARCY OSBORNE

Every weekday morning Marcy walks the four blocks between the apartment she shares with her mother and the apartment where she works. She works for Sue, an elderly woman who lives in a new apartment complex for older and disabled people. She describes her job as: "*I guess it would be housekeeping cause that's what I do, do things for her you know.*" Marcy arrives at 6:30 a.m. and prepares Sue's breakfast and helps her dress for the day. She stays all day, cleaning the two-room apartment, preparing the meals, making sure Sue takes her medicine and being her friend and companion. "*I don't believe Sue would accept anybody else like she has me. She depends on me for more than she does her own kids.*" At 6:30 in the evening Marcy walks back home.

Marcy is a quiet woman. At first she seems shy, but this may just be an initial reserve. She is cheerful and laughs easily. She seems self-contained and determined. She dresses in jeans and sweaters picked out because they suit what she describes as "*my own style.*" She has raised three children mostly by herself, having been on her own for twelve years. Her youngest son is now nineteen, and while Marcy plans to stay with her mother as long as she needs to, she also has a sense of independence and adventure. We talked some about how her life has changed over the years and what she would like to do.

> *[I'm] more independent. If a man asked me to marry him right now, I'd say forget it, no way. I don't believe I'd ever get married again. I like being free. That way if I want to go somewhere I go, if I don't I won't. If you've got a man, they're always there ready to tell you when you can go, when you can't go.*
>
> *I'd like to travel. I was telling Sue the other day I'd like to go somewhere, just take off and keep going. I would. I'd like to go to Wyoming. I don't know why, I've always wanted to go there. I just want to go.*
>
> *Well having my kids would be the best [experience in her life]. Getting a divorce would be the worst.*

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THE COMMUNITY: GATE CITY, VIRGINIA

Gate City is the county seat of Scott County (see "Tom Addington"). It is a small town, the 1990 population of 2,200 down several hundred from 1980. It has been the main shopping town for an agricultural county and still has two farm supply stores, three supermarkets, a dry goods store, several small restaurants, four franchised fast-food restaurants, and two small discount stores, Dollar General and Family Dollar. The old courthouse holds county offices and the jail is next door. Several lawyers' offices are nearby. The offices of the county's health department, social services, employment service, agricultural extension, and mental health agency are in Gate City. The school board office and the county's only library are on the main street. There are only two small manufacturing enterprises. Jackson Street is old enough and unchanged enough that the Hollywood producers of **The River** used it as the set of a 1950's small town, giving county residents temporary employment as extras.

Yet in many ways Gate City has become a suburb of Kingsport, Tennessee, a bedroom community as the town manager calls it. The majority of city residents work in Kingsport's industries and most do their shopping in the malls and major discount stores of the larger city. So Gate City, which has been important since settlers on the road to Kentucky came through the pass or "gate" where Moccasin Creek cuts through Clinch Mountain, has become a place to do your county business if you live in the rural part of the county and a place to live, but not work for most residents of the town.

Marcy lives with her mother and son in a building on the main street in Gate City. The building has had a store in the front, but the commercial space is vacant now. There are two apartments in the back, one on the main level and one in the basement. Marcy lives on the main floor. The front door is set back a little from the front of the building. There is a tiny bit of yard next to the sidewalk and Marcy has planted flowers. Some have been killed by the frost, but mums were still blooming when I visited. Marcy was sitting in the living room, a large room with two couches, a bed with a homemade quilt, and several chairs and tables. A large television with "rabbit ears" sits in front of the fireplace at the end near the door. A hall and a dining room open off the room. The floors are wood and the walls a light paneling. There is a large window at one end of the light and airy room. The walls are decorated with many pictures and other items, a large poster of Jesus with a tulle frame, a picture of a cross made with match sticks, a pencil drawing of two kittens made by a niece, several family photographs, other religious pictures, a calendar. In the dining room are a table and chairs and a small deep freezer.

LIFE HISTORY

Marcy has lived in Gate City for two years. She grew up in rural Scott County. Her father died when she was ten and her mother raised four daughters by doing farm work.

Marcy Osborne

I've got three sisters. Ain't got nary brother. Well, we lived back in the sticks. I guess we just went wild back there. Well, it's called Tom's Branch, we lived back in there till I was about fourteen, I guess. Then we moved to where the swinging bridge is at Smith's Ferry, that's where we lived. I've come in many a evening, not even eat nothing, working tobacco. Get in about dark.

Marcy talked about the differences in the way she and her children grew up even though both lived in rural sections of the county. Her own childhood memories sound like those of a much earlier age than the 1950's.

Well, they have it a lot easier now than what I did. And I guess I had it easier than my mother did. There's more money now, easier to get a job. Well they had more clothes than I did, cause I remember when I went to school I had about three dresses to wear. They had a lot more clothes than I did. I had to walk about two mile out of that holler. They didn't have that far to walk. Well we didn't have no T.V. when I was growing up, well not till I got about fourteen. We had an old battery radio. Didn't have nothing like a stereo, nothing like that. We didn't have an electric stove, we had a wood stove. We had to carry water from a spring. We had a wringer washing machine. Well when I was growing up we didn't have a wringer all the time. We didn't get one till later on. Had to use a washboard. If we got a toy it was at Christmas time. A doll, that was about it. Or a coloring book, something like that. We didn't get very much. [My kids] got dolls, coloring books, and it didn't have to be Christmas for them to get it.

Marcy married in her early twenties and had three children, two girls and a boy. Her husband worked in sawmills in Scott County and they lived first near where she grew up and then at Sweetwater in southern Scott County. But her husband had a problem with alcohol.

The trouble with him was when he was drinking. He was really mean you know. That's really the thing that come between me and him I guess was his drinking. I just couldn't cope with it.

So Marcy left her husband and began to raise her children alone.

[It was scary] trying to raise the kids on my own. It wasn't really that much problem though. They enjoyed, you know, being with me and when me and their father was together, why when he was drunk, it kept them scared to death all the time. A many a night they went to bed with their shoes on because they knowed if he started raising cane, I was gonna get up and leave with them. And they kept their shoes on.

Well really I made it better after I left my husband cause he drunk all the time. If he had money he went and spent it on something to drink. A lot of times we had to come to Mommy's to get something to eat. So I really made it better, you know, after I got on my own. Cause he wasn't there you know to waste what money I did get.

ERIC

The family lived on money from the Aid to Dependent Children program.

> *Well, when I had all three of the kids home, it was $327, $327 [a month] or something like that. Then when the oldest got married it was $265. Then when the other one got married it was $207. Well see we got food stamps. That bought the food. What I had left I paid the electricity bill and bought the kids clothes. It wasn't easy, but when you have to, you have to I guess.*

While Marcy has been separated from her husband for twelve years it took her several years to afford a divorce.

> *We was separated for about, I guess, seven year before we got a divorce. It took me a long time to come up with the money to pay for it you know. And I had to pay so much and then wait and pay so much again and it cost me a lot more doing that, too. It cost me $644.00. My sister got her divorce and it only cost her $350.00 'cause her husband paid it straight out. That way it didn't cost as much.*

WORK HISTORY

Marcy began to work while she lived in Sweetwater as a janitor in the school. After she moved to Gate City to live with her mother she worked as a school janitor there for a year. When she was no longer eligible for ADC she got her present job with Sue. She learned of the job from her ex-brother-in-law whose sister lived next door to Sue's son and knew his wife. She says when this job is over, she would be interested in working as a nurse's aide.

Her son, in his last year of school, now lives with her after spending some time with his father who lives in Tennessee. He hopes to join the Marines when he graduates from high school. Her daughters are married and live nearby. One works in a cotton mill in Kingsport, the other hopes to get a job there but has a four month old son.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Marcy left school when she was seventeen and in the seventh grade. She had been sick a lot and had not been able to go to school regularly. She and her sisters rode the school bus to a three-room school, but they had to walk to the bus stop.

> *We had to walk out of that holler, about two miles and in the winter time it got rough. There for a while I couldn't go. I had that rheumatic fever, I was so weak I couldn't do nothing. I was six when I started. I was eight when I had that rheumatic fever. I had to stay out for about two year. It took me a long time to get straightened out.*

> *I had this one teacher, Miss H____, and she was really mean, everybody else thought she was mean, but I liked her. I learned more under her than I did any of them. I'm*

ERIC

> *the only one didn't get a paddling when I was in her room. The rest of them got a paddling. I didn't. They all accused me of being her pet, but I just done what she wanted me to do, you know. I guess I was scared of her.*

None of Marcy's sisters finished school. "*My mother didn't go. I think she might have went through the third grade. He [Dad] didn't go very far either.*" Her husband went to the fifth grade. Her children, however have done well in school. "*The two girls they done good. The oldest one didn't graduate because she quit and got married, but the middle-sized one graduated. My son graduates this year.*" Her son has had some trouble with reading and was in a special education class for learning disabilities for a time. Marcy worked with her children when they were in school, helping them as much as she could.

> *I'd sit down and help them with their math and what I could you know. There's a lot of things I couldn't help them with, I didn't know nothing about. When you don't go far in school, you don't learn much.*
>
> *There was some of that math I couldn't understand. Math I'm pretty good, but algebra. History I never did like.*
>
> *They used to say "writing." Now they say "writing in cursive" and when my daughters first come home talking about it, I said "What are you all talking about!?" You know I hadn't heard nothing like that. I didn't know what they were talking about.*

ADULT EDUCATION

As an adult, Marcy has continued her education. She took a ten week nurse's aid course at the community college in the next county. She would have liked to continue but she rode with her sister and when she decided not to go on, Marcy couldn't either.

> *It was ten weeks. Well they really wasn't nothing hard about it. They had a book we had to read and then we done the tests from that you know. A lot of times we just sat around and talked you know. We didn't have to do that much. We'd have to take a test, I think, about every week, a written test. And most of the time we just took blood pressure and stuff like that. How to take a temperature, how to take a pulse, stuff like that. We didn't have to give no shots or nothing like that. I wanted to take the rest of them. You're supposed to take more than that you know, more than I did. Well you're supposed to take biology class and all that. I was aiming to take them but she backed out of taking any more so I didn't fool with it.*

Marcy was also involved in a GED program which operated in Gate City for a year. That class has since been discontinued. She would like to continue both these programs if the classes met at night, and in her local community.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

> *I read pretty good. But now there's some words I get confused on, you know, like big long words and stuff.*

Marcy is a reader. She reads and writes in her work and to accomplish things in her everyday life. She also reads for fun, "*newspapers, True Story* books, *about anything I can find to read.*" She reads the daily **Kingsport Times-News** and the weekly Scott County paper.

> *Well I read the deaths, the horoscopes, and like where people's in court and stuff like that. I like to read that. I don't read the sports. I don't care nothing about sports.*

She reads tabloids like **The Weekly World News** which have "*...crazy stuff in it, things you wouldn't believe, but I like to read it*". She reads **Reader's Digest**, but not novels. "*I don't like long stories. If they ain't short, I ain't gonna read it*". She also enjoys doing word-find puzzles. While she doesn't use recipes regularly, she does for candy or cakes.

Writing is not something Marcy likes to do, but she uses writing when she needs to, writing grocery lists, birthday cards and an occasional letter to her sister. She says she doesn't need to write as a memory aid very often. For instance she doesn't record appointments on a calendar.

> *I'm pretty good at... if I have to do something, I remember the date. And phone numbers, I can remember them, if they're important, I can remember. I got so many in my head one of these days they're all gonna get mixed up and it's hard telling who I'm gonna call. I just remember, I don't know. Seems like once I dial it, that's it, I remember it.*

Financial reading and writing is one area where Marcy has some difficulty. She doesn't have a checking account or credit cards. She pays bills by money order. Many bills are paid in cash -- rent, electricity, telephone, water -- at local offices. Her sister often does this for her and her mother because Marcy works during the hours these offices are open. When Marcy has unfamiliar forms to fill out she gets her sister's help.

> *Something I have to fill out you know, I always get my sister to help me. She went to the same grade I did but she learnt more than I did. She's good at filling papers out.*

While she was married, Marcy handled all the bills. Tax forms she always took "*to somebody that knowed what they was doing.*" When she first had to fill out school lunch forms, she took them to the school and got help, but after that she did them herself.

Shopping

Marcy does most of her shopping for groceries locally and goes to Kingsport for clothes.

I usually go to Family Dollar. I've been going to Walmart in Kingsport. You turn like you're going towards Knoxville. I know what I want. I've got my own style. I just look till I find what I'm looking for.

She doesn't use coupons and doesn't use sale advertising in the newspapers although she is aware of it. She usually shops for food at the locally owned supermarket which is nearest her house. When she does go to another store, she may use aisle signs for help.

I have to, if I go in a store you know I ain't been in there much, I have to do that to find like where the coffee's at and stuff like that. I walk around and try to find it and if I can't then I go look at the signs and see where it's at.

Transportation

Marcy doesn't drive. She started to learn but she *"run into a toilet"* and didn't try any more. She says she may try to learn again. Her daughters drive and her sister has offered to teach her. Now she either walks or her daughters take her where she needs to go. She has travelled very little outside the immediate area: a weekend trip to North Carolina with a friend, a few visits to her sister's in Rogersville, about forty miles away, and trips to the children's rehabilitation center in Charlottesville with her daughter who had a back problem. The trips to Charlottesville were in a cab, and were up and back, 250 miles each way, in a day. Her children have not traveled much either.

Marcy told me directions to several places we were discussing, but she doesn't have much confidence in her ability to find her way around.

I doubt it [that she could find her way around Kingsport]. *I get lost in the hospital when I go down there. I always like to take somebody with me cause I don't know my way around that much. One day we went to Big Stone Gap, and my youngest daughter -- she's easy to get confused -- she said, "Are we in Kingsport?" She thought we was in Kingsport. She's in Big Stone.*

Health

Getting information about health issues is an important use of reading for Marcy. When her daughter was being followed by the rehabilitation clinic because of scoliosis, Marcy read the booklet which explained the exercises her daughter needed to do. She reads food ingredient labels because her mother is diabetic and must limit her sugar intake. She read in the nurse's aide course and maintains an interest in health matters.

Well I used to go down to the health department and get them pamphlets and if they're anything in the doctor's office when I go, I read that.

EVERYDAY TECHNOLOGY

In her everyday activities Marcy encounters little computerized technology. She doesn't use a bank machine or credit cards. She rarely goes to the library and hasn't used the computerized card catalog. She doesn't have a microwave because she is concerned about her mother's pacemaker. She does use a tape recorder and television. Sue has cable television. Her daughters have a VCR. When the family lived at Sweetwater they had a satellite dish for a time.

Well at [Sweetwater] we had one of them disk. I like to never learned how to work it. I get it all mixed up you know. We'd have to turn the disk with one button and the station with the other. I like to never learned how to use that thing. My daughters could work it good, but now I couldn't. They just looked on it and found out what buttons to push and that's how they learned. I finally learnt there at the last how to work it, then lightning struck it and we never did get it fixed.

LITERACY AT WORK

At work Marcy has encountered some technology. When she began work as a school janitor she had a run-in with a floor buffer.

Well, they had this buffer. And I tried to use it one day and it tried to take me through the side of the building. And they never would ask me to try to use it no more. It did, it had me going every which a way.

In her current job as housekeeper, there is little use of technology except for normal home appliances. The apartment building is equipped with an intercom at the front entrance as well as doorbells at each apartment. Neither are common in this area. Most people in the apartment just ignore the doorbell and knock. And while Marcy knows how to operate the intercom she says she usually knows who is coming and just buzzes them in.

Well you can push it down and ask who it is and talk to them if you want to. I never do though. Most time I know who's coming you know.

Well, I've always cleaned house and stuff like that so when they told me what to do well I just go on and do it. They told me what I have to do before I come out here. I cook for her, and clean house and make sure she has her medicine, stuff like that.

Taking care of Sue's needs is not complicated, but it does involve several tasks involving literacy or numeracy. Every month Sue's children come and grocery shop for her. Marcy writes a list of what she will need. She plans a month ahead.

When I first come here they had already bought groceries you know. I just go by that and if Sue wants anything extra I tell them. That's the way I work it. Sometimes for bread I go down to the Quickstop. For two, it don't take that much.

Marcy must also manage Sue's medication. I asked Marcy to show me how she organizes the medicine. Sue takes several pills twice a day. Once a week, Marcy sorts the medicine into little plastic boxes designed for organizing medication.

She don't know what kind she takes. I have to put it in a box. I fix her medicine on Wednesday. It's like on Monday of a morning and of a night, two boxes, that's the way we do it. She has to take six of a morning and four of a evening.

One box is blue and marked P.M. and EVENING and the other is pink and marked A.M. and MORNING. Each box is divided into seven separately lidded compartments, one for each day of the week and marked SMTWTFS. Marcy said the daughter-in-law used to sort the medication, but that she told her, *"If you want me to do it I will. I've watched you so much I could close my eyes and do it."* So now Marcy does it. She reads on the prescription bottle whether the medication is to be taken once or twice a day. The ones which are only taken once go into the morning box; the ones for twice go into the morning and evening boxes. Sue also takes a vitamin which Marcy doesn't put in a box.

Marcy noted that she always runs out of one kind of medication before the end of the month when the medication is refilled. She doesn't understand why since the dosage is the same as other pills and both bottles indicate that they contain sixty pills which should be enough for the month. She only runs out of one kind and this happens regularly. I speculated that maybe there weren't sixty pills of that kind for some reason, and she said that this month she will count them as soon as she gets them.

CITIZENSHIP

Marcy has voted twice in her life but *"just ain't interested in voting. They'll all promise you a snowball in July till they get in there."* But she is interested in what goes on in the world and watches the news. She and Sue had followed the Thomas hearings. She was skeptical of both Anita Hill's testimony and of what difference her testimony made.

They said some stuff on there, I'll tell you. They're gonna vote him in anyway, didn't they or did they? I sometimes wonder if that woman was telling the truth or whether she was hired to do that to keep him out of there, 'cause she waited ten year. They said they shouldn't took it public no way. [question about sexual harassment] Yeah, it could happen. I'd say it does happen a lot. But what I can't understand is why she waited ten year to bring it up, I mean before he was ready to go in there.

Marcy is not involved in any organizations and does not go to church regularly, but attends sometimes. She has read the Bible a lot.

ERIC

FAMILY LITERACY: CHANGES OVER GENERATIONS

Granny

While this profile is of Marcy, her mother is an important part both of Marcy's everyday life and of understanding the roles of literacy and technology in the lives of people in Scott County over the past seventy years. I interviewed Marcy's mother, Granny, one Sunday afternoon. She and Marcy were sitting talking in the living room when I arrived. Granny looks like Marcy, short and solid, but is of course much older. She wore a house dress with a homemade apron and a sweater and house shoes with knee socks. She was friendly and welcoming.

In this section, Granny tells the story of her life. It begins as we were discussing left-handedness after Granny signed the consent form. Marcy says that while granny is left-handed, she breaks beans right-handed.

> *They ain't but the one thing I do right-handed, and that's cut with scissors. I can't cut with scissors left-handed.*
>
> *Well if I live to see the 24th day of March come I'll be 78 years old!*
>
> *I growed up at Dungannon. And times was really hard when I growed up. We never knowed what it was to get anything for Christmas and we was lucky if we got something to eat. And coffee was rationed, sugar was, well, everything was rationed back then you know.*
>
> *My mother she died when I was five years old and my Grandpa and Grandma raised me. I had to learn to cook for they was sick a lot, my Grandma and Grandpa both was. I had to learn to cook when I was ten years old. And never got to go to school much on account of I had to milk and feed everything, I had it hard. [At one point a tear runs down her face, but her voice is firm and strong].*
>
> *I went to Wood school a little and at the school over from Hardwood, I went to it some and that's all the education that I got. I didn't get no education at all. Never did learn to read and write good, but everything that, every lesson that we had in school, they'd write it, make us read it writing [script], so that's why I learned to read writing and couldn't read print. They had books, but they'd write the lessons down and make you read them on writing. They was about forty in the schools that I went to. Teachers was rough, one teacher to each school. And they didn't know what a principal nor nothing like that was in school when I went to school. They didn't.*
>
> *My grandparents [read]. And my mother, I don't know. I don't think she got too much education for she had to work all the time. She died when I was five years old. And my Grandpa and Grandma raised me and of course they could read and write. They was like myself, they didn't have too good a education. They come up in hard times, too.*

ERIC

Yeah, I done all that when I was a young girl. I wasn't, I was about sixteen years old when my Grandpa died. No I wasn't. I wasn't but fourteen years old when my Grandpa died. I was about sixteen years old when my Grandma died. And then I stayed with one of my uncle's and aunt's part of the time and stayed with the others the other half of the time and I've had a hard time all my life.

She married when she was in her early twenties.

My husband he died... he'd been dead four months when [my third daughter] was born. That's the reason she can cure the thrash.[1] *[Marcy's] daddy's been dead thirty year. He was my boyfriend from the time my husband died. He died with cancer and I never did have another boyfriend after he died. Told them I didn't have no use for a boyfriend or nothing. Raised my young'ns the best that I could and that's what I've done. I've had a hard time araisin' them. My oldest one now, she, she is what you might say independent rich. For she married a man that never drunk a drop in his life, he never smoked in his life. All he ever knowed was hard work and go to church. That's all he ever knowed. And right now she helps me a lot, if she didn't I wouldn't get by. And she's fifty, she's fifty hain't she? My oldest one's fifty. I never did have a job. Worked at home, all my work was at home! For I didn't have enough education for them to even talk about them giving me a job. Yeah, well I lived with one of my half brothers, I lived with him for...Let's see, I commenced staying with him when my oldest one was a baby didn't I, lived with him and we raised tobaccer, raised corn, and vegetables to eat and stuff like that. It's been hard all my life!*

About eight years ago Granny moved to Gate City. She's lived in three places all "*in hollering distance from each other.*" She seems to like being in town, close to people.

I don't know how long I'd live, take me out of Gate City, I've got used to everybody. Ain't got no enemies here in Gate City. That's one good thing. And the biggest, least, and all, the old ones even down to the oldest one here in Gate City, they don't know me by my name. I'm everybody's "Granny." That's what everybody calls me. Don't matter where I go to, that what everybody calls me, Granny.

My landlord, that I rent from here, the first two [times], about twict he come he called me, "Mrs. L____." I said, "You've got to cut that out." He said, "Why?" I said, "You hain't supposed to even call me my name." "Well, what must I call you?" I said, "I'm everybody's Granny in Gate City." He's never called me nothing but

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[1] Because the child had been born after her father died, Granny believed that she could cure the thrush, a fungal mouth disease.

Granny since. And him and his wife, they both think the world of me. He said, "Well," he said, "I've owned that place several year there where you live." He said, "You're the only one that I've ever had living there that tried to keep it cleaned up."

Changes

Oh, mercy, I couldn't tell you how [things] have changed. They've altogether changed all the way around to me.

In many ways in the past thirty years Marcy and her mother have gone from a nineteenth century life to a twentieth century life. They grew up in a similar fashion, in an isolated part of a rural county without many conveniences and in "hard times." But there were differences. When Marcy was fourteen her mother sent to town and got a television, expanding their connections to the rest of the world. We shared the same heroes from **Bonanza, Wagon Train,** and **The Virginian.** And today her son plans to join the Marines at least in part to travel. His girlfriend is a Norwegian exchange student, and the hobby he shares with a friend is collecting exotic snakes and spiders.

But they both, Marcy and her mother, are ambivalent about the changes in their lives. Granny lives in town and seems to love it; Marcy misses the quiet of the country. They both talk of people today having it "too easy" and making it too easy for their children.

Well, they just let them have their way, let them have anything that they want whether they...They saw theirself in a hard place for to let their young'ns have their way and get what they want. I wasn't raised that way. And I tell them about it. [Granny]

We was talking before you come, about you know, kids a-getting to go more places and everything. Well me and my other sister, the one next to me, we would work all day just to get to go to the neighbor's house and watch about two hours of TV. Now kids ain't satisfied unless you're on the road all the time, and they don't want to do nothing. [Marcy]

I think now, people has it too easy. Too much modern stuff! Yeah, like water in the house. When I was growing up we didn't [have it]. Why I know Mommy and them didn't. And electric stoves. We had to use wood stoves to cook on. Most people uses microwaves now. [Marcy]

Granny heats and cooks with electricity, but misses the old ways.

I'd rather have a wooden cook stove any time and I'd rather have just a coal stove. I don't like electricity too much. You have a time getting warm by these electric heaters. Your cooking's a lot better tasting that you cook with wood than you do with electricity, I think. 'Course now all my young'ns likes my cooking better than they like their own cooking. I like to cook beans and taters and different things like that. I like to cook peas and corn and stuff like that. Young'ns say they can't cook it till it tastes like it do when I cook it.

> *It took me a right smart bit to learn these. Well, about the time that I get in the kitchen, get to cooking or something, have the stove on, the phone'll ring and I'll come to answer the phone, and if I have anything on the stove, I'll burn it every time!*

At the same time even though she is not satisfied with electricity, Granny was the one that insisted, over her children's fears, that she have a pacemaker.

> *Ain't it been almost two years since they put my pacemaker in? I'd had, had three heart attacks and they'd been, they'd tried to get the young'ns to sign the paper for them to put it in and nary one of the young'ns wouldn't sign it. They knowed for sure that'd be the last of me. The last [heart attack] I had, why that doctor told them, "This is one of the times it ain't agonna be left up to nary one of you. Whatever she says goes."*
>
> *So he says, "Will you agree," he says, "to have a pacemaker?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, when?" Well I said, "Tomorrow, if you want to put it in." Well he said, "I'll be after you in the morning at eight o'clock." That's what my doctor told me.*
>
> *Well he come the next morning exactly at eight o'clock. He said, "Well, are you ready to go?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Now, you ain't dreading this are you?" I said, "No, I ain't dreading it!" Oh, he allowed that I'd be like some more that he had put them in. And he never put me to sleep nor nothing. I laid there and talked to him while he was putting it in. I never did move my hands.*
>
> *He said, the most of them, he had to tie their hands down and couldn't do nothing with them at all! He took me in there at eight o'clock and at nine o'clock I was ready to come back to my room for my breakfast.*
>
> *It ain't never give me not one bit o' trouble! They check it over the phone every two months and they say that I'm the only one that they never have had, they never have come back on. It works perfectly. I've got the two things that they give me. One of them, they can hear my heart beat on it and then the other they put it right there [right side of chest] and they can hear it beat....*
>
> *[Marcy] It cuts the pacemaker off so they can hear how her heart's doing...with a magnet.*

Granny seems completely comfortable with the technology of the pacemaker. And unlike Sue, she has no trouble remembering her medication.

> *I take medicine at.....[looks at clock] I got to get up and take some right now. I take medicine at six in the morning, at seven in the morning, eight in the morning, then I take medicine at twelve and then at three, and then at six in the evening and then at eleven of the night.*

ERIC

She also explained to me a plan she had heard about to prevent food stamp fraud by using computerized cards instead of paper coupons.

> *And now it's in all the states but Tennessee and Virginia, they put out food stamps. People go get their food, now they go get their food stamps some of them does - about everybody gets them. Well they take their food stamps and they sell them to get liquor and beer to get drunk on. And now they're gonna change all that. They'll get two cards. They get a credit card and they get a card that you can take to the store and punch it to get food on. That's your food stamp card. They're cutting the food stamps out. Yeah, there's a bunch of them, they sell their food stamps and get the money and take it and buy liquor and get drunk. Some of them gets tore all to pieces. It's awful. They've got it down on the card how much you're due a month. You can take it in and they just punch the card.*

CONCLUSIONS

How does limited literacy affect Marcy's life? In situations where lack of education and literacy get in her way Marcy has ways of coping. Her sisters have been and continue to be a support to her, both with her family and with tasks involving reading and writing. Usually Marcy can read what she needs, but in many situations she gets the information she needs in other ways. She observes or asks and then remembers how to perform various tasks. She gets information from television and friends, although she also uses the newspaper and telephone book.

Use of everyday technology does not seem to be an issue in Marcy's life except possibly learning to drive. And it may well be that when she has the need to drive and the money for a car, she will learn to drive. Except for the floor buffer Marcy does not seem to have had problems with technology. For example, she and her daughters rented a carpet cleaner for her mother's apartment. She is not enthusiastic about new things, but as with the intercom in Sue's apartment, she can use it when she needs to.

Marcy didn't finish school and she hasn't gotten her GED. There are things she has trouble reading and writing. But it doesn't seem that her life is limited greatly by any lack of literacy. It probably has been limited to some extent by poverty. But Marcy lives a full life: she does work she and other people value, has raised her children, supports and receives support from her family. She seemingly enjoys life though she is aware of its darker sides and ponders these issues. She has plans she hasn't fulfilled yet, plans for more education and travel, but these are not dreams which are out of her reach.

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YUVETTE EVANS

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YUVETTE EVANS

by Connie White

Yuvette Evans is a twenty-six-year-old African American woman, a waitress and parent of two children. With her 9-year-old daughter, Jessica and her 5-year-old son, Arliss, she lives in public housing in the Lonsdale neighborhood, an inner-city area of Knoxville, Tennessee. Yuvette finished part of the twelfth grade. Although she has been unable to complete any of the three adult education programs in which she has enrolled and still does not have a GED, Yuvette reads fairly well and lack of literacy skills do not appear to be a barrier in her life.

YUVETTE EVANS

Yuvette's life revolves around concerns of raising her children and making a living. She is proud of being able to work and earn money for the things the family needs, to "*pay out of [my] pocket instead of somebody else doing it.*" Her AFDC payment is small, and Yuvette works hard to try to lift her family out of poverty.

Yuvette's personal values, the way she spends her time and how she lives her life are a source of pride.

> *I don't hang out. I don't go out in public and drink. I don't do drugs. I stay home. I might go with my girlfriend shopping, watch her shop. I mostly stay in the house.*

Yuvette's dreams reflect her daily struggles with hard economic realities, and the gap between what everything in our culture points to as "the good life," and the life that she and her children lead. Even in her dreams Yuvette does not imagine the good life will come easy. She expects and wants to work, but at a job of some skill and dignity.

> *One time I was thinkin' about rich people, maybe they need a bookkeeper or accountant, or maybe at a big business. Atlanta's a big city, try to get a job down there. Or maybe Nashville. Get that money...just having a good job, livin' good...have no worries when bill time come wondering how you gonna get by. I'd go shopping and get the kids stuff.*

THE COMMUNITY: The Lonsdale Neighborhood

Yuvette lives in Lonsdale, a neighborhood in the midst of change. Older residents remember an almost rural community, neighbors who knew each other, and small businesses which served the area. Historically, there was a "black section" and a "white section," a division which even now remains noticeable. Knoxville grew and Lonsdale added homes and public housing. It was a working class community with a strong neighborhood identity. Even though Knoxville was taking on big city trappings, for many residents, Lonsdale retained the warmth and familiarity of a small town. In the 60's and 70's, Knoxville, like

most of the rest of urban America, experienced "white flight" out of the center city into the surrounding area. Economic conditions deteriorated as money for services and schools followed the affluent white migration. Inner city neighborhoods like Lonsdale were hardest hit, and suffered further from economic restructuring that caused many residents to lose jobs in manufacturing and textiles. The jobs available in the area are mostly low paying and without important benefits such as health insurance.

Yuvette lives on P. Drive, deep in the heart of the projects. As I drove into the housing development, two story brick buildings rose up on both sides of the street. So many contradictions here -- garbage blowing around in a light wind, broken bottles and broken pavement, flowers at a doorstep, somebody singing, bright sun and blue sky.

Yuvette's home is one of twelve apartments in a red brick building which looks just like every other red brick building for blocks. When I knock, the door is opened by Arliss, Yuvette's son. "*My mama will be here in a minute,*" he promises with a shy grin, before shutting the door.

Yuvette comes to the door, smiling and apologizing "*I didn't mean for him to shut the door on you!*" We step into the apartment, the front room bare except for a couch and matching chair, a couple of tables, and an assortment of photographs of Yuvette's son and daughter. There are no books, magazines or any printed material in sight, except for a Bible.

It's easy to begin talking about our mutual friend, Anna, and her mother, Janie.

> *Anna is a good friend. She take me anywhere, don't charge me. And her mama, she's just like a mother to me.*

Both Anna and Janie are very important to Yuvette; Anna is someone Yuvette can tell her problems to, and both Anna and Janie provide guidance and stability in Yuvette's life. Their opinions and ideas are of great interest to Yuvette; she listens to them. Anna and Janie seem to fill some void in Yuvette's life, to replace the family and community interaction that she does not have.

LIFE GROWING UP

Yuvette was born in rural central Georgia. Before she was a year old, her father found work in Knoxville and the family moved here. Times were better economically for the family, Yuvette reports, once they came to Tennessee. Yuvette describes her mother as a strong woman, the primary person who shaped her life and continues to have a (sometimes unwelcome) influence on her.

> *In some people's families, the mama say "Just wait till your Daddy get home!" It wasn't like that at my house. My mama pop us if we didn't do right. She didn't wait on Daddy.*

Yuvette struggles to reconcile her difficult time growing up, and the continuing differences she has with her parents, by reminding herself what life has been like for them.

> *Mama went to sixth or seventh grade, Daddy didn't get that far. They had it hard, back in Georgia. They had to quit school to work and help their people. When I was comin' up, Mama worked at night. She had different factory jobs -- Levi's, Standard Knitting Mill [apparel plants]. Daddy took care of us when Mama was working. He worked too, at Lays' and JFG [food processing plants].*

Yuvette has a difficult time talking about her growing up years. Because both parents worked, and had to be away from home at different hours, Yuvette says she doesn't have much of a feeling of "family" when thinking about her early years. Although there was enough money to get by on, Yuvette remembers a great deal of unhappiness as a child due, she says, to her parents' absence and her mother's overprotection. Yuvette describes her childhood as being isolated and lonely.

> *You probably think this is bein' mean. When I was little I used to say I wish I had other parents. My mom was kind of strict. She mostly kept me in the house. I guess she didn't want me to mess with no boy. I guess I can't complain. You know, we made it, as grownups. I didn't have too many friends. I guess I wasn't the talkin' type. Anna's the only good friend I had.*

Yuvette resents being treated differently from her brother by her parents.

> *You know my brother, he's a boy, he can go. I had to stay at home and stuff. It's always, I can't wait till I can get grown. People used to come by and [say to my parents] "Look your son's a'comin out." They'll say no, I couldn't even go anywhere.*

WORK HISTORY

Yuvette is a part-time waitress at Shackney's, a national chain with several restaurants in Knoxville. She is eager to talk about her work. Yuvette works about 20 to 30 hours a week, from 5 pm until 9, or sometimes until midnight.

> *People say, "What you do at Shackney's?" They don't think it's nothing. But it's a hard job. There's a lot to it. When I first started I was doin' salad bar and they wanted me to train and do waitress. And you know sometimes I got nervous. You have to call in on a microphone and say "ordering please" and tell them what you need. You have to be a salesman; you have to say, "Would you like to try this today?". I get nervous sometimes. But I like waitressing, because of the tips. On a good night, I can bring in maybe $30, $40.*

This is the third job Yuvette has held; she worked for a while at Wendy's and at a day care center. She is proud of her work record.

I've never got fired off a job, never walked out. I hope I'll be here a while. We really need the money, Christmas coming up and all.

Despite her good record and the tips, Yuvette's pride is often on the line at work. "*I'm independent*", Yuvette says, making it clear that her dignity is worth something too.

They don't care about us up there at that job. You can tell that by the way they treat us. No insurance, no benefits. And the managers, they're always showing out in front of the customers. It's like the waitresses don't matter. If they want you to respect them, they got to respect you too.

Yuvette interprets these insults as an issue of unequal power between management and workers, not in a racial sense. Even though the restaurant is located in an area that has a large African American population, few African Americans work there. But Yuvette is willing to give her employers the benefit of the doubt.

You know I'm the only black in the evening but there's a cook and a busboy in the morning. My friend was sayin' I should complain because they don't have many black people there. But I figure if they were prejudiced they wouldn't have hired me or the other two.

Yuvette especially likes the teamwork of waitressing. She likes to help out the other waitresses, and feel that she is part of a cooperative effort.

You know we have a buddy system, we help each other out. One waitress might go get a drink order, give it to another to ring up 'cause she has so much to do. Or the cook might ask, "Will you make me a Mello Yello" 'cause they're not allowed out of the kitchen and we can't go in there.

Yuvette also enjoys the pride her children have in her job. She says that her children "*tell everybody*" that she is a Shackney's waitress.

His teacher was telling me [Arliss said] "my mom work at Shackney's." He say, "She a cook. She cook chicken." It made us laugh, it was so funny.

A Good Looking Girl With A Good Personality: A Manager's View

I interviewed the manager of another Knoxville Shackney's to get his viewpoint on the literacy demands of a waitress's job.

A waitress needs to be able to read the menu, the ticket and the computer (preregister) keyboard. Sometimes she may need to help a customer with the menu. Not all of the customers can read or understand it. She takes a customer's order and circles it on the ticket here. She goes to the preregister and puts in her number. Then she rings in the order. The computer automatically puts the date and time. The waitress has to write in the table, whether it's the smoking or non-smoking section,

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and what time she calls in the order. Then she writes the time it comes out of the kitchen right here. For breakfast it's a little harder, because the entrees aren't written out in the same way on the ticket.

It's very important that the waitress gets the order put down and rung up on the computer just right. We send the computer records of each waitress's sales to Nashville every month. They figure tips are 15% of the wages, add that amount in then take 8% out (for Federal withholding tax) so that affects her pay. If a waitress makes a mistake and she or the customer catches it, you have to have a manager to come and fix it. Nobody else can remove any charge from the computer.

There really isn't a screening process for literacy skills when we hire. If I'm interviewing, I look at how she fills out the application, whether her writing is neat. I also have her write her address. That way I get a pretty good idea. [To the interviewer] I don't know if I'd hire you or not. That looks like some kind of shorthand you're doing. We generally don't have any problems with waitresses not being able to read and write. They do pretty well learning the preregister. All the girls we hire for the dining room go through a 4-hour waitress training class. We run that class most Tuesdays -- there's some girls in it right now. They see the training films and learn the 10-step process like bringing the customer's water, the napkin, taking the order, checking back, dessert call back and so on. For at least the first shift, they go with an experienced waitress and watch her, then wait some tables with her help. When we hire them, it's for a 6-8 week probation. They sign a paper that says they know they will be released if they don't meet our standards by then. I haven't had to let anybody go on account of problems with reading. Most of the people who apply here have had other food service jobs. They're experienced waitresses.

In our West Knoxville store, we had a really high turnover. The girls were always looking for another job so they wouldn't have so far to drive. If you live on that side of town, you don't need to be a waitress, so almost everybody was coming from across town. This place has less turnover but still we're needing girls almost all the time.

The salary is $2.13 an hour. You can make good money with the tips. A good-looking girl with a good personality can bring in $100 a day in tips. The other day one of our waitresses was working 2 stations, had about 10 or 12 tables. She brought in $119 in tips. If you do that every day, that's more money than I make. But those kind you have to watch. They may be giving away food, maybe a free dessert or something. That costs me money. My bonuses depend on how much we bring in. So you have to watch them. Most of the waitresses don't know that we can tell how much money they should bring in from the computer records, we can catch them.

Almost all of our people are full-time. I believe they get a week's vacation after a year. No sick leave, that's only for managers. Waitresses would probably abuse that real bad. If they had it, they'd take it.

Despite the manager's comments, Yuvette and other waitresses say the norm for tip amounts is generally less than half the hundred-dollar mark. His statement also hints at the paternalism and mistrust which Yuvette says is typical of managers' attitudes toward waitresses. Although technology has become a part of the job in recent years with the addition of the preregister, literacy requirements remain somewhat minimal.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Yuvette reports an educational history characterized, like other parts of her childhood, by social isolation and disconnectedness. She has nothing particularly positive or negative to say about her teachers.

> *I always did like to work with numbers, liked to count. I used to count the colors in my clothes, count everything. In elementary, I used to make good grades. As I got older, something just really dropped. And you know I didn't have too many friends there. I didn't like school. I'm not gonna lie. Sometimes I didn't go. Most times I didn't go. I never really participated, you know went to parties like other high school kids, they go to their Prom and stuff. My mom you know she really didn't let me go anywhere. I didn't do anything really. I just go and do my work, half the time when I did go. I got to twelfth grade at Fulton High School. I did alright. My grades were ok, not honor roll but mostly not bad. I did pretty well considerin' I was hardly ever there.*

Yuvette got pregnant when she was sixteen. She has little to say about that part of her life, which must have been very difficult, given her upbringing. But she refuses to blame her pregnancy for not finishing school.

> *No, after the baby came, it wasn't much difference with school. Mama kept her, while I went to school. When I went. Wasn't often.*

Yuvette was in the twelfth grade when her mother moved to Atlanta.

> *I wish I would have stayed up here. They said my diploma was already ready, just was lacking English and taking summer school. I should have used my head and stayed. I really didn't drop out, you know I went down there to Atlanta and took classes.*

Adult Education

In the past eight years, Yuvette has enrolled in three separate adult education programs, but has not gotten her GED. When she first moved to Atlanta as a teenager, Yuvette attended a high school for adults at night.

> *We had accounting and I liked it, I thought it was so easy. He gave us something to do and I always got it right. But I didn't get to stay in it because we moved to Florida.*

Yuvette tried to keep up with her class while she was away, or re-enroll when she came back.

> *We kept moving back and forth. I liked the accounting class but the other classes were hard. I was going at night and the school was on a street, it was bad, all kind of people hanging out. And I used to have to catch the bus and the subway. I came back here and stayed with my Pa.*

Back in Knoxville, a social worker asked Yuvette if she was interested in working toward her GED. Yuvette began attending JTPA classes. Even though she made several attempts in the JTPA program, Yuvette was not able to stay with the classes. She seemed unable to feel a part of the program, unable to connect either with the teacher or other students. Yuvette described classes where there was little interaction among students, with a disengaged, authoritarian teacher.

> *[The teacher] used to talk about church and stuff, which is fine. But she would explain a little bit, and then we have to do the work. Maybe if I had another teacher...*

Fortunately, Yuvette's experience of isolation was not repeated in the Even Start Family Literacy Program. This federal program is open to parents who have children under 7, and includes the provision of child care and transportation.

Yuvette's Even Start class emphasized group work and cooperation. Her teacher designed activities that promoted interaction among the students.

> *You know when we do the work, we help each other, it bein' like a group thing. The teacher, she help you, she be right there helping you. You're all put together and when we first start out, we do a newspaper thing. We all read it together and we're asked the questions. She'd say, 'Who want to do the first one?' We'd all compare, we're reading it and we'll say to each other. We'll see if we got the same answer, and check it and we all go through it again. At the JTPA, it wasn't like that. I like Even Start best.*

Despite attendance problems in high school and the difficulties of staying with an adult education program, Yuvette remains confident of her ability to be successful.

> *I did take my GED, but I was lacking seven points. I like math and I am good at spelling. I can read, I made it to the twelfth grade!*

LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Although Yuvette says she doesn't particularly like to read, she does read when it is necessary. She mentions filling out forms, helping the children with their homework, reading and writing on the job, and paying bills. She readily uses math in shopping activities and on the job.

I observed Yuvette read a Head Start parent's note aloud to her son, operate her daughter's calculator to multiply monthly furniture payments to learn the total cost, and read the Shackney's menu. Literacy skills do not appear to be a barrier to Yuvette's use of technology, or to most anything she attempts in her life.

Getting By And Getting Around

Yuvette usually pays her bills in cash.

I have a checking account, but I made a mistake with it. One time I called them to see how much I had. I wrote a check, but some of the checks hadn't come in when they told me I had enough. So now I have to get enough money to cover the check and the charge from the bank. It's put me behind. So now I leave my checkbook at home.

Yuvette doesn't have a car or a driver's license. She walks, rides the bus, or asks a friend to take her where she needs to go.

Nobody showed me how [to drive]. My brother, he learn on his own. I could get him to show me, but he go too fast! I might ask my sister-in-law to show me. Yes, [I use a bus schedule]. Or sometime I just go up there and sit and wait.

Yuvette appears to depend on herself to figure things out. She does not seem to need a network of helpers to fill out forms, read directions, or carry out everyday responsibilities. She does seem to want and need support that she often does not have, in making decisions, in talking through her problems, in coping with life. However, these needs relate more to her social context and isolation than to lack of literacy skills.

USES OF TECHNOLOGY

My first interaction with Yuvette was also my first indication that her literacy skills are not a barrier to her use of technology. As I gave her my phone number during our first telephone conversation, I heard a clicking sound in the background. "*Wait a minute,*" Yuvette said, "*my phone has a computer...ok, got it.*" I learned that Yuvette has a programmable telephone, and she often records phone numbers that way. She learned to program the telephone by reading the owner's manual.

Throughout the time we spent together, Yuvette often fixed my tape recorder and showed me how to use it properly. I also saw her use a calculator to figure costs. She mentioned operating a VCR and using a remote control for the TV. "*It's no problem*" she said, when asked about learning to use the equipment. She learned by either reading the instruction manual or "*Just looked at it and figured it out.*"

Every day at work, Yuvette must use an electronic "preregister," a computerized machine to record and price orders on the customers' tickets.

> *At the end of the night we have to do our tickets. We have to ring them up and add them and give it to our supervisor. The supervisor takes the report out of the preregister and does a match.*

If the employee's calculation and the preregister statement don't match, the calculation must be done again. Yuvette was able to learn to operate the preregister easily, she reported.

FAMILY LITERACY

Yuvette's life is closely intertwined with her children. She spends much time and effort thinking about and caring for their needs. Yuvette is very concerned that they both get a good education. Both Jessica and Arliss have experienced speech problems. Jessica stutters, and Arliss had difficulties with delayed speech. Yuvette has sought help for these problems, and is generally supportive of the children's schools. She especially likes Arliss' Head Start program.

> *At Head Start they really care about those kids. They're nice and you talk to them about something and they'll really listen. They asked me if I want to visit the class sometime. I want to go. They send home a little homework thing and I read that to him. He talks better. Head Start helped him out a lot. He talks a lot now. Used to, he didn't really understand. They're having speech [class] with him and it helps a lot.*

Jessica, born when her mother was seventeen, has had more difficulty in school. Jessica has been the center of a tug-of-war between Yuvette and Yuvette's mother, who appears to retain some "claim" on the little girl she helped raise. Yuvette's mother is critical both of Yuvette's child-rearing and of her life in general.

> *My mama likes to worry. She thinks I don't know how to take care of my kids. She don't give me credit. She thinks my boyfriend shouldn't live here. My mama gets up early, makes salmon patties, grits and biscuits and sausage and gravy for breakfast. She thinks I should do that. She don't want me to work. She thinks my daughter shouldn't go out because we live in an apartment, too dangerous. I try to give her [Jessica] some freedom, let her meet her girl friends and stuff. My mama don't want her to get out. She'll come up and get her, take her out of school and go to Georgia. And then she'll bring her back. You know my girl, she was having a problem. She was fighting. She don't like it [school].*

Yuvette is very critical of her earlier involvement with Jessica's schooling. She tearfully described her shortcomings as a young parent:

This is one thing I regret. I really didn't go to the school much as I should, like the PTA meeting. I'm going to spend more time with them and I'm trying to do that now. And you know I can help Jessica with her work and stuff. [While I was in Even Start] she says "My mama go to school too." You know she was proud of that.

Yuvette has dreams for her children, that their lives will be different from their mother's. More than anything, she wants them to be free from the need for government assistance, to "be independent." Yuvette pins that hope on education, believing that graduation will mean a good job. Unlike in her own upbringing, Yuvette does not make clear gender differences between her children regarding expectations.

I want Jessica to do good, I don't want her to have no kids [too young]. I want her to get a good job, rent her own apartment, you know pay out of her pocket instead of someone else doing it for her. And get a car, be independent. I just want them to do for themselves.

Well I hope he'll love to go to school all the time and that he want to do something with his life. I hope to Lord I won't see him out here drinkin' and smokin', hanging out on one of the corners. I want him to go to school and go to college or whatever, try to make something. I want him to get a good job and he'll have a good head on his shoulders. You know I don't want him to do bad, I want him to do good.

COMMUNITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Yuvette does not want to live in Lonsdale. She does not want to be a part of community life. At times she seems almost a prisoner, only going outside to leave the community, apparently almost never to visit or do activities within the community.

I moved to Lonsdale two years ago. I just don't like to be out here. If I could I'd have a house. I wanted a house before I came here. But they didn't have a house. They just had this. You have to take it or maybe there won't be another chance. Nothin' against the people out here, I just don't want to get in contact. You know people... it's hard to trust anybody. I just as well stay in the house. They probably figure that I think I'm better than anybody. That's not it. I just want to stay out of trouble.

In her life in the community, Yuvette's mother's warnings seem to have taken hold. She practices a self-imposed isolation, seeing only Anna and Janie from the neighborhood. Yuvette seems very concerned for her children's safety. The harshest reprimand I saw her administer happened when Arliss left the front yard and went out of sight around the corner of the building.

At least a part of Yuvette's dissatisfaction seems to come from living in public housing.

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> *The manager came here to inspect. I was cleaning the oven, had the cleaner in there letting it soak. She told me to pick up the paper in the yard. I went to do that. She said (pointing at the oven) "You're going to clean that shit up too, ain't you?" Janie told me to write it down, put the date and everything, and make a complaint about her. It don't do no good, she's like that with everybody. People treat you like that when you don't have nothin'. They act like they're high up over you, people do, when you're low income.*

If I Don't Vote It Won't Matter

Yuvette's alienation from the community is reflected in her thinking about her relationship to the community, and civic responsibility. Yuvette doesn't see herself as having any power to affect what happens in the "outside" world. Although she reported that she occasionally watches the news on TV, Yuvette does not read books, magazines or newspapers. She doesn't mention current happenings or appear interested in news-making events, even as they relate to her own life, as in the issue of racism in Shackney's hiring. This doesn't prevent her, however, from recognizing power/political issues, such as labor/management questions and her treatment by the housing inspector.

Once outside her world of work, family and a few close friends, Yuvette seems to pull back in confusion, fear or disinterest.

> *I didn't get to go [to the community homecoming]. I just worry about us having to eat up there. But I never went up there, no. I went one time [to the community improvement organization] with Anna. But then I never went back. I don't really understand, don't know what you have to do.*

> *No, I don't have a card, don't vote. Janie say you need to vote. You know, have a say so. But I figured one vote...if I don't vote it won't matter.*

ADULT RESPONSIBILITIES: I'M INDEPENDENT

Family obligations and the need to support herself and her children worked against Yuvette's continued participation in Even Start. The Even Start program begins at 9:00 and continues until 12:30, the time that Arliss goes to Head Start. When her children return home from school, Yuvette has time only to get ready for work and get them to the babysitters. When Yuvette gets off from work, the children are generally already asleep and often spend the night with the babysitter. Yuvette was spending very little time with her children. She also didn't feel that she could quit work.

> *I tried to do both of them [work and go to school]. If it was just me I'd do both. But I've got Arliss and Jessica. If I do both, I'm not gonna be having time for them. See there was no money coming in. You know paying rent...I'm the only one paying the bills.*

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Since she stopped going to Even Start, Yuvette can spend mornings with Arliss. But she hopes to find a way to go back to Even Start.

If I can get all my bills paid up then I'll probably go back to school. I really do need goals...I need my GED. I'm going to start back going to Even Start, I really am. But [for now] it be too late.

Yuvette's economic struggle is the focus of much of her energy and concern. When she recently hurt her foot, Yuvette was scared to go to the hospital, afraid of what she might be told. The experience underscored the ways in which she and her children live on the edge, without options in a time of emergency.

What if I couldn't work for two or three weeks? You never can tell what might happen. I might lose my job. You know I don't want to hear that.

Yuvette repeatedly mentions that she wants to pay her own way. "*I'm independent,*" she says many times. "*I don't want my kids to say, 'My mom didn't work'.*" Her income allows the family to purchase items such as a couch, a chair, a TV and a telephone, hardly in the realm of luxury for Americans.

Looking around the nearly-bare apartment, Yuvette's wants seem so few, but they are important to her.

I need furniture. I want something halfway decent. Not trying to impress somebody, you know I want it for myself. That's why I'm working. I love this couch. I love to look at the color. I want to keep it so bad. I got it at the rental place. You know, pay so much a week and then you own it. But you know it takes forever. I know it costs more that way. I couldn't get credit to buy at the regular store. This store ad said, No down payment! No credit hassle! So I went there and they tried to get me to get a lot of things. I got this couch and chair, and the TV. For the couch and chair, I pay a little over $20 a week. I pay that for 78 weeks. But now there ain't so many weeks left and I hope I'll be able to see it through to pay it up. If I had the money to buy it straight out I would do it. I tried _____ (furniture store), tried to get them to use my record at the rental place to get credit. They told me they don't count no rental place when they see about giving you credit. So what can I do? Anna says to put the money in the bank, every week, until I get enough saved. But it seems like every day when I bring home my tips, the kids need something for school, or something. It's hard. I hope they don't come for the couch. It's so embarrassing, it happened to me once before. They come to the door, say 'Miss Evans, we came after the table.' I hope they don't come. I want something nice so bad.

Yuvette's heartfelt desire to have a new couch and chair -- a little piece of the American dream -- saddles her with a debt, and with a decreased ability to stop working long enough to participate in a program that will help her prepare for her GED. One afternoon, we drove to the furniture rental store so Yuvette could make a payment. When she got back to the car, Yuvette told us that the clerk had tried to interest her in a bedroom suite. A

headboard, chest, dresser and mirror was $880, Yuvette said, if you paid "straight out." The rent-to-own deal was $23.04 a week, for 78 weeks. *"He wouldn't say how much altogether,"* Yuvette reported. We both gasped as Yuvette borrowed her daughter's calculator to figure it out, and found that she would be paying almost $1800. *"I'm going to try my best not to buy that,"* Yuvette vowed.

POSTSCRIPT

A few days after we finished the interviews, Yuvette was fired from her job at Shackney's. Yuvette reported that a customer complained to the manager that she had not refilled the tea glasses quickly enough. Yuvette said that even one customer complaint was enough to be fired over, and that she had had another complaint about three or four months before. She was angry at Shackney's, because she felt they treated her unfairly. Yuvette also felt some panic about paying the furniture bills and buying her children's Christmas presents.

Yuvette found a job within a week, bagging groceries part time at a national food store chain. Yuvette was happy to have this job, noting that again she had found work on the bus route. There were other benefits as well:

> *They have a union. They can't fire me for little or nothing like Shackney's did.*

For the first time, I heard Yuvette talk about making her boyfriend move out.

> *He laughed when I told him I got fired. I told him, I'll have another job before you. And I did. Seems like he just not tryin'. I think I'm better off without him.*

Completing a preparation program to get her GED, raising her children in a positive and loving way, and finding skilled employment that pays above survival wages are important issues for Yuvette. Despite the social isolation and poverty of Yuvette's life, she manages to keep going.

ERIC

LES WILLARD

ERIC

LES WILLARD

By Kathleen P. Bennett deMarrais

Les Willard is a thirty-six year old white man who lives in Knoxville, Tennessee. He works as a skilled electrician, but is unable to read well enough to pass the written test required for an electrician's license in the city. Les is married and lives with his wife and two children: a fifteen year old step-daughter and a nine-year old son. Although he was officially graduated from high school and awarded a diploma, Les is unable to read except for a few words he sees regularly in his work.

LES WILLARD AND HIS FAMILY

Much of Les' daily life is consumed with work in order to make enough money to support his family. In addition to his regular forty-hour a week job as an electrician, he has regular "side jobs" which he works in the evenings and on Saturdays. These jobs all involve electrical and plumbing skills, although he will do most any work he can get if it will bring in money. He sometimes does yard work for friends and family. Les keeps two nights a week free for bowling and on Sundays catches up on the work that needs to be done around his own house such as car repairs or home maintenance.

Les' jobs are tied to his relationships with family and friends. He sees himself as someone who "holds up" -- who takes his responsibilities seriously. If someone needs something, he'll make sure it gets done; so although he works to increase the cash flow into the house, he also works to help his friends and relatives. Les seems to have defined his "kin" as those relatives who are worth his time and energy. He has several brothers and sisters he chooses to have little contact with because of difficult circumstances in the past. For those he regards as kin -- his own immediate family, a disabled brother, his aging father, his wife's mother, etc. -- he takes full responsibility to make sure they are cared for. He devotes time to these responsibilities. His kinship network is an integral part of his regular job in that he is partners with his aunt's husband, Dave, and the two men work as part of Dave's brother's electrical contracting business.

Les is a tall, wiry man who regularly dresses in jeans and black t-shirts, usually with colorful slogans or pictures. His official work uniform also includes a pair of sturdy leather work boots and a leather "pouch" or belt in which he carries all the hand tools he needs for jobs. Les' lifestyle which consistently involves sixty-hour (or more) work weeks and his sense of responsibility for his extended family seems to have taken its toll on his physical well being. He has been physically ill off and on over the past several years with an undetermined stomach ailment and with colds and viral infections. He does not generally seek medical help because he has no medical coverage.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Les and his family live in a small one-story frame house in one of the poorest communities in Knoxville. The house is situated on a lot that formerly held two houses so it

is larger than other properties in the neighborhood which are crowded onto tiny parcels. The other house that had been on the lot burned down before Les and his wife bought the property from his wife's aunt. They paid $8,000 for the house by paying her at the rate of $160 per month for four years. Les believes she sold the house not only because she had a second house in another part of town, but also because she did not feel safe in the neighborhood. Les' double lot is partially surrounded by a four-foot chainlink fence which marks the property line. Les reported that his wife would like to have a new home built on the lot next to their present house:

> *My wife was telling me about something she read in the paper or heard in the news about this company. If you make less than sixteen thousand a year, they would come in and build you a house for about $190 a month. She said "I'm going to do that and I'm going to tear this place down."*

In the back portion of the lot is an unpainted one-story grey cinderblock building which Les is improving so that his disabled brother can live there. The two-room building is being used as a storage facility. Les spent some time last year repairing the roof until his progress was stopped when he fell off, hurting his ribs. Although the trim on the building is now rotted, he plans to put new trim, new doors and windows on the structure.

The houses around Les' property are much the same -- one or two bedroom houses. Some are in better condition than Les' house. Others are in poorer shape and resemble tenant farmer houses. The street in front of these houses is lined with older cars and trucks belonging to local residents.

Les feels that the neighborhood is unsafe because it borders Western Heights, the second-largest housing project in Tennessee, run by the Knoxville Community Development Corporation. That complex is made up of long rectangular brick and stucco apartment buildings resembling military barracks and houses a predominately African American population. I was struck not only by the expanse of the projects, but also by their barren appearance. The bleakness is enhanced by the lack of grass, trees or bushes. Some of the apartments' windows were broken and are covered with plywood.

When describing his community, Les mentioned with dismay that he lived "*only three houses away from the projects.*" He is concerned with safety of the community. Les tells a story of someone attempting to break into his home. He met the intruder at the door with a shotgun and said, "*Come on in.*" Les says he has not recently been bothered by burglars, but keeps his shotgun handy. Les also keeps two dogs for protection. He explains that although neighbors think the dogs are "mean," they really aren't. Les' back storage building has been burglarized but nothing of value was taken.

I can only describe Les' house from the outside, since I have not been invited inside. The side yard is as barren as the rest of the neighborhood. There is no vegetation except for weeds and occasional vines covering the property. The yard contains an assortment of

building materials and yard equipment. Paper and plastic items collect against the fence where they have been blown by the wind. In contrast, someone planted beautiful dark purple morning glories on the fence which provide a splash of intense color. In addition, Les and his family had decorated the porch for the Halloween season with a headless scarecrow dressed in a flannel shirt and jeans.

LIFE HISTORY

Les was born in Knoxville and raised in a family of six children. Since his father was a farmworker on dairies, the family moved around to different areas of rural East Tennessee when Les was young. He talked about living in Knoxville, Riceville and Loudon and helping his father with the milking from the time he was about six years old:

Ever since I was old enough to stand on a milk crate I been pullin' on cows' tits...udders.

His mother did not help with the farm work because she was not well:

My mother wasn't able. My mother, she's been in and out of Healthrest [mental institution] since she was thirteen years old.

Les enjoyed farm life and speaks with fondness and pride of his work on dairies as a young person:

I could drive any tractor, use any kind of machinery on the farm, milk any cow, hog tie any pig.

We had chickens, eggs...had some prize cows we had to take care of....pretty cows....black and white Holsteins...The biggest cow gave over two gallons of milk.

They give you all the milk you want to drink...We thought that was a lot when we was kids, though. Go out to the dairy, we put a glass jug under that spout, turned that spout on...get the ice cold milk.

When asked if he would like to return to this type of work, he replied:

Ain't no money in it...no money in it. They pay you like three bucks an hour.

Les was unsure about his parents' school backgrounds. Although he reported that both could read, he was unsure how far they had gone in their own schooling:

No, I don't know when they quit [school]. My father, he could read. My mother could read. I don't know...my father graduated....I believe he did, but I ain't for sure about that.

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Les married his brother's former wife, after their divorce, and cares for the daughter of that marriage (now fifteen), as well as the son (aged nine) of the present marriage.

Work History

Les' work history has been affected seriously by his difficulty with reading. When he finished high school, he went out looking for jobs and when an application was put in front of him, he walked out the door.

I would go into places and have to fill out applications and I couldn't do it. I just had to lay it down and walk out.

He knew he couldn't fill it out. He worked at places where application forms were not necessary. He worked at a furniture company as a "delivery boy" and at a manufacturing company as a warehouse laborer loading tabletops onto trucks.

All I did was load them on the truck. The foreman says "get this. Put it here. Get this. Put it there." There wasn't no reading in it.

Les then started working with his uncle who had an electrical contracting business. He learned to be an electrician working in this job. He is unable to get an electrician's license because he cannot read well enough to pass the test.

Working as an electrician

Les now works with Dave, his aunt's husband, in Dave's brother Ed's small electrical contracting firm. Ed has the necessary state license to work in the county; he does not have the appropriate license to work in the city. Dave and Les at times work illegally in the city doing electrical work and are fearful of being discovered by the electrical inspector.

Dave and Les work exclusively on jobs for Royal Realty Company, one of the largest real estate companies in town which owns and rents many properties in the greater Knoxville area, as well as in other states. Royal pays Ed directly for Les and Dave's salaries at common laborer's scale plus $.50 per hour per person and an additional small fee to cover the vehicle used on the job -- a total of $6.25/hour -- rather than an electrician's higher wage,. Les and Dave keep time cards and give them directly to Ed. Les fills out both his and Dave's timecard. Dave can read on about a second grade level according to Les. Since Royal Realty is subcontracting their labor, the company does not pay health or any other benefits for these workers. Ed does not carry benefits on these workers either. Ed owns the van and the tools used by Les and Dave in their job. Dave and Ed do the mechanical work on the van when necessary. Dave has some health benefits through his wife's job, but Les does not. His wife is unemployed. Ed has a good relationship with both Les and Dave and Ed freely loans his tools to both men when they do side jobs. The kinship relationships between the three men is essential to this working arrangement.

Working without health insurance

Les does not have health insurance for himself or for his family members. Since it is not provided by his employer and because his income is so limited, he is unable to afford health insurance. Consequently, he avoids medical care except when absolutely essential. His wife recently underwent surgery for a gall bladder problem and incurred a hospital bill in excess of $7,000. He was worried for weeks about how he was going to pay this bill. Just recently he reported that Medicaid had covered it. Last year, when Les fell off a roof and broke three ribs, he did not go for medical help, but taped the ribs himself and waited for them to heal. He suffers from chronic stomach problems. He thinks he has a stomach ulcer, but has not gone through the necessary diagnostic tests. He became quite ill a few months ago and was unable to keep any food down. He did go to the doctor who, upon seeing that Les would not consent to hospital tests because of the costs involved, agreed to give him a prescription for Zantac to get the stomach acid under control. He recalls when he weighed 205 pounds a few years ago (he's 6'1"), but says he is now down to 175 pounds. Les needs extensive dental work, but is unable to afford it.

Work, Work, Work!

Les consistently works at two and often three jobs. He works a forty-hour week for the electrical contracting company. He works at night and on Saturdays doing side jobs which are sometimes electrical work, but are also plumbing, house repairs, gardening, etc. He usually reserves Sunday for home and family. He often does work at home on Sunday, such as working on his truck or doing home repairs. In addition, if someone in the family needs help with some kind of manual labor, he takes on the responsibility. Recently, he installed a heating system for an elderly neighbor.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Les' early educational history is somewhat unclear. He went to many elementary schools but has little recollection about his experiences in the schools.

> *I went to a whole lot of 'em [elementary schools] -- Riceville, let's see, I went to Carter. Carter had an elementary. That's where they sent me to seventh grade to ninth grade.*

He does remember doing well throughout the elementary grades:

> *I was making A's and B's all the way up to the sixth grade.*

A pivotal incident for Les occurred in sixth grade when one of his teachers would not help him with his math assignments. He recalls this incident:

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That's the only thing I can remember about school, except in the sixth grade, this one teacher, I couldn't do the math and she grabbed the math book and started hittin' me in the head with it and I said, "Well, I'm not doin' this math" and she said, "Fine!" From then on I quit tryin'. That's the only thing I remember.

The rest of Les' educational history is best told in his own words:

I quit school down in Riceville [in 6th grade] and moved back to Knoxville.

My mother and my older brother made me go back to school and they took me up Carter High School and I enrolled in the seventh grade there. About a week and the following Monday they come to me and said I was too old to be in the seventh grade...I was sixteen. I come back to Knoxville when I was sixteen years old. They said I was too old to be in the seventh grade, so they moved me up to the ninth grade and that's the only reason. They didn't give me no other reason why....I went a half a year and again they come to me and told me I was too old....One of my teachers come to me and told me I was too old for the ninth grade and I was in vocational rehab and they moved me up to the tenth grade...So I finished that half of the year out in tenth grade. The next year I graduated to the eleventh and I done half of that year and again they come to me [and moved him to the twelfth grade].

It was goin' kinda fast seemed like to me. I didn't see why they were movin' me up like that 'cause there was a lot of 'em in there seventeen and eighteen year old and they wasn't movin' them up....I don't understand why they did it. You go to 'em to try to get 'em [teachers] to give you some help and they say "go back there and try to figure it out."

And when they moved me up to the twelfth grade and I finished it out and they told me, says we'll mail you your diploma, I said, can't I go through the line-up? And she said "No. We'll just have to mail you your diploma."

They [his teachers] wouldn't try to help you....Mostly you sit at your desk and do nothin'. You wouldn't do no work. It wasn't learnin'. It was a story.

Despite this rather grim picture of school, Les did remember one teacher who he described as a "good teacher:"

There was one teacher that did [try to help]. Shop teacher. He got in there with you and showed you how to do things but the teachers in the class, I only had one class, all she done was sit up and read a book.

Les seems to learn best when someone demonstrates for him rather than explains it without a demonstration. Traditional models of schooling in which teachers lecture and give assignments to students obviously did not work with Les.

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You show me one time and you won't have to show me nothin' else....Anything I start, even though I don't know how to do it or can't read it...it will be done!

EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY

Les can read some words and phrases. He says he can "relate to" (recognize) some words, but has difficulty with long words.

I don't feel comfortable with none of it [reading]. It's kind of hard to do...hard to read. I just don't feel comfortable with none of it....

Although he reported reading a variety of materials on the checklist of everyday texts we used for this project, he seems to rely heavily on any pictures and diagrams to comprehend the printed material.

One of the hobbies Les has had since he was a child is building model cars. He described the process he uses:

I put model cars together, but I never once look at the words....I look at the picture, at the pieces and from there it goes together....I put model cars together my whole life not by reading the instructions...by looking at the picture....This is Latin to me [points to paper full of written text], but show me a picture and I can do it.

In addition to building models, he also enjoys bowling. He has been in a Thursday night league with his wife and daughter for five years. It's a family outing that nothing seems to interfere with -- even work. When asked about scorekeeping in bowling he explained that he can add up the points for individual games, but since he can't divide, relies on the league's secretary to do the averages. *See, I can count scores in bowling. I've been at it for five years.* He recently joined a men's Monday night league. He religiously keeps Monday and Thursday evenings free so he can bowl.

Les does enjoy cartoons and comic books, and reads Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Flash Gordon: *"Hey, I read the funnies, comic books...I read the words in 'em."*

He reports that he uses the phone book to look up numbers of businesses when he needs to. When asked if he can find what he needs in phone books, he replied: *"Not really. I can but it takes me a while."* All the other phone numbers he needs to know -- his boss and family members -- he remembers. He only has three phone numbers that are necessary to memorize.

Les vividly described his experience in taking a written driver's test. I was surprised that he took a written rather than an oral test, so he described the procedure he used to complete the task:

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You know it's got...you got a dot here...dot here...dot here...I went down through, I put dot, dot here, dot dot there [random filling in of circles]....Yeah, that's how [I passed it]. I didn't know what I was puttin' down. I filled in the circles and I hand the paper to her and she said come out here -- we'll take your driver's test. I was nervous...I was shakin'. She got in the passenger's side...she said go up here and take a right. Go right here and take a right. I run a stop sign...got halfway in the intersection and it scared me to death. I got all the way around there where we started from. She wrote me out this paper...said your license will be in the mail.

Les uses several means of compensation to make up for his difficulty with reading. He makes a point to memorize what he needs to be able to write or remember later -- such as the names and addresses of places he works for his time card or directions that he will need in order to find a location.

I put it back here in the back of my mind and just keep it there. When I got to remember, then it comes forward. You got one handicap, you gotta fall back on something else. This is what I got to fall back on [memory].

At home, most of the reading is done by Les' wife. She takes care of the mail, bills, letters from school, etc. She reads to him when necessary -- she reads instructions for appliances (such as the microwave) if necessary and tells Les what it says. She also fills out application forms for him. For example, she recently filled out a sanction card for him to join a bowling league. Les explained that it used to embarrass him that he could not read, and he would be ashamed to ask for help. Now he is able to ask someone to read for him without feeling embarrassed. *"My daughter helps me a lot; my wife helps me a lot."*

Family Finances

Les is able to perform basic mathematical computations, but relies on his wife to handle the finances of the household. In describing his numeracy skills he explains: *"I can do some math. Division I can't do. Some multiplication I can do. I can do adding."* Les and his wife deal primarily with cash rather than checks. Les explained that they used to have a checking account, but his wife, who wrote the checks, was unable to handle the account:

Don't have one [bank account]...had one...the wife wrote the checks and she writes this number down on here and thinks that there's money in here [pointing to imaginary checkbook] and she writes another check....Yeah, I said "baby, give me them checks, honey." She got to bouncin' here and bouncin' there. She couldn't manage that checking account...so I said, "The checks go baby." From then on she don't put no more money in that bank. We still got the account [checking account].

It is still Les' wife who takes care of cashing his check and paying the bills. Les has very little to do with the daily finances of the household. He explained their system:

Les Willard

I sign it [his paycheck], put it in the envelope, put it on the bookcase, my wife comes in and picks it up, she takes it to the bank, cashes it....and spends the money.

Les's bills include the "light bill," "cable bill (TV)." He has no credit cards and his house is paid for. He explained that he no longer has a phone in part because his daughter ran up the bill by making three-party calls. He also reported that sometimes when he is unable to pay his light bill, he borrows the money from his boss, Ed, who advances him the money and then takes it out of his next paychecks a bit at a time until it is paid.

In addition to using cash as a financial base, there is an extensive system of barter used by Les, his family and friends. For example, he trades his labor for goods and services. Recently he needed money to buy a new (used) motor for his truck, so Dave bought the engine for him. In return, he worked off the debt on Saturdays at the same hourly rate he would have worked during the week at his electrician's job. He has traded his electrical services with other men for work they could do for him.

Shopping

Les' wife has the responsibility for all the shopping both for food and clothes. This seems to go along with the way they have divided up the household responsibilities. He laughed when he told me that "*she works inside and I work outside.*"

She sometimes shops for supplies he needs for his repair work as well. He sent her out one Saturday to get motor mounts so that he could finish putting an engine into his car on Sunday. He seems to be too busy working (60 + hours per week) to do any of the shopping or work around the house. When asked about what he does when he does go to a store for something, Les explained that he didn't need to read anything: "*Well, I always know what I'm goin for.*"

Getting Around

Since he has lived in Knoxville for approximately twenty years, he knows the community well and tends to use landmarks rather than street signs in finding locations. For example, in order to find our house, he remembered to turn left at Westwood instead of going straight like he would to his boss' house, then go up the hill, turn left on the third street up, go up the hill and around the bend.

When I'm on a job I try to write the address down and the street name before I leave the job and if I don't I'll have to ask somebody how to spell it 'cause I wouldn't know how.

Les has a 1971 Chevy truck he uses for work. He is always working on it to keep it in running order.

ERIC

LITERACY ON THE JOB

Les has little need to read on the job:

In my line of work I don't have to read nothin'. All I do is go to a job, put my nail pouch on, put my electrical pouch on and screw wires, take wires apart, pull wires.

I write it [a time card at work]. One time card and that goes for both of us.

I can relate to some words [he uses relate in the same sense as recognition]....Dining room. I've seen that. I don't know how to spell it, but I've seen that. Kitchen. I've seen that. And there's a bunch of words I've seen but don't know how to spell. I can relate to them....Fuse ain't no problem. I know what fuse is....I can see the word and know what it is because I've been told what it is. Circuit I've seen. Breaker, I've seen. Sometimes I would have to try to read. I can read some of it, but the two dollar words I can't pronounce.

Obtaining an Electrician's Licensing

The reason for the complex organization of his worklife is in part due to the difficulty involved in becoming officially credentialed to do electrical work in the city. I called the city office which deals with these permits to inquire about the process of licensure. The test for an electrician's license is given four times a year and is administered by Block & Associates, Gainesville, Florida. They told me the next test would be given on December 14th, but application must be made by November 1 in order to take that test. It costs $40 to take the test. The office has the National Electrical Code book available for $30.00 which can be used to review the material covered on the test. If you pass the test, to get a license, you also need three letters of recommendation from people who are aware of your abilities and must have had five years of experience in electrical work. There is an additional fee of $350 per year for the commercial license to work in the city. Les tells me it is also necessary to pay $50 to be bonded.

When I called the Block & Associates office in Florida, they told me the examination consists of three tests given in the morning and three in the afternoon. They had no manuals for the test, but suggested that the material came from a list of references available at the local office -- primarily the National Electrical Code. When I asked about an oral examination for those people who could not read, I was told that this was done only in the Gainesville office.

I called a bookstore to ask about study manuals for this type of test, but found nothing that was even close to a study guide. We found one book called the Complete Arizona Contractors Study Guide - Electrical for approximately $75, but there were no other titles in Books in Print which seemed appropriate.

When I told Les what I had found he shook his head and remarked, "*They don't want the little people to have anything.*"

USING TECHNOLOGY

Les does use some technology, but his experience is limited. He has tried to use the Automatic Teller Machine at the bank, but was unsuccessful: *I can't get them things to work [laughter]. I push my code in it. Spits my card back out.*

He and his son both played Nintendo games until their machine and one of the games was stolen by a neighborhood child.

> *I bought this game [Nintendo] for myself and he let this little boy borrow it and this little boy ain't brought it back yet...All you gotta do is hook it to your TV and plug it in. It's got another load thing like a charger box. All you gotta do is plug that in the wall and hook the other side to your antenna.*

Les reports that he has and uses a microwave oven and remote control on his television set. However, when he was working on our electrical system, he did not seem to be familiar with the system as indicated in fieldnotes. Les was checking the plug that the microwave was connected to, and he wanted to see if it was on or not. He took a look at the buttons and paused. I was standing next to him and he said, "*How do you work this thing?*" In fairness to Les, ours is a particularly complicated microwave.

In a discussion about computers, Les reported that someone gave him a computer to hook up to the TV as its monitor, but has not yet done anything with it. He seems particularly hesitant when it comes to working with computers. He asked to bring the computer over for me to look at for him. He said that he was unable to work on cars where computer technology is involved. All the vehicles he deals with are pre-computer technology.

When he was working on the electrical outlets which would service my computer, he was fearful of doing anything to damage the machine. He had to be reassured that the computer was disconnected and could not be harmed. He made a point to put my computer on a separate electrical circuit to make sure nothing else would interfere with it. He explained: "*I don't know anything about computers. I know electrical work, but I don't know computers.*"

FAMILY LITERACY

Les wife graduated from eighth grade and is able to read. She does not read to their children, but does do the reading necessary for day-to-day matters such as bill, school reports, etc. Although the family does not have many books nor subscribes to magazines or newspapers, there is a clear message to the children that education is to be valued.

From the time they were old enough for school, Les registered the children using his wife's mother's address in order for them to go to what Les considered a better school. The

neighborhood school, like the projects, is predominantly African-American. Les explained that because this school is "*98% black*" he did not want his children to attend; he did not think they would be able to get a good education at the school. Apparently other white families in the neighborhood have used the same practice to put their children in schools across town. Since the school the children go to is outside the local neighborhood, Les' wife keeps her mother's car to drive the children to school everyday. Les and his wife want their children to be better educated and have more opportunities than they had and have taken deliberate and time-consuming steps to try to secure good schooling for them. Les feels that his children are getting a better education than he did. Their daughter, aged 15, makes A's and B's in her high school classes, with the exception of a recent C in geography. Les told me she wants to go to college to be a computer expert.

Their son, Little Les, is in fourth grade. Although he does not perceive himself to be a good reader because of his placement in a Chapter One remedial reading program, Little Les also has aspirations to go to college:

I'm gonna try to go to college, no matter what!

The following excerpt from the interview transcript provides a glimpse of Les' views of his own schooling and his hopes for his children's education:

L - *I wasn't pushed. They didn't encourage me to do nothin'. If you want to do it you can, if you don't you can sit there.*

L - *His [Little Les] teachers is really interested in him. This one...Les told a story on this one teacher and she actually cried...she actually cried and that boy, he's got the knowledge, but he ain't got the patience. He accused the woman teacher of pullin' his ears and that fell all over me. I was so mad I was spittin' fire.*

K - *So what did you do?*

L - *I went there and I blessed the woman out in front of her class and she broke down and started crying.*

K - *This is one of the teachers at _______ school?*

L - *Yeah. His teacher last year...and that made me feel so bad when she told me that he would disrupt the classroom, talk, get up out of his chair. I made him apologize to that teacher, then I turned around in front of his classroom and I busted his butt...from that day on, I've not got a report on him yet. He thinks 'cause the teachers can't paddle you no more, he can do what he wants to, but I told the teacher if the boy needs a blisterin', blister him. I told her that. I said, "if he does not mind you, you send me word and he'll be standin' in class tomorrow."*

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K - *You haven't heard anything?*

L - *No. And I better not be hearin' nothin' this year.*
I want him to have a better schoolin' than I had. I was not pushed, encouraged to go to school. I want him to have better than I did. Him and my daughter both.

CITIZENSHIP

Although Les regularly watches television, he does not watch the news or listen to it on the radio. The family does not get any newspapers or magazines. When asked about how he keeps up with local or national events, he replied:

I don't listen to the news...I don't care. Long as it don't bother me, I don't care.

Les has never voted. In addition to his lack of interest in current events, he explained the reason he had never registered to vote:

I don't vote...Never been registered. The only reason I don't register is on account they can call you up for jury duty...I don't want that...I don't want to. I can't put people behind bars. I can't hurt people even though they hurt people; even though I did put one person behind bars, my sister, but she needed it -- 19 month old baby 50% of its body scalded to death....She's still in prison -- 99 years -- and one day.

I HOLD UP: ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR KIN

Les comes from a family in which he is the only one of his siblings who has not been in prison. He has little use for his brothers and sisters except his younger brother who is disabled. He has little contact with these family members. He explains that he married his brother's wife after they had divorced and that his daughter is really his step-daughter:

He ain't got no responsibility to him [talking about his brother not taking care of his daughter]....I've had her ever since she was two years old. I hold up. I don't try to run away from nothin'.

Les seems to take this same attitude toward the family members with whom he feels a kinship. He shares the childcare responsibilities with his wife. His love for his daughter is clear when he describes her desire to be adopted:

L - *There's one other thing she's wantin' me to do. Her name is Willard, but it's not my name. She wantin' me to adopt her. She don't feel I love her; she's always throwin' that up at me. She's wantin' me to adopt her. I said, "You'll always be mine, you got my name, what else you want?" She said, "I want it on paper."*

K - *That must make you feel good.*
L - *Yeah. I don't know what I'd do without her.*

K - *So are you going to do it?*

L - *Yeah. My brother...he had to pay child support...don't pay now and he...when she was about four he said, "you ought to adopt her, Les" and I said, "Why? So you won't have to support her?" Makes me mad every time I think about it. I don't claim none of my brothers....maybe one of them -- the sick one -- I try to take care of him. It's a hard job taking care of a thirty-four year old kid. He's thirty-four, but he acts like a nine-year old.*

K - *How do you explain your success?*

L - *I think I was adopted (laughter)...I don't know. I don't like to go places. I don't like to go to bars. I don't like to smoke dope. I don't like to drink. I like to work. I don't like to be around a crowd of people and I don't like to go to restaurants...fear of someone watching me eat. I don't like that. My daughter's the same way. I know they ain't watchin' me, they're too busy eatin', but...it just bothers me.*

Les seems to take pride in family responsibilities and taking care of his "kin." In addition to caring for his immediate family, he serves as the legal guardian for his disabled brother. He moved his father from Loudon to Knoxville so he could help him get Social Security benefits and take better care of him. He and his wife regularly share childcare responsibilities when her brother's family come for frequent weekend visits. He brought the "cousins" over with Little Les on two Saturdays while he worked on our electrical system. He regularly does household repairs and yardwork for relatives who need help.

Despite the difficulties of poverty and illiteracy Les has to face in life, he definitely "holds up." He and his wife have managed to build a solid marriage as well as a supportive environment for their children and extended family. They have tried to secure a good education for their children. Les is dissatisfied with his current worklife and would like to "get out of this rat race." He would like to "better" himself by learning to read in order to become a licensed electrician.

LISA BOGAN

ERIC

LISA BOGAN

By Faye L. Hicks-Townes

Lisa is a thirty-seven year old African-American woman. She was born and educated in the rural community of Bay Springs, Mississippi and lived there until she came to Knoxville with her first husband in 1973. Separated now from her second husband, Lisa is struggling to overcome the effects of an abusive second marriage and provide for her two children with a job as a sales clerk in a department store. Although she has a high school diploma, her reading level is at fifth or sixth grade level.

LISA BOGAN

I first met Lisa when we became members of the same church choir. We were in the alto section together. One of the first things I noticed about her was what seemed to me a contrast: Lisa was very friendly and outgoing in certain instances but would withdraw in other circumstances. For example, when the choir or a certain section engaged either in idle conversation or relevant discussion of issues, Lisa always participated. However, if conversation revolved around printed material such as songs or programs, Lisa seemed to withdraw. I also noticed that Lisa rarely read the printed verses of songs we were expected to memorize. Instead she would listen to the words as we sang them with her copy of the song face down near her.

It was typical of Lisa's life that I began to know her in a church setting. It seems that every facet of her life is filtered through her strong belief in God. Take for instance, Lisa's reaction to the Gulf War.

And why does this person want to be you know ruler and take over and do, treat people the way he want to? But that's been goin' on ever since the Biblical days and I just still wonder why do people want to have power over another person? God give us all freedom to do as we please but in a peaceful, loving way, not evil. But a lot of us have this evil force goin' within us and want to rule everything and everybody. And you can't do that, not as long as God have a say in it.

Lisa has had some hard times in her life but has a strong faith in her God-given abilities to make life better for herself and her children. Lisa's hope and determination for a better life come from her Christian beliefs.

But I guess God gave me that there because I've seen people whereas I have made less money and another person has made a lot of money and I seem to make it better with what little money I have than a person that makes a whole lot of money. And I'm like, how could they let their-self go like that makin' all of this money and I got this little amount o' money comin' in and everything seems to be so organized. And to me that's common sense of managing things better than that person with a whole lot of money throwing it away. Wisdom or something.

THE COMMUNITY: FIVE POINTS, KNOXVILLE

Lisa and I met each time at her apartment in the heart of the Five Points area of East Knoxville. Five Points is an urban area that has recently been targeted for rehabilitation. Once a thriving business center, Five Points is most recently known for the number of murders, police raids, and drug deals that occur over any given weekend. The largest business in the area was a grocery store that closed several years ago. The building stands empty with boarded windows and the parking lot is a haven for drug and alcohol users. The population of the neighborhood is predominantly poor and African American. Road construction and detours in the area caused me to drive around in confusion for several minutes before locating the apartment house.

Lisa lives in a large two story white house renovated for apartments. The yard is surrounded by a chain link fence and abuts an alley. Lisa keeps the backyard gate padlocked because her downstairs neighbors have many visitors who like to enter from the alley to come and have a drink. Shortly after my arrival, about 11:40 a.m., a visitor to the downstairs apartment rang Lisa's doorbell and invited her to come and have a drink with them in celebration of the visitor's birthday. Lisa politely declined.

As I was waiting for Lisa to answer the doorbell I looked around the area. Almost directly across the street was the garage that both Lisa and my husband had told me was used to buy and sell drugs. Around the garage entrance area were several men dressed in grease and dirt covered work pants and well worn jackets with torn pockets. They watched me until I entered the house. West of Lisa's apartment were several nightclubs. East of her apartment were the remains of a business building with most of the businesses out of operation. In the midst of this decay I did notice one new business that specialized in custom-made choir robes.

Entering Lisa's apartment, I could see that it was very clean, organized, and nicely furnished. The apartment has three bedrooms, two full baths, an eat-in kitchen, and a small living room. Lisa and I settled in the living room for our talk. There was a sofa, two armchairs, a commode table and lamp, an end table and lamp, a bookcase with pictures and books (school yearbooks, Bible storybook, an automotive book, Jaguar) and, in the center of the room, a 17 inch color TV and stereo system on an entertainment stand. I sat on the couch and Lisa sat in the arm chair nearest me. She offered me refreshments, but I declined.

Lisa has lived in this apartment for less than a year. Before moving here she had lived in her own three bedroom home in a residential section of East Knoxville. Lisa and her first husband purchased the house. After they were divorced, Lisa, her children and second husband lived there. The second husband's alcoholism and the ensuing financial problems forced Lisa to sell the house and move to an apartment. Lisa's former neighborhood is quite different, in appearance and atmosphere, from where she lives now.

It was a nice little neighborhood. The children, my children could play in the neighborhood. And the neighbors are all nice that live there....And if anything come up we would see after each other's children in the neighborhood.

Since Lisa has been in the Five Points area, her associations with her present neighbors are limited to simple courtesies and intercessory prayers.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Lisa grew up in rural Mississippi. Her father had practically no formal schooling and could not read or write. Lisa's mother taught him to write his name after their marriage.

My dad he never went to school. He went to school from maybe first grade or something. And what he learned was from his family I guess and that was math. And he met my mother and she taught him how to spell his name. But other than that, Daddy didn't know much of anything. So he couldn't help me. But my dad, about him not goin' to school, he just said he didn't see no sense in no one goin' to school. He had his own business of piling pulpwood in his big truck and all and he was doing pretty good at that.

Lisa's mother finished the eighth grade and was able to read and handle many household chores such as electrical work and plumbing.

And Mom just worked in the home, in the field, and in white people's home. And she kept the house up. Like if the porch needed repairin', my mom she paid for it to be fixed. She bought the lumber and everything, from someone. And if the electricity or something had happened in the house, she would fix that herself. Mom was very handy around the house to do things and we had outdoor facilities and Mom wanted indoor facilities and Dad didn't believe in indoor facilities 'cause he had been used to outdoor all his life and he just didn't believe in havin' a bathroom in the house. And so Momma was determined to have this bathroom so she worked and she had a lot of friends too and the white people that she worked for in the town, the town we lived in, I don't know, they was just good friends to us to. So Mom she took care of things around the house all right, so she eventually got her bathroom....

But Mom read a lot, like she finished the 12th grade. And she was left handed. She could write and do things very quickly. And if my mom would have finished high school and college I don't know where my mom would be today. She was real smart.

Lisa was the fourth of seven children.

My mom, she worked a lot. It was six girls and one boy. And she took out as much time as she could with us. And she asked the other kids to help the others that was slow or whatever, anything around the house, and we farmed a lot. So it wasn't that much attention on someone helping me study.

Only two of the children attended college and neither of the two earned a degree.

My sister Justine, which is the fifth child, she went to college. No, no, I take that back. I'm the fourth child, Sharon she's the fifth child, she went to college. Justine is the sixth child and she went to college. And my baby sister Anette she went to college but she didn't finish. She started but she didn't finish. Uh, but now my brother Aaron, now my sister Nancy she's the oldest and then my brother Aaron and then Delores. They didn't go to college. But they were smart to me and they could have but I guess they, well really we didn't I don't guess it was grants back in those days to. And I come from a very poor family and couldn't no one afford to send 'em if they wanted to go. And my baby sisters underneath come along, the grants and things was more so out when they went. So it was just two out of my family went to college. But I don't think they, I don't think Sharon ever finished her college, she went off and start doin' airlines, bein' a airline stewardess. But she went to school for that too, they have to know something about the plane provided in case something happens to the pilot. Uh, Justine is more so into office work with computers and what have you out in California.

Lisa's first husband shared her background. He was a poor reader from rural Mississippi.

... about like I was on reading because he come from a small town, Hazelrig, Mississippi. And I guess he, I don't know what his background was on it, or anyone ever helpin' him or what was with him. But he's also trying to better hisself in reading and spellin' and what have you.

Lisa's first marriage ended because she felt neglected by her husband.

What got it was, my husband, my first husband and bein' young, I felt like he wasn't payin' me too much attention because he was always out with the boys on his spare time and left me home with the baby. And I would always have things prepared for him, oh gosh, I guess I was like a little puppy dog, ready when he come home just at the door there, so happy to see him. And I got the bath water ran. I got your plate fixed with food and everything, we made plans to go to a movie or something, a picnic or what have you, just did all these things together and then it slacked off and he started neglecting me I felt. But it just that he needed the time to himself to breathe. I guess I was smothering him with all this love and attention that I wanted to give him. And so I just got with some girlfriends and I start goin' out, having a good time and everything and then he wanted the attention and I just like I don't have time for you....And it just went downhill all the way.

Lisa has two children from her first marriage ages nineteen and fifteen. Lisa is pleased with the job she has done raising her children and has high hopes for their futures.

And my children, I feel like they're goin' do real good because they're so many children on drugs and they abuse their parents, and my children respects me so far and not on drugs or anything and real mannerable children. And I think I have done a terrific job there, a terrific job. Sometimes I feel like well maybe my children will be something else in the world to contribute to the world, whereas I neglected my life to be there every second, every minute, every hour for them, 'cause at school they could reach mom at home if something come up. I took them to wherever they needed to go to different things. And whereas some parents are working every day neglectin' the children, they end up goin' astray, on drugs or whatever and get in with the wrong group. But I had that problem with my daughter, but I was there to work with my daughter on that betrayal my daughter felt.

Lisa attributes the failure of her second marriage to her husband's alcoholism.

The drinkin' got pretty heavy 'cause he would drink sociable, I noticed that when we first met but never every day, and then it got to the place where it was all day. And he just kept things to himself no matter how much I talked to him or questioned him about things, he just wouldn't talk to me. O.K., I just start sayin' to myself and getting more and more into the church with my children, and their school activities and ignored him. Well that's when he really got angry with me 'cause I wouldn't talk back to him on some things that he would talk to me about....But it just got to the place where he would curse, I'd end up cursing, then I'd just say well that's no good 'cause God wouldn't have me to do this, so I shut up with that. And I couldn't go anywhere. It got to the place where I couldn't talk on the phone, 'you're talkin' to some man, you're goin' out to meet some man' but he wouldn't say it in a nice way, he was always sayin' vulgar, hellacious ways and the children in all the midst of this. Let's see about three years and the last year it got so bad, so I had to call it quits and go our separate ways. I'm still married to him but I'm thinking of goin' through with my divorce in the month of March hopefully, if my financial status is a little bit better. 'Cause I know I'm going to have to pay for it.

WORK HISTORY

Lisa had her first real job after she finished high school. She worked in a factory that produced thermostats for electric blankets and other things. Lisa worked at the plant for about half a year. Lisa married her first husband during this time. Then she became pregnant and stopped working because of illness from the pregnancy. Her next work experience came after she and her husband moved from Bay Springs, Mississippi to Knoxville, Tennessee. Lisa worked in Knoxville at a factory that produced fish hooks and bait. It was located at the Forks of the River. After three weeks, Lisa quit this job because the cost of child care and transportation took most of her salary. Her next job was at Levi Strauss in Knoxville, sewing jeans. Lisa only worked there for three weeks. This time she said her babysitter wasn't taking good enough care of her daughter. Lisa's next job was at a

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deli where she worked the counter. This job ended after four months. According to Lisa, there were errors on her check every payday.

After Lisa's second marriage, she got a job working in the cafeteria of a city elementary school. This job lasted only one year. There was no mention of why she left this job. Lisa also mentioned having worked in church run day care centers and selling Avon. She stopped selling Avon because she had transportation problems. Lisa also mentioned working for Kelly, a temporary service company. She said she was sent to warehouses to work with clothes. Presently, Lisa works for Best's department store in the Mall.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Lisa attended school in rural Mississippi. She completed high school, but says she stopped learning after the sixth grade.

O.K. I wasn't good in math at all. I guess when I got, uh, sixth grade, that was it. I don't understand math anymore. My reading, I'm in sixth grade, spelling sixth grade. It was like I just couldn't learn anymore, when I reached that sixth grade level. But I did enough to make the grade. I studied. I understood some things but some things I just didn't understand as I grew older in high school. So I guess I just give up on it myself.

Although Lisa's experiences in school were frustrating for the most part, she has fond memories of her teachers. She never blames them for her reading problems.

Um, I was kind of slow in school but my third grade teacher she pushed me to do things and my second grade teacher, and I did good in a play, couple of plays that they pushed me at, but I was always very scared, nervous and didn't have faith in myself to do things.

Miss Fauld, we had a special relationship. Now she was one of the teachers, elementary teachers that pushed me to do things that, try to give me faith in what I could do. And Miss Hayden, my second grade teacher, she'd push me in a lot of things and say you can do better than what you're doin'. Miss King, my 11th grade teacher, she said I could do better than what I was doin'. So she was a special teacher. They all, all of the teachers that we had back in those days was real good teachers. They pushed a lot of kids but it was so many of us in the class until they didn't have time to take out with the slower kids. They took out as much time as they could with us, but it was just pressing to them to go on and teach, you know, kids that could keep up and everything.

Lisa was far less understanding of her family's inability to take the time to help her with her learning problems.

So it wasn't that much attention on someone helping me study. It just seemed like it came natural for the other kids in my home. It was just difficult for me. But everyone

had their own thing, doing it, and working and what have you, 'til I just felt neglected. I said no one loved me. I never told my dad he didn't love me but I always told my mom she didn't love me, didn't care for me. I felt like I was the black sheep of the family. And they told me I always felt sorry for myself and I said if I don't feel sorry for myself who will, because I felt lost. I felt alone. I felt so alone until when I reached the age of twelve I tried to kill myself. I looked at TV and I would see these people taking pills to kill themself, so I took these aspirin, they were Bayer aspirin. They were very popular, Bayer aspirin. And it was about twelve aspirin left in this Bayer aspirin bottle....And my mom, she asked me what's wrong with me. I told her that I just want to kill myself because didn't nobody love me, wouldn't nobody take time out with me to do anything. "And I'm just gonna end it all." And she said "Well, honey, how many pills left in there?" I said, "Twelve, mama." And she said, "Well, if you wanta kill yourself you go right ahead. Because all I can do is go on to church and pray for you." And she left my older sister at home with me to see after me.

Lisa does have one very fond memory of a learning experience in her home. Her father taught her to tell time when she was in the eighth grade.

But my daddy did help me. I was eighth grade until I learned how to tell time. And he taught me how to tell time. And I remember in school, in elementary, the teachers were helping us to tell time but I just couldn't get it. And I needed that special attention there that I didn't get and I just went on and forgot about it. And my boyfriend bought me a watch for Christmas when I was eighth grade and that's when my dad, I was askin' my dad about the time a lot and he just took time out and took time with me and just showed me how to tell time. And uh, that was amazing to me. I was just so proud of myself and my dad for teaching me that.

Lisa also remembers the anger, frustration, and embarrassment that were a result of her poor reading skills.

There was some books that I looked at when I started to read. I enjoyed reading 'em. But when the words become hard for me, to pronounce the words, I get angry because I didn't know the words and I try to get by with "what's this word here?" They would tell me so many times on words that I didn't know until they would get frustrated with me on it. And I would get so depressed I would just put the book down....I knew I was slow and sometime I was too embarrassed to admit that I was slow in some things.

Adult Education

Lisa has tried to improve her reading skills by enrolling in an Adult Basic Education program that prepares adults for the GED. Although Lisa has graduated from high school, she thought the program would help her become a better reader. She is currently out of the program but hopes to go back.

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We had teachers and there was a group of people that come in and uh, need their GEDs. And I was, I guess about the smartest person in the class there, because I knew how to read better than they would. And the teacher would take up more time with the ones that was slow this time than myself. But she also said if we had any problems to come to her. O.K. we started on our summer vacation and some of the parents and they're saying it's hard to come back to school once you stop, especially people, parents with children. And that's what happened to me. I didn't go back, but I'm still trying to get back into going. 'Cause I feel like I can get the pronunciation of words if I can just get someone to take out a lot of time with me, 'cause it's like they said if they just have to get one person to tutor you until you get that, they'll do that, 'cause they're determined to help you learn to read better if you don't know how at all.

EVERYDAY LITERACY

Lisa seems to handle her encounters with everyday literacy quite well. She is able to follow directions especially well if they are illustrated.

I do good in reading directions on things. Even when I would buy things for Christmas and had to put things together, I could read the directions and put it together. And somehow I just look at it, uh the way they have it drawn out and put it together. But with products and what have you, things, I do good in reading on that. And whatever it is I don't know, I go and look it up in the dictionary and I know the meaning of it.

Lisa is also able to use maps and road signs effectively. She attributes this ability to her gift of common sense.

O.K. it's like in a direction magnet to one city to the next, I feel like that's, once you get your little map or direction, it's common sense to go straight there to this place that you've never been before. I have done good at that. Even in the class that I took for reading, we read maps. We had, he just kinda went over, like school. It was just school all over again goin' to those classes. And if someone give me directions, I follow those directions good. And reading my map, I read that real good. I end up having to sell my house and tryin' to find a real nice place to live, I got this mapbook of Knoxville. And I got the newspaper, other clippings from someplace else that might have had some places for rent and the street that it was on. I got my little book, mapbook, and found out where the street was and went straight to it. So I just do good in reading maps and everything.

Lisa is a very good organizer. She lives on her salary from a part-time job, child support from her first husband, social security disability from her second husband, and a rent subsidy from Knoxville Community Development Corporation (KCDC). Effective use of organizational skills helps Lisa run her household efficiently.

I understand everything in the grocery store that I go into at. And it takes me forever to be in that store. I check the prices, the name brand, the non-name brand, what's a better buy. I may buy some off brands that's a little cheaper than the main product and try it. If it's O.K. I'll keep buyin' that product. But if it have a funny taste to it or the detergent may not last and wash the clothes as clean as another product, I do not buy that product again. But I make my budget, I have a budget, I go into the store and I deal with that budget that I have. And sometime I come out under my budget and that way it saves me money and I can pay a bill with it you know. So I do pretty good in budgeting myself in stores and around the house, you know paying bills and what have you, real good. My daughter say I can go to the store with 50 cents and bring back fish and toilet paper and butter and just everything for 50 cents.

Although Lisa is very price conscious in the grocery store, she does not use coupons. She seem to find the limitations on the coupons very confusing.

Well I started trying to save coupons and use them but uh, it was things that you had to buy with that coupon, products that coupon was for. And I just stopped saving, because there were things on that coupon that I didn't want, I didn't use, so I just stopped. If they was accepting the coupons on you know, whatever, then I would use it, but I have to get that product so I just stopped.

Lisa does not buy a lot of reading material now because she can't afford it. She does, however, take advantage of the public library.

...but moreso I can't a lot of 'em, so we end up goin' to the library where we got library cards. Oh gosh we went last month a great deal. We haven't gone this month. But last month and month before last, we go pretty often, especially if the kids have school assignments and they need to use an encyclopedia or something, do some kind of research from school, we go to the library. And I may check out some books. I like animals and insects what have you and I may check out some books like that and read them here at home. I always try to get 'em back on time, being an orderly person.

Literacy at Church

Lisa makes a special effort to keep up with Sunday School lessons. Her poor reading ability may be an obstacle, but it is not one that can't be overcome.

O.K. if I participate in Sunday School, I do pretty good in that if I have my Sunday School book to bring home to read before we go in Sunday School class that Sunday morning. And I look up a lot of things in the dictionary and find the definition of it and when questions are asked in the Sunday School then I can do pretty good in that. But if I do not have the Sunday School book I participate a little because I can't answer the question. I just kinda learn from what's being said and taught and reading over the Bible and someone explaining that verse in the Bible, learning that way. And a lot of

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things that have been said in the Sunday School uh, and lessons that we've gone over, I had when I was a child at home. And all the things that are bein' said I already know them. And there are some things that come to me that are new to me.

Divine intervention also seems to be a part of Lisa's preparation for Sunday School at times.

Or just studying, reading my Bible studying, I'll look things up. And som... me I don't, like I may miss a Sunday School, I don't get a Sunday School booklet, so I don't have anything to study 'cause I don't, they have give out all the Sunday School books and I don't have anything to study but I'll just study. And you know sometimes things that I have studied and I'll go to Sunday School and it relates to what I studied that week and that's amazing to me too. I guess that's God's way of keepin' me in touch with their lesson sometime when it happens that way.

Lisa had been using the King James translation of the Bible. I gave her a Living Bible to use and she has been very pleased with it.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Lisa is comfortable with technology in the home, but she does not come into contact with much technology now because she lost some things when she and her second husband separated. Others were lost when her home was burglarized.

I've had all of this. I've had VCR, microwave, Atari games that my son had, and electric organs and microwaves, remote controls for the VCR and the television. Someone broke into my house and stole all of these things but the TV, so I have never just been interested in buying anything else because I feel like if I buy it someone will take it and right now I just don't have the money to really get into buyin' these products and keepin' up with 'em.

When I asked Lisa if she felt comfortable using these examples of modern day technology, she immediately responded:

Oh yes. I did real good with all of it. I'm a person that moreso stay to myself to learnin' somethin'. If I can't I need someone to show me how to do this. And once they show me how and I can deal with it, but if I feel like I can do it on my own I just need to get in a room quiet to myself and I can work with it.

Literacy and Technology At Work

Presently Lisa works at an upscale department store in a large mall. Her salesclerk job involves only a minimal amount of reading and writing and poses little problem for her.

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Yes, it's a little reading in that and writing. Because, O.K. how I get back through that, if the customer want to hold something, a item, uh, I have to put their telephone number, their name, and address. O.K. they tell me these things. And I do good on it. If I don't know how to spell their name, I just ask them to spell that for me. And they do. So I get by with that. And that's about it at work with Best's. And reading different things, I do good on the product that's in the store have a name brand they're looking for, I have learned that, I do good in that.

Technology is more of a problem. Preferring to work with the customers and clothes, she avoids using the computerized cash register for two reasons.

Well, that's where I do not have confidence in myself to work with that cash register. I have seen everyone say it's so simple and easy which it do seem very simple and easy. Uh, but I still thinkin' I may make a mistake on it. And I'll be responsible for it. And I just don't want that responsibility of something going wrong. But they say you can't go wrong. The computer tells you when it's wrong but... So I'm still kinda holdin' off on the cash register. Eventually I might get brave enough to work with it and do good at it. But right now I'm just kinda stayin' away from the cash register because the fear of messing up.

There's a training period, if you gonna work on the cash register and I haven't worked with the cash register. Everyone wants me to, that works on the floor, want me to work on the cash register 'cause I'm good with the customers. And plus it would help out more if I deal with the cash register. But a lot of lady that work the dressin' rooms and the floor, uh, we don't care to work with the cash register, to deal with it. We have had some people that will steal some kind of way with it and I, they fired some girls that done this and I just rather not work with the cash register. 'Cause when I worked in this deli, there was too many workin' with the cash register, money come up missin' and I just don't want people to blame me for money missin' that I know I'm not goin' to get, I know I'm an honest person, but to try to convince someone else of that it would be kinda hard from time to time. So I just don't deal with the cash register. Maybe one day I might go ahead and deal with it but right now I just don't care for it.

FAMILY LITERACY

For her two children, Lisa has been an involved and concerned parent. Her daughter Toni, is nineteen and her son Benny is fifteen. Lisa read to them when they were young and had them read to her.

Well we have a gathering to the place where, when my children were small I would get the books out, now I could help them with things, their elementary books and little story books that I would buy them in the store and read to them and they would go to school. I would let them read to me. And they did good. And I did good in helpin' them with that.

When Lisa's children were older she was unable to help them. At this point she turned to school personnel, friends, and their stepfather for the help they needed.

But as they got older in high school and the work became that hard for me again, then I start askin' help from the school teachers in the program they have and they've helped my kids at reading. I went to PTA meetings, if anything went wrong with my child or my child had problems here at home with their studies and I couldn't help them, I got them help at school, their teacher, I talked to their teacher, their guidance teacher and I helped my children. And I just thank God that that was there for them as it wasn't there for me in my hometown. And I just felt comfortable goin' to the teachers tellin' them you know my problem here at home that I couldn't help my child. So can't you all help them? And I helped them you know to my best of knowledge that I could at home. That's what I did. I even had friends to help my children. O.K. and after I remarried, their stepdad helped them a great deal 'cause he was real smart.

Toni has finished high school and enrolled at a local community college. Toni's attempt at higher education, however, met some problems this fall semester.

But my daughter, she's 19, graduated from school and everything, goes to Pellissippi State, she's doin' real good in reading and spelling. My daughter she's goes to Pellissippi but it hurt my heart that she failed her English and math. She's not good in math. So the grant will not pay you know for your schooling if you fail. So now she's gonna have to work to pay for that and make up that grade. And then the grant will continue after she makes that on her own.

Benny, Lisa's 15 year old son, does well in school in spite of being a slow reader.

And [Benny] he's a little slow in his spellin' stuff and reading but he's a whiz in math. I mean 'cause he's always been up on time, up early, get off to school ever since he was kindergarten. And he's smart at a lot of things, electronics and he work with that real good. And I think that calls for math too. But he's good in his math. But he's doin' good in school. He always passed, made A's and B's and he made a D this past, no last week, and he was just like destroyed by makin' a D because he never made a D in school. So maybe it'll make him strive more to do better, study harder. 'Cause as I, you get high school it get kinda hard.

Lisa hopes both her children will be able to finish college.

I have encouraged my daughter to better herself to the utmost, much better than her mom, and my son because if you ever marry a young lady you will be provider of that family and that means you've gotta earn more than minimum wage. And so they're both determined to go to college.

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CIVIC AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Lisa is very serious about her responsibilities as a voter. She doesn't let her poor reading skills keep her from being informed. She relies on the media, her church, and friends to keep her informed on issues and candidates.

I registered to vote and I try to get there every chance I can to vote. Uh, if I'm not, you know, keeping up with the person on TV, talking with someone about the candidate bein' a pretty good person to vote for, it's like, I don't know who to vote for you know. So I kinda go along with the paperwork from church, or a neighbor or a friend that is into it more so than myself, and they give me some advice on it and vote for that person.

Lisa also depends on media, church and friends to learn about national issues.

Sometimes I pay attention to my phone bill. They have a thing that come in to your telephone bill that tells you things that happenin'. And television and our church and different churches when I visit churches too. I find out about local events and what have you. Radio stations, Gospel stations tell me about events or other stations that I may listen to. And friends, they tell me about some of the events that's going on.

The Church

The church plays a very important role in Lisa's life. When I asked her what role the church plays in her life she said:

It has brought me a long way where I have strayed from, after I had left Mississippi and moved here and stayed to myself a great deal. I didn't know anybody in this town. And after I went from church to church and then made Rogers my church home. And started singing in the church choir. It brought back a lot of memory of me being' home singing in the choir and doin' things in the neighborhood. And it has let me know how much I have kinda let life pass me by.

When Lisa talked about her old neighborhood and her former neighbors, church was a big part of how she evaluated the neighborhood and her relationships with neighbors.

And the neighbors are all nice that live there. They, more, everybody went to church but they didn't go to church as often as I would go or the elderly lady, which I call Mama Glass, lived across the street from me. But more so Christian people lived in the neighborhood.

I stay in touch with them, especially Mama Glass...And she invites me to their women's day program and I participate in that at their church. I, if we have revival goin' on at our church, I invite them to my church, sometime, my neighbor wouldn't make it but Mama Glass would and I would make it more so to her church too.

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Lisa also uses her Christian faith in dealing with her new neighbors.

I don't socialize with 'em and if I do I'd preach to 'em so much about the Lord until they kinda keep their distance from me.

And the people who live downstairs, I try to pray for them because they have a alcohol problem and I pray for me too because I feel that I am very prejudiced now against people that drink.

Lisa's social life also seems to revolve around her church affiliation.

And I have girlfriends that go to my church. We socialize and cook out together in summer months and we have Thanksgiving and Christmas things together and our children and if anything's going on in the town like at the World's Fair Site, they're havin' these fireworks or whatever, we participate in those, and parades, go up to the mountains sometimes, to the dogwood, the leaves and things, or just go shoppin' for some tennis shoes or somethin' that may be less there than here. I try to be active in dealin' with people, prayin' and what have you.

When Lisa's second husband became an alcoholic, she again drew on her faith. Whether or not Lisa would take her second husband back rests on his religious conversion.

So he's livin' with her and I'm just still in limbo about. I know and feel in my heart I'd never go back to him unless he cleans hisself inside out in the name of Jesus and with that drinking problem he has.

Although things have been difficult for Lisa, her Christian faith helps her to persevere.

And it kinda worried me sometimes when things go down for you like, Lord will I really end up like this but if I have faith in you like you say I do, no I won't. So I'm just strivin' for it each and every day.

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MARIA REYES

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THE COMMUNITY

The Trailer Park

"Trailer parks like these are all over town. They appear overnight and become a sore," said Jorge, the HEP coordinator who introduced me to María. He was driving me to her house because he was afraid I would never find it. The appointment for the interview had been set for his classroom, but María had called that morning to say she had no transportation. She invited me to come to her house instead.

María's trailer looked recently painted in bright yellow and brown. An old-looking blue VW van was parked by the porch. Behind the van was a large car with the front two doors opened. We parked by the van and approached the car parked behind. Antonio, one of María's three sons, greeted us. Jorge asked about the car and he explained he had taken the seats out to change the car's carpet. A young boy opened the trailer door and stood there watching until María came to the door and invited us in. Since Jorge had to return to the Community College, I went inside with María and her grandson.

The trailer looked small from the outside but it seemed larger once we went in. Although Antonio was working outside and had some tools and two beer cans by the car, the porch was clean and tidy. María apologized for "the mess" but I did not see any. The room we entered consisted of a narrow area that seemed to serve as living room, dining room and kitchen. It looked lived in but not messy. A small sofa lined one side of the living room area, a two-shelved bookcase with a TV and a VCR, the opposite side. María got a rag and cleaned a small round table that served as the dining area. We sat at that table across from the kitchen.

María lives in the trailer with her two sons and youngest daughter. The oldest daughter and her two children live somewhere else in the same town. Her oldest son lives with his father in Texas. María takes care of the two grandchildren while the daughter is at work.

Valley View, North Carolina

Valley View, along with most of Western North Carolina, was originally the land of the Cherokee. The town traces its beginnings to 1787 when the first white settlers arrived in the area. The land is very fertile and the town is surrounded by apple groves and produce farms. Nestled against the Smoky Mountains and surrounded by numerous lakes, Valley View town government is very interested in attracting tourists but farming is still the main source of income for its residents. A recent survey by the Department of Labor reported 350 apple and 250 vegetable growers in the four counties surrounding Valley View. These growers depend on the availability of farm workers to harvest their produce.

Main Street is Valley View's business and commercial area. The street was recently renovated by adding a brick sidewalk and planting trees along both sides. Antiques and curio

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MARIA REYES

by Loida Velazquez

María Reyes is a forty-one year old Latino migrant worker. She was born in Mercedes, Texas, a small town near the border with Mexico. For the last twenty-seven years she has traveled along the Eastern migrant stream looking for a better life for herself and her five children. María left school before completing sixth grade but her English reading skills test at the third grade level. Her preferred language is Spanish, although she is not literate in Spanish. During the time of the interview Maria was a resident of Valley View, a small town in North Carolina with a growing migrant community, and was enrolled in a high school equivalency program (HEP) for migrant workers.

MARIA REYES

Yo trabajé en los campos en Ohio cuando me casé con mi esposo. He piscado tomates y cotton en Arizona. En California trabajamos en un packing house, en Chicago trabajé en un plastic plant, en Oklahoma trabajé en un dry cleaners, en Florida he piscado oranges. He vivido en Dallas, en Abilene, en Fort Worth. Este es el estado que me gusta más y este pueblo. Yo nunca he vivido en un sitio que me guste más. Me gustaría quedarme aquí.

[I worked the fields in Ohio when I first got married with my husband. I have picked tomatoes and cotton in Arizona. In California we worked in a packing house, in Chicago I worked in a plastic plant, in Oklahoma I worked in a dry cleaners, in Florida I picked oranges. I have lived in Dallas, in Abilene, in Fort Worth. This is the state I like the most and this town. I have never lived in a place I liked more. I would like to stay here.]

María is less than five feet tall. She has worked hard all her life and it shows. Life as a migrant means getting up before sunrise and working under the broiling sun until you are too exhausted to continue. You have to stoop and crawl to pick the crop, eat a fast lunch from a truck parked in the middle of the field, live in cramped and substandard housing, and move often to find work. For the last five years María has worked the fields in Florida during the winter and picked apples in North Carolina during the Fall.

My first contact with this family came through Tito, a High School Equivalency Program (HEP) graduate I interviewed for my research on dropouts and the culture of migrancy. At a certain point during that interview Tito said:

"My father is not like my mother, he even went to college for two years".

He did not seem ashamed by his mother's illiteracy, he was just stating a fact. He later sounded proud when he told me he was the only child in his family who finished high school requirements (by passing the GED test) and this had motivated his mother to enroll in HEP.

stores attract vacationers visiting the Smoky Mountains and give life to the town. North of Main Street is the town's residential area. Most of the houses are surrounded by tall trees and well-cared for gardens. South of Main Street are two large car dealerships. To the south of the car dealerships are several trailer parks. Some of the farmers provide housing for the migrant workers within the farms, but most, like María, live in the trailer areas.

Migrants in the United States

For the purpose of this profile, migrant workers are defined as those persons who are agricultural laborers and who travel within the geographical boundaries of the continental United States and Canada. Migrant workers move along three identifiable streams: the Eastern stream, the Mid-Continent stream and the West Coast stream[5]. The Eastern stream is made up of Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Anglos, Canadian Indians and African Americans. The stream flows up and down the region east of the Appalachian Mountains. The mid-continent stream traces the Mississippi River basin. This group is primarily composed of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, African Americans and most recently Vietnamese and Cambodians. These migrants move in all directions to and from regions in Texas. The West Coast stream is the largest migrant movement extending from California and Arizona to Oregon and Washington. This stream is comprised primarily of documented and undocumented Mexicans, Central American, Vietnamese, Filipino and other Western Pacific immigrants.

Mexican-American migrants are predominantly from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California. Undocumented migrants, recently arrived from Mexico, are incorporated daily into the families of Mexican-American migrants moving through the streams.

Migrant groups differ in social and educational backgrounds. While many Mexican-American migrants have some knowledge of English, others are not literate in any language[6]. For some, illiteracy is a result of their social and economic status; for others, the result of the disruption in education caused by the frequent moves. Other reasons for illiteracy include coming from countries with a strong oral tradition of language learning or from cultures possessing no written language (like Haiti, Khmer and Hmong).

The social and educational background of migrants results in education-related problems for their children. Ignorance of the school system, difficulties in learning the language and

[5] J. B. King-Stoops, Migrant Education: Teaching the Wandering Ones. (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1989.)

[6] J.O. Prewitt Diaz et al., The Effects of Migration on Children: An Ethnographic Study (State College, PA: Centro de Estudios Sobre la Migracion, 1990).

problems adjusting to the community environment are but a few of the reasons why many migrant children drop out of school. Many migrant children make a conscious and deliberate choice when they drop out to join their parents on the migrant stream and become an added source of family income.

LIFE HISTORY

María is the fifth of nine children born to a first generation Mexican-American family. Her father was a hard working migrant laborer who became a crew leader. He would contract to bring a set number of migrant workers from Mexico for farm owners from as far as Michigan and Ohio. As with most migrant families, farm work was a family affair that involved not only her father but her mother and all the children. During harvest time the whole family migrated North or East along the migrant streams. María started working the fields at a young age. María's parents were children of migrants who dropped out of school to help their parents and became migrants themselves.

My father went to eight grade and my mother went less. . . I think she went to seventh.

Mi apá era contratista, trayia gente para los trabajos.
[My papa was a contractor; he brought people to work.]

María's parents spoke Spanish at home. She lived in a Hispanic neighborhood where everybody spoke Spanish. When asked in what language she preferred to conduct the interview she chose Spanish, yet she went to a school where everything was taught in English.[7]

I was thirteen when I first got married and fourteen when my first child was born.

María divorced the father of her five children eight years ago. Although he had a high school diploma and two years of college, the couple became migrant workers too when he was unable to find another kind of work. María kept the children after the divorce and joined the Eastern migrant stream following a boyfriend who is a crew leader. This new relationship lasted six years. The day we first met she told me they had broken up the day before because he physically abused her. A tattoo spelling his name covered each knuckle of the fingers on her left hand. They were visible the day we met but were covered by rings during our second interview.

[7] Maria chose to conduct the interviews in Spanish because it is the language she uses in daily communication with her children, friends and fellow migrant workers. She uses a form of Spanish full of anglicisms. For example, she says "Apa" for "papa" (father); "nohotros" for "nosotros" (us); "writiear" for "escribir" (to write); "piscar" for "recoger" (to pick).

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

María attended school on a regular basis until she was in the third grade. Although she later continued until the sixth grade, she says her education stopped at the third grade.

> *I went only to sixth but you can say I went only to third grade because ..... I couldn't attend for several years. When I went back I was older than the other children and at that time they would promote you because you were too old for the grade not because you had learned as they do now.*

Her memory is vague about those years that she missed school. She talks about an illness that paralyzed her face temporarily and about going to the fields with her parents.

> *I only went to school when we were at home in Mercedes. I missed school so often that by then I was too old for school... I was about twelve when I dropped out of school.*

From her school years Maria only remembers the strictness of the classroom environment.

> *They were very strict, very demanding, they would raise their voices [the teachers] and you would tremble. They did not have patience with the children. Everybody would behave because we were scared of the teachers.*

As in most small towns, the teachers were community residents who taught in the same school all their professional lives.

> *The one I remember best is the one who taught all the children in my family from my oldest brother to the youngest. The teachers in that school taught in the same school all their lives. When I went to first grade my brother was twenty-two and his first grade teacher was my first grade teacher.*

María herself made the decision to drop out of school. She talks about dropping out as something that had little to do with the school or her parents.

> *It was my decision but my parents did not oppose it because by then my father was very ill and could not work the fields anymore. I was expected to assist my mother and help her with the fruit stand my father had by then.*

The reasons María gives for dropping out are consistent with the reasons given by other migrant dropouts. Although María talks about illnesses that kept her from attending school, she also mentions that she did not attend school while her family went to work the fields in out-of-state farms. These trips up the Mid-Continent and Eastern streams normally take three to five months. Most migrant parents take the children along and they might or might not attend school while away from their home base.

Adult Education

The records at the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) show María's reading skill is at the third grade level. They used the English version of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), to determine vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. The Spanish version was not used because, although Spanish is Maria's preferred communication language, she cannot read or write in Spanish. Her spoken English is good enough to facilitate communication outside her Hispanic circle of friends and relatives, but she recognizes a deficiency in reading and spelling.

I don't know how to read and that is why I am going to HEP, to learn to read. I like math and I can do it but I have a problem with reading and even with math when it is a word problem.

In addition to attending classes in the HEP program, Maria attends an ESL literacy class, and a JTPA work experience program.

LITERACY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Lack of reading vocabulary and comprehension skills affect Maria's daily interactions but does not paralyze her.

Yes, that is something I have problems with (filling out forms and applications), for example, you have to report changes in income within five days ... I don't put the information in the right place because they always have to ask me again ... so I ask the person who is helping me to do it for me.

When María goes to the Migrant Clinic she makes sure the doctors, nurses and technicians explain clearly to her the tests and medicines prescribed. She cannot follow the instructions of a sewing pattern but she uses a sewing machine to sew her dresses. She is concerned about retaking the driver's test but she has traveled from Florida to Texas driving by herself.

The techniques María has developed to deal with her reading and writing limitations are assisted by "a good head for numbers" and "a good memory". About grocery shopping she says:

No, I never look at the ingredients. I have to stretch my money and I buy only what I can stretch....I go by myself because I know how much money I have and as I select the items I add in my mind the amount. If I take someone with me they will distract me with conversation......

She has also developed a network of people who assist her to read and understand important documents.

When I get mail I try to read it. If I cannot understand it or it has too many words I can't understand, I don't leave the letter out of my sight. I take it to people I trust... and they will explain it for me.

Although María has migrated back and forth from Florida to Valley View for the past five years and admits that her involvement with the local community is very limited, the network of people who assist her with reading is well developed and stable. They are people familiar with the plight of migrants and who are in one way or another involved with the local migrant community.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Maria has learned to interact with modern technology by developing a support network and by sharpening her ability to retain information. She is not afraid to ask for assistance and is not intimidated by the instruments of technology.

...That is something I have, I am not afraid of things like that (power tools and machines). All I need is someone to explain to me how and I will learn and be able to do it. I have yet to find something that I could say I have tried and could not do.

A VCR and a microwave are the most sophisticated appliances in María's trailer. The microwave is used to warm food only and the VCR is used by her children.

LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY AT WORK

Working the fields does not require any reading or writing. Most migrants are paid in cash at the end of the working day and will work without a contractual agreement. Between migrant trips María worked at jobs where the need for literacy was minimal: ironing at a dry cleaners, assembly work at a plastic plant and canning at a packing plant.

Two months ago María enrolled at the High School Equivalency Program for migrant and seasonal farm workers. As part of the program María was assigned to do work-experience at the local Employment Office. She received training to work as a receptionist. Her job is to greet the clients as they come in and assign them to the available counselor. María is very grateful for the opportunity to learn to use a computer at her work-experience placement.

María's low reading skills have forced her to develop other ways to deal with the reading and writing demands of her environment. She is not afraid of asking for assistance and relies heavily on her memory to learn job routines.

I have been assigned to do work-experience at the Employment Office. The way I have done it is by memory. I have a very good memory. I had never used a computer but Vickie, the supervisor, is teaching me. It is not difficult, everything comes out as in a sheet of paper. All questions have a blank... Most of the things I learn are memorized

... If things are explained to me clearly I learn them. I just run them over in my mind (until I learn them).

Taking phone messages at work and spelling names are María's hardest everyday tasks.

That is new for me. I never write letters but now at the work-experience training I have to write because the staff leaves me to answer the phones while they go for lunch and that is when we get a lot of calls ... and I have to write (the phone messages) and it's very hard for me because I don't know how to spell.

Besides memorizing, María has developed other techniques to deal with the lack of spelling skills.

I write it as good as I can and make sure to get the name of the person who calls. I ask them to spell the name very slowly so that I make sure I have spelled it correctly. I take their phone number and the message and after they hang up I rewrite it carefully. If I don't know how to spell a word, I look to see if I can identify it in some of the books they gave me. Once I find a word, I memorize it and when another call comes in with a similar request I am able to do it then.

The work-experience supervisor showed María how to use the computer to retrieve information on the clients. María explained to me in careful details the steps needed to retrieve information:

...When people come in I greet them politely and ask if I can help them and they will tell me "I am looking for a job" and the type of work and I ask for the social security number and I write it in the computer and hit "Enter" and it will give me all the information on that person: where they live and what kind of work they are looking for. Every job is coded by numbers and if I want to know what the number stands for I enter "D", hit "Enter" again and the number and it will tell me the type of job the person is looking for and I enter "O" and "A" and the original information returns. If all they want is information on what we have, I send them to use the other computers by the wall. If they find something they will give me the number and I find their name in the computer and I enter a key and the computer will make a copy for that person, then I will take it and put it inside a box. I have to check to see if they are veterans and put those apart from the ones who come to claim. Those will be placed in another place. I have to check all those things before storing the papers.

María's memory skills and her eagerness to learn seems to ingratiate her with her employers. She quickly memorizes the work routines and impresses them with hard work and good attendance.

She has me doing almost everything. She sometimes leaves and I stay by myself [at the JTPA work-experience].
In the last job I had I was the best and fastest worker and my supervisor said I was the best hand he had ... He was the one who told me 'you have a good head, you are a smart lady, you can do anything you set out to do.'

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In some ways María is different from the typical migrant worker for whom field work is the only available job. She has worked at a dry cleaners, done assembly line work, served as a nurses aide at a nursing home, and assisted a mechanic at a repair shop. When asked how did she learn to do those things she answered: "*People would explain it to me and I would listen carefully.*"

FAMILY LITERACY

Only one of María's five children is still in school. Her youngest daughter is in fourth grade. The other four children dropped out of school before completing high school requirements, although one now has a GED.

While María's former husband was still part of the family, he read to the children and helped them with homework.

> *Their father finished high school and went to a college for two years and he did most of the reading. He used to read to me too. He helped me to understand things before we got divorced.*

Helping her only child left in school seems to be María's greatest concern.

> *I try to help my daughter with her school assignments. What I hate the most is Social Studies but I try to help her by carefully reading a paragraph and trying to find the answer to the questions. We read together and try to find the answers together. I don't know if they are the correct answers but we try.*

She is very concerned about her youngest daughter and seems to blame herself for the other children's school failures.

> *My oldest son never finished. He had completed eleventh grade and attended twelfth grade for a few months and he dropped out. It made me mad. Then came Tito and did the same. I know it was my fault, because I would take them out of school to take them with me to Florida and they would miss school for a while and they started to get behind.*
>
> *... Sometimes I think it was my fault that she [my older daughter] left to get married because she was very private and quiet. She had a good head for school like her father, but I could not stop her.*

COMMUNITY IN MARIA'S WORLD

Migrants live in isolation even when they are surrounded by people. They move often and their involvement with the local community is limited and casual. María's experience is no different. She has lived in Valley View on five different occasions but her circle of

friends is limited to the other Hispanics living in the community and to the people working for agencies and programs to help migrants. They form her helping network and are her only contact within the community. She has never voted in local or national elections but would like to:

No, I have never voted because I don't know how to do it, but I would like to. I never know who the candidates are or anything, but it is something I would like to learn.

When asked if she was involved with any local organization she answered: *"No, I am Catholic and attend mass but that's all"*.

During her interviews María expressed interest in making Valley View her home but three weeks after our last meeting I learned that she was back with her boyfriend and had left with him to go to Florida for the winter harvest. She left her youngest daughter with relatives in Valley View, so that she can continue in school. It seems doubtful María will return to the HEP program or the work-experience at the Employment Office.

At the same time María's newfound interest in education filled her with hope for the future. She is fascinated by computers and carefully described the steps she took to learn how to use them. She sees learning how to read and write, not only as the means for personal liberation, but as the way to fulfill her desire to help others.

I see people who read and read and I want to be one of those people. I want to be able to take a book and not be ashamed. Because I want to be able to open a book and be able to understand it. I am the kind of person who sees someone with a problem and wants to help that person. I want to be able to help others and if I know how to read and write well, I will be able to help others. That is what I want to do. I tell myself if I try hard I will be able to do it.

APPALACHIAN PROFILES:

OVERVIEW

ERIC

APPALACHIAN PROFILES: OVERVIEW

These Appalachian profiles contain powerful images of people's lives:

- Tom's ambition to move up in the world to be a sharecropper -- a role that many would think at the bottom of the labor market.
- Maria with her boyfriend's name tattooed on the knuckles of her hand, a symbol of permanence in her world which is constantly on the move.
- Marcy's children often going to bed with their shoes on, ready for her to take them away if her husband came home drunk and abusive.
- Yuvette fretting over being able to keep up the payments on her couch and chair, little enough to ask for in twentieth century America.
- Les working, working, working, to take care of the many people he calls family.
- Lisa losing her house to the debts of an alcoholic husband, living across the street from drug dealers but working in an upscale department store.

The images stay with those of us for whom life is less marginal. The profiles paint a different picture of adults who have low literacy skills from conventional "wisdom" about illiteracy. These are not feckless, helpless individuals who are a drain on public resources. They value education, care about their children's futures, work hard. They are thoroughly decent people who are doing their best with what has been dealt out to them.

But their lives are on the edge. Most of us these days are one major illness away from economic crisis. These people are even closer: the loss of a part-time job, a large repair bill, a child's illness, especially divorce -- any of these can destroy the fragile security they have tried to build up. In the lives of poor and working people, literacy is only one factor in a complex inter-relationship of social and economic factors.

In this overview we summarize the role of and interactions between literacy and technology in the everyday lives of this group of people. Following the six major research questions of the study[8], we examine their use of literacy and technology, and the impacts of technology in expanding or diminishing literacy demands. We look at their expectations and beliefs about literacy and technology, and how they see the demands placed on them by their social and personal contexts. We outline the barriers and incentives they identify to furthering their own literacy skills. Finally we describe how literacy impacts on their social relationships.

[8]Listed in the Introduction, p.3 and in the text that follows, shown in italics at the beginning of sections.

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EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY & TECHNOLOGY

Those of us who read fluently often assume that people with limited literacy skills do little reading in their everyday lives. We also assume that their use of technology is affected by their literary limitations. Deprived of the capacity to read manuals or instruction booklets, how could anyone master new technology like computers or VCRs?

In fact, little existing research documents just what people with low literacy do read and write in their daily lives. Our profiles show that everyone reads some in both their home and work domains.

These profiles also shed light on the previously unknown issue of technology use by adults with low literacy skills. The profiles show that literacy limitations do not seem to significantly affect technology use. The people we profiled make limited use of new technology (like VCRs, computers) but this seems primarily because of their low incomes. Limited literacy seems neither to have diminished nor expanded their technology use.

Literacy - What do People Read?

1. How do people use literacy in their daily lives? What literacy practices are employed by adults of different backgrounds and life experiences in their homes, workplaces and communities?

What do people read in their everyday lives? The literacy skills among the people we profiled vary quite widely, and so do the kinds of texts they encounter and read. But the more fluent readers were not always those who read most. In every domain of their lives -- home, work, community -- everyone we interviewed did some reading, and each used reading in several ways. **Table 1** summarizes the text materials which each person reported reading, as well as the technology they said they use. This table is probably not an exhaustive list, particularly for those who read a lot, but indicates the kinds of things people remember and report when asked.

At home in their families the uses of literacy were similar for everyone. All had children in school and did some reading related to their children's schooling. For Tom this was limited to papers his son brings home from kindergarten while others also read the various forms and communications from the schools. Everyone had some financial reading, but it was rather limited in every case -- paychecks, prices, money orders, catalogs, bills. These people do not do much complicated financial reading. They don't invest, have savings accounts or usually checking accounts. They do have to deal with the paperwork of various bureaucracies -- the schools, the welfare system, housing programs, medical bills, adult education programs. Almost everyone reads in connection with shopping and consuming. This may be very limited, as for Tom, whose instrumental reading is mainly confined to brands of pop and candy bars. It may be quite extensive, as for Yuvette, who read the manual for her programmable telephone.

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TABLE 1. A SELECTION OF LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY USES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

	LITERACY USES	TECHNOLOGY USES
TOM	Children's books Food labels - candy bars, soda pop Letters from wife Routine bills Child's school papers Prices in stores Road signs Bible	Farm equipment - tractor, chain saw, loaders Television Stereo
MARCY	Newspapers, True Story, tabloids, Reader's Digest Grocery lists, store signs, prices Mail order catalogs Birthday cards, letters to sister Money orders Food ingredients Brochures from Health Dept, doctors Materials from Nurse's Aide course Bible Medicine labels Papers from son's school	Satellite dish Television Intercom Mother's pacemaker monitor
YUVETTE	Menu at restaurant where she worked Customers' bills Papers from Head Start, child's homework Bills, Forms Bus schedule GED class materials	Preregister at restaurant Programmable telephone Tape recorder VCR Calculator Remote control TV
LES	Time cards from work Names and addresses of jobs Some work words - "fuse," "kitchen" Cartoons and comic books Phone book Paycheck Bowling league score cards	Tractor, farm machinery Mechanics of cars and trucks Electrical work - wiring etc. Nintendo Microwave TV with remote control Cable TV
LISA	Forms, labels from her work Brochures, fliers from church, Sunday School Fliers, bills Prices in stores Directions for assembling toys etc. Dictionary, maps Bible Newspaper, classified ads Children's books, library books for pleasure	TV with remote control Stereo VCR Microwave Electric organ
MARIA	Some mail, forms, bills Child's school work Phone messages	TV, VCR Microwave Power tools & machinery Computer at work

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Only three of the six report reading something for entertainment, but reading ability does not seem to be the determining factor. Yuvette, who is one of the more skilled readers in this group, does not read for pleasure or much at all, while Les with very limited reading enjoys the funnies and comic books.

Most report some reading in their work, but it is quite limited. Tom probably does the least, only incidental reading of names of machinery or seed. The rest write names and addresses or read menus or labels, but none mentioned reading reports or manuals, and they learned their jobs by watching and experience, not reading.

Reading which relates to their community or to the broader world -- church, other organizations, politics and news -- is also fairly limited for everyone. Only Marcy regularly reads local newspapers, only Lisa regularly attends church and reads bulletins and Sunday School lessons, only Les is part of regular recreational group which involves some literacy.

Some people are clearly much more limited in their literacy use than others. Marcy and Lisa read quite broadly, while Yuvette, Les and Maria have only a few uses for their reading. The uses of writing by the people we profiled are much more limited than their uses of reading. Few send notes to school, or write messages; send letters and greeting cards to others; or make grocery lists, write down phone numbers.

In their overall reading patterns especially, and to a lesser extent in their uses of writing, the people we profiled look much like the rest of us. They use text for a variety of purposes, and have found ways to deal with literacy demands of their daily lives which they cannot meet. It is worth noting again that, within this group, literacy usage is not consistently related to literacy skill. Marcy has some of the highest literacy skills of the group and makes quite extensive use of reading and writing. Yuvette also has higher literary skills, but reads little.

Nor is schooling closely related to literary skill. Both Lisa and Les have a high school diploma but quite low skills. Marcy and Yuvette did not graduate but seem to have quite high literacy skills. This lack of equivalence between schooling and literacy is also indicated nationally in data about GED candidates. A recent study[9] shows that in 1989, 83.8 percent of GED candidates reported studying for the test (either through classes, TV or on their own), an average of 30.5 hours. This is not enough time to make substantial gains in reading levels. It suggests that many GED candidates spent a minimal amount of time preparing for the test, and were, in effect, walking around without a high school diploma but with quite high literacy skills. Similarly a substantial number of high school graduates have quite low literacy skills, like Les and Lisa.

[9]American Council on Education, GED Profiles: Adults in Transition, No. 1, Sep. 1990, p.2

Technology -- What do People Use in Everyday Life?

2. How do technologies other than literacy expand or diminish the role of literacy in these adults' everyday lives?

As we examine the relationship of literacy and technology in these people's lives, we see few ways that technology either substitutes for literacy, or demands increased literacy. Their use of technology is somewhat limited, but access does not seem limited primarily by lack of literacy. All had some consumer electronics, if only a television and stereo. Most also had used, if not owned, a VCR, a microwave, video games, remote control devices. Tom, Maria, and Les said they could operate equipment or power tools. But none seemed to use automated teller machines or computerized information systems (like card catalogs). And their experience with computers was minimal. Only Maria and Yuvette had used computers at work in a very limited way. Les and Lisa expressed discomfort with computers. Marcy and Tom did not ever seem to have been in a situation where they had come into contact with computers.

However, for the most part, literacy does not seem to be the major factor limiting people's use of such technology as they have access to. Far more important is income: many of those we interviewed simply could not afford VCRs, microwaves, computer games and the other technological trappings of our age. The use of automated telling machines in banks becomes irrelevant to those who live in a cash-based economy, with no bank account.

But if these adults are not participating fully in the computer revolution, several have experienced another revolution in technology use in their lives. Some of the people we profiled, although not very old, have moved in their lifetimes from an essentially nineteenth century agrarian world into an industrialized one. Marcy grew up, as she says, "*back in the sticks.*" No TV, an old battery radio, wood stove, carrying water from the spring. Lisa and Maria grew up in similar rural situations.

The technology in Tom's present life seems little different from that Marcy describes for her childhood. The stove is electric, a TV and refrigerator have been added, but there is still no inside water, no bathroom, no car. But the absence of new technology in Tom's life says more about his poverty than his lack of literacy. Others in rural areas, like Marcy in her later years, master VCRs, satellite dishes, microwave ovens and remote controls as readily as do their urban kin. Marcy's limited literacy skills did not prevent her from learning to use the satellite dish (although, in a way familiar to us all, her children mastered it first). But lightning struck it, there was no money to replace it, so that was the end of that technological innovation.

Although literacy difficulties are not in themselves necessarily a major barrier to technology use, there may be specific barriers erected by limited literacy. For example, Tom's limited literacy is a barrier to his use of a car, because he cannot get a driver's license. But on the whole, the adults we profile have learned to operate most of the technology they need or to which they have access.

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Technology may expand or diminish the role of literacy in everyday life, by heightening literacy demands or by substituting for literacy. For these six people, the technology to which they have access does not seem to place undue demands on their literacy abilities, or to be significantly limited by their literacy difficulties. As the next section describes, they also make only limited use of technology as a substitute for literacy.

Literacy, Technology and Access to Information

A potentially important role of both literacy and technology in people's lives is as a source of information. TVs, radios, computers, telephones, VCRs, all enable people to gain information. So do books, newspapers, magazines, owner's manuals, food labels, prescription labels, maps and phone books. The people we interviewed varied in their capacity to use these sources of information, although for the most part their access to and use of print-based information was fairly limited. There seems to be a pattern: those who desire information about news and current events both read and watch news shows on TV. Those who are not interested in the ways of the world do neither.

Although Les watches television, he does not watch the news, or listen to it on the radio, and the family takes no newspapers or magazines. He has little interest in what's happening outside his own circle. He gets information he needs for his work and family chores by asking those who know, guessing and watching others. Tom reads little, has no newspapers or magazines in the house, and watches only a little television -- baseball or football games.

Yuvette can read but doesn't care to. She watches the news occasionally on TV, but does not read newspapers. Like Les, she has no interest in current events. When she needs information (for example, in her work at Shackney's), her reading skills are adequate.

In contrast, Marcy regularly reads the two local newspapers, a weekly tabloid and Reader's Digest. Her main interest in the newspapers is not in current world events but deaths, horoscopes and court cases. She watches the news on television, and around the time of the interviews had followed, like the rest of us, the Thomas hearings.

Lisa too talked about these hearings and Anita Hill's testimony. Although her literacy skills are limited, Lisa has no problems with getting the information she needs. She reads directions on things she buys, reads the news insert that comes with her phone bill and church bulletins. She uses a dictionary regularly to prepare for Sunday School lessons. She used a map of Knoxville and newspaper advertisements to find the apartment she now lives in, when she had to sell her house. Although there are few print materials in the home, if her children have a school assignment which involves research, she takes them to the library.

Maria uses a variety of means to get information she needs. She is the best "plugged in" to a network of helping agencies of any of the people we profiled. If she receives mail she cannot read, she says, *"I don't leave the letter out of my sight. I take it to people I trust."* The agency personnel she deals with are familiar with the plight of migrants and involved in the migrant community. But Maria also has other, more independent, ways of getting information, which are primarily oral. At the migrant health clinic she is careful to get the

doctors and nurses to explain to her clearly the tests and medicines prescribed. She memorizes much of what she needs to know, and for the rest, depends on an oral culture in which she asks people to explain how things work, or what she needs to do. She is neither afraid to ask for help nor intimidated by technology.

Information comes to the people we interviewed, like most of us, in a curious mixture of the modern (electronic media) and the archaic ("show me"). Most of them have telephones, and use the telephone to stay in touch with family (and since they say they do not write letters, the telephone functions as a substitute for literacy). Their use of electronic media may not be very different than for other Americans. They do not seem to depend on television in any way. There was no reference to the use of tape recorders as a memory aid or for listening to "books" on tape. None appear to be aware that their access to information is seriously limited by their literacy skills. And although we may perceive their access to and use of information to be rather narrow, it reflects the way they see and live their lives in relation to the outside world.

ATTITUDES & EXPECTATIONS ABOUT LITERACY & TECHNOLOGY

3. What expectations and beliefs do these adults hold about literacy and other technologies used for literacy?

A common stereotype of the adult with limited literacy is of someone who hides his or her lack of literacy and at the same time does not value literacy and education, at least for their families. There are internal contradictions in this stereotype -- why hide something if you place no value on it? There is some indication among these six adults that the former may be true to some extent: several expressed their embarrassment about not being able to read well. There is no evidence that they do not value literacy and education -- indeed there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary.

The two men are the poorest readers and the two who expressed most embarrassment about not being able to read. Les was hesitant to apply for jobs which involved a written application. Tom has never gone back to take the driver's test after his first embarrassing failure. Lisa, too, talked about feeling bad at not being able to read the books she wanted and the frustration she perceived in others when she asked for help.

In contrast, neither Marcy who reads quite well except for some *"long words,"* nor Maria who reads poorly, expressed any embarrassment about their literacy limitations. If they need help reading, or more likely in writing, they ask for it from family or other helpers. In general it seems that their limited reading abilities or lack of high school diploma are perceived by all these people as problems, at least in terms of employment, but not as really debilitating factors in their lives.

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TABLE 2. FEELINGS, ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT LITERACY

TOM	Resentment toward school and teachers because he does not read well Confusion about why he did not learn to read Belief that he could have a better job, "carpenter work or something," if he read better Desire to read and belief that he could learn if taught right Embarrassment at not being able to read Confidence in being able to learn from others how to do things
MARCY	Some ambivalence about modern life in general, mobility, television, lack of hard work, people having it "too easy" Confidence in her ability to learn, as in Nurse's Aide class
YUVETTE	Blames herself for not graduating Believes that a high school diploma would help her get a better job, although vague about what that could be Perceives no limitations from her literacy No problems with learning new technology
LES	Resentment at barriers created by lack of literacy Discomfort with reading At one time embarrassed to ask for help with reading, but no longer Hesitant to work with computers Belief that if he could read more he could "better" himself
LISA	Worry about making a mistake on computerized cash register, fear of "messing up" Satisfaction with her ability to work with people Depression, frustration, embarrassment about not being able to read well But also positive feelings about her ability to organize and function her daily life, and support her children's schooling Comfortable with home technology
MARIA	Confidence in her ability to learn Sees reading and writing as a means to personal goals, to settle down in a town she likes, and to get a job helping others

In contrast to this perception of their limited literacy being a problem in their lives, most of the people we profiled have confidence in their ability to learn practical skills, and have positive feelings about their abilities in everyday life. Tom knows he can learn from others how to do things he needs. Lisa is proud of her ability to organize her budget and run her household. These are people who do "function" well, and know it.

Value of Education

All the people we profiled value education and literacy, perhaps having unrealistic expectations of the difference it could make in their own and their children's economic situations. In a variety of ways they are working to promote their children's education: transferring their children to what they perceive to be better schools, looking over

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schoolwork, helping with assignments, visiting the schools, taking their children to the library. All of these parents not only love their children, they want them to have a better life, and they value education because they see it as the key to that better life.

When they examine their own educational histories, three seem to understand why they read as they do. Marcy and Maria both received limited schooling due to health problems and economic circumstances. Yuvette puts primary blame on her own lack of interest in high school for her failure to finish. The other three seem uncertain as to why they have such difficulty reading. They describe themselves as "slow." They attended school, and both Les and Lisa graduated. But they did not learn to read beyond a very basic level and they don't understand why.

Attitudes toward Technology

It is more difficult to determine any general expectations of the technologies which might be used for literacy since they have such limited access. For the most part, the people we profiled have few fears or apprehensions about the technology they have encountered or expect to encounter. Like Maria, they expect to be able to work it out, even if it takes a while.

Neither do they seem to have expectations about how technology impacts their limited literacy. Although they all watch some television, and to some extent it provides information which might otherwise be obtained by reading, they do not seem to perceive it as an alternative or substitute for literacy. They seem comfortable with technology as they have experienced it, but have little sense about it transforming their world.

LITERACY DEMANDS

4. Are the perspectives and expectations of those with limited literacy skills at variance with societal demands? What are those demands and who is making them?

In a print-based society, almost everyone experiences some literacy demands which they have difficulty meeting. It may be tax returns or warranty deeds, scientific articles or medical records, but most of us are "illiterate" in something. The people we profiled also identified literacy demands which they have difficulty meeting (summarized in Table 3). However, these literacy demands seem fairly limited. In their everyday lives, neither extensive use nor extensive demands for literacy are made.

TABLE 3. LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY DEMANDS WHICH PRESENT DIFFICULTIES

	LITERACY DEMANDS	TECHNOLOGY DEMANDS
TOM	HOME Bills and mail Driver's manual and test Newspaper Some papers from school Bible WORK Labels on agriculture chemicals	
MARCY	HOME Some children's school work Forms: insurance, taxes etc.	HOME Satellite dish
YUVETTE	HOME Contracts for rental furniture	
LES	HOME Mail Bills Letters from school Instructions for appliances Application form for Bowling League WORK Job application forms Customers' addresses and directions Test for electrician's license	HOME Automatic teller machine at bank Vehicles with computer technology
LISA	HOME Information about candidates in elections Some product directions Sunday School lessons Children's school work	WORK Computerized cash register
MARIA	HOME Mail and bills Child's school work Health-related information Driver's test WORK Forms and applications Writing phone messages	

For the most part their literacy demands on-the-job are limited. Les is most hindered at work by his limited reading ability. He is able to handle the limited reading and writing he must do as his job is now arranged, but his inability to take the electrician's test places severe restrictions on how he works and how much he is paid. Tom is able to do the farm work he encounters, but he says he guesses at times when applying fertilizer and pesticides.

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He certainly does not read the safety information on the labels. Lisa and Yuvette both have sales forms and computerized registers at work. Yuvette seems to have had no trouble, but the written work is a challenge for Lisa and she avoids the register. Marcy's work has few literacy demands and she meets them easily.

In both work and home domains, people have devised strategies to meet common literacy demands. They may have a regular "reader" or writer (usually a spouse or sister), they may have learned to recognize formats for bills, they may ask for explanations, observe or guess. However the means (to be detailed further in the Synthesis section), the people we profiled have everyday literacy strategies which work for them.

Although these literacy demands are neither very high level nor extensive, their literacy limitations seem to have encouraged development of a great deal of practical problem solving ability. In both work and everyday life, situations which might seem to demand higher literacy skills than these adults possess are dealt with through "practical problem solving."

Problem Solving in Everyday Life

Our literature review included research in cognitive psychology on "practical intelligence." Ethnographic research by Scribner, Lave and others highlights the level of expertise people have in solving problems in their everyday lives, from work to grocery shopping.[10] Experienced workers consistently devise "least effort" solutions to quite complex mathematical operations demanded by their work. Grocery shoppers use estimation to gauge best buys with accuracy. The same workers and shoppers may perform rather poorly on pencil and paper tests designed to assess the skills they use so well in practical operations. The research suggests that while specific and selected use of text material may help effective practical problem solving, the latter is not at all tied to general literacy skills.

We too found examples of "practical problem solving" using cognitive processes including math. Tom explained to the interviewer how he estimated his bid for cutting a field of tobacco.

> *You count one row, we always count one row, and if you got, say, 100 sticks in a row, and you got 20 stick rows, that'd be 2000 sticks ... some rows might have a stick shorter or somethin' like that, and we guess at it a little bit, might lose a stick, might gain a stick, we always give 'em pretty good guess at it.*

Tom also estimates the rate to apply soda and fertilizer to a piece of land for tobacco growing, at the rate of 500 lbs. soda and 1500 lbs. fertilizer to the acre. Since plots of farm

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[10] See, for example, Sylvia Scribner, "Studying working intelligence," in Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave (Eds.) Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 9-40; and Jean Lave, Michael Murtaugh and Olivia de la Rocha, "The dialectic of arithmetic in grocery shopping," in ibid, pp. 67-94.

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land are often irregular sizes and shapes, it requires a good eye and a lot of practice to make good estimates. The agricultural extension agent confirmed the practical problem solving abilities of farmers with low literacy: *"They've got it upstairs, using human computers."*

Les makes similar educated guesses in measuring electrical cable. He "walks it" out the length of the room, or the area across which it is to be run, adds what is needed on the walls. It usually comes out quite accurately.

Both Lisa and Maria get a sense of achievement from their ability to work out their household budget, and shop effectively.

> *I do pretty good in budgeting myself in stores and around the house, you know, paying bills and what have you. My daughter say I can go to the store with 50 cents and bring back fish and toilet paper and butter, and just everything for 50 cents.*

Maria also prides herself on her shopping and cash-stretching skills. *"I go by myself because I know how much money I have, and as I select the items I add in my mind the amount. If I take someone with me they will distract me with conversation."* She does not make grocery lists, but relies entirely on her memory.

These adults with low literacy skills appear to use most of the same strategies for grocery shopping also used by the middle class, educated shoppers of Lave, Murtaugh and de la Rocha's research. They go to familiar stores, buy familiar goods, and do price comparisons on selected items. Tom usually goes to the grocery store himself, because he thinks he gets better bargains than his wife can. Despite his very limited reading skills, he compares prices, and knows the words for familiar products (like brands of soda pop).

Like the others we profiled, Les' ability to resolve many of the problems he encounters in his life, from assembling model cars to getting a better education for his children, does not appear to be significantly limited by his literacy skill. *"I put model cars together my whole life not by reading the instructions ... by looking at the picture."*

Indeed, literacy may not help their ability to solve problems in their lives. Yuvette knows that buying her couch and chair via a rent-to-own company is costing her more than if she had the cash, or could get credit from a furniture store. But *"I want something nice so bad"* and she cannot get credit. She was shocked when she and the interviewer used a calculator to get the total cost of buying an $880 bedroom suite through rent-to-own -- a whopping $1,800. Yuvette vowed she would *"try my best"* not to buy that, but with her strong desire for some nice things, and with few options, she recognizes she might well be tempted.

The literacy demands in the everyday lives of these six people are primarily ones they have worked out ways to meet. However, the demands are quite limited, especially in the domain of work. A bigger question is how much they have limited themselves or been

limited by their literacy in their expectations for themselves, in their jobs and income-generating capacity, in their readiness to engage in further education and training, and in their social and community relationships.

Economics and Work -- Living on the Edge

All the people profiled in this section work and have tried a wide variety of the lower skilled jobs available in their communities (see Table 4). But for the most part they have not held jobs which enable them to live with even a margin of comfort. They may not be underemployed in terms of hours worked, but they may well be underemployed in terms of their needs and abilities. The impact of literacy varies from one to another.

TABLE 4. WORK EXPERIENCES

TOM	Laborer for tree company, cutting and spraying growth around power lines and road verges Laborer, loading tobacco at warehouse Farm laborer, especially in tobacco
MARCY	Farm work when young Janitor at a school Housekeeper for an elderly woman
YUVETTE	Fast food restaurant Day care center Waitress at Shackney's restaurant Bagging groceries
LES	Delivery boy Laborer in shipping dept. of manufacturing plant Electrician Other jobs on the side in home repair
LISA	Factory in Mississippi making thermostats (6 mo., left when pregnant) Factory in Knoxville making fish hooks and bait (3 wks) Levi Strauss jeans factory (3 wks) Deli counter (4 mo.) Cafeteria in elementary school (1 yr) Other short-term jobs - church-run day care center, selling Avon Products, Temporary Services Sales clerk in department store (14 mo. to date)
MARIA	Migrant farm worker Dry cleaners Assembly line work Nurse's aide Mechanic's assistant in repair shop Auto parts store

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As Tom says, *"It's kinda hard on me every day, 'cause I never know where I'm gonna get ahold of the next penny at, and I know they [the children] need somethin' all the time."* His part-time and sporadic farm work keep him on the margins in terms of cash income. He says that it would help him, in tobacco farming, to be able to read the names of the chemicals which have to be applied, but it seems that literacy is not his major handicap. Usually he works with someone who does read -- his crew boss who is an old school friend, or his father. To become a farmer, rather than a farm laborer, he would need, not literacy, but land.

For Les, his literacy difficulties have proved a decisive limitation to advancement in his job. Les could earn much higher wages as a certified electrician, and his lack of reading skill is all that prevents him from passing the required tests. His practical skills as an electrician are high, but he cannot get the certification.

Lisa talks about her hesitation to use the cash register at her department store, although it is not clear that her literacy limitations are the major reason (since she also expresses concern about handling cash and being accused of theft). Nor does this avoidance seem to endanger her job. Her other encounters with technology at home (VCRs, microwave, Atari games, electric organs and remote controls) have presented her no problems. She generally learns slowly, and requires extra time and attention to learn new things. Perhaps she has not had the individual teaching she would need to use the cash register at work.

For the others, the work-related impacts of literacy limitations are less clear. Although Maria's husband had completed two years at a community college, lack of jobs in their home town forced him into the migrant stream. Her own more recent experiences demonstrate how hard it is to leave the migrant stream, settle down, and find a good job.

None of the people we profiled have encountered the substantial technological changes at work which others in this country have experienced over the last few years. The literacy and technology demands of all their jobs are very limited. Although we did not conduct detailed observations at their work, it seems likely from the interviews that none of them come close to the average reading-on-the-job times of 113 minutes a day, which Mikulecky found.[11] Their jobs are much more like the service jobs Spencer studied, which presented fewer and easier reading demands than either more skilled blue collar or white collar jobs.[12]

Technology demands in their jobs are also limited, and for the most part are not the "new technology" demands of automation and computers. Most of the people we profiled are experiencing the bottom end of the job market in their area.

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[11] Larry Mikulecky, "Job literacy: The relationship between school preparation and workplace actuality," Reading Research Quarterly, XVII(3), 1982, p. 418.

[12] Shirley Jean Spencer, Occupational Literacy as a Variable Construct in the Mineral Extraction/Energy and Service Industries, Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas A & M, August 1987, p. 3.

Is this simply a matter of their lack of literacy skills, or the credential of a high school diploma? If they did improve their skills, get a GED, would higher-level jobs open up for them? And if they did, who would fill the large numbers of low-skill, low wage jobs without which our economy and society could not function? We will return to this issue in the Synthesis section.

BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES TO LEARNING

5. What kinds of incentives would lead adults to further their own literacy skills and knowledge? What barriers stand in their way?

In order to understand barriers and incentives to learning, we look back at their experiences with school, and how they came to be adults with low literacy skills despite many years of schooling. We also look at their hopes and aspirations and their plans and attempts to meet society's demands for higher skills and credentials.

Educational Background - Schooling

The schooling experiences of the people we profiled, listed in **Table 5**, will be familiar to many participants in adult basic education programs. Pregnancy and family moves impacted on schooling, childhood illnesses took their toll, and teachers for the most part paid little attention to those who were falling behind.

TABLE 5. SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

TOM	Left school in 9th or 10th grade when he was 17. Reading at 3rd grade level or below, but stronger in math. Switched schools several times as family moved.
MARCY	Left school at 17 in 7th grade. Missed two years of school, because of rheumatic fever. Walked two miles to catch school bus.
YUVETTE	Left school in 12th grade, no diploma. Liked math. Good grades in elementary school. Not many friends, did not participate, hated school, didn't go a lot. Got pregnant at 16 but stayed in school. Left when mother moved to Atlanta.
LES	Has a high school diploma but was advanced rapidly through last four grades. Changed schools frequently. Pivotal negative memory in sixth grade. One positive memory of a teacher who showed him how to do things.
LISA	Graduated high school in rural Mississippi, but says she stopped learning in sixth grade - math problems, gave up, did not understand, teachers overloaded. Describes herself as "slow reader." Father taught her to tell time in 8th grade.
MARIA	Went to English-speaking school to 3rd grade, though home was Spanish speaking. Then had a break (because of illness and parents' travelling) then went back through 6th grade. Dropped out at 13 in 6th grade to help mother run family fruit stand because father was ill.

Marcy grew up back in a "holler" and had to walk two miles to get the school bus. Rheumatic fever kept her out of school a lot, and she left at 17, when she was in seventh

grade. Maria also was ill often as a child and missed a great deal of school after third grade. She gave up on school when she was in sixth grade, to help her mother with the family fruit stand, as her father was very ill. The family's migrant life also disrupted her schooling repeatedly: she only attended school when they were back home in Mercedes, Texas, and they were often away for several months at a time working the harvests.

Even for those who were not migrant farmworkers, family moves were a major factor impacting their schooling. Tom's family moved to Ohio and then back to Virginia. He found it difficult to switch between the demands of the two systems, and thought he was doing better in Ohio. Les' father worked as a dairyman on several farms, and Les attended "a whole lot" of elementary schools. Moving schools frequently had a negative impact on Les' success in school, as it did for many adults with literacy problems.

Although the problems may begin in elementary school, the people we profiled often remembered the transition into middle school as being a turning point in their schooling. Like several of the people we profile, sixth grade was a pivotal time for Les. He was having difficulties with math, and his teacher started hitting him over the head with the math book. From then on, Les stopped trying. Yuvette made good grades in elementary school, but didn't like school later, and didn't go a lot. Lisa, too, says she stopped learning after sixth grade, although she received a high school diploma. *"It was like I just couldn't learn anymore, when I reached that sixth grade level ... I guess I just give up on myself."*

Les tells a remarkable story of being held back in grades for several years, being in sixth grade at sixteen, and then being moved very rapidly through to twelfth grade in only two years. For the most part his school memories are dismal, of teachers who had no time to explain things to a slow learner, who expected him to "go back there and figure it out." His one good memory is of a shop teacher who was prepared to do what Les really needed: show him. This continues to be the way that Les learns: *"You show me one time and you won't have to show me nothin' else."*

Tom describes himself as a slow learner. As he remembers it, he was willing to learn, but the teachers did not have patience enough to teach him. He was often sent out on menial tasks, like raking the ballfield. *"They just passed me to get rid of me."*

Lisa also needed extra time and extra help to learn, and she didn't get it either from home or from school. Her one good memory of a learning experience was when her father taught her to tell time in eighth grade. She really wanted to learn at that point, because her boyfriend had given her a watch, and her father took the time she needed to learn.

For Yuvette, getting pregnant at sixteen was not the precipitating factor in her attitude toward schooling that it might have been. She hated school before then, she hated it afterwards, and avoided it as much as she could. But she did stay enrolled until in her twelfth grade year, her mother moved to Atlanta. That was what cost her a diploma. If she had stayed in Knoxville, she says, she could have graduated. But despite an Atlanta adult high school, JTPA classes and Even Start classes, she still does not have a diploma.

Overview

Adult education experiences

All except Les have participated in adult education programs, although we made our contact with only one through an adult education program. As Table 6 shows, like many adults, they move in and out of programs, impelled by other factors in their lives. Their incentives to enroll in adult education programs have been primarily, though not solely, job-related. Tom's experience was not voluntary, and was not continued once he left the correctional institution. But Marcy, Lisa, Yuvette and Maria hope that working toward their GED will help them get a better job, and more stable, less marginal life.

TABLE 6. EXPERIENCES WITH ADULT EDUCATION

	EXPERIENCES	BARRIERS
TOM	7 mo. in class in a correctional institution, reading and spelling. Good experience, although surprised to be told he was only on 3rd grade level	Time Being "bashful" Transportation Impatience/anger
MARCY	10 wk Nurse's Aide course at community college. Several mo. in GED class Interested in continuing a course related to nursing and continuing to work toward her GED	Time - 12 hr work days Location of classes Limited offerings in her community
YUVETTE	Atlanta evening high school, enjoyed accounting class, found others hard JTPA GED classes in Knoxville Even Start Family Literacy classes, which she enjoyed because of the group work Would like to go back because GED is path to a better job	Afraid of bad neighborhood Dependent on public transportation, esp. a problem at night Disengaged, authoritarian teacher Time for job and young children
LES	No adult education experience Has expressed interest in learning to read "to get out of this rat race"	Time - works several jobs and long hours Embarrassment
LISA	GED class (although has her diploma) to better her reading Still interested, perhaps in personal tutor	Summer break Needs individual attention and plenty of time
MARIA	At time of interview, enrolled in High School Equivalency Program (HEP) for migrant workers, an ESL literacy class and JTPA work experience program. Encouraged to try it when her son got GED	Money - stipend not enough to live on Difficulties in breaking out of migrant life for both economic and cultural reasons

Nevertheless, despite the incentive, a complex assortment of barriers stand between them and participation in literacy programs. Time is a premium for several: they work long and irregular hours, they have family responsibilities, many problems to deal with -- Tom says, *"I ain't really got time to sit down."* For Tom, lack of independent transportation is also a

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factor. Both Tom and Les would like to learn to read better, but a sense of pride, and reluctance to admit to others their reading difficulties, get in the way. As Tom says:

> *I'm kinda bashful, you know, 'cause I just won't let anybody come in and try to learn me to read, somethin' like that, 'cause I know it makes them angry and I get angry and I just don't want to do nothin'.*

To be most effective in reaching adults, these profiles indicate, adult basic skills programs need to provide a great deal of support. The support needed is not only in transportation and child-care and other services, but also emotional support. There is a striking contrast for Yuvette between the Even Start class, where she felt part of the family with other parents of young children like herself, and the regular ABE class where she could not connect with either teacher or students. In Even Start, she says: *"You know when we do the work, we help each other, it bein' like a group thing. The teacher, she help you, she be right there helping you."* In the ABE class, however, the teacher *"she would explain a little bit, and then we have to do the work. Maybe if I had another teacher ..."*

Yuvette articulates what she, and probably many others, need from an adult education program: support, encouragement, a feeling of belonging, to be with others like herself. She also needs time to be with her children, as well as time for work. It is not easy for adults whose lives are on the edge to commit to the long-term process of gaining basic skills. Many immediate pressures and problems get in the way.

Adults with low literacy skills face many problems in the rest of their lives which make a commitment to their own education difficult for them: their time is stretched, their family economy is on the edge, they focus on their children's needs rather than their own, and their self esteem is easily damaged by being made to feel stupid. Literacy programs need to provide an encouraging environment for adult learners. Above all they need to feel support, to be part of a "family" or community of learners, and to have the personal attention of a teacher.

LITERACY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

6. How does the use of literacy and technology impact social relationships?

We might expect literacy to impact social relationships in a variety of ways. First, conventional wisdom asserts patterns of inter-generational literacy, in which parents who have low literacy levels are unable to help their children be successful in school, and so pass the problems of illiteracy from generation to generation. Second, Fingeret and other researchers have described the importance of social networks to adults with low literacy

skills, to enable them to exchange other services for reading.[13] Finally, we might expect literacy limitations to have an impact on how people relate to their broader community and to citizenship.

Patterns of Intergenerational Literacy: Parents, Siblings, Children

Table 7 outlines the literacy and schooling of three generations of the families of the people we profiled. Perhaps most striking is the overall absence of pattern. At the level of their parents' generation, there does seem to be a pattern. All of their parents' generation had limited schooling, most less than high school level, and usually also limited literacy skill. Limited schooling was probably the norm at that time for residents of the rural communities from which most of our profiles come: whether Mississippi black or Appalachian white, most working class people did not complete high school in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's.

Furthermore, as in the present, limited schooling sometimes masks well developed literacy skills. Lisa's mother *"read a lot,"* although she had left school in eighth grade, and was well able to take care of a wide range of the family's needs. Tom reports that his parents could *"read pretty good."*

If the pattern of inter-generational literacy were accurate, we would expect that all the siblings of the people we interviewed would have literacy difficulties. This is not consistent. Tom's sisters all graduated high school, but his twin brother dropped out at the same time as himself, although with somewhat better reading skills. None of Marcy's sisters graduated, although one sister has higher skills than Marcy does, and helps her with filling in forms and with getting around. Lisa's siblings graduated, and three attended some college. None of Maria's siblings graduated. There is not a clear pattern in this generation.

Nor is there a distinct pattern among the spouses of the people we profiled. The two men have spouses who are the "readers" of the family although they did not graduate. Lisa and Maria had spouses who were much better educated than themselves. Yuvette has no spouse. Marcy's spouse had fewer years in school than her, and skills lower than her own.

Among the children of the people we profile, there is great variation in terms of their success in school. Some are still too young to tell whether they will do well in school: Yuvette's son is still in pre-school; Tom's children are in kindergarten or younger. Those who are older have not consistently had problems in school. Lisa's children are both college-bound, and have done well in school. Marcy's oldest daughter left school to get

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[13] Hanna Arlene Fingeret, The Illiterate Underclass: Demythologizing the American Stigma, Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1982; and "Social network: A new perspective on independence and illiterate adults," Adult Education Quarterly, 33(3), Spring 1983, pp. 133-146; and also Linda Zeigahn, "The formation of literacy perspective," in Robert A. Fellenz and Gary J. Conti (Eds.) Adult Learning in the Community, Bozeman, Montana: Center for Adult Learning Research, Montana State University, June 1990.

TABLE 7. FAMILY LITERACY

	TOM	MARCY	YUVETTE	LES	LISA	MARIA
MOTHER	No H.S. diploma, Could read	Almost no education, maybe 3rd grade	6th or 7th grade	Does not know, could read	8th grade, read well	7th grade
FATHER	No H.S. diploma, could read	Long dead, educ. like mother	Less than 6th grade	May have grad. H.S.	1st grade, non-reader	8th grade
SIBLINGS	5 sisters all grad. H.S. One twin brother dropped out in 9th grade at 17	None of 3 sisters graduated, although some have higher skills	One brother	5, one mentally handicapped, others	6 siblings, youngest three have some college	8 siblings, none grad. H.S.
SPOUSE	8th grade, reader	5th grade (long separated)	None	8th grade, reader	First husband grad. H.S. but with low reading; second was "real smart" a good reader	H.S. diploma and 2 years college
SELF	Dropped out in 9th grade at 17	7th grade	Left without grad. in 12th grade	Has H.S. diploma, maybe 3rd grade reading level	Has H.S. diploma, stopped learning in 6th grade	Dropped out in 6th grade at 13, around 2nd/3rd grade reading in English. Does not read Spanish
CHILDREN	One in kindergarten, two pre-school	Elder daughter left H.S. to get married, younger daughter grad. H.S., son will grad. this year	Daughter is 9, has problems in school. Son in Head Start, some developmental delays	Daughter makes A's and B's in school, son in remedial reading program	Daughter grad. H.S., now in community college, son doing well in H.S. but "slow reader"	None have grad. H.S., one son has GED, youngest daughter still in school

married before graduation, although she was doing quite well in school; her middle daughter did graduate, and her son will graduate this year. Les' daughter makes A's and B's in high school.

But some of the children have had problems: Yuvette's daughter has been the center of a tug of war between mother and grandmother, and has had problems in school as well as speech problems; Yuvette's pre-school son has developmental delays. Les' fourth grade son is in a Chapter One reading program, although he plans to go to college. None of Maria's children have graduated high school, although one got his GED. She pins her hopes on her youngest daughter, now in fourth grade.

Among this group of adults with low literacy skills, we find no consistent patterns of inter-generational transfer of illiteracy. While we studied only six adults, the lack of a clear pattern does suggest that the reality may be more complex than conventional wisdom suggests.

Literacy and Social Networks

These profiles are striking in their depiction of lives narrowly focused on family and kin. The people we profiled have a strong family priority. They demonstrate that while the forms may be changing, family values continue to be strong in this society. The form of the family may be multi-generational (as in Marcy's three generation family), the traditional nuclear family (Tom) or extended family (Les's immediate family together with his handicapped brother), or single parent with children, sometimes with a boyfriend (Lisa, Yuvette and Maria). But whatever their concept of family is, all the people we interviewed focus primarily on that family. They all value their children and want something better for them than they have had themselves.

In some ways their literacy limitations tie them even more tightly to that close family network. Many depend on family members for help in meeting literacy demands, and for other kinds of help, including finding jobs. Marcy found her present job through her ex-brother-in-law who happened to live next door to one of the children of the elderly woman whom she looks after. In small rural communities it is common for "who you know" to be more important than "what you know" in getting a job. Even in a large city Les, severely limited in his ability to seek jobs, found work through similar means. Lisa, as the most outwardly involved of those we interviewed, is also the only one who does not have an extended family nearby. The others depend on extended family networks for much of their lives.

Literacy and Community Involvement -- Citizenship

Beyond the family, most of the people we profiled have little interaction. Only Lisa votes regularly, attends PTA meetings, actively seeks news of the world, and participates regularly in church. Marcy has voted twice in her life, but sees little point. She has a

passive interest in the news of her small town (scanning the deaths and court cases in the local newspaper), but apparently little active involvement. Yuvette is perhaps the most self-isolated. Although her two best women friends are active members in a neighborhood organization, Yuvette has never attended a meeting, nor even the community festival which the group organized. In a community which she seems to feel to be alien and threatening, it is a virtue to stay home and stay out of trouble.

Both Les and Marcy have some recreational activities (bowling and dancing) which extend beyond family networks. But, except for Lisa, none of the people we profiled either vote, participate actively in a community organization or church, or appear to have much interest in the rest of the world. It is hard to disentangle the factors which may contribute to this. Their limited literacy probably does limit their access to and use of information about the broader world. They also devote substantial amounts of time and energy to surviving -- long work days, raising families, shopping for bargains, taking care of others. There is not much time or energy left over for citizenship.

But perhaps more than time and energy, it is the lack of perceived efficacy of citizenship activities that prevents people from becoming involved. Like many poor people they feel quite powerless, and do not expect that their voice, their vote, or their actions could make any substantial difference either in their own lives or in their communities. Marcy sums it up when she says "*why vote?*" People with very limited time and energy do get involved when they think it makes a difference. Most of the people we profiled don't expect to make a difference.

CONCLUSIONS

These profiles provide an in-depth view of the lives of six people in our region who have low literacy skills. They offer a rich description of their uses of literacy and technology in everyday life, the ways in which their literacy skills limit them, and the strategies they have devised to cope in a print-based world. The profiles support a social contextual view of literacy: what literacy means for each person varies, and their literacy demands and uses vary according to their context. The social contextual concept of literacy, derived primarily from developments in cognitive psychology and socio-linguistics, views literacy as socially constructed, culturally negotiated and tightly bound up with the context of its use.[14]

These individuals vary in how, what, where, and when they use literacy. Different demands and uses of literacy may exist for the same person in different domains of their lives, and at different stages of their life history.

[14] Key work in this area includes Jenny Cook-Gumperz (Ed.) The Social Construction of Literacy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave (Eds.), Everyday Cognition: Its Development and Context, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984; and John Szwed, "The ethnography of literacy," in Rogoff and Lave.

Overview

The patterns of literacy use we found do not seem closely associated with literacy skills, although clearly skill level plays a role. Someone like Yuvette may have fairly high level skills but be almost a-literate. Someone like Lisa may have much lower skills, but may need to use text, or even read for pleasure. Literacy skills, literacy demands, cultural and social contexts, expectations and attitudes are all inter-connected in quite complex ways.

Our profiles put literacy in its place as only one of the factors impacting people's lives. It is not clear for most people that a gain in literacy skills on its own would make substantial differences to their lives. Perhaps it would help them get a better job, perhaps enable them to move out of poverty. That is most likely to be true for Les, if gains in literacy skills enabled him to get an electrician's license and command higher wages. But without some major changes on a national level (for example, national health insurance and a minimum wage which is a living wage) they would most likely simply move from one sector of the working poor into another.

Everyone we interviewed would like to improve their skills and get more education. Not everyone can find a way to do so without other changes in their social context. Such changes vary from solving transportation problems to finding time between working and caring for family. Their experiences suggest that adults with low literacy have considerable practical skills at managing their everyday lives, that they have developed their own ways of learning new skills and new tasks, and that the formal education system does not fit these very well.

In their everyday lives, the people we profiled rely on memory, educated guess work, trial and error, and social relationships to cope with the demands of a print-based society. They learn through demonstration, explanation, taking extra time, using the support of friends and family. They learn what they need to learn in order to do some immediate task. In contrast, formal education programs tend to isolate them from their social network, expect them to learn for the sake of learning, and do not often permit them to utilize their own learning strategies.

In the Synthesis section of this report, we will review the literacy strategies and learning strategies which all of the people we profiled have developed, and draw implications from them for adult education policies, programs and approaches.

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CALIFORNIAN PROFILES

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INTRODUCTION:
THE MULTICULTURAL IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF CALIFORNIA

The six profiles from the West Coast offered here serve to represent the individual lives of immigrants now living the complex, multicultural reality of California. Migration, adversity, bilingualism, cultural domination, underemployment, cultural isolation, limited English language proficiency, and hope are living issues for these new residents of the most populous state in the country. Due to an historically massive, sustained influx of immigrants and the consequent rapid expansion of its culturally diverse population, California is no longer what it used to be, and no one is sure what it will become. What is certain is that a complex process of economic, social, and cultural change is well under way, occurring too rapidly to be well understood or accommodated by public policy makers or service providers.

A recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle[1] sought to characterize the magnitude of the culture shift currently under way in the state:

o By the year 2000 there will be no cultural majority in California -- all cultural groups will be "minorities."

o Latinos will comprise about one-third of the state's population in the year 2000.

o Almost two-thirds of California's legal immigrants in the past ten years came from Asia, while about a quarter came from Latin America.

o Legal and illegal foreign immigration to California was estimated at 2.3 million in the 1970's, at 3.1 million in the 1980's, and is projected to be 4.1 million in the 1990's.

o From 1990 to 2000 graded enrollment in California's public schools is expected to grow by 48.1 per cent, from 4.8 million students to 7.2 million students, many of them the children from immigrant homes.

o Many adult schools and community colleges throughout the state maintain waiting lists of hundreds or even thousands of immigrants waiting to enroll for ESL instruction

o More than one million illegal immigrants granted legal status under 1986 "Amnesty" legislation will soon be eligible to bring parents and children to the United States.

o California's governor, with limited supporting evidence, has sought to "blame" California's budget problems in part on a growing immigrant population.

o In contrast, some experts, including conservative, laissez-faire economists, argue that immigrants, with their willingness to work hard for low wages, are "good for" the United States economy.

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[1] December 23, 1991.

○ Most immigration projections for California are probably conservative and understated, for they do not take into account secondary migration to the state by immigrants who have first settled in other states.

The six individual profiles presented here offer a profoundly human view of what it is like to be on the inside of a major cultural and demographic shift. They also offer a picture of the complex and important interactions of literacy and technology in these and other immigrants' lives. Literacy -- in terms of the English language proficiency that one needs for successful everyday interactions -- looms large for these immigrants, and they are keenly aware of how literacy and English proficiency are closely tied to their lives, their job prospects, and their families' chances for prosperity.

Without ethnographic profiles such as these, it is difficult to gain a sense of the nature of life as an immigrant in California, even if one is inclined to do so. Simply reading the statistics cannot suffice. It is remarkably easy, in fact, for members of the dominant [if no longer majority] Anglo culture in California to continue to live with only an incidental understanding of the diverse immigrant cultural communities that surround them. The impacts of this massive cultural shift can remain largely invisible for many "regular, mainstream" Californians to ignore in their everyday lives, for it is their culture which remains dominant, their culture which the TV broadcasts, their culture which the print media largely presents, and their culture which the workplace rewards. But cultural boundaries and cultural change, while invisible to some, clearly exist and present powerful barriers to immigrants, often serving to hamper the human growth and development that are ultimately needed for collective economic growth and development.

These profiles offer insight into patterns of literacy and technology in the everyday lives and work lives of members of some very diverse immigrant communities in the San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California. The profiles come from several of the major immigrant groups that have impacted California in the last decade or more. The people profiled range from an urban Latino youth who loves video games to a middle-aged Chinatown fish seller who is a former agricultural engineer; from a non-literate North African refugee who now cleans homes for a living to a Russian bookkeeper who used to teach college-level accounting; and from a widowed, "newly-legalized immigrant" Latina who studies building maintenance to a Cambodian refugee who helps other refugees as a bilingual aide in a literacy program.

The subjects of these profiles inhabit realities so diverse that it is hard at times to believe that they could live in the same time and place. But they do, and it is this overwhelming diversity that somehow must be accommodated through new and innovative ways to use -- and to learn to use -- language, literacy, and technology.

Oliver Gonzales is a 17-year-old high school student who lives in San Francisco, California. He was born in Managua, Nicaragua, where he lived until he was 11. His family immigrated to the United States in 1985, first to the Los Angeles area, and then, two years ago, to San Francisco. When Oliver entered sixth grade in Los Angeles he spoke no English. Since that time he has developed a pattern of truancy and low academic performance, and was briefly

a member of a gang. Recently Oliver was transferred from a regular high school to an alternative program because he will not have earned enough credits by the time he is 18 to receive a high school diploma. Use of computer-based literacy instruction is a major component of Oliver's current educational program.

Alicia Lopez, age 47, migrated from her native Mexico to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1981. She lives in a home with her sister's family in South San Francisco and raises her six-year-old grandchild as if she were her own daughter. Until five months ago, Alicia worked as a cook in several food preparation factories. Since nearly all of the employees were Spanish-speaking, she was able to function with very limited English. Alicia recently enrolled in an employment training program where she is learning facility maintenance skills and studying English. Her goal is to find stable employment that would enable her to adopt her two youngest grandchildren, currently in the foster care system because of their mother's drug addiction. While she is determined and capable of mastering new skills and systems, her limited English presents significant barriers to her ability to advance, particularly in the employment arena.

Sokhhoeun is a 38-year-old Cambodian male. He has been in the United States since 1981, when he arrived as a refugee and was resettled in Oakland, California after a grueling, six-year odyssey through Cambodia and northern Thailand. Sokhhoeun lives in the Asian refugee/immigrant community and works as a bilingual aide in a refugee program serving that community. He is married and has three children. Sokhhoeun has had limited formal education: two years as a Buddhist monk in Cambodia; English classes for a few months in Thai refugee camps; and English and vocational training classes in the United States. His work experience includes work as a farmer, diamond prospector, small merchant, warehouse worker, and teacher's aide. He hopes to improve his knowledge of English and medical terminology to get a job as a translator in a health care setting.

Michela Stone is a 32-year-old, single woman refugee from Byelorussia in the western Soviet Union. She has lived in San Francisco for two years and hopes to gain American citizenship. She lives alone in an apartment building and works close by as a bookkeeper in the emigre department of a community center. Her father lives nearby, and she frequently visits him to cook for him. She has an advanced degree in accountancy teaching from the Soviet Union and has experienced little difficulty with either technology or with written English. However, her long working hours and the closeness of the immigrant community make it difficult for her to meet American people and to practice and improve her spoken English. She hopes to be able to get a job teaching accounting in an American community college.

Nura Tola is a 29-year-old female Oromo refugee from the southern area of Ethiopia. She came to the United States in 1990. Nura is married and lives with her husband in the Oromo community in San Jose, California. The number of Oromos residing in San Jose reached 400 at one point in 1990, but decreased to about a 100 when most of the community members moved to other states in search of affordable housing and better employment opportunities. Nura works as a hotel cleaner. She had no formal education in her country, and is literate in neither her native Oromo nor in English. She is currently studying ESL. Nura has no children but plans

to have them when she gets adjusted to the life style in the U.S. She would also like to learn sufficient English to work in the health care field.

David Wong is a male Chinese immigrant, 53 years of age. He is married and has two children, both of whom are now university students. Wong immigrated to the United States in 1983 with his family in order to secure better opportunities for his children's future. Since his arrival in the United States he has worked and lived in San Francisco Chinatown. In China he was an agricultural engineer, having graduated from a technical college. He now works in a fish and poultry store in Chinatown. He has studied English in ESL classes offered by the local community college for several years, and is now attending citizenship classes in the evenings. He has tried unsuccessfully for several years to get a job as a janitor, for he wants a job with benefits and a retirement plan. He is now on the city's civil service list for janitorial jobs, so he is hopeful. He is also working on a novel in Chinese to describe his experiences as an immigrant.

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OLIVER GONZALES

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OLIVER GONZALES

By Sally Ianiro

Oliver Gonzales is a 17 year old high school student who lives in San Francisco, California. He was born in Managua, Nicaragua, where he lived until he was 11. His family migrated to the United States in 1985, first to the Los Angeles area, and then, two years ago, to San Francisco. When Oliver entered sixth grade in Los Angeles he spoke no English. Since that time he has developed a pattern of truancy and low academic performance, and was briefly a member of a gang. Recently Oliver was transferred from a regular high school to an alternative program because he will not have earned enough credits by the time he is 18 to receive a high school diploma.

OLIVER GONZALES AND HIS FAMILY

Oliver is soft-spoken and well-groomed. He is well-mannered in a quiet way and makes little eye contact when he speaks with adults. He wears his hair in a short pony tail. He appears at ease with his peers, and has made several friends at his new school. Although a quick learner in computer class, he is reluctant to admit he has talent. "*Nah,*" he shrugs. "*I just know something.*"

Oliver lives with his mother, two aunts, uncle, paternal grandmother, younger brother, and three younger male cousins. His father lives in Los Angeles and has not lived with the family for the past two years. Nevertheless, Oliver, his mother, and his brother are living with his father's side of the family. The extended family acknowledges that Oliver's father does not live with them because he is an alcoholic.

His brother, who is 15, and his cousins, aged 13, 12, and 10, all read and write English and Spanish. Oliver speaks Spanish with the adults in his family and English or Spanish with his brother and cousins.

As the oldest child in a household where none of the adults speak or read English fluently, it is Oliver's responsibility to act as interpreter for the family. He accompanies other family members to medical, legal, and financial appointments. He also reads and translates the family's mail and notes sent home from school.

Oliver describes how he spends his leisure time:

I go out with my friends in the afternoons. I go out with my girlfriend on weekends. Everything's all right ... We go to the movies or walk around the city. We go to Fisherman's Wharf, Oakland, to some other cities. We take the BART.

Although Oliver is generally upbeat and positive about his life, he is worried about his brother's involvement in a gang. Raul, a sophomore at Mission High School, used to regularly cut classes, and earn C's and D's. This year, the boys' grandmother has been calling the school to check on his attendance, and grades have improved to B's and C's.

I told him to get out [of the gang], but he said, "No. I ain't like that"...I asked him, "What do you like about it?" He says, "I just like it"... Probably [he's in it] 'cause he only wants to hang around with these dudes, and these dudes are from gangs. And they got pretty girls too in the gang ... You know, but he never tells me what he like about the gang. There's nothing funny in that thing. It's all just fighting, that's all.

Oliver's cousins have mixed feelings about school. They were separated from each other, and came to the United States at different times. Axel, 13, and Harry, 10, left Nicaragua when they were four and two years old, and are less fluent in reading and speaking Spanish than the other three boys. They are likely to mix English words in their Spanish conversations at home. Oliver says of Axel, *"He talks like a Chicano and can't read that good in Spanish. My aunt is teaching him to speak better, but he doesn't care about Spanish."* Axel is an average student in his junior high school, but Harry, a fourth grader, dislikes school more than the other boys do. Oliver says, *"He's a bad student. The teacher's always calling my aunt because he talks and doesn't do his work."* Oliver's cousin Alan, in contrast, enjoys school. A sixth grader, aged 12, Oliver says *"He is very talented in school."* He was five when he came to the United States.

While Oliver is quiet and non-aggressive in school, he is proud of holding his own on the streets. Throughout five interviews, he was never more forthcoming than when explaining the reason for having missed one session.

It was like around 11:30 (a.m.) and I was walking on 16th and Mission. I just got out of the bus. By the corner of 16th there was three black boys. So the bigger one he walked up to me and he told me that he liked my jacket. So I told him, "Thank you." And he goes, "I like that jacket and it's gotta be mine." And so I told him, "Take it if you can." Then the other one, that he was around 16, he punched me right in the back of my head.

The incident ended when the police intervened.

They called my parents and told them what happened so the cops told me that it was all right for me because I had witnesses, that I didn't start anything. They were trying to jump me because of my jacket. So they let me go.

Oliver was grateful he was not put in jail.

I just went there to talk. They didn't put the handcuffs on me. They didn't do nothing ...I think it was a bad experience. Police have chased me because of fighting or things like that but this is the first time they catch me. But this time wasn't my fault... That's about it. I've still got my jacket.

Oliver Gonzales

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Oliver lives with his family in the Mission District of San Francisco. They rent a house three blocks from Mission Street, which is the shopping, transportation, and social hub of the Inner Mission District. Mission Street has the feel of a crowded, busy, Latin American city, but it also has a distinctly American commercial flavor, and is sometimes called the "Mission Miracle Mile." Oliver's mother and aunts do not speak English, but are able to get most of the services, entertainment, and goods they need on Mission Street from Spanish-speaking merchants. Occasionally the family shops at the large discount stores on downtown Market Street. Here is how Oliver explains the difference: *"On Mission we use both Spanish and English. But on Market we use just English."*

Historically, the Mission District has been a place where new immigrant groups take root. Irish came first, followed by Mexicans. The most recent groups are Nicaraguan, El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Southeast Asian. There is also a growing African American population in the Inner Mission. Low rents, coffee houses, and inexpensive restaurants also draw a substantial number of college students and artists. But tensions among races, nationalities, and gangs make it a tough place to live. A public housing center four blocks from Oliver's school is plagued with drug-related crime. Like most American inner cities, the Inner Mission has a growing number of homeless people, crack dealers, drug addicts, alcoholics, and prostitutes.

When Oliver's family moved to San Francisco last year from Los Angeles, he enrolled in Mission High School. He has since been transferred to one of the school district's satellite alternative schools. Most of his friends -- other Nicaraguans, Guatemalans and El Salvadorans -- attend Mission, and he still visits friends there and feels he is a part of it. *"There's a lot of fighting,"* he says, *"but we enjoy Mission."*

Oliver and his friends play baseball and basketball in a neighborhood park and go to the Boys' Club a block off Mission Street a couple of times a week. There they play pool, basketball, and video games. But his main activity is "hanging out" with his friends. Their corner is 24th Street and Mission, a few blocks from his home. Asked if his friends constitute a gang, he says, *"No, they're not gangsters, but I have friends from gangs."*

Although Oliver was a member of a gang when he lived in the Los Angeles area, and although his brother is now a member of the 11th Street Posse, Oliver has chosen not to join any of the Mission gangs and seems to co-exist with them with little anxiety on his part.

> *Yeah, they tell me all the time, jump in, jump in! But, nah. I don't like that 'cause that's what my mom tells me all the time, not to get in gangs and things like that ... I know that's not good 'cause gangsters they go to jail every day just wasting their life. Drink, do drugs, rob. That's all what they do. They fight.*

Oliver describes several of the gangs in the Inner Mission:

They don't like each other, I don't know why. Like that gang, 11th Street, and 22nd and Bryant, the Bryants are Salvadorians and Nicaraguans. And the 11th Street are the same thing - Salvadorians and Nicaraguans. And they don't get along. It depends on the color they wear, too... Like 22nd and Bryant, they wear red, red rags. And usually myself I don't like people that wears red rags like that. Like they do. That's why 11th Street wears brown. And I don't like them either ... St. Mary's Posse, that's a different one. This here is Filipinos, Samoans, and Blacks ... Yeah, there're other gangs too, but they're Black... On the 11th Street they got two Black kids but on Bryant they don't got none...They even got Filipino girls on 11th Street.

LIFE HISTORY

Managua, Nicaragua

Oliver was born in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1974, the first of two sons. His father owned a liquor store; his mother worked as a secretary. They lived five or six blocks from his father's store and only a block from a modern shopping mall.

We had a TV. We had a stereo. My mother had a milk shaker and things like that, an iron. Yeah, we had everything... clocks, no video cameras but regular cameras...a stove, refrigerator. My father used to have a gun for self-defense... We had a typewriter but it wasn't an electric one. We didn't have a computer. We didn't have a car.

We were not rich or poor, but we had a house and everything that we needed. We were all right. We were in the middle. In this country we're about the same like Nicaragua.

Oliver sees few differences between the two countries.

Well, it looked like here in San Francisco. They got like old houses, new houses. They got malls, and they got like Mission Street. And they got stores, they got markets and restaurants, just like here. Like San Francisco.

Oliver's father had an 11th-grade education in Nicaragua. His mother graduated from high school and attended a two-year secretarial school. While both parents read and write Spanish well, he says, "*my mother do it better. She's very smart.*"

The Gonzales family moved to southern California, where they had relatives, when Oliver was 11 years old. Not only did his parents feel life in Nicaragua was becoming dangerous, but there was a possibility that his father would be drafted into the army. Oliver was not hesitant about the move: "*I wanted to see what the U.S.A. looks like. People, other people said like in Nicaragua that here everything's beautiful.*"

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Oliver Gonzales

Oliver felt little impact from the civil war in Nicaragua because fighting was confined to the mountains. Friends of the family died in the war, however, and he remembers that his parents talked about people dying, and about the draft.

'Cause they got like older people, they send them to the war. They take them from their jobs and they take them to like army camps and train them. Then they send them [to war]...And then sometimes they took kids, like 16-, 17- year-old-kids. They'd take them to the war, too.

Oliver's father did not want to serve in the Sandinista army, Oliver says, because he supported the Contras. His father supported the Contras because "*the Sandinistas broke the country. The economy is down 'cause of the Sandinistas.*"

El Monte, California

Oliver's family lived with relatives in El Monte, near Los Angeles, for four years. Oliver says the family entered the United States as legal immigrants. Neither of his parents speaks or writes English; nevertheless, his father found a job as a security guard and his mother returned to secretarial work.

A highlight of coming to the United States was playing video games for the first time.

They had a video game at my house with my relatives when we first came here to the United States. It was Atari 2600. They showed me how to play it. It's not that hard. All you have to do is push start and kill the space ship.

When I was 11 I started playing on the corner stores and in video arcades.

Oliver spoke no English when, at 11, he entered sixth grade. He encountered few other Nicaraguans:

There's not much Nicaraguan people in L.A. -- Mexican, there were some Puerto Ricans, some from other countries, El Salvador...In the whole school, I just met one.

In his first year of high school Oliver joined a gang to which his brother also belonged.

And when I was in L.A., I did a mistake, too. I got in a gang...But in L.A. it's not the same like here. Like here, is like playing, they just fight with fists. Over there they fight with weapons. Guns, things like that. That's why I was not going to school.

After four months Oliver dropped out of the gang, but his brother stayed in. He says it was not difficult to quit, and he remained friends with members of his former gang. "*I just told them I didn't want to be there no more...To get in the gang, three guys got to jump you. And to get out is the same thing.*"

San Francisco, California

Oliver says emphatically, "*This is better,*" when asked how life in El Monte compares with life in San Francisco. His father remained in El Monte when Oliver, his mother and his brother moved here two years ago. He has not seen his father, who communicates little with the family, for a year. His mother is not working but they manage with the help of the extended family. Oliver's aunt is looking for a job for him.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Oliver learned to read Spanish in school in Nicaragua when he was 6 or 7.

First I was looking at the alphabet on a piece of paper. They told me to write, then learn them. Then they gave me this book to look at the pictures and there was like a horse and there was CABALLO on the bottom...The teacher goes, what letter is this? So that's the way I learned how to read.

His mother read children's books to him at home, and he says both parents have always been supportive of his education. "*They encouraged us all the way. They wanted us to graduate and get a good job.*"

Oliver says he learned to read quickly and helped some of his friends with reading. He now reads both Spanish and English comfortably, though his vocabulary remains limited in both:

The Bible I read in Spanish 'cause in English there is some like words that I don't understand. It's like in Spanish there's some words that I don't understand, too...Like if it's in Spanish, I ask my aunt what it means.

Oliver spoke no English when, at 11, he entered sixth grade. His teacher, who was from Puerto Rico, was bilingual, but the class was conducted in English. Only two other students in the class were non-English-speaking. He describes his first day of school in the United States:

That first day I went to Westmont, I didn't know what to do because everybody was speaking English and I didn't saw no one or I didn't heard no one speaking Spanish...I saw a teacher, he looked to me Spanish. So I talked to him. I told him that I was looking for my classroom and he took me to my classroom and everything. He helped me a lot.

A private teacher came to his home and taught him English. He thinks the tutor was sent from the school. Later, in middle school, Oliver attended English as a Second Language classes for two periods a day. His other classes were taught in English by bilingual teachers. Of sixth grade and middle school, Oliver recalls:

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I learned a lot in those years...'cause like in math I had a teacher, like when I had a D average paper, he used to get me and work on the problems that I was having with the material. That's how I learned a lot. There was a teacher and his helper. He used to work with the people that didn't know what to do. 'Cause in every classroom there's smart people and people that can't do nothing...I'm in the middle.

Language is the biggest difference Oliver has found between attending school here and in Nicaragua. Academically, he was *"at the same level with everybody"* in his American classes. But his lack of English held him back:

That was very difficult because I was sitting there just watching the teacher speaking but I couldn't understand what he was saying. And I remember when we was doing our test, I was doing it but I didn't know what I was doing because I didn't understood what it was all about.

Initially, Oliver was discouraged by having to read in English:

Sometimes, like when I was in sixth grade, I used to say that, damn, I don't want to learn to read...'cause I thought it was boring.

He changed his mind, however,

...'cause I was growing up. I was older so I learned how to read well, 'cause I know reading is important now, everywhere. Like I went out when I was walking in the street and there's this sign that I wouldn't know what it says on the sign. That's how I figured it out that it was important to learn how to read.

The four years the family lived in El Monte included three changes in schools for Oliver, and bridged the end of elementary school through the first year of high school. Oliver says he had problems at school and at home.

I missed a lot of school. A lot. My grades they were not that good ...I missed a lot of school because I had this problem with my dad. And we were having a lot of problems in the house 'cause of my dad...'cause my father, he used all kinds of stuff. He drink, he drink.

In San Francisco, Oliver attended Mission High School for one year and a summer.

After summer school they sent a letter home from school. In the letter they wrote that I need like parents' counseling. And I went with my mom and they told her that I didn't have enough credits to graduate. I used to cut a lot too at Mission. That's why I didn't earn enough credits to graduate.

He cut school, he explains, "'*cause I had a lot of friends and girls that'd tell me to cut.*" Although he knew he would not have enough credits to graduate by age 18, he believed he could stay in school until he was 19. The school recommended he attend a satellite program run by the school district at a local community-based organization.

In September 1991, Oliver enrolled in the satellite program with 20 other 17-year-old students. The program has one teacher and one aide, both bilingual Latino males. Oliver attends school for four hours each morning. One hour is spent in the computer lab learning typing and playing educational games. The rest is devoted to working independently from textbooks or on an Apple computer.

Oliver's attendance has improved dramatically since he enrolled in the satellite program. Asked why he has changed, he says:

'Cause I'm thinking about me. 'Cause I'm thinking about the future now...'Cause I was kinda crazy you know when I was in 8th, 9th grade. It was like I didn't know what to do. I was like crazy...For me it was like I wanted to be cool with everybody. You know, I wanted to cut and those things. Not no more.

Oliver does not consider himself a good math student, but he does see the practical value of math. Asked if he used math often, he says:

Yeah, everywhere. On the store. If I've only got ten dollars and I've got to buy things, first I just add the prices of the things so that I know how much I'm gonna be able to spend.

"*Everybody knows how to operate a calculator,*" he says. Yet he does not use one himself: "*It's better when you think, when you do it by yourself. You use your brain.*"

Oliver expresses concern about his writing ability:

Sometimes I get worried about that 'cause when I'm doing something like here in school and I've got to write like a paragraph or something, stories, I get worried 'cause maybe I don't know what to write, you know. There's something that comes to my mind, but I don't know how to write it.

Question: Do you think you'll use writing much in your life?

Probably, to get a career you have to be able to write and read good. Probably if I want to get a business job you're gonna have to...They write a lot, don't they, in those kind of jobs?

When he lived in El Monte, Oliver helped out in a cosmetics store run by a friend of his family. He says, "*Maybe I'm smart in business. I knew what we was selling more.*" He

finds the idea of a business career appealing, especially "*when you see a person sitting at a desk, just signing papers. There's people in the back. Just sitting there signing papers.*"

When Oliver turns 18 he plans to take the G.E.D. and enroll in a local adult school to earn a diploma. Eventually he hopes to get a job at a restaurant or doing janitorial work to put himself through college. The thought of college, though, is intimidating to him and his friends:

> *When I think about that I get scared...That's what I hear in the classroom. Everybody say the same thing: Oh, that will be scary to go to college, to go the first day of school.*

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Bilingual Skills

Oliver's language skills and those of his younger brother and cousins help the family function more comfortably in American society. He explains his role in helping his uncle set up their new stereo system:

> *I read the instructions for it -- how to plug it in and how to connect the speakers and the radio...I was reading and my uncle, he was doing the job...I translate it into Spanish for him.*
>
> *Question: What would happen if you weren't there to help?*
>
> *I think that they wouldn't be able to plug it in 'cause nobody's reading English there except my brother and my cousins and me.*

Oliver seems at ease in a bilingual environment. He is as comfortable watching sporting events and "Tom and Jerry" cartoons in English as he is watching his favorite soap opera, "El Magnate," in Spanish. He listens to cumbia or salsa on radio and tape, but also likes rap music. He says all his friends like rap. "*I don't understand some words, I understand most of the song. And if I don't understand the song, I play it over and over and over.*"

He recently accompanied his mother to traffic court. Asked why it was necessary to go to court with his mother (and miss a day of school), he explained:

> *'Cause she likes to go with me. 'Cause she says she's afraid. She don't like to go to court. She says she don't like the judge. The way they talk and everything. She's always nervous when she goes to court for a ticket.*
>
> *Question: Does the judge talk to her?*
>
> *No, he talks to me. And I tell her what the judge say.*

Question: What did he say?

Nothing. Just, she was driving. I think she was speeding. She was driving too fast. That's what the judge told me. So I asked her and she said she was not speeding. That's what I told the judge. And the judge told me, ah...no, that she was. That the police wrote on the paper she was speeding, that's why he give her a ticket. We started talking about some other things and then the judge was laughing, he was teasing me. Like he was telling my mom, you were in a racing track? But nothing bad. Then Mom was all right. She was nervous at first.

Question: Were you scared?

Nah, I wasn't scared. This was not the first time I go to court. 'Cause I go sometimes when my friends go.

The Role of Reading

Oliver uses reading primarily for daily living, but, unlike many teens, he also seems to enjoy reading for pleasure. He reads menus, clothing tags, instructions, the family mail, and maps with ease. He spends about a half-hour a day reading the sports page of the local newspaper, the Bible, Sports Illustrated, or a car magazine. Oliver, like his brother Raul and two of his cousins, reads more fluently in Spanish than in English, and is more likely to buy magazines and comic books in Spanish than English (although they do buy magazines in both languages).

About twice a month, Oliver says, his mother turns off the Nintendo game, over the protests of his brother and cousins, and reads aloud.

Sometimes they [his aunts or mother] buy books in Spanish book stores and we read together tales from Nicaragua. Like scary tales ... in our living room. My mother she reads aloud for all of us ... We don't do it a lot 'cause we're busy playing Nintendo video games.

Sometimes Oliver initiates the readings:

Oh, maybe if we're watching TV then I grab the book and start reading so we turn off the TV and we read all together ... "Ichabod Crane" it's an American story, but that story I read it to my cousins 'cause it's in English. And then when my mother reads a story for us she reads Spanish stories. Like that one, "The Pit and the Pendulum." That's in Spanish, too.

In contrast to the brief time spent on recreational reading, Oliver spends about two hours a day watching television and almost as much playing Nintendo games. He has membership cards at two local video rental stores and rents tapes twice a week. He plays video games at

the corner stores on weekends, and listens to his Walkman "*when I come to school, get out of school, at my house, before I go to sleep, when I'm walking in the street.*"

Oliver gets around the Bay Area easily. He does not own a bus map because, he says, "*I know the city now. I can take any bus and come back.*" He will consult the maps at bus stops sometimes, he says. He figured out the layout of San Francisco by traveling around in cars with his friends. He learned to use Bay Area Rapid Transit, or BART, by reading the instructions.

I know that to go to Oakland, first I look at the map at the BART stop. And I know that I got to cross the bridge, so I buy a ticket to Oakland...They got signs there that says how much it costs...Then I just look at the BART stops.

The Language of the Inner City

Oliver learned to read graffiti as a survival skill.

I had friends from gangs and they teach me how to read and how to write like they're writing...In gangs they put their whole name, and then their name like Yogie...Every time you see a tag (a set of initials) with like a number or things like that, that means the guy is in gangs...but it's easy to read like.

R.I.P., rest in peace, that means you're gonna die, I'm after you...And sometimes a cloud...And a cross. That means where you're gonna go...Like sometimes they write like this [draws a circle with lightning bolts next to it]...It means gunshots, we're going after you guys with guns...If they put like that they're gonna kill you, you don't get worried about that, 'cause they mean that they're gonna beat you up.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Like many other American youths, Oliver is very much at home with consumer electronic equipment because "*I got all that at home and I use them every day.*" Consumer technology used in Oliver's home includes a stereo, a compact disc player, a tape recorder, three color televisions, two VCRs, Nintendo games, a microwave oven, radios, clocks, and standard kitchen appliances. His uncle also owns a car and a chain saw.

Oliver has learned to operate each piece of equipment by watching or having a friend or relative demonstrate.

Looking at what other people's doing helps me a lot...First when I'm going to do something, first I like to see another person doing it first, so like that I can see, you know, what's the error and what to do.

He is a patient observer.

Sometimes it happens in games, you know, when I'm playing video games. And there's some games that I've never played before and sometimes it's hard to figure them out, how to play, what to do. 'Cause they got all kinds of figures and you don't know what to do with them. When you hit the start, you start playing, they don't tell you anything.

Question: So what do you do?

Probably just let the game play alone like...Like if you don't know how to play something you can just look at it for five minutes and then you know how to...what to do.

Question: And if that doesn't work?

Sometimes I bring in my friends. They show me how to play if they know...My cousin, he knows how to play all the games.

Asked if language was a problem with video games, he says, "*Nah, first you put in a quarter, then you play. There is no reading involved. There's only the name of the game on the machine.*"

Oliver was first introduced to computers in his school in El Monte:

I didn't know what to do 'cause it was the first time I was looking at a computer. It was inside of a bus and was like 20 computers inside a bus. The teacher showed me how to do things...It was cool.

When Oliver moved to San Francisco and enrolled in Mission High School, he was assigned to a three-month "introduction to computers" class. He thought the class was easy, but enjoyed it because "*I learned something about computers and how to use them.*"

In the satellite program he now attends, he spends as much as 90 minutes of a four-hour school day on computer programs covering math, English, social studies, and typing. He describes how he learned to play "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?"

You have to figure it out. I mean you learn the color of the flag of the country...It took like two days for me to learn how to play...I was watching (another student) 'cause he knew how to play it.

SUMMARY

Oliver shares many of the characteristics of most American youths: he plays video and computer games, hangs out with his friends, watches television and is a full-fledged member

of the consumer society. He differs in a couple of areas. As the oldest son of an immigrant family, he plays an important role as interpreter for older family members. And he is unique among those we interviewed in having a strong place in his life for recreational reading, including regular family reading aloud sessions. His future plans are somewhat vague, and although he plans to go to college, the prospect is an intimidating one for him.

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ALICIA LOPEZ

ALICIA LOPEZ

By Mari Gasiorowicz

Alicia Lopez, aged 47, migrated from her native Mexico to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1981. Widowed, she lives with her sister's family and raises her six year-old grandchild as if she were her own daughter. Until five months ago, Alicia worked as a cook in food preparation factories. Since nearly all of the employees were Spanish-speaking, she was able to function with very limited English. Alicia recently enrolled in an employment training program where she is learning facility maintenance skills and studying English. Alicia is a generous, thoughtful, and determined woman. Her family situation challenges her, and her limited English presents barriers to her ability to progress. Nevertheless, she approaches her life with the attitude that, "you can do anything you really want to."

ALICIA LOPEZ AND HER FAMILY

Alicia's family makes up her social world. She lives in a house with her sister's family and an adult male cousin. Alicia shares a room with her granddaughter, Carmina, whom she cares for as if she were her own. (It was only when the child left the room that Alicia identified her as Maria's daughter, not her own.) Alicia daughter, Maria, age 29, came to the U.S. six years ago after Alicia had been here more than four years. Maria now has five children. Maria's life has brought Alicia much pain:

My daughter -- it's been six years since I brought her here. She was married in Guadalajara and her husband treated her badly so I asked, do you want to come [to the U.S.] with me? I went to Guadalajara to get her and a couple of months after I brought her here, Carmina was born. And a couple of months later, she went to live with her boyfriend and left me with the baby. And now she has other children. He got her into the habit of using drugs and because of that, the children have problems. The children are in the hands of the government [foster care]. They told her she had to go to school but she didn't go. It's been more than a year.

I talked to the social worker. He said, ask your daughter "Why?" I have tried many things: talking to her, being angry, begging. She doesn't listen to me; she doesn't want to understand. So, I'm tired. It's very painful for me. Every week, I go to see the baby. She is not intoxicated (with cocaine) anymore.

I want a good job for them in another state on a ranch, or where there is space. I want to adopt them. If she can change, that's better. If she were clean, she could get the baby back. She has help [recovery] in her own hands. But, if she doesn't want to...it's a tragedy, but...

Alicia's two sons, ages 23 and 27, live in Mexico. Until a few years ago, she sent them $500 each month so that they could go to school and start their own professional careers. At that time, she was earning only $1,200 per month.

They want me to come [back to Mexico to live]; they'll help me. But you get used to supporting yourself and you don't want anyone to help you.

Until recently, Alicia has worked -- often two jobs at once, and usually at least ten hours a day. Five months ago she enrolled in a job training program that she attends weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm.

I don't go out dancing or anything. My world is Carmina and the other children. My family.

I go to Mass on Sundays. In Spanish, or English, whichever. It's the same. I keep the faith, the Catholic church.

She mentions only one person with whom she socializes outside of her family. He is an old boyfriend, now friend, whom Carmina refers to as "Papi." A poster-sized picture of him with his baseball team hangs on the wall in her bedroom.

I got to know him when I first got here. So, we were together. He's from where I'm from. The only problem is that he drinks a lot and at some point I said, "No." I said, If you don't want to change, then you'll have to live your life without me.... now he is a friend.

Alicia's social world is much narrower than it was a few years ago. Her fear that her two youngest grandchildren could be adopted by strangers provides strong motivation for her to focus on her own employability because she needs a steady income in order to be eligible to adopt.

There is a Mexican saying, a drop of blood weighs more than a pound of meat. People who are not related by blood don't care as much. Parents adopt a child and then they have their own and they love the first one less.

THE COMMUNITY

Alicia lives in the city of South San Francisco, just south of San Francisco City and County. South San Francisco has 55,000 inhabitants, 27% of whom are Latino according to the 1990 Census. (In contrast, San Francisco's population is only 14% Latino.)

[In this neighborhood,] more than half of the families are Latinos -- families that have been here 20-30 years, some of them, so of course there are children, and adults, various ages...

Several blocks from her home is a small downtown area. A restaurant, a bakery, two bars (all Mexican), a Chinese restaurant, a Burger King, and two discount stores share two

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short blocks. Alicia lives approximately one hour by bus from downtown San Francisco and the job training program in which she is enrolled.

LIFE HISTORY

Childhood

> *I was born in Mexico, in the state of Zacatecas, in a small town – Nochistlan. My childhood was good. We were a large family. We're 11 – six girls and five boys. We were many, so we couldn't have anything we wanted but it was good, my childhood.*

Alicia's mother gave birth to 22 children; Alicia was the fourth of the 11 children who survived. Her mother ran the household; her father had a series of small businesses including an ice cream store, a janitorial service and several real estate ventures.

> *He was very hard-working. All of the businesses that he had made money. It was that he didn't know how to take care of it. And he had other women...*

Her parents were both from middle class families, and since her mother was an only child, she inherited the house in which she grew up.

> *It was a nice old house – seven, eight rooms, a large area with big trees, fruit trees, a beautiful yard. My mother was born in that house, and almost all of us. We had a radio by the time I was 15, no television, or blender or stove. We cooked on charcoal. We used a stone grinder (for grains)...we washed clothes by hand, with a scrub board.*

Because the family was so large and because her father "was careless with money," Alicia grew up in what she described as a lower middle-class household.

Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Alicia dropped out of school at age 13 to help her mother raise her younger siblings. Partly to escape her father's harsh discipline, she married and left home at age 16 and had her first child at age 17.

> *He was very strict with us. We couldn't go out; couldn't go to parties. He was strict about everything, had to have his way. That's why they had so many children.*

At the age of 26, with children ages four, eight and ten, Alicia was widowed; she did not want to remarry. She moved in with her mother and younger siblings. In the intervening years, her mother had also been widowed and had moved from Zacatecas to Guadalajara so that her other children could attend high school. Alicia's mother looked after

her children while she took a full-time job at a Kodak store selling cameras and supplies. At this job, she became familiar with photographic equipment and had a chance to practice her math skills.

If it cost 860 pesos and there was an import tax of 20 percent, I would calculate that [on paper]. I could do it very fast.

She stayed at this job for eight years.

Migration to the U.S.

In 1981, at age 37, Alicia migrated alone and undocumented to the United States. She went to South San Francisco where she had extended family.

Then I came here. I've been here 10 years. You can earn more. I came, I came, I wanted to come. I was the first one [of my siblings]. I came to work -- to earn more. [My] children stayed with my mother.

Initially, she lived with an aunt, but she felt constricted. "*I liked to go out and she wanted me to be back at a certain time.*" Then she lived with a friend, and then in an in-law's apartment in the house of another aunt. Five months ago, she moved into her current housing situation, sharing a room with Carmina in her sister's house.

Employment in the U.S.

During her first seven years in the U.S., she worked for a company that prepared food for Price Club and other discount stores.

I made salads, soups, macaroni, tortellini, alfredo sauce, pesto, tabouli, elbow macaroni, minestrone, lasagna, chicken noodle, beef noodle, salads -- waldorf, coleslaw...They gave me the formulas and I did everything -- cooked everything.

The manager wrote in English. He'd give me the formula -- all the powders and they all had a name. Six ounces of this, six ounces of that. And I'd try [the powders] and then I'd memorize the names.

He'd give me a list to do for that day -- 25 lasagnas, five black bean soups, 140 pounds coleslaw and I'd write it down [in Spanish].

When I was making salads -- 120 batches of a certain salad -- I would figure out how many ounces of this powder and this one.

With the exception of the manager, who was white, the companies employed only Latinos; her co-workers were all Spanish speaking. She managed to do her work with a

knowledge of English limited to the names of foods, but believes that she could have progressed much further if she had spoken English.

> *It would have been better if I had spoken English. I could have learned many more things. I could have gotten a better position. In other companies, there are people who know less than I do and have higher positions because they speak English... Also, I couldn't ask for a raise. English is very necessary.*

She used some large but simple machines to mix foods, but prepared most foods by hand. There she worked 10-12 hours a day. Her starting rate was $3.50 an hour and by the end, she was earning $6.00 an hour.

> *Almost all were Latinos -- people who didn't have papers. And because we didn't have papers, they paid us $3.50 [an hour]. They got us good and cheap because we didn't have papers.*

The company moved to a city 45 miles away. She decided not to stay with the company. Commuting was out of the question:

> *It's far -- I'd be gone from seven in the morning till 11 or 12 at night. That's a lot -- then you have to pay for babysitting and you're never home.*

Relocating did not make sense either. She had always lived with family members or rented from other Mexicans who had not required the usual last month's rent and security deposit, but she anticipated that would not have been the case if she had moved. She also believed that babysitting costs in a new location would be prohibitive. "*If they would offer me good money, I'd follow the company, but for $6.00 an hour, it's not worth it.*"

She packed spices for $5.00 per hour in one factory and then added another nearly full-time job in a ravioli packing factory for $7.25 per hour, until the company relocated to Washington State last year. In each of these jobs, she worked long hours and found herself too tired to go to school, although she signed up for English as a Second Language classes twice.

Amnesty

Also during that time, Alicia became a legal resident of the U.S. through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (commonly known as "Amnesty"). Gaining legal status relieved tremendous stress about the possibility of being deported.

> *When I arrived, without papers, I was afraid of just waiting at the bus stop. People said -- I heard from friends that sometimes someone at work with a bad disposition would report a company...It was very ugly. Really horrible. Now it's different, but*

before I was legal, I would always be afraid that I would be walking and they'd grab me. It's an ugly fear.

Her new status also made her eligible for benefits including unemployment compensation, MediCal for her child and government-funded employment programs like the one she enrolled in five months ago.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Growing Up

Alicia grew up in a household that supported education. Her father had been in the Seminary and her mother had a third or fourth grade education.

My mother believed in education; she sent me to school....[My parents] read at home. They had very nice books -- stories for children -- different stories. Now I have to look everywhere for nice stories for her [Carmina].

Alicia attended a small public elementary school. She liked school, however, during her seventh grade year, she dropped out primarily to help her mother raise her seven younger siblings. Though she now wishes that she had stayed in school longer, she does not begrudge her mother.

I left school at age 13 to help take care of the other children. I can't blame my mother. She had so many children that she couldn't really pay attention to all of them...I regret that I didn't study more. People who study more, work less and earn more, and people who study less, earn less and work more. So I regret it.

With the exception of a brief employment training program at Kodak, for her job in a photo store in Mexico, she had no formal education as an adult until recently.

Adult Education: Employment Training

About the time the ravioli factory relocated to Washington, Alicia learned of the job training program that she currently attends.

I heard about it on the radio [in Spanish] and I went to find out. It didn't cost me anything. I qualified. So I started.

It is a private non-profit employment training program that offers instruction in four skill areas: facility maintenance, shipping and receiving, accounting, and office skills. The program is funded partly through Amnesty, partly by an insurance company, partly by PEL grants (government-funded) and partly through a bank loan. She enrolled in the facility maintenance training track -- instruction in plumbing, carpentry, painting, electrical work,

and janitorial work. Her English skills, both written and spoken, are minimal, and not adequate for the other tracks.

> *If I could understand more English, I'd learn something more...something better, but since I don't, I'm studying this.*

She is in her fifth month of an eight month program. She attends weekdays and is quite enthusiastic about the program.

> *From 8 to 10 and from 10:15 to 12, plumbing, or electricity, and 1 to 2:15 and 2:30 to 4, English.*

> *The teachers are very patient. They are very good. I like school. It's not easy for us -- those of us who are older. We don't learn as fast as the younger ones, but the teachers are very patient. When I think about all the time I lost... but you can't regret...*

By her instructors' and her own accounts, learning English comes slowly to her but she performs exceptionally well at facility maintenance skills. She provided the interviewer with a 45-minute tour of the work area demonstrating with comfort and care the proper use of each tool. She also described the skills that she must perform in order to graduate from the program.

> *I have to take out the toilet in the ladies' room and put it back so that it doesn't leak. I have done it twice already but the third time is one that counts.*

After she finishes the program in three months, she hopes to be able to find an apprenticeship (unpaid) where she can improve her skills. Her next goal is to find a job, and then she hopes to continue her schooling.

> *If I have a job -- more or less good, and I have time, I'll continue classes in English. It's because of the language that I can't do other things.*

LITERACY LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Alicia's uses of literacy and language in her daily life are characterized by three themes: First, she reads and writes Spanish well. When she can obtain information or services by conversing and completing paperwork in Spanish, she manages without difficulty. Second, her written and oral language skills in English are very limited. She is hampered by her lack of English and ultimately avoids many situations in which using Spanish is not an option. Third, in her words, "*If I want to learn something, I can.*" Alicia is skilled at making use of the resources she has access to. She offers an example of successful problem-solving:

Three years ago, I had a niece who is a doctor who wanted me to send her some books and I didn't know where to buy them. I looked in the phone book for different book stores and I found a big one on Market Street and I went there and bought them and sent them. If you want something, you'll find it.

In her conversations about her job training program, Alicia identified three strategies she uses for learning the maintenance skills, some of which involve literacy. First, she pays close attention to the skill instructor's lectures and demonstrations, for example, as he explains watts and volts current in black, red, green and white wires, and the uses of various types of nails. Second, she has found books in the library to help her understand electricity, although, "*The one in Spanish was so old, so out of date, that it didn't serve me. The one in English, I understood only a few words.*" Her third and primary strategy has been to work with the other women students:

The women get more than 90% on the tests. The test is on electricity, I got 93% and the men got 70%, 72%, 75%. The women work together more than the men. For example, there's a Salvadoran woman. We work, this is this; that is this. We work together – it's better – you can talk. And the men don't really work together. They say good morning, but that's it. It's better – working together.

Alicia finds learning English to be harder than learning maintenance skills, and studying with other women students is not as effective. "*[The most difficult] is speaking. I want to learn but you have to practice. I am ashamed to speak.*" She borrows books and tapes in English from the library and follows the text with the tapes. She also looks up common words and then copies them many times in her notebook. "*And I get these newspapers from my neighbor's recycling bin. I can pick out a few words*" but she cannot understand the whole article.

Most of Alicia's literacy strategies follow this pattern: first use her native language, second, avoidance of situations that make extensive demands on her limited English proficiency, and thirdly, creative problem-solving.

Use of public services

For the most part, her use of public services falls under the first category; Alicia conducts most of her business and communicates almost entirely in Spanish because Spanish-language services are often available. Carmina's school caters to the many mono-lingual Spanish speaking parents by offering a Spanish-language call-line at the school and sending all information to parents in both languages. Alicia also has had no trouble finding bilingual staff and forms for legal and social services. This includes the staff with whom she dealt during the Amnesty application process, the social worker assigned to handle her grandchildren's foster care, and the employees who process MediCal forms.

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Alicia Lopez

Alicia uses two public libraries about once a month; they both have bilingual librarians and large (if sometimes out of date) collections of books in Spanish and simple English. She discovered the public library system only a few months ago when she started the employment training program.

> *I can get the books out of the library and use them for a month and then renew them and not pay anything! These books are very expensive; I can't buy them.*

While in most cases she has been able to receive adequate services, she does cite having had to go to a family practitioner who spoke Spanish rather than a specialist who spoke only English. She also faced language barriers in trying to participate in union activities at one of her previous jobs.

> *This [letter] is from the union but I can't read it... They don't speak Spanish at the union. I didn't go to meetings because they didn't speak Spanish and I didn't speak English. Oh, I went once or twice and I tried with someone translating this and this and this but no.*

Transportation

Public transportation has also not been much of a problem for Alicia. She has a monthly pass and uses the bus exclusively. She has always been able to find out from Spanish speakers which route to take.

> *I called up [the employment training center] and they told me [in Spanish], "It's on this street and this street and do you have a car? Where are you coming from?"*

> *Before, if there were people here longer, or now I've been here longer than other people... I teach them what bus. My aunt taught me; she spoke English and everything. She would take me and show me...Now, on the bus that I take in the morning, the driver speaks English and Spanish and so I can ask him how I get somewhere.*

Right now, the cost of owning a car and insurance is prohibitive but Alicia hopes to buy one eventually. She has had some practice driving and since the driver's test is available in Spanish, she does not anticipate any difficulty in passing it.

As Consumer

Restaurants are another arena that present little difficulty. She eats out seldom, but that is due to the cost rather than her discomfort with the language.

> *For example I like Chinese food. I know the names of the main foods [because of work] so I know I like [this dish], and this I don't.*

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As for calculating the tip:

If they treat you well, you leave two or three dollars. If they don't pay attention to you, you don't leave anything.

Shopping for food items is easy because, "*There are many products that are the same brand in Mexico. And well, milk, cookies, bread, pastas, it is obvious.*" Cleaning products presented dangers that she was not even aware of until recently.

I know how to use bathroom cleaner now, because I've learned in school. But before I didn't and it's dangerous because it has a lot of gasses, and if you mix it, it's dangerous. But it's in English and I couldn't read the instructions.

There are circumstances in which her limited English presents some problems in everyday living, but they are fairly minor. In reviewing the mail she had received, Alicia described her attempt to follow up on a coupon (entirely in English) for carpet cleaning. She was able to read the basic information:

Carpet cleaning. $24.95 for five rooms. A good deal. I called for information and no one speaks Spanish. They say, do you want to make an appointment? What day? I can't understand her; she doesn't understand me, so I didn't do it.

Finances

Alicia has never used banks in the U.S. Before she became a legal resident, she limited her financial transactions to cash in order to protect her undocumented status. At two of her three jobs, she was paid in cash since the companies hired undocumented workers and operated under the table. Now she receives an unemployment check and cashes it at the local meat market. She has few bills since her sister owns the house. She pays her bills using money orders -- usually two each month. She is also trying to establish a credit rating.

I have credit cards from JC Penney's, Mervin's -- to try to develop a credit rating...I always stay within my limits. I know what my balance is. If I go the store to buy a pair of pants, I buy [only] what I need.

She added that she is only able to obtain credit cards where the sales clerks speak Spanish or the form is available in Spanish.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In her room at home, Alicia has a television, a VCR and a tape recorder. The stereo in the living room belongs to her cousin so she prefers not to use it. Kitchen appliances available for her use include a microwave, a blender, a stove and oven. They also have a washing machine. She finds new appliances quite simple to figure out.

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> *Actually, these days, the instruction manuals for things are really very clear. They have pictures for everything...Now things are much more modern. There are the buttons. It's just a matter of trying them.*

While she exhibits no discomfort or fear about using technology in her daily life, her broader views seem to reflect society's love-hate relationship with technology.

> *What's modern is good -- to be able to heat food in the microwave -- it's good, but at the same time it's the same technology that's destroying us. It's bad for you, that it gives you cancer.*
>
> *And modern things, machines -- they displace people in their jobs. At ____, when they got a big packing machine, it replaced eight or ten people, now four people do that job.*

Technology at work

In her former jobs in food preparation plants, Alicia made use of fairly simple technology, primarily mixers. Much of the work was done by hand. In her current job training program in facilities maintenance, she uses a variety of hand tools. Her low-wage, low-skill jobs have brought her into little contact with sophisticated technology: although some food preparation plants are becoming increasingly mechanized, the ones for which Alicia worked relied more on cheap labor that computerized machinery.

FAMILY LITERACY

As a parent, Alicia is thoughtful about her role in the formal and moral education of Carmina and the other grand-children.

> *I always go to her school. With the other children I wasn't as careful. Now I pay more attention; I'm more careful.*

She emphasizes two themes in discussing how she raises Carmina: her desire for Carmina to "become someone," and the value of retaining the language and culture.

> *I tell her to study because people who study work less and earn more. [To Carmina] You have to study because the people who don't end up cleaning bathrooms and I don't want that for you. I want you to work in an office -- to do something positive.*
>
> *I want Carmina to speak two languages. For her to speak English and not Spanish -- that I wouldn't like. I want her speak both. I don't want her to lose her roots, her customs. I want her to love Mexico. I know many friends of the family who have children 14-15 years old who have disdain for Spanish. I try to inculcate that in her -- to love Spanish. English too. She must speak both.*

Spanish is spoken exclusively in the household. With the exception of her cousin who is rarely home, the adults speak little English and except for Carmina, the children are not yet school-age.

Summary

Alicia approaches new experiences with confidence and determination. She has faced difficult times -- as an undocumented immigrant, in her family, in unstable and low-paying work. But she is successful at a wide range of activities -- from learning facility maintenance skills, to mastering new technology in the home, to deciphering the child custody system. Learning English presents her with her greatest challenge. She sees her limited English as also the greatest barrier to her being able to get a better job -- the key to her being able to adopt her grandchildren. She is determined to keep studying English until she can achieve her goal of gathering all her grandchildren under her own care and love.

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SOKHHOEUN

ERIC Full Text Provided by ERIC

SOKHHOEUN

by David Hemphill

Sokhhoeun is a thirty-eight-year-old Cambodian male. He has been in the United States since 1981, when he arrived as a refugee after a grueling six-year odyssey through Cambodia and northern Thailand. He was resettled in Oakland, California. Sokhhoeun lives and works in the Asian refugee and immigrant community in East Oakland.

SOKHHOEUN AND HIS FAMILY

Sokhhoeun is married with three children, aged thirteen, eleven, and nine. He lives with his immediate family. Members of his extended family (father and other relatives) live nearby in the same part of town. He came to the United States in 1981 after a harsh six-year journey following the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia which took him through the experience of forced labor, de facto imprisonment and exploitation on the Cambodian-Thai border, and further incarceration in refugee camps in Thailand prior to travel to the United States.

He had previously worked in Cambodia as a farmer, diamond prospector, and tractor driver. In the U.S., he worked in construction and warehousing jobs, prior to taking his current position as a bilingual instructional aide for a refugee adult literacy program. He has held this job for six years.

Sokhhoeun describes himself as someone who likes to help others. His first job in the United States was in warehousing, but after being laid off and falling ill, he started to volunteer with a refugee resettlement agency, helping newly-arrived refugees connect to social service agencies. He was soon asked by an agency administrator if he wanted to work further in this area and he agreed. He then became a bilingual teacher's aide with the ESL adult literacy education program where he currently serves.

He works at three sites in this program -- in Oakland (one day), Richmond (one day), and Hayward (three days). Each site is located a considerable distance (10 to 20 miles) from the others. Two of the sites are in church facilities that are rented by the literacy program. The refugee adult students with whom he works are predominantly from Vietnam, Afghanistan, China, and Laos. He works mostly in the classroom helping individual students or small pull-out groups with particular lessons being taught by the instructor. He also helps adult refugee students with individual problems such as social service referral. He finds that informal chats with students at break time is an effective means of establishing friendships and gaining confidence.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This part of town, just east of the downtown Oakland business district, has seen substantial changes in the last ten to fifteen years. Formerly a predominantly African American and Latino community, the area now has become considerably more complex.

Homeless people huddle in doorways and young African American males stand on some street corners. Young Asian males inhabit other corners admiring each others' cars outside of convenience stores that display a multilingual array of advertising. At the same time, along the main commercial corridor of East Fourteenth Street, numerous refugee-run businesses have grown up in what were once abandoned storefronts or plasma donation centers.

Signs in Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian advertise banh my (Vietnamese pate sandwiches), coffee shops (serving strong Vietnamese coffee), hair salons, auto repair, video rental (dubbed in Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, and Thai), groceries, fast food, and legal services. Many of these businesses have grown up surrounding the Clinton Park Adult School site at Sixth Avenue and East Fourteenth Street. Clinton Park is the main ESL center in this part of Oakland, and it seems to have become a nexus for small businesses that serve a newcomer community.

Sokhhoeun lives in a two-bedroom apartment with his wife and three children. His wife was formerly employed, but has had to take some time off because of illness in recent months. The family lives in a small, pastel-colored, California stucco apartment building in a residential section. Most of the other tenants in his apartment building are Mien people from the hills of Laos. He communicates with them in English. When he was looking at the building before moving in, he introduced himself to his prospective neighbors and offered them his help should they need it. Now he is often invited to his Mien neighbors' social gatherings.

There are no Cambodians in his apartment building, although many live nearby, as do members of his extended family. According to Sokhhoeun, most Cambodian families living in Oakland are members of a formally-structured community mutual support system. It is organized by neighborhoods, each with a designated leader. Sokhhoeun is the leader for his neighborhood. There are fifteen such Cambodian neighborhood groups in Oakland, and the leaders of each neighborhood section choose a chief leader. All the leaders are men, and the group maintains a mailing list of all Cambodian families in Oakland.

A primary function of this support system is to support individual families when a member has passed away. When a death occurs, neighborhood leaders canvass their members for monetary contributions (usually fifteen to twenty dollars) which are then passed on to the chief leader. He then presents the contributions on behalf of the entire Cambodian community to the bereaved family at a formal funeral ceremony. Sokhhoeun stresses the importance of this community support function in time of family bereavement, identifying it as the primary focus and activity of the Cambodian community group.

LIFE HISTORY

Family Life, Literacy, and Technology in Cambodia

Sokhhoeun was born in 1952, the youngest in a family of five children (two brothers and two sisters). Both brothers are now dead, killed by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. After many years of struggle, his remaining family has now come to live in Oakland, California.

> *I was born in Cambodia and I grew up in Cambodia also. When I was a child... my family is very poor, and I don't have a chance to go to school in my country. I never been in the school. So when I was... thirteen years old... I became a monk. Then I learned my language from that... After that, when I was eighteen I got married... After I got married two or three years then I had one child... Then my family moved down to a different city, because my family [was] very, very poor... When I was 25 then my family moved to another city, too. That was called Battambang city....*

When Sokhhoeun was young his family lived in rural areas of Cambodia. The whole family worked to help his father, a rice farmer. The family moved around frequently, seeking situations in different regions of Cambodia where they could make enough of a living to survive. The land the family farmed was usually located at some distance from the villages where they lived.

> *[We worked] very, very hard every day...In the morning we get up at six o'clock... and when we got to the farm, you know, it's around eight or eight thirty, something like. It's not very close... The field is very far... We walked two or three hours sometime... It's my own [family's] farm... because... when we move from another city we have to buy land, you know, buy the land from someone else....*

His family lived in simply-constructed homes, which they rebuilt themselves whenever they moved to a new area. Forms of technology employed in Sokhhoeun's home included a basic wood stove, hand tools, water buffalo and plough, hand tools, machete, stringed musical instruments (Asian violin), and transistor radio.

> *We live in a house together, one house... but it's not really, you know, good house... They used hay to make a roof... The walls just bamboo, they use bamboo. And for the floor they use the bamboo too... We do have the stove, but it's not a stove like we have it right here [in the U.S.], electricity stove, gas stove, whatever, we just [use] the... cement to make it don't burn the floor, because the floor we make from the bamboo. So we... just make three leg like this [gestures like a tripod]... and you put the pot and... we go cut the wood and make a fire.... When we grow rice... we use the cows, pull the... plough... to make the ground... open and we can put some rice in.*

We do have radio... We have small hand radio like that [points to tape recorder], we use battery... Once awhile we go to the city to the market... and we buy the battery from there....We use the, kind of like, the violin.

His father knew how to read and write, but his mother did not. He doesn't know if his parents ever went to school, but he doesn't think so. He remembers his father reading Buddhist texts every day at home.

He had a book at home and he liked to read the -- what is that called in English -- you know, when you become a monk, you study that word [Buddhist scriptures]... So he likes [liked] to read that every day... But he's not become a monk...

At the age of thirteen, in 1965, Sokhhoeun was sent for two years to a Buddhist temple near his home to study as a monk. When Sokhhoeun was fifteen, his family moved to a region of Cambodia known for its diamonds. For the next eight years, until 1975, the family was relatively prosperous. Their work involved careful prospecting in isolated, forested areas where diamonds were known to have been found.

In 1975 with the fall of the Cambodian government, the Khmer Rouge took control of the country. Sokhhoeun and his family together were forced out of the area where they had been living and sent to work on a sugar cane plantation.

The Khmer Rouge... they force you to the countryside. They not let you stay in the city... They told everybody to move out... When the Khmer Rouge took over, the Khmer Rouge... leader, the boss or whatever, they ask you to do what they want to ask, you know... So we have to do for them. No choice. If you say something, they kill you. So we have to do what they ask you to do... I stayed there since 1975 to 1979... Four years, right...? Just working, the same work, the same job... no choice.

In 1979 Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia and drove the Khmer Rouge out of many areas they controlled. This was the start of a period of chaos and extreme deprivation for Sokhhoeun and his family. At first, the Khmer Rouge ran away from his plantation, and the refugees used knives to stop them from taking all the vehicles with them. The Khmer Rouge returned well-armed the following day to identify and punish the leaders of the previous day's uprising:

They pulled that guy to the front of the people that sat... So they used the handgun, a very small one and shot it right here [points to his temple], "Boom!" He died right away, and the brain blow in front of everybody. So, very, very, very scary... Nobody say anything, just, oh my God... God help me, [chants a Buddhist phrase] God help me, something like that.

After the killing, the Khmer Rouge told everyone to go back to work and left, promising to return with food. But there was not enough food. After a few days, the community of

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about three hundred people held a mass meeting at night and concluded that if they did not leave, everyone would die. It was decided that the group should split up into small parties of about fifteen people, each to head off in a different direction. The remaining food in the village was divided up among all the families. The next evening, Sokhhoeun's family left, traveling together by foot with several others. They went to another village about five or six miles away. They were allowed to stay, but their time was brief, for the Vietnamese army came through again, and Sokhhoeun and his family left. Their trip to the city took about five days, during which time they had no food.

After considerable effort, Sokhhoeun's family finally reached the city and lived there for a time. Food remained incredibly difficult to obtain, and most energy was taken up with forays of several days' duration outside the city to find food. They often followed directly behind the Vietnamese army advances to outlying villages in search of food. Once obtained, heavy loads of food were carried back to the city using traditional shoulder pole carriers.

Abandoning hope of any life in Cambodia, Sokhhoeun's family decided to leave the country altogether, to travel to Kaui Dang, on the Thai side of the Cambodian-Thai border. The walk there took about a week. It was a difficult trip, and again there was insufficient food. Upon arrival at the border, where they might have expected to encounter some relief, the refugees discovered that they were virtual prisoners of the Cambodian border guards and the Thai merchants who crossed the border to sell food and goods to the refugees. The refugees were not allowed to cross the border into Thailand, nor did they wish to return to the Cambodian interior. Yet they needed to survive and have food to eat. In order to get food, the refugees had to work -- either for the Cambodian border guards or the Thais. They were thus stuck at the border for almost two years, working for food and trying to make things to sell to the Thai people as a source of subsistence. Conditions were terrible:

> *[There were] many, many people, you know. And no house, no place to live, and you have to use the tent. But tent... was just very thin plastic we... buy from Thai people... very cheap [quality]. But if very windy... it's broken.*

Refugee Camps in Thailand

Ultimately, in 1979 word of the plight of the Cambodian refugees who were being detained and exploited at the border reached the American embassy in Thailand. Arrangements were made to send trucks to ferry large numbers of refugees across the border to the recently-established refugee camp at Kaui Dang. While greatly relieved to be crossing into Thailand, upon arrival at the camp Sokhhoeun found few preparations had been made:

> *When we got to Kaui Dang camp, it's very difficult too, the first time - we no house, no everything. Just like a forest, like all the tree... Nothing when we first came. We just use the tent again, before the American Embassy help to build the house.*

The family lived in the Thai refugee camps for two years until 1981. Gradually, as shelter facilities were constructed in the camp and as food was available, the refugees began to feel better. They remained prisoners, however, subject to brutality and atrocities at the hand of Thai military guards.

While in Kaui Dang Sokhhoeun had his first opportunity to learn English, but he decided against it. Some refugees who were literate in the Cambodian language or spoke some foreign language -- usually French or English -- set up classes as profit-making language-teaching businesses. The classes cost twenty baht (Thai currency) per month. He did not choose to study English or any other subject at this point because he saw no practical value in it. He had no reason to hope that he or his family would be granted refuge in the United States. Instead, he devoted himself to supporting his family by evading camp sentries to go outside the camp perimeter to purchase goods from Thai merchants in nearby villages for resale within the camp. Many refugees operated such small businesses in the camp.

Sokhhoeun's father-in-law, who had been a soldier, applied for resettlement in the United States when the family first entered the camp, but Sokhhoeun was not optimistic about the application. However, one day he learned that the application was successful:

> *They put the name on the [bulletin] board in the section [of the camp] and a lot of people they... run... to see the name... to go to the United States. So I didn't go [to see the names]... I didn't do anything. So I felt, oh, nobody take us. You know, it's very difficult, you have to have... a lot of money to go there [to the U.S.]... So finally then my father he went, he went to the section to read (the names]... and when he came back he said, "Oh, we have name! We have name!" We feel happy, you know. All the family, we very excited. So we have name, go to United State.*

After a series of interviews with American authorities, Sokhhoeun's family was moved to a camp at Mairat for refugees preparing for resettlement in the United States. In this camp, seeing that knowledge of English would be of practical value, Sokhhoeun began to study the language. As in Kaui Dang, this language training was not free. For three months he paid to attend English classes conducted by another refugee in the camp. At the end of three months, the family was transferred to Bangkok and boarded a plane for San Francisco.

Adjustment to the United States

Sokhhoeun and his family of five persons arrived in San Francisco on September 21, 1981. When they entered the terminal they found that there was no one to meet them:

> *When I got off from the airplane, everybody [other refugee families] they have sponsor, they took [them] very fast. You know, they just come and get, come and get. Just only my family [was left]... I think I spent there about five or six hours... at the airport. I don't know where's my sponsor. My family and me and my wife cry, you know. Just*

only my family, I don't know where to go. You know, I'm very sad: why they take me and throw me away...? I thought, oh, my God. So I'm very sad.

And finally, my sponsor went [there]. Then... they call my name: Are you Sokhhoeun? I said, Yes! OK, I just know how to say, yes, and no by that time, not a lot [of English]. And [the sponsor said], now you come with me. So I follow him to the car, to the garage... They brought me to a hotel near the airport... But I didn't ask why, they just left [us] there... They have food for us... I have a room to sleep...

The family stayed in the hotel for a few days until a Cambodian-speaking case worker arrived to transport them to Oakland and to begin the resettlement process. They lived for about three weeks with another Cambodian family until the sponsoring agency helped to find a one-bedroom apartment.

After moving into their own place, the family began to feel a little better and more settled. In the next few days, Sokhhoeun had to ask a Cambodian friend to apply for identification papers, social security number, refugee cash assistance, and medical care. He felt quite uncomfortable having to be so dependent upon someone else for help, because in order to help them, his friend had to apply for time off from work two to three days in advance.

So, it's very very upset for me about that... I didn't speak English myself, so [it was] very difficult to ask somebody, you know? They are working, right? So when I ask, they didn't say anything, they say. Oh, you know, I have to get permission from my boss first.

This caused Sokhhoeun to hesitate before asking for help. He was determined to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible, and he developed a learning strategy to help in this regard. He decided to make copies of all forms that were filled out for him before turning them in. In this way, he had models to help him develop the literacy skill to fill in other forms which asked for similar information. After about five or six months, Sokhhoeun began to feel self-sufficient in the United States, and he no longer needed to ask people to do things for him.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

First Language Literacy

Sokhhoeun had no formal education until the age of 13. At that age he became for a time a Buddhist monk, a common practice for young Cambodian males. At his mother's urging he went to live for two years in a nearby rural temple.

My mom said, oh, you know... you have to become a monk, so I would like you to do that, because you are the boy, you have to be do that for at least about two year or three

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years... And I say, oh, maybe it's difficult for me, Mom, and then she said, no, it's not very difficult, you just go there and study about a month to learn the word that [are needed to] become a monk, first. So, I think... that time that I feel like [doing] it... So I say, OK, I go then... I'm very interested, too, myself... When I became a monk I learned very fast, you know, catch up very fast when you became a monk. Because your mind is... straight about study... we don't think about anything else beside study, so just study, study...

Life in the temple was rigorous, an unvarying schedule that began with prayers in the main hall at five o'clock, running for one to two hours. This was followed by food gathering. Monks split up and went in teams in different directions carrying begging bowls to gather food for the day's meal from people in nearby villages. On return to the temple, a meal was prepared and eaten, and the remainder of the day was spent in prayer, study, and chanting.

Formal instruction in Buddhist ritual and doctrine was conducted by chief monks at the temple by means of traditional oral transmission, followed by exposure to the written texts of particular rituals, one at a time. In this fashion after a few months' time Sokhhoeun learned to read and write the Cambodian [Khmer] language.

[When first at the temple] I know how to speak [Cambodian], but I don't know how to write and read... We don't have the teacher... But... the first [head] monk... teach all their monk in that temple. So, just teach the same thing [as in English] like alphabetical order, like "A, B, C" and, you know, vowel and consonant... But the Cambodian language, we have more vowels. English they have only five vowel, OK, but the Cambodian they have 32... vowels, and... about 36 consonants. I'm not sure now - I forgot [laughs]. It's been a long time.

When I first became a monk... they just brought me the book... OK, you study this... And you just look at every day, every day, every day... if you have any question, just go there and ask, what is that, what do you say... how do you pronounce that? It's just word by word, or something like that... So, very difficult to read that Buddhist word, very difficult... Not like everyday [words] - special word. And they [the words] have a tail, they have a head, or whatever... [laughs]. It's very difficult, but when they tell you... one time, then you just try to remember yourself, you know...

The new word, we have the book... [for example] one book we study today... lesson number one, lesson two, lesson three, lesson four... We just study, study... But we have special... book used... when people die [funeral ritual]... They invite a monk to chanting... And another book we use for happy new year, or something like that, you know, different kind of... ceremony.

But we don't write very much. Just used to read and, you know, to practice by orals... But if you want to study like... more education about Cambodian letter, you have to go

to the city and study at school... I decided to go into the city and study, but at that time the Khmer Rouge came into my country, so I don't have a chance to go. I just quit.

Once Sokhhoeun had learned to read through his studies at the temple, he was then able to transfer the skill of reading to other texts of a secular nature, although doing this kind of reading often required additional independent study or questioning of others.

So when you want to study about politic, about... something else, you have to use another book, and learn that by yourself. Sometime... if you don't know you can ask people... like the people that [have] high education or whatever.

Learning English

Sokhhoeun did not avail himself of his first chance to learn English when he initially lived in the Thai refugee camp in Kaui Dang. It was not until he learned of his family's selection for resettlement in the United States and their transfer to another camp in Mairat in 1981 that he began to study English in earnest:

Now I decide, oh, I better go to English class... You have to pay money... I study there about three months... When I first came I didn't know anything - "A," "B," "C," "D," or whatever -- I didn't know. So they [teach] very beginning, like children... They teach me about the sound of the letter, OK, the consonant and sound of the vowel. And it's very good teacher. He's very slowly and very... do again and again, you know, until the student remember... He's a Cambodian, too....

So I learned very fast, because when we know all the sound and all the consonant and put together, it's very, very easy how to... read and write... So that's the way I learned. Just only three month I can read, you know, what they call "Book One," something like that... It's very beginning....

He [the teacher]... has the [teaching] material, enough material. I don't know where he get from... But maybe they bought it from the Thai people or from the Thai market, I don't know.

[In the class] it's a lot [of people] - very big, very big... They have [the class in] the house, and the wall they make from hay... and leaves... Very full inside, but another some of the people they stand [outside] and try to tear [open] the wall and study. But the people stand outside, they not pay. Many people they try to do that.

Talking... the teacher taught us too... They practice. They wrote the question, like "What is your name?" OK, and, "Where are you from?" learn how to practice in pair, and stand up. Sometime the teacher call two people to the front, in front of a lot of people... so you just asking and answer, something like that. It's very, very, very good.

At that time, Sokhhoeun was the only member of his family who studied English. Now in the United States, his children and his younger siblings speak better English that he does, but his parents, older siblings, and wife still speak little or no English.

Adult education in the U.S.A.

Sokhhoeun enrolled in a refugee ESL literacy program when he first came to the United States, and stayed in it for around six months. He found it helpful in adding considerably to the very limited English speaking and listening skills he had acquired in the refugee camp.

Subsequently, after about a year in California, he enrolled in a bilingual vocational training program for about three months, training to become an electronic assembler. The program was offered by the Oakland Chinese Community Council, and included instruction in English and Chinese. This was not very helpful to Sokhhoeun, since his English was very limited, and he speaks no Chinese, only Cambodian. Before the end of the program he found a job through a Cambodian friend who was also in the program. This job was a stock handler in a warehouse, and was not at all related to the electronic assembly training he had been receiving.

Sokhhoeun has also attended several semesters at a local community college (Laney College), where he studied English (both ESL and some basic literacy classes offered for native English speakers), and some basic math. He expresses particular pride that the English courses he took were not specifically *"for refugees,"* and that he was a regular community college students, not a member of a special program.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Sokhhoeun demonstrates understanding and skill in employing some forms of literacy in his current work and life. Sokhhoeun uses literacy when he needs to use it -- in his daily life at home, in his community, and at work. He values and respects literacy as an important tool. He feels similarly about education.

Soon after his arrival in the United States Sokhhoeun developed an important learning strategy that employed text as a storage and modeling device to enable him to achieve rapid self-sufficiency in his interactions with bureaucratic agencies:

> *So when I went to apply for welfare, I have to watch them [his friends]. This is my idea. I have to watch them. How can they do, how... can they fill out the form, what form they do... the word they use... or whatever. Then, after he help me to fill out the form... I take it home, I not just [turn in]... I just make a copy first. That's my idea. I didn't know anything, but I just make a copy... Then later on... if I want to do that again I know, oh, maybe I can make copy from the old one. So that's my idea. I think that way, I do that way... So I just keep the old paper. When I have something problem, the same situation... I may copy from that... Later on, then I don't need help.*

Now, I ask them [friends] to [go to] another place, like Social Security office. So, they help me to fill it out, right. Do the same think like Welfare form, you know... I look at... every single question... But I try to remember. I cannot read all, but... I can read some, like "what," "where," something like that... So I try. Then, they [friends] help me to fill out. Then I didn't return it [the form] back today. I just want to xerox first, the form that they fill it out for me. So now I gave them [the agency] the original, I keep the copy. Every places... I keep original. That's my idea. So then later on if I have any problem do[ing] the same thing, I take the old one, and a little different like birthdate or whatever, right? Just change that.

I make up [this idea] myself, I do myself. Nobody tell me. I just, you know, use my brain to do that. Because I didn't know the English, I cannot read the English. But if I have a copy, I can follow, I can copy do the same thing.

Sokhhoeun is clearly proud of this strategy, proud that he devised it himself, and proud that it lessened his dependency on others. This example also suggests one important way in which he views literacy: as a practical tool for storing and retrieving important information.

He speaks Cambodian at home, as do all the members of his family except for the youngest, who speaks in English but does comprehend Cambodian. Sokhhoeun does not read much written in Cambodian at home. When asked if he reads for pleasure, he says that he does not. His English reading at home is a Cambodian-English medical dictionary. He wants to expand his medical vocabulary, for he hopes to be employed eventually as a translator in a hospital. He also reads the English teaching materials used in the classes in which he works.

He sometimes helps his youngest child -- the nine-year-old -- with his homework, but his older children do not ask for this assistance. Sokhhoeun does not read much else in English at home. When asked if he reads Cambodian newspapers in order to keep up with events "at home," he expresses little interest in those events. He notes that occasionally a friend might share with him a Cambodian language newspaper that is printed in Long Beach in Southern California [home of the largest Cambodian population in the United States]. But he points out that he and many other Cambodians have so many painful memories about life in their country that they may display little interest in hearing of its current conditions. He does write letters to a few cousins that remain in Cambodia, perhaps once every few months.

Sokhhoeun notes that he has a checking account, and has had one since he got one within two or three months of arrival in the United States. He does not do his own taxes. Like many Americans, he pays someone else to do them.

Sokhhoeun seems to have adopted a view of literacy, language, and text that might be described as utilitarian. When he sees a pragmatic benefit to be gained from using text, then he does so. For example, when he learned to use copies of old forms to fill out bureaucratic forms, he was fulfilling a pragmatic need. Literacy also has a role in most of his learning

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strategies -- learning to use an ATM, a VCR, finding his way around the city. For example, his class went on a recent field trip to a regional park. He wanted to remember how to go to the park later to take his family, so he drew a clear and detailed map [labeled in English] in his personal datebook to record this information for future use. He often uses his datebook [and seems to save the old ones] for this information storage purpose.

Thus Sokhhoeun seems to have rationally assessed the functional utility of text for him and assigned it a role in his life that is indeed one of its most basic uses for humans: to somehow "fix" or make permanent information and knowledge, and to retain it for future retrieval. His view of text appears to be largely utilitarian. The notion of employing reading for aesthetic, pleasurable, or non-pragmatic cultural purposes does not seem to be a part of Sokhhoeun's life.

Literacy at work

On his current job, Sokhhoeun is required to read and understand the English lessons that the teachers whom he assists are assigning to literacy students. He prides himself on always taking each lesson home and making sure that he understands every word, should he be called upon to explain any elements to students by the instructors whom he assists. On his job he also reads and fills out attendance forms that must be submitted to funding agencies to document program operations. In addition, he has to read and understand internal memoranda and other agency-related procedural materials.

Sokhhoeun also has to do some math on his job. He is required to total the attendance figures for daily, weekly, and monthly attendance, and to transfer the figures from individual teachers' attendance sheets to central files. This process involves adding, multiplication, and divisions of up to three-digit figures. Although his supervisor notes that accuracy can sometimes be a problem in this task for him, Sokhhoeun feels that he is able to perform this math-related task satisfactorily. He generally uses a calculator to do the math, although he points out that he could do it by hand if necessary. He does indicate that he does not understand fractions, although he can do percentages. He can do no algebra or more complex mathematical operations. He learned his math skills in Cambodia while a monk at the age of thirteen.

EVERYDAY USES OF TECHNOLOGY

At home, Sokhhoeun's family has quite a range of modern technology: car, stove, refrigerator, television, telephone, VCR, and typewriter. He displays considerable respect for the forms of technology he possesses or has learned to control, as well as pride in his ability to use and maintain them. His automobile and VCR are two prominent examples of this.

He notes that when he lived in Cambodia, driving was considered to be a valued, socially desirable skill. Usually only men drove, and the profession of "driver" was a

respected one. It may have been this set of values, plus his own innate pragmatic curiosity, which motivated him to teach himself to drive a tractor while working under the Khmer Rouge on a sugar plantation. He notes that he always rode next to the tractor driver when the work crews went out to the fields, carefully observing the shifting, acceleration, braking, and backing techniques employed with a large and heavily-laden trailer. He asked incessant questions of the driver. Ultimately, the driver let him take over, for it allowed the driver to sit in the shade eating sugar cane while watching others work.

When he came to the United States, both because of the inefficient public transportation system, and because of the value he places on driving a car, he strove to get a car and learn to drive it as soon as he could. Within six months of his arrival he accomplished this, buying a 1970 Pontiac. He still displays considerable pride when talking about his current car, a 1980 Toyota Corolla [with a stick shift]. He describes how he has changed the plugs, points, oil, starter, battery, and proudly points to a new set of Dunlop steel-belted radial tires. He describes in detail how he diagnosed the problem when his car had a dead battery. He asserts the virtues of changing oil regularly.

He displays similar pride in his VCR, which he has owned since 1983. He describes how after he first played a few tapes, the TV picture got "snowy." When he asked a friend he was told that he had to get a VCR cleaning tape, which he did. But then he smelled the head cleaning liquid [acetone], he decided that it smelled a lot like finger nail polish remover [also acetone]. So he went to the drug store and bought some of the cheaper nail polish remover, invented a head cleaning tool made of a chopstick with a cotton ball fastened to it with a rubber band, and began cleaning his VCR's heads with it. He now notes that his VCR picture is consistently as clear as when the VCR was brand new. He points out that he carefully cleans the heads after every third tape he plays on the machine.

After having been shown how to use it by a bank employee, Sokhhoeun learned to use an ATM, and now uses it regularly. In learning to use this new technology, Sokhhoeun employed the same learning strategy which he described for other tasks, both literacy and technology-related. And indeed, many of the skills he describes learning involve interactions of technology and literacy. For example, when he learned to drive a car in the United States, he was able to bring to bear a technical skill he had previously learned while driving a tractor in the forced labor sugar cane plantation in Cambodia. However, he had no knowledge of the meanings of any of the traffic control symbols [lights, signs, images], nor was he acquainted with the rules of the road. For this he always sat close to whoever was driving, observed carefully, and asked careful questions. As a result, after six months in the United States he bought a car and successfully obtained a driver's license.

When he recounts his consistent pattern for learning new technical skills [such as a VCR or bank teller machine] he reports that after the new technical skill has been visually demonstrated and orally described to him, he then insists on writing [or having written for him] the procedural steps he has just learned. He then refers to these notes when he needs to

perform the function in the future. The basic learning pattern Sokhhoeun has devised for most new situations is as follows:

1. He asks someone to describe orally for him and visually show him how to perform the process.

2. He then performs the task under their supervision, usually several times.

3. He asks them to write down the steps, or he writes down the steps.

4. He performs the task repeatedly on his own, until he is comfortable with it.

5. He relies on the written text of the steps the next time he has to perform the task, to refresh his memory.

In discussing this relatively invariant learning format that he has evolved, Sokhhoeun notes that no one taught it to him; it was simply something that he invented to solve problems. He also reflects on his own learning processes and needs by noting that it is not possible for him to learn a new process when only a written description is presented. He states that he needs first to see something and to have it explained to him. Only then does text seem to have utility for him -- a reminder and reinforcer of the process that has initially been acquired through other modalities. It is interesting to note that this process to some extent parallels the way in which Sokhhoeun first learned literacy in a Buddhist monastery: through oral presentation, followed by presentation of text as written reinforcement.

Sokhhoeun regularly uses technology for literacy purposes. His main source of information is English television news. He gets up every morning at the same time and watches the news on the same channel. He seldom reads newspapers, either English or Cambodian. He also uses both television and his VCR in the evenings for entertainment.

Technology available, but not used

When asked about other forms of technology that he might want to learn to use, he mentions the computer. There are currently two computers available at two of the sites where he works, one an IBM PC-compatible, and the other an Apple Macintosh. The Macintosh sat, unused, directly next to him during several interviews. It is seldom used by staff at that site. However, Sokkhoeun has not attempted to learn to use it, unlike other technology of modern American life.

He thinks that he could learn to use a computer, but that it would have to be through individual tutoring, perhaps with another Cambodian staff member who works at one of the agency sites. He does not identify any particular functions that he would be able to perform with the computer that would be able to help him with his home life or work life. He thinks his children should and will learn to use computers. He notes that he has bought a

typewriter at home, primarily for his oldest son's use for school assignments, but that he uses it sometimes, too.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In talking of the future, Sokhhoeun speaks in general terms of his need for further education. He thinks that at some point he will need to move to another job, and that it may require further education -- he is interested in either becoming a teacher or a medical translator. However, beyond his leisure-time reading of a Cambodian-English medical dictionary, Sokhhoeun does not seem to have clear ideas about the educational and other steps that would be necessary for him to achieve these goals. In the meantime, his wife's illness and inability to work places additional strain on the family's ability to survive, and would make further education very difficult.

Sokhhoeun is a vibrant, expressive, attractive individual. He is warm and sincere, and he displays a strong attitude of independence and self-reliance. He has taught himself many things of a technical and intellectual nature -- as well as having had brief occasional exposure to formal instruction -- and he displays a pragmatic, self-reliant problem-solving rationality.

MICHELA STONE

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MICHELA STONE

By Tom Nesbit

Michela Stone is a 32-year old single white woman refugee from Byelorussia in the western Soviet Union. She has lived in San Francisco for two years and hopes to gain American citizenship. She works as a bookkeeper in the emigre department of a community center, and has a second part-time job as a bookkeeper for a local dentist. She has an advanced degree in accountancy teaching from the Soviet Union and has experienced little difficulty with either technology or with written English. However, her long working hours and the closeness of the immigrant community make it difficult for her to meet American people and to practice and improve her spoken English.

MICHELA STONE AND HER FAMILY

Michela lives alone in a small third floor apartment in a four story building with 20 other apartments similar to hers. She doesn't know many of her neighbors. Her mother is dead and she has a younger sister who's married and lives with her Russian husband and child in New York. Her father, who emigrated with Michela, also lives in San Francisco, in government-subsidized housing.

I still cook for him, so I see him 3-4 times per week. He is also learning English so he comes to where I work for classes. I spend one night a week at his apartment so I can cook or clean for him. He can look after himself but I need to do this. In Russia, family is very important.

Her apartment is close to her work: "*I have a nice apartment near this job. It's just seven minutes by walking. It's very nice. It has a security system which is very good. And my spruce tree -- it's my friend.*" She doesn't know a lot of people in her apartment building, or generally outside of the emigrant community.

Most of the people I know are Russian. I do know more Americans than my friends, partly because of where I work. But also, my friends, they have family and more obligations to kids. They don't have time to spend outside home. I have very few good friends. In Russian a friend means a lot. It's one who shares your bitterness and your happiness, you can share anything. Here you don't have quite the same sorts of friends because you don't live in your community like you used to. When situation is hard you need to find a way to survive. Some people find an honest way to survive. Some people just cheat and lie. Especially here, society gives people such a good field, such a good opportunity to lie. This is true. So making friends is hard. I have a lot of acquaintances. Especially working here, I know a lot of people and they know me, know who I am. Everyone comes for money or for favors. I try and help them.

As for free time, I love to cook. As you can see I'm very ...I eat too much. So I try not to cook, but...I like to dance also, but I don't have much time. If I had a car it would

be easier. My hobby, it's photography. I have a camera but it's not very good. Here the equipment is very high quality but I can't afford it.

I also get together with my friends and I try to find an American friend. This is most important problem. Finding American friends. Male or female doesn't matter. I don't look only for romance. American men are not so romantic. I decided not to have a boyfriend right now. It's totally different values.

Michela is not a member of any community groups. "*No time!*" However, she once joined a choral society.

I went with my friend. She had a Chinese boyfriend, and it was Chinese group though most had been born here. We sang in English. I didn't like it much. I just liked people.

In order to feel more assimilated into American life as well as to improve her learning of English, Michela began to teach Russian to three Americans.

I started to exchange Russian to English, English to Russian. Lessons just for exchange, you understand. Not for money. We read and write and speak Russian and English. Maybe one hour, two hour a week. Then I learn something about American lifestyle. Cultural exchange. To meet American people, to learn something from them.

Her students are two Americans who want to learn Russian so they can visit, and an American-born Lithuanian who wants to keep his cultural heritage. "*You see, Russia and news about Russian federation has been a lot in the papers. This wakens interest. People want to go there, to see for themselves.*"

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Michela's apartment is designed for one person: a bathroom, a small storage area, and a carpeted oblong room that is bedroom, living room, and kitchen. The cooking area is sectioned off by a counter that serves as a table. Michela's kitchen area has a small refrigerator/freezer, an electric cooker, and a microwave oven. Her living/bedroom contains a bed, a small low table, and a bookcase with some books, photos, a small TV, and an FM/AM radio. There are pictures on each wall, although one of the shorter walls is taken up by a window that looks out onto a mature spruce tree. The overall impression of Michela's apartment is of functionality and practicality.

Most of the area where Michela lives is filled with similar apartment buildings or small family homes. There are not many trees or gardens and Michela's building faces onto one of San Francisco's commuter corridors. There is a university close by and every other street corner contains a small grocery store. There are banks, supermarkets, launderettes, cafes, and restaurants within a 15 minute walking distance. Frequent public transport to other parts of the city is close by.

Michela Stone

Michela Stone is part of San Francisco's Russian immigrant population. She has lived in the area for just over two years and feels part of a wide community network. The community center where she works is an integral part of that network, meeting many of the housing, education, and social needs of both recent and more established immigrants.

I think there's about 10-15,000 emigrants from Russia in the area. There's been four waves of emigration. Around the time of the revolution, after World War II, about 1973/74, and then after 1987. The border was closed from 1981 until then. Each wave helps the next settle in. It's like family. We're very tight.

Most recent Russian emigrants to San Francisco are Jews, though it's not a religious thing. It's more cultural, you know? It's how we grew up. We want to keep it. The center where I work is not a synagogue. Most people who use the center are Russians. It's just a local place for Russians to go, to keep our traditions, to be together.

Many have a college education and come from the Russian professional class: university teachers, businesspeople, doctors, or scientists. They come mainly from the Ukraine, Lithuania, or Byelorussia in the western Soviet Union. *"They're the ones with the knowledge of European countries and cultures. They know about other ways to be rather than just Soviet way."*

Most Russian immigrants come to the U.S.A. for two main reasons -- first, poor living standards in their country of origin. *"Even if you're wealthy it's hard. You can't buy or do much. There's not a lot of foreign currency in Soviet Union so most things are for tourists."* Second, emigrants desire to live in a more open society.

They also dream about living in a free country. Where government does not lie to the people. It's like prison sometimes. Where you go, what you do, it's watched. And for Jews it's worse -- there's persecution. There was a lot of trouble. Like for me and my father. Our name, it's ______. It's Jewish. We didn't do anything. But we have to think one thing, say another thing, do a different way. It's hard. I worked with teenagers. When you know young persons and they ask you some question and you have to say certain things and not say certain things.

LIFE HISTORY

Growing up

Michela was born in Gomel, a city of 500,000 people in south-eastern Byelorussia. She lived there with her parents until she was 17.

My mother live there all her life, but my father came from a smaller city. My parents weren't so young when I was born. The war you understand. My father was 34, my mother was 29 when I was born. This was quite old for Russians.

Michela has one sister, younger by two years. The family lived together with Michela's paternal grandmother all the time that Michela was a child. Michela's parents both worked.

My mother, first she was a math teacher in the local high school. But then she was an executive director in a secondary school in a military base. When I was born it was hard for her to find a job. So she enrolled in a correspondence course from Kiev and she graduated with a diploma in foreign languages [in French and German]. My father, he was the first in his family to go to college. But he did not complete his undergraduate education. So he did not change jobs too much. In fact he stay in the same job for 42 years. He was accountant. It was a trade union company, and he eventually got a trade-union position as a financial manager. In Russia you know that a trade union's task is different. It is not only to protect workers' rights but also to provide welfare for the people. Trips to resorts and taking care of workers' health and welfare. So my father organized that for the union where he worked.

Michela lived at home until she was almost 17. Then she moved to Moscow while she went to college. After she had been there two years, her mother died and she returned to Gomel to finish her degree at the local university. "*We were an established family, in terms of the money situation, but still it was hard for us. It was expensive to stay in Moscow.*" She lived again with her father and sister for two years, until her sister got married.

My sister's husband, he came to live with us. It's a Russian tradition. Then they had a baby, my niece, and our apartment became very small, you understand. So we switched apartments.· One for me and my father, one for my sister and her family.

In Gomel, Michela worked as an accountant/bookkeeper in a wholesale company.

It was boring for me. I was only 20 years old and it wasn't very exciting. No computerized accounting. We used abacus and calculators. I had to supervise three older women and they made it hard for me to do that. So I was very depressed and decided to get another job.

I should add that I was a camp counselor for five years each summer for violent kids from bad families. We would go away into the country and do education and workshops. Help the children, they were aged about 14 or 15, feel good about themselves. So I realized that I liked to teach, and I applied for a job teaching basic statistics and simple accounting in a college. I did that for 7 years. During that time I also did a correspondence course and got my Masters degree in Accountancy Teaching.

Emigration from the Soviet Union

In January 1989, Michela and her father got their permits to leave the Soviet Union. They moved first to Italy and then (after 2 months) to the U.S.A. She has lived in San Francisco ever since. She plans to stay in the U.S.A. "*I lost my Russian citizenship - I am*

a refugee. I want to be a U.S. citizen. After 5 years I can apply." Moving was challenging and frightening.

> *I didn't know what we would find. We were lucky. My sponsor found us a place to stay. You need to have a sponsor to come here. Our sponsor was my father's friend's son. He was financially responsible for first few months. He gave us an apartment for me and my father. Two beds in one room. But it was cheap. We stay there one and a half years. Then my father got a government-sponsored apartment and I move to my own place.*

Work

When she first came to San Francisco, Michela worked *"as a cleaner in an apartment house, then in a hotel doing office work. Then I got a job here at the center."* She'd eventually like to move to a job teaching in a local college. *"I need to learn economics, though"*. When she moved to the U.S.A. she found people were not particularly helpful with advice about work.

> *People would tell me that I couldn't get a job as an accountant. You can get a job at a hotel or cleaning up someone's mess. Why they did that I don't know. It was mis-instruction. It made me think I was nothing.*

Soon she was able to find a job which made some use of her accounting background, as a bookkeeper with a non-profit community center for Russian emigres. Her office is small (10 ft. square) and crammed with files, two desks, computers, and a giant refrigerator leaking ice. Papers are strewn over every surface. The office feels cluttered but friendly. Her co-workers are constantly in and out of each other's offices. They use Michela's office to play computer games. On a wall near her desk, Michela has pinned a list of tenses of English verbs. *"It's my homework."*

Neighboring offices of similar size serve as a reception/ counseling area, and the editorial office of a Russian language newspaper put out by the department for the emigrant community. She works with two other people, both Russian, although she has sole responsibility for the department's financial record keeping. She is clearly skilled at her work and enjoys it, despite the meager salary.

To supplement her income she also works for seven hours per week as a bookkeeper for a small dental practice near her apartment. She found this job through an acquaintance in the Russian community. She works there twice a week -- one evening and on Saturday mornings. The work is similar to her full-time job: she prepares accounts, balances budgets, deals with invoices. Apart from the owner, she does not deal with any of the dentists or clients.

ERIC

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Michela went to a local school in Gomel until she was 16. She remembers it fondly.

It was easy for me to learn to read. I could read before I went to school. My mother and my grandmother help me. They would read to me and I would follow the words on the page. Writing -- that was harder. I could print but my calligraphy was not so good. I had no patience with this. We had ink and a quill pen. My mother always say Michela has great patience. If I make mistake I start again from the beginning. I found school easy -- apart from chemistry and algebra. I love physics. I was a good student, not because I am quick learner, but because I studied a lot.

She took her high school exams a year earlier than her contemporaries and then moved away from her family home to go to college in Moscow. She lived there for two years.

It was great experience. I lived in dormitory and was near the theater and movies. I went out all the time. I used to skip my lunch and go. I was a full-time student as well so it was a busy time. I never missed any school.

When her mother died, economic hardship caused her to move back home to live with her father and her newly-married sister and brother-in-law. "*My father he didn't force me to move back. But I thought it was necessary.*" She completed her bachelor's degree (in accounting) at the local university and enrolled in a correspondence course to get an master's degree in accountancy teaching.

She remembers her parents (her mother especially) being very supportive towards education, partly due to their own educational experiences.

My father, his family was not so clever, so educated. He was the first in his family to get a higher education. Before the revolution, for Jews -- it was forbidden to live in a city. Just in the country where schools were not so good. My mother's family was very well educated. I know this for three generations. Her mother was a governess and could speak seven languages.

Michela feels that her mother being a teacher helped form her attitudes towards education and learning.

When I was little I remember being read to a lot by my mother and my grandmother. Not only in Russian. My mother would read me stories in French and German. Fairy tales, and historical stories mostly. Lovely printed books with colorful pictures, special editions.

She doesn't remember her father helping so much. "*Of course he was working, man. Sometimes, eighteen hours a day.*" There were always lots of books around the house.

Russian history, classical literature like Pushkin, math books -- my mother was a math teacher, foreign language books -- mainly in French and German, and crossword puzzle books -- my mother used to love doing crosswords. No English books, though -- I don't know why. Perhaps no one could read English. My father certainly couldn't.

When she left Russia, Michela had to sort out her family library.

There were over 2,000 books, most of which my mother had collected. All sorts of books. All had to be left behind -- I brought only 40 books with me. Some cookery books, a collection of Pushkin, some history. I don't have any kids, but I brought at least a couple of history books to let the children know about Russian history.

Adult education in the U.S.A.

When she moved to the U.S.A., Michela couldn't speak any English at all, only a little German. "*At first I forced myself to read for one hour per day. It was the rule. I just did it.*" Since she's been here, Michela has already enrolled in several adult education classes: basic literacy, accounting, and two English classes. "*The literacy class was the most helpful. Probably because I'd just moved here and needed to know the most.*"

This basic course developed practical literacy skills in simulated real-life situations. "*I remember we were taught how to use the telephone. To talk faster and not so loud. You see, in Russia we shout. Really loud.*" She concentrated on using simple English words and phrases.

That was so helpful. The teacher wasn't American. He was Chinese, I think, and had graduated from a school in France. And he did not have such good English. We had to listen to him very hard. But that made it easier for us to learn. Just simple English. I wasn't so afraid of making mistakes when the teacher made them too sometimes. He was OK.

The course was held in a community-based organization in central San Francisco. Most of the other students were recent immigrants, (though by no means all Russian), and one of the main objectives of the course was "*learning how to do things the American way. So we can better get jobs.*" The students learned a lot from each other.

At first I thought I don't want to be doing this. So many different languages, you understand. I want to learn American and be in class with Americans. But after a while I liked the other people better and saw that they had many of the same problems I had. We talked a lot about that. We had a lot of fun laughing at everyone's mistakes.

The accounting class and the other English courses were held in more traditional college environments and less enjoyable.

ERIC

The first course was about listening and grammar. I thought the teacher was very good and helped us a lot. But the course was more expensive and not so fun. A lot of written tests and corrections. And passages, you know? Reading passages. You have to understand direct and indirect questions. You could not use your previous knowledge and experiences to get a correct answer. It was hard. Even for Americans.

Michela's goal is to improve her English to such a degree that she could pass the TOEFL (Test of English for Foreign Learners) – a standardized test that non-native speakers must pass in order to enroll in college.

I'd like to be able to go to college here. Enroll in a business program. Get an MBA. Nobody thinks my MA from Russia is worth much. I took TOEFL once and scored only 10 below. That's just one or two answers. I'll certainly take it again when I have time to study.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

At work, Michela reads in English. "*Papers related to accounting, program services. I don't know every word. Some very technical. My co-workers help me a lot. I also have dictionary on my desk. I use every day.*" She also writes in English. "*Just short letters and notes. To be honest, my writing is not so good. My co-workers have to correct it. Syntax is different between English and Russian.*" One of the drawbacks of her job is that she doesn't get to speak a lot of English.

With my co-workers I speak mainly English. About 85 percent of time. With clients I speak mainly Russian. Their English not so good. Most of my work is with figures, and it's in my head. As well, a lot of the people who use the center are Russian and can't speak a lot of English. I can't improve my English very much.

Because of her two jobs and having to cook for her father, Michela doesn't have much free time. Most of her free time is spent reading, both in Russian and English.

Not as much as my parents did, though. They had more settled lifestyle. I don't have time. I read both English and Russian. In Russian I read Pushkin and Russian history. These were the books I brought with me. In English I read accountancy books and love stories. Love stories are easy to read. Short, simple words. Accounting books are technical, not so much interest. But with dictionary, it's OK.

I also read magazines about the [movie] stars. This help me participate in some conversations amongst my friends. In the dentist's office where I work they have magazines like USA Today and People. If I have 15 minutes off I try and read them. To understand what's going on in the country. It's interesting for me to read about Soviet Union. It's hard to understand the changes in Soviet system. I sometimes see a Russian newspaper – my father subscribes. For him it's his life.

Shopping presents little difficulty for Michela.

I can usually understand. You don't need English to buy food. You just walk in and they serve you. In Chinese store, I ask how to cook certain vegetables. Usually they tell you. Some don't know English. It's hard to find right person to explain.

Sometimes I don't know products. When we went shopping I didn't know different kind of tofu. I didn't know you could get different sorts, like "hard". Sometimes I use dictionary to find out what's in canned foods. And for recipes.

When she first came to the U.S.A., Michela would carry a dictionary with her, "*always with me. For two years, in my purse.*" Now, she doesn't use one when she goes shopping. She doesn't use food coupons either. Not because she doesn't understand their language or use but,

I don't have the time. At first I think "why do Americans try to save money?" Although I do try to buy cheapest. I always buy brand name of store. It's less money.

Buying clothes can be more troublesome. "*In Soviet Union, sizes are different. For example, I don't know what is 'petite.' I cannot ask the salesperson. So I try on. I usually go with friends and they tell me.*"

Michela doesn't have a car and gets around by public transport although she has passed her California driving test. "*That was easy. No trouble with the words.*" Public transport is readily available and easy to use. "*For first few days it's hard. I don't know ways to go. No problem now.*"

Michela occasionally goes to restaurants, mainly Chinese: "*Though I find it hard to understand the menu. Not words like "spicy" or "pork" you know, but specific names of dishes. Sometimes I ask, or point. Sometimes I choose what I know. I try to read. I usually get what I ask for.*

In general, Michela has little difficulty with written English. What she doesn't understand immediately, she remembers or writes down to look up when she gets home. "*You can pick up most from context.*" Because of her greater difficulty with understanding social contexts, spoken English is generally harder to pick up.

I try to understand what people say on the bus. But it's hard. People use a lot of slang. In Russia, too. But you use slang without thinking. Here I try to use at right time, but the words are different. If you try to understand just the words, it's hard. I cannot participate in conversation about the movies -- I don't have time to go often and I can't understand much when I do. At first, I tried to speak English with my Russian friends but we jumped back. We didn't know enough words. But we tried.

ERIC

Talking to other people I find hard. People don't always show you. They behave not nice. They don't want to teach you because they're afraid you're going to take their jobs. They're not always sympathetic when you don't have good English. For example, there was a counselor at the local college. When I met him he was very rude. He didn't give me any information. He just kicked me out and didn't explain. All because I had poor English. I understand he has more people apply than places, but...

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Both at work and at home, Michela is comfortable with a wide range of technology, much of which she had also used in some form in her life in Russia. She uses technology for literacy in several ways, including a computer at work and television for information (both news and cultural information).

Michela gets most of her news from TV rather than from text sources.

I have a small TV which gets local channels. My father -- he has a cable TV with 35 channels so he can watch Moscow news everyday. He watches a lot but doesn't understand much. I watch the news and soap operas. "Young and Restless" is a favorite. There's a lot of stories. It helps me find out about American life. In Soviet Union the soap operas are more about crime and cops.

TV is also a good source of entertainment, and she also watches certain programs for cultural information about American life, and in order to have conversation topics.

I like "Jeopardy" because it's written, you know? Of course, I don't know many of the answers but I like reading. I also watch programs called "Donahue" and "Geraldo." They are talk shows, with different guests. That's really interesting. Always some aspect of American life is on. People are very open with their feelings and opinions. Not like in Russia. I usually find the programs very interesting. Most of the general ideas I understand, some of the words are hard.

Michela doesn't have a VCR: "*If I did I could tape these shows and discuss them with my father and friends. Only so much time though.*" At the moment, she doesn't want other technological equipment either. "*When I have more money, I buy. Better kitchen equipment. Make life easier.*"

Michela also uses modern office technology at work.

I use computers here for the bookkeeping and for typing letters. I did use computers in Russia too but they were more outdated. Different machines. Slower. Some of the computer language is hard. I thought "goto" was a strange word. I couldn't find it in the dictionary. Only now I know it is two words, "go to."

She has little difficulty too, with written instructions for household appliances. "*If I don't know, I try to just use and see how it works.*" She can readily pick up how to use most machines. Though, "*when I first came, I couldn't understand the ATM machine at the bank. People from my class show me. Now it's no problem.*" Her only serious difficulty was with a newly-purchased telephone answering machine. "*I didn't know how to set it up. I don't understand the word 'rings'. I knew which buttons to press but not how to save. I use a dictionary. Then it's not so difficult.*"

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Michela doesn't have any children of her own but spends time with those of her friends who do.

> *Most of my friends have kids and they ask me not to speak English to their children. They are frightened they will lose their Russian. Then parents will lose family connections and influence on their children. I think they are right. If I had kids I would be same.*

Retaining and sharing aspects of her own culture is very important to Michela.

> *It's strange. Americans are more competitive, more individual. In Russia we are more together. We help each other. We are more social, more sharing.*
>
> *You see, with my students - the ones who learn Russian. We have lesson outside - in bar, or beach, or sometimes in my apartment. This helps me learn English better. I'm not afraid to ask some question. Because my student, he or she feel the same way I do. Because we don't know a lot we are not ashamed to ask each other. Personal contact and exchange has helped me the most.*

SUMMARY

Michela was well educated and highly literate in her native language. In only two years in San Francisco she has mastered most everyday tasks and a work environment that employs more sophisticated technology than in her previous life. Nevertheless, her limited English fluency presents her with many problems, and the necessity to work two jobs, as well as take care of her father, means she has little time for further education.

NURA TOLA

ERIC

NURA TOLA

By Lensa Gudina

Nura Tola is a 29-year old female Oromo refugee from the southern area of Ethiopia. She came to the United States in 1990. Nura is married and lives with her husband in San Jose, California. Nura works as a cleaner in a hotel. She had no formal education in her country, and is literate in neither her native Oromo nor in English. She is currently studying ESL. Nura has no children but plans to have them when she gets adjusted to the life style in the U.S. She would also like to learn sufficient English to work in the health care field.

NURA TOLA

Nura has experienced considerable changes in the course of her almost thirty years. She grew up in a village with no electricity, and with mainly traditional forms of technology. She fled her home in southeastern Ethiopia in 1982, with the other women and children of the village, due to the war between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo liberation movement. She spent eight years in a refugee camp in Somalia, experiencing many brutalities that she is reluctant to talk about. Finally, her husband was able to get a visa to emigrate to the United States, a country whose existence they had never known. A year later, Nura joined him in San Jose.

Nura's husband now works as a security guard at a nearby hotel, and Nura works as a cleaner. She is enrolled in an ESL class, but because she was not literate in any language, and because there is no Oromo-English dictionary, Nura is struggling to learn English. Her husband was educated and already literate in two languages (Oromo and Arabic) when he came to the United States, and because of this had an easier time understanding ESL classes than she has had.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Nura Tola and her husband live in an apartment in the Alum Rock area of San Jose. The neighborhood is largely populated by immigrants, mostly from Mexico, Vietnam and some from east Africa. Two other Oromo families live nearby, and Nura keeps in close contact with them. Her contact with other neighbors is minimal because of the language barrier. When they occasionally see each other in the hallway they smile and say hello, but that is all. Nura is struck by the differences in social and cultural life between her present community and the one in which she grew up.

> *I would like to know the language well enough before I have children. I see the difficulties some of the Oromo women with children go through in this country. Life in this country is not like back home where you leave your children with your relatives or neighbors if you have to go to the market or do something else. There are no relatives here, and as you know your neighbors don't even greet you, let alone take care of your children. You know how we take turns back home to get together at each other's house*

and drink coffee every morning. That's one thing I haven't been able to get used to -- drinking coffee on my own or eating alone.

The Oromo community in San Jose is quite small. The number of Oromos residing in San Jose had reached 400 at one point in 1990, but decreased to about 100 when most of the community members moved to other states in search of affordable housing and better employment opportunities.

LIFE HISTORY

Growing up in Ethiopia

Nura was born in 1962. She had thirteen brothers and nine sisters. Half her family was killed in the war and the whereabouts of her parents still remain unknown. Her father was a sheik with Islamic education. He could read the Koran in Arabic. She grew up in a mud hut with a thatch roof. There was no electricity in the whole village. At night, for light they used lamps with kerosene oil and wick. One of her brothers had a transistor radio that he brought back from the town where he went to school. Since her father was a religious man he didn't allow Nura and her sisters to listen to the radio. They had no clock in their house; instead, during the day, they looked at the position of the sun to tell time.

The sun rose at six in the morning and set at six in the evening throughout the year. You know, we don't have long or short days like they do here. We woke up when the roosters croaked and set out for work. By looking at the sun we knew it was midday and time for lunch. And in the evening the animals would start heading back home -- the cows would lead and the donkeys would follow, never the other way around. We depended both on the sun and our animals for time telling. And there are the "Ayyaantuus" who can tell the time of the year by looking at the position of the moon and the stars.

Nura's father was a prominent religious leader in the village and relatively better off than most of the villagers.

My father had four wives. Each of his wives had her own thatch hut with the kitchen built separately from the house. Children lived in their mother's hut. But every night we all gathered at the oldest wife's hut. All huts were located in the same compound. The men worked on the farm and the women took the produce to the market. We cultivated fruits, such as oranges, pineapples, papayas, bananas. We also cultivated vegetables and coffee. The men used oxen to draw the plough and a sickle for harvesting grain or crops. Women were not supposed to work on the farm, but sometimes we would help with the weeding.

One of the factors that prevented Nura from attending school was that her village did not have a school of its own.

Our village was surrounded by mountains. The rainy season lasted four to six months. There were no schools in our village, the closest one was located in another town across the river. Due to the rains, the river remained full for most of the year, which prevented us from going across to attend school. My father sent my brothers to go stay with relatives and attend Islamic school; but we, the women, couldn't leave unless we were married. As you know, once a woman gets married she has no life of her own. Her time is divided between taking care of her husband and raising their children. The thought of going to school never crossed my mind until I left my village and went to Somalia where I saw some Oromo women attending class. At first I was ashamed at the thought of a woman going to school, especially a married woman. But as time went on I got used to the idea and started going to one of the classes myself.

Flight and the refugee camp

In 1982, during a war between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo liberation front, Nura's village was raided, and the women and children hid in the mountains.

Our village was raided one night by militia men from the government who looted and killed. We [the women] took the young ones and headed toward the mountains to hide. We could see from afar when our huts and crops were being burned. We were also told that our water wells were poisoned. So we began the long walk to Somalia that took fourteen days. We walked at night and hid during daylight. We lost half of the children on the way due to the heat and lack of water. Just within a day nine children died on us -- there wasn't much we could do. There was no help to be found in the middle of the desert. We didn't realize where we were going. We were looking for another village like the one we left. Instead what we found was a desert with no water or food. We walked from sun down to sun rise, our feet were bleeding. But we had no choice -- we either had to keep walking and find some food and water or die in the desert. When we came close to the refugee camps we were surrounded by Somalian soldiers who accused us of spying for the Ethiopian government and put us in jail. Terrible things happened to us that I don't even like to talk about... but after a while they had to let us go. The jails were too crowded and people kept arriving by hundreds and thousands as the war kept getting worse and worse.

She spent eight years in a refugee camp in Somalia. Nura had never dreamed of coming to the United States, but eight years of hardship from living in refugee camps in Somalia and the dim prospect of returning to her home village motivated her to find a way of getting out of the camps.

We had no idea that such a country even existed before we left home. We knew that there were other countries, such as Djibouti or Somalia, but not the United States. I knew about those two countries, because they said that things like radios and watches came from there. Maybe the people who went to school knew more about other countries -- I didn't.

ERIC

Nura's husband found out about the possibilities of migrating to the United States through a relief worker. He applied immediately, but the process took four years. His visa came first and he had to leave right away, without his wife. She came a year later, in 1990.

Due to health problems I had to stay behind for one year until the problem cleared. The day I was supposed to depart, one of the Oromo relief workers explained to me about getting on an airplane and flying. I didn't like the idea, but he told me that was the only way to get to America. Planes remind me of the war. After four years in Somalia in the refugee camps war broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia. The Ethiopians flew across the border and dropped bombs on some of the refugee camps. Many refugees died by the bomb attack. I can still hear the sound the jets made as they dropped the bombs. You can hear them come from far away, but before you know it they are right above you. I don't even know how we survived that. The God of our ancestors delivered us.

The relief worker explained more and told me not to get off the plane until it arrived in San Francisco, without mentioning anything about changing flights in France. When I got on the plane I sat there the whole night with my eyes wide open. When we arrived in France everybody got off the plane but me. The stewardess came and talked to me, I think she was telling me to get off. I asked, "San Francisco?" She shook her head. I said I wasn't going to get off the plane until we got to San Francisco. She wasn't understanding what I was trying to say; she went and got other stewardesses, they all tried to explain, but I was determined to stay in that plane. They were very upset that they couldn't communicate with me. I started to cry, not knowing what was going on. Finally they all got up and left and I followed them. Right there I realized the importance of going to school and learning other languages. I was happy when I finally arrived in San Francisco and saw my husband.

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Nura didn't receive any formal education while she was at home. She remembers being taught her genealogy as a child. She could count up to twelve generations on her father's side and up to seven on her mother's side. Learning one's genealogy is a very important part of one's identity in Oromo culture as a way of keeping track of who is related to whom. The European method of using last names does not have parallel in Oromo culture. Women never take a name from their husband – they retain the same name from birth to death. Oromo children take their father's first name as their last name. Each child is coached to recite the first name of its grandfathers for as many generations back as possible. She was also taught arithmetic through games and by counting the family members and cattle in the neighborhood.

Every night, when the men came back from the farm, and the boys returned the cattle to the corral, we all would sit around the fire and listen to the elders as they told stories about the olden days. The stories were usually about animals, explaining why, for example, hyenas and donkeys became enemies or why zebras have stripes. Numbers

ERIC

were taught to us through songs or games. I don't remember being taught anything else; other things you just learn by watching others do them. I watched my mother and one of my step mothers as they cooked and learned how to cook. I also went to the market with them and observed how they sold the produce we had carried to market. We also did our shopping while we were there. I always followed one of my step mothers who was known for her bargaining ability and learned how to shop wisely. A neighbor taught me how to spin cotton and weave the yarn into cloth. My oldest sister taught me how to weave baskets. After she showed me how to do the basics, I started using my own imagination to combine different colors and weave various designs.

Adult education

Nura attended classes on how to read and write Oromo while she was in the refugee camps in Somalia. Since the classes were inconsistent she still has a difficult time reading Oromo.

The Oromo organization at the camps sent their people around to talk to refugees, especially women, about the importance of education. They told us that unless we got educated we would spend the rest of our lives in those refugee camps. We were all determined to do anything to get ourselves out of the camps. Along with other women I started going to a certain location where we sat under a tree and recited the letters of the alphabet, one by one. Sometimes I sit in my English class and think about the situation in the refugee camps. Here in San Jose each student sits on his own chair, with a desk attached to it. There, in the camps we sat either on the ground or found large rocks and used them as stools. Our laps were our desks. We didn't mind it though; we were so excited that we were learning something.

I still try to improve my reading ability, but since I came to this country and started learning English I have a hard time differentiating between the rules of reading the two languages. I keep getting mixed up by the rules of reading and writing Oromo versus English. English is a difficult language to learn. The other students use dictionaries to translate new words but there is no Oromo/English dictionary. If my husband doesn't know the words then I will never find out. And sometimes even after they are translated they don't make much sense. Even worse, some words in English don't even exist in the Oromo language and vice versa.

Both Nura and her husband have attended ESL classes, but learning English is very difficult for Nura. She has little opportunity to practice:

My teacher says that we should be in contact with Americans to practice our English, but I hardly come in contact with Americans. There aren't any in my neighborhood. The only time I see them is when I watch television or go to the store. But at the store they have no time for discussions. My husband and I were advised to talk to one another in English, which we tried for a while. But since we kept running out of English words, we

cut down on communicating with one another. That made us feel even worse, so we gave up on the idea of communicating with one another in English.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Nura hardly uses literacy in her everyday life. Her cleaning job doesn't involve any reading.

I know which cleaning detergent to use and how much of it through practice. At home I only write when I take down telephone numbers or when I do my home work. I also have to read the bus numbers when I catch the bus to go to work or school. I would like to be able to read the newspaper or story books but that will take a long time. If I get letters or bills I wait until my husband comes home from work. I do open the bills and I know where to look for the amount, but I still don't know how to write checks. My husband takes care of that.

Nura gets most of her news from other Oromo friends and some from television and radio.

Our Oromo community holds a meeting once a week. Those who know English would tell us about what is happening in our home area or other countries. They get their news from the paper or BBC radio, and some of them call their families back home to find out what is going on -- those who have family members left. I don't, so I don't call home. My husband and I watch the news every night. Sometimes I can tell just by looking at the pictures, but not all the time. I can understand some of the spoken words, but since they talk very fast I don't understand most of it. I also like to watch films; my teacher says they help one learn English faster.

Nura and her husband own a video cassette recorder which they use to watch video tapes of Oromo cultural shows that were taped on different occasions. Nura seems comfortable operating the VCR. She knows how to turn it on or off if she wants to watch a video tape but doesn't know how to record shows from television. Nura and her husband also own a tape recorder.

I use the tape recorder to tape my voice and send it to my friends and relatives since I can't read or write well enough. I also use it to listen to tapes they send me. It's just like how you would write a letter. I always start by saying greetings and go on to tell them about my life here and ask them how their lives are going. It is nice, I enjoy doing it. But I would like to improve my reading and writing so that I can send them regular letters. I would also like to write down everything that we went through after we fled our home. I seem to have forgotten some of it. I think this country makes people forgetful, I have become forgetful since I came here. It's probably because of having to learn so many new things within such a short time.

Her lack of English proficiency creates problems for her in many ways. She must use a translator when she goes to the doctor, and this can be embarrassing when the translator is a man. She would like to be able to write letters to her friends and relatives. Above all, she would like better English skills so that she can get a better job.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Everyday technology for Nura Tola is fairly basic by American standards. Her apartment has a refrigerator and an electric stove for cooking. She uses the oven only occasionally, for baking bread -- one of her Oromo neighbors showed her how to set the oven temperature and the timer. She remarks on the contrasts between this technology and that with which she grew up:

> *Another appliance I had to learn using was the stove. My husband instructed me on how to use it. I think it's amazing how you could light fire without doing much. You know how it is back home: you have to walk to the forest and gather fire wood and pile it outside. Then you have to build a fire from the embers you left covered under ashes the previous night. To start cooking you have to use three fire stones to put the clay pot on. Most of our time was spent cooking. In this country everything cooks fast.*

She also uses a blender to mix the batter for the traditional thin pancake-like bread that she and her husband eat every day. She has used a red and green marker to mark the buttons she needs to press to start or stop the blender.

When shopping Nura only selects items that she is familiar with. She prefers to go shopping with her husband but since her husband is not always available she does most of the shopping alone.

> *When I first arrived here I was told a story that I can never forget. An Oromo man who had recently arrived went shopping by himself and ended up buying dog food. He kept eating that until other Oromos came and told him that what he was eating was dog food. I always buy fresh vegetables, never canned food. If I have to buy meat I wait until my husband can come with me. The most difficult part is when I get to the counter to pay. I still don't feel comfortable using American money, especially the coins. I can't understand how a dime which is a lot smaller in size is worth more than a nickel. It's getting better now, but I have to think hard when using American money.*

Technology and work

In her cleaning job, Nura has had to find ways of learning unfamiliar technology. She has to punch in and out, but that created little difficulty for her. She uses a soda machine occasionally, and identifies the type of soda she wants by the color of the can, not by name. She has learned how to use the vacuum cleaner and washing machine at work.

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Of all the equipment I found the vacuum cleaner easy to learn. You just have to switch it on; the rest is just like using the broom. What I found difficult was using the laundry machine -- setting it to cold or hot and adding the right amount of detergent in the right place. But when you compare it to going down to the river, as we did back home, it's much easier. Easier but not as enjoyable. Going to the river to wash our clothes was one of the happiest times since all the girls in the neighborhood went together. We bathed in the river until the laundry dried.

Another machine which she found difficult at work was the machine used at the hotel for ironing bed sheets. The machine requires setting at a certain temperature and adjusting where necessary. Now she has learned to use it on her own, but still sometimes when she feels unsure she calls her supervisor for help.

When cleaning bathrooms at the hotel, she used to spend quite a lot of time trying to get the right water temperature. A fellow worker eventually explained that the blue color represented cold and the red color hot. The water faucets they have in their apartment are not marked with colors, and her husband had told her to turn the faucet right for hot water and left for cold.

GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

Nura's immediate goal is to improve her English so that she can go to the doctor on her own and fill out job applications without depending on others.

You see, I developed health problems while I was at the refugee camp due to lack of food and water, so I need to go to the doctor's quite often. At times I don't feel comfortable telling my health problems to the interpreter, especially when you have a male interpreter. It can be embarrassing. I would like to call the receptionist and set my own appointment to see the doctor; but it seems to me that English becomes even more difficult over the phone.

I would also like to get a better job. The one I have right now is physically demanding and with my poor health condition it's difficult to do it. But everything here requires a good knowledge of the English language.

Nura's long term goal is to get trained in the field of health education and become a health worker.

When I fled my home village and took refuge in the mountains, we lost 9 children in one day. At that moment I wished I knew more about medicine and how to treat people. In our village there were a few individuals who knew traditional medicine very well. They say that it was taught to them by their family members who were also medicine men or women. They used herbs for those who had internal problems, massage for those who might have hurt their backs through hard work, or fell off a horse, and several other

methods for other health problems. The medicine people never accepted money. If they accepted money from a sick person, the healing power left them. People didn't get sick in my home village as much as they did when I was in the refugee camp. There were no medicine people or herbs to cure the sick, people would die without getting any help. I would like to learn about medicine and help those who are sick. But I sometimes wonder if I am going to learn enough English to understand all these things. But I see you and other Oromos around here. You don't seem to have much problem understanding English, do you? One day I will be able to understand everything in English and say everything I would like to say.

Nura dreams of going back to her home village, but she is afraid to go back and face the changes that have taken place.

My home is always on my mind -- when I wake up or even when I am asleep. People always ask me about how it feels to be away from my home. Taking someone out of his or her village is like taking a calf away from the mother cow. If you grew up in the village you would know what I am talking about. But I am afraid of going back. I don't know what has been happening there. I just have to get used to the life here. Like my English teacher would say, "learn, learn, nothing else but learn."

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DAVID WONG

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DAVID WONG

by Chui Lim Tsang and David Hemphill

David Wong is a 53 year-old male Chinese immigrant. Born in China in 1938, he immigrated to the United States in 1983 with his family. Since his arrival in the United States he has worked and lived in San Francisco Chinatown. He lives with his wife and two college-age children in a small apartment that is a few minutes' walk away from the fish and poultry market where he works.[1]

DAVID WONG AND HIS FAMILY

David Wong lives with his wife and two children, a son and a daughter. His son is 22, his daughter 19. The son is a senior at San Francisco State University, and will graduate with a degree in business in Spring 1992. The daughter is a sophomore pursuing the same degree at the same university. Wong and his wife both work, he in a fish and poultry market and she in a garment factory.

The Wong family has lived for about six years in a two-bedroom apartment in the Chinatown area. It is in an older building, and the rent is reasonable. The apartment is small and crowded, packed with furniture, a TV, radios, a microwave oven, a VCR, a computer, and other electronic products. By United States standards, it is a small area for a family of four -- two parents and two grown children -- to live in. Yet its location means a short walk to work for Wong. Shopping and social networking in the Chinese community are convenient as well.

Wong works in a fish and poultry market. He has been working there for several years. Before that he worked as a meat cutter in another market nearby. In his current job he serves customers who are mostly Cantonese-speakers, selling them fish and cleaning the fish for them. The market where Wong works is located on Stockton Street, the major shopping street in Chinatown, about seven minutes' walk from his home. It is a small store with seven employees, and the owner works there together with the other employees.

Wong's wife also works outside of the home. She is currently working in a garment factory in another part of the city. She makes about $5.00 an hour doing clean-up work at the garment factory. Before this job, she was unemployed for a few months. While unemployed, she found it very hard to find work, although she searched for work actively. She works similar hours to Wong, six days a week.

On his days off Wong usually goes shopping with his wife, and they sometimes eat out in Chinese restaurants. Now that his children are grown, they no longer go out much with their parents, except on special occasions such as Chinese New Year, Christmas, Chingming

[1] David Wong did not wish to be taped for any of his interviews. The interviewer made notes at the time, which summarized much of what he said, and afterwards reconstructed what he had heard.

(ancestor memorial day), and other significant holidays. Wong's friends are all Chinese and Chinese-speaking. He also socializes with his wife's family, which is well represented in the local area. On occasion, he goes to the headquarters building of his family association in Chinatown and talks to friends from the same part of China from which he came. Chinese family associations, formed over generations by Chinese immigrants from the same clans and regions, have traditionally served as centers for community and cultural maintenance. The surname "Wong" is one of the most common in China, and the Wong family association is accordingly one of the largest in Chinatown.

Most of Wong's social network consists of people who are recent immigrants. Many were educated in China, but few have received formal education in the United States. Many have to work long hours like Wong and base their social network in the Chinatown circle. Few venture outside, for it is here that they find understanding and friendship in their newly-adopted home.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The San Francisco Chinatown community contains one of the highest concentrations of Chinese in North America. It also manifests one of the highest population densities in the United States. Chinatown is an economic and social center for Chinese and Chinese-Americans from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In many ways, it is a self-contained, self-supporting community within which immigrants can subsist, making only limited contact with the English-speaking world. There are restaurants, theaters, bookstores, video rental stores, food stores, dry goods stores, and religious and family associations which combine to meet most subsistence, cultural, and social needs. There are also Chinese newspapers, radio, and television stations. Until recently, the local Chinese TV stations mainly broadcasted imported programming from Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, with the San Francisco earthquake of 1989, Chinese language news broadcasts became a priority as it grew evident that reliance on the English-language media in a time of crisis was difficult for many members of the Chinese community. Now one of the Chinese language channels offers a locally-produced news show in Chinese.

San Francisco Chinatown is also a major tourist attraction, although recent earthquake damage to an important freeway is said to have impacted negatively on Chinatown businesses. Other Chinese and Asian community business areas have grown up around the San Francisco Bay Area, and these outlying business districts appear to have benefited from the earthquake damage to the transportation links to San Francisco Chinatown. These developments may be starting to undermine the centrality of San Francisco Chinatown to the San Francisco Bay Area Chinese community.

San Francisco Chinatown is located in one of the oldest parts of the city, and and it has been firmly established for well over a century. This section of town consists largely of older brick construction and relatively narrow streets. The high level of population density of San Francisco Chinatown is immediately evident to the visitor. The main shopping street

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for the community is Stockton Street, and it is frequently difficult to walk along this street at peak hours due to crowded conditions. The 30 Stockton public bus route, which runs along this street is legendary for its crowding. On this street, cars inch their way through narrow lanes lined with double-parked cars and trucks unloading visitors and commercial goods. Produce shops, meat and fish markets, Chinese delicatessens, restaurants, dry goods stores, herbal medicine stores, Chinese banks, and souvenir shops line the streets of this area, offering a variety of goods and services to shoppers living within and outside the immediate vicinity. Following traditional Asian marketing practices, displays of goods spill out onto streets, with a wide variety of fresh food items, imported goods, and other merchandise offered at low, highly competitive prices.

On weekdays, Chinese housewives, retirees, office workers and a heavy mixture of out of town tourists can be seen crowding the streets of Chinatown. On weekends the crowds are even heavier, as Asian residents of the greater San Francisco Bay Area converge on Chinatown for fresh and authentic food ingredients, quality restaurants, newspapers, Chinese movies, family associations, and other cultural elements that this unique community provides. Due to limited availability of land in this area, generally poor living conditions, and already high rates of population density, many Chinese and other Asian immigrants who would in fact prefer to live in this area for its cultural benefits cannot do so. Thus they return on weekends to partake of a sense of community that is not available to them through their lives in outlying or suburban areas.

On smaller streets, behind the main shopping avenues, there is also considerable economic activity. Small garment factories predominate. In store fronts, basements, or second-floor walk-ups, the sound of double-stitch sewing machines can be heard, layered with conversations in Cantonese or other Chinese dialects conducted over work by the predominantly-female workforce. Women often bring small children to work with them due to lack of child care alternatives. Small doors open to admit delivery of thick stacks of pre-cut fabric pieces ready to be sewn, or to present for pick-up racks filled with completed garments. Family associations, social clubs, churches, and religious associations are also frequently seen on these less-crowded, back streets.

Life is rapid and quintessentially urban in San Francisco Chinatown; work is hard and long. Ten-hour days working for piece work or close-to-minimum wage are entirely too common for the members of this immigrant workforce, and health insurance or paid vacations are all too rare. Asian immigration into the San Francisco Chinatown area continues at a high rate, fueled by continuing uncertainty over the future of Hong Kong and economic and political difficulties throughout China and other parts of East and Southeast Asia.

LIFE HISTORY

David Wong was born in Hahksan, outside of the city of Canton (Goangjou) in the province of Guangdong in southern China. Hahksan was a rural town with about two

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thousand inhabitants, most of whom were farmers. They worked their own land as well as lands owned by others. Wong was the fifth child in a family of six children which included three girls and three boys. His parents were small farmers who owned their own land. When the Communists took control of the government of China in 1951, many of the large land owners lost their land holdings. However, farmers like Wong's father with small plots of farm land were left to continue what they and their ancestors had been doing for centuries. Besides farming, Wong's father sometimes went to markets to sell his farm products. According to Wong, life in the village was poor. Children usually went without shoes in the fields. Families wore clogs made by Wong's father at home. When children reached school age, they walked to school barefoot. Only in winter did they wear shoes, mostly ill-fitting, handed down from older siblings.

The house Wong lived in as a child was a simple farm house with a mud floor. The only items of technology in the home besides manual farming tools were a clock that required winding and a manual, Victrola-type record player. As Wong puts it,

> *It was an old style hand crank machine that looked like an attache case when folded. Before you play the records, you take the hand crank and give it a number of cranks. Everyone in the family knew how to use it. We had a supply of records--Chinese opera -- that came with the recorder. My father bought it. It was made in China.*

While his mother was illiterate, Wong's father was thought to be quite well-educated, for he had five years of classical educational training. He also served as a teacher in the village school at night. Wong's father loved to tell stories. It is common in the Chinese educational tradition to employ parables, aphorisms, and traditional sayings, and he often used such devices to educate his children. As Wong notes, "*Because my father was a learned man he liked to tell us stories to make us understand things.*" Wong recalls fondly his times as a child when his father told such stories. One story he remembers had the following message:

> <u>mh</u> <u>pa</u> <u>loufu</u> <u>ji</u> <u>pa</u> <u>louh</u>
> *Not afraid tiger only afraid leak*
> [One doesn't fear tigers or violence as much as leakage or losses]

Wong was extremely fortunate in having access to education opportunities, and he was the first and only member of his family to complete elementary school, as well as high school and technical college. Following completion of technical college, Wong was assigned by the government to work as an agricultural engineer in the local county agricultural center in Toishan county, Guangdong province. His responsibilities included directing a project to control pests. He also conducted research on the effectiveness of plant fertilizers for different crops. Wong used a variety of basic chemical and agricultural laboratory equipment in his work. He was also familiar with some of the more rudimentary forms of mechanical farm equipment used in China at that time. His salary was about $75.00 a month. That compared quite favorably with the $50.00 average monthly income that most

workers were making. With assigned housing, free schooling and medical care, his living conditions were thought to be comfortable.

Wong came to the United States in 1983. He immigrated under the sponsorship of his wife's brother. His reason for immigration was simple: there were limited opportunities in China for himself and particularly for his children. This reason -- to provide opportunities for one's children's future -- is frequently cited by immigrants as key to the decision to emigrate to the United States. When he first arrived in San Francisco, Wong wanted to return to China. It was a very difficult time for him and his family. He had no job and no income, and he did not speak any English. He had no access to any public assistance programs of any sort. He had no unemployment insurance and no local experience, and taking welfare is frowned upon in the Chinese community. He thought that his best plan would be to work hard for a few years, save some money and then go home to China. That plan, however, has long since perished. As he now expresses his thinking,

> *Today I no longer plan to go back to China to live. It's not too hard to work here. There is no use returning to China. My children are here and there is no retirement in China.*

In his current job at the fish market, Wong works from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM every day, six days a week, making $5.00 per hour. He gets time off for lunch and time off for breaks when the store is not too busy. The job does not provide medical coverage of any kind. Although his salary is low and the hours long, Wong considers his job to be one of the better ones available in the Chinatown labor market. He notes that overtime is compensated in this shop. He likes his employer because he is kind and treats his employees fairly. Wong describes how his boss encouraged him to get a drivers license:

> *I have a driver's license. But I don't have a car. I took my driving test three times before I passed the test. After I failed my test the second time, my boss said he will give me $50.00 so I won't give up. I passed it on my third try. He's a nice guy. He's the lean one [points to him], about 60 years old, working on the opposite poultry counter.*

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Growing up

Because Wong's father had received a classical Chinese education, education and learning were emphasized in the family. Schooling was not free in China when Wong was young, but it came to be publicly subsidized under the new communist regime. Even so, education was only supported by the government up through the sixth grade, and this education was not mandatory. All of the children in Wong's family were sent to school. As Wong notes,

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I was the only one in the family who was successful in education. My oldest brother quit after only two years. My second-oldest brother managed to stayed in school for six years. He never made it to secondary school. All of my sisters went to school for only three to four years.

Wong attended elementary school and junior high school in his native town. He did well in school, and his record of academic excellence earned him scholarships so that he was able to continue his education well past junior high school. His high school years were spent in a boarding school, because there was no high school within easy distance of his home. Once again, he performed well academically, and he was allowed as a result to skip a grade during his high school years. All of the instruction up through high school was delivered in Chinese. Once in high school, he studied English as a foreign language for three semesters.

After high school Wong was fortunate to gain admission to the Agricultural Technical College in Siuhing not far from his home for his college education. Only a small number of high school graduates in China then, as now, were able to obtain a seat in any university or technical college. Thus it was quite an accomplishment on Wong's part to gain admission to the three-year technical college. After he graduated he was assigned by the government to work in the nearby town of Toiseng, the county seat of Toishan. Historically, Toishan county has been the source of much Chinese immigration to the United States.

Adult Education in the United States

After he started work as an agricultural engineer in Toiseng, Wong took part in no further formal educational programs. It was not until his move to the United States that he saw the need for further formal education as an adult. But Wong did not start attending adult education programs in the United States immediately upon his arrival. It was not until 1987, four years after his arrival, when he felt his economic situation was under control, that he began to take adult education classes. Since 1987, Wong has attended about four years of English classes, all offered by the local community college. The last English class he attended was an ESL 300 level class, which is termed a "low intermediate" level according to the local community college district. He repeated the course at this level three times. In between, he also attended for several semesters a janitorial training program offered by the community college on Saturday mornings. He also took part in janitorial training offered by the local union. Wong's goal is to obtain a janitorial position somewhere outside of Chinatown.

Currently Wong attends a citizenship class offered by the community college at the YMCA a few blocks from his home. He attends classes Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings. Class begins at 6:30 every evening. This means that Wong has to rush home after he gets off work at 6:00, take a shower to wash off the smell of fish caused by work at the market, and run to class in order to make it on time. On the nights he attends class Wong does not eat his dinner until after class, around 9:00. He hopes to be able to use the knowledge gained from this class to pass the test to become a U.S. citizen.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Wong and his family speak the Toishan dialect, a sub-dialect of the Yue language, when they communicate with each other. This is the language that Wong spoke in his home village. With their friends and neighbors they use mostly standard Cantonese, the lingua franca of Chinese immigrants in North America. Wong's children speak fluent English but Wong's wife speaks practically no English at all.

Wong reads the overseas version of the Tsing Tao Daily newspaper from Hong Kong every day. This is one of several Chinese language daily newspapers that are widely available in San Francisco Chinatown. He does not usually read the local English-language newspapers. His son, however, reads it every day. When he does look at the English-language paper, he focuses on the want ads, scanning them for janitorial openings. When he reads the English-language newspaper he uses an English-Chinese dictionary.

Besides reading the Chinese newspapers, Wong watches TV in the evening to get his news. He watches the Chinese TV stations when he has time. He sometimes also watches English language programs which his children have selected that come on after the Chinese programs. In describing his comprehension of the English language programs he notes:

> *I can't understand all of the dialogue. I can probably understand 30 to 40% of the programs my children watch.*

Wong is also working on a novel that he has written in Chinese, which he completed earlier this year. In his free time, he now works on revising it. This novel combines his personal immigration experience and his knowledge of the village in which he grew up.

Other reading materials in evidence in the Wong household include such items as utility bills, telephone bills, bank statements, and tax forms. Wong usually deals with these materials himself. He learned long ago that these can be deciphered once he figures out the way the information is laid out. The regularity and fixed format of these documents make it relatively easy for him to deal with them. He sometimes consults his English-Chinese dictionary when handling these documents. He does not, however, like to ask his children for help:

> *I don't ask him [the son] to help. I can do it myself. He is busy most of the time and it's easier for me to handle these matters myself. Yes, I can handle these myself. I really don't need his help.*

Wong says this in a way that indicates he feels it is probably more work for him to ask his children than it is worth. He expresses the same feelings about filing his income tax. He takes care of it himself. And if it becomes too complicated, he asks his friends or an accountant. As an example of this, Wong notes that he needed his relatives' help when he

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first applied for his immigration papers. The letters he got were too complicated for him to decipher, so he sought the help of his contemporaries.

Wong keeps a family checking account in a local bank. The bank is located about a block away from the market where he works. He goes there to deposit his pay check and withdraw cash. Workers in the bank can speak Chinese, a common practice in the plethora of banks and thrift institutions in San Francisco Chinatown. He writes the checks and sends the bills in himself.

Wong gets around the city by bus. He doesn't go to many places outside of Chinatown. He sometimes goes shopping in the large chain stores, and when he does he takes the bus. Occasionally, he has to go across town to visit his wife's family. For most of the places he needs to go in his everyday life he goes on foot. He has never had to ask a stranger for help in finding his way around the city.

> *I can read the bus schedule and I can read the signs. I can also drive. Do you know that after one week in this city I could already figure out where things are? I could read a map. I went everywhere with the map. I could tell how to get from one place to another.*

Wong does most of his shopping in Chinatown. He does not have much trouble shopping, even in large mainstream department stores such as Macy's. Sometimes he and his wife go downtown to the department stores to shop. He can read the labels and the price tags. When he really needs something in a store he asks. He recounts how he once asked for help in a large supermarket:

> *Like the other day I went shopping at Cala Foods. I wanted to buy some game hens. I saw an ad in the newspaper. I couldn't find any in the store, so I had to ask. But they couldn't find any more. They told me they will have more next Friday. That was not a problem for me.*

Literacy at Work

The fish market where Wong works sells has tanks for live fish lining the inner wall of the shop. Other fresh fish are displayed on the counter over ice. Because of the melted ice and water used to keep the fish fresh, the floor of the shop is constantly covered with half an inch or more of icy water. The only tools the workers use on their job are knives and wooden sticks to slaughter and clean the fish. Hand trucks are used to transport the goods and ice is kept in a large freezer in the back. Other than cleaning and selling fish, Wong has to help clean the store and sometimes he cleans the big fish tanks.

Wong speaks mostly Cantonese at work, since most of the customers who come into the market to shop for fish or poultry are Chinese Cantonese speakers. But not all of the

market's customers can speak Chinese, and Wong describes how it often falls to him to handle these English-speaking customers:

> *There are some American-born Chinese who cannot speak Chinese. I have to deal with them. In fact, there are quite a number of clients who cannot speak Chinese. Then there are non-Chinese clients. I will have to speak to them. I don't have much trouble. I can say "Hi," "How much," "What kind of fish," "May I help you," "Thank you," and all that. There are only two people at work who can handle English. Besides myself, there is another person. The others cannot speak English at all.*

Wong does not deal with written English at all at work. Some math skills are required because the workers have to collect money from their customers and make change for them. This does not present a problem for Wong. A typical math transaction involves figuring out the amount owed by multiplying the cost per pound or per ounce of the fish purchased by the actual weight of the fish. Then the total purchase is added together. Sales tax does not need to be figured, as there is no tax in California on the purchase of basic raw food items. Wong then has to collect the money from customers and give the proper change. The store has one old-style cash register on which totals can be rung up. The register does not indicate the amount of change due, as is the case with modern electronic registers.

TECHNOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Wong can use most of the appliances that are in his family's apartment, including the TV, VCR, radio, and audio tape recorder. Generally speaking, he has learned to use them once their operation has been demonstrated to him by his children. The family has two microwave ovens. One is for the children and the other is for Wong and his wife. The one used by his children is more modern and complex, and Wong cannot figure out how to use all of its functions and features. The one he and his wife use is a more basic model that is easier to handle.

Wong's wife takes care of the family's laundry. Small items such as underwear she washes at home. Larger items she takes to a nearby coin-operated laundromat. She has been shown how to use the machines and using them does not present a problem.

Wong uses his family's VCR and the TV extensively. Like most of his friends, Wong and his wife are avid followers of video programs produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan. They rent videos frequently from any of the numerous Chinese video rental stores that have proliferated in Chinatown. In addition, Wong and his wife tape Chinese TV programs.

Wong also uses his audio tape recorder quite often. He has obtained taped material to help him review the facts he must know in order to pass the U. S. citizenship test. He reviews these materials at home using the audio tape recorder and earphones when he has time. Wong has a driver's license but does not own a car. He believes he has no need for one right now.

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Wong has a bank card that he has received as a feature of his checking account at the local bank he patronizes. The card allows him to withdraw money from automatic teller machines (ATMs), but he does not use it. He notes that he has given it to his son so he can have access to cash whenever he needs it:

I give it to him so he can get money if he wants to. He carries it with him. He took it with him when he went to Los Angeles. I don't need it. I don't know how to use it.

Wong has a personal computer at home. His children often use it, but he has never thought of doing so. He does not view it as a tool which can help him in his daily life or to achieve any of his goals.

GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Wong has a limited set of goals and expectations for the immediate and not-too-distant future in his life that have important relationships to literacy and technology. Each of his goals is framed in terms of a unique set of expectations that reflect his perspective as an immigrant and one who is not a member of the dominant culture in the United States.

His first, foremost, and most consciously pursued goal is to get a janitorial job. He is not completely satisfied with his current work in the fish market, and he believes that securing janitorial work will lead to better pay, medical benefits, and a shorter work week. His expectation in this regard appears realistic, inasmuch as service trades such as building maintenance are heavily unionized in San Francisco, with relatively good pay and benefits. He has been trying to achieve this goal for two years now. He recently took a test for custodial positions offered by the San Francisco civil service system. These jobs pay about $9.00 per hour and have full benefits. He passed the test and is now ranked 125th on a list of 200 candidates. Wong believes that if the city continues to hire janitors at its current rate, he may be hired in about three years.

Wong has been diligent and rational in his pursuit of this primary goal. Before taking the civil service test he tried numerous times to secure a janitorial position in different places. He applied at three large San Francisco tourist hotels but he was not hired at any of them. He believes that his lack of English communication skills was a key factor in these hiring decisions. He thinks that he probably made errors in filling out the application forms, or that his writing and the information he put down were not judged adequate. Thinking, understandably, that the local janitorial service workers' union could help, Wong enrolled in a janitorial training program offered by the union. Unfortunately, three months after he finished the program, he had not been placed in a job. In fact, no one in the class got a job.

He was told that after he become a union member he would be able to get assigned to a job. However, in order for him to become a union member, he first would be required to put in a minimum number of work hours on a union job. But to accumulate all these hours would mean quitting his present job and reporting to the union hall every morning and wait

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for assignment to any temporary job that might have been called in to the union that day. If fortunate, he might in this fashion gather enough hours to qualify for union membership after 5 months. Wong feels, justifiably, that he is in a dilemma; he cannot afford to quit his job in order to become an union member, but he cannot become a union member unless he quits his job. Therefore, the civil service appears to him to be his best alternative for janitorial employment at the present time.

Wong believes that the goal of janitorial employment is a realistic one for him. He does not feel he has had any trouble learning the technical skills of custodial work. He has, after all, completed two custodial training programs and can master all of the machines used in this trade. His only problem as he sees it is his English communication skills. This seems an insurmountable barrier to him. Wong has made a hard-eyed and pragmatic assessment of what he can do and what sort of work will support him and his family in the new cultural context in which he finds himself.

His assessment reflects the dual filters of his own cultural perspective and his limited English language proficiency and literacy. He evidences little awareness, for example, of the fact that one of the growing, most promising industries in the San Francisco Bay Area is the biotechnology industry. He sees no link between his own background as a trained and experienced agricultural engineer and the employment possibilities in this new area, for example, as a lab worker in a biotechnology firm.

He also sees no direct utility for him in learning to use the personal computer he has in his home. He cannot think of how the use of computer may help him with his dream of getting a janitorial position, or with job search, or with any sort of creative function. He seems to dismiss the learning or using of the computer as superfluous. His isolation from the dominant culture because of his lack of English proficiency appears to have simultaneously isolated him from practical uses of technology that might aid him is achieving his goals.

Wong has other goals as well. He wants to obtain his United States citizenship and he wants to buy a house. His pursuit of the citizenship goal would appear to be well under way. His enrollment in citizenship classes in the evenings and his regular audio tape study of citizenship questions enhance the likelihood of his becoming a United States citizen in the near future. It is also likely that Wong and his family will be able to buy a house in a few years. He and his wife both save regularly, and housing prices have started to fall in the local housing market. So this goal, too, appears achievable in the near term for Wong.

A final goal that Wong describes is his intention to complete a novel in Chinese about his immigration experience, and to have it published. Despite the fact that cultural and linguistic barriers have caused him pragmatically to pursue work that ignores his education and experience, Wong has nonetheless found a different, more aesthetic means of employing his Chinese education, intellect, and literacy: his novel. In describing his novel, he expresses his hope of recording and sharing with others -- in other times and places -- the

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unique nature of his life and his experience, surely one of the most basic and moving uses or purposes of literacy:

> *This story is about an immigrant Chinese who returned to China after spending years in the U.S. After returning to his native village with money he managed to save with his hard work in the U.S., he built a nice little house in a remote part of the village. There he married and planned to live his life in the quiet company of his new family. One day, he was found dead. The suspected cause of death was murder. The story kind of dramatizes his experience in the U.S. and the events that led up to his death. I wrote it for fun. It's about 30,000 words in length. I am recopying it now. I don't know if anyone will want to publish it.*

CALIFORNIA PROFILES

OVERVIEW

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CALIFORNIA PROFILES: OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Though diverse in background and contemporary experience, these immigrant Americans share common experiences from which we can learn. This overview offers a summary of important information about all six of the people profiled in the previous section. Table 1 below presents a summary of the current contexts of their lives contrasted with the contexts of their lives prior to migration to the United States. They have come to California from many parts of the world, and from backgrounds that differ not only from mainstream America, but also from each others. Their educational backgrounds range from only informal education through the master's level. Most (four of six) are from rural backgrounds. There is considerable range in work experience in the home country: two professionals (an accounting teacher and an agricultural engineer), one in retail sales, one in farming and prospecting, and two with no formal work experience.

An important distinction to be understood among the people profiled is the experience of the immigrant versus that of the refugee. Four of the people profiled here came as immigrants while two (Sokhhoeun and Nura Tola) came as refugees. This distinction becomes clearer when examining the number of years it took Sokhhoeun and Nura Tola to make their way to the United States from their countries of origin (six and eight years respectively) versus the brief time the others spent in moving from their home countries to the United States. Immigrants also generally plan their migration -- its timing, its purpose, and its destination -- while refugees usually have little choice and little knowledge of where they will ultimately land. Recalling the accounts of extreme adversity and violence that Sokhhoeun and Nura faced in their migration experiences adds clarity to the distinctive nature of the refugee experience.

All but one of the people we profiled (Oliver Gonzales, still in high school) have worked in this country, and their employment without exception may be characterized as low-paid, entry level positions in the service economy: food production worker, teacher's aide, bookkeeper, house cleaner, and fish seller. All have studied ESL, and four of the six have participated in some form of job training, although their current work does not always show a direct relationship to the occupational focus of the job training they have received.

This overview reports on the patterns of interactions between literacy and technology in the lives of the six immigrants profiled. The analysis, as was the case for the initial data collection with each of the profiles, was guided by the study's five broad research areas:

** Everyday Uses of Literacy and Technology
** Attitudes and Expectations about Literacy and Technology
** Literacy Demands and Economic Realities
** Barriers and Incentives to Learning
** Literacy in Social and Community Relationships

The overview of the California profiles follows this outline.

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TABLE 1: PRE-MIGRATION CONTEXT AND CURRENT CONTEXT: WEST COAST PROFILES

	Oliver Gonzales	Alicia Lopez	Sokh-hoeun	Michela Stone	Nura Tola	David Wong
Pre-Migration Context						
• Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
• Number of Children in Family when a Child	2	11	5	2	23	6
• Highest Grade in School	12	7	2 or 3	MA acctg.	Informal	15
• Urban or Rural	Urban	Rural	Rural	Urban	Rural	Rural
• Employment in Country of Origin	None	Camera store worker	Farmer, diamond miner	Accountant, Acctg. Tchr.	None	Agricultural Engineer
• Year Left Country of Origin	1985	1981	1975	1989	1982	1983
• Year Arrived in U.S.	1985	1981	1981	1989	1990	1983
Current Context						
• Age	17	47	38	32	29	53
• Living Arrangement	Mother & ext. family	Granddtr. & ext. family	Wife & 3 children	Alone	Husband	Wife & 2 adlt. chldrn.
• Employment in U.S.	None	Food production worker	Teacher's aide	Bookkeeper	House cleaner	Fish seller
• Schooling in U.S.	Mid. schl., Hi schl., alt. program	Job tng. & ESL	ESL & job tng.	ESL, accounting	ESL	ESL, janitor tng, citizenship

EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY

1. How do people use literacy in their daily lives? What literacy practices are employed by adults of different backgrounds and life experiences in their homes, workplaces, and communities?

There is considerable variety in how the people profiled on the West Coast use language, what they speak and listen to, what they read, what they write, and which language -- their native language or English -- they use for which purposes. Table 2 provides a summary of their main uses of first and second languages for speaking/listening and for reading/writing.

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Speaking and Listening

First Language

Everyone profiled uses their native language at home with family and in their local community. Most either live in a cultural community of their own native language speakers (Latino, Chinese) or relate primarily to other immigrants (Oromo, Cambodian). Often their native language is also their primary language at work. But their native language is not spoken to the exclusion of English in all of the homes. Oliver speaks both English and Spanish with his younger siblings at home. Sokhhoeun's youngest child, aged nine, speaks English at home, although Sokhhoeun speaks to him in Cambodian. This is a common pattern of interaction in immigrant homes between immigrant parents and American-raised and -schooled children.

In their workplaces, native language use predominates for most people, with a limited use of English. Nura Tola needs no English in her work as a hotel maid. Sokhhoeun speaks both English and Cambodian at work. He speaks English to the teachers he works for, and he speaks simplified English when helping refugees with their ESL literacy lessons. Michela Stone speaks both English and Russian at work -- some English when she needs to, to colleagues, and Russian to other immigrants. It should be noted, too, that both Sokhhoeun and Michela work in what might be thought of as "sheltered English" environments, which have a focus on serving the needs of immigrants, and thus provide a supportive environment for immigrants to work as well.

Almost all of the people profiled here also have access to -- and make use of--one or more forms of electronic media that employ their native languages. There are numerous Spanish language radio and television stations in the Bay Area, both Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese TV and radio, and videos available in more languages. Only Michela Stone does not seem to make much use of electronic media in her native language, although she does characterize her father as an avid watcher of the news in Russian from Moscow that is broadcast nightly by one of the local cable channels.

For low-level speakers of English, having access to public and private services in their native language is of paramount importance. Alicia Lopez, for example, reports that Spanish language services are relatively widely available to help her in dealing with her granddaughter's school, in meeting social needs, and in handling financial transactions. Only in the health care area does she indicate that she needs to contend with English. Three others -- Oliver Gonzales, Sokhhoeun, and Michela Stone -- have relatively high levels of confidence and proficiency in English, which makes reliance on native language services relatively unnecessary.

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TABLE 2: USES OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGES

	Oliver Gonzales	Alicia Lopez	Sokh-hoeun	Michela Stone	Nura Tola	David Wong
Native Language	Spanish	Spanish	Cambodian	Russian	Oromo	Cantonese Chinese
Speaking & Listening L1	• In the Mission District • TV (Spanish soap operas • Radio & audio tapes (cumbias)	• Radio & TV • Only Spanish used at home • School, most pub. services • Pub. trans. • Shopping	• Family • Camb. community grp. • Helping refugees • Rented videotapes	• Father & friends • Some clients & co-workers	• Oromo videos • Sends audio tape letters • Husband • Translator at Dr.'s ofc.	• Family, relatives, friends • Most customers at work • TV, radio, videos • Banking
L2	• Downtown on Market St. • English TV • Radio & audiotapes(rap) • Interprets for family (e.g. for mom in traffic court)	• English tapes from library • Medical services • ESL class	• At work w/ staff and stdnt. • TV (news & westerns) • Youngest child speaks English to him	• Some co-workers • TV news, soaps, game & talk shows • Shopping	• ESL class • TV news • Some shopping (familiar products)	• Some TV • Some customers at work • ESL class • Shopping • Audiotape of citizenship exam questions
Reading & Writing L1	• Family reads stories aloud • Bilingual instruction in middle school	• Recipes for food prod. job • School, most pub. services • Credit applications	• Letters to relatives • Camb. newspaper (rarely)	• Russian literature • Russian newspapers (rarely)		• Newspapers • Writing own novel • Work information • Letters
L2	• Family reads stories aloud • High school work • Public trans. • Menus • Clothing labels • Instructions (e.g. uncle's stereo) • Maps • Sports page of paper • Bible • Sports or car magazines • Graffiti	• Recipes for food prod. job • ESL books • Newspapers discarded by neighbor • Appliance instructions (w/ pictures) • Dictionary • Copies new words as memory aid	• Medical dictionary • ESL lessons he teaches • Personal notes on procedures • Application forms • Newspaper headlines	• Accounting documents at work • Dictionary • Short letters & notes at work • Accounting texts • USA Today, People mag. • Shopping • Appliance instructions • Menus • Personal notes of hard words	• ESL class • Detergent labels • Phone no's. • Bus route no's. • Hard to recognize coin values	• Bills, bank statements, tax forms • Want ads • Dictionary • Bus routes & schedules • Price tags & labels shopping • Job application forms • Citizenship class materials

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Overview

Nura Tola, however, appears to be almost completely reliant on her native language (Oromo), with only periodic translation support available to help her negotiate the most necessary service transactions, such as health care. She describes the difficulty of this situation for her:

You see, I developed health problems when I was at the refugee camp, so I need to go to the doctor's quite often. At times I don't feel comfortable telling my health problems to the interpreter, especially when you have a male interpreter. It can be embarrassing. I would like to call the receptionist and set my own appointment to see the doctor; but it seems to me that English becomes even more difficult over the phone.

Second Language

None of the subjects profiled speak English very much. Outside of ESL classrooms, they have little interaction with native English speakers, and encounter relatively few demands for English language in their communities and workplaces. A main exposure to English is via electronic media.

For them all, English was first and most continuously encountered in its live, interactive, and relatively natural use in the formal schooling situation of the ESL classroom. For Nura Tola and Alicia Lopez, the ESL classroom may be the only venue where they can actually gain regular access to living, relatively patient, native speakers of English, with whom to practice and improve their limited English. David Wong, too, who studied ESL diligently but then stopped after hitting a plateau in his learning, now has considerably less exposure to the live, interactive use of English on a daily basis.

Some, though not all, of the people profiled here regularly speak English when shopping. Michela Stone shops in English, although she often goes to Chinese markets, where neither she nor the merchants understand each others' English. Nura Tola finds shopping in English (her only option) a trial, so she limits herself to familiar products and much prefers her husband's assistance when shopping. She tells the story of another Oromo refugee's shopping mishap, which made a strong impression on her:

When I first arrived here I was told a story that I can never forget. An Oromo man who had recently arrived went shopping by himself and ended up buying dog food. He kept eating that until other Oromos came and told him that what he was eating was dog food. I always buy fresh vegetables, never canned food. If I have to buy meat I wait until my husband can come with me.

Demands for speaking and understanding English at work vary. David Wong, for example, speaks Cantonese Chinese most of the time in his work as a fish seller, although he describes how sometimes he has to handle English-speaking customers:

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There are some American-born Chinese who cannot speak Chinese and there are non-Chinese clients. I will have to speak to them. I don't have much trouble. I can say, 'Hi,' How much,' 'What kind of fish,' May I help you,' 'Thank you,' and all that. There are only two people at work who can handle English, besides myself.

It is important to note that none of the six people we profiled work or study in environments where only English is used. All of those who work do so in contexts where one or more languages in addition to English are in regular, not simply incidental, usage.

A significant exposure to English for almost all is in watching English-language television broadcasts. For example, Michela Stone conscientiously watches soap operas, game shows, and daytime talk shows in the hope that she will learn about American culture and perhaps extract something with which to make conversation with native speakers of English. In **Jeopardy, Donahue,** and **Geraldo** she expects to find aspects of the real American life which she has not found ways to connect with in her own experience. English language news broadcasts are also watched by several of those we profiled, even though in some cases their level of understanding must be quite low.

A final source of exposure to oral English for at least three of the people profiled is the medium of audio tapes. Oliver Gonzales makes extensive use of his Walkman, and he includes rap music among his listening selections. He describes how he makes meaning from some of the rap tunes: *"I don't understand some words, I understand most of the song. And if I don't understand the song, I play it over and over and over."* Both Alicia Lopez and David Wong use audio tapes of oral English as aids to learning. Alicia goes to the local public library and checks out books that are accompanied by audio tapes that read the text. She then listens to the tapes and reads the texts in order to improve her English listening and reading skills. David Wong has bought a set of audio tapes that provide sample questions and answers for the American citizenship exam that he will have to take. He listens to the tapes and drills himself for his upcoming exam when he has time.

Few of these limited experiences with English language provide the kinds of immersion in naturalistic language use that we often assume immigrants have. We discuss below the implications of this relative isolation from the English-speaking dominant culture.

Reading and Writing

First Language

Reading and writing in the first language of the profiled subjects varies considerably. Nura Tola, for example, who is not literate in Oromo, does not identify any personal uses for the written form of her first language. David Wong, on the other hand, is writing a novel in Cantonese about his experiences as an immigrant.

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Between these two extremes of written first language usage fall a number of examples and a few fragmentary patterns. Sokhhoeun, Michela Stone, and David Wong, for example, all report reading their native language newspapers. David Wong reads the Tsing Dao Daily newspaper from Hong Kong every day, while Michela and Sokhhoeun read native language newspapers only occasionally, usually when a friend has given a copy to them. Sokhhoeun offers a reason for this relative lack of interest in his case. He points out that he and many other Cambodians have such painful memories about life in their country that they may prefer not to hear much about its current conditions, however much they may seem to be improving.

Another relatively common form of written first language usage is the writing of letters home to relatives, which is particularly important for Sokhhoeun, Alicia and David Wong. Alicia Lopez has two sons in Mexico, and until they were grown she sent them through the mail almost half her monthly earnings. Nura Tola meets the same need through the medium of audio tape. She notes that she would like to develop her first language writing skills so that she could write to friends and family, as well as document some of her experiences.

There are other uses of written first language: Michela reads novels in Russian, Alicia reads announcements from her grand-daughter's school in Spanish, Oliver Gonzales reads scary stories aloud in Spanish as well as English to his family.

Second Language

Reading and writing in English, their second language, presents even greater variety than the oral second language uses. However, there are some clear patterns. Everyone encounters some level of written English demand in their daily lives -- in shopping, transportation, paying bills, using appliances. As with spoken English, all of the people profiled have had some exposure to written English in the formal schooling of ESL instruction. Those who have completed ESL classes feel they have gained some measure of limited survival proficiency in reading and writing English. For others, such as Nura Tola and Alicia Lopez, learning to decode and write English text remains a daunting barrier.

All note that they need to be able to decode written English when using public transportation or when driving. Both Oliver Gonzales and David Wong note with some pride how they have been able to find their way on public transit. Oliver explains:

I know that to go to Oakland, first I look at the map at the BART stop. And I know that I got to cross the bridge, so I buy a ticket to Oakland... They got signs there that says how much it costs... Then I just look at the BART stops.

Sokhhoeun says he bought a car as soon he could after arrival in California, so that he would not have to rely on public transit. He then learned to read the traffic signs and symbols by sitting with friends who drove, querying them about every sign he could not understand.

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Shopping and eating out also present written English demands for most people at some time. Sokhhoeun, Michela Stone, and Alicia Lopez note that their earliest and still most regular restaurant-going experiences are in Chinese restaurants. This in itself is an interesting linguistic phenomenon, in that English becomes used as an intermediary language between immigrant merchants and immigrant consumers from different cultural groups, in this case employing English transliterations of Chinese food terms such as cha siu [barbecued pork] or gai lan [Chinese broccoli]. As Michela Stone describes it,

I sometimes eat out. I like Chinese. Though I find it hard to understand the menu. Not words like 'spicy' or 'pork,' you know, but specific names of dishes. Sometimes I ask, or point. Sometimes I choose what I know. I try to read. I usually get what I ask for.

Nura Tola probably encounters the greatest difficulties with everyday English texts: she has some difficulty interpreting English signs or symbols when food shopping so she generally avoids the purchase of canned or labeled foods in favor of fresh vegetables that she recognizes. She also notes that the lack of correspondence between size of coins and their value sometimes presents her with problems.

Many of the subjects also report that they can interpret and pay bills in English and most have checking accounts. Only Nura Tola leaves all the bill-paying for her spouse to deal with. However, Alicia Lopez has developed a pattern of bill payment that left as faint a "paper trail" as possible, as an effect of living for several years as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. Until recently she has lived primarily in a cash economy, and when she does use forms of money other than cash, she purchases money orders and is trying to establish a credit rating by applying for charge accounts (although she relies primarily on Spanish to do this).

There is some diversity in how the people profiled handle written English instructions for using appliances, equipment, tools, electronic devices, or other forms of technology. Michela Stone, Oliver Gonzales and Alicia Lopez report that they are generally able to interpret such instructions. Alicia displays a pragmatic trial and error approach while also noting the value of pictures in written instructions:

Actually, these days, the instruction manuals for things are really very clear. They have pictures for everything... Now things are much more modern. There are the buttons. It's just a matter of trying them.

On the other hand, Sokhhoeun, David Wong and Nura Tola indicate that they have some difficulty reading and directly interpreting written technical instructions. Sokhhoeun reports that he needs to find someone to visually demonstrate the technical operation to him, and that afterward he uses written English text as a reminder in performing the function. David Wong asks friends -- not his children -- or consults his dictionary to try to interpret instructions. Nura Tola does not employ written English technical instructions in learning to use new tools or equipment.

Overview

All except Nura Tola report that they read parts of English language newspapers, at different times and for different purposes. The four most English literate of the six profile subjects have some sense of the discourse functions of the different papers or sections that they read, and they seem to be able accomplish their specific reading purposes with these functions in mind. For example, Oliver Gonzales reads sports sections because he wants to find out how his favorite teams did, and David Wong looks through the want ads hoping to find his elusive janitorial job.

The use of the dictionary is another evident common pattern of English text usage. Reading and interpreting English text -- labels and signs -- when shopping, moving around, and eating out can be facilitated by using a dictionary. Michela Stone reported that for her first two years she carried a dictionary around in her purse, so that it wa always available. Now her English has become more proficient, but she still keeps one on her desk at work, and consults it at some point of every day,

Finally, the profile subjects note a variety of other forms of written English text that they use or interpret in their everyday lives: popular and sports magazines, maps, the yellow pages, and a hybrid form of English text that is around in the community -- graffiti, or "cholo writing."

> *I had friends from gangs and they teach me how to read and how to write like they're writing... In gangs they put their whole name, and then their name like Yogie... Every time you see a tag [a set of initials] with like a number or things like that, that means the guy is in gangs... but it's easy to read like: R.I.P. -- rest in peace -- that means you're gonna die, I'm after you... And sometimes a cloud... And a cross: that means where you're gonna go... Like sometimes they write like this [draws a circle with lightning bolts next to it]... It means gunshots, "We're going after you guys with guns"... If they put like that they're gonna kill you, you don't get worried about that, 'cause they mean that they're gonna beat you up.*

EVERYDAY USES OF TECHNOLOGY

Research Question 2. How do technologies other than literacy expand or diminish the role of literacy in these adult's everyday lives?

The people profiled here use a remarkable range of technology, particularly when we compare those technologies they used formerly in their home countries with those they use now. An important message from this comparison seems to be that people will learn to use -- and will search out, will pay their hard-earned money for -- technologies that they believe can do something useful or important for them. But they will not necessarily use other technologies -- even if readily available to them -- when they perceive no particular direct benefit in doing so. **Table 3** which follows summarizes the uses of technology reported by the profile subjects in their home countries and in the United States.

TABLE 3: USES OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

	Oliver Gonzales	Alicia Lopez	Sokhhoeun	Michela Stone	Nura Tola	David Wong
Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
Technologies Used in Country of Origin	• nice home in city • TV • stereo • stove • refrigerator • blender • iron • clocks • gun • manual typewriter	• nice home in rural town • charcoal oven/stove • stone grinder for grains • scrub board for laundry • photographic equipment	• bamboo hut • cement tripod wood stove • machete • hand farming tools • water buffalo • plough • tractor • ringed musical instruments • radio • shoulder pole carriers	• apartment in urban Russia • electricity • stove • refrigerator • radio	• mud hut with thatch roof • kerosene lamps • radio • no clock • hand farm tools • fire stones & clay cooking pot • hand spinning and weaving tools	• farm house with mud floor • hand farm tools • Victrola • clock • agricultural lab. equipment
Technologies Used in Home or Everyday Life in the United States	• stereo • CD player • 3 TV's • tape recorder • 2 VCR's • Nintendo • microwave • radios • clocks • stove • refrigerator • phone	• TV • VCR • tape recorder • microwave • blender • stove • refrigerator • washing machine • phone	• car • TV • VCR • stove • refrigerator • typewriter • phone • ATM	• TV • radio • stove • refrigerator • microwave • electric cooker • phone • ATM • answering machine	• TV • VCR • stove • refrigerator • tape recorder • washing machine • phone	• TV • VCR • radios • 2 microwaves • tape recorder • coin op laundromat
Technologies Used at Work or at School in the United States	• IBM PC (PALS syst.) • Apple PC	• food mixers • food production hand tools • hand tools for plumbing, painting, janitorial work	• forklift • calculator	• PC • calculator • janitorial supplies & equipment	• vacuum cleaner • janitorial supplies & equipment	• cash register • fish cleaning tools • hand truck • janitorial supplies & equipment
Technologies Hard to Learn but Now Used in the United States	• some academic software		• ATM • VCR	• ATM • answering machine	• VCR • stove • washing machine	
Technologies Available at Home, Work, or School but Not Used	• car • chainsaw	• stereo • PC's and office equipment	• IBM PC • Macintosh PC		• VCR record function	• ATM • PC • complex microwave

Overview

Technologies Used in Everyday Life

In order to understand the kinds of technological transitions they have made in coming to the United States, it is useful to examine briefly the technologies employed by the profile subjects in their home countries. Four of the six people profiled come from rural settings (mostly with relatively poor backgrounds), while two came from urban backgrounds. The former used primarily traditional hand tools (although Sokhhoeun learned to drive a tractor). The latter had adequate though unsophisticated technologies available to them. Oliver Gonzales, from his description of home life in Nicaragua, was probably best acquainted with diverse forms of consumer technologies. This, along with his age, may account for his ready adoption of computer-based technologies in the United States, such as Nintendo and computer-based literacy instruction. Interestingly, all, both rural and urban, had radios, so they were exposed to this medium of communication.

There is considerable similarity in some of the current uses of technology in the home and in everyday life among the people we have profiled. All now live in urban settings, most in apartments. All have televisions (sometimes more than one), stoves, refrigerators, radios, and telephones. Five of the six people profiled have VCRs. Most (four of six) have microwave ovens and tape recorders. However, other forms of technology that are prevalent in contemporary United States culture -- the ATM, the telephone answering machine, video games, and automobiles -- are used more infrequently.

Despite the ubiquitousness of the automobile in California life, for example, only one person (Sokhhoeun) owns and drives a car, although two others (David Wong and Micheia Stone) proudly report having a driver's license. This lack of attachment to automobile ownership and use may have several explanations. One, of course, could be the costs involved. Another could be that there is relatively good public transportation available to some of the profile participants. Other explanations could be the barrier of literacy and language in the driver testing process, or the recently-lifted barrier of illegal immigration status.

Four of the six profile subjects report some difficulties with learning to use certain technologies in the United States. Sokhhoeun and Michela Stone report that they had some trouble learning to use the ATM. Michela said: *"When I first came, I couldn't understand the ATM machine at the bank. People from my class showed me. Now it's no problem."* Sokhhoeun and Nura Tola also indicate that they had difficulty learning to use the VCR. In most instances, they report that they learned to use these technologies by having some one else show them what to do. For example, Sokhhoeun reports how he asked someone at the bank to show him, step-by-step, how to use the ATM, he had them watch him do it a few times, and then had them write down the steps so that he could remember them in the future. Sokhhoeun used the same method to learn to use his VCR: he had the sales person go through the same teaching process described above.

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Technologies Used at Work or at School

There is a striking contrast between the manual "low-tech" technology (like janitorial equipment) in the work lives of Nura Tola, Alicia, David Wong and Sokhhoeun, with the "high-tech" equipment (personal computer) that Oliver Gonzales and Michela Stone use in their daily work or school lives. It is possible that limited literacy and cultural knowledge on the part of the immigrants profiled here has contributed to their relatively high concentration in low-skill, entry-level employment such as janitorial work. However, we should also note the contrast between the low-tech equipment at work and the relatively high-tech equipment which they have learned to use at home, and for which language limitations were not an unassailable barrier.

Michela Stone uses a personal computer at work as a part of her bookkeeping duties and Oliver Gonzales uses a personal computer as a major medium of instruction in the alternative educational program where he is enrolled. Both Sokhhoeun and Michela Stone report using a calculator in their work -- he to tally student attendance and she to perform a variety of accounting calculations.

Several other forms of non-computer technology are reported as being used at work or at school, although they are not used in common and do not form patterns of use across the profile subjects. Alicia Lopez formerly used food mixers and food production hand tools in her work in quantity food preparation, and she now learns a variety of hand and power tools in her facilities maintenance course. Sokhhoeun taught himself to use a forklift when he did warehouse work. David Wong uses a cash register, hand truck, and fish cleaning tools in his current job.

ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY

3. What expectations and beliefs do these adults hold about literacy and other technologies used for literacy?

Two main attitudes seem to predominate among the people we profiled about both literacy and technology. The first is a sense of confidence that they can master it (although no doubt most find mastering the technology easier than mastering the English language). The second is that their most successful adoption of language and literacy is in contexts where there is an immediate and identifiable use for them in their lives. This is most easily shown in the contrast between computer-based technology and video-based technology: the former hardly used, the latter used by almost everyone.

Attitudes and expectations of technology

For the people profiled here, simply because a technology is available does not mean in all cases that it will be used. There are several forms of technology to which each of the profile subjects have access, but which they do not use: personal computers, ATM cards,

automobiles. There appear to be two reasons to explain the failure to use available technologies. One has to do with ownership and pride: Oliver and Alicia do have access to certain technologies that belong to someone else, but they are reluctant to use them. It is more than likely that this reluctance in both of these cases -- Oliver's to use the car and Alicia's to use her brother-in-law's stereo equipment -- owes primarily to interpersonal feelings around ownership and control.

A second more significant reason that may be advanced to explain failures to use available technologies -- in particular, personal computers and ATMs -- is that the people profiled do not conceive of these particular technologies as having any direct benefit or utility for them. Or it would take too much trouble to learn to equal any benefit of use. Their failure to use these technologies would not appear to be solely a direct result of the complexity of the technologies, although complexity and language limitations may be a factor. The profile subjects have made rational assessments based upon their available information about these technologies. Although their information may at times be limited by their own cultural filters, they have decided, for the time being at least, not to use certain available technologies.

The omnipresence and importance of video technology in the lives of all of the people profiled here merits particular emphasis in this analysis. Unlike the sporadic use of computer technology noted above, televisions and VCRs are widely owned and widely used among the immigrants we have profiled. Indeed this is a phenomenon that can be seen throughout immigrant communities on the West Coast. With the earliest emergence of viable and affordable consumer home VCR technology a decade or more ago, there was rapid growth and acceptance of its use in immigrant communities. ESL teachers often found that the VCR, a technology that was quite new to them, was already well-known to their immigrant students.

Three reasons may be advanced to explain the prevalence and wide acceptance of television and VCR technology among the immigrants profiled here. The first is simply the attraction and entertainment value of the medium. As countless studies of American television viewers claim, television is a magnetic, intrinsically fascinating medium, sometimes despite its content. Almost regardless of language, and due to the medium's powerful use of images and sound that are not much dependent upon language, all of the people profiled report watching and being entertained by English-language broadcast television, even though their understanding of the language may be limited.

A second reason for the wide acceptance and use of video technology relates to the maintenance of cultural identity. The drive to maintain and reinforce one's own cultural identity is an understandable, natural, and powerful human urge. Surrounding oneself with the reassuring and familiar images, symbols, sounds, and tastes of one's own culture is a common response to the anxieties related to culture shock that one often feels when encountering a new culture for an extended period of time. VCR technology and native language tapes can provide a powerful means of providing this cultural reassurance and

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reinforcement. For those immigrants, such as Nura Tola, who are not literate in English or in their first language, the VCR offers a particularly powerful means of retaining a sense of cultural identity and personal value, even though the size of her immigrant community is quite small.

A third reason to explain the wide use of the video medium among the immigrants we profiled is that they value television as an information source. They use it to find out about American culture, as a news source, and as a way to improve their English. They also use it as a means of encountering -- albeit electronically -- actual native speakers of English, a feat that most cannot accomplish in their real everyday lives. David Wong, who watches whatever English language programs his children have selected, describes how he watches TV: *"I can't understand all of the dialogue. I can probably understand 30 to 40% of the programs my children watch."*

Video technology, then, appears to be a form of technology that is uniquely accepted and valued among the immigrants profiled here. They and the members of their communities have proven willing to devote time and money to its acquisition and application, and they identify important resulting uses and benefits of the technology for them. Some of these uses have direct implications for language and literacy acquisition. Further exploration, then, of how video technologies might be employed to promote language and literacy acquisition among immigrant communities is clearly merited.

Literacy-related attitudes, expectations, and aspirations

Each of the people we profiled has a complex set of expectations and aspirations for their lives in the United States. Many of these are related to issues of literacy. For example, Michela Stone's aspirations and expectations for the future have a direct connection to language and literacy. She wants to improve her English so that she can pass the TOEFL (Test of English for Foreign Learners -- a standardized test for enrollment in U.S. colleges), enroll in college, and ultimately get a job teaching accounting.

> *I'd like to be able to go to college here. Enroll in a business program. Get an MBA. Nobody thinks my MA from Russia is worth much. I took TOEFL once and scored only 10 below. That's just one or two answers. I'll certainly take it again when I have time to study.*

Alicia Lopez' primary aspiration is to be able to be in a position to adopt her granddaughters. In order to do so she needs a good-paying, steady job and, therefore, more fluency in English. She believes that she has missed a lot of opportunities due to her limited English proficiency, and clearly views improved language proficiency and literacy as keys to attaining many of her aspirations.

Oliver Gonzales' aspirations include getting his GED, working to put himself through college, and eventually embarking on a career in business. He sees an important role for

literacy in achieving these aspirations. He believes that improving his writing skills will be an important adjunct to success in the business world, and he expresses some concerns about this:

> *Sometimes I get worried about that 'cause when I'm doing something like here in school and I've got to write like a paragraph or something, stories, I get worried 'cause maybe I don't know what to write, you know. There's something that comes to my mind, but I don't know how to write it. Probably, to get a career you have to be able to write and read good. Probably if I want to get a business job you're gonna have to...They write a lot, don't they, in those kind of jobs?*

Perhaps the strongest attitude which everyone we profiled holds in common is a strong sense of self-reliance and independence. While this is not directly a literacy-related attitude, it does have significant implications for the role of literacy and language proficiency in their lives. Analysis of the life stories presented by the six people we have profiled produces a picture of a group of people who are all strong-willed, self-reliant, and determined. They all have demonstrated considerable drive for independence, and they have acted quite dramatically and emphatically to achieve their goals by overcoming extreme forms of adversity in coming to a new country to make a better life for themselves. They all display a strong will to survive and a pragmatic outlook that focuses on the possible.

Sokhhoeun and Alicia Lopez are typical. Sokhhoeun has shown a strong drive for survival, self-reliance, and independence throughout his refugee odyssey. While in the refugee camp, for example, he regularly risked harsh physical punishment from camp guards by slipping out of camp in order to secure goods to sell within the camp to support his family. In the United States he has demonstrated a pattern of self-reliance and dislike of dependence on others. He got a car within six months of his arrival in the country. He also devised a means of copying his application forms to public agencies so that he would have models to follow, thus avoiding repeated requests to friends to help him go to these agencies.

Alicia Lopez, too, shows considerable determination, self-reliance, and self-confidence. She recently displayed the courage to seek and achieve legal resident status after living for so many years as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. She also shows strong will and self-reliance in her willingness to go back to school at the age of 47 in facilities maintenance, a non-traditional occupation for women. Finally, she displays single-minded dedication to gaining custody of her grandchildren, now in foster care, so that she can give them a home and raise them as her own flesh and blood.

These strong individuals are aware of the ways in which language and literacy limitations inhibits their independence and self-reliance, and are seeking more skills in order to reach their aspirations.

LITERACY DEMANDS AND ECONOMIC REALITIES

4. Are the perspectives and expectations of those with limited literacy skills at variance with societal demands? What are those demands and who is making them?

There may be a variance for the people we profiled between their current jobs and those of which they are capable, as well as between their aspirations for future work, and what is likely to be available to them. Literacy and language play a role in these variances, but only as one factor among others. Table 4 compares their education levels and work experience in their home countries with current jobs or future job prospects in the United States. The six immigrants we have profiled -- with the exception of Oliver Gonzales, who is still in high school -- are all working or have worked in low-paying, entry-level jobs in the local service economy. Alicia Lopez, now in training for facilities maintenance work, has almost ten years' experience in quantity food production and packing; Sokhhoeun, now a teacher's aide, was a warehouse worker and forklift operator; Michela Stone formerly did janitorial work and now works as a bookkeeper; Nura Tola does janitorial work; and David Wong worked first as a meat seller and now a fish seller in San Francisco's Chinatown.

TABLE 4: EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

	Oliver Gonzales (age 17)	Alicia Lopez (age 47)	Sokhhoeun (age 38)	Michela Stone (age 32)	Nura Tola (age 29)	David Wong (age 53)
Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
Education in Country of Origin	• middle school	• 7 years	• 2 years in Buddhist monastery	• MA in accounting	• nonformal education	• 3-year technical college
Education in the United States	• high school alternative program (not yet graduated)	• ESL and facilities maintenance training program	• 2 years ESL • 3 mos. job training in electronics assembly	• ESL training • bookkeeping training	• ESL literacy instruction	• ESL training • 2 janitorial tng. programs • citizenship instruction
Jobs in Country of Origin	none	• camera store worker	• farmer • diamond prospector	• accountant • accounting instructor	• weaving • work in the home	• agricultural engineer
Former Jobs in the United States	none	• Food production worker • packer	• warehouse worker • forklift operator	• janitorial worker	none	• meat seller
Current Job in the United States	none	none	• bilingual teacher's aide	• bookkeeper	• janitorial worker	• fish seller
Future Job Aspirations	• restaurant or janitorial job to pay for college • business career	• facilities maintenance worker	• medical translator	• junior college accounting teacher	• health worker	• janitorial worker

Overview

This analysis in at least two cases offers some rather sobering examples of underemployment. Both David Wong and Michela Stone clearly have the training and experience to do work that is far more challenging than what they are currently paid to do. David Wong could put his skills in agricultural engineering to work in the rapidly developing biotechnology industries of the San Francisco Bay Area. And Michela Stone could work in a far more financially rewarding and productive accounting job than her current position in a community-based organization.

In all cases, it is evident that the profile subjects believe their limited language proficiency, literacy, and education contributes to their lack of opportunity to do work that is more financially and intrinsically rewarding. David Wong has evidently decided that the English language is such an insurmountable barrier that he will pursue janitorial work instead of work in his field of expertise. After studying English diligently for several years, he noted that he had reached a sort of "plateau" in his learning after he repeated the same level of ESL instruction three times. The reasons for this plateau were not fully explained (or even understood) by him. One probably relate first to his difficulty in learning well, or even attending class regularly, in the evenings after a long working day. The second reason may be located in the often over-crowded conditions in many community college ESL classes -- often 50 to 60 adult learners in one classroom. Even after lowering his sights to pursue janitorial work, however, his continued lack of success in finding this sort of employment seems to him still to be due to his lack of English language proficiency.

Alicia Lopez, too, has thought carefully about the link between her limited English language proficiency and underemployment. As she puts it,

> *It would have been better if I had spoken English. I could have learned many more things. I could have gotten a better position. In other companies, there are people who know less than I do and have higher positions because they speak English... Also, I couldn't ask for a raise. English is very necessary.*

In addition to the barriers to better employment which their limited English proficiency present, two other important factors seem to be operating for the people we profiled. First, they often lack cultural information about the labor market. Second, the reality of the Californian economy is that immigrants are routinely slotted into low-wage, low-skill jobs, regardless of their qualifications and skills.

Lack of Cultural Information About the Labor Market

Immigrants appear to get information about jobs and the labor market through culturally-influenced channels. Often the information they receive is valid; other times it may be less so. It is quite common for the people profiled here -- as well as for many other immigrants -- to get information about job openings and the local job situation in general from friends or relatives. This is a much more common job information source for them than sources such as want ads, job announcements, or employment counselors.

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It is only natural to trust job information that is provided in the native language and couched in familiar cultural terms from such sources as friends or relatives. Unfortunately, what is from one perspective a culturally appropriate strength and an important survival resource can also serve to limit perspectives of what is truly available in the labor market. In some cases, in fact, the information disseminated can be simply wrong or inaccurate due to cultural misunderstandings or miscues. Michela Stone, for example, notes how she received inaccurate information about job prospects from other immigrant friends when she was a new arrival:

> *People would tell me that I couldn't get a job as an accountant. You can get a job at a hotel or cleaning up someone's mess. Why they did that I don't know. It was misinformation. It made me think I was nothing.*

The cultural job information grapevine can also raise expectations unrealistically, creating false images or hopes of job availability. Sokhhoeun, for example, mentions getting a teaching credential or becoming a medical translator as possible future jobs that he might pursue. He may have seen or heard that teaching jobs are available, but he has no apparent knowledge of the BA degree and testing requirements that could stand as barriers to his achieving this goal.

Not only can this pattern of limited job information sources contribute to limited job prospects or unrealistic job expectations for the immigrants profiled, it also contributes to an ongoing condition of isolation from the dominant, English-speaking culture. All of the people profiled work in settings where the dominant workforce is other immigrant workers; most therefore do not come into regular contact with native speakers of English. Their sources of information for jobs, then, will probably continue to be limited by their continuing cultural isolation.

A Local Economy Dependent Upon Immigrant Workers for Some Jobs

It is apparent that the people we have profiled view their limited English language proficiency as a key causal factor in their confinement to work in low-wage, low-skill jobs. However, additional analysis suggests that there may be a more complex, symbiotic labor market relationship involved. It may be argued, in fact, that the local economy depends precisely upon these types of workers to fill exactly these kinds of jobs.

There is abundant evidence from the experiences of the people profiled here -- as well as from other immigrants' experiences -- to suggest that the jobs they fill are indeed done almost exclusively by immigrants. Almost without exception, they report that in their workplaces they are surrounded by other immigrants or by workers who are not members of the dominant, mainstream culture. In fact, they wonder at this phenomenon, puzzled about how they will ever improve their English when they never seem to have the sustained personal contact with those whom they view as native speakers of English.

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Staffers of one workplace literacy program encountered the same phenomenon recently when conducting a "literacy audit" in several service industry worksites in San Francisco to prepare for workplace ESL literacy training. A research question was posed as a part of the data collection protocol to explore the communicative interactions the immigrant workers had with co-workers who were native speakers of English. To the initial surprise of the investigators, this question generally produced the response: "What native speakers of English?" There were simply none to be found in these jobs. It became apparent instead that in many service industry workplaces in the San Francisco area, entry level jobs are filled almost exclusively by immigrants.

What is generally found in these job-sites is one of the two following strategies for "managing the multicultural workforce:" either all the workers are recruited from the same language background (for example, Spanish speakers or Chinese speakers) for ease of supervision and native language communication, or there are a series of clusters of workers from different language backgrounds who work together, often supervised by someone who is bilingual. Alicia Lopez described her work in such a setting:

> *I made salads, soups, macaroni, tortellini, alfredo sauce, pesto, tabouli, elbow macaroni, minestrone, lasagna, chicken noodle, beef noodle, salads -- waldorf, coleslaw... They gave me the formulas and I did everything -- cooked everything... The manager wrote in English. He'd give me the formula -- all the powders and they all had a name. Six ounces of this, six ounces of that. And I'd try [the powders] and then I'd memorize the names... Almost all were Latinos -- people who didn't have papers. And because we didn't have papers, they paid us $3.50 [an hour]. They got us good and cheap because we didn't have papers.*

There are at least two important implications to be derived from the preceding discussion. The first is that the immigrant workers we profile seem to identify their own low English language proficiency as the primary cause of their limited job opportunities -- in essence "blaming themselves" -- without realizing that there may be broader, structural economic factors at work that require their services in the work they now do. The second implication is that communication in English among immigrants from different cultural backgrounds is an important communication skill that needs to be taught in ESL programs. For most of the workplaces reported in this study, this skill -- communication with other non-native speakers of English -- is at least as important for job success as communication with native speakers of English.

Use of Public Services

It is important to consider the uses that the profile subjects make of public services, as well as the contributions they make toward supporting those services for two reasons. First, it is often observed in studies of low literacy populations that they make relatively limited use of the entire range of public services that may be available to them, perhaps due to their low literacy; and second, it has recently been claimed in California by state officials that

immigrants represent a disproportionate drain on the funds that are available to support public services. Table 5 below presents a summary of forms of public services used by the profile subjects, and the ways in which they contribute to the funding of those services.

TABLE 5: USES OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR SUPPORT

	Oliver Gonzales (age 17)	Alicia Lopez (age 47)	Sokhhoeun (age 38)	Michela Stone (age 32)	Nura Tola (age 29)	David Wong (age 53)
Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
Receipt of Public Aid or Cash Assistance	none	• unemployment insurance	• received Refugee Cash Assistance & Medicaid as new arrival	none	• received Refugee Cash Assistance & Medicaid as new arrival	none
Uses of Public Services	• attends public school • attends alternative education program • public transporation	• granddaughter's school • public transportation • public library	• 3 children in public school • briefly used public transportation, now drives	• job training • community college classes • public transportation	• ESL literacy training • public transportation	• ESL & janitorial tng. at community college • union janitorial program • public transportation
Contribution to Public Funds	none	• not now working • paid taxes when was working after being "legalized"	• works, pays taxes	• works, pays taxes	• works, pays taxes	• works, pays taxes

The analysis suggests that overall, the people we profiled make rather sparse use of public services, and that primarily for education. Three have at some point been the recipients of cash support from government sources: Alicia is receiving unemployment benefits (paid by her former employers, not by taxpayers); and both refugees, Nura Tola and Sokhhoeun, received federally-supported Refugee Cash Assistance when they first arrived in the United States, and publicly-supported medical care. In contrast, all but

by government PEL grants, and partly by a bank loan to cover tuition. David Wong is taking citizenship classes in a local community college. Others have children in school or public university. The only other public service which is extensively used is public transit.

We must conclude that these immigrants at least are not a substantial drain on state government resources, rather that they are hard-working contributors to government revenues.

BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES TO LEARNING

5. What kinds of incentives would lead adults to further their own literacy skills and knowledge? What barriers stand in their way?

In order to understand the barriers and incentives to learning which the people we profiled experience, we need to understand both their prior educational experiences and their experiences with adversity. Both impact on their aspirations and expectations of education.

Education Experiences

The people we have profiled have had a remarkable diversity of educational experiences. They range from the oral transmission of counting skills through songs and games reported by Nura Tola, to the post-baccalaureate level training in accountancy teaching that Michela Stone received. **Table 6** analyzes these formal and nonformal educational experiences, both in their countries of origin and in the United States; as well as the learning strategies that they identify as useful.

All the subjects reported that they had at least one parent who was literate. All parents, too are said to have placed value upon education. Only one person (Sokhhoeun) indicates that neither of his parents had any formal education. He reports, however, that his father could read the Khmer language, although he doesn't know how his father learned to read it. He remembers his father reading Buddhist scriptures every day at home in Cambodia:

He had a book at home and he liked to read the -- what is that called in English -- you know, when you become a monk, you study that word [Buddhist scriptures]... So he likes to read that every day... But he's not become a monk...

In an interesting reflection of two of the world's great learning traditions, Nura Tola reports that her father, a sheik, had a classical Islamic education, and David Wong reports that his father had a classical Chinese education. Both men put their learning to direct use

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and were respected for it. Nura's father was a prominent religious leader in his village. David's father farmed by day and taught in the village school at night. Neither of their mothers had received any formal education, however.

Analysis of the patterns of formal education reported from their country of origin reveals a range from no formal education to post-baccalaureate training. These prior educational experiences may have had a powerful role in shaping later expectations about education, and in shaping learning strategies. Nura Tola explains that religious beliefs and traditional practices in her culture largely prevented women from receiving formal education:

TABLE 6: FORMAL AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

	Oliver Gonzales (age 17)	Alicia Lopez (age 47)	Sokhhoeun (age 38)	Michela Stone (age 32)	Nura Tola (age 29)	David Wong (age 53)
Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
Parents' Educational Background	• f: 11 yrs school • m: 2 yrs secretarial sch	• f: attended seminary m: 3-4 years .	• no schooling, but father can read	• f: some college • m: teaching diploma	• f: a shiek-traditional Islamic education	• father had 5 years classical education
Formal Education in Home Country	• middle school	• 7 years	• 2 yrs. in monastery	• MA in accounting teaching		• 3 yrs. technical college (agric. eng.)
Nonformal Education in Home Country		• camera store equipment (math)	• farming • diamond prospecting • tractor drv.		• weaving & hand work • counting • marketing	
Formal Education in the United States	• high school • alternative high school (computers)	• job tng. & ESL program	• ESL • job training	• ESL • accounting	• ESL literacy	• ESL • janitorial training • citizenship
Nonformal Education in the United States	• using video games, VCR, computers • graffiti	• food production processes • using phone book	• car • forklift • ATM • VCR	• ATM • phone machine • PC	• phone • TV, VCR • washing machine	• local geography & transport. • bills, VCR
Learning Strategies They Identify Using	• watching others • asking questions	• watch • find texts that explain the task • work with other women	• oral instrc. & demo. • do task under superv. • write down steps • practice • review written steps	• use dictionary • learn from other students in class	• learn from husband • turn on and try ot	• use dictionary • ask friends (contemporaries)

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My father sent my brothers to go stay with relatives and attend Islamic school; but we, the women, couldn't leave unless we were married. As you know, once a woman gets married she has no life of her own. The thought of going to school never crossed my mind until I left my village and went to Somalia where I saw some Oromo women attending class. At first I was ashamed at the thought of a woman going to school, especially a married woman.

Sokhhoeun recalls that he received no formal education until the age of thirteen, at which time he was sent by his mother to a Buddhist monastery to study for two years:

When I became a monk I learned very fast. Because your mind is... straight about study... we don't think about anything else beside study... They just brought me the book... "OK, you study this..." And you just look at every day,.. if you have any question, just go there and ask, "What is that, what do you say... how do you pronounce that?"

Of all the participants profiled, Michela Stone reported the most extensive educational background, and she expresses unmistakable enjoyment of learning and her life as a student:

It was easy for me to learn to read. I could read before I went to school. My mother and my grandmother help me. They would read to me and I would follow the words on the page. I found school easy – apart from chemistry and algebra. I love physics. I was a good student, not because I am quick learner, but because I studied a lot.

Nonformal learning also played an important part in the home country educational experiences of many of the people we have profiled. Nura Tola reports on how she learned the skills of counting, cooking, shrewd marketing, and weaving through story telling and observation:

Every night, we all would sit around the fire and listen to the elders as they told stories about the olden days. The stories were usually about animals, explaining why, for example, hyenas and donkeys became enemies or why zebras have stripes. Numbers were taught to us through songs or games. I don't remember being taught anything else; other things you just learn by watching others do them. I watched my mother and one of my step mothers as they cooked and learned how to cook. A neighbor taught me how to spin cotton and weave the yarn into cloth. My oldest sister taught me how to weave baskets.

Formal education in the United States for all the people profiled has included ESL instruction. Beyond this, four of the six have received some form of job training: Alicia Lopez is enrolled in facilities maintenance training; Sokhhoeun was in an electronics assembly training program; Michela studied accounting in English; and David Wong has taken two janitorial courses. Oliver Gonzales is the only one of the six who has studied in a computer-based literacy setting.

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Nonformal learning experiences in the United States for all of the six profile subjects have been rich. Nonformal learning experiences reported are quite diverse, and include: using video games, reading graffiti, performing food production processes, driving a car, operating a forklift, using a phone answering machine, operating a washing machine, and using a VCR, an ATM, or a personal computer.

All of the profile subjects display the ability to reflect on how they learn and the strategies that they use to support successful learning of literacy and technology. Several strategies are commonly reported by more than one profile subjects, including the following: watching others; asking others; working together with others; and using a dictionary. Some report meta-cognitive uses of written English text as a tool for helping themselves learn or remember things. Alicia and Michela write things down to help them remember or to look them up later. Sokhhoeun has devised a relatively invariant format for learning in which he employs written text to help him acquire and reinforce new skills:

1. He asks someone to describe and show him how to perform the process;
2. He then tries the task under supervision, usually several times;
3. He asks them to write down the step, or writes them himself;
4. He performs the task repeatedly on his own, until he is comfortable with it;
5. He relies on the written text of the steps the next time he performs the task.

Their diverse experiences of education, in formal and non-formal settings, and especially in their home countries, have given the people we profiled some confidence in their ability to learn. Their ESL class experiences may have shaken that confidence somewhat (perhaps for David Wong and Alicia Lopez in particular, who have experienced difficulties). Nevertheless, prior educational experiences have not been the kind of barrier for these immigrants that they have been for the people of the Appalachian profiles.

The Experience of Adversity

Each of the people profiled has been faced with considerable adversity that they have had to overcome in order to simply survive and carry on their lives. These experiences also have shaped their attitudes toward education, and create both an incentive and a barrier to further learning.

Some have faced political adversity, some social adversity, and some personal or familial adversity. These experiences of extreme adversity have made important impacts upon them and upon their abilities to live their new lives in the United States. **Table 7** summarizes the forms of adversity that the immigrants we profile have experienced on their way to the United States, and as a part of their lives at the margins of existence in the United States.

All of the profile subjects have experienced some form of political adversity that has impacted negatively on their lives. Undoubtedly the most wrenching and violent forms of such experience occurred for Sokhhoeun and Nura Tola, both of whom were forced to flee

TABLE 7: EXPERIENCES OF ADVERSITY

	Oliver Gonzales (age 17)	Alicia Lopez (age 47)	Sokhhoeun (age 38)	Michela Stone (age 32)	Nura Tola (age 29)	David Wong (age 55)
Country of Origin	Nicaragua	Mexico	Cambodia	Russia	Ethiopia	China
Political Adversity	• family left Nicaragua to escape civil war	• lived for many years as "illegal alien" in the USA	• Cambodian war caused 6-year refugee experiences	• lived under totalitarian political system	• Ethiopian war caused 6-year refugee experiences	• lived under totalitarian political system
Social Adversity		• difficulty with cultural adjustment	• difficulty with cultural adjustment	• loss of job, underemployment due to immigration	• difficulty with cultural adjustment	• loss of job, underemployment due to immigration
Personal or Familial Adversity	• formerly a gang member • had brushes with police • father's alcohol abuse caused family separation	• daughter's substance abuse has put grandchildren in foster care • widowed at age of 26 with 3 children				

their countries to escape violence and likely death due to wars in Cambodia and Ethiopia. However, the others all faced considerable politically-related adversity, in their lives under authoritarian systems or civil war. It was ultimately their lack of hope for their lives under these political systems that caused them to emigrate to the United States.

All have faced social adversity simply through the major decision they have made to emigrate to the United States -- to leave behind all that is familiar and to try to survive and support their families in a new culture. All express difficulty at making the social and cultural adjustments necessary to life in a new country.

Personal and family adversity has impacted heavily on some of the people we profile. Oliver Gonzales, for example, was briefly a member of a youth gang when he lived in the Los Angeles area, before realizing that it offered him little other than negative prospects.

> *And when I was in L.A., I did a mistake, too. I got in a gang . . . But in L.A. it's not the same like here. Like here, is like playing, they just fight with fists. Over there they fight with weapons. Guns, things like that. That's why I was not going to school.*

Alicia Lopez has also experienced considerable personal and family adversity in her life. She was widowed at the age of 26 and never remarried. Her biggest concern now is the fate of her grandchildren who are in foster care, the daughters of her own daughter Maria, who has had a continuing substance abuse problem.

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These experiences of adversity have affected the lives of all of the people we profile. Such experiences are not at all unique among the immigrant and refugee populations who are seeking to structure new lives in the United States. In some sense they are an incentive to further education: developing greater literacy proficiency may be seen as the avenue to greater stability in their lives, to better jobs. However, such experiences may also be a barrier to further education, when continuing adversity consumes available time, energy and resources. For almost everyone we interviewed, survival is the central and dominant force in their lives. They may have little time and energy for further education.

Five of the six people profiled work hard simply to secure economic survival for themselves or their families, and they have little leisure time. Demands of work limit ongoing education, or at a minimum made its pursuit an exhausting challenge. David Wong, for example, works from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm, six days a week. The work is hard and hazardous, standing for hours in half and inch of icy water, gutting, cleaning, weighing and selling fish. Alicia Lopez until recently often worked two jobs, and at least ten hour workdays. She supported not only herself but her grand-daughter and two sons in Mexico. She signed up for ESL classes twice, but found herself too exhausted to attend.

Persistent health problems also place an added burden of survival: Nura Tola has chronic health problems, Sokhhoeun's wife had to stop working when she fell ill. Factors such as these create barriers to education.

Most, when they do focus beyond the economic survival issues of work, tend to focus on their families. Few, even upon probing by the interviewers, identify much role in their lives for leisure, personal growth, aesthetic pursuits, hobbies, or relaxation. These are serious people struggling to survive in difficult economic situations. They are living at the economic margins of existence, and they consequently have time for little else beyond economic and family survival.

LITERACY IN SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

6. How do literacy and technology impact on social relationships?

Isolation and Multiculturalism: A Paradox

An important theme in the everyday lives and work of the people we profile is their isolation from interactions with members of the dominant culture of the Unites States. In what might seem to be a paradox of their lives in a multicultural society, most of them report little contact with "Anglo" Americans -- except by watching them on television. Their experience of the United States to date has placed them in contact with members of their own cultural groups, and in most cases with members of many other immigrant and subordinate cultural groups in the workplace or their neighborhoods. But few report extended contact -- and none report friendships -- with "Anglos." They express puzzlement at the fact that they

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could be living in the United States and yet have so few regular interactions with what they believe -- and the media tells them -- are Americans.

Due to the isolation they experience through the types of work they must do, and due to the communities in which they congregate, they are experiencing a kind of hyper-multiculturalism which does not include members of the dominant culture. Their ESL teachers tell them to practice English with native speakers, but they never meet any except their teachers. As Nura Tola notes,

> *My teacher says that we should be in contact with Americans to practice our English, but I hardly come in contact with Americans. There aren't any in my neighborhood. The only time I see them is when I watch television or go to the store. But at the store they have no time for discussions.*

Michela Stone also reports her frustration at being unable to establish many relationships with native speakers of English:

> *Talking to other people I find hard. People don't always show you. They behave not nice. They don't want to teach you because they're afraid you're going to take their jobs. They're not always sympathetic when you don't have good English... I try to find an American friend. This is most important problem.*

Three important implications may be derived from the analysis of this theme. The first is that the immigrants profiled rely on television for an inordinate amount of information about the dominant culture of the United States, almost as a surrogate for interactions with native speakers of English. Most of them clearly desire such interactions with actual humans, but must settle for them in a passive, electronic incarnation.

A second implication of this condition of relative isolation is that ESL teachers play a powerful role as spokespeople and representatives of the dominant United States culture. In many cases the interaction with the ESL teacher is the only sustained relationship our profile subjects have had -- or are likely to have -- with a native speaker of English. This places considerable pressure on the instructor and the curriculum to deliver high quality, accurate information.

A third and final implication of this analysis is that we are seeing now the emergence of a dominant use of English as a means of intercultural communication among different immigrant groups -- none of whom are native speakers. For all of the people profiled, their primary purpose for using English, then, is not to communicate with native speakers of English, but to communicate with other non-native speakers of English. Important and powerful language changes having to do with nuance, cultural background, language evolution, social relationships, power, and other linguistic factors could ultimately emerge from this new and highly fluid form of language use.

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Support and Maintenance of Linguistic and Cultural Communities

Another important socially-related use of literacy that may be identified among the six people profiled is the maintenance of a sense of cultural community. All the profile subjects report multiple forms of native language literacy use with the clear intent of maintaining a sense of community and connection to their cultural background. The forms they employ for this function are diverse, but the purposes are similar. As noted earlier, video technology has come to play a particularly important role with respect to cultural maintenance, but it is by no means the only form of support for this function.

Michela Stone, for example, reports that the Russian immigrant community in San Francisco is close, that its members are very supportive of one another. Indeed, the community center where she works has deliberately tried to become an integral part of that community. Sokhhoeun, also, has a similar example of community cultural maintenance. He is a leader in the Cambodian community organization in Oakland. The group formally divides the city's Cambodian community into sectors, with a leader appointed responsible for each sector. A list of all Cambodian families is maintained, and each family is canvassed by the sector leader when one of the families in the community has suffered the death of a loved one. Sokhhoeun also works in a refugee service agency, so he is surrounded by cultural reinforcement on a daily basis in his job.

Nura Tola, too, displays considerable ingenuity in developing diverse forms of cultural maintenance and community reinforcement, although the Oromo community in San Jose where she lives is relatively small when compared to other immigrant communities. She makes and sends audiotaped letters to friends back home to maintain her connections there. She and her husband watch videotapes of Oromo cultural shows when they can get their hands on them. She and her husband also meet regularly with other Oromos:

> *Our Oromo community holds a meeting once a week. Those who know English would tell us about what is happening in our home area or other countries. They get their news from the paper or BBC radio, and some of them call their families back home to find out what is going on -- those who have family members left. I don't, so I don't call home.*

The people we have profiled display diverse and ingenious ways to perform an important social function -- the maintenance of their cultural identity and sense of community while they are living and surviving in a sometimes bewildering new country. The value they place on their own language and culture is reflected too in their determination that their children will be proficient in and value their parent's culture and language. Alicia explains her views on the importance of bilingualism for her granddaughter, Carmina:

> *I want Carmina to speak two languages. For her to speak English and not Spanish -- that I wouldn't like. I want her to speak both. I don't want her to lose her roots, her customs. I want her to love Mexico. I know many friends of the family who have*

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children 14-15 years old who have disdain for Spanish. I try to inculcate that in her -- to love Spanish. English too. She must speak both.

Michela Stone, though she has no children of her own, expresses a similar view on developing the first language among the children in immigrant families:

Most of my friends have kids and they ask me not to speak English to their children. They are frightened they will lose their Russian. Then parents will lose family connections and influence on their children. I think they are right. If I had kids I would be the same.

Generations and Literacy

Family relationships figure in some of the social patterns of literacy use. Two patterns in particular are analyzed here: the tendency for children in immigrant families to serve as cultural interpreters for the limited-English-proficient parents; and inter-generational examples of shared literacy uses.

It is often noted in immigrant families that children are frequently called upon to serve as linguistic and cultural interpreters for their parents. These children, who may have grown up and been educated in the United States, are often asked to translate in encounters with public agencies, to read bills or tax forms, or even to help other relatives fill out their immigration papers. Oliver Gonzales, as the youngest and most nearly bilingual of the six profile subjects, reports that he plays this role of interpreter for the adult members of his family who have limited English language proficiency. Because Oliver is the oldest child he accompanies other family members to medical, legal, and financial appointments. He also reads and translates the family's mail and notes sent home from school. He recently accompanied his mother to traffic court. Asked why it was necessary to go to court with his mother (and miss a day of school), he explained:

'Cause she says she's afraid. She don't like to go to court. She says she don't like the judge. The way they talk and everything. She's always nervous when she goes to court for a ticket.
[Question:] Does the judge talk to her?
No, he talks to me. And I tell her what the judge say.

A second social pattern of literacy use that is evident from some of the cases profiled has to do with inter-generational sharing of literacy activities. Three examples may be cited from the profiles. Oliver Gonzales, for example, reports that he and his family sometimes read scary stories aloud to one another -- usually in Spanish but sometimes in English. Sokhhoeun also reports shared inter-generational literacy activities. He sometimes helps his youngest child, a nine-year-old, with his English-language homework at home. David Wong, too, reports a kind of English-language literacy activity that is influenced by his son.

His son buys the English-language newspaper every day and leaves it around the house, so David sometimes reads it.

In summary, then, there appear to be a set of potentially important patterns of socially-related literacy uses having to do with inter-generational relationships that emerge from an analysis of the profiles.

CONCLUSIONS

These California profiles offer a rich description of six immigrant's lives and their uses of literacy and technology. There are many important points to come out of the overview of the detailed profiles, each with their own implications for further research and practice. The main points are summarized below.

There is considerable variety in how the people profiled use language: what they speak and listen to, what they read and write, and which language -- their native language or English -- they use for which purposes.

Immigrants use a remarkably wider range of technology in the United States than they had used in their native country. This is partly due to access, but all the profiled subjects indicated that, in addition, they would seek out and use technologies they believed could do something useful for them. Conversely, they would not use others if they perceived no direct benefit or it was too much trouble to learn. There is a clear contrast between the widespread and creative uses of electronic media (television and video) and that of computers, to which several have access but only a few use.

Each of the immigrants profiled has a complex set of expectations and aspirations for their lives in the United States. Many of these are related to issues of literacy and (fewer) to technology. However, more importantly, all the subjects profiled evidence considerable strength of will and purpose, self-reliance and independence. All had overcome extreme forms of adversity in coming to a new country to make a better life for themselves.

All the subjects believe that their limited language proficiency contributes to their lack of opportunity to do more financially rewarding and stimulating work -- in essence, blaming themselves -- without realizing that there may be broader, structural factors at work. In addition, all work in settings where the dominant workforce is other immigrant workers. This limits their hopes and knowledge of other jobs available and limits their opportunities for communication with native English speakers.

All the subjects profiled mentioned the isolation they feel from the dominant culture in the U.S.A.. Most were puzzled that they were living in America and yet had so few regular interactions -- let alone friendships -- with what they believed were Americans. Consequently, most relied on television for information about the dominant culture, and (if they had one) their ESL teacher for more human interaction.

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Overview

Although English is becoming a means of intercultural communication between immigrant groups, most immigrants use their native language within their own group to maintain their sense of community and connection to their cultural backgrounds.

Finally, there is evidence that children of immigrant families serve as cultural interpreters for limited-English-proficient parents, and that there is some inter-generational sharing of literacy activities.

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SYNTHESIS

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SYNTHESIS

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES

These profiles depict a remarkably diverse group of people, from all continents of the world, with life experiences that range from the most local to the most international. Each group of profiles from east and west would seem exotic and different to the other. That diversity is an important element in our understanding of everyday uses of literacy. Adults with low literacy skills do not fit common patterns and stereotypes. They have many different backgrounds, many different lifestyles, many different experiences and skills.

Among the Appalachian profiles, two are rural and white -- Marcy Osborne and Tom Addington. They share a similar context of rural life, and work in the informal sector, but their literacy skills are at different levels. Yuvette Evans and Lisa Bogan are both African American women, both single parents, although with very different backgrounds in terms of their upbringing, values and life experiences, also with different literacy levels. Maria Reyes, Texas-born and of Mexican origin, is not literate in her first language of Spanish. She tries to get away from her life in the migrant worker stream, longs to settle down in a small town with a better job, but finds it hard to make the transition. Les Willard is white, a skilled electrician who cannot get a license because of his literacy limitations, and so is caught in a cycle of long working hours for low pay.

Among the California profiles, there is a wide range of literacy, language, cultural and life experiences. Two are refugees -- Nura Tola and Sokhhoeun -- who have experienced brutal terrors and years of disruption before their arrival in the United States. Others are part of the immigrant stream which is transforming Californian society. Oliver Gonzales from Nicaragua, Alicia Lopez from Mexico, David Wong from China and Michela Stone from Byelorussia all came hoping for a better life. Their diverse international backgrounds led them into immigrant communities in the Bay Area which are almost as diverse. Their literacy and language skills vary greatly, but all experience problems not only in understanding and using the new language, but also in cultural information and understanding.

There are some striking commonalities across these diverse lives. Without losing the richness and variety of the lives of the people we profiled, we can see some common patterns, as well as differences. In this Synthesis, we will explore both common themes and differences, as well as the implications of our findings for adult basic education.

Common themes

Several common themes emerge which we will explore in this Synthesis: common patterns in uses of literacy, and in the strategies they use to cope with limited literacy; in their self reliance and determination to be independent; in the hard times they all have experienced, and the overwhelming focus in their lives of "getting by," of surviving; in lives which are at the margins of our society, both economically and culturally; and in their hopes and aspirations for what greater literacy skills could do for them.

Everyday uses of literacy: While individuals are at very different skill levels, and have their own unique patterns of literacy use, the patterns fit within an overall framework. There is not a clear separation between ESL literacy and native English literacy. Individuals vary, but there is no consistent pattern of differences in literacy use between native English speakers and non-native English speakers. They draw upon the same pool of potential literacy uses, as best fits their needs, skills and current tasks.

Strategies used for literacy: Our profiles reinforce earlier research which described some of the strategies which adults use to deal with literacy demands, most notably Fingeret's ground-breaking research on social networks and the use of "readers." We go beyond earlier research to depict a rich array of strategies from which individuals draw. Again, there is no consistent pattern of difference between the native and non-native English speakers. Indeed, we suspect that many of the strategies are also used by the highly literate as "short-cuts" to solving immediate practical problems. We may be able to read instruction manuals, but many of us use trial and error, guesswork, and watching others.

Self-reliance: Everyone we interviewed is determined to be independent, dislikes having to rely on others, does not want to live on welfare, wants and expects to have control of their own lives. This drive leads to hard work, often with long hours, to earn an income to support their families. Often it means supporting others too.

Survival: A closely connected common theme is that everyone has faced down hard times, and survival is the dominant force in their lives. Some have survived refugee camps and atrocities beyond our worst nightmares. Some have survived other kinds of hardships: divorce and loss of a home, drug and alcohol abuse by family members, job loss, poverty. Because of these continuing experiences, the dominant force in their lives is survival. There is not much room for other things - either for having fun, or for educational experiences. Their absorption in getting by, the long hours they work, their focus on family, all create barriers to their access to education.

Living at the margins: Another related common theme is that the lives we describe have been marginalized by our society, both economically and culturally. In terms of their cultural identity, they are all minorities of one kind or another. This is most obvious for the linguistic minorities of the West Coast, and for the Spanish speaking Maria, but it is true to some extent of the other Appalachians, both white and African American. Their non-standard English, their roots in rural society, whether current or in childhood memory, and many of their cultural values (connectedness to place, music, food), all set them apart from the mainstream.

Likewise, they all fill a similar niche in the job market, a parallel place in the economic structure -- that of low-skill employment, often in the service sector, often part-time, always low-wage. Despite the economic restructuring of this country, which has created some jobs requiring higher skills and greater education, the economy still creates very many jobs which demand few skills, little literacy, low education. Indeed, as manufacturing declines and the

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service sector increases in its share of the job market, these low wage jobs seem to be expanding, and many former manufacturing workers are experiencing a downward shift through the job market and in their wages.

The economy in both California and Appalachia depends on a large pool of labor willing to take these jobs. Our profiles indicate very minimal literacy demands in most of the jobs they held. Nor is there any indication that the literacy demands in these kinds of jobs is changing very rapidly. But there is a clear indication from the profiles of a great waste of human resources. The people we interviewed seem capable of much more: they have common sense, practical problem solving skills, determination, a "work ethic." But they are in jobs that demand little of them, and see no clear way to better jobs, with or without more education.

Hopes and aspirations: Nevertheless, our last common theme is that they do hope for more, for themselves and for their children. The people we interviewed would like better literacy skills, see specific ways in which that would benefit their lives, hope it would help them get a better job. They want to learn and they demonstrate their capacity to learn everyday skills (even when they were not successful in the academic skills of school).

Differences

In focussing on commonalities we do not intend to overlook the differences that do exist, not just at the individual level, but between the two broad groups of native and non-native English speakers. Those differences are real, and have as significant implications for instructional programs as do the commonalities. We see four key themes of difference between the two groups of profiles: in the uses of technology by the non-native English speakers; in the impact of first language usage; in the connections between ESL literacy and family relationships; and in the clarity of cultural identity which the non-native speakers have, in contrast with the white and African American Appalachians we profile.

Uses of technology: We analyze the uses of everyday technology, especially for literacy-related uses, by the California group, and contrast it with the much more limited usage of the Appalachian group. As a whole, the people we profiled in California use technology more, have it in their homes more often, and are more comfortable with literacy-related uses of technology than the Appalachian group. In particular, we point to their use of technology to maintain cultural identity and community -- native language television, videos from the old country, tape-recorded letters. Technology plays a unique and vital literacy and information role for them.

Impact of literacy on family relationships: In immigrant families, children commonly assume the role of interpreter and mediator between their parents and the English-speaking world. Their role as "cultural translator" and broker affects the power relationships within the family, and creates tensions and impacts which are not experienced in the same way by the English speaking group. Although in some cases, children act as "readers" for the

Appalachian group, and parents show the same kinds of reluctance to use them in this role as the non-native speakers do, nevertheless, their roles are much more narrowly defined. Literacy limitations seem to have less impact on family relationships than do second language limitations.

Use of a first language: It is striking how much the Californians we profiled continue to use their native language. Most of them are in relatively "sheltered" workplaces which are bilingual or multilingual. Most live in neighborhoods where their native language is freely spoken. They continue to use their native language within their families and extended families, and in broader cultural communities. Because of this context, English language proficiency may be less of a priority for them. Certainly they have few opportunities to practice and be immersed in language with native English speakers. While the Appalachians we profile rarely use standard English, and move in circles where similar non-standard English is used, they do not have this first language experience in the same way.

Clarity of cultural identity: The final theme of difference concerns the clarity of the cultural identity of the non-native English speakers, compared with the Appalachian group. Each of the West Coast profiles belongs to a broader community beyond their extended family. These are cultural communities which may be quite small (like Nura Tola's Oromo refugee group) or quite large. They may be formal organizations or informal loose groupings. But they all contrast with the people of the Appalachian profiles who on the whole have little beyond their family. Other than the church and a bowling league, there are no institutions with which they identify, and no real sense of community or cultural identity beyond the family.

Implications for literacy education

In the last section of the report, we focus on some implications for literacy education which we see in our profiles. These range from the theoretical (reassessing "functional literacy") to the practical (suggestions for classroom methods). We analyze the learning strategies which the people we profiled use in their everyday lives. We look at how they use technology and the implications for how it might most effectively be used in education. We examine when and what people learn, to illuminate the potential for mismatch between what people think they want to learn and what teachers want to teach them. We look at their needs for support in entering and staying in educational programs. We question the concept of "functional literacy" in the light of the effective ways people have found to function in their daily lives with limited literacy. And we suggest that in making changes in their lives, literacy on its own is only part of the picture, one factor which is closely intertwined with others.

Learning strategies: Although many of those we profiled did not do well in formal schooling, they all have demonstrated their capacity to learn, and to master many skills. They describe a wide variety of learning strategies which they employ in their everyday lives. We analyze this "toolbox" of learning strategies from which people draw to meet

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particular needs and contexts. Although individual differences in learning styles are discernable, we again see no consistent differences between the native and non-native speakers. They draw on the same tool-box. Educators need to pay attention to these practical learning strategies, and incorporate them in more formal educational experiences. We suggest that programs should be structured to build on these learning strategies and incorporate them in the formal educational process. Teachers can help people become more conscious of their learning strategies, document them, and learn to apply them in new settings. Learners often expect that school requires not only specialized content knowledge, but also completely different skills from those they use in their everyday lives. Teachers can help them see that they can use many of the same strategies with which they are already familiar to master new tasks of all kinds, including school.

What and when people want to learn: There is sometimes a mis-match between what people want to learn, and when they want to learn it, and what is offered to them by teachers. The mis-match may occur in the skills and content of the course, or in the definition of "mastery." We found that in their everyday learning experiences, people learn a specific skill for a particular purpose. They want it at that particular time, and may not have much interest in learning for learning's sake. This suggests that what we have usually regarded as a major problem in literacy education programs -- students dropping in and out of classes -- may be turned into a strength, as long as people have a positive learning experience, drop out having got what they needed for the moment, and feel encouraged to re-enter at a later time to continue their learning or gain a new skill. Again, programs that are based on and respond to the needs and interests of adult student will be better able to serve them.

Technology: Our profiles paid careful attention to when and how people use technology in their everyday lives. These data provide insights which educators can use. In general, although technology is not widely used for literacy, we found little discomfort with the technology they have encountered among those with low literacy skill, when it has some clear and accepted purpose for them. We contrast the widespread use of television and video for cultural maintenance among the non-native English speakers with the limited acceptance of computers as a useful tool.

Providing support: Our profiles suggest that people need much more from an educational program than a specific set of skills or content knowledge. Not only do they have many problems in their lives, and many demands on their time and energy, which makes it hard to participate, but also they need social support. Our profiles suggest that key learning strategies for many people are socially-oriented -- they learn from others in a variety of ways. They also often use technology for literacy in social ways (for cultural maintenance, to learn a new culture).

Only one person in each set of profiles had experience of formal cooperative learning, but both had found it very comfortable and useful. These profiles suggest that, despite the acceptance of technology and their ability to use it, a program which is solely technology-

based may not provide the other kinds of social support which people also need. Educators should pay attention to learners as "whole people," and find ways of providing social support within their programs.

"Functional" literacy: The concept of functional literacy, although seldom satisfactorily defined, has been a driving one both in educational circles and in policy circles for many years. This view of literacy places a primary emphasis on the pragmatic uses of literacy -- to accomplish life tasks and especially work tasks. While proponents of functional literacy accept a continuum of skills from non-literate to literate, they look for a cut-off point at which a person can be tested and declared "functionally literate." Despite a body of research and theory to the contrary, functional literacy concepts survive and are deeply imbedded in public policies, program designs, and instructors' assumptions.

There are many critiques of functional literacy, some of which are summarized in the Literature Review (Appendix A). For example, Kazemek takes issue with its underlying assumption that literacy is a generic and definable skill which all literate adults have (and which illiterate adults should have).[1] Here we will examine two issues in particular: the emphasis on literacy for purely pragmatic uses, and the equation of literacy skill with ability to accomplish tasks.

Proponents of functional literacy make the assumption that there is a direct connection between people's ability to interpret or use text in a life-skill task (for example, reading a bus timetable) and their ability to actually perform that task in real-life (use a public transportation system effectively). Our profiles suggest that the jump from literacy to competency in everyday life is too quickly made. Although we are a print-based society, there are many ways of accomplishing life tasks effectively. The profiles themselves depict very "functional" individuals. They pay taxes, hold down jobs, may own a home, pay rent on time, shop, raise children, are involved in their children's education, and are generally good citizens (though they seldom vote). The coping strategies and learning strategies analyzed above demonstrate the ways they have found to function with limited literacy. Just as Sticht, Mikulecky and others have demonstrated that people's on-the-job skills are much higher than would be measured by general or academic-based reading tests, so we should expect that people's everyday life-skills are much higher than would be measured by competency-based assessment tools.

Our analysis of literacy strategies used by adults with limited literacy skills also suggests that literacy has many other faces, not simply a pragmatic one. Many of the literacy strategies are social in nature, involve cultural knowledge and cultural maintenance. It is not simply that some people do read for pleasure, but that literacy is embedded in a broader social and cultural context in their lives. We cannot reduce it to relatively simple life skills.

[1] Francis E. Kazemek, "Necessary changes: Professional involvement in adult literacy programs," Harvard Educational Review, 58, 4, 1988, p. 466.

To see the people we profiled as very competent, resourceful and "functional people, and to argue that the functional literacy concept may be misplaced, is not to argue that they do not need or want to improve their literacy skills. For the most part the people we interviewed do wish for better skills, and see some specific ways in which higher skills would help them. They have hopes and aspirations, goals both concrete and vague. Society wastes an important resources when it marginalizes people who are this resourceful, hard-working and capable. It is time we laid to rest the idea that adults with low literacy skills are incompetent and dysfunctional, susceptible to all manner of social problems from drug abuse to crime. It is time that we saw literacy education and capitalizing on strengths, and enabling individuals to contribute more fully to their communities.

When literacy is not enough: We have wrestled with the question of whether, given their social contexts, given the economic and social structure of this society, increasing literacy skills will help individuals such as the people we profiled to advance -- get a better job, or a job, have more stable, less marginalized lives. There may be no complete answer. While some jobs do require higher literacy and technical skills than in the past, there is at the same time a downward movement in the job market. In another Tennessee study recently completed, women textile workers with many years of factory work experience, relatively high wages for women in the area, good benefits and stable employment, found themselves back in the job market when their plant closed.[2] Some of them went back to school to get their GED, and to get more job training. Despite these new skills, almost everyone lost wages in the move to a new job, lost health insurance and lost union representation.

When the economy is unstable, increasing education may or may not pay off for individuals. But our profiles suggest another important factor. While literacy and language proficiency may be important in gaining credentials, something more is needed to gain access to the higher levels of the job market. That something more is somewhat amorphous, but centers around cultural information. To get a job, you have to talk right, act right, dress, right, know the right people - to become part of the mainstream culture. The acquisition of this subtle cultural information is not easy for either native or non-native speakers, because it challenges their own identity.

In the rest of this chapter, we explore these issues further using the data from the profiles. The text follows the format outlined above.

[2] Juliet Merrifield, Lachelle Norris and Loretta White, "I'm Not a Quitter!" Job Training and Basic Education for Women Textile Workers, Center for Literacy Studies, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1991.

2. COMMON THEMES

2.A. EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY

The demands and uses for literacy which people experience are mediated in part by their social context -- where they live, what their jobs are, what is current in their communities. They are also influenced by personal factors -- how they grew up, what their expectations are, what their family's expectations of them have been. We might contrast Oliver's family, where there is Spanish literacy, regular reading aloud, and expectations of a certain level of education and literacy, with Yuvette who did not grow up with books or reading, and has none in her home now -- literacy is just not a relevant part of her life.

Although there is some association between literacy skills and literacy uses, it is not at all exact. Yuvette with higher level skills is essentially a-literate, while Lisa with much lower skill levels has many more uses for literacy in her life.

On the whole, in the domains of work and home, the demands for literacy which the people we profiled experience are quite low. Minimal levels are needed to "get by" (find the amount owing on bills, use the bus, fix things, drive around, get low wage manual jobs). They have been able to work out ways to meet these demands, which are described below as "literacy strategies."

The uses of literacy by the individuals we profiled have been described in some detail in the profiles themselves, and summarized in the two overview sections. Here we will look across the profiles at the uses of literacy by the two groups of native and non-native English speakers, to look for common patterns or differences. Table 1 summarizes the data from the profiles in terms of the categories devised by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, based on those established by Shirley Brice-Heath in her ethnographic research on language and literacy in two communities.[3] There are six main categories of reading uses:

1. Instrumental - to gain practical information (including labels, directions, maps and street signs);
2. Social-interactional - for social relations (including letters and notes from family and friends, church newsletters and other communications);
3. News-related - whether national, local, work or family-related;
4. Recreational - reading for pleasure, reading to pursue other recreational pursuits (including sports scores, weather reports for fishing enthusiasts);
5. Confirmational - to check or confirm facts (may include looking up a word in a

[3] Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines, Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988, pp. 123f.; Shirley Brice Heath, Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; and "Critical factors in literacy development," in S. de Castell, A. Luke and K. Egan, (Eds.) Literacy, Society and Schooling: A Reader, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

dictionary to check spelling, looking up a phone number in the directory, checking appliance instructions, warranties and so on);
6. Critical/educational (including materials in formal education but also others read with the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and insights, bedtime stories for children).

There are also five major categories of uses of writing:

** Substitute for oral messages (phone messages, notes to a child or teacher);
** Social-interactional (letters, greeting cards);
** Memory aides (shopping lists, notes on calendars, other notes to oneself);
** Financial (writing checks, money orders, forms, tax returns);
** Public writing (for a church bulletin, newsletter, as well as more formal publications).

Between them, everyone we interviewed uses reading and writing in all of the categories. Many had quite diverse uses, especially of reading, even though their literacy levels are not high. In **Table 1** we summarize the data for each of the profiles, (for the California group combining both native and non-native language uses which are described separately in the California Overview section).

TABLE 1. USES OF LITERACY

	Tom	Mcy	Yv	Les	Lis	Ma	Nu	D	A	Mi	O	S
USES OF READING:												
Instrumental	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Social-interact	X	X			X			X	X	X	X	X
News		X			X			X		X		X
Recreational		X		X	X					X	X	
Confirmational	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Critical/educ.	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
USES OF WRITING:												
Substit. oral		X				X			X	X		X
Social-interact		X						X	X	X		X
Memory aides		X	X	X					X	X		X
Financial		X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X
Public writing								X			X	

There are some differences between the Appalachian and Californian groups in their uses of writing. None of the Appalachian people did any public writing, and two of the California group did some, mainly in their native language (Oliver's graffiti and David Wong's novel in Cantonese). Among the Appalachian group only Marcy does any social-interactional writing (greeting cards and notes to family), while most of the Californian immigrants do write in their native language to stay in touch with their widely scattered families. The exception is Nura Tola, who is not literate in her native language, and uses technology for this communication. Otherwise, there is no consistent pattern of difference between the two groups. All have many uses for reading and writing in their lives.

Nevertheless, for almost everyone the elaboration of reading and writing within each of these categories is fairly narrow and limited. A great deal of it is instrumental in some way: only a few read for pleasure (Michela reads Pushkin in Russian, love stories in English; Marcy reads Reader's Digest and True Story; Les reads comics).

We should note briefly here that reading numbers and using basic math do not seem to present the same problems for most people as reading text. Often people who are very poor at reading are quite good at addition and subtraction, even simple multiplication and division. They use everyday math, in their work, grocery shopping, recreation (like Les' bowling scores). As long as the calculations are limited, and do not require fractions or decimals, most people seem to be able to handle them quite well.

We might have expected to find that adults who have low literacy skills use reading and writing in quite different ways from those with higher skills. We might also have expected to find different patterns between the two groups -- native and non-native English speakers. Neither expectation was realized. Everyday uses of literacy among these adults with low literacy skills looks much like those described for different populations by Heath, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, although less elaborated.

2.B. STRATEGIES FOR LITERACY

People who have limited literacy or language skills have to find ways of living in a print-based society. All of the people we profiled experience literacy demands which are beyond their literacy skills to meet. They have devised a set of strategies which enable them to meet these demands, and live their daily lives, which we describe as "literacy strategies." The existing literature on low-literate adults suggests a few of the strategies which they use. Fingeret found most people with low literacy skills had social networks in which some members provided reading services for them, while they provided other services in exchange.[4] Fingeret also identified two other literacy strategies which a few of the people

[4] Hanna Arlene Fingeret, The Illiterate Underclass: Demythologizing the American Stigma, Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1982; and "Social networks: A new perspective on independence and illiterate adults," Adult Education Quarterly, 33(3), Spring 1983, pp. 133-146. Thanks to Fingeret for proposing the term "literacy strategies" in oral communications.

she interviewed used: these are memorizing text materials, and using technology, like tape recorders, in place of literacy.

The people we profile use these strategies and more. Our research reveals a rich and diverse array of strategies which people can call on to meet literacy demands in their everyday lives. For the most part, these strategies work for them, are effective in meeting the literacy demands which their lives place on them.

We have identified four main types of strategies which adults with low literacy skills use to meet demands for literacy in their everyday lives. These are:

** **Other-oriented strategies**, including using regular "readers," asking others for help or information on an ad hoc basis, using other oral information sources, and observing others;
** **Self-reliance strategies**, including guessing, extensive use of memory, and learning the formats for routine documents, and selective use of text, including native language text when someone is literate in their native language but not in English, and including both reading and writing;
** **Avoidance** of difficult or potentially difficult situations;
** **Use of technology for literacy**, such as television, VCRs, computers and tape recorders (sometimes involving limited use of text, e.g. telephone use may require use of the phone book).

Most people use more than one of these strategies in their everyday life. They have a battery of strategies from which they select what is most appropriate for any given situation. Which they select depends in part on the task or literacy demand, in part on the context (are they in the home, at work, or out in their community) and in part on personal preference (which includes feelings of confidence or embarrassment). We see no consistent differences in the patterns of literacy strategies used by the native and non-native English speakers.

Other-oriented strategies

People with limited literacy may rely on others to help with daily literacy demands in several different but related ways. They may regularly use a "reader," most often a family member, to read mail and other text for them. They may ask others for help in a more sporadic and ad hoc manner -- asking people for directions, help in stores, to spell names and addresses. They may also draw on other oral sources of information, without a formal request. And they may observe others.

Use of a "reader:" Among the people we profiled, use of a regular "reader" or readers, of the kind described in Fingeret's research, was limited to those with the lowest literacy and/or English language skills: Tom, Les, Maria and Nura. Tom says about unfamiliar pieces of mail:

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I always just bring it here and let the old lady read it, and if she says something she says something, and if she don't, I don't pay it no mind.

Similarly, Les' wife reads to him when necessary, for example instructions for appliances, and also writes application forms for him, for example to join a bowling league. Nura's husband is her reader:

If I get letters or bills I wait until my husband comes home from work ... I still don't know how to write checks. My husband takes care of that.

Marcy who has fairly high literacy skills uses a reader (actually a writer) in a limited way: her sister regularly helps her with filling in forms, since this is a task which she finds difficult.

The others may ask others for help with literacy or language tasks, but in a much more sporadic and ad hoc way. They do not have regular "readers" and they handle most of the literacy tasks they encounter in other ways.

Oliver is himself a "reader" for other family members, despite his limited vocabulary in both English and Spanish. He translated for his uncle the English instructions for setting up a new stereo system, he accompanied his mother to court for a traffic offense, and other family members to medical, legal and financial appointments. We discuss below the potential impacts on family relationships.

Asking others: In a related strategy, many of those we profiled ask others for information, to show them how to do something, or for information. These are not regular "readers," but are people on the street, in stores, or family and friends who are consulted on an ad hoc basis as and when the need arises. They may ask directions, bus numbers, for help in stores, for help in spelling names and addresses needed at work. Commonly, literacy difficulties are covered up by asking how to spell words. Maria, for example, finds taking phone messages at her work experience job very hard.

I write it as good as I can and make sure to get the name of the person who calls. I ask them to spell the name very slowly so that I make sure I have spelled it correctly.

Both Les and Lisa use the same technique in their work when they need to write down a customer's name and address.

One way of dealing with limited literacy in shopping is to go to stores where you ask a salesperson for what you need, rather than a supermarket where you may need to read labels and signs. Les does this with the materials he needs in his work and for his repairs. Michela and David say they ask for what they need in stores, although David is reluctant to ask, and does so as a last resort.

Synthesis

Alicia, living in a Spanish-speaking community, readily asks directions, transportation advice and so on from those around her, in Spanish. Oliver's strategy for dealing with a new English-speaking school when his family first moved to the U.S. (and he spoke almost no English), was to find a teacher in the hall who looked Latino, and ask him for help.

> *That first day I went to Westmont, I didn't know what to do because everybody was speaking English, and I didn't saw no-one or I didn't heard no-one speaking Spanish ... I saw a teacher, he looked to me Spanish. So I talked to him. I told him that I was looking for my classroom, and he took me to my classroom and everything. He helped me.*

For most of the non-native English speakers we interviewed, using their oral or written native language is a readily available strategy for coping with their English language limitations. Most live in communities which contain many speakers of their native language.

Listening: oral sources of information: This is a little different from the "asking someone" strategy. Asking someone is pragmatic and immediate -- how do I do this? Which bus do I take? Does this store have so-and-so? The listening strategy is a preference for listening to others for more general kinds of information. For example, Lisa is probably the only conscientious voter among those we interviewed, and depends primarily, although not entirely, on oral sources for political guidance.

> *If I'm not, you know, keeping up with the person on TV, talking with someone about the candidate bein' a pretty good person to vote for, it's like I don't know who to vote for, you know. So I kinda go along with the paperwork from church. A neighbor or a friend that is into it more so than myself, and they give me some advice on it and vote for that person.*

Similarly, Nura, from her strong oral cultural tradition, relies on oral sources in Oromo for an even wider range of information:

> *Our Oromo community holds a meeting once a week. Those who know English would tell us about what is happening in our home area or other countries. They get their news from the paper or BBC radio, and some of them call their families back home to find out what is going on - those who have family members left.*

Observe others to get information: Visual observation to gain information from others was referred to as an explicit strategy by some of the people we profiled. Tom said that he decides when it is time to plant potatoes or other crops by watching when others do so.

> *Well, he'll find out, Dad or somethin' mention, time to plant 'taters or somethin', or [I'll] see someone else plant 'taters, then you know I'll usually wait maybe a week or somethin' like that, then plant my own. I usually watch people or somethin' or other like that.*

The agricultural extension agent confirmed that less literate farmers are slower at adopting new practices than others, sometimes one, two or more seasons behind, presumably because they are gaining their information from observing others. Oliver too uses observation to get new information, especially in video games:

> *Looking at what other people's doin' helps me a lot ... First when I'm goin' to do something, first I like to see another person doing it, so like that I can see, you know, what's the error and what to do.*

Self-reliance strategies

Four main strategies fall within this group: learning the routine formats of bills and forms, using memory in other ways, making educated guesses, and selective use of text.

Know routines of regular bills, forms etc.: Fingeret described a person in her study who memorized routine forms as a strategy for coping with limited literacy. In our study, several people can handle familiar texts because they have memorized the format, even though they have limited English literacy and have difficulties with unfamiliar texts. Tom knows what his regular bills look like. Nura says she can find the amount owed on regular bills, although she does not pay them: *"I do open the bills, and I know where to look for the amount."*

Sokhhoeun devised for himself a very successful coping strategy when he first came to the United States. He photocopied all forms he had to fill in, at first with the help of others. Very soon he had a set of forms which he could use as boiler-plates for completing others on his own, even though he could read little. He is proud of this strategy which he invented, and has found it successful.

> *I make up [this idea] myself, I do myself. Nobody tell me. I just, you know, use my brain to do that. Because I didn't know the English, I cannot read the English. But if I have a copy, I can follow, I can copy do the same thing.*

Memory: Using memory as a substitute for literacy is related to the ability to understand routine forms and bills. Many adults with low literacy skills rely on their memory instead of writing down phone numbers, directions, grocery lists and other everyday information. Marcy, for example, talks about memorizing the phone numbers she needs:

> *If I have to do something I remember the date. And phone numbers, I can remember them, if they're important. I can remember. I got so many in my head, one of these days they're all gonna get mixed up and it's hard telling who I'm gonna call. I just remember ... seems like once I dial it, that's it, I remember it.*

Les also uses memory to get him around town, using familiar landmarks to memorize directions to jobs. Maria is quite explicit about using memory in learning work routines.

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Les: *I put it here in the back of my mind and just keep it there. When I got to remember, then it comes forward. You got one handicap, you gotta fall back on something else. This is what I got to fall back on.*

Maria: *Most of the things I learn are memorized ... If things are explained to me clearly I learn them, I just run them over in my mind.*

It is possible that the use of memory as a substitute for writing things down is used primarily by those who are not literate in any language. The non-native English speakers who are literate in their native language did not seem to rely as heavily on memory or oral language learning as did those who are not literate in their native language (Nura and Maria). Those who depend on their memories have developed their capacity much more extensively than those who write things down.

Nura in particular comes from a culture with a very strong oral tradition, and has particular difficulty with learning English literacy because there is no Oromo-English dictionary, and some English words do not even exist in Oromo. She is adept at using technology to preserve that oral tradition (tape recording letters home, watching Oromo cultural shows on videotape), but has some fears about losing her powers of memory in this literate culture:

I would like to write down everything that we went through after we fled our home. I seem to have forgotten some of it. I think this country makes people forgetful. I have become forgetful since I came here. It's probably because of having to learn so many new things within such a short time.

Guess: Both Tom and Les talk about their use of guessing in familiar work contexts, in place of literacy. Tom says:

I guess at a lot of stuff, 'cause that's the way I go about doin' it. I guess, you know, about how much you should need and all this, 'cause I've done it for a while. I usually come out bein' about right.

In familiar contexts, known tasks, guessing or estimating may be a very effective way of working. Les, too uses visual estimation in his electrical work, in place of measuring wire. Perhaps the most startlingly successful use of guessing was by Les in his written, multiple choice, driver's test:

*I went down through, I put dot, dot here, dot dot there [*random filling of circles*] ... Yeah, that's how [*I passed it*]. I didn't know what I was puttin' down.*

Selective use of text: Many of the people we profiled, both native and non-native English speakers, use text selectively. The dictionary is widely used. Michela, for example, keeps a dictionary on her desk and uses it everyday, and for the first two years she was in the U.S. carried a dictionary with her in her purse, to help with shopping and other everyday

literacy demands: "*Sometimes I use a dictionary to find out what's in canned foods, and for recipes.*" Both Maria and Lisa also talk about their use of a dictionary when confronted with unfamiliar words. Lisa, for example, describes a very systematic way of using the dictionary in preparing for Sunday School lessons.

There are also other ways of using text selectively when literacy and language are limited. Tom, for example, talked about skipping words he did not know:

> *Big words mostly what I got problems with 'cause I don't try to sound them out or try to piece them together. And when I come to a big word I just pass it up and go on to the next word. If I know it I'll say it, and if I don't, I'll just keep goin' on.*

Alicia uses Spanish texts to back up and reinforce her English learning: for example, she found some Spanish textbooks in the library to help her understand electricity, and retrieves newspapers from her neighbor's recycling bin to find common English words and copy them many times. Both Oliver and Sokhhoeun also write notes for themselves in English as an aide to memory. David gets most of his news from Chinese television stations, but with the help of a dictionary scans selected parts of his son's English language newspaper for items of particular interest (primarily want ads for janitorial positions).

Getting around, either driving or using a public transportation system, often involves limited use of text -- bus numbers, road signs and so on. Many have mastered such limited texts, even though their general reading levels are quite low. Sokhhoeun, for example, bought a car as soon as he could after coming to the United States, and learned to read the necessary road signs by riding around with friends and asking them about every sign he could not recognize. Soon he could get around on his own. David Wong made similar efforts to learn to use a map of the Bay Area, so that he could move around independently as soon as possible after arriving there.

All four self reliance strategies are quite widely used by the people we profiled, and seem effective for them when dealing with literacy tasks in familiar contexts.

Avoidance of difficult situations

Avoidance of situations where literacy or language demands may exceed available skills may be an important strategy for many, both native and non-native English speakers. Non-native speakers may choose to move primarily in circles of others who share their native language, for their shopping, transportation, social and community activities. Native English speakers may avoid situations where they are likely to be asked to use literacy. Tom has avoided going back to re-take his driver's test, after his first embarrassing failure. Les, after graduating high school, did not try to get jobs where he knew he would have to fill in an application form:

> *I would go into places and have to fill out applications and I couldn't do it. I just had to lay it down and walk out.*

Since then, his work has been restricted to jobs that place few literacy demands -- laboring jobs where an application form was not required, working for family members. His limited shopping (primarily for work and repair supplies) is in building and electrical supply stores where you ask for what you need and an assistant brings it out, and reading is not required.

The avoidance strategy may also be employed even by those, like Yuvette, who do not regard their literacy as a limitation. For Yuvette, whose literacy skills are somewhat higher than most of the others we profiled, barriers come in the form of choices not taken. Her literacy skills are adequate for most situations she encounters in her daily life. However, the fact that she never reads unless it is absolutely necessary means that a large portion of the world is closed to her. Other than a bible and text on food packages and other purchased items, Yuvette's home contains no printed materials.

> *No, I really don't read ... I have this little paper right here, you know, comes in the mail, but no, we don't [read for pleasure], not really.*

Because she does not read, although she can, many avenues of learning and enjoyment are not open to Yuvette.

Using technology for literacy

On the whole, the native English speakers we profiled were very limited in their use of technology for literacy. They may watch television but do not seem to regard it as an important information source (they seldom watch the news, for example). The person with the most developed use of technology in place of literacy for information and communication purposes is also the one with the least experience with modern technology in her native community: Nura Tola. She uses a VCR to watch Oromo cultural shows which others in her Oromo community have taped. She uses a tape recorder to send and receive "letters" to friends and relatives.

> *It's just like how you would write a letter. I always start by saying greetings and go on to tell them about my life here and ask them how their lives are going.*

Even though her English is very limited, she and her husband watch the television news each night:

> *Sometimes I can tell just by looking at the pictures, but not all the time. I can understand some of the spoken words, but since they talk very fast I don't understand most of it.*

Michela, too, uses English language television for news, as well as for other cultural information about American life:

I have a small TV which gets local channels ... I watch the news and soap operas. "Young and Restless" is a favorite. There's a lot of stories. It helps me find out about American life ... I also watch programs called "Donahue" and "Geraldo." They are talk shows, with different guests. That is really interesting. Always some aspect of American life is on. People are very open with their feelings and opinions. Not like in Russia. I usually find the programs very interesting. Most of the general ideas I understand, some of the words are hard.

David Wong uses a VCR, tape recorder and TV for information, but primarily in Cantonese rather than English. Sometimes he will watch the English language program that comes after the Chinese language news. But most of the programs and the videos he watches are not in English.

Summary -- strategies for everyday literacy

The people we profiled use a wide variety of strategies to meet literacy demands in their everyday lives. Many of them are similar to strategies that literate people also often use -- such as guessing, using oral sources of information, technology for information and communication, observing and asking others, selective use of text and knowing routine formats for forms and bills. Literacy limitations, however, make them more dependent on such strategies than those who have more literacy skills. Table 2 summarizes the literacy strategies used by the people we profiled.

TABLE 2. LITERACY STRATEGIES

	Tom	My	Yv	Les	Lis	Ma	Nu	D	A	Mi	O	S
Other-oriented:												
reader/writer	X	X		X		X	X					
ask	X		X	X		X		X	X	X	X	
listen	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
observe	X			X		X	X				X	
Self-reliance												
know routines	X						X	X				X
memory	X	X		X		X	X					
guess	X			X								
selective text			X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Avoidance	X	X	X	X		X			X			
Technology					X		X	X		X	X	X

Synthesis

On the whole, the people we profiled who have the lowest English literacy skills use the widest range of strategies for coping with literacy demands: these are Tom, Les and Maria among the Appalachian profiles, and Nura and David Wong among the Californian profiles. This makes sense, since the others with higher skills experience fewer literacy demands which they cannot meet on their own. No-one uses only one kind of strategy. Everyone has a battery of different strategies which they use for different purposes in different contexts.

Some strategies are more widely used among the native English speakers, some among the non-native English speakers. The self-reliance strategies, for example, including guessing and memorizing, are more common among the English speakers. Guessing, in particular, probably requires much more deep cultural understandings than the immigrants have yet acquired. Use of technology for literacy is more common among the non-native English group. But on the whole, both groups use all the sets of strategies. And, on the whole, these strategies enable people with limited literacy to function quite well in their daily lives, and to cope with most of the literacy demands that are placed on them.

2.C. SELF RELIANCE AND INDEPENDENCE

A significant common theme in the lives of everyone we profiled is that of self-reliance and independence. They are determined to be independent, dislike having to rely on others, even family members, do not want to live on welfare. They want and expect to have control of their own lives. For some, this independence means isolation, as for Yuvette, who prides herself on staying home and staying out of trouble. For others it means taking on support of other family members, as for Les, who married his brother's ex-wife and raises his niece/step-daughter along with his own son, and another handicapped brother. He prides himself on his ability to "hold up." Tom speaks of needing to "*...try and take care of them [his family], maybe satisfy them.*"

This drive for self-reliance is also strong for the immigrants and refugees in the California profiles, and is evidenced in their second language practices, their life styles, and their attitudes. David Wong, for example, despite his limited English language proficiency, says he can handle everyday bills and banking business, including writing checks, and does not ask his English-fluent son for help:

> *I don't ask him to help. I can do it myself. He is busy most of the time, and it's easier for me to handle these matters myself.*

He completes his own tax returns, and is working his way toward a more stable job as a janitor so that he can support his family. For him and almost everyone, the drive to independence leads to hard work, often with long hours, to earn an income to support their families. Often it means supporting others too.

Alicia's drive for self-reliance was influenced by the insecurity of her position as an illegal immigrant for many years. She made little use of public services in California during

this period, even those which would be unlikely to result in her being discovered. She only discovered the public library system a few months ago, and was excited to find she could borrow books she could not possibly afford to buy. She worked hard and long during this period, and since, to support her family.

Sokhhoeun from the very beginning of his residence in California has shown his determination to be independent, even from friends. He became self-sufficient in dealing with agencies as soon as he could, learned his way around and bought a car which he services himself, even devised his own methods for cleaning the heads of his VCR.

Although Yuvette's sense of independence isolates her from others in her community, for most of the people we profiled, their drive for self-reliance does not exclude them from family and/or community relationships. Sokhhoeun, for example, is a leader in his neighborhood's Cambodian family mutual support network. He helps his non-Cambodian neighbors, as well as the students in the ESL program in which he works. Like others we profiled, he wants to be in relationships with others, but not to be dependent on them.

2.D. GETTING BY – SURVIVING IN HARD TIMES

Closely connected with the theme of self reliance and independence is the common experience of facing down hard times. Survival is the dominant force in the lives of all. Even Oliver, who is still in his family's care, has street survival as a significant factor in his life. Some have survived refugee camps and brutalities, like Sokhhoeun and Nura Tola. Some have survived other kinds of hardships: divorce (Lisa, Marcy, Maria, Alicia); drug and alcohol abuse by family members (Marcy, Alicia, Les, Oliver); job instability and poverty (Yuvette, Lisa, Alicia, Tom).

These continuing experiences of crisis, of fragile and hard-to-maintain stability, mean that survival has to become their primary concern. It is true for most people in this country that a life event like a major medical problem can create a crisis which plunges the family into economic chaos. Most of the people we profiled lead lives whose security is even more frail. Recurring crises constantly threaten their hard-won equilibrium.

Les puts in long hours of work, including extra jobs on weekends, and fixing things around his own house. He needs to work these hours to support his extended family. If he could get his electrician's license, he would earn higher wages and perhaps need fewer working hours. But he cannot get the license because his literacy skills are so low. He cannot improve his literacy skills because he needs to work such long hours. He is trapped in a vicious circle from which he can see no escape. His own ill-health, and his wife's health problems, to be faced without health insurance, only exacerbate the problems. When he fell off a roof and broke some ribs, he could not go to the emergency room or see a doctor. He bound up his ribs himself, and went on with his life. He is continuously troubled by an ulcer, but cannot seek treatment.

Health care is an issue for others too. Tom is still paying off bills from the hospital where his children were born, more than two years after the last birth. Yuvette fears being unable to work; she recently hurt her foot, and was too scared to go to the hospital -- scared of what she might be told.

What if I couldn't work for two or three weeks? You never can tell what might happen. I might lose my job. You know I don't want to hear that.

Health conditions are not the only threats to the fragile stability of these lives. When Yuvette lost her job as a waitress, she stood to lose the only "nice things" she possesses, a couch and chair. Because of her low income, she is paying far more than their market value by purchasing this furniture in a rent-to-own plan. If she missed a payment, the furniture would be re-possessed.

When Lisa separated from her second husband, she lost the home she owned because it was in his name, and he accumulated large debts through his alcohol problems. In a burglary around the same time, she lost other trappings of a middle class life -- microwave, VCR, remote controls, a home organ, her son's Atari. Now she is starting over.

The refugee experiences of Nura Tola and Sokhhoeun are distinctive and gruelling. For Sokhhoeun, it took six years from the time he and his family were forced to leave their homes when the Khmer Rouge assumed power, to the time he was able to leave for the United States. The time included four years laboring on a sugar plantation under armed guard, two years in a refugee and forced labor camp on the border with Thailand, and then in a Thai refugee camp. Surviving these times required hard work, ingenuity and determination. Many did not.

Nura Tola told similar stories of hardship, disruption and despair. Women and children fled their home village when it was raided by government militia men who looted and killed. Concealed in the mountains, walking by night and hiding by day, many children died. Jailed at first by Somali soldiers, Nura does not want to talk of the atrocities. After eight years in a refugee camp, she and her husband finally found an exit to the United States, a country of whose existence she had not even known.

Such extreme experiences must always color one's life. No wonder that survival continues to be a dominant focus. But that is so even for those with less extreme hardships in their lives. Alicia's special hardship lies in her daughter's drug addiction. Her two youngest grandchildren are in foster care, Alicia is raising another grandchild, and her greatest hope is to be able to get a good enough and stable enough job that she will be allowed to adopt the other two.

In such lives, there is not much room for other things -- either for having fun, or for educational experiences. Their absorption in getting by, the long hours they work, their focus on family, all create barriers to their access to education. This is perhaps most striking

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for Alicia, whose life for years as an undocumented immigrant meant that she was constantly watchful and afraid of being discovered. Only after Amnesty, and a subsequent plant closing and job loss, was she able to take advantage of a job training and ESL program.

Like Alicia, David Wong has made goals for himself. When he first came to the United States - with no job, no money, no English, no welfare or unemployment support (accepting these payments is frowned upon in the Chinese community) -- he made a resolution to work hard for a few years, and then return to China. Although he no longer plans to return, he still works hard, and at a job far removed from that for which he was educated and trained in China. He has been diligent and rational in pursuing what to him is a career advancement, to a janitorial position, and has focussed all his efforts toward that end.

If this and other goals seem limited, to those with other ambitions, we have to recognize with what effort even limited changes are achieved. The dual filters of limited literacy/language proficiency and cultural expectations, may limit what people aspire to. But those aspirations may be realistic for them in their contexts.

2.E. LIVING AT THE MARGINS -- CULTURALLY AND ECONOMICALLY

Both culturally and economically, everyone we profile is in a marginal position in society. By living at the margins, we mean being part of a linguistic and/or cultural grouping which is distinctly different from the mainstream dominant culture; being in a position in the labor market in which you can be readily replaced by others with similar skills; leading a life whose stability is fragile and easily over-turned by common life events, such as ill-health, divorce or job loss.

Cultural margins

Culturally, the non-native English speakers are most clearly marginalized. Even in California which soon will have no "majority" culture, the dominant culture is Anglo, and members of the many and diverse minority groups live their lives largely isolated from and invisible to the mainstream culture. Although there are native language TV stations, available to at least some on cable, the main TV channels, radio stations and newspapers are in English and their discourse is primarily within the mainstream culture.

Maria, among the Appalachian profiles, is also a member of a linguistic minority, although Texas-born. Not only is she at the margins in terms of her language, but she is a migrant worker, which further impels her to invisibility within the mainstream culture. Her work, her community, her social interactions are all within the migrant worker stream. Her longings to settle down in a small town and become part of the mainstream are constantly thwarted by both economic and social pressures.

But some of the other Appalachians are also members of culturally distinct groups, Marcy, Tom and Les were raised as rural Appalachians. As white Appalachians, we might

characterize that culture as having a strong attachment to place, strong family ties, distinctive music, dance and food, and non-standard English. Lisa and Yuvette are also members of a minority cultural group. As working class African American women they share a position in society, although as individuals they are very different. That culture is distinctive in form from that of white Appalachians, although there are also many parallels.

The African American rural culture has been perhaps the most deliberately marginalized by American society, through a long and continuing history of racism. But the Appalachian culture and language too have been characterized as not just different from the mainstream, but sub-standard. Both African Americans and white Appalachians have a culture which has survived, but been changed by, contact with the dominant culture. Both have been cultures of adversity, and of exploited groups. Both cultures too have become commercialized -- in Nashville and Motown. It is hard to have access to the traditional forms of the cultures, and the experience of being culturally inferior is re-lived constantly by children from the hollows, or from inner-city housing projects, in the public schools. It is a life at the margins.

Economic margins

Paradoxically, the mainstream is utterly dependent on these "margins." Without the stream of immigrants willing to work hard in low-wage jobs, the Californian economy would collapse. Without the work of people like those of the Appalachian profiles, the economy of that region too could not function. Farm laborers, food service workers, sales clerks, care-givers -- all are vital to the economic survival of the area, but all are low-wage and low-skill jobs. There is little job security and high job turnover for most of the people we profiled in both regions. Most of their jobs are in the service sector, the fastest growing sector of the economy. Tom, in agriculture, Les in construction and Alicia in manufacturing are the exceptions. Several have held manufacturing jobs in the past, although always low skilled jobs within that sector. Are these low skill jobs the only ones of which they are capable? And what is the role of language/literacy proficiency in keeping them marginalized in the economy?

There are some very clear cases of underemployment among the people we profiled: that is, people in jobs below their level of training, ability and experience. This is perhaps most clearly seen among the immigrants who had an earlier life elsewhere:

** David Wong was an agricultural engineer at a research station in China, but is working in a fish and poultry store, with the ambition to be a janitor;
** Michela was an accountant with a master's degree in accountancy teaching in Russia, but is working now as a book-keeper.
** Les is a skilled practical electrician who cannot take the test to get a license because of his literacy limitations, so is tied to a low-paying job;

More subtle cases of under-employment also exist among the people we profiled. They all seem intelligent, hard-working, thoughtful people, who are capable of much more

demanding (and higher-paying) jobs. Almost everyone we interviewed feels that they could get a better job if their literacy and/or language skills were higher.

But it is not clear that literacy and language deficiencies are the sole, or even the main, factor holding them back, although this is certainly one a complex of factors. There are some questions as to whether "better" jobs would be there for some of them, even if they did have higher literacy skills. As an example, we might look at what Marcy's alternatives might be. Her ambition for her children is a steady job at the J.P. Stevens textile mill. One ambition for herself seems to be to become a nurses' assistant. To get either job she would have to learn to drive, get a car, and learn to find her way around, which she finds difficult, even in Kingsport, a not-very-large town of about 30,000 people, only a few miles from the small town where she lives. Her present job gives her a great deal of control over her time, and how and when she gets things done. She would have to learn a different way of working. Her literacy skills are not far short of what is needed for such a job. But there are other factors in the way.

Similarly, the California immigrants experience a labor market which places a heavy emphasis on low-skill, low-wage service jobs for immigrants. The California Overview sections suggest that language and reading/writing skills are not the only factor keeping them in such jobs. The people we profiled also have limited cultural and other information. They relate mainly to other immigrants, in their workplaces and in their neighborhoods. They trust the information given them by fellow immigrants, but it does not always present a valid picture of the options available to them. Lack of information may create both significant lowering of their sights (for example, Michela, an accountant, being told she could only get a job "cleaning up someone's messes") and unrealistically high expectations (Sokhhoeun's hopes that he could become a teacher or medical translator, without real knowledge of the qualifications needed for either).

The urban Appalachians do not seem to have many more options. Yuvette thinks about rich people, and how they must need accountants. The reality for her, if she could get her GED and go on to job training, would probably be a job as a book-keeper. In Knoxville, this probably means less money than she gets on welfare ($4.50 an hour starting wage, and a short career ladder). Lisa's ambition is to be a model, or to star in TV commercials. She is attracted by the offers of agencies which claim to place people in such jobs, but the reality is probably much less optimistic.

There are two main issues here: first the question of whether there are higher skill, higher wage jobs to which they could reasonably aspire. The second issue is of what it would take for them to get such jobs, and whether literacy is enough.

In the last five years, a flurry of reports has raised concerns about the implications of technological change and literacy skills of American workers. From *Workforce 2000* to *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages*, these reports have suggested that changes in

our economy and technology are placing ever greater literacy demands upon the workforce.[5] Two major changes lie behind these scenarios: the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, and the export of many lower-paid and lower-skilled jobs to Third World countries. Manufacturing jobs in the United States are changing: low-skilled assembly jobs are going overseas, and automation means that the jobs left demand new skills.

The overall shift in emphasis from manufacturing as a major source of jobs to a service economy, also has skill demand implications. The highest growth rates among domestic jobs are for those requiring higher literacy skills (paraprofessional and technical jobs) - although this should be tempered by the fact that, despite the high growth rates, the actual numbers of such "high tech" jobs are still quite small. The greatest numbers of jobs are still in the lower skilled categories, and are likely to remain so for many years.

While these economic and technological changes are undeniable, their implications for literacy are less clear. From the Luddites onward, there have been workers who experience technological change as de-skilling rather than skill enhancing. Europeans in the last twenty years have taken seriously such concerns about the de-skilling effects of technology, through the work of Arbetslivcentrum in Sweden and other institutes. On the whole, Americans have been more hopeful about technology and less concerned about negative impacts.

Levin and Rumberger, reviewing studies of the impacts of technologies on skill demands, conclude that, in the past, technological changes have raised the skill requirements for some jobs, while lowering it for others.[6] They argue that little net change has resulted for the overall workforce. The shift from a production-based economy to a service-based economy has resulted in a proliferation of low-wage, low-skilled, part-time jobs. Technology change both may require better educated and trained workers, and may substitute machines for workers. For example, restaurants and food production, where several of the people we profiled have worked, have become computerized, but the cash registers are not much more skill demanding than they ever were. Indeed, since workers do not have to calculate change any more, they are probably less skill demanding than in the past.

As a number of commentators point out, this country is experiencing an increasing division between rich and poor, haves and have nots. *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages* points out that since 1969, real average weekly earnings in the United States have

[5] W. B. Johnston and A.H. Packer, Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century, Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute, 1987; National Center on Education and the Economy, America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages, The report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, Rochester, NY, June 1990.

[6] H.M. Levin and R.W. Rumberger, "Education, work and employment in developed countries: Situation and future challenges," Prospects, XIX(2), 1989, pp. 205-224.

fallen by more than 12 percent, but that this burden has been shared unequally.[7] The incomes of our top 30 percent of earners increased, while those of the other 70 percent spiraled downward. The same period has seen striking increases in the earnings gaps between white collar professionals and both clerical workers and skilled blue collar workers.

While higher levels of education do correlate with higher wages, the differences are at the high end of the scale (college level education) rather than at the lower end. Young men without a college education have seen decreases in their real incomes over the last decade, and the differences between those with and without a high school diploma are quite small.[8] This data may indicate that small gains in literacy skills, or credentials, may not open up many new opportunities.

In our profiles, we did not interview anyone who is currently working in a manufacturing job undergoing significant technological change (although such technological change is being experienced by several in service sector jobs). We cannot say how limited literacy affects workers' ability to deal with such changes. However, other data suggests that many skilled manufacturing workers (and not only those with low literacy skills) are being displaced from manufacturing and ending up with the kinds of jobs held by the people we profiled.

A study recently completed by the Center for Literacy Studies documents the experiences of a group of women textile workers in Tennessee, as they went through a retraining program and back into the workforce.[9] The women had worked for many years as sewing machine operators for a large international apparel manufacturer. The jobs had been quite good ones for women in the area: average wages of $7 an hour, paid health insurance and vacations, union representation. When the plant closed, the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) offered GED and job training classes to the workers, and around half enrolled in one or more of these.

Nevertheless, the study found that at the time of interview, around twenty months after the plant closed, job training had not had a significant impact on the women's subsequent job experience. Whether they trained or not, whether they worked toward a GED or not, almost everyone lost wages when their last job at the sewing factory was compared with their first job after the closing. Average wages dropped by 24 percent, and a quarter lost 60 percent or more of their wages. Not only did basic skills education and job training not help people get a better-paying job, but it did not even help them get another job in the first place -- the proportion of women working full-time, part-time and unemployed were about the same, whether or not they had trained.

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7 Op. Cit., p. 21.

8 America's Choice, p. 20.

9 Juliet Merrifield, Lachelle Norris and Loretta White, op. cit.

Job training did open up a wider range of job options to the women. Most of those who did not train (as well as of those who took GED classes) went into other manufacturing jobs. Those who took job training split about equally between manufacturing jobs, clerical jobs, and service jobs (mainly health care and food services). They experienced the downward shift which many workers displaced from the manufacturing sector into service jobs experience: the service sector has some high paying, high skill jobs, but large numbers of low-paying, low skill jobs, and the latter are what most people get.

The findings for this group of displaced workers suggests that increasing education and job skill training does not necessarily enable even experienced workers with high school diplomas to get better jobs, at least as presently constituted. In order to advance, the study suggests, training needs to be much more closely tailored to the local job market, and much more strategic planning needs to take place with individuals to enable them to take advantage of training opportunities.

The same may be true for others in marginal positions in the economy, like the people we profile. It may not be impossible for them to break out of their positions, and to move upward economically. But it will not be easy. We will suggest later in this chapter that literacy on its own may be a necessary but not sufficient condition to make this leap forward.

2.F. HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS -- LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Nevertheless they do hope for more, for themselves and for their children. The people we interviewed for the most part would like more literacy skills, see specific ways in which that would benefit their lives, hope it would help them get a better job. They want to learn, they demonstrate their capacity to learn everyday skills (even when they were not successful in the academic skills of school). They perceive that their limited literacy has an impact on their lives. To portray them as resourceful, capable individuals who are managing their lives is not to argue that they do not need literacy education. They themselves feel they need it and want it.

Some have elaborate and practical plans to enable them to attain their aspirations. Alicia, for example, enrolled in a training program in building maintenance and to improve her English proficiency, in order to get a better-paying and more stable job than she has been able to get as a non-English speaking immigrant worker. She wants and needs this in order to be able to adopt two grandchildren now in foster care. David Wong has a long-term strategy (stretching over the next three years) to get a job as a janitor. Michela plans to improve her English to the point where she can enroll in college, get a business degree (which she already has in Russian) and get a teaching position in a community college, similar to the one she had before leaving Byelorussia.

Others are aware of specific ways in which improving their literacy, and/or gaining a credential would help them, but do not see the means to doing so. Les and his electrician's license, Yuvette and her dream of a book-keeping job and earning enough money to buy nice

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things, Lisa and her modelling dreams -- all would like to be able to move forward. They know their limited literacy, their lack of a high school diploma, prevent them from having some options that might otherwise be open to them. But the process to get them from where they are to their dreams is not yet actualized.

Despite the lack of success in prior schooling which the people of the Appalachian profiles had experienced, all had some confidence in their ability to learn everyday tasks. In the right circumstances, they believe, they could learn to read and write. They tend, however, to regard school skills as very different, and to blame themselves as well as uncaring teachers, for their educational experiences. We will argue later, as we examine the educational implications of these profiles, that a big step forward for all of them would be to know that they could apply their everyday learning strategies to literacy learning.

While their own concerns are with their individual skills and advancement, we would argue that there are benefits to society from providing them with literacy education. They are an untapped resource for their communities and our society, a largely wasted asset. They have demonstrated their competence, their thoughtfulness, their hard work and their values. They need literacy programs which recognize and build on their strengths, relate to their own experiences, provide the support they need to make changes in their lives. Such programs could not only enable them as individuals to move out of the margins, but could turn to other uses the resources, energy and skills which they now use for survival. Society would benefit from investing in its "human capital," enabling these individuals to become full citizens, in the broadest sense of the word.

3. DIFFERENCES

We have focussed so far on commonalities, on the themes which we found across all the people we profiled. But there are differences also, and these exist not just at the individual level, but between the two groups of native and non-native English speakers. In this section we will address theses that differentiate the two groups of profiles -- the ways they use technology, the impact of first language use, the connections between ESL literacy and family relationships, and cultural identity.

3.A. USES OF TECHNOLOGY

Part of our research brief was to look at everyday technology use by the people with low literacy skills. We had a particular interest in technologies used for "literacy" purposes (to gain information and to communicate) -- like television, radio, VCRs, telephones and computers. We also wanted to examine whether and in what ways limited literacy affects people's technology use generally, and especially computers.

We found few examples of people who had experienced difficulties with the technology they had encountered. Les was defeated by the ATM at his bank, Lisa avoided use o the computerized cash register at her work (although not only because of limited literacy).

Otherwise, in terms of the technology to which they had access, no one we interviewed expressed difficulties related to literacy skills.

However, it is also clear that most people were not strongly involved in technology used for literacy. For the most part, the Appalachian group in particular does not have access to the brave new world of modern technology -- VCRs, computers, ATMs. If asked, they would probably say this is not so much because they cannot read the instructions, but because they are poor, and cannot afford them. Nevertheless, the Californian group has no higher incomes on the whole, but makes more use of some of this technology. In order to understand these differences, we have to examine the purposes for which the Californians and the Appalachians use technology, and the items of technology which they do and do not use. Table 3 summarizes technology access and use among all the people we profiled.

TABLE 3. EVERYDAY ACCESS TO AND USES OF TECHNOLOGY

	Tom	My	Yuv	Les	Lis	Ma	Nu	D	A	M	O	S
USED:												
Computers*			X			X				X	X	
Video games				X							X	
VCR			X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
TV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Satellite dish		X										
Tape recorder			X				X	X	X		X	
Microwave				X	X			X		X	X	
ATM										X		X
AVAIL/NOT USED:												
Computers*				X				X	X			X
ATM				X				X				

* Including computerized equipment, like cash registers.

Everyone in both groups of profiles has access to and watches, occasionally or regularly, a television. In contrast, five of the six Californian people, but only one of the Appalachian group (Maria) currently have a VCR in their homes (although two others in the Appalachian group have had VCRs in the past). Maria, whose first language is Spanish, uses the VCR in the same way as the people of the California profiles: to watch films in her native language (although its primary use is by her sons).. Two people within each group of profiles have used a computer (in Yuvette's case, a computerized pre-register rather than a full-function

computer). But three others among the California group had access to computers but did not use them. Among the Appalachian group, only Les had a computer available to him which he did not use.

In Les' case, the absence of use seems to be due to his discomfort with the technology itself, and may be literacy related. But it may also be that he, like the others of the California profiles, can see no particular application for a computer. Les does play video games with his son, a technology both simpler and more graphic, and also more immediately applicable in his life. The California Overview section explores the differences for the people profiled there, between the use of video technology and that of computer technology. Video serves as a cultural medium, a way of staying in touch with and reinforcing ties with one's cultural and linguistic community. People watch videos of movies made in their native country, and videos of cultural events. They may find them at their local video store, tape them off the air from native language television stations, or circulate them in an informal cultural network.

Video and television also serve the function of helping non-native English speakers learn about their new host culture. Michela watches game shows, talk shows and soaps in English, Nura watches the news, Sokhhoeun watches Westerns. Their understanding of the language may be limited, but they feel the programs offer a key to American culture.

Video serves a powerful function and has a persuasive and visible cultural application for the immigrants of the California profiles. In contrast, the Californian group makes little use of the computer technology that is available to most of them. Everyone except Nura could use computers, if they chose. Only Michela, who had used computers at home in Russia, and now uses one at work, and Oliver, a member of the computer-generation, who uses a computer in school (and plays video games at home) actually use them. Outside of the schoolroom, it seems that people see little utility in computer use. If they saw a reason they would likely use them.

Automated teller machines (ATMs), like computers, have limited use by both groups we profiled. For the people of the Appalachian group, who live primarily in a cash-based economy, and for the most part do not have checking accounts, the ATM is superfluous. Among the California group, Alicia has until recently lived in a cash economy with as few paper trails as possible, to avoid detection as an illegal immigrant. She now has store credit cards, but makes little use of banking. Oliver still lives at home. Nura relies on her husband for all financial management. Again, for these people, an ATM has little utility.

The central difference, then, in the pattern of technology use by the people of the Appalachian and California profiles is in the use of technology for cultural communication and reinforcement. Those who are part of an Appalachian culture perhaps find little in mainstream television to appeal to them, but do not have the alternative cultural networks and forums available to those from more distinctive cultural groupings.

While the cultural function of technology such as television and video may be regarded broadly as part of literacy, it seems likely that it takes the place of face-to-face and oral interactions rather than for text-based communications. Among those we profiled, we found few examples of technology being used directly for literacy purposes. Nura, who probably has the least English proficiency and the greatest cultural gaps to bridge, also makes the most use of technology for literacy. She watches videos of Oromo programs and cultural shows and tape records letters to family. Like many of us, she has not learned to program her VCR to record from the TV, but then, she really has not needed to, since her limited English means most television shows are only minimally intelligible.

If technology for most people does not substitute for literacy, does limited literacy affect technology use? Our profiles can only be suggestive, and more research needs to be done before this question can be answered. We have evidence that almost everyone has mastered the technology that has some meaning and application in their lives. They are confident in their ability to master whatever new technology they encounter. Nevertheless, it is also clear that most people have not encountered computers in any significant way, and that mastering a microwave or VCR in their home does not require the same level of sophistication as mastering a computer.

At this point we can only suggest that limited literacy is not as important an inhibiting factor in technology use as some others (like poverty, seeing a use for it). The anecdotal experiences of literacy programs using computer aided instruction seems to reinforce our suggestion that adults with low literacy skills can fairly quickly and easily become comfortable with using computers, when they have a clear purpose.

3.B. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Another area of difference between the Californian and Appalachian groups of profiles is in the way in which literacy and language proficiency impact on family relationships. In immigrant families, children commonly assume the role of interpreter and mediator between their parents and the English-speaking world. Their role as "cultural translator" and broker affects power relationships within the family, often runs counter to cultural norms, and creates tensions and impacts which are not experienced in the same way by the English speaking group. Although in some cases, children act as "readers" for the Appalachian group, and parents may show the same kinds of reluctance to use them in this role as the non-native speakers do, nevertheless, their roles are much more narrowly defined and have less impact.

The people we profiled seem to have two main concerns about impacts on family relationships. First there is the issue of the impact on power relationships within the family when children assume a brokerage role with the English-speaking world, an issue which is

only obliquely referred to by the people we profiled.[10] Second, there is a fear of "losing" a child to the dominant culture and a wish for them to value their roots, an issue which is explicitly discussed by several people.

When children like Oliver mediate extensively for their parents with the English-speaking world, their parents' power may seem threatened. These feelings may lie behind David Wong's reluctance to ask his son for help in any of his everyday literacy needs, even though his son is a fluent English speaker. David says that his son is busy most of the time, and would not have time or be available to help. Nevertheless, the son does live at home, and might be expected to be available if asked. David does not choose to ask.

Among the Appalachian profiles, Les, at least, displays some of the same reluctance to have his children read for him that David Wong did about his son translating for him. Nevertheless, the sense from our profiles is that impact of limited literacy on family relationships is much more of an issue for the immigrants than for the native English speakers.

The second main theme regarding family relationships in which the Californian group differs from the Appalachian group is the concern about losing a child to another culture. Michela says:

> *Most of my friends have kids and they ask me not to speak English to their children. They are frightened they will lose their Russian. Then parents will lose family connections and influence on their children.*

Alicia expresses similar sentiments. However, Maria, also a non-native English speaker, but not an immigrant, does not express these feelings. Like other rural Appalachians, wanting a better life for her children than she herself has had, may well mean leaving her "community," defined for Maria as the migrant stream, but for others as a place. When there are few good jobs in a rural Appalachian community, getting on usually means leaving, and education has been seen as a primary "ticket out" of poor rural areas. There is some tension around this: people who change too much may be accused of "getting above their raising." But that is tempered by pride in children's accomplishments. There seems to be much less tension around impact on family relationships for the Appalachian group than for the immigrants of California, who fear the loss of their culture in following generations.

3.C. IMPACT OF FIRST LANGUAGE USAGE

All of the non-native English speakers we profiled continue to use their native language in a variety of ways in their homes, communities and workplaces. Alicia is typical in that

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[10] Elsa Roberts Auerbach, "Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy," Harvard Educational Review, 59 (2), May 1989, pp. 165-180.

she can call on family members and others in her Spanish speaking community for most situations. David lives and works in a setting where Cantonese is the primary language. Most of the customers in the store where he works speak Cantonese, but a few do not (either American-born Chinese or non-Chinese). These he can deal with in his limited English.

Michela too has limited daily interaction with native English speakers. She uses both English and Russian at work, and primarily Russian in her home setting. Important concerns for her are trying to find American friends, and developing her fluency in both the language and the culture to be able to understand casual conversations on the bus or about movies.

I cannot participate in conversations about the movies -- I don't have time to go often, and I can't understand much when I do. At first, I tried to speak English with my Russian friends, but we jumped back. We didn't know enough words. But we tried.

Like the other non-native speakers of our profiles, Michela has little contact with native English speakers, and has experienced unfriendliness when she has come into contact.

Talking to other people I find hard. People don't always show you. They behave not nice. They don't want to teach you because they're afraid you're going to take their jobs. They're not always sympathetic when you don't have good English.

As the California Overview describes, the people of the California profiles live and work in a context which has few native English speakers. In their communities and their workplaces they encounter few native English speakers, and most of their relationships outside their own linguistic and cultural groups is with other minorities.

However, their adherence to their native language is more than a function of isolation from English speakers. Their native language provides these immigrants with a clear and unshakable identity which they neither wish to nor are able to change. They are adults, fully formed and cognitively functioning in their first language. Both the language and their cultural identity is reinforced daily in their families, their communities and their workplaces. Their first language is a living reality. It is entirely natural for them to use their native language, as fully-formed adults who function well in their own language. It seems foolish, as well as ineffective, to expect Nura and her husband to speak to each other in English, as recommended by their ESL teacher.

The Californian profiles indicate that immigrants seek not to lose their native language but to become bi-lingual, as far as they can. They know that becoming as fluent as possible in English will help them in many aspects of their daily lives, and they hope it would help them gain a better life. But they also value their native language, and want their children to speak it too. Alicia talks about the grand-daughter she is raising.

I want Carmina to speak two languages. For her to speak English and not Spanish -- that I wouldn't like. I want her speak both. I don't want her to lose her roots, her

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customs. I want her to love Mexico. I know many friends of the family who have children 14 to 15 years old who have disdain for Spanish. I try to inculcate that in her -- to love Spanish. English too. She must speak both.

The Literature Review (**Appendix A**) discusses the debate between second language theorists about whether adults can indeed become fully fluent in another language, because their cultural identity is so closely tied to their first language. Our profiles reinforce the view that language and identity are closely entangled.

In contrast, the Appalachian group, both African American and white, speak a non-standard form of English, but one which is regarded as sub-standard. Children in public schools continually hear the form of language they hear at home characterized as inferior, and experience attempts to teach them to "speak it right." The cultural identity components of their language use are parallel to those of the Californian immigrants, but there is much less clarity of cultural identity in general, and therefore their experience of a kind of first language use is different.

3.D. CLARITY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Although we have elsewhere characterized the white and African American Appalachians as part of distinct cultural groupings (Living at the Margins, above), it is undeniable that their cultural identity is much less clearly defined, either for themselves or others, than those of the immigrants. The immigrants are all more clearly, and acceptably, different, "other," than the Appalachians. For themselves, their bosses, the people they meet, they are defined as from somewhere else, speaker of another language, holder of various cultural beliefs and practices. This can be an isolating force, but also a source of strength and reinforcement of cultural identity. As immigrants they have the designation of outsider, but also as an inside member of a cultural grouping which they themselves value highly.

That cultural identity is continually reinforced by powerful media: they have native language television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines, food and restaurants. And these all exist alongside similar media for other cultural groupings, highlighting differences.

Cultural identity is also reinforced by community. In the Appalachian Overview we discussed the strikingly narrow focus of the lives of almost everyone we profiled. Beyond the family, they had few institutions in which they participated, and little sense of being part of a wider community. In contrast, everyone in the Californian profiles identifies with a broader community beyond the family. Sometimes that is a formal institution, like David's Wong family association, or Sokhhoeun's Cambodian neighborhood support grouping. They may be much more informal, like the other teenagers with whom Oliver hangs out, or Nura's Oromo community which meets weekly. But that cultural community is there for everyone.

For the Appalachians the elements of their separate culture are much less clear. In the first place, there is much less diversity in the cultures of their own region, and so their

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differences (which might stand out in the Bay Area) are submerged. Secondly, they are not immigrants, and do not have the official or self-designation as outsiders. Even for immigrant groups, cultural identity becomes much more murky for the second and third generations.

Thirdly the Appalachians are part of a culture which has been in contact with the dominant culture for a long time, has been changed by it and often taken over by it, in a commercialized form. While "country" and "gospel" music have become national music forms, access to the more traditional white and African American Appalachian cultural forms is hard. If mainstream national TV does not address their cultural identity, neither do they have the local stations which might have such a focus, broadcasting local bluegrass or gospel. Cable TV, even if they had it, would bring only more of the same. They have no newspapers in "their" language. And while country cooking and soul food restaurants do survive, they are far outnumbered everywhere by fast food franchises.

In this context it may not be surprising that the people of the Appalachian profiles do not speak of their cultural identity: Tom does not call himself a "hillbilly," Lisa does not even talk about being African American. The only time Yuvette talks about race is in relation to her workplace, where she assures herself that racism is not the reason why there are only two African American employees. Neither by themselves nor by others are the Appalachian people we profiled identified as being part of a distinctive cultural group. Yet their distinctiveness as well as their literacy difficulties, limits their ability to move into mainstream American society.

The interconnected themes of first language and cultural identity have important implications for literacy and literacy education. In the final section of this synthesis, we will explore the implications of the themes of commonality and difference, as well as other findings of the profiles, for literacy education policies and programs.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Literacy education traditionally focuses on the "gaps," on what people do not know and cannot do. Our profiles of twelve people with limited literacy suggests another approach -- a focus on their strengths. To us as researchers, these profiles argue for an approach to literacy education that assumes people with limited literacy are resourceful, capable and experienced, and that they have already learned much during their lives. Literacy programs could do much more to value and respect learners, build on and expand what they know, and capitalize on their strengths.

Our profiles have a number of specific implications for how we should shape literacy education. In this section, we will focus on six areas: how people learn, what they want to learn, the application of technology to education, their need for support, the challenge they make to conventional ideas about "functional" literacy, and the inter-relationships between literacy and other factors of their lives and contexts.

4.A. STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING

In a print-based society, it is common to assume that literacy is the skill that pre-dates all others -- the skill one acquires first, in order to learn everything else. That assumption implies that adults who lack literacy skills do not learn. Yet the people we profiled demonstrate a wealth of learning experiences in their lives, inside and outside of formal educational settings. The Appalachian profiles describe people who have not learned well or easily in formal settings, which is why they went through many years of schooling without learning to read. But they have nevertheless learned many things in their lives, and have developed some clear strategies for learning. Understanding these everyday learning strategies of adults with low literacy skills is important for seeing how adult education programs can better meet their needs.

We identified two major types of learning strategies employed by the people we profiled (which parallel the main literacy strategies described above). Within each group are several strategies:

** **Other-oriented learning strategies:** including both visual strategies (demonstration, observation) and oral strategies (listening to explanations); and also cooperative learning with other people;
** **Self-reliance learning strategies:** including repetition and practice, selective use of text, trial and error, or alternatively, a systematic, step-by-step approach to learning.

Other-oriented learning strategies

Just as many of the people we profiled look to others in various ways to help them meet literacy demands, so too do other people in their families and communities play an important role in their learning. Visual and oral learning strategies are often combined, and cooperative learning with others may also be effective.

Visual learning -- Demonstration, watching others, observing: Many of those we profiled talked about the importance of being shown visually how to do something, or watching and observing others. Tom spoke for others when he said:

> *'Cause I don't read nothin' like that, can't read, so what I've pretty well learned I learned off other people. I've helped a lot of people, and people showed me how to do stuff like that.*

Les also emphasized the importance for him of visual learning:

> *You show me one time and you won't have to show me nothin' else ... Anything I start, even though I don't know how to do it, or can't read it ... it will be done!*

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This use of observation as a learning tool is one that probably we all use, and one that is especially important in a primarily oral culture. Nura's description of growing up in an Ethiopian village gives a particularly graphic picture of such learning:

I watched my mother and one of my step mothers as they cooked, and learned to cook. I also went to the market with them and observed how they sold the produce we had carried to market. We also did our shopping while we were there. I always followed one of my step mothers who was known for her bargaining ability, and learned to shop wisely. A neighbor taught me how to spin cotton and weave the yarn into cloth. My oldest sister taught me how to weave baskets. After she showed me how to do the basics, I started using my own imagination to combine different colors and weave various designs.

The broad application of visual learning strategy is demonstrated by the parallels between Nura using it to learn to weave baskets in her home village, and Oliver using the same strategy to learn to play the computer game, "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?"

You have to figure it out. I mean you learn the color of the flag of the country ... It took like two days for me to learn how to play ... I was watching [another student] 'cause he knew how to play.

From Les learning Nintendo with his son, to David Wong learning to use household appliances from his children, learning by observing is important for almost everyone we profiled, native and non-native English speakers alike.

Oral learning -- Listening to explanations: A learning strategy that is somewhat distinct from visual learning, but often linked, is listening to someone explain something. Nura, for example, listened to stories told around the fire by the elders, virtually the only formal education she experienced growing up. Alicia pays close attention to her instructor's explanations in her maintenance class. Similarly, Maria says she is not afraid of learning power tools and machines: "*All I need is someone to explain to me how, and I will learn and be able to do it.*" When Maria goes to the Migrant Clinic, she again asks for and relies on verbal explanations:

When I go to the doctor I ask questions, and if I can not understand anything they give me, I ask the doctor to explain it. I ask a lot of questions and try to get them to explain things in words I can understand.

In all her work experiences, Maria learned how to do the job in the same way: "*People would explain it to me, and I would listen carefully.*" One suspects that often the visual and oral learning strategies are combined and reinforce one another, such that an "expert" both demonstrates and talks about what he or she is doing.

Sokhhoeun's limited formal schooling includes two years study in a Buddhist temple, where oral learning was part of literacy learning. The apprentice monks first listened to the words of Buddhist rituals, then were given books in which they were written. Without formal literacy teaching, the young men gradually figured out the connections between sound and print. He now applies essentially the same strategy to any learning task.

Cooperative learning -- working together: A somewhat different approach to other-oriented learning is described by several people who have found cooperative approaches work for them. For his work in tobacco, Tom has teamed up with someone who reads.

> *We were raised up [together] and we get along pretty good. He helps me and I help him, and I learn a lot from him. He reads, stuff like that. Next year I'm gonna put some [tobacco] out, maybe swap work or somethin' with him.*

One of Alicia's prime strategies for learning in her maintenance skills class is to work with other women.

> *The women get more than 90% on the tests. The test is on electricity, I got 93%, and the men got 70%, 72%, 75%. The women work together more than the men. For example, there's a Salvadoran woman. We work -- "This is this, and that is that." We work together -- it's better -- you can talk. And the men usually don't work together. They say "Good morning," but that's it. It's better, working together.*

However, the cooperative learning does not work in every situation for Alicia. In learning English, she is more shy about speaking with others, even though they are also non-native English speakers. The group approach works less well for her in that learning task.

Yuvette talks about the importance for her of working together in her Even Start family literacy class.

> *You know, when we do the work, we help each other, it bein' like a group thing ... We all read it together and we're asked the questions. She'd [the teacher] say, 'Who want to do the first one?' We'd all compare, we're reading it, and we'll say to each other. We'll see if we got the same answer, and check it and we all go through it again. At the JTPA, it wasn't like that. i like Even Start better.*

Self-reliance learning strategies

People have worked out a variety of ways to learn in which they do not depend on others, either formal or informal teachers. In these learning strategies of self-reliance, we see use of repetition and practice, selective use of text materials, trial and error, and/or a systematic step-by-step approach which incorporates a number of strategies in a consistent way.

Repetition and practice: Several people talked about repetition and practice as important learning strategies, especially for literacy and language. Oliver, whose English and Spanish languages are fluent, although with limited vocabulary, uses repetition to understand the words of a rap song: *"And if I don't understand the song, I play it over and over."* Maria says: *"If things are explained to me clearly I learn them. I just run them over in my mind* [until I learn them]." Alicia copies common English words over and over until she learns them. She also uses repetition and practice for the skills she needs to graduate from her maintenance class.

> *I have to take out the toilet in the ladies' room and put it back so that it doesn't leak. I have done it twice already, but the third time is one that counts.*

David took his driver's test three times before passing. Lisa needed extra time and repeated efforts to master the skill of telling time in eighth grade. The use of repetition and practice is important in many ways. Most people recognize that, and expect to work at difficult tasks over time in order to master the skill.

Selective use of text: Even for those with limited literacy, text can be used in a selective way to back up and extend learning experiences. Alicia uses Spanish language texts to reinforce learning in her maintenance skills class. Lisa uses text materials in particular ways to learn how to use new products and appliances:

> *I do good in reading directions on things. Even when I would buy things for Christmas and had to put things together, I could read the directions and put it together. And somehow I just look at it, uh, the way they have drawn it out, and put it together ... and whatever it is I don't know, I go and look it up in the dictionary ...*

Sokhhoeun has developed a careful and invariant approach to learning which involves first having a new skill demonstrated and orally described to him, then writing down (or having written for him) the procedural steps involved. He uses text as a way of "fixing" knowledge and information so that it can be later retrieved.

Selective use of text may also be combined with repetition and memory as a learning strategy, for example, in making notes as aides to memory (Michela does this often). When people are literate in their native language, using written texts in that language may help them cope with limited English. Alicia is literate in Spanish and at work used to write down in Spanish the instructions given to her by the manager. Most of the others use reading, speaking and listening in their native language, but little writing, at least for functional purposes.

Trial and error: learning from experience: For people who have difficulties with written instructions, as well as for those of us who read easily, trial and error may be a favored way of learning to use technology. Alicia finds new appliances quite easy to figure out: *It's just a matter of trying them."* Michela, too, has had little difficulty with learning to use household appliances: *"If I don't know, I try to just use and see how it works."* In this

strategy, they are like more literate people, who could read the instructions, but more commonly try it first -- then refer to the instructions only to resolve any remaining puzzles.

Systematic, step by step approach to learning: In contrast to the try it and see approach to learning, some of the people we profiled described very systematic, step by step approaches to learning. Oliver, for example, describes how he learned new video games. The first step is to try it and see if he can figure it out, or to watch someone else play. Sometimes trial and error does not work: *"... they got all kinds of figures and you don't know what to do with them. When you hit start, you start playing, they don't tell you anything."* When that happens, the next step is to *"let the game play alone ... for five minutes, and then you know how to ... what to do."* And if that step does not work? *"I bring in my friends. They show me how to play if they know ... My cousin, he knows how to play all the games."*

Lisa describes systematic approaches to problem solving and learning, both in locating an apartment to rent and in preparing for Sunday School lessons. In both cases, she uses text in selected ways to overcome her literacy limitations.

> *OK, if I participate in Sunday School, I do pretty good in that, if I have my Sunday School book to bring home to read before we go into Sunday School class that morning. And I look up a lot of things in the dictionary and find the definition of it, and when questions are asked in the Sunday School then I can do pretty good in that. But if I do not have the Sunday School book, I participate a little because I can't answer the question.*

Maria has also worked out for herself a step by step approach to learning the computer at her work experience position, and is very clear about the sequence and the tasks involved in retrieving and entering information. Sokhhoeun's systematic approach described above, combining visual demonstration, oral explanation and written notes on procedures, is a clear and consistent learning approach that he has devised for himself, and that works well for him.

Summary -- a toolbox of strategies

The different approaches to learning which are outlined here are not at all mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily employed by different people. The same person may at times use trial and error, at other times observation of others, at other times selective use of text, in order to learn how to do something.

While individual learning styles may mean that some people are more comfortable with certain strategies than others, everyone used more than one learning strategy. Which they choose to use first may depend partly on the setting (is there an "expert" available?), partly on the task (is this likely to be similar to other things I know how to do, so that I can use trial and error?) Some strategies may work better for certain tasks than others. Alicia finds cooperative learning with other women is very effective for her maintenance skills course,

but much less so for her language class. In effect, each person has a toolbox of available strategies from which they draw to meet the needs of the task at hand.

As with the uses of literacy, and literacy strategies, there are no clear differences between the native and non-native speaking groups in terms of the types of strategies chosen. Both draw upon the same toolbox, with individual variations affected by personal preference, by context and by task. Table 4 summarizes the everyday learning strategies upon which the people we profiled draw.

TABLE 4. EVERYDAY LEARNING STRATEGIES

	Tom	My	Yuv	Les	Lis	Ma	Nu	D	A	M	O	S
OTHER-ORIENTED												
Visual	X	X		X			X	X				X
Oral						X	X		X			X
Cooperative	X		X	X					X			
SELF-RELIANCE												
Repetition/pract.					X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Use of text		X	X		X				X	X	X	X
Trial & error	X			X		X	X		X	X	X	
Step-by-step					X	X			X	X		X

Further analysis of everyday learning strategies also contributes to the next sections of this report, on the use of technology in education, on the common mis-match between what people want to learn and what teachers want to teach, and the provision of opportunities for support by education programs. The learning strategies also generate some specific suggestions which teachers and program developers could use in ESL and literacy instruction.

Recommendation 1: Programs should be designed not on the assumption that adults with low literacy skills are deficient, inadequate and helpless, but that rather on the assumption that they are adults who have already learned much in the course of their lives. The learning strategies they use in the rest of their everyday lives can be the basis for acquiring literacy skills, a starting point of strength rather than weakness.

Recommendation 2: Literacy teachers could help students become more conscious of the everyday learning strategies which they have already developed, and how to apply them in new situations. Strategies for school work can draw on everyday learning strategies.

Recommendation 3: In particular, adult basic education and ESL programs could look for and expand the selective use of text in learning strategies. For example, programs could teach the use of writing for note taking, as memory aides, or to reinforce learning. They could teach use of a dictionary. They must, however, do so in terms of real-life uses -- making grocery lists, taking phone messages, notes to teachers. Learners in the class who already use text in some ways could talk with other students about how and when they use it.

Recommendation 4: Newspapers are quite widely used among the non-native English speakers in particular, and to a more limited extent among the native English speakers. Adult education programs could use newspapers in their teaching, focussing in particular on their discourse functions (what kinds of information does one find in the different sections, in headlines, lead paragraphs and the body of articles; how might such information be useful in everyday life?)

These recommendations may be fully realized only within a changed structural context: one in which ABE and ESL programs have more resources, more full-time professional staff who have time to prepare customized instruction rather than simply working through a packaged curriculum, and who have the training to design and carry out instruction that draws on learners' skills and knowledge.

4.B. WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO LEARN/WHAT TEACHERS WANT TO TEACH

Informal learning in everyday tasks contrasts with the current structure of formal education in many ways. One area of contrast is that in informal learning, the learner dictates the methods, the content, and the goals. In formal education that is seldom the case. In this section we explore the potential for mis-match between what adults want to learn and what educational programs want to teach them. Such a mis-match may occur both in the content of the learning and for the definition of when a skill has been "mastered," and a goal met.

In the past, adult basic education programs have not been as constrained as public schools by a mandated curriculum. Adult education principles have held that adults set their own learning goals, and that these should direct the content and the pace of the learning experience. The practice has often been less than the theory, but adult education has at least to some degree been "learner-centered." Increasingly, however, adult education programs are experiencing the same kinds of demands for assessment and accountability that public schooling faces. They must demonstrate their effectiveness in teaching adults to read, or to acquire a second language. And to demonstrate this effectiveness, most often they must use assessment tools like standardized tests. And in turn, the use of standardized testing leads to a strong inclination to "teach to the test."

What people come to the programs to learn may not match well with the content or skill areas of the standardized tests. Perhaps they want to learn to read the Bible, or use a checking account, or pass their driver's test, or get an electrician's license. If the teacher

sticks to a curriculum structured around skills and content knowledge to be tested, there may be a mis-match between the student's goals and the teacher's goals. This mis-match is possible even when the student has as vague a goal as *"getting the GED"* (as Yuvette sees it) or *"learning the American way, so we can get jobs"* (as Michela puts it). The utility and application of what is being taught may be much more apparent to the teacher than the student.

Our profiles shed some light on the kinds of things that people want to learn. If we look at both when and what the people we profiled seek to learn in their everyday lives, we see very instrumental and directed learning activity. They learn what they need to know at a particular moment in time to achieve a specific goal. The goal may be to play a new video game, to perform tasks needed for a new job, to master some new equipment, or to gain enough English to get around town. Not only is learning for learning's sake not a widely practiced activity for the people we profiled, but their learning for a specific goal is almost always immediate and specific. The longer-term goal of obtaining a GED may be there for many, but the learning they actually do is mostly short-term and pragmatic.

The Californian profiles in particular highlight a significant mis-match between the expectations and contexts of the students, and the goals of ESL programs. Most ESL teaching assumes that the goal is for the student to be able to interact with native English speakers. In fact, it is apparent that the people we profiled have little interaction with native English speakers. For them, a far more important role for English language proficiency is for interaction with speakers of other native languages. These are the people they work with, and see in their communities. ESL programs which recognized this reality might take a different approach to their instruction.

When interaction with their ESL teacher is the only sustained interaction with a native English speaker in an immigrant's life, that relationship assumes a new significance, and a new orientation. First, it places even more power and authority in the teacher's position than that already present in most teacher's roles. Secondly, immigrants cannot go out and practice with native English speakers, as most ESL teachers expect. Neither is it realistic to expect them to practice with each other as if they were Americans. Thirdly, programs need to address directly the need for immigrants to communicate in English with other non-native speakers (that is, with people who have strong accents, different discourse rules and cultural assumptions). Further research is needed on what these communication strategies might be.

Another mis-match between learner and teacher perspectives may also occur at the point of deciding that a goal has been met, and a skill acquired. Whether or not they use a standardized test, teachers may be looking for demonstrated mastery, using standards different from those of the student who simply wants enough to get by. David Wong, for example, took the same level ESL class three times before simply giving up, and deciding he had sufficient English competency to meet his everyday needs.

Adult educators have usually viewed with some alarm the phenomenon of adult students dropping out and later re-entering adult education programs. When this happens, adult

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educators say, students do not meet the ultimate goal of high school equivalency diploma, they lose some skills while out of the program and must work on some tasks over again. Perhaps this view has been rooted in a school-based understanding of adult education -- that students are "supposed to" enter at the bottom and stay in until they finish what the school determines is the end. But adult education principles, what Malcolm Knowles describes as "androgogy," hold that adults determine their own goals. This idea is both widely accepted and widely ignored in adult basic education.

A different perspective on the dropping out and re-entering of programs, derived from our profiles, might be that adults often have short-term and instrumental goals. They may stay in a program long enough to make some progress toward these goals, but leave before the program's goals for them have been met.

We cannot allow this possibility to endorse complacency about drop-out rates from programs. Many people drop out for different reasons: because the program does not meet their needs, because they feel uncomfortable and inadequate to the tasks, because they have many other immediate and pressing problems in their lives. Education programs should and must address these issues. But we should also recognize the short-term and instrumental nature of much learning, and ind ways for programs to meet such needs. For example, short-term courses could be offered on specific life skills -- using a checking account, getting a driver's license -- as well as providing longer-term classes toward bigger goals.

These profiles lead us to reiterate what adult educators commonly say (but do not always do): that programs should first and foremost seek to meet the needs and interests of the students, and that assessment of when and whether their goals have been met should be done by the students themselves. They, and not we, must determine what is good for them.

Recommendation 5: All adult education programs should start with and build on the experiences of the learners. This means giving people opportunities to share their knowledge, experience and skills, and to learn from others. This can be done in small ways (teachers ask, "who knows something about this?") and in large (significant student involvement in program direction). When adults feel that programs pay attention to "who they are," they are much more likely to both feel successful and stay with the program.

Recommendation 6: ESL programs should understand that the contexts of many of their students mean that their primary use for English is to communicate with speakers of other non-native languages, rather than native English speakers. This would change the focus and orientation of the program in many respects.

4.C. USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

The profiles from both Appalachia and California suggest that limited literacy does not prohibit use of technology, particularly where people have access and see a clear use for it. Few of the people we interviewed had encountered any difficulties with the technology to

which they had access. Nevertheless, the ways in which they used some kinds of technology were very different, as described in the Differences section, and these have some implications for educational uses of technology.

Video technology is a widely used and accepted technology for the non-native English speakers, both for maintaining cultural links and learning about the new culture. It could be incorporated much more extensively into educational programming. Television programs, for example, could be used as language teaching aides, especially the talk shows which show unscripted and relatively natural English usage.

Since almost everyone has a VCR, and formal and informal networks exist for distribution of videotapes, consideration could be given to funding production of a video language teaching series. Such a series would need to pay careful attention to several concerns. It might focus on specific language groups (Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, for example) and use these native languages and appealing cultural forms. Oliver, for example, talks about watching Spanish soap operas -- the "tel.novella." This form would be an appealing one for language programming for Spanish speakers. Others would be more appropriate for other languages. Such a video series might use the native language for conveying important cultural information, for example, about the realities of the job market, as well as teaching inter-ethnic communication skills.

Currently, computers are the favored form of technology for adult education, and we found little to suggest barriers to their use. Neither did we find evidence of their acceptance and use in everyday settings, as we did with video technology. At the moment, it does not appear that either the native or non-native English speakers have a sense of the value of use of computers in their everyday lives, beyond the form of computer games. Creative spirits might look to this very acceptable and widely used form of computers, and devise literacy programs for adults modelled on the computer game format. These might be particularly successful for younger age groups.

In general, we can conclude from our profiles that computers are encountered, and that paying attention to appealing cultural forms may be as successful in getting them more widely used as in the case of video technology. Software might follow the format suggested for the video series -- targeting a particular language group, incorporating the native language, building on cultural forms and usages. Careful attention to developing software might put computer-based education in a much more acceptable and widely used position.

Many of the non-native English speakers had access to computers at home or at work, as well as to video games. Software in an appealing format (such as games), made widely available in an acceptable price range, and building literacy and language skills, might well have a widespread appeal to non-native speakers. The appeal of in-home products for literacy instruction, like "Hooked on Phonics," suggests a similar market potential, although one would hope for a stronger educational product. Our profiles suggest that many people, even though low-income, can get access to technology which has a clear application in their lives.

Recommendation 7: We suggest that developers of technology-based educational programming pay careful attention to the ways that technology is used in people's everyday lives, to its cultural as well as pragmatic functions, and to the format which makes its use appealing. Programs could be developed using video as well as computer technology, in culturally sensitive ways.

4.D. PROVIDING SUPPORT

For literacy and ESL programs, "support" for students is often defined in terms of services such as childcare, transportation, sometimes counseling and referrals to other agencies. These profiles suggest that programs need to be sensitive to another kind of support for their adult students: social support. When we analyze the ways in which people learn, and the ways in which they prefer to live their lives, we see all of them using what we call "other-oriented" strategies for many learning needs. They watch others, ask for explanations, learn with others. They have an array of "self-reliance" strategies also, but many of them would agree with Tom when he says: *"What I've pretty well learned I learned off other people."*

However, there is a discrepancy between the way that people learn in everyday settings, and educational methods used in formal schooling. Apprenticeships and mentoring have little application. Because of the way public schooling is structured in this country, most of us have never experienced an opportunity for real cooperative learning. Adult basic education on the whole has followed the model of independent learning within a classroom setting. ESL classes have more often used group approaches. Literacy programs outside the ABE sector have been dominated for many years by one-on-one tutoring using volunteers, which is also an approach to more social learning. However, the one-on-one approach is not cooperative learning, because only one of the pair is the learner.

Within the group of people we profiled, a few have had experience with cooperative learning in formal education settings: Yuvette's experiences with the Even Start family literacy program, Michela's ESL class, and Alicia's building maintenance class. We described above the contrast for Yuvette between her experiences in a JTPA program preparing adults for the GED test, and the Even Start program. In the former, although the students were sitting in a room together, the teacher presented some task and the students worked on it on their own. In the Even Start class, students work together to answer questions, help each other, discuss their ideas. Although she left the program before getting her GED, the reasons did not have to do with the program itself, but with the time commitment. As Yuvette says, *"I like Even Start better."*

ESL classes have more often provided opportunities for students to work together, learn from each other and support each other than have ABE classes. Michela describes her ESL class experiences:

At first I though I don't want to be doing this. So many different languages, you understand. I want to learn American and be in a class with Americans. But after a

while I liked the other people better, and saw that they had many of the same problems I had. We talked a lot about that. We had a lot of fun laughing at everyone's mistakes.

This sense of fun, of enjoyment a[illegible]eing together, of the support derived from feeling part of a peer group which shares problems and is working together toward a solution, is a significant experience. Alicia attains similar support from informal cooperative learning group among the women in her building maintenance class. It pays off: the women get much higher grades than the men in the class, who work independently, and she believes it is because of the cooperative learning. *"It's better, working together."*

Adult education programs which have a technological base probably need to pay special attention to how to enable this kind of social support to happen. No matter how effective computers may be as a learning tool, adults often also need something else from a learning experience: to feel a valued member of a group of learners.

Recommendation 8: Adult education programs should seek ways of providing social support to learners, to build on their social orientation to learning, and their social and cultural uses of video technology. This social support can be provided through learner-centered groups, as well as through student associations and other activities.

4. E. WHAT IS "FUNCTIONAL" LITERACY?

The Literature Review (Appendix A) outlines different concepts of literacy. As literacy skills came to be seen on a continuum, rather than a simple dichotomy of literate/nonliterate, many people wanted to hang onto the idea of a goal, or a cutoff point, at which people could be said to have "enough" literacy to function in their daily lives. The functional literacy concept arose to meet these needs. Numerous attempts have been made to coin a definition of functional literacy, few of which satisfy more than their authors. Whether explicitly or implicitly, functional concepts of literacy are dominant in educational and policy circles.

These concepts of literacy focus exclusively on its "functionality" -- accomplishing tasks of everyday life, and, especially, accomplishing work-related tasks. They place little emphasis on other aspects of literacy -- literacy for entertainment and enjoyment, for cultural communication, for critical thinking and reflection, and for full citizenship. Functional concepts of literacy narrow our understanding of what literacy is and can be.

The functional concept of literacy assumes a gradation in skill levels from non-literacy to the highest levels, but also assumes that there is a point in the continuum that can be consistently and for all persons, defined as "functional literacy." Gray's definition for UNESCO in 1956 forms the basis for many variants: A person is functionally literate when *"he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group."*[11]

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[11] W.S. Gray, The teaching of reading and writing, Paris: UNESCO, 1956, cited by Kenneth Levine, "Functional literacy: Fond illusions and false economies," Harvard Educational Review, 52, 3, August 1982, p. 251.

Definitions of when functional literacy has been attained, and what counts as literacy, change over time (the ability to write one's name in the early nineteenth century, a fifth grade education level by the 1947 census, a continuing upward push, to ninth grade and beyond). And while functional concepts could allow for differences based on context, for the most part the functionalists have sought "a test" which will sort the sheep from the goats, and enable us to say who is or is not functionally literate.

The search for such a test has taken us through the controversial Adult Proficiency Level to such competency-based assessments widely used today as CASAS. There have always been some criticisms of such assessments. Some critiques center on how the testers decide what is or is not a functional skill required of a particular person. For example, the tests are almost always urban-biassed: they would require a rural person living 60 miles or more from the nearest bus route to be able to read a bus timetable in order to be deemed "functionally literate."

Our profiles raise another concern about such competency assessments, and about the whole concept of functional literacy. We found people to be very "functional" in their everyday lives. They hold jobs, may own a home, pay taxes, shop, get around on public transportation systems or in cars. They take care of their families, are involved in various ways in their children's education. They have many and varied skills. But they cannot read well.

The reason for the discrepancy between their apparent "functional literacy" level, and their ability to "function" in everyday life lies in their strategies for meeting everyday literacy demands, and for learning. Even in a print-based society, there is more than one way to fulfill most everyday tasks. Competency-based assessment, and its theoretical base, functional literacy, make a great leap: that if someone cannot read a bus timetable, they cannot use a public transportation system effectively; if someone cannot read a want ad, they cannot find a job; if someone cannot read appliance instructions, they cannot learn to use it effectively. We found that this leap is not justified. Even the highly literate may use non-literate ways of functioning in everyday life. Rather than take the time to pore over the small print of a bus timetable, we will probably ask someone standing at the bus stop when the next bus is due. We find jobs through friends, family, people we know, and not only through want ads. We use trial and error to operate a new appliance. These and other strategies are also used by adults with low literacy skills in their everyday lives. They enable them to function quite well, despite their literacy limitations.

We cannot make the assumption that measuring literacy competencies is a direct or indirect method of measuring ability to function in everyday life. We do not say that the people we profiled do not need more literacy -- and neither do they. We do say that "functional literacy," if it is to have any useful meaning at all, is what the individual wants it to be, not one someone else thinks they should have.

Recommendation 9: The concept of functional literacy should be laid to rest. Adults with low literacy skilis should be credited with the skills and knowledge that they do

have. Educators should start to build on and extend this knowledge and skill, based on the needs, desires and interests of the adult learners.

4. F. WHEN LITERACY IS NOT ENOUGH

If we were to hold to only "functional" uses for literacy, we would have to conclude from our profiles that literacy on its own may not be enough to enable people to pursue their aspirations. However, the profiles make it clear that literacy and language are closely interwoven with culture. This is as important for the Appalachian native English speakers as for the Californian immigrants.

A critical issue in second language learning, described in the Literature Review (Appendix A), and which has implications also for native language speakers, is the question of why adults find it so much harder than children to attain proficiency in a second language. There are a number of theories to account for this phenomenon, some of which center around cultural identity. Language and culture are closely inter-woven, and for an adult immigrant to acquire complete proficiency in English would be to give up some of his or her identity in their home culture.

Becoming acculturated involves language proficiency, but much more, and it is that "much more" which may apply as easily to native language speakers who are part of cultures outside of the mainstream, dominant culture. To get a good job, for example, it is not enough simply to have literacy skills, nor even necessarily to have content skills. One may also need to speak standard English, dress in a certain way, and act in a certain way. The need for these broader forms of cultural information is perhaps most clear for the non-native speakers, but applies as well to native speakers.

Michela, for example, has quite good oral and written English skills, she has the content knowledge needed for a better job in accountancy, yet remains as a book-keeper in an emigre center. Yuvette's literacy skills are quite high, and she is close to GED passing level, yet she holds down a series of part-time service jobs which have no possibilities for advancement. For her to pursue her ambition to be an accountant would require a wide range of changes, not just in skill levels, but also in the way she talks, interacts with others, and presents herself.

Acquiring subtle cultural proficiency involves giving something up. Some would have to give up work that is flexible are largely under their own control, like Tom and Marcy. Some would have to give up the community with which they identify, like Maria. To make these changes as an adult is no easy matter.

Two solutions to this dilemma have been tried at different times and in different places: change the person or change the workplace. Adult basic education programs have often operated as "acculturation" programs for immigrants, and even at times for natives (like Kentucky's Moonlight Schools for Appalachians of the 1920's). However, there may be ways that programs can both value and accept the cultures of their learners and at the same

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time teach them how to "pass," to operate with the cultural rules of the mainstream. Lynn Curtis describes "bicultural" literacy projects *"based upon the learners' perspectives, but also incorporating the cultural realities of being a minority population within a broader dominant society."*[12]

Workplaces can also change. In California, we see in the low-wage jobs commonly held by immigrants, that workplaces have been in many ways much more responsive to the realities than ESL programs have been. They have devised strategies around the presence of other language speakers and absence of native English speakers: these include having a bilingual supervisor, and/or including only one non-native language group in a particular section, or in the whole workplace (see the California Overview for more discussion). Workplaces are responding to the multi-cultural realities of California, far ahead of educational institutions. If workplaces can be opened up successfully to different cultures, perhaps other institutions can be as well.

In these issues we see a strong case for the social contextual conception of literacy. Literacy is not a mechanical skill, it is not even solely defined by written texts, but also by cultures. Probably many of us experience "many literacies" -- at work, at home, in our communities and in our reading for pleasure we experience different vocabularies, different purposes, different literacy strategies, and we find different meanings. They are all part of literacy, but can be understood only within particular contexts and purposes.

This view of literacy is much more complex than functional views, and lends itself less well to P.R. campaigns and quick-fix solutions to literacy "crises." But it is a complexity with which both policies and programs need to grapple, for which educational structures must be devised and resources found. For it reflects the real lives of people much more accurately than simpler concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

In these profiles of adults with low literacy skills, we see some myths challenged, many questions about conventional assumptions on the lives and abilities of people who do not read well. Although we do not claim that these twelve people are representative, or typical, of the population of adults with low literacy skills, qualitative research does enable us to generalize, not to populations, but to theory. When the findings from these individuals run so consistently and strongly counter to assumptions (which themselves have little or no research backing), we must question the assumptions.

[12] Lynn Curtis, Literacy for social change, Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press, 1990, p. 107.

TABLE 5. CONVENTIONAL ASSUMPTIONS CHALLENGED

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HOLDS:	OUR PROFILES SHOW:
LOW-LITERATE ADULTS –	**LOW-LITERATE ADULTS WHO –**
o don't value education	o value education and literacy
o cannot help children in school	o work with their children
o don't care about children's future	o care about their children's future
o don't work	o work hard and long
o are a drain on public resources	o make limited use of public resources
o don't want to learn	o want to learn
o don't know how to learn	o have developed learning strategies
o don't read in everyday life	o read some in everyday life
o cannot use modern technology	o can use technology when shown
o can't problem solve effectively	o have practical problem solving skills
o have low self esteem	o have pride and self-respect
o cannot set long-term goals	o have goals and aspirations
o are subject to social ills	o are good citizens
IN ADDITION, IMMIGRANTS –	**WE PROFILE IMMIGRANTS WHO –**
o interact with English speakers	o don't interact with English speakers
o need English to work	o use little English at work
o need English in their communities	o don't use English in communities

Perhaps, in our anxiety to make a case for literacy education, we have focussed too much on problems. Our profiles suggest that many people who lack literacy skills are among the working poor (along with others who have literacy skills). They have character and perseverance. They are struggling with great resourcefulness to cope with their hardships. If we don't invest in these people, the gaps between the haves and have nots must only increase. If we do invest in our human capital, the investment will pay dividends in the longer term.

In this synthesis we have recommended conceptual and programmatic changes in our approaches to literacy education. In conclusion we should note the striking parallel between the marginal lives of the adults with low literacy skills whom we profiled, and the marginality of most literacy education. Our recommendations could not be achieved without changes in an educational context which is itself marginalized – in terms of resources,

staffing and its position within local and national educational institutions. The need for change is urgent. As immigrant populations increase, ESL programs have long waiting lists. English literacy programs as presently constituted have difficulty reaching and keeping involved those adults who lack literacy skills. Yet our profiles indicate a national resource is being lost -- people who are hard-working, experienced, resourceful, and at the margins. We need to find a way of capitalizing on their strengths, enabling them to further develop their skills, and open up to them more employment opportunities. To do so, we need an adult literacy system that has the resources, the structure and the people to meet the needs of adults with low literacy skills.

In this study we have profiled twelve people who are all very different from each other, yet have in common the experiences of limited literacy and language abilities, and life on the margins of U.S. society. They share with most of us a desire for some stability and security for themselves and their families. While they have been constrained by lack of English language and literacy, they have found ways to meet demands and to learn. They have not been defeated by the adversity in their lives. From them not only can we learn better ways to do the work of adult education, and how technology might be incorporated in this work, but also we can learn from their creativity, determination and spirit.

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APPENDIX A

LITERATURE REVIEW

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APPENDIX A -- LITERATURE REVIEW

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EVERYDAY USES OF LITERACY IN ADULT LIFE

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This literature review focusses on what is known about everyday uses of literacy among adults in the United States, and on how adults with low literacy skills live their lives in a print-based society. The research base in these two areas is slim indeed: much is simply not known about how people use literacy, how literacy plays a role in their interactions with technology, and still less about the vast majority of adults with low literacy skills who choose never to enter adult literacy programs. Nevertheless, although the literature is small, three broad areas provide thoughtful research, intriguing insights and often rich descriptive data: a series of ethnographic studies of literacy uses in everyday life, including a few studies of immigrant families and literacy; another series of research studies on workplace uses of literacy; and several ethnographic studies of "practical problem solving" in everyday settings.

In order to set the stage for this research and its findings, the first part of this report reviews some of the theoretical frameworks with which literacy has been viewed in recent years, and in particular two major schools of thought: the "functional" view of literacy (literacy as a skill or set of skills used in various aspects of living) and the "social contextual" view (literacy as a social construct which cannot be separated from the context in which it is used and the meaning which it has for the user).

The second section reviews key issues and debates within two related fields of practice: adult literacy education and English as a second language (ESL) education. These issues, and competing approaches to instruction, derive from the theoretical concepts outlined in the introduction.

The issues provide an important context for the third section of this report: a review of existing research on everyday uses of literacy -- including a series of ethnographic and other qualitative studies on literacy in everyday life, research on literacy demands and uses in workplace settings, and ethnographic research on practical problem solving. The final section draws conclusions and frames further research questions.

WHAT IS LITERACY?

The struggle for a broadly agreed definition of literacy has consumed much paper. During the last two hundred years (and especially in the last twenty years), concepts of literacy have changed significantly. In early industrial society, literacy was conceived of as a simple duality -- one was either literate or non-literate. Standards for literacy were quite

low: often the ability to write one's own name and little more.[1] Through the twentieth century, literacy standards climbed, and literacy came to be seen more as a continuum from nonliterate to literate. This period has been characterized by a series of literacy "crises," centering around times of war and technological change.[2]

"Functional" literacy

Nevertheless, while the literate/nonliterate duality has been officially abandoned, a place is often set on the continuum as a cutoff point for "functional literacy." Whether this is set at fifth grade level or ninth grade level, it still assumes that all those who test below that level are deficient in skills, while those above it have the basics needed to survive. Numerous attempts have been made to define "functional literacy" without recourse to arbitrary grade levels, usually in relation to an individual's ability to meet his/her own needs and goals. However, few of the definitions satisfy more than their authors.[3]

The functional view of literacy is dominant today. It assumes literacy to be a generic and definable skill or set of skills which all literate adults have (and illiterate adults should have):

> *In practice, this usually means the ability to make efficient use of various decoding skills, to recognize appropriate sight words, or to perform at an arbitrarily determined grade level.*[4]

Kazemek points to this as "a common misunderstanding of the nature of literacy" which persists despite a body of research and theory to the contrary. The functional view links literacy closely with economic development, in much the same way that "human capital

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[1] For reviews of the changing history of literacy in this country, see Lawrence C. Stedman and Carl F. Kaestle, "Literacy and reading performance in the United States, from 1880 to the present," Reading Research Quarterly, XXII, (Winter, 1987), pp. 8-46; Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick, "The nature of literacy: An historical explanation," Harvard Educational Review, 47, (3), August 1977, pp. 370-385; and a special issue on the history of literacy of History of Education Quarterly, 30 (4), Winter, 1990. For a more idiosyncratic view, see several works by Harvey Graff, including The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.

[2] Documented in W. D. Cook, Adult Literacy Education in the United States, Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1977.

[3] See, for example, Kenneth Levine's review of definitions in "Functional literacy: Fond illusions and false economies," Harvard Educational Review, 52, (3), August 1982, pp. 249-266; and Thomas Valentine, "Adult functional literacy as a goal of instruction," Adult Education Quarterly, 36, (2), Winter 1986, pp. 108-113.

[4] Francis E. Kazemek, "Necessary changes: Professional involvement in adult literacy programs," Harvard Educational Review, 58(4), 1988, p. 466.

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theory" once linked education with Third World development.[5] Proponents of this view see the current economic crisis of the U.S.A., and its apparent inability to compete in the global economy, as being caused by a workforce with inadequate skills. They argue that workforce training is the key to accelerating productivity when the labor force is not growing,[6] and point to Japanese or German blue collar workers' basic skills as superior to U.S. workers' skills. For example, Merry White, professor of comparative sociology at Boston University and author of The Japanese Industrial Challenge, was reported in Business Week as saying:

> *Much of the success of Japan stems from the fact that its blue-collar workers can interpret advanced mathematics, read complex engineering blueprints, and perform sophisticated tasks on the factory floor far better than blue collars in the U.S.*[7]

"Social-contextual" literacy

The advent of detailed studies of literacy demands and uses in various social settings, of new approaches to social history, and of new developments in cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics, has led to an alternative conceptualization of literacy from that of a skill or set of skills. In this alternative view, literacy is conceived as socially constructed, culturally negotiated, and tightly bound up with the context of its use. Such a concept resists easy and universal definitions. As Kazemek argues, there is a body of research which:

> *shows that literacy is a relative phenomenon, one that is both personal and social: it occurs in different contexts, situational as well as cultural; it depends upon the reader's and writer's purposes and aims for engaging in literacy acts; and it varies according to the nature of the text. Finally ... literacy is an ethical endeavor that has as its goal the liberation of people for intelligent, meaningful and humane action upon the world.*[8]

The social construction of literacy has been a particular concern of cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics in the last few years, and reflects a new interest within those disciplines

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[5] See Juliet Merrifield, "Illiteracy, the workforce and the global economy," in Thomas Valentine (Ed.) Beyond Rhetoric: Fundamental Issues in Adult Literacy Education, (Symposium Draft), Dept. of Adult Education, University of Georgia, May, 1990, pp. 244-278; a review of the development of human capital theory in Elchanan Cohn, The Economics of Education, Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1978; and the debate among several contributors to Daniel Wagner (ed), The Future of Literacy in a Changing World, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987.

[6] Among many recent contributions which take this point of view, see for example, U.S. Departments of Labor, Education and Commerce, Building a Quality Workforce, Washington D.C. 1988; National Center on Education and the Economy, America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!, The Report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, June, 1990.

[7] "Human Capital: The decline of America's Work Force" Special Report, Business Week (Sep. 19, 1988).

[8] Ibid. p. 467.

in examining cognitive activities in their contexts.[9] In contrast to the functional literacy concept, it assumes that the skill cannot be separated from the knowledge context with which it is used, or the meaning it has for the user.

> *We expect literacy to provide not just a technical skill but also a set of prescriptions about using knowledge. Literacy is not just the simple ability to read and write: but by possessing and performing these skills we exercise socially approved and approvable talents; in other words, literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon.*[10]

In the contextual view of literacy. any individual may vary in how, what, where, and when he/she uses literacy. Different demands and uses of literacy may exist for the same individuals in different settings or contexts. For example, work-related literacy may differ not only in content but also in style and purpose from reading for pleasure or school-based literacy, as will be illustrated below in the section reviewing research on work-related literacy. Again, any particular individual may change over time in their uses of literacy (literacy cycles exist, including periods of a-literacy, or non-reading).[11]

While the "social-contextual" view of literacy is gathering momentum with a solid body of research, the dominant mode of thinking about literacy in public debate still derives from the "functional literacy" approach. The functional view of literacy as a clearly defined set of skills that can be accurately measured in standardized tests has had a powerful impact on the field of adult literacy education, and has shaped particular ways of structuring and delivering literacy education in recent years.

BACKGROUND: ADULT LITERACY AND ESL EDUCATION

ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

Adults are not Children

Much of the recent research in cognitive science and sociolinguistics relating to literacy development has focused on school-based literacy, and on the "first time learning events" of children in the K-12 classroom. While these insights are important, several fundamental differences exist between literacy acquisition and use for children and for adults. Some of

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[9] See Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave, (Eds.) Everyday Cognition: Its Development and Social Context, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984, including the introduction by Barbara Rogoff; and the work on practical thinking including Robert J. Sternberg and Richard K. Wagner, (Eds.) Practical Intelligence: Nature and Origins of Competence in the Everyday World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

[10] Jenny Cook-Gumperz (ed), The Social Construction of Literacy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, Introduction p. 1-2.

[11] A good summary of these contextual variations in uses of literacy is John F. Szwed, "The ethnography of literacy," in Rogoff and Lave, op.cit., pp. 13-15.

the key issues in children's literacy development, like disentangling the effects of literacy and schooling, are not as relevant in adult literacy development. Adults who join literacy education programs are, for the most part, "schooled." Most of them will have had at least seven years of schooling, many will have had some high school, and some will even have graduated high school, but without proficiency in reading.

Adult enter literacy programs with significant differences from children in school. Adults enter the classroom with a wealth of life experiences which re-frame and often screen both their perceptions and their participation in the learning experience. They usually are volunteer learners (although the JOBS program is changing this), and face issues of entry and commitment many times in their adult lives as they drop out of and re-enter programs.[12] These adults have a strong sense of self, a history of emotionally laden past learning experiences, and a complex set of motivations (including resistance[13]).

Many adults have lived their lives without literacy, and have found a variety of ways to survive in a "print-based" culture, as suggested by a few ethnographic studies of low-literate adults, which are reviewed below. These strategies include extensive utilization of their social networks, dependence upon literate family members, or other adaptive skills to maintain or access the broader society. They have talents and skills in social relationships, in practical life skills, and in their indigenous cultural knowledge. They may make extensive use of memorization and oracy to take the place of literacy. However, they are clearly aware that our society places a great deal of value and status in literacy.

Structure of Adult Literacy Education

Adult literacy education has been chronically under-funded throughout its history, and has struggled to meet the needs of at least a small proportion of those who did not complete their high school education. Within the field are several major approaches to instruction, including volunteer-based "each one teach one" programs, school-based adult basic education programs, functional context literacy training, and critical literacy.

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[12] Issues of motivations, deterrents to participation, recruitment and retention of adult learners have preoccupied adult education researchers for years, and have a large literature base. See, for example, G.G. Darkenwald and G.A. Larson, (Eds.) Reaching Hard to Reach Adults, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1980; E.R. Hayes and G.G. Darkenwald, "Attitudes toward adult education: An empirically-based conceptualization," Adult Education Quarterly, 40 (3), 1990, pp. 158-168; T. Valentine and G.G. Darkenwald, "Deterrents to participation in adult education: Profiles of potential learners," Adult Education Quarterly, 41, pp. 29-42.

[13] See, for example, Alan Quigley, "Hidden logic: Reproduction and resistance in adult literacy and adult basic education," Adult Education Quarterly, 40, 1990, pp. 103-105; and for a detailed ethnographic view of resistance in action, Sheryl Gowen, Eyes on a Different Prize: A Critical Ethnography of a Workplace Literacy Program, Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgia State University, 1990.

(1) Volunteer-based literacy programs

In this country, volunteer-based literacy education organizations have used a variety of methods and approaches, but have some things in common. They have focussed on those with the very lowest literacy levels, have paired them with volunteer tutors who are usually from a different class and often cultural background, and have taught beginning reading skills. They have not been part of the credentialing system which has driven the school-based ABE programs. Often, indeed, these ABE programs have been content to refer new students with minimal literacy skills to volunteer programs. But neither has their main focus been on life skills. Rather they have worked toward mastery of very basic reading, spelling, comprehension and grammar as the foundation for possible further education.

Volunteer-based literacy has been critiqued on a number of grounds, but perhaps most significantly because widespread dependence on volunteers is evidence of the marginal status of adult literacy education (we would not, for example, staff our children's schools with volunteers).[14] Volunteer programs have also been criticized for their rigid methodology, and for the relatively small numbers of adults they have been able to reach (the same criticism has also been made of ABE programs). Nevertheless, as the literacy field has changed in the last few years, so have the volunteer groups. Volunteer groups now span the spectrum of teaching methods, and have organized a strong voice in advocacy for literacy education at the local, state and national levels.

(2) School-based traditional ABE

Often run by school systems or post-secondary community colleges, staffed by part-timers who also teach children in schools, and directed toward a credential paralleling the high school diploma, it is not surprising that the dominant tradition in Adult Basic Education (ABE) for many years has been school-based. Like schools, ABE has taught general literacy and knowledge skills, for personal development or advancement, but with a major focus toward the General Educational Development (GED) test. In a society which values credentials, especially in getting jobs, this focus may be valuable for individuals.

ABE programs may serve adults at all literacy levels, from non-readers to those close to GED level. Typical instruction is 2 to 6 hours per week. It may take place in a classroom setting, often highly individualized (students are working through structured curriculum materials on their own, with occasional assistance from a teacher). At the lowest literacy levels instruction may take place one-on-one with an individual tutor (usually a volunteer), or it may take place in small groups.

[14] For a review of different program models and their critiques, see Hanna Arlene Fingeret, Adult literacy education: Current and future directions, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education, Information Series No. 284, 1984.

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Many ABE programs have limited funding and most are staffed by part-time personnel with significant support from volunteers. The adult learners come into and exit literacy programs on a highly sporadic, unpredictable basis. In such a context, it is hardly surprising that ABE has always had difficulty demonstrating high "success" rates among participants, either in terms of credentialing, skill gains or even perseverance in the program.

Among the many criticisms of ABE programs are: that they reach only a small proportion (perhaps 10 percent) of those "in need;" that they do not take into account the different interests and needs of adult learners and tend to use curriculum and methods developed for children; and that the knowledge and skills acquired in such academic or school-based learning transfer rather poorly to adult life. In the last few years, traditional ABE has been strongly attacked by proponents of functional literacy for its failure to teach job-related skills.[15]

(2) Functional context literacy training

The functional context approach to literacy education has flourished in a political climate which sees schools and education as part of the cause of this country's economic problems. While at its broadest, this approach to literacy concentrates on the use of literacy in any aspect of life, the main context of importance has been job-related literacy. A large part of the research base for this approach to literacy education has come from research on military training programs.

The expressed goal of job-related functional literacy programs is to improve workers' performance on the job. Two main methodological schools of thought are emerging within this approach. The first, championed originally by Sticht, claims that process and knowledge cannot be separated, and that improved job performance results by working on both literacy skills and job-content knowledge together in the same program:

> *... the dual nature of cognition ... suggests that all human intellectual abilities require both processes and knowledge. This, in turn, suggests the near futility of improving cognitive ability by teaching processes in isolation, such as teaching "reading," "writing," or "critical thinking" as content free processes. The work of cognitive psychologists has confirmed the importance of knowledge and context for facilitating learning and transferring this learning to other settings.*[16]

Another school of thought within the functional literacy area has developed in response to suggestions that jobs are changing too rapidly for specific job-knowledge to be taught.

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[15] See, for example, Thomas Sticht, Functional context education: Workshop resource notebook, San Diego, CA: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc., 1987.

[16] Thomas G. Sticht, and Barbara A. McDonald, Making the nation smarter: The intergenerational transfer of cognitive ability, San Diego, CA: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc., 1989.

Furthermore, it is said that the organization of work is also changing rapidly, and that among the "basic skills" workers need are not only reading and writing, but also working in teams and making decisions. Proponents of this view of functional literacy argue for the teaching of skills per se, with a special focus on the meta-cognitive skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, sequencing, and analysis.[17] It is thought that these skills underlie all job tasks, and that by making them conscious, workers will be equipped with "portable skills" which they can use in any job context.

While the Sticht school of functional literacy is closer to much of the recent research on cognitive function, both schools within the functional approach to literacy are fundamentally incompatible with the social contextual view of literacy which has come out of psychology and linguistics in recent years. The functional literacy proponents assume literacy to be a consistent set of skills, performance on which is measurable (even though assessment measures are conceded to be inadequate). The skills can be constructed by an observer from job task analysis and other techniques, and are disassociated from any personal meaning or value they may have for the worker.

(3) Critical literacy

This small and marginalized part of the field of adult literacy education in this country nevertheless has a substantial track record in other parts of the world. The critical literacy approach views literacy as the route to personal empowerment and social change. Paulo Freire is the most influential proponent of this approach, which underlies mass literacy campaigns in many parts of the world, in revolutionary and non-revolutionary settings. Freire summed up the essence of this perspective when he suggested that people need to be able to read their world and write their own history.[18]

Since the purpose of this form of literacy education is to develop personal growth and understanding in order to act upon social problems, its curriculum and methods are very flexible and derive from the interests and experiences of the particular adults in the classroom. The "problem-posing" approach is often a component of the curriculum.[19]

The goal then is to increase the social significance of literacy in family life by incorporating community cultural forms and social issues into the content of literacy activities. This model is built on the particular conditions, concerns and cultural

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[17] See, for example, the workplace literacy program described in depth by Sheryl Gowen, op. cit., which is typical of functional literacy programs of this kind.

[18] Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo, Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, South Hadley, Mass: Burgin and Garvey, 1987.

[19] See, for example, Elsa Roberts Auerbach and Nina Wallerstein, ESL For Action: Problem Posing at Work, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1987.

expertise of specific communities, and, as such, does not involve a pre-determined curriculum or set of practices or activities. Instead, the curriculum development process is participatory and is based on a collaborative investigation of critical issues in family or community life. As these issues emerge, they are explored and transformed into content-based literacy work, so that literacy can in turn become a tool for shaping this social context.[20]

A recent addition to the research base on work-related literacy adopts a critical theory framework to examine resistance by workers to use of job-related texts, and to participation in a functional literacy-based workplace literacy program.[21] Gowen's ethnographic research reveals that while employers may believe that workers do not read their job-texts because they cannot read adequately, employees may consciously choose not to read or value job-related texts, either because they are wrong (they do not tell how a job is actually done) or as an act of resistance against an unfair and disliked authority figure. She contrasts the low value placed on job-texts with the high value placed on texts outside of work -- the bible, GED workbook, newspapers and letters. And she argues that, to be successful, workplace literacy programs must meet workers' own needs and interests as well as those of employers.

Adult Literacy and English as a Second Language

Although adult literacy instruction and adult second language instruction (ESL) have much in common, in practice there is little connection either at the level of theoretical framework or at the level of instructional methodology and practice. The two fields have developed separately, and key issues outlined below in current ESL are different from those in adult literacy instruction. ESL issues center around language acquisition among adults, rather than literacy acquisition. It is not clear whether either the process of acquiring literacy in a second language is closer to oral language acquisition or closer to literacy acquisition by native language speakers. Nor is it clear whether those who are in process of acquiring literacy in a second language use it in the same ways as first language literacy. These unknowns are particularly pressing with the influx of immigrants who are not literate in their native language, or whose native language may not exist in written form.

Similarly, at the level of instructional practice, ESL and literacy education for adults have few connections. Although "whole language" principles in adult literacy appear to have much in common with the "communicative" approach in ESL, there has been little borrowing of instructional approaches in either direction. As an example, language experience has been a widely used technique in ESL instruction for many years, but is only recently gaining widespread acceptance in traditional ABE instruction.

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[20] Elsa Roberts Auerbach, "Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy," Harvard Educational Review, 59 (2), May 1989, p. 177.

[21] Sheryl Gowen, op. cit.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Theoretical Issues in Second Language Acquisition

While substantial and rigorous research into literacy and language acquisition issues for ESL learners is clearly still needed, theoretical developments in the fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, second language acquisition, and teaching English as a second language (TESL) offer important suggestions about the nature of adult second-language learners and adult second-language learning. Much of the research and debate about how learners acquire a second language and what they do with that language, serves as the basis for second-language curriculum planning and teaching practice worldwide. These approaches also influence much of current adult ESL teaching practice in the United States, particularly in those states with large ESL learner populations and active professional ESL teaching organizations. It is appropriate, then, first to review some of these theories of adult second language acquisition, and secondly to outline major approaches to second language teaching.

This section summarizes three critical issues under discussion in recent years among second language acquisition researchers: (1) The idea of a "critical period" for second language acquisition; (2) access to a "universal grammar" by second language learners; and (3) the "monitor" theory of second language acquisition. This discussion is followed by that of an area that is particularly problematic for ESL teachers and learners -- due both to the lack of research and theory and the enormity of the pedagogical challenge -- nonliterate and preliterate ESL learners.

(1) A "Critical Period" for Second Language Acquisition

The idea of a "critical period" for language acquisition grows out of the everyday observation that many people perceive greater "difficulty" in acquiring a second language as adults than they did in acquiring their first language as children. The most extreme form of the theory argues that whereas between the ages of two and puberty the human brain seems to show the plasticity that allows a child to acquire its first language, after puberty this unique capacity seems to be gone because most of the particular functions (especially the speech function in the left brain hemisphere) have been permanently formed and have lost the flexibility needed for nature-like language acquisition. Thus, it is argued, while it is possible to acquire another language after the critical period (pre-puberty), it may be necessary to accomplish this in a physiologically different, more difficult way. First language acquisition by children and second language acquisition by adults, it is claimed, need to be seen as two biologically different processes.[22]

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[22] E. Lennenberg, Biological Foundations of Language, New York: Wiley, 1967; T. Scovel, "Foreign accents, language acquisition, and cerebral dominance" Language Learning, 19, 2/4, 1969, pp. 245-253; W. Klein, Second Language Acquisition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

There are, however, powerful counter-arguments to the primarily biological explanation offered above.[23] While granting the undeniable--that adults seem infrequently to acquire native speaker-like fluency in a second language as children do in a first language--these arguments offer a social, rather than biological, explanation. It may well be, for example, that the adult immigrant is much less willing to give up his well-established social identity in the home culture by becoming fully fluent in the language of a new culture. There may also be other, influential social context factors affecting adult second language acquisition that operate less intrusively on child first language acquisition.

It is sometimes argued, too, that in the language learning situation adults, by virtue of their fully-developed cognitive capacities, can bring to bear many learning skills that children cannot. They can, for example, conceive of abstract "rules" about language and consciously apply them. In fact, one researcher argues that adults are better than children at learning a second language when the tests are conducted under controlled conditions, while noting simultaneously that seldom do adults and children learn language under the same controlled conditions. V. J. Cook summarizes well the counter-arguments to the critical period theory:

> *Given all the factors that distinguish adults from children, it would be strange if we found no differences between them but it is not necessary to invoke some peculiar property of language learning to explain them. While one does not wish to deny the strong impression that many people have that some adult immigrants speak their new language poorly, this may be ascribed not so much to an intrinsic defect in the adult's mind as to differences in situation, in motivation, in willingness to surrender part of one's identity, and so on, that separate children from adults.*[24]

(2) Access to a "Universal Grammar" by Adults

Another related area of debate surrounding the question of adult second language acquisition is based upon Noam Chomsky's notion of the language acquisition device (LAD), to which all humans are said to have access in their acquisition of a first language as children.[25] In a generally well-accepted set of arguments, Chomsky suggests that the LAD is an innate human language endowment--a coherent set of principles and parameters that children are born with--which, taken together with the input of everyday language that a

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[23] V.J. Cook, "Second-language learning: a psycholinguistic perspective," In V. Kinsella (Ed.), Surveys 1: Eight state-of-the-art articles on key areas in language teaching, (Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; S.M. Gass & J. Schachter (Eds.) Linguistic perspectives on second language acquisition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; B. Harley, P. Allen, J. Cummins & M. Swain, (Eds.) The development of second language proficiency, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[24] V.J. Cook, "Second-language learning: A psycholinguistic perspective" in V. Kinsella (ed.) Surveys 1: Eight State of the Art Articles on Key Areas in Language Teaching, (Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 14.

[25] N. Chomsky, Aspects of the theory of syntax, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965.

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child hears in the first one or two years of life, accounts for the rapid emergence development of language in all children of all cultures and languages.[26] In no other way, it is argued, can this rapid language development be accounted for; the "miracle" of a child's acquisition of language, it is said, cannot simply be explained as a sum of all the language fragments the child has been exposed to during the first few years of life.

The theory of a "universal grammar" grows from the notion of a language acquisition device, as applied to the problem of adult second language acquisition. The universal grammar is said to consist of a small number of inviolable universal linguistic principles of a quite abstract sort that account to a large extent for the similarities across all languages. Associated with some of these principles are sets of parameters that define possible variations across languages. The extent to which the adult second language learner does or does not have access to the universal grammar to use as a tool for acquiring the second language is a matter of considerable recent debate among second language acquisition researchers. In addition, the degree to which second language teaching practitioners "believe in" the existence of the universal grammar can have a considerable influence of the teaching methodologies they may employ. The three main competing points of view that are held by researchers on the universal grammar question are summarized below:

The first position holds that as long as the universal grammar has been activated normally in the course of first language acquisition, it can be reactivated in the course of acquiring a second language. This position also argues that the adult learner's knowledge of the first language and greater cognitive development need have no serious effects on the second language acquisition process.[27]

The second position argues that the universal grammar can be and is reactivated for adult second language acquisition. It is suggested, however, that language transfer errors will arise because the learner will assume that the parameters that were set on the universal grammar when acquiring the first language will apply to the second language, when frequently they will not. If sufficient input regarding the second language can be provided, this position argues, then the universal grammar can be substantially reactivated--its parameters and settings adjusted for the new language--by the adult second language learner.[28]

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[26] J. Schachter, "Testing a proposed universal," In S. M. Gass & J. Schachter, (Eds.) Linguistic perspectives on second language acquisition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

[27] S. Krashen, Inquiries and insights: Second language teaching, immersion and bilingual education, and literacy, Hayward, CA: The Alemany Press, 1985; S. Krashen & T. Terrel, The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom, Hayward, CA: The Alemany Press, 1983.

[28] S. Flynn, "Differences between first and second language acquisition: Setting the parameters of universal grammar," in D. A. Rogers and J.R. Sloboda (Eds.) Acquisition of symbolic skills, New York: Plenum Press, 1983; L. White, "Island effects in second language acquisition," In S. Flynn & W. O'Neill (Eds.) Linguistic theory in second language acquisition, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1988.

The third position, in contrast to the two earlier positions, suggests that the universal grammar in its entirety is not available to the adult second language learner after the critical period for first language acquisition. Only that portion of the universal grammar that was activated in acquiring the learner's first language, it is argued, is retained by the adult learner, and the adult learner has no access to the underlying rules or mechanisms for adjusting the parameter settings of the universal grammar. According to this view, the adult second language learner has available for acquisition of the second language only the principles and parameter settings that were activated in the first language acquisition process.[29]

(3) The "Monitor" Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Stephen Krashen's "monitor" theory of second language acquisition[30] may be seen as an elaboration of the first position outlined above, which argues that adult second language learners can gain full access to the universal grammar to acquire a new language. Krashen argues that there are two ways for adult learners to gain proficiency in a second language: subconscious acquisition and conscious learning.

Subconscious acquisition, Krashen suggests, is by far the more important of the two processes, for it is based on meaningful and purposeful communication with speakers of the new language, and the learner is oriented not to the form but to the content and effect of utterances, remaining unaware of the linguistic rules and structures used in the process. Subconscious acquisition can only take place, he argues, if the learner receives substantial "comprehensible input," that is, a considerable dosage of the new language used in ways that enable the learner to naturally grasp its meaning.

Conscious learning is said to involve the internalization of explicit rules under conscious control. The conscious application of these rules that have been learned is controlled through what is termed a "monitor." Thus, conscious control of language output and self-correction are said to be examples of the operation of the monitor. The monitor, it is argued, can become effective in a communication situation only if: (a) there is enough time to operate it; (b) the speaker is concerned with the correctness of his/her speech production; and (c) the speaker knows the correct rule to apply.

Krashen's work has been relatively widely disseminated in the ESL practitioner community, and his theories are often cited by teachers as the basis for current classroom practice. Nevertheless, there is continuing debate among language acquisition researchers who question whether practitioners should uncritically accept Krashen's theory. The monitor

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[29] R. Bley-Vroman, "What is the logical problem of foreign language learning?" In S. M. Gass & J. Schachter, (Eds.) Linguistic Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 and J. Schachter, "Testing a proposed universal," In S. M. Gass & J. Schachter, ibid.

[30] S. Krashen, op. cit.

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theory has spawned what is termed "the natural approach" to second language teaching, which places a considerable emphasis on offering comprehensible input to the learner through extensive listening activities in the early stages of second language acquisition, prior to requiring any oral language production on the part of the learner.

The Unique Needs of Non-literate and Pre-literate ESL Learners

ESL (English as a Second Language) literacy students represent a special population with a unique and challenging set of needs. As if the issue of oral second language acquisition for economic survival were not sufficiently daunting for newcomers to the United States, the lack of rudimentary knowledge of the written English symbol system, the inability to read or write one's home language, or the non-existence of a writing system in the home language considerably complicate the issue and present added barriers to full economic and citizenship participation by this population.

Unfortunately, despite the clear need for a special focus on this group, much of mainstream ESL research and practice does not identify ESL literacy students as a special population.[31] Since the first major influx of refugees from Southeast Asia inspired a few initial efforts at ESL literacy research and development activities, there has been relatively little theory-building or research in this critical area.[32] Yet with the recent passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), a massive population of nonliterate ESL learners has once again entered the nation's adult education delivery system, with the system, again, unprepared to respond with a coherent, research-based set of curricular or instructional approaches.[33]

The current state of research knowledge in the area of adult ESL literacy is fragmentary and contradictory. There is no agreement on whether reading and writing should be taught separately or together, or whether reading should precede writing. In fact, the only idea which has gained widespread acceptance -- if not systematic empirical validation -- is that oral skills should be developed prior to and as the basis for reading and writing.[34] Many important issues with respect to ESL literacy learning and instruction -- such as the value of

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[31] J. Morley, "Current directions in teaching English to speakers of other languages: A state of the art synopsis," TESOL Newsletter, 20, 1987, pp. 16-20.

[32] W.W. Haverson & J.L. Haynes, ESL/Literacy for Adult Learners, (Language in Education: Theory and Practice Series, No. 49). Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982; J. Bell and B. Burnaby, A Handbook for ESL Literacy, Ontario, Canada: OISE Press, 1984.

[33] H.S. Wrigley, "Linking the amnesty curriculum with student concerns," Immigration Reform Language Issues Network Bulletin, 1-4, 1989, Long Beach, CA: California State University, Long Beach.

[34] Bell & Burnaby, op. cit.; G. Rathnell, Benchmarks in reading instruction in the second language classroom, Hayward, CA: Alemany Press, 1984; K. Wallace, Learning to read in a multicultural society, New York: Pergamon Press, 1986.

developing literacy skills in both the home language and the target language in the adult literacy acquisition process -- remain primarily as matters of speculation in the literature, and deserve further careful investigation.[35]

ESL Pedagogical Content

A review of the field of second language teaching pedagogy reveals four major approaches that practitioners have adhered to for the past several decades. These include: (1) The Grammar Translation Approach; (2) The Audio-Lingual Approach; (3) The Communicative Approach; and (4) The Humanistic/Psychological Approach. Each is discussed briefly in this section, along with examples of specific teaching methods within each approach.

(1) The Grammar Translation Approach

This approach, now largely discredited, was the basis for second language instruction in the United States and Western Europe until the 1960's, when the audio-lingual approach became popularized. It is important to understand the grammar translation approach, if for no other reason than the fact that many immigrants coming to the United States have been taught using the grammar translation approach. Their expectations for what language instruction should "look like" will often not be met by teachers in ESL classes who are employing newer methods.[36]

In essence, this approach makes no distinction between written and oral language. Reading and writing skills are emphasized, and there is also a heavy focus on the learning of abstract grammatical rules. A focus on developing oral or listening skills is largely ignored.

(2) The Audio-Lingual Approach

The audio-lingual approach was developed in the 1960's as a reaction to the book-centered orientation of the grammar translation approach. Whereas grammar translation had emphasized reading and writing skills, the audio-lingual approach shifted the focus of second language teaching to speaking and listening. A major assumption of the approach -- to which many second language teachers continue to subscribe -- is that the second language is best learned orally and aurally, with reading and writing serving as

[35] J. Cummins, "The cross-lingual dimensions of language proficiency: Implications for bilingual education and the optimal age issue," TESOL Quarterly, 14, 1980, pp. 175-187; J. Fishman, Advances in the study of societal multilingualism, The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1978; K. Hakuta, Mirror of language: The debate on bilingualism, New York: Basic Books, 1986; Wallace, op.cit.

[36] J.T. Roberts, "Recent developments in ELT," In V. Kinsella (Ed.), Surveys 1: Eight state-of-the-art articles on key areas in language teaching, (Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

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reinforcers prior to being treated in their own right as important skills. The academic schools of behaviorist psychology and structuralist linguistics were predominant at the time, and their respective views of language learning as a process of formation and of language itself as speech, provided a rationale for the new methodology.[37]

The audio-lingual approach, like the grammar translation approach, assumes that the major problem in learning a foreign language is to master the grammatical structure of that language, and that this problem requires almost exclusive attention. Both approaches tend to maintain teacher-centeredness because of the necessity for keeping the class together and under control.

The actual methods developed out of the audio-lingual approach constituted a considerable shift in pedagogy for second language teachers, and these were accompanied by the increased use of new (at the time) technologies such as language laboratories and audiovisual equipment. Classroom activities such as drills, memorization, dialogues, and substitution of language patterns may be said to characterize the audio-lingual approach. It should be noted that many audio-lingual methods remain in regular use in second language classrooms today, and continue to constitute a considerable portion of the language teacher's arsenal.

(3) The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach, to some extent a response to audio-lingualism, stresses the development of communicative competence as the goal for learners, rather than structurally or grammatically correct responses in the early stages of second language acquisition. The approach is based upon recent developments in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and philosophy of language which argue for a distinction between language (the abstract "rules" of how correct utterances are to be constructed) and communication (the actual meaningful, situated language-in-use).[38]

One impact of the communicative approach has been to seek to shift the focus in language teaching from an emphasis on grammatic structures to one on communicative functions, or what the learner is really trying to do in a social sense with language. To exemplify this, a lesson influenced by the communicative approach might focus on "showing anger" rather than on "the present perfect tense" as might be the case with the audiolingual

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[37] M. Savile-Troike, "Reading and the audiolingual method," In R. Mackay, B. Barkman, and R. Jordan (Eds.), Reading in a second language: Hypotheses, organization, and practice, Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1979.

[38] J.T. Roberts, "Recent developments in ELT," In V. Kinsella (Ed.), Surveys 1: Eight state-of-the-art articles on key areas in language teaching, (Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; D. Hymes, On communicative competence, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971; and H.G. Widdowson, Teaching language as communication, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

or grammar translation approaches. The sub-field of English for Specific Purposes (of which Vocational ESL or "VESL" is an example) developed under the influence of the communicative approach, particularly with respect to syllabus design.

Specific classroom methodologies that are employed by teachers who adopt the communicative approach might include listening activities, role playing, problem-solving, total physical response (TPR), pair practice, and contact assignments outside the classroom. Morrow offers the following tentative principles of a communicative language teaching methodology:[39]

(1) Know what you are doing (i.e. make sure each part of the lesson focuses on some operation the student might want to perform in the target language);
(2) The whole is more than the sum of the parts (i.e. communication cannot be broken down into its component parts without its nature being thus destroyed...);
(3) The processes are as important as the forms;
(4) To learn it, do it;
(5) Mistakes are not always a mistake.

(4) Humanistic/Psychological Approaches

A final set of approaches to teaching second language acquisition may be summarized as "humanistic/psychological in nature. These approaches share two assumptions: (1) that the affective aspects of language learning are as important as the cognitive aspects; and (2) that the answers to language-learning problems are more likely to come from psychology than from linguistics. Three well-known methodological frameworks which may be characterized as humanistic/psychological include: "The Silent Way," "Suggestopedia," and "Community Language Learning" (CLL).

LITERACY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES

Ethnography provides rich, descriptive data about "the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants."[40] Although research on the literacy demands of everyday life is limited, several studies provide insights into literacy uses in diverse communities. Some of these ethnographic studies provide a detailed look at the everyday uses of literacy in diverse communities with varying literacy levels; two studies address the literacy practices of low-literate adults; and others address everyday literacy of non-native English speaking families.

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[39] K. Morrow, "Principles of communicative methodology," In K. Johnson and K. Morrow (Eds.), Communication in the classroom, London: Longman, 1981.

[40] Judith Goetz and Margaret LeCompte, Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research, San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1984, p.17.

This section reviews what these studies can tell us about the everyday uses of literacy by adults, and the strategies which people with limited literacy skills use in a print-based society. To a small extent, these studies also tell us about adults and technology.

Everyday Uses of Literacy -- Family Studies

Shirley Brice Heath spent nearly a decade in the Piedmont area of North and South Carolina visiting with families in two working class rural communities, and with the teachers she identified as "townspeople."[41] This work was done at a time of technological and organizational change in the textile industry, and of changes in schools brought about by racial integration. In Ways with Words, Heath examines how adults and children in two communities -- Roadville, a white millworkers' community and Trackton, a community of African-American working families -- learn and use language and literacy. In addition, she asked the teachers in her college classes, black and white townspeople, to document the literacy and language uses in their own families. The three communities differed in many aspects, and only the townspeople used language in a way which matched what was expected in school.

Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines described families on Shay Avenue, an inner-city neighborhood in New Jersey.[42] Each family had a child who was doing well in the first grade at school. The researchers spent time with both the adults and children, talking to them about their lives, observing their use of literacy, collecting samples of what they read and wrote. In contrast to much that has been written about inner-city families, they found educated parents, multiple uses of literacy, and active interest in children's education. They also found people living in extremely difficult situations struggling against great odds for better lives for their families.

Hubbards, Nova Scotia, a rural suburb of Halifax, was the site for Lorri Neilsen's work.[43] A new resident in the community, she visited widely, was involved in her children's school, and conducted long interviews with three adults:

> *Differences in their family contexts, schooling, personalities, types of intelligence, and experience have combined to make each of these individuals unique in the ways they*

[41] The main work resulting from this field research is Shirley Brice Heath, Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; along with a number of articles and book chapters.

[42] Denny Taylor and catherine Dorsey-Gaines, Growing Up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988.

[43] Lorri Neilson, Literacy and Living: The Literate Lives of Three Adults, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989.

make meaning in various contexts.[44] [And, we might add, in the ways they use literacy.]

These ethnographic studies help us appreciate the multiple uses of literacy. They also highlight the extent to which the uses of literacy vary in different contexts, defined by culture, economics, geography, and gender as well as by years of schooling or job situation. One of the strongest impressions from the review of existing ethnographic studies is the critical importance of context to how literacy in defined and used.

The studies show reading and writing being used for many purposes. Literacy use varies from person to person, from time to time, from community to community. Judy is a college educated former teacher in Hubbards, Nova Scotia.[45] Her reading includes advertisements, an occasional novel, recipes, card catalog information (as a library volunteer), teaching materials, the newspaper, children's books, the clock, measuring cups, stove dials. Judy writes lists, bills, notes to teachers, letters to friends, notices for the Home and School Organization, notes and outlines for substitute teaching.

In the same community, Jim is a financial officer for a mining firm, and a business writer. He writes letters and reports, many full of financial information. In addition to his work, his reading includes Reader's Digest, the newspaper and an occasional book, a novel or nonfiction. Elizabeth reported that she read slowly and thought she might have a learning disability; yet she reads to learn about a wide variety of topics including motorcycles and management styles. Her business reading includes financial journals and E-mail. She was once a prodigious diary writer but now writes primarily for business purposes.

The low-income people with whom Heath and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines worked might be expected to be less likely to use literacy. And in fact the people from the communities of Trackton and Roadville did use literacy in a more limited number of ways than the townspeople or the Hubbards people. But they, like the working class families of Shay Avenue used literacy in a variety of ways and for many purposes. In many respects their uses of literacy resembled Heath's townspeople or the suburban families Taylor interviewed for an earlier study.[46]

Heath devised a classification of types of reading based on her Carolina study. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines use and expand on the same categories for their families on Shay Avenue.

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[44] Ibid, p. 128.

[45] Neilson, op. cit., is the source for all the examples in these two paragraphs.

[46] Denny Taylor, Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983.

We summarize here the types and uses of reading and writing, using examples primarily from Heath's communities (Trackton and Roadville) where uses of literacy seem to have been the most limited.[47]

TABLE 1

Types and Uses of Reading	Examples
Instrumental - reading to gain information for the practical need of daily life	Labels; telephone dials; school messages; price tags; checks and bills; street signs and numbers
Social-Interactional - reading to gain information pertinent to social relationships	Greeting cards; church newsletters; letters from family; announcements of meetings
News-Related - reading to gain information about third parties or distant events	Newspapers; church magazines; memos from factory or union; circulars from school
Recreational - for leisure time or planning recreation or for story-telling topics	Comics; cartoons; brochures about entertainment programs; newspapers; ball game schedules
Confirmational - to check or confirm facts or beliefs	Bible; sports magazines; warranties and directions; bills and loan notes
Critical/Educational - to increase ability to consider a topic, for school or job needs	Textbooks; bedtime stories for preschoolers

[47] Shirley Brice Heath, "Critical factors in literacy development," in S. de Castell, A. Luke and K. Egan (Eds.), Literacy, Society and Schooling: A Reader, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

TABLE 2

Types and Uses of Writing	Examples
Substitute for oral message - when face-to-face communication is not possible or to reinforce	Notes to school; messages for children; assignments
Social-Interactional - to give information and be courteous	Notes on greeting cards; thank you notes
Memory-Aids - for the writer or others	Grocery lists; labels in photo albums and baby books; notes on calendars
Financial	Checks; mail-orders; forms; notes for taxes
Public writing	Church bulletins and reports

Everyday uses of literacy - low-literate adults

The uses of literacy in everyday life are many and varied. Particularly in modern urban society there are many instances when instrumental uses of literacy are expected. How do people with limited literacy skills cope in these situations? Are they isolated, unable to participate? Are they left out economically? Are they unable to provide proper parenting for their children? Two ethnographic studies focus on the literacy uses and strategies of low-literate adults.

Fingeret looked at the questions of competence in adults with low levels of literacy. She talked with low-literate adults in a northeastern city to discover how they functioned in a literate society.[48] Zeigahn interviewed twenty-seven low-literate adults, both Native

[48] Hanna Arlene Fingeret, The Illiterate Underclass: Demythologizing an American Stigma, Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1982; and "Social Network: A New Perspective on Independence and Illiterate Adults," Adult Education Quarterly, 33(3), Spring, 1983, pp. 133-146.

and Anglos, who live on the Flathead reservation in northwestern Montana, focusing on the individuals' relationships to literacy.[49]

Fingeret interviewed 43 adults who were students in literacy programs or had been identified as having low literacy skills. She discovered that rather than the isolated, incompetent individuals of the stereotype "illiterate," most of the people she talked to led full, active lives as members of social networks, and despite their lack of reading skills, functioned rather well. Some were active in networks on a neighborhood level and some on a more cosmopolitan level that involved them in a wide variety of activities and contexts.

These networks of friends and often family may also include "caretakers," people like caseworkers or attorneys. Members of the network share and exchange: one may do some plumbing, another take care of children, another read. While the person who cannot read and write may be hindered to some extent in dealing with literate society, they are helped by other members of their social network. In most instances, Fingeret found that this is a relationship of exchange rather than of dependency.

Some low-literate adults with whom Fingeret talked are involved in quite broad and "cosmopolitan" social networks. She reports on a building contractor who combined a broad social network of family and friends, an ability to learn by listening, and use of technological aids like calculators and tape recorders to run a successful business and move socially in a wide circle. Other networks are more limited, but satisfying to those in them. Fingeret argues that while someone may be unable to read and write, they can be quite "socially literate."

Zeigahn found that literacy was a tool which some valued and others did not, and which could be circumvented in many situations. In her study examining perspectives on literacy among low-literate adults in Montana, Zeigahn also found reciprocal relationships or social networks. One woman who was a poor reader was able to give advice on marriage and raising children to younger women. Husbands and wives helped each other. In some cases, the relationships were not as satisfactory. Illiterate adults may have to depend on someone whom they do not like or cannot help in some way. The exchange may be more contrived than the give and take of a true social network.

> *It's usually not a big deal, it only takes a few minutes. But also, if it's charting, I'll tell them I'll do some other small task for them if they'll chart for me. Otherwise, they'll crab about me being lazy.*[50]

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[49] Linda Zeigahn, "The Formation of Literacy Perspective," in Robert A. Fellenz and Gary J. Conti (eds) Adult Learning in the Community, Bozeman, Montana: Center for Adult Learning Research, Montana State University, 1990; and "Conceptual framework for a study of community and competence," paper presented at the 29th annual Adult Education Research Conference, Calgary, Alberta, May 6-8 1988.

[50] Zeigahn, op. cit., p. 15.

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Other strategies exist for adults with low literacy skills to cope with literacy demands of everyday life. Fingeret gives the example of a black woman, 36 years old, who has learned the format for job application forms, and knows how to fill one out, even though she cannot "read" the form. This strategy compares with "Jim" from the Neilson study, who talks about his early difficulties with filling out government forms for work, until he came to learn what they really wanted. Once he had figured out the information needed, he did not need to read the complete form any more. The ethnographic literature suggests we all have strategies to deal with unfamiliar or difficult situations. When pipes burst our strategy may be to get out a blowtorch or call a plumber. Both work, both enable us to "function."

Literacy among language-minority families

Ethnographic research on literacy use among non-native English speakers is even more limited than for native English speakers. A small number of studies of families give some insights into how literacy is used, and how much it is valued. Auerbach found the experiences of families associated with the University of Massachusetts at Boston English Family Literacy Program, were at odds with the assumptions of conventional "transmission of school practices" models of family literacy.[51]

The common assumptions of family literacy are: (1) that language-minority students come from literacy-impoverished homes where literacy is not valued or supported; (2) that family literacy involves a one-way transfer <u>from</u> parents <u>to</u> children; (3) that success in school is determined by parents' ability to support and extend school-like activities in the home; (4) that school practices are adequate and it is the home factors that determine who will succeed; and (5) that parents' own problems get in the way of creating positive family literacy contexts.

The reality, Auerbach argues, is very different. First, parents in the UMass/Boston program consistently value literacy and education, reward their children and provide emotional and physical support. This finding is backed up by other research on immigrant families, including the Harvard Families and Literacy Study and a study of Mexican immigrants.[52] Delgado-Gaitan's study of literacy among four Mexican immigrant families found that each used a variety of types of literacy texts in their everyday lives. These included both Spanish and English newspapers, letters from family members, and children's schoolbooks. The parents in the Delgado-Gaitan study did not regard themselves as readers, and had little formal education. Far from not valuing literacy, these and other immigrant

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[51] Elsa Roberts Auerbach, "Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy," <u>Harvard Educational Review</u>, <u>59</u> (2), May 1989, p.169.

[52] J.S. Chall and C. Snow, <u>Families and Literacy: The Contributions of Out-of-School Experiences to Children's Acquisition of Literacy</u>, A final report to the National Institute of Education, 19982; and C. Delgado-Gaitan, "Mexican adult literacy: New directions for immigrants," in R. Goldman and K. Trueba, (Eds.) <u>Becoming Literate in English as a Second Language</u>, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987, pp. 9-32.

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families may value education highly, and see it as the key to upward mobility for their children.

Secondly, the UMass/Boston Program has found that the direction of literacy interactions is not only from parents to children. Children often are brokers or middle-men between their non-English speaking parents and the outside world.

> *Family members each contribute in the areas where they are strongest: instead of the parents assisting children with literacy tasks, the children help their parents with homework, act as interpreters for them, and deal with the outside world for them. Parents in turn, often foster their children's first-language development and help in areas where they feel competent.*[53]

As other studies indicate, Auerbach points out a wide variety of contextual factors which may contribute to literacy development, not simply the amount of specific school-like activities which parents do with their children. School-related factors may be as important as home-context, and parents in the UMass/Boston Program suggest ways that parents can offer "critical support" to their children's teachers, in order to have some input into schooling.

Finally, Auerbach argues that the problems and issues that parents must deal with in their own context can become pathways for increasing their own uses of literacy, rather than becoming "barriers" to increasing literacy.

> *As these issues become part of the curriculum context, literacy will become more socially significant for families, which, as Taylor and others so often remind us, is what characterizes the families of successful readers.*[54]

These limited studies from non-native English speaking families support the findings from low-income native speakers: that we must put away the stereotypes of literacy-impoverishment in the home, of low value placed on education and little involvement in literacy-related activities. Language-minority families, like low-income families, may have many and varied uses of literacy in their everyday lives.

Adults and technology

Adults without literacy skills have been using technology for centuries. Technology of the "machine age" or "industrial age" was quite accessible to use without literacy. Car mechanics, factory machine operators, housewives and secretaries have all used machines, and often fixed machines, without needing literacy skills. However, a new concern about literacy requirements arises in relation to "new technology" based on microchips, lasers and

[53] Ibid., p. 171.

[54] Ibid. p. 176.

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other non-mechanical operations. In everyday American homes, many families are now surrounded by equipment like video recorders and Nintendo games, microwave ovens, touch-tone telephones and answering machines, remote control devices. In their communities, people are confronted by automated tellers at their banks, computerized card catalogs in their libraries, automated ticket machines on subways. At work, whether in restaurants or production lines, clerical or blue collar jobs, computerized technology is fast becoming commonplace.

Many of these new computerized devices have built in some kind of "communication:" when you do the wrong thing, the machine may buzz or flash a message at you. The controls do not work with the logic of mechanical devices. Off is not always the opposite of on: often the same motion on the same button does and un-does a particular operation (off/on; mute/un-mute) or the same button may activate different operations (withdraw funds/complete transaction.) For some people the new technology is easy to operate. Others are mystified.

The ethnographic literature on everyday uses of literacy does not provide much information on either the demands of changing technology or low-literate adults' responses. Fingeret's and Heath's work was done in the 1970's before much "new technology" was widely used in everyday life. More relevant for these families are the demands of a bureaucratic society for information, whether in the workplace or for access to services. Only Neilsen, in her consideration of Elizabeth's work in a systems integration firm, discusses "computer literacy," and this by a highly educated person. Most of the studies make,only brief reference to demands of modern technology.

Heath found that in many ways, lives of the Roadville families were structured in traditional ways, gardening for example, but they also are involved in travel and trying to be "modern." They were interested in new trends in camping and hunting equipment. The expected standard of living in Roadville included a considerable amount of equipment: "a freezer, a sewing machine, garden tools, a power lawnmower, washer and dryer, a car, ..."[55] Today, we could imagine the same families would have VCRs with remote control, CD player, a microwave, and various video games and computerized educational toys. Heath points out that these families may do extra paid work rather than decrease their spending on consumer goods.

Zeigahn reports the educational plans of a 39 year old tribal member which included computers:

Pretty soon you won't be able to work in the woods 'cause they'll be computerized. They already got the sawmill on computer now; before when you went in, they marked your material by hand. Now they just run it through the machine, which has a computer

[55] Heath, op. cit., p. 40.

that grades your lumber. That's why I was thinking about going back to school, to get into computers.[56]

Some adults with limited literacy skills are challenged to learn about computers, as was the man Zeigahn interviewed. Others are able to adopt new technologies without additional schooling. Fingeret found that some people with limited reading and writing skills used the technology available to them to substitute for literacy. A building contractor "took notes" with a tape recorder and used a calculator. Illiterate adults isolated by physical location or fear of visiting at night use the telephone as a supplement to face-to-face interaction to maintain social networks. Electronic media (radio and television) serve as a source of information. Fingeret suggests that:

Literate adults who depend on books for information and paper and pen for communication may be less conversant with media technology than illiterate adults who are "passing" as literate.

While these ethnographic studies do provide a rich discussion of the uses of literacy in various communities, they are quite limited in their consideration of the impacts and uses of modern technology. Of more application to this question is the research on work-related literacy.

WORK-RELATED LITERACY

While concern about the lack of fit between adult workers' literacy skills and the changing demands of work is a driving force behind today's "literacy crisis," ethnographic and other research on work-related literacy give some grounds for optimism. There is now a substantial body of research indicating that work-related literacy demands and uses are very different from school-related ones, and that experienced workers are much more skilled at on-the-job problem-solving using literacy and numeracy than at pencil-and-paper tests measuring the "same" operations.

Two main bodies of research illuminate how workers deal with the literacy demands of their jobs. One consists of a series of assessments of on-the-job reading and writing demands by Sticht, Mikulecky, Diehl and others. The other consists of ethnographic research on "practical problem solving" in work settings carried out by psychologist Scribner and associates.

Reading and writing on the job - job task research

Much of Sticht's research emerged from concerns of the Armed Forces. During the 1960's, the Department of Defense needed more soldiers to fight the heightened Vietnam

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[56] Zeigahn, op.cit., p. 6.

War. It lowered its entrance requirements to admit men who had previously been excluded because of low mental aptitude. This resulted in an influx of marginally literate men into the armed services, and therefore a series of research projects to test strategies for dealing with the problem. The Human Resources Research Organization, HumRRO, conducted a series of research projects beginning in 1968, both to explore strategies for lowering the reading demands of jobs, and to develop a prototype literacy training program to upgrade functional competency. Additional research was later conducted by Mikulecky, Diehl and others in the 1980's in various civilian work settings.

The research has several consistent findings:

1. Workers in most types of employment do considerable job-related reading. The mean times reported in different studies range from 30 minutes to 2 hours per day. When Mikulecky compared workers' literacy activities with those of high school and technical school students, he found that workers' average daily reading times of 113 minutes was higher than that of students in school.[57] As Spencer reports, most of the studies agree that workers at all levels do substantial amounts of reading, and that the reading done by lower level workers is neither less nor easier than that done by higher level workers.[58] The only exception she found was among the service workers in her research, all restaurant and motel workers, who encountered significantly fewer and easier job reading demands than did either blue collar or white collar workers. Although higher level workers, especially professionals, do not necessarily read higher reading level materials, they do face a greater range and complexity of job reading demands.

2. Job-related reading is primarily "reading-to-do" (as opposed to "reading-to-learn" which is the primary purpose of school-based reading). As Mikulecky says:

> *Workers read and write to accomplish tasks, solve problems, and make evaluations about the usefulness of material ... Students in secondary schools read primarily to obtain information needed to answer teacher questions.* [59]

Diehl summarizes the main kinds of literacy materials used and created on the job.[60] Overall, material with "connected discourse" is used more often than material consisting

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[57] Larry Mikulecky, "Job literacy: The relationship between school preparation and workplace actuality," Reading Research Quarterly, XVII(3), 1982, p. 418.

[58] Shirley Jean Spencer, Occupational Literacy as a Variable Construct in the Mineral Extraction/Energy and Service Industries, Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas A & M, August 1987, p.3.

[59] Larry Mikulecky and Jeanne Ehlinger, Training for Job Literacy Demands: What Research Applies to Practice, Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, 1987, p. 4.

[60] Diehl, op.cit., p. 226-227.

primarily of charts and other displays; and material of a few pages in length is used more often than longer materials. The principal types of materials are:

** One to three page texts: memos, letters, newsletters, notes, written instructions, short reports;
** One to three page chart, graph or other display: order forms, invoices, blueprints, schedules, short parts lists with prices;
** A book or part of a book: manuals, catalogs, articles.

Other work-related literacy materials noted by other authors include signs and notices, account statements, policy manuals. Work-related literacy demands are strongly repetitive and contextualized, that is related to knowledge which the worker already has. Workers have repeated opportunities for reading and re-reading the material, and their job experience provides them with knowledge which they can use in comprehending the written material. This helps explain the next finding.

3. Workers commonly comprehend job-related material at least two grade levels higher than they can comprehend general reading material. When Mikulecky, Diehl and others administered general reading tests and job-related reading tests, they consistently find that workers score higher on the job-related reading. And while there is a significant correlation between general reading ability and job-related reading ability, it explains only a small amount of the variance in job reading ability.[61] Factors other than general literacy affect workers' skills at reading on the job.

4. General literacy skill is only one small factor in job performance. Mikulecky has carried out several studies assessing job performance and comparing it with literacy skills: he found that different literacy skills did not account for differences among performance groups.[62] He suggests that "metacognitive" skills are more important than literacy skills per se:

> *superior job performers differ from their less able counterparts in their ability to think through what is needed on the job and then to apply reading and writing abilities to complete these job tasks efficiently. Superior workers know when to skim, when to look for new information, how to decide which information to jot down, how to compose meaningful messages to co-workers, when to check a reference, and how to find ways to organize notes and information to better do their jobs.*[63]

[61] William Allan Diehl (1980), Functional literacy as a variable construct: An examination of attitudes, behaviors, and strategies related to functional literacy, Ed.D. dissertation, Indiana University, p. 251.

[62] Larry Mikulecky, "Literacy task analysis, defining and measuring occupational literacy demands", paper presented at Adult Education Research Conference, Chicago, IL, 1985, p. 12.

[63] Mikulecky & Ehlinger op.cit., p. 11.

5. Workers with lower level reading abilities do not necessarily adopt other strategies to get their work done. Diehl, Sticht and others have looked for evidence of use of strategies such as "auding" (listening to others explain) by lower level readers. Their research has not shown any higher use of these alternative strategies by lower level readers. Instead, "Use of the context, and the repetitious nature of job tasks, probably enables many workers to read material on the job that they would not be able to read in isolation."[64]

Literacy demands of work for non-native English speakers

As is the case with the ethnographic studies of literacy uses in everyday life, the primary subjects of the research on literacy practices at work which are summarized here have been native English speakers. The lack of similar studies of literacy demands and practices on the job by non-native speakers of English is particularly troubling in view of the demographic changes taking place in the U.S. workforce. Non-native speakers of English are becoming an increasingly important force in American worklife. As a result of recent waves of immigration there has been substantial growth of heavily populated non-English speaking communities across the country. It is estimated that by the year 2000, eighty percent of those entering the workforce will be women and minorities, and many of these will be non-native speakers of English.[65]

Understanding of workplace literacy demands and uses for non-native speakers of English is still in its infancy. Clearly, one of the most basic distinctions that needs to be drawn between the literacy needs of native speakers and non-native speakers of English has to do with the added burden of developing oral/aural proficiency, as well as cultural understanding. As one source notes,

> *. . . the limited English speaker also needs communications skills for the workplace, even in the most basic, entry-level jobs. Though workers frequently learn routine tasks by watching demonstrations of co-workers, the reality is that routines are interrupted, new assignments are given, and equipment breaks down. Workers need to be able to inform supervisors about problems, and supervisors need to be understood when they give instructions and make requests.*[66]

It is somewhat ironic that one of the best sources on investigating workplace language functions for non-native speakers and developing workplace-based ESL programs remains the

[64] Diehl op.cit., p. 264.

[65] W.B. Johnston and A.H. Packer, Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century, Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute, 1987.

[66] BCEL (Business Council for Effective Literacy), "Job-related basic skills: A guide for planners of employee programs," BCEL Newsletter, No. 11, 1987, p. 5.

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work of British researchers Jupp and Hodlin.[67] Their work, which was of considerable merit and rigor, was nonetheless done almost twenty years ago in British factories, focused on the language needs of primarily South Indian workers. It is likely that the workplace language demands that contemporary industry in United States in the 1990's places on immigrant workers from a wide variety of cultures may be somewhat different by now.

Subsequently, a limited series of isolated studies have investigated limited-English-proficient workers in the United States and issues of language and culture. One study investigated the kinds of entry-level jobs taken by non-native speakers of English.[68] Another inquired about the opinions employers hold of refugee employees.[69] A study in 1985 investigated promising patterns of job-related training design for non-native speakers of English.[70]

In a survey of 52 employers in the Chicago area, Mrowicki found that six primary language-related factors were perceived as "problems" with LEP workers[71]:

1. Failure to ask when something is not understood.
2. Ability to understand company policy.
3. Ability to report problems on the job.
4. Following directions.
5. Obeying safety regulations.
6. Relations with other employees.

Unfortunately, however, none of the foregoing studies have been integrated, and there has been no consistent research agenda either articulated or pursued in this critical issue area. Rather, there have been scattered articles and monographs which advocate various approaches, while providing little research evidence as to their success. There is, then, limited comprehensive and reliable research information that describes the communicative, cultural, social, and critical thinking demands of the workplace on this population. Lack of a knowledge base, however, does not preclude training programs from employing a variety of methodologies. For example, bilingual vocational training (BVT), vocational English as a

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[67] T.C. Jupp and S. Hodlin, Industrial English, Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975.

[68] H.H. Cangampang and C.L. Tsang, Integrating limited English speaking workers into California's labor force. San Francisco: Career Resources Development Center, 1988.

[69] J. Latkiewicz, Industry's Reactions to the Indochinese, Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Technical College, 1982. (ERIC Document No. ED 241 664)

[70] D. Hemphill et al., Promising Programs and Practices: Vocational education for limited English proficient students, San Francisco, CA: Chinatown Resources Development Center, 1985.

[71] L. Mrowicki, Project Work English. Employer Needs Assessment: Preliminary Report, Arlington Heights, IL: Northwest Educational Cooperative, 1984.

second language (VESL), and related approaches have been in place for a number of years, and will no doubt expand in the foreseeable future.[72]

Practical problem solving on the job

Insights into often-impressive cognitive skills brought to bear in commonplace situations emerge from the research on "practical intelligence" which some cognitive psychologists have been conducting over the last ten or more years. Wagner and Sternberg summarize this work:

> *... we believe that much of the learning that matters to success in real-world pursuits happens in the absence of formal instruction. Furthermore, we view traditional IQ tests as measures of only a subset of the competencies required for maximal learning from and performance in everyday situations.*[73]

Scribner describes the concept of "practical thinking" as "mind in action."

> *... thinking that is embedded in the larger purposive activities of daily life and that functions to achieve the goals of these activities ... practical thinking stands in contrast to the type of thinking involved in performance of isolated mental tasks undertaken as ends in themselves.*[74]

Particularly exciting research relating to cognitive and literacy activities on the job has been carried out by Scribner and her associates in a milk processing plant.[75] The researchers carried out detailed and systematic observations and experiments to reveal how workers develop strategies for solving familiar problems on the job. The workers use literacy texts in formulating the problems (order sheets, price tickets) and in devising solutions (price lists, box labels). But their re-statement of the problem and their own solution to that problem go far beyond the constraints of the texts themselves.

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[72] D. Cichon, J. Grover and R. Thomas, Industry-based Bilingual Vocational Training: A Review of Related Literature, Dover, NH: Development Assistance Corporation, prepared for Office of Vocational Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1990.

[73] Richard K. Wagner and Robert J. Sternberg, "Tacit knowledge and intelligence in the everyday world," in R.J. Sternberg and R.K. Wagner (Eds.) Practical Intelligence: Nature and Origins of Competence in the Everyday World, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 51.

[74] Sylvia Scribner, "Thinking in action: Some characteristics of practical thought," in Sternberg and Wagner, op. cit., p. 15.

[75] Sylvia Scribner, "Studying working intelligence," in Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave (eds) Everyday cognition: Its development in social context, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 9 -40; and Sylvia Scribner, "Thinking in action: Some characteristics of practical thought" in Robert F,. Sternberg and R.K. Wagner, Practical Intelligence: Nature and origins of competence in the everyday world, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 13-30.

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In one example, researchers recorded observations of product assemblers filling mixed case and unit orders. Assemblers often did not literally follow the written order. An order for 10 quarts could be formulated as one case less 6 quarts, and could be assembled in a variety of ways from partially filled cases, depending on what was available. On all occasions, the mode in which the order was filled:

> *... was exactly that procedure that satisfied the order in the fewest possible moves - that is, of all alternatives, the solution the assembler selected required the transfer of a minimum number of units from one case to another.*[76]

The "least-effort" solution was arrived at even though it often required the assembler to switch from one base number system to another. Errors were virtually non-existent for experienced assemblers. In contrast, novices and students made more mistakes and more often followed literal solutions which involved many more transfers.

The researchers found that experienced workers had creative and sophisticated solutions to commonplace problems. They found that components lying outside the formal problem (objects and information -- including texts -- in the work environment, goals and interests of the problem solver) were incorporated by workers into the problem formulation and solution. They found continuing new ways to solve old problems. Scribner concludes:

> *Since creativity is a term ordinarily reserved for exceptional individuals and extraordinary accomplishments, recognizing it in the practical problem-solving activities of ordinary people introduces a new perspective from which to grasp the challenge of the ordinary.*[77]

But in pencil and paper arithmetic tests administered to the same workers who were so accurate and sophisticated in their mathematical skills in practical problem solving, they made many errors on problems similar in format to those they solved so well on the job.

The importance of this research to everyday uses of literacy is that literacy is itself an aspect of cognitive activity, and is also commonly used in everyday settings to solve problems. Scribner's research fits with that of Mikulecky, Sticht et al in that it suggests some of the ways in which experienced workers use literacy to solve job-related problems, and also that the difference between skilled and effective workers and novices may lie more in their ability to perform practical problem solving than in their reading ability per se.

[76] Op.cit. p. 17.

[77] Op.cit. p. 28.

PROBLEM-SOLVING IN EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

Other studies of problem solving in everyday situations also show how selectively and creatively people use literacy in these activities. Lave, Murtaugh and de la Rocha studied problem solving activities in the prosaic setting of grocery shopping.[78] "Expert" shoppers (who ranged in formal education level from 8th grade upwards) used a variety of complex and fairly sophisticated mathematical calculations to aid in their decision-making in grocery stores. Of particular interest here is how they used literacy.

The authors argue that: "In general, over time, the expert shopper transforms an information-rich arena into an information-specific setting."[79] That is, although grocery stores are "print-rich' -- full of signs, labels, packaging texts -- people are very selective in what they read. Mostly, the researchers find that expert shoppers look at the signs showing where different items are shelved only in an unfamiliar setting, or when they are shopping for a non-routine item. For the most part, shoppers establish routine routes through grocery stores which take them past the shelves where they buy items, and avoid excessive walking along aisles which are not used. Shoppers also usually consult packaging, price labels and so on only when they are establishing a new choice or updating an old result. Most purchases are routine, based on old assessments of relative value.

The findings of the ethnographic research stand in sharp contrast to the same shoppers performance on standard paper and pencil arithmetic tests. Twenty five shoppers were tested with a pencil and paper math test on the same operations they used in grocery shopping. Average scores were 59% on the arithmetic test, "compared with a startling 98 percent - virtually error free - arithmetic in the supermarket."[80]

Since there was no variance in problem solving success in the supermarket, researchers used "frequency of use" of arithmetic as an alternative index of facility with arithmetic in the everyday setting. Number of years of schooling correlated highly with performance on the test, but not with frequency of calculation in the supermarket (which suggests that schooling teaches how to take tests, but not how to use knowledge). Years since completion of schooling likewise correlated significantly with arithmetic test performance, but not with frequency of grocery-shopping arithmetic.

Lave et al's research, along with the work of Scribner and others in work settings, suggests that our methods for assessing people's literacy are inadequate. Expert problem solvers routinely devised complex least effort solutions requiring quite sophisticated

[78] Jean Lave, Michael Murtaugh and Olivia de la Rocha, "The dialectic of arithmetic in grocery shopping", in Rogoff and Lave, op cit, pp. 67-94.

[79] Ibid. p. 76.

[80] Ibid., p. 82/83.

mathematical operations -- but performed rather poorly in tests designed to assess proficiency in the same operations. Sticht, Mikulecky and Diehl have shown that workers can commonly read and comprehend work-related literacy materials more difficult than they can read in a general reading test. This research suggests that many people who perform below targeted levels for "functional literacy" may nevertheless be functioning adequately, or to their own satisfaction, in their everyday lives. The small amount of ethnographic research on adults with low literacy skills seems to confirm this possibility.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Research on everyday uses of literacy may be limited, but it is full of insights for how literacy should be conceived, and how literacy education programs should be conducted. Ethnographic and other studies challenge the assumptions of the "deficit" concept of low-income and low-literate adults. They underscore the importance of context in literacy use and the concept of reading and writing as a process for negotiating meaning between person and text. They reveal "many literacies" in everyday life, and many strategies with which adults with low literacy skills deal with literacy demands. The findings challenge us to conduct more research, and clarify and expand the research questions for our ethnographic profiles of adults with low literacy skills.

Perhaps most importantly, the research depicts adults who are strong and resourceful, skilled and knowledgeable. It is often assumed that low-literate adults live impoverished lives, socially and culturally as well as in terms of literacy. These studies suggest that to lack reading skills is not necessarily to lack other skills: indeed the adults Fingeret and Zeigahn studied had many other skills, had full social lives and much cultural knowledge. They were respected and "functional" members of their communities. Research by psychologists into practical problem solving in everyday life shows people creating sophisticated solutions to familiar problems, in which literacy plays only a small and selective role. Gaining information from literacy texts is only one source of information, and one that can often be circumvented in familiar contexts.

Secondly, the research reveals the vital role which context plays in relation to literacy. To view literacy as a generic set of skills which can be measured in standardized tests would be to ignore the research showing how much more skilled workers are at reading job-related materials than at general reading tests, and how much more accurate people are at mathematical operations contained in everyday problem solving than in pencil and paper tests. Recent developments in cognitive science indicate that knowledge and processes are intertwined, and the research on everyday uses of literacy confirms that when the process (literacy as skill) is separated from the knowledge (everyday context), everyone looks much less skilled than they really are.

Just as there are different literacies in different aspects of people's lives (work, home, shopping, school) so there are different ways that people have found to relate and adjust.

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These may include resistance (refusing to read work-texts, for example, not because they are unable to read, but because the texts are associated with power relationships). They may include using members of social networks as "readers." They may include using technology to take the place of literacy (tape recorders, for example, instead of writing memos, telephones instead of writing letters). They may include spouses and children serving intermediary roles in relation to certain aspects of the outside world.

The research also raises many more questions than it answers. It raises questions of how we should think about literacy, and how we should develop literacy education programs. If people become skilled at dealing with familiar everyday problems, how do they respond to changes (in work, in technology, in literacy demands, in social relationships)? Do the changes become incentives for further learning, or do people devise other ways to adapt or ignore the changes?

If most learning takes place outside formal educational settings, can educational programs borrow some of the processes by which informal learning takes place? If cognitive skills are not as easily transferred from one context to another as we had once thought, can educational programs be devised to facilitate such transfers? If so, how? If standardized literacy and numeracy tests are so poor at revealing true "functional" abilities, what can take their place in the educational process for assessing present skills and those that need attention?

The research on everyday literacy also raises many more questions about how adults with low literacy skills live their lives in a print-based society. We know less than we should about how people in different kinds of communities and cultures actually use literacy, and their strategies which may substitute for school-taught literacy. We know little about the kinds of demands that changing technology place on adults with low literacy skills. We do not know enough about how they use technologies for literacy. We know little about their expectations for their own and their children's literacy, about their attitudes to literacy and to technology. We know less than we should about whether they think they should further their education and literacy skills, and what factors affect their decisions about further education. These and other questions will focus the ethnographic profiles of twelve adults with low literacy skills, from a wide variety of social, economic, cultural and geographic backgrounds.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS - FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILES

1. **How do people use literacy in their daily lives? What literacy practices are employed by adults of different backgrounds and life experiences in their homes, workplaces, and communities?**

What is the nature of people's literacy and numeracy use?
- what do they read and write? (collect samples)
- do they read alone or with others?
- what are the purposes for their reading and writing?

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- what do they do with it (discuss?)
- who is audience (for writing)?
- how do they use numeracy?

Special focus on work-related uses of literacy:
- do they use reading or writing skills to do their job?
- are there written materials around them at work (notices, signs, memos)?
- do they read them? If not, why not?
- what are the purposes for reading and writing on the job?
- do they have ways of dealing with texts at work?

Special focus on shopping activities:

- How do people use print in making decisions and choices in their shopping behaviors?

What strategies do people use which substitute for school-taught literacy (and numeracy)? Possible examples:
- memorizing
- shortcuts
- own techniques
- codes
- learning outlines of forms
- signs
- selective use of "readers"
- observation of others
- trial and error

Do people who don't read well see and interpret signs (e.g. no smoking, bathrooms)?

Do people who don't read well frequent restaurants and other commercial places which use pictures and symbols rather than written forms?

Do adults with low literacy skills use "confirmational reading" as in Taylor's and Heath's studies?

Do adults use literacy skills to get around (maps, road signs, bus schedules)?

How much do people depend on literacy to operate equipment?
- When do they look at the instructions?
- What if they can't read the manual (can't read, or it's a translation and unreadable) -
- how do they get the equipment to work?

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How was literacy used in their family of origin and how do they use literacy in their own families now?

- children's schoolwork
- reading to kids
- notes/school reports/teachers
- what did their parents read?
- what were their parental attitudes toward literacy and schooling?

2. How do technologies other than literacy expand or diminish the role of literacy in these adult's everyday lives?

How have adults learned the skills necessary for daily living (driving, use of other forms of transportation, geography, cooking, laundry, etc.)? If they need to know more, how would they find out?

What is their use of the phone book, phone, 800 numbers for information?

What equipment and technology do people come into contact with on a daily basis, and what are their strategies for using and understanding them?

What are their attitudes toward this equipment and technology?

How do people accept or resist technology?

If adults are proficient at mechanically-based technology, can they transfer these skills to computerized technology (e.g. push buttons for on and off rather than knobs; nothing to see/take apart)?

What are the gender differences in literacy demands, and responses to new technologies, strategies for dealing with new situations?

How much TV do people watch? What are they watching? Is some taking the place of reading (news, recreation, information)?

What uses do their children make of technology?
- Are the children more proficient than their parents? - Do children serve as intermediaries between their parents and new forms of technology (e.g. VCRs, remote controls, computers).

3. What expectations and beliefs do these adults hold about literacy and other technologies used for literacy?

What are adults' expectations about their own literacy, about their children's literacy and education?

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Do they expect to adjust to new technology or to avoid it? Do they believe that they have the skills to cope with whatever happens?

What are their expectations about how changes will affect their lives (computers, telephones, TVs, VCRs, automation)?

4. **Are the perspectives and expectations of those with limited literacy skills at variance with societal demands? What are those demands and who is making them?**

Are there differences in literacy demands for adults from different settings? (Rural vs urban differences; class and cultural/ethnic differences; age and gender differences)
- Are there differences in openness to new technology?

Does concern about the social setting make it more difficult to deal with new technology (not wanting to appear foolish, hold people up while you are reading directions)?

What are the literacy demands on the job and are they changing?

What changes have the adults seen in terms of literacy demands in their everyday lives?
- are there some aspects in which they now have more difficulty than before - e.g. fixing cars, banking?
- how are they dealing with these changes?

5. **What kinds of incentives would lead adults to further their own literacy skills and knowledge? What barriers stand in their way?**

What are the childhood school experiences of the adults?

How do they perceive these childhood experiences?

What are their perceptions and experiences with adult education programs?

What are the pressures for adults to return to formal education programs?

What are their goals and aspirations?

What stands in the way of their goals and aspirations?

What would lead them to work on their own literacy skills and knowledge?

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APPENDIX B

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REFLECTING ON OUR RESEARCH

Kathleen Bennett deMarrais

The purpose of this portion of the report is to provide a more detailed description about our research process. Although not usually part of a formal report, we believe it is necessary to reflect on our research methods as part of the context for this study. In doing so, we provide others with information that may help in designing future studies using similar methodology. In the discussion below we relied heavily on our experiences as described in researchers' fieldnotes and our records of participants' own words. We attempted here to pinpoint some of the joys as well as the difficulties, issues and concerns in engaging in this type of research.

A TEAM EFFORT

This research project was a team effort. Juliet Merrifield, David Hemphill and Kathleen Bennett deMarrais began the process by designing a skeletal outline for the research methodology. Beth Bingman conducted a pilot ethnographic profile based on these initial methods, which enabled us to refine and enrich the design. At that point, we involved the research teams where much collaborative effort was put into designing processes which could be commonly used by the individual profilers. Team meetings were held regularly throughout the research period in which we determined who the participants would be, discussed gaining access to them, refined interview questions and data analysis procedures, and exchanged drafts of the profiles in different stages of completion. The result of this collaborative effort was the establishment of a warm, supportive and energizing research environment. A sense of the process is captured in the words of one of our profilers:

Good collaborators help each other do better work. This didn't surprise me, but I was reminded how helpful it is to work as a team instead of an individual. It's so enjoyable to actually have others help think about your work in a supportive way, and to do the same for them.

GAINING ENTRY

One of the initial dilemmas we faced as researchers was that of gaining entry into the lives of participants. The process of locating and gaining permission to conduct research with the participants was often a complicated and time consuming process. For example, as we reported in the pilot profile, Beth Bingman had to make several trips to the participant's house before she was able to arrange the first interview. This Appalachian man lived in a rural area of southwest Virginia with no transportation or telephone, so access to him was a bit more complicated than some of our other participants.

Kathleen Bennett deMarrais relied on her husband to help set up the necessary conditions for her to ask Les Willard to be a participant in the study. Les is very hesitant to talk with

strangers, particularly those he regards as better educated than he. Since Les and her husband work for the same company, the contact was made through this connection. Kathleen then became friends with Les as he did electrical work at her house. After several weeks she was able to interest him in the study. Since he was uncomfortable with being audiotaped, only one lengthy audiotaped conversation was done. This conversation took place at the end of several weeks of informal conversation and observation; the rest of the study relied on fieldnotes of informal conversations and observations. After each visit Kathleen and her husband recounted all the information they had gained on tapes which were later transcribed into fieldnote form. It helped to have two people involved in this process. As Les became more familiar and trusting, he was able to share some very personal and painful experiences.

Loida's experiences in gaining entry, although quite different in context, provide a view of the complexity and unpredictability of this process. Loida describes gaining entry to her participant's life:

> *My first contact with Maria came through her son Tito whom I interviewed for another research project. Shortly after he completed the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) Maria decided to enroll and prepare to take the GED test too. Tito had said his father was educated but Maria, his mother, did not know even how to read. This sentence gave me the idea to interview her. I asked the HEP coordinator to ask Maria if she would be interested in talking to me about her experiences as a low reader and she agreed to meet me during my next monitoring visit to the program.....I arrived at Mountainville at 10:40 a.m.. Maria was not in class because her boyfriend had taken her car and she did not have transportation. When told that I was in the classroom to talk to her, Maria invited me to come to her house. I drove to her trailer park with the HEP coordinator and stayed at her house for four hours. Maria Reyes and I sat at the dining table and I explained to her the research. I offered to come back another time after she said she was cleaning the house and taking care of her two grandchildren, but she said it was okay to start today and continue tomorrow at the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) classroom. I asked what language she wanted to conduct the interview and she said she preferred Spanish. ...We were interrupted by the arrival of her youngest son Tito and when one of her two grandchildren woke-up from a nap. In spite of the interruptions, the conversation went on smoothly and I felt at ease talking to her. I felt that Maria was eager to cooperate and be helpful. She answered the questions directly and with little elaboration.....When I listened to the tapes that evening I realized how difficult it was going to be to capture Maria's voice through the translation of the conversation to English. Maria's Spanish combines the rural dialect of migrants with anglicized words in a very unique way. The tapes were translated to standard English to facilitate the analysis of the data.* [Loida's fieldnotes]

COLLECTING DATA

The process of ethnographic data collection requires people who are flexible, creative and sensitive to cultural differences. Even with adequate training, unless researchers have the sensitivity to observe and understand the particular circumstance in which they find themselves, the research process can be extremely difficult and uncomfortable. The following example written by the researcher who completed the profile on Nura Tola described the way in which she was sensitive to Nura's needs and cultural framework:

The information on Nura Tola was obtained through a number of meetings in her apartment, located in the eastern side of San Jose, CA. The interview was conducted in Oromo language--mother tongue to both the interviewer and the interviewee. Nura didn't feel comfortable being tape-recorded without rehearsing the conversation ahead of time, therefore, each interview had to be conducted twice--first without a tape recorder, then with the tape-recorder on. Though time consuming, Nura's method of rehearsing the conversation helped bring up certain issues that would have been forgotten otherwise.

Nura insisted that we ate lunch together before we started the interviews, then we would start the conversation sipping on the spicy tea she always served after lunch. We always started by talking about life back home since Nura seemed to enjoy talking about her life back in her village. She seemed happy and relaxed as she talked about her home and would become very serious and sad when taking about her experiences in the refugee camp in Northern Somalia. [Lensa Gudina's field notes]

Data collection in practice is usually more difficult under any circumstance than we expect it to be. It is sometimes difficult to be as observant or as present in an interview as we should be without immediately filtering the data through our own perspectives. Data collection requires an openness as well as total attention to our participant in the research process. With this type of research it is also easy to become overwhelmed with an enormous amount of data within a short period of time. Connie's rich description of her own participant observation experience illustrates these points:

It's harder to do fieldnotes well than it appears. I found myself enjoying writing the fieldnotes, but realizing that doing good fieldnotes is a lot of hard work. I enjoyed the sheer volume of them -- I sort of impressed myself as they began to pile up -- the transcripts, the notes from each meeting, the interview with the manager, the observation at work, the trip to the furniture store. I had to really force myself to "see with new eyes" so that I could do better descriptions for the field notes. Sometimes I didn't try hard enough. I remember the first day I went to meet Yuvette at her apartment, I felt like I really did see with new eyes. I remember even now how brilliant was the blue of the sky. I remember the contradictions between the place, the grinding poverty of it, and the beauty of the sun and the wind that day, and how despite the despair all around, people had planted flowers at their doors and somebody was singing. That day I felt like

I breathed in all of it, wasn't blind to it at all. That day I felt like I could see and I could feel and I could write.

Another of the difficulties in the data collection phase of the research process was in asking sensitive questions of the participants. The participants in this study have all lived for years as outsiders to the literate world and as such, many struggle with feelings of inadequacy or low self esteem. As part of the research design we were asking them to talk about the ways in which their lack of skills affected their personal and professional lives. The struggle for all of us was to attempt to encourage the participants to talk about these sensitive issues in a way that would be respectful of them. This is not easy and is not always possible as one of our researchers illustrates:

I don't like to make people uncomfortable. The experience of interviewing made me confront that right away and realize that the fear of making someone uncomfortable can be a barrier to becoming a good interviewer. It was so hard to ask the difficult questions of Yuvette, such as -- Is the man who lives here the children's father? I was fairly certain he was not, but I never asked. After a couple of weeks she mentioned that he was not. Do your two children have the same father? I never did find that out. How much total money do you earn, with your AFDC and part-time waitress salary and tips? I also didn't ever ask that. I have to find some way to hold on to the sensitivity that makes me want to help people feel comfortable, but also not be so timid about that as to neglect asking important questions.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

It is not often possible to know how participants feel about the research process or what effect we have on them as we engage in long, penetrating discussions. The process of talking about our lives can be disconcerting and uncomfortable at times. We, as researchers, like to think that the participants benefit from having someone to listen to their stories of life experiences. Maria Reyes certainly supports this beneficial view as expresses her feelings about the research process in the essay she wrote shortly after being interviewed:

"Three Feelings I Got During My 'Reading in Daily Life Interview"

While I was interview I felt good about my self because I rember about my father & mother & old times. I rember about my jobs where I use to work. I felt depress when I rember the bad time when I was talking about the good time. There were bad with good --But mosted I try to rember good by rembering about my kids when they were little. I felt good about my self when i can say good thing I did and i can say god thing about my kids they done for me or other. I feel good for the things I said in these interview I becase they are true and they are about my family & me. And because today I feel good. [We have presented this essay exactly as written by Maria]

However, we also need to examine the risks within the research context. For example, since Kathleen has worked with Les on this project, he seems more and more dissatisfied with his current job, often expressing his desire to quit. He has also been extremely ill for the past month with no health care. Of course, we need not attribute any of this to the research project, but we do need to consider that in his sharing of the distress related to the lack of benefits, salary and independence in his job, he seemed to feel more keenly that he should have something more for himself and his family. A change in jobs for Les will certainly be disrupting for the family, whether it leads to a better or worse economic situation for him. Those are certainly his decisions, but researchers do need to consider the effect the process of doing this type of research has had on the participants. Calling attention to sensitive issues may force participants to take action they may not otherwise take.

GETTING INVOLVED IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Through the research process, many of us became intimately involved in the lives of people we knew only vaguely or did not kno at all. We were all changed through the process of the research. One of the difficul esearchers face at the end of such a project is taking leave of our participants. How this done is an individual dilemma. Some researchers will continue to have contact with the participants others will not. Clearly several of the researchers have developed friendships that may last for a time. Others feel the need to continue to be involved in some way in the participants' lives. Connie expresses her conflicts in working through the relationship she established with Yuvette:

> *I sometimes felt I was just using Yuvette, even though she was being paid. It seemed a lot to ask, to invade a person's privacy in that way. I wanted to tell her all about my own life, my own problems, my own dreams, just so it wouldn't all seem so one-sided, so invasive. That's hard to do, and I don't necessarily think that a research participant always cares to know those things about a researcher. It is hard to break off the relationship too. I found myself wanting to play with the kids, to offer a ride to work, to help solve problems, to tell Yuvette about my husband when she told me about her boyfriend, to be a friend instead of have a business relationship. If feels funny to think about interacting with such intensity for a few weeks and then acting as if the only reason I was interested was just because it was my job to be interested, to suddenly stop talking and spending time together.* [Connie's reflections]

Although our involvement with the participants may be limited, it has enriched our own lives. We have been given the gift of viewing life through the eyes of people we would not usually have occasion to interact with in our daily lives. We have been able to listen to the stories of those who live on the margins of society whose voices are often silenced by conditions of poverty and the powerlessness which accompanies it.

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APPENDIX C

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF RESEARCHERS

CALIFORNIA

Lensa Gudina, is a refugee from southern Ethiopia, a member of the Oromo ethnic group (shared by the woman she profiled, Nura Tola). She was an undergraduate at Washington State, and is currently in the graduate program in adult education at San Francisco State University. She is planning her thesis work, to conduct a participatory native language literacy program in southern Ethiopia.

Sally Ianiro, for the past two years has taught in the community-based literacy program for high school drop outs which the person she interviewed (Oliver Gonzales) attends as a student. Before that she worked in other ESL programs mainly with Latino populations. She is a graduate student in adult education at San Francisco State University, conducting her thesis study focussing on media literacy and its impact on non-native speakers and youth.

Chui Lim Tsang, is an immigrant from Hong Kong. For the last nine years he has been director of Career Resources Development Center, one of the largest community-based literacy and job training programs for immigrants and refugees in San Francisco. He has a doctorate in linguistics from Stanford University, and has conducted other research projects focussing on employment issues for cultural minorities.

Tom Nesbit, in an immigrant from Great Britain. He is a graduate of the adult education program at San Francisco State University and soon to be a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia. He has worked as a literacy teacher in a community-based youth literacy program in San Francisco. He has conducted evaluation studies of labor education in San Francisco, and has an extensive background in Britain in labor education.

Mari Gasiorowicz, works as a researcher for a non-profit regional research organization, the Center for Applied Local Research. She has directed numerous studies at the community, city, county and state levels on education, substance abuse, mental health and social service delivery. She is a graduate of the adult education program at San Francisco State University, and has conducted a study of decision-making by Mexican American women about returning to school to study English. She speaks fluent Spanish, and was a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa.

David Hemphill, is Associate Professor at San Francisco State University, and co-director of the Center for Adult Education. He is the author of texts on training immigrant populations in job-related skills. He has fifteen years experience as a practitioner and program coordinator in a community-based program for immigrants to study English and find jobs. He teaches courses and conducts research in areas including: multicultural education, qualitative research methods, program planning and adult teaching methods.

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APPALACHIA

Mary Beth Bingman, is a Graduate Research Assistant with the Center for Literacy Studies, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a doctoral student in adult education. She has a B.A. in History and a Masters in Special Education from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has worked as a special education teacher in elementary schools, and has taught community college classes for rural Appalachian adults. She has extensive experience working with Appalachian communities, especially in southwest Virginia, in community-based education programs in the region, and in qualitative research.

Faye Hicks-Townes, is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She has worked for eleven years as a high school English teacher, and for one year as an English instructor in a community college. She is currently planning her dissertation, to focus on multi-cultural education.

Loida Velazquez, is Director of the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, part of a federal program providing basic skills education for migrant workers. She is a doctoral candidate in adult educatiom at The University of Tennessee, and has made extensive study of migrant populations with particular attention to the role of adult education in their lives. She has conducted case studies of migrants, testified before Congressional committees, and is currently completing her dissertation, a qualitative research project on migrants in the southeastern United States.

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