

ATTENDING TO RESISTANCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF RESISTANCE AND
ATTENDANCE IN AN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION CLASSROOM

by

ARLEEN LYDA PARE

B.A., McGill University, 1967
B.S.W., McGill University, 1975
M.S.W., McGill University, 1976

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Arleen Lyda Pare

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explores the relationship between student attendance and student resistance in an Adult Basic Education (ABE) classroom. Resistance is interpreted to mean the positive opposition to dominant cultures and discourses (of which schooling and literacy are a part), as is described in the work of Henri Giroux. The study was conducted in a community college Fundamental ABE classroom. It documents and describes instances of student resistance that were gathered through three and a half months of videotaped observation and twelve interviews. The initial question focused on how ABE students, who generally have marginalized identities, managed to remain in ABE programs despite literacy's almost inherent thrust toward standardization and the mainstream. As I pursued the relevant literature and reviewed the data, the theoretical concept of resistance began to influence the research question, so that it finally became "What is the relationship of student resistance to student attendance in an ABE classroom."

In the data that I gathered, resistance presented as a complex phenomenon that could be divided most usefully into five different categories. Comparisons of student resistance categories with student attendance patterns suggested that students with more, and more varied, resistance styles were the students who attended most regularly. Most of the students who attended sporadically or who dropped out of the ABE program either demonstrated no resistance, very little resistance, or only the type of resistance that I categorized as the withdrawal type of resistance.

These comparisons imply that ABE teachers and programs could benefit from framing their experience of student resistance as a positive, political phenomenon to be recognized, valued, encouraged and worked with (not against) in ABE settings. Further it suggests that encouraging students with withdrawal type resistance to resist in other styles might also encourage them to keep attending.

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I also thank my committee who read the drafts and provided the advice so that this thesis could finally see completion.

The idea for this exploration began four years ago during an observation in a Vancouver adult literacy classroom.¹ The class was engaged in a grammar lesson. The teacher had asked the class for a sentence with an object and one of the students volunteered an example. He walked to the front of the class and confidently wrote "I seen the bus" on the chalkboard. It seemed like a good example to the student. The teacher, however, was concerned; although the sentence included an object, the verb was wrong. She corrected the sentence by crossing out the verb, "seen", and substituting the standard verb, "saw". The student was chagrined. He stood at his seat and, pointing to his sentence, demanded to know why "seen" was wrong. He repeated his sentence loudly and with conviction as if to demonstrate its rightness and acceptability; however, the teacher was steadfast in her refusal to accept it, even though the reasons for her refusal were not made clear. It was simply not correct. Other students were also confused. They considered the original version preferable and argued for it; however, their point of view was not accepted. The teacher explained that although they could say "I seen the bus" in conversation with their friends, it was not acceptable in literacy class. As the students filed out of the classroom for the break, they gathered around the offended student and confirmed their disapproval of the incident.

This event left me wondering about the possible impact of this cultural conflict. Would the student interpret the event as a challenge to (and diminishment of) his working class language, culture and identity? Would he decide that the adult literacy classroom was not for him, that the personal costs were too great? Would this result in him dropping out? Or, alternately, would the solidarity of his classmates and his capacity to question and resist the teacher's point of view sustain him?

The situation interested me because it involved the politics of identity (in this case, working class identity) in adult literacy education. The particular manifestation observed in this classroom event was the politics of language usage. Jennifer Horsman, in her 1990 study of

¹. The observation referred to in this introduction occurred three years before I undertook this current study.

women and literacy in Nova Scotia, conflates literacy, schooling and "standard" language as a compounded form of social control. She writes:

The imposition of "standard" language has been part of the process of creating a "social police." Thus the teaching of reading and writing has been the inculcation of a particular form of language claimed to be "standard." Through the use of this language "the exploited classes, child and adult, have been induced to consent to the conditions of their own cultural subordination" (Batsleer et al. 1985, 36). Which language, or form of language, becomes the "standard" is a matter of power. The process of imposing "standard" English labels all other English "below standard" and makes "standard English" appear not as a particular historical and class-based form of language. . . Studies which concluded that working-class English is a restricted code unsuitable for abstract thought have been influential, even though further studies have refuted these conclusions. . . . Because "standard" English is the language of schooling, literacy, for most children, has meant learning a [second] language [The student's own language] comes to seem incorrect, which can easily lead to students seeing themselves as inferior. This domination . . . goes a long way toward explaining how school has been a place of silencing and becoming "stupid" for working-class children from many communities. (Horsman, 1990, 12-13).

Language form is only one manifestation of cultural identity. I suspected that although the classroom event I had observed was a transparent and extreme example of school culture versus a student's (working class) culture of origin, it was not an isolated incident. Similar cultural encounters likely occur frequently in educational settings, at various levels of awareness, and concerning other elements of cultural identity, such as, for example, cultural values, styles, expectations, tastes or interests.

I then wondered whether cultural conflicts in adult literacy education might affect the attendance of an adult literacy student; and whether, within the North American experience of high attrition rates in adult literacy programs, various sociological conditions in the learning context, including conditions of dominance and difference, might be related to attendance.

For decades, literacy practitioners and researchers have noted the difficulty of attracting and sustaining adult literacy students in adult literacy programs and have identified attendance as a major problem in literacy programs. Further, the majority of adults with limited literacy skills do not enrol in literacy education. Audrey Thomas reported that, according to earlier researchers, "especially at the lower literacy (or Fundamental) levels . . . Only one percent to six percent of the target population enrol in programs" (Thomas, 1990, p.5). In addition, once enrolled, many

learners do not remain in literacy programs. "Dropout rates have been quoted to be as high as 20 to 60 percent" (Thomas, 1990, p. 5). Anderson and Darkenwald found that dropout from adult literacy programs was four times as high as dropout from other adult education programs (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979, p.5).

Given the difficult early school experiences reported by many low literate adults, it is not surprising that many do not return to school as adults. As well, if adult schooling replicates or echoes past difficulties, which would undermine adult cultural identity or dignity, then this might affect students' attendance in literacy programs. Michelle Fine and Pearl Rosenberg "found that students who drop out of high school came disproportionately from the social classes, races, and ethnic groups most alienated from schools. Standard curricula tend not to reflect their lived experiences, nor provide much encouragement for their pursuit of education" (1983, p. 269-270). Fine and Rosenberg concluded:

Dropping out of high school needs to be recognized not as aberrant and not as giving up. Often it voices a critique of educational and economic systems promising opportunity and mobility, delivering neither. Thus far, the critique stems disproportionately from those least likely to be heard. (p. 270)

These high school dropouts occasionally return to Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes as adults and become adult literacy students. Against high odds some adult literacy students persist in programs that can intrinsically involve personal, cultural, and educational struggles for the adult student. This is particularly so since most adult literacy students also lead lives that are most often economically and socially demanding. But also undermining is the adult literacy student's economic, cultural and social marginality: their lifestyles and learning styles are seldom reflected, sanctioned or encouraged in adult literacy schooling.

In this study I will explore the issues of marginality, resistance, and ABE attendance in adult literacy education. In Chapter One, I outline the theoretical framework for the study and pose the research questions. In Chapter Two, I provide a chronological review of recent North American research literature on attendance in ABE, demonstrating the paucity of ethnographic, critically oriented research in this area. In Chapter Three, I describe the research process and the

setting for the study. In Chapter Four, I present the study's findings. My conclusions and discussion, including implications for ABE instruction, are presented in Chapter Five.

I became sensitized to the fundamental importance of literacy in North American society when my youngest son started to have reading problems in grades one and two. I would try to imagine what he could do when he grew up if he never learned to read and write. He was bright and curious, but how would our society receive him if he did not acquire literacy skills? Not very well, I thought.

Years of work as a social worker and years of my life as a feminist have exposed me to life at the margins of society. I value the margins. Years and years of schooling have taught me how much education draws us to the middle, to the mainstream of society, and how hard it is to protect marginal identities in schooling environments.

All of this background has lead me to this study and has influenced the particular perspective from which I view the material.

Chapter I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Resistance

The concept of resistance is pivotal to this study. As I searched for theoretical positions that made sense of the lives of the learners in the adult literacy program that I studied, the concept of resistance emerged. It is used by critical education theorists and by post structuralists to explain, and to shape, opposition to the dominant status quo.

I use the concept of resistance in two ways, both as it has been used in resistance theories proposed by critical theorists such as Henri Giroux, and as it is used in post structuralists' discussions of opposition to dominant discourses. Although my use of the concept of resistance derives from both critical education and post structuralist theory, I have not privileged one over the other. I operate within both theoretical traditions as each sense of resistance applies. Patti Lather encourages critical researchers to move theoretically among the three theoretical positions she views as most useful: critical theory, post structuralist theory, and feminist theory. In this study I primarily use critical theory (in the specific form of resistance theory) and poststructuralist theory, both of which will be elaborated. I use feminist theory as an underlying and guiding position rather than as an overt theoretical framework.

There are several reasons for choosing the concept of resistance to inform this study. Primarily, the issue of cultural conflicts and differences between school culture and student cultural backgrounds lends itself to resistance theory. As Henri Giroux expresses it:

Culture is both the subject and object of resistance; and the driving force of culture is contained not only in how it functions to dominate subordinate groups, but also in the ways in which oppressed groups draw from their own cultural capital and set of experiences to develop an oppositional logic (Giroux, 1983, p. 281-282)

The issues of student attrition (or dropout) and persistence may be issues of oppositional, resistant action (or of accommodating action) and the relationships therein are worth exploring.

Most adult literacy students have numerous obstacles to overcome in order to remain in literacy programs. Apart from the overt demands and economic deprivations that shape their lives

and sometimes determine whether they will remain in a literacy program, literacy students also have other, less obvious struggles. They frequently struggle with negative past school experiences and many report struggles with being stigmatized as "illiterate." In addition, they may have difficulties with aspects of current school culture (that generally mirrors white, male, middle class values and concerns), as did the students in the classroom event I described earlier. Any one of these issues can discourage adults from returning to school for literacy education. As well, these issues can discourage adult literacy students from remaining in literacy education.

Many adults enter adult literacy programs only to leave within days or weeks. A few leave because they get a job (Beder, 1991). For some, other life events, often pertaining to child care or health concerns, intervene to postpone or prevent their schooling (Thomas, 1990). However, there are many who leave for whom there are no such concrete explanations. Neither do demographic variables provide adequate understanding of the reasons and the process of dropout. Nor is there adequate understanding about what sustains those who remain and persist in literacy programs. As the literature review reveals, several survey studies have linked demographic traits and psychological dispositions to ABE attendance, but little is known from observation studies and attendance continues to be problematic in ABE programs.

Hal Beder studied the issue of adult literacy program enrolment. Although Beder's study concerned barriers to enrolment, the responses he collected have implications for issues of attendance once a student has enrolled. Beder found, for example, that among the six most significant barriers to literacy enrolment, five pertained to adults' discomfort about returning to school. The most cited reason for not returning to school, "I would feel strange going back to school" (1990, p. 213), indicates that low-literate responders felt they did not belong in a school environment and that they anticipated feeling uncomfortable there.

Allan Quigley, using the concept of resistance in his 1990 study of public school dropout and adult literacy non-participation, suggested that student resisters dropped out of school because they did not want to forfeit their cultural identity or their freedom. He argued that they choose, in

the spirit of dignified resistance, to leave the schooling system rather than succumb to its rules and demands.

Little has been written about resistance in adult literacy education. Most critical theorizing and research has related primarily to the public school system for children. However, because most literacy learners are from marginalized groups and many are dropouts from the public school system (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979), there is reason to consider the concept of resistance in adult literacy education. Adults with limited literacy skills come from a range of demographic backgrounds; however, in North America, most are not from the dominant cultures. They are not, typically, middle-class; many are poor; many are not white; many are immigrants whose first language is not English; and there are slightly more women ABE students than there are men (Beder, 1991). Further, although there is increasing awareness and effort to make adult literacy education more learner-oriented, school has been and still is predominantly white, middle-class, and male-biased in its structures, processes, expectations and content.

Critical Education Theory

Critical theorists such as Michael Apple, Pierre Bourdieu, and Henri Giroux argue that the school system serves the interests of the dominant culture in maintaining its hegemonic position in society. "As part of state apparatus, schools and universities play a major role in furthering the economic interests of the dominant class" (Giroux, 1983 p.279). While this form of socialization may occur with more impact at the elementary and high-school levels, there is no reason to believe that adult literacy students might not find the socializing component which accompanies school-based literacy alienating and personally undermining.

Unlike school children, whose school attendance is compulsory, adults who return to schooling are generally considered voluntary students. When critical researchers study oppositional behaviours in elementary and high-schools, they are studying the behaviours of involuntary (and younger) students. These oppositional or resistant behaviours have been broadly identified as, for instance, disregard for authority, testing school rules and developing counter-cultures within the school (Willis, 1977).

Adult students, however, can express their opposition ultimately in terms of their attendance, a mode of resistance that is not fully available to involuntary students. Adults may attend sporadically as may involuntary students; however, unlike involuntary students, adults may also leave the program altogether. This is not to suggest that all adult literacy dropout is oppositional or resistant. Further, adult resistance might take other forms within the parameters of attendance. I raise the issue of resistance because it would appear that there could be some connection between attendance and resistance. I also raise it as a possible or partial explanation only.

Horsman reported on a woman in her study, who was unhappy about the literacy program she had attended: "She found the whole process depressing and upsetting and so exercised the one power she had: She dropped out" (Horsman, 1990, p.212). Horsman goes on to explain that although other women in her study did not drop out, they persisted through exercising other forms of resistance which resulted in their remaining in the programs. Given the high rate of attendance difficulties in ABE, it seems useful to further explore forms of resistance that may be associated with persistence (or regular attendance), as well as forms of resistance that may be associated with sporadic attendance or with dropout.

While it is apparent that resistance behaviour could be related to non-attendance (dropout or sporadic attendance), I also wanted to understand how students who remain in adult literacy programs manage to persist and attend regularly in the face of apparent cultural conflict. Resistance theory encourages the examination of human agency within culture and cultural production and acknowledges the contradictions that exist within ideologies, institutions, groups, and individuals.

[When] a theory of resistance is incorporated into radical pedagogy, elements of oppositional behaviour in schools become the focal point for analyzing different, and often antagonistic, social relations and experiences among students from dominant and subordinate cultures. Within this mode of critical analysis, it becomes possible to illuminate how students draw on the limited resources at their disposal in order to reaffirm the positive dimensions of their own cultures and histories. (Giroux, 1983 p. 292)

Although Giroux refers above to conflict among students, I use his concept of resistance to examine the relationships between the subordinated cultures of adult students and the dominant school and social cultures. In particular, I am interested in examining the students' capacity for resistance, on the assumption that some forms of resistance may reaffirm and promote persistence (regular attendance) in adult literacy programs.

Aside from shifting the theoretical grounds for analyzing oppositional behaviour, the concept of resistance points to a number of assumptions and concerns about schooling that are generally neglected in both traditional views of schooling and radical theories of reproduction. First, it celebrates a dialectical notion of human agency that rightly portrays domination as a process that is neither static nor complete. Concomitantly, the oppressed are not seen as being passive in the face of domination. The notion of resistance points to the need to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the connection between their own experience and structures of domination and constraint. . . . [P]ower is never unidimensional; it is exercised not only as a mode of domination, but also as an act of resistance. . . . (Giroux, 1983 p.289-290)

Post Structuralist Theory

I also use aspects of post structuralist theory. Patti Lather describes post structuralism as "implod[ing] the concepts of 'disinterested knowledge' and the referential, innocent notions of language that continue to haunt the efforts of educational inquiry to move away from positivism and loosen the grip of psychologism on its theories and practices" (Lather, 1991 p.6).

Poststructuralist theory relies on the concepts of discourse and subjectivity. I use post structuralist theory primarily for the concept of discourse. From the post structuralist perspective, I follow Horsman in her use of the concept of discourse, which includes the concept of resistance, in order to speak about resistance and attendance issues in an adult literacy classroom. Although the concept of discourse is most widely associated with Michel Foucault (eg., 1980; 1982) and with feminist post structuralist scholars (eg., Terese De Lauretis 1986; Chris Weedon, 1987), Horsman explains her use of the concept in the following way:

When we speak of illiterates, . . . or any other category, we have a whole complex set of terms and assumptions implied by the category that allows us to understand what it means to be "illiterate". . . . All of these constitute discourse. This oral and written language is found in and helps to shape bureaucratic processes and social relations. In this way it helps to form our subjectivity, our sense of self. . . . Through my language and actions I may be able to adapt my role and contest the assumptions embedded in these discourses. But discourses which are endorsed by

bureaucratic processes have a weight which in themselves will shape my life. . . . It is [the] dual sense of being a subject [(1)subjected to and (2) author of] that is crucial to discourse. People are seen neither as helpless puppets subjected to control through discourses, nor as the traditional rational individual who makes free choices. Discourses are not monolithic. Although discourses which are made powerful through institutional frameworks are an important form of control, we can also contest and challenge them. As we participate in resistant discourses, we are part of a process of changing perceptions of experience and forming new subjectivities. (Horsman, 1990 p.22-23)

Literacy learners, then, like all of us, both resist and enter aspects of the dominant discourse. Their resistance, (or acceptance) of the dominant discourse will be individual, but can reflect collective experiences and may affect their attendance in adult literacy programs. My use of resistance assumes a sense of dignified agency on the part of the literacy students, which I wish to emphasize in the evolution of the research.

Feminist Theory

I also rely on feminist theory in several ways. As a feminist of twenty-five years, feminism informs my perspective. I am sensitive to the dynamics of dominance, subordination and resistance, especially in terms of women's experience in patriarchal structures and this has sensitized me to the experiences of other subordinated groups. In this way I draw on personal experience to inform my research, and in particular, I draw on my own experience of resistance (and accommodation) as a woman student with a feminist perspective who has roots in the working class.

I have found that the political language regarding acts of resistance is mainly masculinist, often describing resistance in terms of grand heroism and polarization. In opposition to this trend, in this study, I also look for the subtleties (and recognize the ambiguities), the small words and acts that indicate that the student is resisting the subtle conforming discourse inherent in the acquisition of schooled literacy.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In this study, I am primarily interested in exploring how adult literacy students, most of whom are from a variety of cultures outside the dominant and school cultures, and who are often

stigmatized and marginalized, manage to cope with the demands, the cultural impositions, and their own positions within the adult literacy education system. I explore this in terms of the concept of resistance, and how the students' particular ways of coping, in terms of resistance, affect their program attendance. My initial question was, "What coping mechanisms do adult literacy students employ in order to adjust to, and remain in, an adult literacy program?" Gradually, resistance theory and the concept of dominant discourse influenced my analysis, and my approach. My research question became more firmly based in the concept of resistance, and evolved to: "What are the forms of resistance in an adult literacy program; what is the relationship of resistance to attendance in an adult literacy program; and does the educational environment influence resistance?"

In pursuing this exploration I made the following assumptions about resistance:

- 1) that resistance is generally a healthy response in circumstances of subordination;
- 2) that resistance can take many forms, some of which will result in persistence and some of which will result in attrition; and
- 3) that different students will resist differently and will resist different aspects of the school and/or dominant cultures and/or discourses.

Chapter 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Adult literacy has become an important issue on the agendas of politicians, industrialists, and educators in the past decade; many proclaim a literacy crisis. While others dispute the label of crisis, there is no question that literacy and illiteracy have captured public attention in North America. However, one of the most persistent adult literacy program problems, along with the problem of very low enrolment levels, is the equally enduring problem of very high attrition or dropout rates. Adult students leave Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in far greater proportions than they leave other areas of adult education.

More than two decades of research literature addresses the issues surrounding attrition in adult literacy. The majority of the research, based on quantitative survey research methods, attempted to establish relationships between demographic, psychological or social variables and reasons for dropout or persistence. This body of research yielded little solid information on the phenomena; most concluded with the recommendation for more study, while acknowledging the enormous complexity of the issue of attendance (including persistence, sporadic attendance, and dropout or attrition) in Adult Basic Education. All the quantitative studies were restricted by the nature of quantitative research and generally produced superficial demographically based results that do not result in much understanding, from a student perspective, of the issue of attendance. Given that this was the case for the majority of the studies, I have presented this review of North American research literature relating to ABE attrition and persistence in a chronological order (for the past fifteen years). It demonstrates how little research methodology, perspectives, values and categories have changed or shifted over almost two decades. It also reveals the gaps in the research in terms of how the question of ABE attrition has been defined and how it has been studied.

Only one author in this review is different. Allan Quigley addressed the issue of resistance in relation to attendance and he did so using a range of adolescent literary fictional characters. Despite its adolescent scope and literary-based methodology, I have included this study in

particular because of its focus on resistance and its use of resistance theory. As well, few researchers explored adult literacy dropout in terms of the social and cultural power imbalances implicit in adult literacy education and none, in the following review, used an ethnographic approach. These gaps inspired the direction of the present study.

Generally, in the past literature, the adult literacy student has been classified and studied based on demographic characteristics and/or on personality traits. In some studies the student's social connections are examined; in others, the student and the educational setting were explored in relation to attendance.

Jones, Shulman and Stubblefield (1978)

In 1978 Jones, Schulman and Stubblefield noted that "the high dropout rate among Adult Basic Education students is a long standing source of concern to ABE teachers and administrators" (p. 47). Their study sought to relate student persistence to student social support systems. They argued that much previous research focused on sociodemographic and personality variables in relation to persistence and that this type of research failed "to generate any reliable basis for predicting what types of adult students are most likely to persist in such programs" (p. 48). They avoided the approach of directly asking students why they had dropped out of ABE programs "since this procedure is subject to contamination by social pressures" (p. 48), implying that many ABE dropouts might not have been comfortable telling researchers about what they might have considered to be unacceptable reasons for leaving ABE programs.

The researchers distributed two questionnaires (the Adjective Check List and the Social Climate Scales) to 163 students initially; however, in order to be included in this study, the students had to belong to three social support systems: work, family and church. This limited the final sample to 70 which seemed to indicate that many ABE students may not work, belong to a church or have family.

The researchers found that integration and involvement in the three social support systems (church, work, and family) could predict students' persistence, but not dramatically. They further found that social support system variables, in combination with sociodemographic variables,

predicted persistence more effectively than social support alone, but that sociodemographic and personality variables were weak predictors.

This model defined social support narrowly and in terms of middle-class values; as well, it excluded many students who were not supported. It was also limited, typically, by the reduced sample; however, the emphasis on social environments was a conceptual advance on earlier research.

Anderson and Darkenwald (1979)

In 1979, Anderson and Darkenwald prepared a wide-reaching report on participation and persistence in adult education with emphases on various sub-groups, including ABE. They used data from the 1975 American Census and multiple regression techniques for data analysis.

They found that ABE students are much more likely to drop out than adults in other types of adult education programs. They noted that:

while such students are, in general educationally and economically disadvantaged, and disproportionately black, all of these factors are controlled in the regression equation and thus we must look elsewhere for an explanation. Perhaps reasons have to do with threat, difficulty, and frustration often experienced by adults in these programs. (p. 27)

Nevertheless, they did find that level of educational attainment is by far the most salient variable for adult student persistence. Age, race, geographical location, and job-related reasons for enrolment were also significant to persistence in this study.

While Anderson and Darkenwald suggested "threat and frustration" as reasons for attrition, they did not suggest that these reasons, which are related to the concept of resistance, be explored further. It is possible that the concept of resistance, which may not have been significantly recognized or articulated at the time of their study, could be more useful now in the exploration of their results.

Wilson (1980)

In 1980, R. K. Wilson reported on his study involving retention and dropout as compared to personal variables in adult upgrading programs. Using the Adjective Check List, which he administered to 142 students at enrolment, he compared results for students who persisted and

for students who left. He found that students who persisted scored significantly higher in the categories of Self-Control, Endurance, Deference, and Nurturance than students who dropped out. Students who left the program scored significantly higher in the number of unfavourable adjectives they checked, as well as in the categories of Autonomy, Change and Succorance (the need to be taken care of).

Given that the school culture is different, and difficult, for most returning literacy students, these results are interesting in terms of who is likely to resist, and who is likely to accommodate to, those different and difficult conditions. While those who left described themselves as "more rebellious and hostile" (p.183), those who remained described themselves as "more obliging, tactful, diligent, practical and compliant" (p.183). Those who left "were seen as less socialized . . . [and] less willing to subordinate self" (p.183). Wilson recommended, among other things, that peer relationships be promoted to encourage attachment to the school program. While peer relationships may promote attachment to school, they may also encourage solidarity among culturally marginalized students (a form of resistance) in the school, which may also work to promote persistence.

Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984)

In 1984, George and Karen Diekhoff investigated the relationship between dropout and sociodemographic variables gathered from ABE students at intake. They found that five intake variables were related to dropout in the U.S.: youth; Hispanic ethnicity; unemployed but ready to work status; lack of General Education Development (GED) completion goal; and the presence of other family members with low literacy skills. The Diekhoffs analyzed the intake information of 66 enrolling adult literacy students. However, they used only 44 sets of data as only 44 students were able to present complete data.

They also attempted to cross-validate their study one year later. This attempt failed to demonstrate the predictive powers of the five intake variables cited in their first study. They explained that intake procedures had changed in the intervening year so that a waiting period

screened out and reduced the number of potential program dropouts. However, they did find that the five variables could predict waitlist drop-offs.

Lewis (1984)

In 1984, Linda Lewis examined ABE persistence and institutional and personal support systems. She sorted the various types of reference groups and significant others into a typology of five types, according to their level of positive support for ABE, and then analyzed their impact on the ABE students. Lewis interviewed 214 ABE students and founds that friends and family members were described as both the most supportive (in some cases) and the least supportive (in other cases) of ABE student persistence. Teachers were perceived to be the most important resources for ABE students and married students felt they received more support than single students.

Lewis recommended that "significant others involved in the lives of students must be welcomed along with the student participants into the educational setting so that they can learn more about what is going on" (Lewis, p.78). Among other benefits, this recommendation promotes some inclusion of the ABE students culture in the ABE program.

Taylor and Boss (1985)

In 1985, Taylor and Boss used the personality variable referred to as "locus of control" as the basis for study. Locus of control conceptualizes that individuals believe either in internal control (that an individual can control their own behaviour) or external control (that an individual's behaviour is beyond their own control or is in the control of another). Taylor and Boss pursued this study despite poor results from former studies based on the same variable. They reported that a similar 1980 study by Newson and Foxworth failed to produce positive results because the Newson and Foxworth student subjects received a training allowance which financially encouraged persistence.

Taylor and Boss hypothesized a positive relationship between internal locus of control and ABE completion. Their findings supported this hypothesis and led them to recommend that counsellors and teachers work with the students who exhibit external locus of control in order to

change the students' attitudes and behaviours, despite their acknowledgment that locus of control beliefs, which result from the reinforcements of a lifetime, would be very difficult to change. Given the high rates of ABE dropout, it might also be useful to analyze the origins of locus of control beliefs to explore their relationship to student membership in dominant or in marginalized groups.

Garrison (1985)

In 1985, Garrison investigated the predictive power of goal clarity and course relevance versus the predictive power of psychosocial variables upon persistence. He found that persisters entered ABE with a higher completed level of education and worked more hours on their ABE courses. He also found that those who dropped out of the ABE program had clearer goals and judged the courses to be more relevant to these goals. He interpreted this latter anomalous finding by suggesting that those who left the ABE program were unrealistic in their occupational expectations, which led to dropout. Garrison also found that one social affiliation variable was predictive as well: persistence was positively associated with social integration at school. This last finding is supportive of the idea that students who are more socially, and culturally, comfortable in school (ie. more socially integrated) may be more likely to continue attending.

Darkenwald and Gavin (1987)

In 1987, Darkenwald and Gavin used social environment theory (from Lewin, 1938 and Murray, 1936) to examine the relationship between dropout and the social ecology of the ABE classroom. Social environment theory assumes that behaviour is a joint product of individuals and their environment; they influence each other especially in micro or proximal environments such as classrooms. Darkenwald and Gavin used Moos' theoretical perspective and his Classroom Environmental Scale (CES) to measure the classroom environments along three dimensions or domains: the Relationship Domain (to assess in-classroom support and involvement); the Personal Growth or Goal Orientation Domain (to assess basic goals of the setting); and the System Maintenance and Change Domain (to assess control, orderliness, change response etc.). These three broad domains each subsume a set of dimensions. Earlier research suggested that student

dissatisfaction was a function of discrepancies between student expectation of a classroom environment and their actual experiences in the classroom environment. Darkenwald and Gavin cited a 1978 study by Irish that "indicated that in-class negative reinforcers were the most potent predictors of dropout" (p.154).

Darkenwald and Gavin administered the CES to 91 original study subjects in five ABE programs. They found that the most powerfully predictive variable was the affiliation dimension subsumed under the Relationship Domain. Students who left the ABE program were less affiliated than students who remained. This supported the findings of previous attrition researchers, such as Boshier (1973), Garrison (1985), Irish (1978), and Wilson (1980).

However, as with other quantitative descriptive studies, this research is problematic: the inability to randomly select subjects; the definition of dropout; and the attrition of initial subjects (from 91 to 77) all lead to possible distortions in the results. Nonetheless, the indication that the affiliation variable is important with regard to persistence in ABE is of interest to my current study in that cultural inclusion is associated with affiliation.

Garrison (1987)

In 1987, Garrison again addressed the issue of ABE student dropout, this time using Boshier's congruence model and tests in concert with other socioeconomic and psychological variables to compare their respective predictive powers. He administered various tests to 110 adult students in tenth grade mathematics classes. He found that: 1) socioeconomic variables had no significant predictive power; 2) nine psychological and learning setting variables contributed to the explanation of 16.4% of dropout/persistence behaviour; and 3) the Boshier self-other variable was predictive but in reverse of expectation in that persisters experience more self-other incongruence than those who dropped out. However, Garrison conceded that his study neither discounted nor confirmed Boshier's congruence model any more than Boshier's study did.

Quigley (1990)

In a literary approach to ABE dropout research in 1990, Allan Quigley, using the concept of resistance, analyzed the lives of several school-resistant fictional characters. Although this

study did not address the issue of adult attrition, its grounding in resistance theory is of special interest for my current study. Quigley suggested that:

[for] the schooling resisters in the sample, resistance meant a visible or invisible struggle to be free within a certain values system, culture, moral set, or emotional environment not found in schooling. Their decision was a process of growing awareness that a certain freedom or liberty was being denied through schooling and the dominant culture. They choose to resist schooling while embracing an alternative values system. . . . (p. 68)

Quigley asserted that resisters are resisting the values of the dominant culture, the normative values and assumptions that underlie schooling. Although Quigley suggested that it may be inaccurate to assume that participants and nonparticipants are similar, it may be that the issues of cultural marginalization that both potential ABE students and enrolled ABE students must deal with are similar. Quigley proposed that nonparticipation can be understood on theoretical and ideological grounds. This implies that persistence and attrition may be, at least partially, interpreted on these grounds as well.

Martin (1990)

In 1990, Larry Martin applied the general model of attrition developed by Tinto in 1975 to the prediction of persistence and attrition in ABE programs. Tinto's model posits that a student's integration into the social and academic systems of an educational program most directly relates to continuance in that program which leads to new levels of commitment." Tinto based this model on Murray's needs-press theory (Murray, 1938). Martin further explained:

[for] example, the student friendships and faculty support which result from social integration can be viewed as important social rewards that become part of the person's generalized evaluation of the costs and rewards of attendance and that modify educational and institutional commitments. (p.34)

Although Tinto first developed his model based on college students living in college residences, Martin suggested that ABE students, like college students, must adjust "their behaviours and expectations to the academic environment of the institution [while] returning to an established home/community network" (p. 35).

Martin surveyed an original 151 ABE students by telephone, collecting background data and information about the students' expectations of their ABE program; 59 students received follow-up questionnaires. He identified three categories: completers, persisters, and dropouts.

Martin found that while Tinto's model discriminated between the three categories, it identified completers most successfully. Four academic variables distinguished completers: more student-instructor organizing time; more learning effort; more favourable student assessments of instructors' knowledge, both initially and subsequently. In Martin's study, neither social integration nor institutional commitment variables distinguished completers from persisters and dropouts. Martin concluded that completers may have had shorter term goals that do not permit social integration or institutional commitment and that their initial higher level of education allowed them to manoeuvre through the academic system more confidently. Persisters were found to be older students with fewer children under thirteen, who sought teachers' advice more often, and who were more focused on GED completion.

Martin concluded with a caveat:

While this study suggests that academic integration and short term goals are key variables in the success of completers, it leaves unresolved the role of social integration for students with lower levels of academic achievement and longer-range goals. This is a research and practice question of particular importance in the inner-city where sociologists (Wilson, 1987) have observed long-term trends of increasing levels of social isolation among increasingly economically impoverished populations. (p. 173)

Beder (1990)

Hal Beder, also in 1990, conducted a survey on reasons for ABE non-participation.

Although his study did not focus on attrition I have included it in this review because his findings have implications for resistance and attendance. His finding that the most significant reason for individuals with low literacy skills to not return to school (the listed response: "I would feel strange going back to school") was relevant in terms of student perception of school culture and their own identities (p. 213). As well, of the six most significant reasons for not enrolling in ABE, five related to what was referred to as disposition. Including the reason cited above, these were: "There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age;" "Going back to school would be

like going to high school all over again;" "I am too old to go back to high school;" and "A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life" (p. 213-214). If these reasons, categorized here as dispositional (implying a personal trait), were also understood to be sociological (implying that the social circumstance contributes to the situation) this would broaden the meaning and application of this study. These chosen statements reflected discomfort or incredulity about schooling by individuals who did not feel acceptable to, nor accepting of, the school system: they implied that nonparticipants felt strange, different, and removed from the educational system, and were unable to identify with schooling. It is likely that most ABE students have felt similarly prior to enrollment; most speak freely of feelings of fear, discomfort, uneasiness, and strangeness when they enter ABE classes for the first time. Beder's study emphasized that individuals with low literacy skills do not feel at ease about school, suggesting that they feel marginalized by school. Because the main reasons for non-participation cited in Beder's research are suggestive of the concept of resistance (despite their application to non-participants, as opposed to enrolled ABE students), Beder's results were encouraging for this study.

Thomas (1990)

In 1990, Audrey Thomas wrote a report for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology in British Columbia with the purpose of exploring reasons for nonparticipation and high attrition in adult literacy programs in the province. Because most ABE attrition research has been conducted in the U.S., Thomas' report was relevant to this study. Thomas noted that the issue of attrition rate, or dropout, assessment was a difficult one and, in particular, was impossible to estimate with any certainty in B.C. For example, no ABE administrators supplied the requested attrition data to Thomas. Thomas also noted that there were problems posed by differing definitions of attrition and by definitions that implied that leaving was a problem of student failure.

She distinguished between dropout, stopout (also referred to as dropin or sporadic attendance), and persistence, stating that often students who leave return later. She acknowledged that the reasons for students leaving are complex, but found that the most often cited reasons fell into either work-related or family/health related categories.

Thomas' findings reveal the following information regarding student retention: ABE students often lead chaotic lives and supports are important to retain the less motivated. The ABE students she interviewed recommended peer counselling, tutoring, and assistance with program transitions. Learners said that the group and social interactions in ABE programs were important to them.

Thomas used student quotes and ideas to enrich her study, one of which was of particular interest to this study. A non-participant said: "Education corrupts people. Educated people have their hand out for the almighty dollar and they forget their fellow human beings. We are destroying the planet" (p. 46). This perspective clearly reveals that education is not necessarily viewed positively; there are those who profoundly resist it.

Thomas' extensive study is of especial value to this study because it was BC based (most ABE attrition research in North America is US based), included the concept of resistance, used the subjects' own words, and emphasized the complexity of attrition research.

Quigley (1992)

Most recently (in 1992), Quigley again explored the question of ABE attendance. He noted that ABE student attrition was still considered the most important program issue in the field, reaching rates of 60-70% in some ABE programs.

Quigley examined whether some ABE students drop out because of negative former school experiences. He compared persisters' and dropouts' expectations of ABE and their belief in education at the time of entrance. His findings were anomalous in that dropouts were slightly more at ease in school than persisters and they believed more in school. However, this anomaly may be explained by his third (other) finding, which was that they also felt that they did not receive sufficient attention from teachers. Dropouts were younger than persisters, more likely to be loners, and more likely to seek help more from counsellors than from teachers.

Quigley recommended that students who appear disinterested (the potential dropouts) need to receive extra attention in the first three weeks of school. He asserted:

we need to further investigate the attitudes of those who persist against all odds . . . those who quit and try and try again and those who never come back to ABE/literacy. Thus, further research is needed to respond effectively to the expectations of those willing to enter, to more clearly reveal the complex dimensions of "school", and to understand better the life-long love-hate relationships so many adults, formally educated and undereducated, have with their past schooling. (p. 31)

Commentary

Most ABE attendance research to date has been of the survey or descriptive variety. Despite occasional contradictory and anomalous results among some of these reviewed studies, they appear generally to agree that those who persist in ABE programs are more likely to be older, to seek teacher advice, to have higher levels of education upon entrance, to be interested in GED completion, and to connect socially in class.

The main problems with these studies relate to the difficulty of applying quantitative methods with sufficient rigor to complex ABE issues and to the difficulty in accessing ABE populations. These problems include survey sampling techniques: access to ABE populations is

limited and therefore random sample selection and sample size maintenance is not possible. Those who leave ABE programs are often difficult to locate. Any follow-up research further reduces the sample sizes and threatens to distort results. Subjects appear to be self-selected in so far as results come from the small number of subjects willing to be interviewed or surveyed. Darkenwald and Valentine state that their study's external validity "can only be established by replication. This is true for all factor-analytic research" (Darkenwald and Valentine, 1985, p. 179). However, replication either rarely occurs, or, if it does occur, is rarely reported or is conducted with adjustments to the original study which compromise the replication. Further, contradictory findings from (adapted) duplication of studies, such as Garrison's adapted duplication of Boshier's study, create additional confusion.

Thus, ABE attendance as it has been studied from the perspective of quantitative researchers continues to be an elusive issue. The questions asked, the categories chosen, and the values implied and imbedded tend to reflect the viewpoint of educated professionals. The exception is the 1987 Quigley literature study on resistance. However, his use of fictional data only reinforces the idea that researchers have great difficulty getting the answers they want from the ABE students themselves. Despite the difficulties, the reviewed studies generally support the further exploration of attendance issues from a sociological perspective, especially from the perspective of resistance of marginalized groups in the dominant educational environment.

It is important now to explore attendance from a perspective that is more student-oriented, more contextually based, and that also questions some of the cultural conditions of literacy education. It is also worthwhile to move away from the problematic quantitative research methodology into a qualitative, ethnographic approach that privileges the subjects of the research and gives more voice to their perceptions and issues.

Chapter 3

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The Methodology: An Ethnographic Approach

The methodology employed in this study is, unlike the methodology in the reviewed research, primarily ethnographic. A review of the literature on attendance confirmed that survey research data about ABE students provides only partial information. While survey methods are useful, they do not provide sufficient depth or understanding of complicated phenomena; nor do they provide information on the personally and socially less acceptable (and therefore less accessible) reasons for leaving, reasons often related to resistance, boredom or frustration. Nor do survey methods provide complex information about what helps ABE students to remain in ABE programs.

I chose observation and interview methods because information about why individuals act in the ways they do is complex and not necessarily always fully accessible, even perhaps to the individuals themselves. The ethnographic approach allows research issues to be explored in context and at length; it adds both breadth and depth to the data. The hours of observations and interviews create a layering of information about influences on students' actions regarding attendance.

The Setting

After I had chosen an ethnographic approach I approached my friend Kit², who teaches in the ABE program of Main Community College at the Dover campus, and asked her whether I could conduct this study in her ABE class. She agreed and after several weeks of presentations to and approvals from the institutions involved, I began my observations. I include here a description of the research setting in order to provide an orientation and context for the research findings.

². All names of persons and places in this research study are pseudonyms.

This description will fix the study's findings firmly in the particular context that produced them by providing a sense of the community formed by the institution, the ABE program and the classrooms, as well as the population from which students were drawn.

The study was conducted at a small satellite campus, one of five satellite campuses, attached to a large Vancouver Island community college. The college is referred to as Main College in this study and the satellite campus, which is a forty minute highway drive from Main College, is referred to as Dover campus. The relationship between Main college and Dover campus appeared to be strained at the time of the study. There were "teachers' lounge" discussions among the teaching and administrative staff concerning their dissatisfaction about the perceived lack of local control for Dover campus.

The Town

Dover campus is located in the small town of Dover in a semi-rural area on Vancouver Island. A large percentage of the population in the town and surrounding area are employed in or connected to the forest, fishing or farming industries. Ten percent of the population are First Nations peoples.

Because of the semi-rural, small town setting, many of the students attending the Dover campus ABE program know each other before meeting at the college. Although this is usually positive, it is not necessarily so. Kit, who has been at Dover campus for over seven years, elaborated:

Most of [the students] are born here. . . . They often know each other. Like when they get to class they find they were in the same opportunity class at high school. . . . Or lots of people are related to each other, especially lots of the First Nations students are related. And other people know each other and they've seen each other around. It's not that they know each other, but when they come to the class there's a familiar face there. And sometimes it's a familiar face they can't stand; sometimes it's a familiar face that makes them feel more comfortable. But sometimes we have a lot of conflict between somebody whose family doesn't get along with the family of somebody else in the class. Or somebody who won't come to class because they're uncomfortable with another person in the class because of something that's happened because they were both tenants in the same building five years ago when they had some kind of quarrel or because one of them stole the other's sister's boyfriend, you know, that kind of thing. . . . I don't do a lot about it until one of them comes and says I can't stand this person.

At that point Kit offers counselling services or seat changes and encourages the student not to quit, but sometimes they leave anyway.

The Campus

There are only two campus buildings; both are small and both are less than eight years old. The manageable size and newness of the structures contribute to a pleasant, bright, and friendly campus atmosphere. The campus offers several student services. A central cafeteria is located adjacent to the Fundamental ABE classrooms, which is managed on contract by a former college Food Services Program graduate. She was particularly friendly and some students mentioned her as one of the reasons they liked coming to school. Ann, one of the students interviewed said, "Oh, the people are nice, everybody; the cafeteria, when you go in there, they're nice to you." Doris also mentioned the cafeteria manager. When asked if there was anything at the college that helped her to come, she said, "The people, and that lady in the cafeteria."

There is also a small but serviceable library on campus and daycare is available at a Native Centre which is next to the campus. College students have priority access to daycare spaces; however, although this is helpful, there are too few daycare spaces available for children under the age of two.

One day while I was observing, First Nations speakers from Kanehsatake spent a half day at the campus presenting information about the Oka Resistance. Students from the ABE programs were given time to attend. There are a relatively large number of First Nations students at the campus and several First Nations ABE students attended this event. I interpreted this as indicating that the college was open to presentations from the marginalized cultures that were represented in the student population.

The campus ABE program employed eight staff members, including an ABE coordinator and several teachers, some of whom were on part-time contract. Two teachers, Kit and Val, were the instructors in the combined level one and level two ABE Fundamental class that I observed. Kit, the more senior and experienced of these two teachers, was employed for sixty percent of her

time on part-time permanent status and forty percent of her time on part-time contract. Val was employed solely on part-time contract.

The Classrooms

The standard number of student spaces available in a British Columbia Fundamental ABE class is fourteen; because this was a combined Fundamental class there were twenty-eight available spaces. Not all the student spaces were filled with registered students during the course of this study. For the greater part of the winter semester (February to June), twenty-four students were officially enrolled. During the study observations, there were never more than a total of ten students present.

The two adjacent Fundamental classrooms were standard classrooms. Each room was equipped with chalkboards, bulletin boards (on which were affixed items such as group photos, advice about school closures in snow storms and the student check-in sheet), tables and chairs. The smaller of the two classrooms (approximately 15 by 20 feet), referred to as the Exhale Room³, also housed a row of computers against the west wall. This classroom was used for quiet, individual work such as student writing or computer work. When students worked in this classroom, they understood they would work on their own and receive no teacher direction. One of the teachers was always present for assistance with spelling questions, for instance, but not to tell the students what to do. The tables in this room were arranged in four separate groupings, so that students could quietly consult with each other.

The larger classroom (approximately 20 by 20 feet) was referred to as the Inhale Room and was used for group learning, group projects, oral reading, films, science class, chalkboard spelling and class meetings. The tables in this room were arranged in a large U-shape with a teacher's table at the front and centre of the open U. Two additional tables stood adjoined behind the left side of the U, close to the classroom entrance. Because they were behind the central configuration of student seating, students who sat at these two tables were somewhat separated from the class. I

³. Kit explained to me that she was influenced in naming these two rooms by reading Sylvia Ashton Warner.

will refer to these two tables as the isolated row in the rest of the study. A few of the students selected these tables deliberately and consistently. Other students sat at the tables arranged in the U-shape, usually in seats they chose consistently.

The Program

This ABE class was a combined Fundamental levels one and two class. Level one is the entry level of the college ABE program; level two is the next stage of literacy learning, which is nevertheless still considered part of the Fundamental program.

The students chose which classroom they wanted to work in, depending on their own literacy skill level, and their preference for the work offered in each classroom, from period to period. There was a teacher expectation that students would work at their own skill level. For instance, if the work occurring in the Inhale Room was at level two, students who could not manage this more advanced level would do individual writing in the Exhale Room. However, despite this expectation a student could choose otherwise. Ann, for example, always chose to be in the Inhale Room for science class despite her difficulty with reading, and especially oral reading, both of which were part of science class. Although science reading was the most difficult, Ann's favourite subject was science and this preference directed her choice.

The program was arranged on the basis of monthly theme units. The first theme unit in the winter/spring semester was the Learning unit which focussed on students' past school experiences and their ways of learning. This unit set the stage for discussions about school difficulties, which most of the students had experienced, so that school "failure" was described and discussed less personally and more politically.

The second theme unit, for the month of March, focussed on the upcoming Speak Out. The Speak Out was scheduled for April 1st and was sponsored by the Fundamental class. The students spent considerable time in March preparing for the event. They arranged for a luncheon, meeting space, invitations, media coverage and video recording. They also worked on presentations to the audience on the topic of returning to school as an adult.

The third theme unit was on a project at a local forestry museum and the fourth unit was on oral histories. The units simply provided the focus for the month while the basic literacy skills were taught in an on-going manner.

The Teachers

This Fundamental ABE class was a combined class, so there were two teachers, Kit and Val. They were both Canadian born white women. Kit was the more senior teacher, having taught Fundamental ABE at Dover campus for seven years. In her late forties, she was also slightly older than Val, who was in her early forties. And although Kit and Val shared the planning, teaching and evaluating, many of the methods and approaches were developed by Kit in former classes.

Kit had a reputation among her peers as a good teacher. Her primary interest was the teaching process itself and she arranged the details of the Fundamental class so that this teaching process could happen most effectively. She explained her approach:

It is true, I do care about these people, but what I really care about is teaching and I think if I really cared about those people, then I might go and do something else. Like I might go and do community development work or, I might, I don't know, if I really cared about them then I'd go into politics and try and right the social injustices.

This illustrated that, although Kit was more focussed on the teaching process, she was also keenly aware that ABE students experience social injustices because of their low literacy skills and their social and economic marginality.

Val was also interested in teaching but she was more focussed on the students as individuals. Her teaching experience spanned a period of twenty years, although she has not taught continuously during that time.

Data Collection

The primary data collection methods used were: 1) recorded in-class observations; 2) recorded, guided interviews with ten students; 3) recorded, guided interviews with the two class teachers; and, 4) informal observations and conversations, both in and out of the classroom.

The in-class observations occurred from February to the end of May, 1993. In March, April and May, recorded observations occurred two consecutive mornings each week for approximately three hours each morning in one of the two adjoining classrooms used by the Fundamental level Adult Basic Education class at the college. In March and April I observed on

Thursday and Friday mornings; in May I observed on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. In total, I observed twenty-three mornings of ABE classes.

While the initial three in-class observations were recorded by hand-written notes only, the other twenty observations were recorded by video camera and supplemented with hand-written notes.

I interviewed ten of the twenty-six registered students. These students were selected on the basis of their representativeness of the class demographics, their availability, and their interest in participating in the interview. The one hour interviews were held at the school (although not in the classrooms) before or after classes and were audiotape recorded with supplementary hand-written notes. A set of questions was used as a guide; however, not all the questions were asked of each student, not every student responded to each question, nor was each interview confined to the question guide.

Interviews with both teachers focussed on personal teaching theory and practice, on the teaching context, and on the students. These interviews were also audiotape recorded and supplemented with hand-written notes. The teacher interviews were based on the Pratt Conceptions of Teaching Interview Guide developed by Dan Pratt (Pratt, 1992). The interview with the more senior teacher, Kit, was approximately two and a half hours, while the interview with Val was one hour long.

Since the college was out of town for me, I also had the good fortune of being the overnight guest of Kit each week that I observed. This closer and more prolonged relationship with the senior teacher provided not only a greater opportunity to gather casual information about many aspects of the research issues and context, but it also provided an opportunity to clarify, verify, and expand on information gathered in the institutional context. This added immeasurable depth to the study.

In addition to these primary sources for the ethnography, I also used informal documentation. As secondary data to my observations of attendance, I also used student self-monitored attendance sheets. These sheets were displayed on the bulletin board in the smaller

classroom and students were asked to check themselves present on each day they were in attendance. There was no official attendance taken in the Fundamental class and these sheets served as a backup check when the teachers noticed that one or several students had not been attending for a period of time. Not only was attendance taking not administratively compulsory, but the Fundamental level teachers did not think that it served any constructive purpose. Therefore, in determining attendance patterns, I also compiled my own lists for the days that I observed and checked with the teachers to see if my observations were consistent with each student's pattern for that period of time.

An additional documentary source for this study was provided through various student writings. These were gathered from in-class writing projects and from "Voices," an ABE student writings magazine to which the Dover campus students occasionally contributed.

Chapter 4

DATA PRESENTATION

This chapter presents the research data, providing first, a three-part introduction to the data. In the first part of this introduction, I present general demographic information about the student participants. The second part presents information about student attendance issues, including the definitions of attendance used in this study. In the third part, I present a discussion of resistance issues, including the definitions used and the categories of resistant behaviours that I developed.

I next present the student research data, organized according to individual students. I then explore the relationships between a student's attendance pattern and the types of resistance behaviours that that student displayed. This section also provides information about teacher interventions.

Data Analysis

I examined and re-examined the data from all sources (transcripts, audiotapes, and videotapes) to elicit information about attendance and evidence of resistant behaviours. After reviewing the data from every source, I transcribed all the quotations and all the descriptions of behaviour that related to attendance or to resistance onto coded index cards for each student and for both teachers. Data that related to attendance was transcribed onto small (4 inches X 4 inches) green index cards. Data that related to resistance was transcribed onto large (4 inches X 6 inches) green index cards. These were all organized into separate stacks for each student and teacher. I then organized the students into three attendance groupings and recorded the incidence of resistance behaviours (see Tables 1, 2 and 3, pp. 97, 98, 99) This permitted me to observe relationships between attendance groups and resistance categories.

Classroom observation information and casual discussion information was used to obtain the data for seventeen student profiles and for the two teachers profiles. These sources were also the only sources used for the information regarding the seven uninterviewed students. The audiotape transcripts of the interviews were used as additional sources for information for the student profiles for the ten interviewed students and for the two teacher profiles.

I have analyzed the research data in terms of patterns of attendance and types of resistance, examining the attendance patterns of seventeen students (out of a total of twenty-four) who were enrolled in this ABE class. I selected these seventeen students because, although their attendance was not necessarily persistent or consistent, they attended enough to give me adequate time to observe them in a meaningful way. Of these seventeen students, I interviewed ten, who were selected largely on the basis of their availability.

The presentation of the data is organized according to each of the seventeen students, providing for each student first, a brief profile, then information about the student's attendance; and finally information about the resistance behaviours, if any, that that student engaged in. The data has been arranged so that the students are grouped according to one of three attendance patterns (dropout, sporadic attendance, or regular attendance).

The final section in this chapter discusses teaching behaviours that relate to resistance. This provides a fuller context in which to interpret student behaviours, which were responsive to the learning environment and influenced by the instructors teaching approaches.

This analysis places student resistance in relation to student attendance in adult literacy programs. It also reveals how teaching approaches can encourage persistence through positive accommodation of this important aspect of literacy learning.

Student Demographics

During the winter/spring semester (February 5 to June 25), the Fundamental ABE class had an accumulated total of twenty-four enrolled and attending students. This total excluded three who never attended, one who immediately advanced to level three and one student who attended on five days in February only but whom I never observed.

Of these twenty-four students, thirteen were First Nations men (seven) and women (six), nine were white, Canadian born men (five) and women (four), and two were South Asian women who immigrated to Canada from the Punjab. Ten students were from the local area; eight had moved to the Dover area within the past ten years; and there were six students for whom this particular information is not available. There were twelve women and twelve men who enrolled in

and attended this Fundamental class. Their ages ranged from the early twenties to fifty, with the majority of the students in their twenties and thirties and only four students over forty.

Of the twenty-four enrolled and attending students, three left before the end of March. Maureen's name did not appear on the check-in sheet after February (nor did I observe her after this month); May moved away; and Doug's name did not appear after the end of March (nor did I observe him after this time). Of the twenty-one remaining students, I interviewed ten and include observation information for an additional seven, for a total of seventeen key student participants in this study. Of the four students who were not included as key students, two attended only once or twice and two joined the class in the second half of the semester. These two situations prevented adequate research observation. Those who were interviewed and observed were the students who were most available and most willing to be part of the study.

The seventeen key student profiles include background information, where available, on domestic and economic situations, past school experiences and current ABE status. This information provides a background for each student and a context for the attendance and resistance information that emerged for each student.

Attendance Information

I have categorized student attendance into three patterns of attendance, which cover the range of attendance possibilities: dropout, sporadic attendance and regular attendance. These categories are similar to the categories that Thomas used in her 1990 study of ABE programs in British Columbia.

Attendance Definitions

In this study, the definition of attendance refers to the range of patterns within which enrolled ABE students either (at one end of the continuum) come to class or (at the other end of the continuum) do not come to class.

Dropout

In most research studies, students who stop coming to classes for a significant period of time at the end of the semester are generally referred to as dropouts. In this study, a student who stopped coming to classes more than four weeks before the end of the semester is considered to have dropped out of school and is referred to as a dropout.

Sporadic Attendance

In other studies, students who attended infrequently and inconsistently have been referred to variously as drop-ins, stopouts or sporadic attenders (Thomas, 1990). In this study, these students will be referred to as sporadic attenders. Sporadic attenders attended less than fifty percent of the classes but still continued to attend during the last four weeks of the semester.

Regular Attendance

In former studies, students who continue to attend frequently and regularly throughout a semester or a program are often referred to as persisters (Thomas, 1990; Martin, 1990; Garrison, 1989). In this study, these students will be referred to as regular attenders. Regular attenders attended over fifty percent of the classes and continued to attend during the last four weeks of the semester. In this definition of regular attendance, I include only students who enrolled before mid-semester (mid-April), because I did not get to know the two students who enrolled in the second half of the semester well enough to include them or to calculate and categorize their attendance accurately.

Attendance Commentary

Although the dominant discourse prescribes regular attendance as superior or more successful than sporadic attendance or dropout, I prefer not to privilege one form of attendance over the others with respect to the students. For some students there may be more success in dropping out than in remaining in a class, particularly if that class contributes to erosion of identity and self-esteem. Much depends upon the student's own needs and timing and calculating personal success is a more complex process than is generally recognized.

Nevertheless, frequency of student attendance is one of the measures of system success. Although this measure of system success may result in the problematic tendency to view student success similarly (suggesting that what is good for the system is good for the student), regular or frequent attendance is a well established and salient measure of system success, measuring what is most measurable: that students continue to attend. In British Columbia institutional funding from

government sources is usually tied to student attendance. It is useful to keep not only these perspectives in mind, but also to ask how the system can accommodate the student, rather than the reverse, for the system's own success. Therefore, it may be in the interest of the institution to examine how it might accommodate the student instead of focussing on how the student should adapt to the institution.

It must also be noted that student attendance fluctuates for many reasons beyond the scope of school influence. As well, it is likely that no single reason is sufficient to explain any student's attendance pattern. I am interested in discovering how student resistance, in particular, relates to student attendance. Therefore, the findings focus on and represent this (partial) description and interpretation of attendance behaviours.

Resistance Information

This section explores the concept of resistance as I have applied it in this research context: how the Fundamental ABE students manifested resistance and how their teachers addressed it. It begins with the definition of resistance used in this study. The presentation of the five categories of resistance behaviour that I developed from the data and which shaped my definition of resistance, follows. I used these five categories to organize the range and volume of resistance behaviours that I observed for each key student participant.

In analyzing the data, I interpret any behaviour that appears to withdraw from, or question or challenge, the dominant status quo of school culture, dominant culture, or dominant discourse, or any behaviour that asserts an individual's marginalized identity, or that makes a connection across marginalized identities, as resistance.

Resistance: Definitions and Categories

For purposes of this study, I have defined resistance as follows:

Resistance is a defiant (oppositional) behavioral or attitudinal response of a subordinated/marginalized individual to dominance and/or exclusion, that attempts to (re)establish the dignity of the subordinated/marginalized individual in the dominant situation and to mitigate power imbalances. As such it is considered a political act.

This definition locates student resistance behaviours within a framework of political resistance, regardless of the resistant individual's awareness of a political dimension to their resistance. The defiant behaviour can take several forms: it can be withdrawing, which avoids the dominant situation; it can assert awareness of dominance and oppression, often by verbalizing an understanding dominance; it can be confrontive, which challenges the status quo (ie. the dominant situation); it can be assertive of a marginalized identity; or it can be expressive of subordinated solidarities against dominance. In this study, the marginalized identities that engender resistance are based on the political identities related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and geography.

The process of reviewing and organizing the data began to shape the categories of resistance behaviours that I developed. As I looked at the videotapes, read the transcripts and wrote the cards, I began to see patterns of resistance. I grouped them into five categories: withdrawal behaviours, awareness behaviours, challenging behaviours, assertion behaviours, and solidarity behaviours. Although there may be other types of resistance behaviours, the data that I reviewed could all be subsumed by these five types.

Withdrawal Behaviours

As I reviewed the data I saw over and over, for instance, that several students consistently chose to sit in the isolated back row seats in the Inhale classroom. They generally sat alone, often attending on different days from each other; they rarely spoke; and they frequently left the classroom for long periods of time. I began to view these repeated sets of behaviours as resistance behaviours which were different than other kinds of resistance that I saw in the classroom. I categorized and labelled this kind of resistance behaviour as "withdrawal behaviour."

This category includes behaviours that silently express either a rejection of parts of the dominant situation or a difficulty with accepting parts of the dominant situation. Most of the examples of this type of resistance behaviours relate primarily to current school values and expectations. These behaviours seem to demonstrate resistance to an aspect of the individual's surroundings; however, this was not always verifiable. In this study, I interpreted these (usually

non-verbal) behaviours as indicating resistance to a situation of dominance. I felt it likely that the situation (or parts of the situation) may have been imposing unwanted expectations and/or limits on the marginalized individual or it may have been making the individual feel unwelcome, unacceptable or inferior and that this provoked a resistant response that was a kind of withdrawal.

Awareness Behaviours

During my observations and in the interviews, I heard many students speak negatively about situations of cultural or school dominance, past and present. Des, for instance, talked frequently how poor he was as a child and how badly his teachers treated him in elementary school. I began to view this type of behaviour as revealing a level of student awareness about cultural or school dominance and their own subordinated positions within these described dominant situations. I labelled these stories, commentaries or pronouncements as resistance behaviours of the "awareness" type.

These resistant behaviours demonstrated the students' awareness of their marginalized positions in the dominant discourse and their objection to those positions. They also demonstrated the students' use of their subjectivity as a source of agency to reframe their experiences and their socially conferred status and to establish their own worth. Awareness resistance behaviours related primarily to certain areas of dominant discourse: the public school system (former school experience); the stigma of "illiteracy;" the stereotypes of poverty; and racial and gender prejudice.

The public school system was one area of dominant culture to which the ABE students expressed resistance and awareness of (former) oppressions. In the first theme unit of the semester (in February) the focus in the Fundamental class was on learning and past school experiences. Kit explained to me that she often presented this topic as the first unit in a new year. Whether students would have felt comfortable talking about their difficult past school experiences without this topic's official and early introduction is unknown; however, it was clear that many students had a lot to say about the subject both in class and during interviews. Most of what the students said reflected their understanding that they had been mistreated by uncaring school systems; they identified deficiencies in the values, teachers, and policies of their former public schools. Only two students (Vanessa and Horace) reported positive public school experience. The students also spoke with similar awareness about other systems of dominance they had experienced; however, the school system was raised most frequently.

Challenging Behaviours

During my observations, I also saw several students challenge the actions of the classroom teachers. Usually, it was some aspect of their teaching approaches that was challenged. When I noted a student directly challenging a situation of dominance, this appeared different, more active and immediate, than the revealing of awareness. I categorized this type of resistance behaviour as "challenging".

This category of resistance behaviours includes behaviours that actively confront forms of institutional dominance. Most of the behaviours occurred in the ABE classrooms and involved resisting school related authority. However, a few of the students described confrontations that they had initiated in their youth.

Assertion Behaviours

In this study, there were also several students who positively asserted their own marginalized cultural identities. Asserting a marginalized identity is in and of itself a resistant act since the dominant culture seeks to erase marginalized identities by denigrating or simply ignoring them. Doris, for example, talked about her First Nations traditions on several occasions. In the ABE classroom, which is a dominant culture situation, this promotion of her own cultural identity was resistant in the sense that it challenged acquiescence to the culture of the dominant environment. I categorized these resistant actions as "assertion behaviours."

This category of resistance behaviours includes using words and actions that promote an individuals' subordinated and/or marginalized identity. These behaviours demonstrated either defiance about, or pride in the individual's own educational, racial, cultural, class, geographic, or gender identities. They demonstrated that the resistant individual rejected the negative stereotypes associated with marginalization. The examples challenge the student's exclusion from the dominant culture on the basis of their marginalized identity and express their insistence on having their own voice heard within the dominant discourse.

Even the simple declaration of having a marginalized identity can be defiant and resistant: it demands mainstream notice and fights invisibility. The fact that all of the students

acknowledged the marginalized identity of "illiterate" indicates that, at least in this pivotal area, they resisted, despite the hurt that that recognition could bring.

Solidarity Behaviours

A fifth category emerged when one or more students talked about or demonstrated connectedness within or across marginalized identities. Although this category is similar to the "assertion" category, I categorized it separately because it was a more complicated activity. I labelled it "solidarity behaviour."

Behaviours that express solidarity among different marginalized identities or within the same marginalized identity are similar to behaviours that assert marginalized identities but they involve collectivity. Much of the behaviour that I identify as solidarity behaviour relates to the students' common identity of being people with limited literacy skills. The students in the class demonstrated solidarity most around the identity of "illiterate."

Resistance Commentary

In this chapter, I present data from both classroom observations and interviews that I interpret as student resistance. Interpreting this information in terms of resistance and as evidence of resistance can help educators develop alternative perspectives for understanding puzzling and/or oppositional student actions. These alternate perspectives avoid applying psychological explanations, which often presume student pathologies, to oppositional student behaviours.

Positing resistance maintains a respect for the reasons that underlie oppositional behaviours. This position assumes that students have healthy reasons for avoiding school, for sporadic attendance and for dropping out. It also encourages educators to honour the persistence, the sacrifices and survival strategies, including a variety of classroom resistance behaviours, that students who keep coming back to school must employ. If educators recognize resistance and value it, they can consider ways of working with resistance (instead of against it) to help students through the process of maintaining their marginalized identities while entering into and remaining within the dominant cultural systems that literacy acquisition generally requires. I maintain that a positive consideration of resistance is important, not only to help students, but also to help ABE change and improve.

The concept of agency is pivotal both in resistance theory and in post structuralist theory. Agency refers to the marginalized individual's capacity to change their environments and to control the terms of their own existence. When post structuralists refer to the dual nature of the subject (as subjected to and as author of) within the concept of discourse, the aspect of authorship refers to the individual's capacity to effect change in the discourse itself. When an individual is "subjected to," that individual enters the dominant discourse and is controlled by it. When authoring, agency is employed to change circumstances; when being "subject to," agency is employed to change self according to some received or accepted value from the dominant discourse. Authoring reflects resistance; being "subjected to" reflects accommodation.

Most of the seventeen key students in the study displayed resistant behaviours, some over the full range of the five categories and others in only one or two categories. Some categories

appeared to be more associated with sporadic attendance or dropout. As well, both teachers often addressed resistance positively either by introducing it, encouraging it or supporting it. These teaching actions (strategies, interventions and reactions) are also presented and examined.

I consider the recognition of the positive and political nature of resistance to be valuable to ABE instruction. When educators view resistance this way it prevents them from viewing student resistance as pathology, which demeans and victimizes students. Instead this recognition emphasizes the web of power dynamics that inform the ABE student's school experiences. This definition views resistance as stemming from an individual healthy attachments to their own cultural identities.

The concept of resistance . . . shifts the analysis of oppositional behaviour from the theoretical terrains of functionalism and mainstream educational psychology to those of political science and sociology . . . it has . . . a great deal to do with moral and political indignation . . . [T]he concept of resistance represents an element of counter-logic, that must be analyzed to reveal its underlying interest in freedom and its rejection of those forms of domination inherent in the social relations against which it reacts. (Giroux, 1983 pp. 289-90)

The results of resistance behaviour may have negative or positive impacts on the marginalized individual, but the behaviour itself originates in a healthy and political (whether recognized as such by the student or not) response to marginalization.

In some cases, a resistance behaviour might seem to fit into more than one category. For instance, a behaviour that could be categorized as asserting marginalized identity, might also be identified as a behaviour that demonstrates solidarity. Generally, however, distinctions are possible and may be meaningful in relating kinds of resistance to kinds of attendance.

ABE students resist several dominant discourses. Resistance is complex and varied: it has more than one face and different faces have differing consequences for the individual and her/his interaction with the dominant systems.

In the following section, I present seventeen student profiles, including information on their attendance and resistance behaviours. The words and actions of the students demonstrate the pervasiveness, the variety and the specifics of student resistance in this ABE class. I wanted the students' voices to convey the complexity of their circumstances; therefore, I include many and

varied student quotes. This leads the way to a discussion of the relevance that the different types of students' resistance behaviours have to student attendance. As well, I also present the teachers' behaviours and words, which mainly support student resistance.

Student Profiles

Five Who Dropped Out

There were five students who dropped out of the class before the end of the semester: Adam, Hank, Horace, Pat and Ron. Of these five, I interviewed Adam and Horace, but not the other three who were less available.

Adam

Background Information

Adam was a thirty-six year old First Nations man who first registered in the Dover College ABE program three years ago. He was married to Jill, a student in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at Dover campus. Adam told me about his wife's program the first day I came to the Fundamental class. He lived with Jill and her four teenage children. He has worked as a security guard, but his main source of income at the time of this study was income assistance. He said he received considerable family encouragement to attend ABE.

About his public school experiences, Adam said, "[I had] a lot of anger that I couldn't do the work, frustrated, and I was mad at myself that I couldn't do the work." He said he spent a lot of time in his public school library, avoiding the classroom. Adam was ambivalent about attending the ABE program. "It's kinda mixed up for me, school and job. I want to come to school and then no, I want to look for work. I'm stuck between school and a job, eh? Last summer I was missing school, eh? Like school days I was working, so I miss school." He also found group discussions boring and he objected to the new combining of levels one and two in this large combined Fundamental class. Adam's sister-in-law, Pat was also enrolled in this Fundamental class.

Adam was involved with First Nations traditions. He also continued to struggle with frustration in his adult life in much the same way that he described his struggle during his childhood public school experiences. He still overtly located his difficulties within himself. In a recent piece he wrote for "Voices," a student writings magazine, Adam wrote: "Okay, I'm talking about being frustrated with myself. It's your brains, the part inside the head of a person, which thinks and feels too. It comes hard on me, my mind."

Attendance Information

Adam initially was a sporadic attender who, although he sometimes came to school, often did not stay in the classroom. When he was in class, he usually sat in the isolated row behind the central U-shape of student seating. Adam stopped coming to school altogether before the end of April, eight weeks before the end of the semester. Kit thought that Adam's dropout was related to Adam's wife's term ending in her college NITEP program. During my interview with Adam, he stated that his mother-in-law's persistent inquiry, "are you going to school?" kept him coming back. However, his dropout timing did coincide with his wife's program end date.

Resistance Information

Withdrawal Type

Adam's main type of resistance behaviour was of the withdrawal type. He almost always chose to sit in the back row of four seats which were near the door; he was almost always late; and he left the classroom frequently, often for long periods at a time. On my first day of observation, Adam explained his resistance by telling me that sometimes he got mad and frustrated about his reading and then he simply didn't come to school the next day. He said that other times, he stayed at home for awhile and then went to school late.

One morning in March, Kit instructed the class to compile a list of manners for the classroom. Kit began, "I'm going to write a situation on the board: 'coming late.' What should you do if someone comes in late? Which room do you come in?" Cory answered, "The other room." Horace suggested, "Maybe you should change your pattern, start coming in on time." Kit asked, "What if Adam came in late now? How should we react?" At that moment Adam walked in, late. The class laughed at the coincidence and Kit explained the reason for the laughter to Adam, who smiled but looked perplexed. Cory apologized to Adam for laughing. Adam stated unapologetically, "If I'm late, I'm late." Cory told him, "You brought your butt in, that's the main thing." Adam sat beside Horace. "I'm late!", he declared.

Another incident demonstrated Adam's pattern of resistance behaviours. Adam asked Kit to spell "skipping out" on the blackboard during a writing period in the Exhale room. She asked,

"You're going to write about `skipping out`?" Dave called over to Adam, "Your favourite pastime." Kit wrote "skipping out" on the board as Adam had requested and then asked whether there were other words that needed spelling on the board. Adam called out, "Annoyed." A few minutes later, Adam packed his bag and left, saying he had to take his car in to the shop. It was difficult not to interpret his request for the spelling of "annoyed" as associated with a state of mind (possibly induced by the discussion of his "skipping out" behaviours) that was connected to his leaving.

During our interview, Adam explained that he didn't like some aspects of the ABE program, "I don't like. . . talking about trips all week. . . and we talk about the same thing over and over." I asked if that got boring for him then and he responded, "Yeah, and I just walk out." During one class discussion, just before a class film, Adam, who was sitting in the back row, leaned back and yawned hugely. After the movie ended, he sat with his head on his arm as though he was asleep. Five minutes later, he left the room. These all appeared to be signs of resistance to the (dominant) classroom expectations. They are no less pointed for being non-verbal, but are often more easily overlooked.

Adam demonstrated these withdrawal behaviours every time he was in class. As he attended class twenty-two days during the semester, he demonstrated these behaviours at least twenty-two times.

Challenging Type

Adam also demonstrated resistance behaviour that was not of the withdrawal type. In one mainly non-verbal, confrontive incident Adam demonstrated resistant behaviour of the challenging type. This example involved my role as classroom observer. Adam arrived late for class one morning in the middle of April. He seated himself in the isolated row and noticed that I had the video camera focused on him. He stared at the camera, got out of his seat, and, approaching me, asked if he could use the camera. Using role reversal as resistance to our dominant positions, Adam focused the camera on Marie, the substitute teacher, and then on me. "Write," he directed as I picked up my note pad. He wasn't hostile but he wasn't just fooling around either; he was

purposeful. At this point, Marie intervened and suggested Adam join the spelling lesson at the board.

Assertion Type

Adam engaged in assertion behaviour on one occasion by silently asserting his First Nations identity. Although he did not talk about his First Nations identity in class, he arrived in the classroom one mid-April morning wearing a sky blue T-shirt, which bore the words "FIRST NATIONS" across his large chest.

Hank

Background Information

Hank was a First Nations man, who appeared to be in his early thirties. He told me he had children and Kit told me that he came from a northern community on Vancouver Island. He seemed well liked by the other students but did not appear to have family or friends in the class or college.

Attendance Information

He attended infrequently and dropped out at the end of April. Once, after a prolonged absence in March, he told me that he and his children had had the flu during the period of his absence. Hank attended in February, March and April with decreasing frequency. Kit did not have any information about why Hank had left. This was unusual as most students who dropped out either contacted Kit to explain or else others passed on the information to her.

Resistance Information

Withdrawal Type

Like Adam, Hank also engaged in withdrawal resistance behaviours. He sat in the isolated row consistently. One morning I observed Doris trying to encourage Hank to join her at a central table, reassuring him that she wouldn't bite. Another morning, in April, Kit asked, "Hank, are you happy back there? You want to come sit in the middle?" Hank answered, "I'm OK." Kit checked, "You're OK." Fifteen minutes later he left the classroom. When Hank returned, one hour later, to

his seat in the isolated row Kit seated herself in the isolated row with him for the rest of the class discussion. At the end of April, just before he dropped out, Hank entered the classroom at 9 a.m., fifteen minutes late, and sat in the first row at the front of the class. This was the first (and only) time I had seen him sit in the front row. Like most of the men in the class, Hank kept his jacket on. Kit asked Hank, "Can we find a spot for you [at the board for spelling]. Hank, we've got a spot for you right here." At 9:04 Kit ended the spelling lesson, "I think we'll call it quits." Hank returned to his front row seat and picked up the orange plasticene on the table in front of him. At 9:10 Hank moved to the back row.

Hank did not engage in any other kind of resistance behaviours. He attended class eleven times, always sitting in the back row and often leaving the classroom for prolonged periods of time. This indicates at least eleven episodes of withdrawal behaviour.

Horace

Background Information

I interviewed Horace in late May, just before he dropped out. He was a twenty-nine year old First Nations man who left school in grade nine at the age of fifteen because, as he explained, "I got into our traditional long house. That's why I dropped out of school. I was participating in our traditional stuff." Although he said he "was quite dedicated to school," he identified one aspect of his public school experience that he had disliked. He found his social studies teacher "a bit prejudiced" against him. "I couldn't take in all the information I needed to learn the tasks because I had a poor mark in social studies on account of him. And that's what I really blame, because I like studying social studies. I really enjoyed the course."

Horace was married and lived with his wife and three children until May, 1993. Then he separated and moved in with his mother. He suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and his income was largely from income assistance.

Attendance Information

Horace started the Dover campus ABE program in October, 1992 but dropped out early in that fall semester, he said, because of "alcohol." He added:

Plus, another reason why I dropped out was I was kind of pissed at Val, the teacher. She didn't really know me; I didn't really know her. Like I wasn't even participating in the class. I felt like a stupid doorknob. She was avoiding me. . . . , be that way, and I'll be my way.'

Horace interpreted Val's behaviour as unwelcoming and excluding ("Val's way") and he dropped out ("his way") in the fall semester; however, he returned in February.

Horace returned in February for a second ABE semester. He attended more frequently at the beginning of the semester, but his attendance fell off toward the end of April; before mid-May Horace stopped attending altogether, telling Kit that he would not be back. He told her that at first he could not attend because he'd broken up with his wife and then later, because he was getting together with her again. On the day that I interviewed Horace, he told me he was unhappy about events in class, saying he thought some students were prejudiced. He dropped out shortly after that interview, with six weeks of the semester left.

Resistance Information

Horace demonstrated a range of resistant behaviours. He had no observable withdrawal behaviours⁴ but he exhibited behaviours that demonstrated awareness of domination, that challenged, and that asserted identity.

⁴. Although Horace's dropout in the former fall semester could be interpreted as a form of withdrawal resistance (as could all dropout behaviour), I have focused this study on resistance behaviour that occurs within program attendance.

Awareness Type

He implied awareness of racial oppression that he experienced when he reported his difficulty with a former social studies teacher: "I found him a bit prejudiced . . . Prejudiced against me, yes." Horace also resisted both the implication that his family who did not graduate could be dismissed as uneducated, as well as the negative stereotype of illiteracy when he pointed out that, "My mother didn't complete school, but I do come from an educated family."

In another example, Kit had distributed copies of her unpublished (but government commissioned) booklet entitled, Learners Speak Out. The class read a student's piece about literacy learner militancy in Ontario. Kit asked the class if any of them felt militant. Horace answered enthusiastically, "Sure." Kit elicited this resistant reaction deliberately, encouraging the class to think about learner action and militancy that they might be interested in for their own purposes.

Challenging Type

On one occasion, Horace challenged Val when she was trying to elicit an answer from the class. Val said, "Do you see the punctuation he used . . . what is that thingy he used?" Horace responded, "You tell *us*, Val," as if he felt that he was being talked down to and resented it.

Assertion Type

In an example of assertion behaviour, Horace resisted a dominant culture stereotype about First Nations people when he said, "I want to show that us Natives can get all our education and go to university for seven years."

PatBackground Information

Pat was a First Nations woman in her early thirties who attended only during March and April of the spring semester. I did not get the opportunity to interview her. She was quiet in class; however, she always seemed to be involved. She was related to Adam, who was her brother-in-law.

She first visited the college with her boyfriend, for an ABE Speak Out, which occurred several years before she enrolled. She wanted to enrol at that time but her children were too young. Although this was her first semester and she seemed shy, she spoke at this year's Speak Out and told an audience of about two hundred that she returned to school because she couldn't understand when people spoke to her, especially if they used "big words."

Attendance Information

Pat dropped out before the end of April. She called Kit in May to say that she was in the midst of leaving her husband and that she would return to school next semester, when she had sorted things out.

Resistance InformationAwareness Type

Pat engaged in very few resistance actions; however, she did display awareness of exclusion when she explained, in her presentation at the Speak Out, that she couldn't understand when people spoke to her, especially if they used "big words." She appeared very distressed about the confusion these situations caused her.

She was also aware which side she supported when Kit presented an NFB film about Latin American peasant rebels in class one day. She quietly stated that the rebel barber should have killed the army captain when he had the opportunity.

RonBackground Information

Ron was a First Nations man in his early twenties who was related to another class member, Doris, his aunt. Doris had encouraged him to enrol and he attended classes in February and March.

Attendance Information

By early April Ron had dropped of school. Kit learned subsequently that Ron's mother had wanted him to spend more time with her; however, this explanation seemed somewhat inadequate.

Resistance Information

Withdrawal Type

Ron engaged in very few resistance behaviours except for those of the withdrawal type. Like Adam and Hank, Ron consistently chose to sit in the isolated row, usually alone; he also left the classroom often, and for long periods of time. He attended class ten times and these behaviours occurred at least ten times. One morning at the end of March, Doris sat in the isolated row with Ron. Kit asked, "Can you see anything over there?" Doris tilted her head and then moved to the centre of the class. By the time Doris had relocated herself, Ron had left the classroom, only ten minutes after the class had started.

Summary of Dropout Information

All five students described above were enrolled in the first half of the semester, attended regularly or sporadically initially, but no longer attended classes in the last four weeks of the semester. All five were under forty and First Nations and all but one were men.

Five Who Attended Sporadically

There were five students, Dave, Gil, Darshan, Savita and Vanessa, who attended sporadically. They attended infrequently and inconsistently, but they were still attending in the last four weeks of the semester. I did not interview most of these students largely because they were often not available; I was able to interview Vanessa. Consequently, I have less information to present for these five students.

Dave

Background Information

Dave was a Canadian born white man who appeared to be in his early thirties. He did not seem to have family members or friends at the college. According to Kit he lived outside of the Dover community and drove along the highway for about twenty minutes to get to school. When Dave was in class, he was usually talkative.

Attendance Information

Although he attended sporadically, when he returned to the class, it was as though he had never been away. After one prolonged absence, Dave entered class saying, "I'm living again, I'm living again." He complained that a lengthy bout of the flu had kept him away. Dave's recorded attendance comprised over a third of the semester. He was still attending in June, the final month of the semester.

Resistance Information

Dave displayed a range of resistance behaviours: withdrawal, awareness, challenging and assertion behaviours. His main form was challenging behaviours.

Withdrawal Type

The one example of withdrawal behaviour occurred during an organizing meeting in the Inhale classroom; Dave looked at length through his book instead of participating in the group discussion and then abruptly left the room for a prolonged period of time.

Awareness Type

Dave displayed awareness behaviour on at least three occasions. Dave recognized that he was neglected by the public school system. During one morning observation in early March, Dave sat just staring in the Exhale classroom. Kit sat down beside him and he said, "I'm lost." Kit asked if that was how he had felt in school; he nodded yes. Kit then offered to write what Dave was thinking. He dictated the following: "I was lost and then that's what I felt like. I was one of the lost people because then they didn't give me enough help or talk about enough. . . ."

Two weeks later in the Inhale classroom, Dave spoke more generally about schools:

You pass from one grade. That's what happened to me. Who cares if you learn; who cares? . . . I don't think they [former public school teachers] actually cared if you learned anything at all. They were actually getting paid for a service and they didn't care if you learned or nothing.

Dave was outraged when welfare personnel expected his mother to start working after years at home. One day he explained this to the class. "And way back then the women basically lived in the home and did the dishes. They didn't get an education to get a job. Like my mom, when my dad died, welfare wanted her to find a job. I said, 'How can you expect her to go out and find a job. She only had grade four education and was home all her life.'" Dave's anger reflected his resistance and his understanding that welfare authorities had not considered his mother's (learned) dependency and set impossible expectations for her.

One day in class Dave commented on a feeling of exclusion (from newsprint media) which he felt was related to his low reading skills. However, he resisted finding fault with himself, as the dominant discourse on illiteracy would have him believe; instead, he attributed the fault to the media's methods. He observed, "Well, I can read the newspaper except when they use those big words they don't need to, like about things that happen in Dover." He thought that the media

should be more user friendly, and challenged the idea that it is the obligation of those with low literacy skills to change rather than the media's responsibility to take them into account.

Challenging Type

Dave described an important challenging behaviour from in his youth. One morning in class, Dave responded to Des's story:

He makes it almost sound as like, like after he got the beatings, and he punched his dad, he left home. . . That's basically what happened to me. I said [to my father after being beaten], 'You go your way; I'm going mine. That's the last time it's going to happen.' I could've pressed charges but I didn't want to 'cause I had my brothers and sisters to look after.

Val asked Dave, "How old were you?" "Thirteen," answered Dave "just like Des." Dave challenged his father's brutal dominance and left home in order to remain safe. His awareness of the seriousness of his father's mistreatment was clear when he stated that he "could've pressed charges."

Dave also challenged Kit's and Val's teaching approaches on occasion. Once when Val directed the class to "underline one sentence that you liked" after Des's piece was read aloud, Dave complained, "Why didn't you tell us that before he started reading it?" Another time, Kit stopped Dave's oral reading and directed the next student to continue the oral reading. Dave protested, "Oh, come on, I know all of these words. I wanted to say them." Another time, Kit drew attention to a small breakthrough in Dave's progress, announcing, "Aha, we've learned the method." Dave was not impressed and questioned, "Why does it always take so long [to teach me]?" Kit explained, "Because I have to figure out all the methods and so do you." Dave replied, "I did it this time," asserting his own expertise and, implicitly, challenging Kit.

Assertion Type

Dave also asserted his identity as someone with low literacy skills; however, he did this in a somewhat ambiguous way. In class one morning when Val had asked if anyone had ever used any tricks to pass as literate, Dave answered, "I just say I can't read and write and they say bullshit." This was a "trick", as he expected disbelief; however, it was also a way of asserting his identity defiantly.

Dave was an unusual student. He exhibited many more challenging behaviours than other students in this class. He was also the only non-dropout who displayed withdrawal behaviour. He was also the only sporadic attender to display such a range and volume of resistant behaviours.

Gil

Background Information

Gil is a young Canadian born white man who appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties. He was married and was interested in ham radios. He was generally quiet in class but became more involved and slightly more talkative towards the end of the semester.

Attendance Information

Gil rarely attended in the early part of the semester but attended more frequently after the beginning of April. Kit reported that his wife, who had a visual disability and seemed to depend on Gil for some mobility needs, had started a college Life Skills Program at about the time that his attendance increased. In all, Gil attended approximately one third of the semester; his attendance became more frequent and regular as the semester progressed.

Resistance Information

During all my observations I did not observe Gil engaging in any resistance behaviours.

Darshan

Background Information

Darshan was a South Asian woman who had immigrated to Canada from the Punjab. She appeared to be in her late thirties. She spoke English well, and usually attended with her friend, Savita. Darshan also knew both Doris and Cal in the class because she worked on a commercial farm with them in the summertime. Darshan was married and had children.

Attendance Information

Darshan was a sporadic attender who attended quite infrequently. According to Kit, Darshan (and Savita) seemed to be on their own attendance schedule. She gave one example: "They were away for eleven days and came back and said, "Oh, we've been on spring break.' There's no spring break in a five day plan [in the ABE students' schedule] -- so they do these things, and especially adults do these things." In Darshan's case the spring break may have been her children's.

Resistance Information

Darshan displayed no resistance behaviours during this study.

Savita

Background Information

Savita was a South Asian woman who generally attended with her older friend Darshan. Like Darshan, she had also immigrated from the Punjab to Canada, and she spoke English well. She appeared to be in her late twenties or early thirties.

Attendance information

Savita was a sporadic attender who attended even less often than her friend Darshan.

Resistance Information

Savita did not engage in any resistance behaviours during my observations.

Vanessa

Background Information

Vanessa was a twenty-seven year old First Nations woman with five children under the age of eleven. Except for the two year old, all of her children were in school or daycare. Vanessa's mother looked after the two year old child when Vanessa was in school.

When she was in grade nine Vanessa "got pulled out of school . . . [and] married off . . . [in the] Indian tradition." She was fifteen. Her first husband did not want her to continue attending school even though she liked school and had wanted to continue. At the time of the study she was a single mother relying heavily on her own mother's support to attend the Dover campus ABE program. She received income assistance.

In the first class I observed, Vanessa told me at the end of the class that she had thought about returning to school from the time her four year old was born. She described what impelled her to return:

Well, because of my kids. Because they're asking me things. . . . And my son asked me to help him out with some of his work and I said I didn't know how and I told him to go see your auntie next door because I didn't know and I kind of felt embarrassed because I couldn't help my son and I couldn't really tell him that I didn't really know anything about it and I felt bad. . . . I just couldn't explain it to him that I didn't know the answer and I said I was busy right now. Then when he finally realized, he said, 'Mom, you don't know nothing, do you?' And I said, 'No,

son.' And he said, 'Well, why don't you go to the library and read.' And he's the one that encouraged me to come back to school finally. So, that's what made me come back, because my son wanted to work along with me.

Attendance Information

Vanessa's attendance was very infrequent. She explained that during one period of absence she spent weeks away nursing her sick baby. I observed Vanessa only three times during the semester. Once, when I saw her in class after a long absence, she had her head on her arms, during a class film, as though she was sleeping.

Although Vanessa attended very infrequently, she did attend even at the end of May. She was absent most of March and April. She said that her mother and her children, especially the baby, were sick. She also missed school, she said, "cause I sleep in; I always get up too late." In May, she told me that she started taking iron pills. Her family's health improved and she was bored at home. She said, "I just told my mom that I was going to come back to school and that my baby was better so she could look after her again. . . . I was tired of being in the house all the time and not being around people. . . . I don't like being cooped up in the house, just at home." Val attended that week, but her attendance continued to be sporadic.

Resistance Information

Vanessa displayed no resistance behaviours during this study.

Summary of Sporadic Attenders

The five sporadic attenders were all under forty. The three women all had young children at home. One woman was First Nations and the other two were South Asian born. The two men were white Canadian born. The majority of these students exhibited almost no resistance behaviours.⁵

Seven Who Attended Regularly

⁵. Although sporadic attendance (like dropout) could be interpreted as a form of withdrawal resistance behaviour, in this study I have chosen to focus on resistance behaviour that occurs within program attendance.

There were seven students who attended regularly; that is, they attended over fifty percent of the classes and were still attending during the last four weeks of the semester. These students were Ann, Cal, Cory, Donna, Des, Doris and Henry. I was able to interview all seven, largely because of their availability.

Ann

Background Information

Ann was a forty year old Canadian born white woman with two adult children. I interviewed her in May. She lived on her own and had attended the Main College ABE program for two years. She said that she had been recently embroiled in divorce proceedings. She had spent nine years working as a babysitter and then two years as a hotel chambermaid. Her family was pleased that she had returned to school.

After leaving school at the age of fourteen, Ann stayed at home with her older sister who "only went to grade eight too." She described her life before ABE as "shitty." As a mother she said, "My kids know [that I can't read] and he [her former husband] didn't help me because they [her children] call me dummy and stupid and my ex used to do that too." She hid her illiteracy from her ex-husband but when he found out, he "started pushing" her to return to school. She became very good friends with Cory, another woman in the Fundamental ABE class.

Attendance Information

Ann was a regular and steady ABE attender, attending well over fifty percent of the classes.

Resistance Information

Ann displayed a number of resistance behaviours of the awareness and the assertion types.

Awareness Type

She talked about why she left school at fourteen with an awareness of how badly she had been treated. In our interview, when I asked Ann why she left school in grade seven, she explained:

I was getting teased at school and the kids didn't like me because I was the tallest kid in school. And they picked on me and they just didn't help me. . . . [W]e moved up to Shaw Lake and I went to school and the teacher gave me a book to read and it was hard. She expected me to be up in front of the classroom and read the book and I couldn't even read it 'cause it was in little fine printing. I told my mother that and she went and talked to the teacher and called the teacher an old bag. And that's when I left.

Ann tells this story with pride in her mother's support for her and her mother's resistance of Ann's oppressive classroom experience.

Assertion Type

Ann also noted that she "got taken advantage of" as a person with low literacy skills. However she described herself as a "very stubborn" person who, when faced with great obstacles and despite wanting "to call it quits" cannot allow herself to do so and "just keep[s] on going." This image of herself as a perseverer is also resistant of the dominant discourse that portrays poor and illiterate individuals as people who have "given up" or who lack perseverance. In this way she asserted her agency as a poor, illiterate person despite being marginalized by the dominant discourse.

Cal

Background Information

Cal was a thirty-one year old Canadian born white man. He had to fight a lot, he told me, in elementary school because he and his younger brothers and sisters were the only farm kids in their Alberta school until his family moved when he finished grade five. He moved around a lot after grade five, changing schools frequently. Cal wrote a piece in class using a phrase that his grandmother often used to describe Cal's father: he moved around so much that he "had wheels under his butt." Cal said he had grade five education, but he did attend high school in the vocational stream.

Cal worked in construction for fourteen years but had stopped two years ago. He said that he was having trouble getting construction jobs without his "ticket for journeyman." After his wife attended a computer course at Dover campus, Cal began to consider ABE and finally started classes in October, 1992. He said, "Oh yeah, I've been putting it off for so long, I finally got mad

enough to do it." He was separated and lived alone on income assistance at the time of this study; however, his family was supportive of his educational attempts. Cal had a couple of acquaintances in the class: he knew Doris and Darshan from the farm where they both had worked; as well, he and Cory had had a brief relationship when they started the program in the fall.

Attendance Information

Cal was a regular attender. He attended classes frequently, missing only occasionally to do some part-time construction work.

Resistance Information

Awareness Type

Cal, in his realistic appraisal of the usefulness of literacy, seemed to resist the dominant discourse about the importance of literacy, which presumes a richer life with the addition of an upgraded education. Of his father, who had grade three education, Cal asserted, "Like my mom's been trying to get my dad to come back [to school]. But he's been without it for so long, he's just gotten used to it. Plus the type of work he does, he doesn't really need it. He has trouble finding addresses and stuff like that, but other than that he has no problem." He was also pragmatic about his own situation. He said, "I do wish I was out there working, cause I don't make money sitting here." Cal seemed to resist the dominant discourse about the power, the usefulness, and the mystique of literacy.

Challenging Type

Cal could be challenging in class, mainly challenging the teachers to interest him. "It takes a lot to interest me," he told Kit one day after he had questioned (in a challenging manner) a word she had written on the board, with the implication that her writing wasn't clear. Cal talked about his dislike of reading in terms of sitting still, "Yeah, like, I just wish there was a little more writing involved cause I don't have the patience to sit there and read a book. . . . Shortness doesn't matter, I'd just rather be writing something or doing something or whatever, or doing something else than just sitting reading." In a sense, this revealed his challenge to interest him as well, implying he had better things to do.

Assertion Type

The rural identity, often ridiculed within the dominant discourse which tends to be urban-centred, was an important identity for Cal. He asserted it (along with two other students in the class), though wistfully and quietly, one day. Kit had asked the class if they knew "anyone who lived at the end of a road, isolated." The three students responded positively, almost as though they were speaking to themselves: "It was nice" [Cal]; "Your neighbour's not looking over your shoulder" [Cory]; "Nice and peaceful" [Des]. Cal in particular had talked about how he and his siblings were taunted because they lived on a farm just outside the Calgary city limits and had to go to a city school. Nevertheless, being rural was part of his identity and he asserted it positively.

Solidarity Type

Cal told me that it helped that so many in the class were in "the same position." He explained: "I just didn't know if I could actually handle it. I didn't know how many other people were out there like me. . . . I was hoping that no one was too much smarter than I was, basically. But it seems like we've all in the same position and we all fit in well." This statement reveals a measure of solidarity around people without literacy skills, including his relief that he "fit in well."

Cory

Background Information

Cory was a thirty-one year old Canadian born white woman who started the Dover campus ABE program in October, 1992. She had moved to Dover that September, and enrolled with the insistent help of two friends. She had an eight year old son who lived with his father, Cory's first ex-husband. She, and her first and second ex-husbands all had apartments in the same apartment building in Dover. She said, "I took a month off [in December] when I left my second husband. I just couldn't function to do it. . . . I'd sit in class; I couldn't concentrate. I just had to get my head straight." During our interview, Cory complained that she'd spent the weekend fighting with both of her ex-husbands. She was self employed as a cleaner on weekends.

Cory was teased in elementary school because she "couldn't read or write or anything. 'Dummy' and 'stupid' and just put the dunce hat on you as soon as you walk in the class." She found school "hard" and was always in special classes or special schools. She left home at the age of thirteen, she told the class one morning, to avoid continuing sexual abuse from her step-father. She left school at the same time, finishing with what she described as an official grade eight/nine education but what she thought was actually a grade three/four education. Cory befriended Ann, with whom she did everything. Of her brief relationship with Cal, Cory observed that it had been somewhat troublesome for her in class.

Attendance Information

Cory was a regular attender. Although she periodically missed some classes, she attended over half the classes throughout the semester and was still attending in June.

Resistance Information

Awareness Type

Cory shared Dave's perception about how unhelpful their elementary school teachers had been. She said in class one morning: "The only thing those teachers were there for back them days was their pay cheque once or twice a week".

Although Cory could be resistant and also assume a "bad girl" persona, she showed some ambivalence in some areas and in the following example briefly entered the dominant discourse regarding etiquette. In the last week of March a discussion occurred that related to class status. Cory's attitude was initially accommodating to the dominant cultural expectations but as the discussion unfolded, her responses changed and an awareness of the oppression of imposed upper class standards was evident.

Kit was preparing the class to see an NFB film that satirized the excesses of table manners. In terms of poverty and social exclusion this film was an interesting choice; it pokes fun at rules that serve to exclude poor and working class individuals from the middle and the upper classes. Kit told the class that, "The next movie is also funny" and began to describe it. Cory immediately and enthusiastically launched into a discussion of tableware and table manners. She described her foster mother's typical dining table, which, she said, had five forks, five glasses and finger bowls at each setting. At the end of her description, Des responded derisively, adding, "And a brass band!" Kit questioned the fuss about proper manners in general and, in particular mentioned, "Now there's this rule in [the film] that talks about how you eat your soup." Cory responded, "Oh yeah, that's easy. I know how to do that. You move your spoon away from you." Kit asked why that is done. Cory answered, "I don't know. That's just for snobs. And you gotta make sure your pinky's up. That's for snobs." To which Des commented, "the upper class," and received smiles of recognition from the whole class.

Although Cory was initially eager to show that she was socially knowledgeable, she and the rest of the class finally dismissed these exclusionary refinements of class distinction with Kit's encouragement.

In her interview, Cory elaborated on her awareness of what she perceived as one aspect of public school policy motivation. She explained to me that although she left school in what was, officially, grade nine, she considered herself to really be in grade three. She reflected, "But they would say, like you were in grade nine or ten so it looked good for other people. You know, say, for you I was in grade nine, but [for what] I'd be doing . . . I'd be in two or three." Cory believed that the school had manipulated the grade system in order to make those who didn't fit invisible. She did not think this was done to assist her; she thought it was done to serve the interests of the system, to "look good for other people." Several other students (Cal, Donna and Des) made similar comments about their officially designated grade versus how they would evaluate their "real" grade status themselves.

Cory was also aware of some of the subtleties of subordination through illiteracy: "[T]here is a lot of illiteracy people around but people don't realize it because everybody keeps hush about it, cause I guess you feel degraded. You know, [others] can read better books than you. But it's not like these grade two books; they're reading like college stuff." She understood that the stigma of illiteracy extends beyond whether one can or cannot read, it also includes the level of difficulty of one's reading material. In other words, literacy is not simply about encoding and decoding but involves mastering the typical materials of the dominant discourse.

Challenging Type

Kit liked having Cory, who was confrontive and outspoken, in the class. Kit explained:

I mean, Cory is what I call a "bad girl." Always in ABE you have some girl, some woman, who, when she was fourteen, she got herself in trouble, she got herself pregnant, it was just total rebellion. And when she comes into the ABE classroom, she goes back to that school girl persona that she had and so she writes poetry about sex and she expects you to be shocked. All of those things I really like. And so, I'm always happy when there is a "bad girl" in my class because I like people who stir it up a little.

Kit was not only comfortable with oppositional and challenging behaviour in the classroom, but she actually preferred it. Cory not only challenged aspects of schooling, she also challenged aspects of patriarchal privilege with her "bad girl" persona.

Cory had a lot to say about her experiences in public school some of which displayed challenging behaviours. She described liking to have substitute teachers when she was young: "yeah," she said to Val one day, "you could sit and make spitballs." She enjoyed disrupting the authorized schedule and being able to demonstrate that her agency could exceed that of the representative of the dominant discourse (the substitute teacher). Cory remembered that once when she was in elementary school she had a strongly challenging incident of this kind: "I had a real problem with one teacher, real bad. I smacked her across the face."

Assertion Type

Cory asserted her worth and visibility as an "illiterate". She resisted the dominant discourse that stereotypes "illiterates" as inferior. She noted that it was hard for her to admit that she couldn't read but she refused the subordination attached to the term "illiterate." During a mid-March class observation, she stated, "It took me eighteen years to tell people that I couldn't read . . . [I was] trying to cover up . . . so other people wouldn't notice. My friends would help cover. There are big shots who can't read and write." By identifying herself with the "big shots," Cory resisted the low status stereotypically accorded "illiterates" and asserted her own dignity.

In the interview, Cory expanded on this resistance theme: "Yeah, cause it's hard to tell people you can't [read], cause they say, 'How come? Look at the way you talk and that and being in business.' Like for the last thirteen years I've had my own business. It's easy. Like I know top lawyers today, like that's why they have secretaries." When she explained how she managed with low literacy skills, she was proud of her personal resources: "Yeah, but I go to my memory a lot too. That's how I got along all those years, it's my memory." Despite her low literacy skills, Cory knew she had a good memory and could use it to assert her worth and her agency despite her marginalization.

Cory had a number of marginalized identities that were painful but, which she nevertheless, acknowledged and discussed. When Cory talked to me about being a street person in her younger years, she was resisting hiding a part of herself that the dominant discourse might denigrate or try to make invisible. She said, "I'm not a 'B' word (a bitch) anymore; like the chip's off the shoulder.

'Cause when you have to live on the streets you have to have a big wall up. I still got a lot to keep under control."

In class Cory also talked about being sexually abused in a discussion about leaving home at thirteen. "Have you ever heard of that thing about step-fathers and their step-daughters?" Breaking silence regarding sexual abuse is a key factor in surviving and resisting both the abuse and the after-effects. To break silence in this area is to assert another identity that the dominant discourse has tried to keep invisible and discredited.

Cory asserted her identity as a person with low literacy skills on several occasions. Cory referred to this when she praised, Ellen, the Speak Out speaker: "She picked out everything right on the money. Like she hit all the things about literacy and how much it hurts us to tell people and that." One day in class, Val, the teacher, said that people with low literacy skills are "so smart at covering up. They're so good at it. They've learned so many ways. How can they think they're dumb?" Cory responded emphatically, changing the pronoun "them" to "you" (meaning "one") and rejecting the distance Val was imposing by her use of "they." "Well, you do!" she said, indicating that she, and by extension everyone with low literacy skills, simply do "think they're dumb." Cory, despite the difficult admission that "you think you're dumb," did not remove herself from this phenomenon, even though Val's use of "they" might have encouraged such a distancing. Cory asserted her own inclusion in the marginalized identity of "illiterate".

Solidarity Type

In another example, Cory demonstrated solidarity with others in the class based on their common identity of "illiterate." Following the day of the Speak Out, the class began to compile a report about the event. Kit read out one sentence from the chalkboard, "Our Speak Out is about students coming back to school." Horace interrupted, "About that, hmmm, was the Speak Out like, all the Speakers at the Speak Out, were they all [school] dropouts?" Kit confirmed, "Yep Horace, every single speaker. Yep, all eighty of them." Cory spoke, "We're all dropouts here. That's why we came back to this class, to learn how to read and write and do everything. We all dropped out at an early age and started life. Now we're coming back."

This exchange reveals Cory's commitment to her classmates and to "illiterates" as a group. She made no apologies for school dropout; she simply included everyone in the generic and positive explanation, "We all dropped out at an early age and started life."

Cory explained the feeling of comfort she got from the solidarity regarding being "illiterate": "Like we're a family in there. We all stick together because everybody's the same. Everybody has their problems. But you can ask them and they're not putting you down, like calling you a dummy or anything, 'cause they're no better than what I am." The atmosphere created by this class was supportive for Cory. She felt and participated in the solidarity with the other students, instead of feeling competitive or excluded as frequently happens in school culture.

Des

Background Information

Des was a forty-seven year old Canadian born white man who lived alone in his pickup truck which he parked on his brother's property at night. He disliked his brother, who was not supportive of Des' return to school. Des was helped back into the adult education system by a former employer. He led a solitary life but was a friendly and supportive class member.

Des left home, and school, at the age of thirteen after punching his abusive father. He said he "got tired of my old man hitting me with a rubber hose." He said he was in grade three (officially grade five or six in the special class he attended) when he left school to work in a mill. At school "things were hard . . . My parents couldn't afford P.E. clothes for me." As he said, "What was the point of getting an education."

Attendance Information

He started at Dover campus in February, 1993 and was the most regular attender in the class. Some mornings he arrived for class forty-five minutes before class started.

Resistance Information

Des had a range and volume of resistance behaviours that, like Cory and Cal, included all types except the withdrawal type. Des was especially aware of the injustice of his treatment as a child and its subsequent consequences for him as an adult.

Awareness Type

During one class discussion, Des talked about the frequent use of corporal punishment in his public school: "You got hit with a yard stick," The teacher, Val, joked supportively, "It's a meter stick now." Des carried on: "When the front of my hands were too sore, he just started on the back." No one in the class expressed shock. Henry confirmed the accuracy of Des' assertions by telling his own story of being hit by a teacher. Des continued with his experience: "There used to be lots of kids lined up to get the strap. I once had it because I couldn't write with my [injured] right hand." He finished his story by stating, "They were cruel back then."

Des expressed resistance, and some ambivalence, when he talked about his feeling of dissatisfied exclusion: "There's a lot of things I missed out on; education is just a part of it." At forty-seven, Des objected to his economic marginalization because of "illiteracy"; however, he accepted the dominant discourse's message about how he could improve his position and what improvement looks like: "Some people, I can see that they have things, things I would like to have. So the way you can do that is get a better education. I don't want to be working for people for cheap wages. I want to better my lifestyle."

His feelings that his former school experiences were unfair extended to a sense that his current adult status of "illiterate" was unjustly stigmatizing. However, there was also ambivalence; he both resisted and entered aspects of the dominant discourse on illiteracy. He thought that it was wrong that as an "illiterate" he was assigned an inferior economic status, but he believed that the only answer to right that injustice was for him to improve and to increase his education.

Des also recognized other injustice related to his current economic status. Like most of the students in the class he received income assistance. He commented: "Yeah it's not a very nice thing to be on. By my way of thinking it's a disgrace. They don't even give you enough; I'd like to see them live on \$210 a month." Clearly he was aware of the humiliation and subordination inherent in being on welfare which made him feel dependent and inadequate.

Des also showed considerable awareness of class-related issues during the group discussion about table manners. When Cory had finished relating the inventory of tableware that she said had appeared on her foster mother's dining-room table, Des commented derisively, "And a brass band!" He also added the elaboration "the upper class" when Cory said that that kind of etiquette was "just for snobs," which made clear his resistance of upper class values, as well as his placement of snobs on the social hierarchy.

Challenging Type

Des had also challenged patriarchal authority in his youth, underscoring his capacity for resistance in extreme circumstances. One morning, Des read his own story about leaving home at the age of thirteen (after punching his abusive father) to the class. As he said in his interview, he "got tired of [his] old man hitting [him] with a rubber hose," so he punched his father, leaving home and school at the same time.

Assertion Type

Des also identified as a rural person. He spent his youth in the countryside and worked in fishing and forestry as an adult. He asserted how much he preferred this often devalued lifestyle in class one day when he responded that he thought it was "nice and peaceful," as compared with Kit's description of "isolated."

Donna

Background Information

Donna was a twenty-five year old Canadian born white woman. She started at Main College in 1986 in the ABE program, but switched to the Restaurant Worker program. She left school altogether for three years but returned in 1990 to Special Education classes. She returned to

the Fundamental ABE class in 1993. Donna lived with her parents and depended on them for support and for transportation to and from school. Donna talked about moving around a lot as a child. She was well known in the class and had a couple of friends in the college from the other programs she had attended; however, she did not seem to have friends in the Fundamental ABE class.

Attendance Information

In April, Donna got a part-time job in a local private daycare and missed several classes during this period of time; however, she attended more frequently again in May and June after her daycare job broke down. Donna attended over half the classes, was still attending in June and is considered a regular attender.

Resistance Information

Donna had few resistance behaviours compared to the other regular attenders. Her main type of resistance was challenging Kit's teaching approach for her.

Challenging Type

Like Dave, Donna resisted learning by some methods that Kit used; she and Kit had an ongoing struggle about how teaching and learning should proceed. Periodically throughout the month of March, Donna insisted on proceeding in her own way with her own writing projects in the Exhale room. In one exchange, at the beginning of the month, Kit told Donna that she was writing too much (for Kit to manage to edit). Donna responded, "You're making me feel bad;" she later explained that she was doing journal writing that didn't need to be edited.

Donna also objected to Kit's restriction of Donna's oral reading in class. She resisted Kit's program of instruction designed to teach her to read less haltingly; she thought she would learn better just practising oral reading. In this way, she asserted her agency and belief in her own methods over the school culture's authorized methodology.

Doris

Background Information

Doris, at fifty, was the oldest student in the classroom. She was a First Nations woman who was very involved with her Native traditions. She was also the oldest of thirteen children and had to leave school because, as she said, "There was a big family and I had to help support the family. That was when I went to the farm [to work]." She had attended residential school where she was abused. She "didn't quite finish grade five."

She lived with her husband in their trailer in what Doris described as a "Hollywood style marriage," by which she meant that she lived at one end of the trailer and her husband lived at the other. Doris' granddaughter also lived with them. Doris said she had returned to school partly to provide a role model for the younger First Nations generation, particularly her granddaughter. She also wanted to be able to understand legal documents because she felt that she and her husband

were being taken advantage of in a Native land rental arrangement that they had with a Victoria businessman.

Attendance Information

Although Doris was absent for most of February, her attendance improved considerably during the latter half of the semester; by the end of the term she had attended well over half of the classes. She was a regular attender who said that she had made a commitment to her education part way through the semester.

Resistance Information

Doris displayed the widest range and largest number of resistance behaviours in this class. Her primary types of resistance behaviours were in the awareness and the assertion categories.

Awareness Type

Doris talked about her awareness of gender dominance as it related to teacher dominance. Doris explained how men teachers could affect her. She said, "I can tell by how their faces look, their body language; you can tell. Like some teachers, I freeze. Especially with a guy. They come and stand over me and I just sit. But not with a lady teacher." She described her reaction in these situations as freezing, which could be interpreted as an form of withdrawal as well. However, I have chosen to categorize this example as awareness resistance because the primary tone is one of keen awareness.

Doris also demonstrated awareness of how badly she was treated at the residential school she attended. She reported, in our interview, that she was abused at this school until she left at the age of twelve. Doris talked to me about this: "I had a lot of bad experiences I guess. Abuse. . . ." She told me she was learning to speak up.

Doris also resisted the marginalization of illiteracy. She was aware that she could be taken advantage of as a person with low literacy skills. She said that she enrolled in the Dover ABE program because she thought she and her family were being exploited by a white businessman who rents their land. She elaborated:

I wanted to learn more. My husband has an R.V. and I wanted to know and understand what the paperwork is. . . . Yeah and the land lease is going to be up in three years from now and I wanted to understand why we're getting ripped off because we haven't got any lump sum of money from it and it's been seven years now and they gave us the run around. Otherwise I would have had this nice fancy car now and I'm still on foot. And this is why I want to know [how the system works].

For Doris, learning how to read (legal contracts) was a necessary step towards gaining some control at the interface between the dominant culture and her First Nations culture. Doris' motivation to start ABE was rooted in her desire to resist exploitation.

Doris was deeply and personally aware of racial discrimination. One day at the end of May, as the class filed out, Doris called to Amy as she was leaving. No other students were left in the classroom. The following conversation between Doris and Amy demonstrates a profound outrage at, and resistance to, dominant culture stereotypes of First Nations people:

Doris: You see that write up in the paper about the Indians?

Amy: Yeah.

Doris: They blame us when someone comes up and asks us [to sell them cigarettes]. Down at the mall, I seen a few of them down there.

Amy: Yeah, they came up and asked Mom yesterday

Doris: They make us look bad. They're the ones

Amy: Mom looked at that lady and she says, 'Well, you're not going to go to the newspaper and start saying things about me,' she says and starts yelling. And she says, 'No, no I'm not going to do that.' Well there's already some talk about how us Indians, putting on T.V.

Doris: They make us look bad. It's just like they put a mark on us: 'we're alcoholics.' We can do nothing. Now they put a mark on us that we buy smokes for people.

This example in particular demonstrates how these ABE students were well aware of the political and personal dimensions of dominance and subordination (or marginalization). Doris and Amy are indignant that they are stigmatized and used as scapegoats on the basis of their First Nations identities.

Challenging Type

Doris resisted the concrete results of her and her family's inability to understand the legal and financial dealings they are involved in. Further, she resisted and confronted the dominant white, corporate culture's insinuation that she should be grateful for what she suspects is a shady land deal. Doris explained:

He's (the businessman) always giving us this go-around. Like, 'If I didn't rent this land from you guys, you guys wouldn't be getting any kind of money from us and you guys won't be making this kind of money.' He's always giving us the background that if it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have this today. I finally got mad with him last month. I said, 'If it wasn't for us you wouldn't have this today.' I said, 'If it wasn't for us you wouldn't have this kind of land, so how could you not be getting any money yourself when we know you have a brand new car and I'm still on my feet.'

Doris' words make it clear that she felt exploited as a First Nations person who also had limited literacy skills. She challenged this exploitation by refusing to be grateful, and by directly informing the businessman of how he is dependent on her.

Assertion Type

On several occasions Doris asserted her identity as a First Nations person. One example occurred while she was telling me about her domestic arrangements. Her explanation demonstrated the importance she attached to maintaining this identity and of passing it on to her

heirs: "Well, I made this agreement [with my husband] in order to keep my granddaughter. I didn't want her to go out into the white society and they were going to take her away from my daughter." The arrangement she made was that she would move back in with her husband (from whom she had been estranged) so that her granddaughter could live with them and avoid foster placement in white society.

Doris also advocated for First Nations people. During a discussion about writing oral histories that the class was planning to do, Doris suggested, "A little more understanding. The words of the story, some of our people don't understand a lot of words that are large. Take it down to smaller words so they can understand them."

One day in class, Doris suggested the college hire First Nations people to cater the next Speak Out:

What about getting people who know how to cook? There are quite a few of us on the reserve who know how, that's cooking for two, three hundred people. And they don't charge very much. I know for a fact, I used to do that.

In making this suggestion, Doris asserted that marginalized people are skilled and can be of help to the dominant culture; she asserted that assistance is a two way street between cultures.

Doris also often referred to First Nations traditions. For example, during one observation she noted, "Most homes I go to have their parents' pictures up, even white people. And Indians, they have theirs up, if they're still alive. A lot of them, when they're gone, they put them away, cause that's our tradition."

Kit acknowledged Doris' expertise in First Nations traditions and language, which further validated the presence of the marginalized culture within the dominant culture of the classroom, thus reducing the marginalization. For example, one day in class Kit said:

It's true that Brian [at the Native Heritage Centre] was interested when I said that Doris was in the class and also we were talking about how Amy and Doris were joking back and forth in Hulqu'me'num [a First Nations language]. So, um, he said sometimes Elders want to speak Hulqu'me'num. So he said Doris might want to do a little translation [for the oral history project]. We'll see.

Doris explained her attitude toward resistance and accommodation in literacy education in the following way:

But coming to school and learning, you learn to sit and relax and understand, instead of thinking, 'You white people can't teach us anything; I don't want to learn anything from you.' But I figure you're learning from us too. It's just that you're giving too. It's kind of relaxing to me. I don't know about anybody else, but when I'm there just doing the regular things in class, I get to relax sometimes and leave my mind outside the door.

Doris had to overcome considerable resistance to the dominant culture and school system in order to join this ABE class. As she said, her motivation was based on resistance to exploitation of her First Nations and undereducated status; she intended to increase her personal agency. Although being involved in white education has not been simply positive, Doris makes it more positive for herself by resisting the dominance, especially by asserting her First Nations identity within the school culture. In doing so, she makes it more positive, not only for herself, but for others in the class. Through her assertion of her identity and resistance to the various dominant discourses present, she changes these dominant discourses and helps to shift the dominance dynamics in the classroom.

Solidarity Type

Doris appreciated and contributed to the solidarity of the First Nations students in her class. In a letter she wrote to me at the end of my observations, Doris wrote: "What I miss is that one other person [Mabel, a former ABE student] in class that we used to talk our Native language in class together."

The importance of solidarity among different marginalized people, especially concerning the issues of poverty and illiteracy, were evident to Doris, as is apparent in her report of her conversation with Ellen, the keynote speaker at the Speak Out:

She was thinking everything. It was really good 'cause, like I wasn't at the talk yesterday (at the Speak Out) and when I got to talk, just her and I, she thinks everything that I was thinking of in the background. And she said she was on welfare and I thought, 'Oh, this person's just like us.' It kinda woke me up a little. I said, 'Oh, OK.' She asked if I would speak and I wasn't sure. I would think about it. There are people out there just like us. And we're just like them too. It's kinda hard, you know: somebody out there hurting just as much as I was, eh? And I never thought of that. I thought I was the only one really hurting. Like all of a sudden your problem's outside and sometimes it helps to talk in public about it and maybe somebody out there will give you an answer. It really hurts.

Solidarity is significant to the concept of resistance in that it allows students to see beyond their own problems and marginalized identities. It encourages marginalized people to break their isolation and view their marginalization in a broader social, economic or political context. This connection and identification with others who are also marginalized is part of greater political and personal agency.

Henry

Background Information

Henry was a forty-six year old Canadian born white man from Saskatchewan. He had been a truck driver for many years but back problems forced him to quit and work for his wife who ran a fast food restaurant. The business folded and he and his wife returned to school at Dover campus in February, 1993. His wife was in the more advanced level three of the ABE program. They and their three children lived on income assistance.

Henry had dropped out of school with a grade six education when he was fifteen. He described his public school years:

I had a hard time learning. Classrooms were then quite large and it was just, like, the first was the worst. That's what kinda, I think, screwed me up a lot, in grade one . . . just the teacher. Then I got into grade two and I didn't, like, catch on to some stuff, so on and so forth. And I kinda went along and didn't learn to spell, so I got fed up and quit and I was only fifteen, I guess, when I got out of school.

Then he worked for two years with his father on the family farm before getting a job in construction on a provincial hydro project and later becoming a truck driver.

Attendance Information

Henry was one of the most frequent attenders. Until the end of May (when he had to move houses) he had not missed any classes.

Resistance Information

Awareness Type

In early March, in one example, Kit asked the students in the Inhale classroom whether they thought the government wanted some people to stay poor. In unison Horace and Henry answered, "Yes." Kit asked them what happened if a lot of people stay poor. Henry answered, "More people, less wages. You got to talk their lingo." "Yes," answered Kit, "You got to talk their lingo." This exchange demonstrated that Henry knew that employers can pay lower wages if there is a pool of poor, unemployed workers, and also that "their lingo" is not the language of the welfare and working classes, but is the language of the ruling class, the language of influence. He was aware of the political implications of poverty.

Challenging Type

In one class, during a discussion of public school experiences, Henry recounted how he responded as a child to teacher discipline. He said, "Once when I got hit, I brought me hand up and the teacher hit his own hand". He was proud of his ability to subvert the school authority through his own wits.

Summary of Regular Attenders

There were seven students in this study who are considered regular attenders: Ann, Cory, Cal, Donna, Des, Doris and Henry. Each attended more than fifty percent of the classes and had attendance in the last four weeks of the semester.

In this study regular attendance was split on the dimension of age: four of the regular attenders were over forty and three were under forty. However, the most frequent attenders, (Des, Henry, and Ann) were over forty.

Regular attendance was not gender-marked in this study. Three of the regular attenders were men; four were women. However, all of the regular attenders, except Doris, were Canadian born of European heritage. This makes Doris, a First Nations student, somewhat exceptional; therefore, her comments and circumstances, especially with reference to resistance, are of special interest to this study.

Resistance and Attendance Compared

I observed many examples of resistant behaviour during the course of this study. While most students exhibited at least some resistant behaviour, each student had a particular pattern of resistant behaviours. As well, certain resistant behaviours were easier for the teachers to recognize, value and work with. In the discussion that follows I will compare student resistant behaviours with the student attendance patterns in this ABE program, which are summarized in the three tables below. Table 1 (see p.97) represents the total number of resistance behaviours for each student. Table 2 (see p.98) shows the number of resistance behaviours that were observed and Table 3 (see p.99) shows the number of resistance behaviours that were noted during interviews. The students are grouped according to attendance pattern.

In this section I examine the relationships that exist between student resistant behaviours and student attendance. I examine the resistant behaviours of those who dropped out of the ABE program, those who attended sporadically, and those who attended regularly, looking for commonalties among these attendance groupings of students in terms of resistant behaviours.

Table 1
Resistance Incidents (All) by Attendance Group

Attendance	Student	Resistance Category					Total
		W/draw	Aware	Chall	Assert	Solid	
Drop-out	Adam	22	0	2	1	0	25
	Hank	11	0	0	0	0	11
	Horace	0	3	2	1	0	6
	Pat	0	2	0	0	0	2
	Ron	10	0	0	0	0	10
Sporadic	Dave	1	3	5	1	0	10
	Darshan	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Gil	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Savita	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Vanessa	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regular	Ann	0	2	0	1	0	3
	Cal	0	2	2	1	1	6
	Cory	0	9	4	5	1	19
	Des	0	5	2	3	1	11
	Donna	0	1	4	0	0	5
	Doris	0	10	1	7	6	24
	Henry	0	3	1	0	0	4

Table 2
Resistance Incidents (Observed) by Attendance Group

Attendance	Student	Resistance Category					Total
		W/draw	Aware	Chall	Assert	Solid	
Drop-out	Adam	22	0	2	1	0	25
	Hank	11	0	0	0	0	11
	Horace	0	1	2	0	0	3
	Pat	0	2	0	0	0	2
	Ron	10	0	0	0	0	10
Sporadic	Dave	1	3	5	1	0	10
	Darshan	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Gil	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Savita	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Vanessa	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regular	Ann	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Cal	0	0	2	1	0	3
	Cory	0	2	2	4	0	8
	Des	0	2	2	3	1	8
	Donna	0	0	4	0	0	4
	Doris	0	3	1	4	5	13
	Henry	0	2	1	0	0	3

Table 3
Resistance Incidents (Interview) by Attendance Group

Attendance	Student	Resistance Category					Total
		W/draw	Aware	Chall	Assert	Solid	
Drop-out	Adam	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hank	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Horace	0	2	0	1	0	3
	Pat	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Ron	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sporadic	Dave	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Darshan	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Gil	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Savita	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Vanessa	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regular	Ann	0	2	0	1	0	3
	Cal	0	2	0	0	1	3
	Cory	0	7	1	1	1	10
	Des	0	3	0	0	0	3
	Donna	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Doris	0	7	0	3	1	11
	Henry	0	1	0	0	0	1

The Dropout Group Comparison

There were five students in the dropout category for whom I had gathered sufficient information to permit discussion. Of these five students, Hank, Ron and Adam displayed, primarily, withdrawal signs of resistance. They all sat (often singly because they seldom attended together) in the isolated row of the class either exclusively or primarily; they came and went frequently in the course of a class period and often remained out of the classroom for prolonged periods of time.

As resistance behaviour, withdrawal behaviours seemed to be most difficult for the teachers to acknowledge and work with, although Kit did try several times to persuade Hank and Ron to move into the more central seating area. She also joined both of them, at different times, in the isolated row.

Hank and Ron employed no other forms of resistance behaviours. Adam also displayed two challenging and one (silent) assertion behaviour, but it was clear that his primary mode of resistance was overwhelmingly withdrawal. All three men dropped out at least six weeks before the end of the semester.

The two other students in the dropout category, Horace and Pat, did not display withdrawal signs of resistance. Pat displayed only two examples of resistance, both of which displayed awareness of the oppression of dominant culture. In Pat's case, dropout is associated with only a very little resistant behaviour of the awareness type.

In this group of students who dropped out, there was little evidence of the awareness, challenging, asserting or solidarity types of resistant behaviours; however, there was some variation, particularly with Horace, who displayed a considerable number and range of resistance behaviours. He challenged teacher methods; he expressed feeling militancy in the learner context when Kit asked if anyone felt militant; he also asserted his First Nations identity as well as solidarity with others when he wanted to show that "Indians" could get an education. However, Horace also expressed more ambivalence and had more difficulty positioning himself than others in the class, which may have contributed to making continued attendance in ABE more difficult for

him. He displayed the most evidence of contradiction and ambivalence in reference to his perspective of the dominant discourse: significantly, he displayed this ambivalence particularly around education. In general, however, the dropout group displayed resistance primarily in the withdrawal mode.

It must also be noted that all the key student dropouts were First Nations students. My interpretation of this is that for First Nations people with low literacy skills, the distance between their cultural identity and the dominant culture and school culture is greater than that of other Canadian born individuals with low literacy skills. In this study, the observation that it is primarily First Nations people who drop out indicates a need for the encouragement of a greater range and number of resistance behaviour among the students (given that the First Nations person who persisted displayed the most resistance behaviours) in order to allow the students to remain in ABE classes while asserting and preserving their cultural identities. It would also seem to indicate a greater need for political analysis, discussion, and action, especially on the part of ABE teachers, to counter the situation of dominance.

The Sporadic Attenders Group Comparison

Five of the students in the study are classified as sporadic attenders: Vanessa, Gil, Darshan, Savita and Dave. Vanessa, was a very infrequent sporadic attender. She displayed none of the identified resistance behaviours in class, nor did she express any significant resistance when she was interviewed.

Gil attended rarely at the start of the semester and though he attended more frequently as the semester progressed, he remained a sporadic attender. He participated rarely at the start but he became more involved and talkative as the weeks went by; however, he displayed no resistance behaviours during my observations.

Two other students were sporadic attenders, Darshan and Savita. These two women, both originally from the Punjab, usually attended together. They did not display resistant or oppositional behaviours during the observations, nor did I interview them.

Among the sporadic attenders, Dave displayed the greatest range and number of resistant behaviours. His primary mode was challenging. He challenged former school and familial dominance, as well as current classroom teaching behaviours and governmental policies that ignore the needs of poor people. He also asserted his identity as a poor person and displayed solidarity with Des around childhood abuse. Although he was a sporadic attender he was by far the most frequent sporadic attender, attending over a third of the classes.

The sporadic attenders are a mixed group: two were Canadian born white men, two were South Asian-Canadian immigrant women, and one was a First Nations woman; all were under forty. Of the five that I observed, I was only able to interview Vanessa. Four of the five sporadic attenders exhibited no apparent resistant behaviours and the most frequent of the sporadic attenders was the only sporadic attender to exhibit resistance. Generally, sporadic attendance was associated with non-resistance.

The Regular Attenders Group Comparison

I categorized seven of the students in this study as regular attenders: Ann, Donna, Cory, Cal, Des, Henry, and Doris. Among these seven students, all displayed some resistant behaviours, although two, Ann and Donna, displayed few. While Ann displayed few resistant behaviours in classroom observations, she did oppose the way she was treated when she attended the public school system. Ann also thinks of herself as a resistant, "stubborn" person. This resistant persona allowed Ann to continue attending school when the odds against her seemed overwhelming. In fact, she has attended the Main ABE program regularly for three years.

Like Ann, Donna showed resistance by objecting to her former schooling. However, she also challenged the way that Kit taught her. Apart from these, Donna displayed few resistance behaviours in the classroom.

Cory was a regular attender who resisted the dominant and school cultures often and in a variety of ways. She is aware of power dynamics; she challenges past and present institutions; she asserts her marginalized identities as a low literate adult, as a sexual abuse survivor, and as a street person; she also shows solidarity with other low literacy adults. Although Cory demonstrated ambivalence in her initial tendency to accept the prescriptions of the dominant discourse on etiquette, in the end she dismissed at least some of it as being "for snobs."

Cal also displayed a range of resistant behaviours. He challenged past school experiences, present teacher methods, and the usefulness of ABE. He asserted his identity as a rural person and expressed solidarity around low literacy with others in the class.

Des, the most frequent of the regular attenders, was also a resister. He challenged his past schooling and his impoverished and abusive patriarchal family background. Des was aware of socio-economic class issues and opposed his current position as a poor person on inadequate welfare. He asserted his marginalized identities as a poor, rural individual with low literacy skills and asserted solidarity with his low literate classmates.

Henry was also a regular attender. However, although he was a resister, his resistance consisted mainly of demonstrating his awareness of institutionalized oppression. Although Henry

did not exhibit frequent or varied resistance, he did express an awareness of the dominant structure in society and how it operates.

Doris was an exceptional student in that she was the only regular attender who was also a First Nations student. She was also exceptional in displaying the greatest number and variety of resistant behaviours. She displayed not only awareness and challenging behaviours, but she also displayed assertion of her marginalized identities as a First Nations, poor and low literate individual. Further, she described seeing commonalities among and across some marginalized identities. For instance, although she was surprised when the Speak Out guest speaker, Ellen, talked about having lived on welfare, she immediately recognized that this was a point of possible solidarity across racial identities. However, she maintained her awareness of the oppression that whites generally visit upon First Nations people, as when the white press portrayed First Nations people as smugglers.

Doris was a pivotal student in the class. She was called on by the teachers to take over if the teacher had to leave. Other students looked to her when a student representative position was announced for nominations. Not only is she the oldest, at fifty, but she is also the clearest thinker with respect to resistance. Both teachers encouraged her in her resistance behaviours. She described feeling better about herself at the end of the semester than at the beginning. "Yeah, there's a few things that's real different. I begin to fix myself up. Even to get up in the morning and look in the mirror and tell myself that I'm fine. Understanding math is one more and being a little bit more patient." School seemed to be satisfying her desire for more agency without undermining her identity.

All of the students in the regular attender group displayed more than one form of resistance behaviour. None displayed signs of withdrawal resistance. Other than these two commonalities they are a varied group: six of the students are Euro-Canadian and one is First Nations; four are women and three are men; and four are over forty and three are under forty. This variation heightens the likelihood of a connection between regular attendance and the number and variety resistance behaviour (excluding the withdrawal kind).

Teacher Interventions and Attitudes

The two teachers in this ABE classroom maintained educational attitudes and demonstrated instructional interventions that appeared to be student centred and progressive about both attendance and resistance. These attitudes and interventions affected the general classroom environment, including attendance and resistance, as well as encouraging respect for the identities of everyone in the class. I present a selection of their observed, or discussed, attitudes and interventions.

Teacher Intervention and Attitudes Regarding Attendance

Both Kit and Val were attentive to student attendance. They noticed when a student did not attend for several days. This noticing was followed up with a call to the student to find out what the problems might be and to let the student know that they were missed. If the teachers could not reach the student by phone, one of them wrote to the student welcoming them back. For example, Kit had written to Vanessa in May. On May 19th Vanessa appeared in class for the first time in many days, entering the classroom as the morning lesson was beginning. As Vanessa took her seat, Kit asked her, "Did you get a letter from me in the mail?" Vanessa shook her head. "No, well probably tomorrow then, or today, you'll get a letter. I wrote late last week saying, 'Hi, where are you? We'd like to have you back.'" And here you are, just showed up without getting the letter at all. Good!"

Neither Kit nor Val was interested in keeping official attendance records, nor did the college require it. They posted a check-in attendance sheet on the Exhale classroom bulletin board for the students' voluntary use.

Kit had a rationale for not pressuring students about their attendance. She believed that attendance was a pivotal focus for what she referred to as "power struggles" between students and teachers. During our interview she described a teaching experience that had taught her to avoid "power struggles" about attendance with students.

So last fall I made a kind of a major mistake again around the same thing. We had a student who would come maybe one or two days, totally at random. So I talked to him about what he could do. In fact, there wasn't anything he could do. I mean,

like, it's not to do with a job. He has a life schedule that he stays up all night. I think it's because he's depressed; he sleeps all day and then the day is over so then he doesn't have to worry about going to appointments or looking for a job or those things. So he can stay up all night watching videos. And then morning comes and he's too tired to come to school. So we had this talk and it became clear to me. But I still kind of said, well, you know, I put some pressure on him. Like I tried to get him to talk to me. And he immediately says, 'Well, I'll just have to be different.' Which, of course, is impossible. And so I tried to get him to talk to me about what he could do, but he wouldn't. And he said, 'No I'll just do it.' But, of course, he never came back and that was the last time I saw him. And it was simply silly of me to do that because I knew it wouldn't work, but I believed that it would. . . . It's a kind of thing that you think there's a certain kind of control that you have to have here. But it's actually no advantage and so you just . . . have to live with the fact that you can't have control. I mean some programs are really, really strict. They say that you have to have ninety percent attendance or you're out, or ninety-five percent or you're out. But I think they lose a lot of students.

Kit and Val did not pressure individual students to attend, but they did encourage attendance. On March 19th, Kit gave what was called the "Butt Lecture" twice, once at the beginning of the morning and once at the end. The first time she gave it, she gave it solo. She said:

The most important part of your body for back to school is not your brain; it's your butt. Cause if you get your butt in here and put it on the chair, then your brain will be up to it. We'll deal with your brain in whatever shape it's in. But you've got to get your butt in. And you've been getting your butts in and your brains have worked very well.

The second time she gave the "Butt Lecture," she asked Des to be her "straight man" and the lecture was presented to the class as a dialogue. Kit opened, "So, Des what is the most important part of your body to bring in to school?" Des answered, "Your butt." And it carried on. It was intended to be humorous, but it was given in earnest. Kit explained:

Certainly with adults you have students who come with a million pounds of baggage about school and there is hardly any point in getting into any kind of power struggle with them. And so a whole lot of what I do is designed to keep them coming back because if they don't come back, they won't improve at all. And there is no way. I mean, nobody forces them to come and nobody forces them to come back and nobody forces them to say, 'No I can't drive my aged mother to the old folks home where her only surviving friend is, because I have to come to school.' I mean people have all kinds of reasons not to come to school and some of them aren't very good. So what I need to do is keep them coming back.

When Kit suggested that "some of [the reasons] aren't very good", she implied that some of the reasons that students give her for missing school were not substantial or adequate. They may

have been factual and even important, but they begged the question: "why?" Why, for instance, could the student not have driven their aged mother to the old folks home later in the day, in the evening or on the weekend?

Teacher Attitudes and Interventions Regarding Resistance

Kit and Val made attempts to promote and to work with student resistance behaviours. The initial interview with each student, the monthly theme units, their methods, and their daily interactions with the students could all be generally regarded as resistance positive. They had an awareness of student resistance and built resistance work into the course itself.

At the beginning of each term, and subsequently when new students started the program, Kit always arranged for an initial one-to-one student interview that helped to set a tone of acceptance and solidarity across marginalized identities in the class. Some of the theme unit concepts in this ABE course encouraged student resistance: the Learning and Past School Experience unit; the Speak Out unit; and the Oral History unit. Kit also attempted to work with the physical restlessness that was noted by many students and which could be interpreted as a resistance to the school/middle class culture that requires the subordination of the physical.

The Initial Interview

In this initial interview with each new student Kit stressed the importance of respecting all students in the class. She emphasized that there was a strong expectation that no one would be racist or sexist in the classroom, and that the classroom would be a safe and comfortable place for everybody to learn in. Kit has found that, generally, this initial one-to-one discussion has kept the classroom free of overt racism and sexism. However, if one of these problems arose, she said she responded by setting up a situation that encouraged the targeted student(s) to help educate or refute the student who had been racist or sexist. She gave the following hypothetical example, wherein one of the men students might have said something derogatory about women drivers. Kit would then ask several of the women in the class if they thought they were bad drivers. Some women would then assert their good driving skills, thus discrediting the sexist generalization about women

drivers. And that, according to Kit, would be the end of the issue. Kit was very clear that discrimination would not be tolerated in her class. This assisted resistance because it informed everyone that identities that have been marginalized by the dominant discourses would be respected and protected in this classroom.

Learning And Past School Experiences

The first theme unit (on learning and past school experiences), which presented the opportunity for all students to air their grievances regarding their former school experiences, encouraged solidarity around the mutual identity of school dropout with low literacy skills in a heavily literacy-based society. It also provided opportunities for politicizing awareness, for challenging oppressions in retrospect, and for asserting other associated aspects of identity which have been marginalized, such as poverty. It allowed the possibility of reclaiming and revaluing neglected, abused and deprived adolescent selves. All of this learning encouraged a respect for a marginalized and/or subordinated identity and encouraged the students' resistance against a dominant culture that subverts or subordinates them. Kit and Val both encouraged the students to describe and discuss their experiences. They also taught that learning can happen in different ways for different people.

The Speak Out

The Speak Out had been a feature of the Fundamental ABE program at Dover campus since Kit established it seven years ago. The Speak Out that I observed was a half day event (buffet lunch included) composed of student testimonials describing, generally, the difficulties and the benefits of returning to school, which were delivered to an invited audience of family, friends, other college students and community members. The Fundamental students spent the month prior to the Speak Out preparing their oral presentations and making the arrangements for the invitations, the guest speaker, the hall and the luncheon.

I videotaped the Speak Out presentations. All the campus students who had ever dropped out of school, not only the Fundamental class, were invited to speak about their experiences. Speaking to an audience of about two hundred people, student after student explained their ambivalence about returning to school: how hard it had been to return, how hard it continued to be, but how glad they were to be back. One student who spoke had just returned that day after dropping out for a week. A First Nations student said she was pleased to see so many First Nations faces in the room. Another student said that he didn't think school had anything to teach him but when door after door closed in his face as he grew older, he decided to return. Their emotional and often tearful speeches reflected their desire for acceptance and their fear of continued rejection by the dominant culture.

The Speak Out resembled two types of gatherings that I am aware of. It resembled an AA meeting wherein alcoholics admit to former lives of disability and embrace new lives of sobriety. The key there is to admit to the fault of alcoholism. Taking part in this type of meeting may be personally useful in battling the disease of alcoholism, but it is not resistance behaviour. The second type of meeting that the Speak Out resembled is the "Abortion Speak Outs" of the seventies, wherein women who had had abortions admitted this fact in order to promote the legalization of abortion. The key was to risk exposure and censure in order to affect social change. Taking part in this type of meeting is clearly resistance behaviour.

Although the Speak Out provided the opportunity for solidarity around the identity of low-literacy and also offered the possibility to challenge former school experiences, for some of the students the experience seemed more confessional than resistant. They were confessing to the fault of not having kept up with the expectations of the dominant culture. The Speak Out theme unit is particularly interesting because it represents the ambivalence of literacy to the dominant discourse and the ambivalence that many students feel as they try to both enter and resist it.

For the Speak Out to be a more resistance-positive event, it would likely be important to work towards removing the confessional aspect from the Speak Out and to encourage expression of anger that people often feel when they have, wrongly, been made to feel that they are at fault.

Accommodating The Physical

Many students in this class talked about restlessness; Doris, Des, Cory and Cal all noted the problem of sitting still in the classroom context. This restlessness that was described, but not enacted, likely contains some elements of resistance (of the withdrawal type), but was not evidenced clearly as such in this study. As well, some left the classroom for long periods of time, which, combined with isolated seating patterns and consistent lateness has been described as withdrawal resistance behaviour. Further, physical modes of learning (eg. watching and doing) were described as more comfortable for most of the students that I interviewed.

Kit made several attempts to address this student restlessness. One day, while I was observing, Kit brought in chunks of coloured plasticene and distributed it to the class, explaining:

There's a lot of plasticene on the table because I'm finding that I need something to fiddle with and people are yelling at me because I'm making too much noise fiddling with my keys. I thought, 'I'll get something soft and quiet to play with while I'm talking.' And then I thought, 'Probably everybody wants some. If I have some I'll have to share it.' So I brought in a lot. So if you feel like fiddling, fiddle. If you don't feel like fiddling just leave it there.

During the large class meeting held that day to discuss the organization of the upcoming Forestry and Oral Histories theme projects, the entire class molded their pieces of plasticene while participating in the group discussion. Kit commented at the end of this session that the students were increasing their capacity to sit through long meetings: "You people are getting very good at

being in meetings. You've now been in a meeting for forty or fifty minutes." Cory responded, "Well, remember that first meeting!"

Kit also attempted to privilege physical aspects of learning by using increased physicality in her teaching. For instance, during blackboard spelling one morning, she explained that it helped to learn spelling if one used one's whole arm to write the word on the board, because the more of one's body was in use the more likely it was that the learning would be remembered. Kit explained, "They say that, eh, when you're learning to spell, if when you write things, you write them like this [using her whole arm writing on the board], it helps." When Des asked why, Kit responded, "Because it involves your whole body, not just your brain."

She used this principle (of including and using the physical in learning) again when piloting a new method of teaching reading that she called "read and run." She introduced it:

But what I'm going to ask you to do today is a little more. I'm going to ask you to jump around. Not jump around, but walk around. I'm going to ask you to work with a partner and say the things out loud. And that's a different way of learning. What we find is that when you have to stand up and walk around while learning, there's something about walking around that makes your brain work better. So you might think of that when you're studying somewhere at home -- that walking around and talking out loud helps you learn better.

She summed it up, "So the more parts of your body you can get involved, the easier it is to learn that stuff."

Encouraging The Political

On several occasions, Kit referred to political situations and asked the class for their comments. Once, she presented an N.F.B. film that portrayed rebels in Central America. On another occasion, she described a literacy program in a hotel in Saskatchewan where the employees teach one another literacy skills partly on their own time and partly on work time. She also talked to the class about the politics of class sizes in the public school system and how the system needed to address this issue. Kit talked about adult literacy learner militancy in Ontario and asked if anyone in the class also felt militant, thus encouraging assertion and solidarity.

Although Kit was more active in her approaches to pro-resistance behaviour, Val also acknowledged and validated the many marginalized identities. As well, she continuously encouraged students to speak their thoughts.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This study has explored the concept of resistance as it applies to seventeen particular Adult Basic Education students, and has focussed primarily on its relation to their program attendance throughout one semester. The data derives from ethnographic observations and interviews and is suggestive of educational perspectives and instructional practices that require further exploration.

The data suggests that the majority of ABE students in this class engaged in resistance behaviours in the ABE classroom. In his 1990 study of literacy student resistance, Quigley suggested that ABE participants (enrolled students) might be different than non-participants in terms of resistance; he questioned the resistance of ABE participants. However, in this exploration, there is no doubt that the majority of these adult students expressed resistance. This would indicate that one cannot assume that the adult literacy student is an accommodating student based solely on their participation in ABE. They, like many other students, manage to both engage in and resist different aspects of the schooling project. Nor can their regular attendance be taken to mean that they do not resist; the regular attenders in this classroom displayed more resistance behaviours, in terms of both quantity and variety, than the other students.

Further, although each resistant individual is likely to engage in a range of resistance behaviours, the data suggests a relationship between attendance and type of resistance behaviour.

Those who appeared almost non-resistant or whose resistance fell primarily into the withdrawal category, were not regular attenders. Non-existent resistance and primarily withdrawal type resistance is associated with dropout and sporadic attendance. More verbally expressive and more frequent resistance behaviour seems related to more regular attendance in this ABE classroom. These results suggest a positive association between conscious, active resistance and regular attendance. It also suggests that the more that conscious resistance is encouraged, the more likely it is that regular attendance will result.

This indicates that students could be encouraged to resist in different ways. Some forms of resistance may be less effective in allowing the student to remain in the ABE program (if that is the

student's goal). For instance, withdrawal resistance included the student absenting himself (it was a male phenomenon in this classroom) from the class for long periods of time and thus missing large blocks of work. If that student wants to remain in the program, achieve his literacy goals, and also maintain his marginalized identity(ies), then it may be worthwhile to encourage other forms of resistance, that might replace the withdrawal from of resistance, which has a strong correlation with dropout behaviour. Instructors could explore how to encourage more active and verbal forms of resistance.

This study suggests not only that instructors need to expect and recognize resistance in ABE, but also that they can and should encourage the more conscious and verbal types of resistance. Resistance should be encouraged not only because it is socially just, but also because it contributes to an improved learning context, to student retention and institutional success.

It is not surprising that student retention increases when:

- 1) students feel their marginalized selves are accepted and welcomed into the classroom;
- 2) the classroom seems more receptive to all kinds of student input, even to what appears to be negative input;
- 3) student resistance is encouraged to be more overt; and
- 4) the teacher focuses less on homogeneity, the dominant culture and control, and more on diversity, democracy and marginalized discourses.

In this study, the educational environment seemed to influence the expression of student resistance. Kit had developed methods and curricula for promoting a resistance-positive environment. She discussed her methods in an unpublished paper entitled "Literacy teacher as quintessential feminine." In it, she proposed that teachers not involve their egos in the classroom situation, and, in particular, that they avoid power struggles and enforcement of rules. She emphasized that the major focus should be on student success.

In my observations, Kit put her own analysis to work. Because she recognized that most returning students may not be used to sitting in a classroom for hours at a time, she tried to include physical methods of learning as well as purely mental methods. She made the classroom safe by

encouraging a non-sexist and non-racist environment through the pre-entry interviews. She looked for opportunities to analyze the social power dynamics in student stories.

Kit's curricula also reflected these concerns; she has "political" theme units. The first theme unit, Learning and Past School Experiences, allowed the students to examine their former school experiences (which, like most ABE students were largely failures) in a collective manner in a supportive and politicized context. I observed that it helped to shift the weight of school failure from an exclusively individual base to include system responsibility and failure.

In this classroom, teacher encouragement of resistance seems to have led to an increased vocalization of student awareness of oppression. The teachers' openness to resistance also seemed to result in a reduced occurrence of in-class challenging behaviours. This contrasted sharply with my former observation in a Vancouver ABE classroom, which I related in the Introduction and which served as a motivator for this study. In that case, a power struggle around enforcing standard English in a classroom of working class students escalated quickly and increased opposition, which spread throughout the class.

This study may be most useful in its implications for teaching in ABE classrooms. The results may encourage teachers to feel less threatened by resistance behaviours and indeed to experiment with valuing and encouraging student resistance. Teachers may attempt to promote especially verbal forms of resistance and to work to bring non-verbal, withdrawal resistance to conscious verbal statements of awareness and identity. For instance, following this study, Kit removed the isolated row seating in the classroom, in an attempt to reduce withdrawal resistance.

Limitations

This study was both limited and enhanced by the ethnographic approach that I used. The limitations included the initial lack of a set theoretical framework, the broad focus and the inability to generalize to other contexts. Although I was initially interested in the difficulties of student accommodation in adult literacy programs, I did not have the framework of resistance theory or poststructuralist discourse theory to inform and guide this study from the outset.

Had I used resistance theory and the concept of discourse from the beginning of the study the observations and the interviews might have produced more relevant information. On the other hand, it was important to maintain an open mind during the data collection stages of the research. The lack of theoretical frames permitted the inclusion of data that might have not been noted otherwise.

Directions For Future Study

The ethnographic nature of this study provides indepth information about this particular classroom; however, further ethnographic classroom research needs to be undertaken in order to establish the possibilities for broader applications of this study's findings.

This study was done in a classroom that had resistance positive teachers who had given much thought to the implications of classroom and societal power dynamics, as well as to the value of marginalized identities. It would be useful to the understanding of resistance in ABE classrooms to conduct similar studies in classes without resistance positive or resistance conscious teachers. These sorts of studies would provide additional information about student resistance in less accepting circumstances.

It would also be useful to further explore the relationships of the five forms of resistance behaviour to attendance. As well, it would be interesting to explore the relationships between teaching styles (concepts), student resistance and retention. Studies in a variety of institutional and instructional contexts would provide more insight into the relationships among the variables of resistance and attendance.

Summary

This study examined the relationships between student resistance and student attendance in an ABE classroom. It found that adult students generally displayed resistance behaviours, and that that resistance was expressed in a variety of ways. It also found that the students who:

- 1) dropped out displayed more of the withdrawal type of resistance;

- 2) attended sporadically displayed almost no resistant behaviour;
- 3) attended regularly displayed more, and more varied, forms of resistance.

These findings suggest that retention increases if ABE teachers learn to recognize, value, and encourage student resistance as a positive attempt on the part of the adult student to maintain dignity and pride in their marginalized identities and to assert that identity while participating in the very dominant discourse which tends to devalue it. It suggests that teachers who learn to work with resistance, as opposed to discouraging it, will enhance student learning and ABE retention.

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