

Interrupting Institutional Discourse  
Circulating Themes within the Adult Basic Education/Literacy System

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Adult Basic Education/Literacy (ABEL) system in America can suffer critique. In a system that is staffed mostly by volunteers and plagued by funding woes, the experience of adult learners as participants within the institutional structure can be easily overlooked. Adult students are described as transient and difficult to track. Even so, and maybe because of this characterization, leaders within the local ABEL discourse make it their mission to reach these students in order to assist them to a better quality of life. However, there is more than one discourse circulating within the system. A discourse of outreach and intervention is one strand. The complex relationships education centers engage with more powerful government institutions causes another, more strident political discourse that constrains and influences the discourse within ABEL education centers, down to the classroom level. Within the vortex of motivations and needs created by institutional discourse, an institutional critique may give voice to those who experience the discourse in a way that hinders their education. This paper pursues critique, not through direct reconstruction, but through the encouragement of alternative discourses as additional institutions enter the system. AmeriCorps is presented as an institution that allows for more democratic participation through its distinct organizational features. The features that emerge in AmeriCorps projects offer hope for alternative models of participation within the highly politicized ABEL discourse.

## DEDICATION

Mom and Dad, thank you for encouraging my education. You put it in me to work hard and overcome adversity. I owe the both of you for my successes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Ellie Long, I must acknowledge you first for the many hours you contributed to seeing this project through to completion. Without your guidance, this thesis would not be.

Also, to Alice Daer and Patricia Boyd, thank you for serving on my committee and being willing to offer your time and keen insights.

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS

Symbol		Page
1.	ABEL Adult Basic Education/Literacy .....	1
2.	LVMC Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa.....	3
3.	CNCS Corporation for National and Community Service .....	5
4.	EOA Economic Opportunity Act .....	26
5.	WIA Workforce Investment Act .....	26
6.	NTA National Teacher’s Association .....	27
7.	NEA National Education Association .....	28
8.	DAES Division of Adult Education Services .....	32
9.	AAAE American Association for Adult Education.....	32
10.	SEA State Education Agency .....	36
11.	FERA Federal Emergency Relief Administration .....	38
12.	GED General Education Development .....	39
13.	WPA Works Progress Administration .....	37
14.	AEA Adult Education Association.....	41
15.	NAPSAE National Association of Public School Adult Educators .	43
16.	AEFLA Adult Education and Family Literacy Act .....	45
17.	USDE United States Department of Education .....	68
18.	SCANS Secretary’s Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills ....	
	.....	73
19.	NWB Northwest Workplace Basic.....	73

20.	IPQ	Indicators of Program Quality.....	80
21.	KYVU	Kentucky Virtual University.....	90
22.	KAE	Kentucky Adult Education .....	90
23.	ESL	English as a Second Language .....	90
24.	WIB	Workforce Investment Board .....	105
25.	PDC	Professional Development Center .....	106
26.	SEM	Student Experience Model .....	110
27.	OPAS	Ohio Performance Accountability System .....	112
28.	NRS	National Reporting System.....	112
29.	ILP	Individual Learning Plan .....	115
30.	SRF	Student Registration Form.....	118
31.	S.A.L.S.	South Appalachian Labor School.....	160



## CHAPTER 1

### CONFRONTING INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE

Adult Basic Education/Literacy (ABEL) discourse appears simple and direct. Walk into a local community based educational center or visit a website. You most likely will encounter motivational literature posted on the wall or homepage declaring the center's vision and purpose. At the center, you probably will also encounter a few friendly faces of administrators who may assist you with most of your questions or refer you to someone who can. It is easy to assume that administering adult education services is as simple as is presented by these mission statements and surface impressions. The discourse goes a little something like this: *Adult education encompasses the activities surrounding the delivery of educational services to adults who request and need them. As the population is educated and assisted to meaningful growth, greater economic and personal opportunities are imagined for the individual and society as a whole.*

Assumptions abound in this public discourse, which actually gathers various institutions around rhetorical positions that are based in a complex history of shifting ideology and institutional needs (Branch 41; Grabill 65). Yet this positioning is largely hidden from view. Instead, public ABEL discourse suggests that priorities are uniform across ABEL institutions, that local institutions prize organizational growth above all, and that local institutions' actions remain committed to sponsoring literacy and basic education as the priority regardless of the tension created by the needs of the institution. As I will argue in this thesis, public discourse circulated by ABEL facilities bolsters the image that local

institutions are primarily involved in theory-backed educational work and committed to their obligations as prominent community stakeholders while veiling much of not only the daily grind involved in the maintenance of ABEL institutions, but also the deeply entrenched ideologies that inform education practices within local literacy centers.

On the one hand, in the daily routines of local education centers, cultivating an identity of community advocate and helper may take a back seat to making sure the bills are paid, but what makes the activities of a local literacy center even more complicated are the intensely contradictory public discourses circulating there. That is, public discourses promoting the public service aspect of the ABEL field are complicated by another discourse, one primarily concerned with the administration of local ABEL services by institutions under the purview of a state authority, a political discourse that is about ensuring institutions' continued existence through demonstrated compliance with state regulations. Institutional discourse is one among several competing discourses in the field, though its reality tends to be hidden from certain participants (Grabill 56). As my research below indicates, the ABEL system publicly circulates a discourse of learning while the same system masks the complex discourses and unequal relationships created by the interaction of various relevant institutions necessary for maintaining an organization's operation. This double identity is fraught with a "regulative discourse," and creates the problem space of this project (Branch 8). In *Intersecting Voices*, Iris Marion Young defines an ethic of care that operates in tension with institutional discourse—in the case of her study, a prison discourse.

Of interest to me is the intersection of two literacy sponsors, AmeriCorps and local ABEL programs, which operate within distinct discourses. I want to discover how an ethic of care circulates within this space, particularly when it is threatened and under what conditions it might be able to thrive.

What pricked my awareness to the possible competition of varying discourses within the ABEL field was my own incongruent personal experience. Yes, I was the idealistic public worker who was already influenced by public educational discourse on the K-12 level when I locked arms with a local ABEL facility here in Phoenix, Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa (LVMC), as an adult education teacher. I taught with the assumption that the classroom experience could be abstracted from the functional aspects of the institution that supported my teaching and learning activities. This assumption was easy to make since my assignment was at a satellite location. My beliefs were confirmed in discursive features, such as web and print publications. These portrayed Literacy Volunteer's primary value of education and the center's commitment to knowledge. The institution was transmitter, teacher, instructor, and presenter. Within this discourse, education holds a valued place, the institution's history is dominant, and founding leaders are given a place of honor. These values are communicated in a highly controlled manner so as to offer an overall impression favorable to the institution and from which assumptions may be made about the integrity, direction, and potential of the institution in its dealings with the student. This public discourse addresses what the institution can and will do for me as a learner.

And so it was for me. By joining Literacy Volunteers, I believed I was going to help, serve, and give to a deserving and welcoming community, and I was going to learn in the process. I was going to engage in a meaningful educational experience that accomplished what the rhetoric of ABEL claimed: assist students by taking the next step with them toward their life goals. As the website boldly proclaims, I was, “Educating adults and changing lives” (*literacyvolunteers-maricopa.org*). Believing that the learning process was more about the students than institutional realities was naïve, if well intentioned. In other words, my assumption that my connection to the students transcended or was more important than the classroom’s position within an institutional structure was misguided. The learning center and my classroom were tied to larger organizations. These institutional contingencies, primarily between the center, other community organizations, and the government, involved their motivations in my classroom activities, regardless of whether or not the students and I welcomed or were aware of that involvement. I would soon learn that what I term institutional discourse is a powerful and ever present force in the teaching space, and institutional discourse may conflict with pedagogy while simultaneously featuring instructional expediency and efficiency as central to its rhetoric. Institutional discourse held significant influence on ABEL classes and, in my experience, proved to be inflexible.

A telling incident occurred that brought these differing discourses into focus for me. The incident occurred while I was a program coordinator for a newly funded program that Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa entered into with

AmeriCorps, the national service arm of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Established in 1993 during the Clinton administration, AmeriCorps recruits members of all ages to assist with public health, education, and other “critical” community needs by allowing members to provide “direct service” to the community through partnership with community organizations (*americorps.gov*). As the partnering community organization, Literacy Volunteers was taking on twelve members and placing them at several adult education learn-centers. I occupied a hybrid position as coordinator that required me to act as a liaison among two strong organizations: Literacy Volunteers, the community-based learn center, and the national AmeriCorps program. As a consequence, I experienced features of the distinct discourses associated with the motivations and needs of each institution. As I will argue in this thesis, AmeriCorps is highly idealistic in its discourse and takes liberty to tackle community problems head on (through direct community service and spontaneous projects) due to its variant nature as a structure of networked programs that are connected only by broad, national objectives. Within this networked design, AmeriCorps programs operate more locally on a project-by-project basis, and because they are “sponsored” –“hosted” by established, local institutions, AmeriCorps programs can displace certain institutional responsibilities onto their host agencies. AmeriCorps programs clearly give members an institutional identity and, by design, rely on established institutions (such as the Phoenix-based ABEL facility where I worked) for stability. Through local coordinators who facilitate the partnership, members shape that material

support into an outcome (e.g., “direct service in critical need area of literacy”) that supports the organization’s idealistic initiatives of making a direct impact on the community by partnering with established agencies. In principle, this may seem complicated enough; in practice, carrying out this intricate symbiotic relationship proved to be all but impossible.

In my situation, I was new to both the local ABEL education agency and AmeriCorps. Initially, I operated under the assumption that hosting the AmeriCorps program was a cooperative arrangement between the two organizations, meaning our motivations and goals were congruent. I wanted to do a good job as coordinator, and as I learned more about AmeriCorps, I took on my responsibility to carry those qualities into my work with the twelve members whom I was responsible for overseeing. My job was to transmit the service culture of AmeriCorps as I was the lone touchstone for the organization. AmeriCorps ideology portrayed an army of service throughout the country comprised of idealistic and energetic youth who wanted to give and see the results of their sacrifice in the critical needs areas of health, education, and public safety. The cultural values most prescient to the program I worked with included direct assistance to the community through the content specific vehicle of literacy and basic skill tutoring and training through a cooperative relationship with host sites ranging from an urban learn lab to a tutoring center for parolees. All of the sites involved direct contact with the public where adult students were instructed in literacy, basic education, and English language. Interestingly, as I began to take more initiative in leading the team, my boss and co-workers began to get more

and more restless and concerned about my activities. In my opinion, the AmeriCorps program needed most of my attention since it was new. I made site visits as needed, planned interesting staff meetings, focused on team building, and encouraged team participation in off-site service learning projects. I was too focused on my own activities to realize that my actions were incongruent with what the lead staff felt were institutional priorities. I learned too late that despite the needs of an actual team of *people*, several of whom relocated to commit to their positions in the AmeriCorps program, my actions threatened the institutional discourse operating at the site. My approach apprehended the ideology AmeriCorps espoused of making a difference, becoming immersed in the community, and working as a team. As I would slowly come to understand it, from the ABEL institution's standpoint, the program was secondary to operational concerns. By some unwritten rule, my time was supposed to first be devoted to the office where I would wait by the phone and respond to the daily institutional tasks assigned to me rather than respond to the fledgling needs of the new AmeriCorps program. My responsibility was to make myself available to the agency and conduct AmeriCorps paperwork in the time left over. This was the hard reality of institutional discourse and my first significant glance at it.

Though I am, of course, concerned with my own fate as a professional within this discursive political vortex, my larger point is that learners themselves are poorly served by such political contestation. I will never forget one faithful student whom we abandoned in the name of institutionalism. This episode spelled disaster for my service at the center and acted as a foil to the different discourses

that, as I will argue in this paper, compromise the humanity of personal relationship within the ABEL system. As a new employee, I learned that this lady was a long time student who diligently plowed away at her studies a little at a time. She struck up a relationship with all of us who worked on the administrative side of the center, which was separated from the learning lab and classrooms by a short hallway. She would often be found before and after her studies, walking down the short hallway, looking to strike up a conversation with someone. She had a reputation for being blunt, freely expressing her thoughts and feelings. When the AmeriCorps program started, she benefited from the extra face-to-face tutoring time that resulted from having an AmeriCorps member around. The member, likewise, was eager to find a place to fit in and delighted to be able to offer his time. Once, she came into the center and the member was not there. She walked over to an administrator's office to complain about not being able to complete her work because she needed extra instruction that she counted on the AmeriCorps member to provide. Now, being computer-based, the center usually worked as a self-paced learning environment. However, in the case of students at the lowest literacy levels, the context of a relationship is the best stimulus for learning to read (Taylor, et al. 82). The staff member responded that unfortunately, no one was available at the time, and the center was a self-learning model, as if the student were unaware of these facts. The administrator's response seemed to me more of a general introduction to the center that would be more fitting to give a stranger than a conversation relevant to the level of relationship and conflict at hand. In return, the student seemed deflated and a little put off by



the approach. She felt unheard. Now, I realize that the center, of course, would not be able to meet every need this student had, but such limits could have been communicated in a way that acknowledged the emerging relationship growing between this student and the AmeriCorps member, especially because it was the crux of the adult student's growing motivation for learning to read. Instead, the discussion had entered the realm of institutional discourse in which procedural concerns overruled the humanity named, nurtured, and necessitated by the previously established relationship.

Another change in the institution's policy affected this same student and resulted in an even more strident interaction. Because of recent changes in the economy that limited the number of reliable funding sources, the center was now requiring a small enrollment fee of twenty dollars. This was a huge departure from what the center had required before. Services had always been free. Upon hearing this news, the student expressed an exasperation that could be described as shock. She heard the institution's point of view but now wanted to be heard herself. "Where will the money come from?" she asked. The institution's position was precisely expressed through its staff. In the student's exchange with the staff member, the reasons for the change were made clear, but less attention and care were given to the student's bluntly communicated worries. Again, the organization could not "help" the student in the way that she needed, but the response disregarded the history of relationship between the center and student. The student quickly realized she would not be heard in the discussion and left with a wave of her hand, saying, "yeah, yeah, yeah...whatever." That's what I

thought: the center was treating her like she was “whatever,” just another body, not a committed part of our organization. I thought to myself, “How many times could this interaction be replayed before the quality of our services, reflected in increasing recidivism took hold—recidivism that resulted from unheard frustrations?”

On a personal level, I sensed the institutional discourse I encountered was oblivious to and therefore not equipped to handle the unplanned rhetorical situations that result from really hearing someone through the conflict that naturally occurs in the give-and-take of human relationship, even one based in the narrowly defined relationship of a learning institution and student.

What initially began as a “felt difficulty” (Dewey 72) soon blossomed into a full blown crisis: something was afoot that was bigger than the individual personalities involved. The procedural demands of the local institution were strong, vying for the survival of the center while often seeming to lead to impersonal and illogical decisions. The demands of AmeriCorps were highly idealistic, but I was disconnected from a strong base in support of these ideals. The local educational center was, after all, the one that signed my check. I ended up losing my job because of my commitment to the discourse represented by AmeriCorps. I complained to a friend that the only thing I did wrong was care too much, something I found disturbingly lacking in the agency.

My experience revealed that I was sophomoric when it came to navigating institutional structures, believing the rhetoric of their public discourse and taking their motivations for granted. I don’t intend to draw conclusions from one

incident, but I believe further research confirms the presence of a discourse that validates my experience. It is my position that of the discourses I encountered, that of AmeriCorps and the local learn center, one more easily facilitates the possibility of participation through spontaneous involvement—thus maintaining elements consistent with a caring ethic--while the other focuses primarily on the perpetuation of the institution. When these discourses are brought into contact, conflict emerges that may reveal the truth of an institution's public claims.

### Working Assumptions of my Thesis

The presence of competing discourses, that of the local learn center and AmeriCorps, describes the type of institutional pressure I experienced as I attempted to inhabit both. Regulative discourse, a term Branch borrows from Basil Bernstein and expands to describe the visioning work of community based organizations, deals primarily with how institutions present themselves and their motivations in order to provide theoretical support and cover for their actions. Often, institutional actions are tied to larger structures that order people's place within society, for example, the government as the rescuer of the poor, placing them in low level but steady work positions. An institution's actions may agree with—or be opposite to, its public claims. Regulative discourse, as I experienced it at the local learn center, prioritized procedures that served the perpetuation of the institution rather than the expressed purpose of aiding adults on personal levels. Regulative discourse as observed in the local ABEL center makes assumptions regarding students' place in the world that specifically place them in

limiting roles within the educational process while bolstering educational facilities' own image of advocacy.

My observation was that personal interactions create the tenor of adult education centers' private discourse. Unfortunately, as evidenced by these interactions, participants' human needs for validation and contribution are often compromised by practitioners' unquestioned commitment to institutional practices that develop over time. Procedures are embedded in the regulative discourse, and regulative discourse also appears in the rhetoric that supports the work of local learn centers. Some institutional procedures harm rather than assist in nurturing a reciprocal relationship with the student. An ethic of caring (Young 81) could be cultivated in every interaction but is easily sacrificed to the institution's way of being that favors institutional survival above humanity boosting exchange. One set of actions, for example, being able to procure and aggregate data that aligns with clearly defined outcomes, is more amenable to these educational institutions, while the outcomes of personally based interactions are messy and unsure, leading to unquantifiable, and thus seemingly useless, work.

#### *An ethic of care*

An ethic of care recognizes that unequal partnerships exist in society; social interactions, to be fair, are not necessarily predicated on sameness. Sometimes, we need to rely on another's expertise for the accomplishment of a goal or task. The teacher/student relationship is an example of such a partnership. In describing an ethic of care, Young does not resist the necessary inequality in

situations involving a caregiver and recipient, but she argues for a motivation of obligation on the part of the caregiver to govern these relationships even when the *condition* of the receiver occupies a morally egregious one within society. She gives the example of pregnant drug addicts. Adults returning to institutionalized education may occupy similar positions of judgment depending on the likely reasons they did not complete their education the first time around. Responses to need that are driven by abstracted moral principles would judge those in need as unworthy or undeserving of intervention and either result in efforts at punishment or personal reform through attempts to mark the person with outward indicators of acceptance (Young 85). Rather, through an ethic of caring, the individual is understood in the context of her situation and that societal structures contributed to her place of neediness or dependence.

Young argues that an ethic of caring should extend beyond face-to-face interactions to the policy that establishes the social connection of people to larger structures like school, prison, and social service entities. She goes on to argue for an empowerment methodology that solicits participation of help-seekers through group consciousness raising sessions in which needy members work together to find solutions to their own problems. Institutions live up to their obligations as they provide opportunities for these sorts of meetings and pursue other pertinent interventions (specifically for the population about which she writes) like targeted therapy and assistance with retaining and obtaining meaningful work (Young 92).

An ethic of care is helpful to this project because it acknowledges the ways that adult students rely on practitioners to assist them with goals and tasks

they have so far been unable to meet. In addition, Young's work (79), and others from which this paper draws (Grabill 7; Brandt 28; Branch 58), illumines institutional mechanisms that actively ignore social fixtures that surround and contribute to the condition of adult students. Empowerment may be accessible to students but must be negotiated with the institutions that often are blind to their conditions. Many local institutions do not acknowledge positions of obligation, but instead see their actions as purely altruistic even as they use students for their own means, in the case of ABEL learn centers, as sources of data.

### *Contact Zones*

The entry of another discourse, as is the case in my experience with AmeriCorps, multiplies possibilities for change. The work of Patricia Bizzell may be helpful to understand more implications of the presence of AmeriCorps within local learn centers. "Contact zones" is a term borrowed by Bizzell from Mary Louise Pratt's work to describe the intercourse and conflict of different cultures, often on unequal grounds. Bizzell aims for reform within the field of composition studies, especially regarding teaching practices that segment the discipline, resulting in unproductive, isolated fields of study that limit meaningful inquiry of students and teachers. Bizzell makes her claim that the formation of canons of knowledge happens on "cultural contested ground" (166). Bizzell is concerned here with broadening the discourse within composition studies to better handle lines of inquiry traditionally organized along cultural boundaries. For example, she is concerned with including the perspective of different cultures in traditional English literature course studies. These boundaries, she found, were not helpful to

think about material in rhetorically relevant ways or in bringing the diverse experiences of the student body to bear on the literature. In order to reevaluate contributing members of the canon that were heretofore discounted, indeed, to reshape the canon, the idea of contact zones helps by repositioning members of the discourse. Bizzell suggests a teaching methodology that reorganizes history around periods of contention during which groups battled to determine who held the power of cultural interpretation.

Instead of seeking a simple categorization of historical participants' characters as good, evil, right, or pure, Bizzell argues for situating them around a problem space that provided motivations for their contentions. In this way, instructors don't have to master every aspect of a discipline with the intent to perfectly represent history. Instead, by interrogating each party's intentions, composition instructors welcome the rough and tumble exchange that comes through different readings of the same discourse. Additionally, reading extant literature through the lens of contact zones helps students see themselves as part of the discourse as they interrogate the other, acknowledging that the meaning making space is contested. The idea of contact zones recognizes that, historically, the literary cannon emerged from periods of struggle as participants strove for authority in the cultural representation of themselves and their history. Communicating within the contact zone helps transcend boundaries, or at least transgress them.

"Contact zone" is a good way to describe my experience of the conflicting discourses during my service at the local ABEL institution. I was involved in a

battle for meaning in which my actions were judged for their loyalty to the regulative discourse of the ABEL center amid the tension created by my involvement with AmeriCorps. I struggled for the authority to define my engagement in meaningful action which is consistent with the activity that occurs within the boundaries of a contact zone.

### *A Tactical Approach*

Paula Mathieu, in the interest of the pragmatism of this project, provides alternative responses to the conflicting discourses I experienced. These responses are rooted in democratic participation. In *Tactics of Hope*, Mathieu retools common service learning methodologies of centers of production, namely the university. She was driven to test meaningful action and the long term effectuality of community service learning projects that had become increasingly common among composition classes (Mathieu1). She discovered a distinctively different discourse that operated within the communities these projects set out to serve. The discourse she discovered, which she termed tactical, operated outside the bounds of what was considered effective and meaningful within the university's methodologies. These methodologies, by the way, usually favored students' experiences over those of community members (Mathieu 31).

As an alternative to traditional intervention, tactical discourse is occupied with the tenor and genesis of projects rather than their content. Tactical discourse is spontaneous and defined by broad base participation and initiative on the part of affected groups with the main difference being that change is initiated internally. Tactical approaches are problem based responses to felt needs or



conflict, but the discourse does not lead to systematization since tactical discourse has no interest in institutionalizing a response to need (Mathieu 54). Though tactical discourse results in dynamic solutions and activities, it has the disadvantage of being unpredictable and temporary in nature. Tactical approaches encourage shared responsibility and result in creative, effective projects.

AmeriCorps, an organization that gives rise to project based, short-term programs, operates in conjunction with local institutions. AmeriCorps introduces tactical discourse within rooted, community based institutions. Because its programs are temporary and free of certain institutional constraints, AmeriCorps allows for variation and experimentation, especially through the direct involvement of members and other AmeriCorps staff. Features of tactical discourse are evident on individual cases. The introduction of AmeriCorps multiplies the ambiguous boundary spaces and contact zones discussed earlier, and thus, the chance for tactical occurrences within institutional discourse.

The problem space of this project lay at the place where tactical and institutional discourses converge. I aim to analyze the potential for change within organizations as competing discourses create opportunities for, or obstacles to-- participation. Of course, I was interested in how these several discourses within adult education came to be, under what conditions they continue to thrive, and how they are disrupted or reformed as they circulate simultaneously. This project was guided by the following questions:

1. American adults have been sponsoring one another's learning since the inception of the country. But, speaking historically,

what practices institutionalized such relationships in the unique form of state-sponsored “adult education”?

2. Against the backdrop of this history, how do I account for competing discourses?
3. If, as Branch argues, all literacy programs are guided by their own “regulative discourses” that guide practice with an eye on the world as it will be (190), what features of state-driven regulative discourse are evident in the key reporting documents of the mid-level ABEL agencies that provide oversight for local centers?
4. And yet, state-driven regulative discourse is only one (if weighty) strand in adult education. Another discourse for adult education strives to respond to the unique needs and interests of adult learners themselves and the communities they inhabit (Grabill 88). If unlike LVMC, AmeriCorps is able to, if not institute, afford greater opportunity for the circulation of a caring ethic, where and how do we see evidence of its discourse allowing for caring practices as they exist in tension with institutional discourse?
5. Branch contends that there are rabbit holes, and he promotes a “trickster consciousness” for tactical action that has the potential to resist and reconstruct restrictive regulative discourse (188, 198). And yet he doesn’t provide many specific powerful

examples. How might Paula Mathieu's theory of "tactical change" (20) inform a response to seemingly monolithic institutions?

The history of adult education within the United States is long and more complex than is at first apparent. Educators teach within a highly constrained and symbolic world; most are interested in what best serves the education process. However, having good intentions does not dismiss what I experienced as the contradiction between official rhetoric and actual opportunities for students' self-expression and growth. Students are not always valued as fully contributing members of the institutions where they learn because of the prioritization of these institutions. With the best interest of students in mind, this contradiction must be investigated. The potential for students' participation is directly impacted by a discourse that is self-perpetuating within the adult education system. I believe that local educational centers experience and replicate a regulative discourse that compromises the democratic exchange of caring relationship between the public and the educational organizations that serve them. At the same time, the introduction of the project based discourse of AmeriCorps acts as a rabbit hole (Branch 188) through which participants may resist and reconstruct rather than overthrow some regulative features of institutional discourse by enacting features of a tactical discourse.

## CHAPTER 2

### HOW IT CAME TO BE: ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

This review of literature seeks to parse the roots of adult education within the United States, specifically identifying historical practices that have shaped the field of public, government funded adult education. Of particular interest in this review is the intersection of policy and practice where the institutional discourse created by bureaucracy-generating mechanisms of oversight actually exerts itself within the classroom. Institutional discourse is a political one. Through this political discourse, local education centers answer the legal and administrative requirements that enable their survival within the constraints of more powerful government institutions on state and federal levels (McLendon 3). As the lack of research reveals, the ramifications of the connection of classroom praxis to a larger political discourse are taken for granted. Indeed, the political discourse is usually a hidden aspect of educational institutions, and while students only interact with this discourse incidentally, it is also the most damaging to participants' humanity. Once made visible, the political discourse may not necessarily be retooled or replaced, but may at least be troubled by alternative discourses which allow for different types of participation more respectful of people's humanity and more amenable to cultivating an ethic of care within the institution/student relationship.

In *Eyes on the Ought to Be*, Kirk Branch introduces the concept of “regulative discourse” to describe the top-down, rule based and ideologically

driven vision for adult literacy education that local educational centers enact. Regulative discourse functions within society by assigning significance to knowledge in ways that make moral, *should* statements about the world as a way to maintain social order (44). Regulative discourse instructs the use of knowledge in an effort to control the distribution of resources and goods among various populations (Gee 34, 60). Within this discourse, education is never a neutral act—and not always benign; education consistently moves participants toward a certain vision of the world. Branch argues that this vision should be explicitly geared toward what “ought to be” in the world (21). Often, however, the vision of the world contained within regulative discourse is of a world “as is,” or “as it will be,” a depiction of the world that favors powerful institutions (Branch 23, 24). What is dubious is that educational institutions are couched within a regulative discourse that describes a certain vision of the world and the place of educational practice within it while maintaining a neutral political stance; the hidden nature of their discourse protects them. Branch, for example, identifies vocational and prison environments that benefit from political distance while obscuring the regulative discourse that supports their practices (56, 105-109).

Literacy sponsors (Brandt 14) within prisons and vocational education systems suggest an orderly yet rapidly changing world (Gee 40, 41) in which the lack of literacy education and skill attainment on the part of the individual accounts for his or her condition either in prison or among the lower social strata (Branch 49, 61). This discourse elides institutions’ social responsibility in creating higher and lower classes of people. In addition, institutions’ efforts to advance

participants' education reflect positively on their motivations due to the politically benign yet transformative power lent to literacy education within the discourse (Branch 33). As a result, education institutions and other literacy sponsors maintain a public image of benevolence while hiding political motivations or evading more emancipatory versions of social responsibility (Young 83, 92). As a practitioner in various adult literacy and other education centers in the Phoenix region, regulative discourse explains my experience of the wholly positive representation these centers projected in contrast to the experience of students, which because of the incongruity within the discourse, tended to be fragmented and laden with failure.

Regulative discourse within the adult education system creates status, and thus, marked and forceful power differentials, since it addresses the specific treatment of categories of knowledge. In addition, knowledge is the property of those with the authority and responsibility to properly handle it (Branch 50). For example, knowledge is specifically formed through production centers such as universities where controlled research takes place. The next step of regulative discourse is recontextualization in which that knowledge is transmitted with appropriate cultural values. For example, a student who aspires to become a physicist learns the *subject* of physics at the university, what he needs to know in order to think and act, like a physicist (Branch 44, 45). Finally, the ethics that guide the treatment of that knowledge *within social relationships* is embedded in the actual practices through which that knowledge is handled as it moves away from recontextualization to the field of reproduction, where the knowledge is

constrained by the social structures that support the regulative discourse (Branch 49). Branch offers the example of the elementary school teacher who leaves the education school and puts her knowledge to use in her real life role of teacher, in which she must consider how to work with vested stakeholders (45). Whereas she has learned pedagogy, a *subject* of study, she must now integrate that knowledge in suitable ways in a society which poses institutional and relational constraints on that knowledge. How will she accurately and gently communicate the classroom performance of a student, someone's child, to his parents? Or, when and how can she be successful in her attempt to approach the principal about her own classroom performance in a way that will yield meaningful feedback? These decisions require the teacher to re-form what she has learned, transferring that knowledge from the field of recontextualization, the university classroom, to a setting that abides by social expectations for how teachers, students, and administrators interact with each other. The teacher learns that she is subject to the expectations of her role as imposed by the social order; at the same time, she is constrained by expectations of the state's content standards in the education process. Regulative discourse asserts control over her tools, curriculum, role, and teaching strategies, prescribing the appropriate behavior within specific contexts (Branch 45). The teacher is a cultural transmitter, replicating the order of the world depicted within the discourse while also acting as an authority. Politically empowered by the discourse, teachers enact authority over students who generally are excluded from decision making power regarding their own education. While

this division may be acceptable for children, it has negative effects on adult learners.

Rhetoric, the distinct mechanism of regulative discourse, lends the discourse its power through conceptual knowledge. Certain terms, which Michael McGee calls ideographs, provide social cover and buttress the actions that institutions take on behalf of another person or a group (2). These terms function symbolically rather than literally and become as monolithic as “icebergs” in that they are social markers of the emotion that attends certain activities rather than descriptive of specific realities (McGee 7). These words are part of the regulative function that, Branch asserts, indicate to the thinker how certain knowledge should be consumed and handled (45-51). Within the regulative discourse of adult education, <literacy> is an ideograph. Literacy scholars have recorded the empirically contested and socially assumed meaning of <literacy>, especially concerning its various expressions and benefits (Grabill 4; Branch 25-38). Overall, however, <literacy>, and by extension, <literacy> education, are generally and paradoxically considered benign activities with the potential to accomplish good in society. At once, literacy education is an innocuous and powerful action. So, institutions which pursue <literacy> education are often considered noble and their motivations above criticism (Branch 32-33). A review of history will help illumine this understanding of <literacy> education as an important rhetorical feature within ABEL discourse.

In the next section, I’d like to discuss the history of <literacy> as an ideograph with specific functions within society. Particularly, history reveals the



motivating concepts by which institutional practices were developed in the state sponsored <literacy> education system and constitute what I term institutional, political discourse. Institutional practices now associated with adult< literacy> instruction are grounded in a history of motivating ideas, fueled by ideologically entrenched social movements and organizations that served to sponsor versions of ABEL. Below, I detail the social forces that have had the greatest influence on how adult < literacy> education is currently practiced, including ideological movements, charitable organizations, and the U.S. military. This history emphasizes that the competing ideological strands that make adult < literacy> so complicated today are nothing new but, instead, enmeshed in the very history of American adult <literacy> education.

According to Thomas Sticht, author of “The Rise of Literacy Education in the United States,” literacy education in the United States has been animated by two polemics: the effort to reach and elevate those with the most basic academic skills, usually among the lower socio-economic classes and immigrants, and to improve the quality of life for Americans on a liberal basis by affording greater learning opportunities, particularly for the middle class (23). As a result of social activism and certain fears of illiteracy (Sticht 27) literacy education eventually adopted a human resource model in which literacy education was a tool to develop the citizenry and so secure the national defense and bolster industry (Sticht 33). The tension of these ideas (citizenry, outreach, and national security) is the story of the development of adult education which finally led, in 1966, to legislation that formalized the field as a government fixture through President

Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act (EOA). In subsequent years of literacy movements and crises (Fingeret 15), the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was passed which represented an extension of this economic literacy model, aimed at increasing citizens' competitiveness in a global economy (Sticht 38).

History reveals what happened as literacy education developed in the United States, and Deborah Brandt, author of, "Literacy, Change and Economic Opportunity" reveals the "how". Literacy education has been able to change as the push and pull of literacy sponsors' demands activated and encouraged its use. Literacy sponsors are economic, social, moral, religious, and civic players with considerable authority that require the use of literacy to bolster economic and political cache (Brandt 26). Brandt identifies primary sponsors as those of religion and government (27). In her article, she agrees that the recent treatment of literacy, especially by the government, utilizes a "resource management" model (Brandt 27) that portrays people as resources with capital building potential for the corporations and other organizations in which they work and live.

Primarily, literacy activities of the nineteenth century reveal its use as a means to enhance the lives of the middle class through self-improvement. Several social movements evidence this claim, including the development of public libraries, literary circles, public schools and Lyceums. Lyceums were study circles networked around the country in which participants pursued mutual learning and teaching. These study groups were important in mobilizing support for tax run public schools, and they provided a model for community based adult education centers (Sticht 20). Running a parallel course to that of self-

improvement, religion was a powerful literacy sponsor through the church's encouragement of social morality. Learning to read the Bible and other religious texts served as a means of teaching obedience, and thus the universal need of literacy extended the church's mission both to its followers and to the unfortunate (Brandt 28). By the middle of the nineteenth century, this religious mandate prepared the use of literacy education to include, "secular interests of nation building, social conformity, and civic responsibility" (Brandt 28) since literacy movements often overlap. In other words, the state would not have been able to co-opt the use of literacy in developing its citizenry through public education without the previous work of the church.

By the end of the nineteenth century, several voluntary associations, many of them religiously affiliated, were involved in the literacy education of youth and adults. These included the YMCA and YWCA, the National Teacher's Association (NTA) and American Library Association. In addition to voluntary and religious organizations, other institutions would play an important role in advancing adult basic and literacy education, including the government and corporations. The NTA, a government lobby, particularly would become a strong advocate for the professionalization of adult education through attempts to influence federal policy. The efforts of most voluntary organizations and advocates of public schools were motivated by a belief that education should be offered on a broad basis to all citizens, a liberal model of literacy education.

From between roughly 1850 and 1880, the establishment of government schools for youth directly impacted the field of adult education, and as Sticht

records, the NTA was at the forefront of this movement (20). The NTA (later reformed as the National Education Association), was “the major organization representing teachers and administrators working in tax supported schools. It was a primary force for the professionalization of teaching and strong advocate for public education” (Sticht 27). As public schools emerged, so did evening schools. Although these night schools were initially intended for youth, they lay the groundwork for future adult classes of the same kind. Compulsory school laws increased among the states from the latter part of the nineteenth up to the twentieth century in an attempt to bypass the current unease with adult illiteracy by focusing on the education of the next generation. By the 1920s, compulsory education to age 16 had been instituted (Cook 33). The government’s support of public school teachers, pursued by groups such as the National Education Association (NEA), provided a model for adult educators. The NEA, through its Department of Adult of Education, actively sought to integrate adult education as part of the education system in the U.S., noting the problem of illiteracy in foreign and native born Americans alike (Sticht 28). The activities of the NEA, a voluntary lobbying organization, were buoyed by a mission consistent with the first definition of adult education in 1851 by J.W. Hudson as, “the organized and institutional provision of learning opportunities, principally for those among the lower classes” (Sticht 21).

In addition to the development of a public school system, Kaestle, who discusses the changes in print texts available to American people in the article, “Literacy and Diversity,” asserts through archival evidence that learning indeed

happened through literate practices outside of formal education. During the decades between 1880 and 1920, there were a wide variety of print materials available as a result of the expanding newspaper and magazine markets which made current, interesting reading material prolific and cheap. Kaestle describes the period as full of “ethnic diversity and economic strife, characterized as they were by depression, heavy immigration, and labor-management warfare” (528). Just as this tumultuous period evidenced a diversity of available reading texts, there were widespread various efforts across the country in literacy education that were yet to be consolidated or mainstreamed along a broad national effort.

The first decade of the twentieth century was characterized by heavy immigration and a resulting suspicion and prejudice against new foreigners (Cook 2). During the early twentieth century, about ten percent of the population reported they couldn't read or write in any language, and half of these were foreign immigrants (Cook 3). There was a growing uneasiness with immigrants, many of whom were illiterate, as well as with citizens who couldn't read. Common was the belief that, “Whether native or foreign born, these illiterates were wasted human and economic potential” (Cook 3). Literacy education was the first step toward democracy and an attempt to unify a diverse population. A pertinent example of one response to the social needs of the period was the settlement house movement of about twenty years previous. The proliferation of the settlement house provided a direct forerunner of community based education centers where today, fourteen percent of federal funding for adult education is funneled (Sticht 22). These were centers for immigrants where they could find

assistance in basic education and health services, with the aim of acculturating them to America. By the late 1800s, there were about four hundred settlement houses, the most famous being Hull House founded by Jane Addams in Chicago. The work of the settlement houses advanced the idea that literacy education could be helpful to Americanize immigrants, the same ideology that would later be used in the twentieth century in support of adult education for all.

Similar to the missionary focus of settlement houses, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the work of Cora Wilson Stewart evidenced an activist model of literacy education. Stewart focused on adult illiteracy as a social ill, and she organized efforts to aggressively stamp out illiteracy among adults. She advocated for the public support of educational opportunity for adult literacy learners and was also able to mobilize large numbers of volunteers to help tutor students. Stewart used new teaching methods, such as relevant teaching tools geared for adult learners. For example, Stewart created a newsletter that had interesting stories and repeated important words, so although the language choice corresponded with low reading levels, the students were empowered and interested through the material's presentation and content. Stewart also engaged in what may now be termed "critical" learning through contextual and self-reflective lessons (Sticht 29), such as teaching students to write their names in order to build their confidence in learning.

Literacy which teaches students to ask questions that place participants in rhetorical positions of power or disadvantage uses a critical methodology (Fingeret 6). Cora Wilson Stewart allowed learners to access power by placing

them rhetorically as change agents in their own lives. Her mission was geared toward improving the lives of poorer people through the empowerment of literacy, and the movement impacted the country on a national level. Also consistent with later models of adult education, Stewart worked at night, primarily with volunteers. Stewart's campaign brought awareness to many adults' lack of literacy and made use of innovative methods of instruction that tapped into students' background knowledge. Stewart always respected the adults she taught and made lessons meaningful. By 1912, schools similar to Cora Wilson Stewart's spread out to twelve other counties to serve over 1600 students. Other states adopted literacy campaigns.

The federal government soon caught on to the movement that Cora Wilson Stewart engaged with a focus specifically on low literate immigrants. From 1915-1919, the federal government gave professional aid to groups providing Americanization classes (Sticht 27-28). These classes took place in the evenings and most teachers and administrators of the classes belonged to the NEA. In 1920, the NEA formed a Department of Immigrant Education to provide these teachers with assistance. This became the Department of Adult Education in 1924 as independent adult education activities spread throughout the country, and the mandate of literacy education extended beyond immigrants to the general population. The formation of this department was an attempt by the government to keep pace with independent education activities being conducted throughout the country. The Department of Adult Education at first worked only with public school teachers, but by 1927 extended its support to literacy teachers of all kinds.

The Department of Adult Education became the Division of Adult Education Services (DAES) in 1945, and in 1951 merged with the American Association on Adult Education (AAAE), an organization that had its roots in the charitable work of a private foundation.

Although this review is presenting the chronological development of government supported adult education, I think it is important to make historical events relevant by pointing to another educational program which used a methodology similar to Cora Wilson Stewart's work. Kirk Branch, in his book, *Eyes on the Ought to Be*, describes an adult education program that used a critical rhetorical lens to address educational reform concerns. In the words of Hanna Arlene Fingeret, "A healthy democracy depends on citizens who are able to use information critically; they are able to uncover underlying biases, assumptions, beliefs, and contradictions in text and to use their own experience and cultural knowledge to interpret the meaning of texts" (6). The program Branch describes fit the model of critical reflection described above since it revealed hidden power structures and educated citizens in how to access that power. As a political site of access, the educational program made its goals explicit, and thus, its vision of how the world *should be*.

The Highlander school was originally founded in 1932 as a school with a pragmatic focus on activating members in the labor movement. The school grew from its original purpose to become a center for the development of civic participation and justice (Branch 141), changing along with obvious social needs. In the 1950s and 1960s, Highlander focused its efforts on mobilizing citizens



towards issues of school desegregation and voting rights, and then sit-ins, believing that learning is best accomplished in a context of democratic participation (Branch 159). For example, in drawing attention to social inequalities, the leader of The Highlander School initiated a Socratic discussion in which participants defended their actions of violating what they felt were unjust laws, for example, through sit-ins (Branch 149). He questioned and questioned them so they could clearly defend their positions with strong ethical and practical justifications. Eventually, the movement evolved into the establishment of citizenship schools (Branch 147).

Highlander encouraged an idealism that mobilized citizens, disrobed current injustice, and utilized visionary practices as an organizing principle. The Highlander School demonstrated the use of vision, imagining the world as it ought to be to shape practice. The vision of the school insisted that education must be creative and productive, involving communities and engaging “ongoing social change” (Branch 158). In this way, congruity with a larger purpose lent success to the school’s activities instead of causing a conflict within the discourse that could detract from the school’s efforts. Highlander’s pedagogic discourse was clearly couched in its regulative discourse and Branch would attribute Highlander’s success to the school’s consistency with an explicit vision.

The second decade of the twentieth century was prosperous and witnessed social reform. Prosperity rose, as did lawlessness, suspicion, and intolerance due to fears associated with rapid industrialization and the United States’ involvement in WWI. Before the 1920s, there were only a few targeted efforts to reach adults,

in part, due to lack of awareness of the need. However, thanks to the work of activists like Cora Wilson Stewart, greater opportunities became available for adults to receive some form of education, primarily among the states and in business. Though night classes were impractical for many, partnerships emerged between industries and public schools to provide education to factory workers during the work-day without loss of wages. Small, rural schools began to be consolidated into larger systems and higher education was on the rise again (Cook 33). In addition to compulsory schooling to age sixteen being added to states' laws, graduate schools began to appear.

States pursued the education of adults on their own: "By 1927, 60% of the states had enacted legislation encouraging adult education" (Cook 37), with eleven of those states showing favorable results. A 1925 survey revealed that thirty four states had enacted legislation dealing with adult education. States were supporting local efforts financially and developing state departments of education. At this time, the adult education field did not experience uniformity, though there were various efforts in this vein. During the 20s, some of the only federal legislation concerning adult education dealt with immigration. The Immigration Act of 1921 limited immigration and provided an avenue for naturalization. The Sterling-Reed Bill introduced in 1924 sought to create a Department of Education (the National Department of Adult Education) and fund states toward the education of illiterates fourteen years old and older with the aim of Americanizing them (Cook 37).

Within the states, illiteracy commissions raised awareness and funds from, “individuals, organizations, and the government”, galvanizing efforts within the literacy movement (Cook 40). In 1925, the National Department of Adult Education sought a Specialist in Adult Education in the U.S. Bureau of Education who, “would strengthen the work nationally, coordinate efforts, and insure the development of adult education programs in states where illiterates had not had an opportunity to progress” (Cook 41). During this decade, two significant events took place: the National Illiteracy Conference, and the National Illiteracy Crusade which soon followed. Both events led to awareness of a growing literacy movement on a national, governmental level, and in 1929, Hoover formed an Advisory Committee on National Illiteracy. The goal of this committee was to collect facts regarding the state of illiteracy in the nation, to figure out what had been done and formulate methods of literacy education as well as use literacy as a tool in the education of Indians and Blacks. This committee made the illiteracy campaign national.

Historical changes again shaped literacy education practices. During the 1930s, the same efforts in adult literacy education were not present on a national scale due to the dire economic conditions. Rather, literacy education fell under other relief programs (Cook 49). However, although adult education legislation was not approached aggressively, the various projects that were engaged as emergency relief shed light on the state of adult education through the research that was conducted. In addition, important conferences met to put words to rising feelings within the field.

In 1933, although the Advisory Committee on National Illiteracy ended due to lack of funds it, “represented the first sustained and coordinated attempt to assess the problem” of adult illiteracy (Cook 54). The committee conducted seven studies, covering topics believed to be associated with illiteracy or teaching uneducated adults, including teaching techniques, the relationship between illiteracy and crime, state and local laws, and the life span of the illiterate, among other topics. The committee also sent representatives to forty-four states and various prisons for consultation with State Education Agencies (SEAs). The committee was searching for the best method to reach this group of adults that faced many obstacles. For areas of lack within literacy programs, such as reliable materials, methodology, and facilities, the committee concluded that the states would have to share responsibility for providing this type of aid to their constituents, yet, “the basic problems involved in teaching illiterate adults were not yet solved” (Cook 57).

The Carnegie Foundation, a private charitable organization, conducted a study of the ten year-old opportunity schools of South Carolina that focused on the education and citizenship of young women. Carnegie’s researchers found that the opportunity schools were weakened by the lack of simple, well-graded materials. Also, they concluded that teachers’ informal and formal training was just as important as materials. “By the end of the period, it was fairly evident that campaigns conducted by volunteers were not adequate in solving the illiteracy problem. Professional help was needed” (Cook 58).

The field was starting to feel the need for systematization as an avenue to greater financial and other material support. Yet, though the field uniformly recognized the need, the practices within adult education were diverse in scope and vision concerning the illiteracy problem. The 1930 NEA convention determined sixth grade proficiency was an adequate level of literacy. Opinions differed over this standard although the group realized the importance of creating a reliable definition of literacy in order to target outreach efforts efficiently. As a result of the research and experience of practitioners of the 1930s, “professional educators were beginning to recognize their responsibility in the area of literacy education, and that volunteer campaigns could not always provide what was needed” (Cook 55).

As mentioned above, besides conferences and the work of the NEA and the Advisory Committee on National Illiteracy, most aggressive efforts fell under federal relief programs. In an effort to create work during the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration scrambled to find resources among the population, searching for skills and matching those with needs. For example, The Works Progress Administration (WPA) developed several adult tutoring programs with the goal of employing out-of-work teachers while helping those fallen on hard times improve themselves and thus their future chances. Following Cora Wilson Stewart’s lead, the Administration developed materials specifically for adults on topics relevant to their experiences (Sticht 30). During this decade, the unemployed taught the unemployed as in the example of a 1932 public works program in New York City (Cook 50). Various projects were initiated through

FERA, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. FERA operated with the belief that work lifts the individual, and work is accessible through education. These government activities were significant because they cemented literacy as a feature of economic prosperity; indeed, literacy education was integral to getting a new start or improving one's lot. Over the next twenty years, this link between work, social responsibility, and an individual's education level would become much more explicit.

During the forties, the decade of WWII, the military played a large role in raising awareness of low literacy levels through its activities to recruit enlistees of certain academic ability. During the war, the government attempted to defer men literate below the fourth grade level from enlistment in the army. This led to large numbers of deferments and a resulting strain of man power during a critical time. Through the military's standardized testing, objective information was available en masse for the first time and was fuel for literacy education advocates. Here was proof that there were large numbers of adults who were illiterate or undereducated.

The army adjusted its directives to accommodate the low literacy rate and accepted enlistees on the basis of intelligence rather than literacy testing. However, whereas these adults may have previously been thought to be uneducable, the army proved that they were able to learn in a short period of time through "Development Battalions" (Sticht 24). These special training units provided remedial assistance to enlistees to acquire academic ability needed for army life (Cook 64). The units consisted of small classes that allowed the men to

progress quickly from one level to another in a short eight to thirteen weeks. In addition, the army was free to develop its own techniques and materials and the instructional text was taken from materials used in routine army life.

The biggest influence of the military's activity in this literacy effort, beside its teaching model, was the development of materials. "For the first time, there was an abundance of materials designed specifically for teaching adults" (Cook 70). "These readers, workbooks, film strips, and magazines were the forerunners of civilian materials published some years later" (70). Also, "Approximately 1,000 teachers were trained in new methods and techniques of literacy education" (Cook 71). The military raised awareness of the adult illiteracy problem as it struggled to function effectively. Literacy education couldn't be left to chance or untrained practitioners. Also, the General Education Development (GED), a fixture of adult education, was developed as a result of WWII since the high school education of thousands of troops was cut short. The GED was to become an inroad to academic opportunities for veterans. The military's attempt to handle the problem of illiteracy shored up the theme of personal transformation and life opportunity that is found in the language of adult education policy today.

The decade of the fifties was a period of adjustment after periods of war pushed domestic concerns to the side (Cook 72). Various events formed an awareness of economic acceleration and an attitude of protective isolationism. In 1950, the United States entered the conflict in South Korea and was actively engaged in the cold war. The launch of Sputnik in 1957 caused increased focus on America's own academic achievement. More people were going to school in

greater numbers. As America became an increasingly industrial society, public perception accepted a universal need for basic education. The country was forming its own identity as a world power.

Print materials of this period testify to forces of rising capitalism and a new, self-conscious patriotism. Kaestle notes that the period from 1920-1950 witnessed standardization in print materials as immigration was restricted and education levels rose. In addition, radio, movies and other “consolidated” cultural features united the country, promoting social conformity (Kaestle 535). Labor unions were recognized as changes in the marketplace reflected people’s desire to succeed and stake out a good living by being ably prepared for the workforce (Kaestle 534). The need for standardization and efficiency within the workforce shaped understanding of literacy and gave rise to use of a new term. The term “functional literacy” referred to the ability to read and write in specific contexts (Fingeret 4). Whereas literacy in the 1930s and 1940s was characterized by being able to read and write messages in any language, the 1950s emphasized the ability to use literacy in instrumental ways in society, namely, industry and the marketplace (Fingeret 4).

Literacy developed into an ideograph that communicated equality of opportunity as it addressed a work ready labor force. Opportunities for those lacking literacy skills were provided through states and in the industrial sector. Several states made elementary courses available for adults and passed some legislation regarding adult education (Cook 74). Business owners, motivated mostly by fear of foreign born employees, started training them at the workplace.



In addition, the need to raise adults' literacy levels was witnessed by changes in universities where academics initiated a few efforts to tackle the problem professionally (Cook 84). For example, in 1952, professionals were trained at Syracuse to produce suitable materials for the education of adults. Also, the first undergraduate class in adult literacy education took place at Baylor University Literacy Center, a program to prepare volunteer teachers. Baylor conducted two-day literacy workshops during which presenters demonstrated teacher made literacy materials and discussed subjects such as how to contact illiterates. The group also made suggestions for local literacy councils. In 1952, the Adult Education Association (AEA) set up a committee on Adult and Fundamental Education to investigate problems within the field as it reached towards greater professionalism (Cook 84). Similarly, the Office of Education established an Adult Education Section. Eventually, those who were uneducated were expected to take advantage of opportunities and bear their share of social responsibility for economic productivity. Illiterates would take the blame for "draining" (Sticht 30) society.

Based on the human resource model of literacy education, Eisenhower developed the Conservation of Human Resources Project undergirded by the belief that the uneducated had a diminishing effect on the economy and society as a whole (Sticht 31). The Conservation Project, like the Conservation Corps founded in the 1930s, was focused on preserving and developing human potential. Enacting the Conservation Project heralded adult illiteracy as an official government problem, and in 1957, the National Commission on Adult Literacy

looked for a solution for illiteracy within the government. By the time that the National Commission on Adult Literacy was founded, there were several organizations involved in adult education activities though motivated by different ideologies. Below, Sticht emphasizes the complexity of the resulting vortex of social activity aimed at providing literacy instruction to adults:

By the beginning of the 1960s, the adult education community had become fragmented into several factions: those seeking recognition for adult education as a broad, liberal educational component of the national education system; those who, like Cora Wilson Stewart earlier, sought education for the least educated, least literate adults; and those seeking the conservation of human resources to enhance America's security and increase the industrial productivity of the nation by giving education and job training to adults living in poverty. (32)

The Commission focused on literacy education as a means to employment. What is significant is that the Commission represents one of the first direct efforts of the federal government to find a solution for illiteracy within the government primarily with the intent, according to the political rhetoric used, to secure the economy and defense of the country (Sticht 33).

At the same time that the United States was shoring up its position as a world industrial and diplomatic superpower, domestic inequalities were evident in several sub-classes of the public. In the 1950s, the nascence of civil reform highlighted inequalities, particularly as articulated by the Supreme Court in the

Brown v. Board decision of 1954 (Chisman 5). Of low literacy functioning groups, Forrest Chisman, author of “Adult Literacy and the American Dream,” writes, “Those with the most serious education problems were almost universally poor, socially marginalized, civically ignored, cheated and abused, lacking in self-esteem, and increasingly hopeless” essentially forming a disadvantaged sub-class (Chisman 6). The significant events of the early civil rights movement further cemented the perception that without an education, one did not have a good chance of opportunity and success, a perception that aptly set the stage for the “War on Poverty” of the 1960s.

Government’s greatest contribution to adult literacy education was through strategic legislative decisions made during the Johnson administration’s 1960s “War on Poverty” (Sticht 32) although including adult education in the legislation followed a contentious path with lobbyists. In the 1950s, the National Association of Public School Adult Educators (NAPSAE), affiliated with the NAE, lobbied for the Adult Education Act to professionalize the field and make it equal to other branches of the Department of Education. This effort failed, but events in the military, again, led to legislative approval on a federal level for the professionalization of adult education.

In the 1960s, a task force was created to find out why young men were failing the military’s required standardized entrance exam. The government invested in programs to remediate these men according to the belief that weak servicemen weakened the country. In addition to ensuring that the military was secure, Johnson called for aggressive measures to be taken against the ill effects

of poverty through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Adult education was included among the policy as an area of focus, appealing both to legislators concerned with economic growth and those interested in national security. Through the act, the adult education system received substantial funds. In 1966, the NAPSAE lobbied for the educational programs to be moved from poverty programs to education. The Adult Education Act of 1966 placed Adult Basic Education under the purview of the Department of Education, and so adult education became a permanent feature of government function, laying the foundation for the political institutional discourse with which this paper is concerned. Once a way out of poverty and into productive citizenship, legislation since the 1960s reflects the theme that individual literacy attainment is connected to personal and social achievements that will better citizens' lives (Fingeret 15).

Since the significant legislation of the 1960s, Fingeret, author of *Adult Literacy Education*, notes that the response of the federal government has traditionally been on a crisis and temporary approach to literacy education (15). Each administration pledged to rid the country of illiteracy through aggressive initiatives designed to rally the country's resources with the goal of significantly increasing literacy rates within a specified, ambitious time frame. According to Fingeret, the government offered many temporary solutions for what was viewed as a solvable crisis, not a long term investment. However, adult education and literacy needs persisted through the literacy resurgence of the 1980s. The felt need for improvement in adult education practices and consistent, measurable practices drove the policy of the 1990s, which sought to accurately and adequately

circumscribe adult education activities. Federal coalitions organized to address the needs of the public and manage the great diversity of the field, and documents containing action points intended for state level educational agencies were published. The 1991 Literacy Act, which established regional centers and state governmental bodies, at least provided the infrastructure necessary to support lasting change (Fingeret 2).

The 1991 National Literacy Act was supported by the philosophy that drove Cora Wilson Stewart: raising a figurative army of literacy volunteers within the community to reach those residents who most needed to improve their literacy skills (Sticht 37). The National Literacy Act was designed to encourage literacy activities by providing incentives for community organizations to expand their efforts. Indeed, the current discourse of ABEL is affected by key practices implemented through the Literacy Act, including specific monitoring practices, the primacy of assessment, and increased data reporting standards.

The broad based educational goals of the National Literacy Act were absorbed by the more human resource driven language of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) which based proposed changes in adult education policy on the need for increased competitiveness in the global market which could only occur with a workforce prepared for a technological and skilled market. The WIA provided for all the same educational provisions as the Literacy Act:

At the beginning of the twenty first century, the WIA/AEFLA (Workforce Investment Act/Adult Education And Family Literacy Act) is the source of the federal rules and regulations that guide the

work of more than four thousand state, local, and community based organizations that annually receive federal funds for adult education...the WIA/AEFLA determines who may attend programs, who may deliver programs, how institutions should develop strategic plans, and how programs should be monitored for the purposes of accountability and quality improvement. (Sticht 38)

The WIA's impact on adult education is detailed in Lennox McLendon's "Adult Education and Literacy Legislation and Its Effects on the Field." McLendon explains that the WIA was landmark policy and had a significant effect on adult education by mandating state agencies to act in regulative capacities over both public and private non-profit organizations through increased evaluative requirements (1-5). In effect, the WIA resulted in a standardization of the field and increased the federal government's influence on and presence in the educational process of community based programs as state agencies vied for federal funding. State programs' success lay in providing evidence of federal compliance through demonstrated improvement within their local education facilities. Their local education programs were mandated to prove that adults benefited through their enrollment in these programs (McLendon 1-8).

WIA vested more responsibility and public accountability in the states by requiring them to create plans driven by the need to demonstrate improvement in their federally funded local educational programs. Alicia Belzer is a scholar who focuses on the federal government's role in shaping the political discourse of

adult education. In the article, “Implementing the Workforce Investment Act,” Belzer explains that evaluation requirements resulted in increased standardization within the field (555). States were now asked to perform ongoing assessments and exhaustive reports with a transient and “low-skilled” population (Belzer 531).

Lennox McLendon also points out how the WIA contributed to the development of political, institutional discourse on the local level. As might have been predicted, soon after WIA was passed, many state programs were inexperienced in collecting all the required data confirming students’ benefits of enrollment in these voluntary education programs: the measuring stick? Success was determined by, “students’ post enrollment employment and postsecondary participation nationally” (McLendon 2). Categories of evaluation measured literacy improvement, career training and advancement, post-secondary involvement and the gaining of credentials such as the GED (McLendon 2). As McLendon documents, these seminal categories were derived from students’ stated interests. States were charged with following up with participants to measure program effectiveness in assisting them to reach these self-named goals. State agencies faced a tremendous overhaul in focus and philosophy as their roles changed from distant, regulative authorities to “performance driven systems” (3).

By 2000, the National Coalition for Literacy drafted *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, a document that sought to narrow successful implementation of adult education practices to concentration within three areas: resources, access, and quality (McLendon 4). Now, action points only required states’ commitment to one, a few, or all of the areas of improvement outlined in *Margins*, but *with a*

*need to report on the performance in the areas mentioned* (McLendon 4). And there were a lot of funds at stake in a highly competitive award system. This coalition set a budget for federal appropriations for literacy in 2000 at the billion-dollar mark which effectively allowed about half a billion to go to state grants for literacy programs (McLendon 5).

Describing the new relationship among state, federal, and local agencies, McLendon summarizes the changes in state level agencies responsible for oversight of local educational facilities as now having increased autonomy, with freedom to determine their relationships on all political levels (McLendon 6). States had more responsibility for their own practices due to the decreased regulatory but higher-stake involvement of the federal government. Now the states were responsible for the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of their education programs in their communities with significant impact on the adult education field: “The degree to which state and local adult educators adopt the action agenda in *Margins to the Mainstream* will determine not only the depth and breadth of the advancement of the field but also the unanimity of its voice” (McLendon 9). In its newly defined role with State Education Agencies, the federal government was just as enmeshed in state affairs due to reporting needs.

Jeffrey Grabill’s rhetorical work is useful in providing a framework for understanding the authority ABEL institutions exercise over student participation. Grabill found that federal and state governments are most influential in defining literacy practices (12). Perhaps the most critical component of political discourse within ABEL is the primacy of evaluation, and this is a significant, intense change



introduced by the WIA. Legislative documents carry the authority of law and require significant programmatic adjustments as a matter of routine compliance. Policy determines an educational center's targeted academic outcomes, which refers to the measurement of students' performance on published state standards and benchmarks, the activities that indicate mastery on specific content. This content builds on itself throughout the student's education. Policy also determines the means to best assess progress toward those outcomes, which is central to the discourse (Grabill 35). Additionally, the parts of documents that establish assessment practices create the most powerful systematization within educational centers since procedures that deal with assessment, and more broadly, evaluation, determine an institution's eligibility to receive consistent funding. Within official state documents, regulative tools like improvement plans and checklists, assessments, and annual review reports indicate adult education learn-centers' progress on state defined goals which align with WIA goals. The interests of the education sponsor and government are mediated through regulative documents, and in the process the federal and state governments enjoy positions of privilege as evaluators.

Evaluative procedures play a pivotal role in advancing institutional mandates. The need to collect and report relevant data concerning student performance is primary to an institution's cooperation with supporting agencies. As Grabill states, "In short, the mechanisms of funding connect adult education's purpose to assessment, and this is the power that government has to make assessment central to the ABE process. This power flows through the system

beginning with legislation and assessment controls, and ...drives practice to a significant degree” (16). Information regarding students’ performance is used to satisfy institutional needs for data as a priority over collaborative and democratic practices, despite any other intentions local institutions may have to serve them. The institution exercises authority over the student through its prioritization manifest by its procedures. The student may be in danger of losing control of her own learning process and is effectively marginalized. Grabill offers his observations of how the institution exerts control over the learning process at a particular adult education center, Western District.

Western District was able to maintain the appearance of collaboration through the use of Adult Education Plans in which students selected term academic goals with instructors during their intake process, the formal induction of most adult education centers (Grabill 57). In reality, students had little input in the process. Power, seemingly negotiated on a bottom-up level, remained hierarchical. Meanwhile, the institution took credit for collaborative practices, bolstering their reputation. In fact, from the perspective of program administrators, the process may have seemed collaborative. After all, teachers and students did meet face to face. However, Grabill concluded that not enough time was used to develop the language and concept of student stated goals. In addition, Grabill found that most ethics of reform portray both student and institution generally, usually ignoring the institution as an active participant in the education process and reducing students to a sum of stereotypical characteristics (51). ABEL institutions, even in the framework of a collaborative process such as

creating a learning plan, attempt to shape the identity of their students, bypassing their specific problems or needs.

Closely tied to evaluative functions, local institutions exercise authority over students through their power to determine literate practices. Grabill helps us see the power of the educational institution to declare the substance of literacy and that often within community literacy contexts, the desires of various institutions are more evident than those of participants. He is concerned with the question, “Within ABEL, what counts and does not count as a literate act, and who has the power to declare so?” (Grabill 7). Because institutional concerns of government and the local ABEL organization intersect at the point of classroom praxis, these stakeholders must negotiate what will “count” as the stuff of education.

Importantly, Grabill maintains that the meaning of literacy is found in such documents that are used to secure the institution’s compliance to and fusion with mid-level political structures that establish and monitor progress towards state mandated educational standards and benchmarks. Areas of written policy: formative documents such as improvement plans, processes of curriculum development, and facets of assessment, including testing instruments define what constitutes the stuff of adult education (Grabill 33). The question, “What counts as literacy education?” is answered by the activities selected and systematized in response to documents that require measurable progress to maintain the stream of funding between the local learn center and government. In this way, institutional actions directly impact what counts as valid literacy practices. Whatever is

discounted as successful (measurable) literacy and basic education must be removed from classroom praxis.

The singular focus on measurable objectives limits meaningful actions to the detriment of student initiated, spontaneous learning events. State mandated outcomes are narrowly defined and ignore the process of learning that privileges the experience and contribution of all participants (Beder and Valentine 80). Instead, evaluative practices privilege government and ABEL institutions' agendas. Students may have a different perspective of their progress than is possible to assess by their performance on state standards since state standards are not designed to measure students' experience and background knowledge. Institutional practices bear on the lives of students who attempt to access power through participation in the educational center (Grabill 7). Because students must participate within the institution's delimitation of relevant academic substance, the institution in this way exercises authority over their goals and identities while maintaining a position of power.

As this review of the literature suggests, the history of adult education reveals both the consistent involvement of social groups, charities, and the government in what is an effort to make a good available to all people— education---and diminish a negative state-- illiteracy. The most strident discourse in this review is located within government's involvement evidenced by significant policy changes that directly impact students' participation in the adult education system. Although government involvement appears to have been behind the curve of social movements, government involvement has also clearly

been motivated by ideological justifications, primarily as seen in this review, of seeking to limit the public's dependency on handouts while securing the nation's productivity and solidarity. The lasting government motivation seems to have been to shore up weakness within the body politic, and so form a more secure and profitable nation. Within this discourse, the government has taken initiative in the education of adults, for example, in addressing the educational training of men serving in the military through testing, development of the GED, and creation of the GI Bill.

The government's actions to incorporate adult education within the framework of its educational system indicate a submission to social pressure guided on an ideological level by fear of the impact certain classes of people would have on society as far as the production and consumption of resources and goods. Even today, the political discourse stemming from government involvement reveals the awareness of the social stratification of different classes. The political discourse articulates citizens' position in the world, and also the position the country would like to assume. Literacy education activities are a vehicle for positioning the public in acceptable roles. Once becoming a part of government bureaucracy, policy and funding concerns further complicated the administration of adult education services and added to an increasingly complex discourse, making what was once primarily the work of voluntary organizations a matter of public, political advocacy and institutional practice.

The current political discourse of local education centers connects them to other, powerful institutions involved in educational discourse, namely the

government on state and federal levels. Local educational institutions benefit from regulative discourse, enjoying positions of authority within the educational process. Branch's concept of regulative discourse locates the root of their authority within the power of the political discourse they enact, and Grabill confirms this through institutions' presence in and manipulation of literacy education practices in classroom contexts. However dominant, educational discourse is not only political. As this paper will discuss below, great potential lies in educational systems that are open to the participation introduced by programs with dominant features that are derived from models of democratic participation, significantly different from the political discourse discussed above.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In “Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change,” James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles call rhetoricians to join them in inventing systematic methods for better understanding the key institutions that shape how literacy is understood, valued, and taught here in the United States. Choosing to deliberately shift the focus of reform from personal experience to institutional change, Porter et al. advocate for revisionist work at the place of discursive junctures within institutions. As a professional writer, Grabill searches for a physical and practical approach to critiquing institutions situated in the field in which he works. “We focus, then, on institutions as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power through the design of space (both material and discursive)” (Porter et al. 621). This critique uses a spatial, visual, and organizational perspective to examine the authority, organizational structure, official and unofficial discourse, and boundaries of institutions in order to find ambiguous places (Porter et al. 630). Gaps found at sites of discursive practices become locations of reform. For example, policy writing is one area in which institutional discourse may be reconstructed through the very tool used to uphold the status quo. The authors base their premise for change on the primary constitution of all institutions; since institutions are primarily rhetorically made, they can be criticized and changed rhetorically.

Postmodern mapping and boundary interrogation are the primary media for a spatial and visual analysis of the potential for change within institutions. Postmodern mapping is concerned with the ontology of structures, how they came to be organized, and how that organizational structure positions various perspectives involved or excluded from that construction. The political power that establishes relationships is read in between the lines of institutional maps, such as organizational charts. The authors claim that institutions possess many maps, and as they are rhetorically constructed using discursive features, those relationships can be rewritten using the same discursive tools (Porter et al. 623).

Boundary interrogation reviews institutions' work to exclude certain actions that have not historically defined or been valued by them in the formation of their identities. Even as institutions define themselves, there are points of conflict in which the boundaries may be found to have weak points, places where they engage conflict or difference. These places represent "zones of ambiguity" (Porter et al. 624) where change is possible because institutional mechanisms that attempt to lay hold of these weaker areas of contention are exposed.

Porter et al. advocate for change within the material space of the institution through revision of discursive practices. While their concern is primarily with departments of English and writing programs within institutions of higher education, their call is just as relevant, I believe, to other institutions that "sponsor" literacy (Brandt 8), including—as is central to my interests—sites of adult literacy education, or ABEL. For Porter et al., institutional critique isn't an abstraction carried out in macro-level syllogisms but needs to become a grounded



practice. “[C]ritique,” they say, “needs an action plan” (Porter et al. 612). To inform such action, for this thesis project I invented, as detailed below, a theory-based, data-driven method for analyzing public documents published by highly visible “literacy sponsors” (Brandt 8). These sponsors are various State Departments of Education and AmeriCorps, two kinds of institutions that shape how adult literacy education gets carried out in the U.S. In part, my method is informed by Brenton Faber’s insight that key features of literacy sponsors’ identities and practices circulate in the public documents they circulate about themselves (222). For my analysis, the public documents accessible to me included state annual reports and project descriptions circulated by relevant State Education Agencies and AmeriCorps. Furthermore, the method is grounded in insights from Kirk Branch and Paula Mathieu that the discursive features of such documents belie the individual literacy sponsor’s relationship to other institutions and to the students whom they serve—particularly regulative and/or tactical relationships, as discussed in my literature review.

Grabill and Branch specifically address the role of institutions in creating an adult literacy discourse using ethnographic research. The authors describe the role of government, local educational organizations, and other social institutions in creating unbalanced authority and participatory structures. I locate the power imbalance within the procedures of local ABEL educational institutions established by policy that emphasize satisfying institutional concerns at the expense of human, relational ones (Young 81). Grabill and Branch reveal mechanisms of power that create powerful institutions; however, within powerful

institutions are weaker areas that, like joints, are susceptible to flexibility (Grabill 127, Branch 185). Specifically, this analysis examines current system limitations to democratic, critically aware participation which prevent the circulation of an ethic of care within the public discourse.

Similar to Grabill's experience at Western District, I found evidence of unequal participatory structures in the documents I reviewed for this project. Through these documents, instructors are mandated to set goals with students in a formative process, but ultimately, instructors control the process by aligning student stated goals with state educational benchmarks—and if the goals and benchmarks are not compatible, instructors create these goals for the student (*The Ohio Performance* 5.4). Instructors rely heavily on assessment data more than mutually selected goals. In addition, students' activities in the classroom are guided by the need for data that indicate success according to the achievement of these benchmarked goals. The student's input becomes secondary. In this way, the operation of regulative discourse within the ABEL system results in the disproportion of authority to responsibility on both the student's and teacher's part. The student becomes overly reliant on the teacher's authority and his own voice--an attempt at responsibility for his education through articulation of his goals--is overlooked in significant ways. As a result, the student is underdeveloped and disconnected from the educational system that promises in its mission to reach him.

## Identifying Features

As stated above, my methodology draws from Branch and Mathieu to illumine mechanisms of discourse as practiced within institutions. Both authors pursue lines of inquiry using extant documents and other ethnographic evidence as source material. Branch's methodology involved reading and re-reading FBI and organization notes in order to immerse himself in the culture of the Highlander school; he quoted extensively from these notes. In addition, he also analyzed features of policy within official documents that governed the discourse of adult education programs, similar to the analysis I conducted for this project. Mathieu's methodology was more traditionally ethnographic. She used case study histories in order to gather evidence of specific methodologies currently used in the service learning paradigm common today in composition studies. She also spent time immersed in service learning projects. Mathieu's aim was to find whether and how tactical projects emerged in light of the tensions created by institutional initiatives. Both Mathieu and Branch offered contextual readings of literacy practices in light of their emerging theories of discourse. In the tradition of Paolo Freire, they "read the world" to "read the word" (qtd in Gee 65).

Both Mathieu and Branch detail discursive features within community literacy as experienced first-hand in ABEL classrooms, or at sites of production such as the university. Branch found evidence of a regulative discourse that directs both the use of knowledge and authority relationships within the ABEL system (100). Mathieu substantiates the existence of occurrences animated by hope, activities that counter often one-sided community service ideology whose

focus is on the experience of the college student as ethnographer at the expense of the community (15). Ethnographic research requires immersion into the world of planned study, and the discourses I discovered operating within ABEL using methodologies similar to Branch and Mathieu represent specific world views. Indeed, reading political documents that establish the structure of local educational agencies felt like getting lost deep in a foreign land. Entering these projects required the patience to categorize obvious similarities across various samples. In this thesis project, I extended the work of Branch and Mathieu to code current readings of the discourse, thus categorizing consistent features.

My hypothesis was that if a consistent regulative discourse existed, grounded in the policy and procedures that establish institutions, then that discourse would stand up to inspection regardless of various locations and types of organizations. So, my intuition was that a list of criteria, when read against each artifact, would produce similar results. If the competing discourses described by the research existed within ABEL systems, and as discourses, if they were replicated similarly, they should exist generally. This hypothesis was tested as each document was read against exact criteria.

### The Corpus

I analyzed features of regulative and tactical discourse in a selection of official ABEL documents and reports of AmeriCorps projects, respectively. In observing features of regulative discourse, I thought it was appropriate to choose documents that contained policy requirements. I selected documents from seven states, originally desiring to choose states that also had the presence of a

Literacy\*AmeriCorps national program, the same program in which I was involved. However, these documents were not readily available from each state, so of the seven states used in qualitative evidence: Massachusetts, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Arizona, and California, all except Oregon, Kentucky, and Massachusetts had Literacy\*AmeriCorps national programs within the state. In order to directly address regulative discourse within the ABEL field, I chose state reports that outline compliance regulations of local agencies, setting educational goals for the states that are usually projected over a five year period. In addition to these five year plans, other regulatory documents were available and, I believe, helpful in offering a picture of the discourse. These included evaluative manuals and performance review reports, all publications of mid-level SEAs, those agencies directly responsible for overseeing and collecting data from local, community based and federally funded ABEL educational institutions.

Having established that regulative discourse exists in ABEL institutions and that it is a political discourse, it stood to reason that the discourse would be evident in these political documents. These documents were reviewed for repetitive key words and phrases, for a comprehensive overview of political requirements within the system, and for their treatment of various stakeholders, all criteria consistent with what I believed were features of regulative discourse that addressed the roles of stakeholders and the treatment of expertise within the education field (Branch 48).

I took a similar approach in analysis of other projects for features of tactical discourse. Using Mathieu's idea of tactical projects, I chose from a sample

of documented projects involving AmeriCorps as ethnographic material and read these examples with an eye for discovering features of tactical discourse. Finally, I discussed how and whether AmeriCorps had a role in facilitating the occurrence of these projects. The end goal was to offer insight into how ABEL discourse is influenced by both features of tactical and regulative discourse and how tactical discourse promotes a different type of participation.

Examples of tactical and regulative discourse were observed through a number of features drawn from the work of authors Mathieu and Branch that was formulated into a list and table. These diagrams acted as grids through which the discourses were observed within regulative documents and reports. Here is the list that guided my evaluation of programs for evidence of a tactical discourse. Here, a grid was not necessary because each feature directly correlated with discursive elements found within the case studies and each case was examined on an individual basis. AmeriCorps programs that gave rise to tactical projects or problem solving had the qualities of being:

- short term
- non-prescriptive
- spontaneous
- based on shared responsibility
- subject to progressive reform
- limited reliance on authority
- shared expertise
- non-systematic though concurrent to institutional systems

- elides or supersedes institutional boundaries
- require continued support and/or communication

What I found through my research was that one or many features of tactical discourse could operate concurrently or simultaneously to institutional activities. If institutions maintained control of all projects, unless these features were explicit in the projects' vision, they did not appear prominently within the discourse. The greater the freedom given to participants to act responsibly—to display response ability (Keith 169) through initiative taking, the greater the likelihood of these features being present, whether or not they were fixtures of the official discourse.

Obviously, the analysis of state reports provided more of a challenge. These did not lend themselves easily to analysis. The features I pulled from Branch that were indicative of regulative discourse did not correlate directly to the language of the reports because the reports resisted my purpose of disclosure, which is consistent with a regulative discourse. So, my approach was to find areas of weakness, places where the discourse proclaimed itself too loudly in an attempt to lay claim to a boundary which was actually a site of contention (Bizzell 621). These included places where the language was especially formal or obtuse, repetitive, or where the language type cast the student body. The documents taught me how to read them and confirmed the existence of regulative discourse through the similarities they shared.

Not every state report shared identical features. However, the research proved there to be enough consistency to positively assert the existence of a

regulative discourse that guides the ABEL system. I created seven tables in all, each having presented, through the evidence afforded by the state reports, indications of features consistent within regulative discourse as I understood Branch’s use of the term. Below is an example of one of seven tables created around a facet of regulative discourse as exemplified by the features attending the rhetoric of the documents. All seven tables are available in Appendix A.

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Skill/ Opportunity link</b>	<b>Literacy Myth</b>	<b>At risk population</b>	<b>Data/ Technology/ Prof. staff</b>	<b>Personal responsibility</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x	x		
Pennsylvania	x	x	x		
California	x			x	x
Kentucky	x	x	x	x	x
Arizona	x	x	x	x	
Massachusetts	x			x	
Ohio	x	x		x	

Analyzing Implications

Finally, rhetorical theory explains what happens when regulative and tactical discourses come into contact, which is the heart of this paper because of the parasymphetic quality of AmeriCorps as an institution that comes alongside established community organizations. This thesis employs the work of Bizzell, Porter et al., and Branch in describing areas of weakness and potential that become apparent in the unique partnership. According to Patricia Bizzell, contact



zones are contentious spaces where meaning may be decided (166). These occur when differing, clearly defined positions converge in historical contexts of power struggles. Contact zones offer space for creatively entering a discourse by situating members around the problem space (167). In addition, Branch, as he relies on Bernstein's model of pedagogy, discusses the possibilities that exist as information moves through the production, recontextualization, and reproduction phases of educational discourse (45). Each phase of knowledge formation requires movement from one discourse to another and, thus, different ways of being and thinking from its participants. It is at these junctures where individuals pass from one discourse to the next that participants may bear on the formation of the discourse. These are blurry areas that are open to intervention and reformation (192). Branch invokes the presence of a trickster consciousness at these sites and the possibilities for reformation as "rabbit holes" (188). Participants may enact a trickster consciousness in order to maintain a separate identity. This resistance is on a micro-level, and the trickster is aware of the constraints of his world (Branch 189). However, he is also aware of places that the discourse is weak or experiencing change. For example, teachers and other practitioners may choose to let the "accidents" of the classroom actually guide practice instead of yielding to the anxiety present within the discourse through the reproduction phase of instruction (Branch 194). An instructor may choose to forfeit attempts at a pre-scripted curriculum but instead focus on group needs that emerge in the moment. This in-the-moment response represents a resistance to the reproduction of institutional educational discourse. The teacher is choosing to reconstruct the

students' experience based on priorities beyond the control of those responsible for the recontextualization phase of the discourse who are primarily interested in the cultural order in which the discourse is based.

The presence of AmeriCorps presents itself as both a contact zone and the introduction of a new discourse. AmeriCorps coordinators and members experience more freedom to operate under distinct prerogatives rather than those endorsed by government entities within the ABEL system. Because of its differing discourse, AmeriCorps also raises the contention similarly found in a contact zone. I argue that AmeriCorps opens up more spaces for reformation and emancipatory intervention since it is an institution that enacts a different discourse when in contact with the regulative discourse. However, what I describe in this project are actions of constructive resistance (Branch 198), not escape, from institutional structures. Branch is not hopeful that true counter examples exist to seemingly monolithic institutions. Branch's work with trickster consciousness is helpful in explaining the actions of AmeriCorps members who enact a different identity within community based institutions. Their actions may be inexplicable in light of institutional discourse but wholly consistent with the AmeriCorps initiative for direct service in critical areas of need. Through the introduction of a new discourse, AmeriCorps has the capacity to trouble the political discourse of local literacy centers.

Limitations of the methodology include lack of ideal examples. There is no one sample that displays all the features of a purely regulative or tactical discourse. Qualitative evidence confirms the presence of features of each

discourse, and so results of the analysis describe tendencies rather than true examples. Also, it was difficult to find data of spontaneous projects involving AmeriCorps, especially projects confined to the ABEL field. As a result, I had to broaden my search to other AmeriCorps state and national programs besides only those working in traditional adult community education centers. These range from a house building project in West Virginia, to tutoring and summer nutrition programs for elementary students.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSES: THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION/LITERACY SYSTEM AND THE DISCOURSES CIRCULATING THERE

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is focused on the regulatory features of state-sponsored adult literacy programs active within the discourse. Each feature is first briefly summarized. Then, these features are discussed in detail using the state reports to demonstrate how the discourse is structured through the rhetoric that attends the identified features. The second part of the chapter is focused on recent AmeriCorps projects that evidence tactical features. In both cases, the analysis seeks intersections between larger theoretical predictors and the grounded findings from my own discourse analyses. Furthermore, each section dramatizes key characteristics as these characteristics are embodied in my research. In the case of the ABEL-state reports treated in the first section, these dramatizations feature one or more state reports that best exemplify a given feature. In the case of latter discussion, these examples are literacy projects reported in scholarship on AmeriCorps.

#### Part I: State Documents' Features of Regulative Discourse

Documents scripted by SEAs in compliance with the United States Department of Education (USDE) participate in a call-and-response of political discourse. Documents specific to this analysis are five-year state plans and annual performance reviews, official documents of SEAs that set the parameters for

agencies’--on state and federal levels--relating to each other. They carefully circumscribe positions of authority, production, benefit, and oversight and describe a clear hierarchy. State agencies perform intermediary functions, as they operate in both supervisory and administrative capacities, though with accountability. In order to maintain federal funding, state agencies formulate state plans of education that are the framework for policy implementation within local adult basic education/literacy (ABEL) agencies. Local ABEL agencies are responsible—and indeed are given freedom—for creating procedures that enact policy, but SEAs act as umbrella organizations, fulfilling monitoring and supportive roles. State policy is derived directly from federal law, most recently, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. The federal offices of education, to include the United States Department of Education and the Office of the Secretary of Education, are responsible for executing policy and making changes periodically as the law requires.

### Defining Features of Regulatory Discourse

Here I define the seven features that my analysis suggests most distinctively characterize the tenor of regulatory discourse. These features are rigidity, a moralistic worldview, prescribe social roles, a technocratic vocabulary, a mechanical portrayal of adult literacy learning, binary logic, and a reliance on outside expertise. Below, I define each of these features in more detail. Following these definitions is a more extensive discussion that dramatizes each of these features within the context of one or more especially illustrative state reports.

*Rigidity.* Rigidity is a necessary feature of the political discourse that constitutes the Adult Basic Education/Literacy (ABEL) system. Rigidity is evident in the documents used by SEAs to communicate requirements, outcome measures, and short-term projections concerning the work of local programs. State reports are the documents through which SEAs respond to each requirement of federal policy on a line-by-line basis, as well as report back to the federal government areas in which local programs meet and/or exceed specific requirements of law. Within the reports, states describe, in their own words, goals and objectives that align with WIA required indicators of success within adult education programs. My analysis of these reports reveals that these goals are consistent in their language and content across states and only vary in emphasis. In other words, states may select a certain number of goals from year to year, but all goals are derived directly from the language of the WIA. In addition, each state has its own particular mechanisms for executing federal requirements, but states address federal requirements with recommendations of specific practice that leave little room for program-by-program interpretation. Neither is the language of the documents doubtful regarding the expectations of the federal government, whose authority looms over all state activity with the power to directly impact program operation in the state through removal of funding. However, each state emphasizes individual priorities in the selection of goals.

The second area that shows a great deal of consistency in the state plans was the procedures for reporting on the progress of local programs. Each state

used similar reporting systems and language to refer to data that either indicated compliance with, or failure to meet, stated goals, and thus, program success or failure. The standards for reporting are called performance measures, those specific outcomes that refer quantitatively to students' performance on state selected goals.

Third, the structure of the documents position programs rhetorically within hierarchies of power. Headings are bolded with features that indicate the order and influence of authority structures and the critical nature of requirements. Numbered goals and objectives not only indicate a rigid structure and implementation, but set the goals and objectives apart as representative of authority in and of themselves.

Additional features that appeared in most of the state reports included elements of monitoring and review and procurement and management of funds. All documents contained specific procedures related to being subject to program evaluation as well as involving outside agencies in the process of monitoring. Also, certain states put specific tactics into place that I think are worth mentioning when speaking of rigid practices. The commonality among these features is the rigidity that a systematic discourse among state and federal agencies requires in accordance with political mandates.

*Moralistic Worldview.* One of the most important features of regulative discourse is its function to create moral statements about the world as knowledge is embedded in cultural practices. Regulative discourse tells us how we should feel

about or use what we know and so sets authorities in place who are responsible for maintaining and passing on the cultural heritage of knowledge. For example, in the production phase, university professors, as researchers, are responsible for shaping the disciplinary canon of a field. These researchers possess the authority to decide worthy lines of inquiry, thus, which questions should be answered. Classroom instruction is always situated in this larger, regulative discourse and completes the cycle of regulative discourse by reproducing social relationships as knowledge is embedded in classroom practices. Within adult education, regulative discourse relies on moral statements about the value of knowledge and education to participants' lives which requires a vision of the world as it both is and will be. The discourse makes *should* statements about how education will impact participants' lives and how that knowledge should be used by them. In this case, regulative discourse is evident in the promises the discourse makes to participants. The regulative discourse of adult education leans on a description of under-educated adults' lives and their lack as a portrayal of the world as-is. Statements of the world as-is cover topics like the inherent benefit of skill acquisition, access to schooling, the role of training in the administration of adult education/literacy programs, and beliefs about the economy and educational opportunities for adult students. In addition, these documents speak to adult students' place in the world and the role of education in their lives.

Regulative discourse may be observed within the explicit state and other official documents. For example, Branch addresses the discourse of vocational education that scripts a world of high technology, specialization, and globalization



(109). He finds evidence of this discourse in documents that describe the current needs and policies in the labor force in SCANS (Secretary's Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills), a list of necessary, relevant skills and competencies identified by employers and employees (Branch 103). Likewise, the NWB (Northwest Workplace Basic) System adapts workplace competencies by focusing on employer needs (Branch 104-105). The NWB System also includes curriculum and assessment tools. In this discourse, the idea of competency is used to judge students as either lacking or possessing skills necessary to function within the high performance world, claiming a correspondence between the skills described by the competencies and the real world. The supposed relevance of the competencies support educators' and administrators' role in the discourse (Branch 106).

Through the documents I've reviewed, I found that the discourse of adult education has two sides. One couches literacy practices in a vision of the world that presents low educational skills as a widespread crisis which can only be quelled with aggressive intervention. At the same time, the mood of the discourse created through actual practice is heavy laden with bureaucratic initiatives. The duality of the discourse is consistent with Branch's predictions as well; his research revealed educational practices that, while positioned as rhetorically and politically neutral, were guided by a discourse of obedience and productivity that benefited employers (96).

*Prescribed Roles.* As important as a vision of the world, regulative discourse as evidenced in state reports paints a complex and powerful picture of the parties involved in maintaining the discourse. Each stakeholder is given carefully prescribed roles and spheres of authority. Also, assumptions about each stakeholder influence the participation of the others. One key feature of regulative discourse is that it is intolerant of lateral relationships. Members are required to stay within prescribed roles. Information is kept away from certain parties and funneled to those with the proper authority. In other words, institutional discourses can be identified by a strong hierarchical structure. Information flows in a top-down fashion and carries the authority of the office or role of the person behind it as if information itself is a participant. Thus, participants' functions are limited to roles rather than being based in relationship. In describing participants, labels are frequently used to further reduce participants to specific actions that are either consistent with and support the institution's functions as delineated in the discourse, or are outside the parameters of success as defined by the institution.

The hierarchy of agencies is apparent in each of the documents. The SEAs hold the most authority second to federal agencies like the Department of Education. SEAs are directly responsible for supervising activities of local ABEL organizations. Coalitions are community based and provide inter-organizational support and raise awareness for literacy practices. Teachers are charged as monitors and collectors of data and evidence. Students' roles situate them passively, as they are recipients of interventions, and their participation is quickly turned into numerical data that furthers the continuance of local programs. This is

where the term “lose a gain” derives from (*California Annual Performance Report 5*). A student is a potential gain, dependent on factors such as his length of participation and citizenship status. As long as a student shows improvement over a specified amount of time, whether in a test score or grade level, that person can be counted as a gain. A certain number of gains are required to maintain federal and state funding of local programs. If the data is not properly documented, or a regulation is violated during the student’s enrollment, that “gain” can be lost (*California Annual Performance Report 5*).

*Technocratic Vocabulary.* The vocabulary of the ABEL discourse is repetitive, technical, and—importantly—specific. For those familiar with the discourse, each word raises a specter of authority, benefits, rewards, and threats that are extant in the relationships established in the discourse among local, state, and federal educational agencies. The most technical and widely repeated language revolves around data collection and measurement. This is due to the costly nature of reporting in terms of direct reward or censure. However, the ABEL vocabulary adequately covers all areas of participation, leaving little room for doubt on participants’ roles and the costs and benefits of successful participation.

*Mechanical.* Regulative discourse in the adult education/literacy field is primarily concerned with self-preservation, and, thus, the documents reflect a mechanical portrayal of adult literacy learning. Organizations learn how to respond to federal mandates, and in the process, local educational programs’ activities become

routine. Local ABEL centers are guided by the primary motivation of ensuring programs operate along minimum standards for continuation according to the standards set by the political discourse. The language of minimum terms extends from the discourse of state reports and is overwhelmingly common within the ABEL system. Local learning centers are required to justify their existence in ways that are sometimes non-intuitive through very specific improvement plans, applications, and performance reports. Local learning centers construct complex procedures in answer to federal policy administered through state offices.

Bureaucracy may be the explanation for routine, mechanical procedures. These procedures often do not best serve the mission and vision of local agencies. At the very least, procedural activity tends to more greatly emphasize the mechanisms of mediocre program participation over possibilities for program improvement that may exist if local programs were evaluated primarily on an individual and relational, not politically motivated, basis. In other words, the amount of program energy that is given over to fulfilling policy requirements is the less that can be afforded to imagination.

Local ABEL institutions display the effects of mechanization through obsessive focus on certain aspects of program implementation such as continual improvement and use of technology, selection of reporting instruments, and the certain way in which events like orientation are structured. Also, the use of outside experts or commissions sometimes supports the institution's needs to satisfy accountability requirements over--or without regard to, expressed student

needs. For example, specific requirements, like the need for a literacy board, privilege the mechanisms of institutionalism.

*Binary Logic.* ABEL discourse is very black-and-white. Either a program is successful or not, receives a grant or not, is rewarded, or enters a process of discipline. State reports delineate parameters of success which place programs at certain levels of successful operation based on their measurable performance. The visual aspect of state reports assist in clearly sifting programs along these lines.

Although the state's expectations may be communicated succinctly, programs are complex and may approach, exceed, or encounter standards differently than they are able to communicate by simply reporting back on performance measures. Also, by concentrating on performance measures exclusively, local programs are limited in communicating success in other ways. State reports include explanations for programs' low performance; however, these statements usually include recognition of a zero-sum economy.

*Reliance on Outside Expertise.* The discourse of the Adult Basic Education/Literacy system relies heavily on outside validation to approve the educational and curricular practices of local agencies and delimit sources of authority to which funding is closely tied. For example, as states try to keep up with reporting needs, they may positively emphasize their use of scientific methods in data collection procedures. The simple use of baseline measures in student learning profiles or offering professional training to instructors in new,

research-based methods are hailed as “new”, “progressive”, and “common sense” initiatives (*California Annual Performance Review 2, 5*). “Research-based” is a term often used in justification of classroom practices (*The O.P.A.S. 6.8*) and is an example of what James Gee calls a (word for terms for which meaning is assumed). The term activates myths of education that support a regulative discourse which envisions a world of increased specialization and technical expertise. SEAs enter the discourse positively in support of this vision of the world, responding with descriptions of a specialized and well thought out curriculum. Data collected from local learning centers qualify as research and are the basis for making changes in support of policy mandates. Data are locally generated and represent the immediate presence of authority that undergirds educational practice. Also, reliance on technology adds to the established authority structure in which information is key to problem solving. Highly specialized information in the form of research and data acts as a vehicle of classroom transformation. Thus, the ABEL discourse of state reporting pays specific attention to how information is obtained, distributed, and used in the classroom and among participants on an administrative level.

#### Examples from State Reports Characterizing Each Feature

Below I select one or more state reports from my corpus to dramatize how a given feature constructs and regulates the political discourse within local adult education centers. I discuss in detail the rhetoric attending the presence of these features through the language and structure of state reports. Through careful

reading, I found that the specific language of the reports created the institutional discourse with which this paper is concerned. Through rhetorical functions of repetition, circulating themes, language that referenced hierarchy, and the treatment of knowledge, the documents set a clear framework in which teachers, administrators, students, and the material substance of education were put in specific relation to each other.

*Rigidity Exemplified: Oregon's and Arizona's State Reports.* The report that most exemplifies the rigidity of regulatory discourse was issued by the state of Oregon, with that from the state of Arizona a close second. More specifically, Oregon's *Annual State Performance Report Fiscal Year 2004-2005*, published by the Community Colleges and Workforce Development of Oregon, is an ideal example of rigidity in the ABEL system because of its use of repetition, demonstration of goals through performance measures, and visual display of data. Rigidity is defined as lack of flexibility, and indeed, because of the demands of policy, flexibility would be anathema to this programs' desired operation. The cycle of ABEL funding is one that thrives on the control of measurability. As Oregon's annual report indicates, a seven of the twelve targets for each performance measure were met in the states' programs (*Annual Performance Report 2*). These twelve key performance measures are linked to three goals and seven Oregon benchmarks, which are chosen by the Department as critical areas of focus necessary to achieve the Department's mission for adult education services for the previous review period.

*Rigid accordance with performance measures.* All state plans or reports that I've reviewed for this project evidenced the use of performance measures which are important features of rigidity since they act as boundary setters, indicating the educational priorities within the discourse. Performance measures are the desired, measurable outcome a state chooses to show progress toward the state's big goals. Whereas goals are broad, performance measures limit the time available for local programs to demonstrate students' achievement of their goals at an acceptable rate of progress. The goals chosen for Oregon represent a collaborative effort involving community colleges and the Progress Board and include, (1) "Oregonians have strong literacy skills" (2) "Oregon's workforce is well trained and has access to a wide variety of training programs" (3) "All Oregonians have access to excellent, affordable community college services" (*Annual Performance Report 3*). The performance measures aligned with these goals include a number of specific achievements and tasks ranging from GEDs conferred, to youth entering or returning to school, to the number of start up businesses, and participation in community college courses.

Performance measures are the specific outcomes that show growth; they are outcomes chosen to evidence student progress and relate to one of the three goals mentioned above. Core Indicators, or Indicators of Program Quality (IPQ), are the data that indicate the success of educational agencies towards achievement, at a satisfactory level, of performance measures aligned with state goals. For example, the performance measure may be to increase the number of



adults receiving high school diploma equivalents, and the Core Indicator would be set as a target for a certain number of adults to receive diplomas or equivalents over a course of a year that would indicate programs' success in reaching the performance measure. Perhaps in the first year of the plan's implementation, the Core Indicator would be that 2,000 adults would have received a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Performance measures, quantitative and time-sensitive, are always tied to goals, though the language of goals is broader than that of performance measures.

*Rigid accordance with data presentation.* The evaluation of the state's achievements in each of Oregon's twelve performance measures follows a similar pattern. The numbered performance measure heads the page under the title, "Annual Performance Progress Report, Part II, Key Measure of Progress" (*Annual Performance Report* 6). For example, the first performance measure is 586-1, "Number of GED certificates issued annually" (*Annual Performance Report* 6). Immediately, a side-by-side bar graph follows with bars indicating "Data" and "Targets" displayed side-by-side (6). The Targets, which represent Indicators of Program Quality, are easily compared to the actual data for each year. The set of questions that follow lead the reader quickly through the Department's report of state programs' performance. These questions repeat with each performance measure: "To what goal or goals is this performance measure linked?" "What does the performance measure demonstrate about the goal?" "What does the data reveal?" "What is an example of a departmental activity related to the measure?" "What needs to be done as a result of your analysis?" and, finally, "What is the

data source?” (*Annual Performance Report 7*). The graphs are featured prominently within each section, and each performance measure is directly linked to one of Oregon’s three goals through a short statement that explicitly connects the broad goal—“strong literacy skills” and the performance measure, “increasing the number of GED certificates issued--” (*Annual Performance Report 6, 7*). For Oregon’s performance measure, the goal and performance measure are connected in the discourse by the belief that receiving a General Educational Development Certificate is proof of an increased literacy rate (Goal 1: “Oregonians have strong literacy skills”), a catch-all for increased basic skill levels in all areas that prepares citizens for the workforce or higher education. Finally, the data are reviewed in order for conclusions to be made about whether the Department has been successful in moving towards its intended goal by way of the selected performance measure. Department activities related to the target are discussed, which are concrete examples of ways the Department has contributed to the performance measure over the past years under review. One of the last headings is of a section that suggests any future activities that need to be accomplished in support of the goal.

The repetitive nature of the document nods to the rigid system of accountability within the ABEL field. In each state’s adult education system, performance measures are a way of fine tuning the broad goals since the WIA requires carefully circumscribed data to justify educational centers’ activities. The data that support institutions’ performance may be as simple as the bar graphs Oregon used to show success in surpassing its state targets for GEDs issued year

by year. These data are usually exclusive of and hostile to more nuanced information concerning activities on a local level. The performance measures and data that speak about a state's performance speak about educational activity, but program activity that does not fit the paradigm of measurable outcomes evidenced in this report may go unmentioned, and indeed has no place within this report.

*Rigidity of visual layout.* Visually, the structure of Oregon's performance report lends itself to being easily scanned. Again, the document gives the impression of being flat because of its focused and sequential attention to line-by-line itemization of data. The information only addresses specific positive and negative indicators in regard to the performance measure listed. The data do not address unique aspects of local educational institutions. The information is separated by bolded headings and bulleted under headings which discuss very specific departmental activities. Graphs also provide quick visual access to summary information of the Department's performance on each target.

When speaking of the visual aspect of state reports in how they display the rigidity of the ABEL educational system, it is helpful to draw from another state report, the *Arizona State Plan for Adult Education*, a five-year plan. This plan, instead of reporting back on measures, projects the benefit of future activities the state will select to align its programs with the goals also derived from the WIA. Arizona's five-year plan makes marked use of visual features that connect state and federal policy while highlighting state level activities. Indeed, since state reports and plans are so thick with political mandates and intersecting stakeholder concerns, the use of visual features clarifies the significance and meaning of

information within the document as well as the perspective behind each statement.

In Arizona's plan, the largest, bolded font is used in the presentation of the state's public discourse of literacy education found in the "Vision" and "Beliefs" pages of the document (*Arizona State Plan* iii). The statements on these pages provide the discourse of motivation for the state's practices, followed by the political backing of the State Director of Adult Education in a congratulatory forward. The words, "Vision" and "Beliefs" head each of these pages in large, bold font (*Arizona State Plan* i, iii). It is important that the vision and belief pages contain the largest font, making the statement that these are the most important features of state supported adult education discourse. The plan, in general, uses a variety of fonts and bolded lettering, including bullet points, to separate categories of information, mostly established by the authority issuing that information. For example, references to Title II WIA are in italics. References to requirements of the United States Department of Education (USDE) use bolded numbers. The document includes quotes from stakeholders in bolded Arial font, proudly establishing teachers and other practitioners as part of the discourse while still lending the weightiest voice to those at the top of the hierarchy.

The structure of Arizona's document facilitates scanning and separates topics so that specific information is easy to find. Sections are clearly separated, capitalized, and bolded. For example, the "General Description" of "Adult Education in Arizona in 1999" is segmented into topics of, "Instructional Delivery", "Special Populations", "Student Outcomes", "Program Planning", "Professional Development", and "Collaborations and Communications" that are

clearly visible (*Arizona State Plan 9-15*). Again, the topic of each paragraph is bolded and stands out within the document. Finally, the “Adult Education 5 Year State Plan” is presented in standard outline form, established around five goals (*Arizona State Plan 34*). Each goal is listed in bolded font, followed by two or more objectives. As the plan details the goals and objectives in more depth, both the statements of goals and objectives are bolded to add authority to the words. Written in outline form, these goals and objectives are turned into mandates as the document makes use of quotes from the WIA as a distinctive block of text under the heading of each goal (*Arizona State Plan 66*). The overall effect of the document is a professional looking and dense report that visually mixes the type and size of print, suggesting multiple authorities and strategies in a complex system.

*Moralistic Worldview Exemplified: Arizona’s and Kentucky’s State Reports.* State documents borrow directly from the language of the WIA in their discussion of students’ educational opportunities, work, family life, and personal development. The WIA refers to how state supported educational agencies will assist students in improving these areas of their lives (*Arizona State Plan 10*). The discourse of the state reports paints a clear vision of the world as-is, a world in which students’ needs are exhibited through personal deficits. As a result, students, labeled according to their socio-economic classes, require the state’s assistance. This vision serves as justification for educational policy and reform. Specifically, the *Arizona State Plan for Adult Education* cites the public’s need and the

transformational qualities of education as a causal basis for action (*Arizona State Plan 9*). State reports, in general, also speak of the intended benefits to students on a personal and social basis. The discourse scripted by Arizona's five year plan addresses areas of skill acquisition as a link to economic opportunity, and the promise that program participation leads to personal, holistic development. For this section, I will analyze both Arizona's and Kentucky's state plans; Kentucky's state plan has some interesting features and will be helpful to analyze the literacy myth, the personal success story, and use of technology as instrument of student success.

In the book, *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, James Gee discusses the persistent but empirically unfounded literacy myth that has surrounded literacy education since the emergence of written language (50). The literacy myth extends power to the skills of reading and writing that in many peoples' minds, account for the development of a civilized society. Literacy is leant transformational agency, including the ability to enhance the quality of individuals' lives and encourage economic and social stability on a larger scale. However, these claims, according to Gee, do not ring true when considering social realities even in areas that evidence high literacy rates. The same cities that experience high literacy rates may suffer from crime and economic depression (Gee 57). So why does this myth persist? Gee suggests that literacy is tied to other social institutions that effectually assign citizens to acceptable roles, preserving the goods in society for a few elite. For example, in America, literacy and schooling may represent attempts to manage different classes of people, whether

preparing them for low skilled or managerial work. School could just as easily be about forming a certain kind of citizen for society's purposes and using literacy education as a tool in that service. For example, for some classes of society, school may be more connected to instilling docility required by an employer like Wal-Mart than the critical thinking groomed in future managers (Gee 59). I would like to introduce Kentucky's state report into the discussion as an example of the discourse that undergirds adult educational centers, primarily the literacy myth, the civilizing effect of literacy education on society, use of technology, and personal narratives.

*Portraits of learners in the Kentucky ABEL worldview.* The *Kentucky State Plan* begins almost immediately with a needs assessment, identifying the lapses in the ABEL system in the state. Adult illiteracy is immediately listed as a social ill pertinent to a variety of major social issues within the state, including economic, health, and educational concerns that affect the well-being of Kentucky's families and communities. The document identifies as among Kentucky's two most serious challenges low educational achievement and the persistent poverty of "our" students (*Kentucky State Plan* 8). At the time of the report, a high percentage of citizens did not possess a high school diploma, and a majority of counties fell below state and national average income levels. The median income was 39<sup>th</sup> in the nation (*Kentucky State Plan* 8). Thus, low income and educationally disadvantaged adults are the number one targeted population of the plan.

Disadvantaged and otherwise marginalized populations are clearly acknowledged as among those requiring special attention as they are more likely to be among those receiving public assistance. Adult education is seen as a critical component of services to the disabled and other vulnerable populations including single parents and displaced homemakers; individuals with limited English proficiency; and criminal offenders. With its focus directly trained on the target population, the document concludes that, “Those who are educationally disadvantaged are more likely to be economically disadvantaged” (*Kentucky* 8). Those at the lowest literacy level are among the highest percentage of poverty or near-poverty income levels. In addition, employers identify their employees as lacking basic skills such as writing ability, verbal skills, mathematics, and reading comprehension as well as “soft” skills, such as conflict resolution, punctuality, attendance, and the ability to work in teams (*Kentucky* 9). A large percentage of citizens who function at literacy level 1 receive public assistance. Kentucky’s plan explicitly ties poverty and low educational achievement; thus, the plan’s solutions rely on literacy to transform people, and thereby the state, to be more productive and satisfied—forming its residents into productive citizens. The projected result of educational involvement is increased literacy levels and decreased dependency of vulnerable populations on the government’s assistance.

The document rhetorically positions literacy education as a medium to train those in poverty and low-level skilled jobs to become positive and productive. Even achieving low level skilled work or improving cognitive skills while in such a job is positioned positively since these jobs are portrayed as a step



up from the rampant poverty the state depicts. However, the state projects needs at all levels of employment. According to the document, job growth will be significant in the areas of office and administrative support occupations, production occupations, and sales and related occupations (*Kentucky 10*). The state plan stresses that, “trained workers must be available to construct the needed infrastructure for industry and residential housing” in order to sustain the current and expected economic growth (*Kentucky 10*). “In short, employment will grow in occupations requiring all levels of education and training” (*Kentucky 10*).

Though claiming that all sectors of industry will experience growth, the document suggests that the need for an educated workforce will only increase. Those industries that rely the least on literacy skills are projected to decline over the next two years. As a result, the marketplace is increasing in highly technical skills, so called, “increasingly sophisticated skills” and Kentucky can meet this demand by increasing the “essential skills” of its workforce (*Kentucky 12*). This last statement illustrates the irrationality of the literacy myth by both asserting the decrease in low skilled jobs and that training in basic skills will meet the demand for a more sophisticated work force. Clearly, if the workforce is more specialized and technical, training in basic skills is insufficient to meet that demand.

The claims that literacy education will elevate adults continue throughout the document. In language taken directly from the WIA, the plan states, “Adult Education assists adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self sufficiency, assists adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the

educational development of their children, and assists adults in completing a secondary school education” (*Kentucky* 13). These services are free, direct, and comprehensive. Services include Adult Basic Education, which covers academic skill instruction starting at the sixth grade level, GED preparation, English as a Second Language (ESL), and workforce education. “Adult Basic Education assists adults in improving educational attainment levels and successfully entering employment and continuing education” (*Kentucky* 13). Instruction may also include life skills, employability skills, and computer literacy. Kentucky Adult Education contracts with agencies of all types to provide services, so providers are diverse.

Describing an increasingly specialized and competitive world market, Kentucky Adult Education (KAE) makes a goal of ensuring that adults have the skills needed to be competitive in the knowledge-based economy; thus, an objective of the plan is to transition participants into postsecondary education and training in addition to a focus on basic education. In service of this mission, the use of technology places KAE at the fore of vanguard interventions. KAE discourse esteems innovation, and Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) serves the purpose of aggressively using technology to support the state’s mission of preparing adults. KYVU is an internet based portal through which adult education students and educators “partner” by using, viewing, and posting assignments, enrolling in college courses, participating in professional development programs, and posting free adult education curriculum from post-secondary institutions (*Kentucky* 15). “The KYVU and Kentucky Virtual Library provide a centralized

Web-based system available at all times at no cost to the eligible user” (*Kentucky* 16). Also with a mind to transition adult learners to higher education, Kentucky Adult Education partners with the Technical College System to cross reference college entrance exams with standardized assessments that students would have already taken in adult basic education programs. Kentucky Adult Education also partners with Job Corps, the “nation’s largest and most comprehensive residential, education and job training program for at-risk youth, ages 16 through 24” (*Kentucky* 17). Tax credits are given to businesses to encourage them to allow students to be released from work to study for the GED, and tuition credits are given to students who qualify and complete the GED test within one year.

Workforce education, which experienced an upward trend in Kentucky between 2001 and 2003, is figured within the plan as vital to the health of the economy and workforce, with the purpose of, “improving the productivity of the workforce through the improvement of literacy skills” (*Kentucky* 17). Employees’ skill sets are portrayed as suffering entropy, and requiring retraining in order for them to remain competitive. “In addition to strong reading, math, and communication skills, employees need skills in solving problems, adapting to rapid change and working in teams” (*Kentucky* 17). Literacy skills, unlike in the traditional ABEL class, are adapted to tasks that employees already engage in. These skills can be improved, “resulting in a better-trained, more productive workforce” (*Kentucky* 17).

Along with using the competency argument that emphasizes employees’ lack of skills, education objectives in the workforce are centered on employer

needs. Adult education providers, in a workplace education component, “are encouraged to work with the employer to identify skills employees need to be successful in their jobs and design a course of basic skills instruction around these needs” (*Kentucky* 17). As an indication that workforce education operates in the discourse of the world as-is, instructors in workplace education use relevant examples from the working environment, and Kentucky Adult Education cooperates with providers to integrate job readiness skills into basic curriculum with real-world examples from several work settings. KAE workforce education agencies cooperate with adult education providers to strengthen adult education’s partnerships with business and industry with the end goal of providing job-context training to improve workforce competence.

The plan continues to focus on marginalized groups as targets of intervention, specifically immigrants, stating that the total immigrant population in Kentucky is relatively small but increasing. The goal for literacy education among immigrant populations is the same as for low literacy level groups. These services are meant to, “assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self sufficiency, assist adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children, and assist adults in completing a secondary school education” (*Kentucky* 19). In fiscal year 2003, more than half of adult education programs in Kentucky provided ESL services, defined as a program of instruction designed to help individuals of limited English proficiency achieve competence in the English language. Adult education

providers help adults seeking to improve their fluency in the English language, obtain or advance in employment, and/or pass U.S. citizenship exams. The document stresses that although these programs are administered at the discretion of providers, KAE has “stressed the importance of serving this population” (*Kentucky 20*). The number of students in ESL instruction continues to grow, the document declares, as a result of KAE emphasis. Grants for English literacy/civics programs are available in counties with large immigrant populations. These adults must meet several criteria for eligibility for services, like limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English; their native language is one other than English; and, they live in a community in which a language other than English is the dominant language. “To participate effectively in the education, work and civic opportunities of this country, immigrants must not only master English but also be able to understand and navigate governmental, educational and workplace systems and key institutions such as banking and health care” (*Kentucky 20*).

*Portraits of learners’ needs in the Arizona ABEL worldview.* As is woven throughout the text of the Kentucky Adult Education state report, the “Needs Assessment”, a statement of current Adult Education activities, presents information on the rapid population growth and low literacy rates (according to a 1998 literacy report) in Arizona. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches, statistics indicate that over the past fifteen years, greater numbers of adults have been participating in adult education programs in Arizona, and there is no expectation of demand lessening (*Arizona State Plan 12*). The report adds urgency to language that

already frames a connection between low literacy skills and economic dependence on the state. In this way, the document convincingly establishes the need for continued efforts to reform and expand Adult Education in Arizona.

Increased literacy skills are presented as primary to other achievements, and literacy refers to acquisition of basic educational skills in writing, math, and reading. Eligible adult education providers are also judged, in the state's grant application process, according to their proven effectiveness in improving the literacy skills of adults, especially of those at the lowest literacy levels. These areas include, "demonstrated improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, writing and speaking the English language, numeracy, problem-solving, English language acquisition, and other literacy skills; placement in, retention in, or completion of postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment or career advancement; receipt of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent" (*Arizona State Plan 30*).

Skill acquisition and its link to opportunity refer to how the document positions the acquisition of personal literacy and other basic skills as the foundation for economic opportunity. Within the discourse, literacy skill acquisition is presented as a necessary "first step" to all areas of improvement, including obtaining and retaining employment and career advancement (*Arizona State Plan 15*). Quoting directly from the WIA, the report states that WIA money is invested in state programs in order to "assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; for parents to be fuller partners in their children's education, and to assist in

completion of a secondary school education” (*Arizona State Plan 9*).

Skill acquisition is mainly addressed in Goal 1 of the *Arizona State Plan* for Adult Education. The apparent goal of the state plan is, “To prepare Arizona adult learners to function effectively in the workplace, the family, and the community” (*Arizona State Plan 10*). This general statement connects the function of Adult Education programs and students’ success in all areas of their professional and personal lives. Adult Education is responsible to “prepare” learners to accomplish the basic measure of capability in life, “function[ing]” (*Arizona State Plan 10*). The Arizona state plan focuses on local programs having clearly defined curriculum standards and performance measures that align with the published state education standards and goals, having valid and reliable assessments, and efficient data collection methods. The Core Indicators of Performance for the first three years are included in the report and these, as the name suggests, indicate how the state’s education programs fare on progress toward state performance measures for adult education. These are very basic and include percentages of adults who (1) successfully complete a level at the beginning literacy, beginning ABE and intermediate ABE levels; beginning literacy, beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESOL levels; (2) placement, retention or completion of post-secondary education, training, unsubsidized employment or career advancement; and (3) receiving a high school diploma or its equivalent (*Arizona State Plan 34*).

I use the term holistic development to refer to statements that figure the involvement in state educational facilities as fundamental to people’s success in

personal realms of family, goals, and problem solving. The language of Arizona's state report maintains that by delivering high quality learner centered services, the Department of Adult Education fulfills its commitment to execute the intent of the WIA. In the "General Description" of the state's five year vision, Adult Education in Arizona is described as one facet of "a seamless network" (*Arizona State Plan* 4) assisting families and individuals toward independence: "self-sufficiency, family stability and full participation in their communities" (*Arizona State Plan* 9). This goal is achieved as several state level agencies work together, including other social service providers like the Department of Economic Security and Department of Corrections. Together, these agencies will train and support people in their job search and educational pursuits and assist with ancillary concerns, like childcare, that may interfere with these endeavors. Arizona Adult Education figures that, "adults achieving their educational gains" will allow them to "meet their personal goals in the context of the family, the workplace and the community" (*Arizona State Plan* 17). As the discourse asserts, participation in a Title II state educational facility provides the supportive setting for students to set and achieve educational and personal goals. For these reasons, the report presents several objectives to describe improvements that could be made within local programs' service delivery that would best serve students, primarily through curriculum and staff development.

*Prescribed Roles Exemplified: Massachusetts's State Plan.* Relationships within institutional discourse are hierarchical and political documents explicitly clarify



their order. Massachusetts' state plan situates the work of its Department of Education within the Workforce Investment Unified Plan which covers Titles I, III and IV of the WIA, not just Title II, the section that addresses adult education (*WIA Title II 1*). The "Department" clearly asserts its authority within the document, and iterates the amount of work that has gone into the Unified five-year plan over the past year and a half through self-congratulatory statements (*WIA Title II 1*).

*Authority.* Authority is key in determining the order of a hierarchy. Authority is explicitly conferred within the text through its rhetorical features. The Massachusetts state plan raises awareness of the presence of the authority of the federal government every time WIA Title II is mentioned, which occurs immediately when the Department mentions its license to manage, "our state's federal and state funded adult basic education services" (*WIA Title II 1*). "By state law (the Education Reform Act of 1993), the Massachusetts Department of Education serves as the state's lead agency for adult basic education services and is designated as the 'eligible agency' under WIA Title II" (*WIA Title II 7*). The department claims it is charged by federal authority—the state Board of Education and WIA Title II—to support the mission of Adult Basic Education services in Massachusetts, first to provide opportunities for citizens to develop literacy skills and complete education milestones leading to job and employment advancement, and then to assist them reach their full potential as family member, worker, and citizen (*WIA Title II 1*). Clearly, within this document, the Department situates itself as an authority second only to the federal government.

Authority deals with limiting participants' activities according to a hierarchy of priority. Those at the top of the hierarchy decide the priorities, and thus, the activities that the education system will engage in. The ABEL system, because of its ties to federal policy requirements, privileges institutional efficiency which includes creating streamlined processes for obtaining and recording desired outcomes. The Department has the authority to administer responsibilities among local programs because of its supervisory functions. In this capacity, the Department reveals a preoccupation with authority rather than shared responsibility with others in leadership positions. (For example) However, the Massachusetts plan seems to stress the authority of the local educational facilities to operate autonomously while urging the student on to more responsibility.

*Collaboration.* Collaboration is a word that is used frequently in the Massachusetts plan, but the document does not have the rhetorical structure necessary to support explicit discussion of collaboration as more than a general idea, so that collaboration loses participatory meaning. Instead, collaboration becomes synonymous with the exchange of goods and services across invested organizations. Collaboration, though, is a term that has social capital within the discourse (Boyd 4) and is used to refer to the type of sharing that is integral to developing a more comprehensive delivery system, including coordination through formal memoranda of understanding with Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), interagency planning, and coordination of services among employment and training, human service, and ABEL centers. Language that describes

responsibility sharing abounds in discussions of collaboration. Within the document, phrases such as, “working with” and “helping” indicate a general, diffused sense of responsibility aimed at “working together” in order to deliver best services possible (*WIA Title II* 10, 16). The mechanics of collaboration are left for educational agencies to decide on an individual basis. In any case, true collaboration requires imagination, which is limited in these documents, whose main emphasis is on procedures.

The hierarchical structure within adult education, as portrayed through the discourse of the Massachusetts state plan, causes a split in decision-making power and information dissemination. Releasing information is an act of authority within the discourse. Although everyone may have access to the same information, certain stakeholders are excluded from the decision-making processes. This is a deceiving split. The information itself, not the relationships that situate that information within specific contexts, is given transformational power. Whereas decision-making power increases further up the hierarchy, transformational power doesn't extend from the hierarchy due to the unmanageability of including all stakeholders. However, relying on a small group of people to set procedures privileges the theoretical work of a few participants over others.

Prescribed roles have to do with labels, which are applied through linguistic features of the document. Words such as “special populations” and ideas like professionalization of the field clearly define sources of authority (*WIA Title II* 14, 16). The policy delimits the activities of local learn centers, administrators, and staff. Prescribed roles are based on assumptions that these

categories will not change or intersect in unpredictable ways. Participants are fixed in a certain posture toward one another and toward institutional mission and goals. In the paradigm established by the Massachusetts report, the public occupies the role of the academically disadvantaged, and the Department as their helper. Other agencies, specifically named in this report, are sources of authority that have the resources to fulfill the Department's mission (*WIA Title II 13*). These agencies are brought together on an as-needed basis to accomplish minimum standards of program operation expressed in the report. The language of the report cannot describe deep relationships, nor can it predict the outcome of meaningful interaction that elides the authority inherent in a hierarchy (Beder and Valentine 78). It is not the place of a document like this state plan to create the space for meaningful interaction, but what is clear from examining the discourse, is that relationship may be hindered by the prescriptive roles when those are the primary components of participants' identities.

*Technocratic Vocabulary Exemplified: California's State Report.* The vocabulary of ABEL institutions reveals the discourse's intricacies, a signal to the complexity of interactions and number of stakeholders who all have something to lose. Complexity is displayed by the variety of words needed to express the requirements and nuances of political mandates and the need to highlight certain features of performance while ignoring others. I would like to examine the vocabulary of the *California Annual Performance Report*, which is written from a posture of response to a centralized authority structure, the federal government.

The federal requirements of the WIA situate the state's activities within the discourse of vision casting, receipt of funds, and accountability through evaluation and data reporting. As indicated, the majority of the vocabulary provides language for the evaluation of Performance Measures through Indicators of Program Quality (*California Annual Performance Report 4*). Evaluation language figures prominently in a program's effectiveness and implementation; the two are closely tied. However, whereas evaluation addresses the procedures which indicate the desired outcome of a program's efforts, implementation describes the process of education within the classroom. Words that indicate effectiveness include description of goals, activities, and outcomes that answer USDE Questions. These words categorize programs as successful according to the parameters of the Question and the goal created in answer to the question. So, for example, Question one simply addresses "State Leadership Projects" (*California Annual Performance Report 1*). In response to this stated category of need, a goal is set, "Establish and implement professional development programs to improve the quality of instruction provided" (*California Annual Performance Report 1*). The outcomes then list activities conducted over the previous period that aligned with the goal. These activities either satisfy the goal and provide a sufficient answer to the question or show inadequacy within the states' educational programs.

Question 2 addresses "Core Indicators of Performance," language that derives directly from the WIA and indicates program success or failure (*California Annual Performance Report 4*). Core Indicators of Performance are

always based on numerical demonstration of learner performance. The state reports on whether its adult education programs met or exceeded the negotiated state goals in skill level attainment. These four categories for California in 2007-2008 include Adult Basic Education (ABE) beginning literacy, ESL beginning literacy, ESL beginning high, and ESL intermediate low (*California Annual Performance Report 4*). Success in these areas is indicated when a certain percentage of enrollees complete a level. Core follow-up measures include attaining a degree or GED or entering or retaining employment, for which California exceeded its goal. The words “tracking” and “data match” refer to data gained after students leave the educational setting regarding their original goals, producing another outcome measure for the institution (*California Annual Performance Report 5*).

Student participation in educational programs, from enrollment all the way through level or goal attainment, is always connected, by language, to program survival through reports on performance measures. So, most of the language of this annual review is focused on identifying and collecting information related to performance measures. The report clearly reveals that California is competent in information management and the use of data collection software, emphasizing that healthy programs are able to succinctly and efficiently report data. The increased focus on refining data collection methods highlights changes in law and “reflect continuous efforts by local agencies to ensure the accuracy and completeness of their data, and concentrated efforts...to continue enhancing data collection systems and procedures” (*California Annual Performance Report 5*). In

addition, incentive programs use the language of desire, performance, and reward. Pay for performance is such an example. Pay for performance is an incentive program that the document proclaims has seen results in the state of California. Pay for performance allows up to three benchmark payments per learner within a grant period for attainment of a combination of a significant learner gain, completion of two instructional levels, and receipt of a GED certificate or diploma. So, one student who achieves this combination could count towards three benchmark payments, which translates to bonuses in funding awards.

Data quality is a top priority in California. Specifically, data quality is tied to accountability and its quality to the reliability of the state's information regarding indicators of performance. Data guide classroom instruction to better serve adult learners and improve planning (*California Annual Performance Report 6*). As a point of fact, California's performance report indicates that some instructors used data to inform students of their performance. Data assists in program processes at all levels, from teaching to program management, guiding staff training, writing grants, and improving communication with school boards, legislators, and advisory committees. The language that surrounds data is empowerment within the learning process.

Phrases that refer to the program-implementation phase of education include *best practices; professional development; learner persistence; research-based; targeting instruction; student needs; comprehensive student level data collection; centralized delivery of services; just-in-time support; and activities* (*California Annual Performance Report 1-10*). These words paint the picture of

an active and evolving classroom that is centered on student need, one that is constantly evaluated in a process of individual and institutional reflection. Professional development features prominently in this vision as opportunities are offered to staff to attend seminars and conferences, and the SEA is there to provide “just-in-time” technical support (*California Annual Performance Report 3*). Instruction quality is targeted toward “needs” (state performance measures) and the educational process follows a model that is based on access to resources as indicated by words like “centralized delivery of services” (*California Annual Performance Report 7*). Within the discourse, as long as the classroom is well equipped and staffed by professionals educated in scientifically based methods, success is ensured. However, even though staff is developed professionally, students are perceived from a deficit model, and the state invests in discovering how to overcome student barriers. “Learner persistence” addresses ways programs can encourage learners to overcome hurdles that prevent them from completing their education (*California Annual Performance Report 2*). These words give the impression of needy students and overly responsible learning centers.

Words that address relationship include *collaboration*, which was required among local adult education learn centers, *workforce investment boards*, and *one-stop systems* (One stop systems fall under a different title of the WIA and address vocational development apart from education. They act as referral and information centers.) (*California Annual Performance Report 6, 7*).

Collaboration could include a range of activities that require minimal participation. Local adult education agencies reported their collaborative activities



to the state which mostly included attending staff meetings of collaborating organizations, providing representation, or having an administrator of a local learn center serve on a WIB. Larger agencies were more likely to collaborate, and reported having classes or trainings for local one-stops or assigning a staff liaison to a one-stop (*California Annual Performance Report 7*). Also, interaction occurred through workshops or conferences. Memoranda of understanding were used to collaborate with Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). One interesting example of collaboration occurred between one-stops and local education providers, who share reporting needs. They planned on sharing data and facilitating referral and tracking of clients and document outcomes by streamlining the enrollment and data collection processes. The purpose of the collaboration was to identify best practices.

*Mechanic Portrait of Literacy-Learning Exemplified: Pennsylvania's and Ohio's State Reports.* Pennsylvania's and Ohio's state reports are especially useful to review mechanic features of institutional discourse. Ohio's document is a guide to successfully implementing assessment practices, and Pennsylvania's document is an application guideline, scripting for local adult education agencies what is required to secure funding according to federal law.

*Pennsylvania's state report.* Pennsylvania's *Adult Education and Family Literacy Application Guidelines* emphasizes the role of evaluation in determining programs' eligibility to receive funding, clearly indicating specific activities that are subject to monitoring (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines 10*). All funded

agencies are required to submit data to the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, the agency responsible for state level administration of adult education services. Programs utilize an electronic information system. The document clarifies that this data should be available for review at all times with a minimum monthly reporting requirement. Regular review of data allows the adult education provider and the Bureau to conduct continuous program improvement, an evaluative element for those programs which do not show adequate progress (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 13). Local agencies must be willing to comply with and demonstrate legal and fiscal reporting requirements, performance evaluations, data quality reviews, on-site observations, and evidence of continued professional development. The Bureau coordinates with other agencies to conduct monitoring, including regional professional development centers (PDCs) and the Family Literacy Professional Development Project. “The Bureau will conduct four levels of program review based on factors such as program staff, age, past and current performance, program improvement plans, and discussions with the agency” (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 10). Documenting significant achievement of outcomes for the majority of adults served is a minimum Indicator of Program Quality as listed by the guidelines (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 3).

“Continuous program improvement” (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 9) is the language that describes expectations under these guidelines, achieved by a “Program Improvement Plan” which is revised periodically (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 7). Also, adult education agencies are expected to

have Professional Development Plans. In conjunction with these plans, advisors and Professional Development Centers provide training and technical support to assist programs' improvement.

Pennsylvania's application guidelines address each category in which the Bureau is responsible for oversight of local programs, including service models, continuous program improvement, and monitoring and evaluation. An important feature that plays a role in monitoring and evaluation is the use of Indicators of Program Quality which serve as, "the basis for program evaluation and continuous improvement. The indicators are the basis for program monitoring and selected Indicator areas were used in establishing [... the standards]" (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 8). These include areas of learner outcomes, research-based practice, technology, high quality assessment practices linked to curriculum and instruction, and community planning. These indicators address the state's performance measures. In addition, because the guidelines address workforce programs—programs covered by other Titles of the WIA, other indicators include customer satisfaction and employers' needs. Adult Indicators of Program Quality indicate whether programs provide, "services to satisfy participants' needs and aspirations, to continuously improve, and to be accountable" (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 9). The document is clear to mention that performance measures are based on WIA legislation and address two main functions, program administration and performance.

Interestingly, the preceding Indicators monitor a program's progress through evaluation. The next section of the document addresses whether the

program's Indicators translate into learner outcomes. These focus on, "Customer Results and Program Accountability; Instructional System; Leadership and Continuous Improvement; and Community Interaction and Outreach" (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines 9*).

Learner outcomes are directly connected to the WIA. "Title II of the WIA of 1998 mandates the tracking of performance based on five core indicators" (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines 10*). Objective 04.3.1 restates the oft mentioned five Indicators of Program Quality within the state's ABEL system: improvement in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, speaking English or English language acquisition; numeracy and problem-solving; making the transition to postsecondary education or training; placement or retention in employment or career advancement; and receipt of a secondary diploma or equivalent (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines 10*). Achievement in any one of these areas would represent a gain for any local adult education program. As a way of maintaining consistent data for award purposes, Annual and Ongoing Program Reporting is required, and ensures continuous improvement, "as a condition of funding," and programs must submit three quarterly reports and one final narrative (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines 22*).

The use of improvement plans also figures into the monitoring function of Pennsylvania's state policy. Improvement plans are presented to an administrative body responsible for further professionalizing the field. "All adult education application narratives must have an attached Program Improvement Plan[...].The agency Program Improvement Team should be involved in determining areas for

improvement based on program data” (*Adult Education and FLA Guidelines* 33). Based on the data presented, certain programs are asked to implement the plans they created and thereby subject to increased monitoring. In Pennsylvania, the monitoring “teams” are granted authority to assist these programs and collect evidence of improvement within the selected adult education programs.

The structure of the Pennsylvania guidelines allows for every element involved in the application process to be listed; however, these requirements are not addressed in a positive light, but take on an exclusionary tone. Programs comply with suffocating procedures in order to be considered eligible providers, which is no small feat. Success means a program must be able to submit to and pass the review process in regards to both its learner outcomes and plans for continuous program improvement, including scripted professional development and improvement plans.

Successful applicants are difficult to imagine in a positive sense; rather, reading the long list of requirements makes educational centers’ work procedural and challenging with failure looming large. The focus of the document is on a local program’s openness to criticism and review, and thus the level to which its procedures fuse with state bureaucratic requirements, not on individual programs’ uniqueness or creative approach to educating adults. The document does not assume success or work from a place in which all stakeholders are equals. On the contrary, the document assumes applicant failure. The categories are too broad to be helpful in delineating success, but they are fully capable of describing failure. I don’t intend to cast a negative pall over the work of a document that establishes

itself as procedural; however, my concern is what sort of discourse in which this document is comfortably situated and the impact of that discourse on the different needs and desires of the student population that these programs serve. The current dominant discourse of adult education, evident in this document, indicates a political discourse that may create tension for students at the local level.

*Mechanic Routine: Ohio's Student Experience Model.* The Student Experience Model (SEM) within Ohio's Adult Education system is a key feature of its state plan and addresses student retention issues by focusing on the intake process. "It delineates the sequence of events that a student encounters as he/she goes through the educational process" (*The Ohio Performance* 1.3), and may be adapted to various student needs. By changing procedures surrounding students' initiation into the education process, the state attempts to control the quality of the enrollment experience. The state of Ohio recognizes that student and institutional goals are often mismatched. The SEM is a response to the felt difficulty of students, who are often fraught with the idea of re-entering an institutionalized learning environment. Based on retention research and purportedly represents good practices, the SEM also emphasizes institutional needs while trying to accommodate students.

The intake process figures prominently in the structure of the SEM, as this affords students and practitioners their first impressions of each other. The difficulty that the learning institution faces is in needing to accomplish administrative and not merely social tasks like orientation. Students are first

interviewed during intake, their goals are selected and the registration form is completed. During the intake, students' prior knowledge must be assessed and these results, together with students' experience, are matched with research-based instruction to provide specific, effective instruction (*The Ohio Performance* 1.4). A special SEM is developed for students who identify getting their GED as their goal, which short circuits the intake process by allowing students to take the practice GED immediately, a change in routine that is discouraged. If the student does not pass the official practice exam, then he must continue the intake process with the approved standardized tests (*The Ohio Performance* 1.5).

An important feature of the SEM is orientation, which sets the tone for student engagement with local adult education centers while providing information of critical institutional procedures. "The purpose of orientation is to ensure that all prospective students are provided with the information and assistance that they need to make informed decisions about their participation in ABLE" (*Ohio* 1.3). All orientation programs, though they may differ in some aspects, are instructed to include rapport and support building, program and student information sharing, learning style inventory, and initial goal-setting instruction. Finally, orientation should include initial/diagnostic testing. Screening for disabilities also occurs at orientation. Once these requirements are met, local programs may explore additional activities to expand the student's experience of the adult learning setting. The tension within the orientation process, as the need for a SEM exemplifies, is in balancing institutional and student needs. If the tension between the two increases, the students are often the losers.

The SEM privileges the adult education facility within the discourse by giving the learning institution control over the educational process, promising more success for the student as the institution's involvement increases. The student is not really formative to the process, but she is solicited for information regarding the learning center's instructional objectives. As the language of Ohio's document makes clear, the local educational facility highly values aligning student goals with state standards and achieving state established benchmarks appropriate for student learning. This is the meaning of, "set goals" with the instructor (*Ohio* 1.5). The focus of the SEM is on lockstep proceduralism that aims to push students past orientation and into the classroom.

*Reliance on Outside Expertise Exemplified: The Ohio Performance*

*Accountability System Manual*. "The role of OPAS—the Ohio Performance Accountability System—within the ABLE system is to guide instructional programs as they implement required components of WIA, Title II" (*The Ohio Performance* i), making this a regulatory document by definition. This manual focuses on processes and procedures related to accountability and compliance issues with an emphasis on program implementation requirements at the beginning of the 2010 fiscal year.

The nature of assessment is that it is a process that relies on an outside source of validation. The *O.P.A.S.* sets up a system of artificial measures to assess programs in response to the National Reporting System (NRS) requirements, the core of accountability. As the manual states, "WIA requires adult education



programs to report on Core Indicators of Performance to receive federal funding” (*The Ohio Performance* ii). Ohio’s programs are also required to report on descriptive and participation measures, student demographics, and enrollment information. In completing the larger functions of evaluation, the document addresses the quality of educational processes from the level of materials used, to student goals, and expertise of staff, including instructors. These are all areas that, with the intervention of experts and expert materials, are understood to produce better results. Thus, these components of the educational system are reviewed: written curriculum, professional development, the quality of support services, and successful recruitment of target populations for adult education instruction.

The phrase “research based” is used at several different points within the manual, whether in reference to procedures during the intake process, quality of instruction, or the development of curriculum (*The Ohio Performance* 6.7). Each classroom activity is validated as reliance on outside, specialized expertise is increasingly emphasized, displaying a high priority for the presence of outside authorities. Specialized information—including state selected standards and benchmarks--, people, and offices function as expert authorities.

Indicator of Program Quality (3) states, “The program planning and administration process is based on a written plan implemented and guided by evaluation” (*The Ohio Performance* 6.1). Programs’, “performance is assessed by comparing students’ outcomes to their stated primary and, if applicable, secondary goals” (*The Ohio Performance* 5.3). In addition, the manual suggests that students’ success, including their reported level completion and goal

attainment, may be increased by encouraging them to set realistic goals that are achievable within the program year. In this document, goal setting is named a collaborative process, and all the steps of goal formation are listed, beginning with managing and evaluating goals, and recording and identifying personal goals to create a tracking system. Clearly, the desire is for short term, measurable results that bolster state efforts. In this case, the student's performance, translated as data, is the validating outside authority.

The document instructs staff in the implementation phase of curriculum, instruction. Instruction is to be purposeful, transparent, contextual, and built upon student mastery. Again, the staff is encouraged to use strategies that ensure skill acquisition. In these recommendations, we see the presence of the state political discourse in the educational process in which emphasis is placed on the presence of outside expertise. In this case, the quality of the curriculum achieving the status of "research based" serves the expertise function (*The Ohio Performance* 6.8). Among proven teaching methods mentioned are strategies of phonemic awareness, word analysis, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (*The Ohio Performance* 6.5).

Curriculum and instruction are aligned with standards, and instructors are encouraged to use proven practices. "The ABLE Standards and Benchmarks provide clear guidance as to the content that should be taught within ABLE classrooms" (*The Ohio Performance* 6.1). The newly developed benchmarks are told to represent the fundamental knowledge needed to transition students to postsecondary education and training. Through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP),

students will meet standards and the benchmarks by displaying knowledge content that is required for mastery. In the language of the discourse, “They [ILPs] convey a vision for learning and a common set of criteria that may be used to evaluate individual success” (*The Ohio Performance* 6.1). Instructors are required to select curricula to ensure student success with the goals listed in their plans through their mastery of Ohio standards and benchmarks. “Involving instructional staff in the production of curriculum alignments or correlations is one way to ensure that teachers are familiar with Ohio’s standards and benchmarks and the texts, materials and other activities that will help students achieve them” (*The Ohio Performance* 6.5). Meeting benchmarks is important enough for the Department to enlist the assistance of Resource Centers in compiling resources to teach instructors the specific skills listed in the benchmarks.

The *O.P.A.S.* cements the student’s dependence on her instructor. The manual names both as partners in the development and achievement of the student’s goals, but it is an unequal partnership. The instructor holds more authority because he or she is regarded as the necessary expert who can propel the student, through careful planning, toward her educational goals. The way the student/teacher relationship is constructed within the discourse displays the importance of outside validation in the educational process that relies on the safety of authority based relationships. The *O.P.A.S.* establishes the teacher/student relationship primarily through the student’s Individual Learning Plan. Though discussed above in regards to the institution’s curriculum needs, I

would like to take time to revisit the ILP in regard to the student's experience of the education process.

“An ILP is a road map for the student and instructor to help the student reach his/her educational goals during the learning process” (*The Ohio Performance 5.4*), a sort of bridge that brings students toward the reality of their goals. As the discourse states, goal setting provides intense student motivation through short and long term points of focus and leads students to take pride in their achievements. Initial goal setting, which begins at orientation, includes the direct involvement of instructors and staff who are pivotal in defining the process and its importance. Instructors are expected to educate the student on the general importance of goal setting and setting goals for his education specifically. Instructors are reminded that the ILP should be written with the student's functioning level in mind; goals should be realistic and the initial interview is a time for discussion in order to determine appropriate learning content. The goals that are set in the ILP continue throughout instruction until the student attains mastery.

The collaboration among student and instructor within the goal setting process is deceptive since the instructor functions in a supervisory role, guiding goal formation along the lines of state standards and benchmarks, so the student is not solely responsible for forming her goals. Instructors, through the ILP, designate strategies, and suggest a time frame for the completion of goals. In addition, institutional prerogatives emerge through instructors' emphasis of “tracking” goals. The staff is asked to obtain permission from students at the time

of initial goal setting to track their successful attainment of any Core Indicators of Performance after the student leaves the program. The discourse urges instructors to be persistent in explaining the importance of these tracking goals in order to induce students to allow the learning center to contact them in the future (*The Ohio Performance 5.5*). The institution achieves a “gain” from students who achieve these tracking goals. Goal setting, through the attainment of tracking goals and short, readily mastered goals in ILPs, may serve the learning institution more than the student.

*Ohio’s Emphasis on Assessment and Data Collection.* “Assessment is the ongoing process of gathering, describing, or quantifying information about performance or learning,” so states the Ohio manual (*The Ohio Performance 7.1*). Evaluation begins at the initial point of contact and continues throughout student involvement with the educational center, involves formal and informal evaluation, and according to the discourse, provides the program, instructor, and student with the tools needed to make or re-think good educational choices. State approved standardized tests must be used within the educational process, and all data which are retrieved are connected to state established standards and student goals. Student goals, of course, justify state standards. In Ohio, student performance is measured through some non-traditional modalities, including goal formation and portfolios. The portfolio is used to create a student-centered approach, determine students’ progress, and provide a method for collecting student work. The portfolio must be updated on an ongoing basis and provide a holistic picture of the

student. However, the process of evaluation relies on having quantifiable data to compare to the goals stated within their ILPs, “formal credit for student advancement only is possible when a student demonstrates level gain as a result of post-testing with the appropriate standardized tests” (*The Ohio Performance* 4.3). The instructor acts as monitor on several different levels, and his work is formative in this process, mainly as he oversees and records the results of assessments and ILPs. “Within the ABLE portfolio system, instructors will utilize assessments to verify students’ abilities to perform the benchmarks. Multiple benchmarks may be addressed by a single assessment” (*The Ohio Performance* 4.6).

The state is interested in student performance being measured against goals that are stated “in their own words” (*The Ohio Performance* 4.6). However, the manual sets up a structure of evaluation that ensures that these goals are aligned with state selected standards and benchmarks for the field. The teacher acts as a monitor and forms goals along the measurable outcomes congruent with standards and benchmarks. For reporting purposes, students are required to select a primary and secondary goal on the Student Registration Form (SRF) completed at enrollment. By agreeing to a release of information, which the student is encouraged to sign, the Student Registration Form becomes an evaluative tool. The SRF lists student ambitions and provides baseline data that will be used for data match purposes to track the student’s achievements of Core Indicators of Performance after she leaves the program. The adult education institution wants to know whether she achieves employment, further education, or is involved in her

community. Through the data match and tracking process, the student's privacy is invaded for institutional purposes. Use of the SRF elides privacy issues, but practitioners are pressured to use them in service of the institution.

In the instructional process, students are expected to participate in formal and informal assessments, create long-term goals and become familiar with standards-based education. Students are also encouraged to adjust their learning strategies based on feedback from instructors and other students. They are encouraged to evaluate their knowledge, reflect, and then determine next steps. Student progress monitoring must occur every ninety days and primarily involves a review of student portfolios and then assessment. The purpose of monitoring is to provide students with information about their performance, provide instructors with insight, and provide the program with current data on student performance. All standardized test information must be entered in the information system—targeted standards and benchmarks, portfolio review, and assessments. Tools for monitoring include informal and formal goal review. Both may lead to new short term goals, or perhaps a new ILP. In either case, the continuation or recreation of a learning plan, most critical to the institution is student achievement of Core Indicators of Performance.

The *O.P.A.S.* makes clear, through its emphasis on evaluation, that there are many modalities for examining student performance. However, the most important measures within Ohio's state educational discourse are those chosen by the state. The document attempts to be progressive by including non-traditional evaluative tools such as the portfolio, but a close reading reveals this not to be the

only or most important feature of evaluation. Standardized assessments aligned with state benchmarks are given priority within the discourse. The other measures are attempts to include students as equal participants and so retain their participation in programs, since the document mentions retention as a problem. However, the document relies heavily on outside sources of validation through assessment practices and newly formulated state benchmarks. Within this discourse, state inspired curriculum and streamlined enrollment procedures are kings, and instructors are guides, monitors, and proctors. Indeed, they are rarely mentioned as teachers.

As Grabill and Branch would predict, the above analysis indicates that the practices of regulatory discourse govern the documents that states use to demonstrate accountability and effectiveness. Together, the seven features of regulatory discourse that this analysis tracks (rigidity, a moralistic worldview, prescribe social roles, a technocratic vocabulary, a mechanical portrayal of adult literacy learning, binary logic, and a reliance on outside expertise) maintain a culture for literacy learning that preserves the status quo. These features stem from political requirements placed on local educational institutions and compromise the democratic participation of students, creating a discourse that sets institutional survival as a priority over relationship. This explains students' feelings of not being heard and the confusion that results when a student encounters bureaucracy. The bureaucracy may not completely hinder the substance of the learning environment but shows up in boggling institutional procedures and strongly guides learning content. In addition, invisible, privileged



practices of the institution that stem from the political discourse have practical consequences on the students that educational institutions claim to serve (Grabill 88). The constraints of policy, which emerge through local institutions' priorities and procedures, create barriers to students' holistic inclusion in the learning culture. This discourse must be revealed and addressed if these organizations want to accomplish what they claim, if they are seriously pursuing, with integrity, the best interests of students. Revealing political constraints is the first step. We cannot necessarily remove political discourse, but I believe promoting and encouraging other discourses will assist in disabling the power of the political discourse that operates within learn centers. Welcoming other avenues of participation will weaken institutional discourse and create a space for new discourses to circulate that exert a positive influence on students' experience of the ABEL system.

Below, I analyze an institution that promotes more open, direct, and inclusive participation. AmeriCorps, an institution that operates through a decentralized network of programs, introduces a discourse that stands in contrast to the hierarchical and systematic discourse of state agencies that often trickles down to the local programmatic level. AmeriCorps displays distinct institutional features, including a direct service methodology and—through its partnership with community based organizations-- freedom from constraints that allow for this varying discourse. AmeriCorps promotes and stimulates direct involvement with the community through its unique structure. I would like to first discuss AmeriCorps as an institution, including the regulative discourse that supports its

activities. Then, taking the position that AmeriCorps promotes a different discourse, I analyze features that emerge in AmeriCorps projects consistent with a tactical discourse as found in the work of Paula Mathieu. This list of features guides my analysis of AmeriCorps programs. Discovering the benefits of alternative participation through AmeriCorps programs assists in imagining possibilities for democratic participation within the educational process.

## Part II: AmeriCorps' Distinctive Discourse

AmeriCorps is a unique institution. In his book *Community Literacy*, Jeffrey Grabill defines an institution as a group of people acting collectively over and over in the same way, systematically using procedures to accomplish tasks (7). Institutions' authority derives from policy and is enacted through the procedures that accomplish an institution's mandates. Thus, institutions have the ability to direct a group of peoples' actions. In addition to being the sum of their parts, institutions can be viewed as actors in their own right as they make decisions based on motivations in their own interests (Porter et al. 611). Common thinking is that institutions are walled places, and indeed, the physical space of institutions is a source of their power (Porter et al. 620). AmeriCorps operates as a walled institution, with headquarters for several national programs scattered around the fifty states. However, AmeriCorps fulfills Grabill's basic definition of an institution while also being able to free itself from some institutional constraints because of its organizational structure.

Whereas Grabill characterizes institutions as hierarchical and “top-down” (12), AmeriCorps, as a decentralized network of programs, evades some of the typical implications of such structures (Thomson i). AmeriCorps is a hybrid organization designed to operate sympathetically with local, community based organizations, its various programs operating under the umbrella of lead agencies throughout the country. Lead agencies (such as LVMC, the literacy organization I mentioned in the first chapter) are the primary contractors with AmeriCorps through the Corporation for National and Community Service and are responsible to provide the setting for the members’ service. AmeriCorps members—defined here as volunteers who tutor adult learners or monitor educational activities within community learning centers –may complete their year of service at the lead agency or at separate sites that are sub-grantees with the lead agency. In my example of Literacy Volunteers, two of the twelve members served at LVMC, the lead agency, while the other ten were placed at similar sites throughout the valley. The lead agency manages day-to-day oversight and support of the members while AmeriCorps provides funding and the recruitment and retention of members, mainly through its idealistic discourse.

A certain hybrid partnership results from the interaction of long-standing state sponsored organizations and potentially short-term, project-based AmeriCorps programs. Responsibilities (everything from ensuring janitorial maintenance to covering a reception desk) that usually are the concern of more traditionally structured institutions remain those of the sponsoring organization, the lead agency, rather than being assumed by AmeriCorps members. Likewise,

the institutional discourse of these state sponsored entities endures the potential for interruption through the public, project-based discourse scripted by AmeriCorps. For example, the institutional discourse of LVMC, the learn center where I worked, could not afford much time for students to interact one-on-one with instructors on a daily basis. The center abided by the rule of, “a self-paced learning center,” maybe to best use resources or promote independence. However, when AmeriCorps was introduced to the site, AmeriCorps members were not restricted to the discourse of inadequate student-teacher ratios or facilities. AmeriCorps members were free to spend additional time with students despite previous and existing institutional constraints. The institutional discourse of state-sponsored literacy programs and the more informal, project-based discourse of AmeriCorps must converge since the AmeriCorps program necessitates a level of participation among itself and partner organizations that ranges from coordination to cooperation (Thomson iii). This is meant to be a positive exchange.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to first locate AmeriCorps’ institutional goals—as instantiated in its public discourse. If the previous analysis of state reports reveals formal ABEL organizations engaging in a discourse of authority through policy that supports rigid systematization, it is significant to locate the discursive features of AmeriCorps that script its public identity and the procedures that accomplish institutional mandates, thus enabling the organization to maintain institutional integrity while positioning the organization in a public discourse that supports its (AmeriCorps’) own goals. Below I analyze the character of AmeriCorps’ public discourse and its effect on ABEL discourse.

AmeriCorps' institutional identity is played out on a public forum and represents a distinctive regulative discourse in its own right. AmeriCorps' "external narrative" (Faber 220)—or, identity circulated in public—speaks about the type of country that we should live in, and how we as citizens should be participating in this country. The imperatives in its mission statement (*americorps.gov*) alone (e.g., "direct service," "community involvement," and "volunteer recruitment in critical needs areas") qualify its discourse as "regulative" under Branch's definition, in that its mission points toward a world that ought to be (57). This vision provides protection for institutional objectives as they fit securely within AmeriCorps' vision of the world. However, as I explain in more detail below, the founding of AmeriCorps has political roots, and thus it also circulates another more conflicted "internal" rhetoric—to invoke Brenton Faber (226) again—that engages a discourse of political face saving and collateral building (Walters 42). It is the hidden nature of AmeriCorps' political discourse that constitutes a much more complex and dubious regulative discourse according to Branch (25). As with all institutions, AmeriCorps' idealistic claims must be put under the lens of critical reflection, read in light of the motivations embedded in the organization's discourse and history.

AmeriCorps was a political hot button issue from its inception, particularly suffering criticism as Republicans took control of Congress midway through Bill Clinton's first term (Waldman 23). Opponents of the federally backed volunteer program argued that it was a face saving move by Clinton to appease supporters after his civic rhetoric was contradicted by big government

expansion (Walters 7), primarily through failed health care reform. John Walters in “Clinton’s AmeriCorps Values” notes that during the time of his campaign and inauguration, Clinton presented civic responsibility as the backbone of the nation. However, once he assumed office, he expanded the bureaucracy, giving a double message that the public was reliant on federal government. Walters argues that Clinton presented an America in which public welfare was a diffused value and the government was responsible to act on behalf of the public rather than rely on individuals’ commitment to their private connections (6). Walters claimed that AmeriCorps was an attempt by the administration to reframe government involvement as a positive social force.

The simple motivation of a president attempting to establish a legacy may have led to a program that could be easily situated within a discourse of mutual benefit between the government and public. AmeriCorps operates under a brief list of institutional prerogatives with procedures that consistently support these prerogatives, however beleaguered the program is with financial and other bureaucratic problems. The organization’s mission is three-fold: direct service, community involvement, and volunteer recruitment in critical needs areas around the country through partnership with established community based non-profit organizations and similar institutions like schools and religiously affiliated agencies (Thomson and Perry 400). Critical needs areas include health, education, and public safety.

In addition to its human-service mission, the organizational structure of AmeriCorps allows for a separation, on the local, operational level, of the

institution's idealistic mission and the systematization that allows for the daily operation of any institution. Because AmeriCorps works so closely with local programs, sustainability for national AmeriCorps programs does not translate into survival as it does for more formal, state-sponsored ABEL institutions and, thus, is not a priority as it is for these institutions. In other words, AmeriCorps is nomadic rather than fixed in orientation, although the institution thrives on building positive relationships and impressions within the community (Thomson 418). AmeriCorps also has funding sources and contractual relationships that free the program to operate, at least on a limited basis, without the financial pressure that more formal institutions continually grapple with; consequently, AmeriCorps programs are ensured continued funding with minimal reporting requirements. For these reasons, AmeriCorps' institutional mandates rely on a short list of objectives contained in the organization's mission statement.

With a succinct, idealistic mission statement, AmeriCorps focuses on members as agents of the institutional discourse, using a few key events in members' service to sell them the AmeriCorps experience. Member is the term specifically used to refer to those who enroll in the AmeriCorps program, to distinguish them from regular staff working at the community agencies with whom they partner. Members choose a program and through the contract they sign, commit to a minimum of one year of service at the organization where they are placed. Members are not considered paid employees nor are they volunteers. They are members of a service corps who receive specific benefits from the government at the end of their term of service. The institutional discourse of

AmeriCorps highlights its unique features. Enrollment in AmeriCorps is a sacrificial act of service that gathers like-minded strangers together, trains them, and sends them out on specific assignments in a way that can only be compared to organized units like the army. AmeriCorps members sacrifice time and money while also enjoying certain benefits from the government when their service is complete. The most attractive feature of AmeriCorps' institutional discourse is selling the idea to mostly young people that they have the privilege of being among a class of people motivated, not primarily by gain, but by the desire to give back and have a direct impact on society. The discourse of altruism and effectiveness is woven throughout AmeriCorps members' experience in their recruitment and service term. Even when their service is complete, AmeriCorps makes use of members' success stories to continue the powerful pull of the direct service discourse.

#### Sites of Institutional Transmission

As an institution, AmeriCorps uses orientation, program coordinators, and its website to transmit its institutional discourse. AmeriCorps displays its preference for dealing directly through members, showing belief in its authority to bring to bear a direct influence on various communities through a broad spectrum of programs that operate under a succinct mission. State-based ABEL entities acquiesce to AmeriCorps' authority by virtue of their choice to participate in the program.



*Orientation.* Orientation initiates members into a life of service in the Corps. Official documents, such as the *AmeriCorps Manual*, play a prescient role in establishing the AmeriCorps culture and setting up expectations for the year that begin at orientation. Imagine twelve people gathered together out of individual motivations, often “community service” being among the top three reasons for participation (Selingo A38). They vary in age, experience, and culture and more likely than not, have moved from out of state to be part of this specific program. As an example, three of the twelve members who were involved with Literacy Volunteers as AmeriCorps members had moved significant distances across the country to be a part of the program. Through the leadership of a paid program coordinator who is funded through the AmeriCorps grant but hired by the community based organization, AmeriCorps uses the practice of orientation to shape this group of people into a unique social organism in a way that boot camp similarly forms new units for service.

Orientation must consist of at least five components: welcome and ice-breakers, the history of AmeriCorps as a program of the Corporation of National and Community Service (CNCS), introduction to the local service institution, overview of required components of AmeriCorps service including administrative duties, and content specific training (“Literacy\**AmeriCorps Handbook*” 9). The local institution may be as involved as it desires in the orientation, but one aspect that must be thoroughly reviewed is the expectations AmeriCorps has for members’ service. These are detailed in the manual, which is often reviewed line-by-line. Members sign a contract which is a memorandum of understanding that

they have received and understand the manual. Issues addressed in the manual include keeping track of service hours completion of which allow members to receive the Segal Education Award, communicating with coordinators, handling conflict on the team and at the service site, abiding by local site rules, and completing the administrative duties of volunteer recruitment and quarterly reports. During orientation, members are given their “gear” and participate in a pledge, both symbolically significant. They are to wear a part of their gear every day, whether it is the lapel pin, T-shirt, or sweatshirt (“Literacy\*AmeriCorps Handbook” 8). The AmeriCorps value of direct service to the community in critical areas is woven through the manual and in presentations. It is the one common link among a diverse group of people. The schedule for future team meetings is also set at orientation during which the group decides how often they will come together, whether once or twice a month. New members also receive specific service information at orientation if there is more than one service site.

*Program Coordinators.* Program coordinators are the primary representatives of AmeriCorps and the direct point of contact for members. Coordinators are trained in institutional prerogatives and are instructed to transmit these values through their support of members. They provide administrative support for completion of items such as time sheets and other reports, including informing members of acceptable service activities; members are generally barred from filling in daily operation at the site (“Literacy\*AmeriCorps Handbook” 4). Coordinators answer general questions regarding service. They play an important role as facilitators of

orientation. The coordinator's role is to disseminate information, but more than that, to represent AmeriCorps to the members. The coordinator is the go-to person, who, when questioned about the AmeriCorps program, finds the answer. The coordinator is often overseen in national programs by a national coordinator, but this person is often located in a remote office.

The program coordinator facilitates group interactions, providing information and guidance about goals and activities of the program, and emphasizing the strength of the group, not to mention being a listening ear. The members themselves provide the AmeriCorps experience because more often than not, their motivations for joining are resonant with AmeriCorps discourse, but coordinators have a pivotal role in establishing a positive tone for members' service by how they approach conflict and questions. In addition, they facilitate opportunities for team building and problem solving.

In summary, coordinators manage the institutional concerns of AmeriCorps and also the local service agencies by acting as a mediator between the agencies and the members and vice versa. As such, their ability to act as an effective liaison bears directly on members' experience. Also, coordinators bear responsibility for correctly representing AmeriCorps and making members and leaders at service sites comfortable with the program.

*AmeriCorps' Official Website.* The main function of the AmeriCorps website is to recruit members, in the process recruiting members to its formal discourse. The site is interactive, colorful, and may be initially overwhelming. There is the

impression that a lot of meaningful activity is taking place, and the website makes that service attractive. With up-to-date newsfeed, the website is overloaded with information. The question, “What is AmeriCorps?” is answered in the language of the discourse of making a difference (*americorps.gov*). “AmeriCorps is an opportunity to make a big difference in your life and in the lives of those around you. It’s a chance to apply your skills and ideals toward helping others and meeting critical needs in the community” (*americorps.gov*). The site uses the policy language of, “meeting critical needs in the community” through direct service in specific areas to introduce viewers to its discourse (*americorps.gov*). The site records visual and scripted examples of members’ service so potential members may envision themselves as part of the vast ideological army that is already involved in specific service activities.

AmeriCorps’ public discourse is crafted by the use of vision and mission statements that serve as calls to action to a population likely to be motivated by such appeals. Under an AmeriCorps banner appears a rallying call, “Your world. Your Chance to Make it Better,” similar to the familiar AmeriCorps slogan, “Getting Things Done” (*americorps.gov*). The homepage features a slide show of vivid pictures depicting members in service, doing a variety of tasks ranging from picking up trash to speaking to a homeless person.

“Launch the Interactive Program Selector for Individuals” (*americorps.gov*) takes readers on a personal journey to selecting the program that matches their “skills, interests, and circumstances” (*americorps.gov*). A sub-heading above the service search feature reads, “AmeriCorps is your chance to

put your ideals into action while learning new skills, making new connections, and earning money to pay for college” (*americorps.gov*). Though appealing to idealism, the education award members earn at the end of their year of service is also used as a pull within the discourse.

The information seems to funnel viewers according to the institution’s goals of recruiting, informing, and presenting a good image through sale of gear, historicism, and vision casting. There are several links that allow the viewer to travel through the site, depending on how much and what type of information he is searching for. The site has information for, “individuals”, “organizations”, “general information”, and an introductory “about” page (*americorps.gov*). Though filled with general information, the institution’s target population is directed to “recruitment,” “current service,” and “alumni” tabs that lead to more specific information that may interest members and potential members.

Featured topics for current members address life after service, including job opportunities and plans to use the education award, and AmeriCorps news. Topics for alumni include more technical information about using the Segal Education Award, recruitment, and ways to support other members. Other relevant topics include information about rejoining AmeriCorps, and incorporating the service experience into other areas of life. “Spreading the word” is important on this site (*americorps.gov*).

Importantly, there is also a section for testimonials. A single testimonial links to a page of “Stories of Service,” that are first-hand accounts of members’ service and the impact it had on them and their communities (*americorps.gov*). I

call these success stories, the bragging rights that indicate social capital (Granovetter 209) within the discourse. The members that earn the privilege of telling their stories are allowed to speak into the lives of potential and current members. Similar to the other information on the website, the testimonies are accompanied by an appeal that simplifies the process of joining.

#### Implications: A Decentralized Network that Affords the Tactical over the Institutional

Although AmeriCorps must work closely with community programs, AmeriCorps' structural differences carry potential to trouble the institutional discourse found among many community based ABEL educational sites, which are often characterized as hierarchical with a central locus of authority guiding actions. That is, unlike the top-down institutional structure documented in the above state-sponsored ABEL institutions, AmeriCorps creates a decentralized network that stays true to an idealistic vision, in part, because of its few institutional prerogatives. As a consequence, as I explain below, this structure affords a methodology of participation that can temper—at least temporarily—the formal, top-down regulative discourse of state-sponsored ABEL institutions with more “tactical” approaches (Mathieu 20).

*Decentralized.* Research that emerged soon after the inauguration of AmeriCorps affirmed the program for moving in the direction of a new period in history (Simon 670; Thomson & Perry 403; Brower and Berry 867). Although at the

time, use of the World Wide Web was not endemic to peoples' experience, authors who emphasized the organizational structure of AmeriCorps sensed a weakening of centralized sources of power that only intensified with the development of communication technology (Thomson 26; Granovetter 203). AmeriCorps was hailed for an organizational structure much more compatible to the changes occurring in the public sphere, that of networking, in which loosely organized units are brought together around few social systems or resources rather than dictated by hierarchical structures (Thomson and Perry 402). Said to be more able than traditional institutions to answer the needs of the changing community, networks are broadly defined as any social form that allows inter-organizational transactions of exchange, joint effort, or production geared toward power sharing rather than reliance on government bureaucracies (Thomson i). This definition of networking allows systems that interact from fairly low to high levels to be grouped as networks. Rather than deriving its authority from a localized source of power, AmeriCorps thrives by disseminating, in a strong manner, its institutional identity among various local programs already in existence and through the new relationships that its presence brings. "AmeriCorps programs are viewed as groups of organizations (not single programs) that are embedded in a system of social relationships" (Thomson i). These social relationships include already established institutions and communities that have something to gain from other organizations through trade.

AmeriCorps works through a complex set of partnerships, administered through a third party (CNCS 29). In this thesis, I am concerned with whether

these unusual organizational partnerships influence the level of cooperation within local community organizations and if the dynamics of these social relationships lead to or encourage the formation of spontaneous community projects more likely to circulate an ethic of caring than traditional institutional discourse.

One effect of a networked as opposed to strictly hierarchical structure is increased collaboration among organizations. For example, the introduction of the service discourse through AmeriCorps' presence within an organization presents opportunities for increased resource sharing and contact among institutional leaders (Thomson and Perry 400). Evidence of increased communication and sharing begs the question of whether instances of increased collaboration among institutions can lead directly to the tactical projects described by Mathieu that more accurately address community concerns. There seems to be the sense in the early review of AmeriCorps that positive community change could occur on an institutional level. As Thomson and Perry present in their article, "Can AmeriCorps Build Communities?" organizations now had the potential for effective collaboration through the partnership. The authors advocate for the ultimate expression of collaboration, community transformation, through which organizations are able to supersede individual goals and positively affect their communities through alliances formed in pursuit of these goals (Thomson and Perry 402). In this way, individual institutions are more than the sum of their parts. What is clear is that the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) holds a strong vision for community transformation by making part of



their mission to encourage activities that incorporate the value of service into the daily life of their organizations (*Transforming Communities* ii).

As mentioned above, AmeriCorps operates with great network flexibility for policy implementation, but at the same time, the organization exhibits institutional demands, primary among which is direct service to--and involvement in, the community (Brower and Berry 850). At AmeriCorps' beginning, the process of inter-organizational collaboration was utilized in order to meet this demand. Collaboration varies in degree of participation but is primarily defined by its participants and problem space (Thomson 1). The problem space as defined by AmeriCorps policy is the community as a recipient of transformational action. Participants are the community organizations, the community (passively), and AmeriCorps members and personnel. As demonstrated in their article, Ann Marie Thomson and Perry describe organizations as autonomous entities that surround the shared problem domain, which is the AmeriCorps mandate for community service. These organizations choose to work together according to agreed upon norms while striving to maintain institutional autonomy.

For several reasons, Thomson and Perry, through their research, found that using AmeriCorps' institutional service mandate as a rallying point for community transformation fails (409). Because organizations bring to bear conflicting concerns, and the goals for community service are extraneous to their organizational missions, negotiation and other tactics are required to sustain consistent commitment among organizations. Collaboration may be more arduous than it is worth, especially when the goals of collaboration are added to routine

requirements of institutional operation. What's more, because of differing needs, organizations also view the problem space differently, leading to a lack of consensus which weakens overall effort in support of the goals of collaboration. While the goal of community transformation may be impervious to institutions that are otherwise organized, AmeriCorps may provide special inroads to such an idealistic mandate on an individual and project basis, despite the fact that AmeriCorps struggles to establish its own goal of instilling a service ethic within institutions.

True collaboration requires participation that extends far beyond what may be found on an institution's pro bono to-do list. Collaboration is progressive, and before it can be supra-organizational and transformative—the goal of community change--a foundation of trust, reciprocity, and mutual commitment to goals must be achieved (Thomson 11). In addition, the sort of compromise required to reach this level of collaboration impinges upon organizations' individual mandates. Important to this paper is the finding that the more the criteria for collaboration promote stability in community service, the less room for input and change there is from the group. This leads to the conclusion that it is difficult to maintain an environment that encourages a tactical, problem-based approach to community needs, including the need for community involvement on an institutional level. This finding confirms the intuition that occurrences of transformation are spontaneous. The principles of the founding institution of AmeriCorps, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that encourage

community service on the part of institutions take for granted the collaborative effort necessary to establish a habit of and value for service within organizations.

There is more than one concern regarding direct attempts by organizations at community transformation. In addition to the ethical problems that arise from deliberately setting out to bring change to a group, using AmeriCorps programs to rally organizations to target specific goals for the community is tricky. In other words, approaching organizations and suggesting they work together based on a pre-defined moral imperative in addition to their usual mandates doesn't work. Collaboration across and among organizations is costly in time, effort, and money, and, indeed, if the cost rises too much, organizations may opt out of collaborative arrangements (Thomson 88). The author of "AmeriCorps Organizational Networks on the Ground," Ann Marie Thomson, witnessed collaborative efforts in which participants complained of individual organizational needs being drowned out by procedural concerns and the overarching demands of the collaborative effort. Organizations were not able to sustain the level of collaborative effort in the absence of AmeriCorps programs that was advocated by its discourse of direct community service (Thomson and Perry 408). The author gives one example of a moderately successful collaborative effort that was born out of a perceived need in the community. Partner organizations shared common goals and based the program model on a national coalition model, but still, the program suffered from organizations' need to seek their own goals over those of the community (Thomson and Perry 410).

In the same way that AmeriCorps' structure of networked systems provides for more occurrences of collaboration among institutions, the organization also allows for more direct influence on the part of stakeholders. If AmeriCorps is unable to systematize institutional involvement based on a common community goal of producing meaningful change, the organization does remain consistent to its clarion call of direct action through the influence of its members. Through qualitative research, Thomson and Perry show the significant effectiveness of AmeriCorps members as a result of their enthusiasm and immersion in the community (407). Because of their commitment—a commitment which internalizes service as an institutional mandate—the authors found that AmeriCorps members were able to strengthen the programs to which they were assigned. Also, AmeriCorps and lead agency staff encouraged members' service as they nurtured them through visits and by maintaining open communication. Member involvement strengthened the community, resulting in increased organizational capacity at their service sites. I attribute the transformational quality members engaged as an effect of AmeriCorps' public discourse. As long as members don't violate the policy of local organizations, they are free within partner organizations to operate on a purely idealistic basis. The community is built up as members are nurtured toward their idealistic vision. Members are responsible to operate within the political mandate of AmeriCorps as well as commit to organizational goals. Whereas direct community service is not always a workable goal of community organizations, members are not limited by organizational needs. Their presence represents the expendable energy that

organizations may not “waste” on community projects. Members, recruited and committed to the AmeriCorps goals before being placed at their service sites, are free to think in terms of direct influence, creativity, and reciprocity in the community.

Concerning direct service to the community, AmeriCorps’ discourse and its organizational structure is beneficial because these allow the setting and motivational mandate, the rhetorical blank check, for members to try anything as long as their efforts gather people around a single purpose: direct service to the community in a way that does not violate local institutional goals. AmeriCorps’ strength in project-based discourse is a rallying point for like-minded people. Although armed with a political mandate for service, AmeriCorps does not have the strength to change institutions, but does provide an open portal for change to those whose positions are ancillary to normal program operation. These extra hands, the members, engage in community change because they are empowered by a service discourse.

An example of transformation springing from members who internalized the service mandate is one of the few success stories from Thomson and Perry’s study of AmeriCorps programs and their impact on the community. Although community service resists systematization, the emergence of this particular project occurred only through the presence of AmeriCorps. An AmeriCorps member’s influence on the community began with a simple idea. He wanted to build a playground in a community space (Thomson and Perry 411). This effort was an unexpected event fully supported by the public discourse of the

community organization and AmeriCorps and resulted in positive feedback from a member of the community.

A drawback to AmeriCorps' investment in the community could be short term capacity building that may fade when federal monies do, money that could have been put toward local initiatives that build the community organization in a more rooted way. In order to be effective, sustainable programs must be grass roots and community inspired. When AmeriCorps members leave, their programs may leave also (Thomson and Perry 409). The involvement of AmeriCorps members in the recruitment of volunteers on behalf of the organizations in which they work is another area that may experience short term benefits but lack long term sustainability. As one director found, volunteers are better raised than recruited (Thomson and Perry 414). Long-standing commitment stems from long-term relationships rather than short bursts of furious activity. Maybe the fact that lasting community involvement and development cannot be easily generated or systematized is a positive sign for the true community transformation that functions within a tactical discourse this paper seeks to describe.

Institutional systems proved to be resistant to incorporating the value of community service. Chiefly concerned with their own survival, organizations viewed AmeriCorps as an additional feature, not necessary to usual program operation; the presence of AmeriCorps did not change organizational goals. Thomson and Perry mentioned a few success stories of increased networking among community organizations, but overall, the "building community" goal failed (414). Programs experienced great difficulty in attempts to institutionalize

spontaneous projects or secure commitment beyond an organization's main objectives. The authors argue that because society is increasingly networked and problems are more and more complex, a better future strategy may be to build partnerships among organizations in order to initiate change, gradually introducing a different methodology for cooperation within the community, however resistant institutions are to extra-organizational goals (Thomson and Perry 417).

*Tactical Approaches within and among AmeriCorps Programs.* The structure of AmeriCorps makes its programs more open to spontaneous occurrences in the same way that precise atmospheric conditions promote certain activity, like starbursts. AmeriCorps does not offer a true alternative to institutional discourse but complicates the regulative discourse of ABEL institutions by presenting opportunities for greater participation through these occurrences. Adjusting our methodology for service helps capture these moments, and I find Paula Mathieu's "tactics of hope" most helpful in providing a fitting methodology in resistance to the effects of institutional discourse.

Paula Mathieu, author of *Tactics of Hope*, offers several case studies of community outreach that challenge traditional intervention discourse. Tactics of hope, according to Mathieu, are rhetorically circumscribed projects that combine Ernst Bloch's utopic ideal of hope and a tactical approach to problems within a community of people who wield the power to bring about change (16). It is an activist methodology, and for my purposes, constitutes a distinct discourse.

Unlike traditional institutional discourse, tactical projects weaken the authority of hierarchical structures and urge shared responsibility. Within tactical discourse, those who are traditionally positioned outside powerful structures as recipients of intervention take on greater responsibility since these projects resist hierarchical organization. Those who would be objects of pity become the main contributors to change formation.

Mathieu contrasts tactical and strategic methodologies. Unlike universities and other institutions which have stable directions, a tactical approach puts demands on participants to cleverly inhabit varying space-time continuums by allowing them space to respond to felt needs in prescient ways (Mathieu 16, 17). Mathieu explains that whereas strategies are the vein through which procedural action takes hold in stable institutions, a tactical approach calls for timely action in response to unplanned occurrences, otherwise known as problems. Tactical discourse is directed toward opportunity and is rhetorically based. Within the discourse, Mathieu iterates that inquiry energized by hope is the most important guiding principle for action.

Mathieu identifies the animus of change as hope, which guides critical actions. Hope is also the least predictable element of intervention. Mathieu claims, “To take on hope is to take on risk and responsibility while maintaining a dogged optimism” (Mathieu 17). Hope assesses what is lacking in the present but is not preoccupied with lack. Instead, hope motivates knowledge and personal desire to enable the hope worker to strive for something better. A vision of an ideal provides motivation to move forward through and beyond present



circumstances (Mathieu 18). Hope, then, is not purely emotion, but desire, decision, and action together (Mathieu 18-19). Working with hope as an animating feature of intervention discourse does not remove or distort harsh realities. While hope energizes outreach efforts, its presence allows for the admission of shortcomings both in materials and self, “seeing one’s work as insufficient, and recognizing that success to some constituents might look different to others” (Mathieu 19). Within the tactical discourse, hope allows for learning in the face of difficult situations since the direction of the discourse is toward relationship rather than methodology.

Tactics of hope represent, not a direct answer to institutional strategies, but an escape from them fundamentally. Philosophically opposed to institutional strategies, these tactics resist institutional moves by opting out of systematic processes associated with organizations that privilege long-term continuation, growth, and rigid power structures. In each way that institutional strategies present specific attempts at self-preservation through practices that are protective and controlling, tactical responses address specific needs of communities on a project basis through organic processes that share power. Tactics of hope show general characteristics that respond to each of the seven areas previously named as features of regulative discourse in the ABEL field as evidenced in state reports. Tactics of hope often take on a simpler practice than mechanisms of regulative discourse and cannot be connected to discursive features in the same way, for example, that regulative discourse is encoded in government documents that carry

institutional prerogatives. Rather, tactics of hope are defined endemically by constituents in each situation.

Guided by Mathieu’s work, I identified the following characteristics as being consistent with a tactical approach. These features emerged in the analysis of past and existing AmeriCorps projects as documented in reports and other extant artifacts. These include, but are not limited to features of being,

- short term
- non-prescriptive
- spontaneous
- based on shared responsibility
- subject to progressive reform
- limited reliance on authority
- shared expertise
- non-systematic though concurrent to institutional systems
- elides or supersedes institutional boundaries
- require continued support and/or communication.

It is important to make a note at this point regarding the direction of my analysis. As the experience of this paper confirms, finding true examples of sustained tactical projects is difficult. By their nature, tactical programs are not sustainable—at least not in conventional terms (cf. Cushman “Praxis” 28; Long “Techne” 49). For these reasons, I’d like to highlight features consistent with tactical discourse rather than idealized examples, my hunch being that AmeriCorps programs more easily facilitate the circulation of these features.

Programs that allow and are open to self-reflection, change, and spontaneous implementation, especially when initiated by the community, display features of a tactical discourse. Projects that are built without the use of politically referenced objectives most likely will exhibit features of a tactical approach. Likewise, projects that are committed to imaginative solutions or that privilege relationship among stakeholders are most likely candidates of tactical discourse. In the next section, I would like to examine specific case studies, de facto examples of programs which exemplify features of tactical discourse. This thesis joins the discussion by posing the question: What is it about AmeriCorps that allows for characteristics common to a tactical approach to emerge?

#### Part IV: Model Programs that Operate within Tactical Discourse

*Partners in School Innovation: A non-profit and school district partner to bring change to low income areas near San Francisco and in the process redefine teaching authority and the school experience.* In the article, “Partners in School Innovation: An Unusual Approach to Change Facilitation,” Kim Grose discusses a unique tutoring program that indicates features of tactical discourse. The mission of the school project is explicit, to increase reading levels of low income and minority children with the expectation of success, despite social prejudice. In this summer tutoring program, responsibility is shared among the staff across categories of status, effectually diffusing traditional notions of authority within the elementary school structure. AmeriCorps members’ contribution to the tutoring program is rethought outside of traditional roles. While the school

acknowledged that members lacked the authority of teachers, AmeriCorps members functioned and were treated as partners for the purposes of the project.

As mentioned above, this project emphasizes the involvement of “partners” (Grose 2) and commitment to the work of serving underprivileged schools. The project sets out ready to engage institutional change, but uses an uncommon approach. AmeriCorps members, many of whom are motivated but untrained recent college graduates, fill the gap of teacher needs.

The vision of *Partners in School Innovation* focuses on teachers’ development. Teachers are typically acknowledged as influential in the development of school institutions, yet they are often not given space to voice their own concerns and explore areas of professional growth, to be vulnerable. The vision the *Partners in School Innovation* project maintains that simply training teachers in “best practices” (Grose 3) without ongoing support leads to stagnation that results in professionals who are resistant to change. Within the project, teachers are also acknowledged as learners. They must benefit from the educational process in order to continue to be effective (Grose 1). Professional growth necessitates a scaffolding process, or at the very least, a collaborative effort with others who share responsibility, if not authority, in the learning process within the institution’s discourse. The partners chosen to fill this role are AmeriCorps members who, within this project, work alongside teachers to create, “innovative change projects that are the building blocks for school wide reform” (Grose 2).

Partners are selected through a rigorous process and are integrated into the life of the school in order to understand, on an experiential level, the complexity of initiating change. Within the tutoring project, partners are full staff and gain an understanding of the people involved in change. They are considered teachers' peers, participate in an external network of support, work together with teacher colleagues to create holistic projects, and execute projects, continually reforming them throughout (Grose 5).

As is typical with tactical projects, certain tutoring sites cycled through renewal and struggle. Useful strategies were implemented and failed strategies discarded. At one school, the partners and teachers implemented reciprocal teaching. The partners' role was to train and recruit. They were charged with institutionalizing the reciprocal teaching method so that these new teaching practices were replicated in the entire school, not just in a few classrooms. Members observed teachers during the reciprocal teaching process, provided feedback, facilitated discussions, and collected data on student achievement. Eventually, reciprocal teaching became part of the culture of the school (Grose 6).

At a second school, activity was centered on raising literacy rates (Grose 7). Partners worked closely with teachers, who started addressing their goal by reducing the student-teacher ratio. Here, partners worked were also charged with testing students to assess reading improvement. Interpreting the meaning and implications of the testing data figured prominently in the partners' role. Partners experienced the difficulty of making data meaningful as many participants questioned the data's purpose and reliability in the school's explicit attempts to

enhance literacy. Because assessments are intimidating and “official,” many partners felt ill equipped to handle, use, and interpret the assessment results and then translate them to actual changes in classrooms and in students (Grose 8). As a result, members sought other partners’ input, in effect expanding their base of expertise beyond the assessments through multiple interpretations. Also, for certain groups of students, a redefined partnership between teachers and partners resulted in a commitment to rework the tests—to include the concerns of parents, among others, in reevaluating the basis and tools of assessment practices. Partners and teachers alike recognized the different needs of groups such as English second language learners. For example, gathering meaningful data from upper grade level students would require the assessments to have more dynamic measurements.

The result of the partnership projects at these schools gives weight to a discourse of responsibility, not authority, within the educational process. Creativity and resourcefulness were the result of the *Partners in School Innovation* projects. Whereas creating a professionalized staff is necessary, advantages exist when projects move away from a zero-sum economy of teaching expertise. Utilizing AmeriCorps members within the project provided a setting for members to experience immersion in an educational culture that benefited all participants while at the same time allowed for scaffolded learning and reflection, both for members and teachers. While members were partners, they did not share the same level of authority the teachers held. Rather, members shared

responsibility for those whom they taught, and that shared responsibility resulted in a richer learning environment for all.

*Surprising Equality: An afterschool program brings two disparate groups together through AmeriCorps innovation in response to spontaneous needs.* Jarred Wong, in his and contributing author Georgia Cobbs' article, "Opening the Gates," describes the spontaneous project that he initiated and brought to completion during his service as an AmeriCorps member. Wong was enlisted as a technology and computer expert who worked primarily with seniors and youth in the computer lab of a low income apartment complex. He noticed that a fence bordered three sides of the CGA apartment complex where he worked. Beyond the fence's back border were impressive trees that led to a private school, one of the few in the area. He noticed that the children on each side of the fence were separated by race and socio-economic status. Each day, they mocked and assaulted each other by throwing rocks and sticks over the fence. Wong, when he asked about the situation, was simply told that they had never gotten along. That was the way it had always been. However, because he internalized the AmeriCorps values of direct service to and impact in the community, he did not let the matter rest there.

Wong researched the opinion of a seasoned teacher and brainstormed with others the possible causes of the dysfunction. After listing possible reasons, Wong and the group agreed that the students did not know each other and so Wong, along with another AmeriCorps member sought to build a foundation of trust among the children as a basis of relationship. "It appeared the children had

completely different worldviews” (Wong 54). Wong identified his AmeriCorps experience as being responsible for helping him see this issue as a challenge that could be taken on.

The first step the members took was to bring the two groups together and so form one community. As a solution, the members sought to engage the children in community activities. But first, the distance between them had to be closed. The group decided that a gate would provide access for the two communities to each other. This gate would represent both a physical and figurative portal of connection. The project required inter-organizational coordination between the school and apartment complex. In this partnership, Wong saw a “wealth of possibilities for growth between the organizations” (Wong 56). At the next CGA and Sussex board meetings, the construction of the gate was proposed. The communities both agreed to the project, though naturally some roadblocks emerged. Apparently, the (Sussex) school insisted that the construction of the gate receive parent approval and after that was obtained, the project was postponed by the contractor. Eventually, as all stakeholders worked through institutional roadblocks and other setbacks, the gate was built.

The next goal of the AmeriCorps members was to increase the children’s contact and communication with each other, and finally improve the relationships among children and parents across the socio-economically grouped communities. The members searched for common ground. They asked themselves, “What do all students like?” and answered with the obvious: playing. On the day of its inauguration, the gate was opened with a celebration. The members had the two



groups participate in activities that drew on their commonalities. At first part of the inaugural celebration, the two groups of children were separated. The AmeriCorps team devised clever activities to slowly introduce the children to each other. The children were asked to draw representations of the properties where they lived or learned. Eventually, the children participated in student guided tours in mixed groups. As the final activity of the evening, the children played school yard games and ate pizza together. Success was established at the end of the first meeting. As time passed, the groups of students were naturally drawn to each other and played with each other through the fence during unstructured times.

The author lists the bureaucratic delays as some of the most trying, which is consistent with research on attempts at inter-organizational collaboration discussed. The building of this gate is an example of a spontaneous project that was made possible by a discourse that evidences more features of tactical discourse, which AmeriCorps seemed to facilitate. After all, an AmeriCorps member initiated the project. Resistant to rigid thinking, the member had to engage his imagination. He did not presume to know why the children were hostile toward each other, to his credit. Rather, Wong researched the experience of others who were more familiar with the community. His solutions were not limited, unlike regulative discourse, to a certain vision of what was, but rather, what ought to be. Though Wong maintained the goal of increased relationship from the beginning, he did not hold tightly to any strict outcome measures from which he developed objectives. As Mathieu emphasizes, his response was timely

and pertinent (20). Basing his actions on the goal of building increased trust, Wong's project was guided by an explicit vision even though the project resisted quantification. However, the results Wong experienced and recorded were positive.

*Food for Thought: A summer nutrition program with an explicit vision feeds bellies and minds while allowing kids to inhabit their own discourse.* The Energy Express project in West Virginia demonstrates the power of explicit discourse in establishing a basis for action through vision casting and relationship building as opposed to relying on a hierarchical and rigid structure. Energy Express is a summer breakfast and lunch program that provides print rich environments for low income kids during the summer months when learning tends to be lost. Participating students live in poor areas and are often viewed within a resource deficiency model (Butera and Dempsey 600). Those who enter their communities for the purpose of outreach tend to try to make up for what students lack. However, Gretchen Butera and Van Dempsey, the authors of "Kiwis and Kids" suggest looking at young students' so-called literacy lack through a model of identity rather than resource deficiency. In other words, the authors and practitioners of Energy Express recognize that students inhabit their own discourse. Though they may fail specific academic measures, students are capable literacy practitioners, as they enact knowledge in their homes and communities. With this in mind, the authors insist that any outreach discourse will only be as successful as it is incorporated in students' local discourse. Change extends from a friendly combination of the differing discourses and privileges the

experience, language, and culture of the students. Committed individuals immersed in the local discourse should also be included meaningfully in the learning process, not merely as token representatives (Butera and Dempsey 601). Practitioners, including AmeriCorps members, must see themselves as community members see them.

Within the Energy Express program, AmeriCorps members act as mentors, spending time with students in table groups. They are supervised by site coordinators and have the chance to review plans, conduct projects, and reflect on activities throughout the summer. The curriculum is loosely framed by themes, and students take home books. Within the discourse, literacy grows out of relationship, especially between students and mentors. More important than curriculum, the explicit discourse situated participants, from AmeriCorps members to teachers, in meaningful roles that encouraged responsibility, not roles. Energy Express proved to be successful in many students' lives and meaningful to their families both by sustaining and raising students' reading levels and establishing a positive rapport with parents and other community members.

Energy Express is an example of a networked system with a strong institutional culture. Its central location was in Morgantown, West Virginia, while programs were executed locally at several different sites (Butera and Dempsey 610). Central values were consistent across different communities while curriculum and literature reflected children's local discourse and interests. Also, individual sites were responsible for creating service projects which students had

a part in designing. Communities were connected to the program philosophy of Energy Express through local program leaders' ability to act in intermediary roles as liaisons, transmitting culture while prizing and understanding the local discourse. Local program leaders invested in the community members who taught in the program and also in practitioners responsible for carrying out the tasks of the organization.

The first local program took place at Shallow Creek Elementary School, a school in rural West Virginia. While the program's vision sought to retool students' negative experiences of school by distancing its discourse from that of a typical elementary school, practitioners had to be careful not to define the vision of the program by what it was not. Focusing too much on not being like regular school negatively distanced educational institutions where students spent the majority of the year. The vision of the summer program was that learning was a natural process that flourishes in the context of relationship. At least at Energy Express, everyone could learn, even students who had been hurt by being excluded by academic and other institutional discourse. To make this goal a reality, Shallow Creek Elementary School had to trust both the learners and the teachers. The teachers were trusted community members who successfully incorporated core values of the summer program and integrated those values within the local discourse. Other participants, like the AmeriCorps members, had to learn how to prioritize the discourse of students who inhabited a different culture. This was not an easy or fail-safe methodology. However, Shallow Creek bravely recused the need for systematization common in some local ABEL

educational institutions. The program managed its vision by maintaining open lines of communication through information sharing, site visits, and other documentation. The program was also open to self-evaluation and reflected on better strategies to serve students.

Energy Express at Shallow Creek Elementary School in Green Meadows, West Virginia, recognized difference among participants as these differences came to focus through the project's shared space. However, these differences were not markers of deficiency, only reminders that students, teachers, and mentors inhabited different discourses (Butera and Dempsey 609). Multiple communities existed where Energy Express operated. The presence of difference was not problematic since uniformity was not required within the program's vision, only the acknowledgement of difference and warm reception of the children's world.

Butera and Dempsey stress that creating a discourse in which intervention is successfully implemented requires a methodology in which all participants contribute fully. There is no room for students to be the objects of intervention. In Energy Express, as students were recognized as full participants in the intervention efforts of practitioners, their achievements became part of the community's discourse. The intervention of practitioners did not work against but, rather, used students' experience to buttress and shape their vision. The authors concluded that the greater the difference between the community and intervention discourse, the greater the need for adaptability and compromise (). The goal of intervention should be to bring the marginalized into the process. The measure of

success is when participants describe a program as “ours” (Butera and Dempsey 613). The material used in the program, though important, is a secondary concern and is negotiated within the context of its application in order for that material to be meaningful within the community discourse.

At the Energy Express program in Scrap, West Virginia (pseudonym), students were highly involved in activities that were relevant to their experiences; their discourse was acknowledged within the discourse of outreach enacted by AmeriCorps members. Likewise, AmeriCorps members who acted as mentors reported feeling like they made a difference because of the explicit responsibility given to them to care for the youth who were a part of their table groups. Whereas students were not initially trusting of members, they came to trust their mentors and participate in their table groups as caring was extended. Parents commented on the relationship that students built with mentors. To the parents, the thoughtful AmeriCorps members, obvious through the attention they gave the students, offered acknowledgement of students’ presence.

The vision of the program lay not in procedures, but in a relaxed effort towards improvement, creating a positive atmosphere in which literacy could thrive as young minds were nurtured. All the leaders and adults believed the students would “get it” if they just kept trying until they experienced success. The program was open to teachers trying out different methods of instruction free of the need for measurable outcomes and there was relaxed age grouping. The administrator at one site kept running conversations with students and let them know that each was important. He made a goal to hear each of sixty-four students

read during the course of the project (Butera and Dempsey 607). Again, at this site, it was evident that relationships were central and that activities were student initiated. For example, during a lesson, a teacher noticed that she needed to have a conversation with a student at that moment. She voluntarily interrupted her reading activity to address the student's express needs. Also, students' work was posted all around to encourage them that they were already engaging literacy practices in their lives. Students felt proud when they were acknowledged as learners. However, lasting prejudices lingered with mentors who often pitied the circumstances of students' lives (Butera and Dempsey 609).

*Clean collaboration through AmeriCorps: AmeriCorps' hands-on -deck direct service discourse increases the capacity of a local non-profit to address critical needs of a community for reconstructing homes.* The work accomplished by the AmeriCorps members in the Coalfield Housing Project helps illustrate how AmeriCorps' presence among organizations can galvanize support for short term projects, increasing an organization's capacity for collaboration, flexibility and outreach by superseding bureaucratic obstacles. In the case of the Coalfield Housing Project, the Project's and AmeriCorps members' goals were consistent. There was no conflict between the project based discourse of the AmeriCorps members and the institutional discourse of the South Appalachian Labor School, the members' service site, and so the effect of AmeriCorps' collaboration with the community based organization was not merely additive, but multiplicative (Thomson and Perry). As a result of the collaboration that the AmeriCorps members spearheaded, the Coalfield Housing Project was able to host over 2,000

youth from around the country during a four week period in a continuous stream of volunteerism. These volunteers provided the rehabilitation and weatherization of 350 homes in Fayette County in need of repair. This large effort was termed a housing blitz (David 5A).

South Appalachian Labor School (S.A.L.S.) had a twenty-five year history in the community, and through its Coalfield Housing Project, AmeriCorps members, had, “as their primary objectives the rehabilitation of dilapidated and energy inefficient homes for low--income families in economically devastated coalfield communities" (David 5A). The project manager, who coordinated services with the leader of Campus Compact, noted that the housing blitz, had “been in the planning stage for several months” (David 5A). The Project, in its third year, provided direct relief and assistance to the community surrounding Fayette county by increasing habitable conditions. In addition to year round rehabilitation activities, the housing blitz was organized after a significant flood had damaged the area. “AmeriCorps members cleaned up homes, collected debris and made emergency repairs. Since then the members have provided direct service, constructing and rehabilitating homes as well as coordinating volunteers who have come to help” (David 5A). AmeriCorps members, as part of the Housing Project, were responsible to mentor groups of twelve students involved in the project who did not possess a high school diploma. They would mentor these students towards completion of their GED.

The large numbers of volunteers involved in the housing blitz were likely a response to the recent tragic occurrence of a flood in addition to the consistent



clarion call of the Coalfield Project's mission to bring awareness to the lack of decent living conditions in the county. In any case, the huge collaboration was atypical to S.A.L.S. experience, as in the three years the Housing Project was functional, the average number of volunteers was a steady plateau. For my purpose, it is important to note the success of the blitz was made possible through the unique contributions of AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps' position within community service discourse, particularly the organization's commitment to direct community service in critical areas of need. The Housing Project was in existence prior to the flood of 2000, but through AmeriCorps' support, was able to immediately respond to needs that stemmed from an unplanned occurrence. Importantly, the members were responsible for coordinating the largest congregation of volunteers that year.

The volunteer event was temporary in terms of the project's large scale response to a recent flood. However, the Coalfield Housing Project continued to host and work with teams of youth and college students throughout the year ("July Flood Cleanup"). Although this was an ongoing project, the group's response to a specific event shows AmeriCorps programs' ability to sustain short term projects that increase the service capacity of an organization. AmeriCorps provided the flexibility and sheer manpower that created the capacity within the organization to sustain the large volunteer event. This effort not only represented collaboration with AmeriCorps but several organizations, including the nearby college campus. Unique to AmeriCorps' participation, members were allowed institutional access in order to coordinate and assist in the planning and

implementation of the blitz. Although they were removed from positions of authority, their leadership was effective, allowing large numbers of volunteers to serve. I believe the housing blitz was successful because it was a specific project for which coordination and grueling, time consuming responsibilities were handled by the AmeriCorps members, thus lessening the cost of coordination among stakeholders. By providing the mule work, AmeriCorps was able to use a discourse of neutral community service to seamlessly maneuver between institutions and recruit participation.

The diversity of these AmeriCorps programs speaks to the broad applicability of tactical discourse. It is not the discourse of the adult learning center or elementary school only. Tactical discourse carefully positions the priorities of intervention around the needs of the participants at hand. Material substance is secondary to the discourse which privileges intangible benefits, like the hope that Mathieu mentioned that, importantly, animates tactical approaches to problems. These are the veins through which we have seen this discourse work: programs creating an explicit vision and so being able to emphasize the needs of students rather than the institution; AmeriCorps members having a multiplicative effect in a discourse of organizational consistency and a hands-on-deck ethic; a school sharing responsibility as an inroad to professionalization and greater effectiveness; and a couple of AmeriCorps members not being afraid to pursue solutions to spontaneous and threatening problems. These are the features of a discourse that is active, dynamic, and impactful. This discourse presents a strong foil to the stable direction of many educational facilities that are preoccupied with

funding concerns, thrusting the priorities of other institutions into the activities of educational programs rhetorically positioned as altruistic. Learning to appreciate the features of tactical discourse as they appear in unique projects is a step toward welcoming democratic participation within institutions—creating an environment in which everyone is heard. Becoming familiar with an alternative vision of intervention could create a space for educational programs to begin thinking creatively about the discourses which they both endure and perpetuate.

## CHAPTER 5

### A WIDE OPEN FUTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

It is my hope that this thesis has brought to light some of the complex motivations circulating within the various discourses that ground institutional practices within the government sponsored adult literacy and basic education system. Far too often, these discourses are taken for granted and covered by self-promoting literature surrounding ABEL activities. This paper is concerned with the rhetorical mechanisms that continue the political discourse of privilege and authority within local education centers and, not only that, but also how the current political discourse of adult education impacts personal/institutional exchange. Particularly, students, as they encounter this political, institutional discourse may be confounded by an incongruent and confusing system.

The result of institutional discourse is initiatives that favor institutional operation rather than relationship. Local ABEL institutions pursue funding and formalization on a legislative level and so this ties them to powerful government agencies. Institutions rely on and enjoy the privilege of rhetorical positioning, specifically through the vehicle of <literacy> education, to allow them leverage for advantageous political positioning, as they make the case of simultaneous benevolence and political neutrality. However, the political discourse of local educational institutions is not neutral in that it results in systems that display features of a regulative discourse that minimize student participation, relegating students to roles of objects of intervention, their needs disproportional to those of the institution. What is sacrificed to this discourse is the humanity of interaction

between the local agency and the student, resulting in the absence of a caring ethic. And it is this ethic of caring that I have sought to recover through programs that encourage another discourse, a tactical one. Tactical discourse does not directly counter institutional discourse but provides an encouraging alternative to the nonsensical and systematic procedures of institutionalism. It has been my goal to highlight tactical features as they appeared in AmeriCorps programs, which I argued, because of AmeriCorps' institutional structure, are more amenable to tactical discourse which is spontaneous and internally inspired.

I do not seek to uproot and directly counter institutional discourse. That is too big a goal and nearly impossible. I simply would like to make known and then encourage alternatives to what can feel like an overbearing and monolithic system. My thesis is an effort to get teachers, students, practitioners, and administrators to think about their roles as they must express them in the institutional constraints in which they work and learn. Institutional discourse, before it can be confronted or reconstructed, must be revealed. I suggest that in some instances, the current institutional discourse could be overlaid by what I consider a discourse that is more productive for those who are usually the target of intervention. Tactical discourse is liberating since it provides inroads to powerful participation to those who live and move within otherwise restrictive and confusing discourses. My intention with this thesis has been to examine activities in ABEL in light of the discourse in which those activities are situated to determine whether they are worthwhile.

Teaching is an amazing gift. There is something magical about it, something unpredictable which transcends the material that comprises daily lessons. That aspect of teaching is what I don't want to lose sight of in the treadmill of achievement, test scores, and the fear of lost funding. A greater loss beyond schools closing would be the loss of the humanity that inhabits the teaching profession. Teaching is taking the hand of someone further behind in the journey and pulling her forward. Compassion is worth thinking about and working toward.

It is exciting to read about current institutional critique. I hope future inquiry continues to illumine and thereby weaken the power of heretofore unquestioned powers locked within educational institutions. The revelation of this project for me through my study of tactical discourse is that those affected by powerful institutional discourse possess the power to decide how to further reclaim the spaces they inhabit. However, institutions may assist in the effort to afford community members a greater voice by creating opportunities for them to speak. The welcome introduction of programs like AmeriCorps gives way to increased access sites and the circulation of a more participatory discourse. Hierarchical power structures are weakened through the alternative participation engaged by active multiple discourses, and the authority and influence of differently structured institutions, such as the networked AmeriCorps system, are strengthened.

As witnessed by the AmeriCorps projects included in this thesis, when notions of authority, vision, collaboration, and responsibility are retooled and

stakeholders are willing to rethink the politics of community engagement, features of a participatory discourse emerge. I have argued that features of a tactical discourse emerged within these projects opportunistically, leading to benefits that directly resulted from this innovative, context specific participation. These benefits include shared responsibility, greater creativity and effectiveness, and ultimately, empowerment for those who are traditionally only objects of intervention. What greater achievement for community literacy programs than for adult students to know that their learning programs could not operate without them, indeed that they *are* the program.

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APPENDIX A

STATE FEATURES OF REGULATIVE DISCOURSE

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Hierarchy Primary Stakeholder</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Information Vs. Decision</b>	<b>Rigid Roles</b>	<b>Tasks Split</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x	x		
Pennsylvania	x	x	x		
California	x	x			
Kentucky	x	x	x		
Arizona	x	x	x		
Massachusetts	x	x	x		
Ohio	x			x	x

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Skill/ Opportunity link</b>	<b>Literacy Myth</b>	<b>At risk population</b>	<b>Data/ Technology/ Prof. staff</b>	<b>Personal responsibility</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x	x		
Pennsylvania	x	x	x		
California	x			x	x
Kentucky	x	x	x	x	x
Arizona	x	x	x	x	
Massachusetts	x			x	
Ohio	x	x		x	

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Rigidity</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>	<b>Reporting System</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Evaluative Document</b>	<b>Additional Assurances</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x			
Pennsylvania	x	x	x	x	
California	x	x		x	
Kentucky	x	x		x	x
Arizona	x	x		x	x
Massachusetts	x	x	x	x	x
Ohio	x	x	x	x	x

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Idealistic Language</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Skills</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x			x
Pennsylvania	x	x	x	x	
California	x	x	x		x
Kentucky	x			x	x
Arizona	x	x			x
Massachusetts	x		x	x	
Ohio	x	x	x		

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Mechanic Portrayal Of ABEL</b>	<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	<b>Data Reporting</b>	<b>Use Technology</b>	<b>Intake/Orientation</b>	<b>Monitoring Productive</b>
<i>State Plans</i>					
Oregon	x	x			x
Pennsylvania	x	x			
California	x	x	x	x	x
Kentucky		x	x	x	x
Arizona	x	x	x	x	x
Massachusetts		x			x
Ohio	x	x		x	x

**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Dichotomous</b>	<b>Incentives</b>	<b>Minimum Level Requirements</b>	<b>Competitive Process</b>	<b>Authority</b>
<i>State Plans</i>				
Oregon		x		x
Pennsylvania	x	x	x	
California	x	x	x	
Kentucky			x	
Arizona	x		x	x
Massachusetts		x		x
Ohio		x	x	x



**Discursive Features in State ABEL Systems**

<b>Outside Validation</b>	<b>Assessments</b>	<b>Data Tracking</b>	<b>Prof. Development</b>	<b>Research based Standards</b>	<b>Technology</b>
	<i>State Plans</i>				
Oregon					
Pennsylvania	x		x	x	x
California		x	x	x	x
Kentucky		x	x	x	x
Arizona		x	x	x	x
Massachusetts	x		x		x
Ohio	x			x	

