ABSTRACT

Pre-literate children experience written text as a meaningless material object, the word-object, but the compulsory and institutional aspects of reading pedagogy make this an experience from which they cannot escape. Some children begin to associate their own negative experiential sense with the word-object before they are able to learn to read.

As reading pedagogy continues, these children begin to read back experiential sense which prevents them from converting the word-object to meaningful text. Experiential sense is repressed because it is psychically painful. It retains qualities of phenomena repressed from childhood: it is active and intractable to reason.

The result is an intractable illiteracy which may be interpreted as biologically based “dyslexia.” Further attempts at reading pedagogy in childhood and adulthood generally result in reproduction of the inability because this pedagogy requires learners to attempt to read linguistically which elicits experiential sense. As these children become adults, their avoidance of reading sometimes structures their social relations to accommodate and compound their problems.

The method to overcome the problem replaces experiential sense with positive feelings about written language. The power of language to denote emotions of pleasure and affirmation from learners’ lives is used. These emotions are enhanced through a technique of affirmative intersubjectivity. Short spoken affirmative texts are made by learners, tape recorded and reproduced as written texts by the literacy worker. Through allowing learners control and autonomy over their spoken and written texts, the positive emotions in them are associated by learners with the written texts.

Exercises on the affirmative written texts are used to demonstrate regularities about written language. Learners then progress to reading suitable independent texts and other activities. There are suggestions about how to enhance learners’ feelings as competent readers and writers.

The thesis uses a methodology of action research and includes five case studies of adults with literacy problems. Concepts from social theory, psychoanalysis and object relations theory are used and adapted to understand written language, schooling and illiteracy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A problem with research such as that reported in this thesis is locating people who will participate and persevere with something that *might* help them. Stan, Jim, Philip, Mark and Margaret were such people. To them goes my thanks. The research could not have been completed without them.

My thanks also to Bob Connell whose deft skills as a research supervisor are legendary.

Thanks also to Stephan and Susanne for computer help.

Thesis writing is solitary, pre-occupying and time consuming. I now promise to return to something like my normal state. I make this promise especially to Ella Janneh.
The research described in the body of this thesis was conducted in accordance with the conditions of approval 97/3/9 & 97/8/2 of the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney

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INTRODUCTION
ADULT ILLITERACY AS A PRACTICAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROBLEM

This thesis reports on an action-research study of adult illiteracy. It starts from the assumption that adult illiteracy is a significant problem, the origins and mechanisms of which are still poorly understood. In this Introduction I give details of the extent of adult illiteracy and the main approaches to understanding and overcoming it. I will also describe the aims of the study and how I conducted the research.

Incidence and definition of literacy problems in Australian society

In Australian society and other comparable societies there are some adults who, although they have attended school as children, have literacy problems of varying degrees. While there appears to be no way of knowing the number of adults who are totally illiterate there have been surveys of a wider range of adults with literacy problems.

In a survey of 1,417 adults (aged sixteen years and over) living in the Sydney metropolitan area, in 1973-4, Goyen (1977) found that 3.7% and 43.3% of respondents from English language and non-English speaking language backgrounds respectively were illiterate. Goyen's functional definition of illiteracy was "difficulty in reading and responding to printed material considered relevant to everyday social functioning" (Goyen 1977:26). An incapacity to obtain meaning from 25% of this material was regarded as a "difficulty".
In an Australia-wide survey during 1987-8, Wickert defined literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Wickert 1989:4). Wickert used a sample of 1500 adults aged 18 years and over. Although it is difficult to summarise all her findings, that part of her survey which reflects reading ability concerned what she referred to as “prose literacy”. Respondents were asked to complete reading tasks using texts of different levels. Eighty-four percent of respondents completed the basic task correctly. Wickert comments that "at least 16% of the adult population are estimated to be unable to accurately identify a single matching piece of information in a prose article" (Wickert 1989:18). This figure is complicated by respondents who did not have English as their first language. For example with adults who learnt to speak English before they were five years old, those with a correct score rose from 84% to 91%. This made the proportion of English speakers who could not correctly complete the task 9%. But for those respondents who learnt English after the age of 25, those correctly completing the task dropped to 57%.

In another Australia-wide survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1996 there were 9,302 respondents aged between 15 and 74. This survey had two aspects. Respondents were firstly asked whether they needed help with everyday literacy tasks (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997a). Fourteen percent of people said they needed help with “reading information from government agencies, business or other institutions” (1997a:27). For people who had English as their first language those who said they needed help totalled approximately 10%. For people who did not have English as their first language, approximately 32% of people said they needed help.

Respondents were then objectively measured on a scale of literacy ability (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997b). It was found that 19.7 % of respondents “had very poor skills and could be expected to experience considerable difficulties in using many of the printed materials that may be encountered in daily life”. In addition 27.5% of respondents could be expected to experience “some difficulties” in performing these tasks (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997b:3). With people who did not have English as the first language spoken, the figure for those with difficulties, rose to 48%. For those who did have English as their first language, the figure dropped to 14%.
In Goyen’s survey there was a non-response rate of 27.8% and in the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey the rate was 13%. In Wickert’s survey no non-response figures are given but she does say that people who did not attempt an item were not assumed to have got that item wrong. This presumably means that only those respondents who attempted an item and got it wrong were included in her figures. It should be noted that people who have trouble reading might be far more inclined to not participate in the reading tasks of these surveys, than people who are confident of their reading ability. This suggests that the "illiteracy" levels found by all surveys could be too low.

These surveys establish that there are a considerable number of adults who have reading problems. With non-native speakers the problem may not be one of having a literacy problem as such, but having difficulty with literacy in a second language. With regard to English speaking adults with problems, we may assume (given the history of compulsory education in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) that the great majority of them have been to school. However some of the respondents who did not have English as their first language may not have been schooled. It is a problem with literacy in a first language which I will be examining in this thesis and how schooling may have contributed to that problem. The problem is an inability to learn to read and not the fact that some people cannot read.

In both Goyen’s and Wickert’s surveys the measure of illiteracy is an objective one. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys there are both subjective and objective measures of ability. These measures of literacy should not be confused with definitions of literacy which are philosophical statements about what researchers think literacy is or should be. There is no necessary connection between Wickert’s definition of literacy referred to above and the means by which she measures literacy. For example a person may be able to function in society and achieve all her or his goals but achieve a very low score on the measures devised by Wickert.

In the body of this thesis I have produced five case studies of people who have a reading inability. Rather than recite a number of definitions of literacy or reading ability, I have decided to let descriptions of reading skill emerge from each case study. In these case studies there are great differences in the reading ability of each person. For example in the first case study, Stan was almost
totally illiterate, by which I mean he could not read, while Margaret, in the fifth case study, had a level of literacy that I am sure Stan would have been very happy with. The common factor with each of them was however that they were dissatisfied with their level of reading ability and they felt they were unable to do anything to increase their ability. This is what I mean by reading inability.

Broad approaches to adult literacy

The field of general adult education theory concentrates on the learning styles of adults. Adult literacy could be seen as part of this field, which would lead to a specific view of the issues.

An influential theory of adult education was developed by Knowles (1980). Knowles assumes that adults are self-directed in their learning and that the learning environment should have no similarities to traditional classrooms. While Knowles’ latter point is very appropriate for all adult education, his first point about self direction in fact results in a circularity: adult learning is self-directed and only becomes adult learning when it is self-directed. Practical experience with adult literacy teaching shows that most learners require and ask for direction, not in an authoritarian sense, but because they have not been successful with prior learning in school and they have very limited formal learning strategies.

Other writers on adult education such as Brookfield (1985, 1986, 1987) are critical of how self-directed learning has become something of an orthodoxy. The concept refers to a generic adult and as a result the specificity of different adult groupings is lost. In fact, Brookfield suggests, the research into self directed learning is biased because most of the subjects “have attained an education level above the average. To assume that the behaviours exhibited by these educationally advantaged adults will be displayed by adults from a range of different class and ethnic backgrounds is to say the least highly questionable. The research is biased towards white, middle class Americans” (Brookfield 1985:51).

Adults with reading difficulties will be very unlikely to have attained an education level above the average. Their learning needs are highly specific. This will make most of the ideas from general adult education theory not relevant to them. Accordingly we must look for guidance more specifically to the literature on adult illiteracy.
There are two main schools of thought regarding the origin of reading failure and the way to teach adults with reading problems. One sees the origin of the problem in the nature of schooling which has class biases and irrelevancies for children. On this view, overcoming reading problems involves providing adults with a learning context which focuses on them as adults and their adult status but which nevertheless uses conventional transmission techniques of teaching. I will call this view compensatory pedagogy because it attempts to make up for what these adults were deprived of as children.

The other school of thought assumes that those adults who have not learnt to read in school are likely to have biologically based neurological deficits, not general deficits but deficits which are particular to written language. These people are described as learning disabled. They have a physiologically based problem which prevented them learning as children and this problem continues into adulthood. They require special pedagogical procedures called special education. Their problems are frequently called “dyslexia”.

Compensatory pedagogy tends to see the problem within the institution of schooling. As I have already noted it attempts to address the problem through conventional techniques and remains optimistic that these techniques are adequate, provided they are adapted to adult concerns.

Special education on the other hand sees the problem within the individual. In this approach there is minimal criticism of the institution of schooling. The only criticism is that mainstream schooling is not appropriate for learning disabled people. As children they require special schools and as learning disabled adults they also require special teachers.

These two different approaches to a certain extent reflect issues of social class. Compensatory pedagogy is more oriented to working class people because it is generally these people who have experienced the class biases and irrelevancies of formal education. Compensatory pedagogy is to be found mainly in state funded public institutions where it is called adult basic education. Special education, on the other hand, is generally not free education provided by the state. It is typically privately funded, and requires the resources of the middle class to pay for special schools and specially
trained private providers. Thus the tendency arises for “dyslexia” to be referred to as a middle class disease and “illiteracy” as a working class syndrome.

This dichotomy of compensatory pedagogy and special education is based on ideal types. In practice, actual instances of educational provision may contain all the features to which I have referred. A teacher may begin to assist an adult with reading difficulties by using a conventional approach based on whole language methods while being sensitive to the learner’s self esteem and previous difficulties in school. The teacher may then move to an approach using phonics. If this is unsuccessful, and the teacher is trained in the area, he or she may use special education techniques.

I will now discuss and give samples of both these views, compensatory pedagogy first.

**Compensatory pedagogy**

Mace (1979) ascribes literacy problems to the class nature of literacy and the class nature of the British school system. According to her, middle class parents use literacy at home and in work and give this skill to their children. Middle class parents are able to communicate better with school teachers so that when problems do arise at school, these parents are able to arrange special treatment for their children. Working class children have none of these advantages. This, according to Mace, accounts for the greater number of working class adult illiterates. So Mace sees working class children as wronged and deprived of a proper education. Adult literacy assistance therefore involves compensation and is a continuation of education which employs conventional pedagogical techniques.

In North America, Jones (1981) notes a scarcity of literature on the teaching of adult literacy and then, in contrast to Mace's class based analysis, does attribute some importance to prior schooling, and the importance of school failure in developing of a negative self concept in illiterate adults. This, says Jones, may result in the avoidance of further learning. Teachers must be sensitive to these problems. The approach taken by Jones however is in substance the same as that taken by Mace: a continuation of school pedagogy with a sensitivity to the special problems of these learners.
A similar position is adopted by Stevenson (1985) in his survey of illiteracy in the British army, though he attempts to understand background factors of students to a greater degree than Jones. Some of the factors found by Stevenson were low socio-economic positions of families and a high incidence of problems with school or negative attitudes to school. Stevenson's generalisation on this latter point is that for 62% of the students "school had ceased to have any meaning---an organisation having no relevance to the realities of life" (Stevenson 1985:131).

While Stevenson refers to the mere irrelevancy of school, Johnston (1985) attempts a deeper analysis. He understands adult reading failure through the personal history of learners which includes cognitive, social and affective factors. He is critical of approaches which see reading as an isolated mental act divorced from its broader context. In particular, Johnston focuses on anxiety and inappropriate reading strategies, which he traces to learners’ school experiences. He is critical of school practices which do not identify reading difficulty at an early stage, claiming that the longer the difficulty goes undetected, the harder it becomes to remedy. Johnston claims that schooling and reading aloud in school are productive of the problem. Although Johnston analysed adult reading failure, his main concern is school education. His reason for selecting adult subjects was that mature persons with reading failure are better able to report on their own mental processes than children. Accordingly Johnston offers no strategy for dealing with adult problems but instead turns to the solution of early intervention in school.

Some writers who attempt to broaden the context of adult literacy are those who apply the methods of Paulo Freire in western countries. Lankshear and Lawler (1989) place literacy in an ideological context rather than seeing it as a neutral technical skill. They argue that literacy teaching should be grounded in the daily practices and development of students. Lankshear and Lawler use as an example countries such as Nicaragua where teachers and peasant students were engaged in a common struggle against an enemy. Although there is no specific criticism of schooling by Lankshear and Lawler there is implicit criticism in that literacy teaching in western countries is taught as an ideologically neutral skill. In Australian society teachers and students met in a classroom for a defined period of time which is the extent of their contact. For the teacher, this contact is a work situation. There may also be many other factors which separate them such as age, class and general life experiences. Furthermore, most of the
literacy learners in Nicaragua were unschooled which is a point of fundamental difference ignored by Lankshear and Lawler.

Shor (1980,1992) has greater relevance for contemporary western societies with compulsory schooling. He combines criticism of schooling and society with an understanding of students’ disengagement from critical thinking. Most of Shor’s literacy work aims at enhancing existing literacy skills rather than creating an elementary ability. He recognises that students feel negative about writing, but they are able to write (and read). The important point is that Shor traces much of the negativity about writing and tertiary education to schooling. Put very briefly, it is hierarchical teaching and the irrelevant and reified content of schooling which has created this negativity. Shor says “education is experienced by students as something done to them, not something they do. They see it as alien and controlling” (Shor 1992:20). By reversing this process and introducing dialogue about the lives of his students, he attempts to expand literacy skills and increase awareness of the political and social reality of students’ lives. In a sense this is also compensatory pedagogy because Shor seeks to make up for the negativity produced by years of schooling. However the level of literacy at which Shor is beginning is far beyond that found in adult basic education. His aim is critical literacy rather than literacy as such.

Moving away from critiques of schooling but retaining analysis which focuses on social factors outside of schooling, Grant (1986) has developed a theory of the origins of illiteracy based on the insecurity of the illiterate adult. The failure to learn reading and writing at school is caused by this insecurity. "[T]he origins of this fear can best be understood in the students’ early experience of family. Studied in depth, the personal and family history of the students lend support to the finding that behind the failure to learn literacy at school are unmet psychological needs, persisting from pre-school years and in most cases associated with estrangement or separation from the father, coupled with extreme mother/child dependency” (Grant 1986: 41-42). Although Grant considers schooling, she maintains that the insecurities referred to above are already present in the child during schooling and produce a totally negative experience of it. Accordingly, Grant concludes (1986:41): "The greatest stumbling blocks to their learning lie outside the school experience". In this argument there is an implicit idea of compensatory pedagogy in which the teaching of adult learners with these characteristics requires an understanding and sensitivity to their particular needs.
Coles’ (1987) main concern is to dispute many of the biologically based explanations of reading problems. He puts forward an environmental counter argument and for this reason his ideas are connected with compensatory pedagogy. Very briefly, Coles’ argument is that there are in some families, factors “that adversely affect children’s cognitive development and strongly contribute to the creation of learning disabilities” (Coles 1987:146). Some children lack the prerequisites for learning to read such as understanding the decontextualised nature of written language and phonemic skills. “When this happens”, says Coles, “schools will not consider the instruction to be insufficient; rather the insufficiency will be identified within the children who fail” (Coles 1987:158). This results in schools making judgments about these children’s learning ability which the children internalise. They then act in accordance with this self image.

Special education

The biologically based claims which are the rationale of special education originate mainly in North America. In the United States, legislation and Government funding provides opportunities and help for people with disabilities, which includes people with learning disabilities. According to Brackett and McPherson (1996) this has resulted in the institutions being overwhelmed with requests for assistance. It has also resulted in learning disabilities becoming an “industry” in the United States with a large number of specialist journals and organisations. In Australia there is not the same level of organisation or diagnosis. However there are organisations within each Australian State which promote the idea of learning disability as a biological category. In Australia, these organisations conduct training sessions in special education techniques and often act as a referral source to special educators. There is also an element of proselytising by these organisations for the cause of biologically based learning disabilities.

Adults and children who are diagnosed with learning disabilities are from homes which are not "dysfunctional". They have parents who are themselves literate and they attended schools which are generally considered to be pedagogically adequate. They are intellectually "normal" in all respects other than in formal education and literacy in particular. Coles (1987: xii) says that reading “is the most
common disability, so much so that calling a child learning disabled is understood to mean reading disabled”.

Coles also points to the middle class origins of the biological paradigm. He says that the usual labels of “mental retardation” and “cultural deprivation” were not considered appropriate by middle class parents for their children. This view is supported by Ross-Gordon (1996) and Carrier (1987). However Sleeter (1987) also focuses on the role of teachers in diagnoses of learning disability. Sleeter says that these diagnoses often arise from teachers’ identifying a problem within a student that teachers are unable to deal with alone. Under-achievement in reading is the main learning problem but Sleeter notes that there is in addition often a behaviour problem. She says that “The real LD child is one the regular teacher sees as a problem, usually because he or she reads at a level lower than the teacher expects and therefore achieves poorly in other areas as well, and often because he or she displays distracting or annoying behavior”(Sleeter 1987:74)

As Coles notes there may be disagreement among theorists who accept the biological paradigm about the exact nature of learning disabilities, but they agree that neurological deficits are the underlying cause. This biological reductionism is part of the general medicalisation of deviance noted by Erchak and Rosenfeld (1989). These authors observe that the medicalisation of learning problems occurs because middle-class parents are anxious to de-stigmatise their children's educational failure, to change labels such as "lazy" to more "scientific" and less judgemental ones.

In her recent review of research into learning disabilities Vogel (1998), who supports the biological paradigm, has identified four areas of deficit which are responsible for learning problems. The first is the lack of phonological skills widely understood as the most important deficit. Vogel accepts that this is an “inherited trait” and says that “One of the locations of this genetic marker has been found to be on chromosome 6 in the vicinity of the gene related to autoimmune disorders” (Vogel 1998:19). Secondly, there are pathological aspects of the brain such as cell loss and alterations to the usual asymmetry between the hemispheres of the brain. Thirdly, there is research which has found limited brain activity in dyslexic people during reading tasks compared to the activity levels found in non-dyslexic people. Finally, Vogel refers to disturbances in blood flow to the brain.
Vogel is typical of learning disability theorists in her uncritical acceptance of the biological paradigm. Learning disability theorists do not entertain broader ideas involving explanation via experience. Perhaps the experiences discussed below are unknown to these theorists, or if they are known then writers such as Vogel are unable to incorporate them into their understanding of the problem.

It is not possible to give an account of all the techniques which special educators use. However because lack of phonological skills is thought to be the main problem of learning disabled people, many of the practical techniques of special educators focus on building these skills. Lindamood et al (1974) provided a starting point for many techniques with the “Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization” test of individual ability to hear different sounds within spoken language. In this test children link language sounds to coloured blocks. They then indicate which blocks represent particular sounds spoken by the tester. Lindamood found that there was a positive correlation between ability with this task and reading ability.

According to Frost and Emery (1995) recent research shows that most children with dyslexia have phonological core deficits. This deficit involves difficulty with segmenting words into discrete syllables or phonemes and difficulty combining speech sounds into whole words. Teachers are urged to give intensive instruction in the phonemes and syllables of language through analysis, segmenting and blending of speech sounds. Frost and Emery claim that when language sounds are represented by blocks, children are able to learn how to rearrange phonemes in words. This linking of spoken sounds to concrete objects has been used by many teachers who accept the biological paradigm.

Podhajski (1998) is even more radical. She maintains that many students with reading problems “lack the prerequisite understanding of the basic syllable and sound units within spoken language” (Podhajski 1998:205). Teachers should begin teaching adults and children how to segment the sounds in spoken language, says Podhajski and only when this skill is acquired should written language be introduced. Then the procedures based on Lindamood and various other multisensory methods of linking sounds to written letters can be used.
An elaborate “multisensory” approach to teaching reading to children and adults with learning problems comes from Wilson (1998). She advocates the teaching of a pre-defined 12 stage sequence of skills. Learners must master each sequence before advancing to the next stage. In stages 1 to 5 the emphasis is on decoding: sound cards, word cards and drill are used to teach phonemes. The emphasis moves to encoding in stages 6 to 8 where similar techniques of cards and drill are used. Stages 9 to 10 concentrate on reading comprehension: firstly, students read passages containing only the learnt word elements and re-tell the passage; secondly, independent texts are read to students which they again re-tell. Stages 11 and 12 appear to be advanced phonemic analysis. The “multisensory” content in Wilson’s technique is finger tapping with different fingers for different sounds.

This small sample of techniques used by some special educators amounts to a hyper-intensive teaching of mainly phonological skills. As I have already said these techniques are based on the supposed correlation between phonological skill and reading ability. It seems to be assumed that the ability to segment spoken words into their discrete phones is an innate skill and the absence of this skill is a deficit. There is however another view which seriously questions this assumption.

Scholes and Willis (1991) say that language acquisition theory has ignored the part played by reading skills and literacy in developing ability to segment words into morphemic and phonemic elements in alphabetic orthographies. Scholes (1997) argues that the ability to hear the phonic segments in speech is in fact a consequence of literacy and not a cause or a precursor of literacy. This view reverses the relation between spoken and written language claimed by the special educators referred to above. Scholes (1997:18) concludes that “[w]hat is surprising is that the belief in a phonological basis for reading development and skill is so stubbornly maintained in the face of so much common sense and scientific evidence.”

**Participation and outcomes in compensatory pedagogy**

It is difficult to appraise the outcomes of both compensatory pedagogy and special education because there are varying assessments of their efficacy.
With regard to compensatory pedagogy there is the rather gloomy overview of Charnley and Jones (1979) from the United Kingdom. Charnley and Jones point to limited gains with reading, perhaps only an ability to read a few sentences, and even more limited gains with writing. The main successes many adult learners pointed to were in their own self-confidence and interpersonal relationships. This contrasts with Freire's rapid success with literacy teaching in unschooled societies.

Most adult literacy learners find learning difficult. These difficulties are not well documented and there appears to be an expectation amongst teachers that outcomes in terms of acquisition of literacy skills will be limited. An example is Osmond (1986:36) who says: "It is the experience of Adult Literacy workers that most students resist any real engagement in writing”.

Brennan, et al. (1989) conducted a national survey of adult literacy outcomes in Australia using responses from 521 participants in adult literacy programs. They limited the survey to adults who had English as their first language and excluded what the authors refer to as “developmentally disabled” persons (Brennan et al.1989:13). To some extent, they followed Charnley and Jones’ research in that they included categories other than cognitive outcomes. Students were asked about their perceptions of several outcome categories. They were asked to consider how they felt about these categories both before they began the literacy program and after they had participated in the program. No attempt was made to measure skills acquired through the programs.

Ninety two percent of respondents reported favourable outcomes which were spread across the outcome categories. Significantly, expected cognitive outcomes (i.e. general intellectual literacy ability) declined from 48% to an actual outcome of 41%. Furthermore affective personal change (i.e. self-esteem and confidence) increased from an expected 16% to an actual 50%. These results have led Brennan (1990:49) to claim that that if adults with literacy problems enter a literacy program, then it is very likely that “their expectations are likely to be fulfilled and they are, in fact, likely to achieve more than they expected.” Brennan further claims (1990:50) that over 90% of respondents “made some gains, reaching and going beyond, in many cases, their initial expectations. The outcomes of their experiences in the literacy programs changed their whole lives.”
Brennan’s claims are a little extravagant and beg the question about participation. Firstly, there was no monitoring of which students were selected for participation in the research. From the published figures it is difficult to see how long students were in the programs. But from a rough estimate it seems that approximately 60% of participating students were in the programs for more than 12 months and 80% were in programs for 7 or more months. In voluntary programs if the responses of participants who continue to participate for these lengths of time are taken, then the outcomes will, almost by definition, be positive because students will not continue to participate if they feel they are not obtaining benefits.

Secondly, there was no attempt to calculate the number of students who dropped out of programs shortly after they began although Brennan et al. (1989) do say that a total of 44 persons refused to participate in the research. From my personal teaching experience of adult literacy classes the drop out rate is at least 50%. While there are no published figures in Australia, there are figures from the United States of America. Young et al (1994) claim that the drop out rate is approximately 60% after 12 weeks.

The aspect of question begging in Brennan’s statement is “if adults” enter a literacy program because the evidence says that most adults do not take this step. Grant (1987) estimates that less than 5% of Australian adults in need of literacy assistance actually obtain it. Wikelund et al. (1992) refer to research which shows that there is a similar 5% participation rate in the United States. Two of the surveys of literacy discussed above conclude, from objective tests, that between 9% and 14% of adult Australians who have English as their first language have literacy problems. The figure for NESB Australians is much higher. But nowhere near the number of adult Australians who need help seek help.

This difference between the number of people who need help and the number who seek it cannot be explained away by arguing that people are unaware of and/or manage despite their problems. This is because on their own assessment 10% of people said they needed help with everyday literacy tasks (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997a). And as I noted above the figures for literacy difficulties could be much higher than surveys reveal.
In another Australian survey Griffen et al. (1997) found a variety of positive outcomes of literacy classes including increases in employment, cognitive skills and functional literacy. The findings of this survey are complicated by the large number of NESB participants in the courses surveyed. It is likely that the results are valid for students who are learning to read and write in English but not for adults whose first language is English.

Beder (1999) presents a study of literacy outcomes in which there is a possibility of differentiating between NESB learners and native English speakers. This was a compilation of 23 surveys of adult literacy classes in the United States which the author considered credible. One of the criteria for credibility was whether there were reliable and objective measures, rather than self reports, of outcomes. After noting that there were small gains on tested skills for English speaking participants, Beder concluded that overall there was insufficient evidence to reach any real conclusion on whether compensatory programs had any measurable effect at all.

My conclusion about compensatory pedagogy is that it has very uncertain outcomes. It repeats conventional techniques of learning which have already been unsuccessfully tried with the same students at earlier points in their lives. But there is no uncertainty about participation rates: they are extremely low.

**Outcomes of special education**

As I said above, the main deficit which learning disability theorists identify is that concerning phonological skills. It is impossible to give outcomes of all the techniques which try to deal with this supposed deficit. One of the techniques is Lindamood’s Auditory Discrimination in Depth Program (Lindamood and Lindamood 1969) in which students learn to discriminate the individual sounds in words and letters. There is research on this technique which has found it to be of limited use. The other techniques based on phonological deficits, to which I have referred, may be found to have similar outcomes, if reliable appraisals of them were available.
Roberts (1975) found that when students were given Lindamood’s Auditory Discrimination in Depth Program there were no gains in reading achievement compared to a group which did not receive the program. A very similar outcome was obtained by Kennedy and Backman (1993) who compared the outcomes of students who received a standard remedial program with those who received the same remedial program plus the Lindamood program. It was found that the Lindamood group developed better phonological awareness and phonetic spelling strategies but when compared to the non-Lindamood group, their gains in actual reading and spelling were not significant. That is, the Lindamood technique taught students an abstract set of skills which were of little use for real literacy tasks.

Apart from the efficacy of specific techniques employed by special educators, there is more general research which shows that the problems of learning disabled children continue into adulthood despite their special education. Coles (1987) argues that most children have been helped very little by special education techniques. He says that these children generally have very limited academic progress and, as adults, their problems continue. This leads to “destructive effects on their feeling of self worth, personal relationships, and job opportunities and performance. The personal and psychological turmoil often continues to increase exponentially and, for a learning disabled adult, can reach critical levels” (Coles 1987:xiv).

Although Coles is a critic of the biological paradigm there is more recent research which supports his claims. The more recent research comes from within the special education establishment and from people who are likely to be supporters of biological explanation.

Gerber et al. (1990) analysed details from a group of learning disabled adults who were highly successful in employment and from a group who were moderately successful in employment. Gerber et al. (1990:571) concluded that “[a]n overwhelming trend in the data shows that more subjects rated their specific problems as getting worse when comparing school age to adult years. This was true for both groups and across many items…the percentages shown for getting better are relatively insignificant in both groups”. In the highly successful group 51% of respondents said their reading had become worse in adulthood and 47% of respondents said their writing skills had become worse. In the
moderately successful group the figures for getting worse in adulthood were 54% (reading) and 45% (writing).

In a study of factors affecting decisions of young adults to participate in postsecondary education, Miller et al. (1990) said that many young adults with learning disabilities are less satisfied with their jobs and are working at lower level jobs, compared to their non-disabled peers. Miller et al. cite research which says that in one year of leaving school, 8 out of 10 learning disabled students are unemployed, or underemployed and live below the poverty line. Miller et al. linked many of the employment difficulties to absence of postsecondary education. They found, not surprisingly, that the those learning disabled students participating in postsecondary education had significantly better reading and maths skills than those who did not participate.

White (1992) in a review of 13 research studies into the postschool adjustments of persons with learning disabilities, found that their problems continued into adulthood. White said the studies demonstrate that a majority of the adults still had considerable problems in reading, spelling and arithmetic. These problems said White (1992:454) “frequently cause problems in the vocational and social domains, as evidenced by the adults’ high unemployment rates, underemployment, and general lack of satisfaction with their personal and vocational lives.” The result, White concludes, is that a low number of these adults are independent and self-sufficient.

In an ethnographic study of the lives of 14 learning disabled adults, Shessel and Reiff (1999) found both positive and negative impacts associated with the continuing disabilities of these adults. Six of the adults reported positive outcomes the main one being greater resilience and strength through having to cope with their learning problems. However the negative outcomes were substantial. These included feelings of social isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide. Emotional health was a major issue for the participants in this study: “Stress and anxiety played a role in almost all aspects of their lives…Three participants spoke of the physical health costs such as severe migraines and neck problems related to their anxiety and stress” (Shessel and Reiff 1999:310). There was also the continuing problem of the lack of skills associated with their “disability” the hiding of which was the major cause of anxiety and stress. Shessel and Reiff (1999:314) conclude that “clearly,
learning disabilities persist throughout the lifespan, sometimes becoming even more problematic in adulthood.”

All the research on special education referred to above comes from the United States where, as I have said, the learning disabilities field is an “industry”. There is no similar quantity of research on the outcomes and impact on adults who have simple illiteracy and have not been labeled as learning disabled. A similar amount of research on this type of illiteracy may result in similar findings particularly on self-esteem and emotional difficulties. The overall conclusion on special education however is that it, like compensatory pedagogy, has very uncertain outcomes.

**Aims and structure of the research**

In the following chapters I try to make intelligible the difficulties of adults with literacy problems. In particular I ask the question of whether it is possible to understand these problems as an outcome of schooling. The second question I ask is whether it is possible from this understanding, to develop a method for overcoming reading problems.

In the course of this discussion, the answers to three ancillary questions should become clear: why so few adults with literacy problems do seek assistance; why there are limited outcomes in compensatory pedagogy and special education; and why the attribution of literacy problems to biology may, in many cases, be unjustified.

Education is not a theoretical activity but an activity which changes people through adopting a course of action, an educational practice. Educators engage in educational practice and it is educational theory which should guide this action. Accordingly, the overall methodology I have adopted is based on action-research techniques. I attempt to deal with the practical educational problem of adult illiteracy. In doing so I do not offer a mere interpretation of the problem or a theoretical solution, but a method or course of action to deal with it, which I apply in case studies.
Action-research attempts to reduce the gap between theory and practice by producing theory from the practical context in which theory is applied: the educational or learning context. Carr and Kemmis (1986) indicate four moments in this process as planning, action, observation and reflection. These four steps continue until there is some practical resolution to the educational problem.

In the case of my research this model must be modified. Because there are already well-established practices and explanations dealing with adult illiteracy (referred to above), the initial planning moment of the research is considerable because it requires substantial conceptual critique. The need for this initial planning is made even greater because the guiding hypothesis of the research asserts that it is educational practice itself which contributes to illiteracy.

This initial planning moment is described in Chapter One which sets up the plan of action which I apply in the first case study. The initial planning examines two questions: the nature of written text for illiterate children, and illiterate children’s experience of written text in school. In the chapters which follow, I develop five case studies of adults who have problems with reading. In these case studies there are recurring moments of action or application of the method.

Each of the subsequent case studies in the thesis recapitulates the four research moments. Because each case study applies the method to a different subject, the moments of reflection and planning described by Carr and Kemmis (1986), are adapted to the particular characteristics of each case study. These different characteristics drive the reflection and planning because of the difficulties encountered in applying a general method to specific cases. The result is an accumulation of theory and method which becomes increasingly detailed.

During the planning and reflection moments I draw on concepts which are not specific to education. Many of these concepts come from social theory, psychoanalysis and object relations theory. My reason for doing this is the explanatory power which these concepts offer in understanding the psychology of emotion, and the ideas of practical intervention which the concepts point to.
In taking this interdisciplinary view of the problem I was also influenced by Foucault (1984). He refers to the way one discourse excludes other discourses, but proposes that when knowledge is organised into disciplines, which for Foucault appears to mean a narrower confine of discourse, the exclusions become even greater. Here there appear to be criteria for the construction of new statements within that discipline. The result according to Foucault is that "a discipline is not the sum of all that can be truthfully said about something...Medicine is not constituted by the total of what can be truthfully said about illness; botany cannot be defined by all the truths concerning plants" (Foucault 1984:118). Because education is intersubjective human practice, the discipline of education does not contain all the truths concerning problems with learning.

CHAPTER ONE
THE WORD TAKEN FOR GRANTED

In this chapter I develop a plan of the concepts and central hypothesis upon which I base the first case study. Because written language and schooling are two aspects of our society in which we all participate, there are certain to be taken-for-granted qualities about any investigation of either. When analysis concerns the relationship between the two, the risk of these qualities obscuring understanding becomes even greater. There are two main themes which I explore: the nature of written text for illiterate children; and illiterate children’s experience of written text in school.

PART ONE: THE NATURE OF WRITTEN TEXT FOR ILLITERATE CHILDREN

In alphabetic writing the word supposedly corresponds phonetically to the spoken word. In ideographic scripts there is no such correspondence and written signifiers directly signify meaning. In some languages which are relatively "pure", such as Spanish, there is considerable grapheme-phoneme correspondence. English, because of its hybrid nature, its many importations of words from other languages and the peculiar history of its spelling, has a low grapheme-phoneme correspondence. While there are many regularities in spelling there are also many irregularities, and confusing homophones and homographs. Learner readers may use spoken language as a first order symbolism which mediates
written language as a second order symbolism, but mature readers proceed directly from the written text to meaning.

Because of the low grapheme-phoneme correspondence there are two main approaches to teaching of reading to children, namely the phonic and the whole language methods. These two approaches are sometimes seen as mutually exclusive with teachers taking a dogmatic position on one approach or the other. Chall (1996) calls this the “great debate” and she has collected evidence from supporters of both positions but, appears to favour phonics as the more efficacious method. While each position has its adherents, most teachers in practice are likely to be pragmatic and use a blend of both methods.

If a reader is reading phonetically there is a recoding by the reader of letters to sound rather than a decoding (Goodman 1973). It does not necessarily follow that because the reader is able to successfully recode to sound, that the signified meaning of the written text is obtained. While the correct sound may be obtained, meaning may be misunderstood or not comprehended.

The “whole language” method focuses upon whole texts and whole word recognition, claiming that words and not individual letters are what readers recognise. This approach also emphasises context within which words are used. Whole word recognition is the process which characterises mature and efficient reading: the whole word and blocks of words as visual entities are what readers read, and not component letters. The approach teaches children strategies used in this process.

There is another view of literacy teaching which I referred to in the introduction, in connection with adults. This is the view taken by Shor (1980, 1992) who attempts to make literacy more relevant to his students by introducing dialogue or discourse which is directly relevant to their lives.

The significance of discourse in literacy teaching in schools has been noted by a number of writers. Luke (1993) says that language learning is an integral part of everyday social relations. When children begin school, they are not tabula rasa but have an existing set of linguistic practices which may complement or be at variance with existing practices of the school. These textual resources include all children’s knowledge and experience of written and spoken texts. Divergence between these
resources and the linguistic practices of the classroom may result in those children who are not part of the dominant or mainstream culture feeling estranged from the texts which the classroom teacher is using.

Lankshear (1997) observes that this divergence is not a conscious process but the result is that discourses of dominant groups become established as the discourses of education. Those children who are successful at school are likely to be those who go to school with discursive speech practices that are complementary with those of the teacher.

Put simply one explanation for literacy problems could be this divergence of discourses. The solution could be in the recognition of divergent discourses and the development of teaching strategies which incorporate them. This aspect of teaching reading and the way it contrasts with more conventional approaches has been discussed by Gee (1999, 2000, 2001).

Gee describes language as being social and contextualised rather than it being one closed generic system. Situated language is about how different groups of people experience the world, their action in it, their values and feelings. In particular, Gee says that language is integral to perspective taking on the world. During interpersonal exchanges people use language to express differing perspectives about the world. This embodied nature of language, rather than its abstract nature, is what Gee calls discourse. According to Gee the teaching of reading must involve learners’ different ways of understanding and acting, in particular their different perspectives on experience. Teaching must be in the broader context of children’s existing language practices. Gee refers to this approach as the “New Literacy Studies” (Gee 1999:356).

However Gee does not say in detail how the New Literacy Studies approach should be applied in actual teaching in standard classrooms. But this has not prevented him from engaging in debates with those writers espousing the more conventional approaches to the teaching of reading to which I have referred, namely phonics and whole language methods. Gee (1999) has taken issue with these approaches as they are reported in Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998). Gee claims that his viewpoint “disavows dichotomies between, and debates over, phonics and whole language. It disavows these
not by ‘blending’ the two, but by disavowing both of them” (Gee 1999:358). Gee wants to limit the focus on decontextualised skills in the teaching of reading and draw upon the embodied, situated language resources of children.

Snow (2000) replies that Gee and the New Literacy approach generally refuse to recognise that learning to read is a developmental process tied to cognitive changes within children. In the mastering of reading, research has consistently found, claims Snow, the need for the decontextualised sub-skills which Gee rejects. Snow appears to accept comments by writers such as Adams (1990:3) that “unless the processes involved in individual word recognition operate properly, nothing else in the [reading] system can either.”

In this debate the role of phonics re-appears as the particular sub-skill in dispute. Gee makes the quite valid observation that although many children with high phonological skills do become competent readers, this connection is a correlational one and not causative. In Snow et al (1998) there is, Gee claims, evidence that children’s high phonological skills are themselves the result of good language abilities and that many children with poor phonological skills also become good readers. This observation is consistent with the remarks by Scholes (1997) to which I referred in the Introduction, about phonological ability being a consequence of literacy rather than a cause.

Although Gee’s observations on the broad social basis of language may be correct the question becomes a practical one of how these observations may be implemented in the contemporary reading classroom. For the teacher the problem remains one of how to teach. The need for teaching individual word recognition skills in the classroom may be an expedient for the teacher because of the demands of this institutional teaching situation. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, the work situation for teachers has significant institutional constraints which dramatically affect how they work and how children experience written language. These constraints are not mentioned by Gee or Snow.

However there is a level on which written “language” exists which precedes discourse and signification for a reader. The operative word here is “reader”. Logically, if written text does not signify meaning for people who are attempting to read it but they are unable to do so, then there cannot be meaning or
discourse within the text for those people. This pre-discourse level of “language” should become evident from my analysis of the written linguistic sign and my discussion of the word-object in this chapter.

Whatever method is used, most of reading pedagogy involves children attempting to read either by themselves, or in the presence of a teacher. But instruction in phonics or whole language techniques by a teacher, prior to reading proper, involves the presence of letters as phonemes or whole words, and recognition of their relation to spoken language. These forms of instruction are tantamount to defacto “reading”. As Smith (1985) suggests, learning to read is accomplished through actually attempting to read.

While the debate focuses on pedagogy in school, it is important to recognise that children do have considerable experience with written text before they begin school and before they are able to read.

Pre-literate children and their relationship to written text

The first aspect of this relation is awareness of text without assessing how this awareness contributes to becoming literate. I will discuss two writers in this regard.

Heath (1987), in her study of three communities in the United States, found that pre-school children from a black working class community were aware of print and frequently asked what print said. The older children engaged in games in which they showed their reading skills to pre-schoolers. In a white working class community, parents expected more from their pre-school children, frequently asking them questions about the content of books which parents or older children read to them. Before they go to kindergarten these children are given work books in which they are encouraged to begin experimenting with writing. Heath concludes that “These adult supervised experiences reinforce repeatedly that the written word can be taken apart into small pieces and one item linked to another by following certain rules” (Heath 1987:228). In the middle class community, Heath found that children
were oriented to print when they were babies with their rooms being decorated with characters from books. They had toys which referred to the world of print and acknowledged its importance. Generally, Heath found that these children grew up in an environment where the significance of print as a decontextualised medium was consistently emphasised so much so that “they come to act like literates before they can read” (Heath 1987:256).

In another study, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) say that immersion in a world of print in contemporary societies means that most children develop their own ideas about the nature of written text and have criteria by which they decide what is readable, before they go to school. The authors conclude “that long before knowing how to read, children are capable of dealing with texts in terms of certain specific formal characteristics” (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982:50). While Ferreiro and Teberosky say that this knowledge of pre-school children may not always amount to understanding that print is a representation of language, it is however a graphic representation of meaning.

Even if some children are not aware that written text is a representation of language before they go to school, after they begin school they certainly learn this fact. All reading pedagogy involves relating written letters to meaning and/or spoken language. It also involves attempts at reading by children. By the time of their second year at school all children must know the relationship between written text and language whether or not they are able to read.

The second aspect of this relation is how awareness of print specifically contributes to literacy. The terms "pre-reading skills" or "reading readiness" have been used to describe this type of awareness. This term is now being replaced by "emergent literacy".

Holdaway (1979) in justification of this new term refers to a demeaning of these early skills by the use of the former terms. There is, says Holdaway, a continuity between these early skills and "mature reading" or "true reading" (Holdaway 1979:56-7). In a similar fashion Goodman, (1986) refers to the five roots of literacy. The two roots which refer to reading are an "awareness" of situationally and non-situationally embedded text as representations of meaning (Goodman 1986:6-10). Generally, these roots of literacy are for Goodman knowledge about literacy rather than literacy itself. Further, Teale
and Sulzby (1986) stress the continuities between "conventional" reading and emergent literacy. They say that in "children's early literacy experiences, many of the motives, functions, and uses associated with writing and reading and the psycholinguistic processes employed in writing and reading are identical to those [of] adults and other literate persons " (Teale and Sulzby 1986:xx).

All the writers referred to in the last paragraph are dealing with learning to read as a cognitive event. However, they refer to emergent literacy or the roots of literacy as distinct from literacy proper. For Holdaway, this other literacy is "mature or true reading". In Goodman the roots of literacy are called an "awareness". Teale and Sulzby refer to continuity with many of the processes of adult and other literacy.

Different children have different understandings of the uses, potentials and possibilities of literacy. Teale (1986) observed the different quantities and qualities of emergent literacy in low income households in the United States. He found that only 3 out of 24 children were read to on a regular basis. A particular absence noted by Teale was that of literacy associated with work, which contrasted with the presence of this form of literacy in middle class homes found by other researchers. Nevertheless, amongst these varieties and absences Teale found that the three children who were read to on a regular basis "to be among the most highly developed of the 24 focal children in terms of emergent literacy ability" (Teale 1986:196). Generally, Teale noted the wide variety of cultural and social factors that influenced the literacy practices in the participant homes. While class and ethnicity may be factors they, by themselves, were not determining factors.

There is an analogy between the use of literacy, and the use of tools. Children from homes where parents perform mechanical repairs are likely to have a greater understanding of the possibilities and uses of a wrench, for example, than children from homes where parents do not do not have these practices. The case with literacy practice in individual homes is similar. As Teale (1986) found, the practices differ in relation to written text and children develop different understandings of its emergent possibilities. However the similarities end here. Social practices with tools limit the representations and usage of tools to tools as material objects. Social practice with written text concerns its transcendence as a material object. Until this transcendence occurs through signification, until text’s
emergent possibilities are actualised in signification, text remains a material object. As Goodman (1982:2) observes, there is no precise and observable point at which children become literate. There is, however a fundamental difference between the ontological status of written text at the two different stages.

Theories of emergent literacy understand literacy only as that which is waiting to be formed. Linguistic meaning seems to inhere in the written word and is there to be found by children. Text is text and nothing else. There is no ambiguity or tension about what the word is. The written linguistic sign is a unitary fact and taken for granted.

**The linguistic sign**

Saussure, (1983) however, divided the linguistic sign into two parts. The *signifier* is a physical sound pattern or material element and the *signified* is a concept. The link between the two is associative and the whole formed thereby is the sign. This conceptualisation of language was extended by Saussure to written signs (Saussure 1983:26-27). For Saussure, a general science of signs called semiology could be conceived of and linguistics should form a branch of this science if and when it comes into existence.

Saussure refers to the arbitrary relation between signifiers and signifieds by which he meant that there is no element in the signifier that makes it necessarily refer to the signified. He said that the signifier is "arbitrary in relation to its signification with which it has no natural connexion in reality" (Saussure 1983:69). Arbitrariness also applies to the relationship between sounds and letters. This arbitrariness is distinct from the question of the lack of phoneme-grapheme correspondence, i.e. the inconsistency between sound and letters which makes learning to read problematical. Arbitrariness, as defined by Saussure, depends upon the act of signification and the relation between signifier and signified. Without this relation arbitrariness does not arise and without signification "signifiers" cannot be signifiers.

This claim of arbitrariness is correct a priori but incorrect a posteriori, according to Levi-Strauss (1969). This is so, he said, because of the correlation between phonetic aspects of the signifier and
certain "shadings to the semantic content with which they have become associated" (Levi-Strauss 1969:91-96). These semantic shadings concern not mere individual peculiarities but biological attributes. There are, for example, particular colours that correspond to the phonetic values of particular vowels in different languages. With regard to non-linguistic signifiers, Levi-Strauss referred to the example of the red of traffic lights which is associated with danger, and the green which is associated with placidity. While both these points may be difficult to disprove, they do not explain why there are different words in different languages for the same colours. Further, if there was a natural connection between these types of signifiers and their signifieds, then understanding of the latter would be straightforward, which it is not.

The connection between signifier and signified was likened, by Saussure, to the relationship between the two sides of a sheet of paper. Signifier and signified are two entities "that are intimately linked and each triggers the other" (Saussure 1983:66). Barthes referred to signification as a process "which binds the signifier and the signified, an act whose product is the sign" (Barthes 1967:113).

For Benveniste (1971), this connection between signifier and signified is so binding that it in fact renders the relation necessary and not arbitrary so that the "concept ...is perforce identical in my consciousness with the sound sequence...signifier and the signified, the mental representation and the sound image, are thus in reality two aspects of a single notion" (Benveniste 1971:45). According to Benveniste the arbitrariness lies in the relation between signifier and reality, between the signifier and its referent which, he says, is a philosophical question and not one for linguistics. If the bond between signifier and signified is a single notion, then how may one signifier be attached to two different signifieds? This is the case with homophones in spoken language for example, “weather/whether” and with homographs in written language, for example the word “fair”.

According to Benveniste (1971), the arbitrariness of the signifier is a trite observation. Despite what Benviste says, this arbitrariness is easily overlooked because of the tenacity of the bond between signifier and signified and because this bond is being continually reinforced by the everyday practice of sign usage namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. Arbitrariness becomes apparent only when the sign is analysed into its constituent parts of signifier and signified. Benveniste seems to slip from sign
usage to sign analysis, from one mode of relating to the sign as a unity to another mode of relating to its parts.

Sign usage is a mode of relating to signs as signs: it is a semiotic mode involving transcendence of the materiality of the signifier so that the sign becomes meaning. This semiotic mode is distinct from an objective mode which considers objects in their materiality without transcendence. Signifiers however are characterised by their capacity to signify and by transcendence in that act of signifying.

The existence of this bond or link between signifier and signified in both spoken and written language is an ontological fact and the nature of the connection itself need not be analysed. It is only necessary to observe that this connection is made during the acquisition of spoken and written speech and that individuals have the ability to make this connection. This ability is the capacity to make one entity stand for another.

Linguistic usage in the individual is possible through the provision and creation of linguistic instruments by society. Referring to spoken speech, Saussure (1983) said that no one has ever observed the initial link between sound patterns and concepts, or signifiers and signifieds, taking place. Saussure was here referring to the origin of words, the time when the social practice of attaching a particular sound to a particular meaning began. This relationship always appears as something inherited and fixed and its continuing social usage further enhances its resistance to change. This fixity, which is part of custom and culture, is transmitted from one generation to another.

There are in fact three aspects of this fixity: the individual ontological ability to signify, the nature of the intimate connection between signifier and signified, and the social practice of linguistic usage. These three aspects reinforce each other and give spoken and written speech an appearance of naturalness in which the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is forgotten. However, as both spoken and written language are not part of human biological inheritance, they need to acquired by individuals. There must be a time in the life of each individual when spoken and written text did not signify, when both kinds of texts were different entities, when they were mere sounds or material objects.
In the case of text which is being spoken by a person who is actually present for the hearer, there is an observable connection to an individual human being. With written text however, the connection to a human subject is not as apparent. Written text appears amongst other objects: in books, on signs and packages. Written text, in the form of stories, may be read to pre-literate children and these children may observe an indirect link between spoken and written words. But only spoken words are signifying. Written text must remain a pure material object until it begins to signify. Although the preliterate child may know the name of this object as "words," "writing" or "story," this is not its linguistic meaning. Written text as a material object may have characteristics and possibilities in the same way that all objects have qualities but these are not the same as signification. Pre-literate children may know that printed text does represent meaning without their knowing what this meaning is. An illustration of this is pre-literate children who point to words while being read a book but give these words arbitrary meanings.

It follows that there are a number of aspects of the written sign that are relevant to the question of how a person who cannot read experiences that written “sign”. Firstly, it is reducible to two separate entities, the signifier and the signified, the former being a material object. Secondly, because of the arbitrary nature of the signifier it can in fact signify other meanings, as is the case with homographs. Thirdly, because the “signifier” may exist as an independent material object it may have no signifying function at all and be equivalent to other material objects in the world. Fourthly, like all other material objects the “signifier” may become associated with other non-linguistic meanings and emotions.

But linguistic signs are like all cultural products: they become particular products only through the social processes which have produced them.

The production and consumption of written language

For Marx, the human subject is always constituted within society in a way that produces a new entity. Marx (1973) referring to society as a whole, points to the connection between consumption and production as social processes. He says: “Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of
hand, nail and tooth. Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer" (Marx 1973:92).

There is a tendency within Marxism to reduce all activity to labour or activity which is productive on a material level. But, as the above quotation affirms, Marx's use of the term "production" is not limited to material production, rather it is a general term for activity which is social and productive in the broadest sense. Marx (1975b:349) says referring to production and consumption: "So the social character is the general character of the whole movement: just as society itself produces man as man so it is produced by him". [italics in original]

Claims by commentators such as Habermas (1978:328) that Marx "attempts to subsume all aspects of social practice under the concept of production" and to equate this production with the labour process itself, seems contrary to the above. Instead, the better position is that production is activity in which objects and subjects are modified, that it is a social process which itself changes historically. Because of the significance and necessity of material production, Marx concentrated on this, but material production in a strict sense cannot be isolated from other activity as it is part of life which forms a whole.

There is however, a deterministic element in this conceptualisation of social production. To understand this point it is necessary to return to Marx and his meat. Each individual child born into a society which uses knife and fork as eating implements to eat cooked meat, becomes a subject who may eat that food in that manner. While these objects may be different for different historical individuals because these individuals have been produced differently, within one society differences may also be produced within the subjectivities of different individuals in relation to these same objects. The individual must not be reduced to the social and the processes by which the individual is constituted as particular in any society need to be understood.

Written text is not an object which is produced for the purpose of being blotches of ink or an object in general. It is produced as a highly specific object. It is produced as language and socially mediated as
such. And it is not to be consumed as blotches of ink but as language. In a society which uses these particular objects to exchange linguistic meaning, the subject is also created by these processes as a subject for whom these objects are language. A different society which did not produce and consume such objects, would produce different subjects who could relate to text in another way which might be as blotches of ink only.

However, in literate societies, the social function of written language is highly specific. Written language is constituted as a totally different object than mere blotches of ink through the sensuous powers of the subject which have in turn been constituted in the general process of social production and mediation. This does not mean that written language can never be blotches of ink for that subject. Written language exists on different levels for that subject just as meat may exist as cells and sinews but also as cooked food for the same subject.

To know a social object as language, subjects do not need to have produced or consumed language. Otherwise language acquisition would be impossible. The prerequisite is a social and practical one of subjects’ seeing language produced and consumed in a social context of which they are part. The question of an hypothesised language acquisition device (Chomsky 1962) need not be resolved because the human subject does acquire language. Rather, the question should be one concerning social contexts: which ones promote language acquisition by the developing human subject and which ones impede and frustrate that acquisition.

Most children first encounter spoken language within their own families and become producers and consumers of spoken language within the family. The point now is that the mediation of written language usually occurs after children have become producers and consumers of spoken language. Most children, in literate societies, know that the written language represents spoken language and is not an immediate materiality or mere blotches of ink.

Written language as a material object, is distinct from other objects such as the table-object, the chair-object or the shirt-object. With all four objects there is an equivalence between function and social meaning but the three latter objects have a multiplicity of functions which overlap. For example,
the table may be sat upon and the chair may be used as a small table, while the shirt could be used as a dusting rag to dust the table and chair. As table, chair or shirt their mode of consumption is specific. But this fluidity cannot exist for the object which is language. It could be objected that text written on paper may be re-used for wrapping, drawing or lighting fires, but this is a function of the paper not language. The language is on the paper, the paper is not language.

No term exits, within English at least, for the signifier that does not signify: all terms used to describe such objects evoke signification. Children know that the social function of written text is to carry linguistic meaning. Because children are users of spoken language they know that these other linguistic objects, written texts, must carry a linguistic meaning in a similar manner to spoken language. This means a relationship between signifier and signified in which there is a unity which Saussure likens to the relationship between two sides of a sheet of paper: the signifier seems to automatically evoke its signified so that meaning seems part of the signifier.

**Hegemony of the signifier**

For Saussure linguistics was the margin where sound and thought converge which is language. To study thought alone is psychology and to study sound alone is "pure phonetics" according to Saussure (1983:111). By analogy, the study of non-signifying written text is graphology but this and Saussure's pure phonetics are epiphenomena of signification. They all depend upon signification. There is no term for written text that does not signify: such a term would need to come from the non-literate themselves but their non-literacy is regarded as illiteracy, a deficit, a learning difficulty or dyslexia. Non-literacy is not seen as difference, diversity or pluralism. In a literate society, the non-literate is a group in-itself, not a group for-itself. Non-literacy is something to be overcome, a disability. The non-literate are dominated by literacy.

Graff (1979) discusses domination through literacy by using Gramsci's notion of hegemony which, says Graff, is especially useful in understanding the role of literacy in the rule by different hierarchies. For Gramsci (1971), hegemony rested on the distinction between the state and civil society. The
former exercises power through domination, while consensual power is exercised over civil society. This consent, said Gramsci, concerns the way of life imposed by "the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Gramsci 1971:12). This consensual nature is made problematical when its conscious aspect is questioned: how may rule be considered consensual if consent is not in fact articulated? This point is highlighted by Bobcock (1986:76) who refers to successful hegemony as being "unnoticeable" by "millions of ordinary people [who] come to accept, [it] in the sense of really giving their free consent to, the economic and cultural policies being pursued by the dominant ruling group."

Literacy and schooling are, according to Graff (1979), tools and means for creating hegemony which permits a particular group or class to rule. Graff regards literacy as acquired skills which allow the acquisition of other values through schooling. Hegemony is obtained through literacy. But it is through these same processes that there is domination by literacy as a hegemonic social practice in which all children are forced to relate to written text as signifier. The result is that the dominance of the signifier becomes, to use Bobcock's words, unnoticeable.

Domination by literacy may be seen in the naming of the non-signifying “signifier”. As I have said, such is the extent of this domination that there is no other name for this material entity which does not evoke the notion of signification. All other terms such as "writing" "written words" "text" "written language" and so on are all ways of saying signification indirectly. All such terms acknowledge linguistic meaning as an integral and naturally-occurring aspect of this material object. For the literate, signification seems to live within the signifier. This absence of name gives a clue to the dominating force of literacy as a social practice, a clue to hegemony by literacy.

The materiality of written text is lost for literate people because, for them, it exists predominantly, if not exclusively, as a linguistic sign. When these people read, signified meaning overpowers the pure materiality of the signifier and synthesises it with its signifier. With signification there is a change in substance of the signifier, a change which is not one of mere appearance. Literacy as a social practice exists with the force of any other cultural practice but this force is intensified by the intimacy of the
connection between signifier and signified. Because of the intimacy of this connection, the arbitrariness of the relation is forgotten.

The word-object as subversion of the linguistic signifier

If another name is to be used for the “signifier” as a material object, there must be a compromise in this naming. The naming must capture the absence of signification for illiterate people and their knowledge of this object as language. It should also capture the presence of signification for literate people and the social practices which establish the hegemony of the signifier.

Connected to naming is the process by which material objects are able to signify. Does a material object, such as written text, impress itself upon a reader in a mechanical way so that reader is unable to prevent it signifying? Is there a power within these material objects which make them signify or is this power within the human subject? In other words are human subjects active or passive in their relationship to written text?

These questions cannot be separated from the general question of the relationship of subjects to the external world. This broader question has been discussed at some length in philosophy and social theory. For example, Marx (1975c:421) says: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism...is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively...[T]he active side was developed abstractly by idealism - which, of course does not know, real sensuous activity as such" [italics in original]

The materialism which Marx criticises is a general group of philosophical positions which see the objective external world as an independent reality which impresses itself upon subjects: precedence is given to the object. On the other hand, idealism gives precedence to subjects. In an extreme form of idealism, Hegel claimed that objectivity is constituted by the thinking activity of the subject. Both extremes are wrong, says Marx, and a middle position is required in which subject and object interact
and are transformed by each other. But this interaction is activity carried on by sensuous human subjects.

I will use the name word-object for those written “signifiers” that are known to be words by particular subjects. In the theoretical language which I have used, these objects have been socially mediated as written language for these subjects. However, these word-objects are not read by these subjects. There are two possible reasons. Firstly, they may not be interested in discovering the meaning of the word-objects. This may be so with a person who sees a notice but is not concerned with reading it. In this case it is the active sensuous subject who decides not to read the word-object. The obverse of this is that the word-object has not impressed its meaning upon the subject. Secondly, subjects may not read the word-object because they are unable to read and they do not attempt to read it. In this case subjects have not attempted to use their sensuous powers to find meaning in the word-object.

In both cases, the word-object retains all its materiality and there is no transcendence of it. Subjects are relating to the word-object in a material mode. It is similar to any object which is known to have a particular social function such as shirts, pens and tables.

When subjects relate to the word-object in a semiotic mode, on the other hand, they attempt to transcend its materiality and make it signify. When the fluent reader does this there is generally an immediate transcendence, the word-object becomes a signifier and the written linguistic sign is the result.

However, people who are unable to read or who read poorly, may make this attempt at signification unsuccessfully. In this case, the word-object retains much of its materiality. But because attempting to make an object signify, amounts to attempting to construct meaning for that object, meaning other than linguistic meaning may be found. This, I would argue, is a crucial point in understanding illiteracy as a social product.
PART TWO: ILLITERATE CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCE OF WRITTEN TEXT

The significance of conceptualising written language in this way is that it opens up another view of written text which corresponds more to the experience of people who cannot read, or read with difficulty. This view allows a subversion of the hegemony of the written linguistic signifier because it recognises and names these material objects as other than signifier. It opens up the possibility that there is a mode of consumption of the “signifier” other than the socially normative one of linguistic consumption. *It leaves behind the one-dimensional view that written text has linguistic meaning only and that the only experiences which may be had regarding it is to find this linguistic meaning.* This second dimension allows us to describe the experiences which illiterate people have regarding the word-object and the meanings associated with those experiences. I will do this with the aid of Marx’s concept of alienation.

Marx’s concept of alienation

Today, alienation as a concept in social theory seems to have largely fallen into disuse. There is a certain antipathy to it, and a wide variety of usage in the literature. This may be due, in part, to Marx's changing conceptualisation of the term over a number of texts and his apparent abandonment of it in his mature writings. It is further complicated because Marx's ideas were a theory of revolutionary social change. Critics on the left wished to preserve Marx's ideas for working class mass action in which the study of objective conditions are paramount. The subjective and personal component of alienation offends this perspective.

A number of writers have noted the confusion and imprecise usage of the concept of alienation. Hook (1971:4) described alienation as a theory “about which an extraordinary amount of nonsense is being written these days.” According to Schacht (1971) there is confusion surrounding usage of the term and many situations in which alienation is used may, in fact, be described without reference to it. With a stress on objective conditions as the essence of alienation, Swingewood (1975:88) said that “alienation is used extensively in sociology, psychology and literature and has become a blanket term
to describe every conceivable aspect of cultural fragmentation, social isolation and philosophical angst.”

There is also a positivistic approach to alienation which was originally developed by Seeman (1959). This approach sometimes appears in attempts to apply the concept of alienation to work and school. For example, Mau (1989:17) says that dropping out of school “is often the result of alienation, when students feel powerless, meaningless, normless or estranged in and from school.” In Mau’s study, she asked students questions designed to measure their levels of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and social estrangement. The scores obtained were then statistically manipulated and related to other variables which included grading systems; methods of assignment of students to post-school study; "ethnicity" and "socio-economic status", among others. Only aspects of the objective conditions that prevail in schools and students’ immediate experience of these conditions were considered by Mau. This usage of alienation makes it equivalent to mere attitudes towards these aspects of school. This is an example of those situations described by Schacht (1971) which could easily be described without reference to alienation.

While the above is a very small sample of commentaries on the concept of alienation, it is representative of some of the many different ways in which the concept is employed. In the commentaries, which are voluminous, I am unable to locate a satisfactory account of what Marx meant by the concept of alienation. But my reading of a number of Marx’s texts discloses that Marx was quite clear about what he meant by alienation. To resolve the disagreement and vagueness about the concept, and to have a clear conceptualisation of it, I will discuss a number of Marx’s writings.

As I noted above, Marx’s conceptualisation of alienation changed over a number of texts. These changes may be seen as one of changing emphasis from subjective to objective factors of alienation rather than abandonment of the concept. In his early works the emphasis is on subjective or experiential aspects of alienation while in later works the emphasis moves to the objective and social factors which produce alienation. I will discuss firstly those texts where the subjective aspects are paramount. After this I will mention what appears to be Marx’s notion of the self as a historically changing entity. Finally, I will mention alienation in maturing capitalism and the crucial issue of power.
In this discussion it should be remembered that although Marx was referring to *material* production, I have argued above that production includes all human activity.

Marx (1975b) refers to a self which is *denied in work*. As a result, workers do not affirm themselves in their work. They feel that they are themselves when they are not working. The results are ruination of the worker’s mind and body, and work being avoided where there is no external compulsion. Work is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. Marx was referring to a self which is split by being forced to perform activity which does not correspond to an actual self. The important word is “activity” which Marx equated with life and the person. Accordingly, Marx was not referring to an attitude to work or activity, but to the activity itself which results in alienation. This aspect of alienation is generally referred to as alienation of the self and involves a reflexive relation of the self to itself. The self needs to be understood in conjunction with my discussion of it below.

With non-alienated activity, there is a unity between what the person *is* and what that person *does*. This unity in activity results in affirmation of the person. For Marx this is not contemplative affirmation but ontological affirmation; it affects subjects’ feelings about the essence of their being. When activity is alien it results in absence of affirmation and feelings of *ontological insecurity*.

The object, as a product of labour, is a summary of the workers' activity. The object itself becomes alien because the activity which produced it was alien. Alienation of the product results from the externalisation of the workers’ alien activity into an object. The more of themselves which they put into this activity, the more that they produce, the more of them is lost in the object. As a result, the worker's "labour becomes an object, an *external* existence...it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power...the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien" (Marx 1975b:324). [italics in original]

This latter aspect of alienation refers to the relation between workers and the objects or commodities which they produce. The term object and product are used interchangeably. Objects are what workers direct their activity towards. It does not require a material object in the form of worked on matter. "Object" could be the object of post-industrial work, the provision of a service or the “object”
that a child in school works upon. Conceptually, this relation of workers to the object of activity as product is a description of how they *experience* the object of alienated activity. This relation does not refer to expropriation of the product as an object of exchange value but is a relation of subject to object. Implicit in this relation is a semiotic in which workers read back their own alienation from the object.

In another of Marx’s early texts, (Marx 1975a) he described how he envisaged *non-alienated* production. He said that with non-alienated production “I would both have enjoyed the *expression* of my own individual life during my activity and also, in contemplating the object...I would experience my personality as an *objective sensuously perceptible* power” (Marx 1975a:277). [italics in original] This qualitatively different type of production results in an externalisation and embodiment of the producer’s personality and individuality in the product. There is also an implicit semiotic in this relation but one where the meaning contrasts radically with the semiotic of the alienated product.

Marx’s references to how workers *feel* about alienated labour are explicit (Marx 1977). Workers do not feel that this labour is part of their lives but this feeling ceases when the alienating labour ceases. “Life” resumes when they are able to engage in their own activities in their own time. Workers have to perform this alienated labour, says Marx, because it is their only means of subsistence: they must sell their labor power to another in order to survive. This is a reference to ownership by the bourgeoisie of the means of production.

Marx and Engels used the term “self-activity” to denote activity which is *not* alienated activity (Marx and Engels 1976). They linked changes to what constitutes self-activity to changing historical and social factors particularly the differences between production during feudalism and production during maturing capitalism. They referred to work during feudalism as being a form of self-activity but a subordinate one due to the limited development of individuals in feudal society. Marx and Engels said that with the division of labour under capitalism, work becomes a narrow and exclusive activity which is not self-activity. This type of work is forced upon workers and they cannot escape from it. The term “self” is used in a way by Marx and Engels which equates it with the historically “conditioned nature”
of the human subject. This means that “self” for Marx (and Engels) was the same as socially produced human subjectivity. It is this entity which is alienated, not an ahistorical or “universal human essence”.

Marx (1973) noted that non-alienation or the unity of producers with the conditions of production did not require explanation. It was the separation of producers from these conditions, which is fully completed with maturing capitalism, that needed explanation (Marx 1973:489). Historically, alienation is a deviation from naturally given conditions of production. Alienation is not part of the natural human condition but produced by specific social and historical factors. It follows from this that all children are initially non-alienated subjects.

The reference to maturing capitalism is again taken up by Marx in the final text to which I refer. In this text (Marx 1976) there are few direct references to the subjective aspects of alienation. The references are to the accumulated effect of alienated labour power and its existence as capital. Marx refers to workers' production of alien products and the production of "capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits [workers]" (Marx 1976:716). This final text is an analysis of capitalism as a system, including its origins and laws of operation. These laws may be regarded as based on the individual alienation of workers. Alienation is considered objectively as the activity (labour power) of workers in total which they are forced to undertake in place of self-activity. As capitalism replaces other modes of production and becomes dominant, alienation becomes universal.

Marx was quite definite about the agency of alienation. "If the product of labour is alien to me...to whom does it then belong?" asked Marx (1975b:330). He answered that it can only belong to another person. This is the owner of capital who is able to dominate workers through ownership of the means of production. In the later texts the other “person” becomes the bourgeoisie and the “worker” becomes the proletariat which must sell its labour power to the former if it is to survive. Alienation results from the exercise of power by one person or group of people over other people.

Institutional qualities of schooling, reading and alienation
In the discussion of alienation, I said that it becomes universal under capitalism. Markus (1978) refers to this as a historical *tendency* of capitalism and says this “does not mean that it can in any time be total and absolute, annihilating all traces of the autonomy and subjectivity of individuals” (Markus 1978:45). Lukacs (1971) uses the term “reification” in a way which *seems* equivalent to alienation but says that although they are closely related, they are neither conceptually nor socially the same. However, later Lukacs says (1971: xxi) “that the two words are used synonymously”. He notes the universality of reification and says that its subjective aspect is where individuals treat their own activity and labour power as a commodity to be bought and sold. The objective aspect is where social relations take on the attributes of relations between things. But Lukacs (1971) takes a more extreme view than Markus. He says that, under capitalism, reification marks “the whole consciousness of man; his qualities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can ‘own’ or ‘dispose of’ like the various objects in the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic ‘qualities’ into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process” (Lukacs 1971:100).

Although Lukacs does not conceptually discriminate between alienation and reification, I will use the latter term for those cases where performance of alien activity has become a commodity to be sold and bought and has become *accepted as such by subjects*. They have become inured to alienation as a psychic fact of life. Denial, renunciation and repression of subjectivity have diminished psychic intensity. Affirmation of their selves is through reasonable wages and conditions, although their selves may have reified qualities. It is affirmation because the need for reasonable wages and conditions have become part of their subjectivities. These workers are able to produce a *means* of their affirmation. Society has produced these individuals in this particular but limited way, or as Marx says: “Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer” (Marx 1973:92). If reification is seen in this way it has some characteristics of a defensive posture which the self takes against the intensity of alienation.

For these subjects, alienation/reification has become an aspect of hegemony, an accepted part of social life and of the current social and economic policies of the dominant class (Gramsci 1971). Bobcock’s (1986) point about hegemony was that consent is not in fact articulated but successful
hegemony is unnoticeable. Consent and acceptance refer to civil society while domination remains an aspect of state power. But hegemony can only refer to adults who have been fully constituted through social production and *not to children*, particularly in relation to school. Here the state resorts to domination with legislation requiring children to attend school, and police forces and other agencies which enforce these laws. In schools, teachers exercise direct control and discipline over children and require them to work at tasks which teachers set.

Another point about alienation in the discussion was that all children are initially non-alienated subjects. Because their social production is at a less advanced stage, they are less inured to alienation, and they are more susceptible to feeling its psychic effects. In schools, there is a mismatch between the levels of alienation/reification of adult-teachers and children. Schools are the places where teachers *work* and their work requires them to work on children. At this level, alienation/reification takes on structural characteristics which teachers accept but in their work on children, they “unnoticeably” mediate these institutional qualities of the work to the children. Marx, and the writers who came after him, were concerned with adults and their experiences of alienation/reification not, with how the young child *first experiences* the adult world of work. Kovel says of Marx that he “simply did not recognise the praxes of childhood, and of intimate, domestic life in general, as having any decisive influence on consciousness. Consciousness simply appears for Marx, without ontogeny, in its adultomorphic form, and then begins acting upon nature in the labour process” (Kovel 1988:318). But this point needs to be taken further. Intellectuals and teachers are generally people who are successful products of reading pedagogy and have become highly literate and scholastically successful. The alienating nature of reading pedagogy has never been experienced by them and is not recognised as a factor in understanding learning difficulties. The word-object and the processes by which it becomes a linguistic sign are taken for granted.

Although not referring to alienation or reification explicitly, Holt’s (1973) description of the experience of the child in school is evocative of both concepts. Holt says that before children go to school, their lives are whole. Play and learning are not separated from each other. These children do not experience play and learning as separate from themselves: there is a unity between their own selves and their activity. But in school, Holt claims, “the child is taught to think that his work, his play and his learning
are separate from him, and that all of these, including his very self are commodities to be exchanged for grades, praise, approval, success; to be measured, evaluated, bought and sold" (Holt 1973:253). Just as reasonable wages and conditions for workers are affirmation of their subjectivities, so reasonable grades, approval or praise for school children *have to become* affirmation of their subjectivities, although in a reified way. When they have become affirmation, the needs for grades, praise and so on will have become part of the children’s subjectivities. These children will be able to produce a *means* of their affirmation and society will have produced these individuals in this particular but limited way.

When Holt (1973) describes children who learn in return for "grades, praise, approval, success," these children are nevertheless able to cope with school. This description may fit the majority of children who are scholastically successful. For illiterate children, however, the degree of alienation must be much more intense because these children cannot cope with regular school work. All success is blocked for them until they are able to read. There is nothing for them to exchange for grades and praise. They have *no* means of affirmation.

For all pre-literate children in school, there is a primary experience of written text as the word-object. This is an arbitrary material object, which they relate to in semiotic mode as they try to construct its linguistic meaning. For children who begin to read at this stage, there is some degree of affirmation of their selves as the word-object becomes the written linguistic sign for them. Reading becomes a meaningful experience which they are able to demonstrate to teachers, parents and other children. But children who do not begin to read (for whatever reason) must continue to relate to the word-object as an arbitrary material object. This is a meaningless experience from which they cannot escape. The continuation of *their* illiteracy plus compulsory reading pedagogy means that a primary semiotic of alienation begins which causes ontological insecurity (anxiety). These *negative* feelings about written language are the opposite of the *positive* feelings associated with emergent literacy, and are an emergent *illiteracy*. This primary alienation begins to frustrate further attempts to read and becomes a base on which a superstructure of further negative experiences of reading develops.
There is a social view of schooling which sees it as inexorably benign. The work of school teaching is socially useful. Adult life without a reasonable education, let alone a reasonable literacy level, will relegate a child to menial work at best and unemployment at worst. This benign view of schooling and the hegemonies of alienation and the signifier become consolidated into a whole.

This results in a particular perception of reading pedagogy for the reading teacher. This teacher sees nothing within the written word which could be a reasonable cause for anxiety. It is the written linguistic sign. For the teacher, the text with which the illiterate child is struggling is not an arbitrary and meaningless material object. For the teacher, the material aspect of the text has been transcended and the text is meaning. The adult teacher’s participation in his or her work of persevering with reading pedagogy for the child, is to help that child read and become educated; it is not to mediate or prolong alienation and consciously construct reification. Yet this may be the effect.

Resistance by some illiterate children to their alienation is experienced by teachers as problems of discipline and control. This heightens the difficulty of their work and takes it beyond the teacher’s accepted levels of alienation/reification. With these particular children the teacher’s alienation becomes manifest, and the resisting child may experience this indirectly. Sartre (1968) refers to this form of alienation which children experience as mediated but for him it occurs through their parents. Marxists are concerned only with adults, says Sartre and “have forgotten their own childhoods…everything seems to happen as if men experienced their alienation and their reification first in their own work, whereas in actuality each one lives it first, as a child, in his parents’ work” (Sartre 1968:62). [italics in original] But Sartre, the scholastically brilliant pupil grown into an adult, knows nothing of the direct alienation of children in school. Direct alienation is the main form of alienation which I am discussing in respect of the meaning of word-object. Mediated alienation must also be noted because it may increase the direct alienation which illiterate children already experience.

To bring the situation of illiterate children in school into relief, I will contrast it with children’s acquisition of spoken language. Halliday (1985) describes how young children develop their own protolanguage before the acquisition of social speech. During this development and acquisition the child is in control. "This is the pattern of all subsequent language learning", says Halliday, "…the impetus always comes from the child; he is pushing forward the frontiers of language". (Halliday
In these processes, the meanings which the child expresses are the child's. As the child begins to acquire social speech through mixing his or her protolanguage with it, the role of the adult is to mediate the socially correct form of signifiers to the child.

In these processes, the child’s meaning precedes the signifier. The child shapes the signifier according to his or her desire and linguistic ability. Meaning usually arises from a specific and practical context in which the child is actively involved. The mediator of the correct signified form is often a parent or older sibling, with whom the young child has a close and emotional relationship. All of these actions form a unity with the child at center as autonomous initiator and unifying agent. Play and pleasure are often part of this process.

With reading pedagogy, the process is reversed and the signifier precedes meaning (which does not belong to the child). The signifiers are arbitrary signifiers, the meaning for which the child is forced to find. The context, from which the child cannot escape, is created by the teacher, with whom the child does not usually have any relationship other than that which is specific to the pedagogical relation. For the teacher, the situation is one of work in which he or she may experience alienation which the child may feel in mediated form.

The significance of this difference between formal reading pedagogy and the informal processes of spoken language acquisition, is what follows from children’s control of the latter. Children may abandon the spoken word-object when they desire and return to it when they desire. This prevents alienation and the accumulation of feelings of insecurity or anxiety which they might otherwise construct in respect of spoken language. Abandoning and returning to objects according to desire, is what characterises much of children’s free activity, such as when they play with objects for pleasure. The institutional qualities of reading pedagogy result in some pre-literate children attaching their own individual meaning of alienation to the arbitrary and meaningless word-object before they are able to learn to read and convert the word-object to a meaningful linguistic sign.

Illiterate children’s experience of schooling
I have referred to a widespread view of schooling which sees it as inexorably benign. This view is contested by critiques which conclude schooling has class biases and that it promotes the interests of the existing power and economic order of society. In addition, there are ethnographies of schooling which show it to be an alienating and reifying process for many students. There are also theories of student resistance to compulsory formal education.

For instance, in an ethnography of working class participation in school, Willis (1979) found the main element of a counter school culture was general opposition to authority. Willis concluded that opposition by students was intended to win “symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose: to make you work” (Willis 1979:26). In another study which focused on the relation between work and school, Bowles and Gintis (1976) emphasised the importance of schooling in the formation of personalities that correspond to those required at work. In this process, formal education and the hidden curriculum produce people who will accept their limited social roles. Apple (1990) uses the Gramscian concept of hegemony to argue that schools are institutions which reproduce forms of consciousness which enable social control to be maintained without resort to explicit forms of domination. Through hegemony, the ongoing patterns of domination are seen as held together by implicit rather than explicit assumptions about social life.

With the aid of post-modernist thinking, Wexler (1992) criticised functionalist assumptions about schooling. He related the “decline of the social” to a number of processes he observed in schools in North America. He argued that much of school life, for students, concerns their attempts to establish social identity. At the center of these processes are self relations which are affected by “absences”. For example, in school subcultures he found an absence of personal voluntary social interaction in which subjectivity results from emotional commitment. Instead, relations are the product of institutional forces, particularly disciplinary ones which have appeared under a new ethos in public education. Wexler refers to this ethos as moral virtue coming to mean “the appearance of authority succeeding” (Wexler 1992:107). This type of reified relation extends to the pedagogical relation where it replaces emotion and care. It is expressed in the words of some students as “nobody cares”.

While these texts are a small sample of critiques of schooling, they establish an alternative to the benign view. They refer to all children but it is likely that they are more relevant to illiterate children because these children are unsuccessful at school. There is, however, very limited data collected from illiterate people of their general experiences of schooling. There is even less data from illiterate people of their particular experiences of reading pedagogy.

One study of illiterate people’s general experiences of schooling is Charnley and Jones (1979) who said that most adult literacy students experienced “some form of a feeling of inferiority as they were unable to compete in the literacy discourse essential to the classroom...To nearly all their lot at school was... not a happy one” (1979:59). Charnley and Jones noted that the students in their survey had "failed and knew that early in their primary school life, at about the age of 8 or 9...the form of remedial tuition in the secondary schools had little affect on our student sample. If anything the further efforts in the secondary school merely confirmed their sense of failure” (Charnley and Jones 1979:60).

In another relevant study, Levine (1980) describes the damage that illiteracy inflicts on students. He says: “It is largely because schooling is lengthy, competitive and involves institutional evaluation, that illiteracy can inflict such acute damage on individual self esteem. The literacy requirements set by schools are generally artificial in the sense that they are imposed in the form of academic exercises which are ends in themselves rather than means to goals arising out of pupils’ spontaneous activities” (Levine 1980:38). Once students with reading problems fall below the standard for their cohort, they experience great problems catching up. Remedial help is often too late as by then, students may be demoralised or indifferent.

An example of data collected by Levine (1980), which is more particular to reading pedagogy, is the statement from “Ted.” This illustrates the power relations in schools which some older literacy students faced:

He used to have a big stick about half an inch thick and no one gave lip to him. He used to have the alphabet and he used to go through [it] ‘d’, ‘d’, ‘d’, you know and everybody recite (sic) it off and I knew it all but he didn’t make my reading any better. ‘Cos I didn’t know how to translate all them sounds into the words (1980:43).
I have already referred to Johnston (1985) who traced both anxiety about reading and inappropriate reading strategies to schooling. Johnston is one of the few authors who focus on adult feelings about reading pedagogy. For instance he collected the following statement from “Jack” (then an adult):

What it is, it’s the old feelings...Like when I was a kid in school... and they would ask me to read and the teacher didn’t know that I couldn’t read. Well, those feelings still can come back to me... It’s like you completely feel isolated, totally alone, and when that sets in...if it overwhelms me...you shut right down. (1985:167)

Another writer who has noticed the significance of schooling and its effect upon adult learning is O’Rourke (1995). She said that adult students have “the experience of prior failure. Such failure damages self-esteem and invokes enormous anxiety”(1995:28). [italics added] The extent of anxiety is rarely discussed with adult learners except in the case of maths anxiety and anxiety about writing. O’Rourke particularly notes the practices of reading aloud and reporting back by students which, for older adults, may have connotations with lack of self-esteem and power.

The question implicit in these discussions of anxiety and schooling is whether the anxiety is an effect of being unable to read or a cause. If anxiety is an effect of being unable to read in school, then there must be an initial cause which prevented some children from reading. What could such causes be? The literature has many hypotheses, as strikingly shown in the list of causes of reading failure compiled by Dymock (1982):

(1) Large classes.
(2) Teachers with little understanding/sympathy.
(3) Children's self-labelling.
(4) Broken schooling/illness/changes of school.
(5) Emotional upset/pressure/instability.
(6) Family responsibilities.
(7) Truancy.
(8) Lack of ability/intellectual deficit.
(9) Poor teaching.
(10) Lack of reading readiness.
(11) Lack of specialist reading personnel.
(12) Lack of consistent system.
(13) Inadequate training of teachers.
(14) School system/context/ethos.
(15) Reading method.
(16) Competitiveness in school.
(17) Cultural deprivation/illiterate parents.
(18) Neurological dysfunction.
(19) Little or no schooling.
(20) Discipline problem.
(21) Migrant-illiterate in native tongue.
(22) Speech defect.
(23) School dropouts or pushouts.
(24) No practice or extension of skills.

I am not presenting this list as definitive but it is noteworthy that children’s lack of interest in learning to read is not given as a cause. Nevertheless, only four of these causes could possibly continue past childhood into adulthood and remain as an explanation for adult illiteracy. Of these, 8, 18 and 22 are biological causes, and cause 21 relates only to the specific case of migration. The remaining causes are specific to childhood and schooling and cease to be explanations for the continuing inability to acquire literacy skills as an adult.

Apart from biological “causes”, the explanation for the continuing inability could be the individual meaning of alienation that some adults attached to the word-object during reading pedagogy when they were children.
The semiotic of alienation

In my discussion of alienation I explained how the object or product became a resume of workers’ experiences of their own self-alienation. The result was an implicit semiotic of alienation in workers’ relation to the object. Although Marx did not refer to anxiety as an explicit accompaniment of this semiotic, a contemporary understanding would see it as such. If anxiety through alienation is a cause of being unable to read, it is also an effect of being unable to read. This effect then may then become a cause of further reading difficulty, and so on. There is an ongoing totalisation of anxiety which becomes embedded in the word-object where cause and effect are dialectically related rather than causally separate. Each time illiterate children are forced to relate to the word-object in semiotic mode they find this totalisation of alienation. For them, the word-object means alienation—which I have elaborated as ontological insecurity though it is seen by others simply as anxiety about reading. It overpowers attempts by these children to construct linguistic meaning. Because children spend so much of their time at school where written text mediates so many other activities, the word-object for illiterate children is an omnipresence which they cannot escape. The actual time which these children spend totalising alienation in the word-object, may be more than they spend with their parents. It may be one of their main activities during this part of their lives.

I have already noted that this initial experience of alienation and anxiety becomes a base upon which a superstructure of further alienation is constructed. This includes the humiliation and lack of self-esteem to which Charnley and Jones (1979), Johnston (1985) and O’Rourke (1995) have referred. The difference is, however, that I have conceptualised a primary anxiety which accompanies alienation while they seem to see anxiety only as secondary and as an effect of reading failure.

This totalising superstructure of further alienating experience of the word-object survives into adulthood for these illiterate children. This semiotic of alienation amounts to de facto reading of the word-object because the word-object has come to signify this individual meaning rather than the socially approved semiosis. This alternative signification will continue to frustrate their attempts to read linguistically until a means to remove it is found.

Concluding comments
There were two main presuppositions which I explored in this chapter with the aim of establishing the initial plan for the case studies of illiterate adults. I reduced the written word to an arbitrary and meaningless material object, the word-object, and opened another dimension for understanding illiterate people’s experience of written text. This experience was alienation in schooling generally and reading pedagogy particularly. The institutional qualities of schools, and childhood sensitivities to alienation, make this an experience of psychic intensity for these children. I theorised these experiences for illiterate children as ontological insecurity or anxiety. Because these experiences are focused on the word-object, the word-object becomes a summary of this insecurity and conflicts with these children’s attempts to read. While this is a primary experience of alienation for the illiterate child, the duration of schooling and the omnipresence of the written word in schools ensures that an ongoing totalisation of insecurity becomes embedded in the word-object. When these children-as-adults attempt to read, they read back this semiotic of insecurity.

This initial plan is explored in detail in a case study of an illiterate adult in the next chapter when I develop the first version of a method to remove the semiotic of alienation from the word-object.

CHAPTER TWO
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SCHOOLING

In accordance with Chapter One, a tentative model of illiterate adults may now be proposed. Illiterate adults have constructed an individual meaning for written text during reading pedagogy in their childhood. This meaning threatens their ontological security and results in anxiety. For these adults,
written text remains a material object (which I conceptualise as the word-object). When these adults attempt to read they reconstruct this meaning as a signification of the word-object.

This individual meaning consists of the initial experience of alienation associated with the word-object and the superstructure of further alienation which I referred to in the last chapter. In the description of the method below and in the remainder of the thesis, I have used the term *experiental sense* to denote this totalisation of meaning. I am using the word “sense” in place of the word “meaning” to avoid possible confusion which could follow from using *meaning* for both the experiental and the linguistic.

As long as the word-object is signifying its experiental sense, illiterate adults are unable to appropriate the written linguistic sign and read linguistically. Reading, as an attempt to find meaning in written text involves the reader actively entering into a semiotic relation with the word-object and transcending its materiality. When in this semiotic mode, illiterate adults are required to find linguistic meaning only, experiental sense being regarded as illicit under the hegemony of the signifier. If this hegemony is suspended, linguistically illiterate adults could be regarded as experientally literate. If experiental literacy is seen as valid and made explicit, learners could convert their experiental significations into spoken language. When this spoken text is reduced to writing, there would be correspondence between what they experience and the meaning of that written text when they try to read it. The first version of the method to overcome reading inability, is based on these ideas.

**The method: version one**

The method in detail was as follows:

(1) There was an initial stage of becoming acquainted with the participant during which the extent of his illiteracy was assessed and biographical details obtained. After this first session all further sessions were tape recorded with permission of the participant.

(2) The participant was shown a sheet of paper with meaningless marks arranged in lines similar to conventionally arranged written language. The participant was also shown a sheet of paper on which there was written text. He was then asked to identify which was written language.
(3) A book with no illustrations was shown to the participant and the objective physical nature of the text was emphasised. This is the *objective written text*. Individual pages, enlarged and reduced in size on a photocopier, were compared to other physical objects such as the table, ash-tray and marks and scratches on the wall.

(4) The participant was invited to tear pages from the *objective written text*, throw them across the room and generally destroy them. The harmless nature of this text was continually emphasised and discussed with the participant.

(5) The *objective written text* as this harmless and impotent object was contrasted with other objects that are able to cause harm such as spiders, snakes and people with guns. This stage and stages 3 and 4 were a *materialisation* of the word-object.

(6) The participant was then asked to attempt to read the *objective written text*, the theoretical rationale for this being that it is only in semiotic mode, when attempting to read linguistically, that experiential sense of the word-object is found. While attempting this linguistic reading the participant was asked to say how he felt. This was *elicitation* of experiential sense.

(7) This elicited statement was a *subjective spoken text*. It was anticipated that the participant would find this difficult to articulate, so prompting such as "how do you feel inside, in the guts" was used. The participant was asked to only *try* to read and concentrate on how he was feeling while doing this rather than attempting to say what the written words mean.

(8) The subjective spoken text was then *validated* through dialogue, as being a reasonable statement about how the participant feels when he attempts to read. It was explained to the participant that this "feeling" may be preventing him from reading and that perhaps this "feeling" arises from schooling.
(9) The subjective spoken text, spoken by the participant and recorded on the tape recorder, was isolated on another tape and preceded and followed by music. This was a discrimination of the subjective spoken text as distinct and unique.

(10) The subjective spoken text was reproduced verbatim as a subjective written text in large and easy to read letters.

(11) The tape of the subjective spoken text was played back to the participant while he was shown the subjective written text. The participant was reminded that this is what he feels when he attempts to read and that the written words are exactly the same as the spoken words. Both the subjective spoken text and the subjective written text were then further validated and discriminated. This was done through informing the participant that these texts are different from the objective written text. The latter is an estranged piece of writing, by an unknown person. That text creates negative experiential sense in the participant. All other writing is like this, compared to his own texts.

(12) The correspondence between signified experiential sense, subjective spoken text and subjective written text was discussed with the participant. It was suggested to the participant that he was reading what he felt when he was attempting to read the subjective written text.

(13) After the participant had attempted to linguistically read the subjective written text, he was asked if he was able to differentiate individual words within that text by referring back to the subjective spoken text on the tape.

(14) The processes of elicitation of experiential sense, its validation, discrimination and reproduction as a written text, were continued. The participant referred back to the tapes of the subjective spoken text as required when attempting to linguistically read the subjective written text and differentiate the individual words within it.
(15) During the above stages, biographical details of the participant were obtained, particularly schooling experiences and attempts to teach him to read.

Description of the subject

The above method was applied with "Stan", a fifty-seven year old man who had been unemployed for several years at the time of the sessions with him. Because of his severe illiteracy, he always had labouring jobs. His last job was with a local council as a garbage collector, a job he held for a considerable time. When the garbage collection service was partly mechanised and required fewer workers, Stan was made redundant. However, he has continued working in a voluntary capacity for a number of organisations such as hospitals and those providing assistance for elderly citizens. He said that sometimes he has worked up to five days per week for these organisations.

While he was working in one of those organisations, Stan met a person with literacy problems whom I was assisting. This person was not connected with the research but referred Stan to me. Stan agreed to be part of the research because it explored possible new ways of helping people with severe reading problems. Other attempts by Stan to overcome his difficulties had been totally unsuccessful but Stan was prepared to keep trying. As will be seen below the main reason why Stan wanted to improve his literacy was to assist him in obtaining employment. I suspect that this was the only reason why he participated in the research.

As with all other participants in the case studies, Stan was able to withdraw at any time. It will be seen below that Stan was a person of nervous disposition, he had severe reading problems and attempting to read caused him great stress. He was also older than the other subjects of the case studies and had a heart condition for which he was taking medication. I eventually decided to discontinue the research with him after 8 sessions because of my concerns about the effects of this stress upon him.

Although Stan did exhibit great stress when attempting to read this did not affect my relationship with him. This relationship had most of the characteristics of that between a student and a literacy teacher in
an intensive one-to-one learning situation. Some of these characteristics are empathy with the learner’s particular problems, maintenance of the learner’s self-respect and consultation with the learner about the programme. The major difference was that I was being innovative.

Stan came from a family of ten children, his father was a toolmaker and his mother was a part-time machinist. Stan said that both his mother and father were good readers and writers but because of the large number of children, his parents did not read to him. There were books in his childhood home but most of these belonged to his sisters. All his siblings were literate. Stan has always been unmarried and shares a house with another man who appears to be supportive of Stan. All sessions with Stan were at his home. They were for approximately one and a half hours each and all were tape recorded.

Stan commenced school at five years old and left aged fifteen. He wore glasses from an early age and had a lazy left eye which watered when he was required to read. As a child he had to wear a patch over the lens of his spectacles for that eye. He had his eyes last tested a few years ago.

At school, Stan kept to himself in the playground although he was not frightened by other children. He said it was hard for him to remember these early years. He repeated fourth class five times. There were occasions on which different teachers attempted to help him read.

One such occasion was when he was twelve years old. A teacher insisted that he learn to read by memorising a story line by line. The story was called Johnny Lives Down the Street. Stan was unable to say how long this period of "learning" lasted but eventually he remembered the lines by rote. However, when this teacher required him to linguistically read the words, he could not. He explained this as forgetting. Now, forty-five years after these events Stan could remember the first three lines and was able to repeat them to me. This pattern of knowing the words but being unable to remember them when reading, recurs in some of the reading tasks I gave Stan.

Stan was a person of nervous disposition, especially during the first sessions. He told me about a number of events that had caused him stress, such as an accident at work which he had witnessed, and a fear of flying in helicopters when he was a member of the citizens’ military forces. It seemed,
however, that he had no fear of flying in general, as he had accompanied his mother on an overseas journey which he talked about with great enthusiasm.

Stan did not like school and on one occasion “wagged” it. He went on an expedition to Manly with a school friend. While Stan was absent for one day and returned home at the end of it, his companion was absent for three days and was sent to a “boys’ home”. When the police called at his own home, his mother said to them: "You're not going to take him too are you?" Stan said the police replied: "Make sure he goes to school otherwise we'll put him in a boys’ home." Stan's comment on this episode was that it made him fear going to a boys’ home and he never “wagged” school again.

A major difficulty in this case study was Stan’s reluctance to talk about school. I consider that this was reluctance rather than a problem of memory because of his detailed account of the Johnny story and the school “wagging” incident. But in the sixth session it was suggested to him that he did not really want to read and that it was only a means to obtaining a job. He agreed with this. I then suggested that, for him, reading is like a tedious job: it is done because we are given a wage. He agreed with this also.

I then made the following suggestion to Stan:

When I went to school I learnt how to read, I learnt the meaning of words but you learnt a different sort of meaning. Each time you look at words it comes back.

Stan immediately began talking about the Johnny story in much detail, with several recitations of the first lines. This was unsolicited. The technique of speaking about my own schooling seemed to have prompted the Johnny story. Several times I tried to obtain more details by using the same technique but it did not elicit more information. I asked him on a number of occasions whether there were any other events about school which he could remember but he always quietly told me there were not. From the way in which he spoke about school, I concluded that these were very painful years for him.
Other significant points that Stan mentioned were that when he was fourteen years old he bought a push bike, despite his parents' telling him that he would not learn to ride it. Left to himself and without help, he did learn to ride it. He was insistent that this was through his own efforts and it was obvious that he was proud of his achievement in the face of his parents’ negativity. Secondly, while at school he made two wooden bowls that he still uses, and keeps on the sideboard in his dining room. He made a point of showing me the bowls, telling me in detail how he made them and the particular type of wood he had used. Throughout the eight sessions, it was obvious that he was reluctant to actually read and that he was spending time talking about day to day events to avoid reading. The work with him was discontinued after this eighth session for reasons discussed at the end of this chapter.

Assessment session

At the initial meeting, Stan was able to complete basic written additions of numbers and money but was unable to read the following statement:

My name is.......  
I live at.......  
I want to learn how to read and write.  
To-day is Monday the 16th of September.

The first line above contained Stan’s actual name while the second contained Stan’s street number, street name and suburb. Blank spaces have been used to retain Stan's anonymity.

He was easily able to identify written language in accordance with stage 2 of the method.

When asked at this initial meeting how he felt when he attempted to read the above statement, he said:

When I cannot understand words I feel useless.  
When I cannot understand words I feel real stupid.
Stan acknowledged that the objective written text consisted only of ink marks but was disinclined to tear pages from the text and did so only after I had done it. His actions doing this were reluctant and restrained. The harmless nature of the word-objects in this text was discussed many times throughout the sessions. Stan repeated that he knew that they were only bits of ink and there was nothing for him to be nervous about but his whole demeanour during most of the sessions indicated that attempting to read caused him the utmost anxiety.

The sessions with Stan

During the second session, Stan made the following statements concerning how he felt about his reading difficulties:

I feel guilty.
I feel ashamed.
I must be lazy.

Here, Stan was attributing blame to himself. His inability to read was his fault. We discussed these feelings for approximately fifteen minutes during which I said that he is wrong to blame himself and that these feelings could be preventing him from reading. I said the fact that he could not read may be due to circumstances over which he had no control and that he was certainly not lazy. He had worked for most of his life and continues to search for work. While unemployed, he has worked voluntarily. When Stan attempted to read linguistically, I noticed that his jaw dropped, a slight pallor came to his face and there was a very slight trembling in one corner of his mouth. All readings by Stan were aloud.

In the third session, I asked Stan to think more about how he felt in his body when he attempted to read the objective written text. This elicited the following:

When I am trying to read I feel nervous.
When I cannot read I feel upset in the stomach.
If I try to read my eyes start to water.
I regard these last three statements, and the two from the assessment session, as his experiential sense of the word-object. They are subjective spoken texts. I discussed these with him and suggested that these feelings about reading are real events for him and could result from his experiences in school. This was my attempt to validate these feelings (stage 8 of the method).

For the next session, I isolated these five statements on another tape and separated them by short periods of classical music. This was the sort of music he liked. Stan's own words were used on the tape with difficulty as he is very quietly spoken, lacks confidence and stumbles with his words when he has to speak about reading. I also prepared the subjective written texts of these statements.

During session four, I played the tapes of these five spoken subjective texts to Stan (stage 11 of the method). These were:

- When I cannot understand words I feel useless.
- When I cannot understand words I feel real stupid.
- When I cannot understand words I feel upset in the stomach.
- If I try to read my eyes start to water.
- When I am trying to read I feel nervous.

I regarded these statements, rather than short statements of guilt, shame and laziness, as experiential sense. The latter are more in the nature of conscious deficit theories and contained no references to reading. When Stan heard the tapes he seemed to gain confidence and was able to read the subjective written texts, with few mistakes, if he was able to play the tapes back. However, the more he concentrated on the individual written words rather than the experiential sense as a whole, the more confused he became. This was particularly so when he tried to differentiate individual words (stage 13).

During session four, Stan made the following three additional statements which became spoken and written subjective texts:
When I try to read I fidget a lot.

When I try to read I am not so nervous, I am not upset in the stomach, I don't fidget as much.

When I try to read I am not so nervous.

In session five, all the eight spoken and written subjective texts prepared so far, were given to Stan. Although he had some success with reading them, the more he attempted to read the more confused he became. This confusion again became aggravated with word differentiation when I did not play the tapes for him. For example, the word *as* in "...I don't fidget as much" was continually read for *so* and my transmission of the correct meaning and pointing out the difference in letters and phonics between the two words, added even more confusion. This confusion reached the stage where without reading the word he would say *as* but when reading the word he would, with increasing confusion, read *so* for *as*. The same pattern of confusion was repeated with the word *don't* in the same text when transmission and phonics were used. This pattern is identical with that in the Johnny story from Stan’s childhood forty-five years ago: *Stan could remember the words but when required to read them he could not.*

During session five, Stan composed the following new texts:

- When I look at words they look blotchy but they mean something.
- When I try to read, small words get me confused.
- When I see words I have not seen before I get stuck.

During session six I gave Stan these three new texts and tapes together with the other eight tapes and written texts prepared so far. He was able to correctly match four tapes to written texts. Again he became very confused when he could not read individual words and he once more confirmed that his stomach turns over when this happens. This only happens, said Stan, if he concentrates his attentions on trying to find the meaning of individual words and encounters problems. *He added that this does not happen if he only looks at words without trying to read them.* He repeated that *he knew that*
written words were only blotches of ink and he knew that there was nothing to be nervous about but when he attempted to read them, he nevertheless became nervous.

However, he did know the meaning of some individual words which he encountered frequently in the texts made so far. These were words such as when, try and read. When reading these words, he was more relaxed and spontaneous. However, as soon as there was a problem with the meaning of individual words, as soon as there was an absence of linguistic meaning, Stan would make greater effort to find it which resulted in increased anxiety.

In a subsequent session a similar incident occurred with the text “when I try to read I fidget a lot”. Although he had read this line several times and the words originated with him, after returning to this text four weeks later he could not read the word fidget. Prior to reading this text he read seven of the preceding ones with reasonable success. Any mistakes were passed over and he went onto the next word or line. But the word fidget was persevered with, his attention was concentrated on it and I prompted him with phonics. The point is not that he forgot this word but that the more he attempted to make this word signify, the more confused he became.

Reflecting on the experience of these sessions, I arrived at the following observations about Stan’s reading problems and the method:

(1) His anxiety or experiential sense about reading is intractable to his own reason and understanding. He knows written text is only blotches of ink, that there is nothing to be afraid of. But written words continue to make him feel anxious and ill when he attempts to read them and he cannot find their linguistic meaning.

(2) There is a high intensity and longevity of Stan’s experiential sense. Patterns of reading from his childhood have persevered into adulthood.
(3) There is a dynamic relation between experiental sense and linguistic meaning. Whenever he unsuccessfully attempted to find the latter, a heightened level of experiental sense was found instead. Experiental sense and linguistic meaning appear to cancel each other.

(4) The method used with Stan was not successful as it continued to make him anxious and elicited experiental sense rather than overcome it.

To understand these observations in detail I will discuss them in relation to psychoanalytic concepts which have been modified by sociological understanding.

Conceptual discussion

In Marx's writings the human subject is always constituted within society in a way that produces a new entity. This aspect of Marx has been referred to above in connection with how production influences consumption in a subjective as well as an objective way. Marx said: “Hunger is hunger, but the hunger that is gratified by cooked meat eaten with a fork and knife is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth” (Marx: 1973:92).

For Freud, hunger was an unmodified instinct which may have different objects but the instinct remains in its primal form. With regard to the sexual instinct, Freud said that its connection to the object of gratification is tenuous and that "the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together...We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object" (Freud 1977:59-60). For Freud, there could even be an element of chance in choice of object but the social plays no part.

According to Freud, there is also a permanent division between the individual and society rather than one which is historically created. Civilisation represses unmodified instinct, although the level of repression may change historically. Freud (1968) referred to permanent, aggressive and exploitative
instincts which threaten society and must be subdued. In the family, the anarchy of instinct in children's polymorphous sexuality is expressed in desire for their parents in the universal oedipus complex.

In his second topography of the mind, Freud (1962) described three agencies of id, ego and super-ego. The super-ego represented a conscience-like repository of ideals from parents and society. This is the agency which takes over the censoring and correcting role of parents. It is the one where Freud acknowledged the influence of social factors. He explicitly referred to the influence of teachers and educators (Freud 1962:96). However, he also gave the super-ego a far greater historical and more diverse origin. He said it is not built specifically on the parents but on the parents' own super-egos. As a result, the super-ego is the repository of "all the age-long values which have been handed down in this way from generation to generation" (Freud 1962:90). In contemporary society the possible sources of ideals, and internal censoring and correcting, are far more diverse. If the super-ego is open to the influence of parents, educators and "age long values" as Freud said, why should it also not be open to diverse contemporary sources?

For Freud, the id was the residue of intractable instinctual drives and repressed unconscious ideas. Society, as civilisation, suppresses the instincts and thus constitutes the id. Freud, (1962:98) referred to the id as "a cauldron of seething excitement...These instincts fill it with energy, but it has no organisation and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs."

The id was conceived of as a radically different substance to the ego: it was primitive, thinglike, timeless and unresponsive to reason. Although not all aspects of the id derive from instinct, all repressed content takes on id-like qualities.

The ego, on the other hand, was shaped by reason and reality but in a dynamic and conflictual relation to demands and desires of the id and censures of the super-ego. In this conflict with the id, the ego's reason is generally ineffective. This is the rationale of psychoanalysis: to reverse this relationship of id control and allow reason of the ego to prevail.

For Freud, the main site of production of childhood subjectivity was the family. Kovel says that traditionally there was no sharp distinction between domestic life and production, the distinction which
emerged with capitalism being "the single most important feature of the entire modern era so far as personal life goes" (Kovel 1981:112). For children, however, an equally important distinction emerged in that a significant portion of their social production was removed from the family to the rationalised and institutionalised social relations of formal pedagogy in schools.

This emphasis on formal pedagogy does not deny the importance of the family but sets up an additional site for analysis of subjectivity. Elements of psychoanalysis may be appropriate for understanding this site, together with other theoretical perspectives. When the writings of Marx on alienation were used, his emphasis on material production was pushed to one side and replaced by a broader idea of social production. With Freud, his reliance on instincts, libido and childhood sexuality will also be pushed to one side and replaced by social factors. Throughout the thesis I will however retain Freud’s terms of id, ego and super-ego.

The absence of the social makes Freud’s position, radically different from Marx’s position where the social has a central role. For Marx the dialectic of social production and consumption modifies the subject. How can we adapt Freud’s concepts for social analysis? Lichtman (1982:87) concludes that "[t]he drive is formed through its object, which is itself shaped through its place in the network of social relations." Lichtman goes on to argue that Freud’s concepts may be adapted to refer to social and experiential factors rather than biology and instinct. Lichtman (1982:178) describes the id as: “that portion of ourselves which we alienate from our own conscious awareness under the pressure of intolerable social forces; it is the region of our being in which we flee from these aspects of ourselves which threaten us with dissolution.” The point, however, is to explain why the id has characteristics of primitiveness, intractability and unresponsiveness to the demands of the ego; or simply why some individuals are unable to change their behaviour despite their wishes to do so.

Again, Lichtman’s adaptation of Freud is very helpful. He refers to the time and conditions when the id is constructed. The id, as repressed aspects of the self, retains characteristics which were present at the time of repression. The most severe forms of repression happen in childhood, before formation of the mature self, before the self has gone through many stages of cognitive and emotional development such as those described by Piaget. Those repressed id aspects of the self are separated from
continued growth and retain qualities present in the subject at the time of repression. They become fixed in the form of their development at the time they were repressed. Lichtman argues (1982:194-5) that this dispenses with Freud's theorising of the id as a separate ontological entity of the psyche. Although the id may not be ontologically separate, its processes and characteristics will nevertheless be qualitatively different from those of the developed ego.

One aspect of Lichtman's adoption needs modification however. He defines the id as that which has been repressed and alienated. In doing this he equates repression with alienation (in Marx's sense). In Freud's case study of “Little Hans”, (Freud 1987) the child repressed his hostility and fear towards his father and displaced it onto horses about which he developed a phobia. However, in that case, what was repressed could remain repressed until it dissipated. Moreover, Hans was not required to ride horses, his fear of them was respected. This is not the case with alienation. With alienation there is repression or denial of a true self and the subject must continue to repress this true self while forced to perform an activity at variance with that true self. Both these aspects are together called alienation. In short, all alienation involves repression and denial but not all repression and denial involves alienation. Repression and denial may develop into repressed desire (an id) but if Lichtman's explanation of the id is accepted, this is not necessarily so as the repression may take place after formation of the mature self.

What is repressed as "true self" includes desire not to perform the activity which is alien. If this desire was not an aspect of “true self”, the alien activity would not be alien. Because alienation is continual, the repression involved is continual and more severe. This continual aspect of repression in alienation has important consequences which I will describe later.

Redefining reading inability

The fixated character of the id explains the intractability of Stan’s problem. It is well illustrated by Stan’s statement that written words were only blotches of ink and he knew there was nothing to be nervous about. However the blotches of ink continued to make him nervous when he attempted to read them. Stan as a young child had to repress his desire to not attempt reading and that desire
repress characteristics from his childhood. This is further supported by Stan’s observed behaviour. When he attempted to read his voice became diminutive and his left eye began to water. As a child, Stan had trouble with his left eye. 

As a result of this understanding, I now see experiential sense as repressed and qualitatively different from Stan’s developed ego. The relationship between this repressed sense and conscious attempt to read linguistically is one where the former radically interferes with and frustrates the latter. In Freud’s terms (Freud 1975:344) “the phenomena can be traced back to incompletely suppressed psychical material, which, although pushed away by consciousness, has nevertheless not been robbed of all capacity for expressing itself.” In these terms, Stan’s problem is a psychopathology of the reading process.

The ego’s experience of reading inability

Alienation was not theorised by Marx as a unitary concept. Its two main aspects involved a relation to an object (a subject-object relation), and a reflexive relation of workers to their own selves. As Marx said: “How could the product of the worker’s activity confront him as something alien if it were not for the fact that in the act of production he was estranging himself from himself? After all, the product is simply the resume of the activity, of the production” (Marx 1975b:326).

In the conceptual discussion so far, only the first aspect of alienation, the subject-object relationship, has been discussed. This is the relation of the learner to the word-object. In the first chapter I proposed that once experiential sense had been constructed, learners’ subsequent experiences with this object were a base on which they constructed a superstructure of further experience. Included in this superstructure were further reading pedagogy, stigma, teasing and anxiety. The result is a heightened experiential sense and a heightened anxiety associated with reading. Much of this superstructural experience is a reflexive relation of the self to itself in which the ego is involved.

Freud gave a very limited account of the reality which shapes the ego. Social factors, especially power, play a small part. There is also little or no shaping of the ego through the demands of the id. Freud referred to influence of the id which the ego cannot control, but once this influence diminishes,
the ego has only mundane reality to contend with. There is no discussion by Freud about how the ego has been shaped through its encounters with the id.

Because alienation is continual, the ego regularly encounters the reality of its id and experiences aspects of the self over which it has no control. Stan experienced this with the Johnny story when he was twelve years old. He knew that something was preventing him from reading. This knowledge has remained with him for the rest of his life. Added to this is his experience and knowledge of sickness and the other negative feelings which were signified when he attempted to read.

However there must have been incidents prior to the Johnny story where he experienced his reading problem. Otherwise the teacher with the Johnny story would not have singled him out for special attention. These earlier incidents, where Stan’s ego experienced his id, have been repressed and these ego aspects themselves took on id-like qualities because of the early time in Stan’s life when they happened. Freud seems to refer to this aspect of ego experience where he said that large parts of the ego and super-ego are unconscious (repressed) (Freud 1962:92-93). The significance of this point is that it adds to and further entrenches the intractability of Stan’s difficulties.

But there is another aspect of the severity of Stan’s problem which needs to be considered. This is its possible overdetermination which results from alienation being continual.

**Alienation and overdetermination**

The agencies of alienation and denial were the teachers who forced Stan to read as a child. But he did not attach this alienation directly to them or other school objects. In school, children develop different strategies for coping with the institutional reality of school, their alienation and the power of teachers and adults. The actual strategy adopted by different children must be a compromise between the degree of alienation and the teacher's degree of power. But the strategy must also conform to the child's character. When I suggested to Stan that teachers, such as the one who forced him to "learn" the Johnny story, may have contributed to his reading problems, he showed no resentment. Generally,
throughout the sessions, Stan showed no hostility towards teachers even when he was relating the events of the Johnny story although it was obvious that, as a child, he had been upset.

Stan was unable to account for the origin of his experiential sense, and his feeling of sickness when he tried to read. As a result of the materialisation of the word-object, he understood that written words are only blotches of ink and there was nothing in them that should make him feel sick. Nevertheless he was explicit that when he tried to read these blotches of ink they did make him feel sick.

In psychoanalytic terms, the sickness which Stan feels may be compared to a symptom caused by repressed emotion, the symptom being a representative of this emotion. However it was not mere blotches of ink which made him sick and it is not the word-object in itself which caused the sickness but the word-object in semiotic mode when he actively treated it as language by attempting to read it. The word-object as such did not cause sickness and anxiety. If it did, its omnipresence would result in Stan's existence being reduced to one of virtual catatonia. He would be unable to venture into public places for fear of encountering the written word: he would be under siege by the word-object.

In the case of “Little Hans”, horses made the child afraid "but [the fear] was transposed onto them secondarily and had now become fixed upon those elements of the horse complex" (Freud 1987:213). I note that in Freud’s text, the terms “transposed” and “projected” and not displaced are used. There was, according to Freud, also a condensation of Hans’ desire onto horses: a sadistic desire to tease horses reflected his desire for his mother, while his desire to beat horses evidenced his hostility towards his father. But generally fear was his dominant feeling and was manifested as a phobia about horses. Freud's explanation was that Hans desired his mother and while also loving his father, he wished to exclude him from access to her, the result being conflict within Hans but one dominated by a fear of his father.

In another case of animal phobia, the “Wolf Man”, Freud (1987a) discussed how a fear of being shown a picture of wolves arose from a similar situation. Here the child desired his father but the having of the father required the child to be like the mother which, in the child's mind, was castration. Here again,
there was conflict but the fear of castration was dominant. Freud traced the complex route by which this fear became associated with a picture of wolves and the fear transposed onto it.

Freud attempted to generalise these conflicts as the universal childhood phenomenon of the oedipus complex. Instead of such a universal, I regard these two case studies as examples of how children deal with fear and hostility in situations of adult power which are inescapable for children. In school, which is also an inescapable situation for children, their responses range from compliance to resistance. In more concrete terms, children’s strategies range from the extremes of incendiaryism, vandalism and direct assaults on teachers to the seeming submission and passivity of those students who obtain nothing from school, remain illiterate and who seem to blame themselves.

Through discussing schooling with adult literacy students, Levine, (1980) was able to identify two groups of students and two different strategies that they had for coping with school. Firstly, there was that group who became adult literacy students and who showed little hostility to the process of schooling but who appeared damaged by the process. They were indifferent to learning and were demoralised by their problems. Secondly, there were those students who showed much hostility to schooling and teachers and did not become adult literacy students. Levine comments: "It is unlikely that those who were most antagonistic to school and most deeply involved in counter school sub-cultures will initiate contact with anything remotely reminiscent of the institution with which they spent many years in daily conflict" (Levine 1980:46). The question becomes: what has happened to the emotion of the first group of students who did not show active resistance but who were nevertheless damaged by schooling and obtained nothing from it? This group became adult literacy students. This was the case with Stan who also repressed his desire not to go to school after the wagging expedition to Manly.

Freud (1948) refers to this transposing of fear and hostility as *displacement*. Fear and hostility are repressed and, as unconscious meaning, they are displaced onto another object where they become conscious as a phobia about that object. The inescapable demands of discipline and submission in schooling have to be dealt with by children in some way. For children who have at least some degree of scholastic success, these demands are tolerable because submission is exchanged for success which
is also affirmation of self. But for those children who obtain nothing from school in return for attendance, but whose character is a submissive one, feelings of fear or resentment may be displaced onto another object. Such a process may be unconscious but the object selected for displacement cannot be one which is at variance with the submissive strategy. The word-object is such an object. It is already charged with meaning for the illiterate and submissive child and blocks the way to success. It is associated with schooling in a way which no other object is. It may represent the school for some of these children.

In the cases of the “Wolf Man” and “Little Hans”, Freud argued that there was a chain of association from the events and persons causing the fear, to the objects of displacement. In the mind of a small child, these associations contributed to those objects being selected. The word-object is not merely associated with schooling and submission, it is at the centre of schooling and submission. The school buildings cannot be selected as a phobic object as this would be tantamount to resistance, which is not the strategy of submissive children. The word-object invites displacement because it is the repository of already accumulated self-denial.

There are similarities between Stan's submissive character type and that of Elizabeth Von R. described by Freud, (Breuer and Freud 1974). Elizabeth desired her brother-in-law. But her character did not allow her to consummate her desire. Moreover, this particular desire in itself was intolerable to her and was repressed by her. Her repression of that desire resulted in its becoming unconscious and converted into hysteria. With a different and less submissive woman such a repression may not have occurred. A different woman may have adopted a more affirmative sexual strategy.

If the word-object is understood not merely as a summary of Stan’s own self-alienation but also as a summary of his antipathy to attending school, then the severity of his problem becomes more comprehensible. The word-object is overdetermined as a result of the displaced meaning of the general alienation of attending school which Stan once attempted to escape. Overdetermination is not a pre-condition for reading inability but the word-object could represent the convergence of all the fear and hostility that Stan felt as a child in school and was unable to express. It conforms to Freud's statement that "the principal feature in the aetiology of neuroses [is] that their genesis is as a rule
overdetermined, that several factors must come together to produce this result” (Breuer and Freud 1974:346).

**The super-ego and the word-object**

While overdetermination results from transposed meaning, there are other possible direct meanings which increased the negative sense of the word-object for Stan. These relate to super-ego ideals and values of guilt, shame and laziness about himself and his problem. While it is impossible to know the direct origin of these feelings, one source could be teachers especially given that school conditions were harsher for children when Stan was a student. Another direct source could be Stan’s own family. Both his parents were literate as were all his siblings.

Stan did not mention any specific episodes of people teasing or blaming him so the source could be indirect; he may have attributed these feelings to himself. This is made more likely because Stan had a strong work ethic: he had worked most of his life and continued to seek work. His desire to be literate was part of his work seeking. Remuneration was not the only issue in seeking work because he had also worked voluntarily for long periods of time when unemployed.

The significance of these super-ego feelings is that they increase the complexity of Stan’s subjectivity, the conflicts and negative feelings he has about reading. He feels guilty, ashamed and lazy because of it. In the third case study these conflicts arising through the super-ego will become more obvious.

**Repression and the word-object**

An aspect of experiential sense is the desire to not read which Stan began to repress almost fifty years ago. The early part of this desire and Stan’s early experience of it has id-like qualities which explains its intractability. There is no apparent or rational reason for his feeling of sickness when he attempts to read. In fact on his own stated understanding there is every reason for mere blotches of ink to not make him sick.
The production of experiental sense re-totalised Stan's own subjectivity to include this *determinate sense*. Outside of school Stan avoided any semiotic engagement with the word-object. But his semiotic contact with the word-object occurred *in school* as enforced pedagogy which the episode with the Johnny story illustrates. Here the institutional requirements of the teachers’ work required them to persevere with their forcing Stan to find linguistic meaning in the word-object. Episodes such as this were further alienation but Stan's response indicates that a high level of experiental sense was already present. In addition to producing further alienation and adding to experiental sense these enforced attempts to read *denied and repressed* experiental meaning. Although it is impossible to say at what stage repression began to occur, reading pedagogy must have eventually both reproduced alienation and repressed experiental sense. This repression is a denial of experiental sense which was itself denial. This amounts to *denial of denial*.

The above conceptual analysis is complex and may seem over elaborated. However it has not been made for the purpose of producing abstract conceptual niceties but to highlight the processes of alienation and repression and how these have produced conflict and qualitatively different aspects of Stan’s self. These differences explain the severity and intractability of his problem. They have been separated for the purposes of analysis and description but within Stan they operate as a whole.

**Repression, alienation and the method**

The problems in the method I used with Stan are now obvious. The method itself reproduces repression and denial of denial. These processes have re-emerged in the attempt to overcome his inability, in the following way:

(i) Experiental meaning was to be found by Stan *only through* his attempting to read the objective written text *linguistically* (as in stage 6 of the method).

(ii) By asking Stan to differentiate individual words in his texts (stage 13).
(iii) By asking Stan to explicitly read the subjective written texts linguistically with the aid of the tapes (stages 12 and 14).

(iv) By my direct transmission of linguistic meaning and the use of phonics with the words don't, so and as referred to above.

There is nothing in this process to affirm Stan: only more confirmation of his inability, more production of anxiety. His problems were produced by schooling and the subjective texts have meaning for him. But this is no solace because, although he may realise this, he is powerless despite this realisation. If points (i)-(iv) above are included in the method, the circle of alienation-repression will be reproduced.

This circle of denial has existed within Stan for almost fifty years. Fortunately, Stan is able to regulate the times when he relates to the word-object in semiotic mode. If he had to endure such demands continuously, in all probability his body would have succumbed or his mind would have produced its own means of escape. Stan's puzzlement that blotches of ink may cause him to feel anxious and sick but at other times indifferent, reflects the mystification of the power relations that have engulfed him since he was a small child. His preparedness at times to blame himself rather than those exercising power over him is also reflected in his own gentle character and the strategy of minimal resistance that he pursued as a child. However, in one sense he may be to "blame" for his own problems. Possibly through adopting the strategy of submission instead of resistance and hostility to teachers, he has displaced these threats to his own being onto the blotches of ink, where almost fifty years later they remain.

**Pleasure as the negation of denial**

The circle of denial in the reproduction of alienation-repression must be avoided. Elicitation of experiential sense is unpleasurable in itself and the experience of this unpleasure reproduces alienation. Because much of experiential sense has layers of id qualities, the reason of the ego cannot prevail against it. Furthermore, a method to overcome experiential sense cannot rely on direct linguistic
reading because it will elicit and reproduce experiential sense. Pleasure needs to be introduced into the method.

In psychoanalysis most of the literature focuses on denial of desire and pleasure which are linked to instinct. For example Freud, said: "By an 'instinct' is to be provisionally understood the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation as contrasted with a 'stimulus' which is set up by single excitations coming from without" (Freud 1977:82-3). [italics in original] Desire driven by such an instinct is continuous and seeks expression and, in the case of libido or the desire for another person, desire is specific. Unpleasure is avoided, said Freud (1984c) but this unpleasure is that of a tension within the subject, the absence of which Freud then seemed to equate with pleasure. Pleasure in itself, apart from that connected with specific desires, is more nondescript.

One of the few cases where Freud discussed pleasure as separate from instinct and unpleasure was in relation to jokes. He said that pleasure is the repressed play of childhood which is manifested in the joke. Similarity of sound and play upon words is a pleasure "which had been permitted at the stage of play but had been dammed up by rational criticism in the course of intellectual development" (Freud 1986:226-7). Jokes, for Freud, were a development of repressed play. But why is play, pleasure? An answer to this question will be offered in the next chapter. Now I will turn to Marx for a less complex description of pleasure and affirmation.

In my discussion of alienation in the last chapter I briefly mentioned Marx’s contrast of non-alienated production with alienated production (Marx 1975a). He described the experience of this affirmative object of non-alienated production as follows: “[I]n contemplating the object, I would experience an individual pleasure, I would experience my personality as an objective sensuously perceptible power beyond all shadow of doubt” (1975a:277). [italics in original] Although Marx is referring to material production, the sensuous qualities he attributes to this affirming and pleasurable object exist because the subject has expended his or her own free activity upon it. Affirmative production may be taken in a broader sense than material production, as I have already done in my discussion with alienation, because it is the quality of the activity itself which is significant. The material object is only a summary of the activity. An activity itself may be an object of pleasure and affirmation.
In Stan's case his affirming material objects were his two wooden bowls which he produced over forty years ago. Although produced in school, they were objects of pleasure and affirmation. Their presence on his sideboard, his spontaneous introduction of them and his inclination to talk about them (which contrasts with his disinclination to talk about other aspects of school), confirm this status. Most people have at least one object which qualifies as affirming whether it is a material product, such as a craft object, or an object employed in a hobby or an activity such as fishing. Like the word-object, these material objects also have sensuous qualities and a semiotic, but it is positive, affirming and pleasurable.

Instead of trying to elicit a semiotic of unpleasure and denial from the word-object, the method should be trying to elicit a semiotic of pleasure from affirming objects and converting that to language. Language has a unique ability to denote concrete events and the emotion connected with them. But the danger with language is that it may substitute itself for actual experience. In education, the result may be reified knowledge, as described by Everhart (1983): there is a "right" answer which students "know" regardless of any personal or emotional relationship to the known. Everhart likens this process to one of pouring knowledge into empty vessels. This is similar to Freire's (1972) description of formal education as banking in which, through language, deposits of knowledge are made in learners irrespective of their emotional and experiential relationship to the knowledge.

But on the positive side, language, when used with care, may be used to denote the real and concrete in people's lives. It may carry affirmative and supportive emotion into a learning or therapeutic situation. This aspect of emotionality is one of the criteria for selection of generative words by Freire in his method of literacy teaching. He says (Freire 1973:49): "One selects not only the words most weighted with existential meaning (and thus the greatest emotional content), but also typical sayings, as well as words and expressions linked to the experience of the groups in which the researcher participates. These interviews reveal longings, frustrations, disbeliefs, hopes, and an impetus to participate". I note that these are isolated words, not texts, and they are selected by teachers from their understanding of what is emotional and significant in learners' lives. In using affirmative language,
I will try to reverse these two aspects. *Texts* will be used and *learners will decide* what is significant in their lives.

**Concluding comments**

The work with Stan was discontinued after the eighth session. Stan had a heart problem for which he was taking medication. I was concerned about the level of stress that the work with him created. He also seemed to be showing more reluctance about the work although my personal relationship with him was good. Given these factors, I did not feel justified to continue the sessions especially since there was no clarity about how to avoid the stress of experiential sense in the method.

Through understanding Stan’s inability with the aid of a synthesis of ideas from Marx and Freud, I obtained a different view of the problem. Pleasure and affirmation, rather than denial, needed to become the basis of the method. My plan with the next case study was to try to incorporate these two aspects into the method.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE TRANSITIONAL METHOD**

In the last chapter I developed a clearer conceptual understanding of the intractability of experiential sense and how it prevents the acquisition of reading skills. This understanding showed why a method based on making experiential sense conscious will be unsuccessful.

In this chapter and case study, I concentrate on development of the method almost exclusively. I have retained two guiding ideas which I discussed towards the end of the last chapter. The first is that pleasure and affirmation must become a means of reducing experiential sense. The second is the participant’s spoken language is able to denote pleasure and affirmation. The difficulty is to link these two aspects to the word-object where the positive emotion of pleasure and affirmation could replace the negative emotion of experiential sense.
Although I discarded that part of version one of the method which concerns the elicitation of experiential sense, I have kept the technique of recording spoken subjective texts and reproducing these as written texts. In this chapter I sometimes depart from these two aspects to explore a few other themes. Generally, where there are such departures, I summarise the work rather than give full descriptions. The chapter is in the main a description and explanation of how pleasure and affirmation may be used to create a new positive sense about written language.

**Description of the subject**

The subject in this case study will be referred to as Jim. At the time of the case study he was twenty-three years old and living with his grandmother. Also residing in the same house in the western suburbs of Sydney were two uncles and an aunt, these three persons being children of his grandmother. All of these four adults were literate although one of the uncles did have literacy problems which he had overcome. This particular uncle at one time stressed to me the need for hard work in overcoming these problems and seemed quite proud of his own accomplishment. Jim's aunt had a tertiary qualification and worked in geriatric nursing while the two uncles were employed in what seemed to be factory work. Jim's grandmother at one time showed me a poem which she was fond of. She also demonstrated to me on several occasions that she was able to say the alphabet backwards as well as spell words backwards!

The initiative for the work with Jim came from his grandmother. She found out about this research through a disabilities data base. It quickly became evident that she was protective of Jim and was attempting to improve his general capacity to deal with life's events. Most of Jim's life history was given to me by his grandmother. Jim himself was reluctant to talk about it.

The grandmother was very disdainful of Jim's parents, particularly his father. At various times she called them both alcoholics and drug addicts. She said Jim was an unwanted child and that his childhood was generally unhappy. He lived with her for much of it. He now rarely sees his parents or two siblings. Jim's adult life has been drastically affected by his childhood. He is depressed and his
grandmother refers to him as "lazy". She said that several times a day he tells her that he loves her very much. These are spontaneous comments that he makes often in contexts that she regards as inappropriate.

According to the grandmother, both Jim's parents could read the newspapers. His mother went to second year High School but his father, who came from Germany, may not have gone to school. Jim's parents did not read to him as a child but his grandmother did during those times when he lived with her. She states that she also tried to teach him to read as a child but used to become frustrated with him, particularly when he read small words incorrectly.

Jim missed a lot of school especially when living with his parents. He left school at fifteen and worked in two jobs as a general hand. In his last job he contracted severe dermatitis over one hand and wrist through contact with chemicals, as a result of which he is making a substantial claim for workers compensation. Initially, one of the reasons for interest in Jim's literacy was that it would improve his employment prospects. When it became apparent, about halfway through my work with him, that Jim was likely to be successful in his claim for compensation, this motivation possibly diminished.

In High School Jim was in OA classes where the emphasis is on non-academic subjects. In woodwork classes he made a table and a wine rack for which he obtained high marks. He described his relationship with the woodwork teacher as good. Numeracy was no problem according to Jim. It was reading that was a major cause of stress in school. He reports that he liked the interaction with his friends at school and that there were only a few incidents of other children teasing him because of his illiteracy.

In the last two years of primary school he remembers teachers trying to help him with reading and also parents coming to the school and giving separate tuition to children with reading problems. All of this help appears to have been focused on phonics. Jim was unable to recall any school events before these last two years of primary school.
Apart from two separate jobs, Jim has been unemployed since leaving school. When I began sessions with him he was in a work experience programme connected with his compensation claim. It seems that while in this programme he obtained a forklift driving licence.

At his grandmother’s instigation, Jim went to adult literacy classes at a local TAFE College but was asked not to return because of his uncooperative ways. He also had a one-to-one tutor for literacy at the same College who eventually refused to work with him for similar reasons.

Although in my sessions Jim was generally cooperative, there was an element of conflict about the work. Once when he was outside during a break, I asked him if he wanted more time before we went back inside to continue the session. He answered with words to the effect of, "No, let's go back inside now because I want to get it over and done with."

He seemed to realise, from his demeanour, that he had said something that he had been trying to conceal. During that session and the next one, I attempted to discuss this ambivalence with him, not as a remonstrance, but as something understandable. He was however noncommittal and these discussions did not seem productive. My final comments were to the effect that if he felt conflict about the work I was doing with him then it was better for him to admit it rather than deny it.

When I asked him how he felt when people at school tried to teach him to read, he said:

I used to get stressed and feel sick. I had a couple of arguments at school about it.

The “couple of arguments at school” may be an understatement about his level of resistance to schooling. This seems likely if his attitude as an adult at TAFE was sufficient for two teachers to refuse to work with him. If his level of resistance to reading pedagogy was high, then his level of displaced alienation onto written language may have been low. I will make a further comment on displacement and the intensity of experiential sense after I have discussed the sessions with Jim.
Generally, Jim was not a communicative person throughout most of the sessions. As will be seen in more detail below, he is not a reflective person. His spoken vocabulary is limited. This observation is confirmed by an independent educational assessment which was made available to me. This assessment states that "his awareness of vocabulary above general everyday conversation is still relatively poor." The assessment also refers to Jim's problem as "dyslexia/learning difficulties."

All twenty-seven sessions with Jim were conducted in his grandmother's house where he was residing. The average duration of each session was an hour and a half. All sessions were tape recorded. Thirty-four texts were spoken and recorded. All spoken texts were then written by me and returned to Jim at the following session. Texts are also referred to as stories and all are numbered in chronological order. To avoid confusion between text/story and session numbers, text/story numbers are given as numerals and session numbers are given as words.

Rather than describe each of the individual twenty-seven sessions with Jim, the sessions will be discussed in four groups. Each group had a different approach which obtained different results.

**Assessment sessions: one to four**

The following written statement, similar to that given to Stan, the subject of the first case study, was given to Jim. Jim's correct name and address have been omitted to keep his anonymity:

My name is..................
I live at..................
I want to learn to read and write.
To-day is Thursday the 24th of July.

Jim was able to read the above text except for the words "want" "learn" "read" and "write".

Jim’s comment on school was:
I used to get stressed with school because I couldn't cope with it.

One of the activities that Jim felt comfortable with was fishing. During session one Jim brought out his fishing rod and we discussed how he felt about it. When I asked him why he felt comfortable with fishing and not with reading his answer was:

Because I like fishing and I don't like reading that much.

He was unable to expand on the difference in his feelings about these two activities beyond this statement.

These feelings about reading are reflected in story 2 recorded by Jim. This text was a repeat of story 1 with only minor changes to the wording. It is reproduced here because it illustrates an important point about how experiential sense affects reading:

Story Number 2

When I Try to Read

When I try to read I get headaches, I feel sick in the stomach and I get stressed because I think the other people can read and I can’t.

During session number three I decided to return to text 2 which Jim attempted to read. He listened to the tape of the spoken text four times but each time when he reached the word “other” he was unable to read it. I stopped any further attempts to read and began discussing experiential sense with him, not in these terms, but as a memory of the fact that each previous time he had read this word he was incorrect. In addition, Jim ripped pages from an old book. I reminded him that written words are only blotches of ink. After this interlude he was able to read the text in full.
In more theoretical language, "other" could be seen as having a stronger experiental sense than its linguistic meaning. The former overpowers the latter, although contiguous words in the same text are read correctly. Each time Jim misread the word, experiental sense was retotalised as stronger for that particular word-object. Different attempts to understand this misreading may describe it as a learning disability or dyslexia. Socially constructed experiental sense as an alternative explanation cannot, of course, be proved but neither can organically based explanations. However, the fact that the misreading of "other" appeared to be changed by social interaction between Jim and me, would seem to support an argument based on social origins of the problem rather than organic ones.

But this argument for experiental sense and the particular way it may be operating in the above case is also important on a practical level. It makes Jim's particular problem intelligible and to some extent relieves the perplexity of attempting to help people such as Jim. While the steps that I took to deal with the problem are piecemeal and cannot be a long term solution, they do indicate the possibility of a solution. In other words Jim's problem may not be unchangeable.

In session two, spoken text 3, “Fishing”, and spoken text 4, “My Dog”, were constructed by Jim. Text 3 was as follows:

**Story Number 3**

**Fishing**

*My name is [Jim].*

*I started fishing when I was fourteen. I like it a lot now. I go out deep sea fishing every fortnight. The only thing I like to do is marlin fishing.*

*And I'm in a fishing club. I like going fishing with the blokes, they are real good company.*

*We catch in one day probably, each person catches probably about thirty-five fish, mostly all the time.*
For my twenty-first birthday they bought me an Albee reel because I didn't have one at that time. They went and bought me one.

I feel pretty comfortable with my fishing rod because its small and light and I'm more used to it now than I was first off. It's a fibreglass rod, it's very sensitive on the end of the tip.

These two texts were constructed by Jim's rehearsing what he planned to say while I wrote this down. I then read this draft of the text back to him. He then spoke this into the tape recorder which I controlled. With both these texts there was virtually no dialogue preceding the rehearsal. The contents of the texts are affirming objects. Two other texts were made in these sessions in a similar manner. These were “My Car”, story 5, and “When I Try to Travel”, story 6.

During the next session, session four, Jim was able to read stories 5 and 6 to me but only after he had listened to the tapes. I considered listening to the tapes in these cases as an aid to memory only, similar to linguistic transmission, without changing the sense of the word-object.

During session four he was also able to read story 4 "My Dog" to me after listening to the tape. With story number 3 "Fishing", he made a halting reading to me without listening to the tape but there were six words that he was unable to understand.

In this session I also returned to story 2 to see if diminished experiental sense associated with the word “other” had been maintained. I found that when he attempted to read this story he again became confused with "other" and had to listen to the tape.

After reflection about these four sessions I decided that there certainly was no particular direction which indicated how to lessen experiental sense. There were indications that it could be diminished in a very piecemeal way but this was not permanent. Jim did not show any enthusiasm for the work completed so far. His attitude was more one of compliance which I suspect resulted from his
grandmother's influence. In particular, while he was attempting to read, his voice was flat and hesitant which contrasted markedly with his confidence and assertion when speaking informally about his affirming objects. I decided to embark upon a far more exploratory method and try different approaches. In doing this I recorded Jim's response to these different approaches as well as changes in reading ability.

**Reversed sessions: five to seven**

These sessions covered stories 7 to 10. I decided to reverse the procedure and speak and write texts myself which were relevant to Jim but contained none of his affirming objects. Story 7 is given as an example:

*Story Number 7*

*Story about [Jim]*

*by Peter Williamson*

[Jim] says that when he tries to read he gets headaches, feels sick in the stomach and gets stressed. He also gets embarrassed if there are other people there who are able to read. This is the opposite way to how he feels about his fishing rod. When he holds his fishing rod he feels good, and comfortable with it. I said to [Jim] that headaches, stress, sickness and embarrassment are what a lot of people feel who have problems with reading. We then talked about why [Jim] feels this way. I said that words are only blotches of ink and that when we are at school, teachers make us try to read. If we don't like school or we are feeling stressed because of problems with our family, then trying to find the meaning for these blotches of ink can be very stressful. For people like this, stress can become the meaning of written words. As soon as they have trouble finding the real meaning for words they find stress instead. Once stress is there it blocks out the real meaning. I suggested to [Jim] that he is one of these people. What we need to do is let [Jim] get control over words and help him get rid of the stress. From
what I have seen so far he seems to be starting to do this. In the end written words for [Jim] may end up being things he feels good and comfortable with just like his fishing rod.

By the end of session seven I was convinced that there were no aspects of these sessions that could be productively developed. During session seven Jim also produced stories number 11 ("What I usually do at work") and 12 ("What I did today") the titles of which were suggested by me. Both these stories were spoken straight into the tape recorder by Jim without any prior dialogue.

Exploratory sessions: eight to seventeen

In this group of sessions I attempted several new approaches. First, I discussed with Jim the obvious conflict he felt about reading. This did not appear to produce any results and it was obvious that he did not really understand his reluctance about reading as conflict. I did not pursue this discussion past one session.

A second approach that I explored was a cathartic one where Jim destroyed several “words” which he had consistent trouble reading. However I decided that it was the paper on which the words were written, rather than words themselves, which were destroyed. This “catharsis” produced no change in Jim.

A third exploratory approach was to see what possibilities there were for the use of imagery in the reduction of experiential sense. This is a process of forming images and then exercising control over them as described by Leuner (1969). However Jim was unable to visualise objects so this theme was also discontinued.

Texts 13 to 21 were constructed in these sessions. There would be little point in reproducing all the nine texts produced in this group of sessions so only one sample is given. This is story 18:
Story Number 18

When I Went Motor Bike Riding

I started motorbike riding about three years back. The last time I had a ride on a motorbike was last year with my cousin Ray. We went to Bushtown to ride the motorbikes. It was my cousin's first time to ride a motorbike. We went through the bush and my cousin was going a bit too fast. I sped up to him to tell him to slow down. He thought I was waving to him. He waved to me and accelerated and hit a tree.

Stories 20 and 21 are distinct in that they were both direct transcriptions of my asking Jim questions and his answers. However he showed little enthusiasm for this work and there was no change in his ability to read the stories.

Reflecting on these sessions, I noted the following points about the stories:

Manner of composition.

None of the eleven texts was preceded by any real dialogue. Some of them were spoken directly into the tape recorder while with others a topic for the text was agreed upon with Jim and I suggested a number of points which he could cover in his speaking of them. In many of these texts Jim's voice is flat and sounds perfunctory.

Content.

Only in 4 of the 11 texts is the content affirming. Even in a story such as number 20, Fishtown, which is about an enjoyable weekend of fishing, Jim's voice on the tape seems to negate all the pleasure and affirmation of the content. This is in marked contrast to the confidence in Jim's voice when he talks
informally about, for example, his dog Sam. This aspect of the informal and assertive voice will be discussed below.

**Manner of reading.**

With this perspective it is not so much a question of whether Jim was able to read the texts or how many "mistakes" he made or whether he was able to read the texts without the assistance of listening to the tapes of the spoken texts. It is a question of the tone of voice *when attempting to read the texts aloud to me*. When doing this his voice became diminutive to such an extent that he seemed like a different person. *It seemed as if the very fact of reading aloud had elicited the child in him.* At times this was so extreme he was whispering.

This experience is very similar to that with Stan, (Chapter Two above). Stan's whole persona changed when reading aloud. In both these cases there is a contrast with the informal assertive voice when speaking about everyday events. This assertive voice seemed to vanish, not just when reading aloud, but often when Jim was preparing material that he knew was to be read aloud.

**Transitional sessions: eighteen to twenty-seven**

This was the last group of sessions. They began after a break of sixteen days. Texts 22 to 34 were produced. As with the previous group of sessions, there would be little point in reproducing all the texts. Three will be provided, representing the main issues for analysis.

Text 24 is included because it illustrates how affirming objects may be located through other texts. The subject of cooking arose because of another text where Jim described in detail the catching and cooking of the fish in the trip to Fishtown. This catching and cooking text in turn followed from the text which described the trip to Fishtown. There is a string of three connected texts. It is also noteworthy that although Jim told me initially that he enjoyed cooking, when it came to making the text, enjoyment had changed to a liking of "not that much". This text is also significant in that while dialoguing it he made reference to his father who had shown him how to make potato pancakes.
I like cooking not that much. I cook spaghetti bolognaise and other meat and fish wrapped up in alfoil with lemon, butter and pepper. I also cook fried fish with batter, rissoles and potato pancakes. The potatoes are grated fine, I put it in a bowl and mix it with onion and then put in a bit of flour to make them stick together. Then I put them in the frying pan until they get brown. Then I pull them out. I don't put them on paper because I like a bit of oil on them.

The next text, story number 26, is reproduced because it is probably the one in which affirming objects are present in a more tangible way than in any other story. Prior to making this story we went to the shed in Jim's yard and he showed me his spear-fishing equipment. This was part of a considerable dialogue about spear-fishing. This dialogue continued back in the house.

I go spear-fishing in the summer-time, once a month. I normally go to Cronulla beach, off the rocks near Shark Island.

I don't have a wet suit. I just use a snorkel. I don't have the money to buy a wet suit for scuba diving. I have never tried scuba diving but I would like to. I would like to try scuba diving because I could go further out into the ocean and get more fish.

I use a spear gun and a hand spear. The number of fish I catch will vary but I get most with the hand spear. The most fish I ever caught was about thirty-five. This was about two years ago.

I usually go spear-fishing with my uncle or my mates.

I have never seen sharks but my brother has. He shot one and brought it out of the ocean. This was only a baby, about a metre and a half long.
Story 34 is included for a number of reasons. It is the last text made with Jim. It also contains one of the only two references made to his parents during the sessions. Both references to parents were unsolicited and contrasted markedly with Jim’s general reluctance to speak about them. This text was also different in that it was recorded and then immediately written out by hand by me while Jim operated the pause button on the tape recorder to allow me to write. Up to this point the practice had been to record the text, for me to wordprocess it at home and bring it to the next session.

**Story Number 34**

**Jim’s Table**

I started making my table when I was fourteen at Smallvale High School. It took me two months to finish it. I only had one period a week to do my table. I got pretty good results after when I finished it. I got ninety-five out of a hundred. I burned the timber then I lacquered it and put a smoked glass on it. When I took it home my parents were happy about it. Ever since then it's been used a lot now. I haven't made any other tables since then.

I didn't like school that much at all.

The tables were good making them. It was a real good experience making them and I used to get on good with the teacher in woodwork. In woodwork I made a stool and a winerack. I got good marks on them too. I felt good making the stool and the winerack because it was the first time I ever made one in my life.

To clarify the differences between this group of sessions and the preceding group, the same three issues will be discussed:

**Manner of composition**
With most of the texts in this group there was some dialogue prior to composition. The extent of
dialogue varied. With story number 26, where there was the longest dialogue, it lasted approximately
20 minutes. The shortest dialogue was in story number 24 where it was approximately five minutes. In
these dialogues, I did not directly question Jim but he told me about the affirming objects. If I
requested more information, this was for its intrinsic value rather than its being a mere stage in the
preparation of a text. In short the dialogues were conversations which tended to be ends in
themselves rather than a means to another end.

There were two texts where there was no dialogue at all. In these cases Jim said that he wanted to
speak the story straight into the tape recorder. These were cases where he had developed sufficient
confidence to be able to speak in this direct way and he knew what he wanted to say. Jim’s
demeanour when doing this was that he was in control of the proceedings.

During session twenty Jim and I discussed some of the differences between spoken and written
language such as repetitions. Jim noticed that in some of the written texts I had omitted his unnecessary
use of "and". This point is significant because it points to an emerging conscious sense of composition.
For most of the texts in this group of sessions, I would operate the pause button on the tape recorder
while Jim concentrated on what to say, not only in content but also in form. That is, in Jim's spoken
texts there were the beginnings of language resembling written language which is spoken. A
comparison of stories 3 and 26 (both reproduced above) supports this point.

There is also a difference in Jim's voice in the spoken texts in this group of sessions. It is confident, not
diminutive. On one tape (story 28 about his cousin Ray's birthday party) Jim's voice is almost the same
as his informal voice.

In the construction of spoken texts which were preceded by dialogue, the texts are distillations or
extracts of the dialogue. They were composed texts in which the informality and confidence of
everyday language in the dialogues were carried into the composition of the recorded text.

Content of the dialogues and texts
The content was affirming in all the texts of this group. The content concerned events in the past or future in which Jim was a main actor. The objects were generally those over which Jim had control or activities in which Jim had control. They were objects of pleasure as opposed to denial. Importantly, they were about concrete events in Jim's life, not abstract ones. This allowed him to speak about them with little reflection.

**Manner of reading**

At the beginning of this group of sessions I stressed to Jim that I wanted to try a new approach of his not reading aloud. I said that I wanted him to "make a connection between the words on tape and words on paper. In other words read it to yourself...remember it's your voice." During Jim’s silent reading, I gave him as much time as he needed and as much access to the tapes and the tape player as he needed. On many occasions during these readings, I went into his backyard and left him alone. I recommenced my work with him only when he said he had completed the reading.

Because there was no reading aloud in these sessions it might seem that there is nothing to compare the "reading voice" of the other sessions with. There is however his voice in language exercises which I will now describe.

These exercises involved words in the stories 27 to 34. There were two categories of such words. The main group were compound words such as "cheesecake", "weekend" and "nightclub" which Jim broke down into constituent words. The other smaller group were words such as "fishing" and "going" in which Jim found stem morphemes and their suffixes. There were 31 such words in these eight texts. After Jim realised what was involved, he was able to do the exercises. It is not just the fact that he was able to do this but the speed with which he was able to do it and his voice when doing it. Towards the end of this group of sessions he answered almost before I had finished the question. Not only did his voice become increasingly assertive. But he seemed to actually enjoy showing me that he was able to do the exercise. The exercise became affirmative for him.
Up to here I have not indicated how many of the written texts Jim was able to read. In fact he was not able to read any without listening to the tape until the last transitional group of sessions. In this group it was not until story number 30 that he informed me he was able to read that whole text without listening to the tape.

Should Jim be believed when he said that he was able to read that text, given his reluctance about the programme? I have no doubt that Jim was able to read story number 30 and other texts. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, that he had no hesitation about telling me when he could not read a particular word. He was very open about this. Secondly, when he was reading he appeared to be doing so in a conscientious way and to be very engaged in it. When he was unable to read words, he would find the tape from amongst the collection of cassettes and play it back searching for the particular problem words. All the tapes were marked with their number and title to match exactly the title and number of the written text. After locating the problem words he would tell me what they were. Finally, he was able to break down the words in the language exercises in the manner which I have already described.

There were numerous times when we went back to texts from previous sessions. For example in session twenty-five, Jim again attempted to read to himself story 26, "Spear-fishing". He said that he was able to read it except for one word. He did not listen to the tape but left the problem word and continued reading. He then came back to the problem word, considered the first and last letters and the meaning came to him. The word was "further", in the second paragraph. This manner of reading by Jim is highly significant when considered in conjunction with the conceptual understanding of the method. I will return to story 26 after the conceptual discussion.

Of the four groups of sessions the last, the transitional group, was the most effective. An objection could be made that all the activities throughout the sessions contributed to Jim's more positive responses and that by the time the transitional sessions were reached, the combined effect of these activities was manifest. While some effect of the prior sessions cannot be discounted, no change was observed after any of these sessions. But most significantly, Jim himself appraised the transitional
sessions differently. The following is an extract of a conversation I had with Jim at the end of session nineteen:

I said: So how do you like this new way of doing stuff?

Jim said: I like it. At least I am not getting stressed now about it.

These comments were made shortly after the transitional sessions began. That is, after two sessions Jim said in response to my casual question about his liking of the method that he was not feeling stressed any longer. He volunteered the comment about stress without my mentioning stress. In fact, stress had not been spoken of for some time before this. He made no comments about whether the method might be helpful with his reading or that he was able to read any of the particular texts better than in the prior groups of sessions. He liked the method because he was not being stressed by it.

In my description of Jim at the beginning of the chapter I suggested that he may have had a low level of displaced alienation and a relatively low level of experiential sense because of his resistance to reading pedagogy. Because he experienced stress about reading he refused and avoided reading at a relatively early age and was placed in an OA class where there were fewer academic subjects. He had a good relationship with his woodwork teacher and obtained good marks for his table and wine rack. As an adult, he continued to avoid reading pedagogy as his reaction to TAFE classes shows. Absence of reading pedagogy may have prevented the accumulation of more experiential sense and displacement. In the next case study, there is a contrasting situation.(see chapter four).

The following is an abstract of thirteen essential points of the transitional sessions:

(1) Affirming objects were the content of all the dialogues and spoken and written texts.

(2) The affirming objects related to concrete events in Jim's life as opposed to abstract objects which required formulation by him.
(3) Jim tended to lead me to these objects by informal discussion or by my noticing them in other texts, rather than my specifying what the content was to be.

(4) In the main, we engaged in a dialogue in which he was able to tell me about and describe these affirming objects.

(5) In those cases where there was no preceding dialogue or a limited dialogue, Jim's speaking of the text unaided could also be regarded as an affirming object in itself because he was able to demonstrate his ability to do this. After speaking these texts there was generally a short dialogue about the content.

(6) The spoken texts recorded by Jim were distillations or extracts of the dialogues.

(7) Dialogues tended to be ends in themselves rather than only a means to the construction of written texts.

(8) Spoken texts were composed and structured texts. They were not mere spoken language which was recorded.

(9) Composing and structuring was assisted by my provision of key words from the dialogue upon which Jim based his texts.

(10) Jim's own language was used in the construction of the texts.

(11) The tenor of Jim's speech was inclined to informal assertiveness in the dialogues, the spoken texts and his analysis of the language in the written texts.

(12) Jim had control of the matching of the written texts and the tapes of the spoken texts and the tape recorder during the playing of the latter.
(13) There was no requirement that Jim read any of the written texts aloud. There was no surveillance of his reading. Instead he was given the written text to match with his spoken text. He was able to read the text to himself and listen to the tapes as he required. I gave him as much time to do this as he required.

Stress is one of the terms used to describe the manifestation of experiential sense. If stress is not being experienced then it may be assumed that experiential sense is not being elicited by the particular manner in which the learner is engaging with written language. What follows is an attempt to conceptually understand the transitional group of sessions.

**Conceptual analysis**

For the purpose of this analysis the term “stress” as used by Jim and the term “anxiety” will be treated as equivalent but “anxiety” will be used to cover both.

Jim experienced anxiety when he attempted to read because of a conflict between repressed desire to not read the word-object and his conscious attempt to read. This repressed desire is an aspect of experiential sense. But as I have noted it is also a base upon which there is a superstructure of further experience associated with reading. This superstructure is further anxiety, stress and possibly memories of teasing, stigma and displaced emotion such as general antipathy to schooling. This superstructure causes the word-object to be overdetermined. The result is a heightened experiential sense and a heightened anxiety associated with reading, as discussed in the previous chapter. If anxiety as a manifestation of experiential sense is reduced then the subject will be able to acquire reading skills.

There are a number of therapeutic orientations which attempt to reduce anxiety. Some of those with a psychoanalytic basis were very briefly explored with Jim in the exploratory group of sessions. All of these were found to be inappropriate for him.
Another therapeutic orientation is the behaviourist one. Wolpe (1982) conceptualises anxiety as a learnt response to a specific stimulus, a state that becomes associated with another event. For Wolpe anxiety is fear, which is a physiological condition. It is "the individual organism's characteristic pattern of autonomic responses to noxious stimulation" (Wolpe 1982:23). This learnt behaviour may be unlearnt by systematic desensitisation in which a new response to the stimulus is learnt. It may seem that Jim's anxiety when he attempted to read would qualify as this type of behaviour and could be desensitised. That is, his behaviour could become the subject of another determination. He could learn to relax when attempting to read.

According to Wolpe (1982:56) "all behaviour, including cognitive behaviour, is subject to causal determination no less than is the behaviour of falling objects or magnetic fields". But this deterministic view of the subject is inadequate. As discussed in the previous chapter, the reason why experiental sense is intractable is that it is a repressed sense. Or in more Freudian terminology, experiental sense corresponds to id desires from the past which cannot be modified by current conscious wishes only. The problem arises because of repressed desire and not because Jim's autonomic nervous system has been locked into a particular response.

Generally, I have theorised the human subject as a sense giving active subject rather than a passive subject upon whom sense is impressed by the object. This was discussed in the previous chapter with regard to Stan's ability to make the word-object signify by entering into a semiotic relation to it when he chose. It was not a case of written language persistently impressing itself upon him and making him anxious. These remarks also apply to Jim.

Although these comments indicate that a behaviourist approach is inappropriate in this analysis, there are aspects of practical behaviour therapy which are useful. I value the active and interventionist approach of behaviour therapy as opposed to the more contemplative and introspective approach of psychoanalysis where the subject accepts and understands an interpretation of his problem. As already noted, an introspective and analytical approach was not appropriate for Jim. It may not be appropriate for most adults with literacy problems.
Despite the appearance of an unbridgeable dichotomy between psychoanalytic and behaviourist tendencies, there is an integrationist alternative which regards this dichotomy as one based more on theory than on practice. When the practices of both therapies are examined without theoretical preconceptions, there is a possible basis for a more integrated approach. The advantages of behaviourist practice is its intervention in behaviour and also its significant success in the treatment of problems such as phobias or anxiety about particular objects.

It is impossible to review all the literature on this integrationist tendency. Instead a short summary of the position of Wachtel (1977, 1984, 1997), one of its main protagonists, will be presented.

Wachtel argues that with systematic desensitisation, where the subject is taught muscle relaxation, there is in fact no pairing of relaxation and the stimulus which causes the anxiety. Instead, the therapist provides a context in which subjects are able to relax and expose themselves to the object or event causing anxiety. It is more a case of subjects being able to get control over what is causing anxiety. It is not a case of providing an appropriate physiological condition, through relaxation, which results in a decrease of anxiety as claimed by behaviourists. In fact, claims Wachtel, this therapy relies to a large extent on patients’ skills of introspection and ability to articulate inner experiences in the form of imagining the events giving rise to anxiety.

This contrasts with standard psychoanalysis where the analysis is the therapy. The metaphor Wachtel uses to describe this process is the unearthing of the "frozen woolly mammoth" from the subject's past and its thawing in the present through its acceptance by the subject. In standard analytic technique the therapist remains neutral, intervention being limited to the interpretation offered to the patient. This is similar to what I initially planned to do with Stan in the first case study: to make his experiential sense conscious through dialogue and to construct texts about it. By doing this Stan’s experiential sense would be "thawed" and he would be released from it.

What is significant is not so much Wachtel's argument for integration as his claim that the subject actively overcomes anxiety rather than being physiologically determined away from anxiety in a
passive way as claimed by behaviourists. In doing this the subject actively gives a new sense to the objects causing anxiety, which allows him or her to engage with them without anxiety.

This may be what happened with Jim. He began to give the written texts a different sense. But then it becomes necessary to understand which aspects of the method were instrumental in the production of this new sense. If it is possible to articulate this process then it may be possible to accentuate it in other cases.

Although the following ideas are not canvassed by Wachtel, they seem to follow from what he has said. The main point is the subject's active production of a sense which has a therapeutic outcome. Three cases from the therapeutic literature exemplify this point.

The first is reported by Stolorow and Lachmann (1980:138-139). It concerned a man who was undergoing therapy for severe states of depersonalisation which related to his childhood. While he was within the therapeutic relationship he was able to establish a new sense of self through the therapist's empathic understanding. The subject also made tape recordings of his feelings. When he played them back he listened to them with the same understanding that he felt the therapist had given him. Stolowrow and Lachmann refer to the tapes as transitional objects as in Winnicott's (1985a) sense. This allowed the subject to restore his own feelings of self. Stolorow and Lachmann say, "[t]his use of the tape recorder as a transitional [self object]...enabled him to regain a sense of conviction about his own substantiality and helped him to restore self-cohesion in the wake of narcissistic injuries" (Stolowrow and Lachmann 1980:139).

A second example is provided by Atwood and Stolorow (1984:89-90). Here a woman's early history had diminished her capacity to feel emotion. She was able to establish a supportive relationship with her therapist and during the same period began to care for a teddy bear with great affection and tenderness. Through the teddy bear she was able to consolidate the re-establishment of her lost emotionality and maintain the bond with the therapist when away from him. The teddy bear is described by Atwood and Stolorow in terms that amount to a transitional object.
In a third case (Kaminer 1978) a woman brought a small doll to therapy session when she felt particularly depressed. As well as describing the qualities of the doll in ways which were very similar to that of Winnicott's conceptualisation of the transitional object, she also had a number of small toys at home in her bedroom. When she felt alone she held them and as a result would feel more complete.

These cases may be seen as situations where subjects constructed a sense about objects. But the significant point is that they also used this sense in a therapeutic way to alleviate threatening anxiety. A parallel could be drawn between this construction of sense and the sense which preliterate children construct about written text through emergent literacy.

The objects in question have been referred to as transitional objects. In Winnicott's writings the archetype transitional object is the first such object that the young child creates. I will now examine Winnicott's ideas to elucidate how Jim may have constructed transitional phenomena for his texts which helped him to reduce experiential sense.

**Transitional phenomena and the text**

Winnicott described transitional objects as "some phenomenon...that becomes vitally important to the infant for use at the time of going to sleep and is a defence against anxiety, especially anxiety of the depressive type" (Winnicott 1985a:4). According to Winnicott transitional objects are universal, all children create them in the first year of life to alleviate anxiety. This object symbolises union with the breast/mother with which the baby experiences wholeness; separation from the mother being a state into which the infant develops. During this development, parents provide ego support for the infant's emerging sense of his or her own separate identity. To accomplish this stable separate identity there must have been what Winnicott called good enough mothering by which he meant that mothering need not have been perfect but sufficient to allow stable and separate identity to form.

In a later text dealing with cultural experience, Winnicott expanded on his original definition. He gave a time for the creation of the child's transitional objects. This is "at the place in space and time where and when the mother is in transition from being (in the baby's mind) merged in with the infant and
alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of. The use of the object now symbolizes the union of two now separate things, baby and mother, *at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness*" (Winnicott 1985b:114). [italics in original]

According to Gaddini (1975), it is not so much the breast or bottle that is important as the holding of the child by the mother in a good supportive way so that the child is able to experience its own body boundaries. "What is essential for this 'creation' is", says Gaddini "that he has come to know this object in a *good holding situation*" (Gaddini 1975:733). [italics in original] If there has *not* been good enough mothering, there would be no security for the transitional object to symbolise. There must be a difference between the situations of the child who joyously holds the transitional object as she or he goes to sleep and the child who clutches it in tearful desperation. This is possibly the point that Sperling (1963) is indirectly making when he criticises Winnicott by referring to the fetishistic nature of transitional objects. Sperling refers to "this morbid attachment to an inanimate object [which] is an indication of an arrest in the development of object relation and a fixation to part object relationship" (Sperling 1963:377). However Derri (1984) says that the true transitional object is *transitional* by which she means that it *leads somewhere*. It is not one that is retained for comfort or pleasure in the sense of being fetishistic.

Research by Gaddini and Gaddini (1970) suggests that transitional objects are not universal but are specific to cultures where there are separate child-parent sleeping arrangements. This finding is supported by other research that has been reviewed by Applegate (1989). Applegate concludes that “the development of such attachments is far from a ‘universal’ phenomenon...In fact, the observable attachments of this sort may occur most frequently in white, middle to upper-middle-class children living in Western, traditionally structured nuclear families...the concept of the transitional object appears to be culture bound" (Applegate 1989:46). This cultural specificity seems to be now generally accepted. For example Grolnick says that in western society where children sleep apart from their parents "each child will 'transitionalize' some part of his or her environment and use it as an adjuster and balancer of the complicated process of separating from while still feeling a bond with the mother” (Grolnick 1990:106).
That is, transitional objects are not a result of maturational processes in children but are in fact produced by children if and when they are required. They emerge from an area of the child’s creativity which is intermediate between an inner world and an outer world. This intermediate area is called potential space by Winnicott. It is “in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play” (Winnicott 1985a:15). Potential space provides relief from the strain of relating internal and external reality, this strain being one from which all human beings - adults and children - are never free. This is an unchallenged area and throughout life it is used as a bridge between inner and outer realities in which both realities are modified. It allows for the integration of the social world rather than its imposition. It has been described by Fisher as "an experiential atmosphere in which there is a tolerance for paradoxes...which permits play between internal and external worlds, [and] promotes in the growing child the development of a self-created membrane, continually remoulded, crossed and recrossed, that characterises unalienated development" (Fisher 1975:115).

To return to the objects which small children use to deal with the separation and darkness of their own rooms. Through these objects they are able to modify their experiences of darkness and separation, to make them tolerable. Within themselves, over a period of time, they recreate the darkened room as one which causes decreasing levels of anxiety. This is an activity in which there may not be linear development but one in which children find their own level of need for the objects’ assistance. The essence of this intermediate area of potential space is autonomy.

According to Winnicott the actuality and use of transitional objects is more important than their symbolic value. By this Winnicott could not have meant all transitional objects, but was in fact referring to the transitional object of the young child. His comments should therefore be read in conjunction with the remarks on young children and their symbolism by Piaget and Inhelder (1969) who say that although there are signifieds and signifiers at this age, they are undifferentiated. Signifieds and signifiers are both in keeping with these children’s generally undifferentiated schemes of the world so that the signifiers are seen as really being part of the signified. This must give transitional objects a particular force for these children and a significance close to what they stand for. But this significance is in the material object itself, which may not be the case with the transitional phenomena that adults create.
Of course, there is a time in the life of children when transitional objects cease to be used. According to Winnicott these objects become decathected, by which he means that they lose their meaning. This loss is not absolute because transitional phenomena become diffused over the whole cultural field. This cultural field according to Winnicott (1985a:6) is "the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common'." According to Gro únick transitional objects "are gradually internalised into self-soothing, self-assuring, and self-securing, self-evocative structures" (Gro únick 1990:109).

As I have already said, this loss of the first transitional object does not mean an end to the process of creating transitional phenomena and potential space. Play and creativity are the processes which occupy this space. It is not play in its childlike sense or creativity in a necessarily artistic manner that is the issue. It is the area of mundane, everyday play and creativity in which the new is learnt and accepted. Levin refers to potential space as a "place where people actually live, where they are creative, where they interact in depth, and where things are invested with meaning" (Levin 1991:170). Rose takes the matter even further and refers to a transitional process which is life-long and the transitional object as being only an early example of this process. According to Rose, this process "remains as a way of describing how the mind constitutes itself and its umwelt in dynamic interaction with the outside" (Rose 1978:352). Rose goes on to describe the transitional process in terms which are evocative of a fluid and dynamic dialectical relationship between self and world. But there is, claims Rose, always the significance of the first transitional object within this process which is that of a bridge providing safety between self and world. The process "bridges a self which is by now more or less stable and an exterior which comes to appear notoriously fluid...it provides the stability within which many new sensations may become organised and within which emerging functions may mature under protection" (Rose 1978:353).

This movement away from the material transitional object to a process raises the problem of how to describe transitional phenomena that are not material. It also arises in the case referred to above by Stolorow and Lachmann (1980) in which the tape recorder is described as a transitional object. This cannot be correct, because it was not the tape recorder itself or the tapes themselves that produced
the feeling of self cohesion. It was when the tapes were played and listened to in a particular way that the subject gained self-cohesion. This process was certainly transitional but was not present until actually carried out. Perhaps the best way to conceptualise this point is to see this subject's self reflexively. It was about this reflexive self that the subject produced a new sense. This sense was transitional and led to increasing feelings of self cohesion. This internal sense, not the external material object, was the transitional phenomenon. This point may seem over elaborated but it is essential for a conceptual understanding of the transactions with Jim.

Object relations theory generally, and Winnicott in particular, concentrate on the individual subject as a relational entity rather than as a monad. It is the quality of these relations throughout life that is important. In a therapeutic context the quality of the relationship with the therapist matters more than the quality of reason as a therapeutic tool. Throughout life human beings seek objects and are immersed in a world of objects. Flax refers to the essence of object relations theory as "that human beings by nature are 'object seeking'. We need real and not merely projected or narcissistic relations with others. We seek objects for the intrinsic satisfaction of such relating, not merely to reduce drive tension" (Flax 1990:111). These views are confirmed by Derri (1984) who says that Freud dichotomised subject and object within the cartesian tradition in which there was little room for dialogue between inside and outside. On the other hand Winnicott attempted to show how they merged with each other. Winnicott's "emphasis on the satisfying intermingling of inside and outside in the 'transitional space,' is essentially a 'dialogue model' of mental health" (Derri 1984:313).

The following nine points summarise this discussion of transitional phenomena and potential space:

1. Transitional objects and phenomena may be used to relieve anxiety and fear which have become associated with objects including the self.

2. There is a space or membrane between subject and object in which subjects create objects including transitional objects and transitional phenomena.

3. This space is characterised by the processes of dialogue, creativity and play.
(4) These processes may also characterise the more general manner in which the subject appropriates the external world. The processes may continue throughout life resulting in an unalienated development of subjects and their objects.

(5) Freedom and autonomy are essentials of these processes.

(6) In these processes, subjects draw upon aspects of their history and selves where there is security and affirmation.

(7) Material transitional objects symbolise this security and affirmation.

(8) Non-material transitional phenomena may be seen as a sense which the subject creates which refers back to or denotes this security and affirmation.

(9) Transitional objects and phenomena are transitional. They lead beyond themselves.

If Rose's broad conception of transitional process is accepted, then two distinct areas in Jim's life may be seen. A sample of the first is described in Fishing (story 3) where Jim said of his fishing rod: "I feel pretty comfortable with my fishing rod because it's small and light and I'm more used to it now than I was first off". [italics added] From an object relations perspective, rather than a Marxist one, in the free and non-coerced pastime of fishing, Jim was able to transitionalise his new fishing rod and overcome any initial problems that he had with it. As a result, it became an object which he was happy to talk about and engage with. It became an affirming object. From a Marxist perspective it was not an alien object.

From an object relations perspective he was unable to transitionalise written language because it formed part of the institutionalised pedagogy described in Chapter One. The result was alienation. As discussed previously, if emergent literacy is seen as a positive sense which preliterate children develop about written language, then these children were able to transitionalise word-objects. Similar
comments may be made about children’s spoken language acquisition and play, which I described in Chapter One in terms which are evocative of transitionality.

There was discontinuity in Jim's life which resulted in these two distinct areas. The transitional method used in the later sessions restored some continuity between Jim's affirmative unalienated life and his reading of the written texts to himself. This may be seen as attempting to keep continuity between the following separate aspects:

(1) the assertive informal language Jim used in his informal discussion with me;

(2) the affirming objects from Jim's everyday life that became involved in this discussion;

(3) the development of this discussion into a dialogue focused on these objects;

(4) my writing of his key words from the dialogue;

(5) his speaking in an informal assertive voice of a text composed by him and structured by him based upon his key words.

The result is that language is used in two ways. Firstly, dialogue and spoken text become not so much linguistic statements as *subjective events* in themselves in which language is used to affirm the self. Secondly, dialogue and spoken text are both texts with *linguistic meaning*. The dual nature of language as both affirmation and meaning results in the sense of affirmation becoming associated with *that meaning*. However the spoken text as composed, extracted and recorded meaning is the distillation of that meaning. When that same meaning is expressed in written language, the *sense* of affirmation is associated with that written text.

This sense, as associated with *that* written text, is *potentially* a transitional phenomenon. Rather than this sense remaining a mere "good feeling" about something that Jim had spoken into a tape recorder, it *actually* became transitional and led beyond. It reduced his experiential sense about written language.
Each sense was particular to its written text and not to written language generally. With the production of a number of texts, a process of generalisation developed. As Jim was able to read more subjective written texts his quantity of readable written words increased. It is possible that as his reading ability increased it began to diminish his general anxiety about reading and reduce experiential sense indirectly.

This process of sense production depended upon intervention by me. It was not generated by Jim himself. It contrasts markedly with the case referred to by Stolorow and Lachmann (1980) where the patient's use of the tape recorder to enhance feelings of self cohesion, was his own initiative. Despite this difference, Jim's production of sense was his own creation and conforms to the conceptualisation of the active subject. Jim entered into a potential space with me where we used dialogue and creativity which resulted in the production of a transitional sense about particular written texts.

There was, however, another potential space which Jim entered alone. This was the space between himself and the subjective written texts where he attempted to read them to himself. He entered this space alone but with a transitional sense for those texts. In some cases the texts became readable. This was a solitary experience. This view may seem to vary to some extent with what has been said about the subject as always being a relational entity. However here his relation is with the written text which is precisely the relation which needed changing.

There is a certain analogy with the object-relations theorists’ classic case of the small child who has created a toy as a transitional object. The toy is given to the child by her parents who may play with her and the toy. The child creates the toy as a symbol of this unity. This process is analogus to the first process referred to above with Jim and myself. But when alone in a darkened room, the child with the help of the toy recreates her feelings of separation and isolation into ones which have diminished anxiety. This solitary experience of the child is analogous to that of Jim's second process. To press the metaphor to extremes it could be said that Jim had an "internal non-material toy" while the young child has an "external material toy".
As mentioned above, the child’s creation of the object as transitional depends upon "good enough mothering" which can be symbolised by the object. With Jim, the creation of a therapeutic transitional sense about written texts depended upon his having "good enough general life experiences" in which he was able to affirm himself. His later text construction about these affirming objects, depended upon “good enough assistance” from me in which he was able to freely construct these texts and use his transitional sense in a therapeutic and free way.

In the case study above, I said that I would return to Jim’s reading of story 26, “Spearfishing”, and discuss this in conjunction with a conceptual understanding of the method. When Jim read this story he was unable to understand the word “further”. There was a potential space between himself and this word-object. He had a positive transitional sense about this whole text that reduced his anxiety. He was in semiotic mode and attempting to make this particular word-object signify. When it did not do so, he could continue to regard it as a word-object but leave it and return to it later. At this later stage, he had found the meaning of the remainder of the text and would have felt affirmed by that. In addition, he could then use context in a productive way to help with the meaning of the problem word.

If Jim had been reading aloud to me, things would have been different. Although he had his transitional sense of the text, his effective use of it would have been seriously compromised by the need to make “further” immediately signify. In addition, he would be trying to make the remainder of the text signify linguistically. But by concentrating on “further” and not finding linguistic meaning, experiential sense and anxiety would be signified in its place. This anxiety would be likely to affect his reading of the remainder of the text. There would have been no affirmation and no knowledge of context to help him. In effect, Jim would not have been in a transitional space but back in a similar position to that of institutionalised pedagogy where he could not creatively use his transitional sense.

When children use objects as a transitional objects, they use them in a way which they find appropriate for them. Parents do not insist that children hold these objects in particular ways or that they hold them at all. Children creatively use the object as they require. I emphasise this free and creative use of therapeutic transitional sense as the essence of the process.
Concluding comments

After session twenty-seven there was a break in the sessions with Jim and they were never properly resumed. He began to work in a shop which his grandmother bought which appeared to limit his time available for the sessions. His aunt eventually told me that it was impossible for Jim to be available for our meetings. Later his grandmother informed me that there were "family problems" which had made Jim's attendance difficult.

Towards the end of my work with him I asked Jim whether the sessions were making any difference. His answer was "that they were making heaps of difference".

On a few occasions during the sessions Jim's grandmother told me that Jim was beginning to occasionally read material. There was also a report from his cousin Ray that Jim was reading signs and advertising material on some of their frequent social adventures.

In a telephone discussion with his grandmother approximately three months after the sessions, she said that Jim does not now ask her what words mean except for "the very difficult ones". She also said that Jim has a lot more confidence about life generally, that he has changed a lot. He also reads the "Trading Post" newspaper.

CHAPTER FOUR

ILLITERACY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, which concerns the application of the method, I refine and develop aspects about the changing of experiential sense. The focus of the second part is illiteracy as social practice. The second part shows how the effects of illiteracy shape the ego in
different ways and how the method must be adapted to deal with this after experiental sense about the word-object has changed.

This is the longest of the case studies. In all there were sixty-four sessions over a period of approximately ten months. The length of the sessions varied between one hour and one and a half hours. There were usually two sessions per week. Apart from one trip to a Municipal Library, all sessions were in the subject's own home. There were a number of short breaks in the sessions for holidays, sickness and domestic matters.

Some of the sessions were tape recorded. The first sixteen sessions were recorded because in these sessions much of the biographical and assessment material was obtained. Other sessions were tape recorded when I felt there was going to be significant material. However brief notes were made where there was no recording.

In the writing of this chapter I have in some respects departed from convention and the format of the two preceding case studies. I have discussed conceptual ideas when they arise in the case study. This differs from the other two case studies where there was one separate section of conceptual discussion. Because of the larger number of conceptual aspects, I thought it better to discuss them when they arose rather than return to them as a group later.

Description of the subject

Philip, who was the youngest of five children, grew up on a farm in southern New South Wales. Both his parents were farmers. His father left school aged fourteen at the end of second form. His mother stayed at school until fourth form, when she was sixteen or seventeen. Philip said of his family: "They were not a family that read a lot." He described his mother as a good reader but a poor speller while his father was somebody who read the newspapers and Reader's Digest "quite a bit."

There were books in the family home but Philip does not remember being read to as a child by his parents. He does remember his sisters reading to him when they were at home. Both sisters attended
boarding school at a large town in the district so the times when they read to him did not amount to much. He remembers being given books as a child and being unable to read them.

Philip's mother wrote me a letter about Philip's childhood. She said that Philip was very happy as a child but he was seven and a half years younger than his closest brother. For a large part of his childhood, all Philip's siblings attended college and boarding schools. As a result, Philip's mother said that "he suffered loneliness when his brothers and sisters would come home and then go again."

Philip could not remember much about his early schooling especially Infants' School. In particular, he is unable to remember instances of being taught how to read at school. For primary schooling he attended a local school of approximately twenty-six children. This was a two teacher school. After fifth grade Philip went to another primary school in a nearby country town. When Philip left here to go to High School he says that his literacy was sufficiently low for one of his primary teachers to argue that he should repeat sixth grade but this opinion was overruled by the school Principal.

During High School, he obtained good marks for technical drawing and woodwork. With other subjects however, Philip could not do the exams because he could not read the exam paper. In first form High School, he attempted to do school work but by second form, because of his reading problems, he was purposely misbehaving to avoid doing school work. In second form, Philip was in a group of approximately ten boys from his form who had literacy problems, all of whom spent a considerable amount of time misbehaving and avoiding school work. Philip said that as adults many of these people had severe literacy problems.

On school generally, Philip said that given the choice, he would have stayed at home and worked with his father on the farm rather than have gone to school. He said that he never wagged school. He usually sat at the back of the classroom or sometimes halfway towards the front. I asked him about his parents’ reaction to his problem with reading and he said he does not remember their being concerned. The attitude of teachers in High School was similar: they did not bother with him very much. During these High School years Philip says that he "stirred the other students and was kept in for not doing homework."
After leaving school, Philip received some private literacy tuition. He also attended a TAFE literacy class in one of the nearby towns for about fifteen months. He said that he obtained some benefit from these classes.

Philip is married and, at the time of the case study, lived with his wife Jill in the inner Western suburbs of Sydney. They have one child aged five and another aged seven. Philip and Jill were the owners and workers in a small cleaning business. They both appeared to work hard and long hours. Jill had also worked in banking while Philip has worked at labouring jobs and for a considerable period on his parents’ farm which has now been sold. This farming aspect of Philip's life is significant because he looked back to it with nostalgia and wanted to return to it. He did not like the city and moved here only because Jill wished to be near her mother. They had plans to sell their house and move back to the country which they eventually did. The significance of these aspects of Philip's life comes out in his texts. His work on the farm, the related skills and rural life generally are his affirming objects.

Although Philip and Jill worked as cleaners at the time of the case study, they are lower middle class people. Philip's parents owned their farm. The cleaning business was obtained through Jill's parents. Both Philip and Jill attended private catholic High Schools and their own children attend a private catholic Primary School. Their class position is in contrast to Stan and Jim, in the first and second case studies, who were very much working class people. Another difference is that both Stan and Jim were single.

Philip was a more communicative person than Jim. His language and, in particular his vocabulary, was more developed than Jim's. His reading ability was sufficiently high that initially I questioned whether it was too far advanced for this research.

Philip became involved in the study after I was contacted by a rehabilitation service. He was a client of this service which described his disability as a "Schizo Affective Disorder" the date of onset being 1990. There was little discussion between Philip and me about his disability and its effect on his reading. It is very difficult to say what the relationship between such an emotional disorder and literacy problems is. However many people with similar conditions are capable readers.
Philip's disability did not prevent him from being self employed, a spouse and parent. According to Jill, the disability was the result of "a chemical imbalance in the brain" which was corrected by a course of regular medication prescribed by Philip's psychiatrist. There were a few occasions when, according to Jill, recent medication had not been effective. On these occasions Philip was withdrawn and the work with him was suspended for a few sessions. Apart from those small number of times when he was obviously affected, his general behaviour and attitude to improving his literacy was little different from many other adult literacy learners that I have encountered. With these learners there is frequently a contradictory attitude to literacy. But these contradictions are what this research is, in part, trying to understand and overcome.

The rehabilitation service provided me with a copy of an assessment of Philip by an educational psychologist. This assessment described a battery of tests which had been administered to Philip. The assessment's conclusion was that Philip had "very severe Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) in both visual and auditory perception." The assessment said that Philip's age for word identification was 8 years and 9 months, his age for passage comprehension was 6 years and 9 months and for spelling his age was 7.1-7.2 years. Philip's chronological age at the time of the assessment was 34 years. The report concluded that all Philip's knowledge of letter sounds was poor, confused or slow.

The recommendation of the assessment was that Philip's needs "would be most effectively remediated if he could be taught using teaching methods such as Lindamood or Words in Colour etc, which would cater very effectively for his current severe SLD."

The cost of this recommended teaching could not be met by the rehabilitation service. The psychologist who completed the assessment knew of my research, and referred the rehabilitation service to me. I then contacted Philip and explained the research to him. Philip agreed to participate in the research and it was an explicit condition that he could withdraw at any time. According to the rehabilitation service Philip considered his participation in the research especially convenient for him because I would be prepared to go to his home for the sessions. There was no condition or pressure by the rehabilitation upon Philip to participate in the sessions. His involvement was voluntary.
At no time was I in contact with Philip’s psychiatrist. My subsequent contact with the rehabilitation service was limited to one face to face meeting with his case worker in Philip’s presence. I also had a few telephone discussions with the case worker to report Philip’s progress.

Although I refer to the work with Philip as “therapy” and generally link my theoretical argument to different therapeutic orientations, I am using the term “therapy” in a broad sense. I use the term to highlight the need to change the emotional sense which written language has acquired. This cannot be done using conventional teaching methods. It requires an explicit method which focuses on emotion. The therapeutic orientations from general psychotherapy and psychoanalysis are useful because they are concerned with emotion and conventional teaching is usually not. However because I use the term “therapy” this does not mean that I attempt to undertake a general therapy, especially with people such as Philip who have other emotional or psychiatric problems. Apart from the research element the relationship between Philip and me was in most respects no different from that between a student and literacy teacher in an intensive one-to-one learning situation.

As will be seen later in this chapter, Philip came to value the sessions with me and at one stage said that he was concerned that he might lose me as a “teacher”.

Philip informed me that at the time of this assessment he was not given any "real life" reading tasks. By this I mean reading text that attempts to communicate information, or passages that are similar to the ones encountered in daily life. According to Philip's description of the procedures, the psychologist's assessment seemed to be more of a test of Philip's linguistic knowledge rather than his linguistic competence or his ability to actually use and communicate with written language.

I asked Philip how he felt when he was doing the assessment:

Philip: A bit stupid really. I was trying to work out where it was getting me. Where it was going to lead. A bit childish. I thought it would have been an adult test but it was mainly the test you'd give a child.
Apart from the question of what the psychologist actually assessed, Philip's own definition of himself during the test may have affected his performance. The rehabilitation service gave Philip a copy of the assessment. As a result of its conclusions about him, Philip said that he felt labeled. He told me that he thought there was "no hope" for him.

Jill, who also read the assessment, said she was concerned that this "severe specific learning difficulty" would be passed on to their children because of its imputed biological basis. But about halfway through the work with Philip, Jill said that she was now very happy with their eight year old daughter's progress with literacy as she was reading the novel "Little Women" in unabridged form.

Jill appeared to be a fast and prolific reader of novels in particular. She made several statements to me which indicated that she read with great ease and spontaneity. The implications of this for Philip will be discussed later.

PART ONE: APPLYING THE METHOD

In this part I introduce each major stage of the method under a separate sub-heading sometimes with conceptual discussion. There is also a section where I experiment with a technique to encourage Philip with writing.

All the spoken texts made by Philip were word processed by me. The written text and the tape of the spoken text were given to him at the next session. Philip kept the tapes and written texts and was able to read and listen to them as he required. At some sessions he read the texts to himself and occasionally listened to the tape. As discussed in the last chapter, the learner's autonomy and control of the tapes are important parts of the method.
Assessment session

The following written statement, similar to the one given to the subjects in the first and second case studies, was also given to Philip. His correct name and address have been omitted to preserve his anonymity:

My name is................
I live at..................
I want to learn to read and write.
To-day is Thursday the thirteenth of November,

Philip was able to read this statement correctly and without hesitation. This immediately presented the problem of a discrepancy between his demonstrated reading ability and what I had anticipated from the psychologist's report. To further investigate the level of his ability I asked him to read the following advertisement from a local newspaper:

**DRIVER**

*Supplier of fresh produce to the hospitality industry requires a driver with a class 3A licence. Must be well presented and have a good command of English, customer service skills, as well as knowledge of Sydney metro area. Early start and weekend on roster.*

Philip was able to correctly read this text except that he read "produce" as product, "hospitality" as hospitality. Initially he read "industry" as industrial and "command" as comand but corrected himself when he said his reading of both these words did not make sense.
After reading the advertisement again to himself, Philip was able to explain what it meant. When I asked him whether he felt any stress, he said that he did not. When asked did he feel relaxed he said that he was a bit stirred up. When specifically asked whether he felt tense he said that he did.

To further assess Philip's literacy I selected a far longer article from the same local newspaper. This article is appendix "A".

With this article Philip's reading was slow and hesitant. He misread "surge" as siege, "to hand" as have handed, "surrendered" as supplied and then as surrounded. He also misread "pleasing" as placings. He was unable to read "Endeavour" at all and was unable to pronounce "amnesty". With the word "scheme", which occurs three times in the text, he read it as system on the first two occasions and after some discussion and concentration by him was able to read it correctly on the third occasion.

After his second attempt to read the word "scheme" Philip gave a deep sigh. When I mentioned the sigh with the intention of attempting to understand the feeling behind it, he said he was disappointed because he had been able to read several lines up to this point. When I asked him how he felt in his stomach he said that when he cannot read a word he feels a heavy weight go to his stomach.

Although I had some doubts about whether Philip was suitable for the research, his reading of the longer article showed that he had a negative emotional response to reading. These negative feelings about literacy become more obvious in the second part of this chapter. Philip had a long history of avoiding day to day literacy tasks and his parents’ and wife’s supporting this avoidance. Although Philip was able to read on a basic level, his avoidance of reading meant that his limited reading skills were never used and never developed. For practical purposes he was illiterate.

**Emotional engagement with the learner**

The psychologist's assessment was the basis on which I established initial engagement with Philip. I did this through criticism of it and doubting its validity. I empathised with Philip's feelings while pointing out that the whole point of literacy is to be able to understand written texts. I added that an assessment
which did not require a text to be read seemed to me wrong. My concluding comment was to the effect that there is no established biological basis to what are called specific learning disorders or dyslexia. If a person is able to competently use spoken language there is no reason why that person should not be able to develop a similar competence with written language.

Emotional engagement of patients in therapy is discussed by Cashdan (1988). He says that patients have little knowledge of what psychotherapy is about and even if they do have some intellectual ideas, the actuality of treatment often makes clients have second thoughts. Cashdan says: "Many patients consequently have misgivings over what they have gotten themselves into soon after treatment begins...The engagement phase of object relations therapy is meant to deal with the incongruity felt by the patient and ensure that the patient remains in treatment" (Cashdan 1988:84).

According to Cashdan, therapists accomplish engagement by "transforming what is a distant professional relationship into one that contains elements of caring, commitment, and involvement" (Cashdan 1988:84). The patient must see a person who is more than an expert with qualifications. Cashdan suggests that this is not done by attempting to attend to the presenting problem immediately. Therapists need to show an interest in broad aspects of patients' lives. This is not a mechanical process but emotional linking.

**Deconstructing the culture of teaching and transmission**

While Cashdan's points are appropriate on one level there is a significant difference between therapy in general and the method being discussed. Patients have little knowledge of what psychotherapy is about. This is not the case with literacy. Literacy learners, their relations and friends do have ideas of what "help" with literacy problems involves. These ideas exist as a culture of teaching and transmission. For most people, this culture includes what they recollect of schooling. For literacy this probably involves phonics/whole language methods, but more skillfully and intensively employed. With Jim, the subject of the last case study, I said to his Grandmother that I did not intend to teach him anything. I then attempted a brief explanation of my reasons for this. Her response to this was one of bewilderment and suspicion. It took several further sessions before her confidence was secured.
At the beginning of the sessions I informed Philip that I was not a teacher and I suggested to him that his problems with reading could have originated with his schooling. However on a few occasions in the early stages of the work Philip referred to our sessions as lessons. When he did, I told him that what we were doing had no relationship to conventional teaching. I was trying to change his feelings about reading. Our sessions together should be seen as one adult helping another adult. I knew more about literacy than he did but there were other areas where he had more skills than me, such as in farming.

The other side to the culture of teaching and transmission, is how I as literacy worker was affected by it and how this interferes, in a negative way, with attempts to change the sense of written text. There were occasions, particularly in the early stages of the sessions where, despite my conceptual and practical understanding of its negative effects, I began giving Philip material to read such as articles on gardening and farming. He also attempted to read some of this material aloud to me. On occasions I told him (transmitted) the linguistic meaning of words to him. Not only did this waste time but its effect was negative in that it confirmed his difficulties with reading and reproduced alienation.

The problem was that Philip's affirming objects had not yet become apparent to me. At that time there was no material with which to construct affirming texts. In this absence, conventional transmission techniques readily appeared to fill the gap. This supports Shor's (1992) comment on the obdurate nature of transmission techniques in education. Shor says that teachers' own socialisation as students in school teaches them traditional transmission based methods of education which more radical teacher training finds it difficult to overcome.

Philip's Early texts

Story 1, reproduced below, was recorded in session two. It contains many of the feelings about reading that Philip described in the assessment session. It was preceded by a limited dialogue in which I wrote down not only key words but actual phrases used by Philip. The idea of this was to introduce him to the technique of speaking and recording texts:

*Story Number 1*
The Achievement of Reading

I try to avoid reading in the presence of other people because I become embarrassed. When I cannot understand words I get warm in the stomach and after a while my back starts to ache. I also get butterflies and feel nervous. Sometimes I feel I have to concentrate on the meaning of the words so much I lose track of the meaning of what I am trying to read.

I find I need good light. Large print makes reading easier and also it's easier if the print is black and not grey.

I get annoyed and frustrated when I can't get the meaning then I breathe in, I take a big breath and I recommence trying to read.

Spoken text 2, "Gardening", was also recorded in session number two. Through it I discovered more about Philip, in particular, his rural background. This text is much longer and for the first time Philip demonstrated his ability to compose long spoken texts. For spoken text 2 there was limited dialogue which was more in the nature of my questioning Philip to obtain information for the construction of the text. This gardening text is not reproduced here.

During session three, story 3, "Furniture Restoration", was recorded. This text is not reproduced below. It contains statements of contrast between reading and the activity of furniture restoration, another of Philip's interests. Again there was a limited dialogue which was more like my questioning Philip. During this session Philip's voice was flat and he seemed to lack enthusiasm for the work which took much more time than necessary. He also forgot about the session and appeared surprised when I arrived at his house. This may have been one of the times when Philip was affected by his disability.

Philip's intermediate texts
During sessions five to eighteen texts 4 to 7 were constructed. I call these texts intermediate because they are at a stage between the introductory texts and the time when the "rural texts" were constructed. Story 7 is a sample:

**Story Number 7**

**Moving House**

We have been living here now for three years. In those three years we have put extensions on and taken out the aluminium windows at the front of the house and put timber windows in which were made by [Jimbo] Joinery at Canterbury. We also renovated the bathroom which cost eighteen thousand dollars. This was done by [Freddo] Brothers.

We have just had the house freshly painted. It took us three years to get around to it. That cost two and a half thousand. We had the ornate ceilings painted cream colour and the walls chablis.

We are going to put the house on the market. We hope to get three hundred thousand plus. We have had [Tom Smith], a real estate agent, come around and give us an estimate. We should put the house on the market around February-March which should be a good time to sell. Houses around [Smithtown] have increased by around forty percent which is a big plus.

We hope to move to the south coast which is more relaxed and not so hectic. [Big Bay] is the place we have our hearts set on. It's very small and very touristy in peak seasons.

Getting back to the house - I think that spending eighteen thousand dollars on the bathroom was extravagant. We didn’t plan to spend that much money. We planned to spend only twelve thousand but we had twenty thousand from the sale of the house in Leeton. We bought that house for sixty two thousand dollars and sold it for ninety four thousand. So after we paid off all our bills we had about twenty thousand to spend on this house in [Smithtown]
We fought like cats and dogs over the bathroom and we eventually decided on putting in a vanity which was Queensland redwood. We had two goes at getting that. The first one had scratches on it and we had to send that back to Queensland. They sent the second one down and that was alright. That cost four hundred dollars. It's not much to look at but it's quite nice.

We put a three-quarter size spabath in and to do this we had to extend that wall into the third bedroom six hundred millimetres to fit the spa bath in. We put down federation tiles on the floor to suit the tradition of the house.

Reading the above text then reading one of the texts from the affirming rural group below, will not disclose any intrinsically affirming content. It is possible that other learners may find dialogue about their houses to be very affirming. Because affirming content is highly subjective, there is a problem of knowing when learners are speaking about their affirming objects. When Philip and I had the dialogue for the above text he appeared to be interested in the topic and spoke the text with great care. But it was not until he began to talk about the content for the rural texts that the difference became obvious. Enthusiasm replaced interest.

The rural texts

The next group of texts were constructed in sessions twenty to thirty. I regard this group of sessions as pivotal in the case study. The rural texts are numbers 8 to 11 and number 13, that is five texts in all. These texts relate to events of Philip's youth and early adulthood while living on the family farm in the Riverina district of New South Wales. As mentioned above, I asked Philip during our dialogues for the rural texts whether he would have gone to school or would have done something else, if he had been given the choice. He answered that he would have stayed on the farm and worked with his father. I have also mentioned that Philip does not like living in the City and looks back to his country days as "golden days." Because of the delay in finding these affirming objects, it was session twenty before
texts about them were constructed. Finding affirming objects is a difficulty which may unnecessarily prolong sessions if there is not a specific strategy for finding them.

Part of the difficulty was that I was waiting for affirming objects to become apparent. This was due to my experience with the previous case study where Jim led me to his affirming objects. In the last chapter I made this more passive approach an explicit aspect of the method. I adopted this approach with Philip rather than actively seeking these objects. To adopt a specific strategy to elicit Philip’s affirming objects more quickly, I could have asked him:

- What he would have preferred to do rather than go to school (asked at a far earlier stage, such as after engagement with him and when he was confidently making spoken texts).

- What he likes doing least and what he likes doing most.

- About times past. Were there times when he felt very content?

- Whether there are places that he likes to go or things which he likes doing especially when he feels stressed.

A sample of the rural texts is as follows:

*Story Number 10*

*Hay Making*

*You scarify the ground with a scarifier towed by a tractor then you level the ground with a grader or a leveler which has two smudging blades each end. This levels the ground out and makes it nice and smooth.*
Second stage is broadcasting the grain mixed with fertiliser. The broadcast machine is a cone. At the bottom of it is a circumference driven by a PTO shaft which is part of a tractor driven at twenty-four hundred REVS. The grain drops into this circumference and is dispersed out ten meters wide. Then you travel over the ground with harrows and that shakes the grain down into the soil which is then leveled off.

The second method is combining. The grain drops down through a hose or tube in behind a foot. This foot makes a groove and the grain drops into the groove and is covered by harrows towed behind the combine.

Every paddock that you sow clover into has a gravitation which is a fall in the paddock so that water can drain off. If you leave water laying on the ground it rots the seed and stops germination. The whole paddock over a mile will have a three foot fall. Every bay in that mile has its own fall depending how many acres are in that paddock.

Germination of clover takes two to three weeks depending on the weather. It's got to be nice and sunny and hot as anything. The height clover grows to is one to two feet before it is cut. Clover grows all summer. You have to keep the grain moist so that it can germinate and come out of the ground properly and keep growing. You keep the ground wet and that keeps it growing. Once the ground dries out it stops growing and dies. How much you water it depends on the soil type. With heavy soils you have to water it more often. With light soils you water it less.

The clover is cut with a slasher driven off a PTO shaft from the tractor. It is left to dry for approximately two weeks. Then it is turned over by a windrower better known as a rake driven off a PTO tractor. You travel round and round the bay until you finish each bay. Then you wait one week between turning and tossing the windrow. Once it's turned you give it a week and pray to God there is no rain. Then you turn it again and it's cured. It's ready for baling.
There are two different types of bales. There is the square bale which is four foot long and two foot wide or there is a round bale which is the weight of one tonne. It's wrapped in plastic and normally stored out in the weather. The plastic keeps the water out of the hay and stops it from rotting or going black. The square bale is stored in hay sheds.

The hay is baled with a big baler driven off the back of a tractor. It is taken in through a cone at the front of the machine and tumbled into a circle and spat out the back of the machine and dumped on the ground. It is picked up by forklift and stacked in rows. The bales are picked up by an elevator and loaded onto a truck and taken to a haystack where they are stacked into lots of a thousand. The hayshed will hold five to ten thousand bales. They are then fed out to stock. The stock pass it though their system and shit it out onto the ground. The clover seed is in the shit. It dries out and is spread out over the paddock which is a natural way of dispersing seed for natural germination.

Modes of affirmation used in the rural texts

In the dialogues for the rural texts, I experimented with different ways of enhancing Philip’s positive sense about the language used in the texts. As described in the last chapter, this sense becomes a transitional phenomenon and is used by learners in the potential space between themselves and written text to reduce anxiety and reconstruct their emotional relationship to written language. I used six modes of affirmation which I will discuss separately. Some of the modes require longer conceptual discussion but with others the discussion is short:

(1) Productive affirmation, in which the free production by Philip of his own speech in the dialogue and the subjective spoken texts, further enhanced his positive feelings. As I already noted, affirmation and positive emotion may also be associated with production where it is the opposite of alienated production. Marx (1975a) has already been referred to in this regard. It was obvious that production of the rural texts was a pleasure for Philip.
(2) **Crafted affirmation**, in which Philip consciously composed the spoken texts so they were more ordered and structured than spontaneous speech. Crafted affirmation is an addition to productive affirmation because there could be productive affirmation with no crafting.

(3) **Denoted affirmation**, in which the content of the dialogue and texts are objects from Philip’s past which were affirming. The spoken language used denotes these affirming objects. This denoting power of language has been discussed in previous chapters. The dialogues with Philip were also occasions when he was able to speak about events in his life which were affirming and pleasurable and in this speaking he was able to relive elements of these events. Speech about these objects denotes affirmation.

(4) **Informative affirmation**, where Philip gave me specialised information. This was so with the "Haymaking" story. In the dialogue for this text Philip *told me* how to make hay. I was interested in this process and in many of the technical words he used. He enjoyed demonstrating to another person his experiences and knowledge and giving these to another. He was informative which reverses the conventional teacher-pupil relation. This was empowering and affirmative for him.

(5) **Relational affirmation**, in which my general relationship with Philip was supportive of him and one of emotional empathy and engagement. This is the mode of affirmation in which general affirmative mirroring is important rather than mirroring which uses language (as to which see below). The sessions with Philip were preceded by sessions in which I had emotionally engaged with him and established empathy and rapport. Although initially the objective of engagement is to keep the learner in the relationship, it also functions as a supportive process in which the learner feels affirmed. This affirmation carries over into the dialogues and textual construction. The result is an element of relational affirmation in the written subjective texts.

(6) **Mirroring affirmation**, in which I consciously mirrored Philip’s language in the dialogue to enhance his feelings about his words and himself. I did this usually while seeking further information or clarification. This is similar to active listening but with mirroring the emphasis is on the importance of Philip's hearing his own words used by another person.
In the dialogue for “Hay Making” an example of mirroring was:

Philip: Once the clover is cut it has to dry in windrows.

PW: Windrows? What are windrows?

Philip: They are rows of clover left to dry. They are left to dry out in the open and you just hope it doesn't rain for two weeks.

PW: So the windrows are rows of hay which are drying?

Philip: And the windrower turns them over to make sure they dry properly.

PW: So the windrows need to dry before they are baled. Well what's a windrower?

Philip: A windrower is just a rake which is driven off the back of a tractor. It turns the clover over so it can dry evenly.

PW: So you take the slasher off the back of the tractor and put the windrower on. It's really a big rake which turns the clover over and lets it dry.

In the dialogue for this text I could have acknowledged Philip's speech by nodding my head, engaging in eye contact, smiling and making comments such as "what did you do next". However the mirroring of Philip’s words affected how he felt about these words in particular. Mirroring focused on the words because it was the emotional sense of these words which I was attempting to capture and enhance.

Often the words that I mirrored in the dialogues with Philip became key words. In the last chapter these were described as words from the dialogue which were noted by me and repeated to Jim to help
him in the construction of his spoken text. Key words and mirrored words are significant words in the
dialogue and in some cases may represent affirmation in themselves. An example of this is in the first
rural text, story 8, "Trail Bike Riding" In this text Philip describes riding his Honda 185cc bike in the
Binya Mountains which were near his parents' farm. Philip spoke about his bike and the mountains
with great affection. These words are probably affirmative in themselves because they invoke pleasant
memories. In the construction of "Trail Bike Riding" these words were both key and mirrored words.

Mirroring is important on a general intersubjective level in addition to its specific role in language which
I have discussed above. The general role may be seen in the stage of emotional engagement discussed
above where I reflected back to Philip positive affirmation of his self. This reflecting capacity of the
other in fact applies throughout all stages of the method. As will be seen in the discussion of reading
aloud in part two of this chapter, it also operates on a negative level where subjects experience
reflections of their selves which are not affirmative. Because of the importance of mirroring I make the
following conceptual observations about it.

The significance of mirroring as affirmation of the human subject was discussed by Winnicott
(1958:245). He pointed to the importance of the supportive environment in the healthy functioning of
the individual. Initially this environment is provided by good enough mothering. But Winnicott's point
was that the environment needs to replace the parents. It is not the individual's own mental functioning
which should provide this supportive role. If this happens a false self results. Individuals need
affirmation from outside their own selves, from their social relations and the activities in which they
engage. This need for an affirmative environment is an ontological need.

Winnicott (1972) later discussed the specific mirroring role which the mother (parents) provide. When
a baby looks at the parent's face it ordinarily sees its own self. What the baby sees in fact is how the
parent is experiencing the baby which may or may not be positive and supportive of the baby's
developing ego. In other words how the parent reacts to a baby will influence how the baby feels
about itself. Although this mirroring role diminishes as the child becomes older, it has, said Winnicott, a
continuing importance in the family where "each child derives benefit from being able to see himself or
herself in the attitudes of the individual members or in the attitudes of the family as a whole” (Winnicott 1972:33).

In the mirroring process the therapist gives back to the client aspects of the client's own self. Winnicott refers to therapy as "a complex derivative of the face that reflects what is there to be seen" (Winnicott 1972:32). On this more explicit therapeutic role of mirroring, Southwood (1973) introduced the role played by language rather than mere eye contact and bodily interaction. He says that "verbal communication is something which normally arises out of this mothering and gradually separates itself from it" (Southwood 1973:238). Both processes are indistinguishable from the process of the development of the baby's ego.

Derri (1984) is more explicit about the specific role of mirroring speech as a tool in some therapeutic situations. Derri said that she learnt this process from a patient who asked her to repeat his words verbatim. Derri said (1984:331), "Hearing his own words repeated by the analyst gave substance and reality to those words, as well as to the locus and origin of those words--namely, the patient's 'inside'.” This is literal mirroring and Derri referred to it fulfilling a role that that the patient's mother did not complete. It reflects the patient's own existence and "can belatedly lead to the patient's internalization of self-affirming structure” (1984:332). Although the cases Derri referred to are ones of extreme depersonalisation, the principle may equally apply to cases where there are extreme and negative feelings about written language. These are cases where the subject has "missed out” on good enough emergent literacy and/or good enough schooling which should have made learning to read an affirmative process.

The crafted mode of affirmation may be a problem because of the formalisation involved. But the degree of crafting involved need not be very much. Giving learners key words in a sequence on which they base the text is a way in which ordering of the language may begin. The significance of crafting is not the order of the text as such but that to order the text learners think about the language they are using and in so doing appropriate it as their own to a greater degree. The crafting mode must be a continuation of the productive mode in that it is free crafting and not forced which would, of course, be alienation.
There will probably be considerable variation in the amount of crafting that learners feel comfortable with. For some learners the extent of crafting will remain minimal while others may develop into composers. Although at the beginning Philip was hesitant about recording, he eventually became a high crafter and a very self-conscious composer. His longest spoken text, story 9, Aerial Sowing-Rice Growing, was 780 words. Towards the end of the sessions he said that he liked composing and this was evident in his concentration, especially in the five rural texts.

One of the major indicators of the how Philip was experiencing the dialogue and production of his spoken texts was the manner in which he was speaking. This was an indicator of the degree of affirmation. In the last chapter this was referred to as the "informal assertive" which is the confident tone in which most people address each other in general conversation from a standpoint of equality and friendship. There should be no difference between the tone of the general conversation with the learner and the tone of the speech which concentrates on literacy work proper.

In all the dialogues and recordings for the "rural texts" Philip's voice was far more assertive than when we discussed his attitude towards reading or when I was assessing his reading. In fact, shortly after Philip began the dialogue for the first rural text he said that there were other topics in this area "that I would like to make stories about."

The modes of affirmation are not presented as definitive since, when working with learners, additional modes may become apparent. For example, in Chapter Six I will attempt to enlarge upon the way in which potential space may be used by developing a mode of affirmation focused on playing with language.

The modes of affirmation were an actively and consciously created form of intersubjectivity between Philip and me. It was not a contemplative attitude that I had about Philip in which I listened to what he was saying and merely felt a passive empathy with it. I helped him enhance his positive feelings about particular events and linguistic statements. In creating this affirmative intersubjectivity, the relationship between Philip and me was further enhanced. There is a dialectic between this personal
relationship and the changing relationship with language: both interact with and support each other. But the objective was always to change Philip's emotional relationship to the word-object. This may be distinguished from general psychotherapy where the aim is usually to facilitate change in inter-personal or intrapersonal relationships.

**Language exercises**

After Philip had completed his texts, I asked him to re-read them to himself. When he had done this and he said that he was able to read them all, we used the texts as models to demonstrate some of the regularities of written language:

1. I showed him how to break down compound words into their constituent words. He then found some of these words in the texts and did this himself with no trouble.

2. I identified suffixes, prefixes and stem morphemes. He then found examples of these himself.

3. We went through the letters of the alphabet and discussed the sounds that single letters make. Then Philip identified words in his texts that began with those letters and sounds.

4. I pointed out the phonetic regularities and irregularities of words. For example in story 10 the letter C in "circumference" and "cone" make different sounds.

5. We discussed syllables, how to break words down into them and how doing this is another way of decoding words.

6. I pointed out to Philip regular endings on words. An example is the "shun" sound of "ion" in "federation" and "tradition" in story 7. He then found the same ending on the word "extensions" in the same text.
(7) In all of the exercises on regularities I stressed that there are many exceptions to these regularities. In the texts we found numerous examples of these. When doing exercises such as these, there is a great difference between using words which are alien and those which are subjectively affirming. In addition, when the learner already knows these written words on a cognitive level, the exercises become more practical applications of knowledge than exercises of learning.

The exercises are a non-intrusive way of seeing how well learners have engaged with the texts and whether they are able to read. By the ease with which Philip did the exercises, I was confident that he was able to read the texts. The exercises may also be a means for learners to demonstrate their skills and be affirmed by this.

Writing exercise: Transitionalised imagery technique

After the language exercises, I suggested the idea of writing to Philip. At first his response was negative. He said that he could not write. I then explained that he should write for the purpose of learning only and I expected he would make many mistakes. I said that some school teachers promote the idea that writing has to be correct immediately and that to my thinking this was harmful. We may call these attempts "mistakes" but they are really part of learning.

My plan was to introduce the idea of writing to Philip gradually over a period of several weeks. After the initial introduction of the idea of writing I continued to mention it with the analogies referred to below.

In taking this gradual approach to writing and discussing it with analogies, I was experimenting with a synthesis of affective imagery and transitionalisation techniques. Leuner (1969) describes affective imagery as forming images of stressful events and then exercising control over them. I was extending the idea of control to include playing with images. Transitionalisation was discussed in the last chapter. The part of it that I wanted to use was the idea of a potential space as an unchallenged area which the
subject is able to freely use as a bridge between inner and outer realities. It allows for integration rather than imposition of the outer. In adapting these ideas for Philip's writing I used the following stages:

(1) I made an analogy between learning to write and learning to walk. I said that when we do this as young children we fall over but we keep on trying until we do walk. I said that the same applies with learning how to speak.

(2) In making this analogy I used evocative and specific vernacular words such as "we all fall on our arse, we fall flat on our bums when we try to walk. But we all get up and have another go because it is not a mistake but part of learning." I added that Philip didn't remember doing this as a child but he had the example of his own children doing it.

(3) Philip and I then experimented with falling on our "bums" by rising in our chairs and falling back in them. I said that he should pretend he was a small child when doing this. His attitude to this was amusement. It is worth noting that he may have been reluctant to engage in this exercise if there had not been good initial engagement with him and the maintenance of an informal relationship between us. This stage and stage two were attempts to form images in keeping with Leuner referred to above.

(4) I suggested to Philip that we should make another spoken text using the same procedures that we had used already. He selects an affirming object, we dialogue this and go through the modes of affirmation. But instead of my writing this text, he writes it while listening to the tape. This meant that in addition to the sense from transitionalised imagery, the content of Philip's writing would have a positive sense from being affirmed.

(5) After several more weeks, Philip selected the topic of "shearing." It could have been one of his rural texts as the events originated from the same context. In between his time of selection of the topic and the composition of the text, I continued to mention writing and that when doing it he would probably "fall on his bum." We then made the text following the procedures referred to in stage four.
(6) At the time of the actual writing I again mentioned falling on his “bum” and we repeated the procedures referred to in stage three. I gave him complete control of the tape and player. When he was writing I went into his backyard returning occasionally to see if he wanted more time. He appeared relaxed and even happy about the writing. As he wrote he seemed to do so in a very attentive way. I suggested to him that perhaps he should write only half the text but he insisted on writing it in full.

The result surprised me. I expected that Philip would have many more problems with the production of the words than he did. The response of Jill, Philip’s wife was similar to mine. The result is even more significant because Jill said that the standard of Philip's writing was so poor that a letter he had written her some years ago was incomprehensible.

In conceptual terms, by the time of the actual writing Philip had been able to construct a new sense about this activity. In the potential space between him and his task we had played with images of writing. The content of the writing had a pleasant emotion associated with it. Because there had been a large degree of informative affirmation when Philip told me about shearing, there was increased control and empowerment over the content which was carried into the task.

Philip’s writing, story 14 called “shearing”, is appendix “B”.

**PART TWO: ILLITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE**

After completion of the language and writing exercises I was confident that Philip was developing a more positive emotional relation to reading. Most importantly, Jill confirmed that he was now doing many day to day literacy tasks. However I tried to take Philip beyond those tasks and engage him in reading objective texts. By objective texts I mean texts which he had no part in the production of, did not relate to him and for which there had been no processes of affirmation. The process of engaging Philip in this reading was complex and in the course of it we had dialogues which brought forth new material about the reality of being illiterate in a literate society.
These dialogues illuminated how Philip's self had been continuously constructed through an ongoing process which began in school and continued into adulthood. In discussing this process I have returned to the three agencies of id, ego and superego discussed in Chapter Two. The id is relatively straightforward, but Philip's ego and superego are more complex and I have divided them into a number of different aspects. At the end of the section and in light of the foregoing discussion, I focus on Philip's self as a whole and show how this has resulted in behaviour which is conflicted.

The id aspect of Philip's self

As with the other two case studies, the id aspect related to reading was formed in the early part of his schooling and is qualitatively different from his ego and superego. It was characterised by a repressed desire to not read and frustrated attempts to do so. However the id aspect that I am referring to here is based on a subject to object relation. There are also aspects of Philip’s ego that formed id like qualities because of the early time of their formation. I will discuss these under aspects of the ego.

In my discussions with Philip after it became obvious that he was now reading, I asked him why he had never really tried to read at school:

Philip: I couldn't. My problem started in kindergarten. My mother said that I was writing [my second name preceding my first name].

PW: But a lot of kids do that.

Philip: But it was never corrected. So my problem started way back.

PW: So the difference is that now you think you can read.

Philip: Yes. I can read now.
However, the problem was more complex than that. Because alienation, unlike simple repression, is continual, the impact of id processes upon the ego is severe. In this regard, there are important differences between Philip and the subjects of the last two case studies as will be seen below.

**Aspects of Philip's ego**

There are different aspects of Philip's ego which have been formed through attempting to reconcile the demands of these id processes with the social reality of being illiterate in a literate society. The first aspect, which I call the *reality aspect*, is relatively straightforward: he wanted to read for the practical reason that it is useful, it is a facet of human language. However the reality aspect exists in conflict with other aspects of his ego. These other aspects became apparent in Philip’s attempts to engage with objective texts. I will discuss three of them under separate headings:

1. **The avoidance aspect of Philip's ego**

During the thirty-eighth session I gave Philip his first objective text. This was "Strange but True" (Baguley 1981), a collection of thirteen short accounts of mysterious and puzzling events. The language is not complex and Philip would have already encountered many of the words in his own subjective texts. The whole text is illustrated and is approximately 3,500 words in length.

I briefly explained what the text was about. Philip said that he was interested and I left it with him. The next two sessions were missed because of sickness but I spoke with Philip on the phone and asked him about progress reading the text. He replied that he had read some of it but seemed concerned that I was expecting him to have read all of it by the next session in five days time.

At this session Philip said that he had read the text. He was able to give a brief account of some of the content which he said he found interesting. He also said that he had no real trouble with the words. There was only one word which gave him trouble but he was unable to remember what it was. There was no sign of enthusiasm for what he had read and no request for similar material to read.
For several weeks before reading the text I had been discussing with Philip the need to progress with his reading. I stressed that reading skills are developed by reading and that without using these skills, they were likely to remain at their present level. During these discussions I suggested that he join a local library and find a book that interested him. I said that he should only try to read material that he found interesting. On no account should he read for the sake of reading. All discussions about reading and libraries were initiated by me. None were initiated by Philip.

Although I kept mentioning the library it was a further several weeks before Philip went to a library and acquired a borrower's card. When he had done this I met him at the library and helped him find a book. We selected "A Fortunate Life" (Facey 1981) which is an autobiographical account covering the years 1894-1976. The author had no schooling and a particularly hard childhood. Much of the book covers life on the West Australian frontier. I explained what the book was about. Again Philip said he was interested in the subject matter. The language is very straightforward and, after a perusal of the text, Philip agreed that the book would cause him no problems. The 320 pages are divided into 68 short chapters many of which are almost self contained and are virtual short stories.

The initial plan was that he would read parts of the book himself. In addition, during my sessions with him, we would each take turns reading aloud to each other and discuss the content. However Philip's reading of the book was slow, approximately seven pages per week and his attempts to read aloud with me were labourious. He said that he had trouble finding time for reading. I regarded this statement as being about how Philip's ego had been shaped by avoiding reading rather than about real time constraints in his life.

In an attempt to resolve the problem I thought that explicit changes in Philip's work and domestic routine might facilitate reading. But I also thought that his problems needed to become apparent. I arranged a meeting with Philip and Jill with the aim of making the problem clear. During this discussion we talked about specific times in the week when Philip would read the book. The discussion produced some of the dialogue which I have included in the sections on of the other two aspects of Philip's ego. I wrote the following agreement as a record of our discussion. It is self explanatory. Copies were given to Philip and Jill:
Literacy programme for Mr. [Philip] of [1 Smith street, Smithville.]

This programme follows discussions between [Philip], [Jill] and Peter Williamson on Wednesday 1st July, 1998:

Allocated reading time.
Because reading has never been part of [Philip’s] life he is finding it difficult to regularly read. Without regular reading by him there is a danger that the improvements [Philip] has already made in reading skills and confidence, will be lost.
It is agreed that [Philip] needs specific times which are available for reading. One hour will be allocated to [Philip] every Tuesday and Thursday beginning at 4.00 pm. [Philip] agrees to use these times exclusively for reading.

Specific problems with reading.
[Philip] has mentioned the problem of drowsiness when he reads. It is agreed that the best way for [Philip] to overcome this problem is for him to keep moving his body. Whenever [Philip] begins to feel drowsy he will stand up and walk around for a few seconds.

Joint reading sessions.
Peter Williamson will work with [Philip] on his reading for approximately one and a half hours on Mondays and Wednesdays beginning at 4.00 pm. During this time [Philip] and Peter will take turns reading from the material that [Philip] is reading during his allocated reading time.

Everyday literacy tasks.
Because other people have done day to day reading and writing tasks for [Philip] there is a difficulty about how more of these tasks are to be taken over by him. These tasks
are like the allocated reading referred to above. It is necessary for [Philip] to do them to improve his literacy and create more independence for himself.

[Philip] agrees that he will do more everyday literacy tasks such as form completion and the writing of cheques. He will take more responsibility for the reading and understanding of written material. [Jill] agrees that she will give more of these tasks to [Philip] instead of doing them herself.

Five days after this agreement, I had another session with Philip. Again he had not read any of the book. At this session I did not press him for an explanation but accepted the situation telling him that the responsibility was his. During this session he appeared nervous and withdrawn. He also attempted to make a very hesitant reading aloud of a section of the book.

At the next session, two days later, Philip informed me that he had read three chapters. I now felt that this was the time to discuss in detail, his feelings about reading the book. I referred to stories 1 and 3 where he described reading as annoyance, frustration and misery. Philip was adamant that reading was no longer a misery. I stressed that this was vital because if the work with him became like it was at school, then the plan to read the book would not be successful.

The conversation continued:

PW: What I'm really trying to get at is what happened when you and [Jill] and I sat around the table and had a bit of a yarn about it, and talked about finding time for you to read in. Was that important?

Philip: Yes it was. That's when I realised that you were disgusted with my effort in reading, in the amount I'd read. I felt I've got to pull my socks up and have more of a go.

Philip: [In a light hearted tone] Yes, absolutely disgusted.
PW: No I wasn't disgusted. I didn't expect you to read.

Philip: In ways I felt maybe I would lose you as a teacher. I thought that maybe in ways you'd sort of had enough. Or you couldn't go on any further unless I pulled my socks up and started reading.

In other words Philip had come to value the relationship which could now be used as a means to begin explicit changes to his ego and behaviour although this was difficult for him.

The idea of an explicit agreement to promote specific change, follows from Shelton and Levy (1981) who describe the need for specific detail when trying to promote behavioural change. It is not sufficient to be general. The precise detail of the change and how it is to be accomplished should be stipulated. Significant others in the client's life should also be involved. There should be a public commitment to the behaviour. Reducing an agreement to writing also aids adoption of the behaviour.

The hazard of such written agreements is that it creates a requirement that learners read in their own time. It places obligations upon them and reintroduces the problem of surveillance. A consequence is that it may again disempower them and reintroduce alienation. The antidote to this may be the strength of the relationship built up between the literacy worker and learner. These points are supported by Philip's comment.

This discussion with Philip finished with my telling him that the objective of all further reading sessions should be his enjoyment of the book. Philip had a problem about reading aloud which we discussed in detail. The dialogue for this appears in the section on the socially reflected aspect of Philip's ego. The section in the literacy programme concerning joint reading was rewritten as a record of this agreement and is reproduced below. It is self explanatory:

*Joint reading sessions.*
Peter will work with [Philip] in reading sessions on Monday and Wednesday for approximately one and a half hours starting at 4.00 pm. During these sessions Peter will read aloud from the same book that [Philip] is reading during his allocated reading time. While Peter is reading [Philip] may listen to the reading or follow Peter's reading in the book. [Philip] may also read aloud but only if he expressly wishes. During these sessions if the reading is too fast for [Philip] to follow he will ask Peter to reduce the speed of reading. Whatever course [Philip] follows will be entirely at [Philip's] discretion. The objective of these sessions is that [Philip] enjoys the reading.

Philip's problem about engaging with reading is different from that of a person who acquires skills to perform an activity but prior to that has never attempted to perform that particular activity. In this case there has been an absence of that activity but ego and social relations are not structured to avoid that activity. As the ego acquires those skills there is a simultaneous modification of self and social relations.

Philip's illiteracy cannot be understood as mere absence of reading. It is avoidance of reading. This is avoidance as a defence (in the psychoanalytic meaning) against experiential sense. It was not a case of Philip's merely not reading and writing (and his parents and wife doing it for him). It was a case of his having never been able to do it (we are all born illiterate). He then developed a negative experiential sense about it. The result was that his ego became structured to avoid reading.

As will be seen below, his wife (Jill) and parents merely supported and compounded this avoidance by doing his day to day literacy tasks. Philip had made substantial changes in these social relations before the written agreement. As Jill said prior to the agreement: "He has just improved heaps. He has a go at most things now...Before he just wouldn't even attempt it." I was trying to go beyond pragmatic day-to-day literacy tasks and get Philip to read in a more substantial way.

When Philip said "Yes. I can now read", the id processes of his self, which had shaped his ego to avoid reading, had changed but the shape of his ego remained largely intact. An explicit strategy to re-shape his ego was required. This could use straightforward cognitive measures such as those described above.
(2) The socially reflected aspect of Philip's ego

Experiential sense was initially produced through a subject-object relationship i.e. Philip’s relationship to the word-object. In this relationship the self was considered as a virtual social monad. But the subject needs to be understood as a being who is constituted in social relationships and as a being whose nature it is to be constituted in this way. Philip saw himself reflected in the other as a person who could not read. This was a consequence of Philip’s being illiterate in a literate society. Jill said that Philip felt other people saw him as illiterate and he felt excluded because of it.

This social nature of the subject and the reflected self have already been referred to in the first part of this chapter. This was in respect of the mode of affirmation which I called mirroring. I also described it as an ontological fact of being human. With good enough (mothering) parenting the baby sees its own positive self in the parent's face. Winnicott (1972) referred to a continuing need for an affirmative environment in adult life. I used my position of other with Philip to affirm his self and language through mirroring his words and in a general affirmative relation with him. But as I said in the discussion of mirroring, it also works in a negative way when subjects apprehend their selves reflected in ways which are not affirmative. In reading pedagogy, the negative socially reflected aspect of the ego is exaggerated through reading aloud.

During dialogues with Philip about his reading of "A Fortunate Life" we talked about reading aloud:

Philip: "Hearing myself read, kinds of knocks my confidence down...I'm really better when I'm reading by myself and I understand the story.

Philip: But I've got to read aloud full stop. I have to read aloud so you can hear me read.

PW: But I am really questioning whether we should even do that now. What do you think?

Philip: I think we still should.
I added that I was very skeptical about the benefits of people with reading problems, reading aloud to somebody who is sitting beside them. Then Philip again confirmed his problems with reading aloud:

Philip: It does [agreeing with me]. From my previous experience, yes.
PW: Because you've got someone sitting there watching you, listening to you.

Philip: Correcting you.

Philip and I came to a revised agreement about his reading sessions with me in which there was an explicit statement that he could read aloud but "only if he expressly wishes." This revised agreement appears above. In discussions with Philip I emphasised the necessity of his choice on this aspect. By this stage of the sessions Philip was showing a high level of engagement, affirmation and a changed attitude and practice for literacy. There was ample opportunity for him to read aloud in a situation in which he felt relaxed. On several occasions in these sessions I asked him whether he felt like reading aloud. He always declined.

The conflict within Philip about reading aloud was explicit. He knew that reading aloud had been harmful. But despite this he said that he thought he still should read aloud to me. The latter thought of Philip’s could be put down to the endurance of the culture of teaching and transmission, part of which is testing by reading aloud.

Philip said that he was unable to remember much about early schooling. But attempting to read aloud must have been part of his early schooling because it is part of all reading pedagogy. In this early ego experience, Philip saw himself reflected in the other as incapable of reading. Parts of this ego experience took on id-like qualities because of the early time in Philip’s life when it happened. This may explain the intractability of this problem and why he always declined to read aloud.

By the time Philip, as an adult, began attending literacy classes at TAFE college, he had a life experience of himself as unable to read. This teaching almost certainly involved reading aloud and
provided Philip's mature ego with further reflected-self experience of his inability. This makes sense of Philip's comment in the dialogue when he agrees with me about the harm of reading aloud and adds, "From my previous experience, yes".

Reading aloud is a form of testing of readers. It is an aspect of all reading pedagogy in schools and adult literacy teaching. Although for adept readers it may be a chance for them to publicly demonstrate their skills and, as a result, be subjectively affirmed, these students do not generally continue to read aloud because their competence has been tested and established. Usually it is the beginning, struggling and problem readers who are required to read aloud. This reading may be either in the classroom, in the presence of other students or alone, with a teacher in a remedial setting.

Reading aloud as testing of learners is an examination of the subject and part of the disciplinary technology of society described by Foucault (1977). Examination is a technique of power by which the subject is objectified. It is "a mechanism of objectification", says Foucault (Foucault 1977:187). The examination reduces the individual to a case and an object for power in which he or she may be "described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality" (Foucault 1977:192). While Foucault refers to this power as productive of the individual he is silent on the intra-subjective processes by which this production occurs.

To understand this process subjectively, the first point to note is that the examination fixes individual differences and particularity as the status of that individual. However, as Hanson (1993) says it is the fragmented and tested aspects which are fixed rather than the whole and integrated subject. This representational aspect of testing is a revelation of the self usually performed through institutional domination against an individual. This narrow and controlled presentation of the self compares with the more nuanced self which the individual is able to present and operate with in less controlled social situations.

Hanson's points may be extended further and linked to theories of self, subjectivity and alienation. Firstly there is Cooley's (1902) classical conception of the reflected or "looking-glass self" in which subjects imagine their own appearance to another person who is making judgements about them.
Cooley regarded the presence of perceived judgement as essential adding "that the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling" (Cooley 1902:153).

In a somewhat similar vein, Sartre (1965) referred to the effect of anti-Semitic passion upon Jewish people. Although there is always the relationship to the other for all individuals, for many Jewish people this relation is intensified by anti-Semitism which has a stereotype of Jews. The result may be, said Sartre, an assumption of a phantom personality which is Jews as the anti-Semites see them.

In a different work, Sartre (1969) made a distinction between the consciousness of being for-itself and the consciousness of being for-others, and observed how the former is radically transformed into the latter through the "look" of the other. The for-itself is characterised by freedom and seemingly unlimited possibilities until this freedom is interrupted through the perception of the other's consciousness. From this develops a relation between two consciousnesses in which the other's consciousness is dominant. In this regard, Sartre referred to the other as the one "toward whom I do not turn my attention. He is the one who boks at me and at whom I am not yet looking" (Sartre 1969:269). The result is an alienation and objectification of the self, in particular the alienation of the free for-itself, its possibilities and the world which it organises.

The concept of the look of the dominant other, as the means through which this alienation and objectification operates, is congruent with the other theoretical points mentioned above. The medical gaze, surveillance and examination referred to by Foucault as disciplinary power also involves the objectification of the subject. However, in the examination there is also the judgement by the other referred to by Cooley which is the basis for the reflected self image. Moreover in the case of examination of reading ability the judgement is given weight and character by being that of an adult and teacher. If reading aloud is done in the classroom, there is also the judgement of other students.

This reflected self-image and the revelation of the fragmented aspect of the self also encompasses stereotyping and labelling of children and adults as deficient or biologically different because of their illiteracy. A kind of phantom personality is constituted for the illiterate child and adult living in a mainly
literate society which resonates with the phantom personality which Sartre describes for Jewish people living in non-Jewish society.

These conceptual points allow us to elaborate the concept of alienation. In the pedagogy of illiterate people, alienation is not just in their attendance at school nor in the fact that they may be required to attempt to read. Alienation also results from their being required to read aloud, their reading ability being publicly examined, and this incompetent fragment of their selves being fixed and reflected by the other as their subjectivity. This is the quintessence of alienation for people with reading difficulties.

The case studies collected by Johnston (1985), to which I referred in Chapter One, exemplify this point. In the present case studies Stan's account of reading aloud in school is similar. Stan had memorised the Johnny story. He was able to say the words without looking at the text. But when he was required to read the text aloud to the teacher his anxiety was such that he could not. Anxiety obliterated memory. Stan's memory of the lines was sufficiently strong that forty-five years later he was able to say many of them to me. Although Jim's account of reading aloud was not as explicit, an essential aspect of his relief from anxiety was that he was no longer required to read aloud.

Reading aloud may be an artificial form of reading but it is a particular form of social interaction in which Philip saw himself reflected in the other as fragmented, objectified and incompetent. Because it is likely that this aspect of his ego had id-like qualities, straightforward cognitive measures such as those taken with the avoidance aspect of the ego, would not be appropriate. Philip should have re-experienced and reconstructed his relationship with his own ego by reading aloud, not as testing but through reading aloud in the presence of the other as affirmation. He needed to hear himself and see himself reflected in the other as a competent reader. The sessions with Philip finished before I was able to implement such a strategy with him. However the following is, very briefly, what I had planned to do:

(1) Philip selects the rural text which he likes the most and checks, through listening to the tape, that he is able to read this to himself.
(2) We discuss reading aloud so he understands that it is important to hear himself read aloud in the presence of another person. He must be clear that there is a *difference* between this and reading aloud as testing. It is necessary for him to read aloud to restore his confidence and when he does, there will be no correcting of his reading.

(3) Philip practices reading the selected rural text aloud by himself, possibly with a tape recorder if this helps.

(4) We discuss children's learning to talk and his writing exercise as steps to restore his confidence in which "mistakes" are part of learning.

(5) We do exercises similar to the ones for writing in which imagery and evocative words are used about reading aloud.

(6) Philip then reads the text to me and I follow but make no comments about correctness.

(7) Depending on how Philip feels, this process is repeated with some of his other rural texts.

(8) Eventually Philip reads aloud a passage or page from "A Fortunate Life" which he has rehearsed with himself if necessary.

The above steps are similar to those in the "Transitionalised Imagery Technique" which I used for Philip's writing. They are based on the use of potential space in which Philip is able to develop a new sense about his ego in the activity of reading aloud.

(3) **The relationally supported aspect of Philip's ego**

My plan with Philip was to explore the experience of being illiterate in a largely literate society and look at the wider social relations involved in illiteracy.
When the sessions on reading "A Fortunate Life" began there were problems which I discussed in the section on avoidance. However the discussion also revealed how Philip's illiteracy had shaped his social relations. This shaping began at school: Philip said his teachers "gave up on me." The reaction of his parents was similar. According to Philip they accepted his illiteracy and did not seem concerned. In adult life this acceptance was maintained, as the following discussion shows:

Jill: When we were first married he would not write anything out. He would come to the bank and tell me to get his money out of the bank. [At that time Jill was working in the bank in the town where they lived]

Jill: With looking up phone books, before I'd just do them, whereas now he's got to look them up himself.

Jill: He went from having his father do everything for him, to me doing it because I was in town, I was in the Bank. It gets to the point where you [meaning Philip] don't do any of it and one person ends up with the lot.

Philip: That was the mistake my parents made anyway, having them do it.

Jill: Your father just did everything.

Philip: He [Philip's father] paid me a wage but to make it easier for himself he paid for the insurances and registration and all that sort of thing...and I didn't have to worry about handling my own registration or insurance [ie reading and filling in the forms].

Jill: In a way they have done him a big disservice. They used to give him a cheque each week for his pocket money and that was it. [This refers to a time after Philip had left school when he was working on his parents' farm].
PW: All this stuff about avoiding reading and writing goes back a long way. The point is that you have really made it part of your life. It's almost like part of your personality.

Philip: Yes.

PW: That's the thing we've got to get over...

Philip: It falls back on confidence.

In this regard Wachtel (1994) refers to a circular process in maintaining psychological problems in which internal states are supported by external conditions. A person's social relations and life become structured in such a way so as to maintain the difficulty. Wachtel says that understanding and intervention to break the vicious circle enhances therapy. From the above discussion it is clear that in Philip's case these supportive relations developed and resulted in a diminished need for him to develop his literacy. But despite this he did attempt to correct it through attending adult literacy classes at a TAFE college. Philip and Jill had a good understanding of this aspect of his difficulty as the following quote shows:

Jill: [It's something that] he has tried and recognised as a problem from way back and even when I first met him he was trying to do something about it then. So and [now] he has just improved heaps. He has a go at most things now. He will read most things...but at least he has a go. Before he just wouldn't even attempt it.

These relational aspects of Philip's problem were largely overcome by the time of the discussion. However when I wrote the agreement allocating Philip specific time for reading at home, I nevertheless included a clause specifically mentioning his need to complete everyday literacy tasks.

The super-ego and reading
Philip went to High School with limited literacy skills which prevented him from engaging with school work. As a result, he developed a classroom strategy of active disengagement and disruption:

Philip: I can remember in first and second form it [reading] never gave me the shits because I couldn't read anyway, so I just didn't do it. Then when it came to fourth form, that's when it gave me the shits because I knew I had to get through this work. I couldn't get through the work because I couldn't read what I had to get through. That's what gave me the shits. So then I used to clown around.

PW: So was anybody trying to force you to read and do the work?

Philip: I think the teachers just got sick of me. They just gave up. They didn't bother pushing me.

PW: So how come you felt forced to do the work?

Philip: It was self inflicted.

PW: You thought you had to do it?

Philip: Yes.

PW: You thought you had to get the School Certificate, is that what you mean?

Philip: Yes

PW: So that was where it really maybe happened, in fourth form.

Philip: In third form, I'd say. Halfway through third form.
Philip's statement that "it was self inflicted" relates to his super-ego. This is a relatively uncomplicated manifestation of a super-ego that encompasses ideals of teachers and education. Despite many years of unsuccessfully attempting to read, which was direct ego experience of his repressed desire to not read, he still thought he should try.

This is a point of fundamental difference between Philip and the subjects of the two previous case studies. Stan and Jim gave up trying to read. Philip never really gave up. The result was a longer shaping of his ego and perception of himself as incapable of reading. As an adult he voluntarily attended TAFE classes and was seeking help from me despite a history of lack of success. His superego took over some of the functions of school.

Another aspect of his super-ego has an ideal of reading in which he should be reading to relax. In the discussion (reproduced below) Philip said: "I look on reading as relaxation". He was not claiming that he read to relax. If so, this would completely contradict his id processes about reading and all his observed behaviour about reading. This is a super-ego ideal the source of which may again be Jill, who did read for relaxation. In a discussion with her and Philip when we were talking about Philip's difficulty with drowsiness, Jill said that she did not understand how anyone could fall asleep when reading. She then added: "I can read for hours, until two o'clock in the morning". Another source of this ideal could be Philip's daughter who during the sessions with her father, finished reading "Little Women" for pleasure. This perception by illiterate adults of the reading ability of their literate children was observed by Johnston (1985). Jack Wilson, the illiterate subject of a case study, told Johnston that on one occasion he experienced extreme feelings of jealousy towards his young daughter because of her reading ability.

This is the significance of expanding the social origins of super-ego ideals to which I referred in Chapter Two. Including the wives and children of men, contemporises the origin of the super-ego. Of course the inclusion of a child reverses Freud's idea of the flow of ideals and morals from parents to children. In Philip's situation, the flow of ideals about literacy from his wife and daughter was given force because they represented a social standard of literacy. Without patronising Philip, with regard to literacy he occupied a position which might, in many families, be taken by a child.
The conflicted character of Philip's self

In the following discussion with Philip about his problems with reading "A Fortunate Life", he gave multiple reasons which I have italicised. I jokingly asked him if he needed a "boot up the bum" to make him read. Philip replied that he did, so I asked him what he understood by the words "boot up the bum":

Philip: *encouragement, prodding and pushing.*

When I questioned this, the discussion continued again.

PW: So what has the boot up the bum or push done?

Philip: It's made me get into it. Have a go. *Take it seriously.*

PW: But why weren't you doing that before?

Philip: Oh it's just the way things are, the way *I am lazy.*

PW: But how can you be lazy. You run a job, you're a father. You don't seem a lazy sort of bloke to me.

Philip: I'm not lazy to work. But I don't look on reading as work. *I look on it as relaxation.*

PW: What I'm really trying to get at is the difference now. Because now you seem to be reading in your own time whereas before you wouldn't.
Philip: *I had no interest*. I didn't have anything interesting enough to read. I'd skip through the paper and pick up bits and pieces here and there.

PW: But you had that book for a while [before you began to read it].

Philip: Yes, I know.

PW: What I'm really trying to get at is what happened when you and [Jill] and I sat around the table and had a bit of a yarn about it, and talked about finding time for you to read in. Was that important?

Philip: Yes it was. That's when I realised that *you were disgusted* with my effort in reading, in the amount I'd read. I felt I've got to pull my socks up and have more of a go.

Philip (continuing later): In ways *I felt maybe I would lose you as a teacher*. I thought that maybe in ways you'd sort of had enough. Or you couldn't go on any further unless I pulled my socks up and started reading.

A common sense reaction might be to see these different reasons for not reading the book, as evasion and/or confusion. At worst, they could be seen as evidence of Philip's schizo-affective disability. However, I see them as expressions of Philip's conflicts about reading as he experienced them with me, his family and in other social relationships. These conflicts are not evasion or confusion but expressions of Philip's internal reality. They are *not addenda* to a real self. They are part of his real self which has been constructed through schooling and a social practice of illiteracy.

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have applied the method developed in the last chapter and expanded upon it in a number of respects. I also explored a social practice of illiteracy, which began in school and continued
into wider society. This practice shaped the self and social relations and further entrenched and complicated illiteracy. This wider context of illiteracy needs to be understood because it affects the particular type of difficulties that the learner has developed. This in turn will influence the strategies required to help the learner.

The shaping of self and social relations as a consequence of illiteracy, include much of what I have referred to in previous chapters as superstructure. This superstructure has been built on the base experience of the word-object in school. The work with Philip shows that although the superstructure may involve much adult experience, the base experience from childhood must be understood as qualitatively different, must be and changed first. This is not just theoretical appraisal but also is a point that comes from Philip. He said that without the construction of the affirming texts he would never have developed the confidence and ability to read.

The sessions with Philip finished before I was able to implement the strategy which allowed him to re-experience reading aloud. As planned, he returned to the country, in fact that part of the country where he grew up and where his affirming texts were based. But before leaving, he finished reading “A Fortunate Life” and said that he enjoyed it.

CHAPTER FIVE
PADLOCKS ON BOOKS

Introduction
In the first section of this chapter I give an outline of the method as I have developed it so far. This is version two, version one being the tentative method which I described at the beginning of Chapter Two. The outline is a compilation of the details of the method from Chapters Three and Four. This is not just a description of stages because some of the aspects are recurring ones; although there is some chronological order.

After a description of the subject in section two, I give an account of my application of the revised method in section three. There is little conceptual discussion beyond that developed in the first three case studies. This case was an attempt to apply the method rather than further elaborate it. In discussing the application of the method I have followed the same order as in the outline of the method.

In the fourth section of the chapter I critique my application of the method. I have done this because the work in this case was not altogether successful. Mark, the subject of this case study, has also provided me with more details about his difficulty after the work with him finished. This gave me more material on which to base a critique.

Outline of the method: version two

(1) Emotional engagement with the learner

At the beginning there is an attempt to establish a relationship with learners and sympathetically engage with their problems. Details of learners’ school experiences are elicited early; this is also an ongoing process. Engagement with learners and emotional empathy is the first mode of affirmation of the learners’ selves. In Chapter Four I called this mode “relational affirmation”.

(2) Assessment
This involves understanding the learners’ problems with literacy. There are two aspects to this. Firstly, *skill with reading* focuses on real life reading tasks and describes what learners are able to do with these tasks. It does not attempt to quantify ability or rank learners on scales or ascribe a reading age to them. Secondly, *emotional assessment* attempts to understand how learners feel about reading, whether they avoid it and how their feelings may be manifested as anxiety or feelings of sickness. The second aspect is accomplished with direct questions such as “how do you feel in the guts when you try to read?” It may also be possible at this time to assess learners’ emotional response to reading aloud by direct questions.

(3) Deconstructing the culture of teaching and transmission

Again this is not a process confined to a specific time. It needs to be generalised throughout the sessions. It applies to both learners and literacy worker because both have had many years of schooling and have preconceived notions of what learning is about. It is likely that learners will expect to be “taught”. When there is no conventional teaching they, or some other person close to them, may decide that any method of overcoming their problems which is not “teaching” will be of little or no use.

If possible, the literacy worker should explain the method to learners and say why conventional teaching is of little or no use.

(4) Compliance and overdetermination

If learners have had a strategy of resistance to schooling it is likely that they will have had less reading pedagogy. They will have externalised their alienation directly onto teachers. However, as I noted in Chapter Two, resisters are unlikely to seek help for their reading problems because of their antipathy to education.

The opposite may be the case if learners have had a strategy of compliance with schooling. Because these learners have submitted, they are likely to have had more reading pedagogy. The result may also be that they have repressed their alienation and displaced it onto the word-object which results in it being overdetermined and having greater psychic intensity.
During assessment and throughout the work with learners, the literacy worker should attempt to understand which strategy learners adopted in school. However, because schooling may have painful memories they may be reluctant to talk about these experiences.

(5) Revelation of affirming objects

This is an explicit and vital part of the method. It is linked to the last one in that learners and literacy worker both abandon transmission and teaching. Instead learners begin talking about events and objects in their lives that are affirming and pleasurable. It is important that affirming objects become known quickly otherwise the work becomes too protracted. This happened with the previous case study.

(6) Dialogue

This stage is in practice part of the revelation of affirming objects but conceptually it is distinct. The dialogue is a vital aspect of the method as it is one of the techniques through which the sense of the text is enhanced. It is the basis for some of the modes of affirmation discussed next.

(7) Modes of affirmation

These six modes were discussed in the last chapter. Briefly they are:

- **Denoted affirmation**, where the language used denotes affirming objects in learners’ lives.
- **Mirroring affirmation**, where key words from the dialogue are reflected back to learners in a positive way.
- **Relational affirmation**, where there is a generally supportive relationship between learners and the literacy worker which carries over into the texts.
- **Informative affirmation**, in which learners give information to the literacy worker during the dialogue which reverses the conventional teacher pupil relation, as a result of which learners feel empowered.
• **Productive affirmation**, where there is free construction by learners of spoken texts.

• **Crafted affirmation**, where learners consciously compose spoken texts which results in greater appropriation by learners of their language.

(8) **Recording**

This is the recording on audio-tape by learners of summaries of the dialogues. It involves the productive and crafted affirmation referred to above. The recording of spoken texts is generally not something that most learners have done and they usually need some help, especially in the beginning.

(9) **The subjective written texts**

These are written by the literacy worker and reproduce the spoken subjective texts verbatim. They are given to learners with the audio-tapes of the spoken texts. Learners take the positive affirmative sense associated with the latter text into a potential space and use it to create a new relationship with the written text. This creative process is one in which learners have complete autonomy. Both texts are under the control of the learners and they decide whether to listen to the tapes or read the written texts. If the learners decide to read the written texts aloud there is no testing or surveillance of their reading by the literacy worker.

(10) **Returning to the written text**

It is difficult to say how many texts should be constructed. This will depend upon the severity of each learner's problem. A time will arrive when the learners have completed a number of texts about their affirming objects and it may seem there is nothing left to say about these objects. At this point learners are asked to read them to themselves again and refer to the tapes if necessary.

(11) **Language exercises**
When learners say that they are able to read all the written texts, the words in them are used as models to demonstrate the regularities of language. This work begins with simple analysis: the finding of constituents of compound words. It progresses to more complex analysis which is phonemic and syllabic. This exercise also provides the literacy worker with a non-intrusive way of seeing how well learners understand the texts. With the completion of this stage, learners should have a better feeling about written language and some feelings of control over it. These exercises may be a chance for learners to demonstrate this control in ways which are affirmative for them.

(12) Writing exercise

This exercise uses transitionalised imagery techniques described in detail in Chapter Four. The exercise should not, of course, be forced upon learners. By this stage, the relationship with learners should have developed into one of trust and rapport in which the learners feel they are able to make “mistakes”.

(13) Reading aloud as affirmation

This exercise has not yet been tried with learners but the conceptual basis for it was summarised in Chapter Four. It starts with the reading aloud of subjective texts and progresses to reading aloud of objective texts. This stage is highly particular to the individual experiences of learners. Before this stage is attempted, the literacy worker should have a good understanding of what these experiences have been.

This stage could begin before, during or after the reading of objective texts so long as it begins with the subjective texts. However learners’ emotional problems with reading aloud may not become obvious until the reading of objective texts begin.

If the learner has had particularly alienating experiences with reading aloud and is then able to successfully read aloud, this may be a highly affirmative experience. But great care is needed.

(14) Reading objective written texts
When learners have completed the language exercises, they should be able to attempt reading an objective text. The literacy worker selects texts which interest the learners. At this stage reading strategies are introduced to learners. It is unlikely that they will begin to read objective written texts immediately and without support. This stage may need to be supplemented by procedures such as explicit agreements referred to in “illiteracy as social practice” below.

This stage might begin with a short objective text such as an article but may progress to a book. It is essential that learners are not required to read any of the texts aloud. Reading aloud must be an affirmative process described above.

(15) Illiteracy as social practice

Because learners have been illiterate in a largely literate society, they will have developed practices to avoid reading. In some cases learners’ avoidance will be supported by relations with others who do the learners’ literacy work for them. Learners need to become aware of these practices of avoidance which must be changed before they will be able to develop their literacy skills.

In some cases there may be a need for an explicit written agreement between learners, close friends or relatives, and the literacy worker which sets out the everyday literacy tasks which learners agree to.

Description of the subject

This case study concerns Mark a twenty-six year old man who grew up in a middle class suburb of northern metropolitan Sydney and attended private Catholic schools. His father was, for a time, a lecturer at a University and later began his own engineering business. His mother was a qualified nurse and later became an educator with the Catholic Education Office. Mark appears to have middle class friends and said he would like to go to University if he was able to sufficiently improve his literacy. Mark’s mother is no longer alive and he lives with his retired father. This living situation is one of convenience for Mark due to his financial necessity. Mark wanted to change this situation and find his own accommodation.
Mark said that he was unable to remember his early classroom experiences although he was able to remember events outside the classroom for which his memory is good.

Mark said that he spent a lot of time avoiding reading. He added that he had pretty much avoided reading as long as he could remember. During our first meeting he noticed a poster on the wall and said that his immediate inclination was to look away from it in case somebody asked him what he thinks about it.

Mark was read to as a child but he does not remember its extent. Because of his reading problems, his mother was determined to make him read and in year three or four of primary school arranged for him to have after school reading classes which he “hated really badly.” Mark was eight or nine years old at the time. He had three different after school reading teachers but was unable to say what methods these teachers used. But he showed great reluctance to talk about these classes other than to say several times during the initial interview how much he hated them. Despite these strong feelings, Mark appears to have complied with these special classes and school generally. He did not tell me about any episodes of resistance.

Mark’s vocabulary is more developed than any of the other male subjects in the research. From the written subjective texts, some of which are reproduced below, it will also be seen that his sentences are more complex than the subjects in the first two case studies. This ability with spoken language could be related to Mark’s middle class origins.

I had several discussions with Mark in which I explained to him what I saw as the emotional basis to some literacy problems. During one of these discussions Mark said that sometimes he feels like he is a little boy in a dark corner and people are throwing books at him. At other times he feels like a little boy running through a library and all the books are screaming at him. The books are saying “we have the answers.” But when he looks at the books half the words are missing. There are also padlocks on the books.
Mark’s after school reading classes were very much in his mind when we were arranging the location of the sessions. He was very reluctant at first to come to my house because, as a child, he used to go to the house of the after school reading teachers. Mark attempted to find a location nearby which could be used for the sessions. He was unable to do this. We did have one session at the house of a friend but using this permanently was not possible. Mark also referred to the problem with working in the kitchen of my house because kitchens were where a lot of work with the after school reading teachers had been.

On a few occasions Mark referred to the great impact that being illiterate had made on his life. Once he spontaneously said that if he had the money he would have consulted a psychiatrist because he felt so distressed. But he was reluctant to expand on this statement when I tried to discuss it with him. There was a hint that his life generally had not been happy. His problems could also be compounded by his health problems. Mark suffers from eczema and rheumatoid arthritis which affects the joints in his legs.

There were twenty-five sessions with Mark most of them lasting for approximately one and a half hours. The sessions extended over a period of four months. After the sessions were completed I had six telephone discussions with him. Some of the comments which Mark made on the phone caused me to reappraise my analysis of his problem which became the basis for much of the critique at the end of the chapter.

**The method applied to Mark**

(1) **Emotional engagement**

When Mark was talking about his problems with reading, I sympathised with him. I also gave him an old book and suggested that he rip it up, which he did. On another such occasion in addition to ripping up a book we also burnt it. On both occasions I was providing Mark with an outlet for his stated feelings about reading. I was trying to show him that I understood how he felt and that I accepted these feelings. I hoped there was also an element of cathartic release for Mark in this process.
Although the problems with the memory of the after school reading classes delayed the beginning of the sessions, I accepted Mark’s difficulties and said that I understood how he felt. The problem of the kitchen became a joke between us. Eventually all sessions were held at my house where Mark became very relaxed even to the point of having coffee in the kitchen.

(2) Assessment

To assess Mark’s reading ability I asked him to read the article which is appendix “A”.

When reading this article, Mark was unable to read “surge”, “amnesty” (first occurrence), “endeavour”, “surrendered” (first occurrence), “region”, and “expected”. He misread the following words: “Surrendered” (second occurrence) as sudden; “Andrews” as Anderson; “amnesty” (second occurrence) as armory; “Western” as west but corrected himself; “mid-western” as mid-west; “counts” as counter.

He commented that his misreading of the problem words did not make sense. Generally his reading was very slow and hesitant.

With some of these words Mark was able to read them when he returned to them. However this was a slow and labourious process.

I said that “region” was a word that most people would be able to read but he was unable to do this. I asked him how he felt when he made an extra effort to read such words. He answered that he felt stupid adding that it was an insignificant word with only five letters. I asked him how he felt in his stomach on these occasions. He said that he felt slightly sick.

(3) Deconstructing the culture of teaching and transmission
At times Mark seemed to expect direct teaching from which he would experience more immediate gains. On these occasions I referred to the emotional basis to his problems. I stressed that he had ten years of schooling and three after school teachers. None of this direct teaching had positive results. I also emphasised that because of his avoidance, he had never really engaged with reading. Children who learn to read easily have a positive relationship to written language and no avoidance. This allows them to engage with reading especially outside of school and develop their literacy skills. I explained to Mark that to stop avoidance, his negative relationship to reading must be reconstructed to a positive one.

I also made a very simple analogy. This involved a woman who grew up in a family where a problematical emotional relationship with her father developed. I supposed that the father had a distinctively bushy beard and, as a result of these experiences, the woman had problems in her relationships with men who had a similar beards. In such a situation there is probably little point in telling that woman to be realistic and rational. Explanations that her relationship with her father was in the past and that men with similar beards have no connection to her father, would probably be useless. Instead, therapists may try to change the emotional basis of the problem. I said I am trying to accomplish a similar change but the relationship is with written language, which he developed in childhood, probably in school rather than in his family. It may be very difficult for the woman to go back to her father and directly reconstruct the father-daughter relationship. The situation with written language is easier because it is easily constructed and relationships with it may be directly changed. I emphasised to Mark that a positive emotional relationship becomes the base to enable us to do cognitive exercises such as learning about different reading strategies and the regularities of language.

I had the above discussion with Mark because he had a high degree of perceptiveness and he was able to articulate his feelings. Other people with literacy problems may not be able to comprehend such explanations. Mark appeared to understand the analogy.

I completely avoided any direct transmission or any intrusion of other texts until all of the ten subjective texts were completed. This contrasts with some of the previous case studies where I did resort for short periods to more conventional teaching.
(4) Compliance and overdetermination

As I said in the description of the subject, Mark had protracted reading pedagogy and appears to have complied with schooling and the after school reading lessons. There was none or little externalisation of his alienation directly onto teachers. Because he had such intensive reading pedagogy, he had a high level of experiential sense. Because he complied with schooling he probably displaced even more experiential sense onto the word-object.

(5) Revelation of affirming objects

Mark’s interests include playing the guitar, listening to music, playing basketball and cooking. At the time of the work with him he did the latter for a job in a suburban restaurant. As will be seen in some of the subjective texts reproduced below he is able to express in an articulate way his feelings about these activities.

There was no delay in finding these objects. I simply asked Mark what his interests were and he told me.

(6) Dialogue

All the spoken subjective texts were preceded by dialogue between Mark and me with one exception. This was story 10 which Mark spoke straight into the tape recorder.

All dialogues were generally quite short in which I wrote down key words and phrases. These key words were Mark’s own words. While I was writing them down I repeated them. In doing this I was consciously mirroring his language.

(7) Modes of affirmation
Of the six modes of affirmation I referred to in the outline, the only one not used was the informative mode. This was because there was no specialised information which Mark gave me in the dialogues. Probably productive and crafted affirmation were the two modes used most intensively. Mark appeared to enjoy producing his texts.

Mark was very adept at composing his spoken texts. There was a large amount of crafted affirmation in his production. On several occasions I complimented Mark on his texts telling him that he had a broad vocabulary, especially for a person who had literacy problems.

As noted above, story 10 was composed by Mark without preceding dialogue. During its composition Mark showed a high level of concentration. I told Mark that I thought this story was his best.

(8) Recording

While Mark was recording the tapes of the spoken texts, I operated the pause button on the tape recorder and gave him key words and phrases which I had written down during the dialogue. These were only a basis for him to construct the text rather than statements which he repeated verbatim into the tape recorder.

(9) The subjective written texts:

I have reproduced below three of Mark’s texts, stories 1, 6 and 10. These could be compared with the texts of Jim and to a lesser degree Philip, for their complexity.

Story Number 1

The Hollow Friend

I have three guitars. The first one would be my nylon string guitar. It’s an acoustic Spanish guitar. And the second one would be Harry the Hoffner a 1958 German made guitar. And the
third one would be my crappy electric which has been used previously as a knife throwing board.

The first would be my favourite, my nylon string guitar. I do not have a name for it but it is my favourite because it’s been with me the longest, sounds the nicest and its also easy to play. While Harry is the beautifulist one of them all, it is a 1958 as I have told you previously, with inlay like it was made for the Gods, every guitarist’s dream. People will pick it up that have played the guitar previously and fall in love with it instantly and because of my lack of guitar skills I haven’t found its beauty yet.

Harry has a deep dark voice, deep as a double bass although not quite. It is still an acoustic guitar.

I’ve been playing guitar since I was eighteen so therefore Harry should necessarily grow on me but, as I’ve said before, my guitar skills are not great. My guitar playing skills had simple beginnings so therefore they still are simple. I saw people playing guitar at a Christian gathering and thought they were really cool. But now I’ve embarked on the task of starting a band with a few friends.

I’ve played for enjoyment for the last six years and now I’m playing with a goal. I’m writing music and composing words, the goal being to reach the hearts of many with my words. Although my guitar playing skills are like my electric guitar, it has been used a knife throwing board in its past, it is easy to play and it sounds sweet to me.

Playing takes me away. It gives me an excuse for not talking. It gives me a voice with no words. It is possible to convey emotions without words. Also I can be with my guitar and other people in a place where I don’t want to be and I can play it and it takes me away.

Story Number 6
Discussion

I like debates and arguments, maybe about things of importance. It is good to extract other people’s insights through these. You find out how similar or dissimilar you are to people. A lot of people I have talked to in the past have narrow minds sometimes and don’t think abstractly or broadmindedly. And it’s fun to use nice big curly words. People are very dogmatic in their thinking. They think one line of thought and tend to think that one answer is the correct one. One thinks that they are broad minded and have a large scope on the world but if you talk to another person you can see in fact your views are pretty narrow themselves. Hearing another person that is broadminded is like putting two worlds together. The world seems like such a larger place.

Pull all the fences down in the backyards, and hope there’s no dogs and maybe you’ll enjoy your conversation. Fences make great firewood and they make it burn so bright conversationally. But myself I am a peaceful discusser and if I have a fair point, which is quite rarely, people will accept it readily.

Listening is quite useful in conversation. It can cause your conversation to have more effect on the other person. If you say few words and use weightier words, when you use them it is more effective.

If caught with a dogmatic person wait until a loose spot comes in their train of thought and you can pounce on them. You can hit them with their thought and turn it back on themselves and hit them over the head with it, metaphorically speaking, as well as, nailing them to the floor.

Dogmatic people are to be treated harshly at all times. Use intolerance, it works so well. Hopefully when we all pull together we can drown our dogmatic people all together. There’s more than one answer to every question. Questions have so many answers. Dogmatic people don’t know what to do. If you want to trick a dogmatic person ask any question and then give
them five answers. But remember conversation is all about getting to know people and letting people get to know you. So enjoy.

Story Number 10

I Could Have Told You Vincent

Vincent is a Mini Minor, nineteen fifty-eight in year, eleven hundred in size of motor, green in colour, white of roof, straps on bonnet, yet old in stature, standing tall but often limping along the road with the sad passers by watching with mournful eyes, watching the beauty stagger.

Vincent has been my possession for about up to six years, I suppose. And he has only lived for about six months of those years. In that six months a lot of expenditure has gone into Vincent for when he came into my possession he was in rather a sorry state and over the time of his stillness progressively got worse and worse. But money can cure a lot of things. When it comes to cars they seem to be an endless pit when you start. Hopefully the pit has a plug in it. I think the pit is near its fullness for my car. The Mini Minor, has had a new gear box, a new engine, new brakes, new paint, new just about everything. So he’s running quite well. It’s bringing me much joy and making many heads turn.

And perhaps my reliability and my stability may fall into the same category as the stability of the Mini. Uncertain yet imminent.

A sunny day may find you travelling along with the wind breathing past your hair, music in your ears and perhaps a passenger to keep you company. But either way Vincent is proud to be pushed along by his driver, hopefully.
In the past there have been so many interesting occurrences with the Mini. Pushing it, having flat tyres with no jack or spare or perhaps running out of fuel in awkward places. Sitting on top of it waiting for a tow truck, traffic smiling and all sorts of bizarre things happening.

When I was a child I had a dream. My dream was to have a Mini, green with a white roof. And now my dream has come true. And all the toil and trouble that I’ve gone through has confused me a little. Whether my dream was worth the effort. And I think summer will be its test. If the dream survives summer then it will survive so much longer.

(10) Returning to the written texts

Mark made ten subjective texts. This was a somewhat arbitrary number which I selected because I thought that this would exhaust the affirming objects which he had told me about. But I also considered this number was sufficient to be the basis for some change in his feelings about written language. It may have been possible to use a smaller number of texts but I took a cautious approach and used ten.

By the time we reached story 10 Mark was asking about the next stage of the program.

Towards the end of the sessions in which we made the subjective texts, Mark mentioned that he was now attempting to write more. He was writing lists connected with his work which some of his fellow workers were reading. Now he felt sufficiently confident to appreciate comments that some of them were making about his spelling. He said that he was inclined to try to read texts now rather than avoid them.

(11) Language exercises
I had given Mark copies of all his written texts and the audio tapes. I asked him to read all the texts and listen to the tapes. We then had a week’s break before we commenced the language exercises.

It seems that in this week Mark began to feel anxious about his chances of success. He became worried that if he did not learn to read now, it may mean he would never learn. I talked with him about his anxiety in an attempt to lessen it but this was not effective.

It also seemed that the memory of the after school reading lessons was affecting him. The memory of these sessions from his childhood seemed linked to the exercises on his own texts that he was about to attempt.

This became more evident when we actually began the exercises. Then Mark said that the exercises were boring but I asked him to continue with them. Before the exercises began, Mark read his texts and listened to his tapes for a second time. The exercises were divided into the following parts:

(a) Breaking down compound words in the subjective written texts into their constituents.

(b) Isolation of the sounds that correspond to individual letters of the alphabet. We did this by finding words in the subjective written texts that began with these sounds. We also discriminated between the diverse sounds that one letter may make. For example the letter “G” in German made guitar in story 1, makes one sound which is equivalent to the sound of the letter “J”, as heard at the beginning of the word German and another sound which is heard at the beginning of word guitar.

(c) I demonstrated to Mark how words may be divided into syllables by modelling words in his written texts. For example insidious and enthusiasm in story 3 were broken into their respective syllables. I repeated this with a number of other words in different stories.

(d) In story 8, I showed Mark the use of reading strategies while employing the sounds of the first letter of words. The word resolution in the last line of that story could not be the word decision although the latter word may fit the context and have the same ion ending as the former word. This is
because the initial sound of *resolution* must be “R” sound and not “D”. This process was repeated with other words in the subjective written texts.

(e) I showed Mark a number of the structural regularities about words. Some of these were the regular endings such as *ion, ment, ness, ence, ious, ous, ing* and *ed*. For example, I used story 8 to show him the *tion* ending on the words *ramifications, conversations, deduction* and *resolution*.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the point of using *known* words from subjective written texts as models is that in addition to the sounds being known, there is also a sense of affirmation from these particular texts.

The amount of material covered in these language exercises was limited because it seemed that Mark already knew most of the points covered by them. It was also obvious that he was indifferent to the exercises and he wanted to demonstrate his indifference to me.

Mark’s attitude to these exercises contrasts dramatically with the subjects in the second and third case studies. When Jim found that he knew many of the answers, he was very happy to demonstrate his knowledge to me. Philip did these exercises with a conscientious ease and no trace of indifference.

(12) **Writing exercise**

I did not ask Mark whether he wanted to attempt to write. His concerns were very focused on reading.

(13) **Reading aloud as affirmation**

Mark did not seem to have the same problems with reading aloud as Philip. In fact he voluntarily read stories 7 and 10 aloud to me with no hesitation. He made a few mistakes which could have been coincidental.
I suggested to Mark that after we completed his subjective texts and the language exercises we might read a book together. I suggested *The Catcher in the Rye*, (Salinger 1994). He seemed enthusiastic about this book which he had heard of. In contrast to Philip, in the last chapter, Mark took only a few days to obtain a copy of the book.

A problem with the reading objective texts is how to make the transition from the personal and affirmative nature of the subjective texts to the objective texts. This was particularly relevant in Mark’s case because before we read *The Catcher in the Rye*, I gave him two short articles to read. He laboured with both of them. These two texts were given to him without discussion or reading of any part of them by me. They were given to him separately almost immediately after we had completed the language exercises referred to above. He eventually said that he did not want to read them.

If his reaction to these articles is taken on its face value then it would seem that Mark’s experiential sense about written language had remained unchanged by the subjective texts and the affirmative procedures. But the affirmative sense of these subjective texts is a *transitional phenomenon* in the sense that Winnicott gives to that term. This does not mean that they result in experiential sense being henceforth absent from all written texts. Rather, like all transitional phenomena, they are steps along the way to reducing anxiety and negative feelings and replacing them with positive feelings. The problem is to *generalise* the positive sense associated with the subjective texts to more written texts. If there is no generalisation, reading skills will remain undeveloped because they will be used in a very limited way.

In the previous chapter this difficulty was encountered with Philip. After the language exercises, I gave him a short text to read which he *said* he read. However he appeared uninterested in it. Then began a long process of attempting to engage him in the reading of a book of 320 pages. This was eventually accomplished by a specific strategy of a written agreement between Philip, his wife and me about
explicit times in which Philip would read. It also involved my reading sections of the book to Philip and allowing him to read the rest of the book to himself.

There was a “crisis” in which Philip came to terms with his continued avoidance of reading the book. After this “crisis” the work with Philip was relatively straight forward. In the last chapter I explained this continued avoidance as resulting from the shaping of the ego by an id-like desire to not read. Although this id aspect may have been changed, the ego’s shape remains, an aspect of which is the avoidance of reading. This aspect of the ego is far more tractable to reason than the id aspect and may be changed through relatively straightforward cognitive strategies such as the agreement with Philip and his wife. However while avoidance of reading continues there can be very little generalisation of positive feelings about reading. The point was to find a strategy whereby the positive emotional feelings about the subjective texts could be increasingly generalised to objective texts. To do this required understanding the differences in the social situations and ages of Mark and Philip.

Philip was in a far more settled situation than Mark. Philip was married, had two children and was in a routine of regular work and domestic life with his wife. Philip was 35 years old at the time of my work with him, and Mark was almost ten years younger. Philip came from a rural background and wanted to return to a rural life. This life had been very affirmative for him. Generally he was a person who seemed comfortable with regularity. Philip’s wife was often in the house when I had sessions with him. As may be seen from the last chapter, she was interested in my work with Philip and the three of us discussed his problems together.

Mark had a far more fluid life and once described himself to me as part of generation X: he wanted immediate gratification. He worked irregular hours in a restaurant and was involved in a busy social life. Mark’s life was very much oriented around the city and the entertainments it had to offer. I know he often visited his friends late at night. The irregular hours of work made our meetings difficult to arrange. Although he lived with his father this arrangement was one of convenience only and he wanted to change it.
Because Philip lived close to me and he had two children who required his care, all sessions were held at his house. Mark lived a much further distance from me and, with one exception, always came to my house.

Mark’s life style and social situation lent itself to avoidance. With two exceptions Mark was late for all sessions. Sometimes he was up to an hour late. Generally he would telephone and tell me he was going to be late. Given the nature of his emotional relationship and ambivalence about reading, it is likely that this lateness was avoidance.

Because of these differences there was little scope for a specific agreement with Mark about a reading programme similar to that with Philip and Jill. Most importantly, there was no possibility of the inclusion of significant others in Mark’s life which, as Shelton and Levy (1981) say, helps to change the behaviour. I needed to use a different strategy of generalisation.

The strategy I adopted was *transitionalising my own voice*. In doing this I relied upon the mode of relational affirmation which had made my relationship with Mark one of empathy and support. In addition I associated my voice with the affirmative sense already in his subjective texts. To do this I read all of Mark’s subjective texts to him over a period of two sessions. This was a very personalised reading in which I made comments and appraisals of the stories. I told Mark which one of them I liked the most. I complimented Mark on his ability to compose texts.

When these readings were completed I read the first chapter of *The Catcher in the Rye* to Mark. This novel is about a sixteen year old youth who has recently been expelled from school. The time span of the story is approximately ten days but it contains reminiscences. The language and style of writing appears to be simple as it is in the manner in which such a young person might supposedly speak. I continued the reading sessions of the book with Mark. In between these sessions Mark read chapters of the book at home. In all, I read seven chapters over four sessions and Mark read the remaining nineteen to himself. It took approximately four weeks for us to complete the book.
The manner in which this book was read was similar to that which I adopted with Philip except that the reading sessions were explicitly times in which I read to Mark. There was no suggestion that they were times in which Mark might read aloud if he wished. By reading all of Mark’s texts to him in a personalised manner, my voice and person had become explicitly transitionalised. By then reading parts of the book to Mark, I was inserting my “voice” in the text and creating a positive emotion about the book. My objective was to transitionalise the book and make it a next stage after Mark’s subjective texts.

This attempt to transitionalise my own voice was supported by comments of Mark’s when he had finished reading up to chapter nineteen of the book:

> When I am reading The Catcher in the Rye to myself I can almost imagine that your voice is reading to me. It is not a literal thing of my hearing your voice. But the texture of the words have some hint of your character imposed on them

This comment was made spontaneously by Mark. He also added, while looking at the cover of The Catcher in the Rye, which was partly open, that now this was how books were beginning to appear to him. This refers to a comment by Mark that he sometimes feels that books have padlocks on them.

Throughout his reading of The Catcher in the Rye, Mark seemed to have few difficulties with the actual reading of the text. There were only a few words that he mentioned to me which caused him problems. These words were “psychoanalyst”, “psychoanalyze” and “psychoanalysis” (Salinger 1994:133).

While this reading of The Catcher in the Rye seemed to be successful, problems began when Mark attempted to read another book which he selected himself. The manner in which I attempted to deal with these problems will be dealt with under the next heading of Illiteracy as social practice.

(15) Illiteracy as social practice
The comment by Mark that he had pretty much avoided reading as long as he could remember, is a comment about a social practice that he developed in childhood. Although it does not directly involve others in the way that Philip’s social practice directly involved his wife, Mark’s practice of avoiding reading is social because language usage is social practice. The entrenched nature of this practice becomes more relevant with his attempts to engage with other texts.

After Mark had finished reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, he showed a new confidence about reading. We had a long discussion about his going to University. He wanted to read more books and the particular book he wanted to read was *Catch 22* (Heller 1994). He wanted to read this book because his friends were reading it at that time. He very quickly bought his own copy, attempted to read it by himself but then said it was too difficult. I suggested that he try something easier. I read him the first six pages from *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck 1992). He seemed unenthusiastic about this but said he would read it. I lent him my copy on the understanding that he would obtain his own copy. Mark telephoned me on the day of his next session and said that he had not read any of the book. This session was cancelled. At the next session Mark had read only a few pages from *Of Mice and Men* and had not obtained his own copy.

At this session I made a decision to try and change tactics with Mark. I told him that unless he was able to organise himself and commit himself to reading then he had little chance of being able to study at University. My reason for this change of tactic was that in the work with Philip at the stage where he continued to avoid reading, he perceived that I gave him a “boot up the bum” which Philip also described as “A bit of prodding. A bit of a push.” After this Philip began reading regularly. My reasoning with Mark was that a matter of fact statement about his possibilities of success at University might have a similar effect. At this session Mark agreed to finish the book by the next session. At this next session (seven days later) Mark had obtained his own copy of the book and had almost finished reading it. He began this session by telling me that he had “failed again” because he had not finished the book completely. He added that he had not wanted to read it and could not get interested in the story.
At this session we also discussed books that could interest him and I showed him a number of books that I had. Mark selected *War Crimes*, a book of short stories (Carey 1979). However Mark then informed me that he was starting an additional job and that this would make further sessions difficult. He took the copy of *War Crimes* with him. We have spoken on the phone several times. But he has informed me that at the moment he is too busy to continue with the sessions.

**Critique**

Because the application of the method with Mark was not altogether successful there are a number of aspects about my analysis of his problem and the method that need to be discussed.

My first point is the significant differences between the six modes of affirmation. With the productive, crafted, mirroring, relational and informative modes, affirmation is created *during interaction with the literacy worker*. With the denoted mode, *the denoted object is affirming in itself*, the affirmation having been produced outside of this interaction in free and non alienated activity. Affirmation is brought into the language by the learners from their past. It is very difficult to consider the texts *in themselves* and say whether or not they denote affirmation.

This problem was discussed in the last chapter when I compared Philip’s text about his house with his series of rural texts. I argued that the differences between the texts did not disclose any intrinsically affirming content because affirmation is very subjective. The way I distinguished affirming content was by *understanding its significance in Philip’s life*. He said that instead of going to school he would have preferred to stay on the farm and work with his father. Although Philip was interested in the content of his other texts, when he began talking about the content of his rural texts, enthusiasm replaced interest.

In my account of transitional phenomena in Chapter Three, I said that the young child’s transitional object symbolises *good enough mothering* and that the transitional sense about written text depends upon *good enough general life experiences* which the language of the texts denotes. This raises the possibility that some learners may not have had such positive life experiences.
A reconsideration of the dialogues with Mark and an understanding of his general life experiences suggests that there may have been little in his life that was strongly affirming. In fact much of his life may have been unhappy. As I have already said he would have consulted a psychiatrist if he had the money. He had rheumatoid arthritis and eczema. When making the texts I relied mostly on relational, productive and crafted modes of affirmation. Although these three modes of affirmation are important, they are subsidiary to the denoted mode. My conclusion is that his texts are largely anecdotal and contain no denoted object from Mark’s life which had a deep and positive emotional strength. The possible exception to this is Mark’s first text “The Hollow Friend”, reproduced above, where he talks about his guitars. However he quickly left this topic and began a series of texts which were unrelated to each other.

The result may have been a low level of affirmation in Mark’s texts because of the absence of strong denoted affirmation. This is significant because of the need to counteract the psychic intensity of the severe alienation which he experienced as a child which I will now reconsider.

The severity of Mark’s alienation is seen from a contrast between his situation and that of Philip’s: they both experienced severe alienation at different ages. Philip said that as a child he could not read and nobody seemed to worry very much about it during his schooling. However, halfway through third form in High School, when Philip was approximately fifteen years old he attempted to learn to read because he realised that he needed to obtain the School Certificate. In his words, “it was self inflicted.” Although Philip experienced some alienation before this time, he was definite that these later experiences were when he was really affected. This was when he tried to learn to read but found he could not. In Philip’s words this really “gave me the shits.”

Mark was reluctant to talk in detail about his schooling. But it is known that his alienation began when he was younger: when he was in third or fourth class of primary school at which time he was eight or nine years old. At this age Mark’s mother forced him to go to a series of three after school reading teachers. It is significant that there were three such teachers and the work with them was intensive one-to-one contact. Mark did not have the relative luxury of being able to spend his school years free
of intensive reading pedagogy as did Philip. According to Philip’s mother “he was a very happy child”. (although he did experience some loneliness). As will be seen below this was not the case with Mark.

Mark had a deep antipathy to the after-school reading lessons. He said, “I hated it really badly.” Furthermore it was not self inflicted but imposed upon Mark by parental authority. He was reluctant to come to my house for the sessions with me because he feared they may have reminded him of his childhood experiences. He mentioned the significance of the kitchen as the location of some of these sessions. Although the kitchen became a joke between us it was not that initially. The significant point is that it was remembered from his childhood.

In the account of alienation and repression developed in Chapter Two, the age when they occur is highly significant. This is because the alienated and repressed emotion does not undergo maturation but is locked away within the psyche and retains the characteristics of emotional immaturity it had at the time of repression.

A strong desire to not read must have been the emotion which Mark experienced as an eight or nine year old child during his after-school reading lessons. He was restrained from this emotion as a child by parental authority and had to repress it. This desire to avoid reading continued into adulthood but freed from the restraint of parents and teachers he was able to exercise it as actual avoidance. But it was the emotion of a eight year old child being externalised by a twenty-six year old man.

The severity of Mark’s alienation may also be seen by contrasting his situation with that of Jim. In Jim’s texts there is also a low level of denoted affirmation compared to Philip’s texts. However Jim resisted his schooling. As I said in Chapter Three, he had a low level of displaced alienation. Jim refused to read because as he said: “I used to get stressed and feel sick.” Mark however did not resist the after school reading lessons. He repressed his alienation and displaced it onto the word-object which resulted in it becoming overdetermined.

When Jim found that, as a result of the transitional method he could read his own texts without feeling stressed and sick, he conscientiously engaged with them. He completed the language exercises in such
a way that he enjoyed showing me his ability. I concluded that he was affirmed by these exercises. Mark’s attitude to the language exercises was indifference and he wanted to show this indifference to me. This was the indifference of an eight or nine year old child.

Although Mark has never resumed the sessions, he has telephoned me saying that he is still interested. During one of our conversations, I suggested that it may benefit him if he discussed his schooling and after school lessons because he had told me so little about them. The significant part of his reply was:

In year two or three of primary school I remember two girls asked me to spell horse and I couldn’t. I was laughed at. I felt useless and belittled. I don’t have any good memories of school. I was teased relentlessly.

In another more recent telephone call to me Mark said that he suddenly realised something and he wanted to tell me. The significant part was:

My whole life has revolved around reading...All my problems [rheumatoid arthritis and eczema] are related to reading.

I have said that experiential sense includes all subsequent experiences related to reading difficulties such as further reading pedagogy, teasing and subjects’ own perceptions of themselves as illiterate. This is a superstructure built on an initial experience of the word-object, this initial experience having become intractable and id-like. A reconsideration of the superstructure built by Mark leads me to conclude that it is close to a torment which, on his own understanding, is connected with debilitating health problems. At the time of the sessions the severity of his problem was not obvious to me.

However Mark’s successful reading of substantial parts of The Catcher in the Rye and Of Mice and Men needs to be explained. His reading of the first novel was accompanied by my reading of sections to him. My reading seems to have “infected” the text. The affirmativeness associated with his own subjective texts was carried through the medium of my voice and inserted in The Catcher in the Rye. Mark’s own private reading of this text “found” me, the supportive and affirmative other. According to Mark, the words as he read them had some hint of my character imposed on them. In the previous
chapter I said that the need of the other as a supportive and affirmative presence for the self, is an ontological fact of human nature. This is particularly so as the self develops and grows overcoming fears and apprehensions. My “presence” in the text of *The Catcher in the Rye* gave Mark the support and affirmation which enabled him to overcome his repressed desire to avoid reading. It enabled him to complete his reading of the book. His adult ego was able to withstand the still present id impulses from his childhood.

The content of *The Catcher in the Rye* may have appealed to Mark’s interests given his own history with schooling and his general life style. However *Catch 22* was a book which his friends were reading. I feel that he wanted to read the book *for this reason*. He tried to read it by himself, then decided that he could not. He said the words were too difficult.

Although the text of *Catch 22* is more difficult than that of *The Catcher in the Rye*, the latter book has its peculiarities. These are in the idiosyncratic style of prose which follows spoken, vernacular North American. The real point is however that after one short attempt Mark was adamant that he could not read *Catch 22*. He did not say what the problems with the words were. However my hypothesis is that *there was no presence of my supportive and affirmative “voice” in this text to diminish the “voice” of avoidance from his childhood*. This resulted in a co-presence in the text of linguistic meaning and an id-like desire to not read, which were in conflict. The strength of the latter was still sufficient to overpower the former in the absence of additional support for it.

I accepted Mark’s reasoning too readily and gave him the much more conventionally written *Of Mice and Men*. The passage I read to Mark from this text was to see if the prose was any easier for him. It was not a reading in which I attempted to “insert my voice in the text”. He said it was easier but he was not enthusiastic. My matter of fact statement about his possibility of going to University only aggravated the problem.

I regard Mark’s additional job which limited his time for further sessions, as a strategy of avoidance. If anything, the fact that his friends were able to read the book and Mark could not may have heightened his feelings of inadequacy. All these feelings were present when Mark read *Of Mice and
Men. He was not interested in this book but persevered with reading it. This further compounded his desire to avoid reading. My conclusion is that Mark’s repressed desire to not read required further work to reduce its impact.

Concluding remarks

This case study began as one which attempted to apply the method in a straightforward way. However a major difficulty was how to generalise the positive sense about written language from the written subjective texts. Although a strategy was developed to this end, the way in which I applied it was inadequate because of the strength of negative experiental sense in this case.

In this case study the strength of emotional antipathy to reading was greater than in any of the three preceding case studies. In those case studies there was a definite lack of literacy skills which was maintained and compounded by negative experiental sense and avoidance. In Mark’s case, experiental sense was such a powerful emotion that it continued to dramatically affect his reading even though he had the literacy skills to read substantial parts of two novels to himself.

Overall, learners need to be assessed in a more discriminating way so that there is greater detail about the degree of negative experiental sense. The degree needs to be understood on four dimensions. Firstly, the age when formative events of repression and alienation have occurred is very significant. The earlier the age the more likely it is that experiental sense will be highly intractable. The amount of reading pedagogy is the second dimension: where this is long and intensive, experiental sense will be strong. Thirdly, compliance with reading pedagogy results in displacement and the word-object being overdetermined. Finally, teasing and negative comments about illiteracy adds to this overdetermination.

When these four dimensions combine and result in a high level of experiental sense there will be great need for a strong affirmative sense to counteract it. To do this the subsidiary modes of affirmation may not be sufficient. A strong denoted mode of affirmation may be required. However this supposes that there are good enough denotable life experiences.
When these denotable life experiences are not available, great care is needed in transitionalising objective texts. With these learners the literacy worker should not only read the subjective texts in a personalised way to the learner, but continue reading objective texts with the learner so that a supportive and affirmative sense becomes generalised to them. In addition care should be taken in the selection of these objective texts so that they appeal to the interests of learners.

Although application of the method with Mark was not altogether successful this does not mean that he did not obtain benefit from it. As I have said he did read substantial parts of two novels. Additionally in one of my last telephone discussions with him he made the following comments:

I feel heaps better. I don’t feel it’s a big stumbling block when I just think about it.

When I think about [University] I feel it’s still a bit of a pipe dream. I think the things we did definitely made a big difference.

Although Mark continues to say that he will return for more sessions, at the time of writing it has been more than two months since he last contacted me.

CHAPTER SIX

EXPANDING THE TRANSITIONAL METHOD

Introduction
In this final chapter I explore a way in which the transitional method may be expanded and used to overcome *specific* literacy problems. The method which I describe in this chapter is not a completely new method but an attempt to explain how, once the concepts of transitionality and potential space are understood, they may become the basis for developing strategies for overcoming particular rather than general difficulties with literacy.

I have departed from the format of the previous chapters by briefly discussing, on a conceptual level, transitionality and potential space before I describe the sessions of this case study. The reason is to make clear why I have expanded the method to include a language game.

After the conceptual discussion I describe the language game and how I used it in the sessions. This is followed by descriptions of language exercises and evaluation sessions.

There is no separate section in this chapter on assessment. Because it became clear very quickly what the specific literacy problem was, I have included details in the description of the subject.

**Description of the subject**

This case study concerns Margaret a twenty-one year old university student. She had completed a degree in Fine Arts at a Sydney metropolitan university and is now studying for a Bachelor’s Degree in Education. She plans to become a secondary school teacher of art.

Margaret’s mother came from an Anglo-Australian background and her father was Ukrainian. Her mother had a high level of literacy but her father had low literacy skills.

Margaret attended a number of primary schools. At the first school when she was required to read aloud, she pretended that she did not know where the place was. This was a tactic to avoid reading. She was approximately nine years old at the time. The teacher developed the practice of skipping to the next child. When she moved to a new school, the teacher there discovered that she could not read. Margaret was sent to a school counsellor whom Margaret did not like. Throughout her schooling
Margaret saw a number of counsellors and was given a variety of tests none of which was of any assistance.

At other schools when she was required to read aloud, she developed another tactic of reading with exaggerated difficulty and found that most teachers would quickly excuse her. Margaret said that if she had been forced to read in these situations she would have been unable to read some or all of the words. In addition, by the time she reached year seven she had been prescribed tinted glasses which identified her as a child with learning difficulties.

For the School Certificate examination Margaret was allowed a writer but she did not have a reader. She was also given extra time. For the Higher School Certificate she was given special consideration and allowed to take the exam in a separate room with other students who had special needs. She was allowed to wear her coloured glasses and had special blue paper on which to write her answers.

As a summary of her school experiences with literacy Margaret said that in her primary years she tried to avoid all reading. In high school she discovered that if she was able to quietly read to herself, reading became less threatening. Generally however, Margaret avoided reading aloud while at school.

Margaret was unable to recall any instances of being teased by other children at school because of her reading difficulties. However, she does remember her mother and her older sister having conversations in which they spelt out words so that Margaret was unable to understand them. This occurred when Margaret was aged ten to thirteen years. As a result of this Margaret said that she felt like a five year old. These experiences could have compounded Margaret’s problem but it should be noted that she already had literacy problems by this time.

Margaret’s problem with reading, as an adult, concerned long, complex and unfamiliar words. When these words were the names of people, Margaret became particularly confused and tense. She also found long chemical names confusing, such as those on the labels of hair shampoo bottles. When words which are usually printed in a distinctive and familiar typeface, were printed in a different typeface, she also experienced difficulties. She gave the example of the name of the well known
chocolate manufacturer *Cadbury* which she had recently seen printed without its usual distinctive script. She was unable to read the name. When she encountered words such as these Margaret said that she became tense, skipped over the word or substituted a name for the difficult one. She said that she “froze up” in these situations. Eventually she may have been able to remember how to say difficult words but this was because other people told her how to say them. She did not know why these words were pronounced in that particular way. She gave as examples, the names of two well known theorists from her education course, *Vygotsky* and *Piaget*. When Margaret showed me a journal article from her university course she pronounced the word *pedagogy* as “pedagory” and she could not find the correct pronunciation by breaking the word into its syllables.

Generally, Margaret found that comprehension of written material was no problem. When I gave her a leading article from a metropolitan newspaper, she was able to fluently read this aloud to me with only a few mistakes which could have been coincidental. She was also able to understand the content of the article.

Margaret said that she “hated” writing. She had problems with spelling and she knew when she had spelt a word incorrectly. For written work in her university course she uses a computer which has spell-check and this, to a large extent, overcomes the problem.

Margaret’s difficulty with literacy was particularly worrying for her since she is training to be a teacher and wishes to pursue this as a career. Of great concern to her are students whose names do not have a conventional Anglo-Australian derivation. This concern was increased by the large multicultural student component in Australian schools today particularly in the Sydney metropolitan region where Margaret hopes to teach.

There were twenty-one sessions with Margaret. This included one assessment session and ten in which we played a language game and she constructed spoken texts. This was followed by eight sessions of language exercises on these texts. There were two evaluation sessions.

All sessions were at Margaret’s home and lasted for approximately ninety minutes each.
Conceptual discussion

Not all words caused experiential sense for Margaret. The problem was with unfamiliar, multisyllabic words and unusual personal names. Margaret’s general reading ability was good, as could be seen from the passage she read and in the fact that she had completed a University degree and was studying for a second one. It was a particular category of words which caused experiential sense. Throughout this chapter I will refer to these words as problem words.

Because of this particularity, subjective texts relating to affirming objects in Margaret’s life would be of no value because these would contain only words from everyday usage which Margaret could read fluently. It would be impossible to construct subjective texts containing only or even predominantly the problem words, by using the method developed so far. However there is a similarity with all the other subjects of the case studies. Margaret had a practice of avoidance and became stressed when she had to read the problem words.

Margaret began the practice of avoidance of reading in school and the practice continued as an adult but was limited to the problem words. It is significant that in High school, Margaret found that if she read quietly to herself, reading became less threatening. However she always avoided reading aloud. The prospect of now having to read aloud the difficult names of students was very threatening.

Margaret’s response to problem words had characteristics of repressed id-like desire to not read these words. This response had qualities of emotional immaturity, intractability and unresponsiveness to reason. It was similar to repressed desire described in the four preceding case studies and it was manifested as avoidance. She had a current desire to be able to read the problem words and a current awareness that this ability was needed in her teaching career. But this adult desire and adult awareness could not prevail against the repressed desire from her childhood.

To overcome the problem of the particularity of the problem words, I developed the ideas of transitional phenomena and potential space described in Chapter Three. In that chapter I said potential
space provides relief from the strain of relating internal and external reality. It is an unchallenged area and throughout life it is used as a bridge between inner and outer realities in which both realities are modified. It allows for the integration of the social world rather than its imposition. It is a context in which play and creativity are permitted between internal and external worlds. Potential space characterises unalienated development. It is not necessarily play in a childlike sense or creativity in an artistic manner but mundane, everyday play and creativity in which the new is learnt and accepted. There is a transitional process which is a life-long, dynamic and dialectical relationship between self and world. This is a process which provides stability and protection for the organisation and maturation of new sensations.

Although potential space may characterise a general process of unalienated development, the manner in which I have been using it is not general but highly specific. It is used to create a transitional sense to relieve anxiety and fear which have become associated with specific objects.

In my account of potential space I described two distinct areas of it. The first area was where a new positive sense is given to the spoken language in the texts through the modes of affirmation. In this area, learners and literacy worker interact to create this sense together. In previous case studies, where there was denoted affirmation, those learners had already created an affirmative sense about objects in their lives but it had to be given to language through interaction with the literacy worker. In the second area, learners individually use this sense to create positive feelings about the language in the texts when they read it in its written form.

As I said in Chapter Three, the first area is analogous to that used by small children who create objects as transitional objects. When these children and their parents play with those objects, the children create them as symbols of unity with their parents. The second area is analogous to children’s use of those objects to make feelings of separation and isolation into ones which have diminished anxiety.

To use the first area of potential space I developed a language game which contained selections of the problem words. The object of the game was to allow Margaret to play with the problem words in their
spoken form. Play became a new explicit mode of affirmation. The denoted mode of affirmation could not be used because the words did not refer to affirming objects in Margaret’s life. Play also became a mode of relaxation to help Margaret overcome her anxiety about the problem words. In other words when subjects feel affirmed they also feel relaxed.

Each session in which Margaret and I played the game involved an absurd scenario, devised by me beforehand. Because this case study was experimental, the manner in which I presented details of each scenario and the problem words to Margaret varied until I was able to find an efficacious manner of doing it. For the same reason my involvement in the game also varied as did my collaboration in constructing Margaret’s spoken texts.

The remainder of the method followed that which I have used in the other case studies. After playing each game, Margaret constructed a spoken text which was a summary of the game and included the problem words. I then wrote this spoken text verbatim for Margaret and gave it to her with an audio-tape of the spoken text. The idea was for Margaret to listen to the tapes and read the texts to herself. This process is analogous to the second area of potential space referred to above. In this area Margaret could recreate the written problem words into ones which had diminished anxiety for her.

Although in the session by session account of the work with Margaret, the relational, productive and crafted modes of affirmation are not explicitly mentioned, I did attempt to employ them. Before the work with Margaret began, I attempted to emotionally engage with her and empathise with her difficulties. During composition of the spoken texts I also promoted the idea that these texts were her own productions and that she had crafted them.

After Margaret listened to the tapes and read her texts, she completed a series of language exercises on each of her texts. These exercises involved breaking the written problem words into syllables. During the exercises I also discussed with Margaret her emotional relationship to the problem words and the nature of written English.
Qualities of the second area of potential space are also in the language exercises. Margaret was able to return to the written problem words with diminished anxiety and learn how to use specific strategies of control over them through the exercises. These specific strategies would then have the potential to be generalised to all problem words.

Although play with the problem words was used as a mode of affirmation, there is another reason for using play with language. This is based on the unconscious appeal of the joke. Freud observed that similarity of sound and play upon words is a pleasure “which had been permitted at the stage of play but had been dammed up in the course of intellectual development” (Freud 1986:226-7). For adults, jokes are a return to a former play with words that reason has forbidden. Thus Freud saw the appeal of play with words, such as alliteration and rhyme, as deriving from a general repressed unconscious desire. I have previously noted that children may have played with spoken language when they were learning to speak and that this process may be seen as a transitional one. However the institutional nature of schooling does not allow similar play with written language which may be a source of alienation and learning difficulties about written language.

The language game: Playing with the problem words

Because the technique of the game was modified during the sessions with Margaret, I will give a session by session account of the games and a description of her reaction to them.

One consistent aspect of the game was the presence of the fictitious Professor Hashimoto. This character was the pivot around whom all the activity of the language game was constructed. Hashimoto was a Professor at the University of Yokohama where Margaret was a student. The choice of an overseas location for the game was to utilise exotic and unusual names. It also introduced the absurd into the activity which is an essential element of game playing.

Prior to the first session I told Margaret that I had not carried out this type of language game before and I could not guarantee that it would be effective.
For the first six sessions the games were tape recorded. They were played back to Margaret and used by her to construct the spoken texts. However this practice was discontinued for reasons which I will discuss later.

Only a selection of Margaret’s texts appear below. I have included those which best illustrate changes in the technique of the games.

**Session one:**

I have included below the general plan of the games which I read to Margaret at the beginning of the first session:

**General plan of the games:**

*This is a game in which I want you to imagine that the events of the scenario are real. I will describe these events to you and you have to participate in them and say the lines which I give you. If you find some of the scenarios amusing or even ridiculous that is all right. But it is essential that you keep on playing the game. It is essential that you keep imagining what I have asked you to imagine. You are allowed to laugh. In fact if you do it will probably be beneficial.*

*You are a student at the University of Yokohama in Japan. This University is in fact identical with your own University. This means that in your imagination you are able to visualise it in detail. Try to imagine your University but pretend that it is the University of Yokohama in Japan. Imagine the buildings, rooms, paths, stairs, shops and gardens.*

*Now I want you to imagine that one day as you enter the gates of Yokohama University you see Professor Hashimoto walking towards you.*

*Can you very briefly describe the entrance to Yokohama University? If so please begin your description with the words “The gates of Yokohama University are...”*
Please speak this description into the tape recorder.

Professor Hashimoto is your teacher. You are doing his course on philosophy and although you find the course difficult you also find it very enjoyable and interesting.

Being an Australian student at the University of Yokohama makes you distinctive. You are very popular with students and staff, in fact almost a celebrity at the University. People want to talk to you and spend time with you. Your opinions are valued.

The Professor is also a likable and gregarious person. He likes chatting with his students. Because you have spoken to him before, you know that he is very approachable. In addition you have frequently seen him in bars and coffee shops on campus laughing and joking with students. It occurs to you that this may be a good time to ask Professor Hashimoto a few questions about the course which have been puzzling you for some time. The Professor being a scholar of international repute speaks perfect English and is delighted to talk to you.

In the following dialogue I will give you the words (verbally) by which you ask Professor Hashimoto about the course. These are the words which you speak to the Professor. I will take the persona of the Professor so you will be in fact asking me. In my temporary capacity of Professor Hashimoto I will reply to your questions.

You say: Good morning Professor Hashimoto. I was wondering if you have a minute to answer a few questions.

Prof. says: Certainly, I always enjoy answering questions. We should go over to that seat over there and sit down.

Are you able to imagine a pleasant seat that you like that could also be at the University of Yokohama? If so please describe it very briefly.
You say: Professor Hashimoto could you explain to me the real meaning of the word pedagogy.

Prof. says: Well Margaret strictly it means teaching of children but now days it usually means the art of teaching in general.

You say: That seems clear enough but yesterday in your lecture you used another word and I’m afraid that I did not understand what that was. You said that today women are trying to establish new ways of knowing. You used the word epistemology. What does that mean?

Prof. says: But you have almost said what epistemology means. It really means the study of ways by which we know anything. Some women say that knowing should also include emotion and intuition. Not knowing by just looking and observing. Some women say that men are too empirical.

You say: That’s amazing Professor because that was going to be my next question. I mean about empirical. So empirical means observation.

Prof. says: That’s right.

Now you suddenly realise that it’s later than you thought and that your lecture will begin soon. You thank Professor Hashimoto and explain that you must go.

The Professor suggests that you met him again tomorrow on the same seat at the same time.

You agree.

During this session Margaret played the game in accordance with the scenario. She seemed uninhibited about the fantasy it involved.
In the general plan of the games, I asked Margaret to visualise three aspects of the University as being identical with her own University. Two of these aspects were described by Margaret during the game but were not included in her spoken text. Because the texts were Margaret’s productions, I did not press her to include these descriptions. The explicit visualisation aspect of the games was later discontinued.

During this session, Margaret recorded the following spoken text which was her summary of the game. The problem words are underlined in all texts when they appear for the first time:

Story Number 1

Wednesday at Uni.

Last Wednesday at Uni, that’s the Uni of Yokohama, I just arrived when I saw Professor Hashimoto. He was really friendly and he said “hi”.

I told him I wanted to talk about a couple of things that we discussed in class last week. I wanted him to explain to me what was the meaning of the word pedagogy. The Professor explained to me that pedagogy strictly means the teaching of children but nowadays it’s used to mean the art of teaching in general.

I also explained to him that I did not know the meaning of the word epistemology. He explained that it’s another word for the study of the ways by which we know anything.

Professor Hashimoto continued by saying that empirical was one of these ways of knowing. Professor Hashimoto also explained that empirical also meant observation.

Session two
For this session I continued with the general plan of the games but instead of providing a script for Margaret which she spoke I, in the persona of Professor Hashimoto, related a scenario to Margaret which contained the problem words. The substance of the scenario was that Hashimoto began to tell Margaret about events in his own life. He told her about a visit by three Greek doctors.

I invited Margaret to make comments during the game and to “ad lib” if she was able. I also suggested that she try to pronounce the problem words during the game and not to worry about mispronunciations: she could make as many attempts as she wanted.

The text which Margaret made about this scenario is:

Story Number 2

Classical Guitar

I ran into Professor Hashimoto again at Uni. He mentioned that he had a friend from Athens University coming to see him. The guy’s name is Doctor Daskalopolous. With Professor Daskalopolous he has three other friends. Professor Daskalopoulos is just an ordinary doctor but the other three are specialist doctors.

Doctor Tsenkas is hepatologist, Doctor Savvides is an endoscopologist and Doctor Kourtesis is a gastroenterologist.

All four of the Doctors are going with Professor Hashimoto to hear a performance of the music of Boccherini and Scarlatti. The music by Boccherini is quintet for guitar and the music by Scarlatti is a quartet for guitar.

Initially my plan was to recreate the scene, at the beginning of each session, of Margaret walking through the gates of the University and sitting on the same seat with Hashimoto. My reasons for this was to try and elicit the same imagery and feeling of game playing. However this idea was not
continued with in subsequent sessions because Margaret did not include any of this imagery in her texts. I also thought that its repetitive nature may detract from the feeling of spontaneity and play which I considered essential.

Session three

In this session Professor Hashimoto continued his meetings with Margaret. I related various scenarios to Margaret and continued my attempts to make these humorous and ridiculous. Margaret became very involved. She laughed and made sarcastic comments about Hashimoto, his problems and the other characters in this scenario.

During the game she made some attempts to pronounce the problem words. However, she made most of these attempts during construction of the spoken texts by actually rehearsing difficult pronunciations. By using the pause button on the tape recorder, recording of difficult pronunciations were delayed until improved by practice.

There was another quality to the composing of this spoken text that was very significant. This was general relaxation and playfulness. Margaret did not merely practice pronunciation—*she played with pronunciation*. She made as many attempts as she needed and many of her attempts were accompanied by laughter and joking. It is very significant that the play of the game continued into the composing and recording of the spoken text.

In this session there was more alliteration than in the previous two. Margaret commented on this and was amused by it. She also noticed that at one point I, in the persona of Hashimoto, had used the word *psychochromatic* instead of *polychromatic*. She mentioned this in story 3 below. This text illustrates Margaret’s spontaneity and playfulness especially when compared to the two previous texts:

*Story Number 3*

*Man With a Fetish*
I ran into Professor Hashimoto again, just the other day. I asked him how was his musical concert with the doctors from Athens. The Professor really enjoyed the music but Doctor Daskalopoulos was captivated by the Boccherini and the Scarlatti. Doctor Savvides was enchanted by the Boccherini but he thought the Scarlatti was too somber.

Professor Hashimoto also mentioned that Doctor Savvides was pretty strange and that he would be strange because he was the endoscopologist.

Doctors Tsenkas and Kourtesis were apparently transmogrified by the performance. The Professor explained to me that transmogrified meant that you were transformed. The Professor said it was like a change and I suggested that it was like metamorphosed.

Doctor Hashimoto doesn’t think he’ll go out with these doctors again because over dinner they had some problems. Over dinner Doctors Tsenkas and Kourtesis would only talk about gasteroenterology. The doctors were discussing the kinds of food that he was eating and it made him feel queasy and reticent. The doctor felt queasy, reticent and querulous. He explained that querulous was cranky.

The doctor then told me a strange thing. He said that he was troubled by the dinner and decided that because his area was in philosophy and pedagogy that he should leave. So he left the restaurant without paying.

Doctor Hashimoto felt reticent at dinner and he found that speaking of pedagogy was a bit platitudinous. Doctor Hashimoto felt that the others thought he was a parsimonious, platitudinous pedagogue.

After the restaurant he decided to go home and have a shampoo. This troubles me. He said that he had a predilection for psychochromatic shampoo. What he meant was that he had a predilection for polychromatic shampoo. I just think he is a psycho with a fetish. The professor
has a polychromatic shampoo whenever he feels down. He is a parsimonious, platitudinous, pedagogue with a predilection for polychromatic shampoo.

The Professor in his distraught state rushed home to have a shower and accidentally used his wife’s shampoo which contained triethanolamine. For the Professor and all other people who are devotees of polychromatic shampoos, triethanolamine shampoos are detested and they all see it as anathema.

Session four

In this session I modified the procedure by giving Margaret a written list of the problem words which I proposed to use in the game. I did this because Margaret said that it might be better if she had access to the words. During the first three sessions I had noticed that she was frequently looking at my notes in which I had written a plan of the game and the problem words.

In this session Margaret lacked spontaneity. She spent a lot of time looking at her list of words and little time engaging with me. During the game she made no attempts to pronounce the problem words or discuss their meanings although I suggested to her at the beginning of the session that she do this. Only when she made the tape of the text did she begin to experiment with pronunciation.

In our discussion about this session Margaret agreed with my suggestion that the presence of the problem words in written form was inhibiting for her. Her problem was with written words. The time to introduce the written form of the words was after Margaret had played with them in the game and after she had recorded her text containing them. As a result, all further game sessions were based on spoken language only.

Session five

In this session I decided to experiment with enticing Margaret to participate in the game to a greater extent. I planned to do this by using a greater number of problem words and making comments to her such as “I suppose you don’t know what that word means” and “I wonder if you can say that word.”
This was not successful. Margaret said that introducing more words meant that there was too much material and that she did not know the meaning of many of these words. Furthermore, asking her what these words meant tended to make her feel inadequate although I did this in a playful way. During the session I found myself talking to her rather than engaging in a game with her. Only when we discussed the session as a whole did Margaret begin to engage in a proper dialogue about the game.

All of the above was probably compounded by my reading of my notes for the scenario of the game to Margaret. The notes were:

*Scenario for session five:*

Yuri Andropov, Leonid Brezhnev and Ulysses Koestler are three friends from the University of Guinea-Bissau who have recently visited me.

All are ornithologists which is fortuitous because most birds are arboreal dwelling bipeds. As you know my ardour has changed from polychromatic shampoo to the arboreal. In fact a paradigm of hyperfortuitousness because all three have recently been to Australia where my interest has been focused. Although I am not interested so much in birds, I am interested in the trees in which they live. So my pleasure is vicarious.

Apart from my pedagogical pursuits, I have decided that trees are now my major interest. This is for two reasons. Firstly because of the medicinal properties and secondly because they do not think. This means that ontologically they are distinct from the human species. For a pedagogical philosopher such as me this is very germane because I am afflicted with a surfeit of cogitation. In addition, I find that I have a cowardly attitude to this surfeit which is why I need trees to give me inner strength against my own cogitations. I have a permanent and perpetual plethora of proliferous and pusillanimous prolixity.

If we look at the penultimate paragraph it possibly appears that the expression permanent and perpetual may be periphrastic. This is another exemplification of my prolixity.
It seems that we have deviated from my discourse about my three friends from the University of Guinea Bissau. They will have to wait until our next meeting when I will tell you about how they sent me into an abundance of arboreal bliss.

By reading the scenario to Margaret it became the material which she had to work into a story. To do this she had to listen to the tape of my reading the scenario to her. This made the scenario external to Margaret and it had the possibility of introducing work into the game. After this session I discontinued with tape recording of the game.

A further problem with the above scenario is that the problem words themselves are far too prominent or too much in the foreground. The language is far too formal. I should have mixed the problem words with a vernacular account. The words should have been incidental to the scenario which should in part explain their meaning.

Session six:

In this session I tried to implement my critique of the last session. I related a short scenario to Margaret with a limited number of problem words. I also began to help Margaret more in the construction of the story by repeating parts of the scenario when she needed more detail. This produced positive results. Margaret became more involved: she took more initiative and moved the location for the scenario to the library of the University.

I tried to link words from the scenario for session five to words in story number 3. I also attempted to use alliteration and humour more. The scenario for this session may be gathered from story number 6, below:

Story Number 6
I saw Professor Hashimoto at the library at the University of Yokohama. He brought up the topic of how he had a permanent and perpetual plethora of prolificous and pusillanimous prolixity. The professor realised that before that he had a parsimonious and platitudinous problem with pedagogy and a predilection for polychromatic shampoo. We noticed a definite “P” theme. He was concerned he was developing a pea brain. Ha ha he he he. Which was the Professor’s joke.

The Professor then started bragging about his other friend, an international friend at that, Pierre Foucault, brother of Michel Foucault, that was coming to see him from Paris. Pierre Foucault studies trees and is an arborist. The Professor originally found Pierre Foucault to be a real arboreal bore. But now he finds that he’s quite interesting, fascinating even.

So far Professor Hashimoto has been fascinated by the description that Foucault gave of the Australian tree Angophora Floribunda. This tree is remarkable for its solitude. It gives out a feeling of solitariness. It has knotty and twisted limbs which give it a gnarled appearance.

Margaret’s response to these changes was positive. This was demonstrated by her laughter and the fact that she produced story 6 with ease.

Session seven:

Having arrived at what I regarded as a relatively successful technique of engaging Margaret in the game scenarios, I continued with this approach for the four remaining sessions.

But in this session I took an even greater part in helping Margaret compose the texts. By giving words to Margaret to assist her with composing the texts, if and when she needed assistance, she became more relaxed because she did not have to be so concerned with remembering all the details of
the game scenario. The playful ambience extended throughout more of my interaction with her. Composition of the spoken texts became a collaborative exercise, the only requirement being that it was Margaret who actually spoke the text.

With a more collaborative approach to composition, production of the text became more internal to us as a dyad in which I was a participant rather than an observer. Composition became a process in which we played with the words together.

Story 7, below, is longer than most of the previous stories. The exception is story 3 which is comparable in length:

**Story Number 7**

**Agro. Ornithologists**

*Professor Hashimoto and I were at the library at Uni and the Professor told me about a really bizarre event in which himself and I and some people he knows were all interconnected in some way.*

*Pierre Foucault said that while he was in Australia he was looking at some trees in the bush. Pierre Foucault is an arborist. While Pierre was looking at these trees he met Yuri Andropov, Leonid Brezhnev and Ulysses Koestler. These three people are from the University of Guinea-Bissau and they are ornithologists, friends of the Professor’s. So when Foucault looks at trees he goes into an arboreal bliss and he sees nothing else. When the other three look at birds they go into an ornithological ecstasy and they see nothing else.*

*Foucault went to this particular part of the bush and he saw these big tallow wood trees. Some of the trees are more than fifty-five meters high and two meters across. They are truly gargantuan. They have the botanical name of eucalyptus microcorys. Some of the trees are*
estimated to be more than six hundred years old. So Foucault was looking at these arboreal specimens and he was in arboreal bliss. And he knew these trees as eucalyptus microcorys.

Andropov, Brezhnev and Koestler arrived. High up in the eucalyptus microcorys they saw a bird. It was a superb specimen of a black cockatoo, known as calyptorhynchus lathami. The three ornithologists were most impressed with the calyptorhynchus lathami or the black cockatoo. They thought it was just grand and were going on and on about it between themselves until the Frenchman came along, this is Pierre Foucault, and he couldn’t stop saying what a wonderful specimen of eucalyptus microcorys it was.

So Foucault could only see the tree and the ornithologists could only see the bird. The ornithologists were in an ornithological ecstasy and Foucault, the arborist, was in arboreal bliss. Ornithologists can be a little bit dogmatic, like soccer fans and Foucault doesn’t walk away from an argument. Every time that Foucault said eucalyptus microcorys, the three ornithologists replied with calyptorhynchus lathami. So then the ornithologists assaulted poor Pierre and chased him around the eucalyptus microcorys. The ornithologists were shouting calyptorhynchus lathami, calyptorhynchus lathami, calyptorhynchus lathami. And Foucault was shouting eucalyptus microcorys, eucalyptus microcorys, eucalyptus microcorys.

In the end the stalemate was broken when amidst all this commotion the black cockatoo was scared and flew away. The loud screech of the black cockatoo silenced the maniacs particularly the ornithologists. This action by the black cockatoo resolved the argument and Foucault made friends with the ornithologists and discovered to their amazement that they both knew Mr. Hashimoto. And they met each other in Australia which is where I’m from. My God. And so completes story number seven.

Session eight:
There is little to be said about this session except that I continued with the collaborative technique that I used in session seven. This was successful again. Margaret became very involved in the session. She again moved the location of the meeting with Hashimoto, this time to a restaurant.

Session nine:

In this session I developed the collaborative technique a stage further by giving Margaret further help in the construction of her story. I also introduced more humour. In the preceding session eight, Hashimoto had suddenly left the restaurant where he had been talking to Margaret. In the scenario for session nine I offered Margaret a ridiculous account of the reason for Hashimoto’s sudden departure. In addition, I put these reasons into a simple verse which I read to Margaret. This may seem to be a return to session five where I read my notes to Margaret. However in session five the scenario notes were formal and lacked humour. They also had a large number of problem words mixed into that formal account. In story 9 there are approximately ten new problem words. There are additional longer words but these appeared in previous stories.

Margaret’s response to the verse was laughter. She specifically asked to have it in her story so I repeated it line by and she spoke it into the tape recorder. It should be noted that I read the lines to her and she repeated these spoken words. This was in accordance with the discussion about session four where I decided that the language game should be a game about spoken language only.

Story Number 9

Big Mac

Last time I saw Professor Hashimoto he darted out of the Mcdonald’s in quite a hurry. And I have some theories as to why he did so. On reason for his running out might of been that he had a flash back to the time when he was in the restaurant with his friends Tsenkas and Kourtesis from the University of Athens, the gastroenterologists.
My theory is that as Mister Hashimoto’s mandible was masticating his big Mac, (he) was transfixed by the enzymes in his mouth mixing with the constituents of the big Mac as they slowly slid down his esophagus and the big Mac began its slow journey along his very own gastrointestinal tract. Did he think about the mangled, munched and mutilated Mac in his duodenum and that mixed with more digestive juice (it) became very much like minestrone soup?

I hear that is the fate of all we eat.

All we eat to make us replete.

In fact two doctors are to blame,

Tsenkas and Kourtesis are their names,

gastroenterologists they are by trade.

And it is very much to their shame,

that they spoke too much of the intestinal drain.

[That] It sunk into the professor’s brain,

where it became a sad refrain.

It made him think with every chew

that what he ate must turn to poo.

But a big Mac is enough to make you puke,
you don't need to think about digestive juice.

It was better that Hashimoto ran out the door than throwing up on the floor.

Session ten:

This was the final session in which the language game was played with Margaret. On my suggestion, the text composed from this session was mainly a summary of some of the main points of the previous scenarios. Margaret relied mainly on her own recall of the events with a little help from me. The problem words used were repeats from these previous sessions.

The language exercises

Session ten concluded the language game. Margaret had played with the problem words on ten separate occasions. She had done this with varying degrees of spontaneity, humour and involvement. She had also recorded, on audio tape, ten spoken texts in which she had spoken the problem words correctly. There is a difficulty with the term “correctly” but I will leave discussion of this until later. I gave Margaret ten written texts which were verbatim representations of her spoken texts.

There was a break of several weeks in the sessions during which Margaret listened to all the tapes and read the written texts. I asked her to do this in a relaxed and informal way.

After the break we had seven sessions in which I showed Margaret how to break the written problem words into syllables. We also discussed the emotional nature and possible origins of her problem and the nature of language. Immediately prior to working on a written text we played the tape for that text.
In the first session we worked on the problem words in stories 1 and 2, breaking the problem words into syllables. I defined syllables as clusters of consonants around one vowel. So in story 1, I broke the words *epistemology* and *empirical* into e-pist-em-ol-ogy and em-pir-ic-al.

I stressed that there is another way to break words down which follows *the sounds that can be heard within words*. This is similar to strict syllabification except that these sound syllables may have more than one vowel. In story 2, I broke the word *endoscopologist* into endo-scop-ol-ogist.

In both these methods the primary objective is to see how clusters of sounds within a word may be related to clusters of letters. Although this may be done in different ways the idea is to obtain control over the pronunciation of words.

After I demonstrated these methods to Margaret, we had a further six sessions in which she broke the problem words in the remaining stories into syllables. She used both methods of syllabification. Throughout these exercises I emphasised that she should use a method that she felt comfortable with, the one that gave her most control over the words.

Margaret was able to complete these exercises but she was continually looking for consistency and firm rules by which she could arrive at definite pronunciation. In response I said that English has its origins in a number of different languages and although there are generalisations, there are no strict rules. There are too many exceptions to these generalisations to call them rules. The time and energy spent in memorising the rules and their exceptions would be an impossible and very impractical task. It is far better to understand language as social convention. Correctness is decided by convention which changes with history and culture.

I said that I know the accepted pronunciation of some unusual words because of my reading and I have contact with their pronunciation at University. However if I did not have this contact with pronunciation then I may anglicise the words in a way that is at odds with academic pronunciation. One example that I referred to was the name *Foucault* (story 6) where, if the -ault- was anglicised, it could be pronounced the same as -ault- in *vault*. 
I also mentioned that with the four Greek names of Daskalopoulos, Tsenkas, Savvides and Kourtesis (story 3), I had consulted a native Greek speaker for her pronunciation because I needed confirmation that my pronunciation was “correct”.

I said that with the pronunciation of some of the botanical and zoological names in the stories, I was not sure that my pronunciation was in fact “correct”. Botanists and zoologists may say these specialised words differently. I break these words into syllables and arrive at a pronunciation in my way. If botanists and zoologists disagree with that pronunciation then I may change it. In the meantime I am happy with my own pronunciation. I suggested to Margaret that the major difference between us was that I break the words into syllables and I am happy with the pronunciation that I arrive at. She does not do this. Instead she becomes tense and avoids the words. This is an emotional reaction.

During these discussions Margaret demonstrated that she already had a reasonable understanding of the generalisations about pronunciation. However she felt that everybody except her had a better ability with pronunciation. This once more confirmed my original understanding of the emotional basis to her problem which I discussed with her. I explained, in vernacular terms, the intractability of repressed emotions that are locked away in childhood, as I have conceptualised this in previous chapters.

In the final session of these exercises, I arrived at Margaret’s house to find her very upset. She was to begin her practice teaching at a High School the following day and she had become very anxious about her ability to manage the names of some artists. She also said that she knew nothing about these artists.

We went through the names of approximately thirty artists from an art encyclopaedia. Margaret broke these names into syllables and pronounced them. Her pronunciation of the overwhelming majority of these names was no different from mine. I said that very few people, except professional art people, would be able to pronounce all these names in an “acceptable” way especially when most of the names were from a large variety of cultures where there are different linguistic conventions.
However, she insisted that she was “semi-literate”. I again suggested that her problem was emotionally rather than cognitively based, but during this session she was very reluctant to accept this opinion.

**Evaluation sessions**

At the conclusion of the language exercises there was another break of several weeks, before I had another session with Margaret to evaluate the effect of the work with her.

Margaret said her practice teaching had been successful and problems with pronunciation of names had not occurred. Generally she still feels apprehensive about long and unusual words but the real difference is that now she is prepared look at them longer and try to break them down. Previously she was not looking at the words. Margaret said that she used to glance over the words but she was not fully aware that she was not trying to read them.

She is now more aware that other people may also find some words difficult to pronounce and have problems breaking them down. Previously she thought that this was a problem particular to her. Now she is happy with the pronunciation that she arrives at. She will say that word even though it may not be correct.

Now she also gives more acceptance to the emotional origins of her problem although she does not think there is one single event in her childhood which caused it. This means she is far more aware when she becomes nervous. She said that previously she was not so aware of her nervousness.

With regard to the method that I used with Margaret, she said that on the one hand the stories became tedious because they were repetitive and they took an hour to make. On the other hand the stories were good because she was able to use the words in the stories in the syllabification exercises. Most significantly Margaret said that the method was good because there was little requirement for her to have to do a lot of work. I took this as a comment on my having devised the scenarios for the language games and the eventual collaborative nature of the story construction. Margaret added that
she sometimes felt resentful about her problem being individual to her and that she was required to do something about it which involved extra work and effort by her alone.

Margaret qualified the above comments by saying that she does not have an ability which gives her certainty about breaking words down but there is a whole emotional attitude about problem words which has now changed. Generally she feels much better about long words and has more confidence. To illustrate this she told me that she had recently seen a sign in a delicatessen window for a new type of bread. The name of the bread was long and seemed exotic. In her usual manner she turned away from reading it but then saw the name again on the shop door. This time she decided to try and break the word down. On doing so she realised that it was “pullapartbread.”

Several weeks later I had another evaluation session with Margaret. In reply to my specific question about game playing with the problem words, she said that the games made her feel better about her difficulty through making her feel relaxed about it. Specifically they showed her how lacking in confidence she was so that now she is able to relate to her difficulty as one about confidence and emotion. Because of this new perspective she sees her difficulty as something that will be improved upon in time. To this end, she has been having joint reading sessions with her boy friend in which they take turns reading to each other.

Margaret also added that she is now reading for enjoyment more.

**Concluding remarks**

Margaret’s difficulty with reading began in school where she developed a negative experiential sense about written language. This sense included a repressed desire to not read which was manifested as anxiety about reading and avoidance of it. In particular, she always avoided reading aloud but found that if she was able to quietly read to herself, reading became less threatening. As a result, she was able to develop her general reading ability but continued to avoid problem words which were long, complex and unfamiliar. When these words were personal names which she may have to read aloud, she became particularly anxious.
Through experimenting with the concepts of transitionality and potential space, the transitional method was enlarged to allow Margaret to play with a selection of problem words in their *spoken form*. This play included pronunciation of the words. As a result, when she *read these same words in their written form* she was able to do so with diminished anxiety. Language exercises based on these written problem words showed her how to relate clusters of written letters to clusters of sounds. This showed her how to obtain control over problem words in general.

The feelings of control over problem words in the exercises need to be generalised to all such written words that Margaret encounters. This is experience that Margaret must obtain in the real world in her interaction with written language over a period of time. From what she has told me, she now appears able to do this.

The case study shows that an understanding of the concepts of transitionality and potential space could provide a basis for developing further techniques to overcome a variety of *specific* literacy problems. With some thought and willingness to experiment, a technique could probably be developed to help with spelling problems, for example. In Chapter Four transitionality was used in a rudimentary but effective way in the *transitionalised imagery technique* to develop writing ability.

On a theoretical level this case study shows that play may be used as a mode of affirmation and that when people feel affirmed they are also relaxed. The case study has suggested qualities which the play should have. These are:

1. Play should be about spoken language only. Written language should only be introduced with the written texts and the language exercises after the game.

2. Humour, the absurd, alliteration and rhyme are essential to the game.

3. In constructing scenarios for the game, the problem words should be in the background and mixed with vernacular accounts of the scenarios.
(4) The literacy worker should not be an external observer of the play but an internal participant who plays with the learner and the words.

(5) The literacy worker should look for aspects of the game which seem to provoke participation by the learner and accentuate these.

(6) Construction of spoken texts about the game should be collaborative in which the learner is given many attempts to pronounce the problem words.

(7) The ambience of play from the game proper should extend to construction of the spoken texts.

CONCLUSION

The first question which I explored in this thesis was whether it is possible to understand literacy problems as an outcome of schooling. The answer to this question must be in the affirmative. All five case studies demonstrated that schooling resulted in complex negative feelings about reading which conflicted with each subject’s attempts, as an adult, to engage with written text.

With regard to the second question concerning whether it is possible, on the basis of this understanding, to construct a method to overcome reading inability the answer must again be affirmative. A method was developed which helped four of the five subjects to change their negative feelings about reading and engage in a more positive way with written text.

A short account of the case studies
In the exploration of the topic, I began with a clarification of the concepts upon which I based my investigation. Because written text is an arbitrary material object, I developed the notion of the word-object which is how all pre-literate children must experience written text. This material quality of written text is obscured for most literate people because of the hegemony of the signifier in which text is seen as linguistic meaning only. The word-object is meaningless but reading pedagogy requires pre-literate children to find linguistic meaning in this object. The institutional and compulsory qualities of schooling make this an experience from which they cannot escape. Because some children are unable to cope with these institutional qualities, they begin to attach their individual meaning of alienation to written text. I conceptualised this meaning as experiental sense. When these children attempt to read, they read back their semiotic of this sense which conflicts with their attempts to find the linguistic meaning of text.

In the first version of the method I attempted to make this semiotic explicit and convert it to linguistic meaning. By allowing Stan to read written texts which corresponded to his experiental sense, I hypothesised that he would be able to diminish his alienation. This first version of the method was unsuccessful but its application provided me with fresh insights into the characteristics of experiental sense. These insights included concepts from psychoanalysis which allowed me to see the dynamic relation between conventional reading pedagogy and the repressed nature of experiental sense. Through adapting Freud’s concepts of id, ego and superego to sociological categories, I was able to understand experiental sense as repressed, id-like and qualitatively different from other aspects of the self. Freud’s ideas of displacement and overdetermination were also employed. Pleasure and affirmation became the basis of the method.

In the second case study I experimented with different approaches to overcome reading difficulties and continued exploring ways of making pleasure and affirmation the basis of the method. Through making spoken texts which contained affirming objects from Jim’s life, the sense of affirmation in the texts became associated with those texts in their written form. The therapeutic use of this sense was explained through the concepts of transitional phenomena and potential space. By giving Jim control over his spoken and written texts, he was able to read the written texts without the feeling of stress which was one of the main manifestations of experiental sense.
With the next and longest case study of the project, I explored additional ways of enhancing the affirmative qualities of the subjective texts through different modes of affirmation. By employing Freud's concept of the ego, I also explained how Philip's self had been shaped through his reading inability and how this continued to affect his ability to engage with reading. By moving the focus of my analysis away from the word-object to socially reflected aspects of the ego, an understanding of the negative impact of reading aloud as testing was developed. Following this I briefly explored some of the social relationships which illiterate people establish due to their illiteracy. These social relationships support and sustain illiterate people in their illiteracy.

The next case study was an attempt to employ the method in a straightforward way. This resulted in further conceptual analysis and comparison of the case studies. Mark's situation contrasted with that of the other learners because he had experienced alienation at a relatively earlier age and had complied with intensive reading pedagogy. I argued that, as a result, he had displaced substantial feelings of alienation onto the word-object. This explained Mark’s high level of experiential sense. In this case study I also experimented with transferring the affirmation from his texts into objective texts through the medium of my voice.

The final case study was an experimental enlarging of the method. I applied the concepts of transitionality and potential space to a language game which I used as a mode of affirmation. Margaret had reading problems about long, complex and unfamiliar words but her emotional response to these words could be understood as a particular manifestation of experiential sense. This case study resulted in a number of suggestions about how language games may be used. I also suggested that an understanding of transitionality and potential space may be a basis to develop techniques for overcoming other specific literacy problems.

The methodology used in the research was based on ideas from action-research. I began with an educational problem: adult illiteracy, the unsatisfactory explanations for it and the limited means for overcoming it. This was a practical educational problem for me as a teacher of adult literacy. To resolve the problem I planned an initial course of action to be clear about where I was starting. After
each stage of action and observation I engaged in further reflection with the help of concepts which I considered explained in a satisfactory way the action and its outcome. The result was an accumulation of theory and method. In the remaining few pages I will appraise this theory and method and make some brief comments on their significance.

Discussion of the method

The method which I developed and trialled is not a general method for dealing with adult illiteracy. It is specific in a number of respects.

Generally the method will be appropriate people who have tried conventional teaching methods, either compensatory pedagogy or special education, and realise that other means are required for their problem. Learners should ideally have the “good enough life experiences” to which I referred in Chapter Five and should be prepared to engage in dialogue about these experiences.

The method is primarily therapeutic rather than a teaching or instructional technique. The method is not based on the absence of reading skills but on changing learners' repressed emotional relationship to written text which results in avoidance of reading. The essence of the method is to resolve the conflict between a repressed desire to not read and a conscious desire to be able to read. Although there are language exercises in the method, these are a primarily a means by which learners are able to demonstrate their reconstructed relationship to written text. Similar comments apply to the reading of objective texts. The development of reading skills is one which occurs over a longer period of time than that which the method employs. Reading skills will only develop if there are positive feelings about reading.

Because the method resolves a repressed desire to not read and a conscious desire to be able to read, the latter desire is essential. This results in the method being one for use with adults and older children who want to read but are unable to do so. It is not for use with young children who are reluctant readers. In exploratory work (not reported in this thesis) the method was tried with a number of children up to the age of ten years who were very reluctant readers but it quickly became obvious
that it was not appropriate for them. These children did not want to learn to read and were not interested in reading. Reluctance to read is not a problem which the method is designed to overcome. The desire to be able to read may be ambivalent and compromised by the conflicts which were explored in some of the case studies, especially the case study of Jim. However the method cannot create a desire to be able to read. The children referred to were relatively young and with older children who want to be able to read, the method may be useful. But this is yet to be established.

The literacy problems which the method addresses arose because of the institutional constraints of reading pedagogy. Similar institutional contexts of adult literacy teaching cannot provide the informal, quiet and empathetic relationship needed for the method. The method works on a one-to-one relationship between the learner and the literacy worker which many institutions cannot provide.

While the ethos of teaching institutions may be inimical to the method, people attending these institutions sometimes expect that they will be provided with conventional types of learning. This expectation was described in the thesis as a culture of teaching and transmission and might even include expectations of alienation and the school-like nature of learning. Through their experiences of schooling, learners may see alienation as a quality of "learning". Accordingly, learners must be able to accept the newness of the method and be able to understand why conventional techniques may not be appropriate for them.

A limitation of the method arises from its reliance on the use of spoken language. If learners are unable to fluently use spoken language, the added difficulty of having to construct spoken texts in a second language detracts from the feelings of affirmation on which the method relies. I have unsuccessfully tried the method with a non-native speaker of English who appeared to have general anxiety problems about learning which I attributed to schooling experiences in his native country.

**Compensatory pedagogy**

In the Introduction I referred to compensatory pedagogy as one approach to the origin of reading failure and the problem of how to teach adults with reading problems. This approach sees the problem
arising from schooling which has class biases and irrelevancies for children. It provides conventional
techniques for these adults but in an adult context.

Compensatory pedagogy as an effective technique for dealing with reading inability has the limited
outcomes which I described in the Introduction. The other issue raised in the Introduction was the very
limited participation rates in this form of assistance. I noted that in Australia at least 10% of native
English speakers on their own assessment need help with everyday literacy tasks but the participation
rates in compensatory pedagogy nowhere near match this figure. The latest estimate appears to be
from Grant (1987) who concluded that less than 5% of Australian adults needing literacy help actually
obtain it. Wikelund et al. (1992) report the same 5% participation rate in the United States.

The reason for this low participation is provided in the five case studies of the thesis: all subjects
reported anxiety when they attempted to read. Some subjects reported feelings of physical sickness.
Jim, the subject in the second case study, succinctly described his experience of conventional reading
pedagogy as follows:

    I used to get stressed and feel sick. I had a couple of arguments at school about it.

Jim's understandable and sensible response to stress and sickness was to avoid participation in the
events causing the stress and sickness. When he attended TAFE adult literacy classes (at his
Grandmother's instigation) which provided him with a repeat of conventional reading pedagogy, his
response was the same: he avoided and resisted participation.

The responses of all five subjects were similar. In my view the general response of persons who have
attended school and have limited literacy skills, is very likely to be similar. There is a low level of
participation in compensatory pedagogy because this form of education is a repeat of school events
which caused them to experience alienation and anxiety. The result is a motivated avoidance of literacy
activities. There are limited outcomes with those who do participate because compensatory pedagogy
cannot change the repressed and negative emotional sense which most of the participants have
constructed about written language.
Special education

Although I have referred to compensatory pedagogy and special education as separate ways in which the problem of illiteracy is addressed, the techniques they employ are not based on a radical divergence. Special education could be described as mainly a hyper-intensive form of compensatory pedagogy in which written language is fragmented into its phonological constituents. The fragmentation supposedly makes the acquisition of reading skills easier for learners because of their imputed deficits in the phonological ability needed for reading.

However the fragmentation of the word-object and the focus on phonological skill as separate from textual meaning, must make this form of pedagogy an intensely meaningless and hence alienating experience for learners who already have literacy problems and a strong semiotic of experiential sense. As I said in Chapter Two, each time these learners attempt to read they must try to repress this sense. But each time they attempt to read, experiential sense is reproduced and compounded. The result is an aggravation of the problem.

In the case study in Chapter Five, Mark could not describe the methods which his after school reading teachers used with him. It is likely that the methods they used were ones of special education or very similar. But the significant point is that these methods were intensive, highly alienating and severely aggravated Mark’s difficulties. As a result, Mark became an adult with an entrenched emotional antipathy to reading, and health problems which he attributes to his reading difficulties. There are similarities between Mark’s situation and the situations of some of the adults in the study by Shessel and Reiff (1999) referred to in the Introduction.

There are limited outcomes for special education because, like compensatory pedagogy, it cannot remove the repressed negative emotion which many of these learners may associate with written language. Unlike compensatory pedagogy, however, special education techniques may intensify the problem to a greater extent. Special education seeks to identify and apply its techniques to children with difficulties and at an early age, while they are still under the direct control of teachers and parents.
By doing this, the repressed emotion of these children about written language may acquire more intractability and stay with them for the remainder of their lives.

**The biological paradigm**

Special education is centered on imputed biologically based neurological deficits. In the Introduction I referred to Vogel (1998) who is representative of a wide range of theorists who uncritically accept the biological paradigm. Vogel says that “reading disability or dyslexia is an inherited trait; and, more specifically, the ability to segment words into their discrete sounds (phoneme awareness), rapid phonological decoding, and word recognition are the subskills that are limiting…One of the locations of this genetic marker has been found to be on chromosome 6” (Vogel 1998:19).

There are two aspects to Vogel's account. The first is the nature of the "disability" itself. The second is the claim of its inheritability and that a “genetic marker” has been found for it.

With regard to the nature of the "disability" itself, the intractable id-like qualities of experiental sense explain why some theorists interpret it as biologically based. In Chapter Two, I noted that all repressed phenomena take on id-like qualities. The early part of experiental sense has been repressed and much of this sense includes the repressed desire to not read. Because this aspect is a substantial part of the research findings and provides an antidote to biologistic explanations, I will briefly discuss the nature of repressed phenomena and the id.

Freud referred to the id as having:

[N]o organisation and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction...there is...no recognition of the passage of time, and (a thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time...impressions which have been pushed down into the id by repression, are virtually immortal and are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred...we
have made far too little use for our theory of the indubitable fact that the repressed remains unaltered by the passage of time (Freud 1962:98-99).

Despite psychoanalysis having a multiplicity of orientations, this “indubitable fact” of repressed events being unaltered by time is an aspect about which there is considerable agreement. The “indubitable fact” is the basis of much of the analytic enterprise and probably a substantial part of psychotherapy although the explicit terms of “repressed”, “unconscious” or “id” might not be used. It is the rationale for many therapies which help people to change their behaviour which they are unable to change by themselves.

The repressed, as an explicit concept, has been developed by more recent theorists to include ideas from outside psychoanalysis. I will briefly refer to Wachtel (1987) and Klein (1976) who use Piaget’s ideas of assimilation and accommodation to explain, in broader terms, the intractability of the repressed.

For Piaget (1970) the human subject actively constructs knowledge; the external world does not impress itself upon a passive mind. The construction of knowledge results in schemata which are more or less equivalent to a particular stage of knowledge. This results in objects being assimilated to the knowledge of that particular schema. There is an ongoing process of schemata being accommodated to objects by subjects’ constructing new knowledge when existing schemata are incapable of assimilating objects. The resulting new schemata then become assimilatory.

Klein (1976:239-258) argues that repressed schemata are assimilatory only and do not undergo accommodation through feedback from the environment. The fact that they are repressed, in the psychoanalytic sense, does not mean that they are not active. Like all schemata they are highly active and produce outputs which conform to the assimilatory schemata but not to the external world. The outputs correspond to the subject’s internal emotional world and are impervious to change. Change would be accommodation. Because there is no accommodation, the behavior recurs.
Wachtel (1987:26-44) refers to the distinction between the ego and the id. The former is that part of the self which is in contact with the perceptual world which it organises and makes coherent. When events are repressed and become part of the id, they are cut off from these ego processes and from logical perceptual appraisal. They are denied accommodation and are interpreted only through assimilatory schemata. Therapy reveals these schemata “in their original structure as they are applied inappropriately to stimulus objects which would be more appropriately assimilated by [schemata] which have undergone a developmental evolution” (Wachtel 1987:36). The aim of therapy is to provide a situation which promotes this development and accommodation.

The appearance of behaviour described in these ways lends itself to being described as biologically based. Such behaviour persists despite conscious wishes to change it. It appears, like hunger, to be part of the biological make up of people because there appears to be no other explanation for it. But unlike hunger it is not a universal human attribute so genetic differences must be called upon to explain its particularity. As I will discuss below, psychoanalytic concepts have been applied in a very limited way to schooling. But they do provide a more complex understanding of the experiences of children and an antidote to simplistic biologism. This is not to say that psychoanalytic understanding provides explanations in all cases of reading inability. However in societies which have institutions of compulsory schooling it is likely that adults with literacy problems will have had experiences similar to the five subjects described in the case studies of the thesis.

It is difficult to establish conclusively whether some people have organic conditions which dispose them to problems with literacy. Coles (1987) concludes that there may be such people but in very much smaller numbers than learning disability adherents claim. It is the readiness of the learning disability theorists to so quickly and uncritically accept the biological paradigm and genetic explanations, that needs to be explained.

The acceptance of explanations as valid and forming part of a discipline is what Foucault (1984) refers to as being “within the true”. By this Foucault means that for statements to qualify as part of a discipline they must conform to the epistemological requirements of that discipline at the time when the statements are made. The statements must not go beyond the margins of the discipline. He gives the
example of Mendel whose ideas on the hereditary characteristics of plants were not accepted during his own life. People are frequently puzzled by the fact that the botanists of Mendel’s time did not see the truth in Mendel’s ideas. Foucault say this “was because Mendel was speaking of objects, applying methods and placing himself on a theoretical horizon which were alien to biology at that time” (Foucault 1984:119). [italics added]

Hubbart and Wald (1993) refer to a current tendency to promote genetic explanations and discount social, psychological or environmental factors. This is a form of reductionism that Hubbart and Wald term geneticisation in which there is understanding of parts of the subject rather than the subject as a whole. It is based on the generally high status of science and genetics in particular. But geneticisation rests on the fallacy that genes are absolute determining factors and are able to provide universal explanations about health and behaviour.

At the current time, genetics and science occupy a general position of “being within the true”. Explanations couched in a scientific genre are accepted if they appear to conform to that genre. The obverse is also the case: positions which adopt theory from psychoanalysis and marxism to explain learning difficulties as arising from schooling are unlikely to be immediately accepted as valid.

**Therapy and schooling**

In Chapter Two I said that with capitalism a significant portion of the social production of children moved from the family to the institutionalised and rationalised social relations of formal pedagogy. The institution of the family remains an inescapable social reality for children but now school and its social relationships are a likewise inescapable reality. But in psychoanalysis the family remains the site for understanding subjectivity.

In the literature on psychoanalysis and education, the family remains the location where learning difficulties begin. Schools are merely the locations where these difficulties are played out. For example, Schwartz (1989) in a review of the literature concludes that unconscious wishes and oedipal yearnings of children may interfere with their learning. He says, rather obscurely, that these disturbances in learning are generally overdetermined. He does not clearly specify what these other
determinations are but returns relentlessly to the oedipus complex and the neuroses constructed in the family.

I do not claim that pre-existing emotional problems do not affect the learning ability of children in school. But these problems belong amongst the individual differences in children referred to in Chapter One which make learning in an institutional setting difficult for some children. The experiences of Jim, the subject of the second case study, are relevant on this point. Jim’s childhood problems, originating with his parents, appeared to me to be responsible for his difficulties with school. This does not mean that he could not learn to read but he was unable to learn within the institutional structures of the school he attended. The significant point is that as a result of these institutional qualities he experienced alienation and developed a reading inability. This could not be overcome by conventional forms of compensatory pedagogy or, I suspect, special education techniques because neither of these methods addressed the real problem: his emotional relation to the word-object.

There is a very limited literature on psychoanalysis which does attempt to understand a more definite connection with school. Barbanel (1994) has noted the distance between cognitively oriented school psychology and psychoanalysis. She argues for "interaction" between education and psychoanalysis in the understanding of learning difficulties and broader difficulties in adult life. Barbanel refers to one case study and how the understanding of the subject's "educational history and its interplay with her family and social history was a significant step" (Barbanel 1994:282). She notes that frequently the cognitive and affective are regarded as separate domains in which psychoanalysis ignores cognitive and sociological factors. Although Barbanel calls for educational processes to be included in psychoanalytic understanding of learning problems, there is no analysis of educational processes. Again the assumption seems to be that schooling is inexorably benign.

I have argued for a different position where school is regarded as the origin of learning problems in its own right. I have attempted to show how psychoanalytic and sociological concepts may be directly applied to these problems. The real province of psychoanalysis is the understanding of intrapersonal and interpersonal relations, their dynamics and complexities regardless of their origins. Although the family was the original location where these relations were investigated, there is nothing within
psychoanalysis which ties it exclusively to the family. There is much within psychoanalysis which makes it very relevant to understanding the experiences of children in the contemporary school.

Implications of the research findings for education policy

In Chapter One I argued that the institutional qualities of schools result in some children attaching their own individual meaning of alienation to written text before they are able to learn to read. This results not merely in the illiteracy or low literacy of these children but, it may result in their avoidance of attempts to improve their literacy. This leads to certain implications for education policy.

Where institutional qualities are high in schools, it is likely that there will be higher rates of illiteracy. By institutional qualities I mean contexts where there are limited opportunities for teachers to establish individual and personalised relations with students rather than relations which are dictated by the requirement of teachers to work on and control students. The former relations allow teachers to understand individual student needs. These relations may also result in students being more receptive to pedagogy. In the theoretical terms discussed in the thesis there is more opportunity for relational affirmation of students.

Low institutional qualities may mean that teachers are more relaxed with students and that students do not experience the work stress of their teachers. Again in theoretical terms, students may feel less mediated alienation of their teachers.

But the main concern of this thesis has been the alienation of students in school. While some of the measures mentioned above may diminish student alienation there is nevertheless the fact that alienation is universal in most contemporary societies. This does not mean it is inevitable or that it cannot be reduced. Alienation is an educational hazard of compulsory institutional schooling. The way to counteract it is through is through pleasure and affirmation in learning activities. The pleasure of small children who are read to by adults results in good emergent literacy. These young pre-literate children have a positive experiential sense about the word-object which, as research shows, generally results
in good literacy. But as the case study of Mark shows the benefits of being read to as a child may be negated by inappropriate and alienating pedagogy.

The problem becomes one of how to maintain the pleasure and affirmation that results in a relative ease of learning: how to create a potential space where children may draw on their own learning ability with the help of adults. A wealth of information already exists on creative ways of enhancing the learning environment. The problem is one of applying this information in schools. This re-focuses the problem on the institutional qualities of schools where large classes and inadequate resources make this difficult, at least in the Australian situation. These problems must be addressed by political and social action.

One area which such action could address is increasing the public’s awareness of what I have referred as the educational hazards of alienation. Parents, in particular, need to be made aware that inadequate funding, large classes and low teacher morale and training may not result in their children receiving merely a poor quality education. It may result in their children becoming emotionally incapable of developing adequate literacy skills and being unable to participate in higher levels of educational discourse. The case studies in the thesis and the research into the outcomes of compensatory pedagogy and special education referred to in the Introduction, indicate that the emotional basis to such problems are likely to remain a life-long condition.

Another area for action is in attempting to reduce the influence of the biological paradigm as an explanation for learning problems. The need for action against this influence has two aspects. Firstly, biological explanation takes the focus away from the area where reform is needed: diminishing the institutional qualities of compulsory schooling. Secondly, because biological explanation is in many cases the incorrect explanation of the problem, it is unable to point to a correct solution to the problem. Incorrect explanation and solutions result in wasted public resources. But the human cost is a continuation of the personal stress, feelings of inadequacy and frustration of potential, some of which is reported in the literature and the case studies of this thesis.

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APPENDIX “A”

(Newspaper article read by Philip and Mark)
**GUN BUYBACK SURGE**

A late rush by gun owners to hand in their illegal firearms under the guns amnesty saw a surge in the number of weapons surrendered across the Endeavour police region. Burwood Local Area Commander Terry Andrews said gun owners had lined up five-deep at the counters at Burwood and Five Dock police stations in the last two days of the amnesty. In June The Glebe & Inner Western Weekly reported 1250 weapons had been surrendered in the mid-western suburbs region. Last week the total topped 2350, with figures expected to rise as counts were finalised. The firearms buyback scheme ended at midnight on Tuesday, a year after the amnesty started. Under the scheme the Federal Government paid up to $2500 for common guns and more for rare and antique weapons. Cdr Andrews said many gun owners had not been sure whether their weapons were eligible for payment under the buyback scheme. The banned firearms included self-loading rim fire rifles, shotguns, pump action shotguns and centre fire rifles. Others were surrendered without compensation.

The three local stations to receive the most weapons were Burwood (691), Ashfield (520) and Marrickville (313). Fewer than 150 weapons were handed in at most other stations, with Drummoyne station taking the least - 22. Across Australia, 620,000 banned firearms were collected, of which more than 150,000 came from NSW. Cdr Andrews said Police were not sure how many firearms would be handed in under the amnesty.

"The fact that we got quite a large number is pleasing," he said. "We don't know how many are still out there but at least we know there is a large proportion that are out of the way."
APPENDIX “B”

(Story number 14 “Shearing” written by Philip)

[This is a handwritten text which was photocopied for the printed copy of the thesis and is not available on disk]