NEGOTIATING RESPONSIBILIZATION:

POWER AT THE THRESHOLD OF CAPABLE LITERATE CONDUCT

IN ONTARIO

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers how statistics about adult literacy have produced a new transnational norm

of what it means to "be literate," and asks what has been produced by demarcating a calculable

threshold of capable literate conduct. Analyzing literacy as a form of conduct enables

investigation of the political dimensions of governmental interest in literate conduct and

consideration of what subjects, relationships and forms of power are produced by various

problematizations. Genealogical analysis of the currently dominant governing rationality, what is

termed the psychometrological regime, revealed that Level Three of the International Adult

Literacy Survey (IALS) has been constructed as a threshold between people who can act as

autonomous, entrepreneurial subjects and those who cannot. In the case of Ontario, this threshold

becomes an indicator of "employability" and produces a singular and problematic population

who are subjected to coercive educational interventions. Tactics and techniques in the province's

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy construct literacy programs as sites responsible for

transforming subjects below the threshold into human capital assets; this represents a significant

departure from the original mission of community-based agencies. Data from interviews with

educators in these programs indicate that adult literacy workers occupy an uneasy position

between the demands of policy, their pastoral relationships with learners, and the complex

realities faced by adults who struggle with print. While these educators may choose to disobey some policy imperatives they nonetheless act, at times unwittingly, as agents of governance. By highlighting the impossibilities produced by the neoliberal problematization of literacy, and the negotiations that literacy workers perform in the face of such dilemmas, this research contributes to thinking through how to transform coercive and authoritarian tendencies currently governing literate conduct.

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Chapter 1   Introduction:
Literate Conduct and Global Competitiveness

Since the mid-1990s, the definition of adult literacy that has informed education policy in the Global North is one developed through the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey, or IALS, for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (National Literacy Secretariat, 2000; OECD & Statistics Canada, 1995, 2000). The stated aim of IALS was to inform labour market policy in order to allay the effects of "major structural changes in OECD countries" resulting from "[g]lobalisation and the emergence of the knowledge-based society" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xii). The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) is premised on the assumption that a highly literate workforce improves the competitiveness of nation-states. It defines and operationalizes literacy as a ranked set of cognitive processing skills which, when measured, represent the net worth of the "stock of human capital in the population" (2000, p. 61).

 The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was certainly not the first effort to define and measure adult literacy: census counts have included assessments of literacy for over a century and, since its inception, UNESCO has routinely convened international gatherings to wrestle with how to define it. However, the human capital framing represents a departure, a shift paralleled in all levels of education over the past few decades. Scholars who understand literacy as a social practice have critiqued IALS for privileging a dominant form of literacy over local variants and culturally diverse practices (Hamilton & Barton, 2000; Hautecoeur, 2000; Street, 2011) and for establishing a distinction between competent and needy citizens (Walker, 2009a, 2009b). The human capital framing of IALS has not gone unnoticed: IALS has been criticized for articulating norms which correspond to narrowly-defined work-related skills (Darville, 1999, 2011; Jackson & Slade, 2008).

As governments have adopted policies influenced by the human capital approach, the outcomes of adult literacy programs have been managed through increasingly rigid administrative frameworks (Hamilton, 2001; LoBianco & Wickert, 2001; Merrifield,

1997). Simultaneously, support for any adult literacy work not aligned to numerical accounts and to a human capital framing has been systematically eliminated. The introduction of extensive reporting requirements has not been accompanied by additional resources; a recent survey of accountability in adult basic education revealed that practitioners across Canada feel that "tracking financial details takes precedence over delivering literacy services" (Literacy and Accountability, 2008). Similar frustrations have been reported internationally (Jackson, 2005; Kell, 2001; LoBianco and Wickert, 2001; Merrifield, 1997).

My inquiry is situated within these dynamics and takes as its starting-point similar frustrations expressed by front-line educators in Ontario, women who work in community literacy programs established before the human capital discourse became fully entrenched. These adult literacy workers operate at the intersection of adult learners' wish to learn, their own desire to help people, the principles and values of the organization which employs them, and the imperatives of the provincial Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy which funds their employer. Many adult literacy workers in Ontario feel that the current policy is hindering their ability to help people and limits their ability to respond to what adult learners say they want and need to learn. I took their frustrations as a sign that there is a profound gap between what these workers want to do and to be, and what the policy expects of them. My thesis research explored how the current problematization of literacy has produced this gap and analyzed how these workers are negotiating these disconnects.

As such, my research was a first step in exploring some aspects of what can be revealed by taking the perspective that literacy is a particular form of conduct (Foucault, 1991a; Olssen, 2009; Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006) constructed through years of painstaking educational work. Such a perspective allowed me to excavate how dominant ideas about literacy are put together and to consider how discourses about literacy operate in the world and what forms of power are visible in these mechanisms and practices. In other words, using the analytic lens of governmentality allowed me to pay attention to forms of power and practices of governance in the field of adult literacy.

In situating my work within governmentality studies I am choosing to highlight the processes which emphasize the contribution of an aggregation—the population conceived as an abstracted generality—to economic requirements. This perspective allows me to analyze how power works through processes that shape both what subjects desire and how subjects act. Before discussing how statistical knowledge could produce literate conduct I will outline how I understand the role of statistics within modern governance.

One of Foucault's major contributions was his suggestion that modern forms of power are productive as well as repressive; that power works by eliciting specific behaviour rather than strictly punishing disobedient actions. Foucault drew attention to bodies as the site at which power is transferred, the "vector and instrument of a continued 'working'… the movement, the passage, between subjectivity and productivity" (Butler, 2004, p. 187); thus power/knowledge only becomes material through what bodies do. This empirical focus is why Foucaultian analytics so compelling to me. Walker's (2009b) work, for example, seems at first glance to be similar to my own since she examines the "needy and competent citizen" in OECD discourses. However, her focus on OECD policy as the ideology of 'inclusive liberalism' is distinct from my understanding of it as a discourse that produces specific subjects and actions.

Foucault (1990) argued that a significant shift in the modern era occurred when the "ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (p. 138). He uses the term bio-power to name the process that "brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (1990, p. 143). Noting that information about "the economy" is the principle form of knowledge for modern, bio-political states, he states that techniques of government in the modern era focus on "intervention in the field of economy and population" (Foucault, 1991a, p. 101). Since modern states are defined by their population, they are powerful insofar as they effectively foster productivity in the population as a whole.[1]

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[1] This point is also discussed in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78.* At some point I would like to bring postcolonial scholarship to bear upon his assertion that the shift to a focus on population eclipsed the emphasis on territory. In the case of Canada, and other settler states, it

According to Foucault, capitalist relations of production are maintained by state instruments operating as institutions of power but also by bio-political techniques functioning to ensure "the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (1990, pp. 141). Operating together, these instruments and techniques resulted in capitalism becoming naturalized as the expected economic order. Under capitalism new techniques of bio-power emerged that could ensure that "forces, aptitudes, and life in general" (1990, pp. 140) would contribute as much as possible to the productive potential of the population. The needs and aspirations of the population as a whole became both a focus of governance but also the means through which governmental aims could be realized. Individuals' interests became less important than the interests of the aggregated population. To maximize productivity, mechanisms for "distributing the living in the domain of value and utility" (1990, p. 144) were developed; these often focused on "factors of segregation and social hierarchization" (1990, p. 141) that helped to develop and sustain economic processes.

The aim of my dissertation research was to examine the processes through which governing rationalities enter the world of everyday life and to study what happens when such mentalities encounter subjects whose decisions and actions are informed by a different "grammar of concepts" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 188). Specifically, my thesis research investigated how subjects in Ontario who work in community-based agencies established to help people become literate are negotiating the demands placed on them by policies which aim to make them responsible for producing a neoliberal form of literate conduct. The title of my thesis signals my focus on responsibilization as a feature of neoliberal governmentality, and the fact that both learners and educators are subject to this pressure. By including the idea of negotiation, my title points to an interest in struggles over neoliberal governance. My subtitle indicates that I approach 'literacy' as a form of conduct, and that my research is concerned with manifestations of power arising from how literate conduct is defined in one specific geopolitical space.

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seems that management of the population has been an integral part of securing the territory—for the settler state as against indigenous relationships to territories—and that such processes continue in the present.

This thesis includes my first attempts to conduct genealogical-ethnographic analysis of the assemblage of discourses, practices, processes and actors governing the conduct of literate conduct in the province of Ontario. The thesis itself is also more of an assemblage of interconnected chapters than a linear sequence building a single argument. In chapters 3 through 6 I approach adult literacy from various angles to consider what forms of power are visible in tactics and techniques governing adult literacy in this geopolitical space. I argue that the specific normative literate conduct constituted by neoliberal governing rationalities is articulated through the calculative practices of IALS, in what I term the psychometrological regime. This regime establishes a threshold of capable literate conduct which, in Ontario's welfare regime, constitutes adults deemed "not literate enough" as a threat to the economy who must be forced to change. These adults are required to attend the community literacy programs where my informants work. My ethnographic analysis in chapters 7 through 9 focuses on how Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy defines the parameters of adult literacy education in the province, and how the women who work in community literacy programs are negotiating its coercions and demands. I attend to how they are compelled to act but also what forms of power and alternative rationalities inform their decisions and actions.

1.1   Literacy as Conduct

I take the perspective that literacy is a form of conduct vital to normative subjectivities within advanced liberal states. Neoliberal governing rationalities construct literacy as conduct through which subjects relate to themselves as autonomous, employable units of human capital. Political theorists like Rose (1996b) have argued that literacy is a "basic nation-forming device" on a par with "a common language…and transportation networks" (p. 58). My focus on literacy as a form of conduct stands in contrast to the more usual understandings of literacy as a communicative practice, a cognitive capacity or a set of clearly-definable skills and competences. Common-sense notions of literacy as a universal attribute are very powerful; such notions form the backbone of a broad range of assumptions about modern life, such as "modern nations have high rates of literacy", and "the hallmark of modern nationhood is a system of free, universal public education" and even that "reading is good for you." Such notions are also extremely effective in

shaping subjects' aspirations to become literate and in constituting the desire among some literate subjects to help others acquire literacy.

Universal public education was established as a vital component of the infrastructure of liberal democracies such as Canada, yet it has not led to universal adoption of literate norms. The universality of public education has contributed to naturalizing literacy as normative conduct, even though not all subjects within liberal literate states are equally able to employ dominant literacy practices. In fact, presuming that all subjects relate to print in particular ways may be helping to obscure the fact that schooled literacies perpetuate social division and that a range of practices and structures constrain and disenfranchise significant portions of the population. This thesis is a tentative first step towards arguing that IALS introduces a threshold of capable literate conduct which serves to entrench, rather than overcome, differences in educational outcomes that reflect class and cultural differences. Fuller analysis of how the IALS continuum entrenches inequalities must wait for another time.

The current rationalities and technologies for governing literacy are overlaid upon other discourses and practices such as common-sense notions about literacy as a universal attribute and unquestioned assumptions about the role of literacy in constructing the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) of Canada as an unexamined settler-invader nation. I mention this range of discourses not because I plan to undertake a detailed exploration of all of the elements of descent and emergence between those rationalities and the current political mentalities, but to signal my awareness that governing literate conduct is not a new problem and that multiple discourses and rationalities coexist in today's assemblage. However, although notions about literacy have a long-standing role in constituting liberal states, my argument is that the current neoliberal problematization, promulgated by the OECD, constructs adult literacy as a vital attribute of responsibilized, entrepreneurial and employable subjects. Like most Anglophone member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Ontario has adopted a problematization of normative literacy as equivalent to "employability." IALS asserts that its psychometric approach accurately measures capable literate conduct and claims that adults who do not conduct themselves at Level Three do not possess the "suitable

minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi). I argue that these features of the current problematization construct a calculable cognitive boundary between capable and unfit subjects. Further, my analysis shows that the way in which literacy is now linked to employability makes it a central technology through which active labour market policy mechanisms oblige and coerce subjects who are now defined as unfit.

1.2   Source of my Research / Locating Myself

In focusing on the province of Ontario, I am choosing to research a jurisdiction in which I have been involved in adult literacy work, off and on, since 1981. I understand Canada as an advanced liberal society but also a settler-colonial state with a long interest in the demarcation between what Thobani (2007) terms "exalted" and "abjected" subjects. My own history doing this work in this place means that I bring deep understanding of the complex and multilayered assemblage of discourses, practices, processes and actors in place in the province, as well as an awareness of the exclusions in which literacy is implicated, and how various elements have shifted over time. I consider this knowledge to be a strong resource for my research rather than a form of contamination; at the same time, throughout my dissertation research process, I continually pushed myself to unpack my assumptions about the discourses, practices, processes and actors that I thought I knew.

In the early 1980s, community literacy programs in Toronto saw lack of literacy as "a reflection of a particular social, economic, and political system that does not equally benefit all groups within society" (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991, p. 31). These programs believed that their purpose was to both teach adults to read and also to address how print was so often used to exclude people or deny access to vital information. At that time there was no provincial government policy about adult literacy, so community literacy programs were operating with few resources. The majority of workers in these programs were white, middle-class women.[2] Many literacy activists believed that in order to garner

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[2] There is scant documentation of who works in adult literacy in Canada but this is my experience of literacy programs and networks, and my impression is borne out by data in the national program-based action research project *The Power of Woman-Positive Literacy Work* (Lloyd, Atkinson, & Ennis, 1994).

greater support the field should advocate for provincial and federal literacy policies. They believed that such policies would reflect their understanding of literacy as a means for greater equity and social inclusion.

My experience, as I write this document 32 years after first volunteering as a tutor in a community-based program, is that many literacy workers are frustrated at the current context for their work. Some educators feel that the present funding regime in Ontario is based on the false assumption that most adults who want to improve their literacy skills are unemployed. Some are annoyed that their funding requests must be formatted as a "business plan" rather than a "program plan." Some balk at how neoliberal ideas about literacy do not help the student who comes to the program hungry, nor the student who cannot concentrate because she has been beaten, again, by her partner, nor the student whose landlord shuts off the power in their apartment in the middle of the day, nor the student who worries that her paycheque is less than she expected or does not reflect the number of hours she has worked. Some practitioners interpret these disconnects between their experiences and what policy expects of them as symptoms of irrational policy-making processes or the result of the fact that bureaucracies need data in order to justify their existence. Many educators and activists seem to believe that policies would change if the field were able to lobby more effectively, to build partnerships with business leaders, to marshal more data, or to present stronger stories about how literacy has transformed individual learners' lives.

I have come to a different position. It no longer appears to me that government policies aim to meet the needs of their subjects. Instead, I consider that governmental interests are constructed within a world system of "free trade imperialism" (Louis & Robinson, 2004, p. 160) built on patterns of economic dominance and dependence established in the Victorian era of colonial rule. I now understand IALS as an example of what Allman (2001) would call a hegemonic project of neoconservatism, one that aims to "safeguar[d] the interests of the most advanced…capitalist organizations" (p. 123), and also as a technology of governance that aims to maintain global economic imbalances that benefit the most wealthy nations. I have come to hold the position that a critical, historicized, non-ideological and material understanding of how literacy operates offers a better

understanding of why IALS was developed and how the statistics have been mobilized in labour market and adult literacy policies based on its assumptions; it also provides important insights into why these numbers have been so successful in reshaping the provision of adult basic education.

My research grew out of my awareness that adult literacy work in Ontario has changed a great deal since the introduction of the first provincial policies in the late 1980s. Where previously programs were scrambling to make ends meet but could essentially define their own priorities, the introduction of provincial policy and funding have been accompanied by increased prescriptivism. Regulation of the work has affected how programs describe their aims and philosophy, what criteria they use to decide which students are eligible to attend the program, what types of learning goals they are expected to support, how they recruit and work with volunteers, what learning materials to use, what types of assessments to use, and how to report on student progress. When I worked in a community program in Toronto in 2001-2002, I began to see how challenging it was to define one's own priorities while accepting government funding that was tied to expected outcomes and priorities that sometimes stood in direct opposition to what we, as educators, hoped to achieve.

I have come to the perspective that there is a long-standing interest in governing literacy in this geopolitical space; I have also come to understand various discourses and rationalities as layered over one another. I view Canada as an advanced liberal society but also a settler-colonial state with a long history of educational practices serving to produce both exaltation and abjection. In Ontario, IALS statistics have been used to assert that people who struggle with dominant literacies are responsible for low economic productivity, and that national competitiveness in the global economy depends upon enhancing the skills of these individuals.

Canada has a long tradition of devaluing education for working people, particularly basic education for adults. For students who seek adult basic education, few policies actively support their aspirations or recognize the barriers that make it difficult for them to find, or stay in, programs. In fact, two recent studies have both found that the current system of

provision privileges students who can move most quickly through the system rather than the students who have the least formal education or who face the greatest barriers (Hoddinnott, 1998; Veeman, et al., 2006).

Adult literacy programs across Canada are under-funded and under-resourced and there is little initial or continuing professional development for instructors in these programs. Because the range of provision and commitment varies widely between jurisdictions, working conditions range from unpaid volunteer work to low-paid contract work with no job security or benefits to salaried employment. In some places, adult literacy practitioners hold secure full-time jobs; in others the staff must apply for short-term project funding in order to offer a program in their community and to be employed for the term of the grant (Woodrow, 2006). These material conditions result in extremely high staff turnover in many parts of the country.

Since the mid-1990s adult literacy policy, and therefore funding for programs, has explicitly tied literacy to labour market policies. Community literacy programs in Ontario are expected to conform to this approach, which understands literacy as a means to help people "reach their work or other life goals" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities). Where adult literacy has meant being able to read and write in order to participate in society and to access information, these broader aspects are now defined as "independence" within the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy. The Service Quality Standards on which community-based programs are assessed now limit the number of learners with "independence" goals they are allowed to work with. Instead, the focus of LBS is on employment and further education, as a means to future employment, as the primary goals of programs funded through LBS. My findings show that LBS policy definitions and contractual obligations are making it increasingly difficult for formally-autonomous programs to respond to non-employment literacy needs.

Contemporary policies and frameworks that aim to address the problem of adult illiteracy in the province do not attend to how literacy is embedded in other dimensions of social life. They do not address the needs and material realities of the adults with diverse socio-cultural-economic profiles who attend adult literacy programs, nor how their difficulties

with print may have been socially produced. This disconnect was one of the starting-points for my inquiry, and background work has led me to see that perhaps the statistical framings of literacy operate in ways that obscure the social relations and rationalize the correlation between low scores on literacy tests and other aspects of marginality, including newcomer status, having English as an Additional Language, and poverty. Thus, attributing poverty to "low literacy" has the effect of masking and justifying the growing racialization of poverty (Colour of Justice Network, 2007; Galabuzi, 2009; Preston et. al., 2010).

The OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey, and subsequent surveys and policies based on its logic, can be seen as technologies of colonial governmentality (Asad, 1994; Scott, 2005), designed to refashion how subjects conduct themselves. Using this lens also reveals that such policies seem to operate to ensure that settler-immigrants (whether recent or of long standing) take on colonizing, rather than indigenizing, roles that serve the territorial interests of the nation-state rather than of the people.[3] A conceptualization of this geopolitical space as deeply colonial and increasingly shaped by neoliberal globalization is central to the framing of my inquiry.

During the 1980s, several small community programs existed in Toronto; some were based in public libraries, others in community centres. The program where I began, as a volunteer, to learn about community literacy was located in a branch of the Toronto Public Library; the program where I worked as coordinator between 1985 and 1992 was initiated by the Downtown Churchworkers' Association and located in an under-used United Church that was eventually transformed into a community health and resource centre. In the 1980s, literacy volunteers and staff established an advocacy network, the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML),which agitated for increased government interest in, and funding for, adult literacy ("Parade starts events focusing on illiteracy," 1986). In fact, I was part of an MTML committee that submitted a position paper to the

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[3] As such they are similar to colonial policies that served the interests of the colonial centre rather than the indigenous populace. This issue is not foregrounded in my analysis, but I am tentatively suggesting that the statistics reinforce efforts to retain the global positioning of the OECD member nations as dominant economic actors. Within those nations, the statistics seem to also naturalize inequalities among subjects. More detailed investigation of these elements within settler colonialism must wait for another time.

Ontario Ministry of Education with the expectation that we could influence provincial literacy policy (Alkenbrack, Atkinson, Duncombe, McBeth, & Williams, 1984). My recollection of that era is that many colleagues were inspired by the example of the Sandanista literacy campaign in Nicaragua, and hoped that a campaign with similar objectives could be initiated in Ontario. Many saw our work as built on the pedagogy of Paolo Freire (2000) although in retrospect I think that our interpretation was more liberal than decolonizing; the most critical among us were, it seems to me, applying traditional class analysis (Alden, 1982) rather than perspectives which also considered our colonial context.

I left adult literacy work for several years (1992–2001) while I lived outside of Ontario. When I returned to the province I was astounded by how much the field had changed. Most of the creative and emancipatory work that I had valued—particularly projects to organize literacy students and to publish their writing, plus efforts to connect literacy to anti-oppression work—was no longer happening. While the province now had a literacy policy, I balked at what the policy had "cost": there was no substantial increase in funding to accompany the province's matrix outlining "literacy skills" parceled in great detail into different competencies at various levels. In fact, it seemed that programs were required to do more with less, particularly more reporting and documentation with less funding. It seemed that programs were to perform more administration and less teaching. These experiences made me question what was being accomplished through the introduction of a literacy policy.

While my thinking shifted I observed that many practitioners continued to believe that the field could influence government policy and that advocacy efforts would eventually result in policies which reflected the needs of adult literacy programs and the students who attend them. With this faith in liberal democracy many practitioners are deeply frustrated that policy-makers continue to "get it wrong"; the field as a whole does not seem to have a way to understand why policies attempt to change how practitioners do front-line work, why policies might be at odds with the interests of marginalized groups, or why policies seem to entrench the status quo rather than attempt to transform it. An

example of this attitude is evident in how the field has responded to the statistics from the OECD surveys.

My recollection is that many in the field were relieved at media attention given to the results from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): the sense was that at last the field had proof that literacy was an issue in Canada. Many believed that the IALS data would surely lead to increased government interest in adult literacy and more stable funding for adult literacy programs. I recently examined the websites of many of the regional literacy networks in Ontario and discovered all of them cite the IALS statistics in their descriptions of what literacy is; none posit alternative definitions that challenge how IALS frames literacy. This observation bolsters my sense that the regional networks have become quasi-governmental organizations. In their formative years they may have represented the perspectives and interests of the volunteers and staff (and sometimes the learners) of the local adult literacy programs. However, they are not member-funded organizations and a glance at their recent projects and initiatives reveals how dependent they are on provincial funding: all of their projects align to provincial priorities and frameworks. I have become curious about how the field has been affected by this domination and whether it is even possible, in the current context, to work in ways that are not domesticated by the provincial policy and priorities.

In genealogical inquiry I found an approach which allowed me to shift from "judgement on a deficient reality" into analysis of the assumptions which underlie "taken for granted practices" (Dean 1994, p. 119, cited in Moore, 2005, p. 54). By problematizing taken-for-granted truths, genealogical inquiry is inherently hopeful; because it allows us to change how we understand "that which is given to us" it can "induce change in our individual and collective experience" (loc. cit.).

In other words, I adopted this perspective because of the real-world problem of how statistics made it even more difficult to talk about literacy, even as front-line workers thought those numbers would help. To investigate how this problem was put together, I needed to investigate past definitions of literacy and how they were operating in the

world. That is what I hope to do in the next chapter: to begin to unsettle the assumptions about what literacy means by illustrating its contingent and constructed status.

1.3   Overview of the Argument

This thesis began as something akin to a manuscript-style thesis: a collection of related but independent papers with relevant theoretical literature presented in each chapter. But as writing deepened my grasp of the interconnections I was analyzing, the work began to cohere into a more unified form, with each chapter addressing one element of a broader analysis of developments in the field of adult literacy. It now has a more conventional structure, with most issues of theory and methodology introduced in Chapter 2 and additional literature relevant to the focus of analysis introduced in individual chapters as necessary. While my research as a whole is located within governmentality studies, there is no single literature review; each chapter engages with selected literature and Chapters 3 through 9 each present analysis of some aspect of either primary or secondary data. However, the thesis does retain some characteristics of an assemblage in that although there is a progression between chapters building to my analysis of how my informants are able to negotiate the current context, there are some areas of overlap. In particular Chapter 5 could be seen as repeating material contained in other places, most notably section 3.4 (Literacy as Employability). This was one of the last chapters I wrote and was composed with an audience of literacy scholars in mind; in fact, Chapter 5 was written after I had presented this material at an international symposium in mid-June and will likely comprise the first draft of my chapter for the book the organizers plan to publish. Rather than repair what could be seen as redundancy I chose to leave it as is, because what I was trying to achieve was a concise statement of what this theoretical approach offers to analysis of literacy statistics.

Throughout this work I have engaged my curiosity about the implications of literacy being rendered quantifiable such that transnational experts declare that they have discovered the exact amount that people need in order to "cope" in contemporary life in every part of the globe. I am particularly interested in how this quantification is connected to neoliberal governing rationalities and advanced liberal forms of governance.

I am also interested in how the current problematization borrows, and is distinct, from earlier discourses about literacy.

Current developments are a complex assemblage of policy, practices, discourses and actors in one geopolitical space influenced by transnational pressure to adopt a particular governing rationality. Thus my research includes analysis of the texts that articulate governing rationalities but also data from interviews with women who work in community-based adult literacy programs in Ontario who are frustrated with the changes wrought by the current Literacy and Basic Skills policy. To me, their frustration indicated that they were negotiating conflicting mentalities; I wanted to explore what happens when different rationalities co-exist, and how subjects choose which sense will inform their actions in different moments. That is, I wanted to examine how they respond to new rationalities and technologies, including what might lead them to continue to follow prior rationalities or ethics in the face of punitive measures designed to ensure their obedience to current mechanisms. I also wanted to understand what ethical norms they draw on in deciding whether to enact, inhabit or transgress (Mahmood, 2005).

Normative literate conduct played a central role in processes of colonization and in constructing Canada as a white settler nation; biopolitical exclusions based on normative literate conduct have been, and continue to be, a central feature of this geopolitical space. Within neoliberal governing rationalities, capable literate conduct was subject to calculative practices and the psychometric measures introduced transnationally through the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The calculative practices at the heart of IALS, and the policies which depend upon this rationality, have become what I have termed a psychometrological regime. This regime has specified a calculable threshold between being, and not being, "literate enough." The threshold of IALS Level Three constructs a singular and problematic target population whose human capital must be transformed because their inability to enact capable literate conduct poses a threat to economic productivity and competitiveness.

I consider how the threshold of capable literate conduct has arrived in the province of Ontario. I discuss how it was central to the process of welfare reform which turned social

assistance from a universal benefit to a contractual program designed to eliminate the "problem" of dependence on the part of individuals who have no other source of income. Literate conduct has become a mechanism for governing the conduct of dependent adults in Ontario, using coercive educational interventions to force them to become active, entrepreneurial subjects. Proponents of the psychometrological regime claim that improving the literate conduct of dependent subjects will enhance their "employability." My research indicated, instead, that in Ontario subjects deemed "not literate enough" are being declared "unemployable" while the "low-skill" jobs they performed in the past are being filled by adults with more education and training. These effects indicate that IALS Level Three is operating as a technology of biopolitical exclusion to justify educational coercions against the most economically vulnerable subjects in the province.

Finally, I consider how adult literacy workers negotiate the demands of the current Literacy and Basic Skills policy and the responsibilizing ethos on which it is based. I begin by investigating how the workers' sense of themselves as constructed within specific "practical and conceptual conditions" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 15). I ask how their subjectivities were shaped within a rationality of literacy-as-participation and within organizations which initially relied heavily on volunteer labour. I argue that this assemblage resulted in adult literacy work exhibiting clear attributes of pastoral power: these women sacrifice themselves in order to work with adults in need, and their relationships with literacy learners are intimate yet unequal.

While adult literacy workers disobey the imperatives of responsibilizing policy, their actions nonetheless position them as agents of governance. My penultimate chapter discusses how adult literacy workers negotiate between their humanist commitments and the responsibilizing imperatives of the human capital ethos. I consider their frustrations with the literacy-as-employability as indicative of this disjuncture, and evidence that, despite its coercions, the neoliberal rationality is more an ideal than a *fait accompli*. While literacy workers' knowledge and experience are subordinated by the calculative practices of the psychometrological regime, they have not been completely erased. To illustrate, I consider the differences between how LBS policy, and my informants, define which adults are "most in need" and what it means to be "learner-centred." I note that

adult literacy workers routinely disobey imperatives of policy because of divergent understanding of these key terms. My concluding chapter notes the hopeful character of genealogical-ethnographic inquiry, an approach which situates subjects' desires, thoughts and actions in their complex and contingent contexts and makes visible possibilities for action in the face of coercions without minimizing the power of dominant discourses, institutions and practices.

Chapter 2
Magpie Learns to Look:
Theoretical and Methodological Stories and Sorties

This chapter has been one of the most difficult for me to write. I struggled with how to describe my approach in a way that was true to the many pot-holes, bumps and disruptions I encountered on the journey. My first draft tried to present a distant and objective description of the theoretical underpinnings and influences in the work and the methodological approaches which had informed my data collection and analysis. It failed. Not only were details of the methodological choices I had made missing, but I myself was missing. In short, as Gertrude Stein famously said, "There was no there there."

My first draft of this chapter erased the fact that my doctoral process required me to learn the basics of academic research, since I had a Masters in Fine Arts rather than a research-based degree. That draft obscured the fact that I had had to learn what words like ontology and epistemology meant, how to ask a researchable question, how to plan and conduct and write up qualitative research, how to engage with theoretical and methodological debates, and how to think and write in an analytic, theoretically-informed way. The draft diminished my considerable struggles to overcome doubts that I didn't know enough, hadn't read enough and would never be adequately prepared for what the academic world expected of me. It also minimized my worries that my research would be either puzzling or insulting to the field of adult literacy work, the site from which my research questions arose.

To find a possible resolution to these limitations I turned to dissertations with some affinities to my own inquiry. In her genealogical study of English as a Second Language problematizations and policies in Australia, Helen Moore (2005) presented her methodological journey as a personal recollection of her shifting perspectives and approaches to empirical data. Paula Cameron's (2012) notion of seamfulness drew attention to what can be learned in difficult times and reminded me that my research has consisted, in large measure, of trying to pay attention to how things are assembled. Taken together, these examples offered a way out of my impasse. I began to see that this chapter

could include a record of my evolving understanding and the decisions resulting from those shifts. I began to imagine this chapter as focused on the very discontinuities, wrong turns and rethinkings which characterized my methodological labours. As I began to compose the pages I realized that presenting the various methodological and theoretical choices I made was much more consistent with my ontology and epistemology than my initial effort, which presented my methodology as if it arose, fully formed, from a context-free void. I was pleased to think that I could describe this work as a kind of story. As I played with wording for the title I thought that I should add the word *sortie* to reflect the fact that my research involved, in many ways, sallying forth into the unknown.

What was missing was a thread that would offer some coherence to this chapter. Writing a chronology didn't seem right, mostly because it seemed too linear and dull. I decided that a metaphor might help. What I wanted was one that would highlight, in a positive way, the interdisciplinary nature of my work and my unruly approach to scholarly literature and methodological schema. I needed a metaphor which acknowledged that I have been more of a *bricoleur* than a bricklayer: more interested in using what was available than limiting myself to pre-selected materials and in bringing together disparate parts to make broad connections than in constructing impervious walls. I recalled moments of doubt when I have thought that I should have been more systematic; moments when I have wondered whether my tendency to make links between far-flung points meant that my work relied too much on a habit of picking and choosing what to attend to.

The image of a magpie sprang to mind.[4] These birds, in the popular imagination, are infamous for picking up shiny things, storing them, remembering where they are and retrieving them. But the more I read about magpies the more I realized how well this bird suited the story I wanted to tell. Like crows and jays and other members of the corvid family, magpies are omnivores, interested in anything edible. They live in the open or on the edge rather than deep in forest thickets. They are adaptable, able to solve problems

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[4] It's no accident that I stumbled upon an ornithological metaphor; I've been fascinated with birds for most of my life. To me, the variety and beauty of birds embody how fragile, precious and interconnected life is and what we stand to lose if we believe that our choices do not matter.

and to learn. They are social birds, and they warn others of potential dangers. Their habit of storing food means not only that nourishment is distributed widely, but also that seeds they leave behind are available for future regeneration. These, then, are the thematic threads I use to build the story of my theoretical and methodological journeys and sorties.

2.1   Omnivorous Gleaning

I entered doctoral studies after working for many years in adult literacy and seeing how front-line work in Ontario began to change after the introduction of policy in 1987. As the provincial government gradually became more interested in defining and measuring the results of programs it funded, it seemed as though it was increasingly difficult to work in ways that responded to what local communities wanted and needed. I became aware of the precariousness of literacy work and—rhetoric about the importance of literacy to the contrary—how little funding and support programs received. I became more and more curious about why policy seemed to cause new dilemmas for literacy work, and why activists held onto the notion that if only we could find the right allies in government, we could help facilitate the introduction of policy which reflected the knowledge, experience and needs of adult literacy learners, programs and educators.

For many years I had been involved, in various ways, with community-based inquiry and practitioner research. I had co-authored a description of community-based adult literacy which advocates hoped would inform policy within the Ontario Ministry of Education (Alkenbrack, et al., 1984)[5]. The program where I worked was involved in a participatory study of community-based literacy (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991) and in an action-research study of woman-positive adult literacy work (Lloyd, Atkinson, & Ennis, 1994). For a decade or so the federal government's National Literacy Secretariat funded practitioner research as part of its community development approach (Hayes, 2009). In this period I sat on steering committees for two national research projects—a study of inclusive learning circles (Ewing, 2006) and an analysis of the infrastructure required to sustain practitioner research (Horsman & Woodrow, 2006)—and helped to design and

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[5] Around the same time I first met Kari Dehli. She was on the board of directors of East End Literacy, the community literacy program in Toronto where I first volunteered. When I decided to pursue doctoral studies I discovered that she was a faculty member at OISE, and invited her to sit on my thesis committee.

co-facilitate an arts-based practitioner research project (Stewart et al., 2009). I was hired to establish a journal linking adult literacy research and practice, *Literacies: Practising research, researching practice*. Publishing ten issues between 2003 and 2009, the journal worked to expand readership for reports of both academic and practitioner research, and tried to foster and support spaces for reflective practice.

As editor of *Literacies* I learned a great deal about the dilemmas faced by practitioners and researchers across the country. I noticed that as policies across the country became more formal and elaborate, there was a corresponding shrinkage of spaces for creative pedagogy or for raising critical questions. These realizations fuelled a growing curiosity. Why had the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) statistics been more effective at changing policy than earnest appeals to support basic education as a human right? Why did policies seem to be making front-line work more difficult, rather than easier? Why had we literacy advocates believed that policy would solve our problems in the first place? Did that assumption have anything to do with the fact that we were mostly white, middle-class women? When we received word that the National Literacy Secretariat would be closed and would be replaced by an Office of Literacy and Essential Skills within Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, I started thinking that perhaps graduate work would allow me to investigate these questions. I was encouraged to apply by a member of the steering committee for *Literacies*, Nancy Jackson, who became my thesis supervisor. She advised me to be strategic in choosing courses; she also suggested that I use every course paper as an opportunity to clarify my research question as well as my theoretical and methodological commitments.

I knew that academic discussions had shifted significantly in the twenty-eight years since I had been an undergraduate majoring in Political Science, and was unsure about what disciplinary terrain best suited my interests. I wandered across social science departments at the University of Toronto to find courses that broadened my perspective and sharpened my view. These courses—and related conferences I attended—allowed me to glean in several disciplinary fields and led me to some gems. I nosed around in book history and discovered that, for my liking, the discipline was much too focused on print artefacts, too wedded in European definitions of literacy, too invested in notions of literacy as an *a*

priori good. However, in this literature I discovered a few works that analyzed treaty-making processes as literacy events which played central roles in constructing settler nations (Chamberlin, 2003; McKenzie, 1999; Warkentin, 1999).

As I read across disciplines, I continued to find postcolonial perspectives to be the most insightful and relevant to my interests. I was particularly struck by Scott's (2005) assertion that colonial power operates to "disable[e] old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions…constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable—indeed, so as to *oblige*—new forms of life to come into being" (p. 25).[6] Although I eventually realized that this work would need to be more background than foreground to my developing inquiry, I present these threads here because of their powerfully formative role in my thinking and my ongoing scholarly agenda.

I was particularly interested in the settler-colonial (Barker, 2009; Lawson & Johnston, 2000; Sugars, 2002) context of the geopolitical space we call Canada. I explored these ideas in a course with Roxana Ng,[7] who embodied interdisciplinary thinking, critical reflection and emancipatory pedagogical practice.[8] In this course I learned about political-economic influences which resulted in the Cold War taking precedence over decolonization during the twentieth century (Kelly & Kaplan, 2004; Louis & Robinson, 2004). An approach suggested by Wolfe (2004) seemed promising. He suggested that an effective strategy for "denaturaliz[ing] the Western world view" was to show how its universals are products of historical and cultural experience (2004, p. 113). These insights helped me begin to notice the historical and cultural specificity of the sample test

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[6] Scott analyzes colonialism as a political rationality rather than a form of epistemic violence or an attitude which relies on exclusionary discourses. His attention is directed at how "colonial power is organized as an activity designed to produce effects of rule. More specifically, what I mean to illuminate are what I call the *targets* of colonial power (the point or points of power's application; the object or objects it aims at; and the means and instrumentalities it deploys in search of these targets, points and objects) and the *field* of its operation (the zone that it actively constructs for its functionality)" (Scott, 2005, p. 25). This approach has informed my own understanding of the problematization of literacy as a marker of civilization during the consolidation of Canada as a settler territory; as outlined in section 3.1 of the next chapter.

[7] The course, offered in 2010 by the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, was called "Post-Colonial Relations and Transformative Education."

[8] Dr. Ng died suddenly in January 2013; she will be greatly missed.

items in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS); how the test assumed a consumer immersed in capitalist relations.

Wolfe's (2004) insistence that settler colonies are not the same as indigenous ones (p. 113) encouraged me to pursue my interest in settler-invader colonialism in Canada. His acknowledgement of the central role of gender in imperial relations, particularly Joan Scott's point that gender is "a way of encoding power relations" (2004, p. 115), reminded me that I was curious about why literacy workers are overwhelmingly women. On one level I knew that the low status and low pay helped to account for it being a female-dominated workforce. However, I wondered about power dynamics related to the gendered nature of the field, particularly because most literacy workers are white women. I wondered whether there was something about the "helping" nature of the work that replicates some aspects of the civilizing mission ideology. I would later revisit these ideas when reading the work of Razack (1998), Heron (2007), and Thobani (2007).

To find a way in to the links between literacy and colonization I took a history seminar with Sean Hawkins, "Africa: Writing, History and Colonialism." The readings for this course introduced me to historical ethnographies of missionary education (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Harries, 2007), to critiques of the literacy thesis (Barber, 2007; Finnegan, 2007) and to analyses of the imbrications of literacy and power (Blommaert, 2008; Mignolo, 2003; Mitchell, 1988). Even more significant for my purposes—as will become apparent in the analysis of my ethnographic data—I was introduced to Mahmood (2005). Her problematization of liberal understandings of autonomous individuality gave me theoretical tools to understand how subjects' actions and desires are produced in a range of contexts and under diverse forms of authority. Such scholarship offered examples of how to analyze literacy events as situated in specific historical, geopolitical and political-economic contexts; Hawkins' (2002) own work reminded me that even in coercive contexts, imposed literacies don't usually succeed in completely supplanting local practices.

I was also excited to discover, in Mitchell's (1988) *Colonizing Egypt*, Foucault's (1977, 1981) ideas about modern strategies of control. Mitchell (1988) argued that

representations, including statistics, were mechanisms used to enframe, contain and manage colonial subjects in order to "infiltrate, re-order and colonise" (p. 35). To investigate these questions further I read postcolonial analyses of the role of statistics in the British Raj, such as Appadurai (1996) and Kalpagam (2000). These works led me to histories of statistics which traced the role of eugenics in its development (MacKenzie, 1981; Porter, 1986) but also to Hacking (1991, 2000, 2002), who noted how categories delimit how we think of ourselves and others. I had found a theoretical home for my interest in the power of statistics.

After these extensive and stimulating sorties, I turned my attention back to adult literacy and once again chafed at disciplinary boundaries. Adult education scholarship was disappointing. It seemed to either push aside critical analysis or to descend into battles over interpretations of orthodoxies; it either naturalized literacy or viewed adult basic education as unworthy of scholarly attention. Nor did I seem to belong in policy studies, as I was more interested in what policies were doing in the world than in how they were developed. It was clear to me that I would die of boredom trying to trace all of the minutiae of wording changes in Ontario's evolving adult literacy policies, so I was excited to discover that a broader analysis of policy was possible. In Roland Sintos Coloma's Foucault course I was introduced to Scheurich (1994); he used a Foucaultian archaeological approach to analyze the "social regularities" produced or reproduced in and through policies. Scheurich stated that such regularities are not necessarily consciously or intentionally produced by "a fully self-aware subjectivity that manages those productive and reproductive processes" (1994, p. 302) and noted that although "no particular individual or group consciously created [regularities]. This does not mean… that no individual or group may not benefit from the regularities" (1994, p. 301).

I didn't feel that I fit with literacy studies; too often it seemed to neglect the broader historical and political-economic contexts within which literacy was situated. That said, I found literacy historian Harvey Graff's observation that "the dominant employment of literacy has been conservative, regardless of promises to the contrary" (1995, p. 49) to be tremendously useful. His analysis of the moral bases of literacy in developing Ontario's system of public education (1979) has been central to my analysis. I was also heartened

to discover the work of Collins and Blot (2003), both anthropologists, who stated that issues of power are often neglected in ethnographies of literacy practices and events. Finally, I was pleased to discover that Richard Darville—whom I had known for many years through our involvement in a national organization, the Movement for Canadian Literacy—was using Institutional Ethnography to argue that the international statistics were creating flexibility as an attribute of ideal workers (1999), and that policies were systematically obscuring practitioner knowledge and experience (1995, 2009, 2011).

In other words, I have been an omnivorous scholar. My work is an amalgam of insights gleaned from historians, anthropologists, linguists, educators and sociologists, without being neatly positioned within any of these disciplines. My research is situated in an open space, and I hope that it will create openings for future investigations of how shifting problematizations connect local and global practices. I also hope that it can offer something to the field of practice whose dilemmas were the starting-point for this inquiry, though my contribution may not be the solution that my colleagues and informants might have hoped for.

2.2   Dwelling on the Edge

In the formal proposal for my thesis research, approved by my committee in October of 2010, one of my four research questions was, "How are community literacy workers positioned to bring particular assumptions to their work?" This question arises from my own experience in adult literacy work in Ontario, and my reflections about the demographics of the field. In this section I discuss shifts in how my positioning on the edge of literacy work both enabled and sometimes constrained my unfolding analysis.

For many years I had been curious about the working conditions in different jurisdictions across Canada and what effect those conditions have on the field and on the work. For example, I knew a few decades ago that in British Columbia many literacy workers were full-time unionized instructors working in community colleges while in Alberta most were part-time workers who coordinated programs from offices in their homes. When I was involved with planning the national project to study adult literacy research in Canada (Horsman & Woodrow, 2006) I insisted that the study had to include a description of the

working conditions and funding structures in each jurisdiction. The final report of that project reports that the "the majority of adult literacy educators in Canada are women" (Woodrow, 2006, p. 30) who "have multiple responsibilities" in their positions yet have "little access to meaningful professional development" (2006, p. 27). These educators work in isolation "for low wages, often on a part-time basis, in very insecure jobs" (2006, p. 26). In some regions such working conditions lead to high turnover, but they also raise questions about who is able, and unable, to work under such conditions.

In the summer of 2001 I audited Mary Hamilton's "Introduction to Theories of Literacy as Social Practice," a summer offering at OISE. In that course, I became aware that many of my contemporaries who considered themselves critical practitioners had entered the field because they loved reading and wanted to share that gift. This revelation surprised me, because I had assumed that they had been motivated by an interest in connections between teaching and social justice issues. I knew that few of my white colleagues were aware of the connections between literacy and colonialism, but thought they would have known about inequities in access to education. I had assumed that most would have entered the field with a more critical perspective and a desire to help people disadvantaged by their struggles with print. I knew that most literacy workers were white women, but I began to wonder about what other characteristics they shared.

On a more intangible level I had been curious for a long time about the liberal interpretation of Freire that informed critical adult literacy work in Toronto. Between 1985 and 1992, my co-workers and I often wrestled with how to apply a Freirian perspective to our context, which was so different from that in which Freire worked. We hoped that our work was emancipatory in spirit, and we were critical of volunteers in the program who wanted to help or change students they worked with; at the same time we began to ask ourselves what to do when we noticed that our own actions arose from what Heron (2007) calls a "helping imperative" rather than an emancipatory one. At the same time we noticed that students' lives were not significantly transformed by their participation in the program, even if their reading and writing improved dramatically. During this period I also noticed myself thinking how much I learned from my involvement in adult literacy work. Among other things I learned about how language,

literacy and education are used to marginalize particular communities, about how deeply political education can be, and about how much I, as someone who has never struggled with print, take for granted. When I was a program coordinator I was uneasy if I noticed that a learning partnership was teaching the tutor more than the student. And yet I often found myself stating that I loved the work because of how much I learned from it. This experience left me curious about who benefits from this type of community work, and how it came to be that the effects on bourgeois subjects such as myself seemed to hold more value than other impacts.

For me these questions came to a head when project funding for *Literacies* was interrupted. I began to think that perhaps it was unrealistic of me to think that I could work in adult literacy because I was the sole income-earner in my lesbian household; this in turn made me wonder whether adult literacy work is really only possible for middle-class married women whose partners provide the family's primary income. I connected these questions to postcolonial and post-structural analyses of bourgeois women's subjectivities, starting with Stoler's (1990) analysis of how discourses about race and gender were central to constructing the "categories of colonizer and colonized" (p. 62). She argued that racial categories and hierarchies were maintained through "a middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalized sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed 'milieu' in school and home" (1990, p. 105); bourgeois women "were cast as the custodians of morality, of their vulnerable men, and of national character" (1990, p. 135), both in colonies and in the metropole. Thobani (2007) argued that, in the case of Canada, white women have played the role of enforcing racialized norms of citizenship.

Combined with Shore's (2009) argument that literacy surveys are "racial projects," this work led me to see that the current problematization of literacy constructs poor and unemployed subjects as a threat to neoliberal globalization (Tikly, 2009) and literacy workers as responsible for containing that threat. I found examples of middle-class women taking on the work of shaping ideal subjects in Valverde's (1991) study of Victorian-era moral reform in Canada and Iacovetta's (2006) analysis of settlement work in Toronto during the Cold War era. Heron's (2007) study of white women development

workers revealed that white women's relative power and privilege depends upon them being "good" (p. 53). She argued that the imperative to intervene in the Global South was a central component of "white middle-classness in the late twentieth century" which relies on a "national story…of colonial and imperial innocence" (2007, p. 37). Heron argued that white women development workers re-enact the story of innocence when they describe their interest in development work as motivated by social justice; understanding their motivations in this way allows them to "construct [them]selves as moral subjects" (2007, p. 134) while justifying their role in the domination inherent in development work.

Heron's work helped me to ask what role discourses of "progress" play in forming white subjects, and how Canada's national story of innocence makes it difficult for white Canadian subjects to see how we are implicated in practices of domination. The national story of innocence may also explain why so many white literacy workers believe in advocating for government policies to support literacy work.[9] Believing that the nation is innocent of practices of domination combined with a liberal belief that "democracy" means "government by and for the people" may make it very difficult to critically examine how literacy may be operating to reinforce racialized and gendered inequities. Perhaps a commitment to social justice hinders, rather than supports, critical examination of how one's work is implicated in practices of domination. I began to wonder whether, in the context of a national story of innocence, a commitment to social justice allows subjects to evade critical examination of what their work is producing. On the other hand, there are literacy workers who *do* question the national story of innocence and *are* committed to social justice. How do they make sense of the way that government policies constrain and control, rather than support, their social justice aspirations? What are they able to do within the sense that they make of these limiting policies?

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[9] The national story of innocence has been seriously undermined in recent years as critical discussion of the residential school system has moved into the mainstream. However, the federal government's formal apology may have served to reinstate the story: It positions settler society as moral because the apology is a symbolic attempt to right historic wrongs, simultaneously positioning indigenous protests and assertions of sovereignty as immoral because they indicate lack of respect for the rule of law and a lack of forgiveness. In not substantially altering existing relations of power and knowledge, the apology made contrition 'safe' for settler subjects without threatening any material aspects of their privilege. (For further discussion of the apology, see Henderson & Wakeham, 2009; Subašić & Reynolds, 2009).

At several points in my thesis journey I thought that my analysis of literacy workers might be able to focus on what it meant that most literacy workers are white and middle-class, and how their role as helping professionals was related to their subjectivities. I thought that my research might offer a historical meta-analysis that could foreground some of the sources of front-line educators' frustrations. I also thought my research might critically examine what role literacy workers were playing in white settler nationalism.

I position myself as both similar to and different from other literacy workers in the province. While I share the gender, race and class position of many women who work in this field, I was not raised in North America, I am lesbian and I do not have the financial stability of many married straight women. These aspects of my identity do affect how I relate to processes of subjectivation. Growing up in the Global South as the daughter of a United Nations statistician nurtured consciousness of white privilege and awareness of the historical roots of global inequities. The culture shock I experienced when my family returned to North America made me deeply aware of the power of norms to shape subjects' actions. Coming out as a lesbian in the early years of AIDS made me aware of myself as a subject with "specific articulations of volition, emotion, reason, and bodily expression" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 23) that were quite distinct from dominant discourses which pronounced me wrong and celebrated the death of members of my community. These experiences are part of what makes me mistrustful of governmental interest in articulating norms of "literacy" and what makes me question whether literacy programs operate to assimilate rather than educate. My experiences have sometimes led me to feel that I understand the world differently and to feel separate from other literacy workers. These experiences shaped invisible differences, which means that I do belong in some important ways but also that I am sometimes misrecognized.

2.3   Adapting and Learning

When I began doctoral studies, I knew that I was interested in how literacy is naturalized, and how power operates in and through literacy. I knew that I wanted to investigate how adult literacy work had been changed since policies had been introduced in Ontario. Through my own experiences, both as a front-line educator and as editor of *Literacies*, I knew that mounting reporting requirements were causing immense frustration in the field,

mostly because literacy workers felt that such work added administrative burdens and took time away from teaching and supporting learners. I took this frustration as the starting-point of my inquiry.

At first I thought that my inquiry would be an Institutional Ethnography (IE), because I viewed the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) as coordinating literacy policies in many locales, and activating what Smith (1999) terms "the ruling relations." At that point I understood the OECD's statistical framings as an ideological practice that bolstered neoliberalism; in my view, policy based on this ideology was supplanting a view of literacy as embedded in social relationships, and was serving particular interests. The proposal submitted to my committee stated that my aim was, as Smith (2005) put it, to "substruct" adult literacy work and "go beyond [the apparently ordinary word, literacy]… to envisage the socially organized activities that make its sense" (p. 132). I planned to investigate what social relations are expressed by the dominant conceptions of adult literacy in Ontario, how front-line literacy workers become enrolled in the process of mediating the social relations of neocolonialism in the province of Ontario, and how their actions and options are connected to their subjectivities and to the dominant discourses about literacy. An IE approach allowed me to be clear that my research began from the real-world problem of practitioners' frustration, and from their standpoint.

Before long, however, I realized that IE would not permit me to do some of the things I had hoped to do. In particular it did not allow me to historicize the current problematization of literacy, nor to analyze how literacy workers understand themselves. Many IE studies examine in detail how "boss texts" coordinate people's everyday actions; but my interest was broader than a detailed study of how Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills policy shaped the daily practices of adult literacy workers. The focus on current policy and practice would not, in my view, allow for analysis of governments' persistent historical interest in adult literacy. Its focus on processes of coordination, though it draws attention to the effects of actions beyond the ones front-line workers can immediately perceive, did not seem to allow me to examine how literacy workers understand themselves and the work they engage in. Also, it was not clear to me how an IE analysis would allow me to analyze disobediences; its focus on coordination attends

primarily to the invisible work of boss texts and seemed to leave little room for me to also examine what literacy workers did that was resisting the boss.

I wanted to investigate what the OECD's neoliberal definition of literacy has meant for subjects in one particular geopolitical space who are deemed, by statistics, to possess inadequate amounts of this thing called literacy. I wanted to explore what kinds of pressures it has put on educators who work in programs that pre-date this definition, programs established ostensibly to offer adults opportunities to learn the things that *they* want to learn. Overall, then, my interest was in the traces of power in the neoliberal quantification of literacy, especially its construction of a threshold between being literate and "not literate enough." Doing justice to such an inquiry required that I situate the current problematization of literacy historically and contextually; it also required me to attend to how the current subject position of "literacy worker" has been produced; and it required me to interview subjects to find out how they understand themselves and their work, and to ask how they are negotiating the imperatives of neoliberalism.

For me, the work of Foucault not only offered analytic tools through which to consider literacy as a form of conduct, it also provided a methodological approach for attending to how normative literate conduct has shifted over time, and to the specific historical, social and economic contexts in which such conduct is constituted. Foucault asserted that a defining characteristic of the modern era is that the "fact of living" (1990, p. 142) entered politics and became a target of transformation. In modern power, the "ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (1990, p. 138); this is bio-power. Capitalism would not have developed, he argued, without mechanisms for increasing the number of bodies available, able and willing to work. Thus "economic processes" (1990, p. 141) are supported by "numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (1990, p. 140), including efforts to eliminate "degenerates" and "abnormals" in order to strengthen the population as a whole. In the new capitalist regime, the threat was not from "political adversaries, but those identified as external and internal threats to the population" (Stoler, 1995, p. 85). Bio-power authorizes the state to act as the "protector of social purifications" (1995, p. 81).

According to Foucault, power in modern societies is a set of "mechanisms…addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used" (Foucault, 1990, p. 147). In the modern era power operates by "optimiz[ing] forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern" (1990, p. 141). This *disciplinary* power works to "qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize" in order to "distribut[e] the living in the domain of value and utility" (1990, p. 144). By drawing attention to actions that do not fit, established norms structure what choices are available for individual subjects as they act to constitute themselves.

Foucault stated that he hoped to "loose[n]… the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things"(1972, p. 49); rather than seeing *discourses* as "a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and…a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (langue)" (1972, p. 48), they should be understood as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, p. 49). In a later interview, Foucault states:

> I do not question discourses about their silently intended meanings, but about the fact and the conditions of their manifest appearance; not about the contents which they may conceal, but about the transformations which they have effected; not about the sense preserved within them like a perpetual origin, but about the field where they coexist, reside and disappear. It is a question of an analysis of the discourses in the dimension of their exteriority. (Foucault, 1991b, p. 60)

That is, he is interested in trying to understand what discourses are doing in the world: not only what field they exist within, what conditions led to their emergence, and what changes they have brought about. To draw attention to the fact that discourses shape what it is possible for people to think, know and do—and to name the process of subjecting people to dominant discourses—Foucault uses the term *subject*. He (1977) claims that the creation of individuality is central to the workings of power in modern societies. He argued that techniques used to establish and differentiate individuals—namely hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examinations—are used to calculate

the present and future worth of subjects. Norms offer a means of establishing hierarchies because they allow distinctions among individuals "within a system of formal equality" (1977, p. 184). In "Docile Bodies" he described the mechanisms and techniques that reshaped and reconstructed human bodies, social spaces, time, work and knowledge in the modern era.

Spivak's (1993) "More on Power/Knowledge" helped to deepen my understanding of how discourses form subjects. Spivak points out that all words have histories and that language has patterns that were laid down before we were born. Not that languages don't change over time, but that we learn the languages that surround us, we use those languages and then we leave them, therefore any word that we use carries "traces of the empirical" (1993, p. 28). Spivak notes the importance of bracketing names in order to pay attention to the fact that we each hold specific associations and attribute particular meanings to every word that we use.

To highlight these limits Spivak adopts the term *catechresis* to mean "proximate naming" (1993, p. 26). She states that Foucault's use of the term *power* is one example, arguing that Foucault has been misunderstood because liberal humanists tend not to pay attention to how deeply his work questions the limits of knowing. Liberal misreadings of Foucault occur because people assume that there is a "naturalized referent" for the word "power." Spivak asserts that Foucault used the word "power" as catechresis, to name the "mechanism ...[used] as a grid of intelligibility of the social order" (1993, p. 26). However, by using a word with such strong empirical traces Foucault "produces power 'in the general sense'" (1993, p. 28) and the complexities of the operation of force relations become obscured. Spivak suggests adopting the metaphor of electrical polarities to discuss force relations: this metaphor offers an image of the intensity of that force, while avoiding the common moral judgements about productive power as "good" and repressive power as "bad."

Rather than "naturalizing the force field and constituting it as an object of investigation" (1993, p. 33) Spivak asserts that we should investigate the local foci of *pouvoir/savoir*. To understand what that might mean Spivak proposes a different translation of Foucault's

term *pouvoir/savoir*. She points out that the French word *pouvoir* means both power and "can-do-ness," and suggests we understand *pouvoir/savoir* as "being able to do something—only as you are able to make sense of it" (1993, p. 34) rather than the more commonly used "power/knowledge." As an example of how these force relations operate on subjects Spivak discusses what actions are produced by different ideas about exogamous marriage. She argues that ideas about women being transferred from the care of their father to the care of their husbands produces stable marriage, while the idea that marriage is about finding a soul mate produces perceived freedom in women's fulfillment. Neither is "better"; in both situations people use tactics, experience pain and encounter "terminals of resistance" (1993, p. 35). Spivak's translation of power/knowledge makes the link between discourses and subjectivities very clear to me because it explicitly states that ontology and action are connected. What meaning can subjectivity have apart from its material manifestations? Are subjectivities something other than human actions and tactics in the world?

I understand the relationship between discourses or governing rationalities and subject formation as dynamic rather than deterministic. In this I draw on Foucault's interest in how subjects are formed in discourse—the interlacing of knowledge and power—and in how the formation of subjects is tied to the workings of power. Because of his interest in descent and emergence rather than origins, tradition and continuity, Foucault's approach allows space for people to respond to the web of power in which they are enmeshed. As Loomba (2005) argues, his conception allows for "an account of the mundane and daily ways in which power is enacted and contested, and allows an analysis which focuses on individuals as active subjects, as agents rather than as passive dupes" (p. 34). These ideas have been taken up by a number of scholars whose work has informed my approach. Hacking (2002) for example, uses the term "dynamic nominalism" to describe the interaction between naming and being. He argues that what it is possible for humans to be and to do is affected by how we classify and name, and yet the way that people are "made up" through classifications is not only a result of the descriptive nature of categorization; it also reflects the spaces of possibility that are opened up or foreclosed by these categories.

Subjects are formed within epistemological orders that delimit what it is possible to know and to think and therefore what it is possible to do. The epistemological order takes shape through the interaction between knowledge and power; this articulation often evolves through continuities and ruptures. Although dominant discourse is forceful and serves to subordinate other knowledges, it is most often an aggregation of understandings rather than a thing which was deliberately produced to establish or maintain relations of power. Dominant framings *do* get mobilized for particular ends, particularly by institutions and groups that benefit from a particular epistemological order and the hierarchies that its norms naturalize.[10] However, sometimes subjects also think of themselves in ways that are quite different from how they are shaped to think of themselves, and subjects sometimes act in ways that are counter to the framings of the epistemological order. That is, subjects are creative[11] in performing and hybridizing their identities; the fundamental hopefulness of this perspective is why I am drawn to poststructural scholarship.

Rose (1996c) argued that humans live within multiple "practices that address them in different ways" (p. 140), so are constantly negotiating "contestation, conflict and opposition" (p. 141). He used the metaphor of vectors and his image is that subjects are "the target of a multiplicity of types of work, more like a latitude or a longitude at which different vectors of different speeds intersect" (1996c, p. 142). This view was adopted by scholars who found that traditional leftist notions of ideology as oppressive disregard the role of the unconscious, but also that traditional psychology failed to account for how the unconscious is shaped by the social and cultural context in which individuals are located. Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, and Walkerdine (1998) suggested that it is more productive to consider how desires are shaped within norms and social practices. In this

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[10] I am intrigued by Edwards' (2008) suggestion that it might be useful to "position change agents in organizational and political life as *discourse technologists* whose task is to re-code the meaning of practices. Here the direction and processes of change are formed through the attempted production of a shared ethic, in effect a set of shared meanings, that… inscribes shared desires, goals and aspirations" (p. 29). At first glance this seems like a useful way to frame how actors attempt to intervene in power relations.

[11] For the notion of subjects' creativity I am indebted to Li's reading of Rose's (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought.* Li stated that Rose articulates a "worthy research agenda" which he chooses not to pursue, one that will "examine the ways in which creativity arises out of the situation of human beings engaged in particular relations of force and meaning, and what is made out of the possibilities of that location" (Rose, 1999, p. 279 in Li, 2007, p. 27).

they drew on Rose's suggestion that seemingly oppressive myths, such as the idea of women having a "maternal instinct," should be investigated as a form of social regulation (1982, p. 86, cited in Henriques, et al., 1998, p. 214). Rose argued that social regulation works productively by "defining the parameters and content of choice, fixing how we come to want what we want" (Henriques, et al., 1998, p. 214). In this view, pleasures become instrumentalized and social regulation operates through desires.

Butler (1997) noted that there is a central paradox in subject formation: power not only forms us but also vitally shapes how we understand ourselves and what actions and possibilities are open to us. She argued that the production of subjects is not mechanical because "power can be thwarted at the site of its application" (2004, p. 187). Here it is helpful to remember Spivak's metaphor of electrical polarity in order to keep in mind that this shifting power is not itself a thing. Viewed in this way, power is a force that can be "compelled into a redirection" and that sometimes "changes course, proliferates, becomes more diffuse" (1993, p. 187). Identities, in this perspective, can be understood as a constant negotiation "using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Hall declared that our sense of ourselves consists in "what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (loc. cit.). In other words, he urged us to focus on how individual subjects do or do not identify with "the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions" (1996, p. 14). In this Hall drew on Butler's notion of subject formation as performative.

The urge for self-preservation may encourage subjects to conform to the coercions and limits imposed by dominant discourse, but Butler also argued that such submission can lead to revolt. At times, subjects may attempt to maintain their sense of themselves through actions based on different ideas of what is possible or impossible or what is true or false. Such actions might be hard for others to understand but could also give us "critical distance on the terms that decide our being" (Butler, 2004, p. 193). In this she seems to be extending Foucault's notion that we could break free of the means of our subjection if we could imagine different ways of being. As he put it, perhaps our current

task is "not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" and to "imagine and build up what we could be" (Foucault, 1982, p. 785).

These conceptions of the connections between discursive regularities and subjects have supported me in asking how ideas about literacy—and what counts as knowledge about how to measure, assess and improve literacy—are related to economic and political structures. Using a poststructural understanding of the connection between knowledge and power has made it possible for me to begin to decompose the ways that literacy is naturalized and to consider why, and how, "being literate" is an individual attribute that has importance beyond the level of the individual. These ideas have also allowed me to understand the force of the norm of being literate and to examine how—and why—that norm could prompt subjects to take on the long, hard work of becoming literate, or the work of teaching someone else to become a "literate" subject. Finally, these ideas have supported me in considering how the work of teaching people to become literate is connected to workings of power and desire, often in ways that run counter to the aspirations of individual literacy teachers or their understanding of what it means to do such work.

Conceiving of literacy as a form of conduct has allowed me to analyze how discourses about literacy have operated in the world: how they have naturalized the idea that subjects should be "literate" and been used to change individuals, cultures and societies in the interests of "progress," "development" and "modernization." My interest in the material impact of discourse also accounts for why I am dissatisfied with much discourse analysis, which seems focused on speculation about hidden contents and "silently intended meanings."

The concept of governmentality draws attention to the "self in the world" as "a relation to an always open and ever-changing complex social whole, itself structured by relations of power, and necessitating techniques of governance" (Olssen, 2009, p. 91). This notion draws attention to the particular "social-institutional and political contexts" (2009, p. 91) and historical moments within which processes of subjectivation occur. I want to acknowledge here that individuals who are not fluent in the dominant literacy *do* want to

gain that capacity; they are interested in conducting themselves in a more literate fashion. In my view, their desire arises in part because literacy is so naturalized, but also because of the pervasive and central role of print in contemporary lives. Adults who struggle with print not only want to make sure that they can access their rights, and want to have power in how print used to administer their lives; they know that they are outside and want access to the some of the pleasures, some of the non-instrumental uses of literacy. However, their desires may not always match political rationalities, as several informants noted in my interviews.

That is, I have drawn on Foucault's insight that modern forms of power work by eliciting specific behaviours, that bodies are the site at which power is transferred, and that power/knowledge only becomes material through what bodies do. Governmentality analysis has allowed me to explore the relationships between subjectivities and to investigate how subjects are "able to do something—only as [they] are able to make sense of it" (Spivak, 1993, p. 34). Using governmentality analytic has allowed me to understand the relation of oneself to one's literacy as a political relationship. In this, I draw on Cruikshank's (1996) observation about the governing effects of self-esteem as normative conduct; that the "goal is to deepen the reach of tutelary power intended to enhance the subjectivity of citizens" (p. 247). A governmentality lens has allowed me to focus on what mechanisms exist to elicit literate conduct, and what problematizations and governing rationalities justify those technologies of rule. It has allowed me to ask what different ideas about literacy *produce*, in the general population, in subjects deemed unable to perform this form of conduct, and in subjects who have become literacy workers.

Through a governmentality lens I came to understand neoliberalism as a form of governance, a means of shaping the conduct of conduct, rather than a set of policies or an ideology. This is in contrast to viewing neoliberalism as a set of policies or an ideology as other critics of IALS suggest (Darville, 1999, 2011; Rubenson, 2008; Walker, 2009b). Neoliberal governmentality has been characterized by marketization and responsibilization and constructs and requires autonomous, responsibilized and entrepreneurial subjects who invest in themselves as human capital. At the heart of these

transformations are authoritarian practices, particularly towards those who will not or cannot inhabit the new norms, those who become visible because they are not behaving as autonomous, entrepreneurial subjects.

The power dynamics at play in the current problematization of literacy became visible through governmentality analysis; as these dynamics became more clear to me I became more clear about how this research might operate as a sortie, a move "from a besieged place to attack the besiegers" (Dictionary.com Unabridged, n.d.). The military metaphor is hardly a coincidence; it brought to mind Foucault's (1982) insight that power is less a thing than a relationship, one in which actors are engaged in a "permanent provocation" consisting of "reciprocal incitation and struggle" (p. 790). And it signals that my analysis was deeply informed by works which paid attention to how practices of accounting and calculation effectively avert political struggle (Barry, 2005; Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Rose, 1996a) and embed authoritarian practices within advanced liberal governance (Dean, 2010; Ilcan & Lacey, 2011).

Like much governmentality scholarship, my research adopts a genealogical approach which can "demonstrate that power exists in many locations and practices" (Ilcan & Lacey, 2011, p. 24). Foucault asserts that his genealogical approach can contribute insights about the

> historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge… historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others… [and] historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents. (Foucault, 1984b, p. 351)

That is—who we are is related to how we understand ourselves, who we are in relation to others, and what ethical ideas guide our actions.

My view is that genealogical analysis can offer insights that directly address the kinds of dilemmas which my research was seeking to understand. Genealogy stands in contrast to traditional historical analysis in that it does not search for origins or assume that events

proceed in linear regularity towards an ideal that may be realized at some point in the future (1984a). Foucault argued that such notions of history, and tendencies to think in unitary and totalizing terms, have been "a hindrance to research" (1981, p. 81). He noted that philosophy's focus on ontology "allows us to avoid an analysis of practice" (1972, p. 204) and that historical work which searches for origins effectively turns analytic attention away from the material world. In effect, such works maintain relations of domination because they fail to analyze how knowledge and power are interconnected. He argued for historical analysis as "countermemory" (1984a, p. 93) which could analyze the status quo in order to critically question how it operates.[12] Such "effective history" would avoid speculation and idealism and focus instead on tracing the lineage of specific ideas, and the conditions in which they emerge. In particular, he stressed the importance of paying attention to the struggles whereby some forms of knowledge become dominant and push aside "particular, local, regional knowledge" (1981, p. 82). Foucault adopted the term "genealogy" to describe such work and stated that this type of analysis consists of "painstaking recovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts" (1981, p. 82). He argued that this approach draws attention to the contingent and constructed nature of dominant forms of truth.

A history of the present makes it possible to consider the relationship between forms of truth and forms of practices; such work is "an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse…a challenge directed to what is" (Foucault, 1991, p. 84). What genealogical analysis allows, in other words, is attention to the situated, contingent and specific nature of the present and of common-sense notions. As Dean (2010) puts it, genealogy is "the patient labour of historico-political analysis and a contestation of existing narratives" (p. 61); what it can offer is to "track a kind of history of the conditions of our political reason" (2010, pp. 60-61). Furthermore, genealogical analysis makes it possible to consider what kinds of subjects, relationships and forms of power were produced by different ideas about literacy.

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[12] Had my research been situated within historical sociology I would have referred to the fuller discussion of this question contained in Dean's (1994) *Critical and effective histories: Foucault's methods and historical sociology.* As it is, this book remains on a list of works I hope to read in the near future.

In this thesis, I have used tools of genealogical-ethnographic (Brady, 2011; Tamboukou, 2003; Tamboukou & Ball, 2003) analysis to explore the relations among the various elements of this complex assemblage and to explore the dynamics in operation in this place. Genealogical analysis is often employed in governmentality studies to examine the technologies which regulate individual conduct as an element of the aggregated population, but also to consider how reality is "rendered thinkable" (Rose, 1996b, p. 42) in ways that make it subject to political processes.[13] Genealogical analyses often examine the particular "social-institutional and political contexts" (Olssen, 2009, p. 91) and historical moments within which processes of subjectivation occur. My work takes up the suggestion from O'Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997) that "many [governmental] programmes exist only in the process of messy implementation" (p. 512) and that "relations of contest or struggle…are constitutive of government" (1997, p. 505). My research explored several dimensions of the complex and multi-layered assemblage currently in place in Ontario, asking what is being constructed by the ways that adult literacy is problematized at present, and how differently-positioned subjects are acting.

To critically engage with how subjects understand themselves and their actions and experiences, I turned to scholarly literature which probed the relationship between discourses, actions and ethics. I began from Foucault's notion of the "ethic of concern of care for the self as a practice of freedom" (1997b). For me, this idea is an important reminder that subjects are not determined by discourse. Rather, we have space to act and our selves are constituted through how we perform our identities. For example, as Zackrisson and Assarsson (2008) found, while adult education instructors in Sweden are expected to "chang[e] people in prescribed directions," adult students do not necessarily "interpret[t] knowledge and learning" in the same way, nor hold dominant notions about "the use of education" (p. 122). When personal rationalities and governing mentalities

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[13] The full quote is: "The translation of political programmes articulated in rather general terms—national efficiency, democracy, equality, enterprise—into ways of seeking to exercise authority over persons, places and activities in specific locales and practices. The translation of thought and action from a 'centre of calculation' into a diversity of locales dispersed across a territory—translation in the sense of movement from one place to another. Through a multitude of such mobile relays, relations are established between those who are spatially and temporally separated, and between events and decisions in spheres that none the less retain their formal autonomy." (Rose 1996b p. 43)

conflicted, adult students "often found strategies to work discourse to their own ends" (2008, p. 124).

In other words, how subjects choose to act is neither determined by discourse nor simply a matter of obeying or resisting norms. What is operating is more than what Althusser termed interpellation: the process by which discourses and practices "speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses" (Hall, 1996, p. 5). Mahmood (2005) argued that "the terms people use to organize their lives are not simply a gloss for universally shared assumptions about the world and one's place in it, but are actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge and experience" (p. 16). She suggested that we examine the relationship between what subjects do, what form of authority informs their actions, and how their subjectivity manifests "specific articulations of volition, emotion, reason, and bodily expression" (2005, p. 23). By paying attention to specific details about "the different modalities of agency involved in enacting, transgressing, or inhabiting ethical norms and moral principles," it becomes possible to "analyz[e] the *work* that discursive practices perform in making possible particular kinds of subjects" (2005, p. 188). Mahmood concluded that research must "interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including desire for submission to recognized authority" (2005, p. 15).

For Coloma (2008), a constitutive approach to subject formation "names, claims, and creates bridges across our multiple, complicated, and even competing selves" (p. 21). His approach built on feminists of colour Anzaldúa (1987) and Lorde (1984), who foregrounded issues of power and complexity, multiplicity and historical situatedness. Coloma argued that we relate to our subject positions through both "self-identification and interpellation by others" and that these constructions always depend on discourses that "are grounded within particular socio-cultural, historical, and geographical contexts" (2008, p. 20).

Understanding subjectivity as constitutive makes it possible to understand complexity in ourselves and others; such a view foregrounds how possibilities for action are organized both by external forces and the internal processes we undergo in response to those forces.

If this is so, how can we make sense of ourselves and our actions? For Valverde (2004), personal truth-telling "to probe our actions and to account for them" (p. 71) could make visible how everyday actions require complex negotiations. A process of dialogue, either with ourselves or with others, requires "a certain critical attitude with which to live and to keep questioning the world and oneself while living" (2004, p. 87). Such dialogue would be an ethical practice, but it could also deepen our understanding of subjectivities as composed of "many different kinds of selves" which "easily coexist, even in the same person" (2004, p. 73). Furthermore, research documenting the "ethical dilemmas, wishes and fears" (2004, p. 88) on which we base our actions could contribute to a deeper understanding of subjectivities as multiple, complex and contingent. Taken together, the works these works allow me to pay attention to how my informants' sense of themselves as literacy workers is constantly being negotiated; it also helps me analyze what makes it possible for literacy workers to persist in work under conditions that are can be extremely "difficult and painful" (Coloma, 2008).

2.4   Methodology: Connecting with Informants

My attention is directed specifically to one element in this assemblage: the community-based literacy programs established in 1970s and 1980s. More particularly, my research focuses on the responses of women who work in these programs to the demands placed on them by the current problematization enacted through the current provincial Literacy and Basic Skills policy. I chose to not only analyze documents and discourses, but also to interview women who work in community-based programs across the province. I also note that my research is a snapshot of a particular moment (2011-2012); I acknowledge that things are constantly in motion—though my interest is in the operation of some of the broad tendencies at work in this period.

Early on, I decided that this research would focus on workers in community-based programs. I chose to focus on community-based programs in part because it is the sector I am most familiar with, but also because these are the programs mandated to work with adults who face the greatest struggles with print. I was also interested in these programs because the rationale for establishing them was to respond to the local community's literacy needs. The Literacy and Basic Skills program funds basic-level adult literacy in

community-based programs, and adult upgrading in school boards and community colleges. I knew that the vast majority of workers in these programs were women. Since part of my curiosity was about the gendered nature of the field, I limited my study to women.

From field-based studies (Crooks et al., 2008; Woodrow, 2006; Grieve, 2006) and my experience as editor of *Literacies*, I knew that the literacy field felt thwarted by current policies. This study does not aim to investigate the extent of frustration among community-based literacy workers, nor to propose solutions that would ease their aggravation. Instead, it investigates their frustration, which I understand to be as an indication that community-based programs are a site of struggle. I use my informants' frustrations as the starting-point for my inquiries,[14] asking how the disconnects are put together, how they operate and what they reveal. The frustrations they articulated are not unique to Ontario, though they take a particular shape here.

To identify potential informants I sent an email to all of the literacy networks in the province. A list of the networks is included as Appendix A. My email (Appendix B) briefly outlined the study and asked the networks to help by distributing my call for informants, either by forwarding the email or including a notice in their next newsletter. Within hours I heard from my first potential informant. Over the next week I received a steady stream of emails; when contacted I sent them additional information about what they could expect and how their confidentiality would be protected (Appendix C). Within two weeks I stopped receiving expressions of interest, so assumed that I had heard from everyone likely to be an informant. My next task was to winnow the list.

I had decided I would interview between 10 and 15 informants, so my task was to choose from the nineteen who had contacted me. While I did not set out to find a way to ensure that I spoke to a formally representative sample, I wanted a mix of informants. I wanted my respondents to include women who had been in the field for varying lengths of time, because I wondered whether the frustrations arose from comparing the present to the past, or were resulting from other types of expectations. I wanted approximately a third of my

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[14] In doing so I draw on the notion of "standpoint" from Institutional Ethnography.

informants with more than fifteen years' history in the field, one third with around ten years', and one third with less than five years' experience. I was curious to hear about frustrations in different parts of the province and between urban and rural settings, so wanted to include women who worked in all of those locations. My study was limited to Anglophone practitioners,[15] the largest proportion of LBS programs in the province. Again, I was not trying to be representative, and decided that focusing on English-speaking practitioners would delimit who I spoke to in useful ways. However, several Aboriginal women contacted me and I included two in my study; unfortunately I was unable to find a mutually-workable time to speak to one of them. In the end my study included twelve informants.[16]

My participants include women who work with indigenous adults, with deaf-blind adults, with incarcerated men and with both recent immigrants and Canadian-born adults. Of the twelve informants, four are from the north, four from the southwest, one from the east and three from central Ontario. Four (HW, DM, LA, RF) work in areas with a population under 10,000 and two (SB, BD) work in areas with populations between 50,000 and 100,000. Three (MC, BD, GH) work in medium-sized urban areas, with populations between 250,000 and 750,000; another three (CS, KT, KV) work in a large metropolitan area. Three had worked in adult literacy for less than five years, another five had been involved for between seven and ten years, and four had been involved for more than fifteen years. One woman identifies as Aboriginal, and three told me that they were born outside of Canada. I did not ask them to tell me about their cultural identities, but all of the non-Aboriginal women who I saw could pass as white. I did not ask their ages.

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[15] The Literacy and Basic Skills policy has, since the beginning, included four distinct "delivery streams": Aboriginal, Anglophone, Deaf, Francophone.

[16] One woman, who has been in her job less than three years, asked whether she could be interviewed along with a co-worker who has much more experience. She felt the interview would offer an opportunity to benefit from her co-worker's wealth of knowledge. Since I am committed to research that is mutually beneficial rather than colonizing (Tuhiwai Smith, 2001) and because I hope that my research can be a resource to the field, I agreed. For the research questions that focused on their personal histories and motivations, I interviewed each of these women separately; the joint interview focused on their frustrations and what they were doing to cope.

After making my selection I contacted everyone who had emailed me and told them whether or not they would be included in my study. For the women selected as informants, I sent an email (Appendix D) outlining the terms of their participation and asking them to review the consent form (Appendix E). I asked them to confirm that they wanted to participate on those terms. All agreed, although several had detailed questions about how their confidentiality would be protected; these women were concerned that if they could be identified by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), their opinions could endanger their program's funding. In the end, all were assured of the confidentiality they needed to participate. Once the women had confirmed, by email, that they agreed to the terms of their participation, I began to schedule interviews.

I did not have a travel budget so I planned to do face-to-face interviews with women who were within driving distance and to interview the other women by telephone. Before each interview I emailed informants the list of questions (Appendix F). The interviews themselves were semi-structured because, following Suchman and Jordan (1990), I understand interviews as interactive communication rather than a process for collecting inert data. The interviews unfolded as informal conversations: I did not always use the same wording as the list of questions, nor ask questions in the same order, but I always made sure that we covered all of the questions on my list. I began each interview by outlining the contents of the permission form (Appendix E) and asking the informant to confirm that she agreed to those terms. Exactly what happened next varied from interview to interview. Usually, one of the first questions I asked was about how long the individual had been involved in adult literacy work. This approach allowed me to ask for clarification and elaboration when I needed to, and to share some of my own experiences in literacy work. It also allowed me to relate to my informants on a human level: to share laughter and incredulity, but also to express sympathy with informants who broke into tears.

All of the interviews took place between November 2011 and January 2012. I recorded the in-person interviews on my laptop using Audacity software and an external microphone; I conducted telephone interviews using a conferencing system that offers a recording option. I used skype with one informant who felt that the video would help her

feel more at ease talking to me. The sound quality on skype was inadequate for recording, so we spoke through the teleconference system, but were able to see one another through skype video.

Each interview lasted between one and three hours. It began with me outlining the terms of their participation and asking whether they had any questions about the consent form (Appendix E). As I finished each interview I transcribed it, and assigned each informant a set of initials which could mask her identity. When each transcript was complete I sent it to the informant for review. I asked her to check that I had not made any errors and to tell me if there was anything she wanted removed from the transcript. A copy of that email message is included as Appendix G. My original plan was to interview each informant twice, but once the initial interviews were finished I realized that I didn't have a clear plan for the second interviews. I knew that the interviews I had already done included rich data, so I decided that I would only contact an informant for follow-up if I had questions about anything she had said in the interview. My next task was to begin analysis of the data.

2.5   Learning to do Analysis

My first opportunity to analyze the interview data occurred before I had finished the work of transcription. When I had completed all but two of my interviews I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My surgery was scheduled for a date after I had finished the interviews; while recovering from the lumpectomy I took a short break from transcribing. Before I knew it I was faced with the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) deadline for papers for its annual conference, which I was determined to attend. By that point I was getting bored with being away from my work so decided to base that paper on the data I had available to that point. This was my first attempt to analyze any of the data, and the paper (Atkinson, 2012a) was based on transcripts from six interviews.

An important part of my analytic process was to locate and review the policy documents my informants mentioned in the interviews. Because of my history in adult literacy work I was familiar in general terms with the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy, and some

of its funding mechanisms and reporting requirements. I was also familiar with the policy governing the mandatory literacy test for social assistance recipients, which I had analyzed when I studied Foucault with Roland Sintos Coloma. That course paper was subsequently published in a book co-edited by committee member Kari Dehli (Atkinson, 2012c) and a slightly revised version comprises Chapter 5 of this thesis. As I worked with the interview data I moved between my informants' words, the policy documents governing their work, and the bodies of literature that I was drawing on.

The CASAE paper was my first effort to think through how that group of informants was relating to the imperatives of policy. It focused specifically on how those women were relating to the imperative to partner with other employment services in their communities, and noted that while some informants had adopted the terms of the dominant discourses, others held to views that were based on what I called a "care for the marginalized" approach. While the paper was an important first step in analysis, in retrospect I realize that I did not analyze the "care for the marginalized" approach as itself contingent and historically-constructed. I had fallen into the trap of considering the latter approach as better than the former, of judging one to be bad—because it was similar to the mentalities of the policies that were so annoying to my informants—and the other virtuous. I had created a distinction between "good" literacy workers who were holding on to a social view of their work and "bad" ones who had been duped by the discourse. I had forgotten a key phrase that had helped in my analysis of the policy: "not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 343).

The implication of this theoretical lapse was that, as I continued with data analysis over the next year, I continued to adopt the stance of the frustrated literacy workers. This was a position I knew very well: they were trying to do good work, they knew what they were doing, and policy was making it difficult for them to do what they knew best. I kept getting stuck in a tendency to think of their accounts as "the truth," to think of community programs as good and government as bad, to think of policy-makers as stubbornly impervious to insights from practice. At some point I realized that I had not unpacked the common-sense that literacy workers' frustrations would disappear if only policy was based on practitioners' input. I held this notion despite the fact that I knew

that similar disjunctures between policy and practice were arising in other levels of education, ones in which educators have significantly more clout than in the marginalized field of adult literacy. Even as I started to understand more and more about how the policy was constructing adult learners in the province, coordinating the actions of adult literacy workers, and producing normative literate conduct, I was lured into feeling that the workers' frustration *was* the analysis I was looking for. As my analysis deepened I thought I was making progress when I came to view their actions as guided by ethical commitments to the learners, and by choosing their program's values and principles over those of the LBS policy. However, I eventually began to see that even *that* view was not drawing on one of the most fundamental insights of the literature within which I wanted to locate my work.

Only after I received feedback on the first draft of the thesis did I begin to analyze how the literacy workers' mentality was itself the product of a particular location, context and moment. Somehow I had forgotten that my research had been sparked, in part, by questions about how literacy worker subjectivities were constructed. Perhaps this lapse happened because my research was investigating a field I knew so well. I was pulled into adopting, rather than analyzing, the very familiar perspective of my informants:[17] that their frustration was justifiable and that their knowledge and experience was more valid than those of policy.

2.6   Conclusion: Research as Sortie

In the introduction to this chapter I noted that I understand research as a sortie, as in sallying forth. But I would like to pause briefly to note another meaning of the word: venturing from a besieged position to attack the besieger. In this chapter I have outlined my research journey, using the metaphor of a magpie to organize my reflections about how I approached this study and what I learned along the way. I have described how my interdisciplinarity is a form of omnivorous gleaning for relevant bits of inspiration and scholarly nourishment. I have outlined my own position as someone who inhabits the

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[17] I understand that this is a common issue in ethnographic research; I was fascinated to learn that this tendency has been referred to as "going native." The colonial implications of that phrase, and that framing of analytic work, are tangential to my inquiry but a topic I would like to explore at some point.

edges of the literacy field and my hope that this work can help to open up spaces for critical inquiry and creative practice. I have discussed the particular theoretical approach I have adopted, and my rationale for doing so. I have described some details of how I chose informants and how I approached my interviews. Finally, I have outlined my recursive process of analysis and writing, noting the particular challenge posed by my status as an insider-researcher.

In the introduction to this chapter I promised to talk about my research using the corvids' role as boreal alarm systems, and to consider their role in dispersion and regeneration. I will hold off on that analysis until my conclusion (Chapter 10). For now I will note that as my thesis work became more and more clear—especially as I learned more about doing analysis and considered the significance of my work—what also became increasingly apparent was how this thesis was operating as an attempt to besiege the besiegers. I understood more about what my analysis might contribute to efforts to speak back to the frustrations of policy and to understand the dangers of both current and past problematizations of literacy. I will return to these questions in my concluding chapter.

Chapter 3
Constructing Literate Conduct

> Who we are is not only what we do, did, and will do, but
> also what we might have done and may do. …What could
> it mean in general to say that possible ways to be a person
> can from time to time come into being or disappear? Such
> queries force us to be careful about the idea of possibility
> itself. (Hacking, 2002)

What are the possible ways to be a literate person? Common sense views of literacy consider it to be a set of competences through which people can access significant knowledge and communicate with others. In the Global North such notions assume that children learn to value literacy on their mother's knee as she reads them storybooks, that every child learns these skills in school and that all adults are literate. Literacy has become so naturalized within what Anderson (1983) terms print capitalism that its constructed, contingent and historically specific status is rarely questioned in everyday talk.

Scholars working in New Literacy Studies argue that there is no single literacy. Rather, literacies are social practices that vary in different contexts and are deeply enmeshed with the workings of power, as Street (1984, 1993) noted that literacy is not "autonomous" but ideological. Literacy studies scholars recognize that literacy practices that operate differently in different social and geopolitical contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1994; Breier & Prinsloo, 1996; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995) and that literacy practices have different degrees of legitimacy and power (Bartlett, Jayaram & Bonhomme, 2011; Blommaert, 2008; Ntiri,2009).

Historical research has also shown that mass literacy campaigns have often been "tied to the reordering of society at a time of transformation" (Graff, 1995, p. 49) and that literacy instruction is often part of a larger project of forming modern subjects. I use the term subjects rather than "people" to signal the fact that I draw on literature that understands humans as social beings rather than autonomous individuals. Like other scholars working in this vein, I reject the notion that human identity and behaviour can be understood by referring to essential, unchanging qualities that exist over time and across cultural

contexts. Instead, I understand human identities and behaviours as constructed in the social realm through articulations of power and knowledge which shape what subjects can know, think and do. I also hold the view that although the norms produced through such articulations are extremely powerful they shape, rather than determine, what subjects can know and do. In this I draw on Spivak's sense that subjects are "able to do something—only as [they] are able to make sense of it" (1993, p. 34).

For some time now I have been curious about why, in this geopolitical space, literacy is so naturalized as an attribute that all subjects should possess, and why dominant notions about literacy are European ones which focus on the liberating potential of literacy as realized by the Gutenberg bible. While I don't discount the fact that being able to read in a print-saturated environment can enhance subjects' freedom, it is a form of epistemic violence to use the Gutenberg bible as a totem of the liberating potential of literacy in contexts such as Canada, where Christian missions were so central to the process of colonization. The damage wrought by missionary schools is only now being addressed publically, and faces considerable ignorance and resistance by non-indigenous subjects who hold to a national imaginary of "colonial and imperial innocence" (Heron, 2007, p. 37).[18] A rich body of work has explored the ongoing legacies of colonial education for indigenous subjects (Barman, Heert, & McCaskill, 1986; Steeves, 2010), and my own interest begins from a curiosity about the impacts of this history on settler subjects (Barker, 2009; de Costa, 2009), but such a focus is not central to the current research.

I take the view that literacy education in Canada has routinely been implicated in constructing particular subjects and subjectivities of both settler and indigenous subjects. In this I draw on Stoler's insight that bourgeois nations were constituted by "nineteenth-century discourses of nation and empire" (Stoler, 1995, p. 135) but also Fanon's (2008) insight that both colonizer and colonized are made up in colonial relations. And I take up

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[18] The national story of innocence has been undermined in recent years as critical discussion of the residential school system has moved into the mainstream. However, the federal government's formal apology in 2008 may have served to reinstate the story: It positions settler society as moral because the apology is a symbolic attempt to right historic wrongs, simultaneously positioning indigenous protests and assertions of sovereignty as immoral because they indicate lack of respect for the rule of law and a lack of forgiveness. In not substantially altering existing relations of power and knowledge, the apology made contrition 'safe' for settler subjects without threatening any material aspects of their privilege. (For further discussion of the apology, see Henderson & Wakeham, 2009; Subašić & Reynolds, 2009).

the challenge posed by Willinsky (1998) and Coloma, Means and Kim (2009) that scholars address the colonial legacies of education. Foucault's notion of countermemory (1984a, p. 93) allows me to understand Eurocentric narratives which obliterate the violent colonial uses of literacy in this geopolitical space as reminiscences that perpetuate a tradition of racialized hierarchies (Galabuzi, 2006; Thobani, 2007). It allows me to ask what conditions might have led to the emergence of these discourses, and what configurations of power were, and are, supported by these problematizations.

This chapter is not an exhaustive study of the history of the category of being literate, nor a finely-detailed analysis of literacy and colonization in this geopolitical space. Instead it begins to highlight the contingent nature of the current problematization of literacy, which I analyse in greater detail in Chapter 5. Here I focus on literate conduct as socially and historically produced; I review literature about histories of literacy in this geopolitical space to examine what shifting forms of truth about literacy reveal about different political rationalities. I look for traces of the subjects and forms of power constructed through problematizing literacy as a marker of civilization, as a means of moral integration, and as a tool for participation before turning my attention to the neoliberal problematization of literacy as employability.

3.1   Literacy as Marker of Civilization

Canada is only one site in which European forms of truth about literacy were central to the process of colonization. Ethnographies of colonial encounters in have noted that education and evangelism aimed to systematically reconstruct colonial subjects, cultures and economies. What has come to be known as the civilizing mission was an assertion that Europeans had a duty to train colonized peoples to adopt the attributes of "hard work, discipline, curiosity, punctuality, honest dealing and taking control" (Adas, 2004, p. 81). These forms of conduct were to be used for the "accumulation and reinvestment of wealth…to anticipate and forecast future trends… [in] the drive for unbounded productivity and the provision of material abundance" (2004, p. 81). Comaroff and Comaroff's (1991) analysis of missionary encounters in Africa, for example, analyzed how Protestant education set out to "reorganize the flow of seasons and events that configured space and time" (p. 234) and to create reflective, inner-directed readers who

used literacy for self-improvement (1991, p. 63). Colonial subjects were expected to internalize the values of "[r]ationality, empiricism, progressivism, systematic (hence scientific) inquiry, industriousness and adaptability" (Adas, 2004, p. 81).

Central to the civilizing mission was the "imperial assumption that the difference between European and indigenous cultures—even when that difference is respected—is one between a primitive culture of orality and an evolved culture of the written" (Warkentin, 1999, p. 5). Such a dichotomy entrenches particularly narrow definitions of print which privilege alphabetic writing and mechanical printing, thereby constructing "a literacy that suppresses diversity" (Finnegan, 1991, cited in Walter D. Mignolo, 2003, p. 323). In this geopolitical space European forms of truth about literacy are routinely used to dismiss non-alphabetic practices such as "wampum… petroglyphs, pictographs, painted skins, and birch-bark scrolls" (Warkentin, 1999, p. 3) that existed before contact with Europeans.[19]

However, indigenous literacies were not always dismissed. In the Canadian case, efforts to enforce European norms of literacy emerged in tandem with efforts to dispossess indigenous peoples in order to consolidate the dominion settlement (Barman, Heert, & McCaskill, 1986; Donaldson, 1998; Regan, 2010). During the 18th century "pre-contact social customs… influenced treaty-making between newcomers and Natives" (Miller, 2009, p. 38). In early contact periods, diplomats were fluent in indigenous cultural practices such as the Haudenasaunee wampum. Indigenous peoples understood, and continue to assert, that treaties are documents of relationship and that strong social ties are not separate from but "essential to treaty-making" (2009, p. 309). European understandings, on the other hand, were of treaties as contracts which are primarily textual rather than social and relational. Acknowledgment of diverse literacy practices shifted as the colonial state became intent on settling lands in the north and west. After 1875, pressures to assimilate indigenous people to British norms intensified with the passage of the Indian Act, which unilaterally made indigenous people dependent wards of

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[19] What if, as Canadian book historian Warkentin asks, the "European definition of the 'written' in fact may involve some sort of category mistake? What would it mean to 'write'—or to read—in a culture in which transience and change are welcomed, naturalized, and accepted" (1999, p. 12)?

the state, in order to address the "problem" of the continued existence of indigenous people, who stood in the way of settlement. Between 1899 and 1921 Canada focused on gaining access to what became known as the frontier; in this period documents written in English became more important than what was agreed upon in negotiations and the government routinely "reneged on treaty commitments" (Miller, 2009, p. 190). Furthermore, while treaty commissioners routinely promised that agreements would not impinge on indigenous culture and ways of life "the government's written versions of the treaties always contained qualifying clauses that severely limited those undertakings" (2009, p. 221).

Schools designed to decimate indigenous communities by transforming indigenous children into workers in the emerging White nation were expanded in the period of intensive settlement and consolidation of the territory of Canada.[20] Residential schools aimed to "clothe the pupil in the skills required to survive in a modernizing economy" and operated under the belief that these skills "would be useless unless accompanied by the values of the civilized society in which the child was destined to live" (Milloy, 1999, p. 35). Thus the schools aimed to Christianize pupils but also to teach children "the hourly and daily precision required by an industrial order" (1999, p. 36). In these statements it is possible to see parallels between residential schools and missionary education in other colonial contexts. As in Africa, missionary education in Canada attempted the "systematic moral reconstruction" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991, p. 233) of colonial subjects, and competence in alphabetic literacy was key to becoming civilized in a world predicated on exploiting natural resources in order to generate and accumulate wealth. The explicit aim of residential schools, and all of the colonial policies in which they were situated, was to push aside indigenous ways of being, to make those ways of life impossible; indigenous peoples and cultures stood in the way of the project of constructing a modern European nation in this geopolitical space.

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[20] This insight makes me want to examine whether governmentality scholarship has explored the central role of territory, not simply population, in modern states, particularly former colonies. Such an investigation must wait for another time.

3.2   Literacy as Moral Imperative

Indigenous peoples were not the only subjects who were made up in discourses in this settler nation. Historical analysis of the impetus for establishing universal public education indicates that schools were vital mechanisms for integrating and assimilating liberal subjects; under this political rationality literacy was problematized as primarily political and moral, a mechanism for ensuring order, stability and good government. In this section I carry forward Gellner's (1983) observation that education is "more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence" (p. 34) in consolidating nations, and Rose's (1996b) statement that literacy has been a "basic nation-forming device" on a par with "a common language" (p. 58).

The first census in the Canadas was conducted in response to the rebellions in 1837-8 in which republican settlers took up arms against the oligarchical Legislative Councils of Lower and Upper Canada. The Buller Commission of 1838-1842 aimed to establish local authorities based on the assumption that "public education was one of the infrastructural conditions and supports for liberal-democratic government" (Curtis, 2000, p. 285).

The establishment of public education in Upper Canada, now Ontario, had similar aims. In the early 1800s literacy was seen as a means to achieve "social, cultural, economic, and political cohesion" (Graff, 1979, p. 25) because it was a means of moral instruction. Protestant clergy who advocated public schooling believed that the proper basis of education was social morality rather knowledge or skills (1979, p. 32) and that such morality tempered the "potentially dangerous uses of literacy" (1979, p. 26). Education would provide the moral underpinnings necessary for democracy not by ending inequality but by teaching the burgeoning population to be content to be good workers. For Egerton Ryerson, the father of public education in Ontario, educating labourers would make them more productive because they would be schooled to be punctual and orderly. That is, skills and knowledge were less important than the "social and integrating" (Graff, 1979, p. 31) functions of literate norms. Graff termed this tendency the "moral basis for literacy"; within this rationality poverty was understood as resulting from moral weaknesses such as "a lack of self-restraint, indolent and intemperate behaviour, or early and improvident marriage" (1979, p. 45).

National census counts of literacy[21] seem to carry forward the interest in the assimilative potential of education and the moral bases for literacy. During the early decades of the 20th century the Canadian government was working hard to understand the connection between education, literacy, morality and productivity among the settler population; "Indians" were routinely excluded from census counts. The 1901 census noted that literacy was of interest to the government because "[i]n a country peopled with so many foreign elements as Canada, it is desireable to know if they are being absorbed and unified" (Department of Agriculture, 1902, p. viii). A 1921 census report considered the fact that children aged 7 to 14 were less likely to attend school if they lived in a community in which a large proportion of the adult population could not read or write any language. The authors of the report concluded that "illiteracy has a tendency to perpetuate itself" and that "the school has not only the task of educating those within its reach but also of overcoming this form of inertia" (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1926, p. 9). Following the 1931 census the government published a detailed analysis of the correlation between literacy and schooling. This report describes illiteracy as indicative of "the presence of a number of anti-social forces, of physical and geographical obstacles, of historical events such as dates of settlement, of the racial or nativity composition of the population, of the age distribution…and so on" (MacLean, 1937, p. 26). It decries the fact that several European nations were "apparently sending to Canada the more illiterate portion of their population" (1937, p.43). The report concludes that there is "no doubt that there is a difference in economic status between literate and illiterate families" (1937, p. 70) but also that families headed by illiterates have more children, support fewer other dependents, and have "more evidences of illegitimacy" (1937, p. 63).[22] In other words,

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[21] Focusing on the interventionist role of statistics, Kalpagam (2000) argues that statistics has operated as "the most important language in the narrative legitimation of modernity, that is, for telling stories about progress, of accumulation of wealth, control of nature, the well-being of humanity" (p. 47). She proposes that in addition to analyzing technologies of rule that construct what "counts" as legitimate knowledge about social phenomena we must also pay attention to how those technologies connect to "administrative discourses [that seek] to reconstruct social forms" (loc. cit.).

[22] Unstated assumptions about ideal family structures persist in the present. Irwin Kirsch's presentation at the Educational Testing Service's 2010 *Achievements Gap Symposium* notes that "those with lower levels of education and skills tend to have poorer health outcomes, lower levels of civic engagement, higher rates of incarceration and higher rates of bearing children out of wedlock" (Kirsch 2010, slide 5).

census counts of literacy aimed to measure the effectiveness of the education system in assimilating settler subjects to literate norms and instilling normative moral conduct.

Adult education in the nineteenth century had similar aims. Frontier College, the longest-standing adult literacy program in Canada, offered education to men working in railroad, lumber and mining camps. Frontier College instructors believed that their role was to "Christianize" and "Canadianize" their students. These Reading Camps also drew heavily on social Darwinist hierarchies of "races" and the belief that some peoples could never become fully literate citizens (Walter, 2003, p. 45) because they were inherently uneducable.

The subjects constructed within the rationality of literacy as moral imperative were compliant and posed no threats to the economy or to the social order, either explicitly—through acts of violent political dissent—or implicitly through failing to meet moral norms expected of workers, citizens and family members. In this rationality, literate conduct was a set of moral behaviours relating to work and to civic and family life. Moral literate conduct entailed following the Protestant work ethic: working hard, being punctual and obedient and accepting that rewards of such behavior might not be evident immediately. Enacting literate conduct as a good citizen meant following the injunction to postpone gratification by being temperate, marrying at an appropriate age, not having children out of wedlock, and not rising above one's station in life. As I hope this brief sketch showed, this rationality relied on the disciplinary power of norms to constitute a nation comprised of subjects whose literate conduct indicated that they were contributing to the construction of a modern nation.

3.3   Literacy as Participation

During the twentieth century another rationality emerged transnationally. New structures emerged after World War II to create what Kelly and Kaplan (2004) have called the United Nations world. This system offered self-determination to "formally symmetric nation-states" (p. 134) but in giving priority to modernization, development and the Cold War, United Nations agencies effectively worked to "integrat[e] countries in the international capitalist economy" (Louis & Robinson, 2004, p. 160) rather than to redress

colonial imbalances. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initially promoted the spread of what was called "fundamental education" (Watras, 2007); it held the view that literacy would increase productivity and was therefore vital for social and economic development (Jones, 1990, p. 58). The governing rationality which emerged in this context held that literacy was a set of skills which improved the employment prospects and income potential of nations and also of individuals; interconnections between poverty and lack of literacy came to be understood in new ways, and some advocates considered literacy as a human right.

In Ontario, philanthropists with a range of political approaches established literacy programs in many communities; what they held in common was a desire to help people who were viewed as marginalized and disadvantaged by their lack of literacy. Many programs, especially in rural areas, were part of a network of volunteer programs following the work of American missionary Frank Laubach (Christoph, 2009). A central tenet of Laubach Literacy is the idea that anybody can teach another person to read; this is summarized in the motto "Each One Teach One" and enabled by a graduated set of workbooks with a strong emphasis on phonics. The "Each One Teach One" is prevalent in most community-based programs, which rely on volunteer tutors to teach adults who struggle most with alphabetic literacy. A small number of community literacy programs in the province were started by librarians or other community workers; these include two women who worked with Paulo Freire in Brazil, Sidney Pratt and Brenda Duncombe, along with others who considered literacy teaching as critical praxis and held a strong critique of the charitable approach (Pratt, Nomez, & Urzua, 1977). Documents describing the aims and structures of critical literacy programs were written in hopes that they could affect provincial policy (Alkenbrack, Atkinson, Duncombe, McBeth, & Williams, 1984; Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991) but research to trace in detail what influenced policy must wait for another time.

Charitable and community programs advocated for literacy "as a right, and as a means of participation in society" (Darville, 1992, p. 18). Their work drew heavily on a report published by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO in 1983. *Adult Illiteracy in Canada: A Challenge* stated that "literacy is relative to the societal context in which

people find themselves" but also that "literacy has the following properties: (1) Literacy is a means, not an end in itself; (2) Literacy contains many skills, not only reading and writing; (3) Literacy is a tool for self-fulfillment; (4) Literacy involves participation of the learner and leads to participation in society" (Thomas, 1983, pp. 23-24). The report defined "Functional Literacy in the North American Context" as "a critical threshold which, once reached, enables a person to handle the tasks of everyday life with confidence and responsibility" (Thomas, 1983, p. 24). This definition of functional literacy seems to be conceptualized within a broader understanding of social and contextual nature of literacy, yet its mention of responsibility as an outcome of literate conduct echoes the rationality of literacy as a moral attribute.

During the 1960s and 1970s the federal government had supported basic education up to secondary school equivalency as part of its job training mandate. It became involved due, in part, to findings that the education level of Canadian workers was low relative to "other Western countries" (Alden, 1982, p. 2). The federal program known as Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD) paid for pre-vocational academic training, but funding for the program ended when it became evident that the program did not "reliably lead to people getting jobs or taking further training" (Darville, 1992, p. 16). By the late 1980s most provinces had begun to fund adult literacy programs; policies were premised on liberal assumptions that saw "illiteracy as a primary cause of poverty and unemployment, and correspondingly, [saw] adult basic education as a particularly effective anti-poverty strategy" (Alden, 1982, p. 1).

Under this rationality, literate conduct was equivalent to active engagement, using literacy as a means to other ends, including employment and active participation in society. Such participation was a means which allowed subjects to be self-fulfilled. In this rationality lack of literacy caused poverty and unemployment; subjects who acquired literacy could become confident, active participants in the labour force and in society as a whole. Although disciplinary power is evident to some degree within this rationality, it is also marked by tutelary (Cruikshank, 1996) and pastoral power; adults lacking literacy were constituted as in need of help, and literacy programs were the agents tasked with fulfilling this role.

3.4   Literacy as Employability

During the 1980s and 1990s, governments in many advanced capitalist nations reduced spending on social services, shifted responsibility for social programs from the public to the private sector, and drastically restructured welfare systems. Neoliberalism espouses a diminishing role for the state in the social sphere, yet governments which adopt this rationality spend significant energy and resources enforcing market logic. Such governments enact policies which foster competitiveness in all aspects of life. Within neoliberal governmentality subjects are not social beings connected to others through mutual obligations but flexible individuals who are expected to make life decisions by calculating the cost and benefit of different options available to them (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 201). Subjects are constructed as *homo economicus*: primarily economic beings that should relate to themselves as human capital and energetically pursue personal fulfillment. As autonomous, rational beings, subjects are expected to maximize their own self-interest and in doing so contribute to the competitiveness of the organizations and nations to which they belong. Individuals, rather than the state, are responsible for protecting themselves from risks such as ill health, unemployment and poverty. Subjects are expected to invest in themselves in order to contribute to "social and economic 'progress'" (Rizvi & Engel, 2009, p. 534) and to foster their value as human capital. Within this rationality education, including literacy education for adults, is viewed as the mechanism for enhancing human assets and individuals are expected to invest in education as a means of ensuring their competitive advantage in the job market. International comparative surveys sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have played a significant role in supporting policies based on this rationality.

Established in 1961, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has its origins in the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, which was established under the United States' Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe to forestall the threat posed by communism (Lingard, 2000, p. 94). Its orientation remains focused on "the concerns and interests of richer countries" (2000, p. 95) as its statement of purpose makes clear. Its role is to "brin[g] together the governments of countries

committed to democracy and the market economy from around the world" to "compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and coordinate domestic and international policies" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Since the 1980s, the OECD has taken a strong role in influencing education policy, initially among its member nations. It has asserted that educational outcomes are essential for strong economic performance in the knowledge economy and within the context of globalization. Its ability to influence educational policies, according to Rubenson (2008), results from "authoritatively provid[ing] expert comparative knowledge" (p. 244), particularly statistical assessments. The statistical indicators have had profound influence on policies in many nations because the OECD offers ongoing opportunities for "interactions between national civil servants and their counterparts at the OECD" (loc. cit.). According to Cussó and D'Amico (2005) the OECD was pressured by the United States to "produce statistics assessing the performance of national education systems" (p. 206).

In the United States, concern about educational achievement was sparked by a 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In 1989 the National Centre for Education Statistics hired a corporation, Educational Testing Services (ETS), to develop and conduct the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) ; this survey built on two earlier ETS assessments of adult literacy which were also "funded by the federal government" (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002, p. 2). ETS developed a psychometric[23] approach to adult literacy which assumes that literacy is a set of skills for

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[23] The NALS and IALS are not the only examples of psychometric testing, nor the only ones implicated in issues of power. A fruitful area of future research would be to examine the similarities and differences between IALS and other psychometric technologies. For example, Fendler and Muzzaffar (2008) argue that "bell-curve thinking" has become normalized within education; Miller and O'Leary have observed that intelligence tests were used as "an elaborate and supposedly objective means" for distinguishing between subjects in the 20th century (1987, p. 249). I have not read literature about the eugenic roots, and applications, of 20th-century 'intelligence tests' but there are suggestive parallels between those measurement tools and the IALS framing of 'literacy'. A potentially useful resource for this project is (Stern, 2006), particularly in light of the fact that the results of the US literacy surveys routinely report results according to categories of 'race' and disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Clearly the US context is distinct, but given the US influence in the OECD educational indicators program,

finding and using information contained in text; these skills are ranked according to the complexity of cognitive skills required to decode documents. The designers of NALS argue that psychometric scales offer "powerful tools which make it possible to explore the proportions of adults in various subpopulations of interest who demonstrated successive levels of performance" (Kirsch, et al., 2002, p. xvi). According to the Centre for Education Statistics, the "subpopulations of interest" in the United States are Blacks, Hispanics, adults in prison, adults with multiple disabilities, adults over the age of 65 and adults who did not speak English before they started school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

The psychometric approach was extended to the international level when the Department of Education pressured the OECD to undertake "international comparisons of both students' learning achievement and efficiency of education systems…in order to help assess the USA's position on the international market" (Cussó & D'Amico, 2005, p. 206). The OECD worked with Statistics Canada and hired the American corporation, Education Testing Services, to implement the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Statistics Canada had, in 1989, undertaken a survey of 9,445 adults in order to profile the Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA).[24] The stated aim of IALS was to offer data that countries could use to develop "lifelong learning, social and labour market policies" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xii).

In 1994 the first *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) collected data in Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. The survey was subsequently administered in a total of twenty countries; the major report of its findings boasted that "the survey covered 10.3 per cent of world population (United Nations, 1998) and 51.6 per cent of world GDP (World Bank, 1999)"

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and given that IALS is based on a survey originally developed in the US context (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002), the connections are worth exploring.

[24] Findings from the LSUDA concluded that 7% of Canadians had "difficulty dealing with printed material," that another 9% could "use printed materials for limited purposes only, such as finding a familiar word in a simple text" and another 22% were able to "use reading materials in a variety of situations, provided the material is simple, clearly laid out, and the tasks involved are not too complicated" (Statistics Canada, 1991, cited in Charette & Meng, 1998). These results were commonly interpreted as indicating that "22% of adults were not literate enough for success" (Horsman & Woodrow, 2006, p. 85).

(OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 87). The aim of the IALS was to "provide the world's first reliable and comparable estimates of the level and distribution of literacy skills in the adult population, and [offer] new insights into the factors that influence the development of adult skills at home and at work" (National Literacy Secretariat, 2000, p. 1). The information collected was designed to inform "lifelong learning, social and labour market policies" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xii) that would offset the effects of "major structural changes in OECD countries" resulting from "internationalization of production and of financial markets and…increased competition" (2000, p. 1). For the OECD, literacy is "a broad set of 'information-processing competencies' and a 'multiplicity of skills'" but also a "particular capacity and mode of behaviour" (2000, p. x).

The first report of IALS data, *Literacy, Economy and Society* (OECD & Statistics Canada, 1995) included results from Canada, France[25], Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland and the United States. IALS defines literacy within advanced industrialized nations as "a broad set of information-processing competencies," a "multiplicity of skills" and "a particular capacity and mode of behavior" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. x). Within IALS there are five levels which designers claim provide "a statistical solution for establishing one or more scales for a set of tasks in which the ordering of difficulty is essentially the same for everyone" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 1995, p. 27). The survey used Item Response Theory to rank the difficulty of tasks based on "how well respondents actually perform them" (1995, p. 27) and to assign proficiency scores to individuals based on whether they had an 80%

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[25] It is worth noting that France refused to publicize the survey results. They argued that IALS was based on a flawed definition of literacy and that there were problems with the survey methods and procedures (Manesse, 2000). I also note Rubenson's observation that the neoliberal ideology of IALS seems to have been embraced most enthusiastically in "the Anglo-Saxon nations" (2008, p. 249). When I read Foucault's (1997a) discussion of the distinctions between the German Ordo-liberals and the Chicago school of neoliberalism, this enthusiasm began to make sense to me. He argued that the Ordo-liberals assumed the state should play a role in the social realm, whereas the Chicago school held that the market logics should pervade all aspects of social life.

probability of performing a task at that level correctly (1995, p. 28).[26] According to the designers, the levels reflect an "empirically determined progression of information-processing skills and strategies" (loc. cit.). Test items ranked as the easiest, or Level One, required respondents to locate information in a document; test items which asked readers to make inferences or to integrate or compare information were considered more cognitively complex and therefore ranked as a higher level of literacy. Its designers claim that the five levels within IALS accurately measure the "ordered set of information-processing skills" required to "successfully read test materials" and perform "the tasks based on those materials" (loc. cit.).

The IALS survey was subsequently administered in fourteen additional countries or regions and these results were released in a report published jointly by the OECD and Statistics Canada in 2000, *Literacy in the Information Age*. This report asserted that "literacy skills are an essential ingredient in the process of upskilling" which OECD member nations were experiencing as part of global "economic and social transformations" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 11). It boasted that the survey "covered 10.3 per cent of the world population…and 51.6 per cent of world GDP" and forecast that nations with "higher levels of skills will adjust more effectively to the challenges and opportunities opened up by globalization" and (2000, p. 87). In this report, Level One is described as "persons with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package" (2000, p. xi). The same chart states that Level Three is "considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society"; it notes that this level "requires the ability to integrate several sources of information and solve more complex problems" (loc. cit.).[27]

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[26] Darville (1999, 2011) has argued that because test items in IALS are unfamiliar to those surveyed, what the tests measure is, in effect, the ability to sight-read. He argues that in doing so the IALS test items measure the ability to be a flexible worker, rather than cognitive processing *per se*.

[27] I note that two higher levels, Four and Five, are conflated; the report states that these levels "describe respondents who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi).

While its designers claim that the psychometric approach allowed IALS to "achiev[e] unprecedented levels of reliability in scoring open-ended items across cultures and languages" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 88), this approach does not distinguish between the ability to process information and fluency in the language of the test. By eliding language familiarity and cognitive processing, IALS ignores any issues of access to resources. It ensures that people who are not fluent in the language and dominant culture where they live are, as Blommaert (2008) says, "systematically in danger of being misunderstood, dismissed or silenced" (p. 200). It also seems to be naturalizing the "gap between social groups whose unequal access to the knowledge economy has nothing to do with an ability to decode the alphabet" (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010, p. 185).

When results from IALS—and subsequent OECD surveys based on the same set of assumptions—were published, Canadian media reports of the findings announced that 48% of Canadians were unable to be successful because they "struggle with low literacy" (ABC Canada, 2008). Another common representation was that people who had low levels of literacy were a danger to themselves or others. This trope was taken directly from the descriptions of the IALS levels, which describe a person at Level One as possessing "very poor literacy skills" and "may, for example, be unable to determine from a package label the correct amount of medicine to give a child" (OECD, 2009).

The active labour market rationale directed at the dependent poor is at the heart of the IALS surveys. They were developed in the context of a strong human capital focus within the OECD when global economic shifts began to challenge the economic dominance of OECD member nations. Under the banner of a *Jobs Study* (1994) and *Jobs Strategy* (1996) the OECD argued that dependence and unemployment were causing serious problems; individuals who were dependent on state support needed to become activated (Gass, 1988; Carcillo & Grubb, 2006), and that OECD member nations could only survive if they enacted active labour market policies. Its designers invoke "fall in real wages of people with low skills and widening earning differentials since the early 1980s" as evidence that OECD member nations should focus on literacy that prepares individuals for "employment growth… especially in white-collar high-skilled occupations" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 8).

According to the *OECD Observer*: "As far as the macro-economy is concerned, literacy and gross domestic product (GDP) go hand in hand. The higher the proportion of adults with high prose skills, the higher the GDP per capita" (Pont & Werquin, 2000). In this rationality, the claim is that improving the literate conduct of dependent subjects will enhance their employability. But, as I show in Chapter 5, what is happening is that subjects labelled "not literate enough" according to IALS are being made responsible, as individuals, for structural changes that have reduced employment opportunities.

Tied as it is to efforts to enact active labour market policies, IALS makes literate conduct vital to economic competition and to advanced liberal governance. Its designers and champions assert that IALS marks a positive departure from earlier assessments of literacy because it treats literacy as a continuum rather than a quality that people either do or do not possess. However, the declaration that Level Three is "a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi) introduces a threshold between capable and unfit subjects, it constructs a singular and problematic population which must be transformed, and makes subjects responsible for economic productivity.

The literacy-as-employability rationality introduces a much narrower and more restrictive definition of literacy, one which articulates a psychometric basis for bio-political exclusions. Here I would note that targeting the "inactivity" of the poor through active labour market policies seems to be reinforcing the distinction between exalted and abjected subjects. While people with few material means are disallowed from being inactive, those who possess cultural, social or asset capital are constructed as entitled to expect acceptable forms of inactivity: regular leisure time off from work, paid holiday time and sick leave, and the opportunity to retire from working. These stark contrasts are intensifying as income inequalities rise and as full-time jobs are replaced with precarious and contract positions. Over the past few decades the economy in Ontario has been shifting. There has been a notable loss of manufacturing, a rise in part-time and contingent employment, stagnating wages and rising income inequality (Saunders, 2005). One third of all jobs in Ontario currently pay no more than the minimum wage; a higher proportion than a few decades ago (Yalnizyan). The challenge is a jobs shortage rather

than a skills shortage (Livingstone, 2009) and, as I discovered in interviews with my informants, lack of "literacy" or formal qualifications are being used as mechanisms for sorting applicants in the fierce competition for even "low-skill" jobs. Under this rationality, literate conduct is equivalent to being an active, entrepreneurial subject who relates to oneself as a unit of human capital and uses education as a form of investment. The literacy-as-employability rationality naturalizes social inequalities and, as I argue in detail in Chapter 5, operates as a coercive mechanism of bio-power.

3.5   Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that problematizations of literate conduct are contingent, context-specific and historically produced. I have shown how ideas about normative literate conduct have been tied to economic and political imperatives of governance, noting that the authoritarian power necessary to secure territory for the expanding state of "Canada" was enabled by a rationality in which literacy was a marker of civilization. During the nineteenth century, as the nation was being consolidated through settlement, literate conduct became equated with moral conduct. The Protestant work ethic constructed settler subjects as prudent family members and obedient workers and citizens; the disciplinary power of such moral imperatives is evident in the dominant idea that people become poor if they fail to work hard, violate sexual norms, or were born into "one of the lower races". As print capitalism became more dominant transnationally, literate conduct was constructed as a means to participate fully in society and the economy. In the late twentieth-century, under neoliberal governing rationalities, a new problematization emerged. Literacy became an essential attribute of autonomous entrepreneurial subjects and a means to enhance human capital in order to contribute to local, national and global competitiveness; in Chapter 5 I elaborate the particular role of calculative practices in shaping literacy as employability. The next chapter considers the role of the media in consolidating the problematization of literacy-as-employability.

Chapter 4
Narratives, News and the Literacy Problem, 1979-2009

Between 1979 and 2009, news articles produced "literacy" as an urgent problem requiring attention and action because it threatened productivity and therefore the population as a whole. In this chapter I focus on how, through combining numerical data and individual narratives about the transformative power of literacy in adults' lives, news stories constructed this narrative. I argue that individual narratives about adults who struggle with print helped to consolidate the literacy-as-employability rationality and construct literacy as an attribute that everyone should possess.[28]

To locate the articles I searched the Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database through the University of Toronto library. I used the search terms "literacy" and "adult literacy" and eliminated items dealing with literacy and the K-12 education system. I limited my analysis to news coverage of adult literacy in the two papers with the highest circulation in Ontario:[29] the *Globe and Mail*, which bills itself as "Canada's national newspaper" and the *Toronto Star,* which considers city residents its primary readers. Both papers are published in Toronto, Canada's largest and most ethnically diverse city. Toronto is the capital of Ontario, the largest province in the federation, both geographically and demographically; it is considered the financial capital of the country and is in the province which has, historically, been most heavily industrialized. These characteristics make Toronto rich material for study during the era of neoliberal globalization.

I chose to focus on the past three decades because in this era adult literacy shifted from obscurity to a central tenet of labour-market policies in Canada. During these three decades, the two newspapers I examined published 246 news reports that mentioned adult

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[28] The bulk of this chapter was written long before I had developed an analysis of processes of subjectivation; I would be interested in re-visiting this material in light of scholarship about technologies of the self (Cruikshank, 1996; Edwards, 2008; Martin, Hutton & Gutman, 1988).

[29] Toronto's third paper, the *Toronto Sun*, is a tabloid and was not included in my search. Another paper published in Toronto, the *National Post*, was established to compete with the *Globe and Mail* as a national paper; I did not include it in my search because it was not publishing for the entire period that I surveyed.

literacy in some way.[30] Of these, 199 were national and local news, 30 were international news and 17 were business stories. Many of the news articles were responses to local events, such as the donation of computers to a community literacy program, a protest march by adult literacy students and workers, or some level of government announcing policy or funding initiatives. Another large group of news stories were summaries of reports published by local, national, international or transnational organizations.

4.1   Adult Literacy Makes News

During the 1980s advocates for literacy programs often used the gap between the number of people who need to improve their literacy and the number of people attending programs to advocate for more funding. An article in the *Globe and Mail* reporting on seminars held to mark International Literacy Day in 1984 notes that "It is estimated there are 500,000 functionally illiterate people in Metro[politan Toronto].… Only 1,000 people are enrolled in adult literacy training" ("Toronto school board gives priority to fight to end adult illiteracy," 1984). Similarly, a press conference organized by the Ontario Literacy Coalition in 1988 calls on the provincial government to "start backing its rhetoric about the ravages of illiteracy with money for programs" because demand has grown while funding has been frozen. The advocates use longer waiting lists as an indication of the need for more funding, but also cite statistics to indicate the gap. However, often the way that this advocacy appeared in news articles implied that adults who struggled with print were not taking sufficient advantage of the opportunities provided for them. Literacy advocates seem to distinguish between adults who do and do not aspire to self-improvement: an article about the Newfoundland findings of the Southam survey quotes literacy instructor Susan Hoddinnott saying, "We have to make it easier for people to come to literacy classes… [to] get all the people who are motivated" (Calamai & Southam News, 1987b).

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[30] The two newspapers also included 73 other items—30 opinion pieces, 21 letters to the editor, 13 editorials and 9 columns—and numerous miscellaneous items. The miscellany included: 36 announcements, mostly notices from local adult literacy programs advertising fundraising events or soliciting volunteers; 17 items in the entertainment section, mostly reviews of books, movies and art exhibits focusing on some aspect of adult literacy; and 8 obituaries.

Most local and national news stories were published between 1987 and 2001. The trend began when the *Toronto Star* published articles about a survey of adult literacy conducted the previous year: the survey was funded by Southam Inc., a Canadian newspaper chain, and seven newspapers, including the *Toronto Star.* The earliest article about the Southam survey describes the reactions of "six leaders from across the country" who were "were shocked that 2.4 million Canadians with some high school education or better still remained functionally illiterate" (Calamai & Southam News, 1987a). The article goes on to report that the leaders "were also dismayed that only one in 10 of the nation's illiterates would even consider taking a remedial literacy course, even though the survey found illiterates are often stuck in dead-end, low-wage jobs" (Calamai & Southam News, 1987a). All of this reporting positions individuals as the problem.

Another major news event in this period was the calculation by the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy of the cost of illiteracy to the economy, which began to appear regularly after the first report in 1988. The same year the Prime Minister promised the Canadian Manufacturers' Association that the federal government would deal with literacy. He also announced $110m for "a national offensive by the federal Government, the provinces, business and labor organizations and by the voluntary sector to address the issue of illiteracy" (Polanyi, 1988). In the following decade many articles focused on whether International Literacy Year, 1990, would make a difference to the lives of people who struggle with print. The next major report to trigger news coverage was the release in 1997 of statistical data from the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

In 1990 the UN Development Program began to release reports of the Human Development Index (HDI), which calculates and compares quality of life around the globe using the indicators of life expectancy, adult literacy and GDP per capita. Many of the news articles in the 1990s discussed Canada's HDI ranking compared to other nations, or Canada's drop in status when measures of gender and income inequity were added to the calculation. After 1992 there was a slow but steady stream—at least one article a year—that discussed progress towards development in the Global South. Often, these articles only cited rates of adult literacy as proof of their progress towards development, but some also examined specific efforts to address adult illiteracy.

4.2   Confessing Illiteracy, Inscribing Responsibility

Between 1979 and 2009, media accounts about adult literacy often included statements from adults who struggle with reading and writing and adults who attest to how their lives had been transformed by learning to read and write; there are also a number of instances of adult literacy teachers and tutors sharing confessions they have heard. Such accounts were elements of literacy activists' strategic attempts to gain political recognition and funding.

Most commonly the adults who struggle with print describe the shame and embarrassment they feel for not possessing an attribute that they were expected to acquire in childhood. This secret truth about themselves is so shameful that they must keep it from everyone: teachers in school, employers, and even intimate partners. For example, a 1979 article states "One Winnipeg student, a man near 40, has hidden his inability to read from his wife for years. He is not keeping up with his homework [in the adult literacy program] because he refuses to do it at home and insists on hiding his workbooks from his wife" ("Winnipeg group helps adults to fight widespread illiteracy," 1979). Confessions are also used to illustrate the personal costs of illiteracy.[31] A 2004 article describes how the lack of literacy harmed and limited a woman, Shirley Annable:

> Some impacts of her low literacy skill were minor: For years, she had to buy more expensive cake mixes because they had illustrated baking instructions. Some were huge: She lost custody of three children because she couldn't understand court documents sent to her home and ignored them (Gorrie, 2004).

I do not mean to minimize the intensity of the material and psychic struggles endured by these individuals; clearly they have been profoundly affected by the discourse which insists that all subjects are expected to be literate. My point is that these articles, by sharing individuals' feelings and experiences, helps create an atmosphere which maintains that people *should* feel embarrassed that they do not possess the central tool required in a print-saturated society and *should* aspire to change their "illiterate"

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[31] Investigating the role of confessional practices (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2012) in adult literacy education promises to be a fruitful area for further research.

condition. As such the articles serve to insist upon the "values, norms, desires and dispositions" (Edwards, 2008, p. 29) that support the enterprising ethos of neoliberalism. In doing so they reintroduce the spectre of the undeserving poor as threat to the population as a whole.

A number of news stories use confessions to illustrate how lack of literacy limits people's lives, and what strategies they have developed to cope. In a 1987 article one man describes himself as unable to control his emotions and barely able to survive. Although he found ways to get by, including navigating his way through the city by "memorizing the shapes and colors of buildings", he "couldn't read well enough to make himself something to eat." The article quotes him saying, "I had to restrict myself to doing hard labor…I had no other skill to depend on. I lived like an animal. I missed out on life. I didn't have the information I needed" (Growe, 1987).

Sometimes the coping strategies are described as ingenious, but more commonly they are depicted as deceptions. For example, a 1985 article opens with this vivid scenario:

> When Peter, a 30-year-old carpenter's assistant, arrives at work in the morning, he pretends to read the list of daily tasks assigned to him. He has not told his employer that he is unable to read. Sometimes, he complains that he cannot decipher the handwriting on the order form, and someone in the office reads it aloud. Otherwise, he dictates the words over the telephone to his wife, and she explains them to him (Polanyi, 1985).

The article continues by outlining how employers are, and will be, affected by this type of "dishonesty." It asserts that individuals like Peter are lurking throughout society:

> As a technological revolution sweeps through workplaces across Canada, employers are discovering that hundreds of thousands of workers cannot read or write. The onset of computers is exposing experienced workers everywhere who have been hiding their inability to read and write in unskilled jobs. There is mounting concern that as they flounder with new technologies, illiterate workers

may be responsible for mistakes costing Canadian business millions of dollars each year (Polanyi, 1985).

I would suggest that by positioning the coping strategies within the larger context of technological change and cost to businesses, and by stating that computers are helping to expose people who are hiding, these articles call on readers to be vigilant and to watch for signs that people are deliberately avoiding reading. Such accounts are highly individualized and psychologised. These articles offer glimpses of how to identify these individual subjects whose lack of literacy is jeopardizing the nation's economic competitiveness. They enrol everyone in the project of internalizing the enterprising ethos of neoliberalism.

Stories told by adults who had struggled with print tend to describe how the individual's life has been transformed and improved by learning to read and write. Some accounts emphasize the unacceptable conditions that have been avoided because the person has learned to read. For example, at a 1988 media event organized by the provincial network, the Ontario Literacy Coalition, one man "told the news conference how learning to read and write as an adult changed his life dramatically. 'If I never got the chance, what would I be doing? I would probably be the best criminal in Toronto, maybe the best one in Canada. I like success'" (Picard, 1988).

A number of the accounts of transformation also emphasize that it requires effort and determination to become literate, but that the exertion will be rewarded. For example, a 1984 article ends with the following profile:

> Blanche Rudnick, 50, a student at a literacy program sponsored by the North York Public Library, was functionally illiterate until two months ago. Since she began the program, she has had a letter to the editor published in a city newspaper and is, for the first time, reading stories to the children she babysits for a living. "It takes guts, courage, and willpower to continue to do it," she said ("Toronto school board gives priority to fight to end adult illiteracy," 1984).

These accounts can be understood as redemption narratives that illustrate how people have been saved from the tragic consequences of not being able to participate in the print society in which they live. However, it is also possible to discern within these narratives calls to self-regulation and self-improvement that are so central to self-governance (Cruikshank, 1996). All of the interviewees are, in effect, stating that they know that their lives without literacy were inadequate: they describe the consequences of not attaining the external objective of becoming literate, they outline how they have internalized this objective and they articulate their commitment to a project of self-improvement in order to attain this objective.

Adults who struggle with print are constructed as problems in articles that mention them as lacking motivation. Several pieces from the 1980s note that few adults attend programs compared to the magnitude of the problem, as indicated by statistics. For example, a 1983 article in the Toronto Star reports that a "make-work project to teach literacy has found fewer than 150 adults interested in the service" and that "group's biggest challenge is to encourage uneducated adults to return to school." This is despite the fact that the program is located in a region with "the highest illiteracy rate in Metro Toronto, according to the 1981 census of Canada" (Matas, 1983).

While individual narratives appear in published articles over all three decades, these accounts do not stand on their own: they are always included in articles to relay findings from reports about the literacy problem or about how a particular program is addressing this problem. Most often interviews with adult literacy students are used to counter disbelief; journalists assume their readers will doubt that it is possible that there are adults in their midst who do not read and write. Thus interviews with adult learners are positioned within larger articles about the problem of illiteracy, as evidence that the statistics or claims of literacy programs and advocates are true.

I argue that journalists assume their readers will not believe that adults born and educated in Canada cannot read because many articles—whether or not they include the words of adults who struggle with print—use the first person plural. In doing so the writers include readers in a set of shared and unstated assumptions about literacy. For example, the 1983

Globe and Mail article outlining findings from the UNESCO report opens by stating that "an alarming percentage still lack the basic skills required to cope in society"; the author of the introduction is quoted as saying, "Unfortunately, we in Canada have an illusion that there really isn't a problem" (Laver, 1983). Similarly, a 2007 editorial that begins by confessing that the author's partner could not read until the fourth year of his elementary schooling asserts that literacy is "a skill we often take for granted. We neglect its direct impact on our health, social interactions, ability to learn and day-day-functioning" (Laxamana, 2007). In both of these examples people who don't read are constructed as creating problems for the population as a whole: they cannot cope, their presence is "alarming," their lack of skill makes them unable to learn or to "function." The excluded others are a problem because they cannot act independently or take adequate care of themselves; literacy is posited as the attribute which would turn them into responsibilized (Ilcan & Basok, 2004) citizens, just like us.

Putting a human face on the issue does not indicate that journalists, or the readers of newspapers, value what adults know about their own lives. Over the three decades there are more statistical accounts about adult literacy than human interest stories about people who struggle with print. When the two papers turned to reporting aggregate findings about adult literacy, such as the Human Development Index after 1990 and the IALS after 1997, first-hand accounts decline considerably. This trend is most pronounced after the North American Free Trade Agreement takes effect: between 1992 and 2002, of 61 local and national news stories, only 4 included interviews with adult literacy students or program workers.

The personal narratives in newspaper coverage of adult literacy operate to inscribe the need for literacy skills that serve economic interests in all subjects, whether adults who cannot read or the "rest of us." Not only do many articles insist on the dire consequences of failing to "attack" the problem or win the "war against illiteracy" (Calamai & Tamburri, 1987), some quote experts who claim that lack of literacy will result in "disaster" (Corner, 1986). Others explicitly state that its economic consequences makes literacy an issue that affects everyone. In the article describing how six national leaders respond to the Southam survey results, literacy is said to be "affecting all Canadians", as

"an issue of national economic survival" something that is not just "…a nice thing to do [but] absolutely critical. Non-negotiable" and vital to "survival on a national scale" because of its impact on "Canada's international competitiveness and industrial productivity" (Calamai & Southam News, 1987a).

4.3   Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed how, by quoting adults who struggle with print in news stories, newspapers effectively consolidated the literacy-as-employability rationality. Narratives about struggles with print included descriptions of how ashamed adults feel about not being able to read, the hardships caused by their lack, the strategies they used to cope, and the transformations that occurred when they finally learned to read and write. I argued that news coverage of adult literacy included such narratives in ways that served to "orde[r] the social" (Edwards, 2008, p. 30) according to neoliberal logics. Individual narratives helped to recode the meaning of literacy, steering it away from "a tool for self-fulfillment [that]…leads to participation in society" (Thomas, 1983) towards a definition that emphasized a flexible set of "information-processing skills" (Darville, 1999) useful to economic competition. The shift in meaning was part of a broader move in this era towards constructing enterprising subjects that "exhibi[t] qualities of autonomy, self-management and personal responsibility" (Edwards, 2008, p. 28). The articles in the sample I studied constructed adults who struggle with print as subjects who need to change because their dependency and lack of productivity created problems that are costly to businesses, the government and the economy. Thus the articles articulate the neoliberal values of self-sufficiency and productivity and call on *all* subjects to regulate, manage and develop themselves to attain a literacy that will serve the needs of the emerging knowledge economy. Although my analysis has focused on newspaper reports about adult literacy in one specific locale, I suspect similar patterns have occurred in other contexts: those are fruitful possibilities for future research.

Chapter 5
Calculating Literacy, Constructing a Psychometrological Regime

When data from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was first released, many literacy advocates in Canada had great expectations that the statistics would support adult literacy work. Less than a decade later, however, the sense in the field is that the survey data has narrowed the scope of literacy research (Quigley, Folinsbee, & Kraglund-Gauthier, 2006) and pushed aside the voice of literacy learners. Adult literacy policies have intensified pressure to work with adults who can most quickly and easily show improvement (Myers & de Broucker, 2006; Smythe, 2011; Veeman, Ward, & Walker, 2006). Program funding has stagnated or decreased yet administrative demands have multiplied, leading to a sense among front-line workers that governments are more interested in administrative reports than educational outcomes for adult learners (Crooks et al., 2008). As a result many front-line workers and literacy advocates are tremendously frustrated: they feel that policies elaborated in response to IALS data should make their lives easier but are instead having the opposite effect. Literacy advocates' frustration indicates a profound disjuncture between the aims of government policies and the goals of community programs established to help adults learn to read and write (Darville, 2009, 2011; Jackson, 2005). My thesis research was an effort to grapple with the "dead-ends, problems and impossibilities" (Foucault, 1991, p. 84) produced by Ontario policies based on the OECD statistics. I contend that adopting the lens of governmentality offers a useful corrective to the traps which have ensnared advocates of literacy, myself included, when we have assumed that IALS, and policies based on similar statistics, were designed to increase support for adult basic education and for adults who struggle with hegemonic literacies. My focus on literacy as a form of conduct leads me to ask what is produced by the way in which literacy is linked to individual wealth, economic productivity and national prosperity. I use the observation that numerical accounts simplify or overlook the complexities of literacy practices as a starting point for my analysis of what is constituted by these classifications and statistics.

In this chapter I return to Graff's (1995) observation that mass literacy campaigns have been central to projects of Western modernization and "tied to the reordering of society at

a time of transformation" (p. 49). I consider how the particular kind of literate subject constructed by IALS corresponds to broader economic and political shifts underway in the late twentieth-century. I begin with a discussion of the role of statistics in modern rule, then consider how IALS quantifications of adult literacy may be configuring literacy as a field of advanced liberal governance. I argue that the claim that IALS Level Three is "a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi) introduces a threshold between capable and unfit subjects and entrenches the "imperialist origins of globalization" (Rizvi, 2009). The analysis in this chapter provides theoretical background for empirical evidence in Chapter 6 which indicates that IALS Level Three is being used in Ontario as a threshold[32] to determine whether subjects have value as human capital, or should be subjected to coercive educational interventions.

5.1 Making Statistical Sense

By situating my work within governmentality studies I am choosing to highlight the processes which emphasize the contribution of an aggregation—the population conceived as an abstracted generality—to economic requirements. This perspective allows me to analyze how power works through processes that shape both what subjects desire and how subjects act. Every form of classification produces particular ways of being in the world; in her analysis of "child development" Walkerdine (1993) found that when such categories become naturalized the "particular relations of power and oppression inscribed inside the practices" (p. 461) of classification disappear. She also argues that all classifications produce subjects, rather than read objects, because discourse "actually defines what is understood and how" (1993, p. 454). This is a helpful reminder for adult literacy statistics, which have become deeply naturalized in a very short period of time. Before discussing what kind of conduct is produced by the IALS statistics I outline how I have applied a governmentality lens to statistics.

A number of postcolonial scholars have deployed Foucault's concepts to analyze the role of statistics in subjectification. Mitchell (1988) observed that English rule in Egypt relied

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[32] I borrowed the notion of a bio-political threshold from Weir (2006).

heavily on representations which enframed, contained and managed subjects; statistics was only one mechanism used to "infiltrate, re-order and colonise" (p. 35). According to Appadurai (1996), the "countable abstractions" of statistics offered colonizers a sense of certainty that indigenous reality could be managed. He argued that British statistics about India were often incorrect, but their accuracy was less important than their discursive role "in supporting or subverting various classificatory moves and the policy arguments based on them" (1996, p. 120). Focusing on the interventionist role of statistics, Kalpagam (2000) argues that statistics has operated as "the most important language in the narrative legitimation of modernity, that is, for telling stories about progress, of accumulation of wealth, control of nature, the well-being of humanity" (p. 47). She proposes that in addition to analyzing technologies of rule that construct what "counts" as legitimate knowledge about social phenomena we must also pay attention to how those technologies connect to "administrative discourses [that seek] to reconstruct social forms" (loc. cit.).

Appadurai's and Kalpagam's analyses of the colonial uses of statistics offer examples of how to think about what governing-effects statistics and dominant discourses about literacy have on contemporary subjects. In many ways, the OECD version of literacy seems to articulate the same virtues as the civilizing mission ideology, which asserted that "[r]ationality, empiricism, progressivism, systematic (hence scientific) inquiry, industriousness and adaptability" were the virtues required by "the capitalist industrial order" (Adas, 2004, p. 81). The civilizing mission ideology valued the attributes of "hard work, discipline, curiosity, punctuality, honest dealing and taking control," and assumed that these characteristics should be used for the "accumulation and reinvestment of wealth…to anticipate and forecast future trends …[in] the drive for unbounded productivity and the provision of material abundance" (loc. cit.). A full analysis of the similarities and differences between these rationalities must wait for another time; what is suggestive is the central role of statistics in both governing mentalities. What I would like to highlight is the particular power of statistical classifications. According to Oksala (2010), Foucault posits that bio-power "grounds its demands on scientific truth and the goals of wellbeing and care of the population" (p. 42). While biopolitical brutalities—putatively objective forms of truth and claims to work in the interest of the population as whole—can be contested, they are difficult "to detect and regulate" (2010, p. 42) because

they are the "depoliticised violence of expert knowledge" (2010, p. 38). Expert knowledge produced by a transnational centre of authority, such as the OECD, can be even more difficult to resist.

Earlier I noted that advanced liberalism operates by governing through freedom, through how subjects relate to themselves. It requires "knowing and regulating the nature of human individuals in their depths and details" (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 175). Subjects "come to accept, value, desire and strive to achieve congruence between their personal objectives and those objectives external to themselves" (Edwards, 2008, p. 28) through technologies of the self. Rather than injunction, regulation or threat, power operates through what subjects "cannot not want" (Spivak, 1993). That is, people come to think of themselves and the actions open to them in terms that are produced by categories and classifications that circulate in discourse. Such discourses assert that subjects can only consider themselves modern, or productive or cognitively capable if they perform the narrow literate conduct defined by literacy statistics. While individuals may hold other views, the discursive power of statistics makes it difficult for them to describe their perceptions and experiences in other terms.

Others have examined how calculative practices have been used to restructure education within Canada (McCoy, 1998; Spencer, 2006) and beyond (Grek, 2008, 2009; Jackson, 2005), although not necessarily through the lens of governmentality. Calculative practices (Higgins & Larner, 2010) play a particular role in advanced liberal governance because they are presented as impartial information and can restrict "political controversy in the economic field" (Barry, 2005, p. 89). Standards translate abstract programmes into authority "over persons, places and activities in specific locales and practices" (Rose, 1996b, p. 43) and can be applied to virtually any question of governance. Hacking (1991) used the term looping to describe the process whereby statistics create classifications which limit how people come to think of ourselves. This notion allows me to see IALS as constructing literate conduct as a mandatory.

5.2   Assembling a Psychometrological Regime

The OECD interest in literacy was based on what Street (2003) termed the "autonomous" model of literacy.[33] In this view, which pervades common-sense understandings, improving people's literacy skills will not only enhance their cognitive functioning, it will also improve their income potential and their ability to participate in civil society. What the autonomous model overlooks are all of the "social and economic conditions that accounted for their 'illiteracy' in the first place" (Street, 2003, p. 77).

The designers of IALS assert that a continuum of adult literacy competence is a better measure than past indicators, including the binary of literate/illiterate or the proxy measure of years of education commonly employed in the census. However, IALS and related surveys are based on a particular assessment of competence: calculations of the relative complexity of a particular form of cognitive processing of print material. The assumptions and methodology of IALS have been widely critiqued (Darville, 1999, 2011; Gomez, 2000; Hamilton & Barton, 2000; Hautecoeur, 2000; Manesse, 2000). The surveys can be understood as "uncritically support[ing] the new work-order vision of global capitalism and encourage people to see this as a fixture around which we need to adjust our lives and national policies" (Hamilton and Barton, 2000, p. 385); IALS also uses "productivity as its primary imperative" (Houp, 2009, p. 698). The IALS definition of literacy is "both a conceptual excision, of information-processing skills underlying diverse tasks, and a historical projection" of an "emerging 'knowledge society'…[that] will allow no one refuge from literacy demands" (Darville, 1999, p. 280). It entrenches a set of narrowly-defined work-related skills (Jackson & Slade, 2008) and equates test-taking ability with "'flexibility' as a labour force attribute" (Darville, 1999, p. 273). IALS was one of the "knowledge management instruments" through which the OECD "manufactured a consensus on its discourse" (Rubenson, 2008, p. 257) promoting education as an "instrument in global competition" (2008, p. 253). In doing so, IALS

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[33] "The standard view in many fields, from schooling to development programs, works from the assumption that literacy in itself—autonomously—will have effects on other social and cognitive practices…. The model, I suggest, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these benign effects…The autonomous approach is simply imposing western conceptions of literacy on to other cultures or within a country those of one class or cultural group onto others." (Street, 2003, p. 77)

carries forward educational inequalities which, as Collins and Blot (2003) argue, form subjects who come to accept hierarchical social organization and educational discrimination (p. 96).

It is worth noting that IALS was developed in the context of neoliberal globalization, a term Rizvi (2009) uses to remind us that global trade relations are not new and have historically been structured by European dominance.[34] Shore (2009) has argued that the OECD surveys operate to solidify racialized hierarchies, and I concur that the adoption of psychometry echoes some very worrisome tendencies. During the 20th century cognitive testing was employed as "an elaborate and supposedly objective means" for distinguishing between subjects (Miller & O'Leary, 1987, p. 249), with devastating social effects. Recent results from psychometric tests have been used to argue that there is such a thing as "lower IQ nations" (Wong, 2007). Furthermore, the United States tallies results from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy by race and reported that "Whites had the highest scores" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) in all three domains tested in 2003. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the connections between IQ tests, the eugenics movement and the psychometric framing adopted by the OECD but the parallels are worth further exploration (see, for example, Baum, 2012; Stern, 2006).

The analytic of bio-power allows me to understand the stubborn persistence of the autonomous model of literacy and the "literacy myth" (Graff, 1979)—that economic expansion cannot occur without rising levels of literacy—in the face of substantial historical research to the contrary and significant scholarship elaborating an understanding of literacy as a set of social practices that cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical context in which they occur (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Brandt, 2001; Collins & Blot, 2003; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995). The lens of bio-power allows me to consider what role literacy plays in normalizing hierarchies that operate to construct exclusions along categories of race, gender, disability and class. From this perspective, it seems that literacy is central to the biopolitics of modernity.

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[34] Rizvi reminds us to examine neoliberal globalization as operating in different ways in "particular localities" (2009, p. 53) and to remember that contemporary subjects "negotiate[e] cultural messages…in spaces characterized by asymmetrical power relations" and are capable of "interpreting, accommodating, and resisting dominant discourses" (2009, p. 52). See also Rizvi & Engel, 2009.

Understanding the history of statistics through the lens of bio-power helps me consider statistical approaches to adult literacy in new ways, while also offering a different perspective on how adult literacy workers are being enjoined to act.

Many critiques of IALS suggest that the OECD's human capital approach is an ideological choice or an example of neoliberal policies (Rubenson, 2008; Walker, 2009). Their work has been extremely useful to my own analysis, but I understand neoliberalism more broadly as a political rationality in which "strategies to create and sustain a 'market'" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 199) permeate all aspects of life. Within neoliberal governing rationalities subjects are not so much social citizens who have rights and obligations but individuals who are responsible for pursuing their own self-interest by investing in themselves. A governmentality lens (Larner, 2000) makes it possible to view the human capital approach as an insistence upon norms and values which foster "flexibility among nations, organizations and individuals" (Edwards, 2008, p. 28) in the interests of economic competitiveness.

The OECD claimed that, in order to enhance their competitiveness, member nations should adopt active labour market programs. Radical transformation of income guarantee programs such as welfare and unemployment insurance (Gass, 1988), would encourage people to adopt an enterprising ethos. The problem of their dependence would be solved by shifting them from a liability to an asset on the nation's balance sheet. Such notions, elaborated in the OECD *Jobs Study* (1994) and *Jobs Strategy* (1996), assumed a two-tier approach to the knowledge economy in which "the large group of low-skilled unemployed workers" would be encouraged to enter low-wage jobs through job-readiness and welfare-to-work programs (Rubenson, 2008, p. 254). Education and training programs would be an important mechanism for transforming such problem subjects into valuable human capital.

Before I examine how the IALS classifications are operating, I would like to pause for a moment to consider the relationship between statistics and policy. In contrast to governmentality scholarship which asserts that numbers construct policy, Curtis (2000) has argued that in the case of the Buller Commission—which I discussed in section 3.2,

(Literacy as Moral Imperative)—the collection of statistics was propelled by a political decision rather than the other way around. Given that IALS was tied to OECD interest in promoting active labour market policies, it seems plausible that its statistics may have been driven by the rise in human capital rationalities. And yet it is also true that the calculative practices at the heart of IALS *do* seem to provide data which configures the abstraction of literate conduct as a field for advanced liberal governance. In other words, IALS seems to have a looping effect, not only for individual subjects but also for policy-makers. Thus I agree with both Curtis and with the governmentality scholarship he took issue with: IALS was not only a response to fears about falling competitive advantage, but also an attempt to construct the responsibilized entrepreneurial subjects necessary for advanced liberal governance.

The IALS framing relies on a new definition of literacy, one that privileges the ability to find and use information, and that ranks the complexity of cognitive processing. If IALS was propelled by the policy imperatives of neoliberal governance, what role does psychometric testing play in evaluating and ranking the value of human capital? I would suggest that the calculative practices at the heart of IALS configured the abstraction of literate conduct as a field for advanced liberal governance. In other words, calculations of cognitive processing construct literate conduct—as defined through the IALS levels—as behaviour which is vital to national economic productivity and competitiveness in the global economy. These calculations are claimed to be the new norm for assessing the relative value of human capital. Some scholars have adopted the term "metrological regime" to denote zones in which measures have "come to take relatively standardised forms" (Barry, 2005, p. 96). Given that IALS is based on psychometrics, an apt term for jurisdictions which have been permeated by its human capital thinking and active labour market policies might be "psychometrological regime."

I am arguing that using numerical operations to dissect and quantify individual cognitive processing of print materials, in order to describe capacities of aggregated populations, constitutes a new way of knowing and acting upon adult literacy. IALS renders normative literate practices in official languages a mandatory form of conduct for subjects of neoliberal globalization, and claims that analysis of the psychometric depths and details

of individual subjects is information that is vital to economic productivity and competitiveness. Not only is IALS a new way of thinking about what people can do or can contribute to economic productivity, it also makes people responsible for treating themselves as capital to be invested in. I turn now to consider how the psychometrological regime achieves these ends.

5.3   Producing a Threshold of Capable Literate Conduct

Tied as it is to efforts to enact active labour market policies, IALS makes literate conduct vital to economic competition and to advanced liberal governance. Paying attention to the political concerns which drove the development of IALS, it becomes possible to examine how such surveys are operating to govern the conduct of literate conduct (Foucault, 1982). The designers and champions of IALS assert that it marks a positive departure from earlier assessments of literacy because it treats literacy as a continuum rather than a quality that people either do or do not possess. However, the declaration that Level Three is "a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi) introduces a new distinction: between being literate and "not literate enough." By demarcating this threshold, IALS introduces a mechanism for distinguishing between individuals who are worthy, because they enact capable literate conduct, and those who are unfit neoliberal subjects—the contemporary equivalent of the "undeserving poor." In doing so, it constructs a singular and problematic population who must be transformed. It also makes every subject responsible for being "literate enough" to contribute to productivity. In this way it individualizes lack of literacy, unemployment and poverty.

A very curious thing happens through IALS Level Three: it simultaneously conflates subjects' interiority—the measure of their cognitive processing—and exteriority—the value of their very bodies as human capital—while erasing the context in which these minds and bodies exist. IALS does not claim to rectify the economic inequalities that result from globalization. Instead, reports of its findings invoke the "fall in real wages of people with low skills and widening earning differentials since the early 1980s" as evidence that OECD member nations should focus on literacy that prepares individuals for "employment growth…especially in white-collar high-skilled occupations" (OECD &

Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 8). What these elegant and misleading correlations ignore is the growing racialization of poverty in many OECD nations. Bannerji (2005) reminds us that it is not possible to separate economic, political and cultural spheres from one another and argues that 'race' is a "power-inscribed way—of reading or establishing difference, and finding a long-lasting means for reproducing such readings, organization and practice" (p. 148). Further she states that the economic, political and cultural spheres work together as "active social organization" that create "normalized and experiential knowledge about whose labour counts the least" (p. 149) and can therefore be exploited the most.

IALS rankings justify the abjection of subjects who fall below the threshold of Level Three, those who do not possess what experts have deemed to be the "suitable minimum for coping" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi). In doing so, the IALS framing requires turning attention away from differential access to information, resources and the uneven way in which the benefits or rewards of universal education are distributed. Questions about educational equity are political matters; statistical claims to impartiality rely upon the "depoliticised violence of expert knowledge" (Oksala, 2010, p. 38) to evade such charged issues.

Furthermore, contrary to census measures which rely upon individuals' self-reported status, the IALS and subsequent surveys dismiss individuals' assessments of their interactions with print. Instead the psychometrological regime asserts that their knowledge about their own literacy practices are unreliable or not relevant; it insists that experts' projections about potential future print demands and current cognitive processing are more significant. In particular, tested individuals' knowledge about themselves and their literacy is dismissed. Within the survey they are not allowed to assert their own definition of literacy and they can "can only respond in tightly scripted ways (or transgress by not responding)" (Hamilton, 2001, p. 187). As one critic noted, champions of IALS interpret contradictions between their tested literacy and their self-assessment as indicating that "People don't know how stupid they are" (Henningsen, n.d.).

In introducing a threshold of capable literate conduct, the psychometrological regime breaches the delicate balance between freedom and rights. It justifies coercive measures against people deemed "unable to cope" because they constitute a threat to the welfare of the population as a whole. These insights lead me to several fruitful areas for future research. I would like to undertake analysis of the Level Three threshold in light of Valverde's (1996) assertion that despotism towards unfit subjects is central to liberal rule; and in light of Foucault's characterization of liberal states as "demonic" (Dean, 2001) and Henman and Dean's (2010) argument that such classifications "translate to freedom for some, coercion for others, and obligation for many" (p. 89). I would also like to investigate how the psychometric threshold within IALS may be continuous with past distinctions between who was and was not "educable" and particularly how such constructs entrenched racialized hierarchies of subjects. Another question worth further investigation is how the IALS insistence that testees read autonomously may be linked to the construction of individualized entrepreneurial subjectivity.

5.4   Conclusion

In this chapter I focused on the economic concerns and human capital thinking which drove the development of IALS. I explore what was accomplished by declaring that IALS Level Three was the minimum required to cope, arguing that in addition to an inventory of resources available for the pursuit of neoliberal policies, this threshold produced a technology for implementing neoliberal governmentality. I noted that the Level Three threshold constructed a singular target population but also elaborated a psychometrological regime through which to govern adults who are deemed not "literate enough." In the next chapter I explore how the declaration that Level Three is the minimum required to cope became a mechanism of disciplinary power in neoliberal reforms to social assistance in Ontario.

Chapter 6
Grade 12 or Die:
Literacy Screening as a Tactic of Bio-Power[35]

Over the past decade, a significant body of work has explored the impact of neoliberal globalization (Rizvi & Engel, 2009) on all levels of education. The focus of much scholarship on adult literacy in advanced capitalist nations has been to critique the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) project to explicitly link literacy to economic productivity through surveys starting with the 1994 *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS). For example, Walker (2009) asserts that OECD framing of literacy operates as the ideology of "inclusive liberalism" and Rubenson (2008) argues that indicators such as IALS have been used to "manufacture a consensus" that "more strongly integrate[s] education into the core of labour market and economic agendas" (p. 257). Darville (1999) pointed out that, by measuring sight-reading ability, IALS constructs literacy as "the counterpoint of flexibility as labour force attribute" (p. 280) which will increase productivity and national competitiveness. Barton and Hamilton examined how the OECD framing reinstates a distinction between "vernacular and dominant literacies" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and Hamilton (2001) argued that the IALS tests occlude processes through which "certain literacy practices are supported, controlled and legitimated… [and] others are de-valued" (p. 179). More recent work has drawn attention to the importance of attending to how literacy reinforces power imbalances along lines of race, class and other markers of social difference (Blommaert, 2008; Collins & Blot, 2003; Hernandez-Zamora, 2010).

Although much literacy scholarship points out that print materials never circulate outside of a material, cultural and historical context, relatively little attention has been paid to how definitions of literacy are used to produce subjects "within particular discourse sites" and how constructed identities "[serve] political and ideological interests" (Wickert, 1993, p. 37). In this chapter I consider how the OECD's 1994 definition of literacy was

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[35] An earlier version of this chapter was published as Atkinson, T. (2012). Grade 12 or die: 'Literacy screening' as a tactic of bio-power. In B. L. Spencer, K. D. Gariepy, K. Dehli & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Canadian education: Governing practices and producing subjects* (pp. 7-22). Rotterdam: Sense.

taken up during neoliberal reforms of welfare in Ontario, Canada. Starting in 1997 the province began a process of restructuring through which welfare shifted from a social program guaranteeing a minimum income to a system requiring recipients to enter into contracts which outlined the responsibilities they were required to fulfill in exchange for benefits. Reforms to welfare were designed to reduce the number of people who apply for, are eligible for, or continue to receive welfare benefits (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005): the maximum benefit amount for a single person in 2009 was $7,020 a year, while Statistics Canada calculated that a single person in Toronto could not live on less than $17,954 (Monsebraaten, 2009).

To reflect the shift from a program that helped people in need to a program that aimed to transform non-productive subjects into workers, welfare was renamed Ontario Works. Welfare reform in Ontario was accompanied by administrative changes, including contracting out some portions of the intake process to private consultants. The "new business practices and the technologies to support them" (Herd, et al., 2005, p. 68) increased the regulation and surveillance of people applying for benefits. Although the Ministry of Community and Social Services maintained authority to set regulations governing the program, responsibility for administering Ontario Works was transferred from the provincial to the municipal level. Starting in 2001 a mandatory literacy test was introduced; now every person applying for benefits who cannot prove that they have secondary education must take the *Ontario Works Literacy Screening Test*. The government document guiding how welfare offices across Ontario must use this test is *Directive #8.3: Literacy screening, assessment and training* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2008).

In this chapter I consider how the mandatory literacy test, and the regulation governing its administration, operate as technologies of neoliberal governmentality. My aim in this chapter is to mobilize Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power, bio-power, and governmentality to consider how the mandatory literacy test, and the regulation governing its administration, operate as technologies of neoliberal governmentality. To undertake my analysis I sketch how a particular kind of literacy became one of the conditions that people seeking social assistance were expected to meet. I examine how

these documents operate as technologies of disciplinary, bio-, and governmental power to construct the target population for the Literacy and Basic Skills policy. This chapter provides background information to my ethnographic data, as the individuals identified through the *Literacy Screening Test* are referred to the community literacy programs where my informants work.

6.1 Power in Neoliberal Welfare Regimes

Since the 18th century when liberalism first sought to manage the "domain outside 'politics'" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 180), political rationalities have framed problems in order to act on them, and increasing numbers of agents have been involved in defining, representing, and administering these problems. While liberalism assumes that individuals are free to make choices, the concept of governmentality draws attention to the "self in the world" as "a relation to an always open and ever-changing complex social whole, itself structured by relations of power, and necessitating techniques of governance" (Olssen, 2009, p. 91). Governmentality refers to the technologies which regulate individual conduct as an element of population, but also to the "problematic of government in general" (Foucault, 1991, p. 88). This notion draws attention to the particular "social-institutional and political contexts" (Olssen, 2009, p. 91) and historical moments within which processes of subjectivation occur. In section 2.3 (Adapting and Learning) I outlined my understanding of Foucault's ideas about governance, normalization and the workings of power. I noted that by drawing attention to those who do not fit, established norms structure what choices are available for individual subjects as they act to constitute themselves.

Rose and Miller (1992) assert that neoliberalism should be understood as a kind of governmentality, a "re-organization of political rationalities" marked by "the proliferation of strategies to create and sustain a 'market', to reshape the forms of economic exchange on the basis of contractual exchange" (p. 199). The subject within neoliberal states is

> less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a
> collective body than an individual whose…citizenship is to be manifested not in

the receipt of public largesse, but in the energetic pursuit of personal fulfilment

and the incessant calculations that are to enable this to be achieved (1992, p. 201).

While the tenets of neoliberalism espouse a diminishing role for government in the social sphere, neoliberal governments spend significant energy and resources enforcing market logic. Policies are based on the assumption that individuals must be enjoined to adopt market values and competition can be fostered through social mechanisms. Subjects are "fashioned as free and autonomous entrepreneurs" (Hamann, 2009, p. 43) expected to use "market-based values in *all* of their judgements and practices" (2009, p. 38). The introduction of market logics to education has transformed it into a form of investment which subjects are expected to make in order to "amass sufficient quantities of 'human capital' and thereby become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'" (loc. cit.). Subjects who are not economically self-sufficient, who fail to adopt market rationalities or who do not actively invest in their own development are constructed as a problem.

Market values and cost-benefit judgements were used to justify transforming welfare from a program of entitlement that ensured people did not starve to a contractual program that required people to be "productive" in exchange for receiving benefits (Dean, 2007; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Marston, 2008; Schram, Soss, & Fording, 2003). These changes were part of the larger neoliberal trend toward "responsibilizing" citizens (Ilcan, 2009; McDonald & Marston, 2005). Neoliberal welfare reform was based, in part, on public discourses which asserted that people dependent on social assistance were a major drain on the economy, the government, and the population of taxpayers (Alfred, 2006; Harris, 2001; Myles, 1996; Sandlin, 2003; Schram, 2006).

Specifically, the spectre of subjects who are "welfare frauds" constructs the ideal as an active subject who, starting in high school, begins to accumulate human capital by amassing educational resources. At the same time, the statement invokes the opposite: the person who is wasting their human capital rather than treating their life as an asset that they should invest in. The discourse of the welfare fraud creates a hierarchy of citizenship in neoliberal regimes: unemployed persons are constructed as uneducated, devoid of useful skills and dependent on the state. In Canada, reduced social spending relied

heavily on asserting that every citizen was "personally accountable for the deficit" (Thobani, 2007, p. 209) and simultaneously distanced deserving citizens from the "inherent unworthiness" (2007, p. 210) of immigrants.

Governmentality scholars have adopted the term "responsibilization" (Cruikshank, 1996; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Ilcan & Basok, 2004) to draw attention to the fact that, within neoliberal governing rationalities, subjects are responsible for meeting their own basic needs and governing themselves. Those who are not economically self-sufficient and actively investing in their own development are constructed as a problem. During the 1980s and 1990s such rationalities were adopted by governments in many advanced liberal nations which reduced spending on social services, shifted responsibility for social programs from the public to the private sector, and drastically restructured welfare systems. Market values and cost-benefit judgements were used to justify transforming welfare in many OECD member nations from a program of entitlement that ensured people did not starve to a contractual program that required people to be productive in exchange for receiving benefits (Dean, 2007; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Marston, 2008; Schram, Soss, & Fording, 2003).

According to Ilcan, Oliver and O'Connor (2007), responsibilized subjects are expected to "attain their own welfare through market activity, family resources, and charity if necessary" (p. 82); this assumes that all subjects have permanent, full-time jobs but also that social needs will be met by one's family. Such pressures place women in contradictory positions: they are expected to work outside of the home at the same time as their "care-giving responsibilities in the family household are intensified to offset government cutbacks to social services such as health care and daycare facilities for children" (loc. cit.). Feminist scholars note that neoliberal restructuring of social welfare has relied on not only "increasing privatization of social services" but also "the unpaid labour of women family members or poorly paid domestic labour often provided by immigrant women or women of colour" (2007, p. 82). They term this transformation the "'refamilialization' of caring responsibilities" (2007, p. 81).

Brodie (2008) argues that because social welfare policies were crucial for gender equality they were early targets for neoliberal transformations. Elsewhere Brodie (1997) asserts that privileging of market relations results in women and other equity-seeking groups being considered different sorts of citizens and having less of a place in the public sphere than men. That is, strategies to create market relations in the social realm have landed heavily on the shoulders of women and racialized groups, who continue to experience "lower employment wages, average incomes, and …greater unpaid domestic labour" (Ilcan, et al., 2007, p. 82). In contrast, the primary beneficiaries of neoliberal responsibilization have been those subjects whose take-home pay increased because of lower personal income tax rates: primarily middle- to upper-income white men (Phillipps, 2000).

In part, neoliberal welfare reform was justified through public discourses which asserted that people dependent on social assistance were a major drain on the economy, the government, and the population of taxpayers (Alfred, 2006; Harris, 2001; Myles, 1996; Sandlin, 2003; Schram, 2006). In Canada, reduced social spending relied heavily on asserting that every citizen was "personally accountable for the deficit" (Thobani, 2007, p. 209) and simultaneously distanced deserving citizens from the "inherent unworthiness" (2007, p. 210) of immigrants and indigenous peoples. Critics of neoliberal welfare reform elsewhere have noted that these transformations have served to entrench inequalities along racialized (Alfred & Chlup, 2009; Taylor & Friedel, 2011) and gendered lines (Baker, 1999; Brady, 2011; Brodie, 1997; Little, 2001).

In many cases neoliberal welfare reform relied on authoritarian forms of power. In Australia, for example, the Job Network Program—an early experiment in mandatory job counselling for people on social assistance—relied on authoritarian forms of power and financial coercions to encourage clients to embody "the right attitudes and behaviour representative of responsible self-government" (McDonald & Marston, 2005, pp. 390-391). Case managers were authorized to use coercive measures which but "would create some material hardship, particularly financial hardship" (2005, p. 389). Requiring clients to adopt this ethos would not necessarily increase their chances of finding a job, but were

efforts to force clients to "take up…the ethics of self-reliance and responsibilization" (2005, p. 395).

In the case of Ontario, welfare reforms began in 1997. The changes were designed to reduce the number of people who could apply for, be eligible for, or continue to receive benefits (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005). Reflecting the shift from a program that helped people in need to a program that aimed to transform non-productive subjects into workers, welfare was renamed Ontario Works. One mechanism in its transformation from a social program that guaranteed a minimum income to a system that responsibilized clients was a severe reduction in the level of benefits. In 2009, the maximum benefit amount for a single person was $7,020 a year, more than $10,000 less than Statistics Canada calculated was the minimum required to meet one's basic needs in Toronto (Monsebraaten). The responsibilizing ethos has operated as bio-power that "*foster[s]* life or *disallow[s]* it to the point of death" (Foucault, 1990, p. 138), with uneven effects. A 2001 survey of individuals in Toronto who were no longer receiving Ontario Works benefits revealed that very few people had found permanent jobs that paid a living wage. Employment outcomes were the worst for people born outside of Canada; they were more likely than Canadian-born adults to be living in poverty and to be working in precarious, temporary, part-time and low-wage jobs (Lightman, Mitchell and Herd, 2005).

Another shift with Ontario Works is that welfare is now a contractual relationship; subjects do not have a right to expect that the state will offer support to keep them from starving. Rather than a right, recipients of Ontario Works benefits are now required to sign contracts outlining the responsibilities they had to fulfill in exchange for benefits. These and other administrative changes that accompanied the transfer of welfare to the municipal level resulted in increased regulation and surveillance of people applying for benefits (Herd, et al., 2005). Starting in 2001 a mandatory literacy test was introduced; since that time, every person applying for benefits who cannot prove that they have secondary education must take the *Ontario Works Literacy Screening Test*. The government document guiding how welfare offices across Ontario must use this test is

Directive #8.3: Literacy screening, assessment and training (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2008).

While some critical attention has focused on how workfare responsibilizes citizens and on how the OECD has linked a particular literacy to economic productivity, little attention has been paid to how the current discourses of literacy have been mobilized to support neoliberal reforms. In this section I draw on Foucaultian scholarship to consider how dominant norms of literacy are operating within the political and economic context of neoliberalism. Campbell (2000) argues that analyses of policy must pay attention to the "governing mentalities" (p. 33) which, through tropes, metaphors, and imaginary characters, shape popular discourse and serve to maintain relations of "social subordination, political exclusion, and economic inequality" (2000, p. 223). She notes that discourses both *mobilize* specific ideas for people and institutions to use for particular purposes and *limit* how people can think about their situation and the options open to them. Further, she stresses the importance of locating how policies and practices connect to prevailing discourses and to the political and economic climate of specific eras. Campbell asserts that unless we pay attention to governing mentalities, efforts to reform policies will ignore "those who are politically vulnerable and economically marginalized" (2000,p. 32)—women of colour and poor women—and will continue to subject them to intense scrutiny and coercion. Similarly, Hamann (2009) argues that it is vital to pay critical attention to how contemporary processes of subjectivation "continue to reinforce and expand… greater wealth disparity and increasing poverty" (p. 59), and how these processes produce a growing racialization of poverty and hierarchies of citizenship.

McDonald and Marston (2005) insist that "social policy researchers, activists, and practitioners… [must place] the problem of unemployment within a social context of power and authority" (p. 397). Using the example of the Job Network program in Australia—an early experiment in mandatory job counselling for people on social assistance—they analyze what modes of authority case managers use to encourage clients to embody "the right attitudes and behaviour representative of responsible self-government" (2005, pp. 390-391). They note that case managers are empowered to use

"coercive authority" which forces clients to comply with "requirements which would not result in a greater chance of finding employment, but which would create some material hardship, particularly financial hardship" (2005, p. 389). These forms of authority are the means by which "the unemployed are enjoined to take up…the ethics of self-reliance and responsibilization" (2005, p. 395) that are so central to neoliberal governmentality.

6.2   Ontario's Mandatory Literacy Test

While the IALS test introduced the notion of literacy as a continuum rather than as a fixed attribute, it also ranked literacy into five levels. Level 3 is defined as "a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. It denotes roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry" (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, p. xi). The assertion that subjects cannot cope with "life and work in a complex, advanced society" unless they have completed secondary school becomes, in Ontario Works, the "suitable minimum" level required as proof of literacy by people who apply for benefits.

Ontario's welfare reform began in 1997, and the mandatory literacy screening assessment was introduced in 2001. In this section I will examine the *Ontario Works Literacy Screening Test* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d.) and the seven-page *Directive #8.3: Literacy screening, assessment and training* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2008), which regulates the administration of the Test. Following Campbell (2000), I will pay attention to how these documents frame the links between literacy and employment, and what images, metaphors and characters they use to do so. I will examine how these documents operate as technologies of disciplinary, bio-, and governmental power to construct subjects and to mask certain realities.

Both the *Ontario Works Literacy Screening Test* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d.) and *Directive #8.3: Literacy screening, assessment and training* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2008) explicitly link literacy and employment; both imply that secondary education is required for all jobs in Ontario. The Test includes a note that case workers must read to "applicants/participants… before administering the literacy screening test." The first sentence states: "This test will help determine if your

reading, writing and math skills may be a barrier to employment" (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d., p. 1). The test does not ask what kinds of work the applicant has done in the past. Instead the Test begins with the question, "Do you have an employment goal?"

The Directive states: "Participation in literacy assessment and/or literacy training may be needed to assist participants in achieving employment goals and meeting local labour market needs" (Dir 8.3-1). On the second page the *Directive* makes the link between literacy and employment more clear: "The approved literacy screening questionnaire is intended to help identify whether an applicant's or participant's abilities may be preventing them from getting a job" (Dir. 8.3-2). By stating that the goal of "literacy assessment and/or literacy training" is to "assist participants in achieving employment goals and meeting local labour market needs" (Dir 8.3-1), the *Directive* asserts that the needs of the labour market are the ultimate aim of the policy.

I argue that both of these documents construct individuals as responsible for being unemployed and in need of financial assistance; both assert that the cause of unemployment and financial need is the applicant's lack of skills and abilities. By focusing on assessing subjects' literacy skills, these documents enrol case workers in enforcing the notion that unemployment and poverty result from individuals not investing in their human capital. Both mobilize the image of the entrepreneurial subject as the ideal against which to judge those who have failed to achieve the "suitable minimum" level of education. However, this framing does not acknowledge any structural imbalances inherent in the labour market, such as the discrepancy between the number of jobs and number of people looking for work. It does not acknowledge systemic forms of discrimination that keep particular subjects unemployed, underemployed, or marginally employed (Arat-Koç, 2010; Bannerji, 2005; Kapsalis, 2006; Thobani, 2007). Nor does it acknowledge the fact that education systems perpetuate systemic advantage for white, middle-class subjects (Heath, 1983; Scheurich, 1994; Willinsky, 1998). In the past, individuals receiving welfare benefits would have been referred to as "clients" or "recipients"; the Test and *Directive*, on the other hand, name these subjects as "applicants/participants". Labelling people who receive benefits as "participants"

explicitly indicates that people who receive welfare benefits are expected to be active and independent. This label is a technique for asserting the neoliberal principle that social assistance is a contract between the state and entrepreneurial subjects. In this contractual relationship, the participant does not have rights to a minimum subsistence income; rather, they can only receive benefits if they fulfill specific obligations. Naming applicants as separate from participants discursively reinforces the idea that everyone who applies is not automatically entitled to benefits. These labels are evidence of the notion that not all subjects are deserving of social assistance.

The second sentence of the *Directive* states: "All applicants and participants with less than a Grade 12 or equivalent education are required to take the literacy screening questionnaire unless confirmation of a learning disorder can be provided" (Dir. 8.3-1). This statement asserts that only people with a proven "learning disorder" are exempted from the literacy requirement. That is, those with a disorder that marks them as medically or pathologically less-than-normal are not expected to have completed secondary education. This statement, I suggest, constructs them as subjects who are likely to be dependent.

The neoliberal entrepreneurial subject is reinforced by the manner in which the *Directive* explicitly names "self-sufficiency" as a goal. In a section titled "Reviewing the Results of the Literacy Screening Questionnaire" the *Directive* outlines what actions case workers must take after assessing an individual applicant's Test. Case workers are expected to undertake "a comprehensive consideration of a number of factors with the primary goal of supporting participants as they move toward self-sufficiency through employment" (Dir. 8.3-3). By stating that the "primary goal" is to make participants "self-sufficient", the *Directive* articulates the government's desire to be freed from the burden of paying benefits. It simultaneously makes disentitlement a contractual obligation of every participant who signs the Agreement.

The Test constructs the aptitudes and capacities that it wishes to increase while containing the threat posed by those capacities (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). The *Directive* states that the Test is an unconditional requirement of Ontario Works: "Applicants who

refuse to take the literacy screening questionnaire are ineligible for social assistance" (Dir 8.3-2). To achieve its bio-political ends, *Directive 8.3* outlines how workers are to use the Test. Case workers—or contracted "delivery agents"—have discretion about when applicants must take the test (Dir 8.3-1); they are also authorized to interpret the results of the assessment. These workers are given authority to decide what the participant must do to rectify their literacy problem and to write the contract—called a Participation Agreement—outlining what obligations the participant must fulfil in order to continue to receive benefits.

The Test can be seen as a technology of authority because "[a]ny participant can be required to take the questionnaire regardless of their education if literacy is a barrier to securing and maintaining employment" (Dir 8.3-1). While previous clauses of the *Directive* identify Grade 12 as the educational norm, this sentence introduces an undefined quality simply referred to as literacy. While the construct literacy operates on one hand to define a set of norms by which eligibility for assistance is measured, it also operates as a quality that is open to interpretation. Thus, in inconsistently rendering the notion of literacy both static and fluid, this regulation opens the possibility for literacy to be called upon, at the discretion of the case worker, as a disciplinary tool. Applicants and participants are held in a state of uncertainty about their eligibility for Ontario Works because their educational credentials can be challenged at any time, not only when they apply for benefits.

To summarize, the Test and *Directive 8.3* operate as technologies of disciplinary power because they clearly articulate the norm of literacy to which all subjects in Ontario are expected to conform; bio-power is evident in how the documents construct lack of literacy as a threat to the population and the economy. By defining how subjects in Ontario are expected to conduct themselves in order to maximize the competitiveness of the province, the Test is a tactic of neoliberal governmentality.

6.3   Masked Realities

During the period in which welfare was reformed, the gap between rich and poor widened and the employment prospects of poor people worsened. For example, a 2005

report found that while the Canadian standard of living increased 43% between 1981 and 2003, the number of adults earning less than $10 per hour remained steady at one in six. These workers—who are disproportionately women (especially single mothers), recent immigrants (especially racialized persons), Aboriginal people and people with little formal education—tend not to receive any employment benefits such as supplementary health insurance. Further, they are unlikely to be able to move into better jobs (Saunders, 2005, p. v).

Lightman, Mitchell and Herd (2005) offer vivid evidence that the neoliberal welfare reforms in Ontario have forced particular groups of people into poverty. Their survey of individuals in Toronto who stopped receiving social assistance in 2001 found that very few people had found permanent jobs that paid a living wage, and that employment outcomes were the worst for people born outside of Canada. Respondents were more likely than others to be living in poverty; they were also more likely to be employed in "precarious" temporary and part-time, low-wage jobs. Although these researchers do not use Foucaultian analytics to interpret their findings, their results offer a clear picture of how welfare reforms operate as bio-power that "*foster[s]* life or *disallow[s]* it to the point of death" (Foucault, 1990, p. 138).

When Ontario Works was introduced, one of its aims was to reduce the number of people collecting benefits. Recent research has shown that the declining number of cases may indicate "success" in neoliberal terms, but it masks the fact that most people who left social assistance did not find stable employment (Lightman, et al., 2005). Researchers have concluded that current policies serve the new economy because they force people off of welfare, rendering a faction of the population desperate for any work and, thus, establishing circumstances that allow for a "reduc[tion of] wages and conditions at the lower end of the labour market" (Herd, et al., 2005, p. 76). That is, the current structure of welfare in Ontario serves to "ensure a ready and willing supply of labour for the lowest tiers of the labour market" (Lightman, et al., 2005, p. 103). Furthermore, it is important to note that the punitive effects of the current welfare regime are not equally distributed: people born outside of Canada are the least likely to find employment of any kind when they are disentitled from Ontario Works. That is, the discourse masks the growing

racialization of poverty in Ontario. For example, the Colour of Poverty campaign found that

> [r]acialized people are much more likely to be unemployed than those of European backgrounds…[and] most likely to be in low-status jobs. More workers are being hired in temporary and insecure positions. The Ontario Employment Standards Act does not adequately protect the rights of people in temporary and part time work, many of whom are women, racialized and/or newcomer workers. One in four workers in Ontario earns below the poverty line. This number is higher for women overall (31%) and women of colour especially (38%) (Colour of Justice Network, 2007).

Living in poverty means that racialized groups are less likely to be able to afford healthy food, potentially leading to poor health, and less likely to be able to afford adequate housing, resulting in high levels of homelessness. These facts reveal how neoliberal restructuring has the greatest adverse effects on racialized groups (Colour of Justice Network, 2007; Slade, 2012; Galabuzi, 2006).

The Ontario Works discourses also mask the fact that Canada has a long tradition of devaluing education for working people, particularly basic education for adults. Adult literacy programs across Canada are under-funded and under-resourced and there is little initial or continuing professional development for instructors in these programs. Because of the range of provision and commitment between jurisdictions, working conditions range from unpaid volunteer work to low-paid contract work with no job security or benefits to salaried employment. In some places, adult literacy practitioners hold secure full-time jobs; in others the staff must apply for short-term project funding in order to offer, and be employed by, a program in their community (Woodrow, 2006). These material conditions result in extremely high staff turnover in many parts of the country. For students who seek adult basic education, few policies actively support their aspirations or recognize the barriers that make it difficult for them to find, or stay in, programs. In fact, two recent studies have both found that the current system of provision privileges students who can move most quickly through the system rather than the

students who have the least formal education or who face the greatest barriers (Hoddinnott, 1998; Veeman, et al., 2006).

6.4   Conclusion

The education requirement within Ontario's welfare regime clearly serves its stated purpose of limiting the number of people who qualify for benefits. The literacy screening assessment, as defined and regulated by *Directive 8.3*, achieves much more. In addition to directing and managing the lives of people who are poor and marginally employed, the literacy requirement in Ontario Works asserts an educational norm expected of all subjects in the province. By explicitly stating that all self-sufficient subjects in the province are expected to invest in their human capital, these documents operate as tools of disciplinary power. The disciplinary norm of literacy borrowed from the IALS "introduce[s] a break… between what must live and what must die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 254). It justifies why certain groups of people are forced into poverty and into accepting low-paying, temporary jobs with no benefits while other bodies are made to thrive. By normalizing the growing racialization of poverty, the Test and *Directive* operate as techniques of bio-power. In requiring all subjects to prove that they have invested in their education to the "suitable minimum" level of secondary school completion, the mandatory literacy test is central to the neoliberal project of responsibilization. Both the *Ontario Literacy Screening Test* and *Directive 8.3* are mechanisms for asserting that the economy relies on citizens' self-sufficiency and productivity and that all subjects are expected to constitute themselves as entrepreneurs who undertake education as a form of investment in themselves as human capital. Furthermore, in detailing how to administer the Test, the *Directive* gives case workers authority which enrols them in the process of enforcing neoliberal subjectivation. These effects make the Test and *Directive* powerful technologies of neoliberal governmentality in Ontario.

Chapter 7
"What You Want Them to Want":
Responsibilizing Dependent Adults in Ontario

> … it's not about what the learners want.
> It's about what you want them to want. (GH)

In this chapter I turn to an analysis of Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy, which governs the agencies offering education for subjects deemed not "literate enough." One of the overall aims of my thesis is to analyze how this group of literacy workers negotiate disconnects between the demands of the current policy environment and their own understanding of themselves as literacy workers. As part of analyzing how they inhabit their role, I must consider how policy discourses and practices construct both literacy workers and the target population they are expected to transform. In Chapter 5 I argued that IALS Level Three introduced a universal threshold for distinguishing between subjects who are, and are not, "literate enough" to act as *homo economicus*. This threshold is central to constructing people who "cannot not want" (Spivak, 1993) to invest in themselves as human capital. In Chapter 6 I analyzed how the threshold of capable literate conduct constructs dependent subjects as problematic, and began to note some biopolitical effects of reforms which turned welfare into a mechanism of responsibilization. In this chapter I focus on how literacy programs are made responsible for transforming those adults below the threshold of capable literate conduct.

My aim in this chapter is to investigate how discourses and practices in the LBS policy construct particular subjectivities for literacy learners and literacy workers, and also to understand how these tactics and techniques arrive in the world. To do so I examine how the LBS policy obliges adults who fall below the threshold of IALS Level Three to become *homo economici,* paying particular attention what is produced by these discourses and practices. Next I outline how funding requirements govern the conduct of literacy workers, making them responsible for enacting the governing rationality. I analyze evidence from interview data to consider how the threshold of capable literate

conduct is operating within a shifting labour market to rank and "distribute the living in the domain of value and utility" (Foucault, 1990, p. 144).

7.1   Literacy and Employability in LBS

In 2004, the provincial government signed a Labour Market Development Agreement with the federal government. Since that time, the vision guiding LBS has been that "Ontario will have the most highly educated and skilled people in the world in order to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 1). The vision statement offers evidence of how literacy and productivity are being discursively linked in the governing rationality. As with the IALS framing, this statement connects falling productivity and lack of competitiveness to the levels of education and skills in the population, and produces literate conduct as mandatory. What is implicit is that unemployed and dependent individuals are a drag on the economy; once transformed into capable subjects by acquiring the requisite skills, they will become active agents in the market economy with an enhanced "capacity…for being used" (Foucault, 1990, p. 147) as human capital.

Since 2007 LBS has been part of Employment Ontario (EO), a network that brings together "employment and training services from the federal and provincial governments into one coherent and comprehensive service delivery system" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 1). LBS service provider agencies are now considered EO agencies and are contractually required to partner with other employment service agencies in their community.

MTCU states that it "invests in the knowledge and skills of Ontarians to ensure they have maximum opportunities for success" (2011, p. 1). The focus on "investment" in skills that can produce "success" transforms literacy from a human right, as it was understood within the literacy-as-participation rationality, into a means of bolstering the province's competitive advantage. In this statement, MTCU is shaping what is possible to think. Literacy is no longer a means to access to information or to participate in civil society or to read for pleasure; instead it is a set of skills subjects should desire because it will produce "success" in employment. These assertions construct unemployment and poverty

as individual problems while obscuring the larger forces which have led to declines in manufacturing jobs in Ontario and a sharp growth in contingent, part-time and low-wage employment. Such assertions also erase discrimination and systemic inequalities which result in highly inequitable "opportunities" in the labour market, particularly for women, indigenous people and racialized populations.

The stated aim of LBS is to "support literacy agencies in providing quality services that meet learners' needs" and to "design literacy services for those adults most in need of them" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2012). Here again we see the LBS policy constituting governable objects by redefining what counts as "needs" and defining the parameters of what counts as having the "most" of such needs. The de facto coercive quality of such "services" becomes clear in the details of the contractual relationships at the heart of LBS, as I outline in the following sections.

7.2   Mandating Program Compliance

Adult literacy programs funded through LBS must apply for funding each year by submitting a business plan to MTCU. The plan outlines how many learners the program plans to serve, and details what proportion will have each of five acceptable learning goals—employment, apprenticeship, secondary school diploma, postsecondary education and independence. The business plan is subject to revision by MTCU and, once approved by Ministry staff, forms the basis of the contractual agreement between agencies and MTCU. These requirements are outlined in more detail in the document describing what MTCU expects of programs, the *Literacy and Basic Skills Service Provider Guidelines.* I turn now to a discussion of this document and the contract which requires programs to follow these guidelines.

The Service Provider Guidelines compel literacy programs to work primarily with unemployed adults, especially "people receiving income support" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011b, p. 9). According to the guidelines, programs funded by LBS are "service providers." A performance management framework outlines quantifiable Service Quality Standards—in Customer Service, Effectiveness and Efficiency—which LBS service providers are contractually obligated to meet. Each

service provider's contract states the number of learners that the program is expected to work with; these figures are derived from the business plan submitted by the individual community programs. The contract also specifies what proportion of learners should be working on each of the five learning goals acceptable within LBS.

The contract which programs must sign in order to receive funding—what MTCU refers to as "the Agreement"—describes LBS as a program which "includes both lower level literacy training and academic upgrading" that "form a comprehensive and integrated adult learning service" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011a, p. Schedule "A"). The Agreement states that the role of service providers is to "assist learners in moving toward their training, education, employability and independence goals" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011a, p. Schedule "A"). Here the LBS goal paths delimit the possible choices open to adult learners and produces employability outcomes as the only legitimate aim of literacy education. Using the term "assist" to refer to the work that LBS "service providers" are expected to perform constructs literacy programs as the mechanism for achieving governmental aims. By using the first person plural ("their") to refer to this narrow range of possible goals, the contract constitutes the governmental object—employable human capital—as something that learners are expected to internalize. These goals were produced by a governing interest in reducing the number of dependent subjects and the cost of social benefits, not an interest in meeting learners' other goals related to reading and writing. Stating that learners are "moving toward" goals that are deemed to be "their" own elides the financial coercions through which many of these adults have been constituted as learners. Learning is an obligation rather than a choice for adults who attend literacy programs as a condition of receiving social assistance: the goal they are expected to "move toward" is less their own than it is a contractual obligation.

According to the terms of the MTCU Agreement, service providers may not "make any changes to the Program, and/or the Budget without the prior written consent of the Ministry" (2011a, p. 6). The Agreement includes a list of reports that service providers must prepare and submit, and stipulates that all records that must be kept and maintained for seven years (2011a, p. 9). Service providers can be inspected at any time, with 24

hours notice, to "review the progress of the Program, the compliance with the Agreement and the Recipient's expenditure of the Funds" (2011a, p. 9). The Ministry defines failures to meet contractual obligations as "events of default." Default events include: intentionally submitting "false or misleading information…breach[ing] any material requirement of the Agreement"—including not submitting reports "to the satisfaction of the Ministry"—and not following the terms and conditions of the Agreement in how the agency "carr[ies] out the program" or "use[s] or spend[s] Funds" (2011a, p. 14). Implications for disobedience are dire: funding may be reduced or withheld and service providers could be asked to repay Funds. The consequence for "events of default" can also result in "any action the Ministry considers necessary in order to facilitate the successful continuation or completion of the Program" (2011a, p. 15).

These, then, are the discursive practices within which literacy learners and workers are currently constituted in Ontario. In this brief analysis I have tried to show how the terms of LBS define parameters for the choices open to both adults who attend literacy programs and the women who work in them. In the following sections I outline in greater detail the coercions operating through how LBS constructs its target population and limits their learning to employment-related goals.

7.3   Constructing a Target Population

 The target population is defined as unemployed adults, especially "people receiving income support" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011b, p. 9) but also adults who experience the following "barriers to learning":

> did not complete secondary school; source of income is provincial social assistance (OW or ODSP), or no income, or ward of the state; out of school for at least 6 years; between the ages of 45 and 65; primary or secondary education was interrupted; identifies oneself as a person with a disability; aboriginal person; deaf or hearing-impaired; francophone (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011b, p. 42).

These "barriers to learning" are used to decide whether an adult is "suitable" to become a learner within a program funded by LBS. MTCU considers that these barriers prevent

adults from "achieving learning goals related to employment, further education or training, and independence" (2011, p. 21), and programs funded through LBS must work with adults who, on average, "experience at least 25%" of these barriers. I note that these characteristics correspond to groups who scored poor results in IALS. Defining such attributes as "barriers to learning" transforms factors that correlate to low test scores as individual attributes which make it difficult for individuals to "achieve learning goals" set for them by MTCU. In asserting that correlations exist between low literacy and certain demographic characteristics, and in focusing on people in these groups as the target population, LBS constructs a causal relationship between these traits and one's literacy level. This discursive move erases the complex correlations between poverty or other issues and lack of fluency in dominant literacies. Further, in asserting that these adults are unemployed or "dependent" because of their lack of literacy—rather than because they suffer from inequitable access to education because of discrimination or other systemic inequalities—it also individualizes unemployment.[36]

MTCU describes in some detail the literate conduct that LBS programs are expected to inculcate in adults working on employment goals. The document outlining how LBS programs can support learners in the Employment Goal path includes the following list of "Personal Management Skills for and at Work":

> punctual, dependable, demonstrates a positive attitude, motivated, performs basic
> job duties, meets goals and deadlines, manages time appropriately, organized,
> identifies problems, solves problems, makes decisions, cooperates with others,
> gets help if needed, manages conflict, takes responsibility on the job, follows
> policies/rules/instructions, speaks effectively, listens attentively,
> expresses/contributes ideas, reads/writes as required, translates ideas into actions
> as necessary, adapts to changes to job routines as necessary, asks for and

---

[36] Note that being wealthy exempts one from the coercions of policy, as the example of hockey coach Jacques Demers shows. But I also note that ideal entrepreneurial subjects are expected to be inactive: to take regular vacations, to retire early or not have to work after age 65, to invest money and live off of dividends or interest, and to hire others to do mundane tasks such as housework, gardening and laundry. Poor people, on the other hand, are not allowed to act in ways that can be perceived as being idle.

participates in training as necessary, learns on the job (Employment Ontario, 2011, pp. 13-14).

The comportment described above can be seen as an extension of the moral attributes ascribed to literacy within previous governing rationalities, and qualities on which the civilizing mission based its claims of "racial" superiority for Europeans. The return to an emphasis on qualities which exemplify the Protestant work ethic can be understood as essential to the market place, which is premised upon subjects acting as enterprising and autonomous individuals.

The workers constructed by this list of "Personal Management Skills" are dutiful, motivated, cooperative, attentive and flexible; adults who do not display such characteristics risk being deemed "unemployable." Programs funded through LBS are expected to train adults with employment goals to perform these behaviours and to adopt this relationship to work. In other words, the classifications produced by the threshold of IALS Level Three have become a particular set of attributes expected of autonomous, entrepreneurial subjects. The list of normative "personal management skills" listed above delimit what it is possible to think about how to behave at work, and how to manage one's conduct. And developing these traits has become an expected element of adult basic education.

During my interviews I asked informants why they thought adult literacy programs are now located within Employment Ontario and why the LBS guidelines focus on employment goals. A few mentioned that they believe the aim of policy is to push people into jobs as quickly as possible and because employed people contribute to tax revenue. For literacy workers like my informant CS the emphasis on employment outcomes in LBS seems to indicate that this population is only allowed to focus on learning skills for work. She describes the suite of provincial policies as attempting to "fast-track people into jobs rather than have them so-called—in the ideology of the government—wasting their time learning generic reading and math skills." (CS) This framing transforms something that was considered a social good in policies of the past, "learning generic reading and math skills," into "waste" for the purposes of the current policy discourse.

And yet, adults are also expected to be trained for any job that becomes available. Even employed adults can be constructed as part of the target population for LBS. RF works in a northern community with low levels of unemployment; she teaches academic upgrading rather than "lower level literacy training" (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011a, Appendix A). The majority of her learners are already working and attend the program in order "to upgrade their skills to get a better job, or to maintain employment." Attending the program is a choice for these learners, because they are employed, but this statement indicates that the employability discourse is shaping the desires of subjects who are not subject to financial coercions. RF notes that there are many others in the community who could benefit from the program but only attend when they are laid off. She observed that "if you've got a good job and you're making good money, where's the motivation to upgrade your skills? It's when you're in fear of losing that job or you need a new job or you need *a* job."

The obligation to be "literate enough" and the linkages between literacy and productivity have become so entrenched and powerful that even being employed is constructed as precarious and problematic. Since these adults are currently working, they are protected from being chastised for being dependent, or coerced into learning; nevertheless they are constructed as a problem because they are seen as lacking motivation to become *more* literate, to prepare for a future job that might materialize in case the current job disappears. That is, everyone below the threshold is obliged to become "literate enough." Whether they are employed or dependent on social benefits, they are expected to invest in themselves as human capital in order to mitigate the risk of future unemployment.[37]

One informant, a retired teacher working part-time in the literacy program in a small community with high rates of unemployment, told me that the government may "want to get people back into the workforce" because

> … they also want to get a lot of people off government-funded programs. Like
> OW [Ontario Works] or WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board], they

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[37] I have not familiarized myself with governmentality literature focused on the risk society (Kaščák & Pupala, 2011) but studying LBS as a project in risk management could prove interesting.

want to move people away from those programs where they're giving them
support. So employment gives them that opportunity, if they can push
employment rather than independence or whatever personal goals, then they get
off the system that much quicker. (DM)

In this excerpt, note that DM is articulating the view that the government perceives
people on income support as a burden rather than an asset. Their position on the
provincial balance sheet is as a liability, since they are an income support expense, rather
than an asset, a source of tax revenue. DM understands that, according to this logic, it
makes sense for the government to "push employment" as part of a larger strategy to
decrease the number of people collecting social benefits. I will return to this in section
7.5 (Constructing *Homo Economicus* One Literacy Learner at a Time), where I analyze
the goal paths within LBS. For now, I want to note that the rationality is used to justify
coercive measures directed at those who depend on social supports.

DM's comment articulates the pervasive neoliberal imperative that individuals be self-
sufficient rather than dependent on any form of state assistance; this is an instance of how
individuals are being defined only by their "capacity for being used" (Foucault, 1990, p.
147) for the benefit of the population as an aggregation. In naming Ontario Works (OW)
and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) as comparable "government-
funded" programs, DM is carrying forward the rationality that people are only valuable
insofar as they contribute to the provincial economy. Assertions of this kind obscure the
significant differences between a tax-funded program (OW) and a premium-funded
insurance scheme (WSIB); they also obscure the difference between being unemployed
(on OW) and recovering from a work-related injury (on WSIB).

But in DM's experience, learners whose source of income is OW or WSIB are similar in
several important ways. These learners are obliged to attend literacy classes as a
condition of continuing to receive benefits; they also have strict time limits for achieving
the goals[38] set when they entered the program. The obligation, the time limits and the

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[38] My informants told me that learners on WSIB face a strict one-year time limit, regardless of where they
started. Learners on OW, on the other hand, have up to 18 months and can sometimes receive support for

limited goal paths are all coercions directed against these subjects who are considered a problem because they are not contributing to the province's productivity and economic competitiveness. DM is held responsible for monitoring the progress of these learners, whose file is administered by a case worker in the OW or WSIB office that referred the learner to the program. If asked, DM must answer the case worker's questions about these learners. In other words, both types of learners, and workers in several different agencies, are all enmeshed in coercive relationships. Thus, while DM contrasts her view of learners as "people" with the government's view of them "more as numbers," in practical terms the contractual obligations within OW and WSIB require literacy workers to prioritize these contractual obligations over the human dimensions of learning in the context of poverty.

I will return to that question in Chapter 9, my discussion of how LBS constructs literacy workers as agents of responsibilization. For now I will focus on a number of disconnects that my informants articulated as frustrations about how the current discourse arrives into the complex realities of unemployment and poverty faced by adults in community literacy programs. I understand their frustrations as indicating how my informants understand themselves and their role, as articulating how they see themselves as "other than" the Ministry. At times they perceived that there was little they could do, but at other times they were choosing possible actions for themselves based on the sense they made of what they saw. Nonetheless, how they understood what they saw was a process of negotiating the relations of subjectivation within which they are entangled.

7.4   What We See They Need

In describing how the student population has changed over the past two decades, KV pointed out that in the "neighbourhoods that people come from, there's a lot more violence. Seems to be a lot more hopelessness. More poverty." Poverty also means that students may have unstable housing. As SB said, "There are some people that always seem to have housing issues, you know, finding affordable, accessible and safe housing.

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longer periods of time. It would be worth investigating what factors account for social assistance being more flexible than the public workers' insurance program; such a study must wait for another time.

And enough food and those kinds of things." KV also noted that the instrumentalist focus on literacy-for-work obscures all of the barriers that many adult learners face:

> …what's not taken into consideration is the baggage that comes with a learner who's in a literacy program…[Interviewer: Such as?] Such as…immigration. Such as, when someone does a disappearing act in our classes on the outside, they could be in jail. There's poverty. You know we have students living in shelters. Students with mental health issues. Everything. And that's not taken into consideration in the ministry. It's just, "Hey, teach them how to read and they can get a job." There are students who have to look after family members who are ill and if they don't come to class they are penalized or asked to leave. (KV)

In this quote we see KV naming a range of issues that can make it difficult for adults to attend classes: unresolved immigration issues, involvement with the criminal justice system, poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, lack of daycare, and family care responsibilities. She notes that none of those barriers are acknowledged by LBS.

These women are attempting to make sense of the government's apparent indifference to the brutal realities faced by many adults living in poverty. They assume that the role of government, and the programs it funds, is to help people who are struggling with basic needs. But these women are also constructing themselves as different from the Ministry. In all of these statements, my informants are declaring that they notice and care about the problems learners face: violence, hopelessness, poverty, hunger, homelessness, unstable housing. In drawing attention to the difference between their view learners as "people" rather than "as numbers" my informants position themselves as more aware of the realities faced by learners than the Ministry. In asserting that they care about learners' struggles to survive they construct themselves as more ethical than the government. The sense they make of themselves and their role is an important resource they draw on as they choose to disobey aspects of the policy with which they disagree; Chapter 9 includes my discussion of such negotiations. For now I turn back to the effects of what KV called the "baggage" faced by learners.

In the above quote KV noted that there are many reasons why learners might "disappear": they may have been jailed, they may be homeless, they may have mental health issues, or they may have family care responsibilities. She notes that if a student is struggling and does not attend class, "they are penalized or asked to leave." KV is frustrated that unforeseen incidents which interfere with attendance have been turned into the student's personal responsibility. But her statements also make visible that the literacy-as-employability discourse constructs these adults as social objects who only exist insofar as they embody market relations. Their existence as caregivers, or as people who are mentally fragile or desperate for housing, are not perceptible within this rationality. In effect, this discourse makes it impossible to think of people as anything but units of production for the economy. In other words, the literacy-as-employability discourse not only produces market subjects, it also transforms social care responsibilities into relations that are outside the realm of governance. All of the unpaid work and non-monetary transactions that exist in people's lives are disappeared, and social care responsibilities are relegated to the individual realm and rendered unimportant precisely because they are not market interactions.

Feminist scholars have noted that the individualizing ethos of neoliberalism has had particularly negative effects on women. As social supports are eroded, social care responsibilities have been pushed back onto the domestic sphere, in what some scholars have termed refamilialization (Brodie, 1994, 1997, 2008; Ilcan, Oliver, & O'Connor, 2007). For the large proportion of adult literacy learners who are women, the lack of coordinated support for childcare within LBS makes it difficult for women to complete their programs within the given time limits. CS, who works in a large city, said that not only is daycare "a whole big headache these days, for a lot of people" but also that the shortage of childcare spaces means that women with children often take longer to finish the program because they must juggle the schedules of multiple institutions. In the following passage CS describes how juggling multiple institutional timetables and demands affects mothers:

> They have to find their own spots and you know with the all-day kindergarten and the funding cuts and everything it's become much harder to find a daycare space

in this neighbourhood. One of the really, really disturbing things about the daycare system… We have had a lot of students who become pregnant while in the program and have a baby and ask to come back within a month because they're afraid, they're told that if they aren't in a program they will lose their daycare space for their older children and since daycare spaces in this neighbourhood are very hard to find they're afraid that when their baby's old enough they'll have to find a space all over again. They may end up having to travel miles on a bus every day to take the kids to daycare and then their older kids come back [to this neighbourhood] to go to school and then they come here. So they will do almost anything to keep that space. But if you have a one-month old baby you can't be coming to school every day. (CS)

Here CS is detailing the impact of childcare being treated as an individual concern. The lack of childcare makes women responsible for juggling her responsibilities as parent, worker and student, in addition to her relationships and roles as spouse, daughter, sibling and friend. Piecemeal provision places great demands on mothers and requires them to choose between their children's needs and their own education,[39] but these choices are obscured. Instead, "if they don't come to class they are penalized or asked to leave" (KV) because all that is visible within LBS is whether or not individual women are choosing to invest in themselves as human capital. While providing childcare would ensure more equal access to all learners regardless of gender or family status, such a solution to the dilemmas women face is unthinkable in the current regime. Thus, in addition to refamilializing family care responsibilities, constructing individuals as market citizens makes issues of educational equity "impossible to think" (Fendler, 1998).

RF noted the deep interconnections between poverty, unemployment and lack of education. She said, "I find a lot of people where they're kind of victims of their situation… it's very cyclical. You need the skills to get the job, but you need the job to have the money to be able to pay for the skill acquisition and then to have the time that

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[39] This could be an important avenue for future research: What impacts have the refamilialization of social care responsibilities had on families of adult literacy learners? How has refamilialization affected women's ability to attend and to achieve their goals?

you can do that." In detailing the interconnectedness between barriers, RF does not use the language of equity. Nonetheless, in describing how neoliberal subjects "cannot not want" (Spivak, 1993) to become employable, she notes how the capacity to embody that subjectivity is not equally available to all. She told me that adult literacy learners want to make substantial changes in their lives, but basic supports which would make such changes possible are often inaccessible:

> It would be nice to have more supports for the students because there are a large share of people that, well, "I'm unemployed and I need to get skills but I don't have the money and I can't drive into town." I mean we don't have a bus system…we do not have public transit. And I'm telling you, when it is 40 below here—that's before the wind chill—you can't walk. There is no public transit. But what do you do? Well, if you hire a cab, that's 20 bucks! …How do you get to the program, right? So it would be nice if we had transportation dollars we could give to somebody for that. But here again, that was always very limited and now they've made it practically impossible to access. …And how do you go to a program when, you know, the childcare costs will kill you? And how do you go and apply for a job and, you know, go to an interview if you don't have anything decent to wear? But how do you go and access that if you don't have any money. And we're back to cyclical. If we had more supports in place for the learner... (RF)

In this excerpt RF outlines a number of circumstances that can affect someone's job prospects and interfere with a literacy program being able to produce an employment outcome: no financial support to attend education, lack of affordable childcare, no money to buy clothes to make a good impression at a job interview. We can also see that RF understands that the path to training, education or employment is not a simple and straightforward one, especially for people living in poverty. People on limited incomes cannot afford to buy clothing that would make a good impression in a job interview. Learners who do not have, or cannot afford, their own vehicles may have no way to get to a job interview or a literacy program. And although many learners are parents, childcare is not a service that is available and accessible whenever people need it. RF understands

transportation, childcare and clothing allowance as supports which could enable adults to access education and training, or to get to a job; they could enhance her ability to help people, which she perceives is central to her role.

Seen through the lens of neoliberal governmentality, on the other hand, the needs described by RF can be viewed as examples of poor "personal management skills," since they indicate that individuals have failed to identify and solve problems which impair their ability to participate in the job market. According to Employment Ontario criteria, learners who become discouraged at how such barriers constrain their choices can be seen as lacking the "positive attitude" they need to succeed, and of failing to "get help as needed" (Employment Ontario, 2011, p. 13). In this way, the discourse transforms structural inequalities into market mechanisms which individuals should negotiate effectively and efficiently. Those who are unable to do so can be seen as possessing human capital with less "value and utility" than that of subjects who can more easily embody the requirements of employable adults. In the next section I discuss the LBS emphasis on employment goals as a mechanism for responsibilizing the target population.

7.5   Constructing *Homo Economicus* One Literacy Learner at a Time

While LBS includes five possible learning goals—employment, apprenticeship, secondary school diploma, postsecondary education and independence—the majority of learners admitted to LBS programs must have employment goals. In the following pages I analyze what my informants told me about the practices produced by the LBS emphasis on employment. I begin with what HW, who works in a northern community with high levels of unemployment, told me:

> I'm given targets, okay I need to have 70% of people leaving here to employment. So we have those targets, and I need a certain percentage leaving for secondary, post-secondary school. And that's just not realistic. Because when [they learners] leave here, most times they're going to write their GED or whatever and then they come back if they need to brush up to get ready for employment. (HW)

Note that HW describes the targets as being "given" to her, and something she "need[s]" to produce. She states that the requirement of "70%...leaving here to employment" is "not

realistic" since many learners go on for further upgrading and may need additional help "if they need to brush up" on something that will help them "get ready for employment." Despite the fact that "Grade 12" has become a minimum educational requirement of many jobs, a learner working on their "secondary school diploma" cannot count towards fulfilling the 70% employment target; the only valid employment outcomes are getting a job, keeping their current job or "advancing at the workplace" (Employment Ontario, 2011). In this way, the actual pathways to good employment are obscured.

Most of my informants were intensely frustrated that LBS places greater priority on employment goals rather than what learners say they want to learn when they come into the program. In the following passage KV describes the disjuncture between what adult learners have told her and how she is required, by LBS, to respond to what she hears. In this account she describes how she negotiates between her knowledge as an educator— that when people learn to read, they can read many types of materials—and what she is required to do and say as an agent of the dominant rationality. She also describes how learners are forced to negotiate between their own and the LBS understanding of literacy:

> So goal setting. Learner comes in, "I want to learn how to read a book." "No, you can't learn how to read a book." And they look at you. "No, it has to be work-related. So what is it that you need to learn how to read that you have difficulty with?" Like okay, phone bill's not a good example but, you know, a child's report card or the flyers they send home telling the parents what's going on, like newsletters and stuff, right? So they have to learn how to read that. Then in the meantime they just want to read a book. Which, okay, if you learn how to read a book then you probably will read other stuff! (KV)

In this passage KV describes the process of restating learner goals in terms that are acceptable to MTCU. The learner has clearly stated a general learning goal: they want to be able to read a book. As an LBS instructor, KV is required to tell this person that such goals are not permissible. She must then ask the potential leaner to articulate an acceptable, work-related, goal. In noting that "in the meantime they just want to read a book," she highlights the fact that learners are forced to negotiate between the LBS

definitions and their own understanding of what it means to "be literate." Because they are not allowed to learn to read on their own terms, they may never feel that they have become fully literate. Instead, the LBS definition obliges them to accept literacy as an instrumental, rather than pleasurable, activity. Adult learners in LBS programs are allowed to learn literacy practices which enable them to locate and extract information from prose; they are forbidden from being taught reading as a search for meaning, as a means to expand their knowledge, or as creative endeavour.[40] Perhaps only subjects who are valuable human capital according to the psychometrological regime are allowed such luxuries; in any case, non-instrumental literacies are considered unsuitable for subjects deemed not "literate enough."

The problem of mismatches between learner goals and LBS expectations were deeply troubling to my informants. In the following excerpt GH describes her reaction upon hearing an MTCU representative telling literacy workers that the Ministry was interested in reports which showed that most learners had employment goals rather than statistics which accurately reflected learners' self-defined goals. In GH's view, the government's preoccupation with employment goals was irrational. To her mind, policy should respond to what subjects say they want and need, particularly in light of the fact that the stated aim of LBS is to "support literacy agencies in providing quality services that meet learners' needs" and to "design literacy services for those adults most in need of them" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2012). In practice, however, she has learned that the focus of LBS is on what the government "want[s] them to want." In the following passage she describes a meeting she attended where MTCU staff noted that the number of learners in that region with independence goals was higher than the number of learners with employment goals. The MTCU representatives told the literacy workers at this meeting that this could only mean one thing, that the literacy programs had reported the goals incorrectly. She observed:

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[40] Perhaps, these days, such literacy practices are discouraged in other levels of education as well. But are they utterly banished as they are for adult literacy learners? I'd be interested to investigate this further, particularly as to how this may be carrying forward notions of the dangers of certain groups, notably racialized subjects, women and working-class people, reading for pleasure (Collins & Blot, 2003; Pearson, 1999).

> So it's not about what the learners want, it's about what you want them to want. If the statistics are changing and it is showing that there's a rising request for independence goals, why are we still flogging employment? If that's what people's goals are, should we not be responding to their goal rather than just finding the people that fit the goal that [MTCU] wants? (GH)

Although she may not be aware that changes to Ontario's literacy policy were a result of the active labour market strategies promulgated by the OECD, she perceives that the current literacy policy is "about what you want them to want." GH clearly recognizes that LBS operates as a mechanism for transforming people by attempting to shape their aspirations and desires. She sees that what the government wants is for people to focus on working, on getting a job or, where few jobs are available, becoming entrepreneurs who can generate their own income by any means necessary.

I also note that the way in which LBS constitutes a causal relationship between literacy and employability elides a range of other factors which may contribute to someone becoming a success in LBS terms. In the following excerpt, for example, HW describes two learners who are now "off the system" as a result of coming to the literacy program, yet it is not their literacy skills per se which account for their changed circumstances:

> Do you know, we had one guy here. Just finally passing his GED changed his whole life. Now he's working, he's off the system. He doesn't even *need* U.I. or OW, he's off the system and not only that, he's self-employed! He did that himself. He didn't even think he'd be able to do that when he first started here. But when we started to see all the creativity and all the things he *could* do—You know, we know a lot of people here. It didn't take long to connect him to the right network and now he's flying on his own. We have another young gentleman, he's aboriginal. Came here and he couldn't even read. Now he's started his own business and is getting ready to—you know what I mean?...And you know what else? They don't come back. They don't need to come back. We've given them the literacy, basic skills they need to function in mainstream society. (HW)

For the first man, HW states that "passing his GED changed his whole life" yet the change she repeatedly emphasizes is that he is "off the system" and is now "self-employed." In the second case, HW does not mention what this "young gentleman" can now read; his success consists in the fact that he has "started his own business." In both men the literacy program has been able to produce a predictable result—self-employed individuals—from raw material that was marked as "not literate enough" because these individuals were unemployed. Providing these individuals with the "literacy, basic skills they need to function" is something "else"—an additional benefit—rather than what is counted as the primary success of the program.

But I also want to explore what is revealed by HW's comments about the role of the literacy program in enabling these individuals to become self-employed. While she said that the first man "did it himself" her description indicates otherwise. In saying "when we started to see all the creativity and all the things he *could* do" she is asserting that the literacy program staff were the ones who recognized him as "able to do that" and the ones who helped him believe that he could change. Furthermore, she notes that she and DM "know a lot of people here" and were able to "connect him to the right network." Thus it appears that what has allowed him to be "flying on his own" is not something he has done himself, not even the literacy "skills" he gained at the literacy program. Rather it seems that his success resulted both from "coming to think he'd be able to do that"— which HW attributes to him "finally passing his GED"—and from being connected to "the right network" to support him in his venture. Thus even for employment outcomes, it is the "social aspect," as GH called it, that enables the LBS production line to function as expected. Achieving these outcomes depends on many kinds of skill, knowledge and connections on the part of the literacy workers. None of those are acknowledged. If he counts as a success because of the network of people that the literacy program connected him to, his success is due to social networks. Despite the fact that HWsays that he is "flying on his own" social networks and contacts have played a central role in producing him as a successful entrepreneur.[41]

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[41] This insight makes visible a contradiction at the heart of neoliberalism: although entrepreneurship is considered an attribute of autonomous individuals, business success often depends upon social networks and contacts.

The human capital discourse central to LBS drives particularly coercive practices towards those who depend on Ontario Works for an income. These individuals are expected to get off welfare by any means necessary, what CS calls "the shortest distance to the lowest possible job." In the following quote she describes how this imperative pushes people who depend on Ontario Works into low-wage jobs. She uses the example of a woman aspiring to become a nurse who was forced instead to train as a Personal Support Worker (PSW), which is a low-status home-care job that pays a fraction of a nurse's wage.

> …the idea that people should be treated as units of production value for the economy, that literacy is about increasing productivity and ability to pay taxes and getting off the welfare rolls and that kind of thing. Yes I think it's a good thing to get off the welfare rolls, it's a hell of a life. I would not think anybody here wants to stay that way. But the idea of the shortest distance to the lowest possible job is being pushed a little more than it used to be. That's a real nightmare for people who are caught in this kind of community. They want to get out and they're being told, "Oh no, we can't afford that. You can get a job as a PSW so we can write you off as a success story" when they really dream of becoming a nurse… We had a student who was dragged out I think three months before she was ready to qualify for the nursing program and sent into a PSW [Personal Support Worker] training. (CS)

In the example provided by CS, we see the coercions directed at subjects who depend on social assistance. Within neoliberal governing rationalities individual subjects are expected to invest in themselves through education; those who cannot afford to do so are forced to accept that their education is something that provincial and municipal budgets "can't afford." The woman who CS mentions is someone with no income other than Ontario Works (OW), so was contractually obliged to attend literacy programming. She was "dragged out" and "sent into" training for a job with limited earning potential rather than being allowed to continue in her chosen career path. Instead of being supported to become trained in more highly-skilled, and therefore potentially more lucrative, work, she was forced into a low-wage PSW job. Such authoritarian practices are justified by active labour market imperatives which construct subjects dependent on state support as

problems. But the individualizing ethos at the heart of neoliberal governing rationalities also constructs those who have not been able to achieve high-paying employment—or to invest in their human capital through education and training—as individually responsible for their failure. This example is a vivid illustration of how the financial coercions within OW operate to keep people trapped in low-income occupations.

In the case CS describes, the woman's desire to invest in herself through training for a better job was thwarted. In this example the fundamentally flawed assumptions behind the human capital framing become starkly visible. The neoliberal imperative to treat oneself as human capital is based on the premise that education-for-better-employment is available to everyone in the educational marketplace. It is also based on the punitive assumption that people who are not well-educated when they reach the age of majority should be held accountable for failing to treat themselves as human capital; a perspective that erases substantial research indicating that those who do well in formal education are those who come from well-educated, middle-class households. That is, the employability imperative serves as a technology of bio-power to "distribut[e] the living in the domain of value and utility" (Foucault, 1990, p. 144) in ways that do not unsettle educational inequities.

The OECD documents which informed policies such as LBS, the *Jobs Study* and *Jobs Strategy* (1994, 1996) claim that low wages are a good incentive to encourage people to invest in their human capital. However, in practice, the "working poor" face many barriers to participation in further education and training. And, in the case of Ontario, the benefits of such educational investments are not direct. A 2013 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives discovered that 33% of jobs in Ontario now pay the minimum wage (Yalnizyan); this is a higher proportion than when the OECD *Jobs Study* and *Jobs Strategy* were released. During the period in which such shifts towards responsibilization were occurring in Ontario, the gap between rich and poor widened and the employment prospects of poor people worsened. For example, a 2005 report found that while the Canadian standard of living increased 43% between 1981 and 2003, the number of adults earning less than $10 per hour remained steady at one in six (Saunders).

Policy discourse that implies people are unwilling to work, or don't possess the skills they need, obscures the fact that many individuals who left formal education before completing high school—either because they struggled with academic literacies or because they chose work over formal education—were productive and responsible long before the LBS policy was introduced. However, the governing rationality of current policy obscures the complex reasons people may become unemployed and the tangled interconnections between low literacy and poverty. Several informants mentioned that the government's focus on employment is effectively discounting the skills which these adults do possess. In this they constitute themselves as more in touch with learners, an issue I return to in Chapters 8 and 9.

During my interview with BD, I related the story of a student I met when I first volunteered in adult literacy. This man had been a janitor for several decades, then was injured. After he recovered he was told he would not be re-hired because he did not have a high school diploma and was not qualified to do the work. When I finished telling this to BD, she responded by saying, "Oh I hear stories like that *all* the time." In other words, the new emphasis on qualifications is making it difficult for some individuals to continue doing the kinds of jobs they have been doing for many years. Growing income inequality seems to be intensifying competition for jobs; according to my informants what seems to be happening is that people with more formal education and qualifications are moving into jobs that are often characterized as "low-skill."

Many learners who work in factories or primary resource industries have entered community literacy programs because of shifts in the economy that have resulted in those jobs disappearing. Several informants mentioned that the government's focus on employability as an individual trait obscures the fact that unemployment is the result of lack of jobs in their communities, yet people are being told it is because they lack skills. Here is how one informant from a northern community which relies on primary resource industries told me about the difference between the current economic climate and the period when the economy was booming. She said, many of the adults who now attend the literacy program "would have had jobs" and

> …probably, traditionally, they would have left school and gone straight into one of those jobs. And several of our students had, like they were truck drivers or they worked in the mill doing labour work. And when those jobs were all gone then all of a sudden they were told, "Okay, you went to grade 3 or grade 8 and you were able to work, and now you're 50 or 60 and the job's not there but you have to find something new." And that's pretty scary. Even for the younger ones it's scary. (DM)

In this excerpt we see how the individuals are made responsible when their education levels become devalued in the labour market. While much rhetoric about the knowledge economy claims that the nature of work is changing, and thus raising the skill demands at work, in local resource-based economies such as the one DM describes, these patterns of change are very uneven and it is not always the case that work depends on more skills. Rather, it is only when existing jobs disappear that adults classified as "below Level Three" are told that they are "unemployable" because of their skill levels. Even though the new jobs on offer are likely to pay much lower wages, they are also likely to require higher levels of education because of credential inflation in the labour market. Individuals are expected to transform themselves to fit that chimera.

Compounding the difficulty of their situation is the fact that these individuals have often worked for long periods of time, sometimes decades, for larger employers that saw no benefit in enhancing the skills or education of their employees; when it is no longer cost-effective for these businesses to operate as they have in the past, the employer's lack of support is transformed into lack of foresight or enterprise on the part of the employee rather than lack of investment on the part of the employer. Reiterating this point, KV noted that when a large employer in a small community in southern Ontario closed, the literacy program

> …got a few people from the factory because they had left school early, they got a job, because it paid for stuff, they had to look after maybe their parents and siblings. And twenty years later they're in their fifties, they can't read, they can't count, they can't get a job at the local donut shop even because they don't know

> how to give back change or even use the cash register or read, you know, what we take for granted, everyday words. (KV)

In this excerpt we see that literacy was not seen an employment issue in the community before the factory closed; the individuals who are now learners in the program had no problem finding and keeping jobs. Furthermore, in all of their years of working in the manufacturing sector the employer did not consider them to be lacking in skills, nor did that employer invest in upgrading their skills for the future. However, now that these workers have been laid off because of large-scale economic changes over which they have no control, they are being constructed as lacking skills and made responsible for falling productivity. It has been acknowledged that employers actually depended on these employees as low-skilled in order keep their salary costs low. A host of scholars have made the argument that the economy depends on a large pool of workers who can be paid little, as Alden (1982) and more recent scholarship (Livingstone, 2009) has shown.[42]

My informants noted that the employment focus of the LBS policy erases the reality that many learners had quit school before graduation in order to work. Many of these adults have long histories of de facto employment and have developed multiple skills over their working lives; yet their current experience of unemployment marks them as not employable. While it may be true that the kinds of jobs and the nature of work may be changing in many sectors, and that the number of jobs have shrunk, the relationship of all of this to the employment status of individuals is more complex than current policies imply.

Such credentialism is operating as a mechanism for enforcing the neoliberal logic of education-as-investment and for disciplining those who do not comply. That is, constructing Level Three as a prerequisite for employability is further marginalizing adults who struggled in school and continue to struggle with dominant literacy practices. Rather than offering education that can support them in the jobs they can do—and have

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[42] An interesting side note, worth exploration in the future: my experience of appearing as expert witness in two cases in which employers asserted that employees were exaggerating the level of skill required to perform the job. In both cases the employers argued that the 'low-skill' nature of the work justified lower pay than employees were demanding. One was a pay equity case.

been doing—the more academic skills-based notion of employability erases the skills these individuals have utilized as competent workers and constructs them as unskilled and therefore unemployable. Instead of supporting these adults to qualify for similar or better jobs, or to improve their experiences at work, this process worsens their employment prospects. The imposition of credentials further marginalizes these adults at the same time as it discursively constructs them as responsible for failing to invest in themselves as human capital. This effect could be termed "coercive credentialism" and is worth further investigation. That inquiry must wait for another time. For now I wish to focus on the fact that the tendency to make low-income adults responsible for being unemployed during a period marked by profound economic shifts has troubling political implications.

My informants understood the disjuncture between learners' desires and policy objectives as resulting from government's need to prove that programs it funds are producing reportable results. In the following quote, GH observes that MTCU is driven to seek results that it can "write down and hold up and tabulate and calculate":

> [The MTCU field reps] want cut and dried. They want something that you can write down and hold up and tabulate and calculate....The policy is, statistically, how many learners went on to further education, how many went on to employment. And they have very specific percentages; 70% of your learners are supposed to go on to employment. And it's like, "But 70% don't come with that goal!" So how can we be learner-centred when we're telling them that this is the goal you have to have? That's not learner-centred! So you see the language being changed a little bit. It used to be "learner-centred, goal-oriented, outcomes-based." Now it's "learner-centred, transition based"— and there's another one that they've changed around in there.[43] How very interesting! (GH)

In this passage GH is describing the intensified requirements for literacy programs to produce statistics proving that learners are making changes in their lives. As GH states, MTCU requires her program to produce employment outcomes for 70% of the learners

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[43] The phrase GH is looking for is "learner-centred, goal-directed and transition-oriented."

who attend, regardless of what goals those adults expressed when they entered the program. In Chapter 9 I explore what it might mean that MTCU and literacy workers use the term "learner-centred" in different ways.

Here I wish to draw attention to the imperative to focus on transitions. Note that GH says that the statistics MTCU is interested in is how many learners "went on to further education, how many went on to employment." In other words, she is taking issue with the policy requirement that her work should be "not an end in itself, but a transitioning point to take the student to the next stage of their goals" (Essential Skills Ontario, 2012, p. 2). While LBS claims to provider learners with "maximum opportunities for success" (2012, p. 1) what happens when the learner leaves the program is more important than what they learn within the classroom. That is, literacy programs are expected to demonstrate that learners are investing in their human capital and aspiring to contribute to the province's competitive position. The literacy program is important only insofar as it contributes to "the province's competitive advantage and quality of life" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 1). Through the LBS, then, community literacy agencies are being constituted as sites of labour market activation rather than adult basic education.

7.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that the LBS policy constructs employment as an obligation in the interests of economic productivity and competitiveness rather than a means through which individuals can secure an income to meet their basic human needs. It also limits education to instrumentalist outcomes. I argued that the individualizing ethos at the heart of LBS forces subjects with social care roles, who are predominantly women, to choose between their own education and the needs of their families. Further, I argued that LBS employs disciplinary mechanisms to compel programs to acquiesce to its imperatives and to produce subjects who comply with "what you want them to want."

In the next chapter I explore in more detail how my informants construct their own identities and inhabit their work roles in ways that stand in some contrast, even opposition, to the LBS regime I have been discussing in this chapter. I will argue that

these literacy workers continue to define themselves to a large extent using terms reminiscent of literacy volunteers of the past. The negotiations that follow from the mismatch between such distinct ways of making up themselves and their roles is my subject matter in Chapter 9.

Chapter 8
Pastoralism and Adult Literacy Worker Subjects

I turn now to consider the subjectivities of literacy workers in Ontario. The subject position of paid literacy worker is relatively recent, as it did not exist before governments provided funding for adult literacy programs.[44] When I asked my informants what it means to be a literacy worker, some talked about themselves as working from their own understanding of literacy, and education more generally, which pre-dated the current LBS policy. Others told me that their primary commitment was to the aims and objectives of the specific program in which they work. Through these comments I came to see that my informants' sense of themselves was mostly formed within the rationality of literacy-as-participation outlined in Chapter 3.

A recent Canadian practitioner-research study found that literacy workers had two overlapping perspectives towards their work. Some held a primarily nurturing attitude while others defined their work as political;[45] their orientation reflected an "underlying drive…the motivation that makes instructors care about the work in spite of adverse [working] conditions" (Battell, 2004, p. 70). According to this study ABE/literacy educators shared the following beliefs about the work, whether their orientation was nurturing or political:

1. ABE/Literacy students are powerful, self-determined adults with the right to make their own decisions.
2. Making a connection with students is a necessity, a joy and a challenge.
3. We do not blame students for the effects larger societal forces have made and are still making on them.
4. A positive learning experience is essential for student success and usually must be accomplished in the face of residual anger, resentment and fear about schooling.

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[44] While there were "academic upgrading instructors" in adult high schools or community college programs, I understand that position as a kind of teacher. According to my informants, even those who are accredited teachers, being a literacy worker is not the same as being a teacher.

[45] The tensions between political and nurturing perspectives were evident in one of the first documents in Ontario to argue for alternatives to church-based tutoring programs, "Literacy: Charitable enterprise or political right?" (Pratt, Nomez, & Urzua, 1977).

     5.   Instructors can make a difference in the quality of students' lives and communities.   (Battell, 2004, p. 81)

Although that study was conducted in British Columbia, similar perspectives were evident in my informants' talk about their work. The adult literacy workers who volunteered to be interviewed in my study understand their role as offering a positive learning experience to adults who have been damaged by, or excluded from, compulsory education. They do not blame adults for their educational histories, and hope to help make a difference in learners' lives. Their pedagogic work is guided by learners' preferences and stated needs. Most used the term "learner-centred" to describe their approach, whether their view was political, nurturing or a combination of the two orientations.

My informants work in community-based programs which have, since their beginnings, offered learners individualized attention through volunteers. Some work in programs where classroom instruction is the norm, but even in those programs the instructors primarily tailor instruction individually. One-to-one tutoring was seen as ideal for basic literacy learning because it offered intimate attention to individuals' unique learning needs but also provided an alternative to classroom learning which learners had experienced as disappointing or traumatic. One-to-one tutoring was also adopted because it offered privacy to adults who felt shame because of the stigma of illiteracy. When the Ontario government established the first unit responsible for adult literacy in the 1980's it hired several community workers who held that the learner-centred approach was the ideal model for adult literacy work. As a result, the term has been a part of the literacy regime since policy was first introduced. In Chapter 9 will I discuss how the meaning of the term has shifted under neoliberal responsibilization; in this chapter I explore how this term was part of how my informants understood themselves as literacy workers.

In the remainder of this chapter I focus on the particular conditions and rationalities within which the subject position of literacy worker was produced in Ontario. I outline how my informants understood their helping role as facilitating learners' transformation and consider what my informants told me about their sense of themselves in terms of the

four elements of pastoral power (Fendler, 1998; Forneck, 2009; Lippert, 2005).[46] I begin by considering their desire to be exemplary educators under challenging conditions as exemplifying sacrificing agents serving needful targets; then analyze how their desire to help adult learners change requires them to have intimate and asymmetrical relationships with learners. I conclude by noting that the pastoralism at the heart of literacy work is itself a form of governance.

8.1   Sacrificing Agents, Needful Targets

Most of my informants exhibited traces of liberal-humanist notions that the state has a role in social welfare and that education plays an important role in fostering equality and democracy. For example, here is what CS says about her understanding of the role of education. In her view, education should "break barriers" rather than "keep people… down." She perceived the push to employability, encapsulated in the federal government's focus on Essential Skills, as "unrealistic" because, as she noted elsewhere, it is simply not possible to "prepare people for any job that might materialize."

> When I was doing my education degrees the goal of education is to break barriers and not to keep people in the lower socio-economic strata down in those levels. But I find that this whole Essential Skills, especially with the testing components, is doing just that. Because of the unrealistic mentality behind it. (CS)

In this quote we see that CS is aware of educational inequities and sees her role as doing something about these injustices; her role as fundamentally one of making a difference in people's lives.

My informants' frustrations at the literacy-as-employability rationality evident in LBS was often expressed as aggravation at the government's apparent indifferent to the broader life struggles faced by adults living in poverty. My informants seemed to believe that governments should enact policies in the interest of people's overall well-being and should care for needy or struggling subjects. Many held the view that literacy is a

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[46] This is a very preliminary analysis of adult literacy work as a form of pastoral power; this area promises to be a fruitful area for further investigation.

fundamental right, and that all subjects should have access to basic education. They saw their job as providing this type of learning to this group of people. These ideas are encapsulated in HL's statement that, "There's always winners and losers in a democracy so I'm trying to give the minority an edge to get up." These women seem to see their sacrifices as essential in order to help people in need.

All of my informants mentioned that community literacy work involves extremely challenging working conditions. Every day they face multiple demands and mounting administrative requirements. They are called upon to support students who have issues beyond the classroom, with few supports to do so. They perform this work for low pay in inadequately-funded programs, yet persist under conditions that lead to exhaustion and burnout. In "killing [them]selves" to "deliver a better quality program," these workers are performing the position of literacy worker in a way that requires their sacrifice in order to meet learners' needs.

One of the greatest challenges expressed by workers is that literacy work involves multiple roles and responsibilities. GH noted that "It's common in small programs to be coordinator and instructor. Do the budget, coordination, write reports, teach, do PR [public relations], you name it. I've even cleaned toilets. It's all part of the package." As SB said, "we are instructors but also do referrals, gather information, assess, marketing, PR, intake, training plan development, curriculum development, develop materials." The multiple demands were particularly frustrating when one informant compared her working conditions to those at an employment program serving adults who face fewer barriers than the adults she works with: "They don't have to raise money and do all the things that we have to do to keep their job. And they don't have to clean their own toilet. We do our own cleaning here, too, because we can't afford to [pay anyone else]" (HW).

The low salaries which correspond to inadequate program budgets mean that literacy work is only viable for people who do not depend on it for their primary income. As HW said, "If you're doing it for a career move and you want to support your kids, forget it!" But she also said that "If you don't need the financial gain, if you don't need to financially support yourself, by all means I would say get into the literacy field because

I've never had such a rewarding job in my life." HW lives in a northern community that has had high unemployment since the large primary-resource employer shut down. She herself worked in that plant until it closed and she was laid off; she found her way into adult literacy work through a provincial retraining program called Second Career. Although she loves the work she told me that the salary is so low that "I can't even feed myself" and that if not for her husband's income, she would be on OW. There are many similar examples in my data, such as KV telling me she is able to afford to be a literacy worker only because she has no dependents, and GH noting that she initially got into literacy work because it was work she could do that fit around her primary role as homemaker. Another informant, DM, mentioned that since she is a retired teacher her literacy salary is merely a supplement to her real income: her teachers' pension.

One-third of my informants mentioned that they would look, or were looking, for other work. RF said that if she was "headhunted" for a job with twice the pay, she would leave because "I'm not that dedicated. But sometimes the job you have is better than the job you don't have." And yet as long as they are working in the community-based program, they continue to try to make the best of extremely difficult conditions. BD, who works in a rural area in southern Ontario with high rates of unemployment, noted that community-based programs "get the hardest [people] to serve sometimes. And that's not a bad thing; we serve decent people." For her the scarcity of funding for community-based programs suggests that in the eyes of government, some people are considered disposable. She said, "…as a society as we're moving forward in our big machine, the most vulnerable and the most difficult to serve, they've decided they're just going to plow them under." She understood the lack of funding as directly related to glossing over the lived realities of marginalized people, describing the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities as a "good guy, nice guy, academic, but what the hell does he know about somebody on welfare whose husband beat her up and she's got a restraining order on him and she's trying to get her grade 12?" In this BD is positioning herself as other-than the Minister and the policy enacted by MTCU: someone who *does* care, who *does* know what it is like for this woman. As SB says in the following excerpt, the learners are "what's important" and her job as a literacy worker is to "do the best you can for them."

> You wonder sometimes how much this stuff [the new curriculum framework and reporting mechanisms]—I think it could—but you wonder sometimes how much it really enhances our program. Or we just spend a lot of time spinning our wheels with this new stuff; and you really do have to focus on what's important, the learners, and do the best you can for them. Because that's why we're here. (SB)

That is, SB understands her work as hindered by MTCU rather than supported by it. For her, the new curriculum framework and accountability requirements do not enhance the program but result in staff spinning their wheels. Despite such impediments SB is determined to "do the best" she can for the learners because "that's why we're here." In this excerpt we see SB resisting the narrow role she is being expected to occupy, and trying to maintain her ideas about what does, and does not, "enhance our program." For SB, the new curriculum framework and reporting mechanisms are a misuse of energy: they make her "spin her wheels" instead of supporting her to "do the best" for learners. She articulates that her focus on "what's important," namely the learners, occurs in spite of "this new stuff." And her efforts to hold onto "what we've always done" (as she said elsewhere) can be understood as carving out a space in which she is able to enact and carry forward liberal-humanist program values and principles which pre-date the current policy imperatives.

In many cases the expectations literacy workers have of themselves exceed what is possible. They work in this way for the sake of "the students…only to benefit them." (SB) As she explained to me, "It's not about *me* needing prep time for the fun of it, it is all about we can provide a better program for the learner. I don't care if I don't get a full lunch or any of that kind of thing… you know, a lot of jobs you don't have it. It's just that we could deliver a better quality program for the learner" (SB). In this quote we see that SB understands even the minimum break mandated by labour legislation—a lunch break—as a luxury she is willing to forego in order to "deliver a better quality program for the learner." But not all of my informants were willing to provide service at the expense of themselves or other workers. An informant who is the executive director of her agency told me that she recognizes that the workers in her program were "killing ourselves" with overwork. She noted, "I told my staff, 'Stop it. You're killing yourself,

you're actually killing yourself.'…because I thought, 'You know what? We're just going to maximize the money we're getting, we're not killing ourselves.' We're still killing ourselves, we're just killing ourselves not as much." (BD)

Perhaps it is no surprise that literacy worker subjects, whose agencies began as voluntary organizations, are still working essentially as volunteers. But what keeps these women in the work, given that their job requires such self-sacrifice? Community-based literacy programs include both charitable and community development agencies. There are many differences between these types of agencies, but both fundamentally construct literacy workers as helpers. My informants told me that they were drawn to literacy work because of what BD called "this do-good thing in my heart" or the desire to, as GH put it, "leave the world a better place." They described their helping role as profoundly distinct from the LBS focus on "employment, employment, employment" (GH), yet they talked about their work as making people up in new ways. Their sense was that literacy work was essentially the work of helping people to change. I turn now to a discussion of the intimate and asymmetrical relationships which such work entails.

8.2   Intimacy and Asymmetry

My informants told me that for many adults, the first step towards making changes in their lives, including believing that they can learn and deserve a better life, is undoing emotional residue from past educational traumas. For example here is how KT described a woman who, as a child, had been "tied to the chair in the classroom for being bad because she couldn't learn." KT noted that the first time the woman came to the program she was accompanied by her sister; "she couldn't read anything and [the family] were trying to take care of her. Although she *was* working, she wasn't reading anything." At first the woman couldn't even "be in the classroom she was so nervous" and was "really nervous trying everything." After three years of attending the program, this learner still suffers from anxiety, but has gained enough confidence to be curious: "She reads something she [says] 'I want to know about that now' and…she'll get on [the computer] and try and find out the thing that they said in the book that she didn't know." Note that for KT, it is dramatic transformations such as these that are extremely valuable. But she observes that LBS does not value gains or "progress" of this kind. Noting that learners

often state that they want to "be like everybody else…pick something up and read it" she asked why is learning how to read and write "not *good* enough?"

Some literacy workers see themselves, as HW put it, as "pretty much counselors" in that a significant part of their work involves "getting [learners] to find that confidence to even attempt education." This is especially true when they are working with learners who have had negative educational experiences. For example KV, who teaches in a prison, notes that coming to believe that they can learn is a huge transformation for learners. Many learners were taught that there are many things they simply cannot do; she sees a large part of her job as helping them to unlearn such ideas about themselves. In this example she describes how learning math can transform learners' parental role:

> Some of them, education-wise, have been beaten down. And so you kind of try to tell them, "You know, fine, you were in a special education class. But that does not mean that you can't do this, this and this. We just have to figure out *how* you can do it." …Well, they have children. So we talk about family literacy, too, so they will write more to their children. They will ask their children about their homework and help them with their math questions. And I say, "If you get stuck on a math question with your kids, we can work through it in class." And we do that. One guy goes, "My kids are learning how to do this, this and that. I have no clue!" So we worked through the math. Long division is a challenge. And then once they get it, it's like, "Whoa!" And one guy said, "This is easy. Now I can do this, this and that." And I'm like, "Yup." He said, "Cool." So if they can learn and see that it's not as hard as they thought it would be, then maybe they'll help their kids more. (KV)

In this example KV is not only describing the personal and intergenerational effects of acquiring literate conduct, she is also pointing out that it is often the education system which has "beaten down" the individuals who are now literacy learners. Several informants noted that they were deeply familiar with how students are affected, emotionally, by being made to believe that they are stupid or feeling that they couldn't "measure up" to what is expected of them in school. For KV what distinguishes literacy

programs from the education system is that the former will "work through" material until a learner understands it, whereas schools divide students according to judgments about ability and places those deemed unable to learn in special education classes. As a literacy worker, KV sees her role as consisting of trying to "figure out how you can do it" instead of assuming that "you can't do this, this and this." BD's conviction that "the self-esteem thing is really important" has led her to conclude that programs need to be "very kind to our learners. Very understanding, very adaptable to what our learners need." But she also believes that the focus on self-esteem means that the program should "push the learners in that direction a little bit [so] that it's not 'Can I add and can I subtract?' it's 'I *can* add! I *can* subtract—it's just a matter of somebody has to show me how to *do* the damn thing'."(BD)

While GH describes herself primarily as an educator rather than as a counselor, note that in the following passage she emphasizes the significance of the personal transformation of a woman who read a book for the first time:

> I had a client that came, she was in her forties. She lived in a residential program. I would suspect that there was some developmental challenges, though we never saw any documentation. But as an instructor and a tutor you kind of think, yeah—there's more here than just the reading issue. She was illiterate. It's very rare that you see people who are totally illiterate. We see them with low literacy, we see them with the uneven patterns between literacy, numeracy, technology certainly, but it's not very often in 2011 you see people who are totally illiterate. She was totally illiterate. Couldn't count to ten, couldn't identify numbers. So we began. We had a reading series that we were using, and at some point in the second year she read the first book. She was beyond over the moon. She was so proud. The empowerment in her face! And she said, "Can I take this back to the residence with me?" And I said, "Sure, but promise you'll bring it back tomorrow." And everyone she passed in the hall, "Look what I can read, look what I can read, look what I can read!" Now statistically, that's just one checkmark that someone achieved a goal. But in a personal level, that's a huge, huge issue. (GH)

In labeling the learner's pride in her reading accomplishment as "empowerment" GH is focusing on the personal and emotional impacts of someone changing from being "totally illiterate" to someone who is able to declare, "I can read." She also notes that this change in conduct is a "huge, huge issue," one that she considers much more significant than the statistical information offered by "one checkmark that someone achieved a goal." Elsewhere in the interview GH told me that her view as an educator is that "you change their knowledge, you change their life."

My informants also told me that the personal changes that result from learners achieving their literacy goals or acquiring literacy skills are what they love about the work and what motivates them to keep doing the work despite the frustrations and the poor working conditions. As GH said, "When they get it, it does make a difference. There's nothing that compares with it. That feeling of knowing that you changed something." In the following passage KV describes such changes as "cool", and says that such changes are especially dramatic for the Level One students who "cannot read."

> We have a couple classes that are Level One. They're really great classes. They're my favourite, actually. Level One and Level Three; my favourites. Level One: by far my favourite class. Because when they come in, [there's] not a lot of self-confidence. It took a lot for them to actually come to a program and to admit in public that they cannot read. And then as they build their vocabulary…watching a person kind of change…it's just cool. And then they go on, and they gain the knowledge. It's just really cool watching them [as they gain] self-confidence. They will stand up for themselves. They think before they speak—If we have a class discussion they'll think about it more and not necessarily blurt out the first thing that they would have wanted to say, before. They will try new things. They will bring in stuff. If they weren't sure about something they try it and they would be a bit more adventurous. (KV)

In this passage KV describes the rewards of the work in terms of the developing self-confidence which is embodied in learners coming to "stand up for themselves," and to be willing to "be a bit more adventurous" and to "try new things." The transformations she

describes are only visible because the intimacy of their relationship. She has seen these adults at their most vulnerable—the moment when they took the step of "admit[ting] in public that they cannot read" and came into the program—so I would argue that her pride can also be understood as emerging from an ethic of wanting to honour, rather than violate, that vulnerability.

According to DM, seeing such changes in learners is "about the only reason that people stay" in adult literacy work. Most of my informants echoed this sentiment, articulating a strong sense that the rewards of the work consist in seeing learners' sense of themselves transformed. But the workers' sense of pride in such transformations reveals that perhaps they act more as agents of governance than they would choose to believe. Because advanced liberalism requires subjects who govern themselves, "the relationship of self to self is a political relationship" (Cruikshank, 1996, p. 248). It has become so taken-for-granted that "thousands of people now define their lack of power and control in the world as attributable to their lack of self-esteem" (1996, p. 247). People who do not perform as active liberal subjects are "imagined in prevailing governmental discourses to be obedient entities requiring care" (Lippert, 2005, p. 138). Those who cannot act as independent liberal subjects are constituted as incapable, and in need of pastoral care to be transformed into fully capable subjects. Thus efforts to strengthen subjects' belief that they can act in the world—whether by empowering them or enhancing their confidence— becomes a means of enhancing their ability to act as a fully capable citizen should. In describing improved self-confidence as the most significant changes she makes for Level One learners, KV can be understood as participating in providing learners with an attribute that itself facilitates the process of governance within advanced liberalism. In other words, in acting as caring shepherds, literacy workers sometimes do, most often unwittingly, act as agents of advanced liberal governance.

8.3   Pastoralism and Individualization

In performing themselves as sacrificing agents working in the interests of needful targets, my informants enact literacy worker identities that are tied less to policy than to the community and to their intimate, asymmetrical relationships with adult learners. Their actions continue to be guided by their sense of themselves as educators who are

accountable to the learners and as workers whose sacrifices can and do make a difference in individuals learners' lives. They used the term "learner-centered" to denote this approach to learners and to their work as educators; they also used it to set themselves apart from the assumptions of current policy. For example RF said that, in her program, learner-centred means that "the student decides what they want and what is relevant for them and we have to find a way to teach that, rather than the government determines what they need to come out of the class with." A trained teacher herself, RF noted that teachers are required to deliver curriculum—what students "need to come out of the class with"—whereas literacy workers must be more flexible and responsive to what learners decide is relevant or interesting to them. It is this individual focus that sets literacy work apart from teaching. But this notion of "learner-centred" bears closer examination because it is a key term used in the policy discourse, but in quite different ways and to different ends. I will explore this further in Chapter 9.

To be a learner-centred literacy worker requires coming to know adult learners in what Miller and Rose (2008) call their "depths and details" (p. 175) and entails noticing and building on academic, emotional and physical transformations that result from learning. This knowledge is an intimate knowledge. It begins to develop through the personal details of a learner's "past school history, their past social history" (MC) first shared in the assessment conversation when a learner enters the program. The knowledge is elaborated in an ongoing manner by what learners say about their goals, aspirations, struggles and needs. And it is constituted in the judgements that literacy workers make as they observe the transformed skills, attitudes and behaviours displayed by learners. In such interactions literacy workers are positioned as relatively powerful, no matter how much they genuinely want to be empowering or to work in ways that are driven by learners' goals rather than policy imperatives.

Performing themselves as learner-centred, these literacy workers constitute themselves as compassionate selves who support learners' strengths, and who want "what is good for" the learners. They are guided by an ethic of wanting to help, to do good and to "make a difference." These women consider themselves as caring persons who relate to learners as human beings. While they hold a sense of themselves as concerned, in contrast to what

they see as the indifference of government, they are also constituted in this view as responsible for the individuals in their care. They experience this responsibility as deeply personal, based as it is on establishing and valuing human connection and their efforts to support learners and act in ways that are "in their interests." These women, by enacting their literacy worker selves as sacrificing agents who place learners at the centre of their work, seem to constitute themselves as caring shepherds. However, their desire to help those needy adults who turn to them for help—or are mandated by Ontario Works to be helped—perpetuates a fundamentally individualizing tendency which locates the "problem" of employability in individual adults.

My informants' experience of the work as requiring them to effectively "kill" themselves also maintains an individualized approach. The very real dilemmas posed by the inadequate pay, budget constraints, and expanding workload are problems that each program—and each worker—tackles or resolves individually rather than collectively. While some informants noted that what helped them cope with the impossible demands of their jobs was to honestly talk with co-workers and to vent when necessary, the end result of such conversations was to relieve the pressure in order to be able to get back to work. Several noted that literacy networks had once been spaces in which literacy workers could meet to have similar conversations and to problem-solve, but no longer performed this role. Since becoming dependent on provincial funding, local literacy networks have become more or less quasi-government organizations mandated to carry out coordination of local programming rather than agencies representing the needs and interests of the membership. In the next chapter I consider how these women negotiate the imperatives of a policy framework that they feel does not support them in the work they do, and discuss how they negotiate its demands.

Chapter 9
"You Look at Things Really Differently":
Negotiating Responsibilization

> It's really funny, because the reporting and the actual working on any task, they seem so very separate. Because you can become human in the task!...But then, this is where everything's going, right? You feel like you're on this train that's moving really fast, and you look at things really differently…Pushing back I think is really important. But how it's done—? (KT)

My informants experience the imperatives of the literacy-as-employability rationality as pushing them to work in certain ways, what KT describes in the above quote as a speeding train. Some of my informants noted that the emphasis on reporting takes time away from preparation work or from interacting with and teaching students. A few noted that the speed at which the LBS is moving along its narrow-gauge track leaves them with little time to think about how they look at things and their work, while others claim that they "still do what [they have] always done, [they] just call it something else" (SB).

In this chapter I investigate how my informants comply with the punitive requirements of the LBS railroad, and how they "can become human in the task" (KT) of responding to the needs and desires of the individuals they work with every day. I consider LBS imperatives as efforts to interpellate adult literacy workers as agents of responsibilization and note that my informants are constantly negotiating between this rationality and their own quite distinct sense of the work. I argue that while some literacy workers may follow LBS edicts, their ethics, their sense of themselves as educators and the authorities on which they base refusals to comply indicate that the project of neoliberalism is neither stable nor complete. I begin with a discussion of how adult literacy workers obey, or have adopted, employment imperatives. Next I describe how my informants work around such requirements while mollifying MTCU's demands for data. I conclude with a discussion of the term "learner-centred" as a key site of struggle, and argue that the ongoing struggle to retain a humanist meaning offer glimmers of hope that the psychometrological regime has not fully succeeded in its project of domination.

In examining how my informants respond to LBS attempts to have programs produce predictable outcomes—namely improved employment prospects for dependent adults—I draw on literature about processes of subject formation, particularly insights from Coloma , Mahmood and Spivak as outlined in Section 2.3 (Adapting and Learning). I rely on Spivak (1993) to remind me that discursive practices powerfully shape what we "cannot not want." Coloma (2008) helped me understand that my informants were performing "a dynamic and situated negotiation of self-identification and interpellation by others" (p. 11) and that this dance is shaped by "the socio-cultural, historical, and geographical contexts" (2008, p. 20) in which these women, and these discourses, are situated. And from Mahmood (2005) I borrowed the practice of investigating the relationship between how literacy workers understand themselves and how they act. Asking what norms adult literacy workers aspire to—and how they live, inhabit, and achieve these norms—allowed me to explore what characteristics, including both compliance and resistance, defined their sense of themselves.

In the remainder of this chapter I focus on how my informants perform the negotiation between LBS requirements that they produce employable human capital and their own sense of themselves as embodying a pastoral relationship to learners. To organize my discussion I use the following comment from LA:

> …I'm front-line. My job, nine times out of ten, has been [to do] what you told me to do, or else figure out a way around what you've told me to do, and still get the information you want.

9.1   "My Job Has Been What You Told Me To Do"

In this section I consider imperatives within the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy as efforts to interpellate adult literacy workers as agents of responsibilization. I focus specifically on how my informants respond to LBS attempts to have programs produce predictable outcomes—namely improved employment prospects for dependent adults.

As my starting-point I turn to something that DM and HW said during their joint interview. DM has worked in adult literacy for 7 years, and HW is relatively new to the field; both are troubled by the mounting administrative demands and the fact that adult

literacy programs are under the umbrella of Employment Ontario. DM mentions "the newer reports," which refers to the intensification of reporting requirements over the past decade. Both informants use the metaphor of a factory[47] to describe the pressures programs are under to provide employment outcomes for adult literacy students.

> DM: Now we're supposed to be—we're like a production line. Get them in, get them out.
>
> HW: Get them in, get them employed. Yah. And rapid re-employment. […]
>
> *Interviewer: You described your program as being a production line. So that's how it feels? That you're supposed to produce these outcomes?*
>
> DM: From the reports, the newer reports. And now that we're connected with Employment Ontario, we certainly have that feeling.

In this excerpt we see not only that the workers are being made responsible for learners' employment outcomes but also that adult literacy work is being strictly controlled through "the newer reports." In characterizing the work as comparable to "a production line" DM is drawing attention to the expectation that following specific processes will result in a predictable output.[48] The factory metaphor makes clear that adult literacy work is being constituted as a process for producing a predetermined result (a human capital asset who can be deemed employable) from raw materials (the person who is "not literate enough" and therefore not "employable"). It is my understanding that mechanized production processes are considered efficient if the per-unit production costs are low. My interview data suggests that these women feel that they "really are supposed to produce a

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[47] I am intrigued to note that my informants' metaphors—the production line and the train—are mechanical ones. These reverberate with Mitchell's (1988) observation that colonial approach to literacy (in Egypt) was a mechanical one of producing direct correspondence between text and meaning, in contrast to Arabic literacy in which reading is understood as necessarily an act of interpretation (see especially his chapter "The Machinery of Truth" (pp. 128-160)).

[48] Several informants also described unpredictable outcomes of learning. Of particular interest were comments about how an adult's sense of themselves can shift as they learn or as they come to see themselves as capable of learning. In some cases, these changes pose a threat to personal relationships. A few informants noted that learners sometimes choose their home life over further education which might intensify such challenges. What GH called the "social approach" to literacy would acknowledge such choices on the part of learners; the rationality of literacy-as-employability obscures the fact that some learners do make such choices. Analysis of this phenomenon is tangential to this chapter but I do plan to pursue this question in future research.

lot with very little money" (HW); this aspect of the LBS production line was discussed in section 8.1 (Sacrificing Agents, Needful Targets). In the remainder of this section I consider how my informants inhabit the role of being expected to transform subjects from raw material into valuable human capital.

I would like to begin by analyzing several informants' comments about the connections between normative behaviours and individuals' "employability." RF told me that many learners do not succeed at work because they lack what she called soft skills: "It's problem-solving, it's initiative, it's punctuality, it's attitude, it's things like oral communications … non-verbal communications." She stated that people who most need to develop these skills tend to be on social assistance; she believed that by teaching these soft skills "what you can create is a very viable, a very valuable asset to an organization." In such statements, it seems that RF is articulating the rationality on which the Literacy and Basic Skills Policy is based, using language from MTCU regulations. Specifically, what RF has called "soft skills" borrows heavily from the LBS list of "Personal Management Skills for and at Work" which adult literacy programs are expected to inculcate in learners with employment goals, and which I discussed in section 7.3 (Constructing a Target Population). Where LBS notes the sequence of identifying and solving problems, RF uses the term "problem-solving." Several attributes in the LBS list can be understood as components of what RF labels "initiative": being motivated, managing time appropriately, identifying problems, taking responsibility on the job, contributing ideas, translating ideas into action and learning on the job. RF's commitment to teaching "soft skills" could be seen as illustrating the extent to which the LBS rationality has pervaded practice.

But I would like to investigate further, to consider whether or not my informants have become identified with the employability discourse, or whether they continue to identify their roles according to alternative rationalities. In the following passage HW describes herself as helping to ensure that a man learned to adopt the requisite Personal Management Skills for and at Work. She tells me that the program where she works successfully transformed a man who was "not marketable enough" because he was "full of anger, frustration, anxiety" into someone who got a job:

> We had a gentleman start with us and—oh he was just random and hyper. Nobody
> wanted to deal with him. He was on social services, off social services. The
> workers over there didn't want to deal with him. Somehow he ended up on our
> plate and he came in [to our program]. And it was a big job for about four or five
> months because he was so full of anger, frustration, anxiety, lack of education,
> every single thing. The other side of him was he was a great dad, he was a hard
> worker, he just wanted to get a job. But because of everything that was going on
> in our community, he just wasn't marketable enough. So to pull him in and retrain
> how he thinks, talks, acts in public…anyway to make a long story short, he did
> get employment, unfortunately out of town. But we did receive a letter from
> Ontario Works congratulating us on making such a difference with him so even
> *they* miss him now, because he changed so much. (HW)

By retraining how this man "thinks, talks, acts in public," the program where HW works
has delivered the results that both OW and LBS expected; they made him "marketable
enough" and he got a job. HW describes her program as enacting the kinds of
transformations expected by LBS. As a reward for delivering a transformed subject, the
program "receive[d] a letter from Ontario Works congratulating us on making such a
difference with him."

Yet in this account it is also possible to see that HW has not fully adopted the
individualizing and responsibilizing ethos embedded in LBS. HW notes that in the past,
this man did not have trouble finding work. She knows that he was "a hard worker" and
that his unemployment was due to "everything that was going on in our community"—
namely, massive layoffs resulting from the closure of the primary resource industry in
that region—rather than qualities inherent to him. She constitutes herself in pastoral
terms when she states that the reason he was so "random and hyper…[and] full of anger,
frustration, anxiety" was that he "just wanted to get a job." In this example, then, it is
possible to see that even as HW is enacting LBS expectations, she is simultaneously
holding onto her sense of herself as a different kind of literacy worker, one who helped
this individual in ways that he wanted to be helped. As is often the case with literacy
learners, this man wanted to get a job; HW wanted to help him with that goal because that

was his goal, not because she perceived him as someone who posed a problem by virtue of the fact that he was unemployed.

In the following excerpt, taken from a conversation about the rewards of adult literacy work, RF describes how proud she is to have "built up" a woman learner to such an extent that she was able to "get off welfare." In this excerpt, we see RF constituting herself as acting as LBS expects her to, since the difference that the literacy program has made in this case was to get the woman some training, then a placement, then a credential and finally a job:

> I do like it when you take somebody who their math skills are very poor and they're not succeeding at their job and you can build them up and give them the tools they need to succeed. And, you know, just to see the difference that you make in a person's life—that's a good day! We've had a couple of people [like that]. We had one lady come in and she was on welfare and had three kids and kind of a—not a great home life. And she just wanted to do something different, and we got her all trained up and we got her doing a placement at the local elementary school, and she got on as a supply on the EA [Education Assistant] list and pretty soon she was able to get her credentials for that and now she's got a pretty good job. And it's really improved her home life and her kids and she's gotten off welfare and, you know, that's a good day! (RF)

But I would suggest that although RF describes this woman as a success in human capital terms, using LBS terminology does not necessarily mean that she is motivated by its rationality or that she always means the same thing by those words. When asked to describe her definition of literacy work she told me that she saw her role as "helping people who otherwise wouldn't be able to succeed on their own" and of offering a "leg up" to people who are "victims of their situation." RF was trained as a teacher. She sees her role, first and foremost, as that of an educator. In this passage she describes her role as "build[ing] up" the woman who was stuck in what RF called "not a great home life." She described herself as working to "build [learners] up and give them the tools they need to succeed." What she responded to was the woman's desire "to do something

different." I am arguing that she did so according to an educator rationality which enacts a pastoral ethic of caring for someone in need.

The literacy-as-employability rationality expressed in LBS may be carrying forward an instrumentalist view of the purposes of education which pervades all public education in Ontario; my inquiry was not focused on a detailed genealogical inquiry of that sort, although such an investigation could prove to be fascinating. What I have noted, however, is that the "helping" ethos so often expressed by my informants seemed quite distinct from the employability rationality. Although my informants obeyed LBS imperatives they did not necessarily—or not always—do so out of faithfulness to the rationality embedded in policy. When these women talked about helping people to "get off welfare," they most often told me that they were motivated to do so because of the brutalities of that system. BD pointed out that "98% of those people [on social assistance] really don't want to be on, they just want to get off" because it is extremely difficult to meet one's basic needs on "five hundred and ninety dollars a month for rent and heat and hydro and food." As CS said, "Yes I think it's a good thing to get off the welfare rolls, it's a hell of a life. I would not think anybody here wants to stay that way."

In contrast to enthusiasts of neoliberal welfare reform, my informants did not believe that being on welfare indicated that recipients were deliberately avoiding employment or were inadequate units of human capital. Rather, some noted that the employability rationality forces people on social assistance to take what CS called "the shortest distance to the lowest possible job." As I discussed in Chapter 6, CS observed that Ontario Works is "a real nightmare for people who are caught in this kind of community. They want to get out and they're being told, 'Oh no, we can't afford that, you can get a job as a PSW [Personal Support Worker] so we can write you off as a success story.' When they really dream of becoming a nurse."

In the "kind of community" where CS works—one which includes a large proportion of racialized individuals—the push to "the lowest possible jobs" is particularly troubling. According to CS, using the term Essential Skills to frame literacy as employability is "a concept designed to get people out of very basic literacy into very basic jobs." She notes

that most Essential Skills materials are "geared to [those very basic jobs]. So, for example, if you have a student who wants to go into nursing there are no materials that an actual nurse deals with. You have materials for nurses' aides and orderlies. That is about as high as it goes." In other words, the push to employability not only responsibilizes those who are unemployed, it also requires those with the least financial resources into jobs with the lowest wages. In some communities this means that the push to employability is further entrenching the racialization of poverty.

What they know about the actual effects of the governing rationality seemed, at times, to strengthen my informants' resolve to hold to an alternative approach. I would argue that it was their intimate knowledge of the realities faced by learners—emotional, domestic, community, and economic—which led them to maintain an ethos and rationality distinct from the literacy-as-employability focus of LBS. Perhaps it is the intimacy of these relationships which makes it essential for literacy workers to both comply with, and to evade, policy imperatives. I turn now to a discussion of how they work around policy demands which they find troubling or disagreeable.

9.2   "…Or Else Figure Out a Way Around and Still Get the Information You Want"

Most of my informants strongly resisted being made responsible for employment outcomes. As BD asserted, "It's not my job to get them jobs! It's *my* job to give them confidence, to start them on the road of, you know, further education, lifelong learning." In this quote we see BD articulating her understanding of herself in pastoral terms, as someone who encourages people as part of the process of educating them. We see her distinguishing between how she sees herself—a caring helper who knows individual learners intimately and focuses on what they need and want—and an employment counselor, which she positions as a more instrumental role. Most informants agree with BD's insistence that they are not employment preparation workers. In their resentment at being made responsible for employment outcomes they resist how literacy work is being constructed as a means for producing employable human capital.

Some informants acknowledged that ideas about the economic effects of literacy are prevalent, but chose instead to adopt a broader definition. GH, for example, told me that her own approach was "more of a social theory of literacy and its impacts." She works with learners who are "either blind with additional disabilities or deaf-blind" and described the adults she works with as people who "live in poverty" and are "sometimes very much disenfranchised… [and] very isolated socially." GH noted that because her program serves adults with disabilities, it is allowed to have a high proportion of learners with independence, rather than employment, goals. She told me that the social impact of literacy is something she sees "in the everyday lives of people we serve here" and that what "independence" means for "a deaf-blind person" and for "someone with developmental disabilities" could be completely different.[49] For GH, the social impacts of literacy are related to the "many things in 2011 they still can't access; accessibility is still a huge issue." Furthermore, she cited policies in other countries as acknowledging that "adults play many roles. We are not just workers: we are family members, community leaders, consumers. We are citizens, we are…in relationship with people. I thought that was a much fuller look at what literacy's role is."

Such a "social theory of literacy" was common among my informants, who noted that the employment focus of LBS effectively makes literacy programs responsible for conditions beyond their control. In a community with high rates of unemployment, for example, HW was flabbergasted that the MTCU field representative had the "mentality [of] rapid re-employment, get them back to work." She was perturbed by that mentality, which seemed irrational given that there were no jobs in that community. For her, the focus on employment was, in effect, requiring the adult literacy program to prepare learners to "leave the community." These women performed their role, then, based on their view that unemployment can be attributable to broader issues rather than simply individuals' lack of skills. Furthermore, as GH describes below, in communities where job vacancies do exist, there are many personal circumstances that could affect someone's employment prospects:

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[49] Disability studies literature could offer analytic tools to help unpack the different expectations placed on programs for 'the disabled' and those for 'able-bodied' adults; that analysis must wait for another time.

> We can work with people who have a goal that they want to get a job, and we can do everything we possibly can. But if they don't actually get the job, should that reflect on *my* program's success? Because there could be any number of reasons they didn't get that job. Maybe their spouse became ill. Maybe they have childcare issues, maybe they have a marital situation, any number of things! I don't think that that should be something that should be held back on *my* program visit, because they didn't get the job. (GH)

In identifying learners as more than workers and in noting that adults' lives exist within families and communities, my informants are asserting that such factors should be considered when evaluating individual learners' outcomes. These adult literacy workers are asserting that it is impossible to separate individuals from the personal and broader contexts in which they live.

A large part of the frustration being expressed here is their sense that what they thought were "universally shared assumptions" (Mahmood, 2005, 16) are not adequately addressed by the LBS focus on "employment, employment, employment" (GH). HW thought that everyone should know that people cannot be rapidly re-employed if there are no jobs available. GH assumed that everyone shared her understanding that life circumstances—including their intimate relationships, health status, family care responsibilities, and their ability to access social supports and childcare—invariably affect whether someone can submit an application, get to a job interview, and act as an ideal employee in the interview. My informants assume that LBS should acknowledge these "facts;" their sense of themselves is constituted in and through assumptions such as these, which underpin their desire to help learners. In large measure their frustrations with LBS stem from the ways in which the policy does not allow for high levels of unemployment, nor for common human experiences such as illness in the family, relationship problems or lack of childcare.

But rather than oversights on the part of the Ministry, I am arguing that LBS indifference to structural unemployment and human experiences are features of how the policy, and the psychometrological regime on which it is based, operate. As I noted in section 7.3

(Constructing a Target Population), constituting *homo economicus* both produces and depends upon such indifference. Within neoliberal governmentality people are insignificant except as units of human capital who contribute to economic productivity. As an active labour market policy, LBS is based on the assumption that falling productivity and the dependence of social assistance recipients are the "problem," and improving literacy skills of dependent adults is the solution. This is quite distinct from how my informants understand themselves as educators who wish to offer their communities a learner-centred program where adults can learn what they want to learn.

The age restriction offers a useful illustration of how my informants were able to remain true to their sense of themselves as learner-centred educators while still "getting the information" that MTCU wanted from them. Although programs are not disallowed from working with seniors, literacy workers must ensure that 70% of learners have employment goals and that learners have at least 25% of the requisite "suitability indicators." Rather than offering a program that responds in a straightforward way to the expressed interests and needs of the learners who come through the doors of the program, then, literacy workers are constantly engaged in juggling numbers to "get the information" MTCU wants.

Before I asked DM to talk about her frustrations with LBS I asked her to tell me about what goals adults have when they come into the program. In the following account she, not surprisingly, groups these people according to their expressed learning needs rather than the administrative categories of LBS:

> Right now ours kind of fall into three categories. We have several people who are upgrading to get their GED, hoping to get a job if the jobs ever materialize, and they're just kind of taking advantage of the lull to spend time on their learning. We have quite a few students who come in for technology, learning to communicate with the computer. We have several retirees, senior citizens who are coming to be able to put together picture albums and learn how to use skype, and email and so on, to keep in touch with family who have moved away. And then— okay I've covered upgrading and the technology people—Oh! We have a lot who

come in just for assessment and to have us help them with resumes or …they

practice the GED test, that kind of thing. (DM)

In this description we see DM creating categories based on her work as an educator. She thinks about learners according to what they want to learn. Some want to do upgrading in order to complete a GED while they are unemployed. Some want to learn more about computers, including some seniors who have highly personal reasons for wanting to become familiar with information technology. A third group are individuals who may not be ready to attend a program but want some one-time help, either to prepare a resume or assess their skills and strengths.

Rather than attending to these pedagogical groupings LBS insists that community literacy programs use the institutional category of age because, for its purpose of enhancing Ontario's human capital and competitive advantage, the target population is working-age adults: those between the ages of 18 and 65.[50] The focus on working-age adults creates dilemmas for literacy workers when seniors enter the program hoping to enhance their literacy. As DM said,

We have many students who are seniors or are older people who are coming to learn the whole language of computers. And that's very valid for them in their lifestyle and in contacting family and friends, but it's hard to fit that into what Employment Ontario wants. … We have seniors who are like 83 or 84! You know, they're not going to go into employment or into school, so… What we have to squeeze them makes it difficult to report on what we do.

In this example we see how the administrative categories of age are more important to LBS than what the literacy workers know about the learning needs of seniors in their communities. As DM noted, the LBS categories that literacy workers are expected to "squeeze them into" simply do not fit for many adults. Elsewhere she told me that the

[50] Although LBS draws heavily on IALS data and framing, its neglect of seniors indicates that the active labour market rationality for the policy trumps the classificatory power of the statistics. One of the strongest findings from IALS was that a large proportion of adults below Level Three are seniors; this finding is effaced by the employability rationality at the heart of LBS.

program has not changed its "basic philosophy" which has "always been to give [learners] what *they* need and then we worry about fitting it into the documentation." While she is frustrated at the mismatch between the LBS categories and learners' stated needs, she believes that the staff's job is to "get creative in how we report out what they're doing." It is significant that DM chooses to find ways to work with those adults; their desire to learn is more important to her than the policy imperative to focus primarily on working-age adults.

Similarly, HW described a senior who "wanted to learn more about the stocks and to navigate around his computer." Clearly this individual was not seeking literacy skills that would lead to an acceptable employment outcome as defined by LBS, namely to get a job, to keep a job or to get a promotion at work. Nonetheless, HW told me that she entered this learner as having an employment goal because he hoped that what he learned could help increase his income. She told me that her rationale for this "fudging" was that it was created by MTCU's insistence that she fit people into "the data [they] want to see."

> I put him down as employment, because it took—That's what I mean about fudging. Technically if they were to check, yah, he's trying to make more money for himself. But is he actually going to a job? No. But—better to just be truthful and then have them take that data and then revisit it and then see how they should approach the situation instead of just saying, "This is the data we want to see, now you take these people and you fit them in there." Cause that just causes frustration for everybody involved. (HW)

In this example we see that HW chose a goal category that, while not exactly accurate, fit the closest of any of the goals. Note that HW wishes she could be honest; she wishes the Ministry was interested in finding out "how they should approach the situation." Instead, she notes that MTCU has pre-defined "the data [they] want to see" and requires literacy workers to "take these people and fit them" into pre-determined categories and outcomes. HW notes that in the current situation, literacy programs are more or less required to "fudge" the data, and that such compulsory dishonesty "causes frustration for everybody involved." Literacy workers are frustrated that they cannot be honest about what learners'

actual goals are, and the Ministry is frustrated when programs don't produce the data it wants to see. In her view, mismatches between learners' stated needs and the five possible goal paths means that "the newer reports" which literacy programs are obliged to produce can never accurately reflect what is happening in LBS programs.

In the above examples of how my informants negotiated between policy requirements and their own sense of the ethics guiding their work I note that most informants felt they were forced to be dishonest. They wanted to be truthful about their work but found that it was difficult to fit learners into the categories they were given. They also noted that it was difficult to be honest about what their work entailed because MTCU has predetermined what data should be evident in the statistical reports. There are serious implications for the data literacy workers are required to produce: programs can be audited at any time, and any inconsistencies could be considered "events of default" which could result in loss of MTCU funding. In addition, if literacy workers do not submit reports on learners' attendance and progress to OW or WSIB, they can imperil an individual's income. In other words, adult literacy workers are caught in a tangled web of multiple accountabilities that bear down upon themselves and those subjects. The profound implications of failing to make a report, or of submitting a report that MTCU could deem unsatisfactory, means that literacy workers are caught between being honest and being helpful. LBS funding contractually obliges them to be honest about their work with learners. On the other hand, they feel morally and ethically required to offer adult learners what they say they want and need. Forced to choose between these two, my informants seem to choose the needs of learners over the imperatives of policy. The examples of "fudging" and "getting creative in how we report it" indicate that my informants transgress contractual obligations which they perceive as contrary to their human obligations.

Literacy workers' creativity protects the programs from defaulting on the conditions of their funding. But it also means that MTCU cannot use LBS data to verify whether or not literacy learners have the employment goals MTCU wants them to have. Nor can the data accurately show what factors, other than literacy, account for learners finding jobs. Perversely, then, in refusing to acknowledge other rationalities, LBS not only produces

ethical dilemmas for literacy workers, it also makes it impossible for MTCU to assess the effectiveness of its investment in human capital deemed to be not "literate enough."

9.3   Struggles Over What "Learner-Centred" Means

All of my informants talked about themselves as learner-centred. This term, more than any other, seemed to be at the heart of how they constructed their own identity as literacy workers. To my informants, being learner-centred means giving priority to the needs and desires expressed by adults who enter the program. It means offering individuals assistance with the things they say they want to do and to learn. Importantly, these women also used this term regularly, and emphatically, to distinguishing their own approach to literacy from the employment-centred imperatives of LBS.

The way my informants identify with the term learner-centred is not only interesting, but also puzzling once we notice that the LBS also claims this same term as a centrepiece of its policy. Without explicitly defining it, MTCU has made this concept part of the triumvirate of key objectives for the policy: "learner-centred, goal-directed and transition-oriented." But while the policy uses the same term that is so important to my informants, the meanings the words hold and the actions they authorise are inverted. This critical difference, rarely explored explicitly by my informants, positions the concept "learner-centred" as a frequent source of daily tension and ongoing struggle between literacy workers and MTCU. For this reason, I turn now to a more detailed exploration of not what this term "means" in the abstract, but how it actually informs different priorities in action.

To many of my informants, being learner-centred still means doing their jobs in ways that offer individual attention, care and concern based on learner's expressed desires, interests and needs. This sense of themselves and their role was shaped in the discourse of literacy-as-participation and within ethics of social care, and this meaning of the phrase was a fundamental principle when community literacy programs were being established in the province. During the 1980s when activists such as myself were agitating for government support for non-formal adult basic education in the province, we promoted the concept of learner-centredness (Alkenbrack et al, 1984) because we thought it would

allow space for education that was responsive to adults' experiences, circumstances and needs. This sense has carried forward into the present: informants who held this view included those who have been doing the work for a long time as well as those who are relatively new to the field.

But attachment to this concept is not just a hangover from the past. It is also a choice about the present. These days, strongly identifying with this the term seems to be part of taking an active stance against the "fast-moving train" and the way its reporting requirements seem indifferent, or hostile, to "becom[ing] human in the task" of working with learners. What my informants told me indicated that what they mean by being "learner-centred" is that every day they make ethical choices; they place higher priority on their sense of responsibility to learners than on their obligation to the funder. This ethical choice was articulated when informants described instances in which, despite the rhetoric of learner centredness, LBS prevented them from fulfilling their own expectations of themselves in relation to learners.

BD offered a colourful description of this problem. She said, "The mouths are moving. I always say in life, 'If it talks like a duck and walks like a duck, it's a duck. But if it just talks like a duck…it's not a duck.' It's not a duck, ooh." Elaborating on this point, she said:

> We've presented to the ADM [Assistant Deputy Minister of MTCU], we've gone to [a regional centre] and presented to staff. And I walked out of the meeting in [that city] with the staff and I was…it was *sad*. Because when I walked out I thought, "You know what? It's all about numbers." …you could see that [all they cared about is]—just meet your number. And I thought, "Meet the number? What about meet the need?! What about changing the face of society? What about giving people *hope*? What about saying this is a *new*, fresh approach to education for adults; there's hope out there." (BD)

That is, for BD, it appears that being learner-centred includes walking the talk about meeting people needs. It also means offering education which "chang[es] the face of society" by "giving people hope." The MTCU staff at the meeting she describes were not

interested in anything but the numbers, not interested in anything that BD and other literacy workers knew as a result of their intimate relationships with learners in their communities.

Other informants formulated similar complaints about the gap between talk and action. They told me that they were frustrated that the Ministry seems to be "indifferent" to what is needed by "those adults most in need" of literacy services. These women said that it felt as though everything they know about learners gets pushed aside by the government seeing learners "more as numbers…rather than as people" (DM). Much of this tension takes the form of complaints about the burden of the "new reports" and how they are seen by the workers to "take time away" from the learners. As CS put it, her experience is that "the new curriculum and reporting framework is directed more to providing statistics for the ministry than learning for the students." Similarly, when I asked KT to tell me her greatest frustration with the current regime, she replied "*all* this reporting, and all this learning *how* to report, is taking us away from *them*." And according to HW, recently-introduced reporting requirements have "added a lot of administrative, a *lot* of administrative work" which "takes me away from the students."

These very reports are designed to enact and assess the LBS goal of being "learner-centred, goal-directed and transition-oriented." So, how is it that the same term produces such a different priority in action? It is true that within the LBS context, learner-centred also refers to a highly specific way of working with each learner individually; but the aim and outcome is entirely different. What "learner-centred" means within LBS is that each learner must have a specific achievable goal recorded in an individual training plan, one which is articulated to the transition towards which the learner is expected to progress. But within LBS, not every learner goal is legitimate and countable, as I discussed in section 7.5 (Constructing *Homo Economicus* One Literacy Learner at a Time). Instead, including the term "learner-centred" as a key principle for LBS ensures that the goal paths and outcomes recorded for each learner are ones which are authorised by the policy. What workers encounter as learners' personal goals, such as reading a book or learning to use computers, must be "fudged" until they are stated in terms which align

with the pre-set LBS framework; literacy workers cannot simply respond to learners' wishes, stated in their own terms.

Within the terms of LBS, being learner-centred means that the learning which occurs within literacy programs must be guided by individual goals stated in terms of the five acceptable goal paths; literacy workers must make sure that the majority (70%) of these goals are employment-related. An important LBS measure of program effectiveness is whether or not adults achieve reportable outcomes, notably ones which are transitions beyond the literacy program itself, and definitely not outcomes which are "difficult to report." This kind of individualizing attention has a disciplinary effect on both learners and literacy workers.

So despite the fact that LBS employs a term commonly used by literacy workers, the meanings of this concept in action are definitely not held in common. To understand the fundamental distinction between these two meanings, it is useful to focus on the difference between instruction that is individualized—a personal approach, adopted to specific needs and circumstances—and instruction that is individualizing—imposing norms into autonomous entities, and presuming that individuals' "depths and details" are knowable and should be directed towards the interests of the population as a whole. The LBS aim of enjoining community literacy programs to be "learner-cented" is the latter: to remedy individual shortcomings and skill deficits that are affecting the province's productivity and competitiveness. The aim that my informants identify with and pursue, often against formidable odds, is mostly the former.

I return now to the claim that one informant made, namely that despite all of their frustrations with LBS, literacy workers are able to "do what we've always done, just call it something else."(SB) As this analysis of the term "learner-centred" indicates, what seems in fact to be happening is that they are forced to find ways around the punitive imperatives of policy and to use their pastoral ethic of care as a resource in managing their position between adult learners and the LBS policy. All of literacy workers' invisibilized negotiations are occurring under the aegis of a phrase which produces

meanings and actions that are diametrically opposed to the women's understandings of the very same words. Within LBS, the term "learner-centred" really is "something else."

9.4   Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated the relationship between LBS edicts and literacy workers' actions, considering what happens when subjects whose decisions and actions are based on alternative logics encounter the rationalities of the psychometrological literacy regime. I noted that although the LBS policy interpellates these workers as agents of responsibilization, my informants' actions were guided by a sense of themselves as learner-centred educators. I have observed that even harsh threats directed at both learners and workers have not convinced my informants to relinquish a caring and pastoral role which carries forward alternative ways of doing things. In my conclusion I argue that such actions and incredible resilience indicate that neoliberalism is far from complete.

Chapter 10
Magpie Looks Back:
Warnings and Areas for Future Growth

This thesis investigated aspects of the dynamics of the neoliberal rationalities governing adult literacy in one context, the province of Ontario. I took the approach that literacy is a form of conduct, one that has been tied to problematics of government for a long time. Rather than assuming literacy to be an unquestionably "good" and necessary attribute, I investigated how the current problematization of literacy has been constructed, and how the current neoliberal rationality is both continuous with, and divergent from, earlier problematizations. In doing so my aim was to focus on the dangers of the current governing rationality, not to assert that previous literacy regimes were relatively benign nor to presume that I could predict a literate future towards which we can imagine humanity progressing.

I return now to the image of the magpie introduced in Chapter 2, picking up two threads to tell the final piece of this story. I noted that corvids play an important role in warning of dangers, and that their habit of storing seeds plays an important role in regenerating growth. These attributes serve as suitable metaphors for describing my findings and for outlining questions emerging from the research which merit further investigation.

10.1   Findings and Warnings

After making an argument that literacy should be considered as a contingent, context-specific and historically produced form of conduct, this thesis examined some of the dangers constituted in and through policies based on the dominant contemporary problematization of literacy. I noted that the current rationality of literacy-as-employability was elaborated through statistics developed under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and was tied directly to an interest in establishing so-called "active labour market" policies. My analysis of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) suggested that its calculative practices for assessing cognitive processing and its designation of IALS Level Three as a threshold of capable literate conduct constituted what I term a psychometrological regime. I argued

that this regime produced a means of calculating the value of human capital, one which has become a central tool for implementing authoritarian practices aimed at "dependent" subjects deemed not "literate enough."

Turning to the geopolitical space of Ontario, I considered the role of the psychometrological regime in transforming the governance of welfare and of adult literacy. I explored how IALS has entered Ontario through policies aimed at activating a target population of dependent subjects; my analysis centred on how the mandatory literacy test and the threshold of capable literate conduct have affected adult literacy programs in the province. I examined how the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) policy constructs "dependent" adults as responsible for the province's economic performance and competitiveness and makes adult literacy programs responsible for transforming subjects who are not "literate enough" into valuable human capital. I noted that, in LBS, the threshold of IALS Level Three has become a means of distinguishing between which human capital is valuable and which is disposable, whose skills count and whose can be discounted, but also who can read for pleasure and who is forbidden any non-instrumental education.

I argued that the current problematization of literacy in Ontario produces employability as the thing that governments "want [subjects] to want." In doing so it constructs individuals living in poverty as responsible for their life circumstances. The fundamental individualism of this discourse turns attention away from the structural inequities which result in some groups of people having more access to education than others, and some groups of people being trapped in low-wage employment or forced to rely on social assistance for income support. The individualization of social-care responsibilities has the effect of constituting basic human needs which are not employment-related—such as food, housing, childcare, health care, as well as human care and affection—as superfluous to the economy and therefore not relevant.

The final two chapters of the thesis focus on the position of adult literacy workers within the multi-layered assemblage of rationalities about literacy and the practices shaping normative literate conduct in the current context. I noted that several features of their

relationships with learners indicate that adult literacy work embodies pastoral power. My informants rarely spoke explicitly about what ethics guide their work, yet many things that they said about their frustrations with the current policy offered insights into what assumptions underlie their work. I agued that, in negotiating the demands of policy imperatives which run counter to their sense of themselves, my informants' actions were often directed by humanist impulses formed within a rationality of literacy-as-participation.

Although my informants' knowledge and experiences are daily being subordinated (Higgins & Larner, 2010) by the psychometrological regime, they continue to work in the cracks and to hold onto their own rationality of adult literacy work. I argued that a key resource as they navigate the ethical dilemmas produced by this disjuncture is their sense of themselves as "learner-centred." I observed that my informants' disobediences, refusals and resistances do not negate their participation in—or enactment of—governing rationalities. Nevertheless they attempt, as far as they are able, to remain true to their sense of themselves as driven first and foremost by concern for care of the learners who attend the programs where they work. I hope that my ethnographic data about how front-line educators are negotiating these demands offers a critique, "a challenge directed to what is" that can be used to grapple with the range of "dead-ends, problems and impossibilities" (Foucault, 1991c, p. 84) which they face.

10.2   Seeds for future growth: Limitations and areas for further research

One limitation of the current research is that it does not, as I had initially expected, locate adult literacy work in relation to ongoing colonial relations in this geopolitical space. An interest in postcolonial dynamics in settler states and in global relations remains central to how I frame inquiry but these relations were necessarily background to the current study. Choosing to attend first and foremost to how my informants negotiate the demands of psychometrological regime in Ontario meant that I had to focus on their actions in relation to that regime, rather than to broader historical processes. Although my inquiry was prompted, in part, by curiosity about the predominance of white, middle-class women in adult literacy work, my analysis did not include discussion of what role whiteness might play in pastoralism. My interest in how literacy workers occupied the

space between the LBS policy and learners meant that I paid more attention to how their self-making was a resource in the process of negotiating that position than to how their pastoral role might be connected to the constitution of bourgeois subjectivities within settler-colonialism. All of these questions could be rich terrain for future investigation.

My genealogical analysis of the various problematizations of literacy is, out of necessity, very sketchy. A more extensive examination would be an important contribution to literacy scholarship and definitely merits further research. Even detailed analysis of how a single mechanism, such as the Literacy and Basic Skills policy itself, was established and evolved provides enough material for a dissertation project. For the purposes of this study, however, such analysis had to remain in the background. I undertook the genealogical analysis in order to help me understand the locus and power of the dominant governing rationality and to make visible where my informants got their very different sense of themselves as literacy workers. What I learned from the genealogical analysis I did undertake has made me keen to continue this thread of inquiry. Exploring how the threshold may be operating upon learners definitely merits further research and analysis.

In particular, I am aware that while linkages between the psychometrological regime and processes of racialization and abjection are bubbling beneath the surface, my analysis of these links is extremely narrow. I argued that the IALS statistics could be understood as an attempt to entrench patterns of economic dominance established under colonialism. In discussing the effects of changes to welfare in the province I referred to scholarship documenting how racialized groups are the most adversely affected by neoliberal restructuring. I noted the central role of categories of "race" in the civilizing mission and noted parallels between its imperatives and the definition of "soft skills" articulated within the Literacy and Basic Skills Policy; I also noted that the psychometrological regime borrows many cognitive and methodological assumptions from other standardized tests which have been widely critiqued for eugenic assumptions. Had I foregrounded the bio-political effects of the calculable threshold of capable literate conduct, I could have made stronger claims about how this threshold may be operating to entrench white privilege. As it is, the thesis merely began to make such connections, but I am eager to

pursue further investigation of how issues of race and racialization operate within the psychometrological regime.

At various points in the drafting of this thesis I assumed that the authoritarian tendencies evident in the psychometrological regime might become more central to the storyline unfolding in the dissertation. Perhaps my argument would have been stronger if I had been able to include a more robust documentation of how coercions enter the lives of adults deemed "not literate enough" by the psychometrological regime, or of how those subjects are surviving in the face of a regime which individualizes responsibility for their struggles. Again, such limitations arose out of my need to carve out a manageable thesis topic. Since my ethnographic research focused on the workers who are being made responsible for transforming subjects deemed not "literate enough" into valuable human capital, there was little space to consider in more detail exactly how the threshold of IALS Level Three might be abjecting particular groups of people—such as racialized workers, newcomers and women—within that target population. In my interviews with informants I did not ask about what they noticed in this regard, nor did my data include any quantitative demographic data about learners in the programs where they work.

10.3   Contribution: A Seed of Hope

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. (Foucault, 1984b, p. 343)

This study is not meant to be a groundbreaking intervention in governmentality studies nor an innovative analysis of advanced liberal subjectivation, though I am deeply engaged by the power of these concepts. Instead, its primary contribution is to literacy studies. In this field various scholars have struggled to analyze how local literacy practices are connected across space and time, and to account for how some literacy practices become dominant. My contribution consists in providing an example of how to place issues of power at the centre of such inquiries. Ideally this study can contribute not only to literacy scholarship but can also offer insights which can provide literacy

educators and activists some way to "push back" against the "fast-moving train" that has so effectively laid very heavy rails over their understandings and experiences.

One of the contributions I most desire from this study is to make governmentality analytics more accessible to activists and to the field of literacy studies. It is my hope that this research can help to demystify the processes which produce our understandings of the world, of literacy, and of what choices and actions are available in particular moments and contexts. Our sense of ourselves—who we are and what possibilities are open to us—does matter deeply, since it informs what we believe we can do in the face of policies and pressures that we experience as dangerous, threatening or just plain wrong.

This research has shown that adult literacy workers are finding ways to "become human in the task," to continue to care about the human and social needs of the adults who attend community literacy programs in Ontario. The fact that they are able to hold onto a rationality that differs from that of a quite restrictive set of policies and practices means that it is still possible to act in the face of dangers and coercions. Although my informants' actions may not—yet—be shaking the foundations of the psychometrological regime, their disobediences indicate that there continues to be something that they *can* do. I hope that this work helps to show that neoliberalism is "more an ethos or an ethical ideal, than a set of completed or established institutions" (Dean, 1997, p. 213, cited in Larner, 2000, p. 20). The fact that my research indicates that neoliberalism may not be complete indicates that we are living in times of struggle rather than times of domination. The psychometrological train certainly is moving very fast, laying tracks over other views of learning and education, and yet it has not yet succeeded in obliterating all traces of other ways of being in the world.

But I also want to note that what seems to make it possible to *not* give up or give in to authoritarian coercions is not any kind of dogma, theory, or ideology. Rather, what makes it possible to negotiate between the world-as-it-is and the world we choose to live in and hope to build is our sense of ourselves and our place in the world, and also the ethics which make it possible for us to embody that knowledge in our daily lives. In other words, I agree with what Foucault said in the above quote: that we "always have

something to do." If even the smallest choices in how we view ourselves and others have tremendous significance, perhaps the world we might hope to build is possible and may already be present.

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Appendices

Appendix A   **List of Literacy Networks in Ontario**

The following 16 literacy networks link all of the Anglophone literacy programs in the province.

Adult Basic Education Association of Hamilton-Wentworth	Hamilton
Literacy Network of Durham Region	Oshawa
Literacy Link of Eastern Ontario (LLEO)	Kingston
Literacy Network Northeast	Timmins
Literacy Link Niagara	Thorold
Literacy Link South Central (LLSC)	London
Literacy Northwest	Thunder Bay
Literacy Ontario Central South	Peterborough
Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML)	Toronto
The Mid North Network for the Coordination and Development of Adult Learning	Sudbury
Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy (OCCL)	Ottawa
Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network	Mississauga
Project READ Literacy Network	Kitchener
QUILL Learning Network (Quality in Lifelong Learning)	Walkerton
Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network	Orillia
Tri-County Literacy Network	Chatham

Appendix B   **Email to Solicit Potential Informants**

The following message was sent to all literacy networks in Ontario (see Appendix A) on September 18, 2011.

Dear friends

Could you help connect me with individuals who might be willing to be interviewed for my PhD research? If so, could you forward the attached to your mailing lists, or include the following paragraphs in your next newsletter? Any help would be appreciated. Thanks in advance!

Tannis Atkinson   [my phone number]

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH--Adult literacy workers' knowledge, identities and work practices in Ontario

I am the former editor of Literacies (www.literacies.ca) and am currently working on my PhD in Adult Education at OISE/University of Toronto. My thesis research grows out of my sense of how adult literacy work in Ontario has changed since I was first involved in 1981, when there was no literacy policy in the province. Now we have a policy, yet front-line workers often talk about the gaps between what policy assumes about students and what students say they want and need. My thesis research explores what adult literacy workers in Ontario think about the disconnects between what they thought they would or should be doing as adult literacy workers, and what policies expect them to think and do.

I would like to talk to you if
* you work in adult literacy in Ontario, or have recently left front-line work
and
* you are frustrated about the current policy framework

For more information, or to participate in this study, contact Tannis Atkinson at t.atkinson@utoronto.ca.

Appendix C   **Invitation to Participate, sent to Literacy Networks**

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY
Between neoliberal policies and local realities: Adult literacy workers' knowledge,
identities and work practices in Ontario

Are you an adult literacy worker who is frustrated by the ways that current policies and
funding make it difficult for you to address issues in the lives of learners who attend the
program where you work? If so, please consider participating in my research study.

I have been involved in adult literacy work in Ontario off and on since 1981, before the
province had an adult literacy policy. I am curious about how adult literacy work has
shifted over the past thirty years, and what effect policy has had on practice. I know that
some practitioners feel that the current policy, which is based on statistical indicators,
places greater emphasis on counting things than on teaching people. What I'd like to
understand better is how literacy workers manage to work in this environment. I hope
that results from my research could offer insights about the changing context of practice
in community work and could inform future research, training and education of adult
educators in Canada.

I am a PhD student in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at
the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. **My thesis
research explores** how adult literacy workers in Ontario understand the disconnects
between what they thought they would or should be doing as adult literacy workers,
and the effect of government policies on how adult literacy workers think about their
identities, their sense of purpose and their daily practices.

I would like to talk to you if you work in adult literacy in Ontario and feel frustrated
about the current policy framework, or you have recently left adult literacy work
because you are frustrated by policy changes. I want to talk to both people who are
relatively new to the field and those who have worked in adult literacy for ten years or
more.

If you participate in this study your comments will be completely anonymous. I will
make sure that you, and the agency where you work, cannot be identified. All
information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential. I will ask you to take part
in two semi-structured interviews, each about 90 minutes long, at a time and location
chosen by you. In the interviews, I will focus on

- what led you to become a literacy worker, and what keeps you in the work
- how changes in adult literacy policy in Ontario has affected your work
- what knowledge and experiences you draw on to deal with the changes and frustrations at work

With your permission I will record and transcribe the interviews for analysis. You can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will have the option of having [your data] removed from the study.

Thank you for considering being part of my study! **For information, or to take part, please contact me.**

Tannis Atkinson PhD candidate OISE/UT – Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology

Phone: [XXX-XXX-XXXX]   Email: t.atkinson@utoronto.ca

Appendix D **Email to Individuals Selected as Informants, October 2011**

Dear _____

Over the past few weeks I've been sorting through the responses I received so that I could include women from across Ontario who have been involved in adult literacy for various lengths of time. I am delighted that you are interested in my research, 'Between neoliberal policies and local realities: Adult literacy workers' knowledge, identities and work practices in Ontario,' and hope that you are still available to talk to me. For my study I want to ask you about three general areas:
* what experiences and events in your life led you to become, and remain, a literacy worker
* what kinds of knowledge you bring to your work, and how that knowledge influences how you do your work
* how recent developments in adult literacy policy have affected your work

Ideally, I'd like to talk to everyone in person, but in some cases distance will make that impossible, so we'll have to conduct the interview by phone. I expect the first interview to take about an hour and a half; I may also want to schedule a follow-up interview in a few months.

I'm attaching a consent form that I'll need you to sign before I do the interview. It describes how I'll protect your privacy and what I will do with the interview transcripts. Please let me know if you have any questions about what you are agreeing to by signing the form.

Also, if at any time you have concerns about me or my work, please contact my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Jackson (nancy.jackson@utoronto.ca or [phone].

I'd like to conduct the interviews between now and mid-January. If you are still interested in participating in my research, could you let me know what days of the week and what times usually work for you (for example, Friday mornings, Tuesday afternoons). If your schedule is not very flexible, please tell me three or four dates and times that work
for you.

Looking forward to hearing from you!
Tannis

Tannis Atkinson
PhD candidate, Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Appendix E   **Consent Form**

Between neoliberal policies and local realities: Adult literacy workers' knowledge, identities and work practices in Ontario

You are being asked to participate in a study conducted by Tannis Atkinson, PhD candidate in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. If you have questions about the research, please feel free to contact Tannis at [phone] or t.atkinson@utoronto.ca. You may also contact her faculty supervisor, Dr. Nancy Jackson, at [phone] or nancy.jackson@utoronto.ca.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to understand how adult literacy workers in Ontario understand the disconnects between what they thought they would or should be doing as adult literacy workers, and the effect of government policies on how they think about their identities, their sense of purpose and their daily practices.

Participants' responses will inform conceptual analysis and provide directions for training, education and research on the changing context of community work and adult basic education. I anticipate recruiting between 10-12 participants for this study.

Procedures

If you agree to take part in this study, I will ask you to take part in two individual interviews that each last about 90 minutes. The follow-up interview will be within six months of the initial interview. The interviews will be at a time and location that you choose. With your permission I will audio-tape and transcribe the interviews. As part of the interview process, I will share copies of your transcripts with you, and invite your comments on emerging themes. When the study is complete, I will offer you a summary of the results.

Confidentiality

All information about you will remain strictly confidential. I will keep the interview transcripts and data in a secure location for the entire period that I am working on this study, which I expect to be approximately two years. Only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Jackson, will have access to this data. I will destroy all documents within 5 years of completing the study. To protect your anonymity, and the anonymity of the program where you work, I will use a secure code to identify you in the transcripts and any published findings.

Participation and Withdrawal

You will not receive any stipend in exchange for participating in this study. If you participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any question. You may also withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. If you do withdraw from the study, none

of the information you have provided will be used in the results.

Potential Risks and Benefits

The primary potential risk is that you may feel uncomfortable, angry, anxious or upset because of the information you share in the interview. To minimize these risks, you will be asked to share only what is comfortable for you. You will be encouraged to contact the researcher, or my supervisor, at any time during the study if you have concerns about your participation in the study.

There are several possible benefits of participation. You may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on and discuss the changes you have experienced. Your contributions may help enrich an understanding of the dilemmas and tensions in current adult literacy work. Finally, your participation may shed light on what training and support could be beneficial for community educators.

Rights as a Participant

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Signatures of Research Participant and Investigator

I understand the information about the study, *Between neoliberal policies and local realities: Adult literacy workers' knowledge, identities and work practices in Ontario*, that has been given to me by the investigator. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

If you would like a summary of the research data, indicate here: ____

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant_____ date_____

Signature of investigator_____ date_____

Between neoliberal policies and local realities:
Adult literacy workers' knowledge, identities and work practices in Ontario

1. Experiences and events in your life led you to become, and remain, a literacy worker

What experiences and influences informed your decision to become a literacy worker?

What does it mean to you to be 'a literacy worker'? Has that changed over time?

What kinds of tensions arise between how you approach your work and how policy and funding expects you to approach your work?

How have you managed those tensions?

Why do you continue to do this work despite those tensions?

2. What knowledge you bring to your work, and how it influences how you do your work

What knowledge do you draw on to you do your work? Where did you acquire that knowledge?

How has your knowledge affected how you understand what it means to be 'a literacy worker'?

What kinds of tensions arise between what you know and what policy and funding asks you to pay attention to in your work?

How have you managed those tensions?

3. How developments in adult literacy policy have affected your work

Since you started doing adult literacy work, how has it changed?

How have those changes affected you? How do you feel about the changes?

What would an ideal literacy policy look like?

What would working in an ideal literacy program look like?

In conclusion

How do you understand current literacy policies in Ontario?

What does 'being a literacy worker' mean to you now, under the current policies?

Has your understanding of 'being a literacy worker' changed over time?

What advice would you give to people entering adult literacy work now?

Appendix G   **Email Sent to Informants, with Transcript, June 2012**

Dear _____

I hope you are doing well. Please let me apologize for the delay in contacting you -- I have had some serious health issues over the past few months, so my progress has been slower than I had hoped. However, I have now finished transcribing your interview; it is attached.

The transcript includes all of the names you used in the interview—including the name of your community, the agency where you work, other agencies and the local community college—but I will NEVER include those identifiers in any quote taken from this document. Instead, I will replace the name with a generic term, such as [agency] or [town]. To protect your identity, I will always use fictional initials instead of your name when I use quotes from the transcript. Please look over the transcript and let me know if there is anything you would like changed or removed.

Some time over the summer I hope to conduct a second interview. Before I do I will send some information about what I have heard in the first round of interviews.

If you have any questions or concerns about the process, please let me know. Or get in touch with my supervisor, Nancy Jackson, at [nancy.jackson@utoronto.ca].

All the best,
Tannis

Tannis Atkinson, PhD candidate
Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto
[my phone number]

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