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Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation in Adult Literacy: Power, Pedagogy, and Programs

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In an address to members of the national organization of adult learners, Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE), Dr. Thomas G. Sticht stated a truism: "The Adult Education and Literacy System serves the powerless." Although estimates of the number of adults with low literacy in the United States vary, no one denies that these adults are primarily the working poor and public assistance recipients, and they are disproportionately represented by people of color and immigrants. Moreover, the majority of adults enrolled in literacy programs are women. Thus, adult basic education (ABE) serves primarily those individuals likely to have had restricted access to opportunity and power, not only because of their socioeconomic class but also because of the dynamics of racism and sexism in our society. Although no figures are available on the sexual orientation of literacy learners, Kerka (2001) reported that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students also present issues that should be of concern to adult educators.

The socially constructed categories of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation not only locate individuals and groups within global, national, and local social structures, they also establish social identities that shape people's experiences and cultures. The prevalence of poor people, people of color, immigrants, and women in ABE programs, along with growing concern about issues of sexual orientation, situate the work of the field within "interlocking systems of power and oppression" (Tisdell, cited in Imel, 1995, p. 1). Social inequality described and experienced along lines of race, gender, and class helps to determine who needs literacy instruction, who gets it, how these learners experience it, and what impact it has on their lives. Moreover, both individuals and policymakers in U.S. society expect literacy to remedy the effects of and ultimately reduce social inequality. At the same time, educators may be mandated to teach in ways that reinforce, rather than transform, differences of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation that affect the life chances of learners.

This social context of ABE—along with the identities and social locations of its teachers and learners, the political economy of funding for its programs, and the differential rewards its learners reap from educational achievement—raises concerns for adult educators regarding pedagogy, curriculum, and policy. In this chapter I identify these dimensions of ABE, beginning with the demography of low-literate adults in the United States and in ABE programs and what this demography reveals about the intersection of ABE with gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. The history of ABE and its association with struggles against inequality are reviewed as a backdrop for the discussion of how and whether ABE programs and classrooms provide literacy instruction that challenges or reinforces inequalities of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Examples of pedagogical approaches that question these pervasive forms of inequality are provided. The chapter concludes with recommendations for research, policy, practice, and advocacy at classroom, program, and policy levels.[1]

THE DYNAMICS OF DEMOGRAPHY IN ABE

The dynamics of racism, class inequality, sexism, and homophobia influence the lives of everyone in the United States, including their access to

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[1]This review is intended as an overview of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in ABE, not as an exhaustive exploration of each of these complex issues. Clearly, each kind of inequality merits more study and could be the subject of an article or book on its own.

literacy. As Fine (1997) pointed out, educational research and popular discourse on inequality read as if racism affected only those in minority groups and sexism affected only women. She pointed out that the racism experienced by people of color in U.S. schools could not exist without the simultaneous privileging and "advantaging" of Whites and Whiteness by the same educational institutions.

Although indicators of class, race, and gender are separated out in the discussion that follows, readers should keep in mind that these factors act in concert in their effects on our institutions and our lives, as described in the section that follows on education, employment, and inequality. Race, class, and gender clearly affect the power of individuals to successfully negotiate educational institutions and to reap the rewards for having done so. This is reflected in the relative poverty and predominance of people of color among those with low literacy. Gender presents a more complex picture; in K–12 and at the community college and college levels, women appear to do better than men, although sexism is apparent in the predominance of men at graduate levels, not only in such traditionally male fields as engineering, math, and science, but also in traditionally female fields such as adult education,[2] including ABE. Finally, socioeconomic circumstances remain strong predictors of educational success across race and gender, and educational achievement is a strong predictor of employment success. The latter ensures that individuals with low literacy are more likely to be poor; in an economy moving away from industry and toward information, this is increasingly likely to be so. The connections between sexual orientation (being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender) and literacy, and between sexual orientation and education and employment, are not as well studied. We do not have data on the sexual orientation of those participating in literacy programs. For these reasons, sexual orientation is not as prominent in the discussion that follows.

Class

Sticht (2002) noted that some 4,000 organizations operate programs funded by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the

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Perhaps this introductory review will spark the kind of research and writing that would inform such work.

[2]In this chapter, the term *adult education* refers more broadly not only to ABE (including literacy, English for speakers of other languages [ESOL], and adult secondary education [ASE] or General Educational Development [GED] preparation) but also to postsecondary education and training programs commonly offered by community colleges, degree and certificate programs, and vocational schools.

TABLE 2.1
Number of Adults in Economically Disadvantaged Categories
Served by ABE

Year	Working Poor	Unemployed	Welfare Recipients	Homeless	Yearly Total Served
1995–1996	1,017,268	1,196,866	436,212	38,113	4,042,172
1996–1997	1,026,395	1,103,475	383,116	30,326	4,017,272
1997–1998	957,490	934,559	362,349	20,534	4,020,500

Note. From U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/9499hinvest.html#char

1998 Workforce Investment Act) and that these programs (formerly funded through the Adult Education Act of 1966) served about 31 million learners from 1992 to 1999.[3] Of these students, Sticht told us, 7.9 million were the working poor, 3.3 million received welfare, 9.3 million were unemployed, and 2.2 million were incarcerated. More than two thirds of 15 million enrollees between 1992 and 1996 did not complete 12 years of education or receive a high school diploma, and 3.4 million were immigrants (Sticht, 2002). Although these categories cannot encompass all of the features of class, they are reasonably approximate indicators of its strongest marker, socioeconomic status.

Table 2.1, which shows figures from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), indicates characteristics related to the class of individuals served by ABE between 1995 and 1998. Individuals in severely economically disadvantaged categories accounted for more than one half to nearly two thirds of learners served over these program years.

In terms of overall national literacy needs, data from the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) indicate a close relationship between low literacy and dependence on public assistance. Dependence on public assistance indicates poverty, difficulty in obtaining and sustaining employment, and/or wages so low that assistance in the form of monetary aid or foods stamps is required. Although NALS data were collected prior to the initiation of welfare reform, the economic prosperity of the late 1990s, and the consequent entry of many public assistance recipients into the workforce, these data remain the best available on national literacy and economic

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[3]This figure is a composite of all those served during those years and does not indicate 31 million different individuals.

dependency. In their summary of NALS findings in this regard, Barton and Jenkins (1995) noted the following: "The likelihood of being on welfare goes up as literacy levels go down; the two are intertwined. In the general population, the higher the literacy levels, the greater the number of weeks worked during the year, the higher the average weekly wage, and the higher the annual income. The same pattern holds true in the welfare population" (p. 3).

These statements support the integral relationship between social class, as indicated by income and earning capacity, and likelihood of literacy. As NALS data show, the average literacy skills of public assistance recipients are much more limited than those of the general U.S. population; in fact, they lie below those of the least skilled workers.

The NALS uses Prose, Document, and Quantitative literacy scales ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level of literacy. Half of welfare recipients performed at this level, with another one third scoring in Level 2 (Barton & Jenkins, 1995, p. 3). Although literacy level and education acquired are related, they are not coterminous, and about one half of the welfare recipients surveyed by the NALS did not graduate from high school (p. 5). This was twice the national percentage at the time.

Current trends in wages and the relationship between wages and education reflect widening disparities along lines of class. Between 1976 and 1996, the median earnings of 25- to 34-year-old men without a high school diploma fell by 30%, whereas earnings of 4-year college graduates increased by a range from 60% to 133% (Tyler, Murnane, & Willett, 2000, p. 2).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001), 6.8 million of the 32.3 million people living at or below the official poverty level were in the labor force in 1999. These individuals are the working poor. Although the vast majority (70%) of working poor are White, at nearly all major educational attainment levels women were more likely than men and Blacks more likely than Whites to be among the working poor. As might be expected, the risk of being among the working poor declines significantly for those with a high school diploma, and the risk for workers with associate and bachelor's degrees is even lower.

Race and Ethnicity: Minority Populations in ABE

In the literature on race and education, individuals of African descent and those of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity—indeed all people who are classified

as non-White—are often lumped together and referred to as *minorities.* Only from a narrow U.S. perspective do people of color constitute minorities. From a global vantage point, those of European descent are in the minority, and this is increasingly so. The term *minorities* is used in this chapter only when others are quoted. Likewise, the term *race* is treated as a social construct that advantages and privileges those of European descent and phenotypic Whiteness as it disadvantages those outside of this ideologically fashioned norm. Owing to restrictions in length, issues of race are discussed broadly as they pertain to individuals outside this norm. Regrettably, in setting a context that establishes inequality, it is not possible to devote space to the myriad ways in which the experiences of people of African descent, Latinos, Asians, and American Indians differ.

Data recorded by the OVAE on ethnicity (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001) are shown in Table 2.2. Note that in 2000 Hispanics alone outnumbered Whites, whereas Hispanics and Blacks together accounted for more than one half of all learners served in that year. These figures should be considered relative to national figures collected in the 2001 census. The latter indicate that among the U.S. population as a whole, Whites make up 75.1%, Hispanics or Latinos 12.5%, African Americans 12.3%, Asians 3.6%, American Indians or Alaskan Natives 0.9%, and Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders 0.1%. Thus, we see that people of color are disproportionately represented among those both in literacy programs and in need of literacy (see Table 2.3) when compared with their representation in the general population. Although concern about the participation of African Americans relative to literacy needs has been an issue in ABE (D'Amico, 1990), 2000 data show an increase from 4% to 5% over the preceding 3 years in African-American enrollment numbers reported by the OVAE.

TABLE 2.2
Enrollment in ABE by Ethnicity

	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black, not of Hispanic Origin	Hispanic	White, not of Hispanic Origin
1996	47,359	490,944	704,719	1,524,294	1,274,856
1997	46,558	482,604	664,952	1,590,278	1,232,880
1998	42,333	481,037	662,109	1,663,984	1,171,090
1999	51,466	384,975	621,914	1,469,218	1,078,817
2000	48,532	214,698	614,475	1,029,608	984,594
	(1%)	(7%)	(21%)	(36%)	(34%)

Note.   From U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE

TABLE 2.3
Percentage of Adults at Lowest Level of Literacy by Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	% of All U.S. Adults	% of Adults in Prose Level 1	% of Adults in Document Level 1	% of Adults in Quantitative Level 1
White	76%	51%	54%	50%
Black	11%	20%	20%	23%
Hispanic	10%	23%	21%	22%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	4%	3%	3%

Note. From 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/naal/design/lowdiversity92.asp

TABLE 2.4
Enrollment in ABE by Type of Instruction

Year	Total Enrollment	ABE Enrollment	ESOL Enrollment	ASE Enrollment
1995–1996	4,042,172	1,555,709	1,557,985	928,478
1996–1997	4,017,272	1,323,176	1,861,125	832,971

Note. From U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/9499hinvest.html#enrolltable

Quoting early figures released by the 2000 census, then Director of Adult Education and Literacy Ron Puglsey (Tilghman, 2001) reported in his weekly *Thursday Notes* to the field that enrollments in ESOL rose by 42% during the last 10 years and that an estimated 70% of fiscal year 2000 instructional costs were spent on ESOL and ESOL/civics instruction. Although some ESOL students are born in the United States, many are immigrants. Thus, the fact that students in ESOL classes outnumbered those in ABE and ASE in most recent years (see Table 2.4) should not be read as a clear indicator of the proportion of immigrants to native-born adults served by federally funded basic education programs. As already mentioned, Sticht (2001) estimated that 3.4 million of the 15 million learners served by ABE from 1992 to 1996 were immigrants.

Because many immigrants to the United States are from developing nations, racism and anti-immigrant sentiments often combine to increase the discrimination they encounter in such U.S. institutions as schools and the workplace (Quiroz-Martinez, 2001, p. 17). Immigrants of color enter the race, class, and gender hierarchy of the United States in complex ways,

depending on relations between the United States and their country of origin, the needs of the global labor market, their legal status, their education level, and so forth. Census 2000 data indicate that 8 to 9 million illegal immigrants live in the United States, and more than one half of them are Mexican. Eighteen percent of all residents at least 5 years old speak a language other than English at home; 60% of these residents speak Spanish.

Immigrants who enter literacy programs vary in their eligibility for various kinds of programs and financial aid, in their ethnicity and language, the prior "culture" of their schooling, and other ways. The class background of immigrants varies, but even those well educated in their home countries may work at menial jobs because of lack of fluency in English, occupational or professional licensing issues, differences in education credentialing between the United States and their country of origin, and legal status. Some immigrants in the lowest literacy levels lack literacy and education in their native languages as well as in English. Thus, many immigrants work in low-wage jobs and experience the lack of power and opportunity associated with disadvantaged class status (Bacon, 2001, pp. 30–32).

In an article assessing cultural diversity in New York City, Askins (1993) reported that more than 140 different cultural and linguistic traditions were represented in the city's publicly funded literacy programs during the 1991–1992 program year. U.S.-born and Dominican learners made up the largest groups, accounting for 30% of New York City program participants, and those born in Russia were the third largest group, making up 14% of ESOL learners. Dominicans, Haitians, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Puerto Ricans were found in both ESOL and ABE classes, with more Puerto Ricans enrolled in the latter than the former. The top 10 countries, in terms of numbers of learners in programs at that time, were the Dominican Republic, the United States, Russia, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Colombia, China, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Mexico (p. 1). Although data on country of origin are not available for the adult literacy system as a whole and New York City is far from typical, these data hint at the diversity possible in classrooms and programs.

Gender

Women outnumber men in ABE programs nationally and in most states. In 2000, for example, women outnumbered men in programs in 35 of the 50 states and three of the four U.S. territories that collect such data, and in no state or territory did women constitute less than 41% of enrollees.

Overall for that year, women made up 52% of ABE students. Similarly, women constituted the majority of ABE learners in 1998 and 1999 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

The NALS reported in 1993 that about equal percentages of men and women scored in the lowest level of Prose, Document, and Quantitative scales. Although access to training for particular careers may be segregated by gender as well as race and class, it is also true that women appear to be slightly more successful students overall than men. According to a March 2000 U.S. Census Office Update, 30% of young women had completed college, but only 28% of young men had done so. Among adults in the workforce, moreover, men generally scored lower than women using Document and Prose literacy scales and outnumbered women in the lowest level of literacy overall. Yet, more women than men consistently participate in adult literacy and ESOL programs.

Sticht (2002) summarized the data on men in ABE programs as follows: Men make up a larger proportion of adults without a high school diploma, and men in the workforce are less literate than their female counterparts. Although men are more likely to say they do not read well, they are less likely to enroll in programs, to show up if they do enroll, and to persist once enrolled. Age mediates this gender difference in relation to ABE, such that men between the ages of 16 and 24 outnumber women, but the proportion shifts as age increases. By age 60, women outnumber men by 34% in ABE programs.

These data raise a number of questions concerning literacy and participation in ABE programs by gender. Perhaps the existing employment opportunities and wages for men with literacy needs are greater than those for women. This explanation was given by an African-American woman participating in a focus group on recruitment and retention of African Americans in literacy programs. "Most of these jobs some of these black men got, they don't have to read to do it," she said. "Like construction, or working on the waterfront. Most of these people, black and white, don't know how to read" (cited in D'Amico, 1990, p. 6). Men are more likely to have access to unionized jobs in heavy industry that do not require literacy but pay relatively well, although this is certainly less so since the industrial restructuring of the 1980s (Connelly, 2001). One reason why more young men are attending ABE programs may be the decline in the number of jobs for men with little education that pay wages that can support a family. Women, conversely, may have the added incentive of acquiring literacy and English language skills because they bear primary responsibility for children. However, the aging of children also frees women to enter

programs as they get older, as reflected in the higher proportion of women that attend programs among those age 60 and older.

It may be that school itself, dominated by female teachers, is an environment in which men have difficulty. If men are more likely to have negative experiences in school, this would constitute a dispositional barrier to enrolling voluntarily in school as an adult. In a study of low-income, multiracial adolescent resisters to schooling, MacLeod (1987) noted the following:

> As boys, [the subjects of the study] inhabit a subculture whose values receive . . . validation from the dominant culture. The cultural inversion employed to turn "bad" into "good" is based on a valuation of machismo taken to the extreme. . . . Lacking in nearly every category that defines success in America, the [subjects] latch onto and inflate the one quality they still have: their masculinity. (p. 143)

Perhaps gender expectations in U.S. culture magnify the shame men feel about not being able to read, write, and compute fluently. African-American women in the focus group study just referred to suggested that men might be ashamed to learn in front of women, backing up the assertion with the observation that men did go to school in the all-male environment of prison.

Among immigrant populations in ABE programs, attitudes toward gender, and consequently toward education for women, vary greatly from one culture to another. In a study of the cultural diversity of participants in programs funded by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), Askins (1994) reported that some women experienced "culturally sanctioned constraints and limitations on participation in adult education programs" (p. 14). Such "constraints" could entail physical abuse or conflicts around their housekeeping and child care responsibilities.

Education, Employment, and Inequality

The disproportionate number of African Americans among adults with low literacy reflects the influence of racism on the relationship between this population and educational institutions, practices, and policies in the United States. Africans who came to this country as enslaved laborers were legally forbidden to acquire literacy in many states and suffered inadequate educational facilities once legally entitled to public schooling. Despite the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, African Americans have continued to fight for equity in

education on many fronts. There is a long literature on the experience of African Americans in schools, racial gaps in educational achievements and outcomes in the K–12 system, and possible causes and remedies for the latter (see Powell, 1997, for a review of this work). The following discussion illustrates the confluence among race, gender, education, and labor market outcomes.

Although levels of literacy and degree of success in the labor market are closely linked (Barton & Jenkins, 1995, p. 8), a 2001 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on the relationships among educational *achievement* (as measured by scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP], a test given to K–12 students), educational *attainment* (level of education or credentials earned), and wages indicates that race continues to influence the economic rewards an individual may reap as a result of educational success.

The NCES (2001) study contains data on samples of young adults taken between 1979 and 1992. Among young men, the Black–White gap in earnings doubled over this time period from 16% to 32%. However, among Blacks and Whites who demonstrated similar educational achievement, racial gaps in educational and employment outcomes were consistently smaller; in some instances, they disappeared. For example, among men with similar educational achievement, the Black–White gap was two fifths smaller than among men as a whole. Women had a significantly smaller overall gap in earnings by race, and for young women with similar achievement levels, either no racial gap appeared or, in some samples, Black women earned more than White women with similar educational achievement scores.

An interesting finding of the NCES (2001) study is that the postsecondary educational attainment of Blacks exceeded that of Whites with similar educational achievement levels on the NAEP. For example, Blacks earned high school diplomas or certificates of GED at equal or higher rates than Whites with similar test scores, and they attended college at higher levels than Whites with similar achievement levels. For young adults with similar educational achievement, for example, Black attendance at college was 6% to 17% higher than White attendance. Moreover, Black college attendees completed college at a higher rate than Whites with comparable educational achievement. In the general population of young adults, in contrast, Blacks' rate of college attendance was 4% to 7% lower from 1979 to 1989 and 10% lower in the most recent sample. Among all young adults who had some college, completion rates were consistently lower for Blacks, ranging from 13% to 19% lower.

The NCES (2001) report makes clear that educational achievement can mitigate, but not always erase, the impact of race on educational attainment and labor market outcomes. Although these findings support arguments for programs that increase Black educational achievement, educational institutions in the United States are currently turning out too few African-American high achievers. The real story thus lies with racial differences in achievement. Here, the overall findings of the report document persisting gaps by race in educational achievement, college completion, labor force participation, hourly wages, and employment. These gaps occurred despite some narrowing of scores between Blacks and Whites on the NAEP over the past 25 years and despite the fact that by 1997 Blacks and Whites remained in high school at similar rates (p. vi). The report suggests possible explanations for the gap, including differences in home and school environments, and concludes the following: "Achievement differences do not necessarily cause gaps in educational attainment, employment, or earnings, but they reflect a set of circumstances responsible for Black–White disparities in both the academy and the economy" (p. xv).

This conclusion and the NCES (2001) data hint at, but do not factor in, socioeconomic status, which has been shown to strongly predict educational achievement levels. Thus, socioeconomic status, in concert with the impact of racism, acts to perpetuate the maintenance of disproportionate numbers of African Americans in class circumstances likely to perpetuate low educational achievement. The motive for the higher percentages of Blacks who attain educational credentials, vis-à-vis their White counterparts at similar achievement levels, may be to reduce this impact of racism on labor market outcomes.

In an era when ABE outcomes are increasingly seen in terms of their impact on employment, these findings are important because they illuminate the complexity of the relationships between race, gender, education, and outcomes that influence class. They also parallel recent studies of labor market returns by race, gender, scores on the GED test and subsequent educational experiences of high school dropouts (discussed next).

Although a large body of data confirms the strong relationship between education level on the one hand and employment and wages on the other, this association is strongest for White men (Harrison, 1986). Explanatory factors for the role of race in the education–employment relationship include the poor quality of education many people of color experience, variation in patterns of occupational choice and job availability by race, and persistent segregation. Assessing the relative weights of these

factors, Fitzgerald concluded that "a large part of the problem lies . . . in continuing discrimination in hiring and compensation" (cited in Harrison, 1986, p. 1).

Likewise, in an analysis of publicly funded job training programs in New York City, Lafer (1992) documented the segmentation of labor by gender and race within the context of the city's transforming economy and demography. Lafer's data show that employers in key industries have responded to the increasing number of people of color in the labor force, despite the rise in educational levels among these groups, by "expanding the secondary labor market characterized by low wages and few opportunities for advancement" (p. 224). Based on his analysis of job training outcomes and labor market trends, Lafer stated that, in the effort to reduce poverty and expand employment outcomes for minorities, "vigorous affirmative action policies may prove more effective than job training" (pp. 229–230).

Gender, along with race, influences the economic rewards of education. Although income rises with education level, White men outearn White women and both men and women of minority groups at all education levels. Nonetheless—overall patterns of discrimination in hiring and wages notwithstanding—education still constitutes a way for White women and minority women and men to increase their earnings relative to their less-skilled counterparts. Tyler, Murnane, and Willett (2000) showed that wage increases by cognitive skill level among high school dropouts are greatest for men and women of color and are also greater for White women than for White men. Another way of saying this is that Tyler et al.'s research suggests that raising cognitive skills raises income level relative to other members of one's gender and minority group status, but not relative to White men. Gender and race trump skills in the latter case, with White male privilege alone accounting for some part of income differential, as suggested in Roediger's (1991) *The Wages of Whiteness.*

In a longitudinal study of female high school dropouts, those who obtained GEDs and went on to receive additional education or training experienced a payoff in earnings (Boudett, Murnane, & Willet, 2000). Ten years after dropping out of high school, women who obtained a GED within 3 years of leaving school showed an earnings gain of 25%; having a GED plus 1 year of training or college boosted income by nearly 50%. Although these findings support the value of education and are thus heartening for women, they are mitigated by the fact that even those women who acquired a GED and completed 1 year of training or college earned less than $8,000 per year, or only 87% of poverty-level income.

Moreover, although education can increase income for minority group members and White women, access to education and training is mediated by race, gender, and class. The rise in the cost of 4-year colleges and the corresponding restricted access to these institutions is common knowledge. Perhaps more relevant to adult learners is Schneider's (1997) study of education and job training paths among public assistance recipients and dislocated workers, which documented differential access to training and education by race and class. Social networks shaped by race and class, work experience, and education level resulted in referrals to mandatory job development and job-specific skills programs for African Americans, in referrals to community college and tuition-based programs for Whites and Asians, and to exclusion from the training system for Latinos. Schneider concluded the following: "Dramatic differences in career training paths across race and nationality and gender reveal that patterns of discrimination as well as socialization toward certain kinds of employment persist" (p. 10).

These differences emerge in a recent study of racial disparities in the treatment of recipients of public assistance under welfare reform in Illinois, Florida, and Virginia. Forty-one percent of Whites and no Black recipients at all indicated that caseworkers encouraged them to go to school:

> One white respondent stated: "They encouraged me to get my GED. I've been in school since October, working on the GED. I hope to graduate in the spring. My worker kept telling me, 'You're smarter than you think.' She really convinced me I could do it." A black respondent stated: "They talk to you any kind of way. They say, 'Go get a job.' I told them I only had two parts left on my GED and I wanted to finish, they said, 'That's not what this program is about.'" (Savner, 2000, p. 4)

Experiences in school, the workplace, and other institutions present contradictory messages about how and whether education translates into employment and wage outcomes. Although increased education may raise an individual's employment outcomes relative to peers, education by itself has not reduced the overall inequalities between those advantaged by Whiteness and the rest of the population or between men and women. And educational success continues to be heavily influenced by class. The distinction between education for individual success on the one hand and education directed at changing institutions to make them more just and inclusive on the other underlies issues of pedagogy in ABE, as discussed in the sections on ABE history and practice that follow.

Sexual Orientation

New research on sexual orientation indicates that 5% of men and 4% of women report having had a sexual encounter with a same-sex partner, and 2.8% of men and 1.5% of women identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual (Laumann, Michael, Gagnon, & Michaels, 1994). Although data on sexual orientation are not collected on learners enrolled in ABE programs, we can assume that at least these same proportions of ABE learners have had some homosexual experiences and identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual. In addition to learners who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or gay are those learners who interact with gay-identified people in their lives outside the classroom, as well as learners who encounter lesbian or gay issues in popular culture. Moreover, heterosexism, or socially mandated heterosexuality, is intertwined with the larger system that marginalizes subordinated groups as just described. Mandated heterosexuality is part of the system of gender relations, for example, that defines women in oppressive ways, so that White lesbians face oppression because of both their sexual identity and because they are women. Gay people of color have the added subjugation of racism, and gay men in general are treated in ways that reinforce male supremacy by denigrating those men who fail to realize cultural norms of masculine identity.

Moreover, if negative school experiences get in the way of acquiring literacy, gay and lesbian youths are at higher risk than heterosexuals for low literacy. Hill (1995) pointed out that 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbian youths experience verbal or physical abuse and that 28% of those who have been harassed in these ways drop out of school (Telljohann & Price, cited in Hill, 1995). For many gay youths, abuse at school is compounded by their experiences with family members, who are responsible for more than one half of all assaults on gay youths. In fact, 26% of gay and lesbian youths are forced to leave home. Eighty percent of gay learners report severe fear and isolation (Eaton, cited in Hill, 1995), explaining in part the fact that gay youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual youths. Up to one third of youth suicide has been attributed to gay and lesbian adolescent issues (Gibson & Kourany, cited in Hill, 1995). The likelihood of abuse at school and home during adolescence and the high incidence of dropping out may mean that the proportion of gay and lesbian adults in ABE programs exceeds that in the general population.

Hill's (1995) extensive literature review documents the role of main-stream adult education[4] in the reproduction of heterocentric hegemony at the expense of "gay resistance discourse" (p. 142). He credited largely informal means of education, namely popular and folk liberation education, with promoting "resistance education" (p. 148), or the reconstruction of knowledge in ways that confront stigmatization, discrimination, and self-hatred. However, these forms of education take place outside of formal education programs and institutions, occurring instead in independent gay educational and cultural organizations, service organizations, occupational associations, political organizations, the mass media, and the indigenous gay press.

Hill pointed to the formation of lesbian and gay special interest groups among education professionals in both K–12 and adult education as evidence that teacher concerns with issues of sexual orientation in the classroom are growing. Moreover, he argued that education has played both "emancipatory and oppressive" (p. 142) roles with respect to the gay and lesbian community, a duality that theorists of inequality also assert with reference to class, race, and gender. As Giroux (1983) pointed out, a primary function of schools is to reproduce both the dominant social ideology and the prevailing social structure. Yet, there is also a history within education of linking learning to social justice; in ABE, this tradition is represented by Freire, Horton, and others who advocated education that aims for social change. These contradictory threads underlie historical debates about the purpose of adult literacy and pedagogy in ABE, a subject to which we now turn.

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE HISTORY OF ABE

The history of ABE, in light of the race, class, and gender characteristics of those it has served, is as contradictory as its current state. Quigley (1997) noted that arguments for ABE as social policy have been associated with social regulation of subordinate groups and with building consensus, unifying the nation, and enforcing mainstream notions of moral behavior. Characterizing the 19th century as one of "fear and loathing," he pointed out the association of illiteracy with social crisis and impending disaster (pp. 71–72).

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[4]Again, the term adult education is meant to encompass all forms of ABE and also refers to postsecondary, degree, and certificate and vocational programs aimed at adults.

The association of literacy with knowledge and power had its counterpart in the denial of both literacy and power in the institution of slavery. The maintenance of slavery rested in part on "the power of the master to forbid education" (Goodell, cited in Quigley, 1997, p. 75). The first law to confirm this power, passed in South Carolina, stated:

> Whereas having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; be it therefore enacted . . . that all and every person or person whatever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause a slave to be taught, to write, every person or persons shall, for every offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds of current money. (Goodell, cited in Quigley, 1997, pp. 75–76)

Anti-education laws were so pervasive and successful that by the end of the Civil War, even though African Americans sometimes risked their lives to attain literacy, only 5% of the enslaved could read. According to Chisman (2002), "the fact that most slaves were denied education provided the impetus for the first national literacy movement" (p. 3). This movement enlisted White and Black organizations from the north, including Quakers and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the freed African Americans of the south, along with some agents of the federal government and the Freedman's Bureau. Literacy for adults was as great a concern as literacy for children, such that the demand for literacy exceeded the supply of teachers, books, and schools. The sacrifices made by the Black community to support this movement are legendary; however, the movement for literacy collapsed in the national backlash following Reconstruction, as literacy tests became a way to restrict the franchise for African Americans.

In the second half of the 19th century, literacy became embroiled in immigration issues, and Americanization programs were proposed to bring English and literacy to immigrants. The YMCA, one organization that sponsored such programs, gave as its rationale: "Unless we can assimilate, develop, train, and make good citizens out of them, they are certain to make ignorant, suspicious, and un-American citizens out of us. Unless we Americanize them, they will foreignize us" (Carlson, cited in Quigley, 1997, p. 79). Quigley summarized the policy on literacy up through the 1920s as an increase in federal legislation to regulate low-literate adults, with a strong sense of pity for them at the local level. However, Reid (1999) traced the education programs for immigrants set up by settlement houses to a more progressive belief in education for all, although he noted that many schools barred new immigrants—especially immigrants of color—from attending.

The Depression of the 1930s ushered in a new era of social programs sponsored by the federal government, including literacy programs. The Civilian Conservation Corps not only provided jobs for the unemployed but also offered thousands of undereducated and illiterate young men classes in literacy. In 1934, Dr. Ambrose Caliver, an African-American graduate of Columbia Teacher's College, wrote the Magna Carta of Negro Education, which asserted the rights of African Americans to equal education. Although this government-endorsed document remains "one of the few moments when government, clearly influenced by one committed person, employed literacy social policy for the redistribution of social justice" (Quigley, 1997, p. 82), the political climate soon changed. During World War II, justification for literacy was framed as important to both self-defense and the productivity of the labor force, and the 1950s continued this association of literacy with human capital development.

Social policy often reflects a social engineering and regulation perspective on ABE, but literacy learning was also associated with the voting rights movement. Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson implemented Citizenship School programs for this purpose during the civil rights movement. Rosa Parks, initiator of the legendary bus boycott of in Montgomery, Alabama, had prior to the boycott attended a workshop at the Highlander Center, the well-known civil rights educational organization in New Market, Tennessee, under popular educator Myles Horton (McWhorter, 2001, pp. 90–95).

The civil rights movement, and the decision favoring equal access to education embodied in *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), also raised the issue of literacy with regard to race. Funding for ABE was first institutionalized in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 as part of the host of programs designed to produce the Great Society articulated by then President Lyndon Johnson. Although many of these programs resulted from the struggle for equality by African Americans, they also revealed that the nation had a large population of undereducated adults (Chisman, 2002, p. 7).

Literacy was also associated with equal status for workers, with worker education developing along with the movement to establish unions in the United States. The liberatory power of education for subordinate groups has long been recognized and encouraged by social justice movements that have included literacy in their work, unions among them. More recently, unions have formed partnerships with management to address the literacy needs of workers in the context of changing workplace demands in particular industries as well as in the restructuring of work nationally. Global competition, new technologies, downsizing, the demise

of manufacturing, and the rise of service and information industries have raised the demand for literacy in the workplace. Increasingly, individual workers need to upgrade skills and education to remain employable, as the expectation of long tenure in any given job is reduced. The loss of traditional union jobs that accompanied the industrial restructuring of the 1980s led unions to demand retraining allowances for workers in their negotiations with management. During this decade, funds for joint labor–management education programs became part of collective bargaining agreements. The resulting programs, run as independent nonprofit entities, now constitute the second largest postsecondary source of education after the college and university system (Connelly, 2001).

Currently, the growth of unions depends on organizing new immigrants and involving more members in active campaigns in communities and industries. This trend toward union democratization requires that workers apply literacy and skills to union building (Chenven, 2001, p. 3). Expressing the spirit of the new worker education at a meeting of steelworkers involved in the Institute for Career Development, the industry's labor management joint education and training fund, Bruno (2001) said the following:

> To triumph over politics, or international commodity and financial markets, steelworkers have to conceptualize themselves as worthy and capable of doing work that embodies the unity of conception and execution. It means understanding that steelworkers are not ill educated, possessing less than average intelligence or saddled with little or no honorable skills. The archetypal steelworker named Dutch, whom Frederick Taylor—the father of modern industrial work organization—tempted over a hundred years ago into mindless beast-of-burden work for a few additional shillings, has long since perished. Today, steelworkers are expected to participate in decision making and become computer literate, and operate sophisticated computerized equipment. (p. 4)

Quigley (1997) characterized social policy on literacy as having evolved from an emphasis on regulating subordinate groups in the 19th century to an emphasis on social engineering in the 20th century, with "fleeting attempts to use literacy education for the redistribution of social justice" (p. 71). Examples of the latter would be the freedman's schools that began during the Civil War; the central role given to literacy learning in voter registration during the civil rights movement; the role given to education by unions in their struggles to increase wages, benefits, and rights for workers; and the efforts of those engaging in Freirian and other popular education pedagogies that link learning with community

empowerment. The Highlander Center, which Rosa Parks attended in the 1950s, has been a hub of literacy for social action and 3 years ago hosted the formation of VALUE, the first national organization of adult learners, whose mission is to raise the voices and power of learners in the field of literacy education.

There continues to be tension between those who aim social policies at reforming the poor, workers, immigrants, and people of color into productive yet compliant citizens and workers and those who support movements for equal rights and social justice among these groups through an engaged literacy directed at questioning and challenging the status quo. This tension is present in debates over the role of education in welfare reform (D'Amico, 1999), typologies of ABE pedagogy (Quigley, 1997), definitions of literacy (Shultz, 1997), discussions of policy (Cervero & Wilson, 2001), and the classroom. It is also evident in larger debates in education concerning the impact of changing demography and demands for inclusive pedagogies and curricula.

These debates span K–12 schools through colleges, law schools, and graduate schools, and they concern both curriculum content and pedagogical approach. Among adult educators, Quigley (1997) identified four working philosophies that underlie literacy practice: vocational, liberal, humanist, and liberatory. The vocational philosophy takes a view of learning that focuses on performance skills and clearly measurable behaviors. Emphasis is on recall and recognition of information. Liberal approaches ground literacy education in the cultural knowledge of the Western world and view literacy as a means to enlightenment and enriched quality of life. Humanist literacy educators, whom Quigley argued are the largest group among adult educators, focus on learners' values, beliefs, and attitudes, and they aim to raise learner self-esteem and motivation. Liberatory adult educators see the process of acquiring literacy as a means for personal and social change. For these educators, developing a critical consciousness is inseparable from learning to read, and the goal of education is for learners oppressed by their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation to recognize the sources of their oppression and to work with others to change these conditions.

Adult education thus sits squarely at a crossroads of contradictions. Arguments for increased funding for the field claim, with reason, that access to ABE supports employment, family literacy, and the empowerment of marginalized communities. Yet, the field itself suffers from marginalization, being handicapped by a lack of funding that reflects the unequal distribution of power and resources that education is purported to

change. Moreover, it is asked to raise education and employment levels in a context that rewards these achievements disproportionately, according to race, class, and gender. Added to these contradictions are the class, race, and gender composition of teachers and administrators on the one hand and learners on the other. Both oppressed groups and the powerful support and use literacy, albeit for different ends, thus giving rise to the contradictory tangle of programs and policies that characterizes the history and current situation of ABE.

RACE, CLASS, GENDER, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN ABE PRACTICE

Cervero and Wilson (2001) proposed "three starting points that, when linked together, offer a map for understanding the fundamental issues of practice in adult education. . . . (1) There is a reciprocal relationship between power and adult education, (2) adult education is a site of struggle for knowledge and power, and (3) all adult educators practice with a social vision" (p. 10).

Cervero and Wilson's (2001) starting point for the discussion of adult education practice also makes a good point of departure for a discussion of ABE practice as it is influenced by issues of power surrounding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The preceding part of this chapter established as a context for this section the first point just stated—"the reciprocal relationship between power and adult education"—by looking at the role these forms of structural inequality play in determining who needs literacy, who participates in literacy programs, how wider social relations are expressed in the impact of education on employment, and how these forms of inequality intersect as individuals seek both education and employment success.

The relationship between education and power has been implicated in the discussion of why the field fails to reach millions of adults who need literacy. Explanations for this failure have been classified as situational (concerning factors associated with adult learners' lives, e.g., work schedules, the need for child care or transportation, fear of traveling at night in neighborhoods considered dangerous, and health issues), dispositional (having to do with attitudes, beliefs, or feelings regarding past education, e.g., negative school experiences, or influenced by education, such as motivation to learn and belief in one's ability to learn), and institutional

(having to do with characteristics of programs, e.g., location, schedule, and curriculum).

Gender, race, class, and sexual orientation can affect all of these factors. Situational barriers, for example, might involve the uncertain schedules low-wage workers sometimes have to keep or the fact that they have to work two jobs to support a household. Gender issues might influence the ability to attend programs because of lack of child care, given that women still bear primary responsibility in this area. Moreover, poor health is linked to poverty and low literacy as well as to groups disadvantaged by gender and race. Recent welfare reform policy assumes that low-wage workers can and will continue their education while working—a difficult endeavor for many low-wage workers, particularly those responsible for children or plagued by ill health (Strawn, Greenberg, & Savner, 2001). Paradoxically, those who most need additional education, individuals trapped in low-wage jobs whose incomes cannot support families, can have great difficulty attending classes. Although programs can try to accommodate such learners with flexible scheduling, distance learning options, and on-site child care or referrals to child care programs, the removal of situational barriers involves working for national policy change in welfare reform, minimum wage laws, child care, and access to education for adults. This section of the chapter focuses instead on programmatic aspects of ABE as these affect dispositional and institutional barriers, with the goal of inspiring change that challenges barriers to literacy among adults.

The ways in which race, class, gender, and sexual orientation can influence dispositional resistance to participation in education programs are suggested by theorists who see educational institutions as sites for both reproducing these inequalities and for waging struggles over the content, conduct, and outcome of education. The logic of resistance runs counter to the view of schooling as a means of developing social relations and calls for struggle against, rather than submission to, domination (Giroux, cited in MacLeod, 1987). In poignant terms, Quigley (1997) described his work on resistance, which includes a study of resisters to school drawn from literature:

> It became obvious that in each of the novels and short stories, the protagonist's resistance to school was more than just a rejection of school . . . it was a positive quest for freedom that each protagonist undertook with absolute conviction and, in some cases, with risk to reputation and even life. In their eyes, resistance to school meant a determination to stay true to the beliefs and values of their own culture, their own race, or their religious heritage.

Instead of conforming to what they saw as the spurious values promoted by schooling, they resisted authority as they saw it. The protagonists were seeking to gain the liberty to follow a culture, a value system or lifestyle that they held to be superior to that of school. (p. 201)

Similarly, in his work with ABE learners, Quigley (1997) noted that dispositional barriers emerge within the first few weeks of enrollment and that these grow out of a felt discrepancy between the experience of the program and the learners' known world. This discrepancy has to do with learners' rejection of a world they perceive to be dominating, oppressive, and uninterested in their perspective rather than with a rejection of education or literacy per se. Adult learners whose experiences with early schooling were negative because of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation are likely to vote with their feet when participation in ABE recalls these experiences. How can educators signal to adult learners the differences between themselves and those oppressive institutions? That is the question to which we now turn.

No national data on ABE staff are available by gender, race, class, or sexual orientation. Figures are available for the number of full-time and part-time paid staff and volunteer staff, and they indicate that between 1996 and 1998, 36% to 48% of full-time staff were volunteers, and 13% to 20% of full-time staff were paid. From these figures, we see that ABE programs consist predominantly of part-time staff and volunteers, indicating that the marginalized status of the field extends to its staff. Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that they have acquired literacy and must in many states and programs have also acquired teacher certification or a college degree, staff usually differ from students in class privilege, if not always in income.

Although no statistics on ethnicity or race exist, a few studies shed some light on racial differences between learners, teachers, and other program staff. In a 1996 national evaluation of teacher training funded by Section 353 legislation, which targeted training of full- and part-time staff in adult education, a survey of staff of participating ABE programs was conducted (RMC Research Corporation, 1996). More than 700 teachers responded. Although this sample is not representative, the figures on ethnicity are interesting. Of those responding, 74% were White, 13% African American, 9% Hispanic, 1% American Indian or native Alaskan, and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander. Seventy-seven percent were women. The survey's author noted that the incidence of minority population is lower than in the general population. The percentages also differ markedly from those of the national student population, with the exception of the percentage of

American Indians, which is 1% for both staff in this sample and for the student population. The smallest difference in percentage occurs between teachers (13%) and learners (16%) of African descent.

Research (D'Amico, 1995) done with staff on New York City programs in 1993 reveals a demographic profile little changed from that portrayed in the same city in 1985, with the exception of some increases in percentages of African-American and Afro-Caribbean staff (from 15% to 20.8%) and Hispanic staff (from 9.8% to 11.7%). Ethnicity of paid staff in programs was constant across job titles in the 1993 survey; however, the representation of people of color in counseling positions was higher than in other jobs. Although the sample of 360 paid staff and 303 volunteers was not representative, the fact that the proportions were roughly similar to those among staff of New York City public schools and full-time employees of City University strengthen its credibility. Table 2.5 compares the demographic profiles of staff, volunteers, and learners (D'Amico, 1995).

Taken together, the national survey of programs and the data on New York City suggest that staff of ABE programs—perhaps especially paid staff—do not fully reflect the diversity of learners. Staff tend to be predominantly White; but in large urban centers like New York City, learner populations may be primarily people of color. However, these data do not account for current staff demography nationally, and there are at least some states where African Americans hold high leadership positions.

In New York City, the gender of teachers and learners is more evenly matched, with 62% female students and 70% female teachers. The national sample suggests that although, overall, women make up a higher percentage of teachers than learners, they are a clear majority in both cases. Nonesuch (2001) noted the association of women with teaching at the lower levels of education and with nurturing. As Garber et al. (cited in

TABLE 2.5
Demographic Profiles of Staff, Volunteers, and Learners

Race/Ethnicity	Staff	Volunteers	Learners
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7 (1.9%)	4 (1.3%)	139 (0.3)%
Asian/Pacific Islander	17 (4.7%)	11 (3.6%)	5,992 (11.6%)
African American/Afro-Caribbean	75 (20.8%)	89 (29.4%)	15,025 (29%)
Latino	42 (11.7%)	10 (3.3%)	23,809 (46%)
White	208 (57.7%)	177 (58.4%)	6,798 (13.1%)

Note. From *Staffing Patterns in New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Programs: Data and Directions,* by D. D'Amico, 1995, New York: Literacy Assistance Center.

Horsman, 2001a) noted, "the majority of literacy workers, by far, are women. Perhaps this is not surprising, as literacy work is part of the field of education and a 'caring' profession, areas of work which have traditionally been seen as women's work. Literacy work has traditionally been volunteer or part time and is frequently poorly paid and low status" (p. 20).

It can be said that the marginalization of the field has its source not only in the low status of learners (as seen by mainstream society) but also in the low status of most practitioners. As noted in Horsman (2001a), practitioners often take on the struggle of dealing with funding limitations, poor working conditions, and long hours because they are aware of how well off they are in comparison with learners.

Bailey, Tisdell, and Cervero (1994) examined the professionalization process in adult education for racism and sexism, and although their work encompasses forms of education other than ABE, including higher education, the implications for ABE are sobering. At the time of their research, 91% of full-time faculty at institutions offering doctorates in adult education in general were White; only 1.8% were African American. Similarly, 95% of the members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education were White, and only 32% were women. The authors concluded, "Clearly, those who have the power to create and disseminate knowledge are members of white hegemonic culture" (p. 67). Moreover, these individuals act as gatekeepers for those seeking entry into the profession of adult education.

The issues arising from differences of class, gender, race, and sexual orientation between teachers and learners are complex. Relatively speaking, teachers are in a position of power in the classroom, and the layering of this advantage with White or male privilege, as well as with the higher educational status of the teacher, in most cases can affect learner comfort, participation, and outcomes. In a study of multicultural issues in New York City programs, Askins (1996) reported the following:

> Students indicated that even subtle feelings of being different from teachers could be painful. They spoke of teachers who assumed cultural knowledge which they did not have, often in classes where teachers did not encourage students to ask for clarification. Some students extended this criticism to teachers they genuinely liked and respected. Several said that even "good" teachers sometimes made them feel very uncomfortable. Even small things, like a teacher laughing at something they did not understand, highlighted differences in cultural understandings for students. For several, these small injuries were as difficult to accept as more overt sensitivities. (p. 40)

In discussions and focus groups with students, the attitudes of teachers were the most important cultural issue for students. Students expected teachers to respect them, to try to understand their backgrounds, and to make them feel welcome and at ease. Although resolving the issues stemming from differences of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation is not simply a matter of matching teachers and learners according to these experiences and characteristics, educational research supports the importance of teachers and leaders of color to the recruitment and persistence of students of color (Richardson & de los Santos, 1988). A recent study conducted by Texas A&M University and the University of Texas examined 350 multiracial school districts in Texas from 1991 to 1996. Students from schools with a higher percentage of minority teachers were compared with those at schools with fewer teachers of color. The study used test scores to measure student performance and controlled for such factors as poverty level, expenditures, and teacher qualifications (online at nifl-povracelit, doc. 444, March 24, 2001). Other studies have also found that students of color fare better with teachers of color (see, e.g., *The Dreamkeepers* by Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1994), but the positive association between White student scores and higher numbers of minority teachers was a new finding, supporting the idea that a multiethnic faculty is of value to all students.

Tisdell (2001) defined the power differential between teachers and learners in terms of "positionality: how aspects of one's identity, such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation or ableness affect how one is positioned relative to the dominant culture" (p. 148). Attention to these kinds of social structural references reminds teachers that "adult education is not practiced on a neutral stage" (Cervero & Wilson, 2001, p. 6). Cunningham questioned the validity of approaches that "center on the learner as if learners are disembodied creatures and as if the social context, the social structures, the social class in which we all exist do not affect the process" (cited in Cervero & Wilson, 2001, p. 5). More political approaches, such as those advocated by Paolo Freire, Myles Horton, Septima Clark, and others, not only make these connections between learners, teachers, and their social contexts, but also see education as part of the struggle to redistribute power more equitably.

In her analysis of why racism and sexism persist in adult education, Amstutz (1994) listed three major reasons:

1. A discrepancy between language and behavior, such that politically correct attitudes and use of words such as *empowerment*

substitute for positive action that changes practice and inequalities in the classroom and elsewhere.

2. A lack of experience with and sensitivity to other cultures. If adult educators have little contact with people of color outside of the classroom and have not examined sexism in their own lives, then they will likely reflect only the white middle-class culture from which most come. As members of the group considered the norm, it is natural to assume this experience is universal.

3. Faith in institutional practice. Many educators unwittingly place great faith in institutional practices and do not see racism or sexism unless it is overt and intentional.

Amstutz (1994) suggested that staff development strategies should help educators admit to and examine their own biases and frame questions that help them see beyond accepted relationships. Informal staff development, or activities that take place outside formal workshops and seminars, might include mentoring and peer coaching that enable teachers to experience a consciously antiracist and antisexist approach, cultural settings other than their own, and guided critical self-reflection. The role of staff developers regarding these less formal kinds of activities is to identify resources and options for staff who want to pursue these opportunities to learn and change. Responses to a survey of participants in a National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) online discussion group about poverty and race indicate the interest in such issues among adult educators (online at nifl-povracelit, doc. 483, May 13, 2001). Participants indicated a desire to learn about effective and innovative program practices, resources, and reading materials and about examples of teaching, community building, and organizing around issues of poverty and race in adult literacy.

As the content of this online discussion group demonstrates, teachers are thinking about issues of inequality not only between themselves and learners but also among their colleagues. Drennon's (2002) work with practitioner inquiry groups documents the way in which unresolved and unacknowledged issues of power affect practitioner inquiry groups, whose model for operating parallels that of participatory practice with learners. The extent to which teachers could function as a learning community was affected by the race, class, gender, and sexual orientation of participants as well as by their responsibilities within the group and to larger institutions. Descriptions of either teacher or learner inquiry groups that are constructed as if they are not part of a structured social reality suggest "a balance of power not typically reflected in groups" (Drennon, 2002a, p. 63).

Likewise, although the literature of ABE subscribes to an ethos of treating adults as equals in the classroom, it fails to acknowledge that educators, by treating the distribution of power in the classroom uncritically or as a given, reproduce unequal power structures. If all learners are to thrive, educators must go beyond their role as facilitators to negotiate the power dynamics of the classroom (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998, cited in Drennon, 2002a).

PROGRAM PRACTICES AND PEDAGOGICAL MODELS

As Taylor (cited in Imel, 1995) noted, "I just changed completely from when I first entered school. I used to take this little African body and force it into this European square peg. And you know, it didn't work. I kept trying to do it and trying to change who I was and tried to fit in. . . . When I finally decided to be the person that I am, I started feeling more comfortable" (p. 1). Taylor began by expressing the connection between race, structural inequality, and school failure; she could not squeeze herself into the one-size-fits-all concept of education because that one size was based on the dominant White European norm. In concluding, she expressed a level of comfort with herself that many ABE programs hope to inspire in learners. Although Knowles (1980) introduced the concept of the learning environment and the work of Quigley and others established the importance of learners' first impressions of programs, writers more recently have emphasized attention to the dynamics of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This section reviews this literature and focuses on what programs and providers can do to address issues of power.

Race- and Gender-Conscious Teaching: Insights From Feminist Pedagogy

Because the majority of adult learners in the United States are women, the insights of feminist pedagogy are useful to adult educators. Tisdell (1993) summarized the major concerns of feminist pedagogy as follows: (a) to teach women more effectively, so that they develop a sense of their ability to effect change in their lives; (b) to emphasize connection and relationship to, rather than separation from, the knowledge learned, the facilitator, and other learners; and (c) to encourage women's emerging sense of personal power. Feminist pedagogy is thus, by definition, emancipatory. It empha-

sizes the value of daily experience and of situating knowledge in the context of learners' lives. It attempts to accomplish this by making use of instructional materials that foreground the experiences of women and people of color, as well as curricula that deal with the unequal use of and access to power in the larger society. Feminist pedagogy also pays attention to the ways power is enacted in the classroom—both between the teacher–facilitator and learners and among learners.

Hayes and Flannery (2000) pointed to the lack of work focusing on women as adult learners and the few studies of curricula in adult education. However, they noted that Quigley and Holsinger (1993) found evidence of sexism, racism, and classism in adult literacy instructional materials: Women were represented less frequently than men, fewer than half had stated occupations, and those who did work were found in stereotypically female jobs. Hayes and Flannery, who stressed the importance of female instructors and the presence of other women as learners in creating a comfortable climate for women, nevertheless pointed out that in the case of literacy instruction, where women predominate both as teachers and learners, female instructors often differ from learners in racial, cultural, and class backgrounds.

An example of how these differences between teachers and students can affect learning is found in the workplace literacy class described by Gowen and Bartlett (1997). As emancipatory education approaches emphasize voice and participatory pedagogy, Gowen and Bartlett developed their class along the lines of what the literature suggested were the preferred learning styles of women and African Americans. However, the assumptions about personal disclosure embedded in such techniques as having learners work in groups, develop critical literacy by examining political aspects of their lives, and engage in writing and sharing these writings did not take into account the constraints on the lives of women experiencing domestic violence. Citing two stories of the intersection of literacy and abuse among women in literacy programs, one of which resulted in a woman shooting a man who was abusing her and the other in the rape of a woman who had formed a support group within her GED class, the authors concluded that "working with women survivors requires special skill, sensitivity, and an awareness of the sometimes fatal consequences of literacy and empowerment" (p. 150). They reminded us that "change is never easy, and true power is dangerous as well as liberating" (p. 153).

Pointing out that low literacy, economic dependence, and abuse intersect in the lives of many women, Gowen and Bartlett (1997) learned that the trust and comfort necessary for abused women to participate more

openly in learning take time. They cited the example of a woman who wrote in her journal for many months before sharing and ultimately publishing her story anonymously. This learner moved from private writing and revision to sharing with the teacher. She explained her previous lack of participation in goal setting and other activities as follows: "Before, I didn't have any goals. The secret [of being abused] took up all my space for goals. Now, I don't have a secret, and I have goals" (p. 147).

As Gowen and Bartlett's (1997) work makes clear, although the traditional model for education is based on a male cognitive style and reproduces socially constructed gender roles, alternative and emancipatory forms can present problems for female learners as well. The emphasis in critical literacy pedagogy is on actively engaging the world, and the world can put female learners "at odds with the culture's very narrow prescriptions about femininity" (p. 152). The point is not to revert to business as usual in the classroom but rather to add the awareness that critical pedagogy may present conflicts for women, particularly women in abusive situations. The latter were sobered by their realization of how many of the things common to women's lives are constructed very differently by race, class, and gender, and how this affected their best-laid plans for combining liberation and learning.

Gowen and Bartlett's (1997) experience shows how important it is to be aware of surrounding circumstances in learners' lives, lives that may be very different from those of instructors. For example, female learners must often negotiate with their family for the time they devote to education, sometimes sacrificing their limited free time, sleep, and health to acquire education while still meeting the demands of their household and their work.

Horsman (2001b) did extensive work on how the trauma of abuse and violence affect women learners in Canada. She noted the way in which women's dependence on men, rooted in low wages and the restrictions of public assistance, leads to violence, echoing the work of researchers who see the combined effects of gender, race, and class on poor women's lives as a kind of "structural violence." Horsman noted the contradiction of the promise of literacy, which is unlikely to be fulfilled given the lives of poor women and the ways in which training programs designed for them instead "embed them more firmly in their current lives" (p. 13). American women on public assistance voiced a similar realization when they argued for community college education over training programs that they knew from experience would lead only to low-wage jobs with unstable working conditions (Churchill, 1995).

Research conducted by the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women confirms that violence acts as a barrier to women's literacy learning. Yet, violence is surrounded by silence in North American culture. The impact of violence on learning is largely unacknowledged and rarely discussed. Horsman's (2001b) experiences, and those of the literacy workers with whom she has discussed the issue, resonate with Gowen and Barlett's (1997) conflicts over how to teach effectively around issues of violence. Some women do not want to talk about or acknowledge violence in their lives, and others need to talk. Horsman (2001b) noted that creating space for naming violence may mean focusing on joy, healing, and learning, which builds strength that supports students in resisting violence and control. "Yet literacy teachers still question how to most usefully open a recognition of the presence of violence without pushing women to speak when they would prefer not to and without becoming complicit in silences that leave women isolated and ashamed" (p. 15). The assumption that not speaking or doing anything to resist abuse is the safer, wiser course should be challenged. Horsman asked literacy teachers to take this into account in their own responses, questioning what message is conveyed if a woman's bruises are met with silence. She asked that literacy programs reconsider the relationship between healing and learning.

As Horsman (2001b) and Gowen and Barlett (1997) pointed out, thoughtful adult educators do not merely encourage student voice or participation; rather, they give thought to the idea of "voice" as talk in the classroom. They want to provide women with multiple avenues to voice uncertainty and understanding, including opportunities for private talk and private writing. They give thoughtful attention to when and why and among whom to foster group work, as well as to setting ground rules for discussion that open space for everyone to talk but do not make anyone feel forced to talk. The literature on feminist pedagogy is a rich resource for understanding the nuances and complexities of classroom behavior that make practicing critical pedagogy problematic (Hugo, 2000).

This literature also points out the dissonance between conventional theories of adult learning and the findings of research on how women learn. Likewise, Colin (1994) noted that in adult learning and development courses, models of African American development in the context of a racist society are ignored. Instead, life cycle and life span models are taught as if everyone experiences them in the same way. Flannery (1994) noted that andragogy and theories of self-directed learning emphasize individual autonomy and assume that all people can, should, or want to achieve this kind of freedom as learners. Like some other critics of these

theories, Flannery pointed out that they reflect Western, White, middle-class, and male values and are culturally based in the idea of achieving status through individual achievement.

Flannery (1994) quoted Gilligan and other theorists who assert that women have fundamentally different ways of knowing and learning that are rooted in their relationships with others. She urged adult educators to move toward a "multilayered and comparative construction of social realities" (p. 22), arguing that current theories are not based on the experiences of women and people of color. She offered the following questions as ways to interrogate classroom practice and content: Did I create a text that considers the experiences of people of different gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, or did I clearly acknowledge the fact that a text represents one kind of experience only? Have I allowed differences to exist, rather than placing them in competition with each other? Have I included knowledge different from my own? Have I had people with different experiences review my work for bias? What do I do when opposing viewpoints challenge me? Do I ask people different from me how they perceive me, and do I have what it takes to hear what is said, rather than dismissing their feedback? Does my work multiply political spaces and prevent the concentration of power? What has been muted, repressed, or unheard? Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions? Do I assume universals in what I teach without checking them out? What is written and said about women and people of color with regard to the beliefs that guide my practice (pp. 23–24)?

Flannery also advocated looking at one's own behaviors in and out of the teaching or learning environment. She cited the following comment by an ABE teacher: "Oh, I don't pay any attention to the Hispanics in the class . . . they don't want to learn. They just come here to be together and socialize" (p. 24). This reflects a near universal belief that learners who want to learn listen to the instructor and do not interact, dismissing the possibility that there may be other ways of learning. Adult educators are encouraged to broaden their knowledge base by learning about diverse experiences and theories and by listening for the missing voices in their classes and curricula.

Sheared (1994) offered a model of instruction that combines attention to gender and race. Noting that to give students a voice means acknowledging different realities and understanding that there are different interpretations of realities, she introduced the notion of polyrhythmic voice. This multidimensional idea of voice allows individuals the full expression of their class, race, and gender identities. The two assumptions in which

Sheared's "womanist" perspective is rooted are as follows: Concrete experience is used as a criterion of meaning, and dialogue is the basis for assessing knowledge claims. The latter has much in common with feminist pedagogy in its reliance on connectedness rather than separation in the process of creating and validating knowledge. A manifestation of this connectedness is a call and response environment (analogous to what happens in Black churches when the congregation participates in a kind of dialogue with the preacher) that expresses both understanding and an emotional response, joining cognitive and affective dimensions of classroom discourse. This perspective reflects gender awareness as it enhances the instructional process, embedding sensitivity to gender in patterns of relations in the classroom rather than in dialogue about it (p. 35).

Class Bias in Workplace Literacy: Insights From Worker and Union Education

Class bias is perhaps most evident in the notions surrounding workplace literacy. In most discussions of workplace literacy, the perspective of employers is paramount and unquestioned. Employers' assessments of worker literacy, their standards for literacy regarding particular jobs, and their definitions of the soft skills workers need are accepted uncritically (Darrah, 1997; Hull, 1997; Shultz, 1997). Most of the goals, curricula, and assumptions of workplace literacy programs never take account of worker perspectives on jobs and workplaces, and they are not based on research. (For a complete discussion of why companies provide workplace literacy programs, see chap. 3.) As Hull (1997) noted,

> Despite an increasing interest in preparing people well for the jobs of the future, and an ever-present concern about workers' skills—or the lack thereof—the public discourse on skills and work is rarely informed by research that attempts to describe the knowledge and know-how required in today's workplaces, including the ways in which language- and literacy-related activities are embedded in work. Nor do we often document in helpful detail the successes and failures of education and training programs designed to prepare or repair workers, or explore the intersection of the desire to acquire skills with the opportunity to acquire and use them in the workplace. (p. xiv)

With the exception of joint labor–management programs funded by collective bargaining agreements that take into account the needs and goals of workers as well as those of employers, much worker education in the 1990s fits Mojab's (2001) description:

The political and economic upheavals of the 1990s have left their mark on the field of adult education. A major source of change is the globalization and restructuring of the capitalist economy, which make extraordinary demands on education in general and on adult education in particular. The changing economy calls for the reorganization of adult education into a training enterprise fully responsive to the needs of the market. (p. 23)

The distinctions between education and training are important ones; the former is defined as development of knowledge, skills, mind, and character, and the latter is associated with narrower learning, such as making the learner proficient in particular tasks defined by the trainer. Training has been associated with animals, whereas education generally refers to humans (Rich, cited in D'Amico, 1999).

Butler (2001) noted the blurring of lines between work and learning, including the now common use of business terms, such as *outcomes,* in education. She cited Deleuze's idea that although the corporation has replaced the factory, perpetual training—framed discursively as lifelong learning—has replaced education. Deleuze saw the regime of performance indicators and measurement in education, the shift from learner assessment to system accountability, the ever-increasing insertion of vocational education into schools (as in school-to-work programs), and the primacy of competency-based forms of knowing as evidence of growing corporate hegemony in education. Butler concluded the following:

Adult education, and especially work-related education, offers limitless potentialities and dangerous opportunities. There are many ways of remembering histories and shaping futures, none of them impervious to acts of power and freedom. How do we think and talk and learn and teach about work? Are we learning workers? Do we consider our worker–learner–students to be knowledge workers, humanware, generic workers, or human terminals? (p. 79)

Such theorists raise the question of whether adult educators will accept the corporate or market-driven reframing of our work—and the extent to which we have already done so unwittingly. When and if we do, we take on a class interest radically different from that of our learners, who are for the most part low-wage workers who increasingly go without any shield or intermediary who represents their interests over those of their employers. The demise of unions over the past few decades has put workers largely at the mercy of global corporations that move jobs to locations with the lowest wages and poorest working conditions. It was this race to the bottom that *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages,* the report of the

Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (1990) sought to reverse. Yet, as Grubb (1995) noted, many community colleges have designed training curricula around the needs of local employers only to have graduates become employed by companies that do not compensate them for their training. We can educate adults to develop their literacy skills, but can we explain why it is that increasing numbers of full-time workers earn wages below the poverty level? Adult educators need to be aware of the class-based realities learners encounter in the workplace. If we present an unambiguous or unrealistic picture of the rewards that literacy education delivers in the workplace, then we will again be introducing dissonance between our words and our learners' lives.

Such dissonance violates what Bruno and Jordan (1999) saw as a fundamental principle of adult education: To be effective with people who have real-world experiences, educators must narrow the distance between student as object and student as subject. Central to the effective teaching of working-class adults is seeing them as active creators of meaning in the context of their own experiences. The job of the teacher is to connect the life experiences of students to the larger social, political, and cultural context, using student knowledge as the starting point.

"A way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is implicated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed" (Berlin, cited in Bruno & Jordan, 1999, p. 153). Accordingly, Bruno and Jordan noted that when teaching working-class students, educators should approach them not only as individuals who function in society but also as people with the power to recreate their society. This is a far cry from the functional content of much workplace literacy, as well as from curricula on soft skills that teach uncritical compliance with behavior and dress codes of employer and corporate culture. The next section offers practitioners concrete examples of literacy learning that support the power of learners to challenge the contemporary distribution of power.

CURRICULA AND CLASSROOM: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

As Horsman (2001b) noted, "The promise of literacy is the promise of access to a different life" (p. 14). This promise is a difficult one to keep, and the presence of racist, sexist, corporate, and heterosexist hegemony in curricula or the classroom makes it even more elusive. Following are some

suggestions for classroom work and curricula designed to challenge that hegemony. All of the sources cited here agree that the use of participatory approaches relevant to learners' lives, be it their lives as women, as people of color, or as workers attempting to rethink their position in the workplace, is essential in teaching literacy. As Mev Miller pointed out in the NIFL's discussion group on poverty and race (online at nifl-povracelit, doc. 487, May 15, 2001), participatory learning addresses dispositional barriers identified in the literature on resistance to schooling: "'I won't learn' becomes a way (conscious or not) of resisting what [learners] perceive as enlistment into their continued subjugated place in the status quo." What would be the effect on women learners, she asked, if they were given access to materials at the appropriate reading level that addressed the concerns of their daily lives? Miller lamented the fact that female learners in ABE and GED classes are reading assignments that correspond to educational and political mandates to make learners responsible citizens and compliant workers. She noted that when she brings easy-to-read books on women's issues into the classroom, female learners react as if she had "dropped a bag of candy on the table."

Similarly, most of the contributors to the volume *Teaching Working Class* (Linkon, 1999) advocated the use of films, books, role playing, and theater exercises that make use of stories with which learners can identify. Learners of the same gender, class, or race as the protagonists are drawn into such materials, and the materials also become a means of sharing such experiences with fellow learners.

A special issue of *Change Agent* (1999)[5] includes many suggestions for resources and classroom activities around issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities. In one article, two GED learners in a Boston program were asked whether materials having to do with gender and race were welcome or a distraction from the focus on test questions and materials. They concurred that such materials ultimately serve learners' goals, inspire them, and prepare them for entry into a diverse and conflict-ridden world (Kallenbach, 1999).

In the same issue, Richard Goldberg (1999) described activities he uses with all-Asian classes, beginning with discussions of stereotypes and brainstorming lists of stereotypes of Asians and other groups. He follows this activity with a one-page story about a Chinese teenager who dresses in

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[5]The September 2000 issue of *Change Agent* contains a similar wealth of material on immigration, including topics such as globalization, immigrants and class, immigrant female workers, and immigrant workers' rights.

a style associated with African Americans. Learners discuss the ways in which people make statements about who they are. Students are asked to write about how someone they know makes a statement through his or her appearance and to describe the reactions of peers. Students share stories and discuss what it means to cross cultural boundaries. The class then proceeds to a consideration of how the media stereotypes Asian women, using a video that examines the portrayal of Asian women in American films. Goldberg's class is 80% female, and he conducts carefully planned pre- and postviewing activities around the film. Finally, he shows *The Shadow of Hate,* a film produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center about various forms of racism and ethnic hatred in U.S. history. He shows small segments as he builds background knowledge and uses the guide that comes with the film.

Also in the same issue of *Change Agent,* Anson Green (1999), a practitioner working in San Antonio, Texas, discussed using the novel *Push,* written by Sapphire (1996). (Her birth name was Ramona Lofton). It is the story of an adolescent African American who struggles with poverty, abuse, literacy, and HIV-positive status. Green noted that some learners opted not to read the book because of its strong language, but the novel encouraged others to become active readers and writers and to make important changes in their lives.

Galluzzo (1999) cited the usefulness of Linda Stout's (1999) contribution to the issue, "Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing." She reported that much of what Stout said about her experience organizing in rural North Carolina is applicable to the ABE learners in Maine with whom she works. Sharon Lee Tetrault contributed an exercise on exploring classism that takes place over two class sessions. The issue also contains articles that help teachers think about their own "positionality," including Marie Horchler's (1999) interview with two Massachusetts adult educators about "freezing moments." The latter are classroom encounters in which issues of inequality and difference are raised in ways that made the teachers uncomfortable; the teachers who are interviewed analyze these as "teachable moments" (p. 2). In "Learning to Walk the Walk," Rob Woronoff (1999) explored her experiences as a trainer in New York City public schools around issues of sexual orientation and includes an exercise in self-reflection intended to help teachers prepare to work across differences of culture, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

In her story of a curriculum that went on the road, Lisa White Smith (1999) recounted what happened when Tennessee adult learners—diverse

by race, gender, and age—acted on their determination to visit the Holo-
caust Museum in Washington, DC. Their interest grew out of a curricu-
lum on the Holocaust created by the Center for Literacy Studies in Ten-
nessee. Learners raised money for the trip from organizations and
through their own efforts, determined to see close-up the impact of this
horrifying historic event. Their visit included a talk with a Holocaust sur-
vivor who earned a GED in the United States. The words of one adult
learner—the member of a church that had been burned as part of a wave
of burnings of Black churches in the South—make the connection
between learning about and changing the conditions of inequality: "As a
member of the Friendship M.B. church that was burned down in 1995,
I have experienced the hatred of people who do not know me as a person.
. . . My visit to the Holocaust Museum would give me the chance to teach
my children, family, and congregation members how to build a bridge
between the races here in Columbia, Tennessee" (Janice Shipp, cited in
Smith, 1999, p. 8).

The literacy programs described in *Change Agent* all work to bolster
learners' power to change the conditions of their lives, but they function
first as literacy programs. Popular education models address literacy issues
only as they occur within the context of their main function, which is
social change or community development work. In the history of ABE, as
described earlier in the chapter, voter registration work involved the latter
kind of popular education; the primary purpose was gaining the right to
vote, and literacy was a means to that end. In the popular education model,
the goal of social change provides the motivation to seek literacy. Since
1932, the Highlander Center has worked "to overcome poverty, bigotry,
and economic injustice in Appalachia and the South." In support of
this agenda, Highlander practices a "special kind of teaching—help-
ing people discover within themselves the courage and ability to confront
reality and to change it" (Bill Moyers, quoted in the home page at
www.highlandercenter.org).

Project South, Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide,
is an Atlanta-based organization that defines popular education as a learn-
ing process that is inclusive and accessible to people at a variety of edu-
cation levels. The institute helps people deal with problems they face in
their own communities, moving them toward action and helping to
develop new grassroots leadership. Project South makes use of nontradi-
tional, multisensory learning, drawing from poetry, music, and visual arts
to address the literacy issues that emerge as they work with each individual
or organization.

Literacy South, an organization in Durham, North Carolina, acts as a bridge between community organizations and individuals who need literacy. It describes itself as inspired by the belief that illiteracy and poverty go hand in hand. The experienced, committed literacy practitioners serving Literacy South train representatives from other organizations dedicated to fighting poverty as literacy instructors, showing them how to set up reading classes as part of their work. Literacy South, currently not an active organization, has also produced reading materials appropriate to its mission and available from Peppercorn Press.

In their article on education and action research in Magnolia County, adult educators Reybold and Herren (1999) provided an example of a community project in rural southwest Georgia based on a participatory development model: "Put simply, action research is the way groups of people organize the conditions under which they can learn from their experience and make this experience accessible to others" (McTaggart, cited in Reybold & Herren, 1999, p. 3).

The project was designed to serve the traditionally underrepresented African-American farmers and youth in the area. The 10 educational modules developed for the project focused on communication skills, problem-solving techniques, goal setting, and long-range planning, all for the purpose of supporting the group processes necessary to community leadership. All community members who participated were African American; some were illiterate or semiliterate, two thirds had high school diplomas, and one individual had a bachelor's degree. As with the popular education model, the goal was to make the project inclusive of all literacy levels. According to the authors, the project met its goals of "authentic participation" ("sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life world" of participants) and ownership ("responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice"; McTaggart, cited in Reybold & Herren, 1999, p. 10). Program participants established the Magnolia Youth and Community Coalition to lead community improvement efforts. One of the coalition's achievements was writing and attaining a grant for a tutorial program for community members. Another was addressing the need for an African-American counselor in the local school system. Because the focus was on community change and development, the article does not detail how literacy needs were met in this context. Nevertheless, the example offers a popular education model implemented by a community with varying literacy among its members, under the direction of adult educators. Literacy is part of the strategy for community empowerment but not the prime focus of the work.

Presumably, the project addressed literacy by seeking and securing funding for ongoing tutoring and by ensuring that the needs of African Americans are better served in local schools.

As the work cited thus far illustrates, there are important differences between multiculturalism and antiracism, between helping students prepare for employment and questioning power in the workplace, between reading about women's lives and taking action to change lives, and between teaching tolerance for differences of sexual orientation and questioning heterosexual hegemony in one's own life. Doing the more critical kind of teaching and learning, which requires an awareness and critique of one's own relationship to various forms of inequality, is harder. But it may be what is required to overcome the dispositional barriers to learning found among adult learners. Because this kind of education is difficult, I include three extensive examples in the sections that follow.

A Community-Based Approach
to Critical Pedagogy

This example is taken from an article by Klaudia Rivera (1999), in which she described the approach to teaching and learning in the El Barrio Popular Education Program in New York City. Participants in the program, which Rivera administered between 1990 and 1996, were women primarily from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico who enrolled to learn to read and speak English, to improve their basic education, and/or to prepare for the GED. Most were mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Many were displaced workers from the garment industry. These commonalities shaped the curriculum in that it questioned and challenged the social and economic forces in the women's lives and built on their strengths.

The El Barrio staff practiced a Freirian pedagogy that linked the development of literacy among participants with community organizing to address their immediate problems. The program employed both Spanish-language and ESOL teachers, and most were Latina and bilingual. Several former students worked in the program as teachers. In fact, by 1995, almost half of the program staff consisted of teachers who had experienced the participatory education philosophy as learners.

The curriculum was intentionally bilingual and biliterate, incorporating dialogue, reading, and writing in both English and Spanish with critical thinking, research, technology, and social action. It was organized around popular research units in which participants conducted investigations in

their own communities on topics that they considered important. The women decided on the research questions, methods of data collection and analysis, and presentation of results, which were documented on videos edited by the students and shown in the community and on public access television.

Video and computer technology were important elements of the program and were used by participants regardless of literacy level; they were trained to film, edit, and produce videotapes through grants and collaboration with public access television. Program participants chose topics for the videos. One, for example, addressed the experience of Latinas in the garment industry. Rivera noted that the videos became a transformative tool: "The women who made videos were no longer students learning to read and write and to speak English or exploited and displaced workers of the garment industry; they became informants on their own experience, researchers, and video producers" (p. 493).

Videos became the tool through which participants together contested and reclaimed reality, reappropriating their individual knowledge about working in sweatshops and collectively creating an empowering experience. Research units such as the one focusing on the garment industry connected the program and the community; members of the community educated participants about the issues affecting them, and the learners examined, researched, and then reflected and acted on these issues. The methodology thus broke down divisions between the community and the traditional classroom.

Perhaps the culmination of this work was the program's participation in a class action suit against the City of New York for failure to offer literacy and ESOL services appropriate to Latinas with literacy skills below the 9th-grade level. This occurred as a result of the social services department's attempt to remove a woman from the program because she was enrolled in both Spanish-language and ESOL classes. Thus, liberatory pedagogy led to an active challenge of the discriminatory practices that had perpetuated the association between working-class Latina women and lack of literacy.

Rivera (1999) noted that most students initially resisted the participatory methodology, expecting to be educated in traditional ways, so that pedagogy had to be negotiated. Eventually, teachers who had experienced the methodology themselves became effective advocates of it. To foster solidarity, both participants and staff were represented on all of the program's decision-making bodies, and they contributed to hiring, funding, and programmatic decisions. In the process, teachers and learners

subverted the traditional dichotomy between subject and object in education.

Sexual Identities in ESOL:
Queer Theory and Classroom Inquiry

Cynthia Nelson (1999), a practitioner from Australia, described an attempt to use queer theory to generate inquiry-based learning in an ESOL class in an unidentified U.S. community college. Nelson defined *queer theory* as an emerging body of work that draws on poststructuralist theories of identity to shift the focus from advocating for civil rights on the basis of sexual orientation to analyzing mainstream cultural and discursive practices and from affirming minority sexual identities to problematizing all sexual identities. In other words, rather than merely adding curriculum about gay people and stirring it into instruction, queer theory proposes that the process of learning should question the meaning of all assumptions about sexuality and behavior; "Pedagogies of inclusion thus become pedagogies of inquiry" (p. 373).

Nelson's (1999) questioning of pedagogies of inclusion has relevance to attempts to include any underrepresented group in mainstream educational practice and materials. She wrote the following:

> How is a lesbian to be represented in curricula and materials? Which characters or characteristics will be included, which excluded? If these representations come only from the target culture, are they sufficiently inclusive? Will teachers, teacher educators, and material developers have the knowledge to include sexual minorities? Will students consider such inclusions relevant to their needs as language learners? After inclusive references are made, what happens next? Who decides? (p. 376)

Nelson (1999) pointed to another issue related to inclusion: Aiming for tolerance or legitimizing the identity included is problematic because it presupposes intolerance and can serve to reinforce minority status. In contrast, she said, pedagogies of inquiry might involve:

> acknowledging that the domain of sexual identity may be important to a range of people for a range of reasons; examining not only subordinate sexual identities but also the dominant ones; looking at divergent ways of producing and reading sexual identities in various cultural contexts and discourses; identifying prevailing, competing, and changing cultural norms that pertain to sexual identities; exploring problematic and positive aspects of this identity domain; considering sexual identity in relation to other acts of identity and vice versa. (p. 377)

When presenting sexual identity within a pedagogy of inquiry, teachers are not expected to have all the answers but, rather, to frame questions and invite explorations. A focus on analysis rather than advocacy may more fully engage diverse learners and teachers as well. This approach encourages learners to question the apparently factual and elicits multiple perspectives and divergent knowledges. The posing of identities as acts, not facts, transforms the concept of sexual identity into something people do rather than something they are. Moreover, queer theory asserts that all people are implicated in producing and interpreting such identities, opening up the relevance of the topic for classroom discussion.

Analyzing the ways in which sexual identities are created through observable behavior encourages demystification of unfamiliar aspects of culture without reducing cultures to homogeneous or static traditions. Considering sexual behavior in more than one cultural context helps to specify rather than universalize what it means to identify sexually in particular ways.

As part of a research project on sexual identities as topics in ESOL classes, Nelson (1999) observed several teachers trying to address their concern about the impact of sexual orientation in their classes. Their aim was to make classroom work more relevant to learners who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or gay; learners who interact with gay-identified people in their lives outside the classroom; and learners who encounter lesbian or gay issues through popular culture.

In the case described in her article, Nelson (1999) presented her classroom observation in three voices: those of the students, the instructor, and the observer—Nelson herself. The teacher facilitates a discussion based on a picture of two women walking arm in arm that was part of a student worksheet on modal verbs. The students discuss whether continuous tense is appropriate, as in "They could be lesbians." The teacher then poses the question, "What about two men, 30 years old, holding hands. They're brothers, holding hands, yes or no?" When students respond, "No, no," the teacher's question, illustrating the inquiry approach, is "How did you learn that?" A discussion ensues that raises questions about the same hand-holding behavior in learners' native countries.

Throughout, we are privy to Nelson's (1999) thoughts on the discussion. In her analysis, she noted that the task was developed in a way that makes it potentially interesting to anyone, no matter what their views on sexual identities. Anyone in the room could speculate on the meaning of same-sex affection in the picture, and the task encourages multiple interpretations. The latter underscores the uncertainty associated with reading

sexual identities, and this is reinforced by having students discuss their interpretations in small groups and then compare them to those of the class at large.

By presenting the scenario as ordinary, the exercise makes it possible to introduce differences in sexual identity without marginalizing, defending, or valorizing them. The task frames the interpretive process, rather than the behavior itself, as problematic. Nelson (1999) concluded that an inquiry-based framework is useful because it theorizes sexual identities as culturally contextualized, readable acts rather than inner essences with universal meanings; as positionings (relational) rather than possessions (individual); and as relevant to everyone rather than only to gay people. In taking this approach, Nelson echoed Fine's (1997) assertion that exploration of race is not possible without critically examining Whiteness.

Power, Literacy, and Motivation

In an article in *Focus on Basics,* Greg Hart (1998) described the experience of the Pima County Adult Education program in Tucson, Arizona, which sees literacy as a means to power and personal freedom and considers their achievement to be the strongest motivation for literacy learning. When practitioners in this program decided they wanted to do something to address the 50% dropout rate among learners, they held a series of discussions and retreats and concluded that they would invest their time, energy, and money in introducing power and civic engagement to the curriculum. The purpose was to acknowledge what learners know—that literacy in itself is not likely to effect great change in their lives—and then introduce them to tools of action that when used in concert with literacy could help them effect meaningful change.

Program staff turned to a local activist organization for help and began to convene meetings and forums with students to identify issues affecting their lives. Concerns that emerged included low wages, gangs and crime in neighborhoods, and alienation from schools in which their children were enrolled. Small groups of learners began to research these issues, analyze public documents, develop effective questions for public officials, and prepare speeches and position papers. As happened at El Barrio Popular Education Program, all of these investigative, analytic, and presentation activities developed students' literacy skills.

Six student leaders took paid positions with the program as student advocates and mentors. Eventually, a core group of about 40 students and staff formed a group called Friends and Students of Adult Education.

Participation was through self-selection. Although many staff doubted the wisdom of proceeding in this direction, some of the most skeptical eventually became proponents.

The action approach has generated a number of successes. Student challenges to public officials to support literacy resulted in a statewide family literacy initiative, and their role in the development of citywide after-school programs nearly doubled the number of such programs. Students confronted officials over the decision to build a swimming pool at a local community center instead of building a long-promised adult education facility; they got both.

These and other successes have fueled students' enthusiasm and boosted their skills. Hart (1998) cautioned that the program's activism has made it some enemies and that attrition and student goal achievement statistics have not yet changed. Still, he concluded:

> We have shown ourselves that linking literacy education with the notion of power transforms the perspectives and motivations of educators and students alike. We have seen people's lives change and the lives of their families change. When GED student Lina Prieto, who questioned city and county officials, speaks powerfully to a room of 2,000 people, she knows she has the ability to influence the direction of her community; she has power. Her seven-year-old son, sitting in the audience, sees it too. When teachers see students involved in the civic process, they recognize that they themselves are engaged in meaningful work: they have power. When government officials see that the community they serve has a voice, they see that power belongs rightfully to the people. For the people at the Pima County Adult Education Program involved in this process, adult literacy education and power will never be separated from one another again. (p. 5)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The International Conference on Adult Educators sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, cited in Mojab, 2001) in 1997 outlined the following vision for adult education:

1. Only human-centered development and a participatory society based on the full respect of human rights will lead to sustainable and equitable development. The informed and effective participation of men and women in every sphere of life is needed if humanity is to survive and meet the challenges of the future.

2. Adult education thus becomes more than a right; it is a key to the 21st century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice. (p. 38)

The impact of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation on ABE, as described in this chapter, is intertwined with the promise of ABE as a partner in the creation of a more just society, as stated in the UNESCO vision. How can ABE practitioners teach toward the creation of a world in which the literacy of adult learners will be politically valued and economically rewarded? How can we address the distance between our own experiences and those of learners? How can programs respond to policy and funding mandates and still practice holistic, humanistic, and emancipatory teaching and learning? What kinds of research and policy would support a form of ABE that would reduce the dissonance between the daily lives of adult learners and the world of literacy programs? The recommendations that follow point in the direction of answers, addressing the creation of a learning climate in which learners themselves take up these and other questions vital to their survival, success, and power.

Administrators and policymakers should ensure that literacy program staff reflect the community of learners and include current and former learners as part of paid staff in a range of positions. This means taking a new approach to the processes of recruiting, hiring, training, and more. It means providing national, state, and local opportunities for learner leadership. VALUE, the national organization of adult learners, aims to develop the leadership skills of learners ready to assume such positions. Programs and state adult education staff should support VALUE by joining the organization and facilitating access to membership for learners. VALUE should have a voice in every body of the field, from the board of the National Institute for Literacy to state adult education offices and local ABE programs. The board of VALUE itself is perhaps the only organization in the field that truly reflects learner diversity. On this issue, VALUE is already a leader, and the rest of us are only beginning learners.

Hayes (1994) outlined the components of a personal and professional agenda for change among practitioners, both of which are necessary to this vision of adult education. Her personal agenda includes increasing awareness of racism and sexism and making a commitment to change, increasing self-awareness and reflection; increasing affective learning, and devel-

oping and evaluating new behaviors that reflect these personal changes. Her professional agenda asks adult educators to make the subjects of racism and sexism an overt part of the curriculum, challenging institutional practices that foster White privilege; to form groups and networks as change agents and to collaborate with community groups; and to request and engage in long-term professional development for change.

With regard to pedagogy and curriculum materials, program directors need to seek out approaches and resources that will facilitate a questioning of the ideologies, institutions, and behaviors that perpetuate oppression on the basis of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Educators in the field need to understand that part of the reason for the dissonance that creates resistance to program participation on the part of students is related to recent research findings that classes are teacher dominated (Beder & Medina, 2000; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobsen, & Soler, 2000).

Horsman (2001b) advocated developing separate classes for women as part of creating safe space for women who have been or are victims of domestic violence, and some of the women interviewed in a study of access to literacy for African Americans suggest that creating separate men's groups would help men overcome their shame about needing literacy instruction. Beder and Medina (2000) noted that a class of women welfare recipients "were able to discuss gender issues on a personal level, something that probably would not have been possible had men been present" (p. 4). Although separate classes are probably neither fundable nor feasible, support groups, project-specific groups, or small-group work within classes might help to meet some of this need.

In ABE research, there is scant focus on issues of inequality in practice. More ABE journals should focus on class, race, gender, and sexual orientation in a way that speaks directly to what happens in the ABE or ESOL classroom; most of the journals consulted for this chapter concern adult education in the broader sense. The special issue of *Change Agent* (1999) that was discussed is an exception. Based on the classroom experiences of practitioners committed to critical examination of their work, the issue is a model of the kind of research and writing needed in ABE. Research on issues of inequality should include learner action research projects and foreground the voices of learners. Such work should attend to how White privilege operates in the field to reserve the best positions and highest degrees for those least like our students, and it should propose remedies that can change the existing hierarchy. Finally, research about and with adults who have literacy needs should examine the relationships between education, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and clarify the role of

education in overcoming inequality. Too often, education is offered as a panacea without attention to other areas of policy or to features of the global economy that sustain inequality.

The lack of adequate funding and support of ABE in general and the reduction in access to education among prisoners (which affects poor men and men of color disproportionately) and public assistance recipients (which affects poor women and women of color disproportionately) aggravate the inequality in access to education among adults already disadvantaged by race, class, and gender. These political trends of the 1990s persist in part because of an underlying ideology that denies the impacts of oppression on people of color, women, and the poor and working class. Thus, education policy regarding adults and the marginalization of ABE can be seen as reflecting a conservative ideology that prefers to emphasize the role of the individual rather than recognize the structured inequality individuals may face by virtue of their race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. Similarly, the welfare reform policies of the 1990s reflect the view that failure to achieve economic self-sufficiency is primarily the result of a lack of will and effort rather than of structural barriers to overcoming poverty (D'Amico, 1999). Such beliefs reduce popular support for ABE and support the notion that individuals who have failed to achieve in school and the workplace have done so because of some lack of initiative on their part. It follows that to spend more public dollars on those who have already failed to take advantage of public schooling is to throw good money after bad. Adult learners, ABE practitioners, and policymakers must challenge this ideology with more than heartwarming stories of learners who have made it. Rather, we need to identify what stands in the way of those who do not come to or stay in programs and what hinders those who do. As we illuminate the sources of poverty in learners' lives, we will need to make common a political cause with those who share this perspective.

Adult educators, who always seem to be fighting for the life of ABE programs, must consider joining forces, both nationally and locally, with other organizations that serve those disadvantaged by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The article by Greg Hart (1998) that was discussed offers a local model for such work, one that incorporates community activist work into instruction. In Philadelphia, the onset of welfare reform sparked such a local coalition. Unions, as well as civil, women's, and gay rights organizations and other groups that address the inequalities learners face, can help the field in its struggle to fund and implement the services learners need. Historically, ABE has its roots at least partially in such

movements, and adult learners have a vital role to play in such struggles today.

Through such changes in our political strategies, classroom practice, and administrative hiring and decisions, ABE can begin to address the issues of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation that shape our work. If our programs position learners as world creators, history makers, architects of knowledge, and readers of the world and the word, we can create a pedagogy that fulfills the global vision of UNESCO for adult basic education in the 21st century.

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