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ADULT EDUCATORS AT THE CROSSROADS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHER AGENCY

A Thesis Presented

by

LIZ GING

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts, Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2019

Applied Linguistics Program

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Approved as to style and content by:

Kimberly Urbanski, Assistant Professor
Chairperson of Committee

Jaran Shin, Assistant Professor
Member

Panayota Gounari, Associate Professor
Member

Panayota Gounari, Program Director
Applied Linguistics Program

Panayota Gounari, Chair
Applied Linguistics Department

ABSTRACT

ADULT EDUCATORS AT THE CROSSROADS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHER AGENCY

December 2019

Liz Ging, B.F.A., Massachusetts College of Art and Design
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor Kimberly Urbanski

Since the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, there has been renewed questioning about the nature and purpose of adult education programs in the United States, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The heavy workforce development orientation of the new law is a starker manifestation of trends focused on job training which have been sweeping through the field of adult education for the last few decades. In the midst of these shifts, little research has been done to investigate what the educators charged with meeting these policy goals think about these changes, the nature of their work in this context, and how they negotiate any challenges or contradictions the situation presents. This case-study used cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and a thematic analysis to investigate adult education ESOL teachers' perspectives about this system and their own agency within it. CHAT informed the project during its preliminary phases. The study found that the greater resources and rule-making powers of the

federal policymaking activity system exert pressure on the local adult education activity system, transforming teachers' imagined objects into the economic outcomes prioritized at the federal level. Despite this, the teachers in the study creatively used their own agency to interact with the tools, community, and division of labor within their programs, in an effort to preserve their own goals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	x
CHAPTER	Page
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
Research Questions	5
Introduction to the Adult Education System	6
Setting, Services, and Demographics	7
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Neoliberal Ideology, Educational Policy, and Adult Education.....	11
WIOA and WIA: Policy and Implementation	18
Teacher Response to Neoliberal Educational Policy.....	22
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	26
Project Design	26
Methods and Measures Used.....	26
Context	27
Participants	31
Ethical Concerns.....	33
Conceptual Framework	34
Data Analysis	40

CHAPTER	Page
CHAPTER 4 KATE: COLLEGE AND CAREER READY ADULTS, NOT JUST marginALLY MORE LITERATE POOR PEOPLE	43
The Complexity of Simple Things	44
Chasing the Dragon	44
A Pretty Dire Situation	49
Uninvited Guests vs. Strollers	53
The Rigamarole	55
The Price of Admission	58
The Assembly Line	59
Pawns in a Scheme	63
CHAPTER 5 NICOLE: THRIVING, SURVIVING	74
Part of Something Bigger	75
A Human Story	75
Outside the Box... Things Just Come Out	85
Through Just Being Together	93
Layers of Instability	100
Big, Uproarious, Demanding	100
Pressure, Maneuvering, and Behind-the-Scenes Things	106
Crisis Management Mode	115
CHAPTER 6 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: NO COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES	124
The School Beyond the Classroom	125
The One's and the Zero's	125
A Very Real Fear	132
In the Classroom	140
Very Impressive People	140
Am I Preparing Every Student to Be a Certified Nursing Assistant?	145
Beyond the School	150

CHAPTER	Page
A Sense of Responsibility	150
A Struggle and a Stretch.....	156
CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION	164
Discussion	164
Implications	175
Limitations.....	180
Future Directions	182
Conclusion.....	184
APPENDICES	185
APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS AND INITIALISMS REFERENCED IN THE TEXT	185
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	187
APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPTION CODE	189
REFERENCES	190

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure	Page
Figure 1, Second-generation CHAT Activity triangle (Engeström, 1987).....	36
Figure 2, Third-generation CHAT activity systems (Engeström, 1987)	42
Figure 3, A view of the community garden space at the beginning of the planting season (Nicole, 2014)	91
Figure 4 A second view of the garden space before work began in the plot (Nicole, 2014)...	92
Figure 5, Interaction between adult education activity system and U.S. federal government adult education policymaking activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 1987).....	163
Table	
Table 1, Comparison of current and recent past standards for adult education ESOL (Adapted from Pimentel (2013), Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services (2005), and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Adult and Community Learning Services (2019).....	130

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The availability of free, government-funded adult education programs, primarily providing instruction in literacy, numeracy, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), has long been recognized as a public good in the US. (See Appendix A for a complete list of acronyms and initialisms referenced in the text). Learners access these programs to reach a holistic range of personal, academic, and professional goals. This system has been under increasing pressure in recent years to narrow the curriculum to a more specific range of workforce development-related goals, serving only a portion of the many adults who turn to these programs to further their education (Jacobson, 2017; Pickard, 2016).

These The combining of adult education and workforce development has not only been noted in the U.S., but also in various other contexts. Research coming out of the European Union (Beach & Carlson, 2004; Fleming, 2010; Grummell, 2007; Fragoso, and Guimarães, 2010) indicates that publicly funded adult basic education programs are being

increasingly subjected to commodification and subjugation to economic assessment indicators. For example, as in the US, public-private partnerships are becoming increasingly prioritized legislatively, and adult education programs are tasked with the responsibility for the resocialization of adults to increase worker productivity. This is accomplished through changes to curriculum and materials choices, as well as suggested classroom approaches and methods. This parallels trends in the U.S., suggesting that similar narrowing of the curriculum may be occurring in Europe and also that the economic pressures pushing such changes are working on a larger scale.

The issue is global, though it may materialize in different material conditions in different countries and regions. Private interests work hand in hand with those in charge of government regulations and resource allocation in a globalized world to extract value from the public sector in any way possible, including from the education system. Similar trends have been studied in educational systems around the world, from New Zealand (Leach, 2014), to South Korea (Warriner, 2015), to Zimbabwe (Hwami, 2011), to large swathes of Latin America (Fischman, Ball, & Gvirtz 2003).

A study from Canada (Gibb, 2008) documented how neoliberal influence on the adult basic education system perpetuated systematic inequality and limited rather than expanded the opportunities of learners. Gibb describes how this took place through the essentialization of learners into their roles as potential workers through the narrowing of the curriculum, and the socialization of learners into an individualist narrative of “personal responsibility.” This locates the cause of social problems like poverty in the hands of individuals, rather than seeing their wider arc through society as symptoms of inequality.

This push towards the repurposing of education as workforce development was intensified in the U.S. by the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014. While many adult learners do wish to gain skills which will help them advance professionally, the rigorous and narrow workforce participation-focused outcomes demanded of programs under this new law seem poised to not meet the full needs of the learners. For instance, the new outcomes used to measure program “effectiveness” include four workforce-participation data indicators, one indicator related to post/secondary education, and one related to skill gains in the subject area the learner is studying. Thus, only one outcome measure directly relates to educational progression. The implications of these developments, suspected by adult education teachers and administrators since the passage of the law, are that under increasing pressures for program participants to meet more challenging goals, programs would begin to selectively enroll learners with more advanced educational backgrounds, to direct more resources to students who have higher language proficiency or work skills, and to cut programs which serve learners with more limited formal education backgrounds (see Shin & Ging, 2019). Students who are not able to achieve goals which are unrealistic for their educational/English proficiency level or who are not interested in these goals are in danger of losing access to these programs (Pickard, 2016). Additionally, academic content which is not directly workforce development-related may go by the wayside in favor of practices which provide the necessary statistics that ensure funding. Programs are likely to engage in these practices in order to maintain their funding in order to continue offering classes to their communities, and the pressures of such practices

within programs may lessen the time and attention available for discussion of this topic in the field.

If teachers are to act from the position of reflective professional, rather than mere technician, the initiation of a dialogue about policy mandates for adult basic education programs is critical, yet this process sometimes faces pushback. This is often on the charge that examination of these issues would be surplus to requirements and outside the scope of the work of adult educators (Smith, Hofer, & Gillespie, 2001). However, firstly, critique of policy does not mean one is opposed to its goals entirely. The policy is a way of regulating the achievement of certain outcomes and assigning a value to them. Criticism of the means, and the way these goals are valorized or devalued, does not denote disapproval of the goals altogether. Secondly, to those who would claim that adult educators should focus on the day's lesson and leave policy to policy-makers and program directors, such a position relegates teachers to the role of technicians, which merges nicely with accumulating top-down mandates of ever-increasing standardization, marketization, and commodification in education. (Gray, 2007) The responsibility to be informed of policy, have a critical perspective on it, and navigate one's own practice accordingly is part of a teacher's role as a professional in the field of education, as explored by Merriam (2010).

Additionally, though adult education teachers are the ones tasked with designing and carrying out educational experiences to help students meet various goals, they are rarely asked to weigh in with their own opinion on the larger questions about the purpose of the classes they teach (Smith, Hofner, & Gillespie, 2001). It is disheartening but honest to admit that many adult education programs treat their instructional staff as replaceable and receptive

vessels who will carry out whichever program policies are the order of the day. Teachers in many schools are not expected to be truly engaged in a critical way, unless it coincides with the larger goals of the program they work for. Criticality should be somehow convenient and tidy, so as not to interfere with the larger power plays at work. In light of all this, finding ways to help amplify the volume of teachers' voices in this environment is of utmost importance, in order to acknowledge, bring attention to, and engage with some of the strategies of hope that these teachers are using in their daily practice.

Research Questions

This situation raises various questions about the classroom practices of those who teach ESOL in this context. This study investigated the relationships between different elements of the US adult education system from the perspective of the teacher, through examination of data from interviews and select classroom artifacts. The initial planning stages of the project, as well as data collection, were conceived of and carried out within the framework of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987). The final data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis informed by CHAT. The following questions were addressed:

- ❖ What is the nature of adult education ESOL instruction in a largely government-funded program under WIOA in Massachusetts?
- ❖ Do the outcomes mandated by WIOA create contradictions for practitioners related to their goals in the classroom? If so, how do they negotiate these contradictions?

Introduction to the Adult Education System

To appreciate the system in which the teachers work, an overview of adult education in the U.S. will be outlined, including pertinent federal legislation, the sites where these programs are located, available programming, learner population data, and funding structures. The federally funded adult education system in the US is a sprawling network of independent providers of basic literacy, numeracy, high school credential preparation, and English instruction for speakers of other languages who are over the age of sixteen. The system is regulated at the federal level by legislation from the Department of Labor, as well as the Department of Education, and administered at the state level in ways that vary from one state to another.

Adult education in the US is regulated by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), included as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), a much larger law which governs the funding of many other workforce development programs nationwide, with the stated overall goal of strengthening the US workforce system and creating career pathways through expanded access to education and job training programs. The outcomes measured under WIOA, to document program effectiveness, include six very specific goals: 1) credential attainment (secondary or postsecondary), 2) effectiveness in serving employers, 3) measurable skills gain on standardized assessments, 4) employment rate second quarter after program exit, 5) employment rate fourth quarter after program exit and 6) median earnings second quarter after program exit (United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2018).

WIOA, which became public law in 2014 and the final rules of which were released in June 2016, was preceded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. One of the key differences between these two laws is the new creation of the common performance measures explained above for *all* WIOA-funded programs. This means that now under WIOA, a career center, a program for out-of-school youth, and an adult education program will all be measured using the same six metrics, four of which are workforce participation data. In contrast, even though WIA did factor in employment data, the performance measures were not so heavily weighted toward workforce development, as only one third of the metrics included a reference to employment status. Additionally, under WIA, several states, including Massachusetts, included a variety of other performance indicators at the state level, including participation in family literacy activities, utilization of student support services, and students meeting their own personally defined learning goals. (Bingman & Bell, 2000)

The transition in performance reporting which has taken place in adult education is even more clear when comparing WIOA with the National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991, the law which preceded WIA. Under the provisions of the NLA, adult education program participants did not have their personal data, such as income and employer, collected and tabulated to assess program quality. Rather, programs were assessed based on evaluations of the educational program itself, focusing on areas such as curriculum design, instructional quality, and variety of available programming (Bingman & Bell, 2000).

Setting, Services, and Demographics

Adult education programs are sometimes stand-alone and sometimes a part of larger organizations or institutions that provide them additional support in terms of resources or

space. Examples of host sites for adult education programs include public schools, public libraries, non-profit agencies, community centers, community colleges, and correctional facilities.

Class offerings are divided into three areas: adult basic education, which includes basic literacy and numeracy below the high school level (ABE), high school credential preparation classes/adult secondary education (ASE), and English language instruction (EL). EL classes are different from ASE and ABE in that they are specifically targeted at non-native English speakers and are not focused on credential attainment. Recent national statistics report that EL learners constitute 45% of the adult education learner population, with ABE learners constituting 34% and ASE learners 12%. Of the EL population, these statistics report that 17% of students nationally were at a literacy development level, 28% were in beginner classes, 40% were in intermediate classes, and 15% were in advanced classes (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, Division of Adult Literacy, 2017).

Adult education programs are designed to provide services to three categories of students, according to these three types of programs. The first category is learners who experienced some limitation or interruption to their formal education which prevented their completion of elementary school, either inside or outside of the US. These students, who constitute 34% of overall participants and 17% within EL literacy programs, are typically seeking basic literacy and/or numeracy. The second category, at 12% of overall participants, is students who did not complete high school and are seeking a high school credential preparation course. The third large group, constituting 45% of learners, are adults who are

non-native speakers of English who wish to improve their English language proficiency. These students generally populate the English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, though there is significant crossover into the other previously mentioned classes if the learner is seeking that type of study as well. This results in a mixed demographic of native and non-native English speakers within adult literacy and adult secondary education classes. This overlap can create confusions in terms of how to classify these programs, how to evaluate student progress, and how to choose appropriate pedagogical methods for these classes. Within the EL population, while national statistics cite 17% of EL learners to be at a literacy level and 28% to be at a beginner level, this does not necessarily correspond to the classes they are enrolled in. This is due to the shortage of literacy programs, which are not a feature of all adult education programs. In practical terms, what this often means is that literacy level learners are enrolled into beginner level English classes, without the requisite literacy development level for them to make the progress they are seeking.

Some adult education programs also provide other types of classes, often as short-term offerings, like technology instruction, family literacy workshops, or civics classes. These are either aimed at current students or designed to bring new learners into the program.

Turning from the classroom to other areas, some programs also often offer other services to students, such as private or group tutoring, childcare, transportation assistance, and academic and career advising. Programs often have considerable leeway in how they choose to provide these additional services, depending on legislation at the state level and a program's obligations to other funders.

Funding for adult education programs comes from a variety of sources. Government resources at the federal level, known as Basic Grants to States under AEFLA, are the largest source of financial support. This program is regulated by legislation from the Departments of Labor and Education, while grants are also given at the state government level. These are often administered at the state level by state education agencies, state departments of labor, or institutions of higher education. Many programs also receive support from community organizations, corporate donors, and private donors. The make-up of funding sources is unique to each program.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literature in three particular areas provided background on the current state of the adult education system in the US and the federal legislation which regulates it, such as WIOA. First will be a discussion of the general trend of economic pressures and neoliberal ideology shaping educational policy, with a particular focus on adult education. This first section will also outline research that has responded to workforce development rhetoric. Then, some research specifically on the policy and implementation of WIOA and its predecessor, WIA, will be discussed. Finally, a section on how teachers can and do respond to the marketization of adult education will be presented.

Neoliberal Ideology, Educational Policy, and Adult Education

One of the key issues regarding WIOA is the effect that the underlying economic ideology may be having on shaping educational policy and its implementation in adult education settings. This issue pervades the larger educational landscape in the US, where the influence of neoliberalism has been well-documented in recent years, particularly in the fields of K-12 and higher education settings (Maglen, 1990). Adult education will be highlighted in this section, rather than ESOL specifically. While ESOL classes are affected, due to the way in which they have been subsumed by the policy affecting adult education

overall, the literature about adult education in general more holistically addresses the themes focused on in this section.

As for the effect of neoliberal policy on adult education, research has been done exploring adult education policy evolutions in the US (Roumell, Salajan, & Todoran, 2019), which pointed to the importance of understanding policy as shaped by historical conditions. The study indicated that it was contingent on supporters of adult education to develop an understanding of these historical conditions in order to advocate effectively. Another study focused more pointedly on the implications of the coupling of adult education with workforce development and focusing on the role of human capital theory in justifying such developments (Baptiste, 2001), finding that this has led to an apolitical orientation to learning, a focus on adapting to current conditions, and individualism. These each lead to a problematic change in educational practice because they forge education into a tool for maintaining the status quo of unequal power structures in society and condition learners (and teachers) into accepting the situation uncritically.

While these trends were also present in other legislation that preceded WIOA, such as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, they were intensified under WIOA. For example, under WIA a more holistic range of student goals were included in documentation of student progress, but under WIOA, a much narrower slice of goals, such as entering employment or getting a raise, are counted as evidence of positive learning outcomes for all participants in adult education programs such as ESOL, literacy, numeracy, etc. Additionally, WIOA allocates more funding than WIA for Integrated Education and Training (IET), a program model combining job skills instruction with literacy, numeracy, or ESOL

instruction. IET programs are offered based on labor market needs and the input of private sector representatives. The likely outcome of this is that workforce development boards (WDBs) will prioritize business goals, rather than educational objectives in determining which programs should receive funding for a new cycle. This could repurpose the adult education programs towards the profit motives of private interests, rather than serving the greater public good. Classes which do not create “profitable” outcomes, like basic literacy instruction and lower level ESOL, would be in danger of losing their funding in this situation. Or alternately, programs may proactively close or reduce these classes on their own to boost their outcome data and secure a more favorable assessment from the WDBs, thus maintaining funding. This approach to educational program design and evaluation, focused on meeting the demands of the local labor market, exemplifies Baptiste’s idea of instruction targeting current conditions.

The trend to couple adult education with workforce development is evident in the U.S. Department of Education’s (DOE) recent document, *Making Skills Everyone’s Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States* (Strawn, 2015). This document outlines a variety of specific programming suggestions about how to utilize the adult education system to more efficiently “upskill” a deficient workforce to simultaneously create “opportunity for all” and bolster the national economy. Integration of adult education and job training is presented as a treatment strategy to address the social problems of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment. St. Clair (2015) examined the underlying premise of this proposal, pointing out how it is based upon the unproven yet convenient assumption that low skills are the cause of poverty, and therefore providing skills training will alleviate it. St.

Clair found this superficially idealistic vision to be a thin veneer for the fact that economic inequality and lack of access to education are problems with much more complex causes than the purported “skills gap” focused on by the DoE.

Similarly, inquiring into this concept of the “skills gap” as the source of economic hardship and instability, Jacobson (2017) found it to be an illusion, arguing that poverty is caused by the current configuration of the economy. He further asserts that using adult education programs for job training through public-private partnerships in fact provides businesses with a way to take advantage of the public adult education system and relieves them of the burden of training their own employees.

An example of the process described by Jacobson is the IET model, promoted under WIOA, in which learners participate in both job skills training and another course such as ESOL at the same time. There are numerous ways of organizing such an IET program, but one model recommended in WIOA implementation materials (Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, 2017) splits instructional time between a job skills trainer and an adult education teacher such as an ESOL instructor, with some integrated instructional time as well. This program model is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, there is the issue of instructional time and program resources being further divided in a system which is already precariously underfunded. ESOL teachers and learners may be expected to reach the same goals over time with half the instructional hours as before. Additionally, since job skills training classes may contribute more directly to mandated outcomes, it seems likely that those classes/teachers may be favored in terms of resource allocation in the program. Likewise, since job skills training promises material improvement in quality of life on a specific timetable, it may

perhaps be prioritized by students as well, to the detriment of their progress in a language class which instills a necessary base of language skills, among other things. Finally, these programs and the WDBs dictate which job trainings are available to students, potentially funneling students into whichever career paths are in demand in the local labor market, regardless of their interest or relevance to learners. This training and sourcing of employees for private interests puts a benevolent face on the possibility of institutionalizing the marginalization of immigrants, low-income learners, etc. in the workforce.

However, despite the complex reasons for societal problems such as economic inequality pointed out by St. Clair, Jacobson and others, some researchers take the same position as the DOE and treat these structural factors as given, unchangeable elements to which the adult education system must simply adapt. Therefore, Scully-Russ (2015), emphasized the necessity for educators to learn more about the needs of business and suggested that businesses will “learn that they must invest in the broader community, of which they are a part, in order to remain economically viable” (p. 45). This approach to the problem avoids criticism of the system and denies the political implications of this individualistic focus on educational policy. Any responsibility on the part of private interests in how they contribute to economic inequality in their communities is evaded, as businesses are positioned to change their practices only for profit-making purposes, rather than any sense of social responsibility. To add insult to injury, responsibility is thus laid at the feet of teachers to change their practices to be more in line with the profit-making model of the commercial sector.

Weinberger (2015) also suggests an approach to dealing with the unequal marriage of adult education with workforce development that neglects larger social and historical conditions. She presents a number of possible beneficial steps for adult education professionals to take to become involved in mitigating the possible harsh effects of a narrowed purpose for the adult education system. For example, the voluntary participation of teachers in WDBs to represent educational interests in a body made up primarily of members of the business community is a problematic approach to the issue. This is primarily because one purpose of the body is evaluating the effectiveness of adult education programs, yet the voices of education professionals have been included in a way that is perfunctory at best. In addition, there is no legal provision in WIOA itself for those with expertise in education, such as educational policy specialists, administrators, or educators, to share in the control of the annual program re-evaluation process. However, this and other similar steps to mitigate damage, while potentially somewhat positive, are non-binding. This is in stark contrast to the representation of business interests in the evaluation process, where minimum percentages of participants are laid out clearly in the legislation. These suggestions by Scully-Russ and Weinberger, while attempting to work within the current system, do not acknowledge or address the underlying issues and are a weak attempt to mitigate the problems posed by current policy. Scully-Russ' suggestion for businesses to be more aware of their community's needs may be taken up by some, but ultimately the goal of businesses in a capitalist economy is to generate profit. Strategies which don't contribute to the bottom line seem unlikely to be taken up voluntarily by representatives of private interests who comprise the majority of WDBs.

Likewise, representatives of the adult education community may choose to participate in these organizations, but with no provision in WIOA itself for their concerns or suggestions to be seriously considered, their potential influence seems trivial. For example, a WDB may recommend defunding a program which has a large literacy program and large low-level ESOL classes, because the program has not met mandated annual outcome targets, such as a required percentage of learners entering employment or tertiary education within a year of entering the program. In that case, a participating educator could make the case for why the program should remain open, as it would not yet be realistic for a majority of program participants to meet such a qualifying goal. However, such an argument would have no legal weight in the decision, rendering members of the adult education community potentially powerless. Their participation would be merely symbolic and may actually help to legitimize an illegitimate process.

Certainly, other researchers (Belzer, 2017; Jacobson, 2017) have provided a more pointed critique of the role that structural factors, such as economic inequality and anti-immigrant bias, play in creating the societal conditions that necessitate the existence of adult education programs, which were initially conceived of as social service programs. Belzer and Jacobson have critiqued economic ideology which has played a role in shifting educational policy over time and shaping the rhetoric welding together adult education and workforce development. Belzer (2017) problematizes the narrowed scope of adult basic education programs in the U.S. over the last twenty years, which has arisen from the intensifying focus on job training and skills development mandated by legislation such as WIA, passed in 1998, and WIOA, passed in 2014. She lays out how educational policy since 1998 has primarily

defined adult learners as employees or potential employees, and in so doing, has reduced access to literacy instruction which is not specifically work-focused and has further excluded undocumented learners.

She found that it has also centralized program oversight through the creation of the National Reporting System (NRS). This federal performance accountability system was designed to facilitate sharing of outcome data between local programs, state oversight agencies, and the federal government. Though initially conceived of as a way to stimulate ongoing program improvement, as well as managing data for funding purposes, Belzer found that the hopeful visions of the NRS spurring innovations in program design and implementation through rich data collection were largely unrealized. Rather, she found that the centralization of accountability data served to further regiment instruction by encouraging programs to concentrate on “measurable skill development” (p. 14) which could be measured by standardized assessments. Her analysis revealed that despite the shift toward increased accountability schemes and a stronger workforce focus in these programs, no research had been done to analyze how these practices may affect learners. In the wake of these developments in outcome documentation, research focused on their impact on program structure, policies, etc., rather than on learners.

WIOA and WIA: Policy and Implementation

Regarding the impact of WIOA in particular, there is scant information available in the realm of analysis or critique. One study (Shin & Ging, 2019) analyzed Title II of WIOA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) and a related federal memorandum, and found that the democratic language used to characterize program objectives served as a

cover for the further incursion of profit-oriented practices into the public sphere of adult education. This study also found that the language of the law is replete with neoliberal buzzwords, such as accountability and competition, whose presence in this context accelerates the naturalization of capitalist logic in the discourse about adult education.

Another area which has raised concerns is the outcome documentation mandated by the new law. Prior to WIOA, under WIA and even more so under its antecedent, the National Literacy Act of 1991, the range of student goals which could be counted as indicators of educational progress was much broader. These laws gave credit to learners (and the programs they attended) for a wide variety of language-learning goals related to family activities, social life, education, and community engagement. These laws also gave high priority to statistical information related to student participation in the education program, including learner gains on standardized assessments, attendance, student retention, documented hours spent working with a tutor outside of class, etc. Work-related outcomes were part of goal tracking but were not the priority. This is a stark contrast to WIOA which completely dismantled this more holistic evaluation structure and replaced it with six performance indicators: 1) participation in unsubsidized employment both two and 2) four quarters after program exit; 3) average earnings at said employment; 4) the percentage of learners earning a post/secondary credential within one year of program exit; 5) “effectiveness of serving employers;” and 6) the percentage of learners who have achieved a “measurable skills gain” (Wu, 2016, p. 3) in a program which prepares them for postsecondary education or training.

Pickard (2016) has presented some of the potential dangers of WIOA implementation, particularly regarding these mandated outcomes, specifically that they may prevent programs

from continuing to serve low-scoring readers and that they will prioritize workforce development activities to the detriment of other educational activities like literacy and basic numeracy instruction. While “measurable skills gains” are included towards program effectiveness, there is a great deal of uncertainty in the community about what exactly will constitute a “measurable skills gain” and who will get the final say in this decision. A response to Pickard (Bragg, 2016) published in the same journal made short shrift of these concerns, claiming that literacy instruction and workforce preparation need not be mutually exclusive, and that if such conflicts arise, then educators need to be flexible, and will need to “fight” to keep the doors of adult education programs open, despite the fact that due to new funding and assessment procedures under WIOA, they will have no actual way to accomplish this.

Looking at the legislation which preceded WIOA, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, researchers have explored the implications of how this policy impacted marginalized groups in society. For instance, focusing on one of the WIA objectives (i.e., “becom[ing] full partners in the educational development of [one’s] children”), Sparks (2001) examined how this objective, ostensibly aimed at helping parents become more involved in their child/ren’s education, is used to bring outside intervention into the home literacy practices of the family, such as delegating roles to support the education of children. When taking into account the statistics of family literacy program participants, which included largely female students of color in caretaking positions in the family, she found that the policy targeted women of color to police their parenting practices. This was done by using the family literacy program setting to cast these women as deficient parents in need of resocialization. Additionally, she found

that these programs reinforced traditional gender roles by instrumentalizing women's learning towards becoming teachers for their own children, regardless of whatever other personal goals they may have had.

Women were not the only population of learners whose roles in the adult education system were found to be formed by outside assumptions. In their study, Chen and Kim (2008) showed that older learners were seen as a homogenous group, more defined by their life stage than other aspects of their identity. They were also stereotyped positively, yet these generalizations gloss over some of the challenges older adults may face, which could impact their participation in adult education courses. Overall, these learners face assumptions about their identities and educational goals when participating in the adult education system, namely that their age is most predictive of their learning goals, over all other characteristics. This is problematic because these assumptions may not relate to learners' actual goals, while possibly serving the interests of other stakeholders in the system, as well as reinforcing stereotypes. Overall, Chen and Kim found that generalizations about learner identity rendered invisible differences in race, class, and able-bodiedness, among other characteristics, that impacted learners' experiences.

The implementation of federal adult education policy has affected students on both a micro level—for example the typecasting of learners (Sparks, 2010; Chen and Kim, 2008) under WIA—and a macro level—seen in funding procedures, which supersede all other aspects of program implementation, such as administration, instruction, and assessment. Taking up this issue of funding, in his exploration of recurrent issues in the adult education landscape, Jacobson (2017) pointed out that while enrollment in adult education programs is

forty-two times what it was in 1965, government expenditure per learner is ten percent what it was at that time. That is, need for and interest in adult education has grown, yet funding has steadily and dramatically decreased. He also discussed how this uptick in students and downturn in resources has been matched with an increased demand for compliance with more elaborate accountability schemes.

Teacher Response to Neoliberal Educational Policy

The impact of these ideological currents (such as WIOA) on teacher cognition and classroom practice has not been sufficiently explored. Merriam (2010), for example, speaking to the challenges faced globally by adult educators, suggests a fourfold response: holding space, critical thinking, developing awareness of policy, and collective action. These strategies make up a model of reflective practice for teachers both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, in the classroom, Merriam encourages educators to “hold space” for students, or create an environment open for thoughtful questioning and intellectual engagement, rather than holding rigidly to teacher-set lesson objectives; in this way, the classroom has the possibility of becoming a site of critical engagement with larger realities, rather than functioning solely as a site of social reproduction. Outside the classroom, Merriam suggests the importance of teachers becoming aware of and developing an informed opinion of the policies that affect their contexts, as well as finding ways to build solidarity with others in their community in order to work for change together. The intention of these practices is to counter the negative effects of neoliberal policies on adult education, such as narrowing of the curriculum and the repurposing of adult education programs as generators of labor power rather than sites of learning. While these are good suggestions, and have been

taken up by many educators, the question remains as to how effective these responses can really be because the impact of individual actions by lone teachers, while meaningful and personally significant in the classroom, are insufficient to change larger paradigms without more collective forms of action. Another unexplored question in this regard is how teachers themselves feel about practices such as those suggested by Merriam, or other tactics which would similarly address the problems presented by the coupling of adult education with workforce development.

Looking more specifically at the U.S. context, Abendroth (2014) explores the position of adult educators caught in a web of conflicting goals for the programs where they work. The threads of holistic education and workforce development tangle and contradict one another, forcing the hand of teachers into choosing which goals they will prioritize in their classes. Abendroth focused on attempts to prioritize holistic education in a marketized system by presenting a few examples of educator groups that have collectively worked to subvert narrowing of the curriculum to employability metrics. These groups formed collective reflective practice groups, joined together with K-12 teachers in their cities to pool resources, and worked collaboratively on problem-posing education models to use in their classrooms. Abendroth also suggested Gramsci's (1971) model of the organic intellectual, along with solidarity-building among those in the adult education community as promising ways forward.

However, despite these contributions, a gap in the literature exists relative to teachers' responses to the programmatic changes likely to be ushered in by WIOA, and their negotiation of its impact in the classroom. While studies abound documenting concerted

effort at nationwide levels (in the US and beyond, as detailed above) to repurpose adult education for economic ends, there is little time for teachers in the adult education community for deep discussion of these issues, as studied by Allen (n.d.) in her investigation of the working conditions of ESOL adult education teachers. In an underfunded, resource-poor environment where administrators and teachers are constantly diverted from these topics by resolution of short-term financial and logistical crises, she found that many have little time or energy for this discussion. Her study showed that teachers' ability to resist policies they disagree with or to participate in advocacy work was hampered by working conditions prevalent in the field, namely, a proliferation of part-time positions without benefits, low hourly pay, and scant paid time for preparation or meetings focused on teacher collaboration, let alone advocacy work.

Critique of federal education policy, in the adult education community, is often dismissed as either alarmist or defeatist. Those who problematize the way the structure of the US economy negatively informs education policy are characterized either as hopeless idealists or paranoid conspiracy theorists, both responses which limit discussion. A study done by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (Smith, Hofer, & Gillespie, 2001) found that 39% of surveyed adult education teachers felt that their programs had no mechanism to practically engage with teacher input on program policies.

Another common critique is that those who problematize mandated outcomes are said to have low expectations for students and do not believe they are capable of "succeeding" in the US economy. Discussion of the necessity of having "grit" and "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" are commonplace, directed explicitly at students and implicitly at teachers. This

diversionary tactic naturalizes capitalist ideology and shifts attention away from the nature of the policies themselves. In fact, Ris's 2015 study on the concept of "grit" in educational discourse examined the role this idea plays in discussions about education, finding that it served as an idealized solution to educational challenges, and is based on a false and fetishistic interpretation of the experiences of poor learners. In adult education programs, emphasis is heavily put on successfully handling urgent needs and challenges within programs, rather than taking a larger view. Criticism of larger systems such as the capitalist economy of the US, or the policies, like WIOA, which help sustain it are evaded.

In light of all these issues, particularly with the recent advent of WIOA policies, there is great need for an examination of the current day-to-day realities of adult education ESOL instructors, in their own words. Little research has been done on this current collision course between adult education and workforce development, with its potential to generate tensions and contradictions for educators, focusing on the perspective of the teachers themselves. It is this gap which this study proposed to address.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will include three sections, Project Design, Conceptual Framework, and Data Analysis, describing the way this project was organized and carried out. The Project Design section includes the three subsections of Methods and Measures Used, Research Site, Participants, and Ethical Concerns, to provide this important contextual information. The Conceptual Framework section introduces CHAT, its role in the conception of the project, and a literature review of relevant studies linking CHAT to the themes of the project. Finally, the Data Analysis section explains the ways which CHAT and thematic analysis were used together during this process.

Project Design

Methods and Measures Used

This project used a case study model, incorporating interviews of two selected ESOL instructors, and analysis of select artifacts pertinent to their class/program. Each teacher participated in three semi-structured interviews over a period of about two months. The first interview focused on the teacher's background, their motivation for working at their current school, their classroom goals and challenges, and their opinion (if any) about WIOA. The second interview drew on information from the first interview, and a classroom artifact of

their choosing, and expanded upon the teacher's classroom goals in relation to practice, institutional mandated outcomes (including those related to WIOA), and how they attempted to meet these outcomes and any conflicts that may have arisen. The final interview drew on themes identified in the first two interviews, focusing on the larger picture of the adult education landscape in the context of workforce development policy. All interviews were audio-recorded. Follow-up questions often focused on the contradictions that teachers encountered in the workplace, particularly those related to workforce development policy. For a list of sample interview questions, please see Appendix B.

Context

The research site was a large adult education program, in an urban metropolitan area, that offered a full spectrum of literacy, numeracy, high school credential preparation, and ESOL classes. In a typical year, the program averages about 400 students between their day and night programs, with the vast majority participating in lower level ESOL classes. The ESOL and basic literacy classes meet three days a week, for three hours each, and all other classes meet twice a week for three hours each. For some students, this means they are attending class four days a week, as many students preparing for their High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) are enrolled in both a numeracy and an English class at the same time. While ESOL was the program of focus for this study, there will be mention of other classes throughout, due to the enmeshed nature of ESOL, literacy, numeracy, and HiSET programs; the instructors who teach them; and the students who populate the classes.

The program office is housed in a local public school, where the night classes are held. The night classes also had the benefit of access to the computer lab in the public school,

until access was restricted by the school administration. Daytime classes are held primarily in a local community center, though recently due to a space shortage, at least one class has been moved out of the community center and into a space offered by a local business. There are additional students who participate in distance learning organized by the program, as well as individual and small group tutoring, mainly done by community volunteers. At the time of the data collection, the program was without a volunteer coordinator, so the organization of volunteers was being handled ad hoc by teachers. The program also lacked a student advisor, as the position had been unfilled since the previous advisor's resignation. This limits students' access to certain support services which the advisor typically organized, such as referrals to other programs, requests for help accessing social services, and support for learners with disabilities.

At the research site, the predominant populations of learners are from the Dominican Republic and Haiti, along with smaller contingents of students from El Salvador, Colombia, Somalia, Cape Verde, and various other countries. The most common native languages of learners were Spanish and Haitian Creole. These demographics mirror the surrounding area. Additionally, the program's HiSET and basic literacy programs do serve some students who are native English speakers.

The teaching and administrative staff at the program includes individuals with a variety of different professional backgrounds. The range of time working in adult education varies drastically, with several staff members, mainly administrators, having worked upwards of twenty years in the field, and a much larger, rotating array of newer teachers, who often had less than five years of teaching experience. The ESOL teachers include individuals who

are career language teachers, retired elementary or secondary school teachers, and other individuals who became involved in ESOL teaching because of an interest in immigration advocacy or social work.

The program's largest funder is DESE, though they do receive various smaller grants, which help bolster their budget from year to year. The basic literacy class in particular has long been supported by a grant from a local activist grantmaking organization. Recently, the lower level ESOL classes had also been shifted to an independent grant funding stream, rather than the WIOA-linked five-year grants which support the rest of the program. While the grants span a five-year period, programs are re-evaluated annually for effectiveness, making the funding situation somewhat precarious.

In terms of the requirements for participants in the program at this site, these generally fit into two categories: attendance and testing. The attendance rules were in flux over the various years that the two research participants worked at the program; however, the longest standing policy is that students are allowed a maximum of three absences a month. If they exceed three absences, they are required to meet with the program's advisor (if indeed there is an advisor employed by the program at that time). If this pattern continues, the student risks losing their seat in the program. However, as will be later described more fully, this policy is only sporadically enforced.

The other requirement for students is that they had to complete pre-testing and periodic standardized testing while they are in the program. The tests used are the Basic English Skills Test Plus (BEST Plus), the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), and the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test (MAPT). The BEST Plus was used with basic literacy

and lower levels of ESOL. The TABE was used with higher levels of ESOL. Finally, the MAPT was used with students preparing to attain a high school credential. These tests are used to document Measurable Skills Gains (MSG), when students move up an Educational Functional Level (EFL). Documentation of these gains, through entering them into the National Reporting System (NRS) databases is a required part of WIOA compliance.

Testing must take place at least twice and no more than three times per period of participation, roughly an academic year. In practice this means students are typically assessed at the start of the school year in August or September, in December before the academic break, and then, possibly, once more before the end of the year, in April or May. For students who enter classes at other times of the year, a more complicated process is used to determine when they can be tested. Often if a student has made an MSG in December, they will not be tested again later in the year. Additionally, if a student is tested three times and gets a higher result on their second test than on their third, that higher result can be retained for outcome reporting.

While some programs have separate procedures in place for placing students in an appropriate level class, this particular research site is in the practice of using pre-testing, completed before the student had attended 18 hours of class, for the dual purpose of fulfilling state reporting requirements and determining an appropriate level for new students. The tests are sometimes administered by teachers, but just as often are given by other program staff who are not accustomed to communicating with non-native English speakers.

Post-testing, used in relation to the previously described pre-testing to document learners' progress after at least 65 hours of instruction, is also part of the WIOA reporting

requirements, in that it is used to document MSGs. Exceptions can be made to the 65-hour rule in special situations, for example when a student is leaving a class for personal reasons or when they began studying later in the academic year. All programs are required to pre- and post-test a minimum of 80% of their students, with a goal of getting to a 100% testing rate. All testing must be conducted by certified scorers. The process of becoming certified to be a scorer is rather complex. The training sequence begins with an online pre-requisite training module introducing the process of administering the test, which must be completed a specified amount of time before the next phase, a full-day in-person training that is rarely offered in the local area. Finally, a lengthy follow-up project to prove that one's scoring decisions are within an acceptable range must be completed within a pre-determined time frame, often by participants who lack the necessary materials, for example, a computer capable of playing CD-ROMs. Consequently, the program often has difficulty having enough staff available who are certified scorers at any given time and often have to bring on staff from other programs for short-term contracts to pre- and post-test students. This means that not only are the testers sometimes unfamiliar with communicating with non-native English speakers, as mentioned above, but they are sometimes also complete strangers who learners have never met before.

Participants

The selected teachers are ESOL instructors at an adult education program in Massachusetts that receives the bulk of its funding from DESE and is thus regulated by the federal mandates of WIOA.

At the time of our interviews, Kate, the first participant, was in her third year working in adult education. Having previously worked in the publishing field for several years, she decided to make a career change after volunteering with English language learners at the very program where she later got her first teaching position. She facilitated the change with her year of volunteer work, mentorship from several teachers in the program, and a language teaching methods course which is part of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification. Three years later, (four, counting her year as a volunteer), she had a wealth of experiences to share from her intense introduction to the world of adult education. Though she had cycled through a few different roles and responsibilities in her time at this job, at the time of the interview she was teaching an adult literacy class and a HiSET English class. She also held a program administration role, an aspect of the job that was newer for her.

Nicole, the second participant, was quite experienced as a language instructor and had a variety of teaching experiences, both within the field of adult education, and recently, in K-12 education. While she was working in adult education, she had worked primarily as an ESOL teacher, as well as an adult literacy teacher. She had also worked in a variety of program administration roles, including being morning coordinator and assistant director in one organization, in fact the same organization where Kate worked. She also had experience working in the very different context of language school intensive English programs and had taught English outside the US as well. She had a bachelor's degree in Political Science, a master's degree in Applied Linguistics, and was an L2 Spanish speaker. After completing her master's degree, she had begun a new phase of her work as a teacher and switched from adult education to working with middle school students. At the time of our interviews, she had

been working in the field of language education for about ten years. Due to Nicole's more extensive experience and institutional knowledge of the adult education landscape, as well as her more sustained engagement with the administrative realm of these programs, her interviews generated more multi-layered data, which will be presented in Chapter 5.

The two teachers were selected because it was hoped that, due to their different roles in the organization and different professional backgrounds, they would provide different perspectives on the topics of the study. By focusing on only one program, it was also possible to give a more cohesive picture of program operations and the interplay between different people and processes within the program. Additionally, as the program where the participants worked is very dependent on government funding and thus more beholden to government policy mandates than programs with more diverse funding sources, the influence of government policies on program operations is more overt.

Ethical Concerns

Both of the participants in the study were known to me from professional contacts in the local adult education community. They were invited to participate in the project due to their known commitment to the local ESOL community (teachers and learners), their interest in meaningful professional development, and their deep engagement with the labor of teaching. It was made clear to the participants that their involvement in this study was completely voluntary and that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time with no penalty. As the study pertains to a community that I have had experience with and continue to work in at the present time, I was keenly aware of potential insider bias. This insider status presented both challenges, in terms of bias, and advantages, in terms of access

and prior knowledge of the context. Everything possible was done during data collection to minimize the influence, positive and negative, on my interactions with the participants. Interview questions were phrased neutrally, to avoid leading questions, and the interviews were held in neutral, public locations, for example, at a local public library meeting space.

A variety of strategies were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants in the study, particularly due to the somewhat sensitive nature of the topic of focus. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms of their choice, throughout all documents related to the project. Any identifying information, regarding either participants or sites, was redacted, while essential information was retained. Additionally, all individuals referenced in excerpts from interviews were referred to by pseudonyms as well. The research site is also anonymized, aside from the fact that it was in the state of Massachusetts, which was necessary to reveal for the purpose of explaining some state-specific policies which impacted the participants.

Conceptual Framework

This section will present CHAT as an analytic lens. Explanation will be provided regarding its use in the preliminary stages of this project, as well as some literature to contextualize CHAT's prior use in the study of contradictions in multi-layered educational settings, English language-learning environments, and teacher perspectives.

CHAT in its second-generation form was initially conceived of by Leontiev (1978) and interpreted by Engeström (1987) as an analytic lens to explore and examine complex systems of human activity in a holistic way. Analysis focuses on the relationship between the different elements of the system under study. The relationships between subjects, tools, rules,

community, division of labor, objects, and outcomes are analyzed in terms of identifying potential contradictions within the system (see Figure 1 below). Subjects are the individuals whose actions/goals are being focused on in the study. Tools can be either material or conceptual, including for example, languages, methods, shared approaches, etc. The rules can be either formal or informal and are intended to regulate the behavior of those within the system. The community includes other individuals who are involved in the activity system, by virtue of shared objects (goals) with the subjects. Division of labor refers to the way in which action taken towards the object (goal) is divided among individuals participating in the system, whether power is shared horizontally or divided up vertically. Finally, objects are the envisioned goals of the subjects, and outcomes are the final, realized results, which may or may not match up with the intended object.

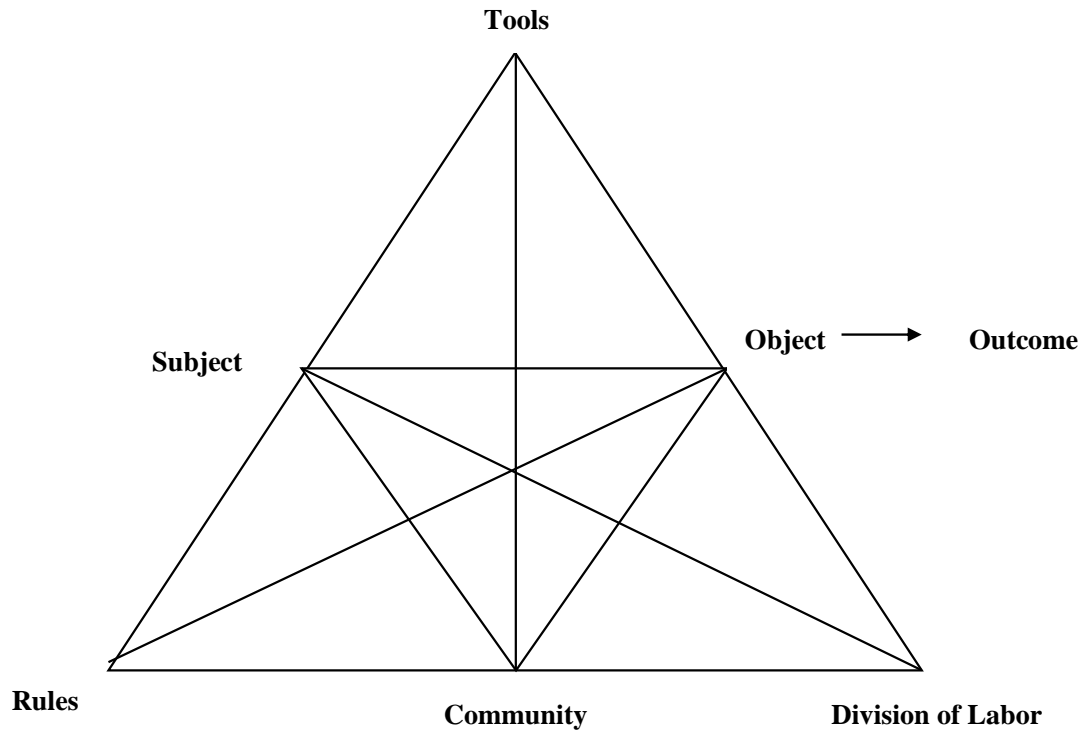


Figure 1, Second-generation CHAT Activity triangle (Engeström, 1987)

The CHAT framework informed the creation of interview tools and the review of interview data during the data collection and analysis processes. For example, interview questions focused on the material conditions of the workplace (tools), multiple levels of policy (rules), social and professional interaction (community), roles within the system (division of labor), and objects (objectives of teachers, students, and programs). This framework was very helpful in organizing a large amount of information about a holistic yet often incoherent system, in terms of how systemic contradictions were shaping action.

CHAT's focus on how contradictions between different elements of the activity system shape the actions of subjects, which in turn transforms objects (initial conceptualized goals) into outcomes guided the identification of themes in the data. In particular, attention

was paid to themes related to contradictions created by the effect of the workforce development policy on adult education teachers and their work. The fact that in CHAT, the primary source of contradictions is conceptualized as the use value/exchange value dichotomy which shapes social relations in capitalist societies, made it particularly suited to the focus on how workforce development policy was impacting the context.

This analytic lens has been used in a variety of studies to analyze contradictions in complex systems, for example in the provision of technology-related professional development activities to teachers (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003) and the creation of partnerships between universities and K-12 schools (Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldino, 2007). The use of this framework for analyzing such large, multi-layer systems in a holistic way made it conducive to this project, with its overlapping layers of federal, state, and local policies; differing amounts of access to resources; and constantly shifting roles for the participants. Additionally, this approach of case studies explored using CHAT-informed thematic analysis has not yet been used to study the perspective of teachers within the adult education system.

CHAT has also been used to investigate topics closely related to two threads of this project: English language learning settings and teacher perspectives. It has been used to study the English language learning classroom in multiple ways, including studies focusing on instructional practices, such as computer-mediated peer response (CMPR), and also institutional practices, such as remedial course trajectories in community college settings. When Jin (2007) studied the use of CMPR with intermediate level English students, she found that the use of technology tools like instant messaging to mediate peer interactions contributed significantly to many students' learning. By analyzing students' use of tools and

the division of labor, she found that the students who recognized and resolved conflicts via the use of CMPR made more progress in their language learning than those who did not. This study highlights how a CHAT focus on tools and division of labor can shed light on the strategies individuals use to negotiate the challenges in a language-learning environment.

From an institutional perspective, Salas, Portes, and D'Amico (2007) analyzed community college remediation policies' effect on Generation 1.5 Latino learners. They found that many ongoing practices placing these learners into developmental coursework served to further marginalize them. They came to this conclusion through an analysis in particular of the informal and formal rules of the activity system, which they found be driving this phenomenon. To rectify these trends, they suggested several steps for community colleges to take to mitigate this phenomenon, including more transparent provision of information about progression into and through the higher education system, as well as increased support for students transferring into four-year institutions. This study's use of CHAT to highlight the ways rules structure activity and may serve to reinforce program participants' already-marginalized position in the activity system suggested the relevance of CHAT for this project. This was largely due to this project's focus on WIOA's role within the activity system of the adult education program.

Focusing on educator perspectives, several researchers have focused on this topic in the area of English language learning. These studies focused on a variety of settings, including hybrid English-science learning, and teacher training settings, but most involved teachers working (or planning to work) at the secondary-level. Walstein (2010), using self-reflective action research, studied her own classroom practice of implementing a sheltered

instruction science content course with English learners, including native language support. Among other findings, her study showed which particular tools (ex. bilingual dictionaries) and division of labor strategies (ex. collaborative translation) using native language support were most helpful to her learners. She also concluded that teacher-created materials were often on par with or superior to available commercial pedagogical tools, and that first language (L1) literacy support could considerably catalyze students' progress with English.

Barrett-Tatum's (2015) study investigated the implementation of English Language Arts Common Core Standards in the classrooms of two different teachers. One of her major findings was how the way different teachers navigated "roles" and "division of labor" created very different classroom dynamics. In particular, she found that the classroom with a more collaborative, student-centered approach resulted in much more active learning experience for the students. These studies focused on educator perspectives illustrated the way in which the elements of the activity system come together to create conditions of greater or lesser agency for the teachers in their work, a topic which was central to this project.

Considering the use of CHAT to study teacher learning, one study took up this topic, focusing on the integration of Linguistically Responsive Teaching (LRT) with pre-service teachers (Solano-Campos, Hopkins, and Quaynor, 2018). In their literature review, Solano-Campos et al. found that the coherence of content program-wide was of great importance for pre-service teachers. Their identification of three activity systems within the teacher education programs and analysis of how different aspects of LRT were taken up in each one highlighted the importance of coherence in teacher education curriculum. They also suggested studies be done of teacher education programs, with respect to the policy context

in which these future teachers will be working, due to their finding about the importance of the rules of the activity system driving behavior, a topic which is the focus of this project's second research question.

However, despite this variety of studies utilizing CHAT as a theoretical framework for studying English language learning contexts and teacher perspectives, no studies could be found taking up this approach to study teacher perspectives in the adult education setting. CHAT was chosen as a potentially fruitful way of studying one slice (ESOL) of the holistic nature of the adult education activity system under WIOA, due to its recognition of the way rules regulate activity within a system. CHAT was also utilized due to the project's focus on workforce development policy and CHAT's identification of the contradictions of capitalism as the cause of contradictions within human activity systems (Engeström, 1987, p. 102). In fact, a 2009 literature review by Niewolny and Wilson directly pointed to the appropriacy of CHAT as a theoretical framework for analyzing adult education settings. In particular, they suggested that CHAT was particularly suited to analyze this field as it would help construct a political analysis of the way education serves as a form of social reproduction. They problematized the apolitical nature of many analyses of adult education contexts and called for more research taking up this theoretical framework to be done.

Data Analysis

CHAT informed the creation of the interview tools, guided the interview process, and was used to guide the thematic analysis. A thematic analysis was additionally used in order to let the teachers' voices highlight the contradictions they described in their workplace in their own words.

The thematic analysis for this study entailed the identification, exploration, and organization of patterns in the data set (Clarke and Braun, 2006). The selected patterns spoke most saliently to the research questions, about the nature of ESOL instruction under WIOA and the effect of workforce development policy on it. Themes were also selected which commented most powerfully on the area of systemic contradictions, how those contradictions pushed the participants into use of more creative strategies inside and outside the classroom, and also the workforce development policy's accelerating mediating influence on the adult education system. Just as subjects interact with the system, attention was additionally paid to how, the elements of the system also act upon the subjects, shaping their personal and professional responses to the challenges of their working conditions. The way in which the teachers' adaptive strategies were informed by the multilayered context of their workplaces and how "the conflictual questioning of the existing standard practice" (Engeström 2001) may have expanded their agency in these situations was also considered. The identification of themes throughout the data analysis was thus underlaid by the CHAT framework.

In the final phases of data analysis, CHAT was utilized again, in its third-generation form (Engeström, 1987), which brings in the interaction of multiple activity systems with "potentially shared objects." (See Figure 2.)

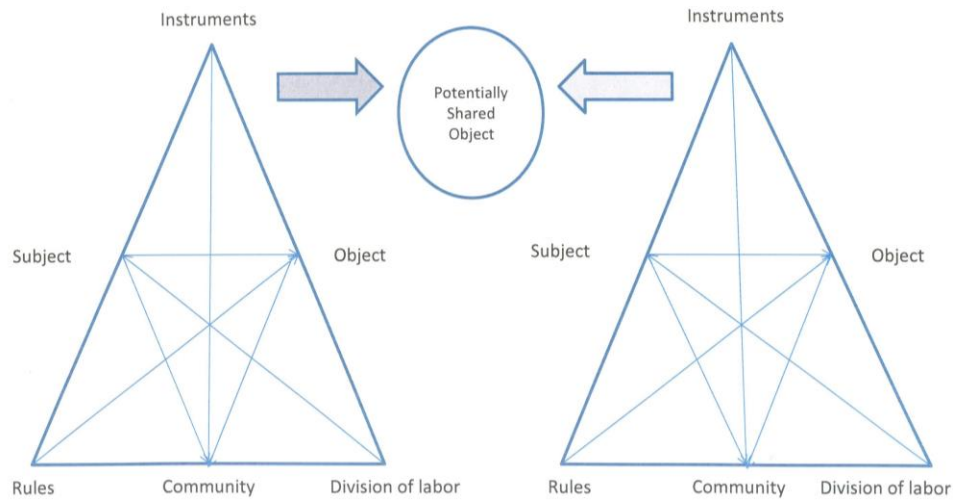


Figure 2, Third-generation CHAT activity systems (Engeström, 1987)

This phase of the data analysis brought in the interaction of the local adult education program activity system with the federal adult education policymaking activity system. This form of CHAT has a particular emphasis on power relations, which is a critical point in understanding the way in which shared outcomes between two activity systems are strongly affected by their respective levels of resources and rule-making power each possesses.

CHAPTER 4

KATE: COLLEGE AND CAREER READY ADULTS, NOT JUST marginally MORE LITERATE POOR PEOPLE

“Well, they told us that ‘our goal is to produce college-and-career-ready students on a path towards earning a family-sustaining wage, rather than merely a bunch of marginally-more-literate poor people.’” This is how Kate opened her description of a recent professional development workshop she had attended, as part of her job as an adult literacy teacher in a local adult education program. This description of the workshop’s goal was not an off-the-cuff remark passed during a coffee break but was actually the text on the second slide that opened the presentation. Kate was attending this workshop about WIOA implementation as part of the paid professional development time she received from the adult education program where she worked.

Kate’s interviews featured detailed descriptions of the context in which the transformation, of the prospective learners into “college-and-career-ready” individuals, was supposed to take place. Her narrative about her workplace was pervaded by stories about how the available tools (classroom space, teaching materials), division of labor (in terms of available classes and staffing), and rules (standardized testing procedures) served to create major contradictions in her work as an adult education teacher. All these factors influenced

how she was, or sometimes was not, able to reach her classroom goals, and perhaps in turn, the goals of learners. Her descriptions of the nature of her work and influence of WIOA upon it illustrated how workforce development policy was reshaping the adult education system from within, and restricting what outcomes were being cultivated by the prevailing conditions.

The Complexity of Simple Things

One of the themes that emerged from interviews with Kate about her work was how a scarcity of material resources was shaping conditions in the workplace and how it affected class availability, materials, classroom space, and staffing.

Chasing the Dragon

The availability, or lack thereof, of appropriate and in-demand classes was a recurring theme. Kate described how her program offered one adult literacy class, which was an anomaly along with the morning Level 1 ESOL class, in that neither of them were funded by DESE as the rest of the program was. Rather, they were both funded through grants from a local non-profit organization. The shifting of lower level classes from DESE funding to independent grants was not completely new, as it had been going on under WIA as well, but seemed to be an ongoing part of workforce development policy's steady march into adult education, bringing with it more challenging mandated outcomes, which in turn pressured programs to move lower level classes off of that funding stream, to not jeopardize their refunding. With WIOA's prioritization of more specific, harder to attain goals, acceleration of this process seemed likely. This shift was further complicated by the fact that even classes that ran on grant funding were still affected by program-wide policies and service shortages shaped by government funding processes.

The literacy class included both native speakers of English as well as students learning English as an additional language. This meant that the class included a whole spectrum of oral proficiencies in English, from beginner students who had recently moved to the US through proficient native speakers, as well as differing levels of literacy skills. Kate described the situation. (Please see Appendix C for the transcription code for interview data.)

There's only one literacy class, so you advance [from one year to the next], but you stay in the same class... That's another frustration of mine. It means I have lots of different stuff, and I have lots of different people working on different things at the same time, which is why I don't have, I mean, I will write lesson plans, but nothing goes like, I explain everything to the whole class, because not everybody's in the same place, so that doesn't make any sense for me to do.

The multi-level nature of the class, due to both literacy skill level and English proficiency, created a very complex classroom environment for Kate, with a lot of conflicting demands on her on a daily basis. She explained how she felt that it would be beneficial for the students to have more than one level of adult literacy, but that it probably wouldn't happen because there were too few students to justify funding separate classes, despite the one large group creating a very demanding classroom environment for her. "Right now, I have fourteen, possibly fifteen students, and I'm going to say that's the max. If we get any more, that's great that more people are coming, but because of all the things I've talked about, I need to cap it. Otherwise, it's just insane."

Limited class availability was not an issue which only affected adult literacy. Kate also described similar issues with lower level ESOL classes. She described the situation,

“The bread and butter, what keeps the program afloat, is the classes that have hundreds of students on the waitlist, the evening ESOL classes...particularly the 1, 2, and 3 classes. And then, as you go up, there are more sparsely...there are less students in the classes.” She went on to describe the situation in more detail, “We have a Level 4, 5, and 6 class, with vacant seats...a very, very full Level 1 class, Level 2 class, and a waitlist of people...So that tells you what the demand is, and what the need is. So why aren’t we meeting that need?”

In fact, when imagining how she might organize an adult education program of her own design, the first change she indicated she would make to programming would be to offer more than one Level 1 ESOL class. At another point in the conversation, she explained some of her feelings about the available programming.

I start to think, sorry, but why don’t we have three Level 1 classes?...Level 1 is always so big, and it’s always a big frustration for the teacher...because it’s such a big class, and the need is so great, and the pressure to get outcomes is so huge, and the students can have so many issues...Why don’t we actually, instead of chasing the dragon of the low-income, highly-educated ELL, why don’t we serve the mass of poor people who haven’t been to school that much, who have just come here and need to learn English? Why aren’t we structured to meet the students’ needs?

A final concern about class availability that Kate raised was about the appropriacy of the instructional approaches being used, in that often classes being offered to a particular student population did not match the learning needs of those students. The previously explained issue of the literacy class with a combination of native and non-native English speakers was one example of this. While these two groups of learners may have benefitted

from different approaches to English literacy instruction, the grouping of them into one class by Kate's program, and the limited resources provided to her made that very challenging. Consequently, she coped with this situation with the help of volunteer teaching assistants, creative differentiation strategies, and planning different lessons for the different contingents within the one class. However, despite these efforts, she was often left with the feeling that she wasn't able to provide the kind of educational experience she wanted for all the students in her class.

Another example of this was created by the artificial divide between Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes, like HiSET, and ESOL. Kate explained how a teaching method named after the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) is used for HiSET English classes. The STAR method, which was endorsed by the program for HiSET English, was originally designed to be used only with learners working in their first language. However, despite this, due to the fact that the program only supported one sequence of HiSET classes, with a mix of native and non-native English speakers, the method used was not appropriate for the student population. Kate described, "Absolutely, we're told not to use it with ESOL students, and there's this weird idea of a big dichotomy between ABE and ESOL...It's for their original native language." She described how as students advance through ESOL levels.

English for Advancement (EFA) [an alternate name for Level 6 ESOL] is almost sort of like a Business English class, it requires a certain level of sophistication in reading and writing, that a lot of students we get don't have. And it's like, they might benefit more from moving into the lower level ABE class...I'm told, 'Do not teach

grammar,’ and then, I end up teaching grammar, because it’s necessary and it’s what the students are interested in...Because the situation is supposed to be that ESOL students stay in the ESOL program. The system I feel is not set up to acknowledge the fact that there’s a large group of students who are both learning English as a second language and also who could benefit from [basic literacy or numeracy classes].

This situation creates challenging classroom conditions for both ESOL and ABE teachers. ESOL teachers work with groups of students of similar oral English proficiency, yet with wildly varying educational backgrounds, while ABE teachers work with groups of learners with similar levels of prior schooling, yet huge disparities in their English proficiency. The issue is compounded, as Kate described, by the use of different pedagogical approaches designed for more homogenous groups of learners being applied to much more diverse groups. ESOL classes generally presuppose basic literacy in the L1, while ABE classes presuppose proficiency in English. In reality, as Kate describes, there is a great deal of crossover between these student populations, creating a very complex learning environment. Additionally, this situation sets up classes wherein the attempts of the teacher to satisfy multiple learning goals at once can create an incoherent sense of progress for students throughout the academic year. For teachers, it seems to create not only task overload, but also a sense of uncertainty and second-guessing of one’s actions in the classroom. Additionally, due to the new more rigorous outcome requirements of WIOA, this already challenging classroom environment becomes more problematic, as a lack of WIOA-specified successful outcomes can lead to program censure or loss of funding.

A Pretty Dire Situation

Another area where this environment of scarcity was apparent was in the over-tasking of employees created by unfilled essential positions filled by other employees and a precarious dependence on volunteers to keep basic programming functioning. The intensifying underfunding and overtasking of adult education programs, over time through both WIA and WIOA, seemed to incentivize these decisions, in that use of free labor over paid workers stretched organizational budgets further than they would otherwise go.

One situation which illustrates the over-tasking employees was the program's long-term lack of a student advisor, a volunteer coordinator, or an evening ESOL coordinator, and the taking of some of these functions by teachers. These positions, which Kate made clear were essential for the program to run smoothly, had been vacant for quite some time, years in some cases, and administration had not prioritized the task of filling these important roles. Returning to the topic of the student advisor, Kate described the importance of the position.

Historically, and hopefully in the future, we have an academic advisor. So for all kinds of students who are having trouble with any kind of social issues, things that are beyond the teacher...The advisor can make referrals, for example, if you think that a student might have a learning disability or some other issue, or we think they might be a better fit for a different program, or if they just need someone to talk to, in confidence, they're there for that.

In the absence of someone whose job description is dedicated to this task, Kate described how she had taken up this role within her own classes, giving the following example.

I had to take up class time, I shouldn't say I had to, because I chose to...I talked to this one student...there isn't an advisor, and she had to leave at the end of class to get home before the last bus left...So anyway, I was talking to this person about how to apply for Section 8 housing...that was the only time when she could talk about it, and it sounded pretty, like it was a pretty dire situation.

She also focused on the importance of having not just one, but many available student advisors, when imagining what the ideal adult education program would look like to her. She explained how wide the range of needs is that the advisor deals with, from housing and legal issues to food insecurity and learning disabilities, and thus how important it is to have knowledgeable individuals in these positions, who can focus on connecting students with the resources that they might be looking for, as their primary job function. Having more than one advisor would allow each person to work with a smaller group of students, or, alternatively, to focus on a specific advising area, for example college/career counseling or social service referrals. This is in contrast to the current situation, in which these tasks had been essentially farmed out to teachers, who had been given no additional time, training, or resources to address these needs, nor any additional compensation for the added workload. The lack of an advisor, who can assist learners with job searches, vocational training, and educational barriers, is especially noteworthy and problematic when WIOA-mandated outcomes so heavily favor workforce participation. The lack of someone to assist learners with this process makes it that much more difficult for students to attain these goals.

A similar situation manifested in the lack of a volunteer coordinator, especially as the program depended so heavily on the free labor of volunteers, the majority of whom were

students, local community members, and retired teachers. Kate, who had originally begun working at the program as a volunteer herself, described the central role of the volunteers.

Lots of volunteers, I wouldn't be able to teach my literacy class without volunteers, I have many different levels in the class and I'm really lucky to have some really wonderful, dedicated people who come in for free every morning that I teach and help out with the class.

However, despite the importance of the volunteers in the eyes of the teaching staff, the program had not had a volunteer coordinator for some time, and the role of organizing volunteers had been taken up by some of the teachers, including Kate. While the administration was clearly aware of the issue, no action had yet been taken to resolve the situation, and no justification given for the lack of action. Kate had taken on the job of organizing volunteers both due to the benefit she saw her students receive from tutoring, and, presumably because, as a former program volunteer herself, she understood the value of the experience for them as well. There was also the ever-present specter of program effectiveness data collection looming over the proceedings.

She described how she had been trying to organize the volunteer tutoring program, a job which had previously been the responsibility of the volunteer coordinator and had become very disorganized in the interim. Additionally, she described a need not only to keep the program running, but also to document the statistics about volunteer participation, as they were factored into annual program effectiveness assessments.

I've been making phone calls. I've been gathering [information]...I'm going to try and figure out if we can set it up for HiSET. I don't know what ESOL is

doing...Right now, there's really no one in charge...I'm having a little bit of anxiety because I'm like, oh yeah, I should be documenting this, I need to be documenting this.

Her recognition of the vital role volunteers play in the organization seemed informed by her own experience as a volunteer herself as well as her experiences working with volunteers with her literacy class in particular, with its multiple literacy and English proficiency levels.

You can't be everywhere at once, and students get annoyed if they're kind of left to their own devices for a while...I have all these different levels and I feel like, it's obviously stressful sometimes, 'How do I manage this?' And I've had [fellow] teachers say, 'Well, the more independent students don't need as much help, so you can spend less time with them,' and I'm like, that's not going to work, you know, they're getting less of an education...yes, they need less help with a particular activity, but wouldn't it be better for them to be able to go on to something more challenging?

While the volunteers provide desirable and appreciated assistance, their presence alone cannot create a learning environment where all the students feel satisfied with the progression of the class, since one class alone with one teacher is being allotted to the needs of what could, or ought to be, several different, very distinct classes.

The overtasking of staff, who often held multiple positions at once, or had taken on the workload of chronically unfilled positions was a recurrent theme in our conversations. Kate herself held three different positions at the time of our interviews, two teaching roles

(adult literacy and HiSET English) and one administrative position, in addition to having taken on the additional duties described above. She described similar situations for other staff, particularly the teachers of the lower level ESOL classes, but also including other staff members like the program's office manager. The office manager, who was a long-term employee with considerable experience and institutional knowledge, was also filling the role of intake coordinator and was the primary person staffing the front desk, responding to the day-to-day inquiries and issues of students and employees alike. Her attempt to fulfill all these different roles was due to a lack of sufficient funding for additional office staff for the front desk or for coordinating student intake. The overload created by this dynamic was intensified by the next issue, a lack of materials and space.

Uninvited Guests vs. Strollers

In this environment where so many things were in short supply in one way or another, teaching materials and classroom space were also at a premium. Kate described the situation being particularly challenging in relation to her literacy class. Regarding space, she had this to say,

Being an employee at this particular organization, and the position it puts me in, and both of the spaces we use, we do not pay rent in any way...I feel like the teachers and students are not treated with respect, and we are seen as kind of uninvited guests, or guests overstaying their welcome in a way, in the spaces that we use, even though one of those spaces is a community center and one is a public school, which are taxpayer-funded institutions, so actually we have a frickin' right to be there.

She also described how she perceived the public school as a hostile environment, where the adult education teachers were viewed with suspicion by employees of the host site whose response to them she described like this, “Who are these interlopers coming into my classroom late at night?”(Kate 35).

Regarding the other community space, she explained how an ESOL class meeting there had been displaced from their classroom and was now meeting in a function room in the storefront of a local private business, on view to the people passing by on the street. She described both how the students seemed confused about why they were going to class in a very commercial, non-academic environment. She also explained the situation which had led to the move, in which a community group from the rapidly gentrifying area around the school got permission to use the classroom for storing their personal items during meetings (which took place in another space), thereby sending the English class elsewhere.

We’re members of the public. We’re members of the community. There was an issue...where the space that was supposed to be used for a class, you know, a class of low-income immigrants to learn English is now utilized for primarily, well...a [community group], where it’s used for their strollers, It’s for their stuff.

The resulting situation is even more striking when taking into account the fact that the English class was moved back to their classroom in the community center for one day when a program evaluation was being conducted by a supervisory organization, and then shipped back to the other space once the evaluation was over.

The Rigamarole

Access to and availability of teaching materials was also a concern. This situation was compounded again in relation to the literacy class, due to the varied nature of the class and the learning needs of the students, many of whom were at a more basic literacy skill level than other comparable classes in the area. Due to this situation, Kate described the dearth of level-appropriate materials.

A typical ESOL worksheet, and I'm talking basic, like the lowest level, even books that are aimed at people that say ESOL Literacy on them, are too confusing...so I find myself having to make worksheets, like the worksheets I showed you [about money]... We did a lot with actual coins and money...Physical stuff is really important.

The creation of most of her own teaching materials, as well as sourcing, maintaining, and planning lessons around different sets of realia, was time and energy intensive for her, consuming far beyond her paid preparation time.

So my frustration is, all ESOL teachers are paid, or are given the same amount of [preparation] hours, and I feel like, oh, I'm terrible for complaining about this, because a lot of programs don't even pay planning hours, but I have to do a *lot* of prep...More [than other classes].

It was also financially costly at times, partly due to push-back from administration about providing materials for the literacy class.

And I always kind of, I feel like I end up doing what a lot of teachers end up doing, which is myself pay for materials because I don't want to go through the rigamarole

of having to justify something and then deal with the attitude, which is like, this is the least wanted class in the program, because it produces the least outcomes. Kind of like, make it so we don't notice this class as much as possible, don't notice how much money is being put into it...I end up buying it myself.

This situation is even more remarkable in light of the fact that this class does not even draw from the main funding source for the program, but from a grant from a non-profit organization specifically for this class. This fact brings into question whether the funds allocated for the literacy class by the grant are even sufficient to cover its costs, or alternatively, whether the grant funds designated for adult literacy are being applied elsewhere in the organization.

Throughout Kate's description of how material scarcity shaped the conditions of her workplace, she gave ample examples of the ways in which the available tools and the division of labor within the program further constrained her options for dealing with the situation. In terms of tools, her description of how her class was not even able to retain their classroom space, as the use of the space for an adult literacy class had been given even lower priority than a social group that needed a coatroom shows how little respect the class was shown by other staff. The availability of and access to teaching materials was also a concern in this area. Kate's description of the lack of appropriate materials for adult literacy more broadly speaks to a larger question of why these materials are either not being produced or not accessible by teachers who might want to use them. It also points out how the lack of access to these materials placed extra stress on Kate, both mentally and financially, as she used her own resources to buy or create her own materials.

The additional fact that the administration of her program was reticent to provide money for these materials, points to a contradiction between the subject, the tools, the division of labor, and the intended object. It was the official responsibility of program administration to properly budget for class materials and provide them to the teachers. However, Kate's description of administrative discourse about her students and their goals, which seemed to assign less priority to these classes, was symptomatic of the way these classes were deprioritized. As certain actors in the activity system fail to carry out the responsibilities that others are depending on them to fulfill, others who are more invested in the process temporarily take on the additional burden of these extra tasks, for as long as they have the material resources to do so. While the program assented to enrolling these learners, ultimately, they are not providing the material support the classes would need to function coherently and sustainably.

In the context of WIOA, it seems that workforce participation-focused goals are driving a deprioritization of literacy and beginner ESOL learners and their teachers. This creates a challenging working atmosphere for these teachers, who feel and experience the tangible effects of their program administration's neglect. Students are also affected, as they are forced to pedagogically subsist on inadequate resources.

These issues are also apparent in the staffing and class availability issues that plagued the program. These ongoing challenges were evidence of contradictions between the subject (Kate) and the object (assisting her students with literacy development). This situation was caused by problems with the division of labor within the program. In this case, the staffing problem compounded Kate's difficulties in two different ways. Firstly, the lack of a

volunteer coordinator again shifted more responsibility onto her to help run the volunteer program. In doing so, her students benefitted from a more manageable class atmosphere, the help of volunteer teaching assistants, and tutoring appointments. However, as she was not paid for this work, the program effectively received the benefits of a volunteer coordinator without having to pay for one. Since the students who were working on more basic literacy development often needed more one-on-one assistance, given the pressure the program was under to “invest” its funding in learners who would attain higher level mandated outcomes, it serves a dark logic that the volunteer program, which was so heavily utilized by lower level learners, suffered from this neglect. Additionally, the fact that the advisor position was also unfilled seems to point out that support services which were often most needed by lower-level students were not a priority for the administration, when higher level students were able to manage without them.

The lack of in-demand lower level ESOL and literacy classes, while higher-level classes ran with empty seats, also shows how the material resources of the organization were being purposed towards investment in these learners who were more likely to attain the mandated outcomes required under WIOA. These learners not only benefitted from the availability of appropriate level classes, but also from smaller class sizes and an attendant lower teacher to student ratio.

The Price of Admission

Another area of focus during our interviews was the role standardized testing played in adult education programs. This manifested in pre-testing, in which one test is used for both initial assessment (to document learners’ baseline for measuring learning gains during the

year) and also as a level assessment for new students. It was also part of post-testing, ostensibly used to measure educational progress during a student's time in the program during a given academic year. A critical element of this process is the fact that the outcome data collected from these assessments is used to document program effectiveness, in compliance with federal law, and also to secure refunding. This issue was particularly important as the organization's primary source of financial support was government funding, in contrast to other programs that had a more diverse funding stream. Kate's comments throughout this section highlight the strategies used during standardized testing procedures, the response of students to the process, and the questionable appropriacy of the assessments themselves to measure student progress.

The Assembly Line

In the program where Kate worked, three different assessments were used: the Basic English Skills Test Plus (BEST Plus), used to measure the oral English proficiency of lower level ESOL and literacy students; the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), used to measure the reading/writing proficiency level of higher level ESOL students; and Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test (MAPT), the HiSET practice test used to place students in English and numeracy classes in preparation for gaining their high school credential. Each of these tests is part of pre-testing, post-testing, program entry, and level placement. They also play a role in outcome documentation for securing refunding. Her descriptions of testing procedures and her experiences with the testing process will touch on both the BEST Plus and MAPT assessments throughout this section.

In terms of the way testing was carried out, Kate described how the administration encouraged teachers and staff to approach pre and post-testing quite differently.

We could also talk about certain ways they choose [to test students], and we are told very explicitly, [how] to pretest, versus how we post-test. We are very draconian on the pre-test, and we are very generous on the post-test...to get a low score on the pre-test and a higher score [on the post-test] to show a bigger improvement, to get that EFL gain...It's a smart strategy in terms of getting outcomes.

She further explained the response from an administrator when she did not immediately pre-test some new students. "I've been angrily told, you waited too long to pretest the students. We don't want them to know anything when we take them to do the pretest." She actually brought up this process early in our interviews, during a discussion of things that made her uncomfortable about her job, when she was discussing the work culture of the organization. Her description comments on both the pre and post-testing process.

This is what I want to talk about, this is the thing that makes me uncomfortable, the things that are kind of dehumanizing, the things that, you know, The students come for an education , and then they're kind of put through the assembly line of assessment, because the way they're assessed is not really, well, We're required to do this. We've got to get them to do this, to get students pretested, and then to get them post-tested. But we're not going to tell them that they're going to get post-tested.

We're asking them to come back to class.

She talked about how students usually go into the testing process with little idea of what is about to happen, and how when those who have left the program receive a phone call to

return to their class, the first thing that is done is they are placed in a room alone, often with a computer or with someone they do not know, for assessment. While they may return expecting to meet with a teacher or classmates, or feeling excited to return to their class, the first thing they are required to do is take a standardized test.

She further described the post-testing process and some of her feelings of skepticism regarding how it was implemented.

I feel like the chasing down [of students who stop attending] is more of an issue with HiSET...Getting students who have exited the program, and the necessity of getting them to come back at least once to post-test, so we can have a result, to measure, which is kind of weird, because this person hasn't been to class, why are we measuring their result in anything?...It's needed to report on our outcomes. I'm told, you know, 'This is a free program, and that's the price of admission.'

With the standardized tests playing such a central role to the data collection which documented the efficacy of the program and helped secure funding, its importance to the program administration was evident to Kate. Also striking was how these testing procedures mediated the students' relationship with the program at key points like program entry and exit, exactly when a more human touch would seem to be so important. Kate reflected on how students seemed to respond to the process, which she described as "an alienating and bewildering process for students."

We have a thing where a student comes in the first day and someone with a laptop comes in and says, I'm going to take you to another classroom and ask you all these personal questions...I've never had the experience of a student *not* looking at me

nervously, looking at us nervously, like, Where am I going? It's like, of course, you'd be like, 'Someone's going to ask you some questions,' And they're like, '*What?!*'

She described how students often seemed nervous, common enough during any kind of testing, but how it seemed amplified by the fact that students had no preparation or explanation at all for what was happening. The sense of confusion was elevated for students who had a lower level of proficiency in English, and who had no one to explain the process. She explained her perception of the effect of this experience, which often included quite personal questions, for example, about one's financial status, participation in social benefit programs, SSN, etc. Much of this data was used for statistical purposes to fulfill program reporting requirements and the SSN-linked financial/workforce data was used with data-matching programs to document federally mandated work-related outcomes.

I feel like it instills a sense of kind of learned helplessness in people, to put them in that kind of situation, because it's like they don't really understand what's happening, and they have to sit there, and also a lot of the questions are kind of personal, to people who maybe [they] don't want to talk about [that with}... *You're just going to go and answer some questions*, which sounds, kind of like a scene out of 1984 or something.

She speculated, with dark humor, about what the administration might consider the ideal testing procedures.

There's a sense of, if we could, it [pre-testing] would be sort of like a Navy SEAL training, where we go to the student's house and bang pots and wake them up in the middle of the night, have them completely disoriented, and do the pre-test. And then,

for the post-test, they are listening to ASMR [autonomous sensory meridian response]. They're being given neck massages, having their nails done.

She explained the same idea a bit more soberly, with a slight touch of sarcasm, describing her perception of the role of student anxiety during the pre-test, as well as how teachers were encouraged to adapt their teaching methods and plans, in relation to post-testing.

It [anxiety] is great for pre-testing. We want bad results for pre-testing. Then for post-testing, we're told, don't tell the students about it, because we don't want them to get nervous. And the week before, we're encouraged not to have a midterm or something that week, have it be super chill and relaxed. That's when the 'warm and fuzzy' lessons would probably be encouraged, because we want the students to be relaxed, because we know when people are relaxed, they do better on the test."

Her comments about the procedures around pre- and post-testing show how the students were only seen to merit an emotionally supportive environment when it would generate a quantifiable outcome that would benefit the program, in the form of MSG data. Additionally, her remarks show how, during assessments, learners were perceived firstly as a source of data for the program, and secondarily, if at all, as people with emotional needs and responses.

Pawns in a Scheme

Aside from the discussion of the administration of these standardized tests, both Kate's experience and her perception of how students responded, we also discussed the tests themselves, and her opinions about them. Our conversation largely focused on three areas: the use of a speaking assessment for the literacy students, the limitations of the tests used

with ESOL students, and her perception of the primary function of standardized testing in this context.

One of the first issues which arose in Kate's description of the actual tests, was the odd situation in which her literacy class students were being assessed using an oral exam. Clearly, this test, the BEST Plus, did nothing to measure the students' literacy development. This situation was made even stranger by the fact that her class has at times included native English speakers, as well as students who had reasonable to high oral proficiency in English, having grown up with it as an additional language in countries like Nigeria and Liberia.

The literacy class does the BEST Plus [speaking test] which is a whole other thing. So, it *is* an ESOL class, so a lot of the students are trying to improve their speaking level, but it *is* a literacy class. It [literacy] is the focus. So, shouldn't it be a reading and writing test?

She explained how the logic seemed to be that since there were ESOL students in the literacy class, it was to be assessed like the other lower level ESOL classes, meaning that it focused on oral English proficiency development.

Administratively, the literacy class was grouped together with the ESOL classes in terms of program supervision, despite the fact that what united the students in the class was not their English proficiency level, but their educational background, meaning that they all shared a history of limited or interrupted formal education. This information about student educational background would more naturally align the literacy class more with the ABE program, where students were assigned class levels based on their general educational levels (GLE) in numeracy and/or literacy. While the literacy students did indeed have different

levels of English proficiency, what united them was an interest/need for basic literacy instruction.

The central issue seemed to be that this class had a very diverse crossover of students of different language backgrounds, with English fitting into their educational backgrounds in very different ways, making it unclear whether the class belonged in the ESOL or ABE program. Ultimately, the issue seems to be that the literacy class did not receive the resources, attention, or respect needed because of both the incoherent way it fit into the ESOL/ABE dichotomy, and also the lower likelihood of literacy students being able to meet mandated outcomes, which did nothing to incentivize investment in the class. To create a unique place for the literacy class in the program would require time, money and expertise. This would resolve the incoherence created by the way standardized testing functioned in the context, particularly the use of an oral assessment with the literacy students.

Moving from the specificity of the literacy class to the broader use of the BEST Plus speaking test with the level 1-3 (lower level) ESOL students, Kate talked about her perception of why oral proficiency was the unique measurement to determine progress for these students, despite the fact that their classes included instruction on the full spectrum of language skills.

This is why I think the BEST Plus is primarily used in lower levels of ESOL, for students at the lower levels, there's more of a challenge in understanding written directions and all that...They [ESOL classes, levels 1-6] have people, a class of people who just came here with a PhD and people who have never been to school,

and they're in the same class...It seems like it's easier to make a gain in speaking, than in reading and writing.

Kate's comments point to three phenomena within this testing environment that Kate perceived. Firstly, this indicates that the written ESOL test, used with higher level ESOL students, (Levels 4, 5, and 6), was not only testing the students' proficiency in English reading comprehension and writing, but additionally their knowledge of test-taking skills and their socialization into academic practices. This was due primarily to the way in which certain aspects of student answers unrelated to their English proficiency, but rather reflecting their familiarity with rhetorical styles privileged in US educational settings, could distort the test results' measure of students' English proficiency. Additionally, her observations point to the fact that tests seemed to have been chosen for different student populations based not on how well they would accurately measure student progress in their given class, but rather based on which tests would garner higher outcome data for the program. Finally, this second observation also explains more specifically why a speaking assessment was used with the literacy students, rather than a test of their reading and writing abilities.

Kate also talked about some of the limitations she perceived of using the BEST Plus with the lower level ESOL students (Levels 1-3), focusing on the way that students' oral responses are evaluated. Firstly, she explained how students' answers to questions during the oral interview are ranked using a rather artificial system, "You know, once you get higher up, it gets a lot more difficult [to make a level gain], *because they're not using enough clauses in their answer.*" This rigid way of evaluating responses, including a provision to give students points based on number of clauses used, seems rather arbitrary, since it could be affected not

only by someone's language proficiency, but also by their personality, communication style, affective state during the interview, rapport with the interviewer, cultural background, and the specific type of exam question at hand.

She also explained how the questions seemed to be soliciting and favoring a specific, more formal style of communication, where students for example, are asked for their opinion on a topic, but receive more points if they support their answer, unprompted by the instructions available, with a justification or rationale. She gave the example of a typical question, "How do you feel about the impact of technology in society?" Students giving a more complex explanation would gain more points because of the grammatical complexity of their speech, not because of the communication skills they express in answering the question. However, if a student gave a simple, but appropriate response to the question, (for example, "Very positive. I think it's good,") they would receive less points because of the syntactic simplicity of their answer. This seems a bit unfair, since students have no idea that this is how the test is evaluated, since there is no mention of it in the directions.

Kate also expressed some frustration with the fact that the test penalizes students for exercising normal communicative functions, well within the range of proficient speakers of English, like asking someone to repeat a question.

What I'm annoyed about is where if they ask you to repeat the question, they're docked a point. I hate that...because a lot of the time, they might have heard the question correctly, but they're checking, or they want a chance to think about it some more...And they actually get deducted for that, instead of getting points for that.

A final related issue that came up was what happens if a student speaks another language during the test. We discussed the common situation where a student knows the tester already, for example when they are a teacher at their school and knows that the teacher speaks Spanish. If the student speaks in Spanish (or any other language) during the test, regardless of the reason, for example, restating the question, they are docked a point, even if what they have said demonstrates their listening skills in English. “They’re showing that they have good listening comprehension, but that gets a negative point, because they used another language.”

This process, wherein teachers who may allow/encourage L1 use in the classroom need to penalize it during testing, creates an environment of conflicting, intermittent reinforcement, which may destabilize students’ sense of how speaking their native language/s will be received, both in the school environment, and the wider society. Additionally, as the test devalues students’ other language skills, it seems designed to uphold a monolingual ideal even in an environment where teachers may normally be encouraging and supportive of use of other languages in the classroom. It may be even more confusing to students when the shift in policy is coming from someone they usually feel safe speaking their native language with. It also places teachers in the position of being asked to enforce an ideological system that might be completely at odds with their own beliefs about language learning. While these assessments may have been judged to be appropriate by funding agencies, they do not serve the desires of students or teachers. The potentially negative effects of these aspects of the tests used, as well as the larger currents they seem to be steered by, tie into Kate’s description of the students going in to be tested, “They’re pawns in a scheme.” This comment leads into

the final topic that emerged from our interview, related to the standardized testing: how Kate perceived its function within the adult education context.

The overarching view she expressed was that standardized testing was viewed, presented, and carried out as a means to an end.

And the end is to not have your school defunded, or criticized in some way, rather than to actually measure the progress of students... Student progress is measured, but it's distorted. And also, I don't think it's the best measure of progress. It's very-it's not fair.

To Kate, the multitude of factors affecting adult education students' learning, such as their often scarce available study time and home/work responsibilities, which limit the time and resources they have to devote to their education, make the use of standardized testing seem like a poor choice of measuring progress from a teacher's perspective.

I feel that...because of the importance that's placed on it [the exams], and the unfairness of that, because you know how we were saying earlier, how there are so many factors that go into whether a student learns or not, and they're not all within the teacher's control.

In a situation where the classroom conditions were so unstable and the rate at which students made "measurable improvements" was so variable, the type of assessments used seem particularly poorly suited to measuring any actual learning. This is largely because the tests were neither measuring the progress the students *did* actually make, nor were the standardized assessments flexible enough to be responsive to the constantly shifting learning environment.

Kate emphasized the fact that the testing was not a good measure of learning by explaining follow-up processes to the initial post-testing, highlighting how and why students were post-tested multiple times throughout the academic year, *or not*.

So the BEST Plus needs to be administered within the first two weeks of a student registering for class, and then we typically do post-testing three months later, and then if it's a gain, if they go up 100 points at least, they are not post-tested again...Everyone in my class made a gain, so I don't have to worry about them being post-tested again, in March or June. It's probably more like May. I think you can only post-test twice, and then you can choose whichever is best. So, if my students don't make a gain, they have one more chance.

If the function of testing were truly to measure and record progress, it would seem logical that it would be done at regular intervals, regardless of the students' results. However, in this system, it seems as though students are being checked for progress, like an immature, yet ripening harvest, which will only be considered worthy of consideration when their progress benefits someone else's bottom line. In this way, student progress is only notable when it either helps secure program refunding (satisfying administrative requirements) or when it contributes to governmental/private sector goals for workforce development (satisfying federal mandated outcomes). Learning which benefits only the students and their classroom community is essentially seen as irrelevant.

Kate's description of how teachers functioned as an intermediary between the students and the administrative testing procedures also stood out when I asked her about how teachers discussed the results of testing with their classes.

I'm not sure what other teachers do. I don't make a big announcement about it.

Usually at progress reports, if a student doesn't make a gain, I would probably never talk about it. You know, like if a student is generally not making progress in class, we might talk about that, but generally they are. And I don't have the utmost respect for the test, so you know I kind of disregard it, and if a student does make a gain, I'll mention it.

This seems to create a rather confusing situation in which students see a lot of importance, in terms of staff, resources, and class time, being given over to the standardized testing process, yet the results seem to vanish into thin air. In some cases, they are not even accessible to the teachers, but only to higher level administrators. It's one thing for teachers to be able to disregard an assessment they believe is not a valid measure of students' progress, but it's something else altogether for students' own test results to be entirely inaccessible to them.

A comment Kate made in our first interview seemed to encapsulate her perception of the situation.

It's [standardized test results are] what the survival of the program *depends on*, not *good* results, but just that this happened, that we crossed the t's and dotted the i's.

And this is all mandated. It's because it's all so top-down,

All the peculiarities of the standardized testing procedures described by Kate point to the repurposing of the evaluation process, from its stated goal of "measuring student progress" to the logistical goal of maintaining funding. Through the execution of formal rules and informal strategies of the testing process, and choice of the tools (the tests themselves), the object, and ultimately outcome, of the standardized testing procedure is transformed. The

obligation to meet mandated outcomes from WIOA puts tremendous pressure on programs to pre-test low and post-test high, in order to document substantial enough outcomes to be deemed “effective” and renew their funding. However, since only one of the six possible effectiveness indicators recognized under WIOA pertains to increases in standardized test scores, there is a limitation to how much even good outcomes on standardized testing can contribute to a positive program evaluation.

However, another aspect of this process which Kate described as part of pre-testing was the program intake process, which she described as an alienating and dehumanizing process. Kate described how bewildered students were being instructed to turn over very personal information during this process, including their social security number, with little or no explanation of what was happening. The reason for soliciting the social security number during this process was for the purpose of automated data-matching, in order to track changes to students’ employment or earnings during and after their tenure in the program. Under WIOA, it is this data which is most correlated with program effectiveness evaluation. While this process was used under WIA, such data formed a much smaller percentage of the points organizations could gain for program effectiveness. The lack of transparency about the use of students’ personal data during the program intake process makes sense from the program’s desire to have access to as much of this information as possible. If students are in a position where they feel disempowered or confused, they will be less likely to question or resist the program’s request for their personal information. This is one way in which the external rule-making power of the federal adult education policymaking system exerts power

over local adult education programs, transforming the object and outcome of the intake and testing process.

CHAPTER 5

NICOLE: THRIVING, SURVIVING

Nicole was an English teacher who had formerly worked at the same program as Kate, as a teacher, coordinator, and eventually the organization's assistant director. Throughout our interviews, two major themes emerged from Nicole's discussion of her experiences. One of these themes, education as a practice of community-building, responded to the first research question of this study, regarding the nature of adult education ESOL classes. The second theme, the chronic instability of adult education ESOL programs, intensified by WIOA, bridges the first research question's focus on current conditions, and the second research question's focus on the impact of WIOA. Her views were informed by her ten years of experience, including work as a teacher in multiple different DESE-funded ESOL programs, some of which were supported by independent, non-profit funding or private donors. This gave her a unique perspective on the research site, whose primary funder was DESE, meaning that the program had much less leeway in complying with government policies like WIOA than her previous workplaces. She also brought the experience of holding a rather high-level administrative position, which gave her a different perspective on some of the topics discussed. Finally, she had been out of the adult education context and

working in a middle school ESOL program for about a year at the time of our interviews, so she also had the benefit of time to reflect on her experiences before describing them during the interview process.

Part of Something Bigger

Almost every classroom experience Nicole recounted for me during our interviews related in some way to her conception of education as primarily a form of community-building. These experiences focused around the themes of community-building and storytelling within the classroom space, community activities which took the students outside the school space, and the specific role that language played in these processes. These stories presented one view of the nature of current adult ESOL education, and particularly the ways in which Nicole exercised her agency, through the use of various tools and community connections, to facilitate educational experiences with her students that satisfied her own definitions of meaningful learning.

A Human Story

The concept of the language classroom as a communal space for sharing life experiences featured prominently in Nicole's narrative of her teaching experiences. Many of her most vivid descriptions stemmed from her time teaching an adult literacy class, though many of them related to teaching ESOL as well. The stories and thoughts she shared with me about this topic fell into roughly two areas: her concept of the classroom as a community space and the use of students' personal stories as class texts and instructional content.

When describing her overall goals for her classes, she had the following to say.

When I thought about my role as the teacher, and what the purpose of the classes were, I had never been so great at being a *language teacher*. The explicit language

instruction. So, my overarching goal was, and I think for better or worse, [it] came out in my instruction, was to have students be able to participate in their communities, and to participate in civil discourse, in a way, by doing classroom activities.

This theme, which was so pervasive in her interviews, stood in stark contrast to the descriptions of desired student outcomes and the individualistic language often used in program mission statements, which often uphold a romanticized vision of individualistic workforce development outcomes as a solution to social problems. For example, the suggestion of a direct causative relationship between an individual learning more English and getting a raise at their job was typical of program discourse, but far away from the type of outcomes Nicole was prioritizing. She gave more detail about what specific outcomes she had in mind, highlighting students' multilingual identities.

It was more, how can students feel part of their communities and how can they see [themselves] and be, multiple ways, that they can be part of their communities. And so, taking risks, and attaining a level of confidence in order to take those risks. It can also be the multiple ways you can take part in your community without actually being an English speaker, participating in Spanish and other languages.

Her recognition of the classroom as a space for taking risks, and the practice or development of the ambiguity tolerance, in which language learning was a process of exploring the multi-faceted nature of communication and expression, rather than finding one right answer, caught my attention.

She also described the intercultural communication dimension of the situation,

There were also the interpersonal goals I had for the students, which were to work together in the classes, crossing linguistic lines, and cultural lines, so that there was that-if it could happen in the classroom, then maybe that can transfer into outside the classroom, too. So those were the goals. And there were language goals, but it was almost like those were secondary and they were implicit in the other goals.

Her description of her class goals shows how she prioritized the process of forming authentic connections with others, through the language-learning process. Although the teaching of English classes in adult education is generally communicative but often focused on individuals' ability as the expense of their interlocutors and the interaction, Nicole's classroom seems to keep these elements present. Regarding which specific strategies she used to promote the crossing of cultural lines, she had this to say.

Always making sure that little cliques didn't develop, even in adult classes, where, preconceptions of people weren't allowed. I tried to break preconceptions that people might have had, little things, like Dominican students not wanting to sit with Haitian students in the classroom, these bigger issues that might be brewing.

Her consideration of the classroom as a social space, as well as an academic space, informed the way she approached the class on a daily basis with her students. Her more abstract goal of helping students make intercultural connections was tested at times by a variety of tensions in the classroom space, such as the previous example, relating to historical/political context, as well as more common miscommunication issues and personality differences. These interpersonal challenges of course, were coming up in an environment of material scarcity, in which scant resources were available for attending to the instrumental goals privileged by

workforce development policy, much less the more social, community-focused goals to which Nicole devoted so much attention.

However, she generally emphasized the potential benefits that could come from bringing together such diverse groups of students.

Any time you get a group of human beings together that are different and have different opinions and are different ages, and come from different walks of life, it's awesome. It's amazing to be able to have that dynamic and for it to work."

While she admitted that sometimes differences between students, especially related to having different goals, could make it complicated for everyone to accomplish the outcome they hoped for, generally she emphasized the positive that came from having such a variety of different life experiences in one classroom.

Talking about the potentials of the language classroom as a space for different types of learning and reflecting on her most recent experiences teaching middle school language learners, she described her highest hopes for the classroom.

I believe that educational spaces are kind of a unique place where you can incubate ideas and develop intellectually and bring those ideas and new ways of interacting out into the world...I want my students, through their experiences in my classroom, I want them to grow their empathy for others, and to see themselves as part of this bigger...to kind of grow their awareness of being really a global citizen, and how that can, what that looks like on a community level.

While these comments are related to her work with young adults, they are reminiscent of the priorities she had when working in the adult education field.

She also described the varied goals of the students in the adult education program where she worked the longest. While some of the goals were more specific quantifiable outcomes, for example, getting a high school diploma or equivalent, many of them were also related to community participation. In fact, even the students' goals that were more individualistic at first glance benefitted from and relied upon the community ties and support learners could draw upon in her classroom.

I think there are a variety of goals. So, there were students that went from the ESOL program into the GED [HiSET] program that ended up getting their high school diploma, and there were many students that wanted to improve their English for job prospects. There were students that had it as a place in the community to go and be part of. And many families came, so there were many whole groups of families. While some of these goals, like high school credential attainment or finding a better job, were in sync with mandated goals for the program, others were not, such as the idea of the school community as a place to belong and have a place of one's own.

Another theme which characterized Nicole's descriptions of her classroom experiences were the strategy of using her students' personal stories in a variety of ways during lessons, as in the Language Experience Approach. In this teaching approach, literacy development is fostered through the use of oral language and the centering of class content around learners' own life experiences. She described having learned about this classroom approach during a professional development workshop and being struck by how useful it might be in her literacy class.

Well, particularly for the literacy class...what interested me was that it was taking a, taking literacy, print literacy, and having it be very tangible for the students. And so, for adults who have gone twenty, thirty, sixty, seventy years not reading and writing, well, what's going to be that magic bullet that gets them to recognize the print around them in a new way? And I felt that their own stories, and seeing their own stories written down might have that connection...And then, just the goal that they, it was always the question I had teaching literacy, 'What is it now? What is it now that's going to make literacy have a place in your life?' Because there are so many reasons of course that literacy could have been very helpful, but it just hadn't made it into their life at any point. So, it was like, 'What can I do to make that connection stronger?'

She took the task of making the world of print language real and significant for her students, and frequently seized upon the Learner Experience Approach in order to do so.

She described some of the different activities and strategies she used, and what roles students took on during the process.

There's the part of it that's working on different skills, like being able to listen to a story and retell the same story. Then there was sort of an editing piece, where I would say back, maybe something that sounded a little awkward, and tell them, 'This sounds a little awkward,' or 'It sounds unclear.' So, their goal of being able to revise something, even if they didn't or weren't able to read what I had written, to orally be able to recognize when something might sound confusing or could be restated in a more clear way.

This practice of storytelling, including telling, listening to, editing, and re-telling student stories was central to her approach for the literacy class. The interpersonal aspect of sharing life experiences with other learners in the classroom space was another plank in the bridge of the community-building practice she facilitated. In telling personal stories, students not only created friendships with other classmates, but they also shared aspects of their identities and life stories that went far beyond the walls of the school building, both in time and space. People talked about their past experiences and future hopes, as well as their lives at home, their good and bad experiences in the U.S., and their knowledge and experiences of other countries and ways of life.

She recollected that students seemed to generally react positively to this approach, “There was certainly pride. There was a lot of pride in having their stories written down and as it became more common...sometimes I could tell that they would try to *create* a story.” She went on to describe how this practice of telling stories in class seemed to trigger some students’ creative streak, as some tried to embellish their stories to draw their listeners in, by adding creative flourishes and extra details. This kind of response is also indicative of the way that the classroom had been tended as a social, community space, in which students’ roles in the group and their relationships with other students helped shape their response to classroom activities. Additionally, the learners’ interest in each other’s stories seemed to catalyze their literacy development and language learning, as they engaged with the social power of language in storytelling.

Nicole also gave a few examples of how these learner-generated stories helped shape the class content. Both examples involved the use of learners’ stories as the basis of more

organic classroom discussion, as well as the creation of literacy instruction materials to be distributed in the class.

There was a student in my class who desperately wanted to pass the driving test, the online, computer-based driver's permit test...She'd already failed multiple times, and so we had been talking about driving and I had started to bring things into class that would be connected in some way to preparing for the test...We must have been telling stories or talking about laws or about driving on the highway or something...[One of the students] drove the wrong way on the highway...and so she was telling the story and we were all laughing.

The student took the opportunity to share her personal story of what may have been quite a frightening experience, but through her facial expressions, gestures, and storytelling style, she took the opportunity to turn it into a comical story to make her classmates laugh. Nicole described her thought process about using the story with the class and working it into the day's lesson.

This is not the only story that I had from her [the student]. She was quite the prolific storyteller, and so I had written other things down that she told [us], and so she told this story, and I thought, I like to use this approach when I can, when it fits with what we're doing, and I felt like it was a really nice story, where a situation that could have gone very differently, went very well, and it was kind of like a human story.

She took this story and used it for the verbal retelling activities described above, and also later as the basis of a short text for the class to work with.

In another case, she described how she and her students collaboratively wrote a story related to the life experience of one of the students, and how she was able to build some of the pre-existing literacy development objectives into the material.

There were times that it wasn't just one student that told the story, like my goal would be a little bit different, and we would collaboratively write something that was organized around a topic. So like, for instance, there was a woman who was in a hospitality training course somewhere, and...we wrote like a day in the life, and I made that story so that it fit the reading instruction that we were looking at, at that time, like the vowel sounds.

In this way, she focused the class content around a story, which, while not a personal story of one of the students, was still related to their life context, and found ways to weave in the specific language instruction that she aimed to accomplish. This type of group story creation activity also allowed a larger number of students a more active role in the storytelling process, as well as a more imaginative approach if they chose.

This process of creative storytelling also figured into the literacy class's project of creating booklets with folk tales from the students' home country. In the particular class cohort Nicole described, all the learners were women from Somalia with young children and they all had the goal of being more involved in their children's education. As a group project, the students each dictated a different Somali folk tale, which Nicole and the other students scribed for them, and became class texts. At the completion of the project, students compiled the folk tales into simply illustrated booklets, containing the folk tales written in Somali and

English, that they could share with their children (Nicole, personal communication, December 9, 2018).

Nicole did describe how using this type of approach was quite a change from what she had previously done, both in her training in a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) course, and her time working in a private language school. She described the shift she made from what she had been trained to do in this way:

You have to kind of put those things [CELTA training] on the back burner for a minute, and you'll use them again, but like really get to know the students, on a very, almost personal level, so that you can use their stories. And one of the best things about the literacy class was using [the Language Experience Approach]...It was just incredibly meaningful for them and for me, because that's their story that they just told me, and I scribed, and now we're using it as the class text, and I got to learn so much about them. They connected to the language in a very meaningful way, and I never would have known that if I had just started with Chapter 1 of the textbook and my bag of tricks.

These observations and reflections about her experiences with the literacy class show the complexity of Nicole's approach to working with this class. While she did draw on some of her early, more method-focused training, her prioritization of the social environment of the classroom and her focus on the learners' stories illustrate her attempt to create a more holistic learning experience than what was necessarily expected of her in the adult education setting.

Outside the Box...Things Just Come Out

Another clear theme in Nicole's narratives about her adult education experiences was the importance of bringing learning outside the confines of the traditional classroom space. Her remarks in the following section comment on some of the challenges of creating a community within a traditional classroom, as well as two particular projects she organized with her students to put this idea into practice: a community language exchange and community garden project.

Nicole's interest in taking learning outside of the classroom seemed partly due to some of the challenges she described as typical in the adult education field.

I think if I could think completely outside the box...it would be moving outside of the classroom completely...because what *is* the purpose of adult education? And in English as a second language in particular, it's about learning the language and using the language. And I think it's important for adults, for all students, to use it in authentic ways, in meaningful ways, and that doesn't necessarily always happen in the classroom, especially in large groups. Because the bigger the group, the more likely it is that there's going to be those lost in the shuffle. So, they're attending classes and coming every night, but how much are they really getting out of it?

She further described how large class sizes not only impeded the ability of some students to reach their goals, but also of teachers to have the time and attention to identify the specific goals of all their students.

They [the students] are not reaching whatever their goals are, and that's another whole part of it. It's like language, sometimes, is not the primary goal for some of the

students. It could be something else, and if you're never able to have that conversation with the student, you're not going to realize that, 'Oh maybe this is an outlet for them, and a way for them to connect with their community in a different way,' and actually in the classroom, there's never an opportunity for that.

Nicole described how the format of the traditional classroom environment created difficulties in facilitating meaningful language-learning experiences for all the learners in the class.

While she was often only able to discover the goals of some learners through one-on-one interaction, the classroom conditions rarely afforded this opportunity. Other challenges included the diversity of English proficiency level and educational backgrounds within each class, as well as by the large class sizes themselves. The diversity of English proficiency within the class made it difficult to differentiate instruction enough to satisfy the learning goals of all the students, as well as making it challenging to present material, orally or in writing, in a way that was accessible to all the learners. Differences in educational background among learners created an environment where students were entering the same class with hugely disparate goals, as well as different levels of socialization into academic practices. In addition to large class sizes, students were dropped and added from rosters frequently. This resulted in creating confusion for teachers who had to continual re-orient to the current makeup of the class, catch up new students, and track down students by phone or email after they had stopped attending class.

As a response to these challenges and in line with her own teaching philosophy, Nicole was eager to organize projects with her adult students outside the structure of the program where she worked. One of these projects took the form of a community language

exchange. She described how the socioeconomic conditions of the neighborhood (where she and many of the students lived and worked) and its changing demographics were a large part of the motivation for the project.

I kind of saw our program-so, our neighborhood, like many neighborhoods, has different pockets of people, different pockets of culture, of socioeconomic class, and I felt like, it was gentrifying very quickly...It was just this feeling of here's this school, and these students actually live in this neighborhood and yet I live in this neighborhood too, and I know that there is this isolation of people who live in the same neighborhood, and I felt like it was more that...people were being *pushed out* of their neighborhood, instead of bringing together the different parts. So the kind of impetus for it was how to bring people together, and *in the neighborhood*, and how to make students feel more a part of the kind of English-speaking neighborhood that they lived in, instead of feeling like they couldn't participate, or wouldn't participate, or that people were looking at them, or not looking at them, in a way that perpetuated that.

She further explained how it related to the students, including the knowledge and identities they brought not only to the school community, but also to the neighborhood where many of them lived. "I wanted [a situation where] the students were the experts. I wanted them to be in the position of sharing something with the community, in a way that they maybe didn't see themselves as doing, or being able to do."

The language exchange took the form of a weekly booth at a local farmer's market, which different students, sometimes accompanied by family members, would attend with

Nicole. The language exchange booth was open to the public, and anyone at the market was invited to participate. Additionally, the market was directly adjacent to a housing complex where quite a few of the participating students lived. Generally multiple students would be in attendance, including Spanish, Portuguese, and Somali speakers. People who wanted to participate could sit down and chat with one or more of the participants, in one of the languages represented by whoever was present.

She described the way she had seen students respond to the activity by reflecting on her own past language learning experiences.

I think that they, if I can put myself in their shoes, when I've had similar experiences of practicing a language that I'm learning in an authentic way, that I make a meaningful connection with a stranger, it's a wonderful feeling. And I think that they had that same feeling. Watching Amelia, who was shy about her language abilities, really engaged in conversation with someone, I could tell she was happy in those moments, and they [Amelia and her husband] were both happy to be, outside of their normal interactions with people, or having to put themselves in positions that were kind of uncomfortable at first.

She observed that students who participated in the language exchange seemed to benefit from the experience in different ways, including the sense of personal reward and satisfaction from meaningful social experiences in one's target language. Her comments also show that she felt that students benefitted from the role reversal of speaking their native language with members of their community who were themselves learners of that language.

Another experience that reflected Nicole's interest in working with students on activities outside the classroom was a community gardening project. She described how the activity arose organically through the discovery of mutual interests between the students and herself.

So, it manifested from my own interests and the interest of the students. So, it was coming together of this, you know, I have an interest in community-based gardening, and my students, many of them grew up in agricultural settings, where growing food was a big part of their lives. So, they didn't have access to a garden at any of the places where they were living, and so, I don't remember how I posed it, but I asked if anyone was interested. Well, actually, first, we volunteered at a community garden in the area.

She described how prior experiences, both her own and the students', as well as current interest, merged to create a situation where she thought to propose the concept to some of the students in her literacy class. Eventually, students from other classes learned about the activity and some of them participated, as well as one of the other ESOL teachers from the program.

The project took place over two seasons, including a phase of working as general volunteers for the community garden, and then a second season where the group had their own plot in the garden space. The participants in the project prepared the plot, weeded, designed the garden layout, and travelled together to a local seed library to select open-pollinated, heirloom vegetable and flower seeds, free of charge, for the garden. (See Figures

3 and 4, of the community garden space.) Throughout the process, everyone seemed to be learning about different things. Nicole described her experience,

So, that first experience, we volunteered there, and they, that was when I first learned about *verdolagas* [purslane], and the other students were all talking about-We were pulling weeds, and they were talking about how the weeds that we were pulling were actually food, that they would have eaten or used. And so, from there, we talked about having a plot together, and then over the course of the summer, we planted food, or planted seeds, and those who would come, came, and so it wasn't the same group of students every week.

Nicole described the personal impact the experience had on her, focusing on the collaborative learning that characterized the experience. Rather than the hierarchical teacher-students dynamic generally present even in more progressive classrooms, everyone who participated learned different things simultaneously. Everyone was a learner, and everyone was a teacher in their own way. People learned the names of different herbs and varieties of beans in multiple languages. Recipes were shared, along with knowledge about how to cultivate different types of vegetables, and how to use common “weeds,” like purslane, wild garlic, and garlic mustard as delicious cooking ingredients. Knowledge about navigating community systems and accessing resources like seed libraries and communal garden space was gathered and developed together. Participants also told stories and shared memories related to their experiences with gardening and cooking, discussions which may or may not have found their way into a more traditional classroom setting.



Figure 3 A view of the community garden space at the beginning of the planting season (Nicole, 2014)



Figure 4 A second view of the garden space before work began in the plot (Nicole, 2014)

Reflecting on the project overall, Nicole returned to her feelings about how the project had transpired in the first place and pondered what the results of the project had been.

It really depends on the-I mean, so much happens through conversation, and getting to know students. It's a little bit organic in that I think this kind of thing would only work when the teacher is able to establish enough of a rapport with the students where *things just come out*, and through that coming out, you're able to decide on, some course of action. And again, these projects or these ideas, I don't know if they would be termed *successful*. *Were the students in attendance every week? No...* I mean, anecdotally, like midsummer, when we had five students and their kids at the

garden, and we made salads with the stuff we picked, it was awesome. Awesome.

And so that's something, like intangible and yet tangible, in that moment, at least.

It was only through the social dynamic within the classroom, that Nicole had tried to cultivate as a community space, that common interests among the group members had emerged. And it was largely due to Nicole's intense interest in and focus on this type of sharing that these projects were generated. They were built up through the communal participation of the students, their teacher, and other people from the neighborhood. And they resulted in a kind of memorable, creative, hands-on learning very different from what could ever have been measured by standardized tests and program evaluation spreadsheet formulas.

Through Just Being Together

A final theme that characterized Nicole's descriptions of community-building with students in her classes was the role of language in that process. Both in describing her philosophical approach and narrating specific incidents, the various languages spoken by students and English, the target language, played major roles. Nicole's descriptions illustrate her view of language learning as an additive process, where the target language serves a complementary role to the learners' other language knowledge and experiences. Three topics that came up throughout the interviews were the role of translanguaging and linguistic repertoire, administrative actions which were in opposition Nicole's approach, and the advantages and challenges that come from a linguistically diverse literacy class.

Nicole frequently emphasized how she tried to develop a holistic view of her students, through learning about their lives and interests, and this extended to the way she spoke about their language backgrounds. She mentioned various times the importance of

encouraging her students to use their full linguistic repertoire in class, as they chose, and referenced her interest in Ofelia García's work on translanguaging.

Translanguaging was happening in the class, but I don't think I was promoting it in the way that I try to identify it with the students now, and talk about it, whereas before *it was* translanguaging, but it was like, 'Use all that you've got! English, Spanish, mix them together.'

This also illustrated how during the time she was doing her Master's degree, she came to find that some of the these phenomena she had observed in her classes were current topics in the fields of education and applied linguistics, and considered promising ways of looking at learner language. This was quite different from the reactions of skepticism or resistance that the use of other languages is sometimes met with in the adult ESOL field. She elaborated on her perspective on using other languages in the ESOL classroom.

It's not just a space for learning English, but to be able to use language in all these different ways to change others' perception of their language use, and to change the language. I also do believe that students need to have a handle on academic language of the current status quo, of what's considered academic language, and so they can go on, and do that translanguaging.

Her explanation shows the very active, dynamic role she saw her students having, both inside and outside of the classroom, as speakers of different languages, including English. She saw the space as one of learning not only about the language, or how to use the language accurately, but of using the language as a social tool to mediate their relations with others around them. Her mention of academic language specifically points to the relevance of

“academic language” knowledge and socialization into academic practices as a form of social capital, that could potentially benefit her students. She also gave voice to the creative process that is part of becoming a speaker of another language, when she mentioned how she saw the classroom as a space where students would not only *use* language, but also *change* it.

She further explained her rationale for encouraging the use of many languages in the classroom.

My understanding of language learning is not to just have an English-only classroom, in terms of facilitating language development, or thinking about language...I would never want a student’s expression to be limited by not being able to fully articulate what they wanted to say in one language, and then feel limited because they felt they could only use that one language. So, they can much more fully express themselves to use their full linguistic repertoire, for one reason.

This view was not always shared by her co-workers, and she described one situation which was indicative of that, regarding an administrative staff member.

She said things that were very off-putting to me, and other teachers, about English-only...saying things to students...I mean, her general demeanor and things she said definitely suggested that she looked down on languages spoken by students who were not white....I remember having a real reaction to her particular opinions about it.

It says something about the level of value and respect accorded to the students (and workers) in the program who were themselves multilingual and people of color, that disrespectful and discriminatory attitudes were not only tolerated behind closed doors but accepted when

expressed by someone representing the program. When bigotry ceases to need a place to hide, it emboldens those who hold racist views to move beyond words to actions, as they no longer have to fear official sanction or condemnation from their community. In this particular case, the problematic comments of the individual were brought to the attention of management, but rather than directly confronting the individual in question, head program staff came to their defense. Additionally, the teachers who brought up the issue were dismissed for being alarmist.

Another indication that Nicole's colleagues did not always hold the same views as her regarding the importance of students' multilingual identities appeared in her explanation for why she encouraged students to use their full linguistic repertoire in class. Unbidden, she launched into an explanation of the difference between a classroom where people are speaking different languages and an unruly, poorly managed classroom environment.

And then, there's a difference between having an uproarious class of students speaking their native language, and not getting anything done, and reeling it back in. 'We've got targeted language practice that we have to do.' So, of course, there were instances of that, that I was like, 'Are you guys totally off task? Yeah? Okay,' So yeah, there's a difference between targeted language practice, where you're practicing the target language, and then, basically silencing somebody's native language, just for the purpose of trying to create an English-only space, which is harmful for their language development, and for their identity.

In highlighting the different reasons for focusing on target language use in the classroom, Nicole pointed out how in her classroom, if she reoriented students to the English language

task at hand, it was for the pedagogical purpose of focusing on language practice, rather than being a form of control that would take agency away from the students. If she intervened, it was for the purpose of helping students accomplish the day's tasks, rather than as an exercise of power. Again, her use of these strategies showed her additive view of the language learning process, rather than seeing it as a process where other languages were to be replaced or stripped away.

Another element of the role that language itself played in the community development process was the way having different native languages affected the literacy development of the students. Nicole discussed how the very varied backgrounds of the students was sometimes a complicating factor in how she planned her instruction.

It was difficult to differentiate when there were multiple levels of language skills, especially for students who didn't really see themselves as English language learners, *because they weren't*. And then students who not only struggled with literacy, but also-They didn't have native language literacy, and they didn't have English language skills, and for me, teaching them literacy, in English, felt a little silly...I would think that having literacy instruction in your native language makes the most sense.

She pointed out several different issues with the way students were considered eligible for the class, as well as what she was expected to teach. Since the class included native English speakers, she knew that the English language content she included for other students was unnecessary for them and probably felt like a waste of time. On the other hand, having to juggle so many different levels of English proficiency meant that often class discussion or tasks would be at a level too high for some of the lower level English learners to follow.

They felt lost, while at the same time, the native English speakers at times resented precious class time being spent on basic English language instruction that the other students desperately needed.

This also raised the issue of whether native language literacy classes would have been a better option for some of the students. Nicole described how she felt that different groups of students benefitted differently from the class.

I believe, or felt, those students who had native language proficiency [in English] or who had higher English proficiency [as non-native speakers], benefitted a lot more from the literacy instruction, whereas those students who were at the lower end of the English speaking proficiency level, I just feel like I didn't, or couldn't differentiate as well, because they would have needed a lot more of a, one-on-one...the challenge was that it was harder to manage the class.

While she felt that the students with a lower English proficiency level may have benefitted from being in another type of class, the reasons why they weren't were quite practical. While there are limited programs in the area for native language literacy for Spanish speakers, and a scattering of options for Portuguese and Haitian Creole speakers, these classes are often full, waitlisted, and only offered at very limited days/times. For native speakers of other languages, like Somali, there is a real dearth of options for local native language literacy classes. Even where these programs do exist, they are often supported by unstable funding sources, making their long-term viability uncertain, as well as making it difficult for them to gain widespread recognition and traction as community resources.

However, despite these challenges, Nicole felt that overall, there were benefits that came from having a group of students with such different backgrounds in the literacy class together. She emphasized the social benefits and personal relationships that formed.

Well, it's always interesting to see diverse groups of people, who are diverse in their linguistic abilities coming together and forming a cohesive learning community, *which happened*. So, that's kind of cool to see. A woman who, literally, spoke almost no English, the whole year, and Sarafina, from Liberia, and Stephany, from the Dominican Republic. You're communicating! And so, there was community that was built in the class, through just being together.

Through her explanations of the various strategies she used to co-create meaningful learning experiences with the students in her classes, a detailed view emerges of the nature of instruction in this context and the ways in which she exercised her agency inside and outside the classroom. Using a variety of tools, including multiple languages, imagination, memory, and students' diverse skills and talents, she tried to cultivate her classroom as a learning community that would help students grow their critical thinking, social inclusion, civic participation, and creativity, along with their English language proficiency and literacy development.

It is important to note however, that some of her most memorable projects, such as the community garden and language exchange, were not conducted during her paid work time. She was only able to realize these plans through the use of her own free time and resources, as these plans were outside the scope of what was possible within the strictures of the program, due to the program focus on individualistic workforce participation outcomes.

In a way similar to Kate's description of using her own unpaid time and resources to create better literacy materials, Nicole did the same thing to facilitate these projects, which students associated with the program, despite the fact that she received no compensation or recognition from the program for organizing them. Similar to Kate, the achievement of her pedagogical objects was only possible outside the bounds of the adult education program's provisioned resources and WIOA's prioritized workforce development objects.

Layers of Instability

The next theme which pervaded Nicole's discussion of her former job was the instability of the various interlinking systems that make up the adult education system, particularly related to administration and funding, which was compounded by their interconnected nature, for example by the legislation that regulate them, such as WIOA and formerly WIA, and the support systems that sustain them. She talked at length about how this situation affected teachers, how it affected administrative policies and practices, and how it manifested in situations beyond the confines of individual programs.

Big, Uproarious, Demanding

Nicole's experience working in adult education was uniquely interesting in that she had several years of experience as a teacher, both of ESOL and literacy, but had also held a variety of administrative positions, including being the assistant director of one organization. This perspective allowed her to see the challenges facing those working in adult education from several different angles and had also caused her to try and reconcile some of the conflicting priorities of administrators and teaching staff, both practically and philosophically.

She spoke about the beginning of her experience working with teachers, as an administrator, and the thought process she worked through at the time.

I would say that, coordinating, I had very similar goals. It was also a lot harder for me to have the same [goals]...I would say that I began to have a lot more empathy for the director, in that it became much more apparent how funding-how there could be a way to reconcile the demands with funders with the-one of the most frustrating things, was feeling like we were implementing *empty things*, or giving anecdotes just to satisfy funders. So I started to feel like there must be a way that we can reconcile those things, where teachers don't feel like they're part of this *disconnected* thing, and we *do* need that money, and we need to keep that funding cycle going, and some of the things that they're asking for are not bad, *like having a curriculum*, is not a bad thing...but [I was also] maintaining those other, those same goals that I had all along, too [from when I was a teacher].

While she gained a better understanding of how important satisfying the requirements of funders was to keep the program open, she expressed a desire to maintain the community-building focus she had brought to her own classroom. She also described her sense of discomfort with certain new policies that were on the way, with the implementation of WIOA, and her unease with how she expected their implementation would be managed between teachers and administrators.

There were a lot of things that were coming down the pipe, like, 'Okay, I can understand that,' but it's in the rollout of it, and how teachers are being asked to perform certain things and what they should be accountable for, versus what they

shouldn't have to be accountable for, that I was just able to have a little bit of a bigger picture of all the different pieces that were involved in keeping the organization going.

In her descriptions of her discomfort with WIOA policies, she particularly highlighted the way in which these new rules were interacting with the already resource-poor nature (tools) of the setting. She saw this as both tasking teachers with additional responsibilities, as well as assigning them responsibilities for assuring their students would meet new WIOA-mandated workforce development goals, something she felt the teachers should not have to be responsible for.

She also spoke about the relationships that formed among the staff, and the work culture of the organization, including one of the sources of frustration for many of the teachers.

It's a complicated workplace culture because in a lot of ways, it was difficult to work there, and yet, it was probably the students, but there was something about working there that made me, and I believe other people too, made us not want to give up on trying to make it better...On the one hand, it was a warm place to work, in that relationships were fast made and there was a camaraderie for sure, and then at the same time, it was frustrating to work there...I think just the lack of appreciation for the teachers from an administrative perspective, and not an appreciation for what they were doing, but instead, just a constant *what they should be-like*, messaging of what *you should be doing*.

She described how this situation was tiring for the teaching staff, and how she found it difficult to reconcile the requirements of her position as the assistant director, with her understanding of the legitimate feelings of burnout experienced by many of the other staff members.

This situation was exacerbated by the nature of the situation, which was not only one of ever-increasing demands (for both teachers and administrators), but also one in which the demands seemed to be constantly in flux. From Nicole's description, it seemed as though this was due both to changing policies on a larger scale, most notably WIOA, as well as some level of mismanagement within the organization. There was considerable interplay between these two factors as well, as some situations which could have been considered indicative of program-level mismanagement were due in part to attempts to comply with the funding requirements and shifting policy mandates of the transition from WIA to WIOA, as well as changes in state-level policies pushed by federal legislation.

There was a kind of general challenge, which is part of why I think I was there for so long, and also why I was so frustrated all the time. [It] was that everything seemed to be changing all the time...and I was actually part of the changing...We would have ideas of how to improve things but they never really could get off the ground because either they would get derailed by the director, or they were too ambitious...It was a challenge to get systems in place that stuck. Yeah, it was a challenge. In fact, that was probably the biggest challenge, that for every rule, there was an exception-to-the-rule-kind of culture of the place.

She gave a more specific example of the above issue.

There was this unenforced punitive measure that if students were late for class, x amount of times, then they wouldn't be able to attend the program anymore, or they would lose their seat. And it was just this air of threat, that never happened, and some teachers didn't want to needlessly-or they didn't want to-Okay, so I knew that there were no real consequences for students being late, so students were just late, and that was kind of it. It was very disruptive...I guess there were some classes where the teacher was late, and so that made it an even more difficult cycle to break.

Her description shows how the intermittent or nonexistent enforcement of a school policy intended to help create an organized learning atmosphere and encourage steady progress for students forced a difficult decision on the teachers. Many of the teachers were unwilling to ask students to be removed from the program, since in a way, they would have been unfairly making an example of them, to encourage other students to comply with the lax attendance policy. This situation came to be largely due to the failure of administration to enforce their own attendance policy, creating the odd situation of teachers being reprimanded by administrators for not enforcing attendance policies which had not been their responsibility to carry out in the first place. Issues also frequently arose when new teachers were hired and would try to hold students to the official policies. Additionally, this situation fed into unprofessional behavior from certain teachers, who also started arriving late. This, in turn, understandably upset students, and some of those who had been coming on time started coming late as well, began dropping into other classes, or stopped attending entirely. Nicole referred to these results of the way the attendance policy was handled throughout the interviews.

This selective enforcement of program policies from higher level administration created a confusing environment for teachers, who would be decisively and aggressively informed of the new rules they were either subject to, or responsible for enforcing, only to find that follow-through was inconsistent.

Student attendance, the lesson plan submission [policy], just kind of every policy that was like, everybody has to follow this, *big, uproarious, demanding* [policy], and then like, ‘Well, we’re not going to enforce it.’ Or, ‘We’re not going to follow through,’ or it created a culture where teachers who followed their job description, I think, were disincentivized to do so. And not to say that teachers *didn’t*, it just created a culture. Some teachers could bend whatever rule they wanted to bend, and others didn’t. And then it got to a feeling of, well, why should I care if even the person at the top doesn’t appear to care so much about these things?...If I could say it in one sentence, [it was] kind of shifting priorities, that made people unstable.

As Nicole explained, different teachers responded differently to this environment. Some people took advantage of the lack of enforcement and others continued to comply with the new rules, despite a lack of concern from program leadership. However, regardless of these different strategies for adapting to the situation, Nicole defined changing priorities, largely instantiated by the federal policy changes of WIOA, which also brought about local and state-level policy changes, within the organization as a primary source of stress and instability for the staff.

Pressure, Maneuvering, and Behind-the-Scenes Things

Beyond her interactions with the teachers, Nicole also described a huge amount of instability that affected her in her role as a program coordinator and later, assistant director. She felt the effect of the situation particularly in regard to student attendance data collection, the role of the student advisor, and collaboration with the formerly named One Stop career centers (now renamed in the state of Massachusetts as MassHire Career Centers, as of 2019). These centers offer public assistance to out-of-work individuals in the areas of developing a job search plan and accessing vocational training. They also serve employers by providing assistance with recruitment, assessment of job applicants, and logistical support, for example mailing services or space rental for events.

Regarding the collection and management of student attendance data, Nicole described a variety of practices, not unique to this organization and seemingly done with good intentions, which amounted to manipulation of data in order to boost outcome data. Since attendance indicators, pre-WIOA, were considered in the evaluation of program effectiveness, good attendance data was helpful for yearly program reports. The first result of this pressure was that classes were routinely overfilled, beyond the official amount they were planned and funded for, as Nicole described,

Then there was definitely a point in the organization where classes started to be overfilled...to account for...so in SMARTT (an educational database program), you could have twenty-five students, I think, but classes were slotted at thirteen, that's seats we were actually funded for, and to make up for poor attendance, if you, I mean, it seems like a crazy rationale to me, *now*, but...if I'm remembering correctly, it was

not my rationale, but to overfill the classes to make up for students that had poor attendance, and then the others didn't count.

In practice, this resulted in the program supporting a population of students much larger than what it was actually funded for, since the larger group of students would yield a greater possibility of obtaining the minimum attendance data required for a favorable assessment. In the classroom, this meant teachers sometimes had classes more than double the size the school was funded for. In the program office, it meant that administrative staff, as well as materials, both for the classroom and office itself, were provisioned for an organization with a much smaller student body. While these trends pre-dated WIOA, they continued throughout WIOA's rollout as well, in the face of WIOA's much steeper outcome reporting requirements, which intensified the difficulties faced within the programs.

The next step of dealing with the attendance information was the input of data, which was recorded on a statewide educational database system. This process too, was affected by the precarious funding situation and need for outcome data.

So, at the end of the month, the office manager could choose which attendance to, I mean, it had to be the same thirteen students, but it could also be fifteen students, and then, if one student didn't have great attendance, she could kind of just, not include them in that month's roster count... There was lots of cooking, well not cooking, but yeah, I'm sure there was some cooking of the numbers in terms of attendance, because it was so closely linked to funding. There was definitely a lot of *pressure* and maneuvering, behind the scenes things I was not privy to.

An additional aspect of this process was the fact that attendance data was analyzed annually in two different ways, as described here.

I have this recollection that there are two different ways of looking [at attendance] at the end of the year: average attended classes, which it doesn't matter if there were twenty-five students in that one seat over the course of the year. It counts as the attendance that those seats were filled... Then there was the other attendance indicator, which was having retention. That number was harder to manipulate.

It's striking that one of the main program effectiveness indicators related to attendance did not require the seat to have been held by the same student, even from one month to the next. This is interesting in particular because students would typically be in one ESOL level for a nine-month period, after which they were evaluated for advancement. So in this case, in terms of program evaluation, having one student attend nine months of English classes and make the requisite amount of progress, would have been considered equivalent to cycling nine different students through the same class, for one month each, scarcely enough time to get them oriented and caught up with the rest of the class. This is unlikely to be the type of program effectiveness that was intended. This way of handling attendance data is another phenomenon that was present during the WIA era and continued, to satisfy state reporting requirements, with WIOA's initial implementation.

Another symptom of the instability in the administration of the program was the issue of student advising. Ostensibly, the program was funded for an advisor who was there to assist students with academic issues, college and career planning, and personal issues that might be impacting them away from school. Regarding the final area, one of the major roles

of the advisor was connecting students with support services like childcare, food assistance, legal aid, etc. However, perhaps related to the fact that the program routinely served more students than it was officially funded for, the position was a challenging one. (Her comments pertain to a time prior to Kate's employment in the program, when the position of student advisor was still staffed.)

This is not to criticize the advisor, because she was, *she is a wonder woman*, but she was *the all* to students. Like, students came to her with issues of domestic abuse, with housing, with citizenship, with job applications, and for one, there wasn't enough of her to go around, and yeah, in that respect, I think we were under-resourced. And then, there were definitely frequent flyers, who were always in her office, and so her attention would go to them, instead of being able to serve as many students as she could.

The large volume of work generated by such a large number of students having only one person to help them with all these different issues clearly limited the time and energy she could dedicate to each student's situation.

[Advising] was something that we were always trying to troubleshoot, cause it was never perfect, and it was always-it was always one of the big issues. It often felt superficial, the way things were followed up on, and how things were taken care of or addressed. It just always felt very superficial to me. But how to make it better? So, for instance, at another program where I worked, there were three counselors. I think that helped to address it. There was one that was the career coach, and there were two

counselors who just addressed, ‘What’s going on in your life? Can I help you with anything?’ And they were all there at the same time. So, there was that.

There are a few conclusions that can be drawn about the impact of the advising situation on the learning environment at the program. As dedicated and knowledgeable as the advisor was, even Nicole, who was generally unfailingly positive in her discussion of her work, admitted that the situation had some problems.

The issue of scheduling and availability is one she alluded to in her comparison with another program. While the primary program where she worked had both day and night classes, generally the advisor was only available until the late afternoon, as she had a typical office schedule. Therefore, evening students, who made up the bulk of the program, would have to make special arrangements to meet with her before she left at 5pm. For many, arriving at class at 6pm was already a challenge, let alone making accommodations to arrive even earlier. If they were comfortable talking on the phone in English or Spanish, they had that as an option as well, but for students who spoke other languages and limited English, generally they preferred to meet with her in person.

In practice, this may have been the cause of Nicole’s perception that student needs were resolved in a “superficial” way. A lack of available time for helping such a large number of students, as well as a lack of available meeting time convenient for the majority of students meant that it was often difficult for problems to be resolved in a meaningful way. A further effect of this was that many students did not utilize the advising services, (Nicole, personal communication, December 12, 2018), which in the case of serious issues, surely affected their learning and may have contributed to the program’s attrition rate.

One more unstable piece of the administrative puzzle that Nicole remarked on was her program's collaboration with One Stop career centers, which she described as "another superficial thing." She explained what she remembered about the experience.

I personally took students to the career centers and...I wish I could remember the stories, but very unsuccessful, very fruitless, all the times that I went... You have to have a TABE 5 or something, to even get *anything*... That might be new now. *They TABE you*. It's not even like, 'This student has a four or five,' or whatever. *They administer it*.

One of the striking things about this description is the restriction of career center resources to a certain segment of English learners, namely the higher-level students, who score at an intermediate level on a standardized test. An interesting contradiction becomes apparent when one considers that Nicole's program didn't have any daytime ESOL classes of a level high enough for students to benefit from the career center services. The only classes that might have had a high enough English level were night classes, that met after the career center was closed for the day.

Another practice which clearly confused, and perhaps slightly agitated Nicole was the redundant testing of students. Even students who had been pre-tested using the same exam, would be re-tested by the career center. Firstly, the waste of staff and students' time would seem problematic, especially in a system routinely low on resources of all kinds. Secondly, it seems rather insulting, especially for a test where administration privileges are so tightly controlled, for people representing the adult education programs to be told that their program's test results are not trustworthy, and students will have to be re-tested.

Nicole also elaborated a bit on the evolving relationship between the adult education programs and the career centers, with the implementation of WIOA.

When I was leaving [the program], this [working with career centers] was a new thing. Because this was all part of this new grant cycle [related to WIOA], that these community-based educational programs are supposed to be working with ‘shared clients,’ I think that’s what it’s called. I think that’s actually one of the goals. One of the things tied together here [is that] people are ‘shared clients,’ and so in order to be a client of the career center, my recollection is that it’s like a [TABE] four, if not a five. Maybe it’s a four.

Here, she hints at some of the anticipated changes from the new grant cycle, related to the rollout of WIOA policies. One of the new areas of focus is the creation of “shared client” relationships, where adult education providers have to collaborate with the career centers. Most noticeably, due to the English proficiency requirements for becoming a client of the career center, lower level ESOL and literacy students are completely blocked out of this system, both in terms of any benefit they may personally receive from it, and also from the potential outcome data that programs could harvest from them, to prove their “effectiveness” and retain their funding. This seems poised to further disincentivize programs from serving these students.

Throughout Nicole’s discussion of the instability of the adult education field, accelerated by WIOA implementation, she described many of the challenges that were caused by contradictions in the system. One of the primary contradictions was evident in a disparity between the evolving and heightened nature of rules programs had to comply with,

yet a lack of appropriate tools to carry out enforcement of these rules. Rules were evolving on a variety of levels, from the rollout of WIOA at the federal level, to the state level rule changes made to comply with WIOA, to the local program policies themselves. In fact, Nicole explicitly stated that her unease with WIOA implementation, one of the factors which contributed to her exit from the field, was due to a disagreement with teachers being held responsible for newly mandated WIOA outcomes, yet without the appropriate tools to fulfill these responsibilities, another manifestation of the tools-rules contradiction.

Another area where this same contradiction manifested was in the process of student data collection and data entry that she described. As high levels of attendance were considered indicators of program effectiveness, this is information that the program was incentivized to collect and record, as it would help gain refunding. However, these rules about evaluation which rewarded good attendance data pushed the program to exceed the available tools, by enrolling many more students than their funding was intended for. This in turn created chaotic classroom environments at times as teachers dealt with a rolling admission situation where decisions about enrolling new students seemed to be based on assuring sufficient outcome data, rather than an appropriate teacher to student ratio. This situation also connects to a contradiction in the objects of different individuals in the system. As administration had the power to make enrollment decisions, the administrative focus on attaining good outcome data won out over the objects of teachers in this situation. While teachers may have wished the school would prioritize enrollment practices which would cultivate positive learning outcomes, the administration seemed blind to this due to the

pressure to maintain positive attendance indicator data. This contradiction was due to the different objects of the administration and the teachers.

Another area where contradiction was present was in the relationship between the rules and the community, particularly in the relationship between adult education programs and One Stop career centers. One priority under WIOA is the creation of “shared client” relationships, with program participants interacting with more than one WIOA-funded service. In this case, the One Stop career centers are a mandated (rules) community member of the adult education programs. The contradictory nature of this relationship manifested in Nicole’s interviews in her account of the new ways these programs were being required to collaborate with each other. In this situation, the goals of the career centers, being focused on workforce development, are in harmony with the goals of WIOA itself, while Nicole’s education-focused goals, and by extension potentially those of many other adult educators, are not. Different objects of participating community members created tension and contradiction.

Another contradiction is created by the fact that career centers require literacy and at least Level 4 (intermediate) English language proficiency for participants, which bars many adult education ESOL and adult literacy students from participation. In fact, at Nicole’s program, this requirement blocked more than half of this student population from being eligible. This is significant because evidence of “shared client” relationships is a required outcome under WIOA. With this requirement in place, career centers benefit from having goals in alignment with WIOA which helps assure their refunding. On the other hand, adult education programs are at a disadvantage, in that the goals of their employees do not

necessarily align with WIOA's workforce development goals, and a large percentage of their participants are not able to contribute to the "shared clients" statistics they are collecting as evidence of program effectiveness. In this context, the prospect of targeted recruitment seems likely, further displacing lower-level students from adult education programs. Overall, these contradictions indicate one way in which the pressure of WIOA policy seems to be transforming the goals of adult education programs, into ever more alignment with workforce development outcomes.

Crisis Management Mode

Another significant area where institutional instability shaped Nicole's narrative was talking about the world beyond the walls of the school itself. She painted a picture of the professional field of adult education, and how the spaces it occupied in the larger world were characterized by some of the same fractured foundations as the classroom spaces and program office she had spent so much time in. The way the adult education system and its contradictions were reflected in these spaces provided a view of the factors outside the school which were affecting learning in the setting, as well as additional ways that the contradictions present in the system, intensified by WIOA, manifested in the lives of teachers outside the school space.

The major themes that emerged from her comments can be divided into two areas. Firstly, she discussed the topic of professionalizing the field of adult education, including the limited availability of professional development opportunities and a short-lived movement towards unionization in the field. Her descriptions in this area illustrate how these phenomena, related to teachers' working conditions, contributed to contradictions between

the teachers and realization of their objects as outcomes. Secondly, she described the culture of burnout in adult education and her own decision to take a step away from the field to reassess her professional goals. Her explanation of her decision clearly illustrates how some of the contradictions present in her work-life, directly related to the rollout of WIOA, contributed to her exit from the field.

Nicole's interest in the professionalization of adult education as a field ran through our interviews and was a theme she returned to several times. She seemed equally motivated by the ways she speculated it would improve working conditions in the system, as well as the way it might assure certain standards of instruction for students. She explained her perspective:

I am a big advocate of professionalizing the field of adult education, so that teachers have a sustainable wage and are able to actually be productive and proactive in the field, instead of the current state, which is to exhaust teachers to the point that they are frustrated...I've met so many teachers who have been in the field for thirty years, and were complaining about the field, and yet, were actually part of the problem with the field, in that they hadn't changed their approaches. Or, so, a way for teachers to be held to higher standards, while at the same time being paid a higher wage. And I feel like maybe unionizing could help with both of those things.

She was in favor of the concept of a union for adult education teachers and staff and described an attempt in 2012-2013 to unionize adult education workers statewide.

I know that previous to that [the most recent unionization attempt], there had been an effort to unionize teachers in adult ed, that did not pan out. And then, when it came

around the next time, when I was active in adult ed, there was a feeling of, ‘Oh, it’s not going to work,’ and so my feeling was, ‘We’ve already got a lot of balls in the air, and there’s already a lot that we can’t do. So, we can’t-’ And I think other people had spoken to about it felt like, ‘It’s not worth our effort right now, to be working on that, in addition to all the other things we’re doing, for something that is speculated to not even be successful.’

Nicole’s narrative of the response to the unionization effort, even by those who supported the idea, echoes her previous descriptions of the unstable environment within many adult education programs. The level of uncertainty related to program funding, resource availability, and ever-higher mandated outcomes created a situation in which the idea of a union for adult education workers seemed perpetually out of reach.

In describing her desire for both better working conditions for adult educators and also higher standards for instruction, Nicole touched on the availability of professional development opportunities.

So there was [one primary organization], and interestingly, [this organization], when I first started, had a fair selection of professional development, and then, in my last year, or second to last year, they actually closed the [local] office of the organization, and so the regional offerings became much more limited. So, suddenly, there was, if you wanted to go to [their] professional development workshops, you would have to go to [a smaller city an hour away by car], to get to it from [here, a major city].

She described how this organization’s move made it quite difficult for local teachers to access free professional development activities, since the organization had been the primary

provider of such workshops for both ESOL and ABE teachers. Additionally, the closest site offering these workshops was not only an hour away by car, but also poorly served by public transportation, making it difficult for teachers to access.

While there were other local organizations offering professional development workshops, many of them restricted attendance to programs to which they provided funding. It was also common for specific grants to fund only specific classes within one organization, meaning that some teachers at one school could attend particular workshops, while others could not, since the classes they taught were not supported by that particular funding source. The lack of accessible professional development opportunities seems likely to have discouraged, if not prevented, teachers and other staff from accessing continuing education.

The next theme that emerged from Nicole's interviews was the unsustainable culture of burnout prevalent in the adult education field.

We would have little cohorts of teachers that would band together to try and improve the organization... There were these waves of, surely there were waves of proactivity by many people in the organization, throughout the whole time I was there, but even up until the end, you know, the youngest, most excited, *were done*. They were burnt out. And so, it was like the next round of the excited, enthusiastic, proactive people-I just, I did feel like it was a cycle that kind of wore people out.

She described how the unstable conditions of the field exhausted even those who entered it with the most energy and engagement. She also acknowledged that her own perspective, having had an "almost full-time" position may have given her a different view of the dynamics at work, from many other teachers at the organization.

Interestingly, she pointed out the fact that the marginal position of part-time teachers in adult education programs has the potential to somewhat insulate them from the bigger picture of the field, while also relegating them to a financially more precarious existence. She explained this by way of comparing her experience at two different programs, one where she was “almost full-time” as the assistant director, and another where she worked part-time teaching one class.

I think [the primary organization] was unique in that people could have almost full-time jobs there, so when I went to [the other organization], there were people who complained...But for me, I just went in and I did my job and I wasn't affected at all by anything that was going on there. And I can't speak for teachers at [the primary organization] who were like that. Maybe the way it affected me was very different from the way it might have affected another teacher.

She also highlighted how having the bigger picture view of program evaluation, as an administrator, affected her experience.

I think there is a layer of instability in adult ed, because these programs go through five-year grant cycles, and I think it's every year, you're evaluated. So, even though you have a five-year grant, there's anxiety every year.

All of the above factors figured into Nicole's relatively recent decision to step away from adult education for a time, pursue licensure in K-12 teaching, and start teaching English language learners in a middle school setting. Her reasons for this decision were a synthesis of the unsustainable work culture, her own desire for deeper learning experiences, and the hope

that maybe by taking time away, she could more clearly focus on her vision of who she was, and could be, as an educator.

As Nicole described her decision-making process and the experiences she had pursued after exiting the adult education environment, echoes of her previous explanations about systematic instability could be heard.

I didn't decide completely to leave adult ed, but I did decide to leave [that particular organization]. And with that, it was kind of a slow transition, because I had been trying to leave for three years, and the reasons were because of the schedule-the schedule is tough-and the pay is not great, and the direction that adult ed was going in didn't feel great...[it] was not exactly what I-the direction I wanted to be going in with it, because I felt like I wasn't in a position to have much influence on the direction it was going in.

Her description of the factors which influenced her included material conditions, like the work schedule and compensation, as well as certain changes which had been taking place during her time working in the field. As will later be discussed, the "direction that adult was going in" that Nicole described was a shift towards a more intense focus on workforce development, as the primary goal of public adult education programs. Despite the fact that she had for a time occupied a higher-level administrative position, she felt little ability to impact this shift towards priorities she disagreed with.

Since exiting adult education, she had begun teaching English to middle school language learners. She described what had attracted her to the K-12 teaching environment.

I felt like I wanted to be on a different side of it [adult education], not in it, but getting to the point in my professional life that I could get back to it somehow, maybe from a different perspective, and I just felt like [with] the resources in K-12, that I could become a better teacher, and then figure out if I was going to go back to it or not... If I went to K-12, then I would be able to get access to more professional development, access more resources, and get the kind of job stability that would hopefully give me more predictability, and that I could grow more, instead of just being in crisis management mode.

Nicole's comments highlight the way she saw job stability as a factor which could help her develop professionally, in contrast to the chronic instability which she described as rampant throughout the adult education field, from the classroom to administration, to the area of support services. She perceived that greater access to resources would give her more opportunities to learn and develop her own ideas about education, since the job stability she would experience would give her time and space to reflect on her own role and goals. This stands in contrast to the unstable position of teachers in the adult education system, who may find their professional development hindered by the unpredictable working conditions they deal with on a daily basis.

The narrative about challenging working conditions in adult education and Nicole's decision to leave the field illustrate a variety of contradictions, touching every element of the activity system. In terms of Nicole's descriptions of the difficulties of accessing appropriate professional development (PD), the failed unionization attempt, and her own inability to continue in the field, all exemplify a contradiction between the subjects and their intended

object of professional growth, caused by issues with the tools, community, rules, and division of labor. These contradictions were imposed upon the system by the influence of workforce development policy, most recently WIOA.

In terms of the difficulties of accessing PD, Nicole's explanation shows a contradiction between the teachers, the available tools, and their object of continuing their education. The tools were limited in the sense that PD workshops were often restricted to employees of certain programs/classes, and also in that the physical locations of many trainings were difficult for the largest community of potential attendees to access due to distance, travel time, and lack of public transportation. The lack of access was particularly problematic due to the recent implementation of WIOA, which necessitated redesign of many of the ways programs worked with students. In such a time of transition, PD would have been especially needed. However, it was at exactly this time that the local offerings were curtailed due to the relocation of the primary PD organization's headquarters to a more outlying area.

The failure of the unionization effort faced contradictions in the area of tools, but also contradictions related to the community and the division of labor. If such an effort had been successful, it may also have had a dramatic effect on the rules of the system, and while this was not the ultimate outcome, this element of potential changes to the rules of the system hung in the balance. The main issue from Nicole's description was the prevailing view in the local professional community that such an attempt was unlikely to be successful. Local teachers were also not enthusiastic about working towards an effort that looked unlikely to succeed from the beginning. This lack of buy-in from the community was made even more problematic (and perhaps also partly caused by) the resource-poor environment, in which

teachers were already facing challenging working conditions. The division of labor was also in question, as without enough critical mass from the community and a lack of tools (money, time) to do the necessary advocacy work, the unionization project lacked the resources it would have needed to succeed.

Turning to Nicole's decision to step away from adult education, her explanation highlights how the "burnout culture" (Nicole) of adult education is comprised of contradictions between teachers and their intended object of professional growth created by all other elements of the activity system. Difficult working conditions are created by a scarcity of appropriate tools, unsustainable divisions of labor, an incoherent professional community, and inflexible rules, most recently WIOA, that prioritize workforce participation above all other goals. In this system, poor working conditions become self-reinforcing, as the challenges that teachers face either force them out of the field or inhibit them from advocating for change, due to their own lack of time, money, and other resources. The result is that those who cannot accept the conditions often leave, and those who decide they are able to cope with the conditions stay, but only by sacrificing their own object of sustainable professional growth in the process.

CHAPTER 6

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: NO COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES

One theme that pervaded both Kate and Nicole's comments during our interviews was the "steadily evolving presence" (Nicole) of workforce development, most recently in the form of WIOA implementation, as a priority for the organization. Both talked at length about how it influenced many elements of the activity system of the program, from lesson plans (tools) and attendance policies (rules) to discourse concerning the student population and their value to the program (community). The influence of WIOA was particularly strong at their program, compared to others in the area, as its primary funder was DESE, making compliance with government policies more critical for remaining operational. Kate spoke about these topics primarily from her role as a teacher, while Nicole's were divided between her teaching and administrative roles, particularly as assistant director of the organization.

Some recurring themes from the interviews are the contradiction created by the differing priorities of the program, teachers, and students, the evolution of mandated outcomes, and the practice of targeted recruitment. These themes were manifested in the school outside of the classroom, in the classroom space itself, and finally in the students' lives outside the classroom, and it is these spaces which structure the following accounts.

The School Beyond the Classroom

The One's and the Zero's

For Kate, the pervasive prioritization of workforce outcomes manifested in the school setting outside the classroom, namely during administrative meetings, in the transition to a new set of mandated standards for ESOL classes, and in the collection of workforce outcome data during student interviews.

Kate described how, as part of her coordinator job, she was being asked to have one-on-one meetings with students to ask how their classes were going. She explained what happened at a meeting with a higher-level administrator, regarding how these interviews should play out.

I didn't voice it, but I had a really negative reaction when my director said to me the other day, 'I want to hear about outcomes. I don't want to hear about how a student really likes the class and the teacher,'...She was making the point that it's not about whether they like the person or not. It's about whether or not the class is effective.

Which, I take that point, but I don't understand why you would ever frame it as a mutually exclusive thing.

This type of discussion seems to point out a disregard for the content knowledge, institutional knowledge, pedagogical skills, experience, and unique personal strengths that different teachers bring to their work. It also illustrates how the pressure from WIOA pushes program administrators to focus so intensely on outcomes that they may lose their appreciation for classroom dynamics and the humanity of the teachers and students in their program.

She further described a different meeting with another program administrator, where the students in the literacy class was discussed.

The [administrator] will say, you know, I've heard students referred to as, 'Oh, I'm sorry we have to put all the one's and the zero's in your class.' The students who are the lowest, low speaking level, students who are probably the least likely to produce outcomes, as they are so defined...by the powers that be. So, I've actually been told, 'Don't spend as much time helping those students. Help the students who are going to progress, possibly into our ABE program'...you know in a way, actually I'm very grateful that she speaks candidly about this stuff, because there's no doubt in my mind about what's happening.

This explanation, by the administrator, seems problematic on several levels. Firstly, the act of an institutional leader apologizing for a teacher having to work with particular students seems disrespectful, particularly when said students are defined by a characteristic outside their control (their educational background). It is also dehumanizing to refer to the students as numbers, denoting the lowest possible value (1), and a lack of value (0). Furthermore, accepting students into an academic program yet explicitly instructing a teacher to deprioritize them, seems disingenuous in the extreme. Again, it seems particularly egregious because free programs like this one are sometimes the only option for many people who can't afford to pay for classes. Someone may enter the program, relieved to have found a way to advance their education despite their limited finances, only to end up labeled as one of the "zero's" and put on the back burner by program staff. This example shows quite explicitly how the workforce development focus of WIOA is cultivating a situation in which students are being assigned numeric values representing their ability to produce results for their program, reducing their worth to their ability to create profit for others on the labor market.

Another area where prioritization of workforce content, underpinned by policies like WIOA, was evident was in Kate’s description of the transition from one set of mandated standards to another. As she explained, publicly funded adult education ESOL curriculum was previously required to be based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ESOL (which were phased out in 2018) and the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). (see Table 1) These standards were mandated for use both in program-level documents like year-long curriculum plans as well as lesson plans for individual classes. The Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ESOL set out language acquisition-specific standards, divided into six levels, and tied to various strands: reading; writing; listening; speaking, navigating systems; intercultural knowledge and skills; and developing strategies and resources for learning. Kate described these standards as helpful and very easy to link to her class content. Despite the fact that they were more general and did not focus on literacy development, she was able to tie her lesson plans to the reading and writing strands in particular. She described using these standards as somewhat intuitive, and the standard documents themselves as easy to navigate. She further characterized the ESOL standards as “more forgiving,” due to the fact that “they were more language-specific and they’re more basic,” in comparison to the CCRS.

The CCRS are a different set of standards, required for all of the program’s adult education classes, focused on the development of academic skills and critical thinking. While she described her experience working with the CCRS as positive, she did describe how sometimes, working with so many different sets of requirements, especially with other

standards, such as numeracy, that were more difficult to navigate, she felt like, “there’s no coloring outside the lines.”

The interesting point Kate brought up in this discussion of standards was that her program, along with other programs statewide, would be transitioning to a new set of standards in February 2019. She described these standards, the MA English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education, (see Table 1) like this, “I think it’s becoming, basically the CCRS, with a little bit of the [ESOL] frameworks sprinkled on top. It’s part of WIOA, [moving] towards all lessons must be preparing students for an academic track or a work track, tracking.”

In contrast to previous years, in which use of the ESOL Curriculum Framework guaranteed some place of importance was reserved for the language-acquisition goals of learners, the new standards will somewhat limit this. Many elements of the ESOL Curriculum Framework, such as the Reading, Writing, and Navigating Systems strands, were integrated into the new standards, yet these goals lost their recognition as valid outcomes in their own right, as they are now only recognized as appropriate lesson objectives when used in tandem with college/career-oriented lesson goals.

Additionally, a few other changes are apparent which indicate what has been prioritized and what has been left behind with the new standards. While the previous Curriculum Framework for ESOL included strands focused on Intercultural Knowledge and Skills, as well as Developing Strategies and Resources for Learning, these are absent from the new standards, seemingly replaced by the new strand of Civics. Also, the new standards collapse Speaking and Listening into one combined strand, whereas in the previous

standards, each one was a separate strand. By collapsing them into one combined strand, these skills lose their weight when being used to justify lesson objectives by language teachers. Finally, the new standards document identifies benchmarks appropriate for ESOL Levels 1-6, but unlike the prior standards, does not seem to include literacy level learners, despite the use of the term “Beginning Literacy,” which is applied to more complex goals than what was required previously. This makes it unclear what standards are currently being used with literacy level ESOL learners.

Standard Title	Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education	Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for ESOL	College and Career Readiness Standards for English Language and Literacy
Policy level	State	State	Federal
Applicable programs	ESOL	ESOL	ESOL, ABE, ASE
Currently in use with adult education programs?	Yes, phased in in February 2019 and mandated in July 2019	No, phased out in January 2019	No, phased out in January 2019
Strands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Speaking and Listening (<i>combined</i>) • Navigating Systems • Civics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Speaking • Listening • Navigating Systems • Intercultural Knowledge and Skills • Developing Strategies and Resources for Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Speaking and Listening (<i>combined</i>) • Language

Table 1, Comparison of current and recent past standards for adult education ESOL (Adapted from Pimentel (2013), Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services (2005), and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Adult and Community Learning Services (2019))

In addition to the language used in administrative meetings and the evolution of state standards, another area which illustrated the prioritization of workforce outcomes was the way in which the above-mentioned outcome data was actually collected. Starting in 2018, teachers had been tasked with collecting outcome data themselves, during what the school ostensibly presented to students as “progress reports.” Kate explained how she handled the process.

First, we talk about how they’re doing in class, and then, there’s this interview, and I preface it by saying, ‘These are some questions that are part of this program, and our funding is tied to it, and I’m required to ask you.’ Sort of to say that I understand why this might feel invasive. ‘What is the name of your employer? How much money do you make? Did you receive any kind of raise in the past year? Do you have benefits? Do you have insurance?’ I don’t feel great asking, asking that to people, but you know, people are usually congenial about it.

In terms of how this information is presented to teachers, Kate had this to say, “The collection of information is, this is something you do. This isn’t up for negotiation or your discretion. And I mean, teachers, I feel, it’s a lot. It’s extra work. The teachers are made to do the extra work.”

Although Kate had to comply with the requirement to do this task, she still emphasized how it felt uncomfortable to pry into students’ personal information in this way.

It seems questionable for the program to frame something as an academic progress report, when fully half of the meeting's purpose is harvesting personal, finance-related data from students. Additionally, it seems possible that this situation takes advantage of students' trust in their teachers, as they might be more reticent about complying with this process were it presented by someone they did not have a personal relationship with already. It also seems questionable, given the somewhat incoherent intake processes Kate described, how fully students understood what kind of information they were agreeing to share when they signed up for a class. Finally, this extra task was given to the teaching staff, without any increase in paid time or other compensation for doing so.

This situation created contradictions in a variety of ways, for her relationship with her students, her relationship with her workplace community, and her own sense of professional ethics. The interview process complicated her relationship with the students both in terms of the tools for facilitating the class (available time and resources), as well as the feeling that her good rapport with the students was being taken advantage of to collect data for the program (due to the rules). It also created a contradiction between Kate and her workplace community, as she felt unable to have a dialogue with her supervisor or coworkers about the process. Finally, Kate's descriptions show how the limited tools available for program intake (lack of translated materials or interpreters to explain what students were consenting to) were in contradiction with some of the subjects, like Kate, whose personal beliefs about their ethical responsibility to the students prevented them from accepting the legitimacy of the process.

A Very Real Fear

Nicole took up a similar theme, of how certain students seemed more valued by the program than others, but from a different perspective, due to her higher-level administrative role. A major topic she focused on was the specter of targeted recruitment during the student intake process, related to educational background, English proficiency, and immigration status. Her comments are punctuated with references to the changes ushered in by WIOA.

At the time she worked at the program, the process of students enrolling in classes consisted of their contacting the program office, filling out an application form, and being assessed for one's initial level. After this process was complete, students would either be given information about when and where to go for their first day of class or be placed on a waitlist. The school had dedicated intake days at the beginning of the academic year, but also engaged in the process of rolling admissions. Due to the potential for workforce policy priorities to privilege the offering of higher level classes to secure outcomes, it seems important to note that the school's most in-demand and waitlisted classes were ESOL Levels 1 and 2, and also that the school's literacy program was well-known in the local Somali community as a place for adults to go for basic literacy instruction.

With the transition of WIOA, which Nicole referred to as "the new funding cycle," Nicole observed conversations and policies which made her concerned that the school would begin selectively recruiting and enrolling higher level students, in order to comply with the new mandated outcome requirements. This meant recruiting both students with more extensive educational backgrounds, as well as higher levels of English proficiency. This shift also entailed the recruitment of legally documented students with valid social security

numbers, as will be described later. She described how this shift began to manifest in conversations within the administration.

So, because adult education programs' status changed under WIOA from its previous WIA version, so, then what was considered measurable outcomes, as we talked about before, changed under WIOA, and then so, as a result, the program internal conversations started to trend towards, recruiting students who were *higher*, who had higher language proficiency, higher educational backgrounds in their native language, and so there was definitely, with WIOA and the connection to the One Stop [career] Centers, with the direct correlation between shared clients-It just made it very, very much that we were workforce development, moving in that direction.

Nicole's comments illustrate how the program response to new mandated outcomes was quite reactive, in that from the beginning, the response went in the direction of strategic compliance, even at the expense of the student body. This is an example of the attitude of reactive compliance common in adult education spaces, which while understandable, given the extraordinary pressure these programs are under for funding, is still unacceptable when it is at the expense of the students they are supposed to serve.

Nicole also described her own personal reaction to this change, including how it affected her decision later to switch to the K-12 system. Her observations reflect her experience with the adult education system prior to the implementation of WIOA, under the previous legislation, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). She contrasts her earlier experience with the changes she anticipated taking place under WIOA. Under WIA, at least in the state of Massachusetts, while students *were* asked for a social security number, they

were not obligated to provide it, and *critically*, there was a higher proportion of outcome data unlinked to SSN information than under WIOA. Under WIA, in Massachusetts, even students without SSNs would be contributing to program outcome metrics like attendance, average attended hours, and personal goal achievement, which are no longer tracked under WIOA. On the contrary, at the current time, these outcomes are no longer recorded for federal use, and the emphasis has shifted to SSN-linked common performance measures like entry into employment, median earnings, and effectiveness in serving employers. Nicole describes how the transition contributed to her decision to move in a new professional direction.

When it [outcome documentation] switched to being tied exclusively to a social security number, then of course, I completely disagree with that, because it totally shifts, and that's actually one of the reasons I ended up leaving adult education. Because it was, it was going in a direction that I didn't want to be a part of, at that time at least, so if I did [return to adult education], I wanted to be in a position to do more about it, because what's going to happen, and I don't know if this is actually happening, programs are going to have to admit only-not only, but they're going to have to admit a large number of students who not only have a social security number, but are likely to meet certain goals. So, for instance, I had a seventy-year old Colombian woman in my literacy class. Well, she's not going to get a job. She's not going to, you know, get any of the other things [mandated outcomes], even if she does have a social security number. I think it will influence how students are-the screening process.

The potential effect of these programmatic changes had a substantial effect on Nicole, contributing to her exit from the field. This seems significant, particularly given her ten years of teaching and administrative experience and the extensive institutional knowledge she had cultivated at this particular organization. In fact, it seems that the institutional knowledge she had developed over time was what had actually enabled her to envision the potential effect of the new policies, and convinced her that the position she held at that time did not provide a viable way for her to make meaningful change.

During our interviews, Nicole also reflected on her experiences working with undocumented learners, contextualizing her response to WIOA, and also speculated various times about the way the new WIOA policies might affect undocumented students. One of the changes she hinted at was the shrinking availability of support services specifically for undocumented students, which were previously provided by some programs. While the program she described in our interviews did not have a large population of these students, she had previously worked at a program with a large percentage of undocumented students, where immigration enforcement issues were “a very real fear.” In response to student concerns, the program hosted events to provide legal support regarding immigration enforcement, giving undocumented learners a place to safely ask questions and get answers. Under the new WIOA policy, this type of service offering seems unlikely because programs are disincentivized from offering even basic services to undocumented learners, let alone special workshops. It seems that these prior experiences informed Nicole’s response to the policy shifts of WIOA, having given her additional experience with a student population where the issue of immigration enforcement was a visceral fear.

Nicole also speculated a bit further on the issue of undocumented students, and how they would respond to the shrinking number of programs where they could access adult education classes. I questioned her about where she thought they would turn, when the majority of adult education programs, restricted by the same legislation, seemed likely to begin restricting the number of undocumented students they admitted.. She had this to say, regarding where these students might go.

I don't know, because you know, even [another widely praised, non-profit ESOL] program, even though it's an open-doors kind of program, they're funded by the Department of Education...So, more grassroots, smaller, community-based organizations that aren't tied to accountability measures like that...I'm trying to think of some off the top of my head, besides the library.

She came up with one organization that was not beholden to the new requirements of WIOA, but backpedaled her response a bit,

I think [this other organization] is a really awesome program, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were trying to expand. It was all volunteer-based, and so when a program expands and they're awesome like that, the Department of Education is the biggest funder.

Curiously, she described a process where these well-run programs seem to become victims of their own success, in that once they get large enough to secure government funding which can increase the program's stability, they become beholden to a set of rules which are incongruent with the organization's mission. It is also striking that someone with such

extensive experience in the field could only come up with one program that would be an option for the potential exodus of undocumented students from other DOE-funded programs.

Summing up her thoughts about how the targeted recruitment conversation entered program discussions and how the staff responded, Nicole shared the following remarks.

There was a lot of vocalization from me and other staff members about the trouble with...how it [intake] is going to be linked to screening in some way, and the director's response was that, 'Well, we'll just have to have enough students that have social security numbers, and enough students that re going to be able to meet those goals,' and really, those were nearly their exact words, in order to take those students, the other proportion of students that aren't going to make those goals, or don't have a social security number. And I was torn, because I understand what she's saying. I mean, in order to get refunded, those goals need to be met, and so it's a tricky spot for these programs to be in. They have to deliver something, and if they don't, they don't get refunded. And then there goes a community resource.

Nicole's description illustrates a disconnect between the lived reality of program staff and the vague pronouncements from higher level administrators, echoing WIOA requirements.

Concerns about the potential negative effect new mandated outcomes were met with blind insistence on finding any way to meet those outcomes. That this contradicted the goals of the program, the students' goals, or the program staff's knowledge of the student demographics seemed inconsequential. Simply insisting that the program needs to find enough *suitable* students to fulfill new mandates ignores the lived experience of the program staff and brushing aside their concerns trivializes their knowledge and experience. It takes criticism of

the policy off the agenda and instead focuses, in a perhaps unrealistically optimistic way, on the program finding a way, *any way*, to conform to the new law. The situation seems to be a classic illustration of the question, do the ends justify the means? Is targeted recruitment acceptable, if it helps programs secure refunding and remain open? At the moment, it's a question the adult education field seems to be seeking a satisfactory answer to, yet the answer remains elusive.

These accounts from Nicole and Kate illustrated a variety of contradictions in the way the adult education program was functioning outside the classroom. All of these changes were shaped and intensified by the program's growing focus on attaining workforce outcomes. In all of these contradictions, WIOA, as the most powerful rule regulating the system, has a central role to play in preventing the subjects from achieving their objects.

One of the most pervasive issues in Nicole's narrative about this topic was her worry about the process of targeted recruitment taking hold in the program, due to a pressure to attain outcomes. This process was a threat precisely because of WIOA implementation, which necessitated the enrollment of students who would participate in the workforce in specified ways. She worried in particular about the further marginalization of undocumented learners. The effect of such a process would be that the adult education field would begin to most benefit those who entered the system with the most resources to begin with. Contrary to adult education's history as a social service available to all, targeted recruitment would create a situation in which the cycle of capital reinforces itself through the adult education system. This would be accomplished by restricting access to further educational opportunities to those with either enough prior education and social capital to attain mandated outcomes, or

enough financial capital to pay their own way through for-profit institutions. Those without either would be left without recourse. As for the independent, non-profit educational projects which Nicole referred to, those are also subject to this process, as once they grow large enough to need more funding, DESE is the largest funder. These programs become victims of their own success as they are recuperated by the system and subjected to the neoliberal project of WIOA oversight.

Another phenomenon which illustrated many of the contradictions WIOA implementation was creating within the program could be seen in the student interview process described by Kate. The process by which students were interviewed by their teacher about workforce participation and other financial information exposed contradictions between the teachers, the rules by which they were bound, and the school community. WIOA implementation data collection processes created an ethical dilemma for teachers such as Kate, who felt that this type of questioning was inappropriate and also unrelated to the purpose of participation in the program. This process also impacted the tools available, as it was accomplished during her already limited class time, further restricting time for instructional activities. Finally, it also impacted the school community, in that it both created a situation that may have been uncomfortable, particularly for undocumented individuals, and also in that program discourse about learners seemed to be showing signs of attributing values to learners based on their ability to attain outcomes. This was most clear from Kate's description of administrators labeling learners with numbers to indicate their value. This type of discourse in the community seems to stem from a cultural shift in the program where it became acceptable to appraise students' value in terms of workforce participation in the

capitalist economy. Overall, these trends point to a rebuilding of the activity system of adult education programs in which piece by piece, through the rule enforcement of WIOA implementation, the system is being repurposed.

In the Classroom

Very Impressive People

Focusing on what happened inside the classroom, Kate talked about the workforce development goals often prioritized by the administration and how she perceived that those goals came into conflict with goals her literacy students brought to the class.

She described how the program's focus on WIOA implementation affected the way she planned lessons and units. The program strongly encouraged the planning of class units around work-related topics, for all levels in the program, regardless of the background or goals of the students. She described how she felt while planning lessons that had to center on benchmarks not directly related to literacy or language development.

I feel like it's restricting. And I feel like there's this sense that some things are *useful* and some things are *not useful*... The idea of just having vocabulary to talk about things that are personally meaningful to you, is not considered an important end in itself.

Kate described how she felt about planning a reading or lesson around a minor cultural topic, using the example of Groundhog Day.

When I'm thinking about a concept, in my head, I was like, I could never talk about Groundhog Day, because that would be too confusing, and also has nothing to do with a job, or workforce. Like my boss will be upset if she found out we talked about a groundhog for an hour.

She further described how she felt that the push for workforce-related content affected her students, and how she had shifted her approach to incorporating it, to satisfy requirements, while keeping the lesson content more aligned with her and her students' literacy goals.

So, you can see the micro-expressions on people's faces. You understand what is going through their head...I did, I've never done it again, but I did a lesson where I felt like it relates somehow to a skill, a work skill, or a critical thinking skill, but I won't do a lesson explicitly about jobs anymore. Because I found it too alienating. We'll talk about jobs, but not as in, *when you apply for a job*. I'll do a lesson where we're filling out forms. This can relate to, that's a huge thing for me, spatial stuff.

In this way, she was able to concentrate on the spatial awareness aspect of literacy instruction, including activities focused around the visual organization of information, which also satisfied one of the mandated standards required for lesson plans. Interestingly, Kate did not mention many other instances where she really focused on workforce development content, but rather, often highlighted the ways she was able to incorporate enough to satisfy requirements, while not letting it overtake the class.

In addition to the push for workforce content, there was also an opposition by administration to content/approaches deemed "warm and fuzzy", a category which included things as diverse as class discussions of holidays, stress-management techniques, and trauma-informed teaching. Taking up the topic of stress management, she had this to say:

I don't have a lot of training in this, but I imagine that the warm fuzzies would actually be something that would be a useful thing, to have students do, a breathing exercise, as part of the class...I feel like actually teaching stress management,

actually helping teachers doing that would be good too, (laughter)...But I feel like there should be more awareness around that, and that should inform teaching practices...And it's seen as somehow distracting from more important things, like job training.

Interestingly, she framed these kinds of techniques as being potentially useful for the teachers, as well as students, due to the stressful nature of the adult education workplace. This unquestioned prioritization of workforce content by administration was also manifest in the reaction to a trauma-informed teaching workshop proposed by the volunteer coordinator. While most teachers were reportedly quite interested in participating, the workshop was dismissed by administration as a “warm and fuzzy” way of “coddling” students. The rationale presented was that the program’s aim was to produce “college and career-ready adults, on the path to earning a family-sustaining wage,” and that trauma-informed teaching was merely a way of being “soft” on students, instead of training them to compete in the workforce.

Despite, or perhaps partly because of the sometimes-challenging conditions of her position as an adult literacy teacher, Kate frequently remarked upon the many positive aspects of her job, possibly as a way to rationalize her decision to continue working in such a challenging environment. She talked animatedly and at length about how much she enjoyed her job, had learned valuable lessons from many of her colleagues, and especially her admiration and respect for her students and their goals. She described her class as follows.

They're all very impressive people...And a lot of them, they say, my kids are going to be so proud of me, when they see that I wrote this by myself, when they see that I had perfect attendance this month, you know what I mean"

However, she lamented the fact that some of these students had achieved big goals in their lives which were never a subject of consideration for the program. For example, even the significant achievements of some learners described below, clearly evidence of the high value the students placed on their education, was not enough to prevent them from being profiled as "zeros" by administration, solely due to their literacy level.

I feel like it's annoying because they're ignoring the fact that, like, Why don't they get points for the fact that they raised a child who got a full scholarship to Boston University?...That's *two* of my literacy students...it's sad that it's not counted somehow.

She also talked about the importance of the unplanned moment in her classroom, and the way it created a unique rapport between everyone in the class, that had nothing to do with the workforce development goals of the program. Her comments highlight the tension she felt about the importance she placed on these situations, versus how they would be perceived by administration.

I've had these moments where, and it's never something that I've planned, it's like, what do they call it in teaching? A magic moment?...where people just dissolve into a fit of giggles...There are sometimes moments like that that bring everyone together. And that's so important...And that's *a skill*, of relating to people, and I feel like, that

I have to make the argument that that is economically relevant, even if it feels kind of vulgar to make that argument.

Her comments show how she perceived that the school not only failed to value these positive interactions, but also how it didn't recognize the value of the teacher's interpersonal skills for building strong rapport with and within their classes, and the attendant improvements in the classroom environment and student learning which can come from that.

Overall, throughout the interviews, Kate described a variety of different ways she had responded to the conflict she perceived between her students' goals and the goals of the program. The contradiction between the humanistic literacy goals of her students and the instrumental workforce development goals of the program affected her lesson planning, her interactions with her students and supervisor, and the professional development opportunities that were available to her. Her descriptions of how she handled these situations were evidence of the creativity and personal commitment that enabled her to navigate those contradictions in a way that prioritized the interests of the students, using her own judgement about how to provide them with the best educational experience possible. This tension was not without a personal impact on her, however.

My day-to-day goal is to overcome the despair I feel that my program doesn't-the government, world, and my program director don't want the class to exist...And also demands outcomes, that are not realistic for the students, and to not let that infect me and turn me into a monster who might feel frustrated when my students are not-and to get into a place where I'm meeting students on their level and helping them with *their* goals, which are very basic, which are to be able to do read English and to be able to

write English...Most of the students in my class are mothers, with many children, some of whom are actually college-age, and so for them, it's more of a personal goal, like a lot of them, They just want to learn how to read, but for some of them, it is sort of annoying, because the program doesn't want them, because they're not going to go out and get a job.

Her description of her response to the situation illustrates how teaching is not only a form of labor in the more traditional sense, but also a form of emotional labor. Kate's situation, of serving as the intermediary between a group of students who were experiencing marginalization in a number of ways, and an administration she perceived as not wanting them, seemed poised to create stress for her, as she continuously advocated for these unwanted students, as described in the previous section, when administrators were labeling students as "zero's and one's." The weight of this potential emotional impact was belied by her calm demeanor as she further contrasted the students' goals with the program's goals in this way, "It's not enough that someone can simply fill out the form. We want them to fill out the form and get the job, right"?

Am I Preparing Every Student to Be a Certified Nursing Assistant?

Nicole discussed classroom issues, but with a somewhat different focus. While Kate's descriptions focused on the mismatch between student needs and goals, and those being imposed upon them, Nicole focused more on the contradiction between the expertise and knowledge of language teachers and the imposition of workforce development content into the program. The idea of confusion was pervasive in her comments about the encroachment of workforce development discourse and policy into the adult education environment. She

reflected on these contradictions and the confusion they created for her, both from her position as an administrator and a teacher. Her explanations show the haphazard way in which platitudes about “preparing students for the workforce” were handed down to the programs as well as the contradiction it created between the priorities and expertise of the program staff, and the priorities of supervisory organizations.

So, it was not so much a focus of, ‘This is how we’re going to focus on workforce development. These are some ideas of what it could look like in the classroom.’ It was like, ‘Have a unit on being a nursing assistant or something. Have a unit on working on a construction site, interviewing skills, things like that,’ but for me, who had only had the experience of writing *my own* resume and things like that, it just never seemed like I knew exactly what workforce development looked like, in terms of the content that I could bring into the class and still make it relevant for the students.

Her description illustrates the lack of depth in the guidance that programs received about integrating workforce development content into the curriculum, as well as a scarcity of resources or materials to assist them in carrying out these mandates. Her description also highlights the contradiction between the subjects, the tools, and rules within the adult education system, created by trying to repurpose language teachers as job trainers. Charging the teachers and other staff at these programs with job training for what was determined to be “in demand” jobs in this way sets teachers up to fail, by making them responsible for teaching that does not match their professional expertise or interests. Additionally, it creates a situation where people may comply, despite disagreement they may have with the policies,

in order to prevent the program from being defunded and closing. This compliance with policies one disagrees with philosophically creates more stress for teachers, who feel stuck between the equally unappealing options of turning their classrooms into workforce training spaces or maintaining the content goals they have for their students, yet seeing their programs get defunded. This then in turn may contribute to the burnout culture in adult education, with teachers having to live with contradictions that they cannot resolve satisfactorily. If they do not leave, they tend to become disengaged from their work environment or overwhelmed by the challenges surrounding them.

Nicole described the contradiction between her professional experience and knowledge, and what she was being asked to do in more detail.

Because, I didn't know what workforce development, like what it meant to prepare students for the workforce. I could prepare students to go on a job to be a teacher. I could help them fill out their college application when they're ready, but I didn't know how they should be spending their time in order to really get a foothold into a world that I didn't know...I just, I never knew what *this economy* meant, and that was something that I would say oftentimes, in meetings with the student advisor and the director. I don't understand *the economy*. And so, what am I preparing students for?

Am I preparing every student to be a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant)?

That she felt this way, as the former assistant director of the program who also had a college degree in political science, indicates the level of confusion and obfuscation about the integration of workforce development into the adult education system. Her confusion about the concept of "preparing students for this economy" highlights the lack of information given

to programs from higher level organizations. The lack of information related not only to the goal of the policy, but also the way it was intended to be carried out. While this may have been presented as “giving teachers the freedom to choose” how to implement these content goals, there is little merit in giving someone the “freedom” to choose how to do something they have no expertise or interest in doing.

Nicole’s final comment, a rhetorical question about whether she was supposed to prepare every student to be a CNA, also exposes one of the themes she perceived in her own experience with workforce development in adult education: the targeting of students with lower educational levels or English proficiency for *unsolicited* training for “in demand” jobs.

I disagreed with preparing students for in demand jobs, just for the sake of them being whoever the powers-that-be classified as low-skilled. [Preparing them for a] higher prestige, entry-level job into the medical field, which could be a stepping-stone into something else, but that’s to say that every single person wants to be in the medical profession. It doesn’t have an array of other skills that could be identified and utilized to move them in a direction they actually *want* to go in.

Nicole’s experiences show how the language coming from state-level supervisory organizations routinely labeled and conceptualized the adult learners in these programs as “low-skilled,” an example of how students were categorized only by what they lacked, whether it was literacy skills, a high school diploma, legal immigration status, or English proficiency. This type of categorization created a logic for targeting these learners with program content that would “fix” their deficient condition.

All the quotes from the teachers' interviews in this category illustrate how the pressure of WIOA was creating unsolvable challenges for teachers within the classroom. This was explained by Kate primarily as a contradiction created by the incompatible nature of the goals of students and the goals of WIOA, pushed by program administration. Due to the greater level of power and resources backing up the prioritization of workforce development goals, Kate was forced to find a way of satisfying these goals, however minimally, even as she chose to prioritize the language and literacy development goals of her students. Pressure to attain such a variety of different outcomes was stressful and draining for her. Such a situation further taxes the already limited resources available to teachers within the adult education system, pushing them to comply with workforce development goals to try and maintain a sustainable work-life balance, or overwork themselves to maintain their own pedagogical standards.

Nicole described the same situation but focused more on how the teachers' knowledge and professional experience was poorly matched to the task of attaining WIOA's workforce development goals. She described this mismatch as creating confusion and stress for teachers, by pushing them into a situation where there were no options for responding to the situation in a way that maintained a sustainable program culture, while also allowing them to uphold their own professional integrity. Both of these situations illustrate how pressure created by the rules (WIOA) was able to exert tremendous change in the subjects, tools, community, and objects within the activity system, as these elements realigned to make the attainment of workforce development outcomes more likely.

Curiously, workforce development or job training was not mentioned in program advertising, such as the organization's website or flyers promoting classes. While there are reasonable arguments for providing job training for those who seek it out, the students in these programs were not specifically seeking such training, nor were their teachers looking to become workforce training instructors. The incursion of workforce development rhetoric and policies into the adult education sphere seems to be taking a system presupposed to do one thing, and slowly transforming it into something else, and changing the beneficiary of the programs in the process.

Beyond the School

A Sense of Responsibility

A final area where the influence of workforce rhetoric, policies, and outcomes was evident was how students' lives outside of school impacted their academic progress and status in the program. Both Kate and Nicole discussed this. Kate's descriptions highlighted work as simultaneously a mandated outcome and a barrier to participation. She also discussed the school's attendance policy, and the ways in which it was enforced.

In a description of required outcomes, Kate brought up the paradoxical nature of students' work status, as participants in the program. "Employment is actually a barrier to education. The need to provide for oneself makes it more difficult, because of how low-paying the jobs are, where, not having a car, how long it takes to get there, etc." The situation seemed like a bit of a paradox to her. While the importance of workforce participation was demonstrated to students by the key position it took during student progress reports, and demonstrated to teachers by the way it was emphasized as a mandatory outcome by administration, Kate had observed repeatedly how work often served as a barrier to academic

progress for many of her students. Progress in terms of program expectations included getting a new job, getting more hours, accepting last-minute schedule changes, dealing with informal employment, and working multiple jobs. All of these scenarios contributed to irregular attendance, falling behind in class, and sometimes losing one's seat in a class.

She also explained her own feelings about the economic reality she felt was ignored by the insistence on collecting particular forms of workforce participation data such as whether students had received raises at their work.

I feel like it should be taken into account that *getting a raise is not really a thing anymore...* This is probably radical, I don't think that students' current employment should have anything to do with how well the program is considered to be doing, because it really doesn't have anything to do with that.

Curiously, from Kate's comments, the idea that an adult education program's effectiveness is best documented by mandated collection of workforce data seemed to be becoming accepted as common sense. While the legitimization of these programs' value by using workforce metrics has been going on since the passage of WIA, the formal, federally mandated collection of learners' workforce participation data in this particular way had only been happening since 2018. However, the quick naturalization of this new procedure is a testament to the long history of adult education in the U.S. being justified as a benefit for the economy. While the process may be new, the logic is business as usual. It was clear from her comments that Kate disagreed with the instrumentalization of education that workforce development policies like WIOA are pushing forward.

She also explained how the current state of the economy affected not only those who struggled to consistently attend class, but also those who managed to keep up regular attendance. Her explanation of common working conditions and their effect on workers, which is as applicable to many adult education teaching jobs as it is to the jobs of many of her students, highlight the disparity between current conditions and those which would allow students to prioritize their education.

Low-paying, high-stress jobs...I feel like what I'm talking about is kind of abstract. I wish I had more concrete solutions, but I can say something like, there should be an acknowledgement of the fact that a lot of the workforce is low-paying, high-stress jobs, and that's going to impact how a person is going to be able to learn, and attend class, and all that stuff.

Kate's observations about how the economic paradigm and conditions of the job market affected all the learners illustrate how the effects of a capitalist structuring of society extend far beyond the financial, affecting individuals socially, psychologically, and emotionally, as evidenced by how it impacts the social process of learning.

She gave more details about how the school's attendance policy created conflicts for both students and teachers, both in terms of students retaining their seat in the class, as well as the class being perceived as worthy of funding by administrators.

Right now, I've had a student who's been in the literacy class for a really long time and she recently got a job where she needs to leave-The class goes from nine to twelve and this is the complication-She actually-this was a huge outcome-She went from a job that was like part-time, they would string her along, give her 38 hours,

refuse to give her forty hours, so that she could be full-time and get benefits. Now she has a job with benefits, but it starts at noon. So, she has to leave my class at eleven, and I was like, okay, how are we going to fix this? There's one day where you can go to an hour of tutoring...one of her days off as a day she goes to school.

This example not only illustrates the earlier discussion about how work serves a paradoxical function in the adult education outcome system, both being mandated as an outcome, yet also hindering progress, but also gives a concrete example of the complex ways students and teachers navigated attendance requirements, to prevent students from losing their seats in class.

I have to give out warnings to students if they miss a certain amount of classes. It doesn't matter what's going on in their lives...because of attendance data...If it's shown that there's not enough students in a class, or low attendance in a class, it's like, '*Why should we pay for this [class]?...*The teacher must be *bad* or something.'

Despite the complex web of factors that affected student attendance, Kate described how poor attendance was often attributed to poor quality teaching. At other points in our interviews, Kate also described how the attendance policy was somewhat selectively enforced, depending on the waitlist for the class, which sent mixed signals to students about the importance of the attendance rules. It also showed how the judgement of administrators to decry "bad teachers" as the cause of low attendance was not very well-founded, since for classes without waitlists, low attendance was rarely blamed on the instructor. This seems to paint a picture where administrators, harried by state reporting requirements, took advantage of large waitlists to continually re-stock classes with a new crop of eager students, to keep

attendance rates up, rather than addressing systemic issues that may be contributing to the problem. The likelihood of this is further supported by the practice of habitually over-enrolling classes, often beyond what a teacher could handle, in order to ensure a minimum number of bodies in seats during a given month.

Kate described one particular method which had been used to try and ensure student compliance with program rules, including the testing procedures and the attendance policy.

ESOL actually has a little contract that they make students sign, that is like, ‘I, as a student in this program, understand that I’m provided with a free class, free textbook, and I agree to do the pre-test and the post-test’...It’s encouraging a sense of responsibility.

This contract also specified attendance rules that students were expected to comply with. While the notion of responsibility is not in itself malicious, the whole concept of using a contract to encourage personal responsibility in adult learners seems a bit patronizing, as though these adults had not previously had responsibilities in their lives or did not understand that their decision to attend a class was something they were personally responsible for. Additionally, it seems either naïve or cynical to assume that this managerial intervention would do anything to improve student compliance with administrative policies, when the contracts were in a language that many students could not understand and were presented for signing in a perfunctory way, rather than with any meaningful explanation. Moreover, this contract intervention was implemented without any meaningful investigation of teachers’ or students’ perspectives on the issue. The presence of an academic advisor could have been one possible, more effective intervention, as the advisor was often able to provide resources

that could help students resolve personal conflicts that contributed to excessive absences, like lack of childcare, lack of transportation, etc. Outside of the hiring process itself, the inclusion of an advisor would not have required doing anything new, since it had been a long-standing position in the program, prior to the last advisor's resignation. Furthermore, since students who missed class were often able to make up that time by attending tutoring sessions, which were mostly run by volunteers, hiring a new volunteer coordinator seems like it would have been another helpful step. However, rather than doing either of these things, or anything else to address the admittedly complex causes of irregular attendance, hope seems to have been invested in the concept of a "contract" solving these problems, or at least absolving the school, though not necessarily the teacher, of responsibility when a student loses their seat in the program.

Kate commented on the overall tone of the organization, the way that the language of the business world permeated not only outcome data, but the way in which education and the learners, sometimes referred to as "clients," were discussed.

It's really annoying because it's like, 'We're going to treat education like a business? *Fine.*' Businesses really care about their clients. They really, really care about their relationship with their clients. They wine and dine their clients. They go out of their way to make sure that their clients want to utilize their services.

She contrasted this with a description of the somewhat chaotic registration procedures students often encountered at the school, which sometimes left them confused and unsure what they were agreeing to, when they signed an agreement consenting to the school's policies as well as federal data matching using their SSN. Kate's comment is notable in that

it highlighted the confusing, obfuscated role of the learner within the adult education system. Though programs, particularly in the age of WIOA, are quick to refer to students as “clients,” the treatment students sometimes receive and their relationship with the program bears little relationship to a provider-client relationship. This raises the question, if students are not the client, then who/what are they? And who is the client in this equation? Whose needs are being served and to what ends?

A Struggle and a Stretch

While Kate’s discussion of how factors in students’ lives outside the school affected their learning focused primarily on the classroom, Nicole took up the topic from a different angle, focusing on the evolution of goal tracking and the shifting sands of what outcomes were considered valuable enough to count as evidence of program effectiveness. She described how these changes affected her work in the classroom and her sense of her own abilities as a teacher. She also remarked on these topics from her experiences as an administrator, namely the change in required student outcomes which counted towards program effectiveness in annual DESE evaluations. These outcomes were quite important, not only theoretically as a measure of student progress, but also because student success, so measured, was a large part of how program refunding was secured and maintained. This was true when applying for new grants, throughout the academic year, and at the end of the cycle when reporting results to funders. Nicole briefly described part of the student goal-tracking system in place under WIA, the legislation which preceded WIOA.

So, DESE was, for many of the years I was there, it was based on goals... There were A, B, and C column goals. So, for instance, getting a library card was a column B goal and getting citizenship was a column A goal.

In this system, column A goals were the most difficult to attain and column C goals were comparatively easier. Column A goals were often the culmination of long, bureaucratic process, as in the case of gaining U.S. citizenship, or of prolonged study, for example gaining a high school credential. Column C goals were often more community-based tasks, like going to a parent-teacher conference held in English or helping a child with their homework in English. Column B goals fell somewhere in between.

Hypothetically, this process of attaining goals throughout the school year seemed somewhat promising as a way of documenting ESOL students' engagement with the language they were learning. However, when recollecting her experiences with the goal-tracking system as an administrator, Nicole had this to say:

I mean holistically [measuring student goals], it is nice to be able to, and that's the thing, having been on the inside, and seeing how much of a struggle and a stretch it was so often, to have students declare goals, it didn't feel very meaningful. On the other hand, if it had been meaningful, it would have been a really great thing, both for the program to reflect on, and, since it was necessary for funding, to be able to put forth [to funders].

She humorously described in a bit more detail, an example.

There were some [goals] that you would need documentation [for], and then there were others that you wouldn't need any documentation, and those became like *instant*

goals for everybody...Getting a library card, although yeah, you needed documentation for getting a library card, yet I'm pretty sure there were students who got library cards *multiple years*.

While this example calls into question some of the legitimacy of the way goals were tracked, it does also raise the question of why those involved in documenting goals, and the students themselves, felt the need to game the system in this way. For staff, part of the “struggle” of students documenting their goals seems tied to the resource scarcity of the school environment. For example, often, making progress on certain goals would necessitate students meeting with the advisor, who was not always available. Additionally, the process of collecting goal data and documentation was a responsibility of the teachers, who were given no additional time or resources to complete this complex task, which entailed keeping track of numerous goals and the requisite documentation for up to thirty students. These tasks were done by teachers who lacked any office spaces for storing student documentation, as well as often without the use of a copy machine, which was needed to photocopy the required documents to record the goals. These tasks were done during class time. These logistical difficulties meant that many student goals were not recorded, and the lack of progress this seemed to convey reflected nothing of the students' language proficiency, but rather the insufficient resources of the institution.

She also described the transition which took place over her years at the program, in terms of which type of goals were considered proof of progress, and which were not.

At one point, over time, one of the years it shifted to some of the old goals didn't matter, like the library cards didn't count anymore, and then it became, my last year

there, it became tied to social security numbers, and that's it. There was no more data tracking [of these more personal goals].

The changes she is referring to are the transition from WIA to WIOA which took place in 2017-2018. While under WIA, tracking of more personal or community-oriented goals was included as part of program effectiveness evaluations, under WIOA, this was eliminated.

Nicole described the way that these changes in goal documentation, trending towards workforce development-oriented outcomes, troubled her.

It seemed in the beginning, like of course, these are adult students who have goals associated with making more money to support themselves and their family, and have careers that they want to have, to then being very strictly tied to funding and strictly tied to outcomes, where it was like the students, the individual student goals were secondary to just, *the number*, being able to be ticked off.

She felt that the changes in the way goals were recorded affected her in a variety of ways, from questioning the legitimacy of including non-workforce development content in her ESOL classes to the anxiety she felt, both as a teacher and program administrator, about helping students attain these new required outcomes.

Well, working with students who were at either the lower literacy or just limited English proficiency, [I felt] that it was hard to rationalize those two, the objectives of developing basic literacy skills and developing basic language skills, to have interpersonal conversations, to have social conversation in English, and then to leapfrog to getting your high school diploma on the English GED or something. And so it was a lot of pressure, I think, that made it, it made me feel like I wasn't doing a

very good job, because it's hard to see those gains at such low levels, and then there's an urgency to move students closer to those goals in real time, but then knowing how important those goals were, but not feeling equipped.

She described how with her limited time and resources, she felt it was hard to justify teaching *language skills* in a language class, due to the way the new mandated outcomes were necessitating the prioritization of workforce development content. Her comments also illustrate how being pushed to do this affected her sense of her own abilities as a teacher negatively. This came partly as a result of being required to focus on teaching and being evaluated on her students' attainment of goals which had nothing to do with her training, experience, or reason for entering the field. This exposes another contradiction in the adult education system being pushed forward by the prioritization of workforce development policy like WIOA, in which through changes in program evaluation, the work of teachers is repurposed towards ends which are in conflict with their own professional goals and principles.

Overall, Kate and Nicole both described a situation in which the scope of WIOA's influence over program activities seemed ever-growing and intensifying. Workforce development policies and their implementation expanded in reach through program administrative practices and language, classroom content, student recruitment, and data tracking. These changes, which have been coalescing over some time, seemed to be redefining the goals of adult education ESOL programs and recharacterizing the role of teachers within them.

Such a situation exposes significant contradictions within the adult education activity system in its current form under WIOA, in which the mandated outcomes of the federal adult education policy activity system (attainment of largely workforce-related outcomes) are in direct conflict with all other elements of the local adult education program activity system, particularly the subjects (language teachers), the tools (pedagogical materials, teaching methods, available funding), and the related professional community (language teaching professional organizations, immigration advocacy groups). By leveraging its far greater resources (tools) and influence over rules, the federal adult education policymaking community is able to transform the goals of those on the local level of the adult education programs (teachers, students, staff) quite dramatically, turning the imagined goals (objects) of increased language proficiency, intercultural learning, personal growth, etc. into real-world outcomes that are in conformity with US federal workforce policy goals. (See Figure 5.) This is problematic, as through the transformation of the goals, the beneficiaries also change. Rather than primarily benefitting learners and local communities, the transformation of adult education programs into taxpayer-subsidized workforce training centers serves to enrich the capitalist class.

This transformation seems to be enacted through the leveraging of financial resources and rule-making power at the federal level, and also, in turn, through the gradual transformation *on the local level* of the tools (for example, SSN-linked data tracking), division of labor (short-staffing, over-tasking of teachers), involved communities (as through targeted recruitment and implicit exclusion of undocumented learners, powerful workforce

development boards), and both state-level policies and individual program rules which affect adult education programs.

Additionally, these changes within the system recast the role of ESOL teachers, through, for example, mandated outcomes incongruent with language-acquisition goals, changes to instructional materials and expectations, and the tasking of teachers with workforce-focused administrative tasks, like interviewing students about their jobs and income. With the ongoing shift towards the total integration of workforce development into all elements of adult education programs, all elements of the activity system are re-formed to produce workforce outcomes. This raises the question that, if current trends continue, at what point do ESOL teachers become workforce trainers, in everything but name?

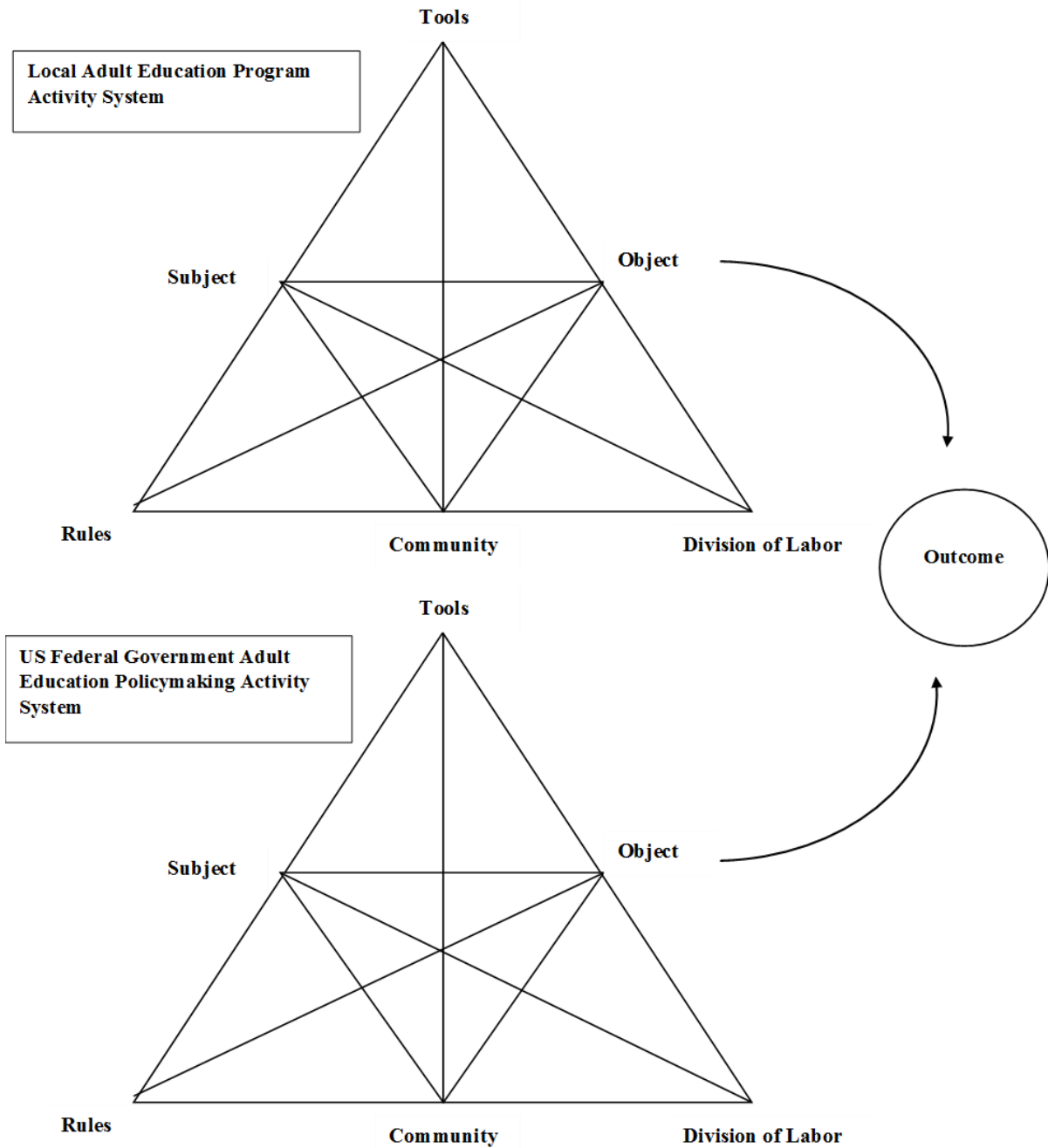


Figure 5, Interaction between adult education activity system and U.S. federal government adult education policymaking activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 1987)

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

One of the major themes from my interviews with the teachers was how the scarcity of resources in adult education environments creates challenging work conditions for teachers and other staff in these settings, as well as challenging learning conditions for students. This topic dominated responses to questions asked during the interviews about the nature of ESOL teaching-learning in the adult education setting in the context of WIOA implementation.

A lack of financial resources creates difficult working conditions in terms of unavailability of appropriate classroom materials, inappropriate spaces being repurposed as classrooms, and overtasking of employees due to short staffing. Additionally, even the meager resources available are not guaranteed due to the precarious funding situation. Compensation of teachers is also part of this equation, including the issues of insufficient paid preparation time, difficult part-time schedules, and a lack of full-time positions (National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2001). All of these factors create an atmosphere of chronic instability that contributes to a culture of burnout and high turnover (Allen, n.d.). While all areas of an organization are affected, this seems to

particularly affect teachers but also support staff positions like student advisors and volunteer coordinators. The effect can be dramatic for organizations that heavily depend on volunteer labor.

While volunteers can contribute much to the learning experience for students, the dependence on volunteers in adult education settings raises numerous questions. The first question raised by this situation is why they do not have enough funding to pay everyone. Then, if they cannot pay everyone, why are they so over-burdened that they need to depend on volunteers? Particularly when the work done by volunteers is necessary to help programs meet mandatory outcome quotas, the disconnect between the level of staff supported by government funding and the level of staff needed for program operations is exposed. Finally, the situation raises the question of whether the filling of teaching positions with volunteers contributes to the ongoing de-professionalization of adult education as a field. This historical over-reliance on untrained volunteers was pointed out by Smith, in her 2017 study of policies and literature pertaining to professionalization of adult education, where she cites it as one of many factors hindering the recognition of adult educators as education professionals, as well as a condition which contributes to program instability.

Numerous issues conspire to create challenging learning environments in adult education programs, but one of the most significant is the confusing relationship between ABE and ESOL classes in these programs. With ESOL programs generally pre-supposing basic literacy in one's native language and ABE programs requiring proficiency in English, there is a dearth of appropriate programs for students who need both basic literacy/numeracy and English language instruction. This is compounded by the limited availability of native

language literacy programs for these learners, particularly those who speak less common languages. Another complication is that, due to the mixed educational and linguistic backgrounds of the learners, the pedagogical strategies used in ESOL and ABE classrooms are often a mismatch for the needs of some learners. For example, ESOL classes which include reading and writing-based activities are not appropriate for learners who cannot read, while STAR reading ABE classes are explicitly designed to be used for the learner's native language. Due to the large population of immigrant students in many STAR classes, many of these learners are experiencing an instructional strategy in English which was only designed to be used with the learner's native language. Consequently, it can become impossible for teachers to differentiate their instruction enough for all the learners in their classes. These issues with the availability of appropriate classes are intensified by other challenging conditions, such as long waitlists for low-level classes and large class sizes.

Regarding this project's second research question of what, if any, effect WIOA implementation had on ESOL teaching in the adult education setting, both teachers described how the difficult conditions of their workplaces are exacerbated by the escalating prioritization of workforce development policies. The new WIOA assessment requirements are not a complete change from prior US adult education legislation which had always had a workforce development component, yet they considerably narrow the window of flexibility these programs previously had to negotiate their compliance with policy requirements, as predicted by Pickard (2016) in her article about the potential fallout of WIOA policy for low-scoring readers in the adult education setting. As policymakers push adult education

programs further and further down a funnel of workforce development policy mandates, the ability of teachers in the system to resist creatively is increasingly restricted.

Adult education programs are undergoing a more overt re-entrenchment in their role of providing the type of workers demanded by the capitalist economy. This outcome mirrors themes of a policy analysis done of WIOA's Title II (Shin & Ging, 2019) which found that the language of the law served to privilege private-sector outcomes and naturalize this type of language in the adult education setting. In practice, this is accomplished by the prioritization of workforce participation information in outcome data and its subsequent use to determine program effectiveness and secure refunding. Education is re-defined as "training," teachers are re-envisioned as "workforce development trainers," and students are simultaneously cast as "clients," while being treated as raw materials for production.

Within this paradigm, achievement of linguistic goals is not sufficient to justify funding a language class, as increased language proficiency is no longer considered sufficient evidence of progress. Students must produce results that show they are participating in the economy in specified ways for their program to be considered successful. In this way, the goal of language learning is de-valued and language programs are pushed, under the threat of losing funding, to become places for thinly veiled workforce training. This shift, of language learning from a humanistic process into instrumentalized skill acquisition, attempts to transform the labor of teaching to comply with an economic system where individuals are only valued for their material productivity (Baptiste, 2001).

This process also devalues students who are seen as less desirable economic actors, whether due to age, educational background, or other reasons (Similar trends were observed

under WIA, see Sparks, 2001; Chen & Kim; 2008). It particularly impacts students who are undocumented and are not able to legally work in the US. Since they lack a social security number and therefore their goal attainment cannot be entered into data tracking systems, they become statistically invisible. While programs are not legally barred from admitting them, with the struggle for funding already extremely challenging, it is a disadvantage for programs to admit too many undocumented students, as it will negatively influence their “success rate,” regardless of how well students are doing in their classes. Additionally, as pointed out by Larotta (2017), such a situation may result in these learners being dispersed to even more unstable community organizations that do not depend on government funding, like religious organizations, making these learners’ access to educational opportunities even more uncertain. If undocumented learners become de facto barred from educational programs, this already marginalized population seems likely to become further excluded from civic participation and more subject to exploitation, particularly in the workforce and legal system.

Another group of students disproportionately affected by these changes are those in literacy classes and lower level ESOL classes (Pickard, 2016). With a longer trajectory ahead of them before they are able to attain many of the mandated goals, students in these groups are likely to be seen as not contributing to the results of their program. This is despite the fact that, for example, it would be quite unreasonable to expect someone who is unable to read to get a high school credential after only nine months of part-time classes. These goals may not even align with the desires of students and is most likely not the primary reason why they enrolled in the program in the first place. As discussed in the data analysis, these trends seem

likely to silently sanction the quiet neglect of students who are unlikely to attain mandated goals.

Another theme in the interview data was how the encroachment of workforce development policy into the already deeply unstable adult education field is creating a perfect storm through changes in the way students are assessed. This situation, in which resource insecure and under-resourced organizations are being tasked with attaining goals they are not designed to achieve, illustrates the pernicious effect of determining organizational effectiveness from quantifiable outcomes. It also illustrates how changes in a top-down assessment system can change a program from a “success” into a “failure” simply through the entry of numbers on a spreadsheet. For example, an adult education program, initially developed to foster students’ development of English proficiency, through legislative change, begins to be evaluated using entirely different criteria, unrelated to the original mission of the organization, the training of its staff, or the goals of its students, and can be deemed a failure when students do not meet the newly specified outcomes. The “failure” of the program does not necessarily reflect the educational progress of learners, but rather that the mandated outcomes in the assessment system are no longer matched with the goals of the learners or teachers. In this case, programs are coerced into adjusting their offerings to meet the external demands placed upon them, or else potentially lose their funding, narrowing the pool of community education resources even further.

Aside from the macro effects that quantification of learning has upon the refunding of programs described above, this process also effects the day-to-day operations of adult education programs in a variety of ways. In the administrative realm, this means the use of

precious time and energy being directed towards the collection, entry, analysis, and potentially even manipulation, of outcome data. All of this is time and energy that is not being directed towards actual administration and teaching. For teachers, the privileging of quantifiable workforce-related outcomes affects every aspect of their work from lesson planning and instruction, to administrative tasks and student conferences. However, one of the more curious effects is the amount of confusion it creates about whether one is actually doing one's job "well." The obfuscation of the adult educator's role in the system arises from the incremental repurposing of adult education classes as a form of social conditioning for participation in the capitalist workforce. The re-branding of certain classes and teachers as "successful" or "ineffective" by the logic of workforce development has the potential to create doubt and uncertainty in teachers' minds about their own beliefs about education, their instructional practices, and the ways they reflect on student progress. This seems particularly the case in the state of Massachusetts for example, where over half of adult education teachers have less than five years of teaching experience. (Allen, n.d.) Having had less time to define and refine their own beliefs about education, they may be less able to deal with contradictions shaping the field.

While educators and other staff in these programs certainly have the option of advocating for change and resisting the imposition of policies they feel are detrimental to the learning of their students as suggested by Merriam (2010) and Abendroth (2014), the ability to do so in an organized way is largely hampered by the logistics of the adult education field in the US in general. The predominance of low-paid, part-time jobs for adult education teachers, along with the lack of full-time positions, creates a splintered field, where most

teachers work for multiple organizations and are often stretched thin, mentally and financially, by the constraints of the work. A study by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy documented that only 25% of adult education employees were full-time employees (defined as 35+ hours/week) and less than half received any paid preparation time (Smith, Hofner, & Gillespie, 2001). Strikingly, a survey done in Massachusetts found that respectively 75% and 80% of part-time and full-time adult education teachers were only able to continue in the field due to financial support from another source, such as a spouse or other family member (Allen, n.d.). Such conditions make it difficult to do one's job properly and survive, much less do unpaid advocacy work in one's little to nonexistent free time.

Additionally, with past efforts at unionization, for example in Massachusetts in 2012, having gained little traction, and economic conditions in the larger society difficult for many, the labor conditions of the adult education field create a high level of burnout and turnover. While there are individuals who persist, the high turnover in the field in creates a situation where many teachers have limited experience. Consequently, many of these newer teachers may lack the institutional knowledge or theoretical frame to effectively push back against policies they may disagree with, making unified resistance and the construction of more holistic alternatives challenging.

Another significant paradox that emerged from the interview data was the contradictory function of workforce participation on learners' progress, as both a mandated outcome and a barrier to participation. Particularly under WIOA, the active participation of learners in the legally sanctioned workforce is a requirement, with measurements of it

constituting more than half of the metrics for program effectiveness. However, a number of factors make complying with this mandate challenging, most notably the fact that increased responsibilities at learners' employment often correlated with academic challenges. Thus, the steps taken towards the goals they are required to meet oftentimes detract from their own progress and participation in educational programs.

Notably, the data collected about learners' workforce participation makes no note of accommodations for domestic work and childcare/eldercare responsibilities. While these forms of labor are a very real part of many learners' lives, they are not accounted for in the current system. This creates the strange situation in which a learner who chooses to care for their own child at home becomes a detriment for their program, not having "participated" in the workforce, while if the same student had paid for childcare to take a minimum wage job (which may not even provide them enough compensation to pay for childcare), this student, and their program, would be evaluated positively. Thus, it seems that it is not just workforce participation that is being measured, but a *particular kind* of workforce participation. For example, someone who is performing domestic labor in their own home is invisible in the system, while someone performing the same labor as an employee to make profits for someone else is valorized.

Even for students whose work is not devalued in the current evaluation measures widespread precarious employment and difficult economic circumstances create different types of contradictions. While documentation of a student advancing at their job might gain points on an annual evaluation of program effectiveness, increased work responsibilities

compete with the time students have to set aside for their own study, in addition to their other personal responsibilities. Additionally, common employment practices and conditions, like shift work, contract work, zero-hour contracts, and the predominance of part-time, unbenefited positions shape the labor market learners participate in, which create a situation where prioritizing one's education can be supremely difficult. Teachers and other program staff also face these economic pressures, though from a different position. There is irony in the fact that adult education teachers are preparing students for jobs that will “earn a family-sustaining wage,” when few would themselves meet this requirement.

Another concern arising from recent legislative changes to the regulation of adult education programs is how the new WIOA policies, as they continue to be rolled out, will affect the use of state-provided funds, potentially shaping the behavior of all participants in the system. On the administrative level, the new outcome requirements seem poised to continue incentivizing practices which will recruit, retain, and document the results of learners most likely to attain mandated outcomes. At the point of program entry, this may change intake procedures, entailing not just data collection about learners' educational background, but also screening, whether official or unofficial, that prioritizes learners with more extensive formal schooling, higher levels of literacy and English language proficiency, and fewer barriers to attainment of mandated outcomes. While limited or interrupted formal education is the most commonly cited barriers to progression in an adult education program, other students who could be caught up in these changes include those with disabilities, unhoused individuals, undocumented people, and those with challenging childcare or eldercare responsibilities. The possibility of preferential treatment being given to students of

particular ethnic, racial, or linguistic backgrounds also exists. Targeted recruitment, sometimes referred to as “creaming,” is already a topic of discussion in the adult education sphere, and the intensification of this phenomenon seems inevitable under current policy. This worry about the effects of targeted recruitment has been expressed even by those who are hopeful about WIOA’s emphasis on further integration of workforce training into adult education programs (Bragg, 2016).

The collection of workforce participation data also places an additional data collection burden on institutions which have received no substantial change/increase in funding to facilitate this additional work. To the contrary, a recently released bill from the Senate Appropriations Committee for the Departments of Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education, (Senate Report No. 116-000 (2019)) if passed, would continue a trend of reducing annual funding for WIOA (and formerly WIA)-funded programs that began in 2010 (Beltrán, 2019). This would mean that despite increased outcome requirements and data reporting burden, federal funding will have dropped 22% in inflation-adjusted terms over the past ten years. Consequently, something will likely be sacrificed to comply with new requirements in the face of more challenging funding conditions. Since teachers are being required to use what was previously instructional time to interview students and record this information, as documented in the interviews with Kate, it seems that the additional work is being given to teachers, to squeeze into their already limited classroom hours. Such an allocation of resources seems even more questionable and redundant considering the extent to which these results are already being recorded automatically in many states with SSN-linked data matching. While the administration will likely continue to promote students’

language development, it seems disingenuous as it becomes increasingly clear that the outcomes that keep the program funded are linked to high levels of academic language development or workforce participation.

Implications

Turning to potential developments in the classroom, language classes are being slowly yet increasingly repurposed into something that is not a language class at all. With the pressure of new mandated outcomes driving funding in a more intense and focused way, class content and goals are affected. The way teachers are hired and evaluated by administration seems likely to be affected by these new requirements. This in turn will affect the way class content is planned, the type of teacher-student dynamics in the classroom, and the way students are evaluated within the classroom space.

These changes also seem likely to affect the type of classes offered by adult education programs in the first place. With the pressure of new mandates, it seems possible that programs may react in a variety of ways over time, starting with shifting their funding sources and modifying their existing program offerings, and possibly resulting in the elimination of certain programs altogether. This process can already be seen, as shown in the interview data, where some programs are shifting their funding for adult literacy and low level ESOL classes from state-provided funding to private donors or non-profits, to avoid losing funding when the learners in these courses are not able to meet high outcomes. This allows the program to continue offering such classes, while not having their outcome data affected by them.

Another change that seems likely is the integration of increased workforce related content into higher level ESOL classes. While this change is already taking place in a piecemeal way, as discussed in the interviews, programs are now more strongly encouraged to integrate required, explicit workforce training into existing adult education classes, rather than just including such content within a language learning-focused curriculum. For example, career pathway programs, which train students for a specific in-demand job, through a series of stackable credentials are one of the favored approaches. “In-demand jobs,” and thus the trainings available, are defined largely by private sector interests. This style of program offering, which favors public-private partnerships, is not responsive to the needs of students, as it is decided upon by external actors from the private sector. These kinds of programs, tailoring English instruction to the needs of specific work environments, are nothing new, but the consequences of taking publicly funded adult education programs and turning them into training labs for private businesses at this scale is.

Over time, this growing divide between low-level ESOL and literacy classes, and higher-level workforce development focused training may meet several ends. It is possible that adult education will divide into different camps. Those focused on literacy and language development may become absorbed into the K-12 education system. Those acclimated to working with learners with higher language and literacy proficiency may find themselves drawn into the corporate-dominated world of workforce development training or private language schools. It’s also possible that adult education will continue as a unified field superficially, while it is torn asunder by internal financial sustainability problems and external capital interests. All the while, there will surely be many working within the system,

including teachers, volunteers, and administrators, who are resisting the instrumentalization of adult education in ways large and small.

The failure of adult education programs to comply with WIOA workforce development outcomes may be used as a reason for the elimination of the fully public adult education system overall. Such a policy would likely be preceded by waves of privatization, which can already be seen in the increase in public-private partnerships, the pruning of low-level classes from public funding, and the use of “effectiveness in serving employers” as an effectiveness metric in program evaluation. Looking at the changes in funding for adult education in the US since the 1970’s, when much higher financial allotments per student were the norm (Jacobson, 2017), it looks like a classic case of defunding, presentation of the public option as deficient, and privatization.

Overall, through these policy changes and the attendant changes in program implementation that they necessitate, the educational process has the potential to become self-negating. As programs increasingly comply with outcomes, more potential students get screened out, more low-level classes and support services are eliminated, and more teachers eager/willing to focus on workforce training are hired, promoted, and attain leadership positions, perpetuating the cycle. By participating in an adult education program, students become less likely to further their knowledge and learning on their own terms, and more likely to be transformed into the type of workers requested by local employers. The adult education setting thus begins to function more strongly as a site of social conditioning, and less as a place for learning.

Even for those who benefit from this newest evolution of the adult education system, those who start out life with access to more resources, stand to gain more from this system. Those who had the fortune to benefit from prior education, whether in the US or abroad, gain access to more educational opportunities, limited though they may be. Those whose prior educational experiences were limited become blocked out of the system, further restricting their options. This creates a permanently marginalized class of potential workers, possibly lacking the language/literacy skills to advocate for themselves, who become grist for the mill of the economy's most precarious, underpaid jobs. The cycle of capital perpetuates itself, where the best way to win the game is to be born on third base. This phenomenon further restricts who is able to benefit from the system on an individual level, while facilitating a wholesale shift of the beneficiaries of the adult education system overall. However, while the learners bringing the most cultural capital have the best odds of benefitting, those likely to benefit the most are actually the private sector businesses profiting from government-subsidized employee training.

It is an often-echoed sentiment that adult education currently exists at the margins of the educational field in the US. Often this comment is invoked during explanations about the instability of program funding, adult education's tenuous relationships to other educational institutions, or the working conditions of those in the field. The encroachment of workforce development rhetoric, policy, and logic into the adult education field, for example through the enactment of WIOA, can be seen as metaphorically repositioning the field of adult education in the cultural landscape. A more intense system of mandated outcomes, coming down from the federal, to the state, to the local level, creates a cascade of policy changes will

simultaneously pull workforce development-focused adult education in from the margins of the educational field, while pushing less instrumentalized language and literacy education further out. Due to these tensions, the field seems to be pulled in two different directions.

While there are many downsides to adult education's marginal position, one dubious advantage it conferred was that of flexibility. While flexibility can, and in adult education, often is employed as a banal catch-all for dealing with adverse conditions, it also permits a greater range of agency and action on the parts of teachers and administrators. While flexible marginality is not an ideal position, it did permit teachers to find tenuous solutions to the contradictions of the activity system of their workplaces. These strategies, of creatively utilizing tools, relying on other community members, or creating more sustainable models for division of labor, which echo the strategies suggested by Merrriam (2010) for responding to neoliberal influence on adult education, become less and less possible as the system is further squeezed by workforce development policy. Both teachers in the study negotiated the conditions of their workplace in their own way, shaped by the elements of the activity system and how they interacted with them. This created a situation in which each adapted different strategies for attempting to resolve the contradictions within their workplace.

The use of WIOA's more specific, quantifiable workforce participation data being used to assess program effectiveness is a way of narrowing the range of possibilities for adult education programs and educators. (A similar process took place under WIA, see Jacobson (2017) and Belzer (2017)). These more specific mandated outcomes draw this more intensively workforce-focused adult education in from the margins, to a position of greater visibility for the purpose of increased scrutiny. At the same time, language and literacy

classes which do not conform to these mandates are pushed farther and farther away from the resources they need to function coherently. It seems that these changes are forcing adult education into a crossroads, where policymakers, educators, and increasingly employers, will have to decide what the purpose of adult education is in the US in the 21st century. The recent public discussion of the Department of Homeland Security's Final Rule on Public Charge Ground of Inadmissability, the so-called, 'public charge rule,' which would require immigrants to have a specific minimum level of education and English proficiency to be eligible for entry, (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services., 2019) would raise the question of whether adult education programs in their current form would continue to exist at all.

Limitations

Limitations of this study fall into roughly three categories: methodological limitations, my own limitations as a researcher, and limitations imposed by the research topic itself.

Firstly, for methodological limitations, I will address the issues of sample size, the use of self-reported data, and a lack of classroom observation data. Due to the desire to capture a rich and detailed view of two individuals within the adult education landscape, I focused on only two participants. While a larger group of participants would have provided a more representative sample of data, the choice to focus intensively on the perspective of two individuals allowed a more holistic investigation of their experiences and views, where a larger sample size may have necessitated focusing on more discrete aspects of their experience. The holistic nature of the context was a central part of this study, and of the

CHAT framework that was used, and the choice of a small sample size helped facilitate the capturing of this information.

Although self-reported data is susceptible to the vagaries of human memory and the way that individuals present themselves in the act of re-telling their stories, and it was not triangulated with classroom observations, the goal of this research was to use the participants' own words to understand the nature of ESOL instruction in the adult education context, as well as the effect, if any, of WIOA on the teachers' experiences. Additionally, the fact that much of the information about the context given by each teacher was independently corroborated by the other, can further allay concerns about the use of self-reported data. In the future, it might prove interesting to combine teacher interviews on this topic with observation data to highlight another facet of the adult education landscape to provide a fuller, more rounded picture of the context. If such studies were to use CHAT in their framing and data analysis, there is great potential for a more complete understanding of how contradictions shape teachers' actions within the adult education program activity system.

Although I have had ten years of experience in adult education ESOL and knew the participants before the research, I was careful not to insert my own experience into theirs. One example of this is my consistent focus on direct quotations from the participants in the data analysis chapters, which allow the teachers to tell their stories in their own words. My insider bias though allowed me to understand the context extensively prior to our interviews which helped me to make connections between the macro perspective of the overall system and the micro perspectives given by the teachers in their interviews.

Although I knew the participants ahead of time, I made sure that they knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Our rapport did, however, facilitate a very candid interview process, which made possible the sharing of many of the stories which helped create a detailed picture of their teaching practices.

Finally, the research topic itself, involving the adult education environment in the context of WIOA implementation, even when limited to a particular research site, is vast and constantly evolving. While I attempted to focus on the teaching environment, the holistic nature of adult program operations necessitated more focus than I anticipated on other aspects of the system, such as administration and standardized testing. Discussion of these other areas was necessary to contextualize the happenings within the classrooms themselves and create a more complete picture of the current adult education setting.

Additionally, the discussion of federal policy affecting local institutions is complicated by the multi-year phasing in of different WIOA requirements and the multi-level nature of their implementation, from the federal, to the state, to the local level. I feel however that the general trajectory of the policy's effects is clear, hard though it may be to pinpoint specific potentially causal relationships between policy and practice.

Future Directions

A number of options for future research present themselves from the findings of this study. There are a few themes from the data which deserve more attention and could be focal points for future studies. One of these is the contradictory nature of workforce participation in adult education programs, as both a mandated outcome and a barrier to progress. This topic could be particularly interesting in the context of preliminary WIOA reporting,

providing information about any changes in program demographics, outcome attainment, and program refunding status. Another possible theme for further study is the creative strategies used by teachers to resist the instrumentalization of adult education, such as the examples given by the study participants like the student-generated literacy readers, the language exchange, community garden project, and others. Taking a different focus, a future study could look longitudinally or retrospectively at the working conditions for adult educators, in the context of federal workforce development policy and the overall economic paradigm of the US.

Other future directions could address some of the limitations of this project, for example investigating the same topic with more participants, over a longer period of time, at multiple sites. As WIOA implementation varies from state to state, projects investigating differences across various states could also be helpful in understanding how state level policies affect local programs' compliance with federal policy. Another possible approach would be a more holistic study of an individual program site, not only interviewing teachers, but also administrators and other program staff. Such a view could give a fuller understanding of how workforce development policy is instantiated in the different spaces of adult education programs, and how those processes impact classroom learning.

Finally, any future studies would be taking place in the context of evolving immigration policy changes. Future research which looks at the intersection of immigration policy and the implementation of services used by the immigrant community could highlight changes in the way immigration is conceived of in American culture. This research could be

potentially even more significant with the possibility of climate change-induced immigration patterns in the decades to come.

Conclusion

This study has explored the nature of ESOL instruction in the adult education context in one program in Massachusetts, in the context of the initial implementation of WIOA, by focusing on the case studies of two teachers. Through extensive interviews, the participants revealed how the accelerating and incessant push of workforce development policy into the adult education space was a force that continually narrowed the range of options they had for negotiating the difficulties of their jobs. Discussion of program policies for admitting and tracking students also revealed the increasing likelihood of selective enrollment practices and other practices like data manipulation which help programs comply with mandated outcomes. The interview data also highlighted the overall contradictory nature of “work” in the adult education landscape, in that workforce participation data of learners is highly prioritized under WIOA, yet such outcomes in students’ lives creates increased barriers to them advancing their education. The situation reflects the larger capitalist economic paradigm in which labor is only valued as such when it benefits the capitalist class. Throughout the study, the teachers also revealed highly personal stories about the humanistic approach they brought to their work, and how they managed to bring their creativity and zest for learning to these challenging conditions. Hopefully adult education teachers will be able to continue creating such holistic learning experiences for their students, even in the increasingly troubled political and economic climate of the present day.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Acronyms and Initialisms Referenced in the Text

Acronym/Initialism	Stands for...
ABE	Adult basic education
ACLS	Adult and Community Learning Services
AEFLA	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
BEST Plus	Basic English Skills Test Plus
CNA	Certified Nursing Assistant
DESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
EFA	English for Advancement
EFL	Educational functional level
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
GED	General Educational Diploma
HiSET	High School Equivalency Test
L1	First language/s
L2	Additional language, other than one's first language/s
MAPT	Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test
MSG	Measurable skills gain
NRS	National Reporting System
PD	Professional development
SSN	Social security number
STAR	Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading

TABE	Test of Adult Basic Education
WDB	Workforce development board
WIA	Workforce Investment Act
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

Interview #1

- ❖ Can you tell me a little about your educational/professional background?
- ❖ How did you get involved in adult education? OR How did you get involved in language teaching?
- ❖ Can you tell me about the program where you currently work? Classes offered, student body, additional services, etc.?
- ❖ (For those who have taught language classes in another context) How would you compare teaching ESOL in an adult education setting and your previous school/program? Similarities? Differences?
- ❖ What are your goals? Overall curricular goals? Day to day classroom goals? Long term career goals?
- ❖ What goals do your students bring to the program/class?
- ❖ How would you describe the culture of the program where you work? Who chooses the materials and classroom activities? How is this choice made?
- ❖ What rules and policies does your program emphasize? (Either for teachers or students) How do you feel about those policies?
- ❖ What's your teaching philosophy?

Interviews #2 and #3

- ❖ What were your plans and priorities for the class? What were some of your goals for this specific lesson?

- ❖ How do those goals relate to your larger goals for the year/session? How do they relate to your students' goals?
- ❖ How do you feel about how it went? Did you make any changes to your plans? / Do you plan to make any changes for the next time you work with this material?
- ❖ What materials did you use for this lesson? How did you choose those materials? Why?
- ❖ What do you prioritize when choosing or creating materials for your classes?
- ❖ How does your program evaluate and track student progress? What's your opinion about that? / Do you have any opinion about this process?
- ❖ Are there any mandated outcomes or target goals at your program? Can you describe them?
- ❖ If you could design your own adult education program, what would it be like? What would its purpose be?
- ❖ How do you see your role as the teacher? What responsibilities do you have in that position? What about your students?
- ❖ What's your program's position on WIOA implementation? How do you feel about that?
- ❖ What challenges do you face at work?
- ❖ Where do you get support for addressing those challenges?
- ❖ Who do you feel is part of your professional community? Where do you look for professional development? Why?

Appendix C: Transcription Code

Formatting	Indicates...
<i>Text</i> (in italics)	Emphasis of speaker
* <i>Text</i> * (in italics with asterisks)	Sarcasm
...	Section of quotation cut
[Text]	Word added for clarity or changed to maintain anonymity of site/speaker

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