

2004

## **Towards an assessment of reading volunteer performance : four case studies of Monterey County Reads reading volunteers**

Lucas Salazar  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps\\_thes](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Salazar, Lucas, "Towards an assessment of reading volunteer performance : four case studies of Monterey County Reads reading volunteers" (2004). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 400. [https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps\\_thes/400](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes/400)

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csumb.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csumb.edu).

Towards an Assessment of Reading Volunteer Performance:  
Four Case Studies of Monterey County Reads Reading  
Volunteers



*California State University, Monterey Bay*

Division of Social, Behavioral, and Global Studies:  
Social and Behavioral Sciences Department

Senior Capstone

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Armando Arias

Capstone Committee: Dr. Seth Pollack; Dr. George Baldwin

Submitted by:  
Lucas Salazar  
Graduation Fall 2004

*How can a country that considers itself a model of democracy tolerate an educational system that contributes to such a high level of illiteracy?*

*Donaldó Macedo*

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	1
Introduction.....	2
• Monterey County Reads – A Description.....	4
The Psychology (Theory).....	6
• Cognitive Development.....	6
• Interest.....	7
Literature Review .....	8
• Reading Coach vs. Reading Tutor .....	8
• Whole Language vs. Phonics.....	10
• Recent Studies .....	11
• Conceptual Framework.....	12
Methodology.....	12
• Sampling Method.....	13
• Volunteer Assessment.....	13
• Procedures.....	15
• Limitations of Method .....	16
Results.....	16
• A Note on Analysis.....	16
• Case A.....	17
• Case B.....	18
• Case C.....	19
• Case D .....	21
• Trends.....	22
• Hartnell vs. CSUMB.....	24
Conclusions.....	26
• Fluency.....	26
• Comprehension.....	26
• Joy.....	27
• Limitations .....	27
• Contributions.....	28
• Future Work .....	28
• Recommendations .....	29
A Theoretical Reflection .....	29
• Information Age Illiteracy .....	30
• Clinton – Structural Functional Engineer .....	30

- Cubicle Cage of Bureaucracy.....30
- Research in the Cage.....32

References.....34

Appendices

- Monterey County Reads Training Manual ..... Appendix A
- Research Instruments/Notes .....Appendix B
- Data..... Appendix C

## Abstract

This paper describes the performance of Monterey County Reads (MCR) reading volunteers. In conjunction with the Panetta Institute for Public Policy and the AmeriCorps\*VISTA program, the MCR program recruits, trains, and places volunteers into schools to read with children one-to-one from grades K-3. The program provides a mandatory two-hour training, which provides instruction on the basics of reading with a child and presents the expectations of the program. I developed assessment tools predicated on MCR training methods to measure the extent to which reading volunteers met MCR expectations, thereby providing an indication of the effectiveness of training. I recruited four research subjects from two categories of reading volunteers in the MCR program: Hartnell College AmeriCorps\* America Reads Volunteers, and California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) Service Learning Volunteers. I observed each subject while reading with a child on four occasions over a four-month period. Additionally, I conducted interviews with four teachers who supervised the reading volunteer subjects after the volunteer assessment period. Results indicate that certain trends in volunteer behavior clearly exist. Specifically, increased fluency, development of comprehension, and promotion of joy are each met in varying degrees. I utilize sociological and psychological theories to explain the environments and problems surrounding the provision of reading volunteers to elementary schools. Also, literature review explores concepts related to the problem, which include: literacy instruction methods, roles of reading volunteers, and beginning literacy programs. These concepts are contrasted to the methods utilized by MCR. The limitations, contributions, potential future work, and recommendations of this research are considered.

## Introduction

Literacy rates in the United States of America reflect a problem. Statistics regarding adult reading proficiency imply that the elementary educational system of years past did not meet the demands that literacy achievement required. According to a survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 50% of adults are at either Level 1 or 2 on the Prose Literacy Scale (Kirsch, 1993). This means that half of the population over 16 years of age does not have the consistent ability to “generate a response based on information that can be easily identified in [the] text, when [the] text is dense or lengthy or contains no headings or other organizational aids” (NCES). How is it that a nation, based on a post-industrial economy, supports itself when a near majority of the population cannot skillfully interpret text? The problems that face a less-than-literate population in an increasingly specialized economy are revealed in Sum’s (1999) study on workforce education. Sum found that in order for the labor market to meet the demands of the high-growth sectors of a transforming economy, the mean level of literacy proficiency must increase. In relation to the statistics on labor force literacy Sum remarks, “. . .these findings paint a bleak outlook for the future of the United States labor market” (p. xvi).

The crisis in adult literacy has its roots in a number of possible circumstances, such as a lack of interest in reading in the family, poor teachers, or second language issues. But, regardless of whether or not children are in possession of the circumstances that promote literacy they enter Kindergarten with a big goal: to begin on a path to becoming proficient readers. A recent publication (Armbruster et al., 2003) produced in association with the National Institute for Literacy and other federal education-based organizations states, “The road to becoming a reader begins the day a child is born and continues through the end of third grade. At that point, a child must read with ease and understanding to take advantage of the learning opportunities in fourth grade and beyond--in school and in life.” This is a critical point, the point where children are supposed to stop reading merely to decode symbols and meaning of words, and begin to read for content; this is the point where children should be able to read to teach *themselves* basic concepts and ideas. If children are behind the learning expectations set for them at this point, it is extremely difficult to catch up. A study cited in the California Public Schools English Language Standards Manual states that, “students who are behind in grade 3 have only a 12 to 20 percent chance to catch up” (California State Board of Education, 1997). But are things looking better for the adults of tomorrow?

A brief look at standardized test scores for the location where this study was conducted shows that the majority of schools in the area do not have a majority of their students reading at grade level by grade 3 and, furthermore, that there is a general decline in the percentage of students performing at grade level as they progress through the program (from K-3). Consider the following table, which includes the STAR results for the “average reading percentile rank” for the two schools where the data collection for this study took place:

School	Grade	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Natividad Elementary	2	27	24	33	34	31
Natividad Elementary	3	28	17	26	40	24
Roosevelt Elementary	2	22	32	42	35	55
Roosevelt Elementary	3	21	21	27	34	29

Figure 1. Adapted from Rand California’s on-line statistical database:  
[ca.rand.org/stats/education/star.html](http://ca.rand.org/stats/education/star.html)

Only a single case in the above table (55 in 2002 for Roosevelt) has an average reading percentile rank at average that is on or above grade level and it appears as though this number could be an outlier. To be sure, on a district-wide level the numbers do not look much better: in 2002 second grade averages at 37 and third grade at 33 for Salinas City Elementary School District. This means, in short, that the average reading scores at these schools is well below the state average.

Reflecting on the importance of reading and the “failure” rate of those who are not on grade level by the end of the third grade, it becomes imperative that *all* students be “over the hump” by this time. For this reason, President Clinton launched an initiative in 1997 to respond to this problem. The Monterey County Reads program, which provided the context for this study, became part of the nationwide team responding to the literacy problem in the U.S.A.

Monterey County Reads (MCR) is a children’s literacy program that was launched in 1996 in response to President Bill Clinton’s America Reads Initiative, which called on Americans to ensure that all children read well and independently by the end of the third grade. President Clinton stated the following in a national address in April 1997: “...I will send my America Reads legislation to the Congress so that we can mobilize the citizen army of one million America Reads tutors I called for in my State of the Union Address, to make sure that every 8-year-old child in America can pick up a book and say, ‘I can read this all by myself.’” One of the problems that accompanied Clinton’s vision is that he did not provide a specific strategy to achieve his ambitious goal. He continues in his announcement that the legislation would fund 25,000 reading specialists and tutor coordinators to organize the effort, but no guidelines were developed for the program in terms of an implementation method. Thus, different programs across the country employed different methods of organizing and executing their programs despite the common goal to have all children reading at grade level by the end of the third grade.

MCR, just as scores of other literacy programs that evolved from the America Reads Initiative, utilizes a particular method to help children enhance their reading skills. This investigation explores a specific aspect of MCR’s method, namely, training and its effectiveness. The research question is:

**How effective is the Monterey County Reads reading volunteer training?**

This research attempts to evaluate training effectiveness with a behavioral assessment based on the MCR Training Manual, which was developed by reading specialists associated with MCR.

## Monterey County Reads: A Description

In order to create the context for this study, it is important to understand what Monterey County Reads (MCR) is. As a plethora of child literacy programs exist, all with differing geography, goals, methods, access to resources, and funding, it is essential to define these points for the program under analysis. The discussion that follows will address the points mentioned above in order to contextualize the study.

The MCR program office is located at the Panetta Institute for Public Policy in Seaside, California on the California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) campus. From fall 1997 to spring 2004, it has grown to serve up to 75 schools in 22 districts with six after school programs at four sites. Monterey County Reads' services are geographically limited to Monterey County, California.

The goal of Monterey County Reads, in the most basic sense, reflects the 1997 address of President William Clinton to, "...make sure that every 8-year-old child in America can pick up a book and say, 'I can read this all by myself.'" As defined in the Monterey County Reads Training Manual, the goal is, "...for students in grades kindergarten through grade three to become INDEPENDENT READERS who will read on grade level with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension" (p. 10). Similar to these goals, MCR targets fluency and comprehension. In addition, a stated goal of MCR is the promote joy in reading. In short, the goal of the Monterey County Reads program is to have all children in Monterey County reading well and independently by the end of grade three, but it takes certain slices of the literacy "pie" in order to help children achieve this goal.

The methods that MCR utilizes extend beyond the recruitment, training, and placement of volunteers, although these are the principal practices that lead to the most valuable outcome of the program: one-to-one reading time with children. Additional practices include conducting book drives, book and certificate distributions, and storytime events. These events provide children with joyful experiences with books/reading. In this way MCR addresses both concepts important to the success of the program: *literacy skill acquisition* and *literacy interest acquisition*. Here follows a discussion of each of the components of MCR methods listed above.

Volunteer recruitment at MCR takes on a variety of forms, as the program has expanded to recruit from military installations, colleges, universities, high schools, businesses, and the community in general. Recruitment is tailored to the specific context that the interaction with the community provides. For example, during a high school recruitment the program director spoke to students about the program at the school's weekly assembly. After the informational speech, AmeriCorps\*VISTA members working with MCR set up booths to distribute contact cards, informational materials, and answer any questions that students had. MCR also utilizes other methods depending on the context. After recruitment, volunteers undergo mandatory training.

Volunteer trainings for MCR are standardized. The volunteer training consists of a one to two hour session that covers the basics of reading with a child to promote increased fluency, development of comprehension, and promotion of joy in reading. Certified reading specialists conduct the trainings in a classroom setting for as few as one volunteer to more than 30 volunteers. The MCR Training Manual (See Appendix A) guides the reading specialists in their presentation. The training encourages volunteers to think about their previous experiences reading with children and the challenges involved in this exercise; specific suggestions are given for reading aloud with a child. Additionally, the training briefs

volunteers on MCR protocol (i.e., volunteers learn how to utilize the various forms for the program and they are presented with the rules of the program/school where they will be working). During this training, volunteers generally submit a signed expectations form and a schedule of availabilities so that the program coordinators can work to place the volunteers in a school of their choice.

Placement of volunteers is a task that involves the MCR program coordinators (AmeriCorps\*VISTA members/supervisors), and the participating school site-coordinators. This can be summarized as a process in which the MCR coordinators relay availability schedules to school site-coordinators, who then find teachers that are able to accept the volunteers at their available times. Once teachers are established, MCR coordinators set a time to meet with the volunteer, the school site-coordinator and teacher for a site-orientation. During the site-orientation a reading schedule is confirmed for the volunteer, the volunteer is briefed on procedures (how to fill out forms/sign-in), and the volunteer is given a tour of the school if one is not familiar. After the site-orientation the MCR coordinator and reading volunteer schedule a date for a first day, to which the coordinator will attend and, subsequently, site-visits will be made periodically to check-up on the volunteer.

These three components involved in placing volunteers--recruitment, training, and placement--constitute the heart of the MCR program. The following practices act as supplements to the main efforts described above.

One supplemental practice that the MCR program conducts is the book and certificate distribution. The book and certificate distribution is done on a semester basis, offering the children who participate in the program a developmentally appropriate book and a certificate signed by the superintendent of the Monterey County Office of Education, the director of MCR, and the respective principal of the school of each child. The books are leveled at the MCR offices. The VISTAs then choose books and make certificates that are presented at a ceremony at each school site. The school site-coordinators and MCR volunteers are invited to attend the event. The volunteers are generally encouraged to participate in the actual presentation of the books and certificates. In the 2003 service year, the MCR program distributed approximately 2,400 books and certificates to children in the Monterey County.

Another supplemental practice that the MCR program conducts is the book drive. The goal of the book drive is to retrieve books from the community through donation and then to redistribute the books to locations that need them. In a recent book drive, roughly 12,000 Hampton Brown Big Books and other materials were distributed to public/private schools and libraries in Monterey County. The MCR program enlists help from not only the individuals and organizations that donate books, but also those who donate materials for shipping and packaging these materials. In this way the program concentrates resources in the community to enhance its efforts to expand literacy.

Finally, the MCR program works with schools to organize Saturday storytime events for those that choose to collaborate on such an activity. During the event, AmeriCorps\*VISTA members and librarians collaborate to provide the children with group reading time, interactive activities, and rewards for attending. The librarians are active participants who engage the children's interest in the library itself by addressing the process of obtaining a library card, finding books, and checking-out books. An additional outcome of these events is increased awareness of the importance of family literacy. These events generally last two hours and are catered to meet not only the needs of the children, but the parents as well.

## The Psychology

Two main concerns surrounding the psychology of learning are addressed here: 1. The development of cognitive processes that constitute a skill and 2. The interest necessary to guide a learner's attention in a way that will promote her cognitive growth towards attaining a skill and sustaining it. Here follows a theoretical explanation of the attainment and retention of the skill of reading as they apply to the context of MCR.

### Cognitive Development

The work of Lev Vygotsky provides theory and terminology to help describe the problems that surround the role of the MCR reading volunteer. This discussion will elaborate on these problems through Vygotsky's "lens" for viewing the, what he calls, development of "higher mental functions". In this case we are concerned with the development of a child's higher mental function of reading well and fluently, but more specifically, the role of an individual who is helping a child to improve in their reading ability. First, Vygotsky's notion of symbols as mediators of internal psychological processes will be addressed. Next, the process of internalization of higher mental functions will be presented. Finally, the child and reading volunteer as subjects of this process will be explored.

The usage of symbols as mediators of internal activity is central to Vygotsky's psychology. Similar to other theorists coming from a school of thought referred to as symbolic interactionism (e.g., George H. Mead, Robert Park), Vygotsky believed that just as tools are instruments that mediate external activity (e.g., a shovel assists in digging a trench), symbols mediate internal or psychological activity (e.g., a red light indicates stop). In Vygotsky's (1978) words, "The sign acts as an instrument of psychological activity in a manner analogous to the role of tool in labor" (p. 52). The recognition of symbols, as described above is a necessary prerequisite to the next concept: *internalization* of higher mental functions.

Vygotsky (1978) outlined the process of *internalization* of higher mental functions (from here forth, it shall be referred to as simply internalization) in the following manner:

1. An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally.
2. An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one.
3. The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events (pp. 56-57).

Given this model of internalization, it becomes the goal of the child to make the skill of reading an intrapersonal process. This is no easy task, a task that involves the development of an entire series of conditioned reflexes, which is inhibited by inherent limitations in attention and memory of the child. What is the best way to assist a child in achieving the status of "intrapersonal reader"? In many instances throughout Adams' (1990) book on beginning literacy she focuses on the concept of "overlearning" the basic skills of reading so that the child can focus on meanings (comprehension) of texts. The goal as she states it is to establish the functions that a child is in the process of mastering and engage

them repeatedly until the point of internalization is achieved. This, then, becomes the goal of the reading volunteer – to facilitate this process.

Another concept associated with Vygotskian theory is helpful to this discussion: *scaffolding*. This term associates with point number two above; it implies that this process of intrapersonal achievement is a social process. The person(s) that a child interacts with, who is in possession of a skill, and the child herself constitute a teacher/student relationship that may be referred to as scaffolding. MCR utilizes scaffolding as a method for assisting children to become better readers. The question that must be asked to and discussed with the reading volunteer is, “what is the best way to facilitate this growth?” In the quest to answer this question, the reading volunteer finds herself in a similar position to that of the child: how to make a process an intrapersonal one, that is, the skill of teaching a child to read.

### Interest

The procedure involved in teaching a skill as a mere goal in itself misses what may be the more important aspect of education, which is to sustain a skill. In teaching children to read or teaching adults effective skills for reading with a child, it is worthwhile to look at what motivates behavior so as to capture that interest in the process. Vygotsky (1998) states:

Thus we see how erroneously from the psychological aspect the process of education is formed when attempts are made to reduce it to simple development of new conditioned reflexes without regard for the development and education of the driving forces of behavior. Creation of habits alone or mechanisms of behavior alone without cultivating interests will always remain a purely formal education that will never solve the problem of the required direction of behavior (p. 24).

So then, an appropriate question to ask is “How does one determine these interests?” An example of one educator’s method may help to answer this question.

Freire’s (1970) notion of conscientization provides an concept that may be of assistance to this discussion. Conscientization is the process through which, “the people...leave behind the status of *objects* to assume the status of historical *Subjects*...” (p. 141) – it implies awareness of one’s socio-political history. Conscientization was the principal goal of Freire as an educator for oppressed peoples in developing countries in Latin America and elsewhere. Freire provides a concrete example of an educational model that utilized materials that were in tune with the interests of those they were to serve in the African republics of São Tomé and Príncipe. In his book written in collaboration with Donaldo Macedo (1987), Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, Freire utilized, what he called, “Popular Culture Notebooks”. Within the notebooks there were many reading and writing activities that were culturally and historically based – all of the contents dealt directly with the dilemma facing the citizens of São Tomé and Príncipe as countries undergoing reconstruction from an era of colonialism. The materials began simply in what was termed the literacy phase. After mastery of the literacy phase, another battery of more advanced exercises was created for the post literacy phase. Both phases promoted critical reflection, which had the aim of encouraging political and social action on the part of the participants of this educational model.

Of course we find a disparity of contexts when we look at the model I have provided above and the framework that MCR provides. For example, Freire's method was applied to adult populations with aims for political literacy and social action. What is important to note here is that from political literacy, which can be viewed as an aspect of the concept of conscientization, comes an interest in social action. This is to say that an understanding of context leads to action to alter that context. To avoid the risk of leaving this connection in a vague state, here follows a supporting argument for why this connection pertains to the topic of interest.

The most basic tenet of humanistic theory, as presented by Carl Rogers, states that the actions of beings are aimed in ways that "maintain, enhance, or actualize [their] organism, and rejects those which do not serve this end" (Rogers, 1983, p. 257). Fortunately, humans have the ability to critically look at their behavior in ways that allows them complex understandings of that which maintains, enhances, or actualizes their organism. We can see that this was Freire's goal in the educational method applied in São Tomé and Príncipe mentioned above. He was making an attempt to encourage thought about concrete situations or real life contexts, which would lead to social action – an action with goals for a better life (or, in other words, that which maintains, enhances, or actualizes the organism). This is the process of conscientization, a process of recognizing dehumanizing characteristics of social phenomena and acting to transform them.

This leads us to a more defined position regarding interests. Human interests are that which maintain, enhance, or actualize the self. Therefore, when considering children's interests it is important to recognize and understand the historical and social identities of a child. Just as in the instances of São Tomé and Príncipe, adults responded to text because it was of immediate importance to their humanity to do so, it is the task of the educator to find materials that engage the child's world or the child's context in order to have her interest?

## Literature Review

This section of the report will look at the range of literature reviewed in conducting this investigation. The goals are to define the expected capacity of MCR volunteers, explore the debate surrounding literacy instruction methods, review recent studies related to the research question, and to pose the author's conceptual framework. For clarity's sake, the literature review will be divided into the following sections: reading coach vs. reading tutor, whole language vs. phonics literacy methods, recent studies, and, to finish, a statement demonstrating the paper's conceptual framework.

### Reading Coach vs. Reading Tutor

Monterey County Reads mandates that its volunteers attend a two-hour training before the volunteer enters the classroom to work with children. This is not sufficient training to yield a volunteer with the title "tutor", that is to say that the volunteers trained by MCR are not equipped with the tools that they need to diagnose problems with beginning readers and, as a result, they cannot implement a proper intervention strategy to help a beginning reader progress in certain areas of literacy development. Wasik (1997, 1998) provided a model of the components necessary to create successful tutoring programs, many of which are possible to realize only in programs that receive a high level of funding.

Unfortunately, MCR is not one of these programs and, therefore, is not able to meet all of the criteria that Wasik defines as important to an effective reading tutor program. The points that Wasik identifies are as follows:

1. A certified reading specialist needs to supervise tutors.
2. Tutors need ongoing training and feedback.
3. Tutoring sessions need to be structured and contain basic elements.
4. Tutoring needs to be intensive and consistent.
5. Quality materials are needed to facilitate the tutoring model.
6. Assessment of students needs to be ongoing.
7. Schools need to find ways to ensure that tutors will attend regularly.
8. Tutoring needs to be coordinated with classroom instruction.

These guidelines imply a tall order on the part of MCR program administrators, VISTA volunteers, school site participants (coordinators and teachers), and the reading volunteers themselves. Many of the points are impossible for the program to meet because of lack of resources. In terms of the type of volunteer that the MCR program trains, the important point to mention here is point two: “Tutors need ongoing training and feedback.” Wasik (1998) states, “. . . what the tutor needs in order to be effective is some expert knowledge of the subject matter and knowledge of effective methods of communicating this knowledge to the student” (p. 563). MCR does not offer its volunteers ongoing training and feedback and, as a result, the volunteers are not given the “expert knowledge” or communication skills necessary to have the most effective intervention.

But MCR is not training tutors. The goal for MCR is to provide the children with meaningful experiences with text. When looking at the MCR program volunteers through the lens created by Wasik (1999) for reading *coaches*, it appears much more congruent with the practice of MCR than does Wasik’s lens for reading *tutors* outlined above. The actions that Wasik defines as activities that can, “foster much-needed literacy development in children” (p. 654) follow here:

1. Reading stories
2. Focusing on comprehension
3. Story retelling
4. Active listening
5. Storytelling
6. Creating opportunities to write
7. Motivating children to read

MCR promotes these practices and trains their volunteers to have the skills to implement them. MCR’s practice, then, is consistent with what Wasik emphasizes as the importance of utilizing volunteers for their appropriate level of training; she states, “Instead of using insufficiently trained volunteers to attempt to tutor, schools need to consider using volunteers as reading coaches” (p. 657). In short, MCR trains and places reading coaches or volunteers that “. . . are not expected to diagnose and assess students’ reading problems and therefore are not expected to provide a specific intervention. Instead, reading coaches can provide opportunities for children to have one-to-one literacy experiences with a caring adult” (p. 654). However, the role of the reading coach does imply certain specialized

behaviors that, depending on their degree of mastery, may determine the effectiveness of intervention.

### Whole Language vs. Phonics

What methods for teaching reading have popular acknowledgement today in the field of literacy education? This brief discussion will discuss the two main poles of the argument surrounding literacy instruction, and it will also link MCR to the concerns found herein.

The debate between whole language and phonics literacy has created conflict among literacy experts. Marilyn Jager Adams (1990) published a work, Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, in response to a request from Congress to evaluate the role of phonics in reading instruction. She takes the position that phonics instruction is a vital method to utilize for beginning readers. Adams feels that it is essential to “overlearn” the phonemes, letter names, frequently occurring spelling patterns, and the sequenced order of letters within words. If these aspects of language are not “overlearned”, then the reader’s attention will be stuck on deciphering the text rather than focusing on the meaning of text. Thus, Adams is a staunch supporter of the “mechanical” learning that phonics instruction calls for, but simultaneously she is concerned that this overlearning process relies on other methods of teaching and interacting with students. Regarding phonics learning Adams states, “[learning phonics] depends integrally on experience, experience can be usefully translated into learning only given interest, understanding, and reflective thought” (Adams et al., 1991, p. 394). More recent publications come to similar conclusions.

Rayner et al. (2002) recently published an article that looked at whole word vs. phonics instruction. In studies where English-speaking college students were taught Arabic in two groups, one utilizing phonics and the other whole word (whole-language’s predecessor) instruction, the two groups had significantly different results. The group that learned through phonics instruction was able to construct many more words than the group that learned through whole word instruction. In another study utilizing 20 first grade classrooms, there were similar results. The group that utilized a whole language method did not score as high as the other group in year-end measures that looked at reading and comprehension. Rayner et al. come to the same conclusion more than ten years after Adams (and, in fact, citing Adams in their work) that there must exist a “delicate” balance between whole language and phonics instruction for optimal results in beginning literacy. Rayner et al. state, “Indeed, recent work has indicated – and many teachers have discovered – that the combination of literature-based instruction and phonics is more powerful than either method used alone” (p. 91).

In short, both phonics, overlearning of the most basic sounds and symbols of language, and whole language, utilizing language in fun, connected contexts, are important methods associated with learning to read. So what does this mean in terms of MCR methodology?

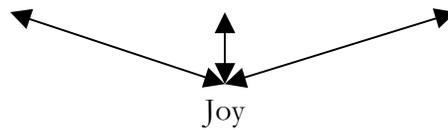
The most recent models for beginning literacy education reflect what was summarized above – utilizing a variety of methods with a well-tuned balance is the best way to approach literacy education. In 2001 the National Institute for Literacy and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn) published a guide for teachers that outlined the components of achieving the skill of literacy. They reviewed over 100,000 studies on reading achievement to arrive at their model. The five components they

identified to achieve mastery in literacy are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. MCR chooses a specific area within this model as its focus, which may be seen as the whole-language side of the spectrum. That is to say that the MCR program focuses on fluency, text comprehension, and, to an extent, vocabulary, leaving the phonics and phonemic awareness aspects to the professionals. That is not to say that a MCR volunteer will never engage in phonics instruction with the supervision of a teacher, for the researcher has witnessed this on a number of accounts, but it is to say that the main focus of the program is to practice fluency and comprehension, and invariably learn some new vocabulary as a result of a meaningful interaction with text. Let us not forget that to create “joyful” readers is also a central concern of MCR. The following figure provides visual representation of the areas of literacy instruction that MCR works to provide.

Model of MCR Literacy Instruction Method

Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Comprehension	Vocabulary
X	X	MCR	MCR	MCR

Figure 2



### Recent Studies

Two recent studies are of pertinence to this investigation. The first (Cobb & Allen, 2001) is an in-depth case study of a volunteer that was considered an exemplary America Reads volunteer. The study found that, even though the subject was a non-educator, with minimal initial training, that he was nonetheless an effective literacy tutor. They attribute his success to the following three things:

1. The tutor had experience in two settings, which allowed him the benefit of several mentors/trainers and also the benefit of two environments working with different populations.
2. The tutor’s ability to interact socially influenced his role as a tutor, as good communication led to an awareness that allowed him to utilize developmentally appropriate teaching techniques.
3. The tutor’s personality and, specifically, his desire to help the children impacted his role as a literacy tutor.

Although this is a single case study, it gives support for implementing non-educators as literacy tutors. When examining the conditions in which this tutor emerged, the study also gives support for the on-going training of tutors, as this was identified as one of the main contributors to the volunteer’s success as a tutor. The second study of pertinence looks at a program that utilizes a similar method of program delivery as MCR.

The second study (Baker, et al., 2000) found that reading coaches--reading volunteers with minimal training--in the Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) program were in fact helpful in fostering beginning literacy in children. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) found that the children in a test group had significant gains in several measures (including fluency and comprehension) of beginning literacy over the control group. The most striking consideration here is that the volunteers in the SMART program have minimal training and work with the students for just two, 30-minute sessions/week. Despite such minimal training and, also, interaction with the children, strong evidence supported the efficacy of the intervention program. Unfortunately, the study included only a short unsystematic study of volunteer performance in the program. The researchers found that the “volunteers in the program take their role very seriously” (p. 25). Their study looked at eight reading volunteers and, although the results were inconclusive, they give indication that the children were excited to see the volunteers, volunteers utilized “useful” strategies when working with the children, and children felt supported by the volunteers. Although these statements are vague, it would seem as though the volunteers are offering the children a positive role model and offering good services, in so far as the “useful” strategies are being employed.

### Conceptual Framework

The researcher’s approach to the problem starts with an understanding of Vygotsky’s work mentioned above. Vygotsky’s notion of symbols as mediators of internal activity and his process of internalization provide concepts useful for discussing beginning literacy acquisition in children and beginning literacy tutor acquisition in reading volunteers. From this understanding, the researcher considers what existing research indicates in terms of literacy methods and reading volunteers. Here, the researcher concludes that it is essential to include connected, interesting text with phonics methods for optimal literacy instruction. Also, on-going training is necessary to assist reading volunteers in becoming more effective reading *coaches* and, maybe, one day to become bona fide reading *tutors*. The existing research on the effectiveness of the SMART program is sufficient evidence to convince the researcher that the MCR program provides an effective literacy intervention program. However, the researcher feels that, when considering work by Wasik (1997, 1998), improvements can be made within the program to make program implementation more efficient and increase outcomes for children and volunteers. The premise here is that with further training the volunteers may be able to independently create strategies to help children read that draw from all five of the instructional components given above. This requires the presence of a volunteer trainer with an understanding of the developmental level of the volunteer, or, in Vygotskian terms, the level of the volunteer’s internalization of the skill of beginning literacy tutoring.

### Methodology

Here the reader will find a rationale for the choice in procedures used for data collection and management. First, the sampling method for the two populations from which data was gathered is addressed. Next, a discussion of the assessment instruments will elaborate on the considerations surrounding the tools that were developed for data collection. Then, an overview of the procedures will articulate how the research process

unfolded. Finally, a short closing section will address the problems associated with the methods explained here.

### Sampling Method

There were two populations of interest to this study: MCR reading volunteers and teachers participating in the MCR program. The sample of the latter population was determined by the sampling method of the former; they were the supervising teachers of the MCR volunteer subjects. For this reason, this discussion will focus on the process involved in choosing four specific MCR reading volunteers as subjects.

MCR recruits several different categories of volunteers (e.g., parent, community member, military, high school, college, etc.). For reasons of interest to the program, the sampling frame was reduced to college students. A further interest of the program was to compare two particular categories of college students: Hartnell AmeriCorps\* Volunteers vs. CSUMB Service Learning Volunteers. For this reason, two volunteers were selected from each of these organizations. They were selected as a convenience sample, that is to say, the researcher's role as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member implied a certain job-related assignment and this determined the populations with whom he interacted. The selection process was simply a matter of finding volunteers that seemed to be generally representative of the population and who were willing to participate. The students were either first or second year in their respective programs. Three females and one male were selected. Both of the populations (in terms of institute membership) had academic support from their institutions and time quotas to fulfill. Hence, none of these volunteers were volunteers in the pure sense of the word; they all had some external incentive to participate in MCR (this is discussed more thoroughly below, see Results).

As stated above, the teachers were selected on the basis of their role as supervising teachers for the reading volunteers. They were all of different ages and experiences with teaching. Before closing, a quick note about external validity.

It is obvious that the sample size is small, but it is the way in which the volunteers were observed (four times over a four month period) and the supplemental data, which will be discussed below, that assists the primary data source (observations of the volunteers) to have a greater degree of validity. In itself, the observation of volunteers makes it possible to state only hesitant claims about general volunteer behavior. When triangulated with other sources of data, though, conclusions gain an increasing degree of validity. Esterberg (2002) states, "Using multiple kinds of data allows you to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each" (p. 176).

### Volunteer Assessment

The question guiding the data collection for this project was, "What is the best way to describe volunteer behavior?" The basic rationale here was that in order to explore how well the MCR training is working it was essential to know exactly what the volunteers were doing in the field. To focus on the matter of describing volunteer behavior, the method of participant observer seemed most appropriate. After this method had been established, there was a further question as to how exactly the participation would take place. After all, field notes are a common way to document experience as a participant observer. The disadvantage of using this data collection method is that analysis would be more tedious

because categories would have to be determined post-collection. Therefore, it was decided to create an assessment instrument to accompany the observations. This method would direct the researcher in the field and assist in analysis by way of pre-determined categories. Hence, a more accurate wording for the method might be “structured participant observation”. The structuring of the observations, undoubtedly, created a bias, as the instrument would direct the researcher’s attention in certain directions as stated. Specifically, it directed attention towards what the volunteer was doing as it related to MCR training. To supplement the observational assessment, the researcher did, in fact, take notes.

The second method used to describe volunteer behavior was semi-structured interviews with the teachers who supervised the volunteers. The interview form designed to extract data from the supervising teachers was constructed in accordance with the assessment instrument for the volunteers. The basic idea was to obtain the teacher’s impression about how the volunteer was performing in relationship to areas that MCR trains for. An area for notes was included on the forms, and the researcher encouraged qualification of teacher responses.

Finally, the researcher acted as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member throughout the 2004/2005 school year. As a result of this broader ethnographic approach the researcher had a significant amount of social intercourse with volunteers and he observed dozens of volunteers in this more informal (i.e., without the aid of an instrument) manner over the course of the year.

The methods presented here were employed to gather the body of data that will be analyzed in the results section. The research instruments/notes can be found in Appendix B. Here follows a more thorough look at the creation and application of the research instruments:

The researcher constructed the volunteer assessment instrument by way of a thorough review of the MCR training manual. The training manual contains 20 pages; five of these pages provide guidelines and/or set expectations for volunteer behavior. These pages were analyzed in order to create the assessment instrument. Categories were created for different stages of the observation and were defined as follows:

1. Commitment to program: Behaviors that exist outside of the child/volunteer relationship; behaviors that display compliance with MCR guidelines/expectations that relate *indirectly* to the child.
2. Commitment to child: Behaviors that exist outside of the child/volunteer relationship; behaviors that display compliance with MCR guidelines/expectations that relate *directly* to the child.
3. Behavior list: Behaviors that exist within the child/volunteer relationship; behaviors that volunteer committed to by signing the Monterey County Reads Reading Volunteer Expectation Form when reading with a child.

The rationale here was to distinguish behaviors from one another as they applied to the service of assisting a child to read better. The metaphor of a unidirectional permeable membrane such as the following diagram illustrates, may help to display the function of this model:

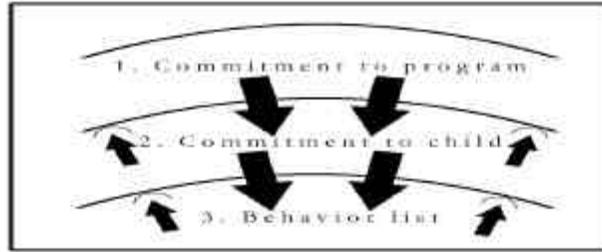


Figure 3

Within these categories, there were specific, observable behaviors listed for each. Each of these behaviors was drawn directly from a statement in the MCR training manual. The MCR supervisor, MCR director, and a reading specialist from Salinas City Elementary School District reviewed the instrument. The researcher made revisions accordingly and then went into the field to gather data.

The interview forms used for the teachers were nearly identical to the volunteer assessments. The first section, *commitment to program*, was omitted because this matter was beyond the scope of the teacher's responsibilities. The one significant addition to the teacher's form was that it included a section for the teacher to elaborate on the three main areas that MCR trains for: fluency, comprehension, and joy. As a semi-structured interview, the researcher would deviate from the form at times, too, if he felt it was a useful deviation, but always covering the questions that were on the form.

Lastly, the validity of the research instruments was based on the fact that reading specialists associated with the MCR program and the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) created the training manual and conducted the trainings. The matter of MCR training validity, that is the appropriateness of their method, is based on this input from specialists. It was assumed that the training method and training manual were valid for the training of beginning reading volunteers.

## Procedures

The data collection process began with an initial observation of the four volunteer subjects. After the initial observation, the volunteers were revisited once a month for a four-month period - a total of 16 observations over four months. As volunteers were observed for their last time, the researcher set appointments with their supervising teachers – one interview each. Here follows an elaboration of the actual procedure involved:

The procedure for assessing each volunteer was consistent: the researcher would arrive at the school's office before the volunteer and begin the assessment immediately upon the volunteer's arrival. The researcher accompanied the volunteer to their classroom and sat near the volunteer and child. The reading sessions had various durations (from approximately 10-20 minutes), but regardless of time spent with the child the volunteers were assessed on the basis of their work with one child for the given day of observation. Therefore, each assessment form reflects one reading session between the volunteer and child. Shortly after a "wave" of observations was complete, that is that each of the four volunteers had been observed for a given month, the researcher wrote notes on that wave to supplement the assessments. The results of the assessments and notes were compiled into tables and discussed in the results section below.

The procedure for assessing each teacher was consistent as well: the researcher set an appointment with the teacher and then met with them to go through the questions posed in the interview form. The interaction took from approximately 15-30 minutes and it was tape-recorded. For each interview, the structure was not completely rigid to allow the subjects to expand on areas where they felt it was important to do so. The forms and tapes were analyzed and, once again, organized and discussed in the results section of this study.

### Limitations of Method

The main problem affecting this methodology is one that researchers must face if they have chosen a participant observer method. The problem here is twofold: 1. The self as instrument implies a subjective interpretation of events (data) and 2. The self as instrument unavoidably influences the environment. The former point impressed this work in terms of how the assessment instruments were completed. Admittedly, there is a degree ambiguity in certain behaviors identified on the assessment form. Regardless of the deliberation of measure definitions that preceded the researcher's entry into the field, certain behaviors were difficult to say clearly that "yes" or "no" this did or did not happen. Additionally, the researcher's presence, with the array of particular characteristics that he carries with him, changed his environment in ways that may or may not have affected the results were he not present. A recent publication dealing with qualitative research methods (Esterberg, 2002) states, "Your own qualities shape what you can see in the field setting" (p. 62).

## Results

The results are divided into several different levels of analyses. To begin, a brief note on the issues surrounding the presentation of the results is provided. Difficulty in obtaining certain data, and other issues are addressed here. Next, the data is presented, primarily, as four separate case studies. Each subject is discussed first in terms of the three main categories of behaviors identified in the assessment form, then a note is made regarding the changes in the volunteer's behavior over the four-month assessment period, and finally the data from teacher interviews is given. After each case is presented individually, a composite table and graph will be presented and discussed. To finish, the cases are divided by their college membership (two cases from Hartnell College and two cases from CSUMB) and compared.

### A Note on Analysis

Before offering the results, it is important to note that data for several of the measures was not fully gathered. Some of the measures were impossible to gather on certain occasions because of circumstance, such as the researcher having to leave before the subject could successfully display a behavior indicated in the assessment form. In cases such as this, when the researcher was unsure of a behavior, he left the section blank and marked it as "need data" in the data spreadsheets (see Appendix C). For some of these measures, it was possible to review documents to determine if a behavior was performed. All of the data within the category of *behavior list* was gathered for each volunteer, although in certain cases a measure was not applicable (e.g., a child could read with fluency, so no measure could be

taken as to the volunteer's technique helping the child to get "unstuck"). Under *commitment to child* several of the measures were difficult to ascertain, and this is reflected in the results. In a few cases, measures under *commitment to program* were difficult to gather and one measure was eliminated, because it was generally not possible to monitor. In the same vein, the teacher interviews were not fully completed. A general sentiment among teachers was that they did not supervise closely enough to answer certain questions regarding the volunteer's behavior. Thus, the data presented from the interviews here is constructed, largely, from marginal notes in addition to the data that *was* retrievable.

### Case A

In terms of Volunteer A's *commitment to program*, he generally met certain behaviors that the assessment looked for. Although, he wore his nametag one out of four observations, he always followed the school's dress code and he signed-in on all but one observation.

It was difficult to obtain the volunteer's behavior as it pertained to his *commitment to child*, specifically as shown through utilization of interactive logs. When it was possible to determine if the volunteer had utilized the interactive journal (two of four observations), he did utilize it. Also, when the researcher was able to confirm the volunteer's interaction with the teacher or VISTA member about issues surrounding the reading session (three of four sessions), he did involve himself in this way. The volunteer was generally on time; his arrival time ranged from eight minutes early to six minutes late. A review of the volunteer's attendance shows that he was absent nine times throughout the assessment period, which included 33 appointments. Interestingly, as the semester progressed the volunteer missed more, but simultaneously he began volunteering on new days. In comparison to the volunteer's initial schedule for reading with children, he volunteered ten days not initially scheduled. These extra days fell in the final month of assessment.

Volunteer A was consistent in certain areas regarding his behavior when actually working with the child. Volunteer A's *behavior list* shows near consistent positive marks on measures 1-5. This indicates that the volunteer greeted the child well, created a positive environment, and made the session joyful and interactive by asking questions. The volunteer scored purely negative marks for measure 6, which suggests that he never asked the child how he/she *felt* about the text. Measure 7 was a hit or miss considering that the volunteer did use proper technique in some instances and not in others (two of four sessions). Measure 8 was never met, although the volunteer was a positive encouraging figure, he never offered specific praise as the MCR training asks for. Finally, Volunteer A's tendency to summarize the session as a whole (measure 9) was met on two of the four observations.

Considering Volunteer A's behavior over the course of the assessment period, it seems as though the volunteer deteriorated to a degree in terms of his *commitment to program*. This is displayed by the fact that he stopped wearing his nametag after the first day of observation. In terms of his *commitment to child*, it seems as though the volunteer was concerned about being on time and, he did interact with the teacher or VISTA regarding his practice as a reading coach. Finally, his interaction with the children as indicated by the *behavior list*, shows an improvement over time in measure 7, which shows if the volunteer was using proper technique when the child would become stuck. The third and fourth sessions, he did utilize proper technique, that is he stopped the child and had him/her re-read a sentence with prosody if they failed to do so initially. Another important area of growth to

mention in this volunteer that was not captured by the assessment instrument, but through marginal notes, was the level of interaction/inquisition that the volunteer developed with the children. Session two was a particularly drab day for Volunteer A, but session three included notes such as the following:

- Very interactive session. Volunteer asked questions after every few sentences.
- Volunteer drilled child for comprehension; before moving on, he made sure that the child understood what was happening.
- Volunteer would cover text, so child could not see and then ask questions to gauge child's comprehension.
- Summarization period was playful and open as volunteer drilled child about characters and meaning in stories.

The interview with Volunteer A's supervising teacher reflected much of what the observations did. In terms of the volunteer's *commitment to child*, the teacher reported that the volunteer did not use the interactive journal and he did not interact with her about concern in reading with the children. This conflicts with the statement above regarding interactive journal use, but upon further analysis of the interview the teacher stated that the volunteer did not "share" his interactive journals with her. On the other hand, she said that he was "responsible" and that he arrived on time and was consistent in attending reading sessions. Her main recommendation for the volunteer was that he communicate more; she said that she attempted to open dialog with the volunteer, but he would not respond.

The supervising teacher gave positive reports on the areas that she felt comfortable to comment on regarding the volunteer's *behavior list*. The main theme throughout was that the volunteer developed his skills working with a child. She said after the first observation by a VISTA member that he began to pay more attention to details. She said that she had seen development in the volunteer's ability to help the child develop a joy for reading, fluency, and comprehension.

## Case B

Volunteer B generally met the points called for regarding her *commitment to program*. In terms of presenting herself at the office upon arrival, she did well signing-in on three of the four observations. She wore her nametag two of four observations, and she always followed the school's dress code.

Volunteer B's *commitment to child* as reflected in the assessment was generally positive. She was mostly on time - her arrival varied from eight minutes early to five minutes late. When it was possible to determine her use of the interactive log, she did review it (one of four sessions). She displayed an interest in interacting with the teacher and VISTA member about issues surrounding the reading sessions (two of four sessions). Over the assessment period she was absent to her reading session 11 of 74 appointments.

In terms of Volunteer B's actual interaction with children, it was marked by a high level of interaction. For measures 1-4 of the *behavior list*, she was consistent on meeting these expectations in all but two cases (in one instance she failed to set a positive tone for the reading session and in another she did not use an appropriate text). This indicates that the volunteer was skillful at setting a positive tone for the session, appropriate materials were

utilized, and questions were asked. Generally, the volunteer would not summarize or evaluate the story, or ask the child to do so (this happened on one account). Likewise, on a single observation the volunteer utilized proper technique when the child was stuck. When offering the child praise, the volunteer offered the child general praise; she never met the expectation of “specific praise” during observation. On certain observations, the volunteer summarized the session as a whole (two of four sessions).

Looking at Volunteer B’s assessment over time in terms of the three areas, there are trends. In terms of her *commitment to program*, it would appear as though it dwindled, considering she met all expectations on the first two observations and then failed to do so on the latter two. Still, it is breach that consisted of not wearing a nametag or not signing in when the volunteer arrived. Although the measures regarding the volunteer’s *commitment to child* were difficult to obtain, it is apparent that the volunteer was serious about arriving on time and attending regularly (85% attendance). It would seem as though she had an interest in interacting with the VISTA or teacher about concerns surrounding the reading sessions. Marginal notes that included the following substantiate this claim:

- Volunteer is very engaged in experience - asking [VISTA] questions about program and collecting names for Book & Certificate Distribution.
- [Volunteer B] said that it was good that [VISTA] was going over this (expectations) with her because she had forgotten most of the training.

The volunteer’s behavior list did not indicate any strong trends over the assessment period. There was a near consistency in her ability to meet expectations 1-4, and inability to meet expectations 5-9.

The teacher interview expands on several of the points mentioned above. The teacher’s perspective on the volunteer’s *commitment to child* was that she was “very committed”. She said that the volunteer arrived on time, was never absent without good reason, interacted with her about concerns in reading with a child, and she used the interactive journal. She did mention that the usage of the interactive journal waned through the semester. Judging from the remainder of the conversation, this did not imply a deterioration of the verbal communication between teacher and volunteer.

The teacher’s report on the volunteer’s *behavior list* was equally positive, although the teacher was uncertain of a few particular behaviors. She confirmed the intensity of engagement on the part of the volunteer that is indicated above. She said that the volunteer set a positive tone for the session and then asked questions, explained vocabulary, and summarized the story. In terms of the three main areas that MCR trains for, the teacher reported that Volunteer B was particularly skillful at developing a joy for reading. She said, “[Volunteer B] would help the children laugh – the children would freely approach her. They like[d] reading with her.” She also felt that the volunteer was helping the children with comprehension and fluency with respective levels of efficacy (that is to say she felt comprehension was a stronger outcome than fluency for the children that the volunteer worked with).

### Case C

Volunteer C seemed sporadic in following the basic expectations that are reflected in the volunteer’s *commitment to program*. She was consistent about signing-in, but her usage of

nametag was on and off (two of four sessions) and a question was raised about her dress. The secretary and principal mentioned that the group that Volunteer C arrived with needed to dress more appropriately.

The behaviors that imply the volunteer's level of *commitment to child* were difficult to gather. On a single occasion it was possible to determine that the volunteer did utilize the interactive journal and, also, that the volunteer interacted with the VISTA or teacher about concerns reading with the children. The data shows that the volunteer did not arrive on time (from two to twenty-seven minutes late). On the other hand, the volunteer was good about attendance, missing two of twenty scheduled sessions for the assessment period.

Volunteer C had impressive marks on the volunteer assessment's *behavior list*. For the most part, this volunteer met the expectations reflected in measures 1-6. This means that the volunteer set a positive tone for the reading session, used appropriate materials, asked questions throughout the engagement, summarized or had the child summarize the story, and she would ask the child's opinion of the story upon completion. Marginal notes, indicate that the volunteer was inquisitive, but that her style was very patient; she had the tendency to let the child go for quite a while before intervening with questions. Measure 7 was never met by this volunteer, although on two occasions it did not apply because the volunteer read with a child who could read fluently (she did not have a chance to "unstick" them). Although Volunteer C was a supportive figure, she did not generally give specific praise (Measure 8) to the children (she did so on one of four observations). Finally, Volunteer C summarized the session as a whole (Measure 9) on two of the four occasions.

Reviewing Volunteer C's assessment over the period of investigation, it is clear that she improved in several areas and deteriorated in others. In terms of her *commitment to program*, although she did not use her nametag on two occasions, she always signed-in and modified her behavior when the issue of dress code was posed to her. Her *commitment to child*, seemed to wane as displayed by her increasing tardiness over the assessment period, but, on the other hand, she was consistent in attending reading sessions. Most impressive, though, was Volunteer C's development in terms of the *behavior list*. She began with an impressive assessment and maintained this. There was an improvement in the volunteer's ability to summarize the session as a whole (she did so on observations 3 and 4). The main areas lacking for this volunteer are indicated in her failure to meet Measures 7 and 8, which means that the volunteer was not using *specific* praise to encourage the child and, also, that she wasn't, generally, using proper technique (although this was a pertinent measure in only two of the four sessions) to help a child with challenging situations they encountered while reading.

The teacher interview gave a positive report on Volunteer C's behavior. In terms of the volunteer's *commitment to child*, the teacher said that she was very consistent or she calls. She said that the volunteer arrives on time, which conflicts with the observations above indicating her tardiness. Unfortunately, the reason for this contradiction escapes us. The only area related to this category that was unsatisfactorily met was that the volunteer did not interact with the teacher verbally (they did use the interactive journal to communicate) about issues relating the reading with children. The teacher went on to state that it is difficult because of the specific time that the volunteer attended the class; the teacher was busy with teaching at this time.

Regarding the *behavior list*, the volunteer received positive marks on everything that the teacher was comfortable to remark on. She said that the volunteer was very positive and that the children wanted to be with her. The teacher reported that the volunteer was critical of the texts they were using for appropriateness. Also, she felt that the volunteer had

developed to ask more questions of the children for comprehension. In response to the three main areas that MCR trains for, the teacher said that Volunteer C assisted the child in all of these areas. She said that in terms of joy, “[Volunteer C] is helping children develop interest who weren’t so interested before.” For fluency, she cited particular children and noted the improvement she had seen in them after working with Volunteer C. She did the same to remark on comprehension. In summary of the volunteer’s behavior the teacher stated, “She does a very good job – the children want to read more.”

### Case D

Volunteer D met expectations for her *commitment to program* in all respects except for wearing a nametag. She did not wear her nametag for one session. On the other hand, she always signed-in at the office and followed the school’s dress code.

Just as in the other cases, data was not gathered for certain areas that measured *commitment to child*. The two measures that were determined show that the volunteer was generally late to her sessions (from two to forty-one minutes late), but she was good about attendance – she missed a total of one of twenty scheduled sessions over the assessment period. Unfortunately, no data regarding the volunteer’s utilization of the interactive journal was obtained.

Volunteer D had mostly consistent readings throughout the assessment period. Generally, she met Measures 1, 3, and 4 of the *behavior list*. This means that the volunteer greeted the child, used appropriate texts, and asked questions throughout the session. She missed Measure 2 on two occasions, because her initial moments with the child were no more than a brief “hello”. Furthermore, Volunteer D did not meet Measures 5-9 for the most part. One on occasion she met Measure 5 and on another she met Measure 6. This implies that, on the majority of the evaluations, the volunteer did not summarize or ask for evaluations of stories, didn’t use proper technique when the child became stuck, didn’t use specific phrases to praise the child, and she did not summarize the sessions as whole.

Looking at Volunteer D’s assessments over time, they show no strong trends. The only notable trend is that the volunteer seemed to show up later and later to her sessions. A look at Volunteer D’s supervising teacher interview will elaborate on these results.

Despite the results posted above, the teacher felt that the volunteer had a very high level of *commitment to child*. The teacher stated that the volunteer was always very responsible about attending, save for one instance related to car trouble. Also, the volunteer used the interactive journal to communicate with the teacher if they did not personally discuss issues surrounding the volunteer’s experience. Again, the source of the discrepancy between the documentation of volunteer arrival and the teacher’s report is mysterious. At this point it is only possible to assume the nature of the circumstances that created this contradiction.

The teacher’s perspectives on Volunteer D’s *behavior list*, were very hesitant, because she felt that she needed more time observing the volunteer to be sure of her statements. She continually said that she assumed “yes” that the behaviors were happening, but that she couldn’t say for sure. From these tentative statements, a positive allusion of the volunteer’s behavior is made. She felt that the volunteer asked questions, used appropriate text, and exercised all of the other behaviors that MCR trains for. When asked about the three main areas that MCR trains for, she reported a certain “yes” for fluency and comprehension, and she offered statements about the volunteer’s behavior that may have had to do with joy in order to illustrate her feelings on this point. Some of the things that she said follow here:

- Even a child who didn't like reading enjoyed spending time with the volunteer.
- Other children in the class appeared to be envious of those who read with [Volunteer D].
- The volunteer was positive in the classroom.

### Trends

The results presented to this point are diverse from case to case. Indeed, each volunteer has his/her own unique style of interacting with the children and the school environment more generally. However, given the large degree of diversity among cases, the data shows certain patterns - these will be discussed here. Consider the following table and graphs, which show a compilation of the data from all of the observations combined. This data shows the number of instances in which a behavior could or could not be confirmed over the entire assessment period for the volunteers as a group. Note that data for *commitment to child* is omitted; this is because of the data type and lack of data for certain measures.

### Volunteer Assessment Instrument Results

Measures			
<b>Commitment to Program</b>		Yes	No
1	Does the volunteer sign in at the office?	14	2
2	Does the volunteer wear a nametag?	5	11
3	Does the volunteer follow the school dress code?	15	1
<b>Behavior List</b>		Yes	No
1	Does volunteer greet child?	16	
2	Does volunteer set positive tone for reading session?	11	5
3	Does volunteer use appropriate text?	15	1
4	Does volunteer ask questions about/discuss book during session?	15	1
5	Does volunteer summarize or have child summarize story upon finishing text?	7	6
6	Does volunteer ask child to evaluate story upon finishing text?	5	8
7	Does volunteer utilize proper technique when child gets stuck?	3	9
8	Does volunteer offer specific positive phrases to encourage child's efforts?	1	15
9	Does volunteer summarize session?	6	10

Figure 4

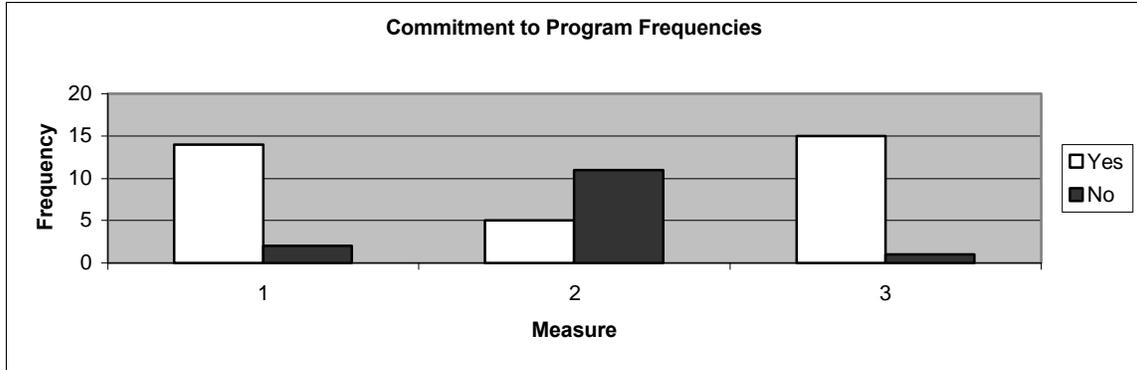


Figure 5

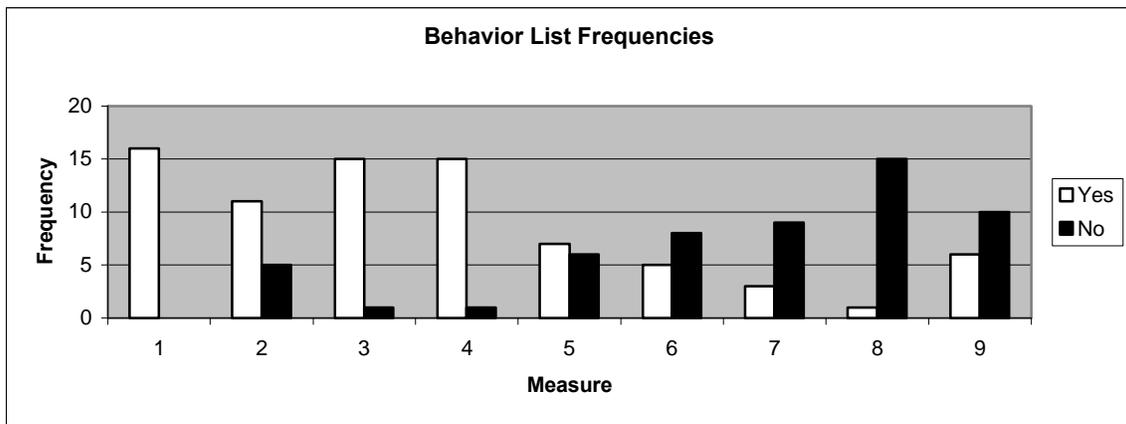


Figure 6

As you can see, several of the measures have clear results indicating a tendency of volunteers to fulfill or not fulfill certain behaviors. First, what does the category *commitment to program* indicate?

Measures 1 and 3 show a strong tendency of volunteers to sign-in at the office and follow the school’s dress code. Measure 2, on the other hand, shows a tendency of volunteers to neglect wearing their nametags. For this specific measure, it is important to refer to the data presented above that shows a tendency of volunteers to begin the program wearing their nametag and, slowly, to discontinue this behavior (as in cases A and B). The compiled data for the *behavior list*, likewise displays certain trends in volunteer behavior.

Measure 1 is the only measure that received a 100% achievement rate. This indicates that volunteers are skilled in acknowledging the presence of the child and welcoming them to the reading session. Measure 2, had a lower achievement rate. The lower rate is a result of the lack of volunteers, on many occasions to go beyond a polite “hello” in greeting the child and engage the child in a bit of dialog before beginning to read. Volunteers had to show an extra interest in the child in order to receive a satisfactory mark for this measure. Measure 3 shows that the volunteers are aware of the text that they are using and will take action if the text is inappropriate. The high achievement rate of Measure 4 shows that the volunteers engage the child in an interactive way by asking questions throughout their reading sessions. Although this measure did not include a rating of intensity, it would have been useful to distinguish between levels of engagement, as it most certainly exists. Measure

5 had mixed results, showing that during certain sessions volunteers would summarize or have the child summarize the story and at others they would not. It is similar for Measure 6, certain sessions would include encouragement that the child evaluate the story and others would not. The results of Measure 7 seem to indicate that the volunteers seldom use proper technique when a child becomes stuck. The general qualification of this measure was that the volunteer would give the child the word as soon as there was a sign of struggle. Measure 8 had the lowest achievement rate of all of the measures, which means that the volunteers had a strong tendency to be general in their praise, as opposed to specific; volunteers had a hard time specifying what the child did well and articulating that to them. Finally, Measure 9 shows another occasionally met behavior. Sometimes, the volunteers would summarize the session as a whole and at other times they would not. The indication here is that more often they did not summarize the session.

### Hartnell vs. CSUMB

The final level of analysis is a comparison between Hartnell and CSUMB volunteers. Consider the following graphs that show the differences in composite behavior (that is the combination of the results of four observations of the two Hartnell volunteers vs. the two CSUMB volunteers) between the two groups. A look at the level of involvement of these two groups of volunteers will conclude this section.

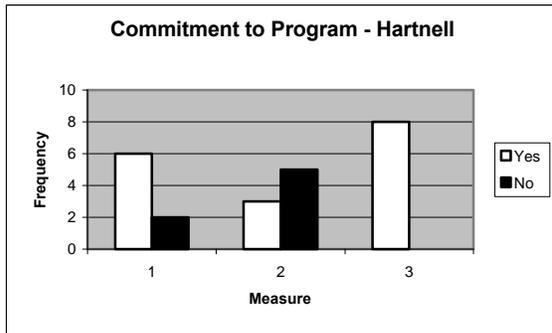


Figure 7

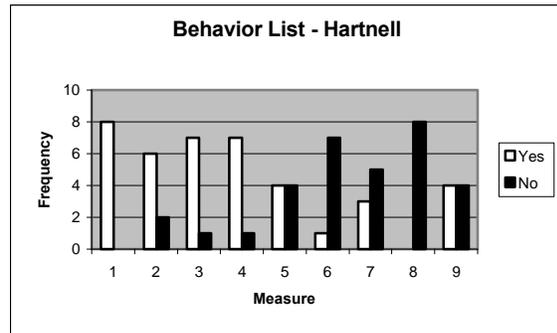


Figure 8

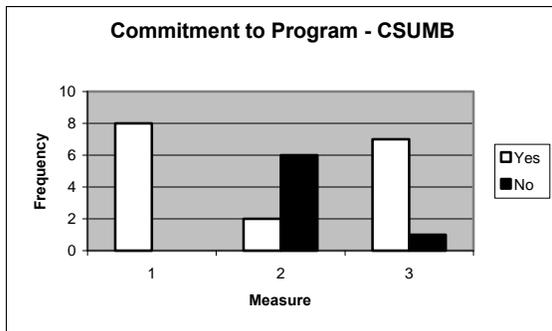


Figure 9

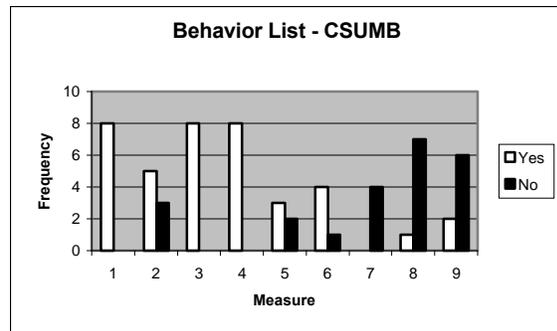


Figure 10

The trends are remarkably similar; it seems as though most of the points of tension for both groups correspond. The marked differences appear in the behavior list in measures 6 and 7. It would seem that Hartnell Volunteers did not regularly ask the children to evaluate the

story upon its completion. The CSUMB Volunteers seemed to have done a better job of this. On the other hand, CSUMB volunteers were not given a single positive rating for using the appropriate technique when a child became stuck, while Hartnell volunteers met this expectation during three observations. As a whole, though, it appears as though the trends are closely related across the category of educational institution affiliation. However, there is one point where the two institutions contrast dramatically.

When considering the volunteer's *commitment to child*, it becomes obvious that there are differences between the two organizations in the cases given. For instance, CSUMB volunteers were generally much later to their sessions than were the Hartnell volunteers. In terms of volunteer absences, Hartnell volunteers tended to be absent at a higher rate than were CSUMB volunteers. But, perhaps these issues of attendance are transcended by something greater, which is the amount of participation more generally. Consider the following table for 2003:

CSUMB, SLI and Hartnell AmeriCorps\* Volunteers: Input into MCR

	# of Volunteers	Total # of Hours	Total # of Children Read With	Average # of Hours/Volunteer
CSUMB, SLI	88	2279.8	842	25.9
Hartnell AmeriCorps*	50	5093.25	1262	101.9

Figure 11. Adapted from MCR data base

So, it may be that CSUMB volunteers are not absent with the frequency that Hartnell volunteers are, but they are also not giving nearly as much time as the average Hartnell volunteer. It is also important to note that the two categories of volunteers have different programs that they are associated with while volunteering.

The majority of volunteers that are recruited for the MCR program from CSUMB are students who are fulfilling a lower-division academic requirement for service-learning. The requirement calls for 30 hours of service in the field. In the case that students choose the MCR program as their service provider, they will be monitored by AmeriCorps\*VISTA in addition to their teacher to ensure that they faithfully complete their hours. The important thing to note here is that this is a mandatory requirement of the school. Therefore, the incentive to participate in the program is simply to receive the credit for class so that they may progress. Of course, the fulfilling experience that many experience as a result of participating in the program may be incentive for those who have had previous experience working with children, but this, for many, is a new experience. Hartnell AmeriCorps\* Volunteers have a much different relationship with their institution.

The majority of volunteers that are recruited from Hartnell are AmeriCorps\* volunteers, which means that they earn an hourly wage for participating and have a chance to obtain an education award if they reach a quota of 450 hrs./year. The quota is a very tall order, requiring the volunteers to participate for approximately 15 hrs./week for the entire school year in order to meet the goal. Additionally, the AmeriCorps\* program offers the volunteers support and additional training. Unfortunately, the precise method and intensity of this training were not determined. Hence, Hartnell AmeriCorps\* volunteers have different forces working on them as they progress throughout the year, which brings up another important point; Hartnell AmeriCorps\* Volunteers are generally in the program for a term of one year, where the CSUMB, SLI Volunteers generally attend the program for a period of one semester.

## Conclusions

Returning to the research question, “How effective is the Monterey County Reads volunteer training?”, what do the results indicate? Broadly, there were trends in certain areas of volunteer performance that did not meet the expectations of the MCR program. This would indicate that training was ineffective in these respects. These points that were not met are of main concern here and they will be looked at through the lens of the MCR program method, that is conclusions will be presented for each area that MCR trains for: increased fluency, development of comprehension, and promotion of joy. To finish, notes on the limitations of this study, contributions, possibilities for future work, and recommendations for MCR are presented.

### Fluency

Fluency development was unavoidably fostered among children reading with MCR volunteers. The volunteers were nearly perfectly consistent in recognizing the appropriateness of texts, and they made adjustments when necessary. However, a certain trend that came to be expected may have impeded the development of a child into a fluent reader. On very few occasions did a volunteer use the technique that MCR trains for when a child became stuck while reading. Several of these instances were qualified in notes with a statement similar to this: “Volunteer gave word as soon as there was a sign of struggle.” The MCR training asks volunteers to wait approximately three seconds before giving the child a word, then to ask the child to repeat the word, and, finally, to repeat the phrase with the new word fluently. Overwhelmingly, volunteers were unable to do this. There is a strong tendency of the volunteer to keep the session moving; the pause and break of continuity that the appropriate technique calls for creates what may be an unnatural experience for the volunteer. This tendency is not unique to a child’s struggle decoding unfamiliar words. For example, on one occasion the volunteer would not stop the child if he was not acknowledging punctuation. The notes said, “I observed children blow through several periods with no regard, and the volunteer offered no intervention.” In short, volunteers seem to utilize appropriate materials, but they are not necessarily intervening in the most effective way when children show signs of struggle with reading text fluently.

### Comprehension

Volunteer behavior was generally beneficial for the growth of a child’s comprehension, however more focused strategies may help MCR volunteers to better serve the children they work with. The volunteers almost always fulfilled certain behaviors that assist children to improve comprehension. One of these behaviors included *asking questions* about the book throughout the session. This was met with near perfect consistency on the part of the volunteers, but unfortunately there is no indicator regarding the intensity or frequency with which questions were asked. If a further qualification were given of the measure that accounted for question asking, the range in frequency and intensity would be great. For example, field notes for the second wave of observations included the following statement, “Volunteer D does ask questions, but there is a lack of engagement, something that I have yet to identify and I have not captured it on the assessment instrument, but it is

something that is important nonetheless.” Although, this nuance is omitted here, other measures helped to gauge the engagement style of the reading volunteer. For example, the volunteers did not consistently summarize the story or ask the children to evaluate it. Likewise, the volunteers would only occasionally summarize the session as a whole. These practices, which review the experience, were ignored regularly. Thus, text comprehension strategies that center on metacognition, need further attention from MCR volunteers. Although volunteers are asking questions during the session, a greater degree of “comprehension monitoring” (Armbruster et al., 2003) would assist the children to develop an *internalized* monitoring system for text comprehension.

## Joy

The reading volunteers included in this study assisted the children that they worked with to develop a greater joy for reading. One specific example of this was that after a positive reading session, the child gave a big smile and said, “¡Qué chistoso<sup>1</sup>!” before scampering off to her desk. More generally, the volunteers greeted the children and usually set a positive tone for reading sessions. This is not to say that there were not sessions that seemed less than positive, for without doubt there were instances where the session seemed quite drab. Outside of the formal sample used for this study, the researcher has witnessed volunteers with little to no regard about how the child is feeling in the interaction. This has been a minority of cases, though, and, as the formally collected data indicates (both volunteer observations and interviews with teachers), volunteers are doing a good job of facilitating joyful experiences for children learning to read.

## Limitations

This study may be best viewed as a preliminary look into the trends of MCR reading volunteer behavior. The small sample size limited the validity of the results. Contrarily, when considering the data gathered by observing volunteers and the contradictions, or lack thereof, found in teacher interviews and the experience of the researcher, the results/conclusions becomes somewhat more tangible. This does not excuse the fact that a much larger sample should be taken in order to refute or enforce the trends identified in this study. This could be easily achieved, since a method has been created through this investigation. A team of researchers could quickly gather the necessary information to validate or invalidate this study. But, this is only one of the many possibilities for which this project provides a springboard.

As a descriptive study, no causal linkages were made in the data. At times mere speculations were provided. For example, above a conclusion was drawn that volunteers do not use the appropriate technique when the children became stuck reading. A possibility is presented that to use appropriate technique means an unnatural sensation for the volunteer. This is purely estimation, but it implies a question that could be turned into another research project all its own. These, and others, are all questions beyond the scope of this project.

---

<sup>1</sup> English translation: How funny!

## Contributions

The contributions of this project may be viewed as follows:

- Creation of volunteer behavioral assessment tool
- Identification and elaboration of trends of volunteer behavior
- Literature and theory review

It is the hope of the researcher that the assessment tool will be utilized by the MCR program and others who may find it useful. As the results of this study indicate, the tool is useful in gathering a large amount of data regarding volunteer behavior. Whether these data would be used in formal or informal ways (i.e., for further study vs. personal/organizational knowledge), they are helpful in, at the very least, creating a dialog about volunteer performance. A further hope of the researcher is that the trends identified in this study are useful to MCR and other programs that promote literacy. Additionally, the literature and theory review may be helpful for those becoming familiar with the field, such as the volunteers of many AmeriCorps\* or AmeriCorps\*VISTA literacy programs<sup>2</sup>.

## Future Work

This project provides a springboard for further inquiry. Each of the questions and categories defined in this study could be looked at critically, thereby becoming unique research questions. Here, I will be concerned with work that would strengthen this specific study, meaning work that would help answer the research question more thoroughly. Aspects of this study that would benefit from more attention are listed here:

- Assessment instrument revision
  - Inter-rater reliability tests
- Child assessment for fluency, comprehension, and joy
- Sampling method/size

A more clearly defined assessment instrument in terms of behaviors measuring fluency, comprehension, and joy may be helpful for further studies. Also, these new tools should be tested across raters in order to determine the consistency of the tool. Ambiguity among measures should be eliminated. Additionally, it would be helpful to have data of child performance. This would allow for a correlative analysis between the performance of volunteer and child. Finally, the sampling size would increase. Four formal observations, four teacher interviews, and informal observations provide a good lead as to what volunteers are doing in the field, but a larger sample size would help confirm these indications.

---

<sup>2</sup> A web-based search for AmeriCorps\* literacy based programs yields 264 hits on September 24, 2004. This number was gathered from the AmeriCorps\* web site at <https://recruit.cns.gov/quicksearchform.asp>.

## Recommendations

Over a year-long service period at the Panetta Institute and MCR as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Scholar, the following is what I have to offer in the way of advice for those who remain working diligently to improve the state of literacy in Monterey County at MCR:

- Provide a copy of this study to all MCR program associates who work on the design and facilitation of the reading volunteer training.

The behaviors that this study identifies are clearly established in certain cases, such as volunteers generally do not give specific positive praise to the children. Although the sample size is small, such observations and their discussions provide insight into what is happening in the field. Best training methods would possibly benefit through a review and discussion of this documentation by reading coach instruction specialists.

- Recruitment strategy should focus on populations that are able to give the most time to the program.

Although the comparison between Hartnell and CSUMB did not show significant differences in terms of volunteer behavior, the differences in terms of how much time they offer the program is substantial. If MCR hopes to offer the children a consistent, sustained experience with a reading volunteer, it would be most beneficial to target existing AmeriCorps\* programs or other institutions that are serious about providing community service. Supporting efforts to bring more literacy tutors/coaches to the area through grant writing or building new partnerships focused on literacy may be effective ways to bolster recruitment efforts.

In summary, the literature and the data presented in this study prompt action to modify the structure of the program, mainly in its approach to on-going training, which may require a shift in the conceptualization of roles of VISTA members. Also, creative approaches to recruitment may help expand the literacy “army” in Monterey County. To finish, I do not have further recommendations, but rather two questions that may be suggestive in nature: (1) What can be expected of VISTAs? and (2) Is the role of reading *coach* trainer beyond the capacity of a VISTA?

## A Theoretical Reflection

The purpose of this reflection is to use sociological and psychological theories to explain the environments and problems associated with this research process. Governmental involvement through policy is explained as a movement from the top to create a more functional society. The realization of this movement is seen in bureaucracy, which is the mechanism for achieving the goals outlined in policy. The problems (in terms of their effectiveness) with these practical mechanics are addressed, as well as the existential implications of these devices. To finish, I elaborate on the struggles and benefits I encountered as a researcher in this context.

## Information Age Illiteracy

The work of Sum (1999) mentioned above, indicates that literacy rates in the U.S.A. create a problem for the demands of a post-industrial workforce. That given, what does this say about the functionalism of U.S. society? Merton proposed the idea that both dysfunction, or adverse consequences negatively influencing a system, and nonfunction, consequences irrelevant to a system, need to be looked at in order to determine the “balance” of a system (in Ritzer, 2003, p. 94). Considering the fact that 50% of adults cannot skillfully interpret text (Kirsch, 1993), the claim may be made that the system deemed as responsible for filling the need of literacy, the educational system, is creating a dysfunction. Looking into causes for this dysfunction, it may be hypothesized that the educational system is failing because the scientific community is not providing the research necessary for teachers to approach their problems with literacy more effectively. In turn, the research community could place blame on the government for not giving them sufficient funding to do their research. So, it becomes a matter of how well each of the parts, represented in bureaucracy (which is discussed below), contributes to the dysfunction and nonfunction of society to make the balance of functionalism. I believe it may be firmly said that, in light of the demands of post-industrialism, the balance is in poor condition.

## Clinton – Structural Functional Engineer

In 1996 President Clinton launched the America Reads Initiative. This initiative resulted in legislation that provided \$210 million to promote literacy through focused programs at the elementary level (e.g., READ\*WRITE\*NOW!), community volunteer training and placement programs, and Federal Work Study. In addition to the funds mentioned above, Clinton provided monies for pre-school programs, training for teachers, awareness campaigns, and for research and evaluation of literacy programs (AmericaReads Challenge: Archived Information). Then, in terms of nation-wide bureaucracy, these are the supports put in place to help local bureaucracies do a good job of producing proficient readers.

## Cubicle Cage of Bureaucracy

The next level of functional analysis is the local bureaucracy, or the bureaucracy that is actually engaged in the direct relationships involved in the service - in our case provision of reading volunteers to elementary schools and, generally, promoting literacy in Monterey County. For this section, Weber’s notion of the iron cage of rationality, Handler’s three-dimensional view of power, and Marx’s view of bureaucracy will guide the discussion.

First, the bureaucracy is not an organization whose structure is guided by humanistic principles, rather the objective of the organization is given priority. Weber on bureaucratization states:

Individual performances are allocated to functionaries who have specialized training and who by constant practice increase their expertise. ‘Objective’ discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to *calculable rules* and ‘without regard for persons’ (in Whimster, 2004, p. 248).

How is it then that the individual can be maintained in a structure that acts “without regard for persons?” The simple answer here may be that those in power within the structure do not care for persons and, most certainly, an administrator with purely rational goals would prefer automatons to humans – this is Weber’s notion of the iron cage, or rationality as the deciding factor in human behavior. This raises the concern of inter-personal politics within the bureaucracy. Handler (1996) looks at this issue by exploring what he calls “empowerment”, which is defined as “the ability to control one’s environment” (p. 115). Within a rigid bureaucracy where the hierarchy is pronounced, those at the top have a great deal of control over the behavior (or their ability to control their environment) of those at the bottom. In Handler’s three-dimensional view of power, the consequences of this follow:

1. She who is higher on the hierarchy is able to get she who is lower to do what she would not do otherwise.
2. She who is higher on the hierarchy is not required to listen to grievances, or creates barriers to hearing grievances, by she who is lower.
3. She who is higher on the hierarchy may influence or mold she who is lower to act in accordance with the goals of those higher on the hierarchy.

To follow this model, Handler discusses acquiescence and conflict and the importance of conflict in empowerment of one in a subordinate position. In the second and third dimensions, though, it is difficult for the subordinate to instigate conflict either because of an obstacle (as in 2) or because of alienation (as in 3). Examples from my work as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Scholar with MCR may help illustrate the different dimensions.

MCR’s bureaucracy includes this hierarchical arrangement:

1. Director
2. Supervisor(s)
3. AmeriCorps\*VISTA members
4. Reading Volunteers

Through my experience at MCR, I confronted several issues related to power disparity. In terms of Handler’s first dimension of power, I confronted issues that inhibited my natural or desired direction of action on a daily basis. An example of this would be that on one occasion I wanted to call community youth organizations to see if they could receive book donations. If I began this process without advising the administration about exactly how I planned to do this, I would be reprimanded. Also, once the process began, my work could be interrupted at any moment by a priority that the administration deemed superior to my current work.

The second dimension was confronted by my cohort of AmeriCorps\*VISTA members and, fortunately, overcome on a very important occasion. It qualifies as an instance of Handler’s second dimension in that there were obstacles to voicing grievances. This example relates to the administration’s power over VISTAs in terms of hours worked. As a group, we were recruited under the pretense that we would work 30 hours a week, when in fact they had several VISTAs working up to 36.5 hours a week. Several times VISTAs appealed to the supervisor for advocacy, but because of her position of power she did not have to listen. We attempted to recruit advocacy from the university without much success. It was not until we wrote a letter to the AmeriCorps\*VISTA program director for

Northern California that we saw any results. After several weeks of distress, we finally had our hours reduced to a 30 hour minimum per week.

The third dimension is reflected as an aspect of the second that I have yet to mention. What I have omitted thus far is that the director was never directly confronted with the grievances regarding hours worked. In effect, she was circumvented, when we appealed to the VISTA program director. Why could this have been? My short answer is fear and alienation. The director held the power of a recommendation and, also, a very keen manner and confidence to manipulate her subjects to do her will. Between these two powers, VISTAs were fearful to confront the “boss” and, therefore, we had to go somewhere else for a voice. Further evidence supporting this view is that I was reprimanded for not speaking directly to the director about these concerns. Also, in response to my concerns, which sometimes included the concerns of those fearful to voice their opinions, the supervisor said something to the effect, “why don’t you just keep to yourself and do your work?”

Although everything said to this point is critical of the MCR bureaucracy, how did it function? Between a team of five to eight VISTAs we managed to provide several thousands of hours of one-to-one reading to Monterey County elementary schools, distributed thousands of books to schools and libraries in Monterey County, created or updated several directives/training guides, and planned and executed a volunteer recognition ceremony among other accomplishments. It would seem, then, that the cubicle cage of rationality provided the structure for great productivity, but unfortunately we do not have an alternative to the cubicle cage for a comparison.

In summary, consider Marx’s fatalistic view of bureaucracy:

...life for the individual bureaucrat himself is actually material insofar as it becomes the object of bureaucratic treatment, for the bureaucratic spirit is prescribed for him, his purpose lies outside him, his existence is the existence of the bureau (in Kamenka, 1983, p. 92).

Indeed this may be fatalistic, for how else are we going to get done all of the work that is needed to make a functional society for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Handler’s positive view of conflict may be just the prescription for a healthier, more humanistic, bureaucracy.

### Research in the Cage

Another aspect of this project that lends itself to theoretical analysis is the process of the research itself. Remember the strict environment described above and consider the prospect of carrying out a research project involving eight subjects monitored over a four month period with a total of 20 scheduled meetings (among several more to discuss the progress of the project with academic and community advisors). The project would not have been possible or, at the very least, much more difficult if I was not affiliated with MCR. Yet simultaneously, it was very difficult to conduct because I was affiliated with MCR. To elaborate on this contradiction, Becker’s (1963) work on deviance will be of assistance.

First, I would like to look at my role at MCR as an “outsider on the inside”. What I mean by this is that my purpose and goals for being in the program were not entirely congruent with the set of rules set forth for me by program. What this meant in my case, in short, was that I felt for the organization to achieve the highest level of service and, also, for

myself to reach academic goals that the organization needed to set different rules and regulations regarding their program implementation and employee policy. At many times this led me to have, what Becker calls a “deviant” identity. At the risk of self-indictment, let me say that at times I was, what Becker called, a “secret deviant”. This means that occasionally I would appear as though I was exuding obedient behavior when in actuality I was doing the opposite. An example of this would be that at times when I was feeling pressure from the university on a deadline, such as with the use of human subjects proposal, I would work on this at MCR where it was forbidden. Computers enable such activity with multiple-window capability making it easy to engage in such behavior. More generally, my identity as a committed college student conflicted with the demands that MCR placed on me and this may be one reason that I was a key figure in resistance to the administration regarding our hours. In short, in many ways I was inhibited from doing my work and, admittedly, I engaged in deviant behavior from time to time in order to meet the demands of the university.

I was also an “insider on the outside” when it came to the act of conducting research. This means that when I went out into the field that I had the benefit of the labels AmeriCorps\*VISTA Scholar and MCR Volunteer Coordinator to supplement my label as CSUMB student. With the assistance of these affiliations, I passed through the gatekeepers at the schools with ease. Once approved from the level of administration, my subjects were of no great difficulty to recruit. It may have been that the mandatory tie and slacks of MCR were of assistance here?

In sum, the different identities that complemented my experience over the year conducting this research and working with MCR led to obstacles in achieving the many goals set forth for me (both from organizations and myself), but also granted me access and recognition that I would not have had otherwise.

## References

- Adams, Marilyn Jager. (1990). *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Adams, M., Allington, R., Chaney, J., Goodman, Y., Kapinus, B., McGee, L. et al. (Feb. 1991). *Beginning to Read: A Critique by Literacy Professionals and a Response by Marilyn Jager Adams*. *The Reading Teacher*, 44, 370-395.
- AmericaReads Challenge: Archived Information. Retrieved October 23, 2004, from <http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/resourcekit/miscdocs/initiative.html>
- Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., and Osborn, J. (2003) *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement and National Institute for Literacy.
- Baker, S., Gersten, R., Keating, T. (Oct.-Dec. 2000). When less may be more: A 2-year longitudinal evaluation of a tutoring program requiring minimal training. *Reading Research Quarterly*. 35, 494- 519.
- Becker, Howard (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. The Free Press: New York, NY.
- California State Board of Education. (1997). *English-language Arts Content Standards*. Retrieved September 4, 2004, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/engintro.asp>.
- Clinton, Bill. (1997). The president's radio address. *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. 33, 599-602.
- Cobb, J. & Allen, D. (2001). When a Criminal Justice Major Becomes an America Reads Literacy Tutor: A Case Study. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44, 556-568.
- Esterberg, Kristin G. (2002). *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. McGraw-Hill Companies Inc.: Boston, Massachusetts.
- Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, New York: Continuum.
- Freire, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Bergin & Garvey: Westport, Connecticut.
- Handler, Joel. (1996). *Down From Bureaucracy: The Ambiguity of Privatization and Empowerment*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey.

- Kirsch, I., Jungleblut A., Jenkins L., Kolstad A.. (1993) *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey*. Retrieved September 3, 2004, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=93275>.
- Marx, Karl. Kamenka, Eugene ed. (1983). *The Portable Karl Marx*. Penguin Books: New York, NY.
- Monterey County Reads: Reading Volunteer Training Manual.
- Prose Literacy and Sample Items (2004) In National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved September 3, 2004, from <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/defining/measprose.asp>.
- Rand California Education Statistics. (2004). Standardized Testing and Reporting Program. Retrieved September 4, 2004, from [ca.rand.org/stats/education/star.html](http://ca.rand.org/stats/education/star.html).
- Ritzer, George. (2003). *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*. McGraw Hill: New York, NY.
- Rayner, K., Foorman, B., Perfetti, C., Pesetsky, D., and Seidenberg, M. (2002). How Should Reading Be Taught? *Scientific American*. 286, 84-92.
- Rogers, Carl R. (1983). *Freedom To Learn For the 80's*. Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.: Columbus: OH.
- Sum, Andrew. (1999). *Literacy in the Labor Force: Results from the National Adult Literacy Survey*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved September 4, 2004, from <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/reference.html#sum>.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1998). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky: Volume 5, Child Psychology*. Plenum Press: New York, NY.
- Wasik, Barbara A. (1997). Volunteer Tutoring Programs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79, 282-288.
- Wasik, Barbara A. (1998). Using Volunteers as Reading Volunteers: Guidelines for Successful Practices. *Reading Teacher*, 51, 562-571.
- Wasik, Barbara A. (1999). Reading Coaches: An Alternative to Reading Tutors. *Reading Teacher*, 52, 653-657.
- Weber, Max. in Whimster, Sam ed. (2004). *The Essential Weber: A Reader*. Routledge: New York, NY.