Violence, Literacy, and Adult Learning: How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

Violence and trauma can negatively affect adult’s ability to learn. Literacy instructors must bear in mind many adult learners have histories of violence and trauma that may affect their experience of the classroom. This ethnographic case study of Parkdale Project Read, and how it meets the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma, develops context-specific knowledge that is grounded in experience. By examining Project Read as an organization, and participants’ supportive relationships, this study will contribute to a better understanding of how violence and hardship are addressed within a practical adult literacy context. The goal of this research is to introduce local knowledge into the violence and adult literacy literature, and to better understand the relationship between violence and adult literacy through interviews with staff, tutors, and learners at Parkdale Project Read.
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Chapter One: Introduction

I have witnessed the effects that violence and hardship can have on adult education first hand as an adult literacy tutor at the library. For 18 months I worked with a young adult learner named Warren, who had experienced a great deal of violence in his life. We never talked about his situation. I only became aware of it because discussing it was necessary to meet his learning goals. Over the 18 months that we worked together, we never developed a strong relationship. I never made the connection that Marion (2005) argues is necessary for successful education (p. 26).

Warren eventually stopped coming to the library. He had never made it a habit to let me know when he would not show up and he did not tell me that he was going to stop attending. This mystery has stuck with me throughout my literacy instruction. After Warren stopped attending, I began to tutor an older man named Mathieu. Working with Mathieu felt entirely different. He was always upbeat and would not forgive himself if he slept through his alarm and missed class. He gave me a pen at Christmas and a firm hug when I stopped tutoring with the library. There must have been something going on that allowed our learning-relationship to succeed with one learner, but not with the other. I did not intentionally behave differently in either case and the only significant change in my life was this continued study. Being a motivated academic, I turned to the literature to educate myself on the matter.

There is a well-developed discourse around trauma and literacy education, which largely centres on the work of Jenny Horsman and responds to questions such as ‘why is it important to acknowledge the impact of violence and trauma on learning’ (Horsman, Moving Beyond "Stupid": Taking account of the impact of violence on
women’s learning, 2006); ‘what are the common experiences of learners who have experiences trauma’ (Horsman, Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence, and Education, 1999); and ‘what strategies do tutors use “to support learning for students who are survivors of violence”’ (Nonesuch, 2008).

Writing about experiences of violence and trauma, and how they affect literacy education, is predicated on the idea that there are common outcomes to similar experiences. It is assumed that learners who have experienced violence tend to have similar experiences in education, and tutors who work with learners tend to react in similar ways. There is a lot more detail in these participants’ experiences that would have been of use to inquiring tutors. One way to capture this experience is through the case study. Baxter and Jack (2008) argue that “qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts” (p. 544). By reading and coming to terms with case studies, adult literacy tutors develop their understandings of the relationship between violence, trauma, and literacy education, and retain the connection between knowledge and context.

On Stories and their Telling

Stories are an important part of adult literacy education. Our own stories are composed of how we understand the world and the meaning that we make of it. Learners and other participants bring these stories to the programs they participate in. To develop a case study of how Parkdale Project Read meets the needs of learners who have experienced violence, trauma, and other hardship, I met with learners, tutors, and staff, and listened to the stories they were willing to share with me. I brought my own
story with me and in return I shared it with them. I will begin this case study by sharing it with you.

Throughout my relationship with Parkdale Project Read I have constantly negotiated between the identities of researcher and tutor. My first contact with Parkdale Project Read was in April 2014 when I applied to be a volunteer literacy tutor. I learned about this program from my thesis supervisor and submitted an application to volunteer before I had decided to pursue this thesis. I care passionately about adult literacy education and after hearing such strong praise for Parkdale Project Read I knew that I wanted to be a part of it. My application was accepted in June of 2014 and one week later the proposal for this thesis was approved. These dates aligned very fortunately and I was able to meet with the staff at Parkdale Project Read and discuss the ethical review process. I wanted to begin our relationship in mutual cooperation and I believe that this theme has persisted over time. Over the next two months I worked with the staff to develop an ethics application and consent letters that met my needs but took into account their expert knowledge and experience. I submitted my application to the ethical review board in August and it was accepted in October, thus beginning my research with and participation in Parkdale Project Read.

A point of contention that came up during initial meetings with staff was my situation as a researcher or a community member. Depending on how I participated I would be seen as either an insider to be worked with or an outsider to be worked for. I chose to pursue this thesis because of my concern for adult literacy education and my past experience as a tutor. I am, regardless of this research, an ally in literacy education and I did not want to have to leave this identity at the door to carry out this research.
We agreed that in addition to my interviewing I should participate in the program as a tutor. My original application to volunteer with Parkdale Project Read was to tutor one-to-one with a learner once a week because I wanted to make a difference in a learner’s life. My role now evolved into becoming a support tutor in weekly group learning sessions. This transition was intended to maximize my exposure in the Parkdale Project Read community and at the same time to limit deep or meaningful relationships that might conflict with ethics approval and my role as an outside researcher. Since beginning this research I have participated in roughly 60 hours of group learning sessions and 20 hours of interviews.

I am overwhelmingly pleased with how my relationship with the Parkdale Project Read community has developed. I have remained an ally in literacy education without sacrificing the professionalism of a social sciences researcher. I am a shy person and participating in this community allowed me to be trusted as my good intentions warrant but also to develop the confidence I need to be true to myself. On multiple occasions participants in the program thanked me for my service and commented on how I opened up socially and developed as a member of this community. I do not plan leaving on Parkdale Project Read when my thesis is approved and I am very happy that I did not wait until then to participate in a community I have grown to care for.

I met many participants at Parkdale Project Read. Nine of them chose to share their stories with me to contribute to this case study. Of these nine participants, two were from the collective, four were volunteer tutors, and three were learners. Participants were selected on a first-come first-serve basis. I made the decision to interview everyone who wanted to participate because I felt it would be against
Parkdale Project Read’s community values to turn anyone away. Everyone’s experience participating is so unique that, aside from very broad themes, I believe I could have interviewed many more people and would still come across new knowledge. In the participants’ depictions that follow I will draw primarily on their responses when asked “what is your role at Parkdale Project Read.” Although they are affected by how I present them, these descriptions represent how the participants view their own participation and have chosen to share it with me.

Jinn and Mary are collective members. I spoke with collective members because they take part in the program’s fundamental administration. The collective is the core paid staff with the most administrative authority. They would be able to expose to me the inner workings of the program as they are intended to function, and how the program interacts as a whole with the community.

Jinn considers herself to be the financial person because she has “a bit of a bookkeeping background ... [she] has always had that kind of brain.” She “[takes] on the budgeting and liaising with the Ministry, auditing and those sorts of things.” Jinn has “been primarily responsible for the business plan and the reporting period. [She does] some programming although recently [she has] done less only because the administrative burden of the Ministry has been pretty heavy.” In the past she took the lead on the Women’s Justice Telling group “which is a partnership with the Parkdale Anti-violence Education Program.”

Mary has “had different roles through the years, [but is] definitely more [involved in] programming. When the collective only consisted of Mary and Jinn, Mary considered herself to be “sort of the hearth and Jinn was the roof.” Mary is the “first
point of contact [when] people come in, [their] first meeting will be with [her].” She is also involved in training volunteer tutors, and liaises with the ‘Investing in Neighbourhoods’ and ‘Daily Bread Food Bank’ programs. She specifically facilitates “the creative writing group on Thursday evenings and the book club on Wednesday afternoons.” Mary has an undergraduate degree in Sociology and Women’s Studies and first worked in women’s housing. She then worked for the International Council for Adult Education and a journal called Convergence. Mary went back to university for a 12 month Master’s degree program in Journalism. After graduation she did an internship with CBC radio, which was “probably the most hellish [and] just wasn’t a good fit.” Mary described journalism as the opposite of literacy. In journalism you “go out and get your story, write it, and have it on the twelve o’clock news. You basically have no idea. You don’t understand the story but are saying stuff about it.” After this internship she volunteered at Frontier College before a job “came up at Parkdale Project Read.” She has since worked for there for fifteen years.

Viktor and Rebecca are volunteer placement students from George Brown College and their stories helped me understand how group learning sessions are facilitated. Viktor works at Via Rail while he studies. He considers himself to be very friendly and “has a relationship with everyone, though it took [him] a while [because he] is not very good with names.” Before working at Via Rail and studying at George Brown he worked in hotel management, which “taught [him] a lot about how to deal with people. [He] finds people are more honest and real” at Parkdale Project Read, which is where his heart has always been. Viktor said to me about his decision to pursue social work,
I am fortunate that my wife does very well so I can actually pursue this career, because living in Toronto is not the greatest career choice. People just look at you like ‘oh yeah, you want to be in social work, but you won’t get paid.’ I kind of realized after 10 years of just getting paid and doing something I did not have a passion for that I don’t really care. They’re real people and I would rather be dealing with real people than fake people.

Rebecca is in her second year of the community worker program at George Brown College, I spoke with her during her last semester. She “started at Project Read in September [2014].” Rebecca assists “with the afternoon groups on Mondays and Tuesdays and support[s] the other tutors who are creating activities for those days. [She also works] with the academic upgrading students Tuesday mornings with questions they have about college and research papers. Before moving to Toronto Rebecca worked at a Tattoo shop and was involved in “10 years of autonomous style organizing in the community and collectives.” This has given Rebecca insight into “how the world works and working with the community outside the anarchist bubble.”

Jolene and June are volunteer tutors as well, but are not placement students like Viktor and Rebecca. Jolene and June tutor learners one-to-one. Jolene comes “from a family of teachers and found reading to be really easy so [she] wanted to share. That almost made it harder in a way because” she feels unable to understand how the learners don’t understand. She has been working with the same learner for five years and meets with him once a week.

June feels very responsible to give back to the neighbourhood she lives in. She “moved to Parkdale three years ago and really wanted to become more involved in that
area and give what [she] could to it. June had just retired from teaching at Ryerson in Early Childhood Education. She found out about Parkdale Project Read through an applicant to one of her classes at Ryerson. She had “finished at a meeting and said [she] wanted to do some tutoring and he said ‘no question, by far the best place to volunteer is Parkdale Project Read’.” June also taught language and has done a lot of international projects in India and Zimbabwe. She loves “language and how language carries culture.”

Lizet, May, and Shihadeh are learners at Parkdale Project Read. According to Jinn, “the primary community [in the program] are the adult learners.” Speaking with learners helped me understand how the program actually operates, its successes, and conflicts within it.

Lizet participates in the academic upgrading program and wants to develop her English language skills so that she can become a lawyer. To reach this goal she wants to study at college to become a paralegal. She attended high school and college outside of Canada and has been in Toronto for six years. Lizet’s biggest frustration is the language barrier to college and employment. She shared with me,

When I went to the college and studied accounting you don’t need more English. This is enough for your do well. It is more based in numbers. For law you must speak English, more than 100% because you have to be over an average speaker. You have to keep going. The problem is because it is my second language, I still have problems or barriers. Sometimes I translate from English to Spanish and it is not the same because even though in Spanish it is one word that can change the whole context. One word.
Lizet’s frustration with language barriers will be discussed throughout this thesis, along with her struggle for accessible and affordable education that meets her learning needs. These language barriers are an example of systemic violence that may cause trauma.

May explained to me how she accidently found out about Parkdale Project Read in 2006.

By chance I went to this lady and she was handing out fliers. There was a flier for ESL. It was not for me. I need to read and write. [The woman] said Project Read and I was shocked because it’s right at the corner.

May told me that she had probably taken the fliers many times but threw them in the garbage because she didn’t know what they said until she asked for one to be read for her. When she started at Parkdale Project Read, May had “a feeling there was a big huge rock on top of [her].” She explained that this rock was a wall between her and the public. She felt ashamed “if anyone asked [her] ‘what does this say’ or ‘what is this address’. [She] was embarrassed to answer them.” Now May feels that she is doing very well. In both interviews, we spoke about the relationship between shame and literacy and how this embarrassment motivated her overcome her situation. She is proud of her accomplishments and her job. “Before Parkdale Project Read [she] would never know [her] kids. [She didn’t] want to be involved with their school and [felt] ashamed and scared.” Parkdale Project Read got May “involved with people. They made [her] see people in a different way.” May told me that “now I think the right way. I sit back and I think before I speak. Before I say something to anybody, that’s what Project Read taught me.”
Shihadeh spoke very little about herself to me. She shared with me about

**Parkdale Project Read**

It is like my second home. I don’t speak English very well when I came here and I appreciate that the people helped me speak up. You know sometimes when you have something that bothers you and you cannot talk to people? When you find people give you more respect more trust and you open your heart and speak up.

Shihadeh learned about the program through a friend she met at her mosque. Her husband had just died and her friend asked her to come to Parkdale Project Read with her. She continued

I am shy I told her I can’t. She said why not. You have fun. Everybody’s nice. I just met her, I told her I come from my house and I met her beside the bank.

She went with me there and she said you will come, you’ll talk to me.

**History of Project Read**

The Parkdale neighbourhood was an “upper-middle class enclave, with large homes” through the 1900s. Residents were attracted by amusements such as the Canadian National Exhibition and the Sunnyside Leisure and Amusement Complex. The greatest attraction, however, was the neighbourhood’s easy access to the waterfront. In 1951 the City of Toronto widened Lakeshore Boulevard and destroyed 170 homes to build the Gardiner Expressway in 1954. These developments cut Parkdale off from Lake Ontario and middle-class residents began to move away. Parkdale’s large homes began to be replaced by poorly maintained high-rise apartments. At the same time, patients of Queen Street Mental Hospital were being de-institutionalized and released without
proper support programs. Densification and de-institutionalization in the Parkdale community led to a dramatic rise in poverty and exploitation (History of Parkdale, n.d.).

The Parkdale community “was instrumental in developing Toronto’s literacy movement. The Parkdale Library was a founding member of the Basic Reading Materials Committee of the Toronto Public Library, the Ontario Library Association Literacy Guild, and the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.” In the mid 1970s the Parkdale Library and literacy workers implemented outreach projects and developed adult literacy materials. Project Read was formed in 1980 to meet the growing need in the Parkdale community for help with reading and writing. In 1984 a second organization, the Parkdale Literacy Project, was created to work with Project Read and “provide more drop-ins and better outreach” (The History of Parkdale Project Read, n.d.).

Parkdale Project Read itself was born in 1986 from the merging of these two community literacy organizations. It was registered as a charitable organization and elected a board of directors. In 1996 the organization faced large funding cuts and needed to begin regular fundraising. It moved in 1998 from Parkdale Library to a temporary location at the Metro Labour Education Centre. In 2001 significant planning took place to determine the future of Parkdale Project Read. New research with Dr. Jenny Horsman was initiated that would investigate the connection between violence, trauma, and learning. Special projects were planned to put the findings of this research into action. Project Read would later move twice more, first to Springhurst Avenue in 2002 (The History of Parkdale Project Read, n.d.), then in 2006 to its current storefront location at 1209 King Street West.
Parkdale Project Read was chosen for this case study first because it is geographically available and accessible to me. For this study I was limited to an organization in the Greater Toronto Area. I live in Toronto and was able to perform much more rigorous research because the case was geographically available and accessible to me. Since I could schedule and perform interviews without concern for travel or accommodations, I could carry out many more interviews and be more flexible about scheduling. Some participants were not able to stay for lengthier interviews so by selecting a geographically accessible case I was able to engage in more frequent shorter interviews to meet these participants’ availabilities to maintain approximately the same face time with participants. Parkdale Project Read is located in downtown Toronto and is close to my university and home.

The second reason Project Read is an ideal case to study the violence and literacy education is that the program is already conscious of the relationship between learning and violence. Adult literacy programs of this type focus more on textual literacy than social, emotional, and spiritual literacy. There are two major adult literacy programs in the City of Toronto; they are run by Parkdale Project Read and the Toronto Public Library. Parkdale Project Read serves learners who live downtown, and the Toronto Public Library’s program serves those who live further away in Etobicoke, York, and Scarborough.

Unlike the library’s program, Parkdale Project Read advertises that it “puts the issue of learning and violence at the forefront of its work, recognizing that most students have experienced violence and will learn better in an environment which recognizes and addresses this challenge” (Horsman, Parkdale Project Read, n.d.). Project
Read’s tutor training program, for instance, is done over multiple evenings in collaboration with other adult education (but not necessarily literacy) programs. Each program leads one of the evenings; Mary from Project Read has dedicated the entirety of her three hour session to learning and violence. Project Read is the ideal case for this study because its staff are committed to unravelling and addressing the relationship between learning and violence.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter One. I will begin by introducing the objectives of this study and posing the research question that guided my inquiry. Then, I will explain the impact I expect this thesis to have on scholarship and practice.

Chapter Two. I argue that a case study of Parkdale Project Read is necessary because it will contribute experiential knowledge that is grounded in practice, to the trauma and adult literacy discourse. I will discuss how learners’ emotions and the impact of trauma on adult learning are presented in the trauma and adult literacy discourse. I will conclude by presenting Jenny Horsman’s writing about trauma and adult literacy education, and the discourse’s depiction of adult literacy learners and volunteer tutors.

Chapter Three. In this chapter I will describe the case-study methodology and thematic analysis that guided this thesis. I will then discuss similarities between my research and Utilization-focused Evaluation. I will revisit the research questions and explain how I collected data formally through interviews.

Chapter Four. In the first of the analysis chapters I discuss contextual findings. I argue that learners consider literacy to be more vast and all-encompassing than
placement students and tutors do. I identify independence and agency, responsibility, and learner centeredness as Project Read’s guiding principles. Lastly, I unpack the participants’ definitions of violence, hardship, and trauma.

**Chapter Five.** I will continue the analysis by outlining the flow of support and authority within Project Read, and then I will discuss how participants understand violence, hardship, and trauma. Authority and support flow opposite to each other at Project Read. The groups who have the greatest access to support have the least administrative authority, and vice versa. I continue by arguing that learners participate to develop themselves and their careers, and even volunteer at Project Read to support their community. Learners discuss their intent as benefiting their family and community, but tutors see learners’ participation as for their own benefit primarily. As I begin discussing violence and adult learning, I introduce the barriers that learners face in education, argue that these barriers are overcome by community support, and suggest that conflict exists between Project Read and the Ministry due to a shortage or time and money in the organization. I conclude by arguing that staff, tutors, and placement students do not factor in learners’ negative experiences of family as they construct and contribute to the idea of a Project Read Family.

**Chapter Six.** To conclude this thesis I will return to the theoretical journey. I will recant the most important findings, shortcomings within the organization, and limitations in my research. I will lastly discuss how race, gender, and power affected my work.
I will introduce this thesis by first describing its purpose, to contribute knowledge grounded in experience to the trauma and adult literacy discourse. I will continue and outline the research questions that guided this study. Lastly I will argue that this thesis contributes to the scholarship by promoting contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study creating accessible knowledge. It further contributes to voice by creating a space for participants to reflect and creating a document for them to reference.

**Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to support the development of the violence, trauma, and adult literacy discourse by performing a case study of an adult literacy program that addresses, or claims to address, the social needs of learners who have experienced violence. Parkdale Project Read has been chosen because the program is advertised as being “dedicated to creating a comfortable and accessible learning environment where students can bring their whole self (body, mind, emotions, spirit) to learning” (About us, n.d., para. 3), unlike most other adult literacy programs. Through a case study of Parkdale Project Read I will develop a better understanding of how this program meets the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma.

**Research questions**

The main research question that directs this case study is ‘how does the Parkdale Project Read adult literacy program meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?’ Secondary research questions include: ‘What role does each actor play?’ ‘What specific strategies to actors use to respond to which
‘What supportive relationships enable actors?’ ‘What factors limit actors?’
‘Why does this matter?’ ‘How are staff and volunteers’ actions received by learners?’

**Contribution to scholarship**

**Contextual understanding.** The knowledge gained through this thesis research contributes to scholarship by fostering an understanding of a previously under-researched context. The case under study; Parkdale Project Read, is not significantly discussed in the literature despite its close ties to the prominent contributor Jenny Horsman. Through conducting a case study this thesis develops a contextual understanding of Parkdale Project Read that will be made available for researchers and practitioners to access in the future.

**Accessible knowledge.** It would be hugely beneficial for adult literacy practice to have accessible literature to draw on. I will contribute to this goal by seeking this thesis’ publication in relevant open-access journals. This is political as well; knowledge from a community context should be published in a journal that the same community can access. Examples of open-access journals that I could submit an article based on this thesis to include *Language and Literacy, Reading Online,* and *Literacy Teaching and Learning.* Very few of the other adult literacy tutors that I talk to read journals or other materials to improve their practice.

**Contribution to practice.**

**Reflection.** There are many reasons that adult literacy tutors are unable to intentionally develop their practice outside of literacy education. By participating in this study tutors had the opportunity to reflect on their practice and make new connections between meaning and context. Participants from every group recognized this
opportunity and the benefit that it had for their participation in Parkdale Project Read and to the organization itself. Tutors became aware of meaning that was previously unknown and reflect on its connection to contexts previously ignored. Reflection allowed tutors to develop their practice; this contributed to the development of general literacy practice and to better experiences for learners.

Reference. When program administrators develop or make changes to adult literacy education programs they need accessible information to draw on. This thesis will act as such a document and will provide administrators with critical information to guide their program’s development. The particular topic is important as well; by referring to this thesis program administrators will be able to learn how an actual literacy program encounters and deals with the impacts of violence and trauma on adult literacy education.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is little known about the work of volunteer adult literacy tutors (Belzer 580), and even less about their work around violence, trauma, and adult learning. This literature review will therefore provide a theoretical grounding in the violence, trauma, and adult literacy education literature. It will establish a basic understanding of what is known in the discourse regarding literacy experience and practice.

Violence and Adult Learning

Jenny Horsman. Jenny Horsman has contributed more than anyone else to the violence and literacy education discourse, and Too Scared to Learn is her most impactful work. Horsman revisits much of Judith Herman’s Trauma and Recovery, but does so from a more critically feminist perspective. Too Scared to Learn is very frequently quoted by authors and researchers in the discourse, and most theory builds upon its foundation.

In Too Scared to Learn, Horsman (1999) argues that “the extent of violence makes it clear that violence can never be ignored in an educational program” (p. 57). She describes four common experiences of learners who have experienced violence; the all or nothing attitude (p. 86), dissociation (p. 89), hyperarousal (p. 101), and diminished trust (p. 102). Horsman proposes that learning must take place through spirit (p. 169), emotion (p. 184), body (p. 191), and mind (p. 203), and combine aspects of literacy and therapy (p. 215). Five of the challenges that tutors face in doing this include appropriately responding to disclosures (p. 258), a fear of doing it wrong (p. 264), transferred trauma (p. 270), chronic exposure to second hand trauma (p. 276), and the importance of tutor support and supervision (p. 278). Literacy workers can deliver better
education when they are aware of the experiences that survivors of trauma may have, types of learning that benefit them, and the challenges that await.

In *Our Assumptions ... about Violence*, Horsman defines violence within the discourse of violence, trauma, and adult literacy education. She establishes what types of violence occur, how violence is interrelated, and how we all participate in the institutions that promote violence. Parkdale Project Read is theoretically grounded in Horsman’s studies of violence, trauma, and literacy education. “Violence includes childhood sexual, emotional, and physical violence; "domestic" violence and stalking; rape and the threat of rape in the public sphere; dangerous working conditions, state-sanctioned violence. Racism, ableism, homophobia, poverty, sexism, and other oppressions are violent and foster violence” (“Our Assumptions”).

**Women and Violence.** In *But is it Education?* Horsman (2004) examines how violence impacts women’s literacy learning. The dominant education discourse tells us that teaching isn’t therapy; this limits recognition of the impact of violence on learning (p. 131). Learners are often abused by “husbands, children, landlords, bureaucrats, and program deliverers. Immigrant learners may have fled from “war, oppression, imprisonment, [and] torture.” Literacy, argues Horsman, must be inclusive and effective for women who have experienced trauma (p. 132). It is impossible to remove the effects of trauma from literacy education. Learners who have experienced trauma may have “all or nothing” approaches to trust, boundaries, and openness (p. 136). When one experiences dissociation, their unbearable trauma leads to a distancing of the self from the body to separate from the trauma (p. 137). This article supports the argument that education does not traditionally incorporate aspects of therapy. It discusses the risks of
abuse that learners face at home, in society, and in education, as well as common experiences of individuals who have experienced trauma, from a perspective critical of medicalization.

In *Moving Beyond Stupid*, Horseman (2006) argues that it is particularly important for literacy workers to acknowledge women’s especially troubled relationship with violence and learning. Violence, for many women, has become the normal experience for in our society. She provides quantitative proof of just how normal experiences of violence are for women, and elaborates on the barriers that women face entering education to escape violence. Ensuring access to adult literacy goes deeper than providing conveniently located programs (p. 177). She writes that women face barriers to education such as “injuries and ill-health resulting from violence, by those who refuse them permission, discourage and belittle them, or by their own conviction, likely “learned” through violence, that there is no point in attending a literacy program because they are too stupid to learn.” Women often enter education in order to put violence behind them (p. 178), but the dominant discourse obscures the normalcy of violence in women’s lives (p. 179). Some of the most powerful statistics that Horsman provides are as follows. 51% of Canadian women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lives, and 25% of Canadian women experience sexual assault before 18 (p. 181).

**Trauma and Adult Learning**

The literature on trauma and adult learning informs Parkdale Project Read’s approach to literacy education. Parkdale Project Read draws on Jenny Horsman’s work on the relationship between trauma and literacy. Horsman, in turn, uses Judith
Herman’s definition of trauma and exploration of its consequences. In this section I will work backwards; first I will explain Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*. I will then describe how Horsman has mapped the relations of trauma and literacy. Lastly, I will discuss other authors who have contributed to this discourse. This will all be presented within the frame of an adult literacy worker’s practice.

**How does trauma affect learning?** Judith Herman’s definition of trauma is significant to this study because it grounds Horsman’s writing in *Too Scared to Learn* (p. 33). *Too Scared to Learn* is in turn referenced by Horsman in her other works, upon which this literature is founded. In this way, Herman’s understanding of trauma is central to how the trauma and literacy discourse understands trauma. In order to contribute to and build upon this discourse in any meaningful way it is important to at least mention Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*.

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman (1992) argues that “psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless... traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control connection, and meaning” (p. 33).

She lays out three phenomena that trauma survivors experience; these are hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. In this paradigm, an individual may remain in a constant state of alert and arousal, and react strongly to small stimulations after experiencing trauma (hyperarousal) (p. 33). According to Herman, trauma may intrude into the survivor’s life by breaking “spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep” (intrusion) (p. 37). Lastly, constriction is a state of complete surrender which trauma survivors may enter as a form of self-defence (p. 42).
Following trauma, survivors may experience radical shifts from intrusion to constriction which can cause unpredictability, helplessness, and the self-perpetuation of trauma (p. 47). The impacts of trauma are greatly affected by how the community responds; they can be mitigated by support and amplified by hostility (p. 61). When learners exhibit hyperarousal, intrusion, or constriction, literacy workers may conclude that these behaviors are a product of past violence and trauma.

**How does trauma affect adult learning?** Authors who write about trauma and literacy reframe the medicalizing discourse and advocate for the creation of a safe space for all instead of the diagnosis of victims, the recognition of power and the institutions that enable violence, and the potential for hidden learning in traumatic experience (Kerka, 2002, p. 1).

Literacy workers can turn to these works for ideas about creating a more accessible learning space for learners who have experienced violence and trauma. Educational responses to the impact of trauma on learning include a holistic mind, body, emotional and spiritual perspective; creating a safe space; allowing for telling one’s story; collaborating with and referring learners to other organizations; and mutual support and care between educators (pp. 1-2).

Muro & Mein (2010) state that “trauma, in the context of domestic violence, is the ‘predictable psychological harm’ induced by ‘horrible events,’ which can be interpreted on a ‘spectrum...ranging from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse.’” Discussion of trauma in the classroom is precluded in the dominant discourse (p. 141). Within the literature, discussion of trauma and learning is defined within the context of domestic violence.
This article supports the argument that the norm in traditional education is to not acknowledge the relationship between violence, trauma, and learning.

Perry (2006) shows that 1/3 of adult learners have “a history of abuse, neglect, developmental chaos, or violence” that affects their ability to learn. This doesn't include those who develop educational trauma through stress-inducing pedagogies (p. 21). He writes that trauma can cause an individual to experience hyperarousal, dissociation, and changes in the regulating brain region and cognitive state (p. 23). Repeated trauma or stress in the classroom can cause students to wish to miss class. It is necessary to be sensitive to the learner's state of mind in order to create a safe environment for adult learners to prevent alarm-arousal. Some strategies he provides literacy workers to do this include familiarity, structure, and predictability in the learning environment (p. 26).

Although he medicalizes trauma, Perry’s writing is still useful to reference because he provides a statistic for the prevalence of “abuse, neglect, developmental chaos, or violence” in the lives of adult literacy learners (p. 21). He also discusses how trauma can hypothetically affect learning, and strategies for educators to avoid triggering alarm-arousal (p. 26).

The authors warn that trying to intentionally provide good amounts of stress for the learner is “a real threat to quality of life.” Potential causes of stress in learners’ lives include a lack of sympathy, an inadequate working environment, poor facilitation on behalf of the educator, uncertainty of the future, divided loyalties, and conflict between work and home (p. 169). Through consciousness-raising, learners can improve self-awareness and reduce stress. Stevenson & Harper discuss how stress affects adult educators and respond to the argument that some stress can be beneficial. They frame
stress within the discourse as an always negative force to be dealt with, and present consciousness-raising as a way to do so.

**Literacy Practice.**

In *Take on the Challenge* Morrish, Horsman & Hofer (2002) explain a process through which tutors can “address the silence about violence in adult education (p. 77). Tutors must first “create the conditions for learning.” These conditions are “trust, safety, beauty, inspiration, nourishment, a balance of silence, talk, listening to music, ownership, [and] space for reflection” (p. 82). They must then change the curriculum to better support learning. A suitable curriculum involves writing, meditation and movement (p. 92), creative arts (p. 93), support and empowerment (p. 94), and must engage with issues of violence (p. 95). Morrish et. al brought valuable knowledge to light. If we know the conditions for learning, the next step naturally would be to research how these conditions are created.

*Take on the Challenge* was developed in collaboration with educators from six New England adult basic education programs (p. iii). It contains explanations of what kind of activities can be used to engage with issues of violence, as well as specific examples of activities that educators can include in programming. It is a much better fit to be used by educators than some of Horsman’s other writings because it deals with practical activities that educators can use in addition to the theoretical characteristics that these activities would need to retain.

Based on an anonymous large scale survey of adult literacy practitioners, Nonesuch (2008) determined strategies that tutors employ to support students who are survivors of violence (p. 26). She also developed a better understanding of the barriers
that prevent tutors from implementing these strategies and clarified the behaviours that tutors link to current or previous violence in the learners life.

This article includes very detailed charts that explain “strategies to support learning for students who are survivors of violence” (p. 35), barriers that tutors face when trying to implement these strategies (p. 37), and behaviours of learners that tutors attribute to previous violence (p. 43). In this survey Nonesuch also asked practitioners about their familiarity with the literature (p. 46). To some extent this acts as a literature review because the author compiled a list of significant works in the discourse.

Ward (2008) travelled to 10 locations in Alberta (p. 55) and asked literacy workers 16 questions to develop an understanding of what literacy workers know and do (p. 57). These questions touched on the learners’ experiences (p. 57), the workers’ opportunities for professional development and preparedness (p. 58), “the actions and supports [that workers have] when learners disclose situations of violence” (p. 59), the process of referring learners to community support networks (p. 60), and the literacy programs’ registration processes (p. 61). This is a very cursory examination of the topic but is still highly relevant. Near the end of each interview Ward asked the participant if they now felt “more knowledgeable about the area of violence and learning” (p. 61) and “what stood out [for them] in this conversation” (p. 62). This is a good example of effective debriefing and will be very informative for this thesis.

**Concluding the Literature Review**

This literature review began by examining the difference between the dominant and critical education discourses in the relevance attributed to learners’ emotions. The
dominant education discourse precludes any place for learners’ emotions in the classroom whereas the critical education discourse argues that successful adult education cannot occur without it. Insofar as learners’ feeling are important, Learners’ emotions become even more important when traumatic and violent experiences prevent learners from fully participating in adult education. This is particularly significant for adult literacy education where traumatic and violent experiences are common for learners and has bearing on how literacy tutors can or should be training.

Reflecting and theorizing about practice is important so that educators can constantly re-evaluate and improve their programming. Too often this happens on an individual basis or behind closed doors. Rather than each program keeping their evaluations private, I would suggest that they be anonymized where necessary and then published. Each program could learn from others’ evaluations; this kind of research would create a stronger intellectual community amongst adult literacy workers. Building on this, the literature should engage with the effects of its implementation. There are occasions where researchers provide practical recommendations for literacy workers. However, there is little accounting for the merits or impact of this advice. It would be ethically dubious to intentionally test theories through social experiments with at-risk populations, but there is little reason why researchers could not follow up with administrators who have put this research into practice for their own purposes. In summation, the literature must more closely examine and publicize the impacts of adult literacy programming on learners’ lives.
Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Method

This thesis is a qualitative inquiry into how Parkdale Project Read meets the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma. When designing the research method I drew on case study methodology. I selected participants using judgemental and then convenience sampling. I collected data predominantly through interviews and analysed it using thematic analysis. I will begin this chapter by explaining why I believe these methodological decisions were appropriate for this study. I will then compare this study’s methodology to Michael Quinn Patton’s Use-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) and discuss similarities between the two. Lastly, I will explain the research method that I used to carry out this research.

Qualitative Inquiry

Once I had decided on this research topic, the first choice I made was between qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. I chose to do qualitative research because it would allow me to effectively create descriptions of complex personal experiences, beliefs, emotions, and relationships (Mack et al., 2005, p. 1). To understand how violence and trauma affect education, I would need to learn more about participants’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences. This is another strength of qualitative research (p. 2).

Case study

I then had to choose the form I would like to pursue for this thesis. Case study methodology was a strong choice for this research because a case study is an investigation of a phenomenon within a context, and at the point when I decided on case study methodology a phenomenon and context were all I had to work with (Baxter
& Jack, 2008, p. 545). The phenomenon is how Project Read attempts to meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence; the context is Parkdale Project Read. Therefore, it is an analysis of a process rather than an individual or program. Limits are important in case studies; this case is bound by time and place and is categorized as ‘descriptive’ and ‘intrinsic’. I will now discuss some of the characteristics of a case study and how they are represented in this research.

**When to use a case study and how to use a case study.** “According to Yin a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions.” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). The violence, trauma, and adult literacy education discourse clearly outlines why adult literacy programs must meet the needs of learners, but does not to the same degree describe how programs can do this. The purpose of this investigation was to fill this gap and gain a better understanding of how an actual literacy program does so in practice. The main question in this study therefore is a “how” question. Questioning “how” something is done is on its own not enough; throughout this investigation I was also asking “why” the findings of the first question matter. A case study method was a natural fit for an investigation of “how” and “why” and provided structure for this study’s development.

“...(b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study.” (p. 545) Volunteer tutors, staff, and adult learners were involved in the study. If I had them try out different techniques for addressing trauma I would have manipulated their behaviour in a similar way to changing variables in a quantitative study. The study was concerned, however, with what participants in
the program were already doing and not what the optimal action was. Therefore
manipulating behaviour would be counterintuitive to the goal of the study.

“(c) You want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are
relevant to the phenomenon under study…” (p. 545) Contextual conditions are
particularly relevant to the phenomenon under study. The context of a learner’s life and
the past experience that they bring to the classroom affect their ability to learn. How
the literacy tutors who work with them react and adapt to their context and experiences
can either improve or further deteriorate this ability. Literacy tutors’ opportunity to
react and adapt is limited by the dynamic of the program they volunteer for and the
training they are offered. Without examining the contextual conditions, including the
learners’ experiences, the tutors’ actions, and the program itself, it would be difficult to
gain a meaningful understanding of how the actors in a particular program meet the
learners’ needs.

“(d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.” (p. 545)
How Parkdale Project Read reacts to and meets learners’ needs is highly dependent
on what the learners’ perceived needs are in this program, how adult literacy tutors
perceive the relationship between trauma, violence and adult learning, and what
training opportunities the program affords its tutors. A case study of a different context
would be equally valid but the understanding of the phenomenon that would develop
would be vastly different. The phenomenon under study is inseparable from its context
without entirely changing its meaning; this meaning is the concern of the study.

**Determining the case.** “While you are considering what your research question
will be, you must also consider what the case is.” (p. 545) The unit that was under
analysis for this case study is a process—the process by which Parkdale Project Read meets the needs of its learners. It is not the individuals that comprise the program who are under study because these individuals are only under study because of their actions, which manifest together as an organizational process. When I discussed the research question, I established that this study would not be concerned with organizational goals, but rather the carrying out of actual action. Organizational goals, along with structure, largely define a program as a unit under analysis. Since this study was not concerned with organizational goals outside of their effect on experience, and only seeks to understand structure to have a more rigorously developed understanding of action, the unit of analysis for this study is a process and not a program.

**Binding the case.** A case under study is limited by its “binding”, which is the restrictions to its scope that prevent it from becoming unwieldy. This case was limited by activity and context. The activity, action, or phenomenon, was literacy tutors meeting learners’ needs. The context was Parkdale Project Read. Neither was limited by time or definition. If they were limited by time, I could only analyze how learners’ needs were met over the year of thesis research. I collected more rich data because I discussed with participants stories from their past experience. Listening to as many stories as possible allowed me to learn more about ‘how’ and ‘why’ tutors meet learners’ needs; and ‘what’ the context is and has been, in which these needs are met. It was not possible to limit this case by definition because the definition is what is under investigation. With the specific research question this study investigated, if I were to limit the case by definition, there would be no point carrying out the research. I would have overstepped participants’ agency and given meaning to their experience on their behalf. The context
and consequences were under investigation, but only for their use in better understanding and defining the phenomenon.

**Determining the type of case study.** “Once you have determined that the research question is best answered using a qualitative case study and the case and its boundaries have been determined, then you must consider what type of case study will be conducted.” (p. 547) This case study is descriptive and intrinsic, and not explanatory, exploratory, instrumental, or collective.

**Descriptive.** This case study is descriptive because it seeks to describe an intervention; the Parkdale Project Read adult literacy program, and “the real-life context in which it occurred;” the particular needs of adult literacy learners. Unlike exploratory cases, the intervention being studied has a “clear, single set of outcomes” (p. 548). It is similar to an explanatory case, which explains “the presumed causal links in real-life interventions.” What makes this case not explanatory is that it only seeks to describe the intervention that occurs, and not to explain what it is about this intervention that links it to its effects (p. 547).

**Intrinsic and single.** This case study is intrinsic and therefore is concerned primarily with understanding the case in itself rather than using it to accomplish something else (p. 549). According to Baxter and Jack an intrinsic case study should be used when the researcher is trying to understand the case “because in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest” (p. 548). It is not an instrumental case because the case is of primary rather than secondary interest, and it does not “play a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else.” This
case study investigates a single intervention, in a single context, and is therefore neither multiple nor collective (p. 549).

**Sampling**

While I carried out this research I interacted with learners who are an at-risk population. In planning this research I made decisions that would take this into account. One very significant decision was how I would approach and select participants for this study.

Qualitative research generally has smaller sample sizes compared to quantitative research. According to Marshall (1996), “an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question.” I needed to choose a number of participants that would not detract from the findings or their applicability. I chose roughly 10 participants, knowing that I could always stop early if the interviews were not continuing to produce significant data. To help solve the conflict of working with at-risk populations I met with the Parkdale Project Read collective and, as Mack et al. (2005) recommend, I “develop[ed] a plan to identify and recruit potential participants.” In qualitative research, recruitment must be non-coercive, respect privacy, and attempt to help participants understand the study. Recruitment must also be sensitive to the social and cultural contexts from which participants will be recruited (p. 6). This is even more relevant in social justice research with at-risk populations.

**Purposive and Convenience Sampling.**

Miles and Huberman (as cited in Curtis et al., 2000) describe six attributes to evaluate sampling strategies. I will discuss the methodology behind my sampling using the structure of Miles and Huberman’s attributes.
“The sampling strategy should be relevant to the conceptual framework and the research questions addressed by the researcher.” (p. 1003) This thesis is conceptually framed by a perspective that any member of a community has the right to participate in the community’s activities. I am both a researcher and community member as I write this thesis; the research itself is in many ways a community activity. I chose convenience sampling first because it would allow participants to take part in this study without being turned away.

“The sample should be likely to generate rich information on the type of phenomena which need to be studied.” (p. 1003) Convenience sampling is “the least rigorous technique, involving the selection of the most accessible subjects” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). I would not be able to get rich information that would allow me to write an impactful thesis using only convenience sampling, as opposed to integrating a second method. I also used judgement sampling and selected groups of participants whose inclusion would more productively answer the research question (p. 523).

“The sample should enhance the [analytical] generalizability of the findings.” (p. 1003) The groups that I chose to interview were adult learners, volunteer tutors, and staff. Almost every community member who steps foot in Parkdale Project Read fits one of these groups. By talking with participant groups that approach whole representation of the program’s constituency I, as Miles and Huberman write, enhance my findings’ generalizability.

“The sample should produce believable descriptions/explanations (in the sense of being true to real life).” (p. 1003) I could have likely had more traditionally academic conversations if I had only spoken with staff members, but this would not produce...
believable descriptions or explanations of the program. To get a more accurate representation of what goes on at Parkdale Project Read I needed to make participation in this study accessible to adult learners, in terms of language, and to volunteer tutors, in terms of time commitments. The interview guide I wrote used clear wording to phrase the questions. When I approached participants to schedule interviews I let them choose the time and locations that worked for them. These two conditions increased learners and volunteers’ ability to participate in this study, therefore making the research more believable.

“Is the sample strategy ethical?” (p. 1003) By choosing convenience sampling I left an open invitation to members of the Parkdale Project Read community to approach me and participate in this study. I was very concerned about unintentionally coercing participants, so I did not discuss participation in this study one-to-one until the individual approached me first. When I brought my research forward to participants, I did so through staff and volunteers in this community. These groups spread word about my research through the community without me risking coercion. I also ensured that when I spoke with adult learners about participation that there was at least one other community member who they knew would be there specifically for them to ask questions to about their participation. This meant that I was not the only source of information about this project, and reduced the risk of my interests as a researcher superseding the community’s interest in its well-being.

“Is the sampling plan feasible?” (p. 1003) To me as a researcher, this was the most important question. Convenience and judgement sampling were definitely feasible sampling techniques. I spent time around the center volunteering and made myself
available for participants to approach. I did not have extra time apart from this to do justice to more rigorous sampling techniques, such as Grounded Theory’s theoretical sampling.

**Interview methodology**

To collect data I could either interview participants, hold focus groups, or observe day-to-day on-goings. Interviews were the best fit out of the three for this research topic. Mack et al. (2005) suggest that “in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored” (p. 2). I could have relied on intentional observation to collect data, but this would introduce a complicated and unnecessary ethical quandary of observing at-risk populations. A focus group would not have been as effective because it would have been too difficult to get the participants together at the same time and place without creating barriers to participation.

**Thematic analysis**

The method of data analysis that I used could be loosely described as thematic analysis. Qualitative research “requires a flexible research design and an iterative, cyclical, approach to sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Thematic analysis was, in some form, a part of this research through all stages. During the interview I identified themes and pursued them by asking targeted questions. I transcribed and briefly coded each interview before the next took place so that I could use the surface-level themes to direct successive conversations.

Analyzing themes in interviews was an effective way to parse the data I collected because it allowed me to “detect and identify factors or variables that influence [issues]
generated by the participants” and the practices of individuals (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 40). This study is entirely about the conflict that participants face around violence and literacy, and how these issues are dealt with at a program level. Thematic analysis led to the production of authentic and believable depictions of Parkdale Project Read and its community. Inductive approaches to analysis, such as this, “start with a precise content and then move to broader generalisations and finally to theories. This tends to ensure that themes are effectively linked to the data” (p. 40).

**Utilization-Focused Evaluation**

There are many similarities between my methodology and Patton’s (2011) Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE). U-FE is based on the idea that “evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use” (p. 4). I have always intended for this research to have an impact on the community, and to be useful when I am done creating it. U-FE evaluators should consider at all times how the process affects the product’s use and application. They do this by clearly identifying which primary groups’ values or use frames the evaluation (p. 4). This thesis is framed by Parkdale Project Read and its community’s values and use. As I discussed above, I met with community members to make critical decisions about this research. It was also very important to me to be seen as an authentic member of the community rather than an invasive researcher. The U-FE researcher “develops a working relationship with intended users to help them determine what kind of evaluation they need” (p. 4). The collective staff told me that what they really needed was an outside perspective on the program’s operation. They needed someone who could commit a great deal of time to speaking with participants and understanding the program’s strengths and weaknesses.
Utilization-Focused Evaluation is, at its core, a checklist of steps, the number of which has grown over time. Step 7 of the Patton’s (2013) 17 step method, “focus priority evaluation questions,” is very similar to the methodology underlying my interviewing. Step 7 is based on the premise that “no evaluation can look at everything. Priorities have to be determined. Focusing is the process for establishing priorities.” I did not conduct the research with U-FE in mind, but through a discussion of its Step 7 I can better explain how I chose to ask the questions that I did. According to Patton, good evaluation questions can be answered quickly and at a bearable cost; the content of the questions is not philosophical, religious, or moral; the question does not beg its answer; and action can be taken based on the questions’ answers.

The questions I asked participants met all of these criteria. The broad topics I discussed were the program’s structure and the relationships between participants. The most intimate questions I asked were about participants’ understandings of violence, trauma, and other hardship. This approaches philosophy, religion, and morality; however, the discussions that I had with participants were meant to foster my understanding of their views and not to guide their development. My questions were all open ended; they intended to incite spontaneous conversation and not to lead the participant down any road. One question I asked was for the participant to think of a learner that they have interacted with, who has faced experiences characteristic of an adult learner. Based on the story that they brought to mind we discussed the learner’s history, conflict, and access to supportive relationships. The questions I asked, such as this, are wholly based on the participant’s knowledge, rather than the researcher’s. Lastly, as the research progressed I focused my questions on actionable issues and
conflict that the community could remediate. The most obvious example is the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Other examples include program-level decisions about learners’ rights to participate, and shortcomings that learners face as they take part in Parkdale Project Read.

**Research Method**

I sampled for participants using convenience sampling. I did not plan to turn participants away who wanted to contribute to this study and it was difficult enough to find people to interview that I did not expect to be overwhelmed by the data. To communicate with potential participants I presented my research to group learning sessions and left leaflets near the door to Parkdale Project Read (see Appendix A). The collective also brought up my research to participants which allowed me to connect with people who only volunteered or attended at days I was not there. I volunteered on Tuesdays, but presented my research at least once on every day the center was open.

I collected data by interviewing participants from Parkdale Project Read. After an initial discussion, in which we talked about the project and consent forms, we scheduled a date to meet. In all cases I met with participants in locations nearby the center, like local coffee shops and restaurants. The discussion was loosely led by an interview guide comprised of pre-planned questions and questions that came up as each interview progressed. I engaged in two periods of simultaneous data collection and analysis followed by a period where the data and its analysis were compiled into theory.

**Interviews**

Data was primarily collected through interviews with participants involved in Parkdale Project Read. It was difficult to anticipate the scale of the interviews, or how
many interviews will need to take place, because sampling was directed by theory rather than statistics. The groups I interviewed are staff, volunteers and learners. I ended up interviewing 9 participants for 17 interviews in total. 4 interviews took place with staff, 7 with volunteers, and 6 with learners.

**Staff.** By interviewing staff I gained a “surface” or “institutional” understanding of the organization. By this I mean that the understanding will reflect how the organization is intended to be structured but not necessarily how it functions in everyday practice. These initial interviews provided a point of entry into the organization. At this point I was an outsider to the organization, and staff were the group that is most accustomed to interacting with outsiders. These interviews helped me develop rapport with the organization and make it more likely that I would come to be perceived as a partner instead of an outsider. Staff members also had the most well developed philosophies and politics because they participate in the organization professionally and have greater opportunity to think about such issues. Staff are able to discuss the impact of violence on learning because, as a group, they interact with learners the most quantitatively; staff have had the highest number of discussions with learners about the impact of violence in their lives and how it affects their learning.

**Volunteers.** Volunteers were the main group I chose to interview and most of the data I collected came from them. This information provided me with a deep overview of the organization because it was grounded in how the organization actually functions towards its primary community, learners. I carried out many interviews with volunteers; each interview informed subsequent interviews and led to the discovery of new categories to be revisited. In order to gain access to volunteers to the scale that I
required I had to be perceived in a positive way. Previous interviews with staff developed this identity and led to them informally introducing my research to volunteers. The role of tutors is largely facilitative; they carry out the instructions of staff to meet the needs of learners. Volunteers provided the most insight of all groups because they are the most active in relation to the other groups. Unlike staff, volunteers’ knowledge was for the most part grounded in experience and became philosophy only through discussion. The knowledge that volunteers gained through meeting the expectations of staff and the needs of learners is what is under investigation in this study. Volunteers and placement students are able to discuss the impact of violence on learning because, as a group, they interact with learners with the greatest frequency.

**Learners.** Learners were the most difficult group to gain access to. They were also the most difficult group to follow through on interviews with because they most frequently cancelled or forgot about the appointment. Interviews with learners supplemented those with tutors and provided a second perspective on a series of events. During the second round of interviews, when I investigated supportive relationships, learners had the opportunity to participate in interviews with tutors if both parties are willing. I did not discuss traumatic or violent events in the interviews unless the learner brought it up and I was confident that its discussion was initiated by them. Support was available for the learner if they felt in any way uncomfortable discussing trauma and literacy. Learners were able to provide valuable information because they are at the centre of Parkdale Project Read. Every other actor involved in Parkdale Project Read is working for the benefit of the learner; without talking with learners I was unable to learn about how this benefit is received. Stake refers to this as
triangulation, and defines it as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Suryani, 2008, p. 119). By interviewing participants of different social locations I reduced the chances of misinterpreting the data (p. 120). Learners are the key group to meet with in order to understand the impact of violence on learning because they are the group that actually goes through the experience. Every learner I met with was impacted by violence or experienced hardship.

**Interview structure**

**Structure.** Interviews were open-ended so that the conversation could pursue emerging details. For every interview I prepared an interview guide. Instead of directing the flow of the interview, the interview guide contained notes about the previous interview and allowed me to pursue lines of thought that better discover new categories and developed the properties of existing ones. To better understand how violence affects participation, I first asked participants ‘what challenges [their] participation in Project Read?’ Some of the questions I asked participants to further unpack the relationship between violence and learning at Project Read include:

- What challenges do adult literacy learners face in and out of education?
- How does PPR view the relationship between trauma, violence, and adult literacy education?
- How have you witnessed trauma and violence to affect literacy education?
- What supportive relationships exist?
- What are the consequences of not having supportive relationships?
**Frequency.** Interviews were carried out for as long as necessary because sampling was directed by theory instead of statistics. The objective was to develop theory as fully as possible based on the case under study. I had expected that this could be completed in four months of interviewing; two months for each series of interviews. In fact I only completed interviewing after 8 months. This was primarily due to how hard it was to set up interviews with learners. Once a learner expressed interest in participating in an interview it took upwards of a month per interview to schedule and complete. The interviews were roughly grouped into two rounds based on their purpose. The purpose of the first round was to learn about the roles that individual participants in Parkdale Project Read play, and the second was to learn about how these individuals support each other to meet learners’ needs. The interviews were divided into two rounds because a discussion of supportive relationships would be better informed only after I have a basic understanding of each actor’s role. Most participants were interviewed in both rounds, the exception being one who stopped participating at Parkdale Project Read after the first interview. Due to repeated interviews with participants, and the length of each interview, I made a special effort to cater to participants’ needs. I met them at times and locations convenient for them, and actively worked to keep an open line of communication to address any concerns that arise.

**Observation**

Between interviews I spent a meaningful amount of time at Parkdale Project Read. Participants would often talk with me and I inevitably learned through my presence there. I described documents as the only formal subject of observation because it was impossible to avoid informal observation and analysis as a matter-of-fact
by being present in the environment. There was no period of reflection or intentional analysis of what I learned in this way but it surely affected this thesis’ development.

**Coding**

After each interview I prepared an interview transcript and forwarded it to the participant. Some of the participants were not able to easily read the transcript for themselves so I introduced them to a placement student who would be willing to read it with them. Participants could change or remove their responses at any time, but I chose to give them a two week grace period to do this before I began to analyze a transcript.

The first step of my analysis was coding. I read through paper copies of the transcripts and created codes to explain what was going on throughout the discussion. The syntax of each code varied immensely. An example of a code I used was “response to ‘what is PPR’” This code explained that the participant was responding to a particular question. Codes also outlined the introduction of ideas or concepts, such as “discussion of ‘self-awareness’”. This code explained that the participant brought up the idea of self-awareness of a concept. The different codes I used often interrelated between each other, such as an introduced idea leading to an asked question in a later interview. I then compiled the codes and their content into a spreadsheet (see Appendix A) so I could graphically see how each was filled out. As each interview was transcribed and analyzed, I used the new codes that arose to return to previous transcripts to see if I missed this code before.

The second stage of coding was to write a brief summary paraphrasing the quotations. This would allow me to interact more effectively with the ideas because long quotes would now be presented to me as short sentences. This enabled me to look for
deeper relationships between codes, such as one code challenging another. An example of this would be “discussion of ‘self-awareness’” being challenged by “response to ‘conflict at PPR’”. In this case Mary told me that the collective was “going through some stuff right now about incidents in the program and how to respond as a team.” The particular incident was a learner being disruptive and the collective deciding if it was appropriate ask them to leave. The first code regarding self-awareness was challenged by the second code discussing conflict. A learner was disrupting the program and due to a lack of self-awareness the collective was considering intervening. There were also similarities between codes that would guide how I would discuss them. Like codes would be introduced together, such as all those regarding “conflict,” those describing ideals, or those that outline structures and relationships. The primary purpose of this thesis was to unearth knowledge, compile it, and then present it for the community. This coding system allowed me to see the data altogether in front of me, organize it according to relations in code and content, and then write about it in a sensible order.

**Revisiting the Research Questions**

The main research question was ‘how does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma.’ Throughout this investigation a series of more concise questions were posed and answered to develop a more in depth understanding of the case. The first question was ‘who exactly constitutes the Parkdale Project Read program?’ By understanding who we are referring to, I was able to carry out a more informed investigation of how the participants who make up the program function. Instead of beginning this thesis by asking what the organization’s structure is, learning more about the actors who comprise Parkdale Project Read
Research Question: How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

Step 1: Who is Parkdale Project Read?

Step 2: How does each actor meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

Step 3: How do actors work together, support each other, and receive external support to meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

allowed for an understanding of the program that is grounded in the role each actor plays and the intersection of these roles.

After developing an idea of who constitutes Parkdale Project Read, I asked how each actor in their individual unique role addresses the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma. At this point I was, to an extent, answering the overall research question. I wished to learn more about each individual actor’s role before I learned more about how they interact so that this investigation can progress from knowledge grounded in individual experience to knowledge developed through relations between individuals. The alternative to this was to delve in at a system level, beginning with an investigation of the structure of Parkdale Project Read and instead
asking how each individual fulfils the program’s expectations. By beginning with the roles of individual actors I reinforced the idea that this community literacy program is defined by those whose efforts comprise it, rather than the program defining its participants.

From this point I asked how each of the unique roles works together, supports each other, and receives external support to meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma. After understanding who the program is, what each actor does, and how actors receive support, I proceeded to Parkdale Project Read’s declared organizational goals. I was most interested in learning about the direct actions and interactions that take place in Parkdale Project Read, and whether the organization promises or fails to keep promises is irrelevant to this goal.
Chapter Four: Contextual Findings

I will preface my findings with a look into the current context at Project Read. This chapter is based on information that came from interviews with participants and would be difficult, but not impossible, to find in documents. It provides the reader with the necessary information to understand the practical findings that will follow. I will lead into this discussion by introducing the organization’s philosophy of literacy education. With this framework in mind, I will outline guiding principles and perspective on violence, trauma, and other hardship.

As already clarified, Parkdale Project Read is an adult learning program that provides support for learners who have difficulty reading and writing. As was evident very quickly, the support provided extends well beyond the development of reading and writing skills. Parkdale Project Read aims at providing as much support for learners as they need, in whatever ways they request, to the greatest extent that the available resources allow. A central facet of its mission is to relinquish power to learners that would traditionally be held by staff and volunteers. Learning, as such, is a partnership between learners and those who facilitate learning.

Many different groups pass through Project Read. The administrators have intended to create a safe space where community members can receive the support they need at the pace that suits them. Community members are invited to be as active as they would like. For instance, if a learner wants to participate in one-to-one tutoring for only two hours a week, then staff try to create this opportunity. If the same learner continues to grow within the community and wants to take on a leadership role, there are many other opportunities available; they could participate in one of the many
different group learning sessions provided weekly, join planning committees to have their say in how their community grows, or propose and help plan events that are valuable to them.

Parkdale Project Read seeks to resist the oppression that learners and other community members are faced with in their day-to-day lives. It is a standalone organization that, aside from the government, is obligated only to its community. It began in the 1970s from a vision of social justice and remained true to this ideal over 40 years of growth. Project Read is deeply intertwined with Parkdale at a community level. It has active partnerships with many community organizations, refers learners to these organizations when they may benefit from it, and is referred learners from them. It receives funding from many different sources, with the eventual goal that no one funder will be so powerful it can control the organization’s programming and growth. It is run by a core collective, a team of relief staff, and the volunteer-work of tutors, placement students, and learners. Before I share my research findings, I will briefly discuss the history of this organization and its community.

**What is literacy, according to Project Read?**

In conversation with participants I asked ‘What is literacy?’ and ‘What is literacy education?’ To analyze these responses, I organized them by participant group and indicated responses that came up more than once. These analyses are presented in figures 2 and 3 below. Emboldened responses were given more than once by the participant group. I also included an analysis of participants’ understandings of low literacy. I did not specifically ask them how they defined low literacy, so the following discussion as it pertains to low literacy must not be taken as exhaustive.
What is literacy? Taking into account the most frequent responses, learners defined literacy as “everything,” and “opportunity,” while placement students described it as simply “the ability to read and write.” This contrast is just as stark between placement students’ and tutors’ responses. Both placement students described literacy as the ability to read and write, while this was at no point mentioned by tutors. The narrative presented by placement students eludes to literacy as the legal right, often taken for granted, to the ability to read and write. Both placement students I interviewed came from George Brown’s social work program, and did not have a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Learners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy is...</td>
<td>...everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...accessibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...contextual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...essential for employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low literacy is...</td>
<td>...more than just decoding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...speaking, talking, and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a source of happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a barrier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...trapping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a source of shame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy education is...</td>
<td>...helps people get where they want to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a tutor revealing possibility to the learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...cooperative between the learner and tutor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...similar to social work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...an opportunity to have the positive school experience the learner missed in childhood.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
background in teaching or literacy education. Tutors defined literacy as being each person’s unique way of getting through daily life and reaching their goals. Placement students’ descriptions of literacy are much more in line with that of the general public than tutors’.

Literacy means something very different to the general public and funders compared to what it means at Parkdale Project Read. These groups for the most part have a very narrow and goal-oriented understanding of literacy and interpret it to mean the ability to meet a certain set of goals or utilize a particular skillset. This definition is very much focused around work. To be literate in this way means to be able to read and write, and to gain and maintain employment. Success in this sort of literacy means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Students</th>
<th>Tutors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy is...</td>
<td>...different for each learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...comprehensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...getting through daily life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...reaching goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...empowering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a right.</td>
<td>...terrifying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...the ability to read, write, and function in society.</td>
<td>...a source of shame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...often taken for granted.</td>
<td>...tied to drug use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low literacy is...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...isolating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...hard to admit for the learner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...mistakenly thought to look a certain way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a source of nervousness and low confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...inherited socially through parenting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy education is...</td>
<td>...undertaken for varying reasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...best without a timeline.</td>
<td>...successful even if learning is social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a way to lessen isolation.</td>
<td>...gendered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...not an opportunity for everyone.</td>
<td>...stabilizing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...exciting for some learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...supportive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...helps people reach their goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3 Discussing literacy continued*
achieving milestones and quantifiable goals. Examples of these goals are being able to
list the letters of the alphabet, decode words and sentences, and fill out job
applications. There is only one correct way to complete these tasks and in this definition
of literacy someone is either literate or not. There is an expected timeline to achieving
this form of literacy and learners who deviate from this timeline are seen to have failed
in some way; this definition does not take into account qualitative differences between
readers and their contexts. The ministry wields this interpretation of literacy education
for the purpose of getting learners off Ontario Works, an employment oriented financial
support program.

Compared to placement students, volunteer tutors’ descriptions of literacy are
more similar to administrators’ staunch Freirean stance. “When [Jinn] describes literacy
to people [she] talks about reading the world.” Mary said that it is true literacy is
reading and writing, but “that is the important piece because it gives people more
choices in their life.” Staff and tutors both spoke about literacy as being subjective to
each person; literacy is understanding what is going on and making decisions, and often
this requires reading and writing. Placement students, on the other hand, felt that the
full extent of literacy was reading and writing skills.

I equate the similarity between staff and tutors’ responses, and the contrast
with placement students’, to be a product of each groups’ relations. Placement students
are first and foremost college students looking to get credit. They come and go at
Project Read as their placement dictates. Placement students first chose their home
institution, and then chose to do a placement at Project Read. Volunteers, however,
chose Project Read of all places to donate their time. Placement students are visitors,
and staff are their supervisors; there is an exchange going on between performance and credit. Staff contribute guidance, rather than supervision, to volunteers. Staff and volunteers’ relationship is founded in the specific drive for literacy education. These two groups are more likely to have been influenced by the same material, like Paulo Freire’s writing. Further, staff and volunteers have a greater period of time to influence each other’s ideologies because of the longer term volunteers spend with Project Read compared to placement students.

**What is low literacy?** Low literacy is bad for the learner. All participant groups agreed that low literacy was characterized by negative experiences. Learners described it as an entrapping source of shame. Tutors similarly said it was terrifying to experience. Staff felt that learners had to find ways to cope with low literacy. Placement students uniquely spoke about how deceptive low literacy can be. Viktor explained to me that in a previous placement he encountered

this one girl [who] works for the city. For two months I was dealing with this her and then it came to me after talking to you that maybe she cannot read. It never occurred to me. Was that what the issue is? She is like yes. She couldn't read. How hard was it for her to even admit that? She didn't I really had to pry. There is a lot of people like that.

To Viktor, a lot of people with low literacy do not admit it to others. Rebecca similarly said that learners intentionally isolate themselves to avoid others’ finding out “they can't read or write, or [from fear of] looking dumb or whatever.”

**What is literacy education?** Placement students, who stated that literacy is reading and writing, and a right, also said that literacy education is not an opportunity
for everyone. This supports my previous argument that placement students’ understanding of literacy is more in line with the public perspective than staff and tutors’. All participant groups agreed that literacy education is more complicated than funnelling knowledge into learners. Learners and staff saw literacy education as a cooperative journey, or partnership between the learner and tutor. Placement students and tutors both acknowledged that access to literacy education is not universal; placement students tied this inequity to poverty while tutors associated it with gender.

Staff, likely the participant group with the most senior experience in literacy education, had the most well developed explanations. They contrasted their perspectives with public opinion, and specifically mentioned that literacy education is much more than the ministry’s perspective of meeting milestones and contributing economically to society. Most interestingly, staff suggested that learners attended literacy education to make up for a missed experience in their youth. Mary explained,

I think there is a real sense of loss that people didn’t go to school. Didn’t get much out of school … That is part of the issue with Frontier College. People can say they're going to college right? I think that is partly why it is called college. Yes everybody says [Project Read is a] school. The school at King and Dufferin. We are definitely a school. ‘The school I wish I had’.

Staff, as the administrators for Project Read, have a unique perspective to speak about literacy education. They are involved in literacy education full-time. With the exception of the experience of low literacy and pursuing education, there are few aspects of literacy education they cannot speak to.

**Guiding principles**
PPR operates on a set of guiding principles that reflect participants’ philosophies and the community’s needs. The following principles were gathered through participant interviews and reflect the program’s organizational goals and the community’s experiences. Participants are seen as independent and agential, responsible, and self-caring. Relationships between participants are guided by respect, learner-centeredness, and self-awareness.

**Independence and agency.** A participant who is independent and agential is perceived as having the capacity in themselves to make their own decisions and give direction to their learning journey. A learner who participates independently and with agency may be given advice and recommendations but it is ultimately up to them to choose to participate. This value was described to me first in an anecdote from Jinn. She told me how a learner was literally led into Project Read by their case-worker. The case-worker expected that they would stay through introductions and evaluations, and eventually through learning experiences. The staff member asked the resistant case-worker to leave so that the learner could participate in the program independently, so the staff could evaluate the learner’s participation as an individual. The learner “came through the door ... for months and kind of came in and sat at the table and didn’t engage in the group [or] talk to other people. It felt like they knew they had to be there.” If the case-worker had stayed they would have forced the learner to participate or removed them from the program due to their lack of participation. By seeing the learner as independent and agential their participation is recognized despite looking different than other learners. Over time the learner’s participation became more evident. “The individual was amazing at math ... they did long division in their head ...
learning was happening.” The learner’s confidence continued to grow and they began to make coffee in the kitchen. They were soon bringing coffee to the table for other learners. “There was this whole shift and transition that was happening [as the learner began] claiming some of the space.” As the learner developed, the staff member became aware that the learner lived in a shared community house. Their participation at Project Read, making coffee for other learners, reflected their participation in their living arrangements. By treating the learner as an independent and agential individual they were given the opportunity to be themselves and participate on a timeline that met their needs.

**Responsibility.** All participants at Project Read are offered the opportunity to take on responsibility within the organization. The four collective members share administrative, program, and fundraising responsibilities. Non-collective staff are responsible for fulfilling their job descriptions. Volunteer tutors and placement students are responsible for facilitating one-to-one or group learning sessions. In the world at large, responsibility is often seen as a burden. Learners are often denied responsibility. When they are given responsibility, taking in the difference, they particularly cherish it. Learners and other participants who are not used to sharing responsibility within an organization may not be able to keep up with those who have more experience in this area. According to the Project Read philosophy, it is not fair to distribute responsibility but expect participants to be able to immediately fulfil their new duties without support.

Learners have the opportunity to participate on the board of directors at Parkdale Project Read. June, a tutor with previous board-member experience,
participates in this organization’s board as well. She refused the opportunity to chair this board because she knew that with her competencies if she were the chair of this board she “would wreck it just like that ... by insisting that it be efficient or by operating as if it were important to be efficient.” May, for instance, is able to participate easier because the other members are willing to move at a slower pace and explain more traditional and proprietary board language. A learner being on the board of directors helps administer the program, but also develops as an individual through their participation in responsibility.

**Respect.** Respecting someone, in this context, should be understood as giving them the space or freedom to make their own decisions because it is important that they be able to be true to their identity. The respect I will discuss is therefore a respect of independence. Within the tutor-learner relationship this takes form in how space is shared. It is likely that there is a power dynamic in this relationship that favours the tutor. The tutor plays the role they do because they have knowledge, skills, or some other characteristic that the learner wished to develop. The learner depends on the tutor’s support to develop and achieve in ways they could not alone. When the tutor respects the learner in this relationship they try to correct this power imbalance. The tutor treats the learner like an independent decision-maker. The tutor is not there to impose their values on the learner or otherwise manipulate their identity. Parkdale Project Read holds volunteer training sessions throughout the year to expose new tutors to the program’s philosophy. A telling example of this is that tutors are trained to not correct learners’ speech patterns unless the learner wants to change them.

Caribbean learners, for example, “often ‘drop an ‘h’ in one place where it should be and
add it where it shouldn’t be. Instead of saying ‘ham and eggs’ they will say ‘am and heggs’. This pronunciation is not technically correct, but not all learners participate at Parkdale Project Read to learn to speak technically correct English. Learners participate for their own reasons and respect for learners and their needs allows for a learner-centered program.

**Learner centeredness.** Jinn told me she had “not enough time to do all the things [she] dreams of” at Parkdale Project Read. There are “lots of dreams [and] everyone ... board, staff, learners ... always dreams of things [they] love to do.” The dream to provide a learner-centered program is constrained by the realities of time and financial resources. Women in the program dreamed of a justice-telling group and now it is led autonomously by female learners. There was a specific need for this program at Parkdale Project Read and it became a reality through the hard work of staff volunteers and tutors. The program was originally facilitated by a staff member but handed over to a learner on Parkdale Project Read’s board of directors. The justice-telling group meets learners’ needs in content and in form. Learners who participate in it want an opportunity to create meaning and facilitating the program gives them an additional chance to do so.

Learner centeredness is the design and structuring of a program to take into account the needs of learners before the needs of other groups. This is a significant role-reversal of the typical societal neglect for adult learners’ interests. Parkdale Project Read practices learner centeredness in many ways. Contract staff positions are designed depending on what support learners need at the time funding becomes available, although the administrative assistant and fundraiser positions support the whole
program. Recently, for example, Parkdale Project Read hired a children’s program worker to mind kids while their parents participate in programming. The staff member helps them with their homework and entertains them to free up the parent’s time and energy. Before this position was created parents, especially mothers, would have to bring their young kids with them to learning sessions in order to participate. This caused disruptions for the group and frustration for parents. Now parents can participate easier in programming while the children’s program worker minds their children and supports their learning.

In order to be effective at meeting learners’ needs, learners must have the voice to speak up for themselves. Learners are often deterred from asking for what they need because they were hurt in the past when they did. Parkdale Project Read addresses this problem through initiatives such as the women’s justice-telling group, which creates opportunities where learners can find this voice. May, an adult learner, told me that at Parkdale Project Read “everything is open. They let [her] say whatever [she] wants.” She used to be scared and afraid to speak up for herself and through the support she received at Parkdale Project Read she has found the voice to ask for what she wants and refuse what she doesn’t.

**What are violence, hardship, and trauma according to Project Read?**

Violence, hardship, and trauma are deeply interconnected and can negatively affect the development of literacy. This discussion of violence, hardship, and trauma reflects the belief systems of staff, tutors, and learners at Parkdale Project Read. These definitions are practical and abstracted by only one step from experience. They are valuable not because they reflect every adult literacy context but rather because they
are descriptions of how violence, hardship, and trauma are understood by participants at Parkdale Project Read. They reflect the local context in which this research took place and therefore they are the definitions which most closely satisfy this thesis’ goals to contribute to the development of local knowledge. The participants’ discussions of violence, hardship, and trauma will be amalgamated into three narratives (see figure 4), to represent the program’s philosophy as a whole. I will only discuss and expand on the central narrative regarding each concept.

Violence. Participants described two aspects of violence. They first spoke about it as a process, in terms of its causes and effects. Violent acts are intentional. To Rebecca, an action is violent when “it has the intent of hate.” Jolene contrasted this with trauma; “violence is an intentional act, but trauma can [result from] something like an earthquake.” In terms of the relationship between violence and trauma, violence is the nature of the act and trauma is its effect on the victim. Jinn told me that “an act that is violent is one that has long-term hurt and pain associated with it.”

There are many different kinds of violence, however. June first mentioned this to me when she said that she was “tempted to try to separate physical and mental violence.” I pursued this line of thought with the participants. Jinn developed this a bit further when she said that “a lot of people think of interpersonal violence; they think of domestic violence and they think of gang violence, physical violence.” Jinn believes that the public largely associates violence with illegal and physical abuse. There is more too it, however, and there are legal forms of violence. Rebecca said the following about the Canadian context.
The best way to learn about how a country a system or a society, with the real values are is to look at their policy. If you actually take the time and look at Canadian social policy here I think it sort of paints his picture of being very racist ... That is the best way I can try to explain that the intent of systemic violence is a way of control really ... pushing people further and further into poverty.

Figure 4 Violence, hardship, and trauma
Interestingly, Jolene felt that this systemic violence can be unintentional. She argued that a system can be violent “even if there is no intention to it ... you can create systematic violence without having the intent to harm.” The fundamental difference between Rebecca and Jolene’s perspectives is whether or not a system can act intentionally and if this intention is to harm. Rebecca feels that the system is acting intentionally through its policy, while Jolene is taking an optimistic perspective and maintains that policy writers’ and politicians’ intentions are not to harm. Jinn fleshes this discussion out a bit more. She explained systemic violence as

Any type of system any type of policy any type of legislation creating or setting environment through which people experience violence and as a result trauma. That's kind of what the residual effects of that are ... I would say poverty is definitely violence; it wears on people. I would say no it is actually violence because I would say the system creates the conditions through which poverty is experienced by individuals and maintains its. Through policy and through legislation through practices. That's why it is so hard to eliminate it.

Jinn argues that by examining poverty we are able to see how the system acts intentionally. It is so difficult to eliminate poverty because through policy, the system is constantly maintaining the status quo. In review, participants explained that violence is intentional action, and when the two are related, violence causes trauma and long term hurt. Violence is not just physical and not always illegal.

Institutional and systemic violence affect the greatest amount of people and are
intentional because policy is constantly creating the conditions for poverty, a form of violence.

**Hardship.** During my initial meetings with Project Read, the administrators asked me to discuss other hardships, in addition to violence and trauma. Hardship was a new concept for me to think about, and I believe that many participants felt the same. The resulting discussion about hardship was much less dense than the previous about violence and trauma. When I asked Mary about hardship, she responded,

Hardship. That's not a word I use very often. Hardship. I think it might be that chronic. It's more the ongoing poverty and ongoing living within the isms. Living within the systems that are working against you. There is hardship and it feels like it is over years. It makes me think of the survivor, hardship.

From this we can gather that hardship is more than poverty, racism, sexism, and discrimination itself. Rebecca simply referred to hardship as barriers and “shaky situations.” June concisely said that “hardship is being without basic needs. Maslow’s basic needs are being deprived.” Based on the previous discussions of violence and trauma, I believe if violence is an intentional action, and trauma is a lingering negative effect, then hardship is the chronic state of being without.

**Trauma.** Trauma is a tricky concept to pin down. Jinn described trauma as follows,

[Trauma is] how those pains ... manifest in your body your mind and emotions. And spirit. It makes your body hurt it makes your body unable to make your body work as well as it did and how it feels. The feelings or emotions on multiple levels. I don't think trauma is so easily defined.
We should take from this that trauma affects the victim, primarily but not limited to the physical body. Mary continues, “trauma is what happens to your mind and body and heart when something in your world shakes you up.” If we take trauma to be an effect on the victim, it can be said that trauma first affects each victim differently. According to Rebecca, “trauma can be different for different people.” Trauma is different for everyone, but it never just goes away for anyone. Mary refers to Jenny Horsman when she says that trauma survivors are “living beside violence, they’re never done with it.” Jolene described some of the effects of trauma to be lack of confidence, disconnection to life, and instability; all of these are in the long term. Rebecca expressed this slightly differently and said that trauma can fundamentally change the victim’s world view. Taken as a whole, trauma is a negative effect on the body that is different for each survivor. It never completely goes away and can cause a long term lack of confidence, diminished ability to focus, and disconnection between the survivor and their life.

These discussions of violence, hardship, and trauma are of course not exhaustive. Nor should they be taken as a replacement for the relevant literature. They simply provide a look into how participants understand these concepts, and that the three are recognized to have negative impacts and to be interconnected.
Chapter Five: Practical Findings

Building on the previous discussion of context, I will now explain this thesis’ principle findings. I will begin by outlining the flow of support and authority through Project Read’s organizational structure. I will then discuss the reasons why each participant group participates in adult education or volunteers at Project Read. These two discussions will wrap up the deeper contextual inquiry. I will begin to discuss purely practical findings through an analysis of how participants discuss barriers to learning in adulthood, and the network of community and support at Project Read. I will conclude by arguing that conflict between Project Read and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities is exacerbated by a shortage of time and money within the organization.

Flow of support and authority at Project Read

Project Read has a dynamic organizational structure that is adjusted to meet learners’ needs as best it can with the limited resources available. This discussion of the flow of support and authority comes from my conversations with Jinn and Mary, two members of the Project Read collective. Learners are the primary community at Project Read and the group for whom support is most readily available. It is difficult to assign an objective structure to support and authority not only because it is constantly changing, but also because there is no clear distribution of power and authority within day-to-day programming. Staff and volunteers run learning sessions but learners serve on the board of directors to whom staff are directly responsible. Placement students provide learning support to learners but learners often directly support the organization through fundraising and event-planning. Despite this complexity I will attempt to
represent Parkdale Project Read’s organizational structure so that the following explanation will flow in an intentional and logical order.

Learners are claimed by administrators and volunteers to be the primary community at Parkdale Project Read because they, as a group, are intended to receive the most support. Power and authority are constantly being exchanged by different groups of participants, however different groups will nonetheless have differing capacities for bureaucratic authority. For example, learners help to plan events but they ultimately have the opportunity to do so because it is provided to them through staff who relinquish administrative authority. The structure through which I explain the different groups at Parkdale Project Read will be organized the greatest potential access to support and administrative authority.

**Collective staff.** At the core of Parkdale Project Read’s administration is a 4-person collective. All 4 members of this collective make the same money and have the same job description. Jinn explained to me, “the paid staff are collective. At least the core staff are collective ... The four collective members and relief staff team will be called upon as needed.”

The collective works as a team to keep Parkdale Project Read running. Responsibility is distributed between its members based on the consideration that all work is of equal value. All permanent paid staff are part of the collective; the collective is responsible to a volunteer board of directors instead of a paid board and executive director. The collective is motivated to work harder because they are responsible to a board comprised of their community and not an individual boss; the collective internalizes the goals of the organization instead of rebelling under direct supervision.
When the collective was first formed it was comprised of only two of the permanent paid staff-members. As contract staff’s terms ended the organization would hire them on as permanent part-time. As the administration grew it was decided that all staff members should be a part of a ‘modified’ collective. Conflict arose within the greater collective as its members became more affected by a fundamental difference of authority between the full-time and part-time staff. Eventually the collective settled on 4 members, described to me metaphorically as the 4 legs that hold up a table.

**Paid staff.** Apart from the collective there are currently three paid staff members whose one-year contracts are funded by the city of Toronto. These positions are an administrative support worker, a children’s program worker, and a grant-writer/fundraiser. Parkdale Project Read is very flexible about accommodating
employees so they can achieve what they want from their work and make use of the skills and experience they bring to the position. An example of this is that the administrative support worker facilitates adult learning programming in order to gain experience transferrable to social services. The children’s program worker facilitates programming as well, but does so to make use of the wealth of experience she believes she has in the field.

**Placement students and volunteer tutors.** Tutors at Project Read are for the most part either placement students or volunteers. Most placement students come from social service, community worker, and Assaulted Women and Children’s Counselor/Advocate program college programs at George Brown, but also from Centennial and Seneca colleges. There are currently three placement students at Project Read. Placement students work longer hours than other volunteers and it is often challenging for them to put in the hours their program requires without financial compensation. This is recognized at Parkdale Project Read but financial compensation for this group is not possible with the extremely limited resources that this program operates on. While at Project Read, placement students are immersed in programming to gain practical experience in their field. Jinn explained the difference between placement students and volunteers to me.

We have a whole range of volunteers. There are volunteer tutors ... many of them will come from college programs. They will come from programs like social service worker and community worker advocate programs [at] George Brown, Centennial and maybe Seneca. Mostly George Brown because we find they are just down the road. We have had students from U of T from
OISE. We have had teacher candidates. I guess they are building their
teacher certificate teaching certificate. That has changed now I don't know
what it’s called but in the past they've had folks do that. I think that is it.
We've had community members. Volunteer their time and larger capacities
for shorter periods of time we've had corporate partners come into short
volunteer stints every once in a while around a particular need.

Rather than receiving compensation for their time, volunteer tutors give their work to
Parkdale Project Read to support their community. Tutors currently facilitate the pre-
Academic Upgrading group, the math group, the knitting group, the driver’s ed. group,
the Fab Vocab group, and co-facilitate the creative writing group. One volunteer tutor
will usually be paired with one learner and they will meet for 2-4 hours during the week.
Because they work together one-to-one there needs to be many more volunteer tutors
than placement students for every learner at Parkdale Project Read to receive both
individual and group learning support. Volunteer training is held throughout the year
and is a constant struggle to find enough potential volunteers between each session to
pair with the growing number of learners.

Learners. At Parkdale Project read, “the primary community are the adult
learners.” There are around fifty learners at any one time, but the number fluctuates.
Learners in this program “range in different literacy levels” and backgrounds. “There are
parents [and] there are workers. In that group we have folks who are engaged with
learning groups and folks who are working with tutors or a combination thereof…”

The greatest division between learners is the programming they participate in,
either group or one-to-one learning. There are two types of group learning sessions.
They are academic upgrading and adult learning. Academic upgrading takes place in the morning and adult learning in the afternoon and evening. Learners who participate in academic upgrading for the most part want to develop skills required to get into college and develop their careers. These learners are usually younger and have a specific goal and their participation in Parkdale Project Read therefore has a potential lifetime. Those who participate in adult learning programs are usually older and are involved in Parkdale Project Read for an indeterminable period of time, eventually leaving due to reasons out of their control. Both programs are characterized by a strong sense of community but this is especially notable in adult learning. Parkdale Project Read is like a family to many of these learners and the relations that are developed within this community reach far beyond the program’s hours. Learners who participate in group sessions tend to spend more time at Parkdale Project Read. For example, there are four afternoon and evening sessions that last two hours each. A typical learner may participate in three to four of them and spends around seven hours at Parkdale Project Read per week. A learner who only participates in one-to-one learning would only spend two to four hours a week there.

Committees. The Parkdale Project Read community is guided and supported by a series of committees that constantly change to meet the community’s needs. Learners, tutors, and Parkdale community members are given the opportunity to be actively engaged in Project Read’s administration through these committees. Currently there are 5 committees--finance, fundraising, programming, personnel/anti-discrimination, and strategic planning committees.
Community board of directors. The collective is directly responsible to the board, which is at present chaired by a former tutor and is comprised of two tutors, two learners and two former learners, and three community leaders. Community leaders come from organizations within the Parkdale community such as the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Center or the Parkdale Community Health Center. A board member’s term lasts two years and appointments are staggered so that the full board doesn’t end its term at once. There is an intentional drive to bring learners, Parkdale community members, and people of colour onto the board so that it can more effectively represent Parkdale Project Read’s diverse community. The board is rounded out by tutors who have gone through the training and can represent Parkdale Project Read’s foundational principles.

The purpose of the board of directors is to keep the program moving in a direction that is focused on the needs of the community and is conscious of what is going on in its community. In this way, having learners on the board grounds it within the community it represents and reflects Parkdale Project Read’s commitment to learner-centeredness. A board of directors is often led by middle-class people of a certain business-minded knowledge in positions such as chair or secretary. To avoid power within the board shifting towards the people who know how to handle ‘this kind of stuff’ there is a conscious effort to create opportunities for learners to speak up and activate agency within board activities.

Parkdale community. The Parkdale Community plays an active and important role at Parkdale Project Read. Mary explained the program’s community connections to me.
We have a weekly group at the Parkdale Activity Recreation Center. We have had that for 10 years or so. There is a group back at Queen Victoria public school or the early years center. We have had College in the Community groups where an instructor from George Brown, and facilitate a group maybe from 1 to 3 rather than 3 to 5... And then there is also outreach and kind of liaising with those organizations that I was talking about, whether they be Local Literacy Committees or the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

Parkdale Project Read has partnered with community organizations such as Parkdale Community Health Center and the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Center. Learners who wish to seek counselling are referred to Parkdale Community Health Center, and those looking for legal advice to Parkdale Community Legal Services, for example (for posters see appendices B and C). Parkdale Project Read also has corporate community partners who sponsor the program financially instead of providing services. In 2014 SoftChoice, an IT company from the Parkdale Community, donated $45,000 worth of technology including a smart television to help facilitate group learning sessions.

**Why learners and tutors participate**

There is overlap between learners and tutors in terms of why they participate at Project Read. Tutors participate by volunteering their time, and learners participate primarily through their involvement in group or one-to-one learning. Learners, however, also take on volunteer responsibility. Each group has different motivations for participating. Figure 8 presents an analysis of each group’s motivations. It maps out why learners participate in education, why tutors think adults participate in education, and
why tutors and learners volunteer. Adults participate in education predominantly to better themselves, but only slightly more than they do to be able to support their family better. In contrast, tutors identified many more reasons why adults participate in education to better themselves, compared to those the adults themselves did. As for volunteering, both groups volunteer primarily to support their community. What is more surprising, however, was that learners’ volunteering was entirely focused towards supporting their community while tutors volunteer to develop their own career. This

Figure 6 Tutors’ and learners’ motivation to participate
shows a philosophical difference between the two groups’ motivations to volunteer. Learners’ usually participate in education first and then as volunteers, so their motivation to volunteer comes wholly from a need within the community. Tutors make the decision to volunteer before they have ever stepped foot in project read and have more and more diverse motivations.

**Why adults participate in adult education.** Adults participate in education for three key reasons. They first want to develop themselves and their career, and to become less isolated. Learners with families may also participate because they feel they need to grow before they can be more involved in their families’ lives. Tutors identified these reasons as well, though using slightly different words. Tutors believe that adults participate in education to develop their career, gain attention (as opposed to become less isolated), and be more involved in community (rather than family). Other reasons tutors believe adults participate for their own benefit include to move forward with their lives (potentially past violence and trauma), because they need literacy to tell their stories, and because they are motivated by learning.

Tutors identified more reasons that adults participate than adults did themselves, likely because each tutor has engaged with more than one learner, while adults were only speaking for themselves. The reasons tutors believe adults participate, that learners did not, are to some extent gradients of those reasons that adults did identify. Moving forward in life is somewhat like developing their career, and telling their stories is like escaping isolation. As per being motivated by learning, it is unlikely that a learner would reflect at this level on their own motivations when they are so much more strongly motivated by career, isolation, and family.
Why participants volunteer. Learners volunteer to support their metaphorical family at Project Read, and participate in education to be more involved in their family at home. Learners think in terms of family, while tutors think of community. Tutors volunteer to give back their community, while they believe learners participate in education to be more involved in community. This focus on community is found elsewhere in tutors’ motivation to volunteer. They feel it is their responsibility to give back to their community, and because learner community members need someone to support them. Both groups similarly identify responsibility as a key motivator to volunteer. Further research must learn more about the idea and role of family at Project Read. I will discuss this in more depth later on.

Tutors are uniquely motivated, compared to learners, because they volunteer to better themselves. Tutors volunteer to build their careers. As previously discussed I believe that this is because they begin volunteering by choice; sometimes this choice is motivated by the self. Learners, however, are begin volunteering because they identify a need within the community; self-improvement does not cross their minds when it comes to volunteering.

How participants discussed barriers to learning in adulthood.

Participants described 10 identifiable barriers to learning in adulthood. In figure 7 I have categorized these as either economic, social, experiential, or educational in nature. Despite being differently categorized, these barriers are all either forms of, or products of systemic violence. How participants discuss systemic violence and barriers to learning in adulthood is critical to how Project Read supports learners who have experienced violence.
It is worth noting that a couple of frequently seen concepts are not present here. When I spoke with participants about the effects of trauma, they spoke about the mind, body, and soul. Each of these represents a facet of experience. The mind thinks, the body lives, and the soul feels. Participants used different terms in place of soul, such as spirit or heart. All of these concepts similarly represent a more instinctual and less logical means of experience than thinking. Mary, for instance, said that “trauma is what happens to your mind and body and heart when something in your world shakes you up,” while Jinn told me that “[trauma] manifests itself in your body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

In the discussion that follows I do not explicitly discuss the body, soul, spirit, or spirit. Barriers that affect the mind, body, and soul have all been grouped together as experiential barriers. Similarly, I will discuss external social barriers, economic barriers that involve a lack of resources, and educational barriers that are associated with negative experiences in education.

**Economic barriers.** Economic barriers are those effects that preclude learning and originate from a lack of resources or opportunity. Society is structured in a manner that expects literacy development to take place in childhood, accompanied by care from the learner’s family. Assuming hypothetically that literacy development only occurs in school, an adult who was passed through school before they learned the content may have 12 years of material to catch up on. Public school roughly follows the hours of a full-time job, excluding homework. It is possible for children to attend and focus on school because they have a family and community supporting them. An adult who does not have this support and who works at least one full-time job already doesn’t have the
time for learning of this intensity. This is even more significant considering that there are many opportunities to develop literacy other than school, that adult learners have been denied.

The consequence of this is that adult-learning typically follows a watered-down schedule of half-days or once-a-week sessions. Learners can still experience improved

Figure 7 Barriers to learning in adulthood
livelihoods from participating this frequently. Some participants at Parkdale Project Read meet with their tutor 2 hours a week and benefit just from having someone caring to talk to. Participants who attend one group learning session every day would be involved for 8 hours per week. Whether they actually absorb the content or not, their participation could be a success because they are getting out of the house and socializing as opposed to locking themselves in their homes all week.

The learners whom this barrier affects most are those in direct competition with others for access to employment or other opportunities. An adult learner who applies to college or university is competing with applicants who have benefitted from 12 years of fulltime public schooling. One who is applying for an entry-level job could be competing with dozens of applicants with bachelor’s or graduate degrees. To succeed consistently in these competitions adult learners need to be able to learn more intensely than is possible without continued support. Lizet explained to me the difficulty that her peers face.

They have to learn the stuff that they need to go to college. Basically Tuesday to Thursday from 9 to 12 o'clock. It is at your own pace. Most people are working and other people are mothers. Mothers who have to focus on their children. I am not in this case but I am working. I am working Thursday to Sunday from 3 to 1 o'clock in the morning. When I reach home it is 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock. It is not very easy to focus because you have to work and study.

Unless an adult has the resources available to them, it can be difficult for them to stay afloat, or support a family, and still have free time to dedicate to learning.
**Social barriers.** Social barriers involve interaction between individuals. Mary explained to me that after poverty, adult learners overwhelmingly experience “varying forms of oppression, inequity and often discrimination.” Social barriers are deeply connected to economics. I will return to Lizet, who shared with me her frustration with discrimination in the job market. Lizet has graduated from high-school and is able to support herself financially, but is not comfortable or happy with where she is at in life.

She wants to attend university but needs to upgrade her education first. To compete with other applicants she needs a more rigorous program than is available at Parkdale Project Read. Parkdale Project Read is free and follows hours that work for her, but to attend programs at George Brown College or with the Toronto District she would need to work fewer hours yet pay more for her education. This economic barrier causes Lizet to face discrimination and oppression socially, in interactions with others. Lizet said,

> [Adult learners] are going to face other students who went to college or went to the TDSB schools and studied grade 12 English at a college level. If you don’t have this kind of stuff when you’re going there you’re going to face some problems. I am going to study for a career that doesn’t need much English but I’m going to face some issues because these people they went to the schools.

This learner is frustrated because she speaks English as a second language and must compete with native English speakers to attend university. She recognizes that she does not have strong English skills and has chosen a career that English is not important in. Even though Lizet doesn’t need to speak English to do the work
this career requires, she fears that she must look like a native-speaker to be competitive in the job-market.

**Experiential barriers.** Experiential barriers exist within the learner’s direct experience, although they very well may have social or economic origins. Lizet does not have the support to participate in the rigorous education she needs and is not emotionally and psychologically able to stay where she is at. The despair that she faces is an example of an experiential barrier. Common experiential barriers that adult learners face include self-doubt, feeling defective, and discrimination due to what experiences that are labelled ‘ill mental health’. These barriers has a huge impact on an adult’s ability to be present in learning. For example, learners who are unable to leave the house or participate consistently due to fear and anxiety are discriminated against in learning programs with standardized curriculums. After Shihadeh’s husband died, she was overcome by anguish and locked herself in her home. She did not describe this as a ‘mental health issue’, but dealing with illness and death can have drastic effects that are labelled as ‘mental instability’. Learners who are labelled as ‘mentally unstable’ are no better or worse as individuals because of it, but it is clear that they will have a worse experience in traditional education systems that value stability and standardization.

**Barriers in education.** Adults often have negative experiences in education that haunt them over time and prevent their return to the classroom. Jinn described this past negative experiences as one of the biggest barriers to adult learning. She recalled how adults face “all of the triggers that might come up [in school again. Parents are] dealing with teachers and principals and intergenerational stuff that comes up around
low literacy.” Adults who had negative experiences in school relive all of these experiences vicariously through their children.

**Community and support**

**The importance of community and its rights.** Historically, Parkdale Project Read was built up out of a expressed need for literacy education in the Parkdale Community. Rita Cox, the head librarian for the Parkdale branch of the Toronto Public Library, started literacy programs in the library because she recognized the need within the community. The effect of her work was so great that the City of Toronto would later name a park after her, a couple minutes’ walk from where Parkdale Project Read is located today. Parkdale Project Read provides learners from the Parkdale Community and the City of Toronto with the opportunity for a supportive family to learn and grow with, and a safe space from which they can become more involved in their community.

Almost all of the participants in Parkdale Project Read come from the Parkdale community or surrounding neighbourhoods. Learners have the opportunity to participate in group learning sessions and to receive one-to-one support. When learners work in groups they learn with and receive support from other members of their community. Learners identify strongly with the Parkdale community and Parkdale Project Read acts as a safe space and community hub within it. Learners who are unable to get to Parkdale Project Read on their own are provided support to help them. Learners are given TTC tokens each session when the program’s funding permits. If learners are late or have conflicting appointments they organize carpools between each other. Parkdale Project Read also holds learning sessions at Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre and Queen Victoria public school. First, this creates other opportunities to
participate geographically. Second, this brings Parkdale Project Read to the learners’ micro-communities. Learners who participate in other activities at Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, or whose children attend Queen Victoria public school, will have an easier time participating in Parkdale Project Read because the opportunity to learn is brought to them.

Learners are seen to have an inherent right to access Parkdale Project Read; it is a part of their community and it is not up to staff to decide who can or cannot participate. Mary shared with me an example of this.

We are just kind of dealing with that at the moment around what we tolerate. If you have been drinking and have the headphones on and you are singing and you are unaware of how loud you’re being. It is like how much of that, a lot of programs have a zero tolerance policy for lots of things. Using certain language etc. If you really want it to be this home away from home. It’s a fine line because you want people to feel safe... There’s a real tension around that. How much can you bring your whole self to project read and how much does that get in the way of people safety?

In this example, a learner who was using the computer was listening to music through headphones as they worked and had begun to sing along to the music at a level that disrupts other learners. The purpose of Parkdale Project Read, above all else, is to provide support for learners. Mary continued, “What does it mean to ask someone to take two weeks break or four weeks break at what point do we ask them to not come back? I told her that forbidding a learner to participate in Parkdale Project Read, their community, would really be exile. “That is an important word.” she responded. “As we
have been talking, we haven't used it. I think we’re going to bring it back to the group and use it because that's the word I was thinking of.” Mary had been discussing it with the rest of the collective; it was a very contentious issue that would have an impact on how the program implements its guiding principles. She knew at some level that it would be exile for the learner, though they hadn’t used this word. Kicking out a disruptive learner is not typically as contentious of an issue in adult literacy programs as it is at Parkdale Project Read.

**Support for learners.** A learner’s first point of support is their relationships with volunteer tutors and placement students. Tutors and placement students facilitate one-to-one and group learning sessions. Learning sessions make up the bulk of learners’ participation at Parkdale Project Read. Aside from other learners, tutors and placement students are the group that learners interact with the most. Learners have so much going on in their lives. The supportive relationships between learners, tutors, and placement students helps keep track of what is going on.

Supportive relationships between learners, literacy workers, and placement students take the shape in the worker or student being there for the learner. Literacy workers and placement students can be a listening ear for learners when they feel like they don’t matter or that no one cares what they have to say. When learners are ready to deal with or effect their situation in some way literacy workers can help them plan of action. They reflect on learners’ situation, refer learners to community services that may be helpful, and help mediate conflict for the learner as they initiate change.
A core component of literacy is reflecting on one’s situation and developing more agency to affect it. Learners cannot develop better conflict mediation strategies without developing their literacy. Conflict mediation and literacy draw on many of the same skills, however, so the two are able to be incorporated and developed together. When conflict arises for learners at Parkdale Project Read, one-to-one or group learning sessions can be adapted to address it. If learners are arguing more often, for example, then the group might engage emotional literacy work and how to deal with anger.

Supporting learners means making room for them to learn what they need to be self-determining in their own lives. Support for learners at Parkdale Project Read mimics what this autonomy and agency would look like. It creates situations for learners to act in ways as though they already had these capacities, and to then bring them into other aspects of their lives. For instance, May was supported as she became more involved in the program’s community board of directors. She has since become more involved in the program and her employment. She said to me,

Project Read gave me the opportunity to work and a decent job, [it] got me to be involved with them about the justice [telling group, volunteering,
[and] everything... Work with women, work with children, work with teachers.

When learners need a break from stressful situations they should be able to leave them and return when they are ready. At Project Read it is expected that learners are able to leave for as long as they need to, address whatever is causing them stress, and return when they are ready. This is not mandatory, but the opportunity for learners to take time off without the curriculum leaving them behind improves their ability to participate. Traditionally, education relies on graded assignments and competition between peers. Learners can have their assignments or participation graded if they want, but it is instead the norm for learners to participate cooperatively instead of competitively, and to be motivated by long-term development instead of short-term grading. Learning at Parkdale Project Read is adapted to meet learners’ needs. When learners speak up and try different learning strategies they are learning to take on the world on their own terms. In their day-to-day lives they may ask for accommodations that they were otherwise unaware they could have. They may refuse situations that do not meet their needs, situations that would otherwise do them more harm than good.

Before continuing to discuss other supportive relationships I would like to discuss three anecdotes that exemplify how learners receive support at Parkdale Project Read. Learners are supported by each other, by volunteers and placement students, and by collective and contract staff. Rebecca, a placement student who facilitated group learning sessions, was on the program’s frontlines and often saw learners supporting and caring for each other. She responded to my questions about support as follows:
Learners support each other a lot of the time. Parkdale Project Read as an organization is there and its collective members, staff members, its volunteers are there to facilitate space and facilitate learning. I think sometimes to facilitate community in the sense in that way as well. I think it is really the learners that come in who then create these networks of support for themselves to be able to talk about what is going on in their lives, to bail, and to help each other become present in this space to then learn. Just yesterday, I guess last week some learners who really wanted to discuss and talk about the murders that have happened at Chapel Hill down at the University of Carolina. That is obviously especially for learners that are of the Muslim faith that is something that is taking up a lot of space for them. They want other people to learn about it; to have that happen as a group and then incorporate that into learning.

Learners are the primary community at Parkdale Project Read and the program is administered in a way to create as many supportive opportunities for them as possible. It should be noted that when learners support each other, while these interactions may be made easier by the space, learners are the agential actors who are really initiating these relationships. They have been told by staff, volunteers, and placement students that it is important for them to check in with the group and bring up their emotions or any conflict that they may experience. Now that they realize that speaking up for themselves is not only a possibility but is of great benefit to them, learners take the initiative, form supportive relationships, and engage with these relationships to create and strengthen their community.
Jolene, a volunteer tutor, works one-to-one with a learner at Parkdale Project Read. She has a very strong relationship with the learner she works with and the support that she gives is a constant surprise to him. In this example, Jolene and her learner work together through a potentially traumatizing experience.

This week he showed up for the lesson and it turned out that his grandmother was in the hospital since the weekend and he didn't know how to look into his phone to find out where she was. I said let's get the heck out of here. I showed him on the phone how to find his Nana. That's an active literacy that is not right for everybody but I just wanted to help them. We are friends. He said on the bus that he was surprised, that he didn't think I would do something like that. I feel happy now that there's trust in that relationship I feel that maybe he'll be more open to that feeling. Letting me in, he acts like he doesn't care about reading and he doesn't want to learn anything but I think this just a barrier.

The learner who Jolene works with is does not participate in many relationships that give him support. He is not ready to participate in group learning sessions and therefore does not have access to the same community Rebecca and I spoke about. His mother and grandmother are his primary supports at home. His mother does not spend a lot of time with him, however, and his grandmother is becoming more ill. Jolene recognizes that this learner needs a strong supportive relationship in his life and the trust that this pair shares enables this relationship between them. She has combined literacy education and social support on an individual basis and has with no doubt contributed to her learner’s wellness and livelihood.
Learners lastly receive support from collective and contract staff, the administrators of Parkdale Project Read. The primary objective of collective and contract staff is to provide support to meet learners’ diverse needs. June, a tutor at Parkdale Project Read, has been working one-to-one with a learner for a while now, but has recently encountered a barrier to her learner’s development.

We had been making progress on both word recognition and sounding out words. She remembers a lot. The words that she knows she has memorized and she can tell you how to spell it. There are a number of words she has that were quite significant. I think we are at a bit of a standstill right now but the administrator said that she was thinking of bringing in an iPad where we could put the large font on and see if she could read that.

The learner that June works with has difficulty reading small to standard sized text. This makes it difficult for her to learn to read new words because, whether or not she can recognize letters and sound the words out, she cannot make out the shapes of the letters on paper. To accommodate the learner, collective members proposed that the pair work with an iPad to quickly enlarge font so the learner can see it. This sort of technology has been made possible by donations from community partners; staff in turn figure out the best ways to use this technology to support learners. June and her learner meet at a location away from Parkdale Project Read, though the two were connected through this program. To allow this technology to leave the center and enter the greater community shows the great trust that staff have for learners and tutors.

**How tutors receive support.** Placement students and volunteer tutors receive support primarily from each other and from staff. Because their relationship and
interactions with learners are characterized by the tutor providing support for the learner, there are few opportunities in day-to-day operations where learners support tutors. I will discuss learners supporting tutors, though in proportion to its predominance in tutor-learner interaction. The ways in which these tutors receive the most support at Parkdale Project Read are through accommodations from staff and tutor support groups.

I previously discussed how flexible the programming is at Parkdale Project Read for learners; they are able to drop in and out, taking time off when they need it and returning when they have the capacity to participate. The same is true, to an extent, for placement students and volunteer tutors. Collective staff supervise tutor’s work and participation at Parkdale Project Read. If a tutor does not feel like they can participate on any given day, or for a period of time, staff attempt to make accommodations for that tutor. Another placement student may fill in for them, for example. If this is not possible, staff members are able to take their place, or if they are too busy the other tutors supporting the group can spread out the work to make up for the absence. The caveat to this is one-to-one tutoring. In a one-to-one tutoring session if no one is able to fill in for the tutor then the session would be canceled. The difference at Parkdale Project Read is that staff are understanding in situations like this and recognize that while the tutor’s absence did lead to the session being canceled, a lack of available back-up tutors did as well. The optimism, trust, and hopefulness that is present in tutor-staff relationships leaves all parties eager to improve the system rather than distribute blame.
Tutors receive other forms of accommodation at Parkdale Project Read. A tutor who is able to work, however in a different capacity, can have alternative work made available to them. This way the tutor is still able to labour for, participate in, and contribute to the organization to the fullest extent they can. Rebecca, a placement student at Parkdale Project Read, was very appreciative when the collective gave her modified work to complete when she was home sick. By doing this, the collective weakened the barrier to participation that is created by illness and physical health.

Things in my own life have made participating more difficult. The collective staff have been beautifully accommodating where I have been doing some of my hours from home when I can’t physically leave the house or make it in. I have been doing a lot of my own research around the website and my own reading around violence stuff which is stuff I have been doing since last semester as well. They have been letting me do my hours from home and have been really accommodating.

Rebecca is a placement student, which means that she is unpaid but does receive compensation for her work in the form of course credit. Each hour she labours for Parkdale Project Read puts her closer to completing her college’s program. Therefore each hour she is unable to participate is an hour more she has to make up in the future. Traditionally when an employee stays home, they are not compensated for their time, unless they can provide a doctor’s note. They are already sick; not paying the employee only hurts them more. Instead of reinforcing this dynamic, the collective found Rebecca work that she could do from home. Because Rebecca was able to do modified work
from home she was able to continue contributing to the program, learning, and achieving placement hours.

Tutors are able to provide support for each other at tutor support groups. Group learning sessions for learners create opportunities for them to develop as a unit and support each other. These support groups would be an opportunity for tutors to do the same. The motivation for tutor support groups came from many different sources.

Mary, a member of the collective, acknowledged that there was room for improvement in how staff support tutors. She recognizes that the goal of the organization is to provide learners support and that tutors need support themselves to do this effectively. In what are called ‘tutor community meetings’, tutors would be able to check in with each other and engage with a sounding board for their ideas. In this regard, Mary stated:

Sometimes tutors feel isolated. They are doing this and need to be able to have a reality check. They might ask each other if it violates any boundaries to take their learner out for coffee. They just need to check in. This student isn’t progressing fast enough, as fast as they imagined. It is really slow, the progress. Yes in fact they are doing a great job and this is the time it takes.

Jolene, a volunteer tutor and one of the heads of Parkdale Project Read’s volunteer organization traces another motivation for tutor support groups. She has been volunteering for the organization for five years and realized that she “didn’t even really know the other tutors because [they] meet during [their] own timeslots and don’t really connect with anyone else.” By joining one of these support groups, tutors can get to know and be resources for each other. Tutors in
these groups will also be more familiar with the issues that each tutor-learner pair faces. When a tutor needs time away from the program one from their support group can fill in more effectively and the learner they work with can continue their development.

A tutor support group is a team of 5-10 tutors who meet in a situation guided by a more experienced tutor-facilitator. With tutors divided into different support groups instead of all being a part of the same one it becomes more likely that the group will be able to find a mutually acceptable time to meet. In the past tutor support groups have failed because volunteer tutors are already giving the organization unpaid labour and coming in for another day doesn’t always work. Aside from the facilitator, the tutors who comprise each group share a mix of experience and a blend of skills. New tutors will be automatically placed in existing groups when they finish training so they feel less isolated and have access to support. Much like other aspects of participation at Parkdale Project Read, attendance in these groups is flexible and not strictly mandatory. Ideally, the groups would meet on a regular basis but in order for the support to be effective the schedule must be as supportive as the content. The goal of these groups is to improve access to support for tutors, not to create work and burden. Groups that don’t have time to meet often are still able to connect via email. Tutor support groups build on the committed supportive relationships between tutors and introduce new tutors to these relationships as soon as possible.

**How staff receive support.** As illustrated in figures 6 and 8, the participant groups who have increased access to support are also those with the least administrative authority. Likewise staff, one of the participant groups with the greatest
administrative authority, have very little access to support. Both of the collective members that I interviewed told me that the greatest support staff receive is from other staff. About this, Mary said to me

“While we have a mutually supportive relationship, I don’t think we get the same kind of support from a community board that we would from a full-time, on-site boss.”

Jinn likewise told me that “not having a top-down managerial type of structure creates space to be more cooperative and supportive.” Parkdale Project Read has a very horizontal organizational structure. The absence of middle-level managers with significant administrative authority means that, at Parkdale Project Read, groups with higher authority have more groups they can in turn support. Because the structure is not vertical, however, there are fewer groups with greater authority than staff who can support them.

Staff support learners, tutors, and the community board. This leaves only staff to support each other, just as learners and tutors support themselves. One way they do this is by checking in and reporting back to each other. Staff as a participant group function as a collective and embody this collegial atmosphere in their behaviour and interactions. The collective has a group workload that is divided amongst the team; when one staff member needs help they can ask the others to take on more work. It is to the advantage of the group for each member to take on this work because they too have a stake in its completion.
The collective have reached out to external supports to compensate for the relative lack of available support within the organization. In a previous iteration of the staff collective, the team saw a psycho-dramatist. Mary explained the situation to me.

When we used to have this model we actually went to see a psycho-dramatist as a team and even then individually. She was like a counselor but did stuff around psychodrama. Psychodrama is kind of acting out scenarios and using drama to get to the crux. It’s arts-based therapy. That was a way I think we felt supported by the program because the program paid for it.

The collective shared this psycho-dramatist and also visited their own individual therapists. Mary said to me, “I don’t think you can do this work without having some kind of formal support.” She would like to see this support built into the organization.

The ideal case would be for Parkdale Project Read to put a therapist on retainer “to draw on when times get tough” or when staff disagreed about how to handle situations and needed to work them through with an outside perspective. This, however, costs more money than is available from the program. Staff already earn much lower of a salary than they should to save money on behalf of the organization, and shouldering the cost of a therapist on retainer would heighten this burden greatly.

**How does support affect adult learning?** In Chapter 2 I discussed the literature as it pertains to the effects of violence and trauma on adult learning. Now I will present their impact as participants have witnessed at Project Read.

Learners living in poverty, a far too common form of hardship, may have difficulty making room in their lives for learning to take place. Project Read responds to this by offering them help surviving. Administrators provide learners with
accommodations such as “TTC tokens or bus passes … to try to help them get to and from learning.” Additionally, all of the services at Project Read are free for learners. This allows learners who have unstable housing to access the program without cost, and further economic strain.

Violence and trauma at home take up a lot of space in learners’ lives as well.

Project Read makes room for learners, so that learners can focus on their education and exert less energy trying to fit it into their lives. Rebecca explained one impact of trauma on learners’ participation, and how Project Read has responded to it.

When you are dealing with constant trauma and other hardship and violence and all of these things read or write or whatever. Your literacy goal is, it suddenly seems not quite as important perhaps as it is to deal with what is in front of you … [Project Read does not exist] under a strict format or curriculum. If people need to come and go that is possible. It makes room for people’s lives. And this shift that comes up in it.

Project Read operates on a flexible curriculum that attempts to follow learners’ needs and learning goals. This curriculum allows learners to come and go and miss as little content as possible.

Violence, hardship, and trauma negatively impact learners’ confidence and self-worth. This, in turn, makes them feel worthless and incapable of learning. If you are unable to learn, why bother? Jolene’s learner had a similar experience.

He thinks he’s garbage and he was passed along and people did not care … Those are the people who are told they are told to trust. Day after day. To me basically are taken by your parents or grandparents or whatever and
your told us the best thing for you get in there. And then you treated like garbage all day.

Jolene’s learner was the victim of abuse at home, and by those he was told to trust. Trusting relationships, especially in learning, must be free from judgement. Without harsh judgement, like this participant faced, learners may open up and begin to trust in themselves, their community, and their self-worth. June’s learner had experienced similar treatment, and responded positively to the judgement-free space that June created. June recalled that “when [the learner] started telling her stories, and having the written down, and the teacher was not judgmental about the stories suddenly she just took off. She said ‘now I can trust you’. And it made a tremendous difference.”

Violence and trauma can also destroy the victim’s trust, and motivation to communicate with others. This is especially significant when the learner was hurt by someone they trusted. June shared with me a child’s experience after someone they trusted raped them.

I could imagine if a child were for example if a child were raped. Not being able to trust Adults. Therefore not being open to any communication that was coming from adults. About information or about adult learning. Closing down their communication.

Victims of violence and trauma may close down their communication in an attempt to limit their exposure to future abuse. Having at least one person they can rebuild a trust for, that is consistently there for them, is important to the healing process. Jinn explained that there are learners she has worked with who
could “call [her] today and [she] would put everything down and talk to them, support them.” Having a strong community of allies can also help learners stay on track and keep focused. Violence and trauma may lead to “the lack of ability to focus and hunker down and do the work.” Mary explained this as “a lot of spinning around.” Jinn worked with a learner who had a similar experience. The learner had been kicked out of school and has had multiple opportunities “to go back to school or attend class … [but] she was drifting in and out and zoning out. Just blanking out on things.” When this learner joined Project Read, Jinn worked closely with them to keep them on track and moving forward in life. Jinn shared this learner’s story with me.

“I made referrals and said if you wanted to you could probably talk to somebody about this so we give a referral to a counselor who I believe she did seek out and get support from. As someone who, I was the first person she told so she trusted me. And want to keep talking about it. We met many times to make sure her story I supported her through the legal process. Just as an advocate. As an ally. Even someone to sit beside her. I didn't necessarily want to speak for her but was just there.”

We see here how all of these supports begin to build on each other. This learner had established trust towards Jinn. Jinn recognized this opportunity and supported her as an ally. Having someone in her ring helped the learner feel confident and stay focused. This service may have cost the learner elsewhere, but Jinn was there for the learner without charge.
There was no specific support that directly addressed learners’ diminished curiosity and openness to learning. Nor was there any effect of trauma that trusting relationships specifically responded to. With regards to diminished curiosity, the damage is already done. The learner has already become disinterested in education and the only way to address this effect is to create relevant learning opportunities that do not cause more harm and further damage the learner’s curiosity. Similarly, trusting relationships do not respond to any specific need. Trust is important in all relationships. With regard to learning, trusting relationships are necessary to not exacerbate the effects of violence and trauma. Diminished curiosity is a product of chronic, long-term exposure to violence and trauma. Trusting relationships are necessary over long time-spans before learners can heal from these effects. Although both of these tiles are similarly related to chronic exposure and long timelines, I did not pair them together because there is no specific connection between the two; that is to say, the support does not specifically address the negative effect.

These findings are relevant because they show how well developed the supports for learners are at Project Read compared to learners’ needs. In Chapter 3 I discussed the reasons why I chose Project Read for this case study. Among these reasons, I chose Project Read because, as an organization, it attempts to address the effects of violence and trauma on learning. These findings show that this attempt is working, and that Project Read has a well-developed system in place to support learners, that is aware of the community’s specific needs. This is no doubt due to Jenny Horsman’s research and involvement in the organization. Most administrators as well have some degree of experience as community support workers. Between the efforts of administrators, and
the knowledge produced from Horsman’s research, Project Read has developed a relevant system of community support.

**Time, money, and the Ministry**

Interactions between Parkdale Project Read and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities lead to conflict. The first time I spoke with her, Jinn said of the organization’s relationship with the Ministry,

> I think that it absolutely reinforces the ways in which power over continues to make all of these experiences feel violent. It feels like violence. That threat of losing the funding is this constant kind of thing that was held over your head. If you don’t do this, this is what might happen.

A couple months later when I asked Jinn about conflict, she said that the organization was dealing with “lots of sort of ministerial things. That’s probably the only one.” The conflict between Project Read and the Ministry is not only impactful enough to be called ‘violent’, but according to Jinn it is also the only source of conflict worth mentioning. Mary had a different perspective on these interactions. She took out a stack of files and said

> This is a compliance visit report. This stuff is just, is really difficult. It is difficult too, because of what is happening now in the world, a lot of this is required. It is disheartening and frustrating.

This conflict is clearly a big problem, but what is causing it? An obvious answer is fundamental philosophical differences, but those could be put aside to enable the two organizations to get along at least bureaucratically.
Even communication is breaking down. Jinn recanted that the Ministry sent “lots of very blunt direct to the point emails demanding information about this and that, [that were] required by 5 PM on Friday when they arrive at noon on a Friday then none of us are in the office.” There is something deeper, something inherent to the current situation at Project Read, which is precluding functional and cooperative relationships.

**Shortage of time and money.** There are not enough resources available to Project Read, in order for administrators to meet their goals. The resources of greatest shortage are time and money. According to Jinn, there is a lack of “time really more than anything else. Not enough time to do all the things I dream of. And resources for sure. One of those resources is financial resources. To make up for the lack of time, staff and tutors work more and do a greater variety of work. The result is that staff are stretched thin. In Jinn’s case, she feels she is stretched thin “because [she is] often juggling a lot of different things, [such as] being a parent, working elsewhere and [being at Project Read].” Jinn’s lack of time then affects her peers, who in turn “feel stretched because of [her] absence at times.” Jolene has taken on more responsibility to combat this. She has started compiling a calendar to organize the grant application process. She explained this to me.

I know that from working on the fundraising committee that if they had better funding that would make things easier. Staff are really stretched out. The shortages of time and money are interdependent. Workers do not have enough time to get their duties done and pursue fundraising. In turn, because there is not enough money, administrators cannot hire staff to alleviate the
previous burden. It is therefore significant that Jolene is using her time to break this cycle and bring in more resources for Project Read.

The shortage of money affects learners more than that of time. Money is used to improve the quality of support delivered to learners. For Lizet, the shortage of money means that Project Read cannot hire more qualified and experienced instructors. As funding becomes scarcer, administrators are unable to provide learners bus tokens and food. May explained this source of conflict to me. She said that learners ask “so many

Figure 9 Time, Money, and the Ministry
things; why don't they give us tokens or tickets? Why don't they give us the food bank?

That's how we face it.” She continued to reflect on this issue.

“The thing is the budget. You have to understand the budget ... If we force them to give it to us when we want it all the time guess what? This place is going to be closed. And then you won't have anybody. We have to support the staff.”

May argued that learners must support the staff for Project Read to continue to run. This is a kind proposition, but it is against the program’s mission statement. The goal of Project Read is to support learners. It is a clear sign that something is wrong when learners need to support the rest of the organization for it to stay open. This problem is that there is not enough resources flowing into the organization for it to support learners and continue to grow.

Conflict with the Ministry. The shortage of resources is both a catalyst for conflict in Project Read’s relationship with the Ministry, and a consequence of it. The shortage of time prevents Project Read from being able to operate on the Ministry’s timeline, and the Ministry does not allow accommodation. Project Read had a good relationship with the Ministry’s previous consultant. Time and deadlines were less of a source of conflict because the administrators “actually had a good relationship.” However, now “it is so crummy and top-down that it makes it not fun.” Jinn feels like the Ministry’s consultant is her boss, which is not the case. The ministry has non-consensual power over Project Read. Jinn explained that “the team is worried right now about what happens if [they] don't comply.”
Conflict further arises between Project Read and the Ministry’s ideologies. Project Read administrators are responsible only to learners and the program’s board of directors, which is largely comprised of other community members, but they are forced to submit a business plan to the Ministry before the start of each fiscal year to continue receiving funding. As previously discussed, there is a huge difference between how Project Read and the Ministry understand literacy and literacy education. Relationships within the organization are largely insulated from outside affect and conflict. Difference between these organization’s philosophies magnifies conflict within Project Read because administrators are forced into a relationship to access resources. This relationship leads to unnecessary reporting, documentation that violates learners’ privacy, and physical illness for staff. Jinn explained that Ministry’s imposed duty to report led to stress-induced physical illness, and “impacted [the program because] she had to take medical leave.” She explained how this led to further strain on the program’s resources. “The collective members have to take up the slack. It impacts everybody … in the wrong ways.” Jinn referred to the shortage or resources and relations with the Ministry as a “cycle of violence.” If the Ministry was more accommodating, or there was enough time and money to dedicate a worker to dealing with what Jinn called “ministerial things,” then it might be possible to break this cycle. Until that happens, the shortage of time and money will continue to exacerbate conflict in the program’s relationship with the Ministry.

**The Project Read Family.** My first instinct was to uncritically support the notion that Project Read is a family, and that this is a positive thing. Learners’ praise of Project Read described it as a family. Shihaddeh, for instance, told me that the program was her
family and that, when the centre was closed, she missed them and longed to return.

May volunteers for Project Read because she considers the community to be her family. The community supports her and she must support them back. Even Lizet, who strongly spoke about the shortcomings of the organization in supporting her learning, was extremely appreciative towards the community. Mary described the program to me,

A lot of people don't have family. This is their community. This is their family. We will talk about this being a home away from home.

The learners, volunteers, and staff are part of a tightly knit community. This community is a large part of why many participants stay with the program. But what if there is a downside to this family rhetoric? What if the idea that Project Read is a family, before it is an organization or business, is detrimental to the programs growth and potential?

When I returned to the data to further analyze this theme I was surprised at what I found. There was significant difference between how participants spoke about PPR as a family, and how they spoke about the impacts of family on learners. Project Read was highly lauded for being a fantastic community, supportive towards learners, and adored by all participants. As a family, Project Read was flawless. In contrast to this was learners’ experiences with family outside Project Read, especially from staff and tutors’ perspective.

From their own perspective, learners’ experience with family outside Project Read was characterized by violence, mistreatment, and struggle. Apart from these very broad experiences, learners and tutors spoke little about family to me. Staff and tutors had much more to say. Tutors and staff similarly felt that learners often struggled to support their families. They acknowledged that children were at an advantage when
their parents read to them; learners often experience shame because they don’t believe they can fulfil this expectation. Family can tie one to community, but according to staff and tutors, learners find themselves in conflict with families that do not support them.

Jolene told me of her learner’s family,

- His family is not great. His mom lives upstairs but won’t even come downstairs … His grandmother has not been supportive of our relationship really. His grandmother one time told him that I didn’t care.

In a similar vein, June explained to me a critical moment of trust between her and the learner she works with.

- Anyway we went through all of that. When we finished she said I think it is easier for me to believe that somebody was stealing and breaking in and stealing and it is to admit that I might not be able to do the locking up that I should etc. If I can't do that my family will put me in a home.

This learner often came home to find her door unlocked. She told June that this was because someone was breaking into her house and stealing her food and clothing. After discussing other reasons the door might be open, she began to realize that she might have left it unlocked, and donated the food and clothing to her church. The learners’ fear, that her family would lock her away if she was leaving her apartment unlocked, was great enough that she created these possible explanations just to avoid considering she might have forgotten to lock the door.

As participant groups, tutors and staff had intricate and fleshed out depictions of learners’ experience with family. This did not come out in conversations with the learners themselves. Future research must investigate participants’ understandings of
family, their projections of family onto the Project Read community, and the impact of this on program delivery and growth. This research must specifically inquire into the difference between positive and negative idealized families. A sample research question might be, ‘what is the effect of considering Project Read a family?’ My hypothesis at this point is that Project Read is only a family insofar as having a positive experience of family is necessary in order to heal past traumatic and violent experiences of it. Project Read is liberating and supportive. Because participants call it a family, they equate correlation to causation and assume that it is liberating and supportive because it is a family. I expect that research would show that calling Project Read a family rules out aspects of future growth, such as business-oriented fundraising and marketing. These strategies are necessary to grow beyond a certain point, which Project Read is fast approaching.
Chapter Six: Concluding thoughts

This thesis produced significant practical findings. First, it found that support and authority flow in opposite directions through Project Read’s organizational structure. Those participant groups with low administrative authority, such as learners, have the greatest access to support. Conversely, the collective staff has great administrative authority but little access to support. This is because each participant group provides support to those with lower authority. This leaves the collective with little access to support within the organization.

Tutors and learners participate and volunteer in adult literacy education for very different reasons. Adult learners participate in education to develop their career, become less isolated, and become able to do more for their families. Tutors believe that adult learners participate to move forward in life, gain attention, and gain the literacy required to tell their stories. Tutors described many diverse reasons for adult learners’ participation than the learners themselves did. In terms of volunteering, both adult learners and tutors volunteer at Project Read primarily to support others. Learners volunteer to support their Project Read family, while tutors do to support community. Interestingly, tutors volunteer to develop their careers and further their own goals, but learners volunteer exclusively to support others.

Adults experience barriers that prevent them from accessing learning. These barriers are economic, social, experiential, and educational. Economic barriers include poverty and precarious employment. Socially, discrimination, oppression, and passing and hiding obstruct learning. In their day to day experiences, learners are faced with self-doubt, feelings of being defective, and conflict around ‘mental health’. Lastly, adult
learners’ negative experiences in childhood education haunt them in adulthood, as they fear returning to school and may be triggered by their children’s participation in education.

I concluded the thesis by arguing that a shortage of time and money exacerbate conflict between Project Read and the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Some conflict is to be anticipated, but these organizations’ relationship is dysfunctional and negatively effects Project Read’s day-to-day capacity to support learners. It is critical that Project Read work to diversify its funding to first be less reliant on the Ministry, and second to be able to hire staff specifically to liaise with the Ministry.

**Shortcomings and room for growth.**

Parkdale Project Read is a wonderful organization. Its staff and volunteers do a great deal for the participants and the program’s community. Like every program, however, there are shortcomings that could be addressed to improve the quality of service, and directions the program could grow to better meet the community’s needs. I will preface this discussion by emphasizing that I do not mean to imply that the program is being negligently operated. Instead, I am responding to shortcomings as they were presented to me by participants, and framing these shortcomings as opportunities for even greater success. To achieve this success, Project Read must pursue more diverse funding to free itself as much as possible from the conflict arising from interactions with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

**Ministry Funding and Learner Anonymity.** Project Read operates radically different from how the Ministry, its largest funder, would prefer it to. Mary explained to me that funding “is all about taxpayer dollars being spent well ... no one wants to pay
for” the type of literacy education Project Read promotes. Project Read must first diversify its funding to create room for future growth that is cohesive with the program’s respect for learners independence and anonymity. At the moment there is pressure from the Ministry to for learners to be counted. When learners first register the Ministry would have it that they are registered. Jinn explained the learners’ registration form to me.

   It is a registration form and at the bottom there is a consent thing. We use clear language on that consent [form and] we will read it together and go through that whole form together … we have taken that legalese thing out and we have more clear language way of describing it. But we have had folks refused to sign understandably. And often time’s people will sign and disappear, and then they don’t come back.

Adult literacy learners are an inherently vulnerable population. Mary described them to me as often “being ripped off … [They are] perceived as someone who could easily be tricked … and they are a bit vulnerable to people who want to take advantage.” It is an oxymoron for the Ministry to expect learners to be able to consensually sign a form they can’t confidently read, before they are allowed to access literacy education.

Project Read must not support this directive with anything greater than contempt. The program, however, still implements this sort of registration. Other examples of this include having learners sign for bus tokens, and sign when they attend drop-in group learning sessions. Viktor described Project Read as “a place to go [for learners]. Sometimes just talking for an hour and checking in.” By further diversifying its funding
and outright refusing to report learners’ identifies to the Ministry, the program would show solidarity with its community and resistance to outside authority.

**Fundraising Staff.** With this more diverse funding Project Read must hire proven fundraisers, pursue more aggressive advertising, and hire more paid support staff.

During his time there, Viktor “joined the Parkdale Project Read fundraising team ... trying to get bigger donations.” He admitted to me that the program was “very under [its] goal for the year, by a lot.” Viktor felt this role was a strong fit for him because he could “use some of [his] connections to try and raise awareness about literacy and what [the program does.” Then Viktor finished his placement term. As I have mentioned, Project Read is supported by passionate staff and an eclectically skilled team of volunteers. The shortcoming of this is that most of these staff and volunteers come from social work backgrounds. Project Read must employ trained fundraisers, advertisers, and teachers. By first contracting a fundraising consultant the program would be investing in its economic future. As long as the fundraiser brings more money in than they are paid the program benefits. As Mary dishearteningly told me, taxpayers do not want to pay for the type of literacy that Project Read is providing. Operating like this, like a business, at first appears to conflict with Project Read’s community values. Ultimately it is a matter of the program meeting the community’s needs, the extent to which it does, and avoiding stagnation. Project Read shares many characteristics already with a successful business. It is responsible to a board of directors, it has a firm and clear mission statement, and it has a body of stakeholders to serve. To achieve all of the dreams Jinn shared with me, Project Read must more aggressively pursue private funding. A skilled fundraiser would be able to do this without unfavourable strings
attached, as the staff have already done with Softchoice and as May sought to do with Kobo, but still stay true to Rita Cox’ founding vision.

**Advertising Staff.** Funds must be second spent on advertising, to give the program a greater social presence and attract more qualified volunteers. I will use June’s success as an example here. Before she began volunteering at Project Read, June taught at Ryerson University in early childhood education. She had just retired and was looking for a way to give back to her community in a way that made use of her experience. Aside from teaching at Ryerson, June has taught around the world, including in India and Zimbabwe, and learned about Project Read after a meeting at Ryerson. One of her peers told her that if she was looking to volunteer, there was “no question; by far the best place to volunteer is Parkdale Project Read.” Strategic campaigning, advertising, and social networking would allow Project Read to connect with specifically qualified volunteers.

**Support Staff.** Most importantly, Project Read must hire trained support staff. Project Read’s community is built to support learners, but this is not enough. The most common shortcoming participants shared with me is that there was not enough support. For learners, Mary mentioned that supporting one-to-one learner-tutor pairs was an area she felt Project Read needed to work on. She told me that “sometimes it is hard to keep tabs on what everybody is doing, especially people working off-site.” Lizet’s biggest disappointment with Project Read was that there were no actual college instructors involved in the college-focused academic upgrading program to teach her. June suggested to me that tutors should have an ongoing support group. Mary specifically told me that supporting tutors “is an area we are not great in.” She
continued, “I think we look at the community, and tutors are supporting us to serve learners. But really tutors need support and we haven't been great at it.” Staff attempt to support tutors and other volunteers, and to an extent they succeed, but their time is stretched so thin already that this support costs the program elsewhere. Lastly, the collective is the participant group with the least access to support, but the greatest administrative authority. Mary explained this predicament to me best,

I think people have their own individual therapy. I don't think you can do this work without having some kind of formal support. I think that is happening for many of us but I think it would be good to have sort of a team support that is built, in an ideal world it would be great to have a therapist who we could draw on for when times got tough and when we were in situations and maybe disagreed about how to handle them were just a need to be worked through with someone with an outside person.

The collective and other staff are exposed to second-hand violence, hardship, and trauma on a daily basis. It is a workplace hazard, a risk they are disproportionately exposed to because of their employment. From an occupational health and safety perspective, one could argue that providing staff with a therapist is necessary to protect them from health and safety hazards. All participant groups are faced with insufficient support. After diversifying its funds, investing in fundraising, and hiring an advertising consultant, it is necessary for Project Read to hire more paid support staff to create a healthier, more efficient environment, and to reduce learner and volunteer turnover. Project Read was created to meet a need within the community, and there is plenty of room for growth as publicly funded alternatives fail to do so. Overall expansion, while
addressing these shortcomings, would enable Project Read to positively affect more
lives and more successfully achieve its mission statement.

Limitations and Further Inquiry

One significant limitation in my research was that I did not conduct follow-up
interviews once the primary two interviews were complete. The purpose of the first
interview was to gain a structural understanding of the organization, which I put to
work in the second as I learned about the participants’ supportive relationships. Some
analysis of the first interview did influence the path of the second, but without a third
interview there was no way to follow up and investigate key findings further. The
effects of this are felt throughout the thesis, in almost every major point of analysis. I
have frequently mentioned that these findings I discussed were inferred from the data
after the interviews were complete, and that most findings were not specifically
investigated. Most findings suggest correlations between participant groups, themes,
and effects, but do not come close to proving causation.

Race, Gender, Power, and Family

Only after repeated analysis did I begin to find conflict between persons, and
between their ideas. I believe that there is a lot more surface-level conflict than
participants were willing to share with me, and that they did not share this conflict with
me because they either felt it was either insignificant or not what I wanted to hear. As a
young, white, male researcher, my identity in many ways leads to a power struggle with
participants. Of all the negative things participants had to say, only one really
complained about the program. In every interview I probed towards a discussion about
conflict, but it was always outside conflict. It was always the Ministry at fault. This may
be true most of the time, but everyone gets annoyed from time to time. Out of the nine
participants I spoke with it is unlikely that only one had a problem with how the
program itself.

There is no doubt that race, gender, and power somehow shaped participants’
responses. The more significant influence, however, was family. Participants did not
complain about the program or other community members because the community’s
family ideology prohibited it. A member of the program does not speak badly about
their Project Read family to outsiders. I began this thesis with a discussion of balancing
my roles as an insider tutor, and an outsider researcher. I also spoke of placement
students’ unique situation compared to volunteer tutors; placement students are first a
part of their home institution. I was viewed as a placement student, and not a volunteer
tutor, because I came from a foreign institution to participate at Project Read. I was not
seen as a member of the Project Read family, but instead a member of OISE
participating at Project Read. I came into this thesis thinking that it would be enough to
be seen as an ally, and I was definitely seen as one. I did not realize until it was too late
that I would not have access to the full picture unless I was seen as a part of the family.
This brings up an ethical quandary; would it have been permissible to become an insider
by working my way into the ‘family’, when I had outside and competing interests as a
researcher? As a member of the family I am bound by community relations and ethics,
but as a researcher I am obligated above all to my institution’s ethical review protocol. I
do not know how I would have resolved this contradiction.

It leaves me contemplating my relationships with Warren and Mathieu. No
matter what I seemed to try, my relationship with Warren did not develop past a
certain point. I believe that until I leave OISE, my relationship with Project Read will not
either. I hope to continue volunteering at Project Read when this thesis is accepted.
When I am no longer bound by competing interests, the Project Read family might
accept me like Mathieu did.
References

About us. (n.d.). Retrieved from Parkdale Project Read:

http://parkdaleprojectread.org/about-us/


*The History of Parkdale Project Read.* (n.d.). Retrieved from Parkdale Project Read:

http://parkdaleprojectread.org/about-us/the-history-of-parkdale-project-read/

*The History of Parkdale Project Read.* (n.d.). Retrieved from Parkdale Project Read:

http://parkdaleprojectread.org/about-us/the-history-of-parkdale-project-read/


Edmonton: Windsound Learning Society.
Appendix A: Paper Trail

Ethics timeline
June 17 Thesis proposal accepted, began preparing ethical review package.
June 18 Met with PPR to talk about recruiting. I decided that I don’t feel comfortable only opening participation to learners who have “experienced violence and trauma.” Instead all learners will be included and the interview will gently probe to learn more about how violence and trauma has affected learners’ participation, and what has been done about it.
June 19 I think that I will interview learners just like staff and volunteers. Details will likely emerge, and this is a more ethical way to approach learners; as mutual participants in education rather than as sources of triangulation.
June 19 THOUGHT - What can I ask staff and volunteers that I can’t ask learners? Should I ask the same things and reinforce the right to refuse to answer?
July 21 Met with PPR to discuss the project. PPR will review the proposal and ethics review and suggest improvements/changes. Rewrote interview packages to include more clear language.
July 21 THOUGHT - I need to participate in PPR before and after research so I am seen as an insider rather than an outsider in the organization. I want to stay after, but how will I stay before?
July 21 THOUGHT - I think that I should spend a lot of time volunteering for PPR in addition to the time I am ‘researching’ that way I will be more of a part of PPR than just an outsider.
July 21 THOUGHT - Participation in this study should be open to anyone who wants to participate.
July 21 QUESTION - How can this project be made more transparent to participants and its findings more accessible?
August 15th Met with thesis supervisor and submitted ethical review.
August 22nd Received comments about ethical review.
August 29 Formatted interview guide better
October 10th Got ethics approval
Planned research question

**Research Question:** How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

**Step 1:** Who is Parkdale Project Read?

**Step 2:** How does each actor meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?

**Step 3:** How do actors work together, support each other, and receive external support to meet the needs of learners who have experienced violence and trauma?
Would you like to be participate in a case study about Parkdale Project Read and how it meets the needs of learners who have experienced trauma, violence, or hardship?

**Learning through Trauma and Violence:**
How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced trauma and violence?

Your participation will help the researcher understand:

- The formal and informal structure of Parkdale Project Read
- Staff and volunteer literacy tutors’ work
- The supportive relationships that improve learners’ experience in education

**Who:** Staff, volunteers, and adult learners at Parkdale Project Read  
**What:** Two interviews, under one hour each  
**Where:** At Parkdale Project Read or a location of your choosing  
**When:** Interviews will take place from October – December, and from January – March, at a time convenient to you.

If you would like to participate or have any questions please contact the researcher:

**Eric Zorn**  
(416) 992 – 6899  
[eric.zorn@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:eric.zorn@mail.utoronto.ca)

All data collected will be kept confidential and stored securely. Names will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure privacy.

This study is in affiliation with the University of Toronto
Consent letters

Date: Eric Zern

Informed Consent, Learners

Dear [Name],

Thank you for thinking about speaking with me as part this research project. I am a graduate student in the Adult Education program at the University of Toronto. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Bonnie Buckley. The purpose of this interview is to contribute to my thesis research about how the Parkdale Project Read adult literacy program meets the needs of learners who have experienced trauma and violence. This letter gives you information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is your choice and should you decide to meet with me, you are free to change your mind at any time. If you have any questions about the research you can call Dr. Buckley at (416) 978-0587 or the researcher at (416) 992-6899. You can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or at (416) 946-1273 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant.

The aim of this research project is “Learning through Trauma and Violence: How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced trauma and violence?”

The purpose of the research is to look at how the staff and volunteers in this particular adult literacy program meet the needs of adult learners who have experienced tough times, trauma, and violence.

There will be 20 – 30 participants in this study. I will be interviewing staff from the Parkdale Project Read program, volunteers, and adult learners.

There will be two sets of interviews for this project. The purpose of the first series of interviews is to develop an understanding of the Parkdale Project Read program. The second series of interviews will concern how staff, volunteers, and learners support each other to meet learners’ needs. Learners will only participate in the second series of interviews.

I am inviting you to participate in this study because your past experience of tough times, trauma, and violence has affected your participation in adult learning and because your present experience as a learner at Parkdale Project Read gives you knowledge which I wish to discuss. Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in an interview at Parkdale Project Read or a location of your choosing. The interview will take place at a time convenient for you.
Dear [Name],

Thank you for considering participating in or contributing to this research project. I am a graduate student enrolled in the Adult Education and Community Development Master of Arts program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Bonnie Burton. The purpose of this interview is to contribute to my thesis research, a case study of how the Parkdale Project Read adult literacy program meets the needs of learners who have experienced trauma and violence. This letter provides you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time should you decide to participate. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burton at (416) 971-0857 or the researcher at (416) 992-6899. You can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant.

The name of this research project is “Learning through Trauma and Violence: How does Parkdale Project Read meet the needs of learners who have experienced trauma and violence?”

The nature and purpose of the research is to investigate how the staff and volunteers in this particular adult literacy program meet the needs of adult learners who have experienced trauma and violence.

There will be 20-30 participants in this study. I will be interviewing staff, volunteers, and learners from Parkdale Project Read.

There will be two sets of interviews for this project. The purpose of the first series of interviews is to develop a structural understanding of the Parkdale Project Read program. The second series of interviews will concern how staff, volunteers, and learners support each other to meet learners’ needs.

I am inviting you to participate in this study because your experience working or volunteering with Parkdale Project Read gives you relevant knowledge which I wish to discuss. Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in an interview at Parkdale Project Read or a location of your choosing. The interview will take place at a time convenient for you.
Interview Guide

0. Why am I interviewing you? Unique knowledge as a participant.
1. Discuss informed consent letter.
2. Discuss structure of the interview.
3. Discuss technology.
4. Do you have any questions?
5. Carry out interview.
6. How did the interview go?
7. Do you have any questions?
8. Schedule 2nd interview.
9. I will return to you a copy of the transcript and primary analysis.
10. After the thesis is complete how would you like to receive a copy?
Interview questions

Staff Interview 1

Understanding PPR
- What is PPR? What does it do? Why is it needed?
- History of PPR?
- What do I need to know/understand/learn to understand PPR?
- What documents are a significant part of PPR?
- What is the structure of PPR? Roles, structures, problems/conflict?
- What opportunities are offered at Parkdale Project Read, which of these opportunities do you participate in?

How do you fit into PPR?
- What do you do? Why? Why this? What makes this possible? What challenges do you face doing this? What are the results of doing this?
- How did you get to this point? Challenges?
- How is your work received? How do you feel about this?
- What problems are there? Why? How are they resolved? How should they be? *Example*

Your participation in PPR
- What does literacy mean to you?
- What is literacy education?
- How has your experience of literacy education changed over time?
- What improves your ability to participate in PPR?
- What challenges your ability to participate in PPR?
- What made you choose to participate in PPR vs other programs?
- How does it feel to participate in Parkdale Project Read?
- Why do you participate in Parkdale Project Read?
- What works for you about Parkdale Project Read?
- What doesn’t work for you about Parkdale Project Read?
- How has your life changed since you started attending PPR?
- How do you make your role unique?
- How, through this role, do you contribute to PPR?

PPR training
- How has your experience of PPR changed over time?
- How were you prepared to participate in PPR?
- How does training affect practice?
- How do rules and regulations affect practice?
- Why is PPR training the way it is?
**Presentation to learners**

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Hello everyone!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Before I am finished at university I will be writing a thesis about Parkdale Project Read.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>I chose to write about Parkdale Project Read because it is very important in the community but not many people know what it is.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>If you would like to meet with me to talk about Parkdale Project Read please talk to me and I can tell you more about it.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>When we meet, we would sit down for coffee or tea at Starbucks for about 1 hour.</strong></td>
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<td>16</td>
<td><strong>I would be very appreciative if you would meet with me and share your experiences.</strong></td>
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## Spreadsheet Coding

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<td>1</td>
<td><strong>What is PPR?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: I would start by saying we are an adult learning program that basically Jinn: Currently, it is a collective. Essentially we all share in many of the tasks. Jinn: The paid staff are collective. At least the core staff are collective. But I Jinn: Being engaged in event planning or fundraising. Right now I</td>
<td>Mary: What is Parkdale Project Read all about? Okay. So we are an adult Mary: I have had different roles through the years. I definitely am more Mary: Our collective is, it just means that we all make the same money, there is a Mary: We have a weekly group at the Parkdale Activity Recreation Center. Viktor: It is a community-based literacy organization that serves not just</td>
<td>Viktor: It is a community-based literacy organization that serves not just</td>
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<td><strong>What is your role in PPR?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: I would start by saying we are an adult learning program that basically Jinn: Currently, it is a collective. Essentially we all share in many of the tasks. Jinn: The paid staff are collective. At least the core staff are collective. But I Jinn: Being engaged in event planning or fundraising. Right now I</td>
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<td><strong>Opportunities are there to participate?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: I would start by saying we are an adult learning program that basically Jinn: Currently, it is a collective. Essentially we all share in many of the tasks. Jinn: The paid staff are collective. At least the core staff are collective. But I Jinn: Being engaged in event planning or fundraising. Right now I</td>
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<td><strong>Why do you volunteer?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Honestly I just happened in on all of my experience in the past has</td>
<td>Viktor: I have my school and I have obviously taken programs in a lot of the</td>
<td>Viktor: Yes from being a placement student there is a midterm and a final</td>
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<td><strong>What training did you receive at PPR?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: I came on and I don't think I had any training. But how I came into the organization Jinn: It is invigorating. And relaying. But at the same time it can be very stressful. Jinn: And oh so many ways. As a parent I have seen how being connected to Jinn: The people in the community. The flexibility, Jinn: I don't feel like</td>
<td>Mary: When I go home at night I don't feel like I have to have a shower. To clean Mary: It is hard to figure out what was connected project read and what is Mary: I think it is the relationships. Viktor: I think though, I can tell you that there is a difference. I think the work. I am just there to help Mary: I think I really don't feel there are. Everyone is very, some</td>
<td>Viktor: Yes from being a</td>
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<td><strong>How does PPR feel?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Honestly I just happened in on all of my experience in the past has</td>
<td>Viktor: I have my school and I have obviously taken programs in a lot of the</td>
<td>Viktor: Yes from being a placement student there is a midterm and a final</td>
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<td><strong>How does PPR affect your life?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What makes participation easier?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Time really more than anything else. Not enough time to do all the things I Jinn: It is. The ministry is imposing more and more of these things that you Jinn: Informally I would say</td>
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<td>Viktor: Yes from being a</td>
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<td><strong>What makes participation more difficult?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Time really more than anything else. Not enough time to do all the things I Jinn: It is. The ministry is imposing more and more of these things that you Jinn: Informally I would say</td>
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<td><strong>What documents do you use at PPR?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Time really more than anything else. Not enough time to do all the things I Jinn: It is. The ministry is imposing more and more of these things that you Jinn: Informally I would say</td>
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<td><strong>How is your organization?</strong></td>
<td>Jinn: Time really more than anything else. Not enough time to do all the things I Jinn: It is. The ministry is imposing more and more of these things that you Jinn: Informally I would say</td>
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<td>Why do volunteers participate and how did they start?</td>
<td>How do participants understand trauma, violence and hardship?</td>
<td>Who participates in PPR and what is the program’s organizational structure?</td>
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<td>What ideologies do participants in PPR value?</td>
<td>What are some of the common experiences that learners face?</td>
<td>How do participants define literacy and literacy education?</td>
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<td>What conflict occurs at PPR and how is the Ministry implicated?</td>
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<td>Which participant groups talk about family and what language do they use?</td>
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<td>What is the relationship between mental health and education?</td>
<td>What rules and boundaries exist at PPR and why?</td>
<td>How is participants’ success measured?</td>
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<td>What makes education relevant and successful?</td>
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<td>What documents do participants use?</td>
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<td>What stops adults and children from developing literacy?</td>
<td>What are adult learners’ priorities in life and education?</td>
<td>How do politics affect PPR?</td>
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<td>What training did you receive at PPR?</td>
<td>What opportunities are there to participate?</td>
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Relevance to the topic:

- Low relevance but noteworthy
- Not enough data

Amount of data:
Participation, support, and authority

- **Learners**
  - Academic Upgrading
  - Adult Literacy

- **Tutors**
  - Placement Students
  - Volunteer Tutors

- **Staff**
  - Contract
  - Collective

- **Board of Directors**

  - Increased Access to Support
  - Increased Administrative Authority
Community and Support

Community

- Community’s origin lies in struggle for literacy, being together, and learning
- Participants generally want to be there, and look forward to participation
- Community is important to participants
- Participants generally come from local community

Goals

- Intention to keep critical decision making within the community
- Intention to bring isolated community members together
- Efforts made to empower members through community participation and decision making
- Values diversity

Strategies

- Funding goes to TTC tokens to bring learners to the centre
- Sharing stories and unpacking experiences
- Civic engagement in external, larger community politics
- Referrals to community service

Support

- Collective support
- Participants being there to listen
- External hired support

Staff

- Check-ins with staff and supervisors
- Accommodated participation
- Tutor support groups
- Encouragement from learners

Tutors

- Greater authority
- Greater support

Learners

- Staff and volunteer learning support
- Relationship with one-to-one tutor
- Solidarity between learners
- Support in discussion groups
- Referrals to external organizations
What is literacy education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy is... ...reading the world.</td>
<td>...everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low literacy is... ...dealt with through coping strategies.</td>
<td>...opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy education is... ...much more than the public perspective.</td>
<td>...accessibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...from the Ministry's perspective, meeting milestones, finding work, and getting off of Ontario Works.</td>
<td>...contextual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...learners meeting their goals in life.</td>
<td>...essential for employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...not always about decoding text.</td>
<td>...more than just decoding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a partnership between the learner and tutor.</td>
<td>...speaking, talking, and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...an opportunity to have the positive school experience the learner missed in childhood.</td>
<td>...a source of happiness.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>...a barrier.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...trapping.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a source of shame.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...helps people get where they want to be.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a journey.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>...a tutor revealing possibility to the learner.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>...cooperative between the learner and tutor.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>...similar to social work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**What is literacy education?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Students</th>
<th>Tutors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy is...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...a right.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...the ability to read, write, and function in society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...often taken for granted.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low literacy is...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>...isolating.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...hard to admit for the learner.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>...mistakenly thought to look a certain way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>...a source of nervousness and low confidence.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...inherited socially through parenting.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy education is...</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...best without a timeline.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...a way to lessen isolation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...not an opportunity for everyone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>...different for each learner.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...comprehensive.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...getting through daily life.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...reaching goals.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...empowering.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...terrifying.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...a source of shame.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...tied to drug use.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...undertaken for varying reasons.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...successful even if learning is social.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...gendered.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...stabilizing.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>...exciting for some learners.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>...supportive.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>...helps people reach their goals.</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Violence, trauma, and other hardship
Violence, trauma, hardship, and education

- Effects of trauma, violence, and hardship on education:
  - Living in poverty forces learners to focus on survival
  - Help surviving
  - Disruption from violence at home
  - Making room for people's lives and needs

- Effects of supportive relationships on education:
  - Diminished self-worth
  - Support must not be judgemental
  - Diminished communication
  - Having someone to talk to
  - Lack of ability to focus
  - Allies and advocates help the learning process

- Unstable housing:
  - The best support comes without cost
  - Diminished curiosity and openness to learning

- Trust is very important
Development of 'Time, Money, and the Ministry' diagram

Scarcity of time and money is tied to conflict with Ministry

Time

Joanne: "I know that from working on the fundraising committee that if they had better funding that would make things easier. Staff are really stretched out. One thing I'm working on for them right now is a calendar. Just to try and get them grants... it would be much easier if the government just took care of it instead of them having to scramble for little bits of money. That takes away from the work they are doing. They're working full time to feed themselves. They're not doing the other things they need to do in their life."

Jim: "They are inundated by the administrative burden of reporting back in order to continue their funding. And this is now taking so much time away from the classroom, from the program. One of the managers at their was asked to the consultant, how do you expect us to do all of this paperwork? We're going to have to close the program in order to meet your administrative requirements."

Jim: "There is not enough time to do all the things I dream of. And resources for sure. Time being one of those resources. We always dream of things that we love to do."

Conflict

Jim: "Dealing with lots of very blunt, direct, and to the point emails demanding information about this and that. Required by 5 PM on Friday when they arrive at noon on a Friday and none of us are in the office. Lots of intransit email."

Jim: "[The meeting] was pretty stressful in the moment and I actually developed some health issues as a result of it. I was already dealing with some health stuff but it all kind of came to the forefront after that day, that meeting."

Visitor: "I know the government is very strict about having everything that release forms all have to match the database."

Jim: "The ministry is imposing more and more of these things. We have a number of folks who are participating anonymously, who are not counted but we are technically don't receive funding from them... I think that if the ministry were to believe that we were that we had too many unrecorded learners, they would be depleting our funding that should be for folks who are registered."

June: "A lot of programs go with the set curriculum. Also the ministry and its goals and its funding process encourages a curriculum."

Money

Mary: "Why don't they give us tokens or tickets? Why don't they give us money to use? We could use it if we want to give it to us if you want. It all the time pass what? This place is going to be closed. And then you won't have anywhere. We have to support the staff. It's less money in my pocket, and it is more money in their pockets."

Liz: "The thing is they don't have enough money to pay instructors for grammar. We are going to do an essay and we use volunteers. I don't have anything with the volunteers. I am so thankful because these people put in their time for us without any pay... I learned when I went there but there people don't know. They don't really tell you. It's not because they don't want to, it's because they don't have funding. They don't have money."

Mary: "Everybody's higher up wants justification for funding. It's all about taxpayer dollars being spent well and most people don't understand the depth of what literacy is. Talk about literacy in the broad sense, no one wants to pay for that."
Time, Money, and the Ministry

Conflict

- The Ministry does not operate on a timeline that works for the program’s staff.
- The Ministry favors a standardized curriculum but Project Read teaches according to learners’ needs.
- The ministry is very strict about recording learners.
- Meetings with Ministry consultants exacerbate existing health issues for staff.
- The program is not funded for participants who wish to remain anonymous and are not recorded. The Ministry views the use of resources on these learners’ education to be a mismanagement of funds.

Time

- There is not enough time for the program to reach its potential.
- Staff are stretched thin because there is insufficient funding to hire support. They are working on their own hours to get the work done.
- The Ministry imposes a duty to report that adds more work to already inundated staff.

Money

- Learners refuse TTC tokens and other forms of support to save the program money because there is insufficient funding.
- The program does not have enough funding to hire instructors educated at a high enough level to teach students past a certain capacity.
- Taxpayers are not willing to fund the type of literacy education that this program is providing.
Tutors and learners’ perceptions of motivations to participate and volunteer

Why do adults participate in literacy education?

- They want to develop their career
- They want to move forward in life
- They want attention
- They need literacy to tell their stories
- They are motivated by learning
- They want to be less isolated
- They want to do more for their families
- They want to be more involved in community

Why do you volunteer at Parkdale Project Read?

- It is my responsibility
- It is my family
- It is my responsibility to share it
- I want to develop my career
- Must give back to community
- Wants to support community because it supported them
- Learners need someone there for them

Learners’ responses: Motivated by something besides their own gain
How different participant groups talk about family

Staff
- Power struggle
- Kids struggle in school if parents can’t help with homework
- Not chosen
- Complicated

Tutors
- How will I feed my family?
- Parents reading to children improves their literacy
- Ties you to community
- Lack of support
- Conflict involving parents with low literacy
- Isolated from community
- Comfortable home improves literacy development
- Illiterate
- Family will put you in a home
- Fed up with each other
- Alcohol abuse
- Ignored
- Broken
- Run away

Learners
- Violence
- Mistreatment
- Struggle
- Supportive
- PPR is my family and I miss them
- Appreciative
- Those you spend time with
Common experiences of learners

- **Economic**
  - Poor nutrition
  - Negative health consequences
  - Poverty
  - Precarious employment
  - Taken advantage of
  - No health benefits

- **Social**
  - Treated like they don't belong
  - Racism
  - Literacy seen as abnormal
  - Discrimination
  - Oppression
  - Taken advantage of
  - Passing and hiding
  - Hides literacy education to avoid harm

- **Experiential**
  - Conflict with others
  - Conflict in school
  - Mental health
  - Feeling defective
  - "Something is wrong with me"
  - "I'm slow"
  - Feeling worthless
  - Feeling like they don't belong

- **Education**
  - Neglect in school
  - Considered a bad student
  - Not given sufficient attention
  - Kicked out
  - Long gaps in schooling

*Emboldened terms represent participants' language*