CHAPTER EIGHT

Competence as a Developmental Process

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INTRODUCTION

Demonstrating competence and mastery is endemic to the human spirit, and as their voices have clearly spoken in the previous chapters, the participants in our study, individually and collectively, have an indomitable spirit. They almost cannot help demonstrate their newfound confidence, competence, and pride in themselves as they talk about the things they have learned and that have mattered to them in their respective programs. Despite the obstacles and hardships, many of them speak with a great sense of accomplishment about how much better they can participate in their classes, teach their children, and perform in their jobs. We would be hard-pressed to find anyone among them who did not feel in some way bigger for their participation in their learning program. Some experienced more of a gain than others, but as their voices tell us, none were unchanged by their experience.

Gaining a sense of mastery and competence over previously challenging and difficult tasks (psychological, emotional, cognitive, as well as physical) inevitably brings with it a tremendous sense of personal triumph. It is a wonderful and inspiring thing to see such triumph, yet educators, researchers, and program funders are also asking the question, How do we assess that triumph? How do we acknowledge and measure the success of the individual learners and of the programs? How do we measure the competence we see these learners demonstrate?

There are as many ways of demonstrating competence and triumph as there are triumphs themselves. And, we will argue, there are as many *ways of being competent*. In this chapter we will look at the many forms competence takes, the variety of ways in which people make sense of and demonstrate their competence, and, most importantly, the variety of ways that people are *differently competent*. Specifically, we aim to suggest and illustrate an expanded, pluralistic view of competence in adult literacy to take into account the ways in which adults have different capacities and capabilities. To that end, we will highlight the current thinking on skills and competence in the adult literacy field and situate ourselves within that thinking. We will also look at the ways in which the participants in our study talked about and demonstrated skills and competencies specific to their role as student, parent, or worker. With all that in hand, we will discuss the implications and possible applications of our perspective and understanding for the wider issue of adult literacy competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF COMPETENCE

While many educators seem to have increasing skill and competence as a primary goal, the definition of skill and competence is actively debated in the field of adult literacy. The terms "skill," "competence," and "performance standards" are used in so many ways in the field that it seems we are not always talking about the same concepts (Green, 1995). The issue of competence itself and the establishment of standards in the field of adult literacy speak to the need to understand and measure individual students' progress and programs' success. However, there is little agreement on what constitutes progress and success, even as there is widespread agreement that adults' fuller participation in society is a desirable end result.

> Competency standards are propelled by a strong political impetus as the way to prepare the work force for the competitive global economy. At the same time, a growing chorus of critics argues that the approach [to competency standards] is conceptually confused, empirically flawed, and inadequate for the needs of a learning society. (Chappell, 1996; Ecclestone, 1997; Hyland, 1994 as cited in Kerka, 1998, p. 1)

At one end of the spectrum in this debate over the approach to standards and competence are those who focus primarily on the acquisition of concrete, specific and measurable basic skills. This view is driven by and structured around traditional academic disciplines, with a specific and measurable knowledge base as the goal. At the other end of the spectrum are those who view competence and performance standards as naturally and necessarily evolving from the context of individuals' lives, subordinating the acquisition of basic skills and their application to the immediate context of what adults need to be able to do to manage the demands and complexities of daily life.

Although much of the debate over the definition and measurement of competence in adult education has taken place in Britain and Australia, issues of basic skills and minimum competencies in adult education have increasingly drawn attention in the United States since the 1970s, as most states have mandated their assessment of students (Kerka, 1998). Also referred to as standards-based reform, this debate is concerned with both curricular content and student performance. It involves two issues: what will be taught and how knowledge and performance will be measured (Green, 1995).

The basic skills end of the spectrum of adult education has been significantly influenced by the K-12 educational reform in the 1990s. This reform has been dominated by the development of content standards for the K-12 curriculum which make the knowledge and skills all students should master explicit (Woodward, 1999). The purpose of this reform is to use "challenging academic expectations to drive instruction, curriculum, assessment, teacher education, professional development, textbook adoption, allocation of resources, and accountability" (Woodward, p. 11, 1999). The content standards for K–12 describe, from the perspective of an ideal curriculum, what students are expected to learn or achieve rather than which pedagogical approach teachers should use. For example, the subject standards for grades 9–12 in physical science include the "structure of atoms, the structure and properties of matter, chemical reactions, motions and forces, conservation of energy and increase in disorder and interactions of energy and matter" (NRC, 1996 pp. 176-190 as cited in Munroe, p. 145). These kinds of content standards are very specific and explicit and clearly reflect a goal of providing a specific knowledge base for the K–12 students.

As a result of this influence of the K–12 standards-based reform, a process is currently underway to revise the GED Test and align national and state standards for it, allowing "GED candidates the opportunity to demonstrate achievement comparable to that of high school graduates" (Woodward, 1999, p. 4). Similarly, Massachusetts, for example, has developed an ABE curriculum framework intended to provide "continuity and consensus about what skills and content matter most" (Hassett, 2000, p. 6). The national debate, then, over curricular standards for both K-12 and adult education focuses on what students should know in specific content areas, such as which algebraic equations a student should be able to perform.

Addressing the issue of competence, the proponents of the basic skills perspective have developed performance standards to assess students' level of content mastery. These standards describe the "type of task that would allow evaluators to measure the level of performance and provide samples of student work that exemplify appropriate performance" (Woodward, 1999, p. 23). These indicators of performance are used to determine a student's level of proficiency and target areas for improvement (Hassett, 2000). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks provide an example of performance standards that are cross-classified by subject knowledge and levels of understanding. For example, the NAEP Reading Proficiency levels are scaled, centered on 250 points and with a range from 0 to 500 points:

350 Can synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials
300 Can find, understand, summarize, and explain relatively complicated information
250 Can search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations
200 Can comprehend specific or sequentially related material
150 Can carry out simple, discrete reading tasks
(Green, 1995, p. 18)

This reading proficiency scale reflects the acknowledgment of different levels of skill while keeping the task specific and the goal clearly identified. Frameworks such as these view competence as

> the performance of discrete tasks, identified by functional analysis of work roles. This analysis is the basis for competency statements or standards upon which competence is assessed and toward achievement of which CBET [competency-based education and training] is directed. (Kerka, 1998, p. 3)

For many educators, "basic skills do not differ from standardized achievement skills, or the academic competencies associated with literacy and numeracy" (Smith and Marsiske, 1994). From this perspective, students' progress in a literacy program, i.e., their competence, would be evaluated by standardized reading tests, such as the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE), the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE–Reading subtest), or the Degree of Reading Power Test (DRP) (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). At this end of the spectrum, then, the focus seems to be on teaching and measuring the skills and content identified by traditional educational values and norms.

The debate at the opposite end of the spectrum surrounds the tension between developing standardized national core curricula and grounding the relevance of skills and competencies in the needs and expectations of individual learners' lives. Hodkinson and Isset (1995) argue that

> competence is not and cannot be a fixed concept. . . . We need to recognize that in order to be competent we must constantly review and change our practice and that practice is partially determined by the unequal society in which we live and…which we sometimes need to challenge and seek to change. (p. 148)

At this end of the spectrum, competence and basic skills are viewed as individualized practices, grounded in social and political contexts (Demetrion, 1999). This perspective on competence focuses on life skills and other abilities necessary for learners to not only function in a complex world but to develop the ability to assess and act upon the unique situations in which they find themselves. As Fingeret & Drennon (1997) describe, literacy involves more than basic skills.

> Viewing literacy as skills or tasks does not adequately encompass the complexity of the experience of literacy in adults' daily lives. Literacy reflects the fundamental interdependence of the social world at many levels. . . . Although literacy requires knowledge of the technical skills of forming letters, spelling words decoding, and so on, these technical skills are useless without social knowledge that attaches meaning to words *in context*. (emphasis in original, p. 62)

From this perspective, adult literacy learning integrates practical competency with self-knowledge and is situated in learners' broadened understanding of themselves, culture and society (Demetrion, 1999). As such, they recommend "authentic assessment" that involves "reflection on and analysis of a sample of artifacts from literary practices drawn from many domains in students' lives," such as portfolio assessment (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 100). The measurement of competence comes more from the relevant and appropriate use of knowledge than from the content and quantity of the knowledge itself. As a result, competence becomes more of a process of gaining entry into a wider and wider arena of the various contexts of an individual's life: being better able to advocate for oneself in job interviews, being better able to talk with the teacher of one's child to discuss and understand how the child is doing in school, perhaps to advocate for the child to get better health or educational services if needed.

> [This] approach to competence is variously termed integrated, holistic, or relational. An integrated view sees competence as a complex combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values displayed in the context of task performance (Gonczi, 1997; Hager, 1995). This approach recognizes levels of competence—entry/novice, experienced, specialist—rather than a once for all attainment. Interpreted broadly, competence is not trained behavior but thoughtful capabilities and a developmental process (Barrie and Pace 1997; Chappell, 1996). Rather than a single acceptable outcome, performance may be demonstrable and/or defensible in variable contexts (Chappell, 1996). (as cited in Kerka, 1998, pg. 3)

The figure and ground at this end of the spectrum shift from a focus on specific content and skills to a focus on the adult-in-context and what that adult learner needs to learn and know in order to manage, as Fingeret and Drennon (1997) say, the "complexity of the experience of literacy in [their] daily lives" (p.62).

As these views demonstrate, there is little theoretical consensus between the two ends of the spectrum on what to teach, what to call competence, what to measure, or how to measure it (Reynolds & Bezruckzo, 1989). One of the biggest challenges in the field of adult basic education is bridging the gap between the teaching of either basic skills or contextualized life skills and measures of competency (Green, 1995). Another challenge is finding a position in the middle of the spectrum. One initiative, however, stands out as an attempt to bring the worlds of basic skills and the integrated approach to adult literacy together.

Equipped for the Future (EFF) is a national, collaborative, standards-based system reform initiative, which presents a new way to understand and respond to demands for adult literacy in this country. This initiative recognizes that "people make judgments and review, reflect on, and change behavior, continually reconstructing relevant and useful knowledge as they interact with a situation" (Kerka, 1998, pg. 2). EFF's philosophical stance is inclusive, integrated, and based on the real-world needs of the adult learners it seeks to serve. EFF is also concerned about creating measurable standards by which adult learners can assess their own goals and success and by which programs can be accountable to their funders.

One of the many goals of EFF is to "focus the literacy system on producing results that matter to our students, our communities, and our funders" (Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson, & Kegan, 1998, p. 25).

> [t]he Equipped for the Future Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning have been developed to answer a complex question: What do adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members? (Stein, 2000, p.1)

A comprehensive survey of adult literacy skills carried out in 1993 by the National Adult Literacy Survey, showed that over 40 percent of all American adults demonstrated skill levels below the benchmark identified by economists Murnane and Levy's (1996) list of New Basic Skills gathered from research in high-performance businesses. The list includes:

- The ability to read at the ninth-grade level or higher.
- The ability to use math at the ninth-grade level or higher.
- The ability to solve semi-structured problems where hypotheses must be formed and tested.
- The ability to work in groups with coworkers from different backgrounds.
- The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
- The ability to use personal computers to carry out simple tasks such as word processing. (p. 3)

While agreeing with the expectation of this set of skills, EFF responds to the issue with a different kind of vision and practice. The EFF team began by going across the country to the adult learners themselves, their teachers, and their tutors and asked what "adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles as parents and family members, citizens and community members, and workers." From the thousands of responses, EFF distilled a framework of sixteen Standards, not of specific tasks that adults should be able to perform but of the

> core knowledge and skills adults need to effectively carry out their roles as parents, citizens and workers. The Standards have been identified through research on what adults need to do to meet the broad areas of responsibility that define these central adult roles. They do not address the full range of activities adults carry out in these roles; rather, they focus on the knowledge and skills that enable adults to

- gain access to information and ideas;
- communicate with the confidence that their message makes sense and can be understood by others;
- make decisions that are based on solid information and reached through thoughtful analysis, consideration of options, and careful judgment;

- keep on learning so they won't be left behind. (Stein, 2000, p.17)

These four points, called the four purposes, are also distilled from the responses the adult learners across the county gave when asked to talk about their purposes for learning. They provide the context and direction for the EFF Standards.

Our project shares EFF's philosophical view in "conceptualizing adult literacy as something bigger than the acquisition of basic skills" (Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson & Kegan, 1998, p. 25) and defining competence within the context of the individual adult learner's life. We take our lead from EFF and agree with its broad view of competence and skill as defined in the "four fundamental categories of skills that adults need to draw from to carry out the key activities that are central to their primary role" (Stein, 2000, p. 17). These four categories organize and contain the 16 EFF Standards and are shown in the chart below (from Stein, 2000, p. 21).

Communication Skills	**Decision-Making Skills**	**Interpersonal Skills**	**Lifelong Learning Skills**
Read With Understanding	Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate	Cooperate With Others	Take Responsibility for Learning
Convey Ideas in Writing	Solve Problems and Make Decisions	Advocate and Influence	Reflect and Evaluate
Speak So Others Can Understand	Plan	Resolve Conflict and Negotiate	Learn Through Research
Listen Actively		Guide Others	Use Information and Communications Technology
Observe Critically			

We see these Standards as representing the kind of competence that Kerka (1998) describes as "thoughtful capabilities [along with] a developmental process" (p. 3) and as assuming that as adults continue to learn, their competence and mastery continue to deepen, that competence is not an endpoint in itself but a self-perpetuating process. We also recognize and base our work on "the fundamental interdependence of the social world at many levels" (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 62) in our attempts to highlight the differing competencies demonstrated by the participants in our study. Some of those competencies involve, for example, the kinds of issues parents face in how to set appropriate and consistent limits for and with their child(ren). Although this competence is not explicitly included in the EFF Standards, it would certainly find a place within them as part of what an adult needs to know and be able to do in his or her role as a parent. It could be seen, for example, as one aspect within the "Guide Others" standard.

In the process of refining the Standards, at an EFF Field Development Institute held in February 1998, many of the participating teachers expressed both admiration and dismay at the descriptions of the Standards and their implicit expectations. One teacher remarked, "*I* can't even do some of those things!" The sympathetic laughter in the room belied similar sentiments and even a sense of nervousness at the prospect of assessing not only their students but potentially themselves as well, and seeing too many students—and potentially themselves—fall short of the benchmarks. Our developmental perspective puts us in the unique and fortunate position to be able to address those concerns and to offer a way to understand and assess the competent performance of these Standards so

adult learners' differing abilities can be dignified and that *different levels of competence* and *different kinds of competence* can be recognized, celebrated, and built upon. Toward that goal, we have actively collaborated with EFF and its leader Sondra Stein, creating the Developmental Skills Matrices, one for each of the 16 EFF Standards.[1] These matrices suggest ways in which the same skill/standard can be differently understood and enacted by adults who make sense of the world in different ways (see Appendix B). The matrices suggest that competence, or the successful enactment of the standard, can look quite different from one end of the continuum to the other. They also suggest that an appropriate expectation for someone's performance at one level will be a very misguided expectation at another, that our expectations and assessment of competence must be directly linked to an individual's capacities.

EFF takes up defining the continuum of performance as it begins the arduous task of defining performance levels for the Standards.

> These levels will be descriptive, focusing on what adults can do with the knowledge and skills at each level, including what external benchmarks are linked to each level. This approach to setting levels is based on the assumptions that adults differ in the goals they want to achieve at different points in their lives and that different goals require different levels of performance. Once EFF performance levels are set, adults will be able to use them . . . to make informed choices about the level of proficiency they need to develop to achieve goals they set for themselves. (Stein, 2000, p. 19)

In our view, not only do "adults differ in the goals they want to achieve at different points in their lives," but they differ in their capacities as well. Assessment measures must take into account both kinds of differences.

We regard competence as a continuum to be judged and assessed within the context of the individual's own capacity and understanding, and as capabilities that continue to grow and build on themselves. One way to view competence is as the ability to use any given set of tools, whether the tools are spelling skills or psychological insights, in a way appropriate to the context of a person's life and capabilities. People make sense of the world in different ways, with different kinds of capacities, and will understand and use those tools in very different ways. Our job as developmentalists and educators is not to teach or to expect everyone to use the tools in the same way but to use the tools in the most appropriate way relative to their own lives and circumstances. This is not to imply that there are no standards for appropriate and skillful adult behavior and competence—there are. The standards come within a broader spectrum that allows the developmental capacities of each person to be the context for their success and their success to build on itself.

It must be said that our criteria and standards for both identifying and assessing competence are firmly rooted in our Western cultural constructions and perspectives. Talking with so many adult learners from so many different parts of the world, we became acutely aware of how our own standards and values are inevitably and inextricably culturally based and biased. Competence itself is value-laden and cannot be otherwise. Assessments and even recognition of competence are inherently judgmental, even with the gentlest of intentions. As educators, researchers, and consultants, we look

[1] Our set of matrices includes 15 Standards. Since our delivery, EFF has further refined the Standards by adding one and renaming others.

at and for the ways adults can now do things better than they did previously. As parents, we may watch our small children gain more and more dexterity every day and thrill at what they are learning to do and becoming competent at, and finding new and bigger challenges to master. It is part of human nature to want to do better, to want others to do better, to be proud to see someone reach for and attain a fuller realization of potential and to keep growing.

One of the risks of looking at competence, especially in marginalized adult populations, is that we can appear too critically judgmental, as if we are working from a deficit model and focusing on what the adult *cannot* do. However, in our study, we focus our attention on the ways the adult learners *do* accomplish their goals and *do* demonstrate their competence, even as they do this in very different ways from each other and with varying degrees of complexity. We look at the ways adult learners are *differently competent* at the same tasks. In fact, our intention is to follow the natural course of human *being*—to look at and support the process and evolution of continued growth (Kegan, 1982). Much as we watch a tree naturally growing and getting taller and wider, we become concerned if we see its natural course of growth is being held back in some way by (unnecessary) obstacles. We admire it when we see it standing tall, yet if it stands less tall than we know it can become, we are concerned. It is our task to do all we can to understand and provide the kind of environment and space in which it can flourish. It is our intention to follow those

same instincts in our attempts to understand and support human growth and evolution.[2]

In earlier chapters, we discussed at length the importance of the holding environment. With respect to supporting and enhancing the learner's competence, the holding environment plays an equally powerful role. The holding environment ultimately holds a bar, if you will, for the level of skill or competence the learner is expected to achieve in that the teacher(s) and the curriculum, whether implicitly or explicitly, have expectations as to the level of performance that is considered successful, and performance is evaluated on that basis. As we have previously argued in other places (Kegan 1994; Popp & Portnow, 1998; Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson, & Kegan, 1998) and as we have continued to argue in this monograph, it is important to understand the context of an individual's own life and mind before setting the expectation for the level of performance of certain skills and competencies. As is powerfully argued in Chapter 5, meeting the student where she is can go a long way toward ensuring her continued participation and growth in the program.

Having this broader view of competence in no way diminishes the importance we see of achieving competence in basic skills. We see the basic skills as a platform for attaining a wider form of competence. For example, critical thinking is a form of competence that is very much on the agenda for many teachers (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 1987). In our Western culture, in general, critical thinking is a competence adults are expected to have at their disposal (Kegan 1994). Yet, as our research shows, for many adult learners, critical thinking and the abstraction it requires are currently beyond their capabilities. If many adults are not able to achieve this standard, how do we hold onto our reasonable expectations while acknowledging that they might be too great for some students? Even while we developmentalists take the view that competence must be seen in the context of the individuals' own circumstances, the larger culture still expects adults to demonstrate a certain level of facility. Kegan (1994) examines the expectations and the dangers of a global acceptance when, as the title of his book suggests, many adults are currently "in over their heads" with what is expected of them and what they can actually do, when cultural expectations outpace the actual capacities of adults. When we say, "what they can actually do," we mean not a set of learned behaviors, but the ways in which adults make sense of and enact certain cultural expectations. We mean the competence adults *do* demonstrate. We have seen in the four previous chapters many of the ways the study participants across the three sites talk about their increased sense of confidence, change in perspective, and sense of becoming better students, parents, workers. In each of the voices speaking in the previous chapters, we hear an implicit sense of competence—the accomplishment of something they had previously struggled with and been unable to achieve. We will now turn to an explicit discussion of the ways in which the study participants, through their descriptions of how they would handle various dilemmas, demonstrated their differing competencies.

[2] One critical issue in the competence debate is language fluency. On one hand, being fluent in the culture's language is a competence in itself, but not being fluent in the culture's language is an obstacle to being able to demonstrate (some of) one's competencies. With the participants in our study, this is a particularly difficult issue because our study was and is very language-based. We asked the participants to explain to us what their experiences were, how they understand those experiences. At the beginning of our study, many of the participants had a very difficult time speaking English with us and explaining their meaning. As their respective programs continued, however, and we continued our conversations with the participants, their language skills noticeably improved for the most part, and the participants acknowledged feeling better able to express themselves. This raises difficult questions about our ability to accurately and fully understand everything the participants told us. At a certain point, it seems impossible to tease apart the competence and the ability to articulate it.

THE VIGNETTES AND COMPETENCE BY ROLE AND SITE

We developed this project to look specifically at issues of learning, transformation, and competence in three primary roles adults take on in their lives: parent, worker, and learner. To illuminate some of the ways that the adult learners in our study demonstrate competence in their respective roles, we posed a hypothetical dilemma containing several problems common to their role and program setting. We then asked them how they would deal with or try to solve the problem if they were the protagonists in the story. Developmentalists (Kohlberg, 1984; Selman, 1980) as a way to tease out a person's reasoning capacities within a particular context have long used vignettes or hypothetical dilemmas. Kohlberg's context is moral reasoning, Selman's is interpersonal perspective-taking, and ours in this study is role-specific problem solving. Although this study was not designed to assess the participants' role competence via their actual performance, we make the assumption that reasoning capacity makes performance possible. We therefore assess competencies inherent in differing reasoning capacities to highlight the ways that adult learners, all along the developmental continuum are *differently competent* at similar role requirements.

In each role-related vignette, we asked the study participants to do several things: consider at least two different dilemmas that are separate problems yet interconnected and mutually influencial; talk to us about how they would handle this overall dilemma, i.e., how they would "solve" the problem; and explain their reasoning for their particular solution. We listen and look for several things: what the participants orient to as the main issue(s) in the dilemma, how they relate to the intertwinedness of the problems, and the complexity of their reasoning in the solution they suggest. From that we can demonstrate—in fact, let the learners themselves demonstrate—the variety of differing skills and competencies they each have and how they might be differently competent from each other with regard to the same issue.

As we expected, each site's data generated a different set of themes of competencies. No one theme carried prominently across all sites, as the issues presented in the vignette and the issues common to each site and role varied considerably. With few exceptions, the themes were raised spontaneously by the participants in their responses. We take this as an indication of the participants' own concerns about the importance of these issues in what they need to be able to do to be effective in their roles as parents, workers and learners. As the reader will see, these themes also echo many of the EFF Standards, such as Guide Others, Cooperate with Others, Resolve Conflict and Negotiate, Solve Problems and Make Decisions, and Take Responsibility for Learning. We present the themes here to illustrate the range of issues adult learners see as important in their roles. We present them also to illustrate the kinds of things that we see as the "thoughtful capabilities" that Kerka (1998) defines competence to be; and the specific kinds of things that adults "need to know and be able to do" (Stein, 2000, p.1) to participate fully in the culture.

We will now turn to the dilemmas by site and highlight some of the competencies that emerged from the responses.

Even Start

The following dilemma was presented to the Even Start participants:

> Daniella and Rita are sisters. Rita is eight and Daniella is six. They are very close but very different. Rita is very smart but very careless and always makes Daniella and other people wait for her. Daniella, on the other hand, is good student, very thoughtful, and always tries to be on time. Every morning Daniella and Rita get ready to go to school together. They eat breakfast together and usually walk to the school bus stop together. Daniella has no trouble getting up in the morning and is always ready when her mother puts breakfast on the table. Rita is exactly the opposite. It's hard for Rita to get out of bed. Rita's mother has to call her five times before she gets out of bed, and Rita almost always arrives at breakfast late. Rita is never ready to leave for school when Daniella is ready and waiting. The same problem comes up every morning—Daniella is ready to go, and Rita is still in the bathroom brushing her teeth or at the table gobbling down her breakfast. Daniella yells at Rita to hurry up. Rita yells to wait a minute. Their mother tells Daniella to go on ahead of her sister and yells at Rita to hurry or she will miss the bus. Daniella doesn't want to leave without Rita and usually ends up crying. Often they have to run to the bus and get there just as the driver is pulling out. The bus driver has to stop the bus for the girls, and everyone has to wait while Daniella and Rita get on the bus. If Daniella and Rita miss the bus because Rita is late, their mother will have to take both children to school. (A male version, with male characters, is given to male participants.)

In this dilemma, we are asking the participants to consider the specific issues of 1) an older child being perpetually late for school and what to do about that, and 2) the younger child being upset by the older child's lateness. We listen for how and if they orient to the conflict between the two children, and the extent to which they do or do not distinguish different people's perspectives from each other. In the follow-up questions, we asked them specifically what would happen if their spouse did not agree with their solution to the problem. The reasoning task called for by the vignette is to be able to consider several subplots in one overarching dilemma.

The following themes emerged from the participants' responses at the Even Start site.

- Discipline/ Setting limits: This theme highlights how parents think about trying to help a child who is perpetually late for school in the morning learn to be on time. What kinds of things do parents do to change a child's behavior? How do they think about the behavior itself and what it might mean to the child, and what does it mean to change it?
- Resolving conflict between children: This theme/competence illuminates the ways in which parents understand and deal with conflicts between siblings when one sibling is upset by another's behavior and that dynamic is interfering with the well-being of both siblings. It is interesting to note that this issue was raised only by those participants making sense with a Socializing or Self-Authoring meaning system or at a transitional point between. This implies that participants making sense with the Socializing system and beyond are concerned with the feelings of each child and, being as sensitive to issues of empathy as Socializing knowers tend to be, they were especially sensitive to the conflict that seemed inherent in the dilemma.
- Resolving conflict between self and spouse: Parents do not always agree on the best ways to help their kids change difficult behavior patterns. This theme illuminates the ways the adult learners at Even Start think about and resolve the conflicts with their spouse over child-raising issues.

- Solving problems: This theme/competency deals with creating plans or strategies for dealing with problems. It is distinct from the issue of discipline and setting limits in that it is not about setting limits but understanding the problem and trying to do something about it in a more general way.
- Understanding the child or the child's behavior; taking the child's perspective; showing empathy for the child: This competency addresses the extent to which the parent is able to take the child's perspective, to see and understand that the child is perhaps dealing with an emotional issue that might be making him or her not want to go to school, and to see that the child's experience is very different from one's own. Parents with at least a Socializing way of knowing raised this issue, like Resolving conflict between children, almost exclusively.
- Teaching responsibility: The parents at Even Start by and large expressed a great sense of responsibility for teaching their kids and for helping their kids learn to take responsibility. The issue of who is responsible for what is a big one for these parents, e.g., what do they see as the child's responsibility, what can and should the child be responsible for.
- Teaching empathy: This deals specifically with parents' efforts to help their children understand the impact of their behavior on others, specifically on their siblings. This theme was also raised exclusively by those parents with at least a Socializing way of knowing.
- Role responsibility of mother: Most of the respondents at Even Start were mothers. The two fathers did not talk about what they saw as their responsibility in the role of father. Many of the mothers were quite explicit about their sense of responsibility as a mother.

A distinguishing feature of Even Start is the emphasis on the family unit, rather than just the individual adult student as at the other two sites. At Even Start, much of the program's focus is being good parents and ensuring their kids get a good education, so the competencies and themes spanned a broader spectrum of issues than at the other two sites. The adult learners at the other two sites did not talk about teaching responsibility or empathy in their responses to the dilemmas. The focus of their attention and conversation with us was their own personal goals. Family and relationships mattered and played into their decisions as is clear in the previous chapters. But the response to the dilemmas and the discussion of competence was a focus on personal goals and responsibilities. Because the dilemmas were written to elicit responses about their respective roles, learning sites, and environments, this kind of response is to be expected.

BHCC

The dilemma presented to the BHCC participants is as follows:

> Susan is in a community studies class in a community college. One day the teacher divided the class into groups of seven people each to work on an assignment. The teacher told the students that in order for the assignment to be successfully completed, each person in the group has to participate and contribute. The teacher then gave the groups specific instructions about what they were to work on in the groups. Susan's group gets together and starts to talk about the assignment. One person in her group says "I have a really great idea for getting this done. It's not quite how the teacher says to do it, but I've seen it done in other places and it's really cool and a lot of fun, and I think we'll actually learn more. What do you guys think?" Some students in the group nod their heads and say they'd like to hear more about it. A few other students protest and say that it's not doing the assignment the way the teacher instructed them to do it, and they don't want to do anything different from what was assigned. The group argues about which way to do the assignment and finally someone says, "Let's take a vote." Up to this point, Susan hasn't said anything. She realizes that her two good friends in the group disagree on what the group should do. One of them wants to go with the new ideas and the other friend wants to follow the teacher's instructions. From listening to the others argue, Susan also realizes that her own vote will break the tie in the group and decide the way it will go. Susan is not sure what to do. (A male version using male names is presented to male students.)

We are looking for responses that highlight both how the learner perceives and makes sense of the dilemma, i.e., what the dilemma *is* for the student, and the kinds of ways he or she would try to resolve it for him or herself. The reasoning that this dilemma calls for is to consider and resolve the issue of competing loyalties—having to make a decision that will inevitably be unpopular with one of the three players in the dilemma. Another reasoning task is to set oneself in relation to the authority figure.

The themes and competencies that emerged as important to the BHCC learners are:

- Responding to authority: For most of the learners at BHCC, the teacher held a particular and clear authority. This theme illustrates the differing ways that the learners at different levels make sense of and respond to the teacher's authority and how they deal with a teacher they do not like.
- Resolving conflict between competing demands and loyalties: The dilemma presented to the learners at BHCC required them to make a choice between following what the teacher said and what their good friends wanted to do, and to choose between one friend who wanted to go one way and another friend who wanted to go another. This competency illuminates the ways in which people can and do make sense of conflicting interests and competing loyalties and how they make the choice when one is required.
- Making decisions: This theme/competency is similar to the one of resolving conflict in that it is about making choices, but it takes a broader look at a learner's capacity to make decisions that are not necessarily about conflicts. It highlights the degree of the learner's sense of authority and

expertise and/or the extent to which he or she relies on other authorities for help or permission to make certain kinds of decisions.

- Taking responsibility for their own learning: As all of the participants were in school, learning is a central issue for them. They have their own goals for and expectations and definitions of learning, as well as an extent to which they take responsibility for their own learning. The learners also have their own ideas about how they learn.

These themes represent the variety of issues that the participants at BHCC grapple with in their role as students making their way through their college experience. For many of the students at this time in their lives, these themes also represent the variety of issues salient to them as they struggle to find their own sense of authority and their own way in the world while staying connected to the things and people that are important to them. As Chapter 4 clearly laid out, this particular time in one's life is filled with issues of identity, acculturation, acceptance, belonging, and independence. Each of the themes described above touches upon different aspects of these issues and asks students to reflect—perhaps in ways they had not before—on how they make decisions; negotiate conflicts and differences of opinion; take in and hold the authority of the teacher; and envision, plan for, and work toward their future. As they responded to the vignette, many of the students brought in other aspects of their lives, particularly their goals and hopes for their families and future careers. So, in the context of these participants' life phase, these themes reflect the competencies they struggle to achieve in order to set themselves up for their lives as independent adults.

Polaroid

The dilemma presented to the participants at Polaroid asks them to talk about how they would respond to the following situation:

> Anthony works on the floor in the Johnson Automotive plant. He has an office supervisor, Pat, and a floor supervisor, Chris. Anthony arrives for his shift and begins his work for the day. After about half an hour, he notices a small defect in his product. He knows some defects are small enough that they are not a problem. But Anthony hasn't seen this defect happen before. He doesn't think it is a problem, but he is not sure. It might be a mistake to keep producing with this defect. Anthony's supervisor, Pat, always tells him to use his own best judgment when making decisions. Anthony also knows that Chris, the floor supervisor, doesn't always agree with Pat. Sometimes Chris questions Anthony about the decisions he's made. Chris expects the people on the floor to do what Chris thinks is best. Both supervisors have said that production is behind schedule, and they want to catch up. Both supervisors are in a meeting for the next two hours. Anthony isn't sure whether to continue his work or wait. (A female version, using female names, was presented to the female participants.)

This vignette asks the participants to consider several different issues and to discuss how they would resolve the problems associated with them. We look at the extent to which participants feel able to make certain kinds of decisions on their own, how they manage that in the face of a potential conflict, and how they tend to respond to a disagreement between two authorities over the work they are supposed to be doing. In terms of reasoning capacities, this dilemma asks participants to demonstrate the ways in which they see themselves in relation to an authority figure, and how they do

or do not distinguish their sense of the right thing to do from what others, particularly authority figures, see as right. Following are themes and competencies that emerged from the Polaroid data:

- Sense of responsibility: This theme encompasses the range of how the study participants relate to and understand their responsibilities in their respective jobs, who is responsible for what, and the hierarchy of responsibility within the organization.
- Making decisions: Although this theme is related to the sense of responsibility, it deals more specifically with what decision participants feel able to make, both within the confines of their job at Polaroid and in their lives outside work. As with the same competence in the BHCC data, this highlights the learners' own sense of authority and expertise and the extent to which they rely on their own authority or look to an external authority to make important decisions.
- Responding to authority: Everyone has a different response to authority. This theme illuminates those many responses in how individuals relate to the variety of authority figures at Polaroid—whether they feel able to argue with or challenge the authority or whether they accept the authority figure's word.
- Sense of duty: This theme illuminates how these participants talk about their sense of doing the right thing for the company and themselves. There is a very clear company standard and policy that many of the participants spontaneously raised, with varying degrees of personal investment in it. Some saw it as the set of rules they must follow, but others saw it as a guideline to add to their own sense of what is right.

Unlike the participants at BHCC and at Even Start, the participants at Polaroid have a certain settled quality to their lives, having worked at Polaroid for 20 years or more and seeming to have a fairly stable sense of identity. (Although several rounds of layoffs at the company during our work with them added a dimension of uncertainty, to be sure.) The themes generated from their responses to the vignette reflect their clear focus on their work. This might be caused in part by the focused nature of the vignette or it might reflect their sense of settledness.

The themes from the Polaroid participants are remarkably similar to those of the BHCC participants; there is one remarkable difference, however: The participants' actual discussions of these themes did not bring in or refer to other parts of their lives. This group of participants did not generalize the situation to their lives or make connections to their families when grappling with the dilemma presented. (They did talk about other aspects of their lives in other parts of our interviews with them, however.) Rather, they focused their attention squarely on the issues raised in relation to their job situations and requirements. Issues of authority and lines of responsibility, doing the right thing for the company and for oneself, and dealing with differences are salient for these participants and seem as important to being a good worker as performing the tasks correctly. These themes, then, reflect the ways that all of the Polaroid participants have a serious commitment to their jobs and to doing them well—a commitment to being and becoming more competent at what they do at work.

These three sets of themes, one from each of our sites, describe the issues raised by the dilemmas to which the participants responded. Although we cannot illustrate every demonstration of competence, we will now turn to a sample of the different ways the participants in our study demonstrated their competence in relation to the particular issue that seemed most salient at each site. We will illustrate these competencies across the range of meaning systems (or ways of knowing) from Instrumental to Self-Authoring.

DEMONSTRATED COMPETENCIES BY ROLE AND SITE

Following are three sets of responses, one from each site, from the participants in our study to the dilemmas presented above. These sets of responses illustrate a trajectory for the differing capacities and competencies that adult learners have and use to respond to and solve the dilemmas presented to them. Again, although many themes and competencies emerged from the data, here we present only one theme/ competence per site. Italics have been added to the quoted material to highlight the central tendencies of the particular meaning systems.

Even Start: Discipline/Setting Limits

Although the parenting role requires many skills and competencies, the one that seemed most salient and presented the biggest challenge to participants in our study was discipline and setting limits in an appropriate and productive way. Many if not most of the participants personalized the situation presented in the dilemma to their own families and the very similar issues they have with their own sons and daughters. Some of the strategies for setting limits are very similar across meaning systems. However, the ways in which each participant understood and made the strategy her own is quite different, thus demonstrating the differing capacities and competencies with which the participants can and do solve the dilemmas of their family lives.

Responding to the dilemma of how to help an older child get up and ready for school on time while the younger child waits and gets upset, the participants at Even Start responded in the following ways, demonstrating the competencies of each particular phase on the developmental continuum.

Instrumental Way of Knowing

> It is very hard to say what you have to do. What you can do is you can make [Rita] [late] one day so and the next day she might change and try to get up early so to get ready before Danielle. As I have some problem at home with my son and my daughter. My daughter used to wake up early. Usually she wake up early but when she goes to the bathroom, she is going to spend more than 30 minutes. And I say hurry up your brother has to use this bathroom, too. Hurry up, hurry up. **I sometimes I say you are going to go without no breakfast, and once she understood that she will be up and do everything. She doesn't want to miss the breakfast. Sometimes I give her a dollar to buy [a snack]. If you do not hurry today, I am not going to give you the money.** So she has to leave the house on time. . . . I say that because I know what they like. When they finish, you know what they like . . . **It is kind of a punishment to make her be on time. . . . You are going to find something. What they want to do you make them lose it and they will change.**

The mother responding here sees the dilemma in terms of the concrete behaviors of the children and structures her strategy and understanding exclusively around that. She seems to have found an effective way to get her daughter to change her behavior. Her strategy of punishment and "finding something they want to do and making them lose it" speaks to her perspective that if she makes a rule and institutes a punishment, the child's behavior will change. There is a very cause-and-effect sense that making the rule will cause a different kind of behavior, that doing the right thing is just a matter of

knowing the rules. The competence demonstrated here is in her capacity to see rules as the way to shape and change behavior, and to create a specific rule that will be meaningful to the child, i.e., take away something important to her, have an impact, and give the child an incentive to change her behavior.

Transition from Instrumental to Socializing

The next response, illustrating the transitional phase between the Instrumental and Socializing ways of knowing, also relies on making rules and adds a new dimension of sensitivity to the child's feelings:

> Every morning I say that you need to wake up early. Every, every day, every night I told to her you need to go to your bed 8:30. If you do go to bed early, then the next day in the morning you have more time to wake up. **Every morning I told that, hurry up, Rosita, hurry up. And she cry because she didn't like to her when I yell. But sometimes I need to yell to her. . . .** The other things, the question for her is, in the night time he told me, she told me, mommy take care of my clothes. I take the [clothes] in the morning, they don't want to use the clothes. She wants another clothes. . . . In the morning she change her mind. I say, you see this? They don't match this? Every morning is the same problem. And they don't care what clothes he use. . . . I think it's hard in this situation when you, when you yell to her. **I know I don't like to yell to her because she don't like.** But sometimes I think it is no good if the, the both, they talk? and one have, do quickly.

This parent seems to be bewildered by the child's responses and changes of mind about her clothes and her inability to change her behavior. When she says, "But sometimes I need to yell to her," she seems to be relying on a set of rules or directions that she must follow but is not entirely convinced about, as she indicates by telling us that "I don't like to yell to her because she don't like." Her own feelings are directly affected by her daughter's feelings. So even while she says she does not like to yell, she seems caught by her sense that is all she can do and is bewildered because this doesn't seem to change her daughter's behavior. So there is, at once, the reliance on the concrete behaviors that ought to work but do not and the sensitivity to making her daughter cry. Her sense of bewilderment is perhaps due in part to her evolving sense of responsibility for her daughter's feelings, mingled with the concrete sense that the rules should be working but are not and the struggle to find a way to hold those two senses together. While this might not sound like a "competent" response, that very bewilderment lies at the heart of her competence. It prompts her to question rules and strategies that do not work, and it prompts her to a new sensitivity to her daughter's experience. She is demonstrating the reality of competence as a thing in motion, reassessing the old ways and trying a new way. For example, her competence shows in her efforts to understand her daughter's behavior and to see the patterns within it. Her sensitivity to her daughter's feelings about being yelled at and seeing that yelling might not be the best solution demonstrates another kind of competency—interpersonal skills, or being able to recognize and respond to another's feelings in a sensitive and appropriate way—that we think is important and is reflected in the EFF Standards as well.

Socializing Way of Knowing

The next response, illustrating a Socializing meaning system, also relies on some behavioral strategies but uses them within a wider social context, which includes a sense of connection to a bigger network

and the possibility of help. The competence illustrated also demonstrates more complex interpersonal skills.

> Have her walk to school—she'll see that it's not fun, especially if the school is far from the house. Maybe that will help her get up early. Telling the principal and stuff of why she's late, maybe they could help with suggestions of getting her to be on time. . . . Because maybe different friends or anybody could help her with different—help her figure a way of how she can be on time. . . . So she can get her education. Be on time. **Not having her little sister crying and worrying about she's being late. Because instead of just Danielle being late, she's putting her sister in of being late too. And it looks like her sister likes to be in school. She must like learning. As for Danielle, to me it looks like she don't like school because she wants to be late. She's showing that she's hesitating of trying to go to school because she don't want to be there.**

Having the daughter walk to school and see that it's not fun teaches the daughter about the consequences of her behavior, helps her see a bigger view of the situation, and reflects the competence of the EFF Standard of Guiding Others. Looking to the principal and her daughter's friends as other sources of help and support demonstrates a competence for recognizing the importance of other people's opinions and expectations, and knowing how to draw on and use those supports to her and her daughter's advantage. This parent sees these others as supports not only in changing her daughter's behavior, but also in changing her daughter's understanding of what she's doing. The competence in this reasoning is the recognition that important others will have helpful ideas and opinions and will provide a fuller circle of support and encouragement.

The more telling of this response in terms of the Socializing way of knowing, however, is her clear concern for and attempts to understand the feelings of both children. The acknowledgment and interest in joining the internal experience of both daughters speaks to a meaning system that has at its core a sense of responsibility for the feelings of others, and for making sure the others feel understood and accepted. Another aspect of her competence, then, is in the use of this sense of responsibility to join her daughter and these important others in understanding the situation. This can attend to the problem of getting both daughters to school on time, her older daughter's feelings about going to school, and her younger daughter's distress at her big sister's causing her to be late. It can also get the wider community involved in supporting the daughter and, in doing so, supporting the mother and younger daughter.

Transition from Socializing to Self-Authoring

The transitional phase between the Socializing and the Self-Authoring meaning systems is now illustrated by this mother's way of setting limits:

> My oldest one like my country style breakfast. He want a rice and soup and some kind of vegetables, but that case, he want to eat something, I give him instead of a meal, only cereal. . . . Yeah. "Yesterday you didn't—today you didn't—today you doesn't, you don't ready for yourself, so it's only just a small breakfast because of the time." . . . so I think I can talk with him, he can understand what I saying. **And also he can understand what's the responsibility and what's the goal mommy's**

> **expect to him. He can understand. . . . That time I didn't say I want to miss his breakfast, skip his breakfast. And now I think my oldest one is understand my adult rule. It's not rule, but my action.**

Here again, the mother is teaching her son about the consequences of his behavior by giving him only cereal when he is late, not the big breakfast he likes. This strategy of helping a child see and understand the consequences of his or her own behavior is a competence that, in and of itself, is not necessarily the domain of any particular way of knowing. Rather, the distinguishing feature that connects this mother's competence to a particular way of knowing—in this case, the transition from Socializing to Self-Authoring—is the way she makes sense of her own choice as well as how her child will respond and understand her choice. In this quote, the mother is saying that she can talk to her child, that she knows he understands his own responsibility and his mother's goals for him. She is taking his perspective, joining her son in his understanding, and at the same time distinguishing between his experience and her goals for him. In doing so, she demonstrates both her sense of responsibility for his experience and her independent sense of what she wants him to accomplish and understand. That she also makes the distinction between a rule and her action ("It's not rule, but my action.") illustrates the capacity to make sense of an action as context-specific, with a particular goal in mind, and to distinguish it from a rule that might be more rigid and general. This perspective and the capacity to make these distinctions between her own goals and her son's experience, and between a rule and a context-specific action, *is* her competence.

Self-Authoring Way of Knowing

The following quote demonstrates the perspective, understanding, and competence of the Self-Authoring meaning system. This mother, like others quoted above, has a clear strategy for dealing with her child in the same kind of situation presented in the dilemma, and she demonstrates her competence with her unusual perspective:

> I have to get them dressed myself. . . . Yes I have to do that. If my son don't get out of bed when I tell him to, and I go upstairs in his room and take him in the shower, give him a shower myself, dry him myself and put on his underwears for him. He is eight years old, bigger than me, and I have to do all that stuff for him myself and make sure he gets on the bus and bye-bye. **But usually when you start doing it, when I start doing it for him, then everything else clicks for him, okay, mama is treating me like a baby, and no one wants to be, you know.** So the yelling the screaming, the kids, **I think they enjoy that because they are like, yeah, I can get you mad. I think the kids, sometimes, they don't understand, but they do it anyway.** You know. It is not even laziness sometimes, they do it to get attention, you know. I don't think it is anything else but trying to get attention. **And once they get the attention, it is not the attention that they wanted, you know. . . . Once I get him going like that maybe once or twice, and then the next day, you know, because they get embarrassed. They don't want the parents to see them nude. They don't want their parents, they are like, hey she is not giving me the attention, she is treating me like a baby.**

Again, it is not the strategy itself that is illustrative of the meaning system but the way in which this mother understands her own behavior, motivation, and intentions, and the way she understands her son's reaction to the way she treats him. In this example, the mother demonstrates her competence by making a clear distinction between her own experience and her son's experience; she has her own feelings about what she is doing, and her son has his separate feelings and reactions. This mother's competence is in her ability to "get inside the heads" of the kids, to understand their intentions and feelings and reactions: "I think they enjoy that because they are like, yeah, I can get you mad. I think the kids sometimes, they don't understand but they do it anyway," *while at the same time* maintaining her own sense of self and responsibility that is separate from theirs. She is aware of the distinctness of the child's psychological agenda and her own. They are connected by the situation, and she is able to understand and join in her son's reactions and wishes not to be treated like a baby. She sees his feelings as entirely his own. She knows she creates the situation for him to *elicit* those feelings, with the clear intention of teaching him something about his own behavior, but her own feelings about the situation are very separate from his, and she does not experience herself as the *cause* of his feelings. Again, her competence *is* this very capacity to take this broad perspective, to step back from the situation to see each of the various components—psychological and behavioral—of each of the players and create a deliberate strategy to draw from and play on all those components.

As noted earlier, we are not assessing the competence of the performance of any of these strategies but of the reasoning capacities with which they are created. We suggest that each of these parents is demonstrating a competence in her own particular way (all of the quotes come from mothers) and to the best of her abilities. A mother with an Instrumental meaning system cannot make the kinds of psychological distinctions between her feelings and her child's feelings that a mother with a Self-Authoring meaning system can. This does not mean, however, that the first mother is not a good mother or that she is not competent. In fact, she is *differently competent* from each of the other mothers, as they are all differently competent from each other. Each woman demonstrates her own "thoughtful capabilities" (Kerka, 1998, p. 3) and reminds us that "competence is not and cannot be a fixed concept . . . [and that] we need to recognize that in order to be competent we must constantly review and change our practice" (Hodkinson and Isset, 1995, p. 148). We recognize the competence of each of the parents quoted above and note the ways competence differs and changes with the evolution of the meaning system. Competence, like understanding, builds on itself.

A summary of the salient features of the competencies of each meaning system or way of knowing, based on the above analysis is presented below.

Meaning System	**Competence: Setting Limits/ Discipline**
Instrumental	Competence in setting limits is based on understanding of and reliance on concrete sets of behaviors and rules. The capacity here is being able to make a plan, create some rules, institute some punishment or concrete consequences that have meaning for the child, and be consistent in holding the child to it.
2/3–3/2	Competence is still based on understanding of concrete rules and behaviors with the idea that just by setting them, the child will change. The new concern for the feelings of the child even as the parent carries out the same strategy(ies), reflects a growing capacity to take another's perspective and a greater competence in including the child's feelings in one's decisions.
Socializing	Competence is based on recognizing and enlisting the help and understanding of other important people in the child's life, recognizing and enlisting the help of experts. Competence is demonstrated in the understanding of the feelings and internal experience of both children and reflects a full capacity to take another's perspective.
3/4–4/3	Competence is based on the parent's action to help the child understand the consequences of his own behavior. Sounds similar to the Instrumental strategy, but the competence here is in understanding what the child can understand separate from what the parent understands, and the emphasis is on both understanding and taking care of the child's feelings while maintaining an independent goal and expectation for the child.
Self-Authoring	Here, the competence is not based on teaching any particular behavior but on being able to help the child have a different understanding of what he or she is doing and the consequences of actions or behavior. The parent's competence is in seeing his or her own understanding and the child's understanding as very separate, that the child has a very different psychological agenda from the parent.

BHCC: Taking Responsibility for Learning

The participants at BHCC, like those at Even Start, responded to the dilemma in many different ways. Some issues raised were very salient to some students but seemingly irrelevant to other students. But this group of participants was very clear about reasons for being in the program and very serious about making education a priority. Taking responsibility for their own learning was something that nearly every student mentioned. Here are some examples of the ways the participants at BHCC made sense of their responsibility for learning and demonstrated their competence at doing so:

Instrumental Way of Knowing

This first example is in response to the interviewer's question about how the student would decide whether to follow the teacher's instructions or go with his friends and follow a different path with the assignment:

> I do by myself. Whatever I saw myself. What I want to do I would do . . . **I can't follow my friend. . . . Maybe he do something wrong. I have to look first what he do. If he do something right I will do with him. But if he do something wrong, I can't . . .** Yes, I decide [with] the teacher. . . . **Because the teacher, we study the teacher. We learn something from the teacher. You have to follow the teacher's rule. . . . She never gives us something wrong.**

The teacher has the ultimate authority for this student, who says, "We learn something from the teacher. . . . She never gives us something wrong," and he demonstrates his competence by respecting the teacher's position and authority and following her directions. For this student, learning seems to be inextricably tied to doing things right versus doing them wrong and following the teacher's rule. As the ultimate authority for this student, the teacher possesses knowledge and information the student needs. The student's sense of responsibility for his own learning and his competence in following through is in recognizing the teacher's authority and expertise and making his decision to "follow the teacher's rule."

Transition from Instrumental to Socializing

In this transitional phase, a person's competence can often appear diminished in comparison to the sense of confidence and sureness that goes along with it in the previous meaning system. Reliance on the teacher as the source of knowledge, rules, and grades continues but is challenged and transformed by the emergence of a need to belong in the group. In his new concern for his *relationship* to the teacher and to the other students, the learner can seem to be wavering between his need for the concrete rules and direction and the need to be part of the group. Rather than seeming competent, the student might appear to have lost his earlier competence. This student's response is to the question of how he would decide which version of the assignment he would choose to go with and why and illustrates that appearance of wavering.

> Because he is my teacher, I think he have good idea about what we learn. And I will see, though . . . [B]ecause he give assignment, he'll give a grade for the assignment...

> [If the group voted to do the assignment differently than the teacher said] I go with the group. . . . Because they win. . . . **This is because they make adjustment, I have to [be] part of the group. . . . But I tell the teacher that they don't want to do this assignment, but you have to change assignment to another one. He will talk with the group. . . . I think the teacher, he had experience about this, because he's the teacher.**

The authority of the teacher still holds as ultimate even as this student feels the pull of his sense of loyalty to the group. The two opposing psychological tugs are not easily reconciled and seem to create a tough conflict for him, as we see from his statement that he will "tell the teacher that they don't want to do this assignment, but you have to change the assignment to another one." He is trying to both stay in line behind the teacher and be part of a group that wants to follow a different path. Unable to let go of either side, he ingeniously comes up with a possible solution to do both at once. So rather than being *less* competent to choose a learning path and take responsibility for his learning, this student demonstrates a *new* kind of competence in being able to come up with a solution to his own dilemma. His competence is also in his new capacity to experience and acknowledge the two opposing tugs and to propose a solution that keeps his sense of obligation to each side intact.

Socializing Way of Knowing

The teacher's authority remains ultimate in a Socializing way of knowing. Not only is the teacher the authority on the subject in the classroom, but she is the bestower of judgment, validation, and acceptance as well. The teacher's ultimate authority can be mitigated somewhat by the presence and validation of friends, as this student demonstrates. The following is a response to the interviewer's question about how the student knows when she has learned something, and if she can know she has done so without the teacher telling her.

> **Not always, not always will she [the teacher] say to you, you have got it. [So] sometimes I do by myself because I will have a thesis, and then all of friends have the same and she will ask,** for example, I know the teacher discussed it a little bit, and I know she was wrong, and I have something that is similar [to what my friends have]. Okay, I am wrong, I got it, I have to do it this way. If I do that, I will got it. So it is like a little bit game for myself and everybody around me. . . . Of course, a lot of times when I learn something I read, **sometimes I didn't need the teacher's word [to say], yes, you are exactly right. I just know that I am right. It is like, yes, I have heard about it, or it looks familiar, or it sounds familiar and yeah, yeah, yeah, you are right exactly, honey.**

This student tells us that she doesn't always need the teacher's word to tell her that she is right, she can know she is right by referring to another source of authority, whether that authority is friends, having "heard about it before," or knowing that "it sounds familiar." Her competence, then, is in her ability to find this bigger, external context to hold what she knows and to choose which authority she will rely on to determine the rightness of her understanding. This student's sense of how she takes responsibility for her own learning is to make sure she is right in her understanding, and her competence is in her capacity to find trustworthy sources of authority for what is right.[3]

[3] One caveat to the experience of the teacher as the ultimate authority is that some students find teachers who do not meet their expectations in some way, who they feel are not good teachers, and

Transition from Socializing to Self-Authoring

In the transition to the Self-Authoring meaning system, an internal sense of authority is evolving, even while the experience of the authority for knowledge and understanding being outside oneself remains:

> **First of all, try to understand very well what the teacher wants this assignment.** The final assignment to look like. I would make sure I understood it. I always do that. If I don't, **I will come to her and ask her once again to say to me in detail what that the assignment should look like, or the project. And then if I have clear picture how it's supposed to be, it's much easier to see one or two options, which one is better.** That's how I know.
>
> I would go with the group that's [going] for the new ideas. How come? Because . . . I would, at least I would like to hear about it more, and if it seems like a good idea to me too, if it sounds interesting, then it might sound interesting to the teacher too and if, if...you know a lot about the teacher, to know what he's like, if he like, you have to do like this, or is he open to, other [things] . . . So I would vote, and the group, because it would be part of [the group] . . . **Because if you make a mistake it's not just you . . . And I'm not alone, there's another half of group which you did mention, who are for that. . . . Basically, I'm always for something that is different or something that's** [inaudible]**. I hate to follow rules.** If there are, [inaudible] if there are like, **the teacher is like that, if he's not open for anything else, maybe he's the way for something, that could also like ruin your inspiration because if they like stick with what the teacher say, they might not made a good project. . . . If I'm alone, I know the teacher is very strict, and I know that I would be punished for it, of course I wouldn't go [with the group]. Then I would . . . have to manage that conflict. . . .** What be the hardest? I don't think anything is hard over there. In this situation, nothing. **If I'm alone, then I would be some difficulties, to make . . . because . . . I would have to put my personal beliefs against the rules and I'm all alone in it. Here I can put my personal against, and I'm not alone, there's a whole group.**

This student orients right away to following the authority of the teacher when she says she would "try to understand very well what the teacher wants [in] this assignment." But just as quickly, she lets us know that once she has a very clear sense of "how it's supposed to be," she can come up with some

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they drop the class. This does not necessarily mean the student has acted on a self-authored internal authority. The Socializing meaning system finds authority in ideas, philosophies, and institutional ideologies as well as in persons. If a student drops a class because he or she does not like the teacher, he or she could be acting on behalf of a shared identification with a particular way of thinking about what a good teacher is or could be dropping the class because he or she doesn't like the teacher and feels that the teacher doesn't like him or her, and this is untenable. As with any set of decisions or behaviors, we are looking at underlying meaning. Three people can make the same decision or act out the same behavior, and all have very different reasons, motivations, and meaning attached to it. Our job is to understand the action's meaning.

other options for how to do the assignment, thus demonstrating the capacity and competence to draw on her own internal authority to go with an option that seems better to her. At the same time, she acknowledges the importance, if not necessity, of being part of the group—having that company, having the support and validation for her personal beliefs, not having to stand alone "against the rules." Even so, she is willing and in fact prefers to stand against the rules as she makes very clear when she says, "I hate to follow rules."

Although this student is not explicitly talking about taking responsibility for her own learning, the fact that she prefers to at least hear new ideas, to always go for something different, and to have a teacher open to more than a strict view of the assignment, and that she fears a teacher closed to this could ruin the group's inspiration and their good project, all speaks to an inherent, unambiguous, and unambivalent desire to learn. The way she takes responsibility for continuing to learn is in going for different things, wanting to hear about the new ideas, and not following the rules, albeit with the support of the camaraderie in the group. Taking responsibility for her learning in this way *is* the competence she demonstrates. She has the capacity to draw on both her sources of support—her friends and the simpatico teacher—and her own internal sense of what she wants from her education. Being able to synthesize these internal and external supports to help achieve small and large goals is her competence.

Self-Authoring Way of Knowing

The Self-Authoring meaning system takes the perspective that rules and authorities are more guides and suggestions to use of in context rather than hard and fast rules to apply across the board. This student talks about how he sees following the teacher's instructions as a way to demonstrate his own opinions:

> Yes. It is not so much my conscious, but it is just a kind of rules I have to follow because it is a kind of game but there is some instructions they give to the player to follow, and if he doesn't work, these instructions I think it is, he is doing something else because I try to think about baseball, and there is a team and the rules they have to follow when they are playing this game. And if you are doing something else, like if you are playing basketball now, if it is baseball, people are not going to understand it. They know you are a good player before, but they expect you to do something way, and instead they see you doing some other kind of game like basketball in the baseball, it doesn't make sense. So I think, I don't got too much my conscious to understand that that is a thing that I can see right away. . . . So you are out of the game. And everything you do, you will be out. **And they don't know how to grade that. It is like some best baseball player. They don't know how to appreciate that the performers know that he is a good player because he doesn't follow instructions, he just goes like that. And no one understands what is going on because we don't have any—something like by which we can understand what he is doing. So it is kind of the assignment, it doesn't say if I follow the teacher's assignment that means I don't have to express my opinion, no I do so every time, I have to express my opinion through the homeworks. But what I have to do, before I express my opinion I have to answer to the question first and follow what they ask me to do, and then when I give my**

> **answer I can give that in my argumentation and try to explain my opinion also through the assignment.** And that would be good for me and for the teacher because now she is going to read what she expected to get and she also can have something more than what she asked me to do. And that can help the teacher to know and to understand. So I understand the lesson. . . .
>
> **So you have got to work different ways with different teachers but just try to do what they need you to give.** Otherwise you are just going to confuse, get confused and, like, too many things which are not important. So that is the way I understand that**. Because any class is, every class is different. So you have to get organized with one teacher of those classes and try to follow instructions, try to, sometimes when I learn, I try to be like the teacher. I think it works good for me. If I learn, for example, say psychology, I try to do my best to think like him, like psychology. It is easy for me. I don't know if it happens for anybody else. It is easy for me to understand what can I say.**[4]

This student knows that following the teacher's directions is important within the context of that teacher's particular class, but he doesn't experience it as a rule that he must follow to do things right. Rather he seems to use the teacher's directions and assignments as templates for demonstrating his knowledge and opinions, and for pursuing his own learning and understanding. He sees the rules as ways to provide the context for everyone involved to understand what the others are doing, not to dictate behavior or thinking—if you want to play the game you have to go by the rules. He takes responsibility for his learning by understanding the template of each class within the bigger system and working within that template. His competence is his capacity to use his understanding to make the system work for him even as he plays by its rules; it is his capacity to see the system as a bigger context in which he participates.

He demonstrates his competence by very deliberately adapting his learning to each teacher, as he says, "Sometimes when I learn I try to be like the teacher. I think it works good for me. If I learn, for example, say psychology, I try to do my best to think like him, like psychology. It is easy for me. I don't know if it happens for anybody else." A couple of things are happening here. One, he recognizes that everybody thinks differently, that each person—teachers in this case—has a *way* of thinking, a *system*, that it is possible to get inside, understand, and emulate: "I do my best to think like him, *like psychology*." Two, he recognizes, along with the fact that everyone thinks differently, that the same strategies do not work for everyone: "It is easy for me. I don't know if it happens for anybody else." He is demonstrating his understanding that each person, including himself, is understood to have, and is seen to be responsible for, his or her independent and individual agenda and way of making sense of things. He takes responsibility for his learning by using his understanding that other people have particular kinds of expectations depending on their context, and to reach one's own goals, one must, to a certain extent, meet those expectations. His competence is in his ability to do this very consciously and deliberately.

[4] This student was not assessed to have a full Self-Authoring meaning system but to be in transition from Socializing to Self-Authoring. However, this passage reflected the Self-Authoring aspect of his meaning-making.

Following is a summary of the salient features of each meaning system or way of knowing as it relates to the competence of taking responsibility for one's own learning:

Meaning System	Competence: Taking Responsibility for Learning
Instrumental	The teacher is seen as the source of information and knowledge, as the ultimate authority. The student's competence is in the capacity to take responsibility for own learning by making sure he or she follows the teacher's rules and does the assignments the right way.
2/3–3/2	Same as above, with the added concern for being accepted and validated and the added competence of caring for the relationship with others in a new way.
Socializing	Competence is in the new capacity to shape and model oneself and one's learning on the example of the teacher or other trusted authority, and to seek that authority's validation for learning and being a good student.
3/4–4/3	Competence is in the emerging sense of one's own authority to decide the best way to learn while retaining the reliance on the teacher/authority and trusted others for support, validation as a good student, and camaraderie in trusting one's own authority.
Self-Authoring	Competence is in the capacity to see the teacher and the rules as guidelines or templates for creating the context in which the student finds and defines his or her own way to learn.

Polaroid: Taking Responsibility for One's Job

As with the participants in the other two sites, the participants at Polaroid raised many important issues in their responses to the dilemma we presented. The issue that seemed immediately salient to each participant was being able to be clear about their own sense of responsibility in their job and the decisions they felt able to make and those that they saw as someone else's (their supervisor or another authority in the hierarchy) responsibility. Like the participants in the other two sites, they tended to immediately personalize the dilemma with stories of their own experience that were very similar to the one presented, and with the circumstances of their own tasks. One participant whose way of knowing is Self-Authoring, did both—related and responded to the dilemma in the hypothetical situation and simultaneously related it to his own experience, moving back and forth between the two and using each to add to his explanation of his understanding of the appropriate thing to do in such a situation. In other words, to a degree that other participants were not able to do, this participant looked at the hypothetical situation and his own situation as specific in and of themselves, and at the same time, generalized the situation, issues, and lessons learned to illuminate all of the perspectives. Most participants focused their entire responses on their own situation. As with the previous two sites' data, we will present examples of the way participants demonstrate their competence through the ways they make sense of their particular job responsibilities and their overall sense of responsibility to and for their job, and the ways they use their differing understanding to do their best work in their positions.

Instrumental Way of Knowing

In response to the question about what she would do if she found a defect she hadn't seen before in the product she makes, this participant knew exactly what to do:

> If I check it and see the defect is big, it's not going to be acceptable, I would throw it away. Because we, when I was working downstairs, we made lens. When I cut those lens I see a lot of defects, scratches, anything, I just threw it away. And then I will tell them what was going on because they will ask me why I had too many rejects. **Then I will, always have one for example to show them. And sometimes I will call the mechanic, or I will call for help because sometime the machine will need to be cleaned. . . . When we have problem in the machine, we call the tech. . . . Or, if something is wrong with the** [inaudible]**, we call the mechanic. You know? If something's wrong with the light, you know, we call the electrician. Something. And then the tech will come, and then they will clean, you know, you know, they will, they will tell you,** Just throw it away until I come back. And then we have people from QC that will take a sample, then they will go check it, just like that. . . . **My job is to call somebody to check it. And then they will decide.** Because I might think, oh, this is no good, and then they will say, oh, that, that one is good. **So, they are the one who take their own, their decision.**

This participant has a very clear, unambiguous understanding of the hierarchy of responsibility, who does what, and who she should call to check the situation. Notice that in her description, the rules or guidelines about whom to call are unwavering, as is her adherence to them. Both her competence and her sense of responsibility about her job right come from these guidelines, the set of instructions about whom to call. It is not her job to decide whether the defect is bad but to know whom to call to make the decision. Her competence is in her confidence in these guidelines and in her clarity of understanding them and acting in accordance with them. She doesn't view these guidelines as a lack of confidence in her ability to judge or as management not letting her make decisions but instead feels more confident in her work because she knows the right channels to follow in each situation.

Transition from Instrumental to Socializing

Illustrating the transitional phase between the Instrumental meaning system and the Socializing meaning system is a participant whose competence is also in his adherence to the way things work at Polaroid and with the added concern and wish to be viewed favorably by his supervisor and coworkers. This new concern for how he is regarded by these others pushes his competence forward by providing an extra incentive.

> **Do your job the way you're taught to do, the way you train to be doing. I think that's the main frame of being, getting along with supervise, and do your best. Whatever the number they ask you to do, if you can, and I prob, I always do more than I asked to do.** Still I, I still came up with that all the time. **I don't want any, any problems with any supervise.** Every time they ask me for two, I give four or six. . . . A lot of people say I'm so fast and do, I, I can, I, everything, if I can, I do, I'll do more. I don't just, I, I'm not just lazy. A lot of people, if they ask for, for one, they give only one. But if I can make it two or three, I do it. Well, **I think it's because I like to do the work, and I don't like to, to fool around at work. . . . That's, that is my way. . . .** And especially when I work now, I, I very

> concentrate on the quality before I go to the numbers and schedule. . . . I care, I think it's more important, quality than in schedule.

This participant's emphasis on his sense of responsibility and his resulting competence is founded on following his supervisor's orders or direction, doing what he is trained and asked to do. But he takes it one step further and tries to do better than asked and more than is expected. He says, "I don't want any problems with any supervisor." We don't know if he wants to avoid problems with a supervisor because of the concrete consequences (losing his job, perhaps) or because a problem with a supervisor would risk that person's positive feelings toward him. It could be either or both. Either way, he is demonstrating his competence by doing more than he is expected to do. He describes why he does more than asked by saying, "I think it's because I like to do the work, and I don't like to, to fool around at work. . . . That's, that is my way." He is describing himself and his work style in simple, concrete terms: "I like to do the work, I don't like to fool around; it's my way." Yet within this concrete description is also the emergence of a more abstract sense of self and self-at-work. To say "it's my way" is a kind of generalization to a way of being rather than just a concrete description of what he does. He is describing a philosophy, albeit still a fairly concrete one, about his *attitude* toward his work, a philosophical stance, a way of being a good worker. That stance and his enactment of it *are* his competence.

Socializing Way of Knowing

The respect for the authority of her supervisor this participant describes when it was urgent for her to decide to wait for her supervisor to complete a task is one of the hallmarks of the Socializing way of knowing as well as one of her strongest competencies.

> It was 16,000 piece of mail that should go out that day . . . and the people, the stuff that was stuck in envelopes, was small then envelope, way, way small than envelope, . . . not too big. Every time we put in the machine, the stamp didn't show, nothing. If we kept doing that, we would spend a lot of money because it was 55 cents each, it was 16,000, and that was a lot of money. And they went through that envelope, they would lose all the stamps, and I stop. I told the guy that I was with, I said stop until she comes back. And when she comes back, then we show her, she said good thing you used, because we would have lost a lot of money. Would have cost more money to start them all over again in another envelope. . . . And I got a raise, . . . you know why? For all the money they would [have lost], now we give you... Yeah, that was, anyway, I got my raise. . . .
>
> You have to think before you do something, or say something, you have to think. . . . **I think you have to have permission to do any job that you do. If you have permission to do, to help, your supervisor will be nice for you, will be nice for him or for her.** Because if she will be [inaudible] for you, [inaudible] she help me, that means that they ask for your help, if they tell you, do this job, **I want this job this way, you gotta go with the flow. You gotta do this way, or, even if you don't like it, you have to stick up for that.**

This participant's competence is evident in her capacity to recognize the problem and take the action to stop, knowing her supervisor would approve. She knows she does not have the authority to make decisions without her supervisor's permission, and her competence is in her capacity to respect that authority and even go one step further to be as helpful as possible. Her sense of mutuality and reciprocity contributes to her competence in that she wants to do well by her supervisor so that it will not only look good for her supervisor, but for herself, too. Then they both "win" and have a stronger relationship as well.

Transition from Socializing to Self-Authoring

In the transition from the Socializing meaning system to the Self-Authoring meaning system, the supervisor's authority still dominates but is tempered by the person's growing sense of competence and confidence in his own perspective and judgment and willingness to stand up for what he believes is right, even when someone else disagrees.

> I think better to shut down the machine and resolve the problem before you do other things wrong. Before, if you do something wrong, so you lost money, for the company [inaudible] **so you have to stop machine and convince the supervisor, show him exactly what's wrong and what you think he's supposed to do to fix the problem. . . .** Because this story is exactly what's happened with me on work. . . . Exactly. Because I do some products is called OEMs, is some kind of glass for plane, the shades for the window, the screen for computer, because we use different kinds of filter. So I have . . . two supervisors, I have engineers for the materials in the skid what they're supposed to do, if you put this color in this color, was have this color, so [I] have supervisor, then when you do something, . . . somebody inspect your job, . . . but on a morning, the person inspect my job work on the night shift, on the morning when I comes, so I found the note, what kind of rejects. I don't agree with those rejects. Don't agree with those rejects, I think that's good to save cost. So I called the engineer, sees kind, she don't say exactly this is good, she don't say this is bad. It's between me and person who inspect.
>
> **Sometime I feel bad when I have to call the manager to come in and stand me, to show him the problems and to tell him, see if you found it so, this is marked rejects, they're marked rejects, but they're clean, good job. . . .** I clean the parts she's thinks it's rejects, I keep the money [inaudible]. Okay, I'm gonna sell you this project. See if you find any kind of rejects on this product. So . . . look, put on the light, say that's perfect, I don't see nothing.
>
> **This is exactly the problem I have. So the inspector said this is rejects, so my supervisor is engineer, [says] maybe this is a reject, I want you to know if it's a reject, if you don't [see] nothing, I think that's . . . your judgment, then ship those things. So I sign and ship, never this come back. Never.**
>
> **Sometime you get those kind of things, like you're a little bad, when I have to go over my supervisor, and go to the plant manager to do that. But, so that's**

> **the kind of things you have your own judgment,** because if you run piece, she's take 50 piece but maybe is 10 is rejects, and 40 is not really rejects... **So, you feel a little bad, because you do a lot of work and you put all your attention on the things you do, somebody tell, oh, this is a reject, I don't want to ship this one, when you go you found that's not rejects so sometimes you have to do something. You don't like that** . . . she says, reject, rejects, **so you not going to have no credit with your worker because you do just rejects,** you put your attention when you do the same . . . before you do lamination, those kinds stuff, **so, when you fight, only your products you think that's okay, you have to be straight and you have your own judgment. . . . So to respond the rejects, have to find somebody else to convince him that's not rejects.**

This participant's essential competence here is that he knew he did a good job, that his work was not a reject and that despite feeling bad about going over his supervisor to the plant manager, he will defend his work, that the quality of his work speaks for itself. At the same time, he feels bad about going over his supervisor and is clear that good relationships with his supervisor and coworkers, and the way they perceive him, are important to him, saying "She says, reject, rejects, so you not going to have no credit with your worker because you do just reject." Nevertheless, his competence is his recognition and respect for both the quality of his own work and for his supervisor, and his conviction and capacity to defend his work even if it means going outside the bounds of the hierarchical structure and risking his good relationship with his supervisor. His competence is also his concern about being well respected by his coworkers and his supervisor, and so he is diligent about keeping the quality of both his work and his relationships high.

Self-Authoring Way of Knowing

A person with a Self-Authoring meaning system can step back from a situation to see it from the perspective of each person involved as well as his own, and can see each perspective as separate and distinct. This capacity leads to a particular kind of competence for seeing the big picture.

> Okay, what I'm saying is **that Anthony shut the machine down, he done his maintenance, he checked the machine out he found nothing in there that was causing the defect. So he shut the machine down.** Now Chris comes by, asks Anthony why the machine's down. Anthony shows him the 10 pieces he made with the defect in it, and he explained to him, that he cleaned the machine, did everything he could in his possibility to get rid of the defect, which he couldn't get away from the defect, so he shut the machine down. **So now Chris turns around and looks at the product and feels it's not that big of a deal of a defect.** So he decides to tell Anthony to go ahead and run the product or run the machine. To keep producing. **So Anthony says to Chris, well, if you want me to continue to run, then you sign off the work order for the day of the day of the product that I made.** Which now he does that.
>
> Chris is the floor supervisor, **I made my judgment, I made my call. Now Chris comes by and he took it away from me, he took it out of my hands. He's the one that decides to run, so therefore it's Chris responsibility now for the**

> **product I produce for the day.** Now Pat comes along and looks at this piece, Anthony, you got a defect there, you didn't do nothing about it, yes Pat I did, I shut the machine down, I done what I was supposed to do, done the cleaning, check the valves and all that, I ran and the defect was there. **I shut the machine down, Chris came by, he elected to tell me to run the machine. I had him to sign the work order to continue to run. Therefore I did my part, I did my job, that's my ability to [show] that I did. Now if there's any recurrence, you go see Chris. [So it's] my decision and my responsibility when it comes to that, yeah, shut the machine down. I done my responsibility, I've done my job, I've done my work.**

This participant is also quite clear about the lines of responsibility, in what almost sounds like a very concrete way. However, the way that Anthony attributes an individual agenda to each player and has done all he can do, given the power and responsibility of his position, speaks to his competence in his capacity to recognize the multiple truths, realities, and perspectives within any situation. He also weaves his own position into the story and implicitly expresses his frustration that he can't follow through with his own judgment but has to bow to the authority of the supervisor: "I made my judgment, I made my call. Now Chris comes by, and he took it away from me, he took it out of my hands. He's the one that decides to run, so therefore it's Chris's responsibility now for the product I produce for the day." One aspect of his competence is that he is willing to take responsibility for his own decisions but not for a decision he disagrees with, even if someone higher in the organization makes it. By having the supervisor sign off on the work order, he can reconcile continuing work he doesn't think is right. The issue for this participant's competence is not whether he actually shuts down the machine, but that the decision is taken out of his hands. Some participants assume that their responsibility is limited and that someone else will take the responsibility for a decision. This participant feels frustrated that he can't act on his own judgment and decision. That he follows his supervisor's orders does not necessarily mean that he accepts the other's decision as right. Rather, this participant demonstrates his competence by recognizing the power structure inherent in the hierarchy in his particular situation, and while actively disagreeing with it, acknowledges the necessity of working within it and does so. He doesn't give up his own sense of what is the right thing to do but works within the system.

Following is a summary of the differing competencies of the different ways of knowing or meaning systems:

Meaning System	**Competence: Taking Responsibility for One's Job**
Instrumental	Competence in taking responsibility for one's job is based on knowing and following the rules, knowing who to call to make the right decision.
2/3–3/2	Competence in taking responsibility for one's job is based on doing one's job as one has been trained, with the added incentive of caring about and wanting to have a good relationship with the supervisor, wanting the supervisor to be pleased with one's work.
Socializing	Competence in taking responsibility for one's job is based on being very clear what one has been given permission to do and knowing when to wait for the supervisor to make the decision. Following the directions of the supervisor results in a mutually beneficial relationship: The supervisor will be nice to and trust the worker and will ask the worker for help, which is nice for the supervisor, too.
3/4–4/3	Competence in taking responsibility for one's job and performance is defined more and more by one's own evolving internal authority and standards for what is right to do. The supervisor's authority is still held as definitive, and there is a concern for maintaining a good relationship with him or her. Both experiences of authority—internal and external—modify and enhance one another.
Self-Authoring	Competence in taking responsibility for one's job is based on and defined by one's internal standards, sense of personal authority, and acting on that authority. Competence is also based on the capacity to see the bigger picture and the multiplicity of perspectives and opinions, and to act in such a way as to enhance both the system within which one works and one's own position. Decisions are made on the basis of personal assessment of the situation and degree of authority within the organization.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

The implications of adopting and applying a developmental view of competence, although not offering any quick assessment tool, hold out the possibility for a model of building success upon success. If adult learners' competence is recognized, assessed, and understood in context, and learners are encouraged to recognize and value their own competence—i.e., what they *can* do—and build on that, it is quite possible and even quite likely that the sense of empowerment accompanying a real experience of competence (even if not yet what one wants to have) gives learners, their teachers, and their program directors a way to mark, value, and celebrate the learner's growth. It also allows us to acknowledge competence as *growth*—that it will be ongoing, that the learner is always in process, and that competence is not an endpoint but a continual jumping-off point. This view recognizes where one has come from and where one may still want to go, and it keeps the learning *process* in perspective.

We see two components to the notion of competence building on itself: There is an increased sense of confidence when one experiences a new sense of mastery and capacity in a particular area. The increased confidence spurs one on to new challenges. At the same time, the new sense of mastery and capacity gives one access to a whole new set of tools and capacities which in turn opens new ways to respond to and manage the complexities of adult life. Confidence and mastery are mutually enhancing and continually build and reinforce one's competence.

A developmental view of competence can also encompass the best of both ends of the spectrum of the debate over what to teach and how to assess it. It recognizes the value of and need for an exclusive focus on basic skills for some learners and at the same time allows learners to help shape their own learning and this learning to build on itself to insure further success and growing competence.

As we have noted and argued throughout this work, the importance of the holding environment cannot be underestimated. It is within the context of the holding environment that one *becomes* competent. The expectations of the holding environment, as we stated earlier, hold the bar for competent performance and mastery of whatever skill, whether basic and concrete or abstract and interactive, the learner is trying to achieve. We have argued that the holding environment must actually hold several different bars for mastery and competence that will be meaningful and accessible to learners at different points along the continuum.

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