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Dear Readers,

We are pleased to release our first issue of the third volume of the Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education. In this issue you will find three research articles focused on GED® completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital, addressing the tensions of meeting the various needs of adult English language learners, and attitudes of faculty members as they teach adults with learning disabilities. These articles provide a unique insight into the learning and literacy needs of adults as they work to address various basic skills.

In “Tensions in Prioritizing Adult English Language Learners’ Literacy Needs,” Haworth describes the struggle of meeting the needs of ELL students while balancing the realities of meeting learner's needs while attracting and maintaining government funding. Using a case-study approach with a private training enterprise, Haworth conducted interviews and focus groups with several members of the organization. The results showed that success was gained by being flexible, collaborating, and possessing strong leadership at the top. Haworth concluded with a connection of the current case study to Hargreaves’ concept of a “moving mosaic” in that the organization sought to maintain equilibrium under ever-changing conditions.

In “GED® Completers’ Perceptions of College Readiness and Social Capital: Linking Adult Literacy to a Greater Quality of Life,” Lott and O’Dell conducted a descriptive study to determine the GED® completers’ perceptions of the two factors college readiness and social capital by using a survey and an exploratory factor analysis. Using those two factors, the authors sought to determine if there was a relationship between literacy levels and college readiness or social capital, but did not find a significant relationship. The authors concluded with practical and policy implications.

In “Faculty Attitudes Toward Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities,” Reynolds and Hitchcock examine the attitudes of ABE faculty members as they work with adults with learning disabilities. Data gathered through the use of a survey enabled them to explore faculty attitudes towards causes, diagnosis, and impact of having a learning disability on academic performance. The results indicated that attitudes and knowledge could be broken down into five factors and that, in general, faculty members had a positive attitude towards those with learning disabilities. The authors make some strong suggestions for future research and strengthening the results.

I encourage you to read through these articles and the practitioner article by Gardner, which explores Correctional Education English as a Second Language literacy program in Maryland. In addition, we have restarted the Research Digest and want to welcome our new column editors Drs. Dean and Ritchey! I also invite you to enjoy our Web Scan and the Resource Reviews. Finally, we have launched a survey to our readers and I encourage you to complete it if you haven't already. The link can be found at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/COABEJournal14. If there is something you would like to see in the journal, please feel free to contact me at journal@coabe.org.

Enjoy!

Jim Berger,
Editor
MISSION STATEMENT

The Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education is published jointly three times a year by the Commission on Adult Basic Education and Western Kentucky University. The journal’s mission is to provide a forum for sharing research, information, theory, commentary, and practical experiences that will improve the quality of services for adult basic education, literacy, and numeracy learners. These learners are found in publicly funded ABE, ESL, and GED programs; volunteer-based literacy programs; community-based literacy programs; family literacy programs; workplace literacy programs; correctional literacy programs; and many other places.

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- Massachusetts Central SABES RSC to create professional development workshops and modules on integrating technology in the classroom
- McDonald’s Corporation’s distance education ESOL program for immigrant restaurant workers
- Health Care Learning Network, a distance education workplace basic skills and college preparation program for health care workers.

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Tensions in Prioritizing Adult English Language Learners’ Literacy Needs

Dr. Penny Haworth
Massey University, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Despite increasing ethnic diversity globally, there has been little research into meeting the further education needs of these learners (Bidgood, Saebi, & May, 2006). In particular, the international literature provides scant understanding of how organizations go about meeting the literacy needs of adult English language learners (ELLs). It is recognized, however, that organizational factors can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of adult education (Fincher, 2010). This paper provides insights into the organizational strategies adopted by one educational provider in its endeavours to meet the needs of adult ELLs in a context similar to Hargreaves’ (1994) description of a “moving mosaic” (p. 195). Case study data gathered included individual interviews with senior managers, a focus group discussion with teachers, and document analysis. Amidst the uncertainties of a shifting environment, three key organizational strategies appeared to help in sustaining the goal of maintaining a student-centered program: flexibility, internal and external collaboration, and a leadership model that provided clear direction as well as engendering a sense of shared purpose.

INTRODUCTION

Provisions for adult ELLs have thus far received scant attention in the international literature (Bidgood, Saebi, & May, 2006). It is known, however, that organizational factors can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of adult education (Fincher, 2010). Also, it is known that resolving organizational issues can divert time away from student support (Brown & Wynn, 2009). One area of concern mentioned in the literature is the continued uncertainty in adult literacy funding (Hamilton & Barton, 2000). This is an issue that also impacts on ELL literacy provisions:

While many aspects of the ESL [English as a Second Language] profession have acquired a certain glamour, or even panache, with their foreign travel and university affiliations, the same cannot be said for adult ESL literacy. Dependent on external funding sources, such as ‘soft money’ grants by government agencies, and thus condemned to uncertain long-range prospects. (Ross, 1992, p. 3)
This paper provides insights into how one Private Training Enterprise (PTE) strove to prioritize the literacy and language needs of diverse adult English language learners (ELLs) against a backdrop of uncertain funding, external accountability, and on-going policy changes. It opens by summarizing literature on adult literacy needs and provisions, and identifying relevant organizational approaches. The research design and the questions guiding the study are then outlined, after which the case study is presented. The paper concludes with discussion of three key strategies that assisted the PTE in maintaining a learner-centered approach amidst the tensions generated by external factors.

**Adult literacy and language needs**

Zepke (2011) notes “international literacy surveys in 1996 and 2006 showed that a large proportion of adult New Zealanders were not literate and numerate at a level needed to meet the challenges of a knowledge society” (p. 432). After an extensive review of the literature, Leach, Zepke, Haworth, Isaacs, & Nepia (2010) concluded that progress on addressing this issue was initially hindered by “a lack of reliable research evidence about literacy and numeracy teaching for adults internationally” (p. 8). In common with governments in many other parts of the world, New Zealand has recently begun to focus more on addressing adult literacy issues. However, meeting the literacy and language needs of adults, who are English language learners (ELLs), is often not a priority despite the fact that western, English speaking countries are fast becoming nations “of minorities with widely differing backgrounds and perspectives” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 184).

Enhancing adults’ literacy skills has many societal benefits (Wignall & Bluer, 2007; Eskey, 2005; Orem, 2005; Wiley, 2005; Barton & Pitt, 2003; Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003; White, Watts, & Trlin, 2001). Lo Bianco (2008) suggests that English language and literacy provides ELLs with “the critical medium for accessing employment, progressing through education and participating in the entitlements and duties of citizenship” (p. 344). The United Nations affirms that literacy “involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society” that is linked to both individual and social aspirations (UNESCO, 2004, p. 13). However, international research (e.g. Wignall & Bluer, 2007) as well as research in New Zealand (e.g. White et al., 2001) continues to raise concerns about the low levels of English literacy amongst adult ELLs. Adult ELLs need to quickly learn a new language to enable them to operate in their new cultural context (Pitt, 2005). Also, many migrants may need to construct a new professional identity (Roberts et al., 2005; Wignall & Bluer, 2007) as their prior qualifications may not be recognized in the new setting (Department of Internal Affairs, 1996). Therefore, the challenge for providers of literacy and language programs for adult ELLs is perhaps how best to address these learners’ diverse, immediate, and long-term needs.

**Adult literacy provisions**

The Tertiary Education Strategy in New Zealand does not identify a specific pedagogical strategy for adult literacy; however, the Tertiary Education Commission advocates an embedded literacy, language and numeracy approach (Zepke, 2011). An embedded approach ensures that “literacy is developed while it is being applied” (McKenna &
It is therefore suggested that literacy skills need to be built in or integrated into real life needs, rather than bolted on in the form of separate literacy programs isolated from social and work practices (Suda, 2001; Wickert & McGuirk, 2005). The benefits of this approach include: the provision of authentic, relevant learning environments related to students’ interests and experiences, and the creation of situations where learners can exercise autonomy (Benseman et al., 2005; Benseman & Sutton, 2007), as well as the introduction of key industry and technical language, and the modeling of text types common in particular professional discourse or industry (McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2005; Rogers & Kramer, 2008).

An embedded approach to literacy and language learning provisions has been advocated for adult ELLs (e.g. Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007), contributing to valuing the diversity of learners (Crowther, Hamilton, & Tett, 2003; Miralles-Lombardo et al., 2007; Nunavut Literacy Council et al., 2007), building a literacy-aware learning culture with the learner at the center of practice, and creating a supportive atmosphere with respectful and trusting relationships (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007; Tusting & Barton, 2007). Reports in Australia (e.g. Miralles-Lombardo, Miralles, & Golding, 2007) and New Zealand (McDermott, 2004; Shameem et al., 2002) suggest that embedding English language in work and life skills helps in connecting immigrants to each other, to learning contexts, and to the wider community. Also, embedding English literacy in work-related courses has been found to be motivating for adult ELLs (Barton & Pitt, 2003; Holmes, 2009; Holmes with Stubbe, 2003; Riddiford & Joe, 2006).

While availability of funding and the development of appropriate learning resources have been reported as significant influences on the effectiveness of embedded literacy models (Casey et al., 2006), it has been suggested that embedded courses provide an economical approach to learning, which makes better use of learning/teaching time (Roberts et al., 2005). However, in reality many adult ELL classes have a diverse range of literacy needs (Barton & Pitt, 2003; Burt et al., 2003; Adams & Burt, 2002). In New Zealand, such classes may include ELLs with differing cultural perspectives, spoken languages, discourse patterns, written scripts and prior educational experiences. Learners in one class may range in age from 16 to 60 years or older with some being pre-literate in both their first language and English; while others have high levels of tertiary education (Shameem et al., 2002). Therefore, despite the recognized benefits, embedded provisions may not always be appropriate. Nation (2008) points out that ELLs with low English proficiency, especially those adults who are preliterate in their first language(s), need to achieve foundational English language before being able to integrate this with work or study-related content. In fact, preliterate adult learners generally require a minimum of 12 hours regular input each week (Shameem et al., 2002), and between 800 and 1200 hours of English language tuition to reach foundational level in English (Ingram, 1981).

Beyond advocating an embedded approach, the literature provides little guidance on the pedagogical structure of literacy and language programs for ELLs. However, the literature does suggest that ELLs experience greater success where a holistic approach to creating a learning culture exists (Bates & Wiltshire, 2001; Guenther, 2002; Miralles, 2004; Miralles-Lombardo et al., 2007;
Organizational factors would therefore appear to be important to study in this context.

Effective leadership may be a critical factor in shaping a shared learning culture because it has a transformative function resulting in growth for all of the members of an organization (Lambert et al., 1997). In particular, a distributed model of leadership is said to create synergy between members of a culture in encouraging all participants to move towards common goals (Harris, 2004; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2010; Lambert et al, 1997). It is unclear whether such a leadership model is effective across cultures, but leadership does appear to be a critical factor in the ability of an educational organization to initiate or cope with change.

Stoll and Fink (1996) have identified a continuum of organizational effectiveness, encompassing organizations that are sinking (ineffective, lethargic and not able to change); struggling (wanting to improve but not knowing how); strolling (neither effective nor ineffective due to ill-defined goals); cruising (having the qualities of effective organizations but not striving to improve further); and moving (having a well-defined direction, as well as the motivation and skills to improve). It could therefore be said that an effective organization will have a coherent, cohesive and collaborative culture, and be continually working to enhance its performance. These features are closely linked to a distributed leadership model.

The degree to which leadership is distributed within an organization has been linked with the potential and willingness of its members to allow changes to occur, and the level of trust and respect that exists between them (Waterhouse, 2007; Grant, 2009). A distributed leadership model has also been found to “generate excitement about teaching and learning” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2009, p. 185). It is significant that a distributed leadership model is often affiliated with the educational ideals of inclusivity and social justice (Adams & Burt, 2002; Grant, 2009; Suda, 2001); hence, it may align with the aspirations of providers who cater for adult ELLs.

A key challenge for organizations that cater for adult ELLs may be the creation of a shared, yet moving culture, which addresses government aims and accountabilities. However, an effective educational organization must also place the learners’ needs at the heart of their planning (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007; Tusting & Barton, 2007; Crowther et al., 2003). Understanding how an educational organization, catering for adult ELLs, achieved equilibrium in the face of tensions created between external accountabilities and learner needs is central to this paper.

The study
The study described in this article took a case study approach, which has been defined as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 16). This approach allows for understanding of the diversity of the context, since in adult and community learning, “given the paucity of detailed national age-aggregated data, one is forced to rely on qualitative studies and individual institutional surveys to gain a picture” (McGivney, 2004, p. 36).

This article discusses an aspect of a larger government funded project (Leach et al., 2010), which focused on identifying organizational factors influencing the effective provision of adult literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) programs.
Ethical approval for the research procedures in this study was gained from the University at which three key members of the research team, including the author, were based. Data were gathered to address the research questions in the wider study, which centered on identifying the profile and position of LLN provisions in the tertiary organization, tutor factors (e.g. employment, qualifications, further training and support), LLN requirements in programs, and strategies for assessing LLN skills. In the current article, discussion of numeracy needs has been omitted; because data indicated the learners’ needs were primarily English language literacy.

The wider study involved five different case settings. Although two cases were situated in different private training enterprises (PTEs), the PTE central to this article was the only provider that catered specifically for adult ELLs. This PTE was selected, based on local knowledge of the researcher, as a provider that was effectively catering for the diverse literacy needs of adult ELLs. Although she had never worked at the PTE, the researcher was acquainted with the context, and was known to several staff members, as a result of several decades of teaching and conducting research on issues related to ELLs in this region of New Zealand.

Data was gathered from across key organizational strata within the PTE. Individual interviews were conducted with four senior managers: the Director (D), Literacy Specialist (L), Assessment Moderator (A) and Office Manager (O). A focus group discussion was also conducted with a representative group of four tutors (T) responsible for teaching class groups at different English proficiency levels. The initials in the brackets above are used to identify quotes in the data cited in this article. The interviews and focus group discussion each took an hour. These were audio-taped and the resulting transcripts were edited and verified by participants. In addition, document analysis helped in developing an institutional profile.

The analysis of case study data was conducted firstly through manual coding, based on emergent themes related to the key research questions. Data was later entered into NVivo, a qualitative software analysis tool, to check and refine the analysis. While each case study was independently conducted, the formal report cases were all written up using a common framework that met the brief of the funding body, the Ministry of Education. The significant tensions discussed in this article emerged later, following further reflection on the data.

The setting

The PTE central to this article was located in a suburban area in the central North Island of New Zealand. This training establishment was unique in that no comparable providers existed in this region of New Zealand; although similar providers can be found in the country’s three largest cities.

Document analysis showed that all teachers at the PTE held a teaching qualification and/or a Baccalaureate degree, and several had postgraduate qualifications (including one person with a doctorate)—an exceptional level of professional skill for a PTE. The Literacy Specialist also had extensive experience as a school principal, an advisor to the Tertiary Education Commission, as well as teaching in a Chinese University. Overall, the management team had a high degree of stability. The Director had first established the PTE as a general training provider fifteen years ago.
The Assessment Moderator had worked with the Director from this time and the Office Manager had also been with the PTE for a number of years. Nonetheless, the PTE experienced challenges akin to many other providers due to constant external changes, as the Office Manager explained:

Well TEC [Tertiary Education Commission] have changed theirs [their structure] about four times, and that affects the people and how we interact with them; because when I first started we were dealing with areas like the Ministry of Education, which they divided up and we got TEC as well, and now TEC is divided, and then they merged, and then they went apart, and then they came back together again.

The PTE catered to approximately one hundred adult ELLs, mainly from Asian nations and with roughly the same number of international students on short-term study visas, and permanent resident adults (including both ex-refugees and new immigrants). The students represented a wide range of needs. Some students had tertiary qualifications in their first language and were preparing for an international English language test to gain entry to New Zealand universities; others were preparing to take the Occupational English Test in order to gain entry to nursing training. The PTE also catered for a number of ex-refugees, making it “one of the few remaining language schools which offer ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] at the lowest levels” (Investment Plan, 2008, p. 1). As it will be seen later, a strong commitment to meeting the diverse needs of local ELLs was a particular feature of this PTE, but also led to organizational tensions.

### RESULTS

#### Maintaining a student-centred focus

The centrality of student needs was evident in the PTE’s commitment to on-going evaluation of student satisfaction:

[Evaluation is] not something we do once. It’s not always formal ... It’s [often] casual, like: ‘How are you going? Your class is good? Your teacher is good? You’re doing the work? … How are the kids? Would you rather come in the morning instead of all day? … Is this the right place?’ (A)

English literacy was a priority since “[students] need literacy … to be able to get jobs … to be able to go on to [polytechnic] to do a trade … do another … training course … go on to university” (O). Computer literacy was also identified as a particular area in which some ex-refugee learners required additional support (L).

Given the diversity of students, it was often necessary to personalize (Green & Howard, 2007) literacy provisions; so the literacy specialist provided one-on-one or small group support (up to five students), while also being available to “go in at a teacher’s request and help deliver a particular part of their program” (L). In addition, he reported once sitting in the back seat during a driving test, to identify authentic language needed by his students.

Personalized literacy support was especially important for ex-refugees and new immigrants. For example, help was provided with “everyday matters such as power and telephone accounts” (L). Individual vocational goals also needed to be addressed, because “you can’t concentrate on that [one need] in the class” (L). For example when
a student was preparing for work experience in a nursery “we spent time talking about plants; he helped make the rooftop garden upstairs” (L). Another group of students wanted to become mechanics:

*They were paired up with a … tutor. We … got some textbooks from the library on automotive mechanics, the vocab was taught. … Neither of the guys had driving licences, so we got the road code and went through that. … So … when they went out into a work experience placement they had some confidence. (L)*

In order to avoid interfering with the on-going class program, the Literacy Specialist had to vary the times he withdrew students from class. Prioritizing student needs therefore involved a degree of collaborative negotiation.

**Emerging tensions**

It quickly became evident that there were tensions between the pressures for compliance and external accountability and the desire to maintain a student-centered ethos. For example, the PTE had approval to offer only level-three qualifications. The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQA, 2010) identifies four levels of certificate (the lowest qualification) ranging from basic, through foundational, to preparation for specific work roles and study, and preparation for broad areas of study and work. However, some students (mainly ex-refugees) were only at level one on arrival, so completing the level-three qualification within the funding maximum of two years was difficult. Meeting students’ needs in an environment of high compliance inevitably created competing agendas: “We have to provide a service, not only to the student but to the government” (A).

Faced with tension between accommodating learners’ needs and attracting and retaining government funding, three key mediating factors appeared to help staff retain a sense of equilibrium, and assisted in establishing and maintaining a learner-centered program. These factors were: flexibility, collaboration and leadership.

**Flexibility**

Flexibility permeated the PTE’s organization. For example, the PTE’s core program, a Certificate in English for Living in New Zealand, was specifically designed to meet a range of needs. This encompassed life skills modules designed in-house as well as unit standards drawn from the New Zealand Qualifications Association framework. Units included those specific to English for Speakers of Other Languages as well as general literacy, numeracy, business processes, communication, and work and study skills. Students could pursue either an academic strand, or an employment strand, or a combination of these in their program.

Class sizes were small (about 12 students), but students frequently moved on to employment or higher study, and new students arrived. To maintain external funding new students were enrolled each Monday: “in order of arrival … or availability of [an appropriate] class” (D). As a result of on-going student changes, course offerings often needed adjustment: “At the moment we have got quite a heavy academic emphasis … but at other times we might be much more a general institution. It’s constantly changing depending on the numbers and on the needs of the students” (D).

In addition, while the needs of older migrants
Tensions in Prioritizing Adult English Language Learners’ Literacy Needs

were often difficult to cater for, younger students tended to move up levels quite quickly, sometimes mid-way through a program (Investment Plan, 2008, p. 3). Flexibility was also provided if a student felt their level was higher than identified in the entry assessment. He/she could try a higher class, and move back down again if unable to cope.

The PTE was funded to deliver literacy support to just 50 students over 46 weeks, at an hour per student per week. However, student movements allowed this to be spread further: “The last intake of Bhutanese refugees … was a young group of people who had done two or more years of tertiary study. … They were only here for 6 months and then I could put someone else in” (A).

While the flexible enrollment and progression policy was to some degree driven by the need to retain external funding levels, the Director also believed it was a strong contributor to learner satisfaction. Nonetheless, constant flux in the diversity of needs in each class necessitated additional support for individual students who needed to either catch up or keep up with the class (A). Furthermore, constant changes to students and programs resulted in a need to select “staff who are willing to go with constant change, who are willing to set up a program, and then basically walk away from it and set up something different” (D).

Collaboration
Collaboration was a further strategy that assisted in balancing external requirements with learner needs. All participants identified collaboration as a particular strength of the PTE. Formal collaborative practices included weekly staff meetings, and the literacy specialist’s annual report to the director on “how we are going in terms of meeting the delivery criteria—the numbers” (L). Regular consultation also took place between the literacy specialist and tutors: “Every six weeks I meet with teachers individually… [to] identify the areas of learning that … they [students] are having difficulty with” (L). These discussions helped ensure English literacy was linked to class content; otherwise “the student ends up doing two curricula for two different people” (L).

Collaboration could also occur spontaneously. For example, impromptu consultation occurred between specialist and class teachers with regard to assessment moderation (noted by A and L); as well as in relation to pastoral care (noted by A, L, D and T), program matters (noted by L and A), and student progress (noted by L).

In addition, an informal collaborative network supported class teachers’ planning:

[With the] module on civil defence we start with the performance criteria. … We look at the resources that are needed. … We go to the teachers … the library … [The Ethnic Center] had just received copies of the civil defence emergency procedure in several different languages, so I picked up copies of those to add to the resource pack. Our Office Manager … might come across something on a website, or … when she's out she might see something and bring it back. … We work really well as a team here. (A)

Informal collaboration could also provide collegial support. For instance, the assessment moderator and literacy specialist “did a moderator’s course together” to ensure consistency in marking against external standards (L). The assessment moderator also mentioned helping a new tutor:
“We marked the standard together, so that she had a benchmark.” Another new teacher mentioned how much she appreciated the informal collaboration: “Because this team is so robust I got heaps of help. It doesn’t take long with people guiding your footsteps” (T).

Informal internal collaboration, while effective, was however, difficult to formalize with regard to external requirements, highlighting another tension. The Director noted: “We don’t record [these meetings] anywhere. That’s one of the issues. NZQA [the New Zealand Qualifications Authority] do audits. … How many meetings do we have? Where’s your documentary evidence?” (D).

Collaboration could also be external, with other educational organizations. This supported students’ progression to work or higher education. The PTE believed it had a key niche in a network of post-compulsory providers:

We all offer something different. … Sometimes it’s better for us to say [to a student] … ‘Have you thought about going to [Community College] … before you come here?’ … [Or,] when you are starting from a pre-literate place at 20 [years old], becoming a nurse is a long way away. … You have to get your English up to a certain standard … then look perhaps … [at] another … funded course … [like] Care of the Elderly. (A)

Students were given support in transitioning to new institutions:

When we send students off to [the polytechnic] … for the first semester, they come back here and have lunch … and use the computers … but by the end of the semester we see less of them. … I say to the students, ‘We are always here and you can always come back and ask us’. There are a lot of trust issues, especially with refugees. … They have to build that trust with [Polytechnic staff]. (A)

Flexible arrangements were sometimes negotiated with other institutions to facilitate the student progression:

I will often say to a training provider, ‘I have a student who is ready to go to [a course for training care-givers]. … Can she come and try?’ If it doesn’t work out I will take her back. … If the student isn’t ready to move on we will get feedback … which we can feed back to the teachers. (A)

However, a further tension arose when students gained employment or went on to further study as they often left before completing a qualification at the PTE. Changes to government funding, making this contingent on student completion rates, therefore came into direct conflict with the PTE’s espoused mission to “help the student to move on” (D) to work or higher study.

Leadership
The third organizational strategy that appeared to help maintain the student-centered focus was the leadership. While the collaborative ethos was strongly suggestive of a distributed model of leadership in the PTE, it appeared that there was also clear leadership from above.

The Director provided a strong model of hands-on student-centered practice. Although there were 100 students in the PTE, the Director interviewed
most new students on arrival: “I see 95% of them, so I know which class they go into; I get a good idea of where they are heading”. Contact also continued after enrollment: “I would probably talk to [students] on a weekly basis … some more than others … juggling different classes, with the different programs, with the different funding, with different student aspirations.”

In addition to being a caring and collaborative leader, the Director also needed to be politically and commercially astute. He constantly referred to how shifts in policy made it difficult to devise long-term plans. His overall commitment to ensuring the needs of these adult ELLs remained visible and became even more evident after the case study was concluded. The researcher was invited to attend a meeting of PTE providers, to provide a broader picture of the challenges in this educational area. A little later she was also asked to provide support through making a submission on a government-proposed policy change.

**Concluding discussion**

Although the PTE was identified as an exemplary case, it is acknowledged that limited data from one institutional case study cannot provide a model for all, and is simply a snapshot taken at one point in time. Additional in-depth research into educational contexts with diverse adult ELLs will be required to provide a clearer description of how post-compulsory institutions resolve tensions that occur at the interface between learner-centered pedagogy and external accountability. However, given the current dearth of research on organizational strategies to meet the language and literacy needs of adult ELLs, the current study provides some helpful preliminary insights.

Although their views are not examined in this study, student needs were undoubtedly central to the PTE’s organization. Through connecting the program to ELL students’ life, work and/or further study goals, English literacy was not viewed as a separate subject, but as “a social practice learned in different contexts over time” (Wignall & Bluer, 2007, p. 7). This is consistent with the UNESCO (2004) definition of literacy noted earlier, as well as Orem’s (2005) view that, for adults, English language and literacy are part of a lifelong learning process that provides a bridge to the future. However, organizational strategies were not purely linked to students’ needs. Many were related to external constraints such as funding, which created internal tensions for the PTE.

Ultimately, the PTE evolved a number of flexible administrative strategies to enable it to continue maintaining its student-centered ethos while balancing external accountabilities that were often linked to policy changes. The PTE staff also built a high level of internal collaboration to insulate them against the constant changes. The PTE also had to continually balance student needs against financial constraints and external requirements, while building and maintaining collaborative partnerships both internally and externally. Nonetheless, a number of tensions still remained hovering in the background, so constant vigilance was required to keep student needs at the forefront.

Ultimately, it could be said that the PTE established an effective educational culture, in that it appeared to be positioned at the positive, moving end of the continuum in Stoll and Fink’s (1996) typology of an educational institution’s ability to improve. However, the PTE perhaps more closely fitted Hargreaves’(1994) description of a moving mosaic, in that it was “dynamic and responsive...
but [also] uncertain, vulnerable and contested” (p. 195). The PTE appeared to be constantly generating ways to maintain equilibrium amongst a number of competing demands. Nonetheless, while the Director stated that he deliberately sought out staff that would be willing to make changes and relinquish ownership of their program, he was also able to recruit well qualified staff, and his senior managers had been with him for some time. These factors may possibly be attributable to his positive, distributed form of leadership which built a collaborative, supportive culture for both students and staff.

The findings from this preliminary study indicate that the PTE’s leadership fits with a distributed model that allows for “multiple sources of guidance and direction following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent by a common culture” (Harris, 2004, p. 258; Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 31). As Hargreaves and Fink (2009) note, effective distributed leadership extends beyond the institution itself to form “a multiplicity of connections and threads that link the organization’s various communities within and beyond its own boundaries” (p. 184). Specific examples of these connections have been noted in the earlier section on internal and external collaboration.

It is clear that the distributed leadership approach in the PTE assisted greatly in meeting students’ needs, and promoting a shared direction. However, the Director’s role also extended to including the sort of proactive, political edge that accompanies a strong sense of visionary leadership. As Fullen (1993) asserts, education has a moral obligation to make a difference in the lives of students, regardless of their background, and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively in increasingly complex societies. In the view of Nelson Mandela (see Stengel, 2010), effective leadership includes leading from the front as well as from behind. Insights from this study indicate that this combination of skills may be vital in maintaining equilibrium in the face of conflicting internal needs and external pressures. For leaders of educational institutions with diverse adult ELLs, many of whom may be viewed as minority groups in the dominant English-speaking society, building a strong, student-centered literacy culture is clearly critical. The findings from this study perhaps highlight the importance of educational leaders who are prepared to prioritize a learner-centered environment within their institutional settings and who will continue to strategically balance this focus with on-going changes in external accountabilities.

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GED® Completers’ Perceptions of College Readiness and Social Capital: Linking Adult Literacy to a Greater Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the efficacy of general education development (GED®) acquisition and GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness and social capital using a quantitative methodology. Also, the study used a descriptive, cross-sectional research design framed by the social capital theoretical perspective.

The conceptual framework developed for the study emphasized the relationship between five central issues: adult literacy, general education development completion, college readiness, post-secondary education, and social capital. The findings indicated that there is not a significant relationship between literacy level and perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The findings support the conclusion that for GED® completers, particularly those who may not be experiencing success in college, becoming college ready and attempting to produce social capital requires more than self-concepts and feelings of being valued in society.

INTRODUCTION
Literate adults contribute economic, political, social and cultural elements to communities and society. Adults in the United States are expected to successfully perform literacy tasks in order to adequately function, that is, to meet personal and employment goals as well as contribute to the community (White & Dillon, 2005). Conventional wisdom has it that even the most basic jobs in the United States today, for example, require workers to speak in English so others can understand them, to use basic math skills to solve problems, to be able to use a computer and other electronic equipment, and to have the ability to follow basic work procedures. These basic requirements often pose a barrier to employment and community involvement for adults with limited literacy skills. Communities have a stake in the literacy capabilities of their citizens because literate adults are able to participate more fully in the life of their community and contribute to its economic, social, and educational health (Fingeret, 1983).

While many researchers have examined the high school to 4-year college transition, few have examined the high school to community college transition. Even fewer have examined the transition experiences of GED® completers, who have participated in an adult literacy education (ALE) program, and have decided to continue their learning in post-secondary education on a community college campus; thus the need for this study.
For this research, low literacy as a hindrance to an individual’s perception of college readiness and the ability to produce social capital was argued. Understanding the impact of adult literacy, the potential of adult literacy education (ALE) programs to encourage more college going, and the production of social capital as a means of improving quality of life, is essential in the debate regarding adult literacy. The following research questions and sub-questions were addressed by using a researcher-developed survey: (1) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding college readiness; (2) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding social capital? (a) What is the relationship between literacy level of GED® completers and their perceptions of college readiness; (b) what is the relationship between literacy levels of GED® completers and their perception of the production of social capital? (c) Do GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness differ by literacy level; and, (d) do GED® completers’ perceptions of social capital differ by literacy level?

**RATIONALE**

This study is significant because it contributes to the current discussions regarding adult literacy education theory and practice, college readiness skills and knowledge, and the production of social capital through attainment of knowledge. A gap existed in the literature where the components of adult literacy and GED® completion were not correlated to or associated with perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The empirical and theoretical literature was minimal, at best. The available literature had focused primarily on the effects of socioeconomic status (SES), race and gender on adult literacy rates, the economic benefits associated with GED® acquisition, and the theoretical definitions of social capital.

This study was designed to focus on the relationship between adult literacy development and GED® acquisition, make a connection to the GED® credential and college readiness behaviors and skills and the production of social capital, and determine if entry into postsecondary education was influenced by college readiness and social capital factors. This study was conducted to assist ALE/GED® program planners, secondary education and community college curriculum designers, and higher education (community college) administrators and policy makers in recognizing the issues and concerns surrounding adult literacy and the possible implications for the Greater New Orleans area. In addition, this study had policy implications for further evaluation and subsequent improvement of ALE/GED® programs in order to facilitate improvement in adult literacy rates, increase college readiness skills, and enhance the level of social capital of GED® completers.

**SOCIAL CAPITAL**

The theoretical framework for this study, social capital theory, was used in order to highlight the connection between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital is a residual or side effect of social interactions, and an enabler of future transactions; like many other aspects of social life, it is not only produced, but also reproduced (Resnick, 2000). According to Inkeles (2000), “social capital is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common; they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (p. 247). Social capital is
productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence (Inkeles, 2000).

Falk and Kilpatrick’s (2000) model of social capital was used as a guide to develop a conceptual framework that graphically represents the concepts examined in this study and their relationships (See Figure 1). The constructs of social capital used in this study, individual dispositions (skill development through adult education, aspirations, and self-concept) and community connectedness (participation in community action activities, community development processes, and building social networks) are discussed.

In attempting to correlate social capital to low adult literacy skills, it is necessary to discuss how researchers have investigated the connections between these two concepts. Bourdieu’s (1986) and Coleman’s (1988) seminal work on social capital and human capital concluded that educational activities and practices are community resources and important aspects of social capital. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society. We, like Bourdieu and Coleman, believe that human capital, as a form of social capital, enhances community and societal engagement and leads to increased production of social capital.

Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk (2003) theorized that the value of social capital for community development is threefold; it represented an existing set of resources within the community based on intervention, a public good goal in its own right, and a resource that could contribute towards sustained autonomous development after the intervention was complete. Community capacity was hypothesized as an emergent outcome that sprang from the social capital generated from
the actions and interactions within and between formal and informal networks; these formal and informal networks were considered to operate like “turbines,” which are “polycentric” rather than centralized or pyramidal in their production of social capital (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, and Nelson, 2000). The extent to which they produced social capital, which was the social energy for building community capacity, varied (Morse, 1998).

Social capital theory was used to frame the issue of low literacy in order to highlight the connection between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Our assumption was that an increase in adult literacy led to the production or activation of social capital. The constructs of social capital used to operationalize the relationships in the study were control and self-efficacy (individual dispositions), and participation, social engagement, and commitment (community connectedness). Ruston (2002) uncovered these constructs when analyzing surveys used to measure social capital. The constructs emerged as five themes (participation, social engagement, and commitment; control and self-efficacy; perception of community level structures or characteristics; social interaction, social networks, and social support; and trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion) which were grouped together to connect the relevant indicators of social capital (Ruston, 2000). Ruston concluded that these five themes were the most widely used indicators of social capital when used for analysis. The themes were then used to create a matrix highlighting the major indicators of social capital.

The individual dispositions of control and self-efficacy, as evidenced in the study, were the individual’s self-processes that included confidence and aspirations in help-seeking (education, advice, and training from ALE participation) and self-improvement (literacy, GED® completion, and being college ready). In addition, we believed that GED® completers possessed the social aspects (interaction, networking and support) needed to integrate into post-secondary education. The production of social capital (community connectedness) manifested itself as increased civic and community participation, engagement, and commitment in order to develop and maintain useful social networks. Three existing social capital frameworks (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2008; Bullen, 2007; Franke, 2005) were examined and components of each were used to conceptualize the constructs for our study. Within the context of the AERA (2008) model, individual dispositions and self-processes were linked to school-based forms of social capital (human capital) in order to produce the mediating variables used to provide individuals with more valuable forms of social capital.

**College Readiness**

Two of the five dimensions from Conley’s (2005) work were used in the study to identify college readiness, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and knowledge. Academic behaviors reflect greater self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control; these behaviors tend to be more completely independent of a particular content area (Conley, 2007a). Contextual skills and awareness included a systematic understanding of the post-secondary educational system combined with specific knowledge of the norms, values, and conventions of interactions in the college context; also, the human relations skills necessary to cope within this system even if it is very different from the community the student has just left (Conley, 2007b), hence, the term “college knowledge.”
It was important for us to make a distinction between being academically college ready and being knowledgeable about college. Both forms of college readiness include knowing that college is an option, having the maturity to understand college processes (i.e., the registration process, academic advising, and financial aid procedures), and understanding how to socially adapt into the college environment through interactions with others. The interactions are the beginnings of the activation or production of social capital. Our assumption was that when individuals with GED® credentials enter post-secondary education knowing that college is an option (contextual skills and awareness), and having the self-confidence (academic behaviors) to pursue such an undertaking, successful entry into and subsequent completion of post-secondary education endeavors will be attained.

The decision to use these two dimensions of college readiness primarily stemmed from our experiences as community college, developmental education instructors. Before a first-time college student, especially those who are academically underprepared, can develop content knowledge and cognitive strategies, he/she must be able to understand the context and culture of college going, as well as, possess the maturity to self-manage through the initial college process and integrate into the college community.

Without specific behaviors, skills, and knowledge in place, we believed that entry into post-secondary education is difficult for GED® completers, if not impossible. Researchers have, both theoretically and empirically, used all four dimensions of Conley’s model to frame issues of college readiness. However, we found no existing empirical studies using academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness solely as constructs for research.

**METHOD**

For this analysis, the researchers used a quantitative methodological approach to complete this descriptive, cross-sectional study. An explanatory, qualitative design offered a more comprehensive explanation and examination of GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness, social capital and the relationship to literacy. GED® completers were asked about their feelings, attitudes and beliefs of college readiness and social capital during a three-month period.

To address research questions (1) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding college readiness and (2) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding social capital, and present the characteristics of the sample, we used descriptive statistics. Next, an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factor analysis (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation was conducted to answer sub-questions (a) what is the relationship between literacy level of GED® completers and their perceptions of college readiness and (b) what is the relationship between literacy levels of GED® completers and their perception of the production of social capital? PAF was used to determine the survey items that defined the latent variables of the study; college readiness and social capital. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, all items with cross loadings at or over .40 and any items that did not factor load at .40 were eliminated. Within the data analysis procedure, a scale score was calculated based on the factor analysis.

After the scale score was calculated, a multiple regression analysis was used to answer sub-questions (a) and (b), to compare scores within groups, and to determine if perceptions of college readiness and social capital could be predicted from literacy level. Prior to computing the multiple regressions, the independent variables
for correlation were checked using Pearson’s correlation coefficient in the bivariate procedure. Multiple regressions were conducted on each literacy level group—6-8.9 (Group 4), 9-10.9 (Group 5), and 11-12.9 (Group 6). The college readiness and social capital scores that emerged from the PAF were used as dependent variables. Group comparisons were based on calculated factor scores. Regression was appropriate for this study because it was exploratory and it helped to explain if literacy level, the independent variable, was important.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to answer sub-questions (c) do GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness differ by literacy level; and, (d) do GED® completers’ perceptions of social capital differ by literacy level? The ANOVA was used to determine if significant differences existed between the means of the three sample groups of GED® completers (literacy levels of TABE) and their perceptions of college readiness and social capital. For the purpose of this study, the post-test score of the TABE was considered the overall literacy level of the participants. The TABE is the official measure of educational progress in adult literacy programs in the Greater New Orleans area and throughout the United States. The TABE assesses competencies in reading, math, and language skills. It was designed to measure the acquisition of skills normally obtained from the second grade through high school graduation (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996).

The post-test data was collected from participant records and assessed through a single item, Question 8, in the demographic section of the survey for recording TABE scores. The post-test score was self-reported, if known, or gathered from participant files by the researchers and administrative assistants. The researchers verified self-reported scores from identifiers that were cross-referenced to names of participants in the databases. The data was used for accountability purposes for each ALE/GED® program. The researchers assured confidentiality by not discussing or disseminating any specifics gathered from these records. The researchers were given permission to review student files by each program director for research purposes only.

DATA SOURCE

The 321 subjects used for the study were derived from the target population (N=1050) of GED® completers currently enrolled in entry-level, post-secondary education courses at two area community colleges. The entire populations of GED® participants at (N=600) Delgado Community College (DCC) and (N=450) Nunez Community College (NCC) were accessible and available to the researchers; therefore, sampling was not necessary. According to Patten (2004) and Zemke and Kramlinger (1986), for a population of 1000-1100, with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5, a sample size of 277-284 is sufficient to make generalizations to the entire population. Therefore, the sample size of 321 is acceptable to generalize to the population of GED® completers at NCC and DCC.

A database of potential participants, (N=1050), currently enrolled in two local community colleges during the academic years from 2009-2012, was created. Participants were contacted through phone, email, mail outs, and face-to-face interviews. This effort yielded a study sample (n=321) designed to be representative of all GED® completers enrolled in entry-level college courses. The usable response rate was 42%. The instrument created for this study was a self-reporting, two-part questionnaire consisting of 76 items designed
to elicit the respondents’ demographic attributes and attitudes towards college readiness and social capital.

The first dependent variable, college readiness, was assessed through the factors of academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness. Questionnaire items for college readiness were developed and justified through the research presented by Conley (2007). Social capital, the second dependent variable of the study, was assessed through the factors of individual dispositions and community connectedness. The AERA (2008) report and Bullen (2007) rationalized social capital factors. The independent variable for the study was literacy level. The purpose of the study was to examine if and how literacy level had the potential to predict college readiness and social capital of GED® completers enrolled in post-secondary education. No evidence was found that other studies used literacy level as a variable in the examination of college readiness and social capital.

Part one of the questionnaire, (Q1–Q9), gathered demographic attributes that characterized the sample. Part two of the survey consisted of 65 statements, (Q10–Q74), rated on a 4-point Likert scale and developed to assess the perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The perception ratings ranged from a high score of four for strongly agree, to a low score of one for strongly disagree. Two open-ended questions on the survey were used to lend qualitative support to the findings of the quantitative analysis, and to provide a foundation for future qualitative research of the same constructs in order to gain a deeper and more meaningful insight into this phenomenon.

In developing items for the questionnaire, a panel of experts were enlisted consisting of both ALE/GED® program directors, three colleagues from each community college (six total), and our dissertation committee members in order to assure content validity. This panel of experts reviewed the items and provided suggestions that were used to revise the first draft. All of the experts were familiar with the concepts involved and the educational research used to establish reliability of the researcher-developed survey.

A pilot field test of the instrument was conducted, in order to gain feedback from (n=10) GED® completers enrolled in entry-level courses at one of the community colleges, to ensure face validity of the instrument. A pilot test had to be conducted to test both the instrument and the survey procedures before the actual survey was conducted (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). We used the feedback from the pilot test to modify the instrument as needed. GED® completers were interviewed to identify their perceptions of college readiness and social capital as assessed by the survey questionnaire. Upon completion of the survey, questions were categorized in order to determine one score for each construct or factor. Reliability and consistency in administration of the survey was maintained and documented accordingly. Feedback collected was used to rewrite the second and final questionnaire used in this study, thus, ensuring the applicability of questions asked to GED® completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education.

**RESULTS**

In order to examine the factor structure of the items within survey questions ten through seventy-four, PAF with direct oblimin rotation was used. Survey questions were factored separately because each focused on a different domain of college readiness and social capital. The latent root criterion (eigenvalues) and the scree plot criterion were also
examined. Variables that clustered into groups combined to create the final items that make up the College Readiness/Social Capital Scale (CRSCS). The determinant was acceptable at 3.81E-009 (0.00000000381). The assumption of independent sampling was met (KMO=.791). The Bartlett test was highly significant at .000. Factor 1 represents the construct of college readiness: attitudes, knowledge, awareness, and behaviors. Factor 2 represents the construct of social capital: individual dispositions and community connectedness. After rotation, the first factor accounted for 22.7% of the variance and the second factor accounted for 6.9% of the variance.

Cronbach’s alpha computed for each factor scale and for the combined CRSCS was acceptable at α = .894. The alphas for each of the four individual factor scales showed reasonable internal consistency reliability. The twenty-five items that were summed to create the academic behavior score formed a reliable scale with an acceptable α = .817. Similarly, the alpha for the contextual skills and awareness scale (α = .700), the individual dispositions scales (α = .789), and the community connectedness scale (α = .850) were acceptable and indicated good internal consistency.

To answer sub-questions (a & b), Pearson correlation was calculated r (281) = .053, p = .375, indicating that the correlation was not significant and had no effect. The correlation for perceptions of social capital yielded similar results at, r (281) = -.071, p = .425. Next, linear regression was conducted to investigate how well literacy level predicts perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The results were not statistically significant for perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The combination of variances to predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital form literacy level, education history (highest K-12 grade completed), age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant, F (5, 277) = 12.734, p<.001 for perceptions of college readiness; and F (5, 277) = 5.857, p<.001 for perceptions of social capital. Tables 1 & 2 present the regression results for college readiness and social capital. Gender and ethnicity could significantly predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital when all five variables (literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity) were included. The adjusted R² values were .172 and .079, respectively.

Sub-questions (c & d) were answered using two analyses of variance (ANOVAs). A statistically significant difference was found among the three literacy levels on perceptions of college readiness, F (2, 280) = 5.332, p=.005 (See Table 1); and on social capital, F (2, 280) = 7.961, p=.000 (See Table 2). The Levene statistic indicates that both factor scores are significant at p< .05 and p< .01; therefore, the assumption of equal variance is violated. Additionally, the between group differences for perceptions of college readiness and social capital are significant (p< .05).

Table 3 summarizes the one-way ANOVA between and within group comparisons for perceptions of college readiness and perceptions of social capital. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests
Table 1—*Regression Results for College Readiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education History</td>
<td>.049</td>
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<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01  R² = .172  F (5,277) = 12.734, p < .001

Table 2—*Regression Results for Social Capital*

<table>
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<th>β</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Education History</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>.067</td>
<td>.147</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td>.176</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.523</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01  R² = .079 F (5,277) = 5.857, p < .001

Table 3—*ANOVA Summary Table/College Readiness and Social Capital*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of College Readiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.432</td>
<td>44.67</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.876</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Social Capital</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>6.83</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td>.858</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>253.87</td>
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</table>

Note: Table comparing literacy level groups on perceptions of college readiness and social capital.

indicated that the low literacy level group (6-8.9) and the high literacy level group (11-12.9) differed significantly in their perceptions of social capital (p< .05). Likewise, there were also significant mean differences on college readiness between the medium literacy level group (9-10.9) and high literacy level group (11-12.9) (p<.05) using the same Post hoc Tukey HSD test.

Two open-ended questions, designed to substantiate the findings of the quantitative analysis, were incorporated at the end of the survey. Thematic analysis was used to categorize
and code responses.

Item 75 prompted participants to “explain what your successful entry into college means to you”. Four themes emerged from the responses:

1. Can better my life, 97 responses (55%);
2. Improve my work/career, 62 responses (35%);
3. Means a better future for self/family, 120 responses (69%); and,
4. Have many other opportunities, 88 responses (50%).

Item 76 asked: describe how you participate in your community. Five themes emerged from the responses:

1. Give myself to help others, 115 responses (66%);
2. Volunteer at centers and shelters, 78 responses (45%);
3. Volunteer with kids, 162 responses (92%);
4. Feed the homeless, 59 responses (34%); and,
5. I do not participate, 43 responses (25%).

**DISCUSSION**

Whether GED® completers had, on average, good attitudes toward college readiness and social capital, data collected indicated that literacy level had a very small, if any, effect on their perceptions. Clearly, the original items on the College Readiness and Social Capital Scale designed for this study were not as reliable as first thought. This instrument might best be utilized as part of a more comprehensive study that includes other demographic factors of influence.

An analysis of responses collected also indicated that GED® completers’ age and gender were statistically significant with regard to perceptions of college readiness and social capital. In contrast, the correlations and regressions of literacy level in association with college readiness and social capital, had no significant relationships. Moreover, the ANOVA did reveal a slight significance in the factor scores of college readiness and social capital.

The main goal of this study was not necessarily to generalize the data collected to all GED® completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Rather, the interest was in identifying whether literacy level predicted perceptions of college readiness and social capital. As such, generalizing the data to all GED® completers should be done with caution, given that some findings may reflect bias, since data analyzed was based on GED® completers’ perceptions. Additional research focusing on GED® completers’ successful entry and completion of post-secondary education, should be carried out to support the results of this study and provide a basis for generalizations.

Given the fact that most respondents thought that college was an important step, the results of the study did not support this view. College going is a form of knowledge acquisition and theorizes that adult learners gain human, as well as, social capital from participation in post-secondary education (Baycich, 2003; Boesel, 1998; Murnane et al., 2000). Pearson correlation indicated that TABE post-test literacy level had no effect on college readiness and social capital perceptions. In addition, the variables did not have a significant correlation.

Multiple regression analyses were employed in order to determine the best predictors of college readiness and social capital. A combination of literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant. However, only gender and ethnicity were found to significantly predict college readiness and social capital when all
five variables were included. Perhaps an individual's economic, cultural or symbolic capital may have a negative effect on how they value education and how they see themselves participating in society.

Although our results cannot be generalized beyond this study, the following conclusions can be cautiously drawn from the research: that adult literacy is still a major concern, especially for the Greater New Orleans area, and the rebuilding effort. The results indicated that there is no systematic association of literacy level to college readiness and social capital; however, there was a determination that gender and ethnicity could significantly predict college readiness and social capital. It may be that for GED® completers, particularly those who may not be experiencing success in college, becoming college ready and attempting to produce social capital requires more than just those self-concepts and feelings of being valued in society. Due to the results of the regression analyses on college readiness and social capital, all factors of college readiness and social capital should play a key role in examining GED® completers' perceptions. There is a definite need for attention to adult literacy education programs and high school curricula, in our area and nationwide, in preparing participants for post-secondary education.

Overall, the results of the study indicated that there is not a significant relationship between literacy level, college readiness and social capital. This was an unexpected outcome. Results of the correlation and regression analyses showed no significant effects or correlations to the variables; thus, not supportive of our initial hypotheses that there existed a significant relationship between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Surprisingly, these findings were not in agreement with existing literature (Bernardo, 2000; Fingeret, 1983; Hamilton, 2006; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Scribner, 1984; Torres, 1994; Wagner, 1992) that concluded that literacy activities and practices are community resources and important aspects of social capital. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society. Additionally, the findings did not support using social capital theory to frame the study and showing how the acquisition of knowledge (human capital) can lead to the development of social networks.

Our assumptions that there is a significant relationship among adult literacy development (GED® completion), entry into post-secondary education (college readiness), and the production of social capital; and, that adult learners perceive that they are college ready and are able to produce social capital as a result of increased knowledge, were not supported by the findings. The results were in contrast to the findings of Tyler et al. (2000), which reported that acquisition of a GED® could lead to higher average levels of human capital through increased access to post-secondary education. Tyler et al. (2000) found that acquisition of the GED® leads to higher earnings and greater probability of employment. Therefore, concluding that literacy is not a significant factor of social capital was quite surprising. Again, our hypothesis that knowledge resources (human capital) are a catalyst to achieving greater individual fulfillment and community involvement was not supported.

The ANOVA did result in statistically significant differences among the three literacy levels. This finding could indicate that GED® scores can be used as predictors of college readiness, but perhaps not of social capital. Although the results cannot be interpreted as solely due to the influence of literacy on college readiness and social capital, it was supported by the work of Joost (2009).
The researcher explored how GED® scores in the domains of reading and math might be predictive of college readiness skills (Joost, 2009).

Our findings indicated that the concepts of literacy, college readiness and social capital are more complex than initially perceived for this study. When examining literacy, the factors that affect literacy development must be taken into account. For example, generational illiteracy, functional literacy, and illiteracy should be comprehensively investigated on individual cases to determine how literacy affects an individual’s perceptions. If college readiness was used as a variable for investigation, each of the four key dimensions (key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness) could be explored for their predictive power. Although social capital has been widely used for research, exploring all forms of social capital would provide an in-depth understanding of its structure and theoretical utility.

LIMITATIONS
There were several limitations to the study. First, the findings could not be generalized beyond GED® completers currently enrolled at two community colleges located in the Greater New Orleans area. The small effect sizes of the correlations between the variables were also a limitation, as well as the possibility that participant self-reported responses were due to factors other than those present in the community college setting. For example, generational illiteracy and apathy towards education could have affected participant responses negatively. Finally, the small sample size created a limitation in the generalizability as well.

Additional limitations were related to instrumentation, data collection methods, and the length and depth of the study. First, the instrument used for data collection was created by the researchers and therefore increased potential threats to validity. Although several related surveys and questionnaires were examined to determine appropriate wording and design, participants may not have interpreted the survey items consistently. Secondly, because we used multiple methods for the data collection process, there was the potential danger of incorrect data entry. Our intent was to gather as many participants for the study as possible, given the preferences of how they received the survey. Lastly, the study was limited to one semester, which created a very short turnaround time between distribution of the survey and returns. Our study could have been stronger if, perhaps, an entire academic school year could have been feasible.

IMPLICATIONS
The findings of our study contribute to the body of literature relating to college readiness and social capital. In addition, it contributes to the body of literature relating to literacy and adult literacy education. Given that the findings indicated no significant connection among literacy, college readiness and social capital, it does open the doors to further examination into social capital theory. Additional forms of social capital (i.e. human capital, cultural capital, economic capital) have also emerged as bodies of literature affected by the findings. The results also indicated that factors of college readiness and social capital are more complex, and should be studied both individually and collectively in order to draw more significant conclusions.

Policy implications include creating specialized policies for ALE/GED® programs that may meet the needs of participants in preparing for and understanding college choice. Policies focusing on
program planning and curriculum design should also be established for ALE/GED® programs to ensure seamless matriculation into post-secondary education. Policies should also include training and professional development for adult educators in ALE/GED® programs, colleges, and universities to better educate and support GED® completers.

The findings are also important for ALE/GED® program educators and for the public two-year post-secondary institutions in the Greater New Orleans area. Our suggestions for practical implications are based on the results of the study, as well as the findings of several other researchers. As such, high school and ALE program curriculum planners should take note of the research of Byrd, 2005; Cline et al., 2007; Conley, 2007c; Greene & Forster, 2003; Kuh, 2007and their suggestions and strategies to help increase the numbers of college-ready students, and align their programs for college success. It is important that adequate collaboration and planning be implemented in order to improve alignment efforts. It is also important for educators to refine support systems so that high school students, as well as GED® completers, can transition successfully to a community college environment. ALE/GED® educators could use more support, resources, and training on strategies for increasing “college knowledge” and awareness.

Furthermore, ALE/GED® program directors should look for ways to give students information that would strengthen their academic behaviors and contextual knowledge in preparing them for a range of post-secondary opportunities. For GED® completers enrolled in college courses, the study may be able to inform adult educators about the value of supporting GED® completers in college, and provide ALE/GED® program planners insight regarding GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness and social capital. K-12 educators could benefit from the findings by providing information to students regarding the disadvantages of dropping out, and encouraging persistence and completion of high school. K-12 educators should collaborate with ALE/GED® educators and college instructors to increase attention to the knowledge and benefits of college going.

REFERENCES


Faculty Attitudes Toward Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities

Dr. Sharon Reynolds
Ohio University

Dr. John Hitchcock
Indiana University

ABSTRACT
The attitudes of adult basic education faculty members toward teaching adults with learning disabilities are likely to influence the success of their students; however, there are no existing survey instruments that measure this construct or the practical knowledge faculty members should have to effectively serve the population. A new survey instrument was developed based on components from existing faculty surveys and other attitudinal measures. The new instrument included Likert-style items designed to assess teachers’ knowledge and attitudes regarding the diagnosis, causal factors, and impact of learning disabilities on academic performance. The survey also queried these teachers about basic support and referral systems available to these students within their institutions. Five stable factors that provide some information about teachers’ attitudes and knowledge were found: Teacher Knowledge, Value of Diagnostic Assessment, Student Academic Potential, Student Attitudes, and Dependence. Descriptive results suggest teachers maintain an overall positive service attitude, but the likelihood that teachers will refer students, whom they suspect is contending with a disability, remains low.

INTRODUCTION
Completing some form of postsecondary education is a goal for more than four out of five secondary school students with disabilities (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004). The rate of enrollment in postsecondary programs by students with learning disabilities has increased significantly in recent decades to a rate of 9% in 2009 (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010). During the 2008–2009 academic year, virtually all (99%) of public two and four-year institutions in the US reported enrolling students with disabilities (Raue & Lewis, 2011). Specific learning disability is the most commonly reported category among college students with disabilities (Raue & Lewis, 2011). The proportion of students with learning disabilities in higher education is increasing internationally as well (Leyser, Greenberger, Sharoni, & Vogel, 2011). This trend should be of interest to university service providers who have a fundamental goal of supporting
students through graduation. Although one recent longitudinal study found that the retention and graduation rates of students with and without disabilities were similar (Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009), other studies have found that postsecondary completion for students with impairments is lower than for students without disabilities (Newman et al., 2011).

Many factors influence postsecondary retention and completion among students with learning disabilities (LD). These include, but are not limited to, academic challenges, and peer, faculty, and administrator attitudes (Rao, 2004). Indeed, Rao (2004) emphasized that faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities are “one of the important contributors to the success of students enrolled in these institutions, colleges, and universities” (p. 2). Negative attitudes exhibited by faculty members can discourage students from advocating for themselves and accessing the accommodations to which they are entitled (Denhart, 2008; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002). Conversely, positive mentoring relationships between college faculty and students, even if they are informal, can encourage the development of a strong classroom identity (Beilke & Yssel, 1998) and persistence toward achievement of educational goals (CCSSE, 2004).

Staff members at postsecondary institutions likely serve as gatekeepers for college students with LD, and their actions are thought to impact student success (Lombardi & Murray, 2011). Despite the importance of faculty attitudes, when it comes to serving college students with disabilities, this construct has not been adequately researched (Rao, 2004). Prior research into faculty attitudes contends with a number of limitations including small sample sizes, lack of attention to the psychometric properties of the instruments used (e.g. reliance on campus climate surveys), and a focus on a single disability category (Lombardi & Murray, 2011). Additionally, much of the related research was conducted several decades ago (Beilke & Yssel, 1998; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990; Satcher, 1992). Also, it appears that few studies have been repeated or updated.

There are some recent studies investigating this topic. Lombardi and Murray (2011), for example, developed an instrument to measure faculty attitudes toward adopting Universal Design principles, and found these attitudes can be reliably assessed. Furthermore, Leyser, Greenberger, Sharoni, and Vogel (2011) compared the results of a faculty survey conducted in 1997 and 2007 to understand changes in faculty knowledge about attitudes and willingness to offer accommodations to students with disabilities. They found that faculty had more knowledge and communication with the offices for disability services, but there were no significant group differences in faculty willingness to provide accommodations to students. Attitudes toward students with disabilities were positive overall. Wolman, McCrink, Rodriguez and Harris-Looby (2004) developed an instrument to measure faculty attitudes in postsecondary institutions in Mexico and the United States and found no significant differences in willingness to provide accommodations among faculty. Additionally, they found that faculty in both countries held positive views about students with
disabilities. Hong, Haefner, and Slekar (2011) modified Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes’ (2000) survey that measured faculty attitudes toward promoting self-determination in college students with and without disabilities. Hong, Haefner, and Slekar (2011) found significant differences in attitudes, knowledge and teaching skill across gender, department and academic ranks. Barnard, Stevens, Siwatu, and Lan (2008) used the Attitude Towards Persons with Disabilities (ATPD; Yuker & Block, 1986) to measure the relationship between faculty attitudes toward diversity and students with disabilities. Results suggested there may be an inverse relationship between diversity attitudes and attitudes toward persons with disabilities. In other words, faculty members with a more positive attitude towards diversity may hold a negative attitude toward students with disabilities; suggesting a deficit view of disability.

Despite the recent increase in research on the topic of learning disabilities in adults, researchers in the field are calling for a more balanced approach to studying learning disabilities with a broader perspective that is inclusive of all ages, literacy levels, and with more attention focused on older adults (Gerber, 2012). Gerber’s contention is corroborated by the lack of published research, which investigates the attitudes of adult education practitioners. In fact, the body of literature in general on low-literate adults with LD—those who are served by the Adult Basic Education (ABE) system—has been characterized as “sparse and lacking scientific rigor” (Gerber, 2012, p. 37).

**PURPOSE**

Adult Basic Education programs are funded through federal legislation (Workforce Investment Act- Title II) to provide free educational services to adults who want to improve their basic skills, learn English, improve family literacy skills, obtain a GED, or transition to postsecondary education. This manuscript presents the results of a statewide survey of the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) programs’ teachers in one Midwestern state. The purpose of the survey, which was conducted in July 2011, was to obtain a better understanding of ABLE teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward disability in general and learning disabilities in particular. Furthermore, this survey allows for initial exploration of the relationship between teacher attitude and teacher practice (i.e. willingness to provide accommodation, likelihood of referring students for diagnostic services). Indeed, Gerber (2012) reinforces the importance of a systematic approach to understanding faculty attitudes and practices, indicating that empirical evidence is needed to inform teacher practice and program implementation. To this end, we ran exploratory factor analysis on this new instrument to examine underlying constructs. It is our hope that results from this and future studies might inform future professional development activities for adult basic education teachers, and perhaps serve as a basis for enhancing instructional resources.

**METHODS**

We reviewed previous attitudinal survey instruments (Gething, 1994; Gilmore, 2010; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Murray, Wren, & Keys, 2008; Rao, 2004; Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brülle, 1999; Wishart,
Reynolds and Hitchcock & Manning, 1996) prior to developing the survey described here.\(^1\) We identified several instruments that measured faculty attitudes towards college students with disabilities (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Rao, 2004; Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brülle, 1999). However, we did not identify instruments that measured the attitudes of adult basic or community education teachers toward adult students with learning disabilities, and providing services to such students who are attending adult education programs. Since the context of adult and community education can be quite different from the typical college classroom a new survey was needed. We used existing faculty surveys, and other measures of attitudes toward students with disabilities (see Appendices A and B), to develop a new and more targeted instrument designed to gather information about ABLE teachers’ attitudes regarding adult students with diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities. Teachers were asked to respond to 48 statements using the five-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

We piloted the survey with a proxy sample comprised of adult education administrators in the Adult Education system of a neighboring state. With permission of the state director of adult education, we distributed the link to the online survey via email to the program directors in all 120 counties of the state, with an invitation from the Senior Associate in Professional Development and Instructional Support. We administered the survey through Qualtrics, a web-based survey management package. A total of 41 individuals responded to the survey. We calculated reliability estimates on the full scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .824), which suggests reasonable internal consistency. A committee of state level professionals with expertise in serving adults with learning disabilities and survey development, analyzed and reviewed the survey results. We then refined the survey items based on committee feedback.

We sent the link to the revised online survey, administered through Qualtrics survey software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT), to the ABLE program administrators via email from the state ABLE director. The email explained the purpose of the survey and invited the program administrators to forward the survey link to their teachers. Of the 916 total ABLE teachers who indicated that teaching was their primary job responsibility, 300 completed the survey (a 29% return rate). This is in part because only 409 of those 916 teachers had valid email addresses. The return rate might have been as high as 65% if only teachers with valid email addresses were included in the sample. Demographic information collected includes highest degree completed, locale, years in ABLE (see Table 1), and number of sites per program.

### RESULTS

Results are conceptualized in the context of total survey error, which is comprised of coverage, nonresponse, sampling and measurement error (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Coverage error deals with the degree to which the sampling frame (i.e., list from which the sample was drawn) reflects the population of interest. Although we had information on all 916 ABLE teachers in the state, coverage concerns can arise if data collection procedures reduce the likelihood or even prevent
respondents from completing a survey. This was a concern here given the aforementioned problems with email addresses. Also, there may be some nonresponse bias. We nevertheless think the response sample may be reasonably reflective of the population of interest. This is based on similarities between the responding sample and what has been documented about the state’s ABLE teaching force. Descriptive analyses of demographic data reveal that the majority of respondents were female (71% female and 17% male). Overall, 47% of the respondents had Bachelor’s degrees, 35% had Master’s degrees and one respondent reported having a doctoral degree. Most of the respondents had taught in the ABLE system for more than six years (55%) and 38% had taught in ABLE for more than ten years. Approximately 38% of the respondents indicated that their program was located in a rural community and 31% indicated an urban locale. In the state, as reported in the 2010 state data, 0.68% of ABLE teachers hold an Associate’s degree, 61% of teachers hold a Bachelor’s degree, 34% hold a Master’s degree, and 1.4% hold doctoral degrees.

Measurement error deals with the degree to which the instrument does not adequately assess the topics or constructs of interest; psychometric properties were accordingly assessed. Reliability estimates using Cronbach’s (1951) alpha were calculated. The alpha for the full, revised instrument was 0.822; subscale alpha’s ranged from a low of 0.688 to a high of 0.839. These meet, or are close to meeting, the standard 0.70 criterion for establishing adequate internal consistency (Nunnally, 1975). See Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are generally slow learners overall.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most adult students with LD are not trying hard enough to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few students in my ABLE program have undiagnosed LD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities can be caused by bad teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities are not real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities can be caused by poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities are overdiagnosed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adults are likely to feel stigmatized by finding out they have LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students who are struggling academically generally do not want to go through the LD diagnostic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, diagnostic assessments serve no purpose for adults who may have LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If an ABLE student is struggling academically, I am unlikely to refer him or her for diagnostic assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students are likely to become dependent on accommodations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD need accommodations to be successful in the ABLE classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students with LD are more difficult to teach than ABLE students without learning disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in ABLE programs do not have the time to effectively service adults with LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students use LD as excuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are not likely to be successful in college (e.g in terms of persistence, graduation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are less likely to be successful in ABLE programs than are students without learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD will never be as successful as those without LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD have many emotional problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of being diagnosed causes undue stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students who are struggling academically generally do not want to be referred for LD diagnostic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students who are struggling academically generally do not want to be diagnosed with LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities usually run in families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diagnostic assessment is helpful to adults who appear to be struggling with learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results from a diagnostic assessment can help ABLE students understand their academic strengths and weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If an ABLE student is struggling academically, I am very likely to refer him or her for diagnostic assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational accommodations for learning disabilities are too costly to be practical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Missing items were handled using mean replacement, and listwise analyses did not yield distinctly different results. Three variants of parallel analyses were used to assess the number of factors in the data set. One variant was used for principal axis factoring, one for principal components and a third used a permutation approach that does not require the assumption that raw data was multivariate normally distributed. This is useful because the Likert-style response options for the survey undermine this assumption. The parallel analyses procedures used were described in O’Connor (2000). In addition, visual analyses of a scree plots were done. Regardless of the approach, a five factor solution appeared to best represent the data. Exploratory factor analyses were then conducted using maximum likelihood extraction approaches. We cross compared these results with polychoric factor analyses, since ordinal data was collected via the response stems. The differences between the techniques were trivial. The five factors are discussed below and are represented in Table 3.
Table 3—Factors and Loading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items (Cronbach’s Alpha)</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1—Teacher Knowledge (α = .839)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers (I) have the knowledge to effectively serve adults with LD.</td>
<td>.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers (I) have the skills to effectively serve adults with LD.</td>
<td>.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of appropriate educational accommodations to meet the needs of my students who have LD.</td>
<td>.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All teachers in my program understand the requirements for providing accommodations for students diagnosed with LD.</td>
<td>.681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know who to contact for more information about educational accommodations for my students.</td>
<td>.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often provide accommodations for adults with LD in my ABLE classroom.</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All teachers in my program are likely to implement the required/appropriate accommodations for students with LD.</td>
<td>.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of the students in my ABLE classroom who have a diagnosed learning disability.</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can serve adults with learning disabilities with the current resources we have in our program.</td>
<td>.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers (I) have the disposition to effectively serve adults with LD.</td>
<td>.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2—Value of Diagnostic Assessment (α = .801)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results from a diagnostic assessment lead to increased self-awareness for ABLE students.</td>
<td>.749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results from a diagnostic assessment can help ABLE students understand their academic strengths and weaknesses.</td>
<td>.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results from a diagnostic assessment empower ABLE students to play a more active role in their learning.</td>
<td>.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, diagnostic assessments serve no purpose for adults who may have LD.</td>
<td>.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diagnostic assessment is helpful to adults who appear to be struggling with learning.</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functioning with an undiagnosed learning disability causes undue stress.</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3—Student Academic Potential (α = .770)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are not likely to be successful in college (e.g. in terms of persistence, graduation).</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are less likely to be successful in ABLE programs than are students without learning.</td>
<td>.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABLE students with LD are more difficult to teach than ABLE students without learning disabilities.</td>
<td>.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD will never be as successful as those without LD.</td>
<td>.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD are likely to graduate from college.</td>
<td>.513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with LD can be as successful as those without LD.</td>
<td>.510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first factor, *Teacher Knowledge*, includes items that relate to teacher perception of their knowledge, skills, and abilities to adequately serve adults with learning disabilities in their programs (e.g. adequate programmatic resources, awareness of educational accommodations, etc.) and included ten items. The internal coefficient alpha for the *Teacher Knowledge* factor was high (α = .839). The second factor, *Value of Diagnostic Assessment*, originally included seven items related to teacher perceptions of the value of diagnostic assessment for learning disabilities (e.g. diagnostic assessment can benefit students through increased self-awareness). The item “learning disabilities are not real” was eliminated from this factor. The third factor, *Student Academic Potential*, included four items that pertained to teacher perceptions about the potential for adults with learning disabilities to be achieved academically in ABLE programs and in postsecondary education (α = .770). The fourth factor, *Student Attitudes*, included four items related to teacher perceptions of student attitudes towards diagnostic assessment (e.g. students do not want to be assessed, students will feel stigmatized if they learn they have LD, the process causes undue stress, etc.). The internal coefficient alpha for this factor was high (α = .775). The fifth factor, *Dependence*, included five items related to teacher beliefs that diagnostic assessment would lead to dependence. This was a fairly weak factor overall and it had an internal coefficient factor of α = .688. Additional items need to be constructed to strengthen this factor.

**Teacher Behavioral Responses**

In addition to the attitudinal items, the survey queried teachers about their awareness and behavior related to diagnostic assessment for learning disabilities. Almost half (47%) of the respondents reported that they had not referred any ABLE students with suspected learning disabilities for further diagnostic assessment, and 37% reported referring between one and five students for further assessment since the beginning of the fiscal year (see Table 4). Most respondents (57%) did not know the name of a professional in their community who offered diagnostic services, and did not have brochures from a diagnostician to distribute to students (75%), but most reported that they knew how to find someone who could offer diagnostic assessments (69%).
Table 4—Teacher Referral Behavioral Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students referred</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 and 10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students with suspected LD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 and 10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Know the name of a psychologist who offers diagnostic testing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Know how to find someone who offers diagnostic testing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have brochures from local diagnostician</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceived Value of Diagnostic Assessment**

The 18 survey items related to diagnostic assessment pertained to teachers’ attitude towards the value of diagnostic assessment for learning disability. The majority of respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed (mean = 3.28) when asked if they were “very likely” to refer a struggling student for diagnostic testing. The mean score (4.00) on “A diagnostic assessment is helpful to adults who appear to be struggling with learning” indicates that most believe diagnostic assessment is helpful. Similarly, there was strong agreement (mean = 4.25) to “results from a diagnostic assessment can help ABLE students understand their strengths and weaknesses.” Most respondents agreed (mean = 4.06) with the statement, “Functioning with an undiagnosed learning disability causes undue emotional stress.” Over 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (mean = 4.18) with the statement that “adults in ABLE programs often cannot afford the cost of diagnostic assessment for LD.” The results indicate that teachers believe cost for testing is a barrier for adult students.

**Perceived Student Academic Potential**

Nine of the survey items were related to teachers’ perception of the potential academic success of adults with learning disabilities. Overall, the results suggest a fairly positive attitude toward the potential of adults with learning disabilities to be successful academically. The statement, “Adults
with LD are likely to graduate from college,” had a mean response of 3.08, which is close to neutral (3). The item “Adults with LD can be as successful as those without LD,” had stronger agreement (mean = 4.10) than the previous statement. These statements, however, contrast with mean responses on two other items in this subscale, suggesting some ambivalence in teacher attitudes toward students with LD. “Adults with LD are less likely to be successful in ABLE programs than are students without learning disabilities” (mean = 2.72) indicated disagreement. Similarly, the statement “Adults with LD are not likely to be successful in college (e.g. in terms of persistence and graduation)” had slightly stronger disagreement, but it was still weak (mean = 2.30).

**Teacher Knowledge of Causal Factors**

Five items related to teachers’ perception of the factors that cause learning disabilities. The responses to the five items on the causal factors subscale suggest that ABLE teachers do think learning disabilities are “real” and are not caused by bad teaching or lack of effort or laziness. However, the statement “learning disabilities are caused by poverty” (mean = 2.40) had only weak disagreement.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the survey suggests that overall ABLE teachers have a positive attitude towards issues relating to serving adults with learning disabilities, including referral for diagnostic assessment. Despite awareness of the value of diagnostic assessments, and having positive attitudes toward providing such assessments for adults in the state’s ABLE programs, almost half of the respondents had not referred anyone for further assessment; perhaps due to the prohibitive cost of diagnostic assessment. This conclusion can be supported by the strong agreement (mean = 4.18) to the statement “Adults in ABLE cannot afford the cost of a diagnostic assessment.”

Lack of awareness or availability of local providers may also be a barrier to providing diagnostic services. Most respondents (57%) did not know the name of a diagnostician in their community who offers diagnostic services, and did not have brochures from a diagnostician to distribute to students (75%). Most reported that they knew how to find someone who could offer diagnostic assessments (69%); perhaps referring to an online network of diagnosticians that is available through the Board of Regents. Further investigation is needed in this area.

While more responding programs identified their program location as rural, the survey results did not indicate a significant difference between the administrator’s ability to identify a diagnostician based on their program location. In other words, it is not significantly more difficult to identify a diagnostician in a rural area than in an urban location.

The subscales indicate that respondents agree, but less strongly, with the statements regarding performance expectations. For example, the statement, “Adults with LD are likely to graduate from college,” had a mean response of 3.08, close to neutral (3). The item “Adults with LD can be as successful as those without LD,” had a stronger agreement (mean = 4.10) than the previous statement. This could indicate reluctance on the part of the respondents to provide a response that is not socially acceptable.

**CONCLUSION**

As far as we are aware, this is the first effort to survey ABE teachers, in general, and ABLE teachers, in particular, about their perceptions of community college students with learning disabilities. We were able to identify five factors: Teacher Knowledge, Value of Diagnostic Assessment,
Student Academic Potential, Student Attitudes, and Dependence. The survey items loaded on to the factors in a logical manner and in a way that is consistent with the literature. While this survey needs refinement and additional testing, these early results provide some initial evidence that we are able to assess teacher attitudes and perceptions. Overall, the results suggest that ABLE instructors in this state have a positive attitude towards issues related to providing services to adults with learning disabilities. The discrepancy between their positive attitude toward diagnostic assessment and their reported rate of referral suggests that the teachers perceive barriers. Indeed, the respondents indicated that the cost of diagnostic assessment is a prohibitive factor for many adult students. There are multiple implications for policy and for practice including professional development.

While this survey provides some initial understanding into the perceptions and attitudes of ABLE teachers, the study does suffer from several limitations. There is some evidence that the responding sample is reflective of the target population, but the overall nonresponse rate and limited teacher email addresses leaves this in doubt. Additionally, there were some missing data, but analyses using mean replacement and listwise analyses did not yield distinctly different results. Overall, the study should be replicated with a new sample that would allow further refinement, particularly with an eye toward addressing the weakest factor—Dependence. Although these limitations are present, the utility of this initial work exists in its primary insight into the possibility of measuring teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward serving adult students with learning disabilities, and the potential to explore the relationship between teacher attitudes and behavior.

Further investigation could reveal a relationship between attitude and behavior, specifically whether teachers’ beliefs about potential financial barriers is inhibiting them from referring eligible students for these services. Additional research with ABLE students about their own perceptions and attitudes toward learning disabilities would extend the research reported in this proposed paper, and provide further insight into barriers to diagnostic assessment, accommodations to which students with disabilities are entitled, and ultimately, academic persistence.

REFERENCES


Endnote:

1. Surveys were identified through an EBSCO search (2011).
Appendix A. Existing Attitudinal Scales Used in Development of ABE Scale

1. Knowledge of the disability (Gilmore, 2010; Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008; Wishart, & Manning, 1996)
2. Knowledge of related laws (Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008)
3. Characteristics (Gilmore, 2010)
4. Causal Factors (Gilmore, 2010)
5. Diagnostic issues (Gilmore, 2010)
6. Willingness to provide accommodations (Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brülle, 1999; Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992)


Appendix B. Breakdown of Attitudinal Components

1. Characteristics (Gilmore, 2010)
   a. Adults with LD are generally slow learners.
   b. Adult students with LD do not try hard enough to learn.
   c. Few students in my ABLE program have undiagnosed LD.

2. Causal Factors (Gilmore, 2010)
   a. Learning disabilities can be caused by bad teaching.
   b. Learning disabilities are not real.
   c. Students from poor families are more likely to have learning disabilities.
   d. Learning disabilities are inherited.

3. Diagnostic issues (Gilmore, 2010)
   a. Learning disabilities are overdiagnosed.
   b. A diagnostic assessment can be helpful to adults with LD.
   c. Adults are likely to be stigmatized by finding out they have LD.
   d. Adults in ABLE programs cannot afford the cost of a diagnostic assessment for LD.
   e. ABLE students who may have LD do not want to get diagnosed.
   f. Diagnostic assessments serve no purpose for adults who may have LD.
   g. The process of being diagnosed with an LD is empowering for adults.
   h. Functioning with an undiagnosed LD causes undue emotional stress.
   i. The process of being diagnosed causes undue emotional stress. I am unlikely to refer an ABLE student who may have an LD, for diagnostic assessment.
   j. I am very likely to refer an ABLE student who may have an LD, for diagnostic assessment.

4. Willingness to provide accommodations (Vogel, Leyser, Wyland, & Brülle, 1999; Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992)
   a. I am willing to provide accommodations for adults with LD in my ABLE classroom.
      ABLE students will become dependent on accommodations.
   b. Educational accommodations are too costly.
   c. Adults with LD need accommodations to be successful in the ABLE classroom.
   d. Teachers in my ABLE program are reluctant to provide educational accommodations to adults with LD.

5. Resource constraints (Murray, Wren & Keys, 2008)
   a. We can serve adults with learning disabilities with the current resources we have in our program.
   b. Adults with LD are hard to teach in ABLE programs.
   c. My teachers have the skills to effectively serve adults with LD.
   d. Teachers in ABLE programs do not have the time to effectively service adults with LD.

   a. ABLE students use LD as excuse.
   b. Adults with LD are not likely to be successful in college (e.g. in terms of persistence, graduation).
   c. Adults with LD are likely to graduate from college.
   d. Adults with LD are not likely to be successful in ABLE programs than those without LD.
   e. Adults with LD will never be successful as those without LD.
   f. Adults with LD can be successful as those without LD.
   g. Adults with LD have many emotional problems.
ABSTRACT

Correctional Education English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy programs vary from state to state, region to region. Some states enroll their correctional ESL students in adult basic education (ABE) classes; other states have separate classes and programs. At the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup, the ESL class is a self-contained classroom with 99% of the ESL students coming from Spanish-speaking countries. These students come from unique backgrounds and teaching literacy can be challenging. This article describes characteristics of the ESL literacy program at MCI-J.

INTRODUCTION

The English as a Second Language (ESL) program at the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup (MCI-J) enrolls adult male students, ages 18–60, who are not native English-speakers. Most of the students are from Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) and Mexico, with a few arriving from Puerto...
Rico or other Caribbean countries such as Cuba. Occasionally, there are also students from South America. This means that 99% of the ESL students at MCI-J use Spanish as their first language. At MCI-J, all inmates are mandated to attend school (located on premises) for 120 days if they do not have a high school diploma. Classes in the school include English as a Second Language (ESL), Special Education, Basic Literacy, Intermediate levels 1–4, and Adult Secondary Education levels 1–4. It is hoped that students assigned to school will stay in school longer than the 120 days, if needed, until they are able to obtain the appropriate literacy certificates or high school diplomas. Once they receive high school diplomas, they may enroll in the Graphic Arts program, Auto Mechanics, be an academic tutor, or obtain other employment within the institution.

**Literacy**

Literacy, defined as “the ability to use printed material and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential,” (NCES, 2005) is still problematic in the United States, especially for nontraditional populations. Seventy-five percent of state prison inmates (over age 16) did not complete high school (ProLiteracy, 2013), or are classified as low literate (below third grade level). Outside of prison, there are 93 million adults who have only Basic and Below Basic literacy skills (NCL, 2009).

Students arrive at MCI-J with varying literacy levels, educational backgrounds, and experiences. Currently, the school has students who have not finished high school, special education and minority language students, students with low literacy, students with drug dependencies, students in gangs, and students with negative school experiences. One-fourth of the ESL students have no formal education at all, either in their first (L1) or second (L2) languages. Thus, the MCI-J school becomes a melting pot of people who need instruction and assistance in many different forms.

**The ESL Students**

The ESL students come from traditional cultures where respect for the teacher is adamant. They are polite and respectful, attendance is regular, homework, and classwork are expected and completed. Within this framework, the challenge for me as the ESL instructor for the past eight years has been one of engagement; how to keep students interested and challenged in school so they will continue to attend regularly and work hard. This can be difficult when students come from families where education has not been prioritized and high school diplomas in any language are few and far between. For my students, the three main incentives for learning a second language are money, their children, and good time credit. When it comes to money, students can earn a larger salary either in the U.S. or in their home countries if they speak English. Their children are U.S. citizens learning English in public schools, are English-dominant, and write letters to their fathers in English. Upon release, most fathers with felonies will be deported back to their home countries if they are not U.S. citizens; thus, the motivation for writing and speaking in English will continue as long as they are separated from their children. Finally, inmates receive good time credit, which is a reduction in their sentences (10 days off per month) for working and/or attending school. The motivation to stay in school then is three-fold; monetary ambition, family circumstance, and good time credit.
Correctional Education
Correctional education (CE) gives teachers the chance to be creative with their methodology and instruction. Instructors follow the state Common Core guidelines and have state statistics in mind as they count certificates and diplomas, but they also have a time element not present in public education. This time element varies from student to student, depending on one’s sentence, but it is an important part of CE instruction. Nontraditional students in prison, including students with special needs and learning problems, finally have the extra time required to study, understand, practice, learn new information, and attain the education they need to be successful in today’s world.

Teaching Correctional ESL Students
As a correctional educator for ESL students, I am mindful of learning activities the students enjoy and instructional modules that bring them success (Gardner, 2011a; Gardner 2011b). Because there is a dearth of information on effective pedagogies for correctional education ESL students, I describe herein what works well for the ESL inmates at MCI-J. The policy information report for correctional education (Coley & Barton, 2006) explicitly states that “creative” “programs tailored to the prison population are more likely to succeed” (p. 20), success being determined initially by higher test scores and academic advancement; consequently, by lower rates of recidivism. ESL students at MCI-J have been successful in the academic environment. They have obtained state certificates for reading, language, math, and writing at all levels. Many are working on their high school coursework and several have received their high school diplomas. Herein are the guidelines that I follow:

1. Focus on the world as multilingual and multicultural.
Although English is considered a power language, and the language of business and education, there are 7,105 other languages in the world (Ethnologue, 2013) spoken in 195 different countries (Nations Online, 2013). A global focus in the classroom supports learning about the world and creating an awareness of “others;” other countries, other people, other events. This enhances vocabulary development with academic content and creates an interest in global affairs. Many incarcerated students do not listen to the news or read current events. They need the support of their instructor to expose them to the geographical lexicon used in standardized testing in order to become literate and “develop one’s knowledge and potential”. There are many topics (immigration, education, international conflicts) today that include knowledge of geography and the world. For the adult education teacher, intriguing facts and discussions can be incorporated into the state benchmarks, including the new Common Core State Standards. My students have become extremely interested in world events and maps due to the inclusion of targeted geographical vocabulary. For example, beginning ESL students learning the difference between the words continents, countries, and cities enjoy not just looking at their own countries on a map, but they also like finding other destinations such as the location of the winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia or the Pacific island where President Obama takes his vacation. Students enjoy and learn the information as they are exposed to it.

The focus on languages in the world and locating nations where people are multilingual, bilingual, or trilingual can trigger awareness that
they (ESL students) are unique in this country because they are learning their second language and becoming bilingual. Although this is a common occurrence among the Hispanic population, it is not common among white and black populations in the U.S., most of whom are monolingual. Even a cursory introduction to different phrases in French or Chinese, for example, allows a new learning experience in a third or fourth language. I have given my students phrases in French—Bonjour; Comment ça va?—and they are intrigued by the orthography and pronunciation. They practice the new sounds and laugh. Not only are they learning new vocabulary—languages, bilingual, multilingual, French, France—but they are gaining an appreciation for other languages and cultures. This inclusion of cultural and geographical information is easily incorporated into beginning lessons on foods, holidays, clothing, and transportation, all of which are included in the Maryland Content Standards for Adult ESL (DLLR, 2008), guidelines for all CE ESL teachers. Once again, the cultural content reinforces the fact that the school appreciates and values students from other cultures and countries, showing respect for all; an important distinction in prison.

2. **Use bilingual textbooks, glossaries, and language as supplementary teaching tools.**

Lee (2012) and Cook (2010) discuss the importance of having the first language (L1) available to students learning a second language, even for monolingual teachers who may not speak a second language. They both argue that bilingualism and code-switching (using both languages) should be permitted as an effective resource for language teachers. There is much debate today about the use of bilingual textbooks and language in the ESL classroom, but Cook (2010) describes an “optimal position” situation, wherein a language class includes both the first and target languages. Because most ESL classes have students with varying educational backgrounds, bilingual glossaries and texts provide a much-needed support system for lower level English learners. There are many of these multilingual vocabulary textbooks on the market (Spanish/English, French/English/Korean/English). At MCI-J we use the bilingual Spanish/English Oxford Picture Dictionary series by Oxford University Press, and the pictures provide a supplementary literacy support for those students with no print literacy in any language. Standard language pedagogy in the United States has always disallowed and discouraged ESL language teachers from using a student’s first language in teaching a targeted language such as English. However, in the 21st century, there is new evidence coming forth concerning the value of bilingualism, and as educators, we may need to rethink our philosophies on second language learning and what works well for our nonnative speakers. As an ESL teacher studying Spanish, I enjoy hearing and using certain Spanish phrases and constructions in the classroom; it allows us all to learn together. At MCI-J, ESL students frequently speak Spanish and Spanglish—a hybrid, or blend of both languages in the same sentence—in the classroom. I consider both Spanish and Spanglish necessary tools for students learning English, especially when there is confusion with English instructions and explanations. There is no harm in allowing students to speak Spanish in the classroom, and in fact, it cannot be avoided. In addition, a student who is able to substitute the Spanish adjective loco (Es un hombre loco/He is a crazy man) for the English adjective crazy in
the above sentence has demonstrated a particular knowledge of English lexicon, morphology, and semantics. This is language learning.

3. Use translations as a supplemental grammar source.

Along with bilingualism, there is a renewed interest in using translations in foreign language and second language instruction (formerly referred to as the grammar-translation method; Cook, 2010). This system of language learning was popular in the 19th century; students would learn certain grammatical rules and then apply the rules by translating sentences from the first language to the second. Although translations cannot be used as a sole method of language learning because they are too restrictive, I have found that targeted translations from Spanish to English assist students in understanding difficult grammatical structures. Students can both compare and contrast the two languages. Examples include adjective placement (before the noun in English, after the noun in Spanish), plural noun formations (both languages add “s” or “es”), use of articles before nouns, and use of subject pronouns. Spanish/English translations provide an effective tool for teaching, explaining, and discussing English and Spanish grammar. Although translations should not be used exclusively, they play an important part in the application of learned grammar skills, and can be used as a supplementary resource to foreign language and English language teaching. My students enjoy working with English/Spanish translations in a limited fashion; we spend about 60–90 minutes per week in structured grammar focus, using Fisher Hill’s *English for the Spanish Speaker* series. These are bilingual texts in four levels, geared toward adult learners who need a large print text.

4. Teach an integrated curriculum in an interactive environment.

Adult basic education teachers should think of language learning as four parts: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each part is dependent upon, and just as important as the other. Although many correctional education programs place ESL students with workbooks, working independently or with a tutor (Dellicarpini, 2006), language learning involves both productive and receptive skills while interacting with others. Interactive language activities need to include practice in all four skills. My students enjoy Sight Word Bingo, oral practice with book reports, spontaneous conversation about favorite foods, sports, and other fun/educational topics, structured and spontaneous role play, phonics, reading aloud of short texts and targeted words and recording same, keyboarding, and basic writing structures (letters, words, short sentences); these types of activities are all essential for an integrated curriculum. Each skill requires a lot of practice and patience to master. Some students enter MCI-J with strong oral skills, but no writing experience. Similarly, some students enjoy writing and filling up their composition books with all sorts of sentences and expressions heard elsewhere, but they are reticent to speak. Their success is contingent upon the instructor using all four skills in the classroom, and providing time for plenty of practice. An integrated curriculum provides the support ESL students need, not just for school and literacy certificates, but for
the workplace, social events, and life skills. An integrated approach to teaching allows students to experience language for what it really is—communication with others in different ways.

**Literacy and Success**

Students remain in the ESL program until they are able to obtain a 1.9 on McGraw-Hill’s Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), which is used in adult education programs in the state. TABE scores reveal the progress made in different academic areas (reading, language, and math), and determine whether students can exit ESL into the general education program described at the beginning of the article. The time it takes to exit is dependent on many factors—motivation, previous education, age, cognitive abilities—but 96% of the ESL students leave MCI-J with improved literacy skills. As their many certificates reveal, they have gained an ability to use print material in English that may be required for school or work. They can communicate in order to function in the community, and use what they have learned in school to further develop personal and professional goals.

**REFERENCES**


For new immigrants, having or gaining skill in the language of their host country is critical to successful social integration. As such, language is a form of human capital—a competency or skill that directly impacts economic possibility and access to an expanded web of social supports. Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), this article provides a thorough and rich exploration of self-reported language ability among Canadian immigrants arriving in the early 2000s, and subsequently interviewed 6 months, 2 years, and 4 years after arrival. Adamuti-Trache notes that this work extends existing research in two primary and significant ways: 1) by exploring language ability as a factor in the immigrant settlement process (a critical endeavor for those outside the workforce such as spouses, dependents, and family immigrants), and 2) by looking specifically at the strategies used by immigrants seeking to improve their language skills (and the need for funded language programs in these incidental, informal, and purposeful learning initiatives). Nevertheless, this research also provides a valuable resource for practitioners seeking data to support the need for expanded language instruction to new immigrants at varying levels of proficiency.

Conceptual Framework
For this examination, Adamuti-Trache utilizes Bourdieu’s (1990) view that capital is accumulated and converted through practice.
in a social field. For immigrants, such practice involves active participation in the society of the host country. Furthermore, this process involves “a gradual transfer of home country-specific human capital into host country-specific human capital” (pp. 103–104). For immigrants, premigration language ability, and their willingness to engage in postmigration language learning opportunities (formal or otherwise), are critical. The process of acquiring host country language capital requires time and investment; immigrants’ decisions to invest time and energy in this process are influenced by their sense of the future benefits, the costs, and the efficiency of language acquisition such efforts entail. In any case, Adamuti-Trache notes the pressure on both the immigrant and the host-country to facilitate this process by providing opportunities for language practices—practices, as noted by Bourdieu, that are always legitimated by the dominate, host culture.

The author’s conceptual framework for this study is one of its greatest assets; allowing for a more robust discussion of language acquisition and immigrant integration as bounded up in cultural practice. While steeped in survey data, it results in conclusions that are both more complex and practical than might initially be expected.

Methods

As noted earlier, this article is based on data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC). It specifically utilizes a representative sample of immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada between October 2000 and September 2001, with survey data collected 6 months, 2 years, and 4 years after arrival. To exclude those still eligible for regular high school enrollment or those typically out of the working age population, only respondents between the ages of 20 and 59, who never lived in Canada before applying for immigration, were included in the study. The result was a sample of 6,090 immigrants representing some 87% of respondents who completed all three interviews.

The study’s outcome variable was immigrant language capital “defined as the self-reported speaking proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages” (p. 110). Individual variables included gender, age, highest educational attainment before arrival, and “immigrant-specific factors” such as immigration status and region of last
Language Acquisition Among Adult Immigrants in Canada

residence. It is important to note the subtleties within these variables, which while beyond the scope of this review, add significant richness and nuance to the resulting conclusions, and coalesce into what the author identifies as a four-part exploratory analysis of 1) pre-migration language capital contrasted with both individual and immigrant-specific factors, 2) modes of language acquisition compared to various social factors, 3) a multivariate analysis of “language proficiency growth,” and 4) the use of descriptive statistics to examine the impact of initial and final language proficiency on various immigration indicators.

Findings and Discussion

The primary contribution of Adamuti-Trache’s study—noted succinctly by the author—is its contribution to other “research that demonstrates that language fluency has economic benefits” (p. 125). Also, it speaks to the complexity of this process and the powerful role of social practice as both critical to language acquisition, and as impediment to those with low levels of premigration language proficiency. As in other areas of adult education, immigrants from socially disadvantaged groups (the elderly or those with less formal education) are poorly situated to access many educational and training opportunities, and are often unable to make good use of informal learning outlets (e.g. digital and mass media). They are trapped in the impossible scenario of having language skills inadequate for gaining entrance to the labor force, where they might engage in the social practices that further enhance language skills and, ultimately, see their capital exchanged.

Indeed, a key aspect of integration into a host culture is developing bridging networks, which is building connections outside of one’s ethnic community. Language proficiency is critical to the development of such networks, and the successful creation of bridging networks is largely predicated upon having enhanced language proficiency.

For those with strong language skills at arrival, the myriad resources of the host country are available for the choosing—most importantly, potential access to participation in post-secondary education. Yet Adamuti-Trache points out the relative importance of incidental and informal learning opportunities to this group as well, noting that “media” was identified as the most popular informal learning outlets.

“...immigrants from socially disadvantaged groups are poorly situated to access many educational and training opportunities, and are often unable to make good use of informal learning outlets.”

“...a key aspect of integration into a host culture is developing bridging networks, which is building connections outside of one’s ethnic community.”
learning tool among all participants (recognized by 77% of poor speakers and 60% of good speakers).

However, for the disadvantaged, even contexts appearing ripe with educational promise mask limitations to language gains. For example, some “45%–46% of immigrants believe that the work environment helped them improve their language proficiency regardless of language skills” (p. 117). Nevertheless, for women who identified as poor speakers, only 38% felt their language skills improved in the workplace as compared to 60% among their male counterparts—a discrepancy which the author attributes to employment patterns and type, with manual jobs demanding (and thereby promoting) limited language skills.

For those interested in the subtle complexities of immigrant language acquisition, Adamuti-Trache’s study is rich with such detail. It is replete with tables examining key areas of analysis, as well as charts, which allow for the visualization of changes in participant-reported language proficiency over time. Overall, this study provides a clear, well-organized, and thought-provoking look at an increasingly important area of analysis in a readable style; easily accessible to anyone working in the broad field of adult basic education.

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REFERENCES

Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies, in the Series New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies

By Dr. Erik Jacobson


“…adult literacy programs are important places where students are introduced to new uses for digital technologies that add to their repertoire of literacy practices.”

Overview

Crossing and re-crossing boundaries of academic secondary research, practical advice and examples for teachers, and critical literacy, Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies is short, well-researched, information-packed, and intellectually challenging. It is firmly grounded in the 1990’s thinking of the New Literacy Studies scholars such as Street, Heath, and Barton & Hamilton, “...whose key methodological stance is to look for specificity in how individuals and communities use the written word (in combination with other semiotic resources)” (2012, p. 3). This book challenges a widely-held notion of “digital literacy,” which Jacobson believes places too strong an emphasis on technology-based media. Jacobson’s new literacies thesis is that specific individual, family, and community literacy practices should be the focus of our attention, whether the medium is print, video, text messaging, tweeting, or a combination of media. The book is written for a wide range of practitioners and researchers interested in literacy/ies, as well as the use of technology in adult basic education and social change.
Organization of the text

The volume is organized clearly in three major parts—Learning, Teaching, and Organizing—and includes six chapters. Chapter 1 of the first part, Learning, focuses on digital technologies’ structure, modalities, and impact on learning. The structure section includes courses, modular learning, and self-study and informal learning. Modalities include print/typographic, audio, visual, and multimodalities. The Impact section includes technologies’ effects on program participation, affective results, and skill development. The second chapter, Learning to be Literate in a Digital Age, focuses on new techniques to learn such as searching for and evaluating information online, reading and navigating web pages, and learning in online courses, as well as “Old Questions to Ask”. Chapter 3, which transitions into Teaching, ranges from perspectives on literacy pedagogy to supporting active learning, and this chapter also includes thoughts on lesson planning. The fourth chapter, Learning to Teach New Literacies, focuses on teacher professional development in the age of digital literacy: teacher expectations for their own development, formal and non-formal structures for their development, and teachers’ participation patterns in professional development. The final part, Organizing, looks at the larger political and social context of education and adult education from the perspective of a social activist who is interested in the role of adult literacies in shaping the world.

Analysis

Given the book’s purpose, the treatment of the topic is thorough and comprehensive. The 10-page bibliography, with approximately 180 references, is impressive and useful. Jacobson’s style ranges from academic and theoretical to conversational, sometimes drawing on examples from popular culture as well as literacy and technology. The extensive inclusion of web site examples is extremely helpful in itself, and these illustrate Jacobson’s points, which are well articulated and fully developed. Compared with the relatively few other books on the use of technology in adult education—all of which appear to be included in the bibliography—this book provides suitable references from many of their authors and offers a unique thesis combining adult literacies and the use of digital technology by adult learners and their teachers. This is not a comprehensive review of how technology
is used in adult basic education and does not, for example explore how administrators, counselors, curriculum developers and literacy librarians use technology. However, that is not its intended purpose.

In the Dedication, Jacobson refers to conversations that he and I have had over the years about the logistics and implications of new technologies. The book itself is like a stimulating conversation with the author. I felt compelled, for example, to examine at least a couple dozen of the web resources he described that were new to me, and I found many to be of great interest and relevance to our field. Jacobson’s description of the kinds of professional development teachers need is very much on target:

“When it comes to technology, this means that professional development should start with the kinds of questions a teacher wants to answer. Thus, rather than beginning with the latest technology, professional development efforts should start with the issues and problems teachers and learners are wrestling with. That is, teachers should identify a need and then look for a tool that would be a good fit” (p. 79).

Other highlights of the book are Jacobson’s synthesis of studies on adult blended learning: that it “is associated with the highest rates of retention/persistence,” that “programs that are distance education only are associated with the lowest levels of retention/persistence,” and that one study found that “learners appear to be able to sustain their efforts in the program with a relatively small number of hours of direct instructional contact (an average of less than 2 hours per month)” (p. 27).

**Recommendation**

I recommend this book for teachers and other practitioners as well as for researchers, professional developers, and program and adult school level technology coordinators. It will open a world of free web-based resources with a wide range of application. It will also introduce some readers to the New Literacies in an appealing context.

**David J. Rosen**

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Mobile Digital Devices Provide Instant Feedback in Class

By Dr. David J. Rosen
President, Newsome Associates, Boston Massachusetts

This Web Scan column is for the growing number of teachers who encourage their students to bring cell phones (feature phones or ideally, smart phones) or electronic tablets to class because they understand how powerfully these devices can be used for formative assessment (i.e. ongoing learning progress assessment and instant feedback to the teacher).

If you have not already done so, the first step is to survey your students to see what kinds of portable digital devices they have. Here is an adult learner focused survey instrument that can help you: https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6715575/Student%20Cell%20Phone%20Survey%20%28updated%2012%202014%29.docx or, for short http://bit.ly/1i00Wyz.

Here are five free or inexpensive feedback or formative assessment tools:

1. TodaysMeet

https://todaysmeet.com/

By
Dr. David J. Rosen
A teacher is explaining something in her class and wonders what her students are thinking. Do they get it or are they confused? Her students wish there were a way that they could ask questions in class without raising their hands—perhaps anonymously. If they have a smart phone or a tablet, individually or in small groups, they can. They—and their teacher—can instantly see their comments and questions in a private online meeting room that takes only seconds to create. Using a multimedia projector, every student can see them, even those who cannot or, who don’t wish to, log on.

Also, using TodaysMeet, a teacher could set up a private homework help room, with herself, a volunteer, or peer tutors as helpers. Any of her students could go to this TodaysMeet room, in real time, as often as they wish.

Private TodaysMeet room dialogues can be saved for up to a year.

2. Socrative

http://socrative.com/

Socrative describes itself as “a smart student response system that empowers teachers to engage their classrooms through a series of educational exercises and games via smartphones, laptops, and tablets.” It has a menu of formative assessments: multiple choice, true/false, short answer, quick quiz, and space race. Students’ answers are automatically aggregated, reported, and you can email the report to yourself.
3. Google Drive (using Forms)

http://google.com

Learning Progress

Using Google Drive, the Forms option of CREATE on MyDrive, you can make your own (text, multiple choice, checkbox, scale, grid or other kind of) formative assessment. You can email it to your students and view their responses.

4. Twitter

http://twitter.com

With Twitter, like TodaysMeet and Socrative, students can post ideas, questions, and connections, while the teacher speaks and answers other students’ posts. “A simple way is to have all students log into the class Twitter account on their 1:1 digital device. As you teach, they tweet their thoughts to a stream displayed on the Smartscreen. It’s anonymous and instantaneous. It lets you know if students understand your ideas and if you need to go faster/slower.”

5. Poll Everywhere

http://www.polleverywhere.com

Using Poll Everywhere, a teacher can create a free, one-question, true-false, multiple-choice, open-ended question or other poll for up to 30 students. They can respond to the poll on any cell phone that has an SMS text message feature. Using an electronic whiteboard or a multimedia (LCD) projector, the results of the poll can be displayed for the whole class as a table or graph. A teacher can set up any number of free, one-question polls and up to 30 people can respond.
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