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ABSTRACT

This summary reports on a research project that looked at the relationship of whole language instruction to adult basic education (ABE) learning. It begins with the background of the three research projects. This section discusses the staff development program that enabled teachers to understand whole language, its principles, and its strategies and the research projects that were conducted simultaneously with the staff development program as ABE teachers began to implement whole language in the classroom. The next section provides an abstract from the 1990 National Reading Conference symposium presentation "Implementing Whole Language Learning in Adult Basic Education Settings", summarizing three reports. The research reports include: "Implementing Whole Language Learning: Adult Literacy Teachers' Problems and Concerns" (Padak et al.); "An Interim Research Report of the Influence of a Staff Development Process Emphasizing Whole Language Teaching Principles on ABE Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy and Their Literacy Teaching Practices" (Connell et al.); and "Adult Basic Education on Learners' Perceptions of Literacy Learning at the Onset of Implementation of Whole Language Instructional Practices" (Padak). The two final sections highlight eight insights gleaned from the research reports and suggest future research projects. (YLB)

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# SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON IMPLEMENTING WHOLE LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SETTINGS

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## Background of Research Projects

During 1989 a special research project was initiated for the purpose of looking at the relationship of whole language instruction to adult basic education learning. The project was an outgrowth of a National Adult Education Discretionary Program Award (Award #V191A-80022) sponsored by the United States Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. This award was given to Kathy Roskos, Ph.D., John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio and the Ashtabula County Adult Basic Education Program.

This initial award provided for a limited study of the way two adult basic education teachers began to utilize a whole language philosophy in their working with ABE students. The teachers were provided a staff development program that enabled them to better understand whole language, its principles and its strategies. The teachers were then given assistance in their implementation of this philosophy and these strategies in their individual settings.

The results of this first research project provided some of the basic data, insights, and structures necessary for applying for a second grant. A Special Demonstration Project grant was awarded by the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Adult and Community Services. The purpose of this grant was to provide whole language training for a core group of teachers in adult basic education settings.

Teachers were recruited to participate in this research project. The teachers recruited for this project committed themselves to participate in a staff development program consisting of large-group training sessions, implementation of learned material in their ABE settings, and small-group feedback sessions. In addition, the core teachers in this project were invited to become trainers of other teachers so that the philosophy and strategies could be expanded.

The staff development program that formed the basis of this project had as its focus the following goals:

1. To develop an understanding of whole language teaching and learning.

2. To develop a conceptual understanding of the reading and writing processes in whole language teaching.

3. To use instructional strategies that reflect an understanding of the reading and writing processes.

4. To create an environment for adult literacy learning.

5. To implement an evaluation process in a whole language literacy program.

Each of the training sessions that the teachers attended focused on key whole language topics: beliefs about reading and writing, the writing process, the reading process, integrating reading and writing, creating literate environments for adults, designing and using an instructional cycle, developing themes for whole language instruction, and assessing and evaluating.

The staff development component of this project was primarily provided by four individuals: Nancy D. Padak, Gary M. Padak, Kathleen A. Roskos, and James V. Connell. These individuals conducted the large-group training sessions and coordinated the small-group meetings. Padak and Padak served as one set of trainers, and Roskos and Connell served as the other set of trainers. The teachers were divided into two groups for the purpose of large-group training and were further divided for the small-group meetings. Research assistants provided assistance in data collection as the project unfolded in various teacher's classrooms.

As the staff development program was taking place, three separate naturalistic and qualitative research studies were conducted. Each of the research projects focused on a limited number of adult basic education teachers as they began to implement the program through their classroom practices with adults. The three research reports have been included in this summary. All three reports were shared as part of a symposium at the 1990 National Reading Conference.

The next section of this summary provides an abstract of the symposium presentation. That section is then followed by each of the research reports. The last two parts of this summary focus on the findings gleamed from this research and the implications for further research.

## Symposium Presenters

Implementing Whole Language Learning in Adult Basic Education Settings

Chair: Nancy D. Padak, Kent State University

### Implementing Whole Language Learning: Adult Literacy Teachers' Problems and Concerns

Nancy D. Padak
Denise H. Stuart
Kent State University

Jane A. Schierloh
Project: LEARN, Cleveland, OH

### The Influence of Staff Development in Whole Language on ABE Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy Learning and Their Teaching Practices

James Connell
Berea (OH) Schools

Kathleen A. Roskos
John Carroll University

### Changes in ABE Learners' Perceptions of Literacy and Literacy Learning During Implementation of Whole Language Instructional Practices

Gary M. Padak
Kent State University

Discussant: Jane L. Davidson, Northern Illinois University

Symposium Abstract

## Implementing Whole Language Learning in Adult Basic Education Settings

### Abstract

Too frequently, adult literacy programs lack a functional focus. Instruction is often geared toward reading and writing skills in isolation (Meyer & Keefe, 1988), which causes many adult learners to view literacy as "fragmented, confusing, and meaningless" (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Kazemek, 1988). Whole language principles and practices, on the other hand, emphasize the learner's experiential and linguistic strengths, maintain high levels of interest, and focus on matters of immediate and functional concern to learners in a context that capitalizes on the meaningful and social nature of literacy and learning (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Kazemek, 1988; Padak & Padak, 1987).

The goal of this symposium is to provide multiple perspectives on how a group of adult basic education (ABE) teachers developed and changed during a five-month staff development project designed to a) develop their understanding of whole language principles and practices; and b) facilitate their efforts to apply such understandings to their own instructional settings. The symposium is organized around three naturalistic and qualitative research

studies which investigate issues related to teachers' and learners' perceptions and behaviors during the project.

The papers share several key assumptions about the process of teacher development and change: teacher development is accompanied by change, or alterations in teachers' ways of thinking and doing (Fullan, 1985); change is affected by both personal and contextual factors (Duffy and Roehler, 1986; Nelson, 1988; Showers, 1983; Vacca & Gove, 1983); change must be viewed as a process experienced by individuals at personal levels (e.g., Hall, 1973). These assumptions have implications for the ways in which teacher development and change may be productively investigated. Explorations of teacher development and change should aim to describe pertinent aspects of the cultures of the instructional settings--how teachers and adult learners interact with each other and instructional materials to negotiate lessons, to construct meaning, and to achieve instructional goals. As teachers develop and change, it becomes important to see how the culture of the settings may change, and what these changes may represent to teachers and adult learners. Naturalistic and qualitative paradigms offer a means for investigating and attempting to understand participants' personal interpretations of reality.

The first study, "Implementing Whole Language Learning: Adult Literacy Teachers' Problems and Concerns," focused on the types and perceived sources of teachers' problems and concerns; their attempts to address them; and changes in

problems, concerns, and resolutions over time. Data sources included all teachers' written reactions to "field tests," field notes from interim meetings, periodic interviews with six focal teachers, and field notes from monthly observations in these six teachers' ABE programs. Domain analysis will be used to discover broad categories that account for teachers' problems and concerns and attempts at resolution. Constant comparison procedures will be used to examine the pervasiveness of categories of problems and concerns across teaching sites and to uncover changes in categories over time.

The purposes of the second study, "The Influence of Staff Development in Whole Language on ABE Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy Learning and Their Teaching Practices" were to examine teachers' perceptions and practices, as well as the congruence between them. Data sources included interviews with all teachers conducted before and after the staff development program, teachers' written logs (kept throughout the project), student feedback forms, and field notes from on-site observations of the six focal teachers. Interview transcriptions and written logs will be analyzed using domain analysis. To examine indicators of congruence between perceptions and practices, categories emerging from the domain analysis of interviews written logs and written logs/ field notes will be examined through constant comparison. Student feedback data will be used to buttress and elaborate indicators of change in

perceptions and practices, as well as the congruence between these two entities.

The goals of the third study, "Changes in ABE Learners' Perceptions of Literacy and Literacy Learning During Implementation of Whole Language Instructional Practices," were to examine changes in perceptions of the reading and writing processes and instruction and to attempt to determine the factors that account for such changes. Data for the study consisted primarily of interviews with more than 30 adult learners that were conducted at the beginning and end of the project. Interviews probed learners' perceptions of literacy processes and literacy learning. Field notes from observations and teachers' written logs provided additional data sources. Domain analysis of learners' interview responses will be used to establish descriptive categories; portions of field notes and statements from teachers' written logs that pertain to learners' perceptions will be examined to provide additional perspectives on the changes in learners' perceptions over the course of the project.

Taken together, the studies provide a description of teacher development and change in the context of ABE literacy instruction, as well as information related to the impact of such changes on adult literacy learners. The discussant for the symposium will respond to each of the three papers by placing them within the larger contexts of research into ABE literacy instruction, teacher development,

and instructional change. In addition, the discussant will lead a discussion among the symposium members and audience related to the themes arising from the research presented.

**Research Report One**

# IMPLEMENTING WHOLE LANGUAGE LEARNING: ADULT LITERACY TEACHERS' PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS

by

Nancy D. Padak
Denise Stuart
Kent State University

Jane Schierloh

## Implementing Whole Language Learning: Adult Literacy Teachers' Problems and Concerns

Adult literacy teachers come from diverse backgrounds (Cranney, 1983). For the most part, although sincerely interested in assisting adult learners, they are untrained (Chall, Heron, & Hilferty, 1987; Kazemek, 1988) and may have narrow, skills-based notions of literacy (Keefe & Meyer, 1985). As Chall et al. (1987, p. 193) note, "Every major published report on adult literacy cites the problem of part-time, often untrained... staff members."

These qualities affect the nature of the programs they deliver. Too frequently, adult literacy programs lack a functional focus. Instruction is often geared toward reading and writing in isolation (Meyer & Keefe, 1988), which causes many adult learners to view literacy as "fragmented, confusing, and meaningless" (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Kazemek, 1988). Whole language principles and practices (e.g., Goodman, 1989; Watson, 1989), on the other hand, emphasize the learner's experiential and linguistic strengths, maintain high levels of interest, and focus on matters of immediate and functional concern to learners in a context that capitalizes on the meaningful and social nature of literacy and learning (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Kazemek, 1988; Padak & Padak, 1987).

Thus, effective staff development programs for adult basic education (ABE) providers are needed (Kazemek, 1988).

Staff development that focuses on whole language principles and practices and that provides support as teachers implement change may address this need. Support must include attention to teachers' problems and concerns, which, given the complexity of the shift toward whole language teaching and learning, are likely to be substantial (Padak & Nelson, 1990; Short & Burke, 1989).

Descriptions of the processes through which adult literacy teachers implement whole language principles and practices may inform efforts to create and implement effective ABE staff development programs. This study was designed to explore several aspects of these processes. Case studies (e.g., Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984) of five ABE teachers' efforts to implement whole language practices in their respective programs were developed. Three questions were addressed: What are adult literacy teachers' problems and concerns during the process of implementing whole language learning? How do teachers attempt to solve these problems? How do problems and concerns change over time?

## Method

### Setting and Subjects

A five-month, state-funded staff development program provided the context for this study. The program, based on related research (e.g., Bean & Johnson, 1987; Goodman & Goodman, 1981; Wood & Wood, 1986) and discussions with state-level ABE consultants and local practitioners, had two major goals: a) to develop teachers' understanding of whole

language principles and practices; and b) to facilitate teachers' efforts to apply such understandings to their own ABE settings. Key features of the program included four day-long sessions for sharing principles and demonstrating activities, opportunities for participants to use whole language activities in their own settings, and informal sessions for sharing about implementation.

Teachers were nominated for participation in the program by their local ABE directors. Five teachers from the larger group of 26 volunteered to participate in the study. These five teachers represented different levels of experience within ABE and taught in a variety of types of programs; thus, they seemed representative cases for the purposes of the study. General information about the five teachers and their programs is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Information about Case Study Teachers

| | Mary | Jane | Cathy | Diane | Edith |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experience in ABE (other) | 10 yrs. (15 yrs., elem.) | 3 yrs. | 3 yrs. (5 yrs., HS & Coll. English) | 22 yrs. (7 yrs. College English) | 9 yrs. (9 yrs., 6-8 LD) |
| Highest degree | M.S. Ed. | B.S. (Social Studies) | M.A. (currently in Ph.D. program) | B.A. | B.S. Ed. |
| Location of Program | semi-rural vocational school | mid-sized city | urban | urban | suburban |
| Type of Program | ABE/GED: 90% individual., 10% small group | ABE/GED; 90% individual., 10% small group | family life; 10% individual., 30% small group 60% large group | ABE/GED; 85% individual., 10% small group 5% whole group | ABE/GED; 85% individual., 10% small group 5% large group |
| Number (hours) of Observations | 6 (15 hrs.) | 6 (10 hrs.) | 4 (7 hrs.) | 6 (6 hrs.) | 7 (13 hrs.) |
| Number of Interviews | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |

Data Sources and Analysis

Data for the study were gathered from observations and interviews conducted over the length of the staff development program (see Table 1). Observers kept written field notes detailing teacher and adult learner activities during ABE instructional sessions. Interviews focused on teachers' attempts at implementing whole language practices, problems or concerns related to implementation, and attempts at solving identified problems.

The researchers collaborated in the data reduction and analysis process. The process first involved identifying data congruent with the research goals (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Data sets or case records (Patton, 1980) were then created for each teacher. These were combed for patterns and regularities (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Inductive analysis uncovered categories of concerns and problems, which were then considered in light of the literacy learning events which comprised the case records. Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify general themes related to the focus of the study.

Three procedures were used to establish the trustworthiness and plausibility of findings. Teachers' reports of instructional situations were checked against field notes from observations. In addition, the researchers completed each stage of data reduction and analysis independently and then collaborated to share insights and, if necessary, resolve discrepancies. Both these forms of

triangulation served to enhance the trustworthiness of findings (Mathison, 1988). Member checks (Merriam, 1988) were conducted at the conclusion of data analysis to establish the plausibility of findings from participants' perspectives.

## Findings

Data analysis yielded five general categories of reported problems/ concerns related to the implementation of whole language teaching practices. Examination of expressed problems over the five-month period revealed no changes. Each category is described and defined below, along with solutions that teachers attempted or speculated upon.

The first category, facilities and supplies, represented concrete problems. For example, one teacher had no access to a chalkboard, tables, or desks; she solved this problem by bringing "in a lot of scrap paper." Another had no access to a copy machine.

### Data Structure and Organization

A second category of problems and concerns related to the overall organization or structure of existing ABE programs. Learner attendance was a major issue within this category. Two teachers believed that they had too few learners to sustain conversations and discussions about reading and writing; the others had difficulty because they had so many learners. Edith and Diane believed that training for volunteers would alleviate the pressure they felt to attend to all learners' needs. Edith invited

volunteers to join group discussions as a means of informal training. Jane said, "I just sort of fly by the seat of my pants, just finding time whenever I can."

In two programs, learners frequently arrived and left at different times, which complicated small group interaction. This problem was compounded by program policies that encouraged learners to decide for themselves how instruction should be focused. Learners in both programs would occasionally decide to spend all their time with math instruction. Neither teacher addressed this problem during the course of the study.

All five teachers believed that learners' inconsistent attendance caused difficulty sustaining instruction: "[Whole language practices are] effective if you can have the same group over and over again and sort of follow them... they're not doing it for the first time every night... consistency in the group and consistency in the techniques, in the subject matter.... But in this program... this coming and going all the time just isn't conducive to effective teaching" (Mary). Edith expressed the concern this way: "it would be nice if I had the whole group working together.. we start a particular theme on Tuesday. The following Tuesday or even Thursday it doesn't mean that the same people are going to be there. So that's a problem...." Teachers attempted to address this problem by planning sessions that could stand alone as well as contribute to a larger plan.

In three programs with open entry policies, teachers were interrupted when new learners entered programs, sometimes for registration and intake procedures and sometimes to welcome new learners and get them started with instruction. Although interruptions caused instructional problems for the teachers, none attempted to change this aspect of program organization.

Instruction

Problems and concerns related to the shift from individualized instruction in GED workbooks (used in four of the five programs; see Table I) toward the more interactive instructional routines characteristic of whole language practices constituted the third category. The three who viewed whole language practices as an addition rather than a potential replacement for past practices expressed concern about fining time to implement new teaching/learning strategies; "and it seems like sometimes we run out of time on certain nights... there might be five students that come in all at once and all of them need something different" (Mary).

Jane expressed the only curriculum-related concern during the course of the study: "how do I introduce grammar problems" in a writer's workshop? She decided to encourage peer editing, but found that learners were "too nice to each other." She attempted to solve this problem through modeling: "critiquing somebody else's paper and showing them how it can be done without hurting feelings, which I

know they're afraid to do."

Three teachers commented on changes in their own instruction roles. For Edith, the change was positive: "I didn't think I had the privilege of taking this much time with a group." Cathy worked to reduce what she perceived to be her own verbal domination of discussions: "I believe that it should come from them, but I didn't always do it that way, particularly in the beginning.... I am so conscientious that it's not necessarily going to stick if they don't participate in it, so I start out by saying, 'What do you think?' So I do that more often.... I think I've discovered that I do a lot less talking." Mary was concerned about evaluation instruction: "[it was] hard for me to evaluate what the students were getting because there was the discussion... I didn't want to intimidate... I wish I knew more of what the interchange was... I wanted to be more a part of the group... I tried to listen and look at faces, but I couldn't hear all the answers and all the things that were happening."

Teachers perceived that learners, too, were adjusting to whole language practices. Edith noted that some learners did not know how to work in groups or how to discuss without arguing. Jane expressed concern about learner comfort, as well: "[some learners are] not very comfortable at all. I can see them loosening up a little bit, but this is three weeks now that I've been working with [them]." Both teachers attempted to resolve this problem by talking with

learners. Jane said, "I don't pressure them; that's their decision to [join the group]... I try to reassure them that ... we understand it's different; it's something they're not used to doing, but if they just bear with me that I think they will get to the point that they will actually enjoy it, and some have already...."

Teacher-Based Factors

The fourth category represented teacher-based factors that presented problems. Several, for example, lamented their lack of planning time, which none had: "I really have not had the time available to me to sit down and plan... looking for the interesting articles and stories and then... deciding what strategy to use" (Jane).

Availability of materials caused problems for three teachers. In particular, they were concerned about finding interesting materials that learners could read successfully. All three had used conventional ABE/GEd material in the past, which they had found lacking. Still, the process of selecting nontextbook reading materials was new, and they expressed some concern about the appropriateness of their choices. To address this problem, the teachers searched their personal libraries, surveyed magazines and newspapers, contacted colleagues, and created mechanisms for sharing good materials with each other.

Teachers' beliefs about the success of their previous programs affected their willingness to consider changes. "If it's not broken, why fix it?" was Diane's attitude: "The

bottom line is retaining students... our attendance has been excellent-- and people don't come if they don't get anything." Of the five, Diane made the fewest changes in her existing program. Jane made the most whole language-oriented changes. She described herself as having "basically an empty mind, willing to accept just about anything. You know, could you please help me work with adults better?" Jane evaluated the impact of her instructional changes on learners, as well: "I could see the value of working this way... I have seen, yes, it does actually work as well as I was led to believe in the workshops."

Edith and Mary were more equivocal in their attitudes and their implementation. They had judged the worth of their programs by learner success with the GED (Edith) or "all these numbers and figures that we were sending to the state" (Mary). Finding alternatives energized Edith: "because I'm more motivated, I can feel the difference... rather than saying, 'Well, come on guys, we've got to learn this because the test says that.'" Mary's reaction was discomfort: "It even feels uncomfortable any more to teach... the way I taught... but none of the [other] tactics feels comfortable as yet." Thus, teachers' attitudes about their previous programs influenced their implementation of whole language practices and contributed to their concerns.

Learners' Needs and Goals

Teachers' perceptions of learners' needs and goals comprised the final category. Two believed that learners preferred math instruction to language arts instruction, particularly writing. Edith solved this problem by letting "them do that for a couple of weeks. And then I say, 'You know, there's other parts that we have to get involved in.'" Jane solved the problem by alternating sessions between math and language arts.

Three teachers found learners' ideas about their own literacy needs problematic. Diane believed that learners were satisfied with her individualized program. Cathy believed that learners attended her family life program to focus on parenting, so she encouraged functional literacy use within that context. For example, learners read, discussed, and wrote their own versions of children's trade books.

Mary described what she believed to be her learners' concerns in this manner: "One thing about this whole language that frightens me a little bit, is that I keep thinking we're going to lose a lot of students, because they're going to... think, 'Well, this isn't what I'm here for. I'm here for this GED, and I want to know that this is going to be on the GEd test and that this is something that is really going to help me pass that test. Because I have this immediate goal...' they want to know how to use commas and semi-colons and colons... And I know that this whole

language doesn't say that you don't teach the skills, but I don't know if it teaches as fast as they want it or something." Although she spoke of this concern during each interview, she did not resolve it. She did, however, speculate on the advantages of creating a voluntary "reading and writing" class for learners who were not so GED-driven, in the hopes that learners' enthusiasm would "spread."

## Conclusions

Concerns from one category were often related to concerns from other categories. Examination of these relationships, particularly in light of the case records developed for each teacher, yielded several themes or issues related to the process of implementing whole language practices in these ABE programs.

Several aspects of policy-level decisions about the nature of ABE programming impeded change toward whole language practices. Teachers reported inappropriate facilities and lack of access to supplies and interesting, authentic materials. Further, they had no preparation time. Under these conditions, their efforts to shift toward whole language practices were often frustrated.

Policy-level decisions about program structure also presented problems. Open entry programs which encourage "dropping in" any time may be very convenient for learners, but these same features caused problems for teachers who wanted to establish and maintain discussion groups for reading and writing. The teachers felt little control over

any of these policy-level issues, which became barriers to implementation from their perspectives.

Another conclusion from this study relates to instructional routines. The routine in conventional ABE programs has teachers making and grading assignments in skills workbooks and learners completing assignments individually. In general, teachers expressed the most problems in areas that represented the biggest shifts from this routine: locating authentic, interesting, and appropriate materials; learning to facilitate learning without controlling it; helping learners adjust to discussions about reading and writing. For these teachers and their learners, the shift toward whole language practices involved reconceptualizing their roles within instruction, which was a lengthy and sometimes problem-ridden process.

A third broad theme arising from the results centers on teachers' acceptance of the philosophy underlying the instructional change. Diane believed that their program met learners' needs, although her criterion was retention rather than learning, and so was reluctant to change. Mary's equivocation about the impact of change on learners' attendance and feelings of goal attainment led her to supplement her program with whole language activities rather than supplanting previous practices. This, in turn, led to concerns about having enough time to accomplish all her goals. Her uncertainty may also have contributed to her

discomfort with both her previous ways of teaching and the alternatives she had learned about.

Cathy, Edith, and Jane expressed acceptance of whole language principles and actively implemented whole language practices. Each became more certain about the decision to change as they evaluated instruction. In some way, all five teachers considered both their own beliefs about literacy instruction and their perceptions of learners' needs and goals to make decision about instruction. Those whose beliefs were most congruent with whole language philosophy and who saw positive changes in learners were most likely to implement change (Rogers, 1983; Spector, 1984).

One purpose of this study was to inform efforts to create and implement effective staff development programs for adult literacy teachers. The results suggest several guidelines toward that end. First, program directors or policy makers should be involved in staff development efforts, so that they understand and can help eliminate barriers to implementation. Second, the shift toward whole language practices may involve changes in some aspects of program structure or support for teachers. Finally, any change as complex as the one studied here should be accompanied by long-term support for teachers that reflects understanding of their concerns, as well as their needs.

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Research Report Two

# AN INTERIM RESEARCH REPORT OF THE INFLUENCE OF A STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROCESS EMPHASIZING WHOLE LANGUAGE TEACHING PRINCIPLES ON ABE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND THEIR LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES

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# An Interim Research Report of the Influence of a Staff Development Process Emphasizing Whole Language Teaching Principles On ABE Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy and Their Literacy Teaching Practices

## Purpose

Adult literacy, having been a focus of national attention over the past two decades, has attained a new sense of urgency at the onset of the 1990's. Numerous reports, articles, books, and policy statements have made the need for improving adults' literacy performance abundantly clear (e.g., Chisman, 1989; Kozol, 1980; Venezky, Kaestle & Sum, 1987; Working Group on Adult Literacy, 1988).

Less clear, however, is "how to" actually improve literacy instructional practices in adult literacy programs (Fingeret, 1984). Chall (1987) remarks: "Every major published report on adult literacy cites the problem of part-time, often inadequately trained, and underpaid staff members...Our interviews revealed a strong need for...dissemination of the wisdom that has already been accumulated...more development and more training" (pp. 193-194). Yet, staff development designs and models that may address such needs are rare, and often demand planning and funding that many adult literacy programs simply can not support. To develop a cadre of professionals knowledgeable about and effective in adult literacy teaching, three general areas of staff development appear critical: updating teachers' knowledge about reading and writing processes, improving their skills in using effective

literacy learning/teaching strategies, and developing their ability to create and facilitate interactive learning environments (Boracks, 1988; Crandall, 1984; Kazemak, 1988; Meyer & Keefe, 1988).

Whole language emerges as a broader set of literacy teaching principles and practices which may address key elements of these critical areas. With its emphasis on reading and writing processes, curriculum integration, and active learner participation, it encompasses a wide range of current knowledge/research about language learning (Goodman, 1989; Watson, 1989; Zemelman & Daniels, 1989). Furthermore, it creates unique opportunities for teacher education reflective of well-designed staff development (Duckworth, 1986; Fenstermacher & Berliner, 1985; Short & Burke, 1989). It also encourages teachers to teach toward the functions of language (communication and expression), rather than exclusively about its forms (decoding and grammar). In sum, considering the need to teach literacy better to more people, a whole language orientation holds much promise. It not only requires an understanding of literacy development and learning reflective of current theory and research, but it also requires substantial staff development efforts.

However, it is not easy for adult literacy teachers to readily accommodate the kinds of changes implied by the whole language perspective. Its demand for a strong knowledge base about language learning, interactive teaching skills, and group process techniques requires well-designed staff development

experiences. Acknowledging the research in staff development design which suggests that such programs need to be theoretically sound, content rich, ongoing, and personalized (Duckworth, 1986; Fenstermacher & Berliner, 1985; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Smylie, 1988), it seems clear that to impact adult literacy needs more broadly, adult literacy teachers need to be involved in a literacy learning process as well - one which updates and upgrades their literacy teaching and ultimately empowers them.

To more fully understand teachers' needs in this respect, a series of studies were undertaken to describe the impact of a staff development process emphasizing whole language on teachers' perceptions of literacy, their concerns about implementation of whole language strategies, their teaching practices, and their students' perceptions of these instructional innovations. The specific study described here focuses on ABE teachers' perceptions and practices. It reports interim findings related to how the staff development process appeared to influence selected participants' perceptions of literacy and their teaching practices.

## Method

**Participants.** Of the twenty-six Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers who volunteered to participate in the state-funded staff development program, five were selected for a closer examination of their literacy perceptions and practices. The teachers had three or more years of experience in adult basic education and all held teaching certificates. The group represented diverse program types and sizes from individualized learning labs to GED

preparation classes. Additional descriptive data about the five teachers is provided in Table 1.

**The Staff Development Program.** A staff development program (in-progress) was designed to prepare ABE teachers to implement a whole language philosophy and approach in their instructional settings and is still in-progress. It included five goals: 1) to develop teachers' understanding of whole language teaching and learning; 2) to develop their understanding of the reading and writing processes in whole language teaching; 3) to encourage their use of instructional strategies that reflect an understanding of the reading and writing processes; 4) to encourage their creation of an environment for adult literacy learning; and 5) to develop their understanding of an evaluation process in a whole language-based literacy program. The program consisted of multiple opportunities for the participants to explore whole language concepts, to practice whole language teaching strategies and techniques, to "test" these practices in the reality of classroom settings, and to discuss the effectiveness of their efforts with one another.

The structure of the whole language staff development program was based on related research (e.g., Bean & Johnson, 1987; Goodman & Goodman, 1981; Meyer & Keefe, 1990; Wood & Wood, 1986) and discussions with state-level ABE consultants and local practitioners. It utilized a Resource Team Model which had been used in other state-funded staff development programs. Key elements of this model included the formation of a group which

TABLE 1: BACKGROUND PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND LOCATIONS

| | PARTICIPANT 1 | PARTICIPANT 2 | PARTICIPANT 3 | PARTICIPANT 4 | PARTICIPANT 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age Range: | 55-65 years | 35-45 years | 25-35 years | 45-55 years | 35-45 years |
| ABE Experience: | 9 years | 10 years | 3 years | 22 years | 3 years |
| Current ABE Job: | Teaches two ABE classes; two sites | Teaches English and reading comprehension | Teaches two ABE classes; two sites | Operates Learning Center 6 hours a day 5 days a week | Teaches Parent-Child Book Class |
| Other Current Jobs: | None | None | None | English Instructor Community College | None (doctoral student) |
| Educational Background: | B.A. | B.A., M.Ed. | B.S. | B.A., M.Ed. +30 hours | B.A., M.A. |
| Current Program: | ABE Basic Classes | English and Reading Classes | ABE Basic Classes | Learning Center | Parent-Child Book Class |
| Sponsoring Agency: | School District | Joint Vocational School | School District<br>General Motors | School District Office of Adult Education | Family Life |
| Enrollment: | 25 enrolled at one site; 35 enrolled at other site; 8 attended per class | 25 enrolled, 8 attended per class | 87 enrolled, 45 attended school site; 10 enrolled, 10 attended G.M. site | 200 enrolled, 25-45 attend per day | 20 enrolled, 3-9 attend per class |

focuses on one curricular area, e.g., reading; participation of the members in regularly scheduled whole group meetings; "try outs" of teaching techniques in classrooms; and sharing sessions following "try-outs," either in small groups locally or at whole group meetings.

Based on this design, the whole language staff development project included two formats: intensive all-day sessions (six planned; four completed) and small group interim meetings (two planned and completed). At the intensive all-day sessions, teachers were acquainted with whole language principles and specific teaching strategies. At small group meetings, held more locally, small groups of teachers shared how they were implementing new strategies and their immediate needs and concerns. All sessions were conducted and/or facilitated by university faculty knowledgeable about whole language teaching and ABE programs. Four of the five teachers involved in this particular research study had participated in all the sessions held to date. One of the five teachers, Participant 1, missed one of the training sessions, but did attend an extra small group session to try and receive missed information.

The content of the staff development program was organized into a guide which had been field-tested in an earlier research project (Connell & Roskos, 1990; Roskos, 1990). The guide consisted of eight sessions, each approximately 3 hours in length, and included procedures and activities on the topics listed below:

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Session 1 - Making Explicit Your Beliefs About Reading and Writing

Session 2 - Revisiting the Writing Process

Session 3 - Revisiting the Reading Process

Session 4 - Integrating Reading and Writing

Session 5 - Creating a Literate Environment for Adults

Session 6 - Designing and Using an Instructional Cycle

Session 7 - Developing Themes for Whole Language Instruction

Session 8 - Assessing and Evaluating Reading and Writing Development

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Each session followed the same sequence of activities through which the staff developers attempted to model whole language teaching behaviors and strategies. For example, in Session 1 the participants completed an anticipation guide related to reading and writing beliefs. Following small group discussions about their responses, they as a whole group examined three major views of reading (top-down, bottom-up and interactive perspectives). Using this background information, they again formed small groups and examined various literacy materials, characterizing the perspectives reflected by each. Next, they participated in a series of activities which allowed them to explore their beliefs about writing. The session closed with the participants summarizing their beliefs about reading and writing in some way, e.g., writing, drawing, graphing, mapping. These responses were shared with the whole group. (See Appendix A for a complete sample session.)

Other sessions included explanations of key teaching strategies and opportunities to practice these with peers. The teachers were encouraged to try small group techniques and teaching strategies in their own classrooms, recording field notes about their attempts. Share sessions were held locally to monitor teachers' concerns and problems as they attempted to implement whole language principles in their respective settings. Through this interplay of the structure and content within the staff development sessions, a process was initiated which engaged the teachers in the articulation and examination of their own perceptions and practices relevant to literacy instruction.

**Procedures.** The five ABE teachers selected for in-depth study participated in a series of semi-structured interviews about their perceptions and practices related to whole language. All interviews were conducted by research associates (doctoral students in literacy studies) and usually occurred on-site closely following the inservice sessions. Only interview data following Session 3 and Session 5 of the total program were used in this report.

Observations, consisting of field notes, were also made of these teachers' literacy teaching sessions (approximately 90 minutes in length), two times a month throughout the staff development period. The same research associates who conducted the interviews also completed the observations. As with the interview data, only observational data following Sessions 3 and 5 were used in this research report.

**Data Analysis**

To assess the influence of the staff development sessions on teachers' perceptions and practices, typological analysis was used (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Twelve characteristics of whole language were derived from the content of the first five sessions of the staff development program, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Expresses/Top-down Development | Uses Reading Strategies |
| Emphasizes Background Knowledge | Views Literacy as a Social Process |
| Stresses Functional Principles | Stresses Integration of Reading/Writing |
| Discusses Writing as a Process | Uses Integration Strategies |
| Uses Writing Strategies | Expresses Andragogical Notions |
| Discusses Reading as a Process | Creates a Literate Environment |

Table 2 provides examples of the participants' comments as found in their interviews and of the participants' classroom practices as found in their observations. Each example highlights one of the twelve whole language characteristics derived from the first five sessions. Through discussion and review the three researchers involved in this project reached consensus regarding the examples as appropriate reflections of the characteristics.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF TEACHERS' LITERACY PERCEPTIONS AND LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES WHICH REFLECT THE WHOLE LANGUAGE CHARACTERISTICS PRESENTED IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS 1 THROUGH 5

| CHARACTERISTICS | LITERACY TEACHING PERCEPTIONS | LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Expresses/Top-down Development | "I'm interested in the discovery process." | Students express general reaction to whole article. |
| 2. Emphasizes Background Knowledge | "..having her students recite remembered nursery rhymes to provide familiarity." | Teacher probes for what students remember being told. |
| 3. Stresses Functional Principles | "The idea of helping our students see the benefit of wanting this for a lifetime." | Read to evaluate, infer, and for information. |
| 4. Discusses Writing as a Process | "..there is my response to his writing the whole process of something there." | "This is what writers do-- write, listen, rewrite." |
| 5. Uses Writing Strategies | " peer editing or mapping..." "..whole sense of conferencing." | "Think for a minute before writing." Group write |
| 6. Discusses Reading as a Process | ".. raise their level for critical reading and thinking." | Models thought process for "read and share" for new students. |
| 7. Uses Reading Strategies | "..the sense of a word sort." "..to stop here and ask my child what would happen next." | Predictions DRTA Anticipation Guide Sheets |
| 8. Views Literacy as a Social Process | "I've asked people to come and join the group." | Student reads her version to the group. Writing in a group |
| 9. Stresses Integration of Reading/Writing | No Examples Evident | "..search (in text) for items to include in resumé (writing)." |
| 10. Uses Integration Strategies | No Examples Evident | Writes new story ending for material read as DRTA. |
| 11. Expresses Andragogical Notions | "..could write it down without being embarrassed." | Asks for ideas on what they want to do. |
| 12. Creates a Literate Environment | No Examples Evident | Paper bag of magazines, construction paper, glue, paperback books |

Based on an understanding of these characteristics, a grid was developed which permitted the matching of statements about whole language as expressed in interviews and practices of whole language as observed in classroom visitations with the characteristics of whole language emphasized in the sessions. Using the grid, interview and observational data on each participant were summarized across the 12 characteristics. The three researchers reached consensus on each statement that was recorded as an indicator of perception and/or practice.

TABLE 3: TABULATION OF PARTICIPANTS' LITERACY PERCEPTIONS AS REVEALED THROUGH PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

| PARTICIPANTS / CHARACTERISTICS | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B |
| 1. Expresses/Top-down Development | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. Emphasizes Background Knowledge | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 3. Stresses Functional Principles | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 4. Discusses Writing as a Process | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 5. Uses Writing Strategies | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. Discusses Reading as a Process | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7. Uses Reading Strategies | 4 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 8. Views Literacy as a Social Process | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| 9. Stresses Integration of Reading/Writing | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 |
| 10. Uses Integration Strategies | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 |
| 11. Expresses Andragogical Notions | - | 1 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 |
| 12. Creates a Literate Environment | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 |

A = All interviews prior to March 31, 1990
B = All interviews between March 31 and June 2, 1990

The five grids were then collapsed into two grids which were analyzed for overall perceptions and/or practices that may be attributable to the staff development experience.

Tables 3 and 4 are the collapsed grids that provide the summaries of the participants' perceptions (Table 3) and their practices (Table 4). Both tables reflect the two points in time used for the analysis of data. Point A is after Sessions 1 through 3 were presented. Point B is after Sessions 4 and 5 were presented.

TABLE 4: TABULATION OF PARTICIPANTS' LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES AS REVEALED THROUGH OBSERVATIONS OF THEIR TEACHING

| PARTICIPANTS / CHARACTERISTICS | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B | A | B |
| 1. Expresses/Top-down Development | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. Emphasizes Background Knowledge | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 3. Stresses Functional Principles | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4. Discusses Writing as a Process | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| 5. Uses Writing Strategies | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 6. Discusses Reading as a Process | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7. Uses Reading Strategies | 3 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 8. Views Literacy as a Social Process | 6 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 9. Stresses Integration of Reading/Writing | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 |
| 10. Uses Integration Strategies | - | 4 | - | 0 | - | 1 | - | 0 | - | 0 |
| 11. Expresses Andragogical Notions | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 2 |
| 12. Creates a Literate Environment | - | 3 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 2 |

A = All observations prior to March 31, 1990
B = All observations between March 31 and June 2, 1990

Eight weeks elapsed between these two training periods. Since characteristics nine through twelve were not stressed until Sessions 4 and 5, those characteristics were not identified in the observations and the interviews until after those sessions had been presented. The number recorded in each column in Tables 3 and 4 indicates that number of times the participant made a direct comment reflective of that characteristic, or the number of times the participant demonstrated that characteristic in classroom practice.

## Findings

The findings that emerge based on this interim study are classified into two categories: participant findings and staff development findings. The participant findings reflect an analysis of the extent to which the staff development program impacted each participant. By examining Tables 3 and 4, one can determine the degree to which a participant has made the whole language characteristics part of her literacy perceptions and/or her literacy teaching practices.

The following chart outlines the findings for each of the participants.

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PARTICIPANT FINDINGS

Participant 1--Literacy perceptions and literacy teaching practices are consistent.

Participant 2--Literacy perceptions are higher compared to the literacy teaching practices.

Participant 3--Literacy perceptions are lower than the literacy teaching practices.

Participant 4--Literacy perceptions and literacy teaching practices are both low.

Participant 5--Literacy perceptions and literacy teaching practices are low but consistent.

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An analysis of the findings for each participant reveals additional information. Although Participant 1 missed the second inservice session as noted in the observation information, she did appear to be successful in terms of adopting the perceptions and practices that were presented throughout the staff development program. She did take advantage of the opportunity to make up missed information. For eight of the twelve characteristics her comments during the interview phase of the study indicated a basic understanding and at least verbal support for the characteristics. Her classroom practices reflected the implementation of ten of the characteristics. The involvement level of Participant 1 in literacy perceptions and literacy teaching practices was higher than for any other participant.

The analysis of the data for Participant 2 reveals a higher level of understanding than of practice. Her interview reveals perceptions related to six of the characteristics. Her classroom practices reveal implementation of five of the characteristics to a limited degree. The participant appears to accept characteristics in principle, but does not really accept them in practice.

Participant 3 provides a different set of data for analysis. The interviews with Participant 3 reveal a relatively low number of perceptions regarding the twelve characteristics. Very few

characteristics are mentioned, and those that are mentioned are done in a very limited manner. The literacy teaching practices of Participant 3, however, are very high in terms of the twelve characteristics. It would appear that this participant is willing to try a lot of practices in the classroom situation without having a fundamental understanding of these practices. The classroom observer for this research project supports the belief that Participant 3 has no depth of understanding of the twelve characteristics, but she does have a "flurry of activity" in her classroom practices.

Participant 4 demonstrated that the staff development program had little, or no, impact on her perceptions or literacy teaching practices. Her dialogue revealed little understanding of the twelve characteristics and her observations revealed little implementation of the characteristics in practice. Participant 4 operated a learning center which had a large enrollment and which tended to have a high daily attendance. Participant 4 tended to function as the "central operator" in the learning center. She was more "locked-in" to the traditional ABE approach.

The analysis of the data for Participant 5 is in many ways similar to Participant 1. Participant 5 did seem to have a balance between her literacy perceptions and her literacy teaching practices. Six characteristics were discussed in the interviews, and seven characteristics were revealed in the teaching practices. The class structure provided a very different dimension for this participant. Her program was an

eight-week Parent-Child book program. Because the program was restricted in time and because it had a more limited focus than the other settings, the data must be viewed within these constraints.

In reviewing the findings for each of the five participants, it becomes apparent that a different reality existed for each. Participants 1 and 5 demonstrated a more even understanding of the characteristics and an ability to implement them compared to the other three participants. Participants 2 and 3, although for reverse reasons, did not match their perceptions with their practices. Participant 4 did not appear to be impacted by the staff development program.

In further examining the data revealed in Tables 3 and 4, it is possible to present additional findings resulting from this research project. The following chart reveals the four major staff development findings based on the twelve characteristics.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

1. Characteristics 4 and 5 focusing on the writing process and strategies received much attention by the participants.

2. Characteristic 8 received substantial attention by four of the participants.

3. Characteristics 6 and 7 focusing on the reading process and strategies received uneven attention on the part of the participants.

4. Characteristics 9, 10, 11, and 12 did not appear to have any impact on the participants.

Participants involved in this study demonstrated more interest in the characteristics focusing on the writing process and writing strategies than they did in any of the other characteristics. The participants' classroom teaching practices focusing on the writing process and strategies were higher than their overall perceptions regarding writing. Both their perceptions and practices regarding writing were higher than any other set of related characteristics. It would be the opinion of the researchers involved in this project that the participants felt less well-prepared in the area of writing. Therefore, they were more willing to become involved and to learn about a new area. The staff development sessions did reveal a keen interest on the participants' part regarding writing.

Four of the five participants did appear to view literacy as a social process. For Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5, their literacy perceptions and literacy teaching practices supported the belief that literacy is a social process. This was a characteristic that the participants saw modeled frequently in the staff development sessions. Along with the two characteristics focusing on writing, these three characteristics seemed to have the most impact on the five participants who formed the basis of this study.

The two characteristics focusing on reading: discusses reading as a process and uses reading strategies, impacted the participants differently. The concept of reading as a process received little attention on the part of the participants. Their perceptions indicated a minimal acknowledgment of that

characteristic. That idea was also not communicated to the students except by one of the participants. The participants' perceptions about using reading strategies were the highest of any characteristic presented. It is interesting to note, however, that the participants' literacy teaching practices were not as high and were demonstrated by only three of the participants. Most of the observation notes indicated the use of familiar reading strategies.

The last four characteristics: stresses integration of reading/writing, uses integration strategies, expresses andragogical notions, and creates a literate environment did not appear to have any impact on the participants. Neither the perceptions nor the practices of the participants would indicate that these characteristics had any impact upon them. As part of the staff development session focusing on creating a literate environment, the participants explained the difficulty they would have in establishing that type of environment based on the physical situations in which they operate. It should also be noted that the staff developers responsible for presenting this session recognized that the four characteristics presented were difficult for the participants to grasp. These four characteristics were also addressed in the next session which was completed after the time of this study.

Although no other major staff development findings have been recorded based on this interim report, two additional observations need to be made. Four of the five participants revealed in their perceptions an understanding of the functional

principles of reading and writing. In classroom teaching practices, however, this characteristic was only demonstrated in a limited manner by two of the participants. The first two characteristics would also appear to need more emphasis through the staff development process if they are to have an impact on the participants.

**Next Steps.** Since this is an interim report based on a staff development program that is in process, it is necessary to conclude this paper with some mention of the next steps that should be undertaken. First, the staff development program needs to be completed. It will be completed in the fall of this year. Participants 1 through 5 need to be interviewed again regarding their current perceptions especially in view of the fact that additional characteristics have been added to the list based on the last three staff development sessions. In addition, all participants need to be observed further so that a record can be made of the present level of implementation of new and old characteristics.

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Research Report Three

# ADULT BASIC LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND LITERACY LEARNING AT THE ONSET OF IMPLEMENTATION OF WHOLE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION PRACTICES

by

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# Adult Basic Education Learners' Perceptions of Literacy and Literacy Learning at the Onset of Implementation of Whole Language Instruction Practices

## Introduction

Many Adult Basic Education (ABE) learners' perceptions of reading tend to be rather narrow, based on decoding and saying isolated words rather than obtaining meaning from interactions with print (Keefe and Meyer, 1980; Meyer and Keefe, 1990; Taylor et. al., 1980). These narrow perceptions of reading may be contributing to a lack of reading growth. Gambrell and Hethington (1981), for example, found that good ABE readers were more likely than poor ABE readers to view reading as a meaningful process. In addition, it has been suggested that adults with meaning-centered views of reading tend to progress more rapidly in ABE programs (Boraks and Schumacher, 1981; Keefe and Meyer, 1980). Explorations of ABE learners' perceptions of writing have not yet been conducted, although case studies (e.g. Forester, 1988) suggest the possibility of similarly narrow views of writing.

This study was designed to examine ABE learners' perceptions of reading and writing processes and instruction in the context of a whole language staff development project for ABE teachers. Calls for whole language learning in ABE settings (e.g., Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Forester, 1988; Malicky & Norman, 1980; Padak & Padak, 1987) are based, in part, on the belief that meaningful, authentic experiences

with print will assist learners in understanding better the reading and writing processes and their own roles as readers and writers. The purpose of this study was to gather baseline information on ABE learners' perceptions at the onset of the implementing whole language instructional practices in their learning environments. After an adequate period of implementation, these perceptions will be reassessed for identifiable changes.

The following questions provided a focus for the study: (1) What are ABE learners' perceptions of their roles as readers and writers? (2) What are ABE learners' perceptions of reading and writing processes? (3) What are ABE learners' perceptions of reading and writing instruction?

## Method

Twenty-six ABE teachers volunteered to participate in a whole language staff development program and they assisted with data collection. They represented a broad demographic range of ABE programs.

After an initial 12-hour training period focused on whole language instructional principles and teaching strategies, teachers were asked to interview a minimum of three adult learners studying in their programs. These in-depth interviews were conducted at the onset of implementing whole language instruction. A structured in-depth interview schedule that probed learners' perceptions of the reading and writing processes and of literacy instruction was

adapted from Burke (1980) and Wixson et. al. (1984). This schedule consisted of eighteen questions. Teachers tape recorded interviews which were then transcribed and prepared for analysis.

## Data Analysis

A total of eighty-one individual student interviews were prepared for analysis. Prior to data analysis, the researcher examined the interview schedule and inductively placed the 18 questions into three (3) separate categories: (1) questions related to the affective domain of learners; (2) questions related to learners' perceptions of literary processes; (3) questions related to learners' perception of literacy instruction. The accuracy of this placement was checked with another member of the research team and one question changed categories as a result of this process. Frequency counts were determined for interview questions that involved forced choice. In all other cases, inductive reasoning was used to determine categories of learner response to questions (Spradley, 1979). After categories were determined, frequency counts were employed to facilitate reporting of results. When learners provided more than one alternative in responding to a question (e.g., Q: Do you like to read? Why? A: Yes. It's enjoyable and you learn a lot.), each alternative was counted as a separate response during the analysis.

## Findings

### Category 1 - THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

Questions:
**R1. Do you like to read? Why?**
**W2. Do you like to write? Why?**

A. Eighty-five percent of the students reported that they liked to read. The majority of explanations given in response to the probe comprised 2 categories: students read to learn new things (38% - "reading helps broaden my mind"), and they read for enjoyment, relaxation, and various pleasure (29% - "visit new places I can't go in real life").

B. Only 53% of the students reported that they liked to write. The largest category of response to the problem indicated that writing allows students to express their ideas and feelings (30% - "writing is a good exercise of the mind"). The next largest category (23%) involved responses that focused on enjoyment or liking to write specific pieces (stories, letters, verses).

C. Thirty-nine students (48%) responded yes to both questions. Only four students (5%) responded no to both questions.

**R8. Do you think you're a good reader? Why?**
**W8. Do you think you're a good writer? Why?**

D. Frequency count in response to good reader question:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| YES | 34 | (42%) |
| NO | 26 | (32%) |
| SOMETIMES | 18 | (22%) |
| NO RESPONSE | 3 | ( 4%) |

The largest category of reasons why students felt they were good readers involved their ability to comprehend, understand, or make sense of their reading (33%). Students also pointed to enjoyment (19%) and reading a lot (14% - "Yes I think I am a good reader because when I read I try to understand what I am reading, and also try to read often.") as factors in their good reading ability.

There was no discernible predominant category for students who responded NO or SOMETIMES to the question. In fact, 23% of these students provided no explanation at all for their response.

E. Frequency count in responses to good writer question:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| YES | 19 | (23%) |
| NO | 39 | (48%) |
| SOMETIMES | 20 | (24%) |
| NO RESPONSE | 4 | ( 5%) |

Students identified writing mechanics such as spelling, penmanship, and sloppiness as the primary reason (34%) they felt they were not good writers. Problems with generating and organizing ideas ("I take too long to get my thoughts the way I want them") constituted the second largest category (26%) for self-assessment of poor writing ability.

F. Only thirteen of the students (16%) assessed both their reading and writing ability as good. Conversely, 20% (n=16) felt that they were neither good readers nor writers.

**SUMMARY:** It would appear that the ABE students in this study have a positive attitude about reading and, to a lesser extent, writing. Their reasons for these attitudes are probably consistent with those of more proficient readers and writers. However, students in this study appear to have low self-concepts about their ability to read and write. The results also suggest that students who do not like to write or do not think of themselves as good writers understand writing as a process that focuses primarily on mechanics.

## Category 2 - LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY PROCESSES

### 1. Perceptions of the Reading Process

**R5. Who's the best reader you know? What makes him/her such a good reader?**

G. All students were able to identify a model of good reading behavior. The majority of students (60%) identified a family member as the best reader they know. The second largest category was identification of themselves as the best reader (11%).

H. In response to the probe, students indicated that reading a lot was the primary reason to identify someone as a good reader (29%). The next largest categories were good pronunciation or oral reading ability (11%) and ability to understand and remember what one is reading (11%).

I. Student responses split equally into two major categories. The first category involved explanations that emphasized reading as a behavior that focused on word or letter identification. This category included a total of thirty-seven responses. In this category, students most frequently described reading as looking at words and pronouncing them or "sounding them out" (35%). The second largest response group explained reading as a way of understanding or making sense out of words (24%). One student's explanation of what readers do involved "getting books, sitting down, practicing word by word, then connecting the words together."

The second major category described reading as a way of understanding, comprehending, or learning - without explicit mention of the word or letter identification. This category also had a total of thirty-seven responses, 68% of which viewed reading as a process of learning or comprehending. The following student's response is indicative of this category: "Reading is a way of learning what you can't actually see. Readers gain knowledge of many things."

A third, minor category involved affective descriptions of reading. This category included eleven responses. The view of reading as fun and interesting (54%) was the predominant response in this category.

**R5. When you come to a word that you don't know, how do you figure it out? What do you do if that doesn't work?**

J. Ninety-five percent of the students reported having some word identification strategy. Ninety-one percent of these students stated that their strategy or system had more than one component, although the majority (71%) went no further than two-deep in their attempts to identify unknown words.

K. The following taxonomy reflects students' choices for the first strategy they would use if they encountered an unknown word:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| LOOK IT UP IN DICTIONARY | 23 | (30%) |
| SOUND IT OUT | 19 | (25%) |
| USE CONTEXT | 17 | (22%) |
| BREAK IT INTO SYLLABLES | 11 | (14%) |
| ASK SOMEONE | 4 | ( 5%) |
| SKIP IT AND DON'T RETURN | 2 | ( 3%) |
| USE SYNTACTIC CUES | 1 | ( 1%) |

L. Only 38% of the students report using context cues at some juncture in their word identification strategies. In comparison, 43% reported that they would ask someone for the word at some point in their system - although, as the data above suggest, asking someone is seldom their first choice.

M. The following student provided the most comprehensive example of a word identification strategy:

"I try to pronounce it to the best of my ability. And if I don't know it sometimes I'll look it up in the dictionary or ask somebody what the word is if someone's close by. Or I'll skim over it sometimes too and I'll go ahead. And generally, after you go past that word and start reading on, you'll figure out basically what that word meant. Or you might come back to it later and you might get it. You might have seen that word before and you just didn't recognize it at the time."

**R6. What do you do if you don't understand what you've read? What do you do if that doesn't work?**

N. Ninety-five percent (N=77) of the students provided some strategy for coping with not understanding what they have read. The predominant response category for their first action when comprehension breaks down was rereading or "going back over" the reading. Sixty percent of the students made this their first choice of strategy. Asking for help was the second most frequent initial strategy at (22%). A variety of other initial strategies, including "looking it up in the dictionary" and "slowing down" comprised the remaining responses.

Q. At some point during their explanation of their comprehension failure system, 69% of the students indicated rereading was a strategy they would pursue. Only 56% stated they would ask for help at some time, and 12% explicitly stated they would "give up."

P. Student responses ranged from a confident strategy that acknowledges the author's perspective:

"I go back and re-read it again and if it's really important to me that I understand what it says I will take the time to look it up in the dictionary, the words that maybe the words I don't understand. Or I'll go back and read a whole chapter again and try to figure out what it is, sometimes I Just figure that the person who wrote it didn't know what he meant either."

To a strategy that result in despair:

"I try to sound it out and work on it, it depends on how well the story is if I sound a word out and I forget whatever else I've read, I have a lot of trouble with that . . . sometimes I can figure out the words in the rest of the story too sometimes, depends on how well the words go . . . (WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'VE READ AND YOU'VE FIGURED OUT ALL THE WORDS?) . . . Then I'm lost, then I'm lost."

**SUMMARY:** ABE students are able to identify models of good reading behavior. Most frequently, these models are family relations who earn their status due to reading a lot, good oral reading ability, and the ability to understand what they read.

2. Perceptions of the Writing Process

**W2. What's the best thing you've written lately? What do you like about it?**

Q. In responding to this question, students described a wide variety of writing activities ranging from "Writing Christmas cards" to "a song" to "a letter to the editor." The most frequently mentioned response was <u>letters</u> (28%). <u>Essays</u> were identified as the second most frequent writing activity (22%).

R. A total of ten students (12% of the total number of interviews) reported that they did not write at all.

S. Students also provided a wide variety of reasons for liking their written pieces. However, the predominant reason focused on the opportunity to share their

feelings, life experiences, and knowledge through their writing (35%). Students also appeared to be inwardly focused with their satisfaction on written pieces as only eight responses (15% of the total) explicitly denoted a concern for external audiences (e.g. children, teacher).

**W3. Tell me what you do when you write something for a class. What's the first thing you do? Then what . . .**

T. Students in this study reported that the first thing they would do is think about their subject or generate some written ideas before they attempted to write something for class. Forty-eight percent of the students responded in this manner making it the largest category emerging from the analysis. The following student's response reflects this category:

"I have to search for something that I want to talk about. I'm the kind of person that I can't just start writing, I have to think of something first . . . I have to write some of my ideas and then recollect the better ideas and make up statement . . . Then, I try to make some paragraph."

Interestingly, few responses (6%) explicitly indicated the need to search or read for additional information as a first step or next step in the writing process.

**W4. Do you ever make changes in your writing? (If yes, what kinds of changes do you make? Why do you make them?)**

U. The majority of students in this study reported that they did make changes in their writing. Ninety-four percent of the students reported some revision strategy. The following taxonomy represents the primary categories of response to the kinds of changes made:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| CHANGES IN SPELLING | 22 | (22%) |
| REWORD OR CHANGE VOCABULARY | 18 | (18%) |
| CHANGE SENTENCE OR PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE | 14 | (14%) |
| CHANGE PUNCTUATION OR GRAMMAR ERRORS | 12 | (12%) |
| CHANGE IDEAS | 12 | (12%) |
| CHANGE MISTAKES - UNSPECIFIED | 8 | ( 8%) |
| OTHER | 14 | (14%) |

V. Most of the students did not provide in-depth rationales for why they made their changes, feeling perhaps that the nature of the change (e.g. spelling) was self-explanatory or because they did not understand the nature of the process. The following responses are

examples of more detailed explanations regarding revision strategies of students in this study:

- "I frequently make changes. My thoughts change. I keep thinking of more things that I wanted to remember."

- Yes I do make changes because often I write fast and I then need to change or correct. Sometimes I believe my thinking is not together. Often I have to erase and change."

- "Oh, yes, I change to better sentences, because it doesn't satisfy me."

**W7. How would you explain writing to someone who couldn't write at all? What would you tell him/her that writers do?**

W. A total of sixteen students (20%) could not provide a meaningful explanation of what writing is or what writers do.

X. The students who could provide explanations identified two primary categories of responses. The largest of these categories described writing as a method of putting thoughts, feelings, and messages on paper. This emphasis on the thought process of writing accounted for 54% of the total responses. As one student explained:

"Use a pencil or a pen. And writing is a creative motion that you do with your hand on a piece of paper. It's done on paper and it's ideas that come through your mind or someone else's thoughts or something that has happened. You write it down on a piece of paper."

The only other notable response category emphasized writing mechanics exclusively as an explanation for what writing is and what writers do. This category accounted for 33% of the total responses. The challenge of defining writing was revealed by the response of one student in this category:

"That would be very hard. That would be difficult. You would have to try to tell them that the first thing you're going to have to learn is the alphabet and learn to spell. After you learn your words and get them correctly and put your sentences together. The first thing you've got to do is learn to read to write. If you can't read, you can't write. You can't do one without the other."

**3. Perceptions of the Reading and Writing Related**

**R9. Does reading ever help you with your writing? How?**
**W9. Does writing ever help you with reading? How?**

Y. Seventy-four percent of the students were able to explain how reading helped with writing. Eight percent of the students were able to explain how writing helped with their reading.

Z. The following taxonomy describes categories that emerged from responses to the "reading helping writing" prompt:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| HELPS WITH SPELLING AND OTHER MECHANICS | 32 | (44%) |
| HELPS WITH WORD MEANINGS AND USAGE | 14 | (19%) |
| HELPS WITH NEW IDEAS AND INFORMATION | 13 | (18%) |
| NEED TO READ IN ORDER TO WRITE OR REVISE WRITING | 8 | (11%) |
| NO REASON GIVEN | 4 | ( 5%) |
| OTHER | 2 | (3%) |

AA. The following taxonomy describes categories that emerged from responses to the "writing helping reading" prompt:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| HELPS WITH SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION | 16 | (24%) |
| HELPS WITH LEARNING WORD MEANINGS | 11 | (16%) |
| NEED TO READ WHAT I WRITE | 8 | (12%) |
| HELPS WITH COMPREHENSION AND MEMORY | 7 | (10%) |
| NO REASON GIVEN | 5 | ( 7%) |
| NEED TO READ THE WRITING IN ORDER TO REVISE | 4 | ( 6%) |
| THEY INTERACT BACK AND FORTH | 3 | ( 4%) |
| OTHER | 14 | (21%) |

**SUMMARY:** The majority of students in this study perceived some relationship between the processes of reading and writing. However, for most of these students, the nature of the relationship appears to be grounded in surface features of both processes (e.g. spelling) or in emphasis on individual word meanings. Students who focused on the "thinking" link between reading and writing were in the minority.

Category 3 - LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

1. Perceptions of Reading Instruction

**R4. What kinds of lessons help you learn to read better? What do these lessons help?**

BB. Two major categories emerged from analysis of responses to this question. The first, and largest (45 total responses or 53%) identified lessons where the actual process of reading for meaning does not occur. Lessons that helped develop spelling skills were the preferred instructional mode (24%) with lessons focusing on phonics and pronunciation (16%) as the second choice. As one student stated in her preference for "English" lessons, "I like them because reading is broken down into many ways."

The second major category (39 total responses) involved lessons where the actual process of reading for meaning did occur. Students identified a wide variety of reading preferences for these lessons including the Bible, history articles, the newspaper, and Newsweek. Students who responded to the prompt WHY noted that these kinds of reading lessons helped them understand and "learn about the world."

**R7. What's the best way to become a better reader?**

CC. Of the total of 95 responses to this question, a great number of students (73%) identified that practicing reading behavior regularly was the best way to become a better reader ("practice makes perfect," "the more you read, the better, you're bound to get"). This response category included both quantity ("read many books") and regularity ("read a little daily").

Of the remaining responses, very few students (7%) explicitly identified mechanics such as spelling, or learning the alphabet as the way to become a better reader.

2. Perceptions of Writing Instruction

**W4. What kinds of lessons help you learn to write better? Why do these kinds of lessons help you?**

DD. Again, 20 students (25%) were not able to provide a meaningful response to this question suggesting that they have engaged in little or not writing instruction until this time.

EE. Student responses again fell into two categories -

those that did not involve "real" writing or reading tasks and those that did. The lessons that did not involve actual writing or reading accounted for 62% of the total responses. The majority of these lessons focused on the mechanics of writing (78%) such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, word usage, and grammar.

Lessons that involved actual writing or reading, the second category, accounted for only 38% of the total responses. Interestingly, lessons that involved reading along or reading connected with writing comprised the highest level of preference (35%).

**W6. What's the best way to become a better writer?**

FF. As in their responses to the best way to become a better reader, students felt that the best way to become a better writer was to practice writing. This largest category consisted of 65% of the total responses and included variety ("write lots of different things") as well as frequency ("write often").

A second, less notable yet important category, involved the mention of reading as a means of becoming a better writer. Fourteen percent of the students identified the reading to writing improvement linkage including one student who urged "reading a lot on a variety of subjects" as the key to developing writing ability.

Again, few students explicitly focused on specific skills (spelling, punctuation, cursive) as the means to writing improvement. Only 7% of the students responded in this category.

**SUMMARY:** Students in this study perceive that the best way to become a reader and writer is to practice. However, they appear to be split into skills-based and meaning-based preferences for lessons that facilitate reading practice; and, they have a clear preference for surface skills instruction to facilitate their writing practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Category 1. AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

1. ABE instructional practices must be directed toward building ABE learners' self-confidence and positive concept of selves as readers and writers. The fact that students in this study responded that they liked to read and write as meaning-based activities - but felt no corresponding degree of confidence in their abilities to do so - highlights the crucial necessity of nurturing the affective domain of ABE learners.

2. Appreciation for writing as a meaning-based process must especially be fostered by giving students many opportunities to write and helping them understand its equal value in relationship to reading. Students in this study expressed a greater liking for reading than writing and more frequently felt they were good readers than good writers.

### Category 2. PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY PROCESSES

3. Many students perceived reading and writing as purposeful activities relevant to their lives. In addition, the majority of these students acknowledged some connection between reading and writing.

   However, the strategies they report using for word identification, comprehension, and revision of writing <u>and</u> their explanations of how reading and writing interact reflect a preoccupation with surface features and word units. This is consistent with previous examinations of ABE learners' perceptions of literacy processes.

   The fact that over 60% of the responses did not address use of context as a word identification strategy <u>and</u> that only 12% addressed revising <u>ideas</u> as a writing strategy suggest that ABE teachers still face a great challenge in assisting ABE learners with developing meaning-centered views of literacy processes, particularly writing.

### Category 3. PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

4. Although ABE learners have a clearly expressed "global concept" of what is necessary to become better at reading and writing (i.e. practice and enjoying in actual reading and writing), their perception of the best instruction to help them attain this are largely

skills-based rather than mean-based. this suggests that instructional planners (ABE administrators and teachers) are not capitalizing on the students' healthy "global concept" and, in fact, may be confusing or retarding it. The fact that few students could promise detailed or sophisticated explanations of why their perceived best lessons worked might reflect this confusion.

5. Students perceived their reading instruction, to be more reading-based than their writing instruction - when the latter occurred at all. This again illustrates the need for increased emphasis on writing as a meaning-based process commensurate to reading.

## Insights Gleamed from the Research Reports

Although each of the three research studies that was conducted as part of this research project focused on a different dimension of whole language learning in adult basic education settings, some common insights can be gleamed from each of the research reports. First, the range of facilities is vast, and a significant number of facilities do not lend themselves to whole language learning. The physical structure of the centers often do not enable group interaction and discussion to take place because of the furniture and space available.

Second, the operational procedures of the programs often do not promote, nor permit, good interaction between participants. Many programs permit the adult to come and go at a time convenient for the individual. This coming and going of the adult learner at various times encourages the participant to participate as an individual learner in an individualized program. This coming and going of adults at various times often prohibits the teacher from interacting with the learners for any type of extended time period. The teacher is often very busy addressing the needs of the adult who has just arrived, or who is preparing to leave. The development of the communications dimension of the reading and writing processes is not easily possible under these circumstances.

In addition to the freedom that many programs provide in the attendance patterns of the learner, a third insight relates to the enrollment procedure for participants. Many programs permit adults to enroll in the program at any time during the year. Because of this reality, the teacher is constantly involved in enrollment procedures and assessment. In addition, the adult group of learners is always in a state of change. No community of learners is established when there is a constant change in the group structure.

The first three insights provide the basis for a fourth insight which focuses on program policies and leadership. Many Adult Basic Education centers do not have guidelines and operational policies which foster whole language learning. Policies which are aimed at increasing enrollment numbers and providing immediate, on-the-spot service to prospective learners hamper the development of whole language learning. In addition, program coordinators and decision-makers who support these types of policies and procedures also hamper the development of whole language learning centers. If whole language learning is to be effective with and for adults, then policies and leadership personnel must provide the support for that direction to occur.

All three of the research reports indicated a general receptivity on the part of teachers to this type of program. After the staff development program had taken place, teachers appeared open and willing to respond to this new philosophy. In many ways teachers appeared to respond affirmatively simply because of the ongoing staff development program that each of them experienced while learning about whole language. More than one teacher indicated that this program provided them with training and development that they had not previously experienced. This sixth insight might be most easily stated by indicating that the teachers found training in whole language learning to be a personally rewarding staff development program. This staff development program met a need that had previously not been addressed in a significant way.

A rather obvious seventh insight was evident in each of these research reports. Teachers who were willing to accept and try whole language in their classrooms recognized the need for more planning time, more strategies, and different materials than they had previously needed. Teachers made it clear that whole language learning requires teachers to make a shift away from the conventional instructional routines to which they had become accustomed. Teachers recognized that these needed changes would not be easily accomplished. The simple desire to make the change would not be sufficient in bringing about the change.

One final insight that these three studies provided focused on teachers' perceptions of the learners. Whole language learning forces teachers to view the needs and goals of learners in different ways. The goal of passing the GED test no longer holds the same place of importance for teachers of whole language. The teachers, however, were quick to acknowledge that the change in the teacher's perceptions and attitude did not automatically signify a change in the perceptions and attitude of the learner. Whole language learning is an evolutionary process on the part of teachers and learners.

Each of these eight insights has emerged based on the three research studies that are reported in this document. No one of the insights is peculiar to simply one study, nor is any insight independent of each other. Each of the insights is an outgrowth of the implementation of whole language learning in adult basic education centers following the involvement of the adult basic education teachers in a whole language staff development program.

## Future Research Implications

A natural outcome of most research projects is the emergence of additional research possibilities. In a project such as this involving three separate research studies, the list of future research possibilities is endless. The variety in the structure and operation of the various Adult Basic Education Centers, the extensive dimension of the whole language staff development program, and the nature of the students and teachers in each location provide more than enough variables for countless future investigations. There are, however, a number of key future research projects that should be conducted.

First, each of these research studies needs to be repeated based on the completion of the staff development program. At the time in which most of these studies had been conducted, the staff development program had not been completed. Most of the teachers had experienced only five of the eight staff development components when these initial studies were undertaken. In order for the full impact to be realized, the studies must be extended to a point in time that goes beyond the completion of the staff development program.

Second, as with all good research, each of these studies needs to be repeated in other settings. If the implementation of whole language learning is to be effective in adult basic education centers, then these research studies must be repeated as a way of verifying the learnings from the first set of studies. In the same way, each of these studies must be extended over time in order to assess the length of impact on the teachers and the learners. The first two studies require that teachers' problems, concerns, and perceptions about literacy and literacy teaching practices be examined after teachers have had a significant opportunity to use whole language. The third study necessitates that the learners' perceptions of literacy and literacy learning be examined at the conclusion of a whole language instructional program and not just at the implementation.

Another key set of research studies that emerges from this project would be those studies that are undertaken once some of the extraneous variables have been addressed. The impact of whole language teaching and learning should be examined in a context in which the physical facilities, the operational procedures and policies, and the educational materials needed for whole language instruction have been addressed. Once the known givens have been provided, then the researcher will be more able to assess honestly the impact of whole language learning on adult basic education learners.

The list of future research implications is endless. The target directions listed above are simply provided as essential future research implications. The important reality is that future research studies be conducted in this area since the door has been opened, and the first glimpse looks promising.

## Distribution of Research Summary

This summary of research on implementing whole language learning in adult basic education settings has been sent to the authors of the individual research reports, the members of the Advisory Committee for this special demonstration grant, and to the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Adult and Community Services. Copies of this report may be requested from the fiscal agency for the grant. Please address all inquiries to:

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