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Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education

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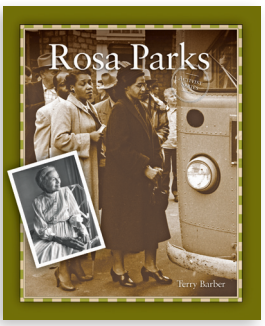

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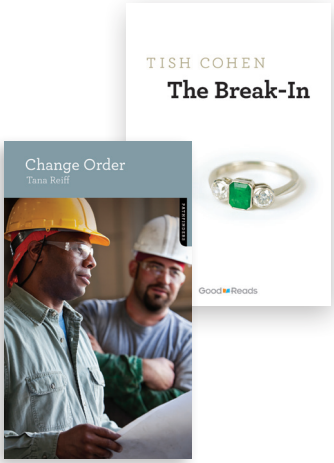

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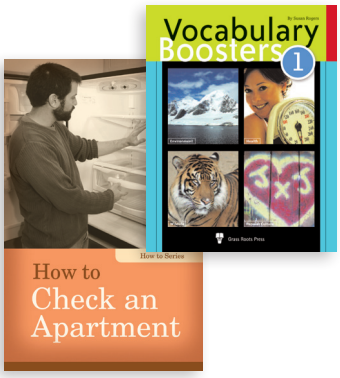

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The COABE Journal, Celebrating 35 Years as a Major Voice in Adult Education

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to release our second issue of the second volume of the Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education. In this issue, you will find three research articles focused on GED® Instruction for Inmates, predictors of literacy skills for ESOL learners, and lifelong learners as they acquire literacy and other essential skills. Each of these articles provides a unique insight into the learning and literacy needs of adults as they work to address various basic skills.

Berridge and Goebel's article, "An In-depth Look at a GED® Program in a U. S. County Jail," describes a study that examined participation in a GED® program, obstacles to participation, and inmate reasons for participating. Using a modified case-study approach, the researchers conducted interviews and surveys with various stakeholders and found that participating led to increased self-esteem, positive behavior, and a desire to achieve personal goals. However, there were obstacles to inmate participation; mainly attitudes toward rehabilitation and institutional barriers.

Ro and Ryu's article, "Investigating Predictors of Nonacademic ESOL Learners' L2 Literacy Ability," examined the literacy skills of 144 non-academic English learners across a variety of factors, and compared them to reading and writing scores as determined by two evaluators. The researchers found the length one studies English, their evaluation of their own reading, and prior education level were strong predictors of reading and writing scores.

Taylor, Trumpower, and Pavic's article, "Unravelling the Lifelong Learning Process for Canadian Workers and Adult Learners Acquiring Higher Skills," used qualitative and quantitative approach to investigate the motivations and practices of adult learners, hoping to improve their literacy, essential skill sets, as well as readiness, and works to manage their own learning. The researchers found that learners sought out formal, non-formal, and informal settings to learn, and were motivated depending on the goals of training exercises. Some of the practices sought to ensure transferability of skills from the classroom to the workplace through the use of experiential approaches.

I encourage you to read through these articles and the practitioner article by Pickard, who explores the literature on attrition in adult literacy programs, our Web Scan, and the Resource Reviews. If you find something interesting in the articles and would like to discuss it further, take a moment to visit our blog, found at: http://coabejournal.blogspot.com. The authors will be moderating a discussion of what they found and its impact on the field. If there is something you would like to see in the journal, please feel free to contact me at journal@coabe.org.

Enjoy!

Jim Berger,
Editor

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE FOR ADULT LITERACY, SECONDARY, AND BASIC EDUCATION

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Mission Statement

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

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RESOURCE REVIEW

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

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An In-depth Look at a GED® Program in a U.S. County Jail

by Gina Berridge and Vella Goebel
University of Southern Indiana

According to Mandryk (2010) and the International Centre for Prison Studies, the U.S. has the world's largest prison population: the Pew Center on the States, a nonprofit organization committed to improve and inform public policy, estimates that one in every 100 adults is incarcerated in a U.S. county jail or state prison (2008). However, as the prison population surges, the percentage of prisoners participating in any kind of education program has declined (Boulard, 2005). In a study of local jails, Harlow (2003) reported that approximately 6 out of 10 facilities provided educational programs for inmates but the overall participation in a jail General Educational Development (GED®) program was only 8.6 percent. The latter is a staggering statistic since it is estimated that nearly half of offenders do not have high school or GED® diplomas (Moeller, Day & Rivera, 2004). Given that individual states are tightening their belts in light of the economy, limited participation in GED® programs would not be cost effective. However, Shutay, Plebanski & McCafferty (2010) argue that action is required based on the continual rise in incarceration and the knowledge that education can decrease the chances of re-incarceration.

The purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs and perceptions of some of the stakeholders directly involved in a GED® program located in a county jail. The researchers investigated the perspectives of the jail's Chief of Programming, GED® supervisor, teachers, and inmates participating in the program. Although gathering data from the corrections officers (guards) might have proved helpful, the researchers were not allowed to interview this group of stakeholders. No reason was provided as to why we were not allowed to do so. The research questions that this study sought to answer were as follows:

- How do stakeholders view participation in a GED® program in a county jail?
- What are the perceived obstacles to inmate participation in a GED® program in a county jail?
- What are the reasons inmates cite for their participation?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Few prisoners attend GED® programs while in jail. GED® programs in correctional settings have significant and unique challenges that similar programs in traditional settings do not have. While the literature is sparse about obstacles to GED® programs in jail settings, findings in other correctional settings such as prisons provide insight

into the problems faced by local jail programs. The obstacles that exist for all GED® programs include funding, eligibility, conflicting administrative priorities, logistic problems, and lack of support from policymakers and the public (Gordon, 2005). In addition, there are obstacles unique to programs in jail and prison facilities. Behan (2007) found that inmates who had become institutionalized resisted participation in educational programs because they were a radical departure from the daily routine of prison life. Clements and McKee (2000) stated that operating in such a claustrophobic and dehumanizing environment made studying difficult for inmates who did not have high school diplomas and/or had a history of negative school experiences. Vacca (2004) stated that inmates often faced peer pressure not to attend class.

It is also unclear to what extent guards' attitudes toward GED® programs may enhance or diminish prisoner participation. For these and undoubtedly other reasons, only a small percentage of prisoners participate in GED® programs.

Impact of Educational Programs in Correctional Settings

According to Gehring (2000), education can be a person's link to a better life, and even though a lack of education does not cause crime, the two are related. The importance and impact of education for inmates in correctional facilities cannot be disputed. Moeller et al. (2004) suggested that the positive experiences inmates gain in an educational program could change their attitudes toward life. Fabelo (2002) contended that "the higher the educational level of the inmates at release, the better prepared they are for community re-entry and for employment" (p. 109). Fabelo's findings were consistent with those of the National Institute for Literacy (2002): "Research shows that quality education is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention" (p. 18). As educational skills increase, so does the chance that an inmate will not return to prison. Moeller et al. (2004) also saw educational opportunities in correctional facilities as necessary in the battle against crime. Educational attainment increases inmates' opportunities for employment upon release and helps them become productive members of society (Shutay et al., 2010).

In their study, Gerber and Fritsch demonstrated that the outcomes of educational programs in prison were a reduction of criminal behavior and fewer disciplinary problems while incarcerated (Vacca, 2004). Inmates who also continued their education after release had lower recidivism rates than inmates who did not participate in educational programs. The lack of a high school diploma correlates with high unemployment, low self-esteem, and poor earning potential for an individual. When these factors are coupled with time spent in prison or jail, the earning future of the individual is bleak, at best. Inmates who have participated in an education program while serving time are more successful at finding gainful employment upon release than non-participants (Shutay et al. 2010). It is also arguable that, without the knowledge and skills that develop from educational programs, former inmates are less likely to be successful in life and more likely to return to jail—despite good intentions and greater self-awareness.

According to a report on U.S. Adult Literacy Programs, 46.5% of prison inmates do not have high school diplomas; comparatively, 26% of the US general population lack diplomas. Further, according to the same report, the average reading level of prisoners is very low, with research finding less than a fifth grade level in one study and less than an eighth grade level in another. More alarming, 67% of inmates cannot write a brief letter explaining a billing error, read a map, or

understand a bus schedule. A full 40% of prisoners perform mathematics at Level 1 of the NALS scale, meaning that they lack the skills to complete an order form to figure the cost of a purchase (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Correctional education programs may be the last chance for these inmates. According to Barton and Coley (1996) in their study of prisons and education, "without training and education, even if they (prisoners) are trying, they're not going to make it when they get out" (p.17).

The researchers, as previous K-12 educators and administrators, believe that education is a key to inmate rehabilitation. We believe that offering educational programs in correctional facilities allow inmates greater opportunities to have successful re-entry into society when their sentences are complete. It is the view of the researchers that correctional facilities should focus on the rehabilitation of inmates, giving them opportunities for educational advancement and job-specific training to reduce re-incarceration and provide the tools needed to be productive citizens.

METHOD

This research asks how those leading the GED® program and those participating in it describe their beliefs and perspectives about the jail's GED® program. In order to investigate these research questions, a modified case study method was used, with data collected from interviews and a survey. This was an appropriate methodology because the researchers sought to identify the multiple "realities" of a diverse group of participants—inmates, the GED® supervisor, teachers, and a jail official—to gain what Suter (2012) called the "insider perspective" (p. 344). That is, the researchers wanted to know how the various stakeholders viewed the GED® program in an effort to find some of the motives for participation as well as some of the obstacles.

Interviews with Stakeholders

The interview approach was informal and relatively conversational and situational. Topics were outlined in advance, but the sequence and wording during the interview varied slightly as the researchers sought to build rapport with the participants. Because interviews were not allowed to be recorded, the researcher took notes as the participants talked. The statements of the inmates, teachers, GED® supervisor, and jail administrator provided a lens to determine what issues were important to explore. Questions were developed to determine participants' perspectives of the benefits and obstacles to the GED® program in their facility.

Survey Data

A survey (See Appendices A and B) was given to inmates after the interviews were completed. The survey was designed to delve more deeply into obstacles that inmates might face in participating in a GED® program, how they viewed themselves since participating in the program, and how much the GED® teacher influenced their motivation to learn and participate in the program.

Human subjects approval was obtained from the researchers' affiliated university's Institutional Review Board prior to the start of data collection, and all participants in the study signed a confidentiality waiver.

Site of Study

The GED® program in the county jail used in this study has grown rapidly since its inception in 2006 with a total of 210 graduates and, at the time of the interviews, 25 participants enrolled (5 females and 20 males). According to the jail administrator, the average jail population on any

given day was approximately 1,100 males and 200 females. Most of the inmates were awaiting trial. If they were found guilty, they could be housed one or more years with the potential to earn "worker" or "program" credits, such as through the GED® program, and shorten their sentences.

Participants

All participants, including inmates, were assured of the confidentiality of their statements. Male and female inmates from the county jail were asked in their GED® classes if they would volunteer for face-to-face interviews in a study about the effects of educational programs in county jails. No rewards or compensation were given, and participants were assured of their anonymity. Four (n=4) of the five female inmates and sixteen (n=16) of the twenty male inmates in the GED® program volunteered to be interviewed. The grade level reading scores of the inmates on the Test of Adult Basic Education ranged from 6.0 to 12.0, with an average score of 7.6. After the interviews were conducted, sixteen (n=16) male inmates and ten (n=10) females inmates volunteered to take the survey in their GED® class after signing a waiver of confidentiality. Note: The female population in the GED® class went up after the face-to-face interviews, as 10 females took part in the survey.

The interviews took approximately 20-25 minutes each and the surveys approximately 10-15 minutes. The following questions were asked to guide the interview:

1. Why did you decide to participate in the GED® program?
2. What do you like about the GED® class?
3. Would you change anything about the GED® class?
4. What obstacles do you face participating in the GED® class?
5. How did you hear about the GED® program?
6. What other comments would you like to make?

The two GED® teachers were interviewed separately in their respective classrooms after the GED® class had ended. Patricia (pseudonym) held a bachelor's and master's degree in philosophy and previously worked in construction management. She had been teaching at the jail for a little over a year. Stan (pseudonym) held a bachelor's degree in history and a master's in education. He previously taught middle school social studies and had been employed at the jail for 2 years. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes each. The following questions were asked to get teachers' opinions and beliefs about why participation in the GED® program was so low:

1. What are the obstacles you face as a GED® teacher in a jail setting?
2. How does the GED® program benefit the inmates?
3. What obstacles do your students face?

The supervisor of the GED® program was a licensed teacher with an educational specialist's degree in educational leadership and administration. Before coming to adult education, she taught marketing education in high school for sixteen years. She had been the supervisor of adult education for the last 10 years and also oversaw other GED® programs in traditional settings within the community. The jail administrator (called Chief by everyone at the jail, including the teachers and supervisor) had been with the sheriff's office for 24 years. As the Director of Programs for the last seven years, he worked with a wide range of community agencies to create

positive change opportunities for men and women who were incarcerated. The supervisor and jail administrator were interviewed separately in their respective offices with a follow-up conversation by phone. Their interviews were about 30 minutes; the follow-ups for clarification lasted about 15 minutes each. The following questions were used to guide the interview.

1. What are the benefits of the GED® program in a county jail?
2. What are the obstacles?

Data Analysis

Only one researcher went into the jail and performed the face-to-face interviews so as to increase internal validity (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Interviews were transcribed to a word processor exactly as they were written in the researcher's notebook. Both researchers took a more structured approach to analyzing the data as they read transcripts of the interviews. As they individually immersed themselves in the data, they used different colored highlighters to code responses that were positive or negative, puzzling, emotional, and relevant (Glen 1996). Statements that would make good quotes were underlined. Also, notes were written in the margins as ideas came to mind. The researchers then compared their data to look for recurring views, similarities of ideas, and contrasting thoughts. As the different themes emerged, the data were sorted under the three research questions this study sought to answer. Survey data were analyzed using SPSS (Appendices A & B) and then compared to the interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

The research questions that this study sought to answer were:

- How do stakeholders view participation in a GED® program in a county jail?
- What are the perceived obstacles to inmate participation in a GED® program in a county jail?
- What are the reasons inmates cite for their participation?

The following themes emerged during the analysis of interviews with the teachers, GED® supervisor, jail administrator, and inmates: (1) increased self-esteem and a positive change in the behavior of the inmates were directly linked to participation in the program, even though low inmate participation was a concern; (2) lack of cooperation from the officers was perceived as an obstacle to the program; and (3) achievement of goals, greater sense of self-worth, and encouragement from the teacher were reasons the inmates participated.

Participation in the GED® program

Increased self-esteem and positive behavior. Both GED® teachers believed in the potential of the program to improve the inmates' lot. Patricia described seeing change in her students: "At first some are quiet. Usually they are a little leery. After a day or two, they adjust. I send work out of class with expectations they will complete their homework. Passing the GED® is a huge self-confidence boost. When they hear they pass, they are bouncing off the walls. I give them an extra copy of their scores so they can send them home." She reported hearing a student say, "I'm smarter than I thought I was! I can do something else."

Stan echoed the importance of self-confidence. "Cheerleading is more important here in a jail setting." He acknowledged the anxiety of some inmates who did not know if they had been evicted

from their apartments, who was taking care of their children, or where their spouses and significant others were. He said he told them, "Get your mind off it. Give me a couple of hours. Concentrate. Focus."

The jail administrator (Chief) believed that the major benefit of the GED® program was the immediate change in inmate behavior once they started class. He cited fewer discipline problems because inmates used their time more wisely. He said that they studied instead of watching TV or getting into confrontations that led to fighting. He exclaimed that there was an "unbelievable decrease in confrontational behavior!" Chief asserted that the inmates did not want to lose the privilege of going to class. He also stated that there had not been one confrontation—physical or verbal—in the GED® classroom.

The GED® supervisor said that, when inmates first came into the GED® program, they reported feeling shame and worthlessness. However, as they progressed through the program, they were excited that somebody cared and was interested in them. They were appreciative and eager to learn.

Eighty-nine percent of the inmates reported in the survey that their behavior was better since beginning the GED® program. They also reported feeling better about themselves, having a better attitude, and being hopeful for the future.

Low participation rates. Both GED® instructors stated that they believed in the benefits of the GED® program—if they could get students into the classroom. Stan talked about the low number of students, acknowledging that numbers have always been a problem. "I can't get enough students in this limited population of 200. Assuming that 40% have their high school diplomas or GED®, that leaves 120 possible students. I have 5 in my class right now."

The jail administrator believed the number of inmates participating in the GED® program might be low because the inmates did not believe they were smart enough or had low self-esteem. Also, he suggested that they might dislike going to school because of a negative school experience earlier in their lives.

Even though information about the GED® program was posted on a bulletin board in the jail, most of the inmates heard about the program from other inmates in their housing unit. During interviews, female participants talked about how many times they had to fill out the necessary paper work to get into the class, while some of the male inmates felt the GED® program could be better promoted to get more inmates to participate.

Obstacles to the GED® program

Both GED® teachers complained about inmates not getting to class on time, but they did not attribute this primarily to lack of interest. They noted lockdowns, class cancellations, and students being pulled from class for various legal reasons or kept from class because of infractions in their pods. Patricia, the teacher in the male facility, blamed what she called "the system—the guards who do not like to be cooperative." Stan, the teacher in the female facility, alluded to the same problem; he stated that, when his students did not come to class, he went to Chief's (the jail administrator) office, knocked on the door, and said, "I need my students."

Elaborating on the attitudes of the correctional officers, Patricia commented, "I know the guys [in the GED® program] get flak from the guards." She believed most inmates were only minimally upset with this but indicated that some did get frustrated. She said, "Most of the guards don't see the value [of the program]. They say, 'I don't see why they're doing this. Why bother? They'll just be back here anyway.'"

Stan saw the officers' uncooperativeness expressed through the issuance—or non-issuance—of request forms for the GED® class. He quoted a student as saying, "Oh, you finally got me after filling out four requests." The inmates believed that something happened to the forms (to sign up for classes) because they were not being turned in. He said, "Officers say other officers tear up the forms."

When asked about obstacles to the GED® program, Chief admitted that the officers' behavior affected the GED® program. He explained that some of the officers did not understand or accept that inmates wanted to change. He believed there was limited cooperation and that officers did not want to interact with the inmates while getting them to and from class. He thought they saw it as a burden and waste of their time. He said, "Officers vocalize or act out in negative ways." He reported overhearing an officer say to an inmate, "You are a piece of crap, a waste of resources." He said that, in retaliation, the officers sometimes took a long time getting the inmates to class. They also took the inmates out of class for small infractions, using the issue of security as the excuse.

According to Chief, he continues to work to get the officers to cooperate, making it better for the people involved in the program. He said that he often thanks the officers for their assistance in getting the inmates to and from the GED® class and, after five years, he reports seeing less resistance.

The GED® supervisor also noted the negative attitude of the correctional officers—a "philosophy of punishment not rehabilitation"—as a major impediment to the success of the program. She reported that the correctional officers were very reluctant for students to come to class, even to the point of failing to forward requests to get into the program and of using concern for "security" as a reason to keep inmates from participating. She had overheard officers comment that the jail was for punishment, not rewards. She believed that some officers felt that the jail was not a place to make things better for the inmates and that the inmates did not deserve to participate in the program. The supervisor said that a female officer had said to her, "Why are you wasting your time on [an inmate]? As soon as she gets out, she'll be back in because of her whoring and prostitution." The GED® participants had told her that the female officers went into the pods very early in the morning and intimidated the inmates participating in the GED® program by taking away their calculators, tearing up GED® certificates, or "messing with" their study materials. The supervisor admitted that, without the help and perseverance of Chief, there would not be a GED® program. "Basically the guards don't want the hassle. Sometimes it's just hard to keep fighting the battle."

Two female inmates spoke about obstacles they faced getting to class, referencing the guards' involvement. One commented, "We are rushed every time, no time to use the bathroom. I don't have time to get ready for class, feel unorganized. I've had to pee for an hour. The teacher called the guards, and they said they would come, but they haven't." Another inmate said, "Guards forget about us for bathroom breaks. They always say they'll come, but they don't." Half of the male inmates indicated on the survey that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements that the officers got them to class on time and encouraged them to go to class. However, the male inmates did not disclose this issue as an obstacle to their participation during interviews.

Reasons for inmate participation

The reasons both male and female inmates offered for enrolling and staying in the GED® program centered on three sub-themes: the achievement of

life goals, a desire for a greater sense of self-worth, and the encouragement of the teacher.

Achievement of goals. When asked why they were attending the GED® program, most of the male responses cited getting a job and/or going back to school upon release. Education was widely seen by these inmates as the path to financial success. As one inmate put it, "I'm 53 years old and quit high school in 1977. My English teacher failed me in the 11th grade. Nowadays, you need to have a GED® to get any kind of job." Another inmate reported that he needed to get a job because he was responsible for four children. Yet another inmate remarked that he wanted to "coexist with the working world. Do things I couldn't do before," while another commented "I'm good at working in a factory. I'd like to get back into that. It was interesting."

Some saw the GED® as a stepping-stone to community college, a trade school, or a specific degree. "I wanted to get it (a GED®) while I'm in here because I want to go to school to be an architect. I build houses for a living. I took drafting in high school. I'll be more stable." Another inmate wanted to get in to trade school to be an electrician:

> "They wouldn't let me in (trade school) because I didn't have a GED®. I wasn't motivated in school. As soon as I could, I dropped out. I was seventeen. I started going to GED® classes, but I didn't finish. Everyone said that I would be just like him [his father who overdosed at age 41], but I'm here to break that cycle."

Greater sense of self-worth. Seeing the GED® program as a way of changing the past and becoming a better person was the second common sub-theme expressed by the male inmates. They talked about dropping out or getting expelled from high school: "I had to drop out in the 10th grade because my mom died and I had three sisters." Failure in school and failure in life were frequently linked in the inmates' comments, with one inmate stating, "I did not get a diploma because in 12th grade I was kicked out. I've been unemployed for 2 years living with my mother." Another inmate said that he attended the GED® class because he wanted "to stop living the way I'm living," while another simply said he wanted "to better himself." The GED®, a job, and a greater sense of self-worth were seen as elements of a new life story, a path leading to "a better attitude about going and applying myself." Participation in the class was a reward in itself: "I feel better about myself when I come to class. I feel like I've learned something. I want to keep that." Unlike previous experiences in school, this one taught a different message: "[I'm] not as stupid as I thought I was. I feel better about myself." With this new sense of self, a real life change seemed possible: "My goal is to get my GED®, [and] then I will send it to my girlfriend. When I get out, I want to get married and be able to do something more—try to find me a factory job—try to fit into society."

The female inmates, like the males, saw the GED® program as a way of rewriting their lives: "I didn't graduate high school and didn't get a GED®. [I] had the time." Two female inmates wanted to get their GED®s to go to college, while another added a new element, commenting on the effect the achievement would have on her role as a mother: "I want to go back on all the mistakes I have made and further my education. I want to be a good role model for my 2 year old."

Encouragement of the teacher. When inmates were asked what they liked about the GED® class, a third sub-theme emerged. Most of the male inmates talked about the teacher, Patricia, and how she had motivated them to learn. These inmates spoke of the "good atmosphere" and "great teamwork;" one inmate reported, "We talk a lot and the teacher helps

us by explaining. There is lots of communication." They saw Patricia as a "hands-on teacher" with "good classroom techniques" and someone who "challenges" and "motivates." Her encouragement was seen as "pushing" but also as essential to their continuance in the program. "Patricia keeps pushing—some days I'm thinking about family and court and have a hard time concentrating. When I get back to my cell, I realize that she was pushing me for the right reason."

The encouragement of their teacher was important to the female inmates as well, but this encouragement was seen less as "pushing" and more as effective communication. "Stan is a good teacher, patient, and willing to work with anybody. I don't feel a lesser person, I feel like an individual—not just an inmate." Another shared, "Stan is a very good teacher. He gets down on our level—makes you understand it." Stan's helpfulness and perceived confidence in his students improved the educational encounter: "It is something to look forward to instead of being down about yourself."

The survey data also showed that the inmates felt the teachers had high expectations and understood how they learned. All but one inmate agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that they looked forward to coming to class.

DISCUSSION

With an average population of 1,100 male inmates and 200 female inmates at this specific facility, the percentage of inmates attending the GED® program is barely 2%. This is much lower than the jail average of 8.6% reported by Harlow (2003). However, in a setting that is characterized by gray cement, windowless walls, armed guards, the dull roar of the electric doors opening and closing, and the isolation from the outside world, there is little wonder why there is low motivation to participate in any educational program. Other factors to consider that may contribute to low participation of a GED® program in a jail setting might be length of stay and lack of reading skills of inmates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). But the primary finding of this study is that, even in a penal institution that may discourage participation in a GED® program, inmates who do participate come to believe that education is a path to a stable life and discover a better sense of self-worth. Even when guards do not believe in the efficacy of education, teachers can communicate the possibility of hope.

The inmates in this study felt hopeful for the future, had a better attitude, and felt better about themselves, which is highly congruent with a study by Terry, who documented several behavioral changes that education had on adult learners (as cited in Mikulecky, Smith-Burke & Beatty, 2009). He reported that adults experienced a more positive outlook on life, increased self-esteem, and an increased sense of responsibility for others. Feelings of hope and self-worth may lead to better behavior in jail. Even in prisons, Gerber & Fritsch cited a reduction in criminal behavior and fewer disciplinary problems when inmates attended an educational program (as cited in Vacca, 2004). In a similar study in the District of Columbia Corrections, there was a marked decrease of incidents in a GED® unit compared to a unit of a general population of inmates (Parker, 2010). The majority of male and female inmates reported on the survey that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that their behavior was better since attending the GED® class. This supports the statement by Chief who reported the major benefit of the GED® program was the immediate change in behavior of the inmates when they started class. Although his claims were not substantiated, he believed there were fewer disciplinary problems and less confrontational behavior.

Nearly all inmate interviews included references

to bettering themselves through education, whether that betterment was by finding a job to support families or seeking additional education once time was served. These findings correlate with a study by Moeller et al. (2004) in which the majority of inmates were in a GED® program to further their education. These findings show that those inmates who chose to participate in the GED® program did so for compelling personal reasons, such as being able to better provide for their families once they were released from jail. Meyer, Fredericks, Borden and Richardson (2010) found that inmates who attended an education program liked gaining knowledge and becoming better people. Further, the researchers found that the inmates participated in the GED® program in this study because they wanted to change their lives. Pelissier (2004) also found that internal motivation served as the driving force for participation in an educational program. According to Moeller, et al. (2004), adults came to class with a better understanding of the need for an education and sense the urgency of it. Our study also backs this finding.

According to the reports from the jail administrator, GED® supervisor, teachers, and two female inmates, the officers were degrading to inmates in the program and were not responsive in areas like getting them to class on time and responding to bathroom needs. Ironically, the male inmates did not acknowledge difficulties with the officers in the interviews, only in the survey. In contrast to the jail administrator, GED® supervisor, and teachers, who all felt the officers discouraged or actively resisted inmate participation in the GED® program, most inmates stated in the interview that there were no obstacles to their participation. However, the male survey data showed problems with officers getting them to class on time and encouraging them to participate. Data from the female survey indicated that such problems were not an issue.

The jail administrator, supervisor, and teachers were very vocal about the mistreatment of the inmates by the guards. Both the jail administrator and the program supervisor reported that the correctional officers were an issue and negatively affected the GED® program. Even though the jail administrator was seeing less resistance from the officers, the supervisor believed that guards did not want the "hassle" of the program and stated that negativity was still a battle she was fighting. Vacca (2004) supported these findings in his research that acknowledged that conflict exists within many correctional facilities regarding the beliefs or goals and purposes of incarceration. He found that the values and attitudes of the officers had a significant influence on the success of programs in correctional settings. If correctional officers believed that incarcerated adults should be punished and not rehabilitated or given the opportunity for educational advancement, this would directly conflict with a GED® program. In a similar way, Mentor (2005) pointed out that officers in a correctional setting may see educational programs as a threat to control and security of the inmates and facility.

The GED® supervisor and the teacher of the female inmates both felt that paperwork was not correctly handled by officers, stating that inmates had to request getting into the program multiple times. The GED® supervisor even reported that the officers went into the female pods and disturbed their GED® materials. Warner (2000) said that negative counter-influences associated with institutionalization included humiliation by officers and inhumane conditions. However, the teacher of the female inmates was quite adamant about paperwork not getting turned in properly or in a timely manner which, he felt, resulted in a lower number of GED® participants.

While the findings of this study add to the research of GED® programs in county jails, its

findings cannot be generalized to larger populations because the sample size was smaller than the reported average. Data from a larger number of GED® programs in jail settings might yield other insights. However, the stakeholders in this study did give insights for future research.

Implications for future research

The researchers acknowledge that inmates who choose to participate in educational programs may have certain attributes and predispositions not found in inmates who do not choose to participate. Family support, religious conversions, and a new self-awareness may be the underlying reasons inmates choose to participate in educational programs, and it may be argued that these other factors, not the benefits of educational programming, deter recidivism. However, the limitations of this study leave many questions unanswered. What percentages of inmates who enroll in a GED® program complete it? What effect does a GED® program have on recidivism? How do the officers themselves speak about their perspectives on education programs in jails and prisons? What do inmates who decide not to enroll in an education program say about this decision? Are the inmates who choose to enroll in a GED® program those who already believe in the life-changing potential of education?

These are questions worthy of study, but they should not be seen as refutations of what this study does show: inmates whose previous experiences in formal education had been negative and who might have been discouraged from participation in an educational program nevertheless participated in it and articulated the hope that schooling could change their lives in profound ways. This is a hope we should encourage.

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APPENDIX A
MALE GED® QUESTIONNAIRE

For each question below, circle the number to the right that best describes your opinions.

Question: When you think about your GED® class, please answer the following:	Scale of Importance in Frequencies				
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I look forward to each class.	0	0	1	12	3
The teacher has high expectations of me.	0	0	0	10	6
The teacher challenges me.	0	0	2	9	5
The officers/guards make sure I get to class on time.	6	3	5	2	0
I feel challenged with the GED® curriculum. *Missing one	0	0	4	8	3
The teacher understands how I learn.	0	0	2	7	7
My behavior is better since attending the class.	1	0	2	9	4
The officers/guards encourage me to go to class.	5	3	6	1	1
It was easy to get into the GED® class.	3	0	5	5	3
I feel that I am learning skills that I can use when I am released.	0	0	2	8	6
I am hopeful for my future because of the GED® class.	0	0	0	7	9
I feel better about myself because I am attending class.	0	0	1	11	4
I feel valued when I am in class.	0	0	4	10	2
I have a better attitude since taking the GED® class.	2	1	3	6	4
The other inmates in my pod encourage me.	0	1	7	5	3

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX B
FEMALE GED® QUESTIONNAIRE

For each question below, circle the number to the right that best describes your opinions.

Question: When you think about your GED® class, please answer the following:	Scale of Importance in Frequencies				
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I look forward to each class.	0	0	0	5	5
The teacher has high expectations of me.	0	1	0	4	5
The teacher challenges me.	0	0	1	2	7
The officers/guards make sure I get to class on time.	1	1	1	6	1
I feel challenged with the GED® curriculum.	0	2	3	0	5
The teacher understands how I learn.	0	0	0	3	7
My behavior is better since attending the class.	0	0	0	5	5
The officers/guards encourage me to go to class.	2	1	2	4	1
It was easy to get into the GED® class.	0	0	1	6	3
I feel that I am learning skills that I can use when I am released.	0	0	1	3	5
I am hopeful for my future because of the GED® class.	0	0	0	5	5
I feel better about myself because I am attending class.	0	0	0	3	7
I feel valued when I am in class.	0	0	0	4	6
I have a better attitude since taking the GED® class.	0	0	0	4	6
The other inmates in my pod encourage me.	0	0	1	5	4

Additional Comments:

Investigating Predictors of Nonacademic ESOL Learners' L2 Literacy Ability

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ABSTRACT

The factors determining foreign language abilities have received copious attention from foreign language studies, and these research findings provided highly converging pedagogical implications for language teachers. However, not many studies have focused on non-academic learners especially with respect to their literacy skills. To fill this gap, the present study investigated 144 non-academic adult English learners' literacy skills by conducting background surveys and a placement test which were then analyzed with standard and sequential multiple-regression. The major finding of this study was that the model that includes the length of time studying English, self-evaluation of reading, and education level was the most efficient combination of background variables to predict both writing and reading scores of this particular population.

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 United States census reports a total of approximately 38 million foreign-born individuals living in the U.S. More than half (53.1%) are from Latin America (Caribbean, Central America, and South America), and more than one fourth (27.6%) are from Asia. The rest were born in Europe (12.7%), Africa (3.9%), Northern America (2.1%), and Oceania (less than 1%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). This population includes naturalized U.S. citizens, immigrants, temporary migrants (such as foreign students), refugees, and persons illegally present in the United States. Even though this demographic data of foreign-born individuals may not represent the exact number of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) learners because many are highly mobile and some are undocumented, there is a potential need for more ESL classes in the United States. Considering the current numbers of total ESOL learners in the states and predicted increase in their numbers (e.g., 31 million of foreign-born individuals were counted in 2003), it is projected that ESL classes will be critical for this demographic.

Nonacademic ESOL learners are those "who are learning English, but not primarily to obtain a postsecondary degree at a college or university" (Bailey, 2006, p. 1). While the goal of academic ESL instruction is to prepare the learners of limited English proficiency with four major language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing) necessary to succeed in academic coursework (Wrigley, 1994), the goal for ESL instruction for non-academic ESOL learners is to provide language skills necessary to function in American society and attain and retain a job (Young, Morgan, Fitzgerald & Fleischman, 1994). Therefore, they are

mostly adults and differ from young ESOL learners who are associated with academic English at English-speaking schools. Many of the adult ESOL learners struggle "constantly to cope with both oral and written directions, understand conversations laced with idiomatic language, and master not just the language of educational materials but also the culture on which they are based" (TESOL, 2000, p. 10). Our focal participants in this paper are the nonacademic adult ESOL learners taking ESL classes offered by a North American college with a purpose of developing communicative skills, not providing preparation courses for university academic settings.

Unlike typical academic ESL and EFL adult learners, nonacademic ESOL adult learners tend to focus on "survival English and basic communication functions" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 105). According to Baurain (2013), the main reason for ESOL learners studying English is to find a job, talk to their neighbors, and do daily chores such as shopping at the grocery store or going to doctor's office without experiencing frustrations. For this reason, they have a tendency to prioritize learning oral skills but disregarding L2 literacy skills (i.e., the ability to read and write). However, in order for them to survive in the target country, functional literacy skills—such as being able to fill out documents and applications in various contexts such as in medical care, housing, or other situations—are also essential. In addition, when pursuing a higher quality of life, higher levels of literacy skills are required (Bailey, 2006). Being able to access and analyze materials and resources in the reading materials (e.g., magazines, books, and newspaper) is a crucial part to progression in the U.S. To further elaborate on the importance of L2 literacy skills for the adult ESOL learners, literacy is usually a prerequisite for promotion to any position with supervisory responsibilities. Another example is that government organizations communicate with individuals almost entirely through written forms: health care services require written applications, and even applying for a driver's license requires the ability to read. Because of these needs and demands, many ESOL learners who lack literacy skills find it difficult in living in the U.S. (Bell & Burnaby, 1984). In order to provide possible remedies for such problems and to further understand nonacademic adult ESOL learners and their L2 literacy skills, we decided to look at possible factors that might affect this particular population's L2 literacy ability. Considering the fact that there are already many studies highlighting strong correlations between language proficiency and language-related variables (e.g., see L2 reading-writing connections, Belcher & Hirvela, 2001) and that the diversity of students' backgrounds can be a very crucial factor in language testing and in indicating strengths and weaknesses in different language skills (Farhady, 1982), we decided to look at non-language related variables predicting their reading and writing scores. We believe that this information is valuable to improve ESL literacy classes and instructions in the United States. For this reason, it is crucial for the following groups to understand the variables predicting nonacademic ESOL learners' literacy skills: (a) policymakers who influence the design, funding, and evaluation of adult ESOL programs; (b) researchers who investigate the success of adult education programs; (c) educators who prepare teachers to work with adult ESOL learners; and (d) the teachers themselves. Thus, the purpose of our study is twofold: to examine what background variables predict nonacademic adult ESOL learners' literacy proficiency level and to investigate the most efficient combination of background variables to predict writing and reading abilities. In the following section, we review literature that discusses predictors of L2 reading and writing abilities. We then describe our current study

design. Finally, we present statistical analyses and discussion of the study results.

What learner variables can account for L2 literacy?

As certain characteristics play a key role in learners' success in acquiring a second language (L2), identifying and understanding these variables are essential in developing and implementing effective curriculum in L2 literacy and in designing reliable tests of students' proficiency. Among the learner variables for those studying English, the factors that have received special attention in L2 literacy studies are: transfer from the native language (L1), prior content knowledge, education level, psychological variables, perceived importance of literacy, and age of arrival in English speaking countries along with length of residence.

L1 transfer to L2, which can either support or detract the L2 literacy development, has been recognized as one of the strongest predictors of L2 literacy (Bhela, 1999; James, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1987). For instance, according to Faerch and Kasper (1987), a learner's mastery in encoding meaning through L1 reading and decoding meaning through L1 writing can positively transfer to L2 literacy skills. In a similar vein, Bartoff (as cited in Penfield, 1986) stated that the students who received literacy training in their L1 showed a tendency to learn L2 literacy skills faster. This could be because of the fact that reading and writing skills are both fundamentally encoding and decoding skills. Additionally, L1 and L2 involve some common knowledge (e.g., content knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, principles of good communication, strategic knowledge) and skills (e.g., logical thinking, organizational skills).

However, the mastery in the learners' native language could also hinder when it comes to their productive performances. This is because differences between L1 and L2 rhetorical structures can impede the production of correct target language forms (James, 1980). For instance, English has an argument structure that has a topic statement at the beginning followed by supporting ideas. Meanwhile, the expectations of rhetorical structures are different across various cultures, and it poses difficulties for ESL learners to adapt to the conventions of L2 reading and writing (Kaplan, 1966). Bhela (1999) investigated four participants from different L1 backgrounds (Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Italian) and compared their writings in L1 and L2. The findings revealed that the participants used L1 structures to produce L2 writing when they lacked knowledge on L2 syntactic structures. Moreover, many ESL and/or EFL students tend to literally translate their L1 to L2 without knowledge of whether the expressions they use in the L1 can be legitimately translated directly into the target language.

In addition to L1 transfer, a number of studies have shown that education level has a critical influence on their L2 literacy (Condelli, 2002; Hammadou, 2000; Rouet, Favart, Britt, & Perfetti, 1997; Tyler, 2001). In particular, Condelli (2002) conducted a longitudinal study on the instructional variables and learner variables affecting L2 proficiency with 495 adult ESL learners. The results showed a significant positive correlation between the years of students' education in their home countries and their L2 reading ability. However, interestingly, their writing ability was proven to be an insignificant determinant. A factor that is closely related to education level is content knowledge. Accordingly, Hammadou (2000) investigated the influence of prior content knowledge and analogies on reading comprehension skills of university students of either French or English as a foreign language. The results highlighted that prior content knowledge had a stronger influence on reading comprehension than analogies.

The role of age in language acquisition has been controversial especially in terms of the existence of a critical period for L2 acquisition, and if it exists, when it begins and ends (Ellis, 1994; Preston, 1989). This debate leads researchers in the field of L2 literacy to study the impact of age-related factors on L2 literacy skills. Specifically, the age of arrival in the target country and the length of exposure to L2 language were found to be significant predictors of L2 literacy skills (Collier, 1987; Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins 1981). For instance, students who arrived in the US between the ages of eight and eleven showed the fastest achievement not only with L2 literacy but also with other L2 language skills (i.e., speaking and listening). In contrast, students who arrived in the U.S. between the ages of 12 to 15 experienced the greatest difficulties in improving their L2 literacy (Collier, 1987). Moreover, their study proved that at least four to eight years were required for the average student to improve his or her L2 literacy sufficiently to meet the national grade-level norms of all subject areas of language, regardless of age of arrival in the United States.

Psychological variables that learners possess were also investigated in relation to their influence on L2 literacy (Netten et al., 2011). Spaulding (1992) contends that a positive stance toward reading enhances the learners' reading achievement while negative attitude decreases reading performances due to their limited interest in reading. In addition, literature on affective dimensions on reading revealed that the learners with high motivation and self-confidence were better able to improve not only their L2 reading ability but also L1 reading ability (Deci & Ryan, 1994; Tsai et al., 2008). Furthermore, self-perceived importance of the content area is known to be an important contributing factor for motivation (Greene et al., 2004; Miller et al., 1999); self-perception is assumed to influence academic-achievement of learners, evoking extrinsic motivation (Borkowski, Carr, Relinger & Pressley, 1990; Schunk, 1991). To be more specific in the context of reading, the motivational impact derived from self-perceptions would influence opportunities to read, the amount of effort in reading, and the degree of determination in pursuing text comprehension (Alvermann & Guthrie, 1993; Henk & Melnick, 1992; Strahan, 2008). Walker and Greene (2009) examined the relations among student perceptions of classroom achievement goals, self-efficacy, perceived importance of classroom work, and sense of belonging within a classroom and found that perceived importance of the subject area is a significant determinant of mastery-goal adoption.

On the other hand, a growing number of studies have documented that self-assessment can be a strong determinant of one's level of literacy as well (Brantmeier & Vanderplank, 2008; Hellekjær, 2005). According to Bachman and Palmer (1989), self-assessment is a valid and reliable measure of one's level of proficiency in low-stakes contexts. Hellekjær (2005, pp. 163-182) also investigated the validity of self-assessment items for reading in English that were filled out by 53 university students, and he found that there is a strong correlation ($r = .72$, $p < .01$) between the self-assessment of reading and actual English reading proficiency. In this sense, learners seem to be able to evaluate their proficiencies in reading to a great extent, even though a broader range of studies is necessary to reveal other factors that might influence the self-assessment of reading—such as age, gender, prior learning experiences, and native languages, among other factors.

So far, this paper has reviewed several learner variables that can explain and predict L2 reading and writing abilities. Since few of the aforementioned studies focused on nonacademic adult ESOL learners, we have decided to look at what learner variables serve as strong predictors

for this particular population's L2 literacy. In an attempt to fill this gap, and to provide a better understanding of the determinants of nonacademic ESOL learners' L2 reading and writing abilities, the present study seeks to answer to the following four questions:

1. What factors might predict writing ability?
2. What factors might predict reading ability?
3. Are the predictors the same?
4. What is the most efficient combination of background variables to predict writing and reading abilities?

METHODS

Participants

Participants in this study were students in an ESL language program in the Northeastern region of the United States. The program is open to members of the public who are interested in learning English for communicative purposes, and it provides theme-based and integrated (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) language instruction to a diverse population of learners. Most of the students are immigrants or family members of international students.

A total number of 144 participants completed this study, and they ranged in age from 21 to 63 years old. The group comprised 111 females and 33 males. Almost half (56.3%) of the students were from Asia, and the rest came from Europe. The L1 of the largest group (28.5%) was Japanese followed by Spanish (18.1%) and Korean (16.7%), while other L1 backgrounds (36.7%) included Albanian, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, etc (see Figure 1).

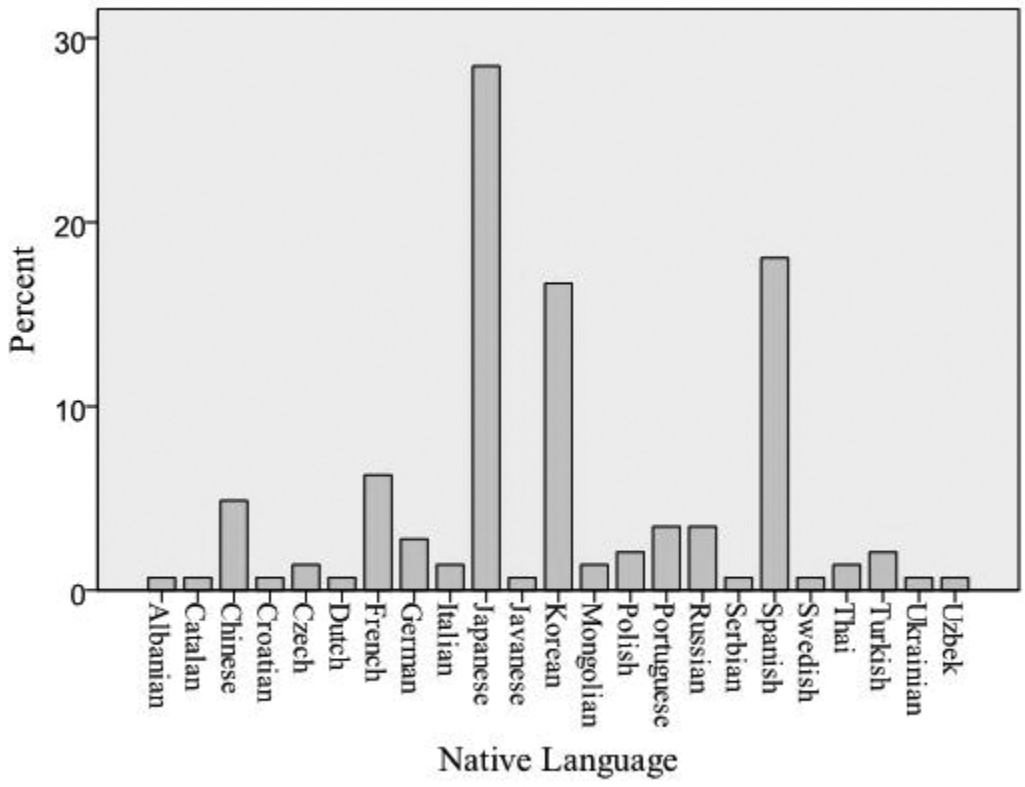


FIGURE 1

All participants had a wide range of education levels. The majority of students held college or Bachelor's degrees (50.7%), and fewer students were holders of Master's degree (21.5%), followed by high school graduates (18.1%) (see Figure 2).

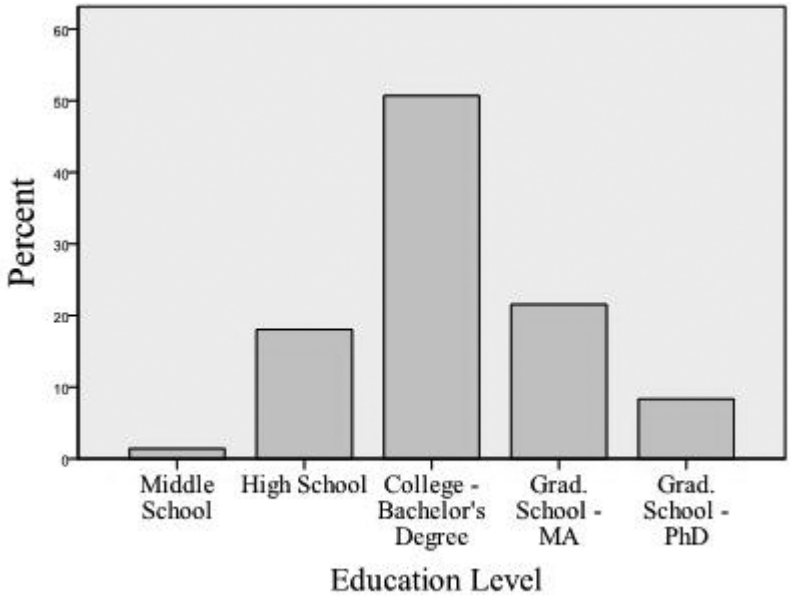


FIGURE 2

Participants had varied length of studying English (4.8 years on average) (see Figure 3). Over half of the students studied English more than 6 years (52.1%), and the second largest groups were 1 to 3 years (16%), and 3 to 6 years (16.7%). There were much fewer students who studied English for 6 months to 1 year (7.6%), or less than 6 months (7.6%).

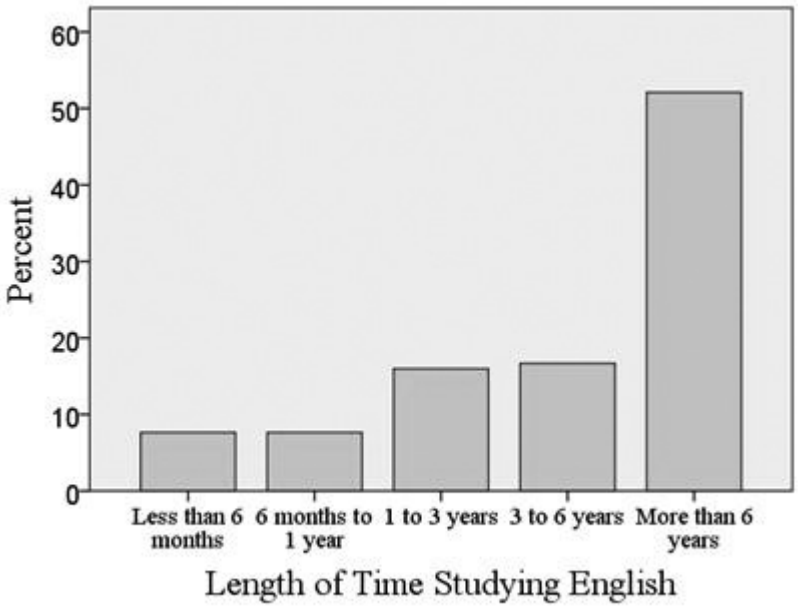


FIGURE 3

Overall length of time spent living in English speaking countries were varied (around 11 months on average), but generally less than 6 months (42.4%) (see Figure 4). The second and third largest groups were 1 to 3 years (20.8%), and 6 months to 1 year (16.7%), respectively. There were few students in 3 to 6 years (10.4%), and more than 6 years (9.7%).

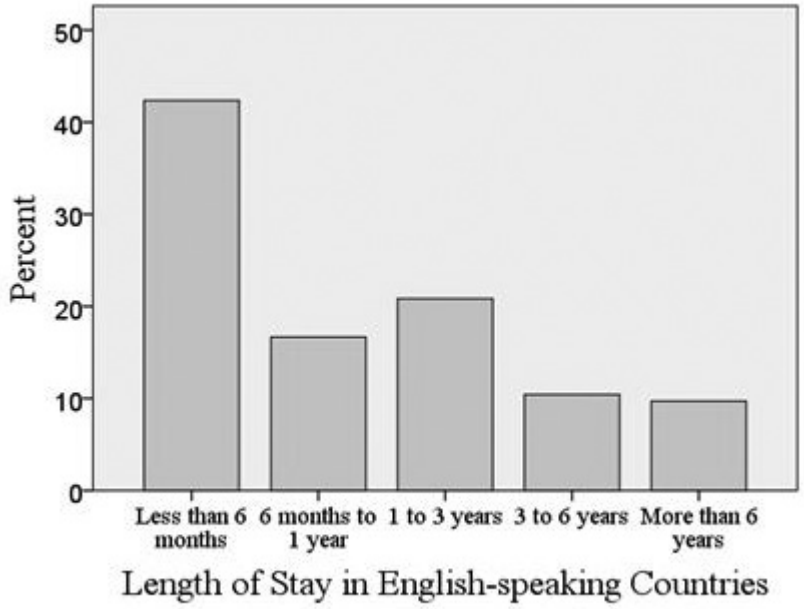
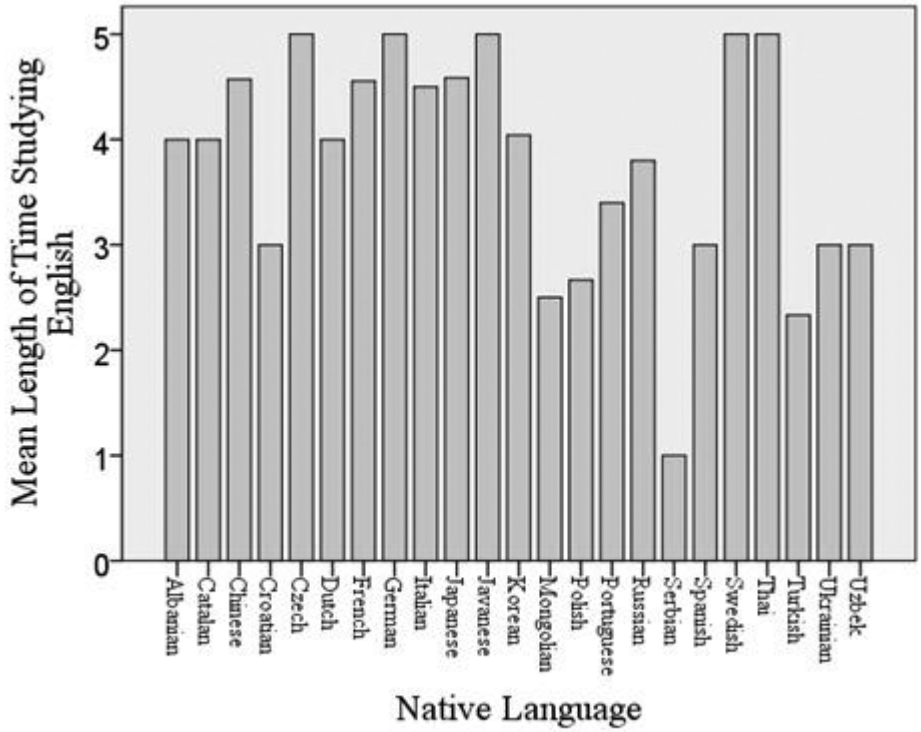


FIGURE 4

The average of length of stay in English-speaking countries was varied across students from different native language backgrounds, French, German, Javanese, Swedish, and Thai being the highest ranked. Serbian scored the far lowest. Score 1 represents "less than 6 months," 2 represents "6 months to 1 year," 3 represents "1 to 3 years," 4 means "3 to 6 years," and finally 5 labels "more than 6 years" (range 1-5).



(*1*: less than 6 months, *2*: 6 months to 1 year, *3*: 1 to 3 years, *4*: 3 to 6 years, *5*: more than *6* years)

FIGURE 5

We looked at the differences in the background variables (length of time studying English, length of stay in English-speaking countries, perception of importance of reading and writing, and self-rated reading and writing) across regions (Asia and Europe) and found that Asian students not only had higher average LSE (see Figure 6) but also higher average lengths of stay in English-speaking countries (LEC) than European students (see Figure 7). Note that LEC has the same scales as LSE, ranges 0-5.

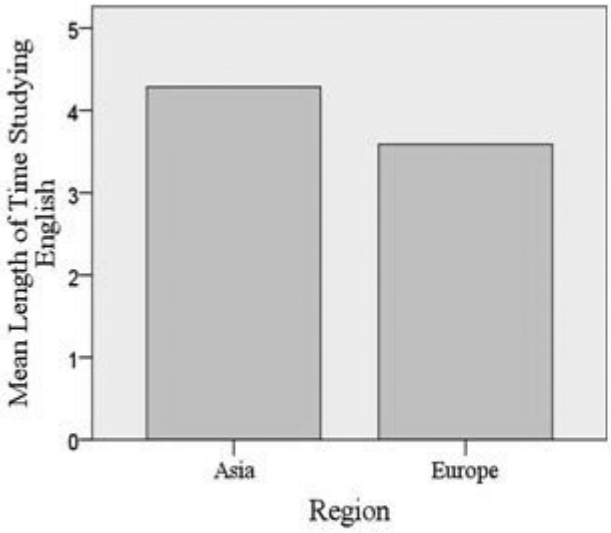


FIGURE 6

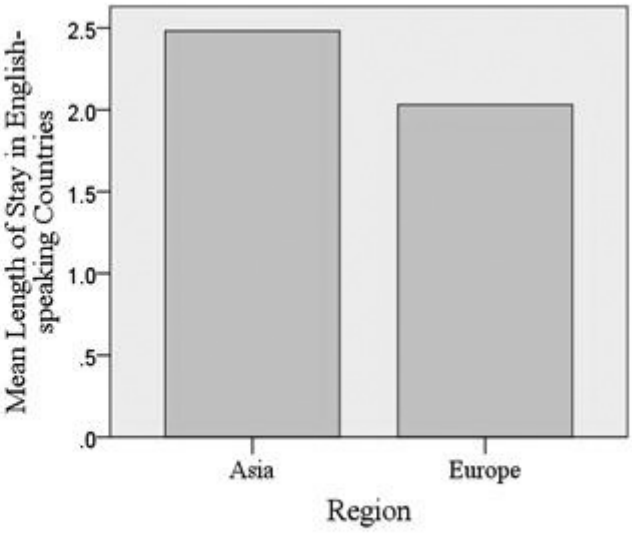


FIGURE 7

(***1***: less than 6 months, ***2***: 6 months to 1 year, ***3***: 1 to 3 years, ***4***: 3 to 6 years, ***5***: more than ***6*** years)

Asian students' perception of importance of both reading (range: 1-4) and writing (range 1-3) were higher than that of European students (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). This might suggest that Asian students possess higher motivation than European students (Greene et al., 2004; Miller et al., 1999; Walker & Greene, 2009).

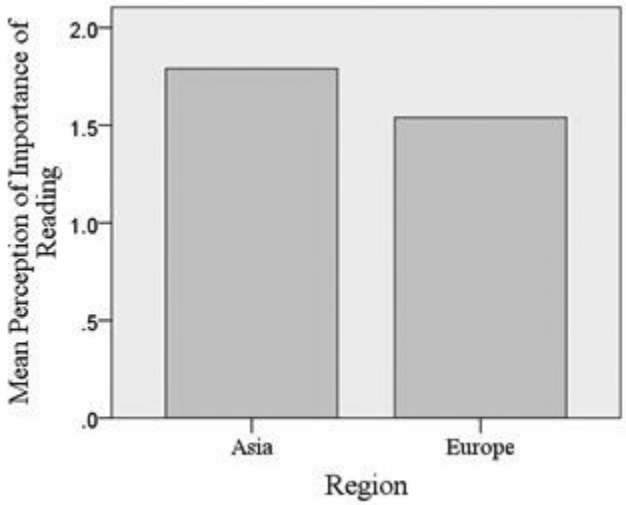


FIGURE 8

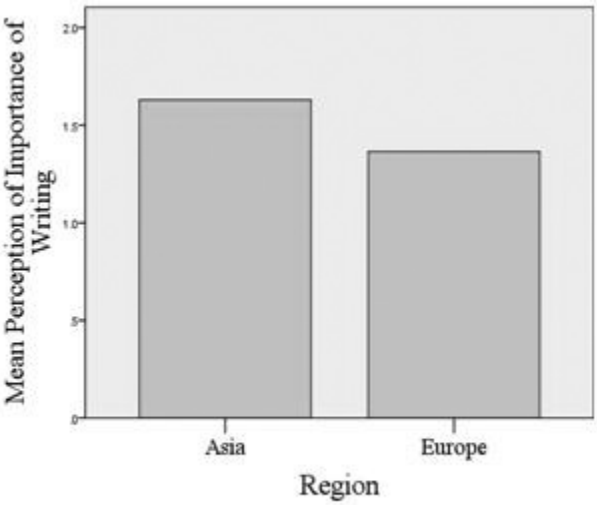


FIGURE 9

As can be conjectured based on the aforementioned qualities (Asian students' longer time studying English and longer stays in English speaking-countries, and their higher appreciation of the importance of reading and writing), Asian students' actual reading and writing scores were overall higher than those of European students (see Figure 10 and Figure 11).

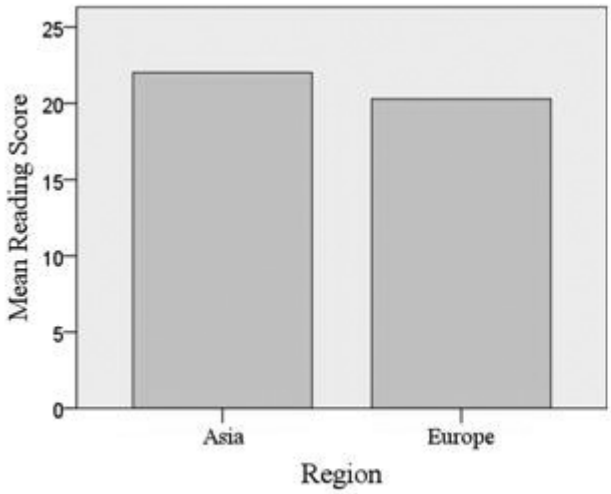


FIGURE 10

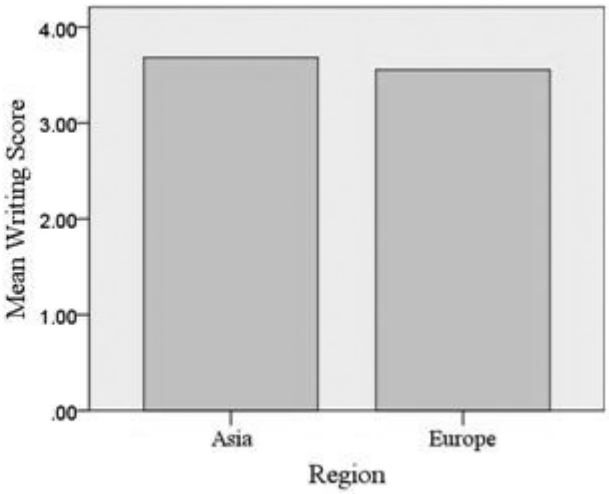


FIGURE 11

However, European students' self-ratings for both their reading (range: 1-5) and writing abilities (range: 1-5) were higher than that of Asian students (see figure 12 and figure 13), which indicates that European students were more confident about their L2 literacy and somewhat over-estimated their reading and writing abilities.

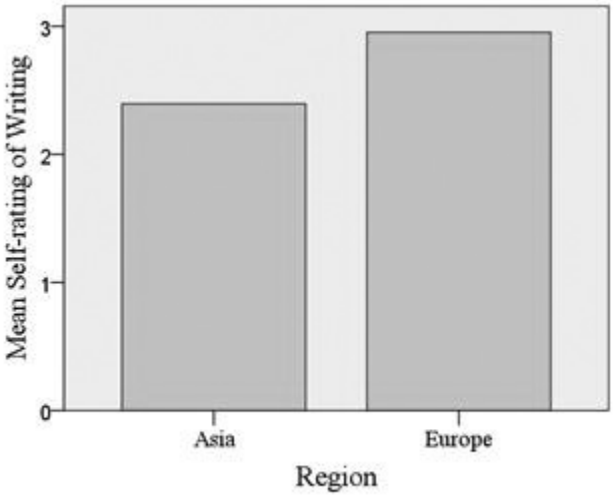


FIGURE 12

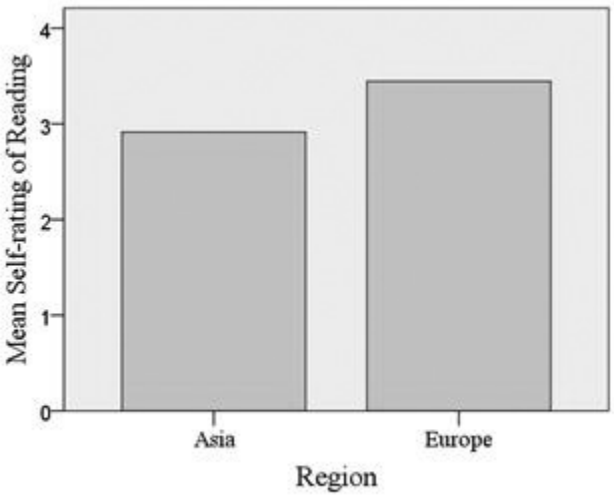


FIGURE 13

Lastly, in contrast to a general belief that females are often better literacy students than males, our data showed that male students outperformed female students in both reading (male: 22.64, female: 20.85) and writing tests (male: 3.65, female: 3.64).

Placement Test

In order to deal with the substantial degree of heterogeneity across students in terms of their English proficiency, placement testing is crucial for the program. The exam consists of five sections: grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Based on the scores, learners are allocated into 13 different levels, ranging from beginner level to intermediate level to advanced levels. In the reading section of the placement test, students are asked to complete 4 reading tasks and are given 45 minutes to read passages and answer 30 multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice items measure the following abilities: identifying main ideas, looking for detail, making inference, and understanding vocabulary in context. In the writing section, test-takers are asked to complete two open-ended writing tasks lasting 15 minutes and 45 minutes respectively. The first task had students to write postcards to their friends, and the second task asked them to write advantages and disadvantages of public transportation.

Scoring Method

a. Criteria for correctness: The multiple-choice reading task was scored dichotomously with a correct answer getting one point and an incorrect answer getting zero points. For the writing test, the rubric covered content, organization, language, and task completion and the score of each domain ranges from one to five (e.g., 1=little or no control, 5=complete control).

b. Scoring procedure: The reading test was scored based on the answer key by one rater. For the writing test, two experienced raters reviewed the rubric together and clarified a norm in order to maintain consistency. Then, the writing test was scored independently by two raters according to the rubric, and the scores of the two raters were averaged to compute the overall score of the writing test.

c. Raters: Since the writing section was scored by two raters independently, the reliability between the raters was analyzed by using the Pearson product moment calculation. The inter-rater reliability co-efficient turned out to be .895, which is regarded as high. The inter-rater reliability was significant at the α=0.01 level, which suggests that there is 99 percent probability that the correlation is not due to chance.

Data Description and Analysis

In this study, we explored some of the variables that might explain the participants' writing and reading scores on placement tests. The variables that we analyzed in relation to reading and writing scores are as follows: education level, length of stay in English-speaking countries, length of time studying English, perception of the importance of reading, perception of the importance of writing, self-evaluation of reading proficiency, and self-evaluation of writing proficiency. Detailed description of each of the variables is presented in Table 1. We designed several models that are combinations of different variables and analyzed them via a multiple linear regression method in SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS software, which is one of the popular analytic packages, enables us to investigate the predictors of the dependent variable by data management and analytic process functions within the software. The powerful features of SPSS include descriptive statistics such as histograms, scatter plots, graphs,

Table 1—*Descriptive Statistics for the Background Learner Variables*

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
RS	144	5–30	21.26	5.62
WS	144	.56–4.81	3.63	.85
EDUC	144	1–5	3.17	.87
LEC	144	1–5	2.28	1.36
LSE	144	1–5	3.98	1.30
PIW	144	1–3	1.51	.67
PIR	144	1–4	1.68	.74
SW	144	1–5	2.64	1.06
SR	144	1–5	3.15	1.11
Valid N	144			
(listwise)				

Note. WS: Writing Score, RS: Reading Score, EDUC: Education Level, LEC: Length of stay in English-speaking Countries, LSE: Length of time studying English, PIW: Perceived Importance of Writing, PIR: Perceived Importance of Reading, SW: Self Evaluation of Writing, SR: Self Evaluation of Reading

charts, and frequencies, and inferential and multivariate statistical analysis such as factor analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and categorical data analysis. The strongest advantage of using SPSS rather than the others is that it does not require high technical skills for users even when analyzing highly complicated data. Multiple regression can be legitimately used for this study since the number of participants in this study (144) was higher than the minimum number of participants required for multiple regression, which is 111 (N ≥104 + number of predictor variables) (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2005). Then, we compared the models in terms of the significance and the R^2 changes to identify which model can efficiently predict the reading or writing scores.

RESULTS

The goal of multiple regression analysis is to identify possible variables that would predict the reading and writing scores for non-academic ESOL learners. First, we estimated a standard multiple regression for the writing scores as a dependent variable in order to answer our first research question (i.e., What predicts writing score?). Table 2 illustrates the results of regression analysis with various background variables representing the dependent variable *writing score*. Specifically, we show the relationship as follows:

Writing score regression:
WS = f [ED, LEC, LSE, PIW, PIR, SW, SR]
Where WS: Writing Score, EDUC: Education Level (high-school graduates, BA, MA and PhD), LEC: Length of stay in English-speaking Countries, LSE: Length of time studying the English, PIW: Perception of the Importance of Writing, PIR: Perception of the Importance of Reading, SW: Self Evaluation of Writing, SR: Self Evaluation of Reading

Table 2—*Regression Analysis of Writing Score with Seven Variables*

Predictor		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	1.072	.382		2.807	.006
	EDUC	.255	.074	.262	3.430**	.001
	LEC	-.009	.045	-0.14	-.189	.850
	LSE	.188	.049	.288	3.854**	.000
1	PIW	.111	.116	.088	.957	.340
	PIR	.078	.106	.068	.735	.464
	SW	.046	.088	.058	.524	.601
	SR	.189	.086	.247	2.196*	.030
	R^2: 0.331					

Note. Dependent Variable: Writing
*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Table 2 indicated that education level (.262, $p<.01$), length of time studying English (.288, $p<.01$) and self-evaluation of reading (.247, $p<.05$) were important factors in predicting writing scores. The standardized Beta shows that length of time studying English (.288) is by far the strongest predictor out of the seven variables. Even though R^2 of the estimation was not high (0.331), it indicated that only 33.1% of variance in writing scores was accounted for by the seven independent variables. However, if we consider the fact that the seven independent variables are not related to language relevant variables at all, 33% of prediction does not seem trivial.

Second, we estimated a standard multiple regression for the reading scores as a dependent variable in order to answer Research Question 2 (i.e., What predicts reading score?) and Research Question 3 (i.e., Are the predictors the same?). Specifically, we show the relationship as follows:

Reading score regression:
RS = f [ED, LEC, LSE, PIW, PIR, SW, SR]
Where RS: Reading Score, EDUC: Education Level (high-school graduates, BA, MA and PhD), LEC: Length of stay in the English-speaking Countries, LSE: Length of time Studying English, PIW: Perception of the Importance of Writing, PIR: Perception of the Importance of Reading, SW: Self Evaluation of Writing, SR: Self Evaluation of Reading

Table 3—*Regression Analysis of Reading Score*

Predictor		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	4.313	2.351		1.835	.069
	EDUC	.918	.458	.142	2.004*	.047
	LEC	.455	.277	.110	1.640	.103
	LSE	1.792	.301	.414	5.963**	.000
1	PIW	-.779	.715	-.093	-1.090	.278
	PIR	1.532	.654	.201	2.334*	.021
	SW	-.354	.544	-.067	-.650	.517
	SR	1.716	.530	.339	3.235**	.002
	R^2: 0.421					

Note. Dependent Variable: Reading

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Similar to the findings from Table 2 (writing score), Table 3 also reveals that length of time studying English (.414, p<.01), self-evaluation of reading (.339, p<.01) and education level (.142, p<.05) play a vital role in predicting the participants' reading scores. Moreover, similar to Table 2, the standardized Beta also shows that length of studying English (.414) is by far the strongest predictor out of the seven variables. In contrast to what we found in writing score results, Table 3 also indicated that perception of the importance of reading (.201, p<.05) was the other important predictors for the participants' reading scores in the placement test. This coincides with Henk and Melnick's (1992) study: self-perceptions influence reading performance and achievement. R^2 of the estimation was relatively higher in Table 3 (0.421), indicating that 42.1% of variance in reading scores was accounted for by the seven independent variables, than R^2 in Table 2 (33.1%).

Based on the Beta size from Table 2 and 3, we generated four models to test our Research Question 4 (i.e., What is the most efficient combination of background variables to predict writing and reading scores?) via sequential multiple regression. Since LSE (length of time studying English) was found to be the most important variable (WS: *Beta* =.288, RS: *Beta* =.414) in both of the writing and reading scores, we decided to use LSE as our Model 1 (WS: R^2=.160, p<.01; RS: R^2=.249, p<.01). In a similar vein, we decided to add SR as our Model 2, EDUC as our Model 3 and PIR as our Model 4, but not other insignificant variables (PIW, SW and LEC) to test which model is the most efficient.

Table 4—*Model Summary for Writing Score*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.400[a]	.160	.154	.78074	.160	27.037	.000
2	.499[b]	.249	.238	.74091	.089	16.676	.000
3	.557[c]	.311	.296	.71233	.062	12.541	.001
4	.569[d]	.323	.304	.70828	.013	2.606	.109

a. Predictors: (Constant), LSE

b. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR

c. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR, EDUC

d. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR, EDUC, PIR

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

The results of the sequential multiple regression tests (WS is dependent, Table 4) show that each Model is a significant improvement on its predecessor except for Model 4. Model 1 accounts for 16%, Model 2 accounts for 24.9%, and Model 3 accounts for 31.1% of the total writing scores of the nonacademic ESOL learners. The three background variables in Model 3 are strong predictors of the students' writing scores as evidenced by the fact that the three variables were able to predict 31.1% of the students' writing scores when all the seven background variables only predicted 33.1% (see Table 2). In the end, the writing scores were best predicted by Model 3; therefore, Model 3 is our fitted model for Writing Score.

Table 5—*Model Summary for Reading Score*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.499[a]	.249	.244	4.883	.249	47.207	.000
2	.589[b]	.347	.338	4.569	.098	21.166	.000
3	.619[c]	.383	.370	4.458	.036	8.109	.005
4	.632[d]	.399	.382	4.416	.016	3.696	.057

a. Predictors: (Constant), LSE

b. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR

c. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR, EDUC

d. Predictors: (Constant), LSE, SR, EDUC, PIR

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

The result of sequential multiple regression for Reading Score (Table 6) revealed that it was Model 3 that showed the most statistically significant combination of background variables that predicted reading score (38.3%). Similar to Table 5, Model 4 was not statistically significant (p>.05). This indicates that our fitted model for Reading Score is also Model 3.

Considering the minor differences in terms of percentage of prediction between Model 2 and Model 3 for reading score (3.6%), and the efficiency of having two variables rather than three to predict reading scores, Model 2 could be more effective. However, in this current study, we thought 3.6% is still a significant difference. Considering the fact that there were only 2% differences between the effect size of Model 3 of the writing section and the one with all seven variables, adding one variable and increasing 3.6% of the prediction with Model 3 of the reading section does not seem trivial. Thus, we decided to use Model 3 as our final model for Reading Score.

In order to show the extent to which one variable is different to the other Model 3 is further calculated with standard multiple regression below in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6—*Regression Analysis of Writing Score with Model 3*

Predictor		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	1.322	.303		4.365	.000	.723	1.920
	EDUC	.245	.069	.251	3.541**	.001	.108	.381
1	SR	.215	.054	.281	3.951**	.000	.107	.323
	LSE	.214	.047	.328	4.594**	.000	.122	.307
	R^2 : 0.311							

Note. Dependent Variable: Writing
*p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 7—*Regression Analysis of Reading Score with Model 3*

Predictor		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	5.112	1.895		2.697	.008	1.365	8.858
	EDUC	1.232	.433	1.91	2.848**	.005	.377	2.087
1	SR	1.524	.341	.301	4.473**	.000	.850	2.197
	LSE	1.870	.292	.432	6.402**	.000	1.293	2.448
	R^2 : 0.383							

Note. Dependent Variable: Reading
*p<.05. **p<.01.

The standardized Betas in Table 6 and 7 both show that LSE is by far the strongest predictor out of the three variables in Model 3. Moreover, the Beta in Table 7 indicates that LSE is more than twice more important variable than EDUC.

To sum, our findings reveal that Model 3 is the most efficient combination of background variables to predict the writing and reading scores of the participants, and that LSE is the strongest out of the three variables in Model 3. In the end, three variables in Model 3 (i.e., education level, self-evaluation of reading and length of time studying English) predicted this particular nonacademic ESOL learners' 31.1% of writing scores and 38.3% of reading scores.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study are based on an analysis of a relatively large number of participants of nonacademic adult ESOL learners in the U.S. Our results showed that the model including length of time studying English (LSE), self-evaluation of reading (SR) and education level (EDUC) were the most statistically significant predictors of the population's reading and writing scores. Particularly, LSE was found to be the strongest predictor out of all the background variables measured in this study. This makes sense considering the fact that people are typically better with a target language when they have spent more time studying the target language. To be more specific, most of the participants were from EFL settings and about the half of the population were from Asia where the English instruction focus is on reading and grammar primarily through Grammar-Translation Method. Considering this, there seems to be a link between what the participants have learned in their previous experience with English education and their current literacy skills. In addition, Condelli (2002) also confirmed a strong correlation between the year of students' education in their home countries and their L2 reading abilities. The results in this paper corroborate and extend the findings of five studies (Hammadou, 2000; Rouet, Favart, Britt, & Perfetti, 1997; Tyler, 2001; Penfield, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1987) that examined students' prior content knowledge and the transfer of L1 literacy skills to L2 literacy. Similarly, Bell and Burnaby (1984) stated that "[g]enerally, students with literacy skills in their native language find it easy to transfer those skills to a second language" (p.3). Since most of the participants in the current study finished their schooling in non-English-speaking countries, our assumption that L1 transfer may have helped highly educated students who presumably had greater L1 literacy skills is likely valid.

Regarding the strong correlation between their actual reading scores and self-rating of reading, our finding coincides with Hellekjær's (2005) finding of a strong correlation ($r = .72$, $p < .01$) between the self-assessment of reading and the actual English reading proficiency. Such concurrent findings on the positive correlation between self-rated assessment and actual students' proficiency levels support reliability of the self-rated method as a tool for assessment. Considering this, there seems to be a good potential for self-rated assessment becoming a reliable and practical measure. Despite the reliability of self-assessment of reading, the poor correlation between self-assessment of writing and students' writing ability implies that there were other factors complicating the relationship. This difficulty to connect self-assessment and performance could have resulted from their anxiety towards L2 productive skills. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are the three types of performance anxieties that are often evaluated as sources of apprehension when learning a foreign language. In this sense, performance anxieties may

have caused the participants in the current study to underestimate themselves. On the other hand, the strong predictability of self-rating of reading on the writing scores could have arisen from the close relationship between reading and writing skills. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) agreed that "reading and writing are reciprocal activities; the outcome of a reading activity can serve as input for writing, and writing can lead a student to further reading resources" (p. 297), which indicates that a learner's ability to write is heavily dependent on and affected by their ability to read, and vice versa.

Two variables were surprisingly non-significant in this study: LEC (length of stay in English-speaking countries) and PIW (perception of the importance of writing). We expected both of these variables to have significant positive correlations with the participants' reading and writing scores. First, the lack of correlation with LEC variable may be connected to the fact that the participants were nonacademic ESOL learners: their focal attention was on improving speech rather than reading or writing abilities. Even in the case of the people who have stayed longer in English-speaking countries, they may not have had strong interest in learning reading or writing abilities. Additionally, their limited attentional capacity might already have been occupied with practicing these more highly valued speaking abilities. Moreover, the finding of the poor correlation between PIW and the participants' reading and writing scores emphasizes that mere positive attitude alone may not be strong enough to generate lead to performance. Similarly, Crawford Camiciottoli (2001), for instance, found that there was no correlation between Italian university students' positive attitudes towards L2 reading and their actual L2 reading habits. The largest group of participants had positive attitudes towards reading, but low frequency in L2 reading (41.8%).

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it has limited generalizability in that this experiment only looks at the population in one particular language learning setting: an ESOL program provided by one North American college. To avoid bias, we recommend future studies have random sampling from various nonacademic adult ESOL language classes (e.g., ESOL classes offered by refugee organizations and religious denominations). A second limitation stems from the intended use of placement tests, which are designed to assist educators in making decisions about where to place students in a language program according to their level of L2 knowledge or ability. Consequently, placement tests are not the best assessment tools to evaluate one's reading and writing proficiencies; instead, proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS should have been used. However, we made informed decisions to use the placement tests instead because of the feasibility of using the proficiency test. A majority of the students did not require proficiency tests and therefore did not possess any scores. Moreover, placement tests are norm-referenced. Even though the purpose of placement tests might not be the best fit for the purpose of our study, the test still measure student proficiency levels and examines how the performance of one student compares with that of others. Lastly, there might have been additional background variables that could have predicted more about the participants' reading and writing abilities (e.g., motivation). Future studies should further investigate different dimensions such as cognitive, affective, or social domains to find other background variables and test to see their predictions.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to an understanding of some of the background factors determining nonacademic ESOL learners' writing and reading abilities. We believe such findings have significant pedagogical

implications: by understanding learners in terms of the aforementioned variables potentially influential to L2 literacy, the teacher can approach curriculum design and teaching technique development from a perspective that better addresses the population's needs. For instance, the variables mentioned above can be used to modify test contents and instructional objectives as the variables may influence the efficiency of ESOL testing and classroom teaching. The preponderance of evidence presented in this paper suggests that the three background variables have a strong relationship to L2 literacy performance. Therefore, ignoring all these factors by defining language proficiency as a concept independent of background variables seems unwarranted. In order to further deepen our understanding of the predictors of nonacademic learners' L2 literacy abilities, more studies in various contexts (e.g., low native language literacy levels) with more varieties of variables are needed. Moreover, future studies may focus on investigating different groups of proficiency levels separately to see whether there is any difference between the predictor of background variables among the groups of different L2 literacy proficiencies.

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Unravelling the Lifelong Learning Process for Canadian Workers and Adult Learners Acquiring Higher Skills

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a mixed methods study that investigated aspects of formal, non-formal and informal learning for workers and adult high school learners seeking literacy and essential skills. Three key themes emerged from the qualitative data: motivations for participation in various forms of learning; seeking out informal learning activities and pedagogical practices in the teaching; and learning interactions of workers and adult learners. Findings from the quantitative analysis also seemed to indicate that workers and adult learners acquiring literacy and essential skills tend to possess both the resources and readiness to continue their lifelong learning in the less formal settings.

BACKGROUND

One of the nationwide issues drawn out in a recent report entitled "S*tate of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field*" describes how a widening skills gap and ongoing shifts in the labour market will have an impact on Canada's economy and social fabric (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012). Upskilling, removing barriers, and widening adult learning opportunities are all cast as parts of the solution in freeing up significant fiscal resources for government. In yet another call for lessening the skills gap, Miner (2012) looks at the need for redesigning Canada's post secondary system by creating a national adult education framework which includes various ways of recognizing all forms of adult learning and training. What these reports have in common is the underlying importance of lifelong learning for workers and other types of adult learners. However, as Taylor, Evans, and Pinsent-Johnson (2010) suggest, there is a large gap in wrestling down the nebulous areas of formal, non-formal, and informal learning for employees with low skills as well as for adult learners seeking entry into the labour market.

To help guide the dialogue on this topic, several researchers such as Hager (2011) have described these three different types of learning. *Formal learning* is any clearly identified learning activity that takes place in an organized, structured setting that leads to certification: for example, a learner who enrolls in an adult high school credit program to complete a biology course to graduate with a grade 12 certificate. *Non-formal learning* refers to learning that takes place alongside the mainstream system of education and training that does not typically lead to formalized certification. An example of this type of learning is a worker employed in a lumber company taking a 10 hour

on site workshop called "Improving Customer Service". The third type, *informal learning*, is referred to as experiential learning and results from daily life activities related to work, family and leisure. Examples of this type of learning may be the young worker who identifies a mentor on the shop floor to help him better troubleshoot electrical problems with a cooling machine, or the student who independently navigates through the Internet to find information on her employment goals as an early childhood care assistant.

One research area and adult population that has not been investigated in a systematic way is the relatedness of formal, non-formal, and informal learning for workers and adult learners seeking literacy and essential skills. Two research objectives guided the study:

(1) What are the common motivations and practices among workers and adult learners seeking literacy and essential skills in formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments?

(2) How prepared are workers and adult learners seeking literacy and essential skills in terms of their readiness to manage their own learning and their social support networks?

FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW

As Eaton (2012) implies, formal learning is the most studied of the different types of adult learning. However, she suggests that developing a better understanding of non-formal and informal learning is essential to recognizing learning that takes place outside of a formal setting. Although little empirical evidence exists on the topic of non-formal learning, some gains have been made in consolidating the literature on informal learning.

In an attempt to generate theoretical discussion, Sawchuk (2011) reviewed three leading models of informal learning related to work. Although each model views informal learning in a distinctive way, when taken together they provide an overview of informal learning dynamics and associations with more formal settings. The *social/conflict model* (Livingstone, 2001) emphasizes how learning opportunities may be unequally distributed depending on power relations; however the cognitive and emotive factors associated with informal learning are not explicitly addressed. The *situated/cognitive model*, on the other hand, brings to the foreground "information processing" and goal-directed problem-solving (Eraut, 2011) but does not make explicit connections between the situational and more global concerns and pressures that also characterize informal learning. The third model, referred to as the *learning in working life* model by Illeris (2011), proposes that informal learning is mediated by technical-organizational, social-cultural, and individual factors. This model also draws attention to the emotional features that shape the work-related learning process which is absent from other frameworks. Although, the models have been formulated based on data from employees with higher educational attainment only, they can provide insights into the nature of formal, non-formal, and informal learning among workers and other adult learners seeking higher skills.

Also related to lifelong learning for workers and adults with low skills is the growing body of research on the relationship among learning, human capital, and social capital (Field & Spence, 2000). Of particular interest to this study are the works of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) and their model of building social capital. As opposed to explaining the broad nature and impacts of social capital, the focus of this model "is on the micro

processes involved in the production of social capital. It suggests that social and human capital co-evolve" (Balatti & Falk, 2002, p. 284). The model consists of three key elements: knowledge resources such as networks, knowledge and skills (human capital); identity resources such as cognitive and affective attributes (social capital); and the learning that occurs between the knowledge and identity resources. As Balatti and Falk (2002) explain, learning occurs when social capital is built or, in other words, when the set of interactions calls on existing knowledge and identity resources adds to them. What may be important to unravel here is whether or not social capital can be viewed as an outcome or as a resource and whether it is an individual characteristic that varies at given times of work and schooling life. The implications of this on the learning process have yet to be determined. As much as there is a recent growing interest in exploring the relationship between social capital and adult learning, there is a dearth of adult literacy research and no empirical investigations with workers with low skills or other adult learners who are preparing for labour market entry.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Instrumentation

For this study, a mixed methods research design was used. This allowed for concurrent timing of the data collection with qualitative and quantitative strands being independent and given equal priority (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Qualitative data were obtained in semi-structured interviews with instructors and trainees/learners from different locations in three Canadian provinces. The interview schedule for instructors included 12 open-ended questions which were drawn from the international literature on formal, non-formal, and informal learning and 7 open ended questions on social capital. Similarly, interview schedules for trainees and learners consisted of 13 open-ended questions and probes that delved into motivations, benefits, supports, and types of activities in the different learning environments. All participants were given definitions of the key terms such as formal, non-formal, informal learning, and social capital at appropriate times during the interview. The two schedules were pilot tested with instructors and trainees in a non-credit custodial training program, and wording modifications were made based on participant feedback.

The quantitative data was collected through the administration of the self-scoring Social Capital Inventory (SCI) developed and piloted at the University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (Taylor, Trumpower & Pavic, 2012). This tool uses a five-point Likert-type scale and is comprised of 24 items which are divided into four 6-item subscales. The first subscale was called *Network Qualities* (NQ) and included sub-concepts of trust levels, efficacy, and diversity. The second sub-scale, referred to as *Network Structure* (NS), measured sub-concepts of network size and communication mode, while the third subscale was called *Network Transactions* (NTr) and focused on sub-concepts of sharing support and sharing knowledge. The final sub-scale integrated sub-concepts of bonding, bridging, and linking and was referred to as *Network Types* (NTy). Psychometric analysis of data obtained for the present study yielded Cronbach's alphas of .86, .82, .89, .88, and .96 for the NQ, NS, NTr, NTy subscales, and overall scale scores, respectively. Cronbach's alphas in the .8 – 1 range are generally considered to indicate adequate to excellent internal reliability (George & Mallory, 2003; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) was also employed. The SDLRS is a

self-administered questionnaire that uses a five-point Likert-type scale designed to measure "the complex attitudes, skills, and characteristics that comprise an individual's current level of readiness to manage his or her own learning" (Guglielmino & Associates, 2012, p. 1). Based on a review of published studies, Delahaye and Choy (2000) have concluded that the SDLRS provides a valid measure of its intended construct. For the purpose of this study, the SDLRS-S – *The Learning Preference Assessment*, a 58-item, self-scoring version was implemented so that the learners could view their results immediately upon completion. Biographical information, including age, gender, and marital status was also obtained as part of the questionnaire. In addition, workers and learners were asked to list any clubs or groups to which they belonged as an indication of their network structures that may occur within or outside of the workplace or school.

Site Locations and Participants

The data was collected in three Canadian site locations: Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. The Ontario site was an adult high school which provides credit and non-credit educational programs for adults returning to high school and seeking re-entry into the workforce. Information on formal, non-formal, and informal learning was gathered from adult learners in this location. The data collected in Manitoba and Nova Scotia was facilitated through Workplace Education Manitoba and the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia. They provided access to various workplace programs in their provinces. Information on non-formal and informal learning was gathered from both of these locations. A total of seven sites were used for data collection: one in Ontario, four in Manitoba and two in Nova Scotia.

The participants were employees of workplace programs providing learning opportunities to improve or upgrade their essential skills, adult learners enrolled in a job readiness program preparing for entry into the workforce, and adult learners enrolled in an academic program seeking further education opportunities. A total of 32 workers and 63 adult learners completed the SCI and SDLRS-S. Of this group, 39 participated in face-to face interviews. As well, 10 instructors from the various programs participated in semi-structured interviews to provide a more complete representation of the learners and learning process. Overall, 67% of the informants in this study were female, 42% were in the 18-25 year old age range, and 64% were single. Racial, language, and ethnicity data were not collected from the sample. Given that programs are designated in either official language of English and French, and since all participants were English speaking, the populations appeared homogenous.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the qualitative data sources related to the first research question, the constant comparative technique was used to identify patterns in the narratives developed from the interview transcripts (Merriam, 2002). To answer the second research question, quantitative data from the two instruments were used. The statistical software Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to provide various descriptive statistics as well as various analyses of potential relationships between the biographical data retrieved from the participants, including gender, age, and membership in clubs that could influence the overall scores on the SCI and/or SDLRS-S. As indicated earlier, these instruments measure network resources and readiness to learn

which are important qualities associated with the lifelong learning continuum, especially in the ill-defined area of informal leaning.

RESULTS

To help answer the first research question, "What are the common motivations and practices among workers and adult learners seeking literacy and essential skills in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments?" results from the qualitative data sources are presented for the three groups. These include workers who are upgrading in their current jobs, adult learners preparing for direct entry into the labour market, and adult learners seeking further education opportunities as a transition pathway to employability.

Motivations and benefits for participating in the continuum of adult learning

One way of understanding the motivations for participating in the different forms of adult learning is to view the spectrum of education and training activities on a continuum. This continuum has three main points: formal learning, which included credit courses and certification; non-formal courses and workshops for specific skill improvement; and informal learning, which included various types of experiential learning driven from work, family, and leisure interests. For the most part, worker motivations for non-formal learning were related to improving their work performance on the job or self-improvement, while adult learners were driven by the identification of short-term and long-term job and career goals. Learners seeking entry into the labour market opted for the shorter, non-formal programs while learners interested in the longer career objectives chose the more formal credit programs. Both workers and adult learners were also engaged in different types of informal learning activities.

Workers participating in the non-formal programs offered at the work site were very motivated to learn new skills to enhance performance in their current jobs or hold onto their jobs given the threat of unemployment. As one worker commented, "I took this course to better myself and to get the extra skills to stay employed." Another employee stated, "I wanted to better fit the position of Quality Inspector. I've been away from education so long that I needed a refresher on how to study and write reports." Some workers were also motivated to participate in the non-formal programs as a means for preparing to write the General Education Development (GED®). Even though no credits were offered for completing this short-term non-formal course, workers believed that the goal of eventual high school equivalency was an investment in their futures. As Marla explained, "Yes, obtaining my high school equivalency certificate was my motivation as well as a willingness to further my education." Betty captured the drive for self-improvement through the non-formal program succinctly when she said, "What benefitted me the most about this program was that I now have a better understanding of who I am as a person. I am figuring out that everyone here is different, they have different qualities and different ways of learning."

Adult learners in the formal programs offering credit courses for a grade 12 certificate were often motivated by a long-term employment goal. Susan described it this way: "I dropped out of high school because I had personal issues. When I turned 25, I realized I didn't want to be a waitress for the rest of my life, so I joined up at this school. I hope to get my high school diploma and then go to university to be a teacher." In addition, learners in the formal credit program were motivated to learn skills that

would be put to use once employment was found. For example, Curt went on to say, "I want to learn to establish work habits that are expected in any workplace; things like consistent attendance, punctuality, and basic problem solving skills." Adult learners participating in the non-formal job readiness programs were motivated to get off of social assistance and find work that would put them back into the mainstream. One learner who completed a 12-week custodial training program mentioned, "This has given me the chance to get back on my feet after having some health problems and the work placement really gave me confidence to apply for a job as a janitor."

Seeking out informal learning opportunities

Common practices to all three groups was their interest in seeking out informal learning opportunities as a result of participating in some kind of structured education and training activity beforehand. Workers and learners who were seeking immediate labour market entry had similar types of experiences with informal learning. Employees who had just completed a non-formal program often sought out internal workplace infrastructures as their venue for continued learning. Health and Safety committees and brown bag lunch meetings held with co-workers were often mentioned as activities where informal learning occurred. One worker stated that he liked the lunch meetings because he could "learn different things about other jobs as I am sometimes called to fill in lots of areas." A fellow worker, Kyle, from the same company said that safety meetings were a time to "ask advice from each other to come up with a better or quicker way of doing things." Alia revealed that, through the Social Committee at the company, she was learning about a new charity that the company was supporting. She now felt more comfortable using her speaking skills as she became more involved with the committee.

Adult learners who were enrolled in the non-formal programs sought out advice from co-workers or supervisors. These types of job readiness programs offered a work placement component much like an apprenticeship where trainees could learn a new skill through trial and error, such as measuring the exact amounts of chemicals needed for cleaning solutions. Using manuals to understand company policies was also a type of informal learning activity. As Jim pointed out, "There was this accident on the 3rd floor and I remembered that they kept the manual in the lunch room so I found the part on how to report the accident, wrote it up the best I could, and gave it to my supervisor to correct."

Looking things up on the Internet was cited as one of the main informal learning activities for the three different groups. Adult learners seeking further education towards employability consistently described this activity as the most commonly used outside of the classroom. They consulted books online to complete homework assignments, gathered information to fill out tax forms, and researched topics such as school/life balance, government news and politics. One employee who had just completed the non-formal workplace program described how he learned to use Excel on his own and can now make charts and templates. Another worker declared that she had learned how to use a new software program on forecasting revenues through sales from a co-worker. She also said that she first observed the skill from her manager and was intrigued to see if you could learn how to do it.

Pedagogical practices teaching workers and learners

Also related to the first research question about common practices was the area of the teaching and learning process. Instructors in the different formal and non-formal programs had similar teaching practices with both the workers and learners. Along with adhering to adult learning principles as the cornerstone of their teaching philosophy, instructors focused on active participation, sharing expertise with learners in the group and developing individual learning plans as tools for success during the course or workshop. There were also several common practices used by instructors, such as making sure there was time during the course to talk about their goals and their families as a way of getting people connected with each other. This often spilled over into peer assistance, especially when the instructor was busy attending to an individual student and his/her learning plan. These teaching strategies laid the foundational skills for the informal learning that happened outside of the classroom. As Samantha stated, "We always encourage the essential skill of continuous learning. The sky is the limit. We encourage the workers to have goals outside of this program."

Another instructor teaching in a non-formal program at the workplace often ran into employees who were former trainees. These workers told her that, because of the course, they had increased their communication skills which resulted in better job satisfaction. They felt more loyal to the company and now understood why lifelong learning was so important. This same instructor went on to say that one worker completed the essential skills program and was later led into an informal learning experience that changed his life: "One of our learners participated in a national numeracy workshop. This fellow travelled to Toronto for three days yet had never left the province in his life. It was an unbelievable experience that he will never forget."

Another instructor from the formal credit program mentioned that leadership was a topic that often came up in the English class. As Claire stated, "We would practice how to debate so that the students could see and model certain behaviours like active listening and how to ask questions, and in our high school we have a student council where I have seen some of our same students volunteer on the council as a way to learn these leadership skills." Another instructor in the work readiness program mentioned that her focus "was helping learners to establish routines and work habits that are expected at the workplace. After being in a group for a couple of weeks, you start to see an improved self-concept and they can start identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. Their worldview expands." A similar comment was made from another instructor teaching in a short job entry non-formal program. Maria described it this way: "After the morning when Angie presented the social capital workshop the entire group wanted to talk about all of their contacts for employment. What was interesting is a couple of my ESL trainees who are often shy to speak in the group came forward to ask how they could learn to better network as they never did this in their mother country."

In interviewing the workers, learners, and instructors about their interactions in both the formal and non-formal programs, a common pattern that emerged was the transferability of skills to their informal learning experiences. Adult learners who worked independently in the credit course with minimal instruction believed that they developed a sense of self-directedness in learning outside of the classroom. These learners

had no difficulty forming learning objectives and identifying the resources to match their objectives. One instructor who brought in community representatives to speak to her groups remarked, "Some of the students began networking outside of the class early in the program and others began networking towards the end." Another worker also explained that "having an instructor teaching was important for the specific details, but working independently was my preferred way because I can now do it on my own away from work."

Readiness to manage self-learning and social support networks

To help answer the second research question, "How prepared are workers and adult learners seeking literacy and essential skills in terms of their readiness to manage their own learning and their social support networks?" results from the quantitative data sources are presented here. The quantitative data was analyzed as follows. First, each participant's overall and subscale scores on the SCI and overall score on the SDLRS-S were calculated. Next, the distributions of scores on the SCI and on the SDLRS-S were determined. Finally, potential differences in scores on both the SCI and SDLRS-S were examined by gender, age, marital status, club membership (those who reported belonging to at least one club or group versus those who did not report belonging to any), and the two different groups of workers and adult learners.

Overall, the mean score on the SDLRS-S was 219.66 (*SD*=26.50). According to norms provided by Guglielmino & Associates (2012), a majority of learners' scores (77%) indicated average to above average self-directed learning readiness. For the SCI, the total scale score was determined by summing responses to each of the 24 items for a potential range of 24-120. Subscale scores were likewise determined by summing the responses for the six subscale items for a potential range of 6-30 each. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social capital. Overall, subscale scores were roughly normally distributed with very few individuals scoring below 18 on any of the subscales, indicating moderate to strong agreement with most items on the scales. Thus, participants tended to agree that they had access to supportive social networks and services (NS); that there is trust, respect, and openness within their social networks (NQ); that there is reciprocal sharing within these networks (NTr); and that they have the confidence and ability to make links with individuals/services that have different perspectives than their own (NTy) (see Table 1 for means and interquartile ranges of total scale and subscale scores on the SCI[1]). Given the distribution of total scale scores on the SCI, cut-off values of 89.5 and 99.5 were used to divide participants into three roughly equal-sized groups, which were labelled as: below average (24-

[1]This decision to convert the continuous SCI score into a trichotomous categorical variable was based on the rationale that the developers of the SCI intended for it to be used for profiling individuals as having below average, average, and above average social capital, rather than providing them with a specific numerical score that they may have difficulty interpreting. DeCoster, Iselin, and Gallucci (2009) have concluded that such discretizing procedures are justified under such conditions.

[2]The average for the SCI is provided in Table 1 (M=94.49). Although the ranges may at first appear quite disparate, it should be noted that there were no scores from 24-60, and only one individual obtained a score of 61, 67, 68, 70, 72, and 74. Thus, a large majority of individuals classified as "below average" were actually within a much narrower range from 76-89. Likewise, there were no individuals who scored 119 or 120, and only one individual scored 117 and 118; therefore, a large majority of those classified as "above average" were within the range of 100-114. So, the effective ranges are all approximately 10 to 14 points wide. Eliminating the extreme high and low scorers from the above average and below average groups, respectively, does not alter the pattern of findings, although the smaller sample size does result in less statistical power. In order to maintain approximately equal sample sizes (rather than identical ranges) and obtain more power, we chose to include these more extreme scores in the analysis. It should also be noted that all of these extreme scores were less than 3 standard deviations from the overall mean, so would not be considered true outliers, further justifying their inclusion in the analyses.

Table 1—*Means (Standard Deviations), Interquartile Ranges[a], and Cronbach's Alphas of Total Scale and Subscales of the Social Capital Inventory*

Scale	Mean	Interquartile Range	Cronbach's Alpha
NQ	24.29 (3.32)	23.61–24.98	.86
NS	23.24 (3.26)	22.56–23.91	.82
NTr	23.42 (3.83)	22.63–24.21	.89
NTy	23.44 (3.28)	22.77–24.21	.88
Total	94.49 (12.04)	92.02–96.97	.96

[a] The interquartile range indicates the values between which 50% of all respondents scored.

89), average (90-99), and above average (100-120) social capital[2].

Chi-square analyses revealed that social capital varied systematically with some of the biographical variables. In particular, a marginally disproportionately higher percentage of females than males had average or above average scores on the SCI, χ^2 (1) = 2.80, p = .094. More specifically, this gender difference was more pronounced for learners who reported not belonging to any clubs, χ^2 (1) = 4.26, p = .039. No gender difference was found for learners who reported belonging to one or more clubs, χ^2 (1) = 0.02, p = .896 (see Table 2). Scores on the SCI were not found to be statistically significantly related to age, marital status, or worker and adult learner group (p's > .10). In addition, scores on the SDLRS-S were not found to be statistically significantly related to any of the biographical variables (p's > .10).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Applying andragogy across learning domains

Results from this study seem to indicate that a driving force for engagement in any one of these three types of learning are the goals and purposes of the specific education and training activity, whether it was for organizational, individual or societal growth. Drawing from the andragogy in practice model espoused by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) may shed some light on understanding the commonalties and motivations around the three types of learning and other complicated questions

Table 2—*Social Capital by Sex and Participation in Clubs[a]*

		Social Capital		
Clubs	Sex	Below Average	Average	Above Average
None	Female	9	14	19
	Male	12	6	7
One or More	Female	7	7	6
	Male	2	2	2

[a] Values in table represent frequencies.

related to the new lifelong learning discourses. According to the authors, this practice model has "offered an enhanced conceptual framework to more systematically apply andragogy across multiple domains of adult learning practice" (p.146). In a nutshell, there are three dimensions to the model: goals and purposes for learning, individual and situational differences, and the core adult learning principles. These three aspects of the model interact to offer a three-dimensional process for understanding adult learning situations. We also see that there are differences between workers and learners that impact the type of learning and act as filters that shape the event. These differences were related to the subject matter that was chosen for the job related learning, the real life situational circumstances such as multiple roles of family and work, and individual characteristics like autonomy.

The core adult learning principles—especially motivation to learn, the orientation to learning, and the readiness to learn—were all prevalent in both workers and learners of the study. Evidence from this investigation seems to suggest that the andragogy practice model could be useful in understanding formal, non-formal, and informal learning as it recognizes the lack of homogeneity among learners and learning situations and illustrates the learning transaction as a multifaceted activity. The framework could be viewed as a contextual analysis step in developing adult programs or individual trainee plans.

The dynamics of lifelong learning models

Returning to the literature on work-related informal learning cited earlier, it was noted that much of the data used to develop these models was drawn from employees with higher educational attainment only. Based on the findings from this study some additional insights can now be made on the situated/cognitive model developed by Eraut (2011) that relates to adults with low skills. In his typology of early career learning taken from studies with nurses, engineers, and chartered accountants, he identifies work processes with learning as a by-product (p.187). What we find in this study are similar types of work processes reported not only by the employees but also by the adult learners. For example, when describing their experiences with informal learning, both groups reported the importance of participation in group processes, working alongside others, consultation, tackling challenging tasks and roles, trying things out, and consolidating and extending skills. Therefore, it would appear that, for both adults with higher and lower educational attainment, most of the informal learning reported occurred as a by-product of the normal working processes. This further reinforces the idea that for adult learners still in a training situation, the structure of that situation has much to offer as a practical work environment for the development of lifelong learning skills.

Another interesting finding from this study on the nature of non-formal and informal learning was that the current role and tasks of the worker and learner had much to do with the engagement of the activity. For example, workers who were interested in improving the conditions of the workplace sometimes volunteered on a Health and Safety committee, or learners returning to school for second career training did so as role models for their family members. This seems to support the earlier work of Taylor (2006) who studied the literacy practices of adults with low literacy skills in the home, community, and workplace environment. In this ethnographic study, he found that the life roles of these adults, such as parent, volunteer, and worker were the driving forces behind the learning, much of which took place

outside of the formal literacy programs.

Viewing the three types of learning on a continuum at a policy level also seems to be receiving support from various Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. In describing the learning contexts, Werquin (2010) points out that non-formal learning can be viewed as the connector between formal and informal learning on the continuum of learning. He goes on to say that defining learning on a continuum is "meant to enable policy makers, researchers and practitioners to speak the same language in their international activities" (p.24). Using the same kind of language with all participants in this study did help to sort out some of the distinguishing elements among these different learning activities. It also helped the participants identify the range of possible connections among these three forms of learning. This seems to corroborate the previous findings by Taylor and Evans (2009) who found it is useful to view notions of informal and formal learning on a wide continuum when they explored the training paths of basic level employees. They found that participation in a formal workplace education program acted as the catalyst for the subsequent informal learning that took place back on the job. Together these findings support the work of Colley, Hodkinson, and Malcom (2003) who remind us that formal and informal learning are far from being discrete categories: "It is more accurate to conceive formality and informality as attributes present in all circumstances of learning" (p.i).

Is there an interplay between human and social capital and types of learning?

There seems to be some evidence from the qualitative data sources to support the idea that human and social capital co-evolves as suggested by Balatti and Falk (2002). This appears to be apparent for both workers and adult learners that were enrolled in the formal and non-formal programs. As the job related knowledge, competencies, and essential skills were acquired by the participants there was also various types of social capital that was realized at the same time. This type of social capital was marked by the awareness and existence of networks and the levels of trust in the work and classroom clusters, which helped to promote collective action among members of that particular social grouping. For example, in the custodial training non-formal program which offered a social capital workshop, both trainees and instructors strongly advocated for this type of activity to be integrated into the regular curriculum. This type of approach also builds on the work of Balatti, Black, and Falk (2007) that used the interactions between networks within and outside literacy classrooms to foster social capital outcomes.

Preparedness for lifelong learning

The quantitative results of this study indicate that workers and adult learners acquiring literacy and essential skills, in general, possess both a readiness to continue learning in a self-directed fashion in the less formal settings and the social capital to help make this happen. Participants in the study had scores on a standardized measure of self-directed learning readiness that were predominantly in the average to above average range. Although norms for the SCI are not yet available as this instrument was newly developed as part of the present study, participant scores appeared to indicate a generally high level of social capital as well. Thus, the quantitative results support and extend some of the qualitative findings: not only are workers and adult learners interested

in continuing their lifelong learning in informal settings, but many appear to have the readiness and resources with which to do so successfully.

Given the design of this study, it is not clear if workers and adult learners already possessed self-directed learning readiness and social capital *before* enrolling in their current workplace, job readiness, and academic programs or if they acquired the skills and social resources that have prepared them for informal, self-directed learning *during* these programs. It is possible that participants enroll in these types of programs precisely because they were already self-directed and prepared to learn. Alternatively, they may not have been quite ready to undertake new learning on their own, so they enrolled in a more structured program in which they could acquire the necessary skills and resources to later apply in the informal learning settings. Based on the qualitative findings, we believe it is, at least partially, the latter. For example, instructors reported instances in which learners acquired study skills, gained proficiency in using the Internet, and made connections with other learners that could benefit them in future learning in informal settings.

Although the overall outlook for workers and adult learners towards lifelong learning is positive, males with no participation in clubs and groups appear to be more at risk for having lower social capital. Females who lack participation in clubs and groups do not appear to be at such risk. Several explanations for this finding are possible. It may be that males do not form bonds with family, friends, and co-workers to the extent that females do if they are not involved in formal clubs or groups. Alternatively, it may be that males have the connections to family, friends, and co-workers but simply do not recognize the support that these relationships can provide. In either case, males in particular may benefit from specific training to point out the nature and utility of social capital.

Limitations and areas for further research

Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the nebulous area of lifelong learning, there are several limitations to the study. Although incentives were provided for various workplace education programs in other provincial locations to participate in the investigation, the range of work sites and types of employees was limited. An interesting extension of this work would be to conduct case study research involving small, medium, and large companies across several industrial sectors with a focus on employees seeking to acquire higher skills training. This may shed some light on worker preferences for types of learning formats and venues specific to occupations.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of empirical evidence in using the Social Capital Inventory (SCI) with other marginalized adult populations seeking further education and training. Further research questions using the SCI could include: Does the amount and type of social capital acquired as a result of a program influence the search for further informal learning activities? Do adults with high levels of social capital seek out learning activities outside of the education and training systems? Is there an association among social capital and participation rates in formal, non-formal, and informal learning? Also related to sampling limitations was the participation of learners in one adult high school located in a particular economic region of Canada. It may well be that the results provided through the adult learner data from this location are atypical from other regions where the service, government, and tourism sectors are not as dominant.

Additional research needs to be done with different community colleges and community–based literacy and essential programs trying to understand whether such programs designed for employability also provide learners with a propensity for civic engagement. What is hopeful about this study is that some initial uncovering has been done around the relatedness of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. These findings could jump start some conversations among literacy and essential skills professionals which may lead us in some new directions for understanding, recognizing, and reinforcing lifelong learning for adults.

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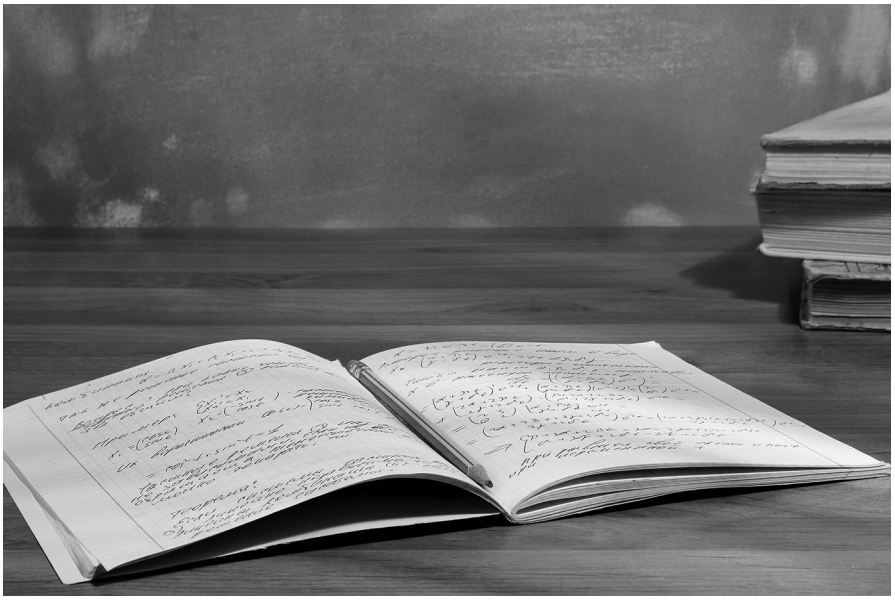
PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

Attrition Happens: Towards an Acknowledgement and Accommodation Perspective of Adult Literacy Student Dropout



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ABSTRACT

The rate of student departure from adult literacy programs is as high as 80% within the first 12 months (Porter, Cuban, & Comings, 2005). An examination of the literature reveals two perspectives concerning learner persistence: a *control perspective* and an *acknowledgement and accommodation perspective*. The control perspective emphasizes the role of programmatic barriers and learners' dispositional attitudes as influences on learner persistence and seeks to remediate the 'problem' of low learner persistence. The acknowledgement and accommodation perspective views low learner persistence as the result of a complex web of factors that includes the lived experiences of individuals in cultural and community contexts, negative systemic social forces such as gender inequality and poverty, and values/goals disjunctures between students and programs.

INTRODUCTION

The rate of student departure from adult literacy programs is as high as 80% within the first 12 months (Porter, Cuban, & Comings, 2005). In seeking to understand this phenomenon,

researchers have focused variously on *attrition*, or the rate at which students leave programs, *retention*, or the rate at which students stay in programs/programs are able to keep students enrolled, and, more recently, *persistence*, or the ways students continue in one or more adult literacy programs or complete their goals. This paper presents a review of the literature on persistence and examines a shift in researchers' approaches to understanding and preventing low student persistence.

The Importance of Persistence

In an analysis of Massachusetts adult literacy students' hours of participation and test score achievement gains, Comings, Sum, Uvin, and Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (2000) showed that about 2/3 of students who attended 100 hours of instruction achieved a one grade level improvement, suggesting that more hours of instruction equaled greater achievement. Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999) suggested that most adult literacy learners come to programs with goals that may take hundreds or even thousands of hours to achieve. Nationally, most adult literacy students will participate for only about 70 hours in a year (Porter, et al., 2005). Therefore, increasing student persistence would seem to be of the utmost importance in helping students meet their learning goals.

However, two studies disputed the connection between persistence and academic achievement. Fitzgerald and Young's (1997) statistical analysis of the persistence and learning gains of a national sample of 614 adult literacy students concluded that persistence of the students in their sample had no impact on their level of achievement. Although the authors conceded that a problem of statistical power may have had an impact on their finding, they contended that analysis of sufficiently larger samples (from the same study, with acknowledged measurement errors) had never produced a statistically significant or even substantial effect of persistence. Surprisingly, the final report of a five-year learner persistence study led by Comings, an ardent advocate of the importance of persistence, drew the same conclusion as Fitzgerald and Young (Porter et al., 2005). After following two cohorts of students enrolled in one of nine library-based literacy programs for the years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, the authors found no correlation between greater persistence and greater measured achievement. However, this finding may be explained by the generally low number of hours of participation in the program: students attended for an average of 58 hours, but more than half of the students exited after 28 hours or less. These averages are both substantially below the 100 hours demonstrated (Comings et al., 2000) to lead to measurable learning goals. Another possible explanation for the lack of connection between these students' persistence and achievement is the insensitivity of the programs' testing instruments and their inability to measure more incremental gains in literacy.

Of additional import is the reality that state and federal governments hold adult literacy programs accountable for the persistence of their students. Beliefs about student persistence shape program design and classroom interaction, inform policy discussions about accountability, and influence funding decisions governing adult education programs. The combination of policy imperatives, poor persistence rates, and the potential impact on learning gains continue to make learner persistence an important focus of adult literacy research.

Prins and Schafft (2009) argued that most scholarship on adult learner persistence focuses on factors described as institutional (related to the program) or dispositional (related to learners' attitudes and beliefs), as these dimensions of

student persistence are considered more amenable to program influence than the life circumstances of learners. I refer to this approach to the improvement of learner persistence as the *control perspective*. Interventions to address low student persistence reported in the literature from this perspective included programmatic changes (e.g. Kefallinou, 2009; Patterson & Mellard, 2007; Porter et al., 2005) and constructing psychological profiles of learner attitudes in order to predict dropout (Beder, 1991; Beder et al., 2006; Quigley, 1997; Ziegler, Bain, Bell, McCallum, & Brian, 2006) and determine appropriate support services (Beder, 1991; Quigley, 1997; Quigley, 2000). Most of these interventions met with limited success.

However, in the 1990s and 2000s another discussion emerged in the literature that shifted the focus away from institutional and dispositional factors and began to emphasize two important aspects of attrition: 1) learners' beliefs about and experiences of persistence (Belzer, 1998; Prins & Schafft, 2009; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Wikelund, Reder & Hart-Landsberg, 1992) and 2) social forces affecting student persistence (e.g., Cuban, 2003; Horsman, 2006; Schafft & Prins, 2009). These later studies discussed the impact of culture, identity, gender roles, violence, and poverty on student attendance and suggested that neither programmatic improvements nor changes in individual dispositions may be sufficient to alter students' patterns of persistence. I refer to this trend in the literature as the *acknowledgement and accommodation perspective*.

METHODOLOGY

Potential sources for this literature review were identified by entering the search terms "adult literacy" and "persistence" in the EBSCO search engine, with Academic Premier and ERIC selected as databases. Sources from the results were considered eligible for inclusion if they focused on adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), or literacy level adult students' attendance in an adult education program and were published in 1990 or later. Two sources published before 1990, Cross (1981) and Darkenwald (1981), were included, as they were considered foundational to the scholarship on adult learner persistence. Qualitative and quantitative studies were both considered eligible for inclusion. Sources were excluded from the literature review if they focused on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students; were redundant reports of multi-part studies; were conducted in non-comparable international contexts, such as developing nations; or were purely descriptive in nature. Additional sources were gathered by examining the reference list of articles selected for inclusion.

Methodological Considerations

Many of the studies included in this review suffered from similar weaknesses: an insufficient theoretical base; an incomplete description of data, methods, or analysis; or a lack of peer review. "Gold standard" research—that is, the randomized trial, published in a peer-reviewed journal—is almost non-existent in the field of adult literacy. A literature review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials examining adult literacy and/or numeracy interventions published between 1980 and 2002 found only nine such trials (Torgerson, Porthouse & Brooks, 2003). One reason for this deficiency is the acknowledged difficulty of collecting quantitative data in this educational context (Bathmaker, 2007; Fitzgerald & Young, 1997; Porter et al., 2005; Young, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1994). Given the enormous attrition rates, it is often difficult to follow students longitudinally or to post-test students, a common outcome measure

for interventions. For example, in Fitzgerald and Young's (1997) statistical analysis of persistence and achievement in 44 programs in 20 states, the original sample consisted of more than 22,000 potential participants. Lack of available post-tests reduced this number to 2,300; validity concerns due to lack of data and measurement error then whittled this number down to 614.

Additionally, many of the qualitative articles published in the primary journals of the field are practitioner-oriented descriptions that lack the rigor and specificity expected by an academic audience. Therefore, much of the substantial research produced in the field and included in this review was published by research centers such as the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), the Manpower Demonstration Resource Center (MDRC), and the New England Literacy & Resource Council (NELRC). While these organizations play an extremely important role in creating interventions, extending theory, and disseminating much of the contemporary learning in the field, they also have their limitations. Specifically, reports they issue are not subject to the same scrutiny as studies published in a peer-reviewed journal. However, as the field continues to develop, more rigorous qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed studies are emerging. Later studies included in this review frequently incorporated significantly more theory, more information about data and analysis, and generally conformed to academic standards more consistently.

Lastly, although many studies of persistence included students of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the sample population, this review focused on studies where ABE, GED, and adult literacy students were studied separately from ESOL students, as these populations have distinct histories, needs, and persistence patterns (Young et al., 1994). One exception, Skilton-Sylvester's (2002) case study of persistence for Cambodian women in ESOL classes, is included because its analysis of the influence of contexts and identities on persistence is particularly relevant to the discussion of the acknowledgement and accommodation perspective.

DISCUSSION

Definitions of Persistence

How researchers conceptualize student participation in adult literacy programs has changed over time. Early research into adult learners' attendance focused on separating students into participants and non-participants (Cross, 1981). Participants were assumed to be "motivated" and non-participants were assumed to be "unmotivated" (Beder, 1991). Over time, researchers began to differentiate among those students who participated in programs by examining the length of time students remained in a given program. Those who stayed in a program until they completed their goals "persisted;" those who left a program before meeting their goals were classified as dropouts (Comings et al., 1999; Darkenwald, 1981). However, Belzer (1998) suggested that many students who stopped coming to school eventually returned to the program (or enrolled in a different one) or continued self-directed study at home. Importantly, she contended that the students did not think of themselves as dropouts. She proposed that "stopping out" might better describe these students' pattern of participation. Incorporating this concept, Comings et al. (1999) offered another definition of persistence, later used by many researchers: "Adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow" (p. 3).

However, even Comings admitted that this definition may make it difficult to measure persistence. How does one reliably calculate hours of self-directed study? How does one establish parameters for leaving and returning? As a result, many programs and studies have focused on the length of time a student remains in a given program and whether or not students achieve their goals before they leave (Prins & Schafft, 2009; Schafft & Prins, 2009). Comings et al. (2003) and Porter et al. (2005) later revised their definition of persistence to accommodate five "pathways" to persistence: the short-term pathway, in which students participate intensively for a short period of time and complete a specific learning goal; the tryout pathway, where students participate for a short period of time, but do not meet learning goals; the intermittent pathway, in which students move in and out of a program over months or years; the long-term pathway, wherein the student attends regularly for an extended amount of time; and the mandatory pathway, in which students are required to participate by an outside force, such as welfare or probation.

Gopalakrishnan (2008), however, took issue with Belzer's (1998) and Comings et al.'s (1999) definitions of persistence, demonstrating that in Connecticut, for the fiscal year 2003–2004, 65% of GED students who left a program did not return to that or any other program in the state within three years. He suggested reforming the definition of persistence to include a longitudinal component that accounts for continued attendance, or the lack thereof. Although the study did not include ABE students who traditionally need much more time to achieve their goals, and who may or may not "stop out" and reengage more than GED students, Gopalakrishnan's point is extremely important: there is little documentation of the long-term patterns of participation among adult literacy students, and more work should be done in this area. Both Comings et al. (1999) and Gopalakrishnan (2008) suggested that programs be held accountable for the patterns of their students' persistence; their belief that programs can control the attrition of their students, if only they try hard enough, is an indication of their investment in the control perspective.

The Control Perspective

The control perspective attempts to remedy low learner persistence by addressing specific factors that programs and practitioners can have a direct influence on, namely those factors which Cross (1981) termed institutional and dispositional barriers. Institutional barriers include any aspect of program structure that might inhibit a student from coming to class, such as timing of classes, size of classes, type and intensity of orientation procedures or support services offered, or type and quality of teachers or classes. Dispositional barriers are internal, often psychological factors that can limit persistence, including beliefs and attitudes about one's own capacity for learning. Several previous literature reviews on adult literacy student persistence have addressed mostly these types of interventions (Beder, 1991; Darkenwald, 1981; Tracy-Mumford, 1994).

Institutional barriers. Darkenwald's (1981) review of existing adult persistence literature perfectly exemplifies the mentality of the control perspective. Darkenwald began the review by lamenting the lack of practical advice on how "adult educators can design and implement superior programs so that retention can be relegated to a minor concern" (p. 1). He concluded his review with an equally optimistic premise: "It is tempting to conclude with the injunction: 'Assess needs accurately and deliver a good program, and retention will take care of itself.' It is almost, but not quite, as simple–and as complicated–as that"

(p. 17). Within the quote is the implicit suggestion of an elusive program design that would meet learners' educational needs and eliminate the issue of learner attrition. Darkenwald reviewed literature concerning psychological, external situational, program context, and teaching-learning factors that affect attrition, and concluded that learner dissatisfaction with teachers, courses, and programs—all controllable elements—may be the best predictors of why students leave programs.

Tracy-Mumford's (1994) review acknowledged that, at times, leaving a program is an informed decision by students and therefore a desirable outcome. She further acknowledged the importance of situational barriers to learner persistence but concluded that "a significant proportion [of dropouts] can be prevented *even when the precipitating conditions extend beyond the learning environment to personal problems*" (p. 1, emphasis original). Overall, her review emphasized the importance of programs providing effective support, quality instruction, and suitable program structure and policies in order to minimize student attrition.

However, moderating institutional factors seems to have had little impact on improving persistence. In one of the largest-scale interventions reported in the literature, Porter et al.'s (2005) MDRC/NCSALL report of a four-year attempt to improve student persistence in literacy programs housed in nine public libraries across the country documented the failure of programmatic changes to improve student persistence. Changes in the study focused on improving instruction and expanding program accessibility. Even with interventions targeted directly towards perceived student needs, the study found that program exit rates ranged from 44 to 84 percent at 6 months after entry. The authors concluded that "personal and environmental factors" such as housing instability, lack of childcare or transportation, and lack of self-efficacy (p. 27), were most responsible for student departure from programs. Because programmatic changes did not affect these factors, student persistence rates were not improved. Despite the large rates of student departure, the authors remained optimistic that, "although such 'programmatic' strategies do not help students overcome their personal difficulties, they do help students persist despite their difficulties" (p. 31). A limitation of this report is that the causes of variation in departure rates from program to program were not explained, but the authors suggested it may have been due to environmental factors such as population served or variations in programming.

Other studies also examined the impact of program structure. Patterson and Mellard (2007) analyzed data from 31 Kansas adult literacy programs using correlational techniques, principal component analysis, and regression modeling in an attempt to statistically predict program characteristics that improved adult literacy learner outcomes. They found that characteristics predicting improved outcomes differed from year to year and were, therefore, difficult to utilize. They proposed that program characteristics might be better imagined as a system, rather than as individual factors. Gopalakrishnan (2008) proposed that the structure of GED programs, with its focus on a single long-term goal and inability to provide feedback about incremental progress, was responsible for low persistence rates in adult education programs in Connecticut. In his comparison of persistence and completion rates for Connecticut Adult High School Credit Diploma programs (AHSCD), GED programs, and National External Diploma Programs (NEDP–an individualized portfolio assessment program geared towards older adults), he found

that the graduation rates for both AHSCD (27%) and NEDP (42%) programs were substantially higher than GED programs (17%). Furthermore, for students who did not graduate, much higher percentages of students returned to study in AHSCD (63%) and NEDP (67%) programs than in GED programs (35%). Gopalakrishnan (2008) recommended emphasizing program structures other than GED in order to maximize student retention and success. However, while intensive programs like AHSCD and NEDP may better serve some portions of the population, many working adults and adults with small children do not have time to participate in such intensive programs. Furthermore, those at very low reading levels may not qualify for such programs. Although the study controlled for age, gender, and ethnicity among participants in the GED programs and the other programs under study, many other factors influence student success rates and ability or desire to participate in a program. These differences and their potential impact on persistence cast doubt on his recommendations.

Dispositional barriers. Other control perspective studies have focused on locating the source of low learner persistence within the dispositional attitudes of the learner. Identifying dispositional barriers is thought to help programs create and time programmatic interventions in order to minimize the impact of potential barriers. Motivation, engagement, field dependence, negative school attitudes, goal-orientation, and beliefs about self-efficacy have all been described in the literature as possible dispositional barriers to learner persistence.

Several reviews (Beder, 1991; Comings, 1999; Darkenwald, 1981) have described the literature on adult learner motivation; a limitation of all of these models is that they drew from a sample of adult learners outside of an adult literacy context, and thus their findings may not be generalizable. However, Beder (1991) compared analysis of adult literacy learners with the general adult research on motivation and concluded that the two populations do not differ substantially in the kinds of motivation they demonstrate. As with the researchers who advocated addressing institutional barriers, Beder (1991) acknowledged the impact of situational barriers on learner persistence, but professed that, with the correct disposition, they could be overcome: "When motivation is strong, adults can be expected to overcome the barriers to participation that life imposes" (p. 39). Comings et al.'s (1999) NCSALL report identified having goals as a specific source of learner motivation that yields persistence. In their interviews of 150 adult learners from 19 Pre-GED classes situated in 15 programs across five states, 57.3% of respondents mentioned having a goal as an important support to persistence. The authors therefore recommended that the first support to persistence be the student's establishment of a goal. Meader (2000) conducted a quasi-experimental practitioner investigation and described that students who persisted in her math class cited the addition of goal setting and goal revisiting as influential in their decision to remain in the class.

In a related study designed to evaluate external incentives rather than intrinsic motivation, Brooks et al. (2008) used a cluster-randomized controlled trial to evaluate attendance in 29 adult literacy classes in England. Learners were randomized by class into a control group and an "incentive-to-attend" group (p.497). The learners in the incentive class could receive up to £70 and the control group could receive £20. (All learners received monetary incentive to attend classes where pre- and post-tests were administered.) The study found that learner attendance in the incentive-to-attend group actually decreased. The authors concluded

that the money deprived learning of its intrinsic value, and students were thus less motivated to participate. Although this was the only randomized controlled trial included in this literature review, the study still had a limited description of data analysis, specifically whether individual learner characteristics other than race, sex, and age (such as entering educational level, difficulty level of class, socio-economic status, or number of dependents) were controlled for during analysis.

Quigley's (1997) influential ideas about dispositional factors included two notable topics: past school experiences and early identification and support of students "at-risk" of dropping out. Quigley proposed that teachers and students arrive at adult literacy programs with vastly different experiences of school and suggested learners' prior negative experiences with school diminished student retention. However, Comings et al.'s (1999) structured interviews with 150 adult literacy persisters and non-persisters about forces of support and obstacles to persistence concluded that past positive and negative experiences with school were equally distributed across both groups.

Quigley's (1997) "at-risk" theory has also been highly influential. Quigley suggested that identification and support of at-risk students in the first three weeks of class could boost student persistence. He described a three-tiered model of identification used by one program: first, an intensive orientation for students; second, an evaluation of individual students by experienced counselors; and third, referrals and second evaluations for those identified as potentially at-risk. He recommended offering intensive support services and extra attention to those students classified as at-risk, although the nature of these services and attention were not described in detail. In a quasi-experiment conducted at his own site, at-risk students were also administered the Witkins' Embedded Field Test and were found to be highly field-dependent (needing peer approval), with the male mean in the students (103.3) substantially higher than the norm male mean established by the Witkins test (45.5, SD = 28.5). A similar disparity was found among the female students (student female mean = 142.3, Witkins' norm = 66.9, SD=33.6) (Quigley 2000). In an additional component of the experiment, 20 students who were identified as being at-risk were randomly assigned to four different learning environments: individual tutoring, small group learning, regular class size (~15 students) with a counselor, and regular class size without a counselor. Small group learning was described as more successful than other environments for at-risk, highly field-dependent learners.

Attempts to reproduce parts of Quigley's model have been described as successful, though documentation is primarily anecdotal. Nash and Kallenbach's (2008) report from the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) suggested that program improvements could make a substantial difference in learner persistence. This action research study implemented by 18 programs across 5 states focused on improving intake and orientation procedures, instruction, counseling and peer support, and reengagement of learners who had left the program. All efforts were described as successful with the exception of the attempt to re-engage learners and foster self-guided study outside of the program, echoing Gopalakrishnan's (2008) previously stated concerns with a definition of persistence that assumes learner re-engagement or self-directed study. Kefallinou's (2009) report on her agency's participation in the NELRC project describes impressive successes perceived by the staff, specifically in learner gains, retention, and staff and student attitudes.

Ziegler et al. (2006) developed the Adult Education Persistence Scale to assess dispositional

factors surrounding school beliefs, self-efficacy, and resilience, as well as the tendency to attribute failure to external forces. Their purpose was to determine if the presence of any of these factors might predict student persistence. They administered the validated instrument to 245 women involved in welfare-sponsored, voluntary family literacy programs across Tennessee. Predictor variables were analyzed using a stepwise multiple regression analysis, and the only significant predictors of persistence found were age and the overall instrument score. Their results support Patterson and Mallard's (2007) suggestion about the need to imagine factors that determine success as systems, not independent characteristics, and expose the limits of the control perspectives' emphasis on individual dispositional barriers.

Although many researchers who subscribe to the control perspective admit the significance of situational barriers (e.g. Beder, 1991; Comings et al., 1999; Comings et al., 2003; Cross, 1981; Porter et al., 2005; Quigley, 1997), the belief that nothing can be done about contextual variables in learners' lives has directed energy and effort towards factors that can be controlled (Prins & Schafft, 2009). However, despite many years of research, numerous attempts to address persistence using a control perspective approach have demonstrated an inconsistent ability to reduce attrition rates or predict persistence patterns. One possible conclusion is that some situational barriers are substantially more influential than institutional or dispositional barriers, enough so that removal of even the most significant of institutional and dispositional barriers is not sufficient to permit interested learners to attend classes. Another possible conclusion is that what programs and policymakers perceive to be insufficient attendance is based on a value system not in accord with the lives, values, and contexts of students. Researchers within the acknowledgement and accommodation perspective articulate similar conclusions.

The Acknowledgment and Accommodation Perspective

The acknowledgement and accommodation perspective shifts the discussion away from a focus on programs' perspectives and abilities to "solve" the "problem" of low adult learner persistence and moves the conversation toward a deeper understanding of learners and barriers as situated in social contexts. The acknowledgement and accommodation perspective focuses not just on learners' perceptions of obstacles but also on larger social patterns that influence "pathways to persistence" (Porter et. al. 2005). It also seeks to understand learners' ideas about persistence itself, questioning when persistence is appropriate or desired and what cultural and personal contexts influence those ideas.

Wikelund et al.'s (1992) review of the persistence literature is the first indication of the emergence of this perspective. The authors focused on the need to expand the theoretical and practical ideas of participation and, of relevance to this review, noted that modern ideas of literacy often confound literacy with schooling and remove literacy from the cultural contexts in which it exists: the lives of learners. They also discussed distinctions between the values and goals of programs and the values and goals of learners.

Belzer's (1998) NCSALL report was the first in the literature to ask how students perceived leaving their program of study instead of what caused them to leave. She followed ten students from the time of their entry into a program for up to four months or until they dropped out. The ten students were interviewed 47 times, and five were still participating at the end of four months. None of the five learners who had

left the program reported feeling like failures, nor did they consider themselves dropouts, in contrast to how most programs and policies would characterize them. All reported a plan to return to education in the future. Belzer recommended that programs address the reality that "some students will always be coming and going" (Belzer, 1998, p. 5). Significant to the distinction of the acknowledgement and accommodation from the control perspective, most students attributed their leaving to circumstances beyond their control, such as jobs, health problems, and financial strain. From a control perspective, Ziegler et al.'s (2006) Adult Education Persistence Scale would score this attribution in negative terms, using it as evidence of a lack of self-efficacy or motivation that might predict attrition, but within the acknowledgement and accommodation perspective, it is simply a statement of reality.

In her ethnographic case study of four Cambodian women learners in ESOL programs, Skilton-Sylvester (2002) chose not to look at the women in her case study as definitively "motivated" or "non-motivated," instead describing their interest in participation as shifting over time as their own identities and roles within their social context changed:

> *In this study, the central question is not, Why are some adult ESL learners motivated to participate while others are not? Instead, the question is, How do the multiple identities of students, the social contexts of their lives in the United States, and the classroom context shape their investment in participating in adult education programs?* (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002, p. 10)

Becoming engaged, leaving a job, starting a new job, having children, or being childless were all shifting contexts in learners' lives that affected their interest in participation and ability to attend. In turn, these contexts were informed by the historical culture of the community and the individual learner's relation to that culture. Skilton-Sylvester proposed that curriculum that focuses on generalized adult roles such as parent or worker does not incorporate sufficient space for individual differences and may prevent learners from making a long-term investment in a class.

Cuban's (2003) case study of the persistence of two women learners in a Hawaiian literacy program drew similar conclusions but emphasized the role of gender in the relationship between learner and persistence. She noted that the literacy program in which the learners were enrolled had specific expectations of what students would need to know as the economy of Hawai'i changed from a sugar economy to a service economy. However, using a narrative analysis technique to examine the women's persistence over the course of their lifetimes, she discovered that these two learners were seeking a community for emotional support and opportunities for self-care, goals that impacted their investment in the learning opportunities provided by the program. Contrary to Beder's assertion that, "literacy learning is clearly the most important payoff of adult literacy education," (Beder et al., 2006, p. 119), Cuban (2003) demonstrated that, particularly for the female participants in her study, social and emotional payoffs were of equal or greater importance. Cuban (2003) critiqued literacy programs whose theoretical construct did not take into account women's caregiving responsibilities or hidden obstacles connected to gender, suggesting that existing research of persistence and programming used an idealized male pattern of student social behavioral expectations. Like Skilton-Sylvester (2002), Cuban (2003) argued that adult learner persistence patterns were connected to students' individual identities as well as their gendered role

in their communities.

Horsman (2006) examined how gendered violence can negatively impact adult learner persistence. In her synthesis of three qualitative studies she conducted exploring women's literacy practices, Horsman contended that violence or the threat of violence is a normal, but commonly overlooked, part of life for girls and women in Canada and offered the statistic that "51% of Canadian women have experienced at last one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of *sixteen*" (pg. 181, emphasis original). She suggested that violence affects many students' potential for successful learning, both by limiting their ability to attend classes and by restricting their capacity to stay "present" in the classroom. She proposed that policymakers and program administrators acknowledge the impact of social forces like violence and re-conceive of adult literacy programs as holistic centers of individual and community healing whose responsibility is to care for the body, emotion, and spirit of learners, in addition to their academic development.

Schafft and Prins (2009) and Prins and Schafft (2009) similarly called for recognition that systemic, structural social factors, including poverty and gender inequality, influence the persistence of adult students. The authors chafed at the dismissive treatment of situational barriers in previous literature and admonished researchers for not acknowledging the systemic nature of many deterrents to participation, saying, "When situational factors such as inflexible work schedules or health problems are discussed, they are often treated as randomly occurring personal problems rather than social problems that disproportionately affect poor families" (Schafft & Prins, 2009, p. 4). Contrary to Quigley's (1997) assertion that in their lives, "most undergraduate and graduate students in college face similar problems" to those faced by adult literacy learners (p. 172), Schafft and Prins (2009) documented how residential instability, a condition particular to low-income learners, may adversely influence persistence. For example, in the five-year period preceding their interview, the 17 learner participants had made a total of 78 individual moves and had lived in an average of six different residences, experiences that likely undermined their ability to persist in classes. Echoing Horsman (2006), a number of women in the study moved to escape domestic violence. Additionally, the authors suggested that women have higher levels of poverty, lower wages, and more responsibility for childrearing than men do, all of which contribute to gender inequality in residential instability. In a separate report from the same study, Prins and Schafft (2009) examined practitioner discourse about learner persistence and reported that practitioners ascribed student departure from programs to a lack of individual learner motivation or values even when other serious obstacles were present. They compellingly argued that programs' perspectives of student persistence may be shaped by a cultural narrative of individualism and directly influenced by state-sponsored professional development promoting individual responsibility for poverty and lack of education.

The acknowledgement and accommodation perspective presents a shift from a deficit- and control- based approach to student persistence to one which acknowledges that attrition *will* happen, because 1) existing social structures of poverty, inequality, and violence may make it more likely that some students will be unable to persist in a systematic fashion and 2) persistence as desired by accountability measures may not be meaningful or relevant to the goals and values of some students. Approaching student attrition exclusively from a perspective that seeks to control

and remediate low persistence has demonstrated limited success and tends to position someone, either the programs or the individuals themselves, as blameworthy—and thus potentially subject to punitive measures. Adopting an acknowledgement and accommodation perspective offers programs, researchers, and policymakers an opportunity to expand their understanding of, and reactions to, low student persistence.

Practical Applications of an Acknowledgement and Accommodation Perspective Programs

Programs should engage in ongoing self-assessment, program improvement efforts, and dialogue with students about their needs and desires but should do so with expectations that reflect and honor student social contexts. Instructors and administrators would do well to critically examine their beliefs about student persistence and cultivate an institutionalized sensitivity to the myriad social and cultural factors that can influence student persistence. However, even programs with a nuanced understanding of students' lives may feel, at times, caught in a tug of war between accommodating students' interests and needs and fulfilling policy and funding mandates, which are frequently at odds. Programs need to place a greater emphasis on advocacy and action towards changing policies that restrict their ability to meet students' needs; they know first-hand how some policies perpetuate barriers to student learning, and policymakers would benefit from hearing their voices. Forging partnerships with groups and organizations outside of adult literacy education that would also benefit from policy revisions could add weight to the call for change, as well as expanding the range of services to which programs are able to easily refer their students.

Researchers and Policy Makers

Lessons from the acknowledgement and accommodation perspective need to be heeded at the research and policy levels as well. Acknowledging the limitations of the control perspective is a good starting point. Researchers following an acknowledgement and accommodation perspective could investigate the relationship between violence, gender inequality, poverty, and persistence in adult literacy; such investigations would enhance our current understanding of the influence of social barriers on adult learners (Prins & Schafft, 2009). Additionally, ethnographic research exploring literacy as situated in social and cultural contexts (i.e., "new literacy" studies) would expand programs' and policymakers' understandings of the needs and experiences of adult literacy students and help debunk the prevalent deficit model of learners' interests and motivations. For their part, policymakers need to acknowledge that education does not exist in a policy vacuum but is connected to policies governing social welfare, economic development, and civil rights (Anyon, 2005). Policymakers should eschew the 'input-output' model of education that encourages research and program policies based in a control perspective and penalizes programs that experience attrition. Instead, policymakers should allow adult literacy educators the funding and flexibility to develop quality programs that serve the range of interests and needs presented by adult learners.

CONCLUSION

More rigorous research on the experiences of adult learners, whether from a control perspective or an acknowledgement and accommodation perspective, would help shed light on the ways individual, programmatic, and social forces intersect to shape the persistence of adult learners, both those who persist in a systematic, traditional

fashion and those who do not. The ongoing conversation about persistence in the adult literacy context offers the field an opportunity to explore the theoretical and ethical considerations of the kinds of literacy programs that are presently available. For now, an honest appraisal of adult literacy programs reveals that the issue of attrition is not going away.

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BOOK REVIEW

Adult Literacy in a New Era: Reflections from an Open Book

By Dianne Ramdeholl

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Adult Literacy in a New Era is an oral history and testament to The Open Book, an adult literacy program that operated in New York City from 1986 to 2001. It seeks to highlight what made the program distinctive and bring attention to how the landscape of adult literacy education has dramatically changed since that time. In eleven chapters, the author reviews various elements of The Open Book's approach by presenting transcripts of staff and student conversations and then engaging in analysis that connects the personal histories to larger pedagogical issues. A key goal of the text is to identify what lessons there are from both the program's experience and its eventual closure, especially for those who share a commitment to putting social justice work at the heart of adult literacy practice. Not surprisingly, the author and many of those whose words are represented in the text speak of how The Open Book was important in their own development as learners, teachers, and human beings. In that way, the book is a mixture of teaching strategies, history, policy critique, and personal memoir.

In her preface, Ramdeholl explains that *Adult Literacy in a New Era* is intended to be "a counter-narrative" to what she sees as the dominant culture. Drawing inspiration from Freire and Boggs (among others), she is explicit about her concerns, especially an adult literacy system that relies on standardized testing as a measure of success and a capitalist order that produces inequality and dehumanization. Ramdeholl's account of The Open Book

tries to make clear how students and staff saw these two issues as interrelated. Many of the discussions presented in the book contrast hopes for a new era for adult literacy grounded in a liberatory or transformative pedagogy with the realities of current funding and accountability regimes. Indeed, one clear value of histories of the recent past is that they can track shifts in governing ethos that are often lost in the daily struggle of just keeping programs running. In that way, *Adult Literacy in a New Era* invites the reader to move from discussing particular metrics associated with the National Reporting System or the Workforce Investment Act to thinking about the meaning behind dramatic changes in policy. This call for a critical analysis of larger political currents is clear, and it stands as one of the strengths of the book.

Adult Literacy in a New Era *invites the reader to move from discussing particular metrics associated with the National Reporting System or the Workforce Investment Act to thinking about the meaning behind dramatic changes in policy.*

Another strength of the book is an honest appraisal of the operational aspects of The Open Hand. This means that, instead of general statements about the value of critical pedagogy, staff members discuss how they tried to put their ideas into practice and what they learned from their successes and failures. Examples include how staffing decisions reflected ideas about student growth and leadership, how they tried to establish student-teacher councils, and how self-critique was valued and practiced. Although the book includes some discussion of generative curricula and makes it clear that student writing was at the heart of the project, the account spends less time on these classroom-based dimensions of the program than it does on the complexity of building an organizational structure that is consistent with participatory ideals. I think decisions about whether Ramdeholl got the balance right will depend largely on what readers are looking for in the book.

Another strength of the book is an honest appraisal of the operational aspects of The Open Hand. This means that, instead of general statements about the value of critical pedagogy, staff members discuss how they tried to put their ideas into practice and what they learned from their successes and failures.

In a similar fashion, readers may have a strong reaction to her extension of the problem-posing approach to education into the writing of the text itself. Multiple times in the text she presents a series of very large questions without having the space to address them in much detail. For example, Ramdeholl writes: "How can we begin and sustain dialogues as a field? How can we ensure that politicians take the next step and follow up supportive talk with real action? How can we subvert the systems that claim to have an interest in working to eradicate illiteracy but keep intact such horrific inequality (p. 96)?" She makes it clear that she doesn't have

answers for all these questions and, instead, sees raising them as an invitation to ongoing dialogue in the field. I understand the approach, but at times I would have liked the author to spend a bit more time sharing her insights.

Given the style of writing, I believe that *Adult Literacy in a New Era* is a better fit for readers who are somewhat philosophical in bent. Although it has explicit discussion of both teaching and organizational strategies, it is not designed to be a manual of any sort. Ramdeholl presents selected conversations, adds her own reflections, and then asks the readers to draw their own conclusions about how to realize the ideas put forth. As such, it functions as an open letter to those who are dedicated to creating humane and humanizing adult educational spaces. Ramdeholl documents a program that did the best that it could for 15 years; and in their conversations, students and staff suggest that, even though The Open Book has closed, the stories from its existence are sustaining. For this reason, rather than being a depressing post-script, *Adult Literacy in a New Era* is an exhortation for the rest of us to keep at it.

Ramdeholl presents selected conversations, adds her own reflections, and then asks the readers to draw their own conclusions about how to realize the ideas put forth.

Reviewed by,

Erik Jacobson

Montclair State University

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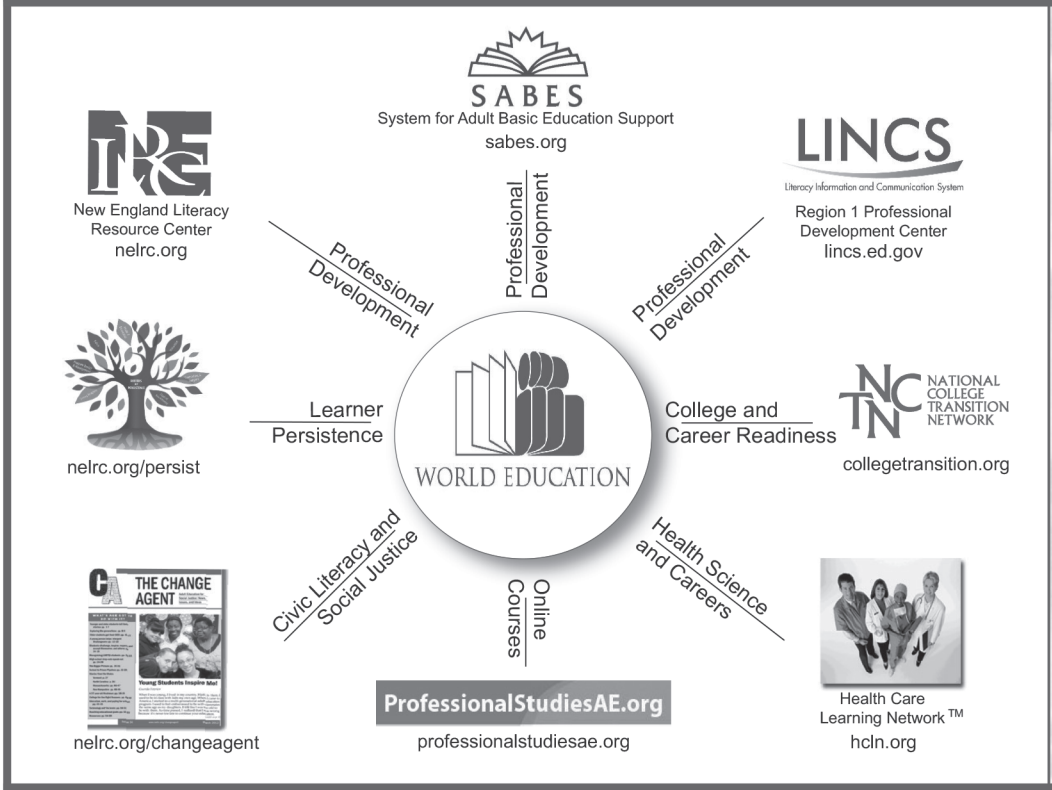

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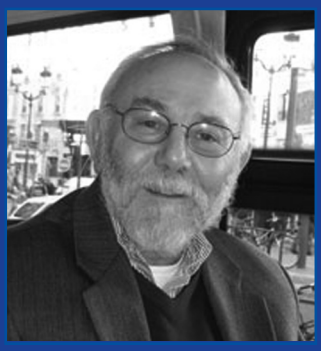

Edited by
David J. Rosen

Project-based Learning for Low-literate Learners Using Free Digital Tools

Edited by David J. Rosen
Educational Consultant
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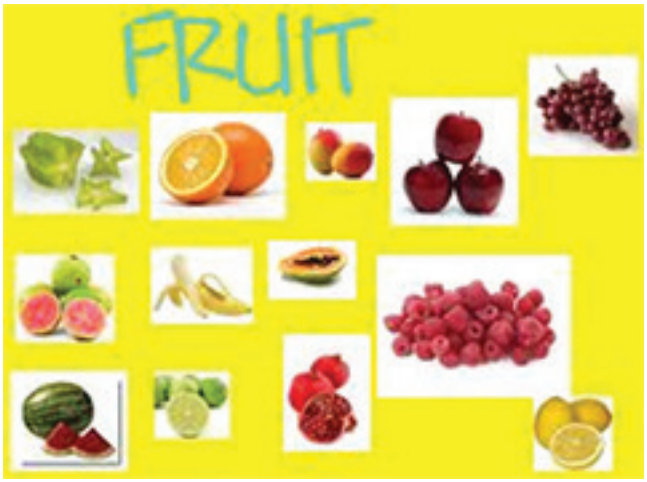
While many adult new readers may not be proficient in decoding and understanding text, they can read images and understand written communication that has a combination of key words and illustrations or photographs. This Web Scan focuses on six free, web-based tools that adult basic reading teachers, their students, and others can use to create rich, engaging text for new readers.

1. Glogster

http://edu.glogster.com

A "glog" is a digital collage or poster. With Glogster, an online tool for creating these posters, students can pull a variety of media into a digital poster that can then be embedded in a student blog, class website, Facebook page, or elsewhere on the web. This is a great way to display both knowledge and creativity. Adult learners, for example, could make a glog montage of personally meaningful images as a way to introduce themselves to face-to-face or online classmates. ESOL/ESL students could assemble vocabulary posters with pictures, or make glogs about where they live now or their home countries. Glogster offers up to 10 free student accounts and has a small monthly charge for up to 50 accounts.



glogster.com

2. MS Word Templates

Students can use an MSWord template to create a simple résumé, cover letter, business card, or flyer. Teachers can also use them to create easy-to-use learning activities. For example, AlphaPlus Canada has some great learning activities created with MSWord templates. These are available at: http://alphaplus.ca/en/oalcf/use-digital-technology-instructional-resources/doc_download/36-use-digital-technology-package-1-sample-activities.html

3. Learn to Use Skype

http://skype.com

Skype is free software for chatting and making voice and video calls to other Skype users on the Internet. With a Skype account, one can also make inexpensive calls to land line or mobile phones around the world. For low-literate adults, or those learning English as a second or other language, Skype offers a great way to practice oral and written language. Students can use Skype to chat (write), talk, and share images with students in classes in other parts of the country or the world. For easy instructions, go to: http://www.gcflearnfree.org/skype

4. Picassa

http://picasa.google.com/

You can use this free photo site to organize, edit, and share photos. As with Photo Story 3, this free Google software allows students, such as the ABE students at Santa Ana College School of Continuing Education, to make learning activities by uploading photos and writing captions for them. (These particular ABE students made learning activities for beginning level School of Continuing Education ESL classes.) Your students could also use Picassa to make a class collage, create their own digital stories, and design their own photographic dictionary by taking photos of common items and then writing an appropriate caption. To see more about how Santa Anna College professor Susan Gaer uses Picassa, go to http://www.susangaer.com/verb/ and to http://timac.wikispaces.com/Google+Goodies.

5. MS Photo Story 3 for Windows XP and Windows 7

http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-xp/help/digitalphotography/create-first-photo-story

With this free, windows-based software you can upload photos, add titles and other text (with a choice of fonts and sizes) and, with a computer microphone, narrate the photos to make a video. Each photo remains on the screen as long as you are speaking. Photo Story 3 can adjust to zoom in and out of chosen photos, and background music is available for you to choose from; additionally, the software allows you to create your own music if desired. You can preview your production and, when completed, save it in a WMV video format or post it on a website or YouTube. To see a clear, step-by-step video on how to use MS Photo Story 3, visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtB6_D_toVQ.

6. Bill Atkinson's PhotoCard

http://www.billatkinson.com/aboutPhotoCard.html

With this easy-to-use, free app from the iTunes Apple store, digital newbies can create custom postcards using nature photos by Bill Atkinson or their own personal photos on their iPad, iPhone, or iPod touch. Postcards can be sent by email or postal mail. To create a PhotoCard, select a nature photo or personal photo, and then flip the card over and type a message. If you're e-mailing your card, you can include an audible greeting. Postcards sent through the postal mail ship for less than $2.00.

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