TOWARD A NEW PLURALISM IN ABE/ESOL CLASSROOMS: TEACHING TO MULTIPLE "CULTURES OF MIND"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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This document is an Executive Summary of a larger, detailed monograph that illuminates our research findings more completely through rich case studies of learners from the three research sites. Copies of the full monograph, ***NCSALL Reports #19*** (700pp), can be obtained electronically or in hard copy as follows:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOWARD A NEW PLURALISM IN ABE/ESOL CLASSROOMS: TEACHING TO MULTIPLE "CULTURES OF MIND"

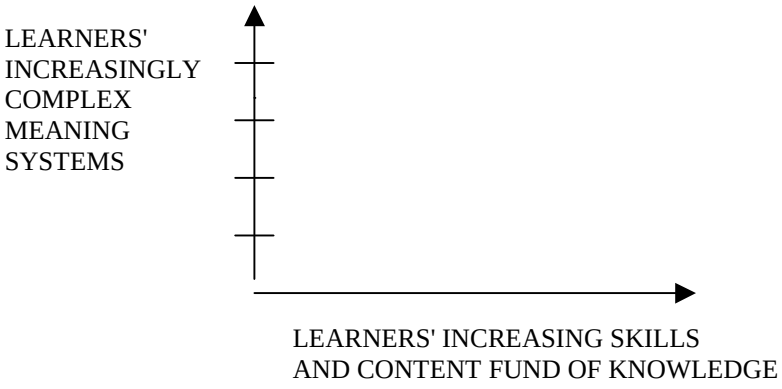
INTRODUCTION

Focus and Context of the Research Study

Beyond the acquisition of important language skills and increased content learning, what are the bigger internal meanings for adults of participating in ABE/ESOL programs? How do the systematic ways adults are making meaning when they enter their programs affect how they will best learn in them, and what they will most need from them?

If we were to depict graphically the "conceptual space" of this study, questions like these suggest two possibly independent trajectories (see Figure One).

Figure One: A New Space for the Consideration of Learners' Experience



The first trajectory (the horizontal, in Figure One) indicates the familiar curricular aspiration for students to acquire greater skills and a bigger fund of content learning. The "beginning student" can be expected to enter the classroom at the leftward end of this trajectory and, over time, hopefully, to migrate rightward.

What is novel about the present study is its introduction of a second trajectory (the vertical, in Figure One), which, when taken with the first, creates a new two-dimensional "space" for the consideration of ABE/ESOL teaching and learning. The vertical in Figure One suggests the possibility of increasingly complex meaning-

systems through which a learner *makes sense of* the curriculum and instruction of the classroom. "Change on the horizontal" for a learner in a history class, for example, might involve developing a greater fund of knowledge about the events, players, and dates of a given historical period in a particular part of the world. But "change on the vertical" (e.g., a change from a more concrete to a more abstract way of understanding the curriculum) might involve a qualitatively new relationship to the content itself such that one can identify the values or beliefs *underlying* a factual historical narrative; generalize from the facts to infer themes or principles; or inquire into the historiographic bias of those who are rendering the account in the first place.

This two dimensional space for the consideration of learners' experience prompts an obvious question: Should ABE/ESOL teachers assume that their students (often beginners or near beginners with the English language or in the subject matter areas, and therefore "on the left" of the horizontal) are also necessarily toward the *bottom* of the vertical? **The present study clearly demonstrates that ABE/ESOL teachers should not make such an assumption,** thus suggesting that this new space for the consideration of ABE/ESOL learning and teaching might not be merely conceptual and hypothetical (as in Figure One) but empirically explorable. The present study constitutes just such an exploration.

As adult developmental psychologists interested in adult education we carefully followed for a year or more the inner experiences of learning and change of 41 ABE/ESOL learners from all over the world. They were enrolled in three distinct U.S. programs (a community college, a family literacy site, and a workplace site), each oriented to enhancing greater English language fluency, increasing content knowledge, and improving effectiveness as workers, parents, or students.

Our purposes were to gain a better understanding of how these adults perceived program learning; how, if at all, program learning helped them to enact a particular social role; and how, if at all, these adults changed while participating in the program. We were particularly interested in how the participants made sense of their instruction, their own motives and goals for learning, their expectations of themselves and their teachers, and their definitions of and sense of themselves in their social roles as students, workers, and/or parents. Additionally, we sought to understand how they conceived of program supports and challenges to their learning and role competence.

We situate our study in the expanding field of ABE/ESOL research in which we detect a growing restlessness and an over-representation of large sample, quantitative, demographic, summary approaches (Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Rockhill, 1982; Valentine, 1990; Horsman, 1990; Hunter & Harman, 1979). We

note that several contributors to the field make clear that what is needed are more thickly descriptive qualitative approaches which are not so markedly framed from the perspective of either the ABE/ESOL "mission," in general, or the intentions and purposes of the specific ABE/ESOL program in which the learner is enrolled. As some researchers note, in much of the research the learner's perspective tends to be considered in light of a program's expectations or the U.S. host society's definitions of the learner's needs, rather than considering the perspectives of learners as *they* would define their own experiences, their own hopes, and their own needs (Wiley, 1993).

In contrast, our study attends to the learner's meanings as the fundamental starting point of the exploration. In so doing we join such researchers as Lytle and her colleagues (Lytle, 1991; Lytle & Schultz, 1990;Lytle, Marmor & Penner, 1986) in their call to help develop a literature of "adults' own evolving conceptual frameworks or theories about language, literacy, teaching, and learning" (Lytle, 1991, p. 120). To this end we most thoroughly attend to both the *meaning constitutive* and potentially *transformable* nature of adult learners' *beliefs*. We focus on how these shape experience, constituting a lens through which the learner looks out at the world within and beyond the classroom, and how that lens can potentially change over time.

Our Developmental Perspective on Adulthood

Our approach derives from a 30 year long-standing theoretical and methodological tradition in the field of adult growth and learning that follows closely the *development* of individuals' ways of *making sense of* their inner and outer experience (Basseches, 1984; Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kohlberg, 1969; Perry, 1970). This perspective is referred to as "constructive-developmental" because it considers the way a person's beliefs *construct* the reality in which he lives, *and* the way these beliefs can change or *develop* over time.

In our constructive-developmental perspective a person's beliefs amount to an interpretive lens through which an individual makes meaning. This lens filters the way a person takes in, organizes, understands, and analyzes her experiences—it

represents her *way of knowing*.[1] Our perspective also suggests that our relationship to our ways of knowing are not casual, random, or strictly idiosyncratic. Rather they are durable for a period of time; reflect an identifiable inner logic and coherence; and may feel more to us like the way we *are* rather than something we *have.* The world we construct through our way of knowing may seem to us less the way things *look to us*, and more like the way things *are.*

We link adult growth and development to the lifelong process of constructing increasingly complex systems of meaning making—or ways of knowing—in order to better understand ourselves and our social roles in an increasingly complex world. Adults gradually evolve from a simpler way of knowing or underlying meaning system to another more complex way of knowing at their own pace depending on the available supports, scaffolding, appropriate developmental challenges, and encouragement for growth. We see development as an interactive process between the person and the environment, which transpires within a social-cultural context. In the United States, the social role and task demands on adults frequently outpace an individual's developmental capacities (Kegan, 1994). Moreover, there may or may not be the necessary supports to develop more complex capacities.

We identify three qualitatively distinct ways of knowing most prevalent in adulthood and widely represented in the present study. While developmental processes are sequential, people of similar ages and life-phases can be at different places in their development (Broderick, 1996; Drago-Severson, 1996; Goodman, 1983; Kegan, 1982; Popp, 1993; Portnow, 1996; Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson, & Kegan, 1998; Stein, 2000). We refer to these three broadly different ways of knowing as the Instrumental, Socializing, and Self-Authoring ways of knowing.

A person predominantly making meaning with an Instrumental way of knowing tends toward a concrete, external, and transactive orientation to the world. Experience of self, others, and the world is understood and organized by concrete attributes, events, sequences; by observable actions and behaviors; by one's own

[1] The important work of Belenky et al., especially Women's Ways of Knowing (1986), has achieved such understandable prominence in the field of adult education, that it may be useful to point out that we are using the term "ways of knowing" in its literal and ordinary sense here; we are not referring to their specific taxonomy. A *way of* knowing (as distinct from some*thing* that is known, a *product* of knowing) is what in philosophy is called an *epistemology*. The underlying structure of an epistemology is the subject-object relationship–what can this way of knowing reflect upon, look at, have perspective on ("object")? What is it embedded in, attached to, identified with ("subject")? The distinctly different meaning-systems defined in our study are identifiable as distinctly different ways of organizing the subject-object relationship; i.e., they are literally different "ways of knowing." Readers interested in the work of Belenky et al., may want to consider however, how their own framework constitutes an alternative way of rendering "the vertical" in Figure One.

vantage point, interests, and preferences. Rules, sets of directions, and dualisms give shape and structure to one's daily life, providing the trajectory for the right way to do what one needs to do, whether helping kids with homework or doing one's job.

A person predominantly making meaning with a Socializing way of knowing has a more abstract and internal orientation to the world. The self, others, and the world participate in a swirl of values, loyalties, and longer-term purposes which are seen to underlie events, attributes, and immediate preferences. Other people are experienced not merely as resources or supplies to the self but also as sources of internal validation, orientation, or authority. The self is identified with or "made up by" its relationship to other persons (such as important people in one's life) or ideas (such as religious, political, or philosophical ideologies).

Persons with a predominantly Self-Authoring way of knowing have the capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of their own internal authority, to be the "maker up" of their own system of belief (rather than "made up by"). The person now has the capacity not only to identify (and identify *with*) abstract values, ideals, and longer-term purposes, but also to prioritize and integrate competing values; to appeal the expectations and demands of others to one's own internal seat of judgment; and to author an overall system of belief or personal ideology of one's own.

Although development is a gradual process and the complete evolution from one comprehensive way of knowing to another may take years (Kegan, 1994), there are identifiable and significantly different steps along the way, each move creating a new frame on how adults think about themselves as parents, learners, and workers. A person's way of knowing shapes how she will understand her responsibilities, possibilities, and expectations for herself as a student, as an employee, or as a parent.

Research Methods

In 1997, we identified three Adult Basic Education (ABE/ESOL) settings that were running programs we considered exemplary. "Best practice" programs are commonly celebrated because they use effective methods for achieving results and set benchmarks for other programs (Hammer & Champy, 1993). In our case, we selected programs that were longer term (nine to 14 months), enabling us to explore the possibilities of long-term growth in students' understanding. These programs allowed us to examine the developmental dimensions of transformational learning—i.e., how the ways of knowing, for some learners, might actually change. We also looked for programs that intentionally incorporated a variety of supports and challenges to facilitate adult learning (including, for example, tutoring, advising,

technological support for learners). Moreover, each program included practices and curricula aimed at supporting the enhancement of adults' specific role competency in one of three social roles: student, parent, or worker. The three sites were: a high school diploma program oriented especially to the work role, staffed by the Continuing Education Institute of Watertown, Massachusetts, and provided to factory workers at the Norwood, Massachusetts plant of the Polaroid Corporation; a Massachusetts Even Start program oriented especially to family literacy; and a pre-enrollment program for prospective higher education students, offered by the Bunker Hill Community College of Charlestown, Massachusetts.

Rich diversities and intriguing commonalties characterized the sample of learners. The learners were men and women; people in their early 20's to mid-life; and mostly immigrants—non-white, non-native English speakers **mostly** from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and from every part of the world. Some of the participants were adults whose prior schooling experiences were negative and marked by shame and failure, and others had prior educational experiences that were positive and marked by pride and success. At the same time, within each site there was an intriguing concentration of learners around a given age and life-phase. The learners at the Bunker Hill Community College site were mostly unmarried young adults in their 20's; the learners at the Even Start Site were mostly in their 30's, and the parents of young children; and the learners at the Polaroid plant were frequently mid-life adults, men and women in their 40's, the parents of older children.

The three sites also provided contrasts in their particular learning focus and cohort design. At Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) learners were a group of recently emigrated young adults who were enrolled in a 9-month pilot program helping them become better prepared for academic coursework in college. These learners participated in the same two classes during their first semester of the program (an ESOL class and an introductory psychology class designed for ESOL learners). During the second semester the group disbanded and each learner independently selected his or her own courses from the full range of academic courses available at BHCC. At the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Massachusetts, learners had emigrated from various countries and had been in the U.S. for an average of nine years. Enrolled either in a pre-GED class or an ESOL class, these learners entered and exited the program at their own distinct times. At the Polaroid Corporation of Waltham, Massachusetts, learners comprised a group of workers who participated in a 14-month Adult Diploma Program leading to the high school diploma (designed and staffed by the Continuing Education Institute). Many of these learners had lived in the U.S. for close to twenty years. In this program every learner began the program at the same time, all worked toward a common purpose, and all graduated the program at the same time.

A total of 41 of the initial 58 learners across the three sites participated in the complete study, making time available on three (and, at the Polaroid site, four) separate extended occasions to share their thinking via a variety of data collection methods and tools, including tape-recorded, open-ended qualitative interviews; structured exercises; classroom observations; focus groups; and quantitative survey type measures. Although we considered interviewing each adult learner in his or her first language, the diversity of our sample made the cost of this strategy prohibitive and impractical. All interviews were administered individually, in English. Each visit lasted several hours and permitted us to gather data on a wealth of questions about participants' experience of a variety of aspects of the learning and teaching enterprise, for example: What are your purposes in pursuing this learning? What, in your view, makes a person a good teacher? What effect is your learning having on your work, in your relationships with your child, or in your role as a prospective college student? Revisiting the same participant over the course of a year or more also allowed us to ask of the data (as well as the participant): Are there changes over time in the learner's views on these kinds of matters?

The overarching research questions that guided our study were:

1) How does developmental level (i.e., way of knowing) shape adults' experiences and definitions of the core roles they take on as learners, parents, and workers?

   What are the regularities in the ways in which adults at similar levels of development construct the role demands and supports in each of these domains?

2) How do adult learners' ways of knowing shape their experience and definition of programs dedicated to increasing their role competence?

   What are adult learners' motives for learning, definitions of success, conceptions of the learners' role, and understandings of their teachers' relationship to their learning?

3) What educational practices and processes contribute to changes in the learner's relationship to learning (vis-à-vis motive, efficacy, and meaning system) and specifically to any re-conceptualizations of core roles?

FINDINGS

In addition to the many better understood forms of diversity that are present in an ABE/ESOL classroom, and which good teachers strive to recognize and include (differences of gender, age, race, cultural origin), our study suggests the importance of *another form of diversity*—a new kind of pluralism—namely, the differing meaning-systems or ways of knowing which adult learners bring into the room. All three of the study's major findings revolve around the importance of this new variable for thinking about teaching and learning in the ABE/ESOL classroom.

The three findings have to do with
(1) the possibility and variety of **significant change** for adults in ABE/ESOL settings, even during as short a period as about a year;
(2) **the importance of the cohort** for adult learning;
(3) the variety of **importantly different ways of knowing** adults bring to the ABE/ESOL classroom.

Major Finding #1: Varieties of Change for ABE/ESOL Learners

As we listened to the learners at all three program sites, across the many months of their programs, we were struck by the forms of change they exhibited. Participants changed in at least three important ways: 1) informative, 2) transformative, and 3) acculturation. We will first introduce them briefly and then describe them in more detail in the main body of this section.

1) All participants were seeking to gain new kinds of information, skills, and ideas throughout the course of their program. Often, these changes contributed to consolidation and elaboration of their perspectives—where learners extended their ideas and values within their existing ways of knowing. Participants also described their learning as contributing either to ongoing or hoped for improvements in many other aspects of their lives, including their sense of their own identity, their careers, their social and economic status, their home lives, and their confidence in themselves.

2) Some participants experienced transformational changes. These learners not only made gains in *what* they knew; they also modified the shape of *how* they knew. They grew to demonstrate new and more complex ways of knowing. That these qualitative shifts in participants' ways of knowing would occur even for a few learners over the short span of one year is quite remarkable.

3) Most of the 41 participants in our study were also undergoing changes of acculturation. As immigrants to the United States, they were confronting the formidable tasks of gaining fluency in the English language as well as fluency in a new culture. We found the ways participants experienced and navigated these changes were related to their developmental position. That is, learners with different ways of knowing demonstrated notable differences in their descriptions of these changes. Learners with the same way of knowing, on the other hand, gave descriptions of change that had striking similarities.

In order to give a brief and somewhat contextualized overview of these changes here, as well as to explicate the developmentally driven similarities and differences among the learners, we discuss each type of change as it was evidenced in one particular site and around one particular aspect of the program. However, it is important to note that the changes we describe were evident *at all three sites*, and in several aspects of the program.

Changes of Consolidation and Elaboration—As Illustrated by ABE/ESOL Students at Even Start

One dimension of the changes among participants, across all three sites, centered on the ways in which new learning enabled participants to consolidate and elaborate on their existing social identities within a given way of knowing. In addition to gaining new skills, knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and values, learners formed new relationships between these ideas, and perhaps reconsidered their own beliefs. These types of changes—what we call consolidation and elaboration—allowed participants to build up and deepen their way of knowing. At Even Start, a family literacy program, learners described how various aspects of the curriculum helped them broaden their understanding of their parenting role and supported them in enacting their visions of themselves as effective parents. For the most part, this consolidating and elaborating went on within the same broad way of knowing with which they entered and exited the ABE/ESOL program.

Parents who predominantly had recourse to an Instrumental way of knowing tended toward a concrete focus on their own and their children's needs. They often found it difficult to put themselves in the shoes of their children and understood proper discipline as ensuring their children did what they were told, followed the rules, and met parental needs. In recounting how various aspects of their program enhanced their ability to parent, Instrumental learners described their increasing ability to perform practical functions and activities. They reported that the program enabled them to better help their children because they were more effective in

communicating with doctors and teachers, assisting their children with homework, and making better use of public transportation. Unlike their Socializing and Self-Authoring peers, Instrumental learners *did not* identify additional criteria by which they understood their parenting role.

Parents tending to make use of a Socializing way of knowing demonstrated the ability to internalize their children's perspectives. They held values of parenting that were prescribed culturally or by authorities, and they disciplined their children in alignment with these externally mediated values. In many cases, Socializing learners at Even Start accepted the underlying values of the program's parenting curriculum, through which they were able to consolidate and elaborate their own views and values of parenting. These learners explained and valued how their increasing ability to participate in educational activities with their children, such as reading aloud or working on a school project, deepened the emotional bonds between them.

Parents predominantly making meaning according to the Self-Authoring way of knowing saw themselves as creators and generators of their own parenting "philosophies." These parents were able to take into account both the child's internal psychological perspective and their own, and they recognized that children's successes and struggles were distinct from and not determined by those of their parents. At Even Start, Self-Authoring learners often adopted the program's approaches to or information about disciplining their children; however, they were able to assess the program's values according to their own self-generated parenting philosophies. Increased parenting skills and information were valued as important sources of fuel for their own self-definition of parenting competence.

Transformational Changes to Learners' Ways of Knowing—As Illustrated by ABE/ESOL Polaroid Learners (The "good teacher")

Some learners experienced changes that not only deepened or elaborated their current way of knowing, but led to changes in the way of knowing itself. For example, at several points during their programs, we invited all learners at each site to describe their understanding of what makes a "good teacher." Over the course of the program, we observed how several Polaroid learners came to demonstrate new ways of knowing, qualitatively changing their conceptions of, for example, good teachers.

Learners with an Instrumental way of knowing wanted their teachers to provide clear explanations, corrections on written work and speech, and step-by-step procedures in order to make them learn. They focused on their own concrete needs and felt supported when teachers gave them information and task-oriented

scaffolding to help them build the mechanical skills they needed to complete their assignments. These learners identified good teachers as *those who "made" them learn*. But by the end of the program, we noticed that many of these learners described "the good teacher" in ways more similar to those who, from the beginning, operated out of a Socializing way of knowing.

These participants, like Instrumental knowers, felt supported in their learning when teachers explained concepts well and talked slowly. However, unlike Instrumental knowers, Socializing learners also expected their teachers to be *good role models*. Wanting their teachers to value their ideas and themselves, they felt most supported by teachers who really "cared" about them. While Socializing learners felt that good teachers helped them understand concepts so that they could complete assignments, they explained that it was the interpersonal connection they had with good teachers that helped them to feel comfortable. They appreciated teachers who employed a variety of teaching strategies that helped them to apply their learning to broader goals. Learners with a Socializing way of knowing were not only interested in *fulfilling* their teachers' expectations of them, but they also *identified with* their teachers' expectations of them. In other words, the teachers' learning goals for them became their own goals for learning. They viewed their teachers as sources of authority and expected the teacher to know what they needed to learn. Although these learners could feel (internally) when they had learned something, they needed the teacher's acknowledgement to validate it. During the programs, several learners who entered with a Socializing way of knowing grew to demonstrate a more Self-Authoring way of knowing operating alongside a Socializing way of knowing. For instance, these learners began to see their teachers' perspective and expectations as separate from their own. Some learners developed a capacity to appreciate the complexity of a teacher's work and developed an understanding of the motivation to learn, to a certain extent, as independent of the teacher's influence.

Learners who were Self-Authoring knowers not only saw their teachers as authorities and sources of knowledge, but importantly also viewed themselves and each other as generators of knowledge. These learners, unlike Socializing knowers, were often able to reflect on their teachers' instruction and offer constructive feedback. Like Socializing knowers, they voiced appreciation for teachers who employed a variety of teaching techniques and strategies to meet learners' needs. However, they were primarily concerned with meeting their own goals and internally generated standards on behalf of what they saw as their larger learning purposes. They had their own internally generated criteria for assessing and critiquing good teachers, who in their view, supported them in meeting their own goals for competence and self-mastery. Additionally, Self-Authoring knowers took greater

responsibility for their learning both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, many of these learners talked about "growing" themselves and "feeling strong" as they learned in the program.

Changes Linked to Acculturation—As Illustrated by ESOL Students at Bunker Hill Community College (The "good student")

At all three sites, many learners experienced changes relating to acculturation and, in particular, related to their understanding of what it meant to be a "good student." At BHCC, the vast majority of the participants were recent immigrants who were growing accustomed to their new roles as students in an American community college. In order to find success in these new roles—to become what teachers and institutions recognize as "good students"—the learners needed to understand and demonstrate the specific skills, behaviors, attitudes, and types of knowledge that are valued in these settings. As with other aspects of their learning experiences, the ways that BHCC students described their understandings of a "good student" were shaped by their different ways of knowing.

Instrumental learners oriented largely to the externally observable behaviors and skills that they had to acquire to be successful as students. They described the importance of improving their academic English language skills, including learning new vocabulary and constructing five-paragraph essays according to accepted rules of grammar, punctuation, organization, and style. Developing successful strategies for studying, such as note taking, using a textbook effectively, and completing homework regularly and correctly were also mentioned as important skills for these learners to acquire. Other particular behaviors that Instrumental learners emphasized included asking questions and offering opinions in class discussions; attending all classes and arriving to them promptly; and utilizing institutional forms of academic support such as personal tutoring and computer software programs. Considering the identified behaviors and concrete skills as the keys to academic success, these learners were likely to evaluate their learning based on the grades and course credit they received and according to their ability to produce the "right" answers. While it is important to mention that all learners (not only Instrumental learners) named many of these concerns, what distinguishes Instrumental learners from the others is that they described *only* these concerns.

Like Instrumental learners, Socializing learners saw the need to learn the skills and behaviors valued by American educational institutions and their teachers and they included these concerns in their explanations. However, they also oriented to abstract purposes and internal characteristics, such as considerations of character and personality that were both augmented by and could help them acquire particular

skills and new types of knowledge. In order to become good students and learn effectively in their new environment, according to the way they saw it, it was important also to maintain a "positive" attitude, a sense of "hope," and the "will to learn." Accordingly, these students tended to refer to the internal world of their attitudes and their personality when they evaluated their learning, judging themselves, for example, on their ability to remain open and receptive to new learning.

In addition to demonstrating similar concerns about acquiring new skills and knowledge, and acknowledging the importance of more abstract internal states, Self-Authoring learners also referred to and concentrated on additional priorities. These students often described their struggles to master the English language in terms of how effectively they were able to communicate the complexity of their own ideas. They showed interest in differences of opinion where each perspective could be considered as a possible and viable alternative that could inform their own understanding. Thus, rather than relying on teachers to communicate correct information or ideas as both Instrumental and Socializing learners did, Self-Authoring students regarded themselves and other students as additional and valid sources of knowledge. These learners could evaluate their teachers and the subject matter by their usefulness in meeting the learners' own self-constructed goals.

Combinations of Change

The changes the participants in our study related and demonstrated are not as straight forward as the above descriptions imply. Instead, many learners across the sites were experiencing multiple types of changes that influenced several, if not all, aspects of their lives. For example, some participants were making transitions of acculturation *and* transformation simultaneously, and these changes concerned not one, but many aspects of their experiences. Participants were coming to many new understandings at once: of their role as students, of the teacher's role, of the subject matter they were studying, and of their relationships to their fellow classmates. We see all these dimensions of change as therefore inter-related and reciprocal.

Furthermore, these changes also combined with and animated other changes. Across all three sites, as learners extended their skills and knowledge, their confidence and feelings of success also grew. Many adjusted the goals and expectations they set for themselves to incorporate larger and more ambitious dreams and plans. Thus, the changes they experienced in the classroom carried over into other aspects of their lives. In particular, students reported that the learning they did in their programs heightened their competency in their social role, enhancing their performance as students, workers, or parents.

Major Finding #2: The Power of the Cohort in Adult Learning

We did not initially set out to examine the influence of the learner peer group on participants' program experience, but an unexpected finding was that being part of a "cohort"—a tight-knit, reliable, common-purpose group—was extraordinarily important to participants, and in *different* ways, at all three sites. This finding challenges the longstanding view that adults, who often come to their class-taking with well-established social networks, are less in need of entrée to a new community than, for example, college-age adolescents who are psychologically separating from their families of origin and who have not yet formed new communities of which they are a part (Knowles, 1970, 1975; Cross, 1971, 1981; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). Despite interesting differences in the cohort design across the three sites, the interpersonal relationships that these adult peers developed in the cohort made a critical difference to their academic learning, their emotional and psychological well-being, and their ability to broaden their perspectives.

The Cohort as a Holding Environment

Growth processes, like learning and teaching processes, depend on connections, and thus invariably occur in some *context* (Kegan, 1982). Students with different meaning making systems will need different forms of support and challenge from their surrounding contexts in order to grow. We refer to such contexts as "holding environments" (Kegan, 1982, 1994), which, when successful, can help students grow to better manage the complexities of their learning and their other social roles.

A good holding environment serves three functions (Kegan, 1982, 1994). First, it must "hold well," meaning that it meets a person by recognizing and confirming who that person is, without the holder's frustration, disappointment, or urgent anticipation of change. It provides appropriate supports to accommodate the way the person is currently making meaning. Secondly, and when a person is ready, a good holding environment needs to "let go," permitting, challenging, and stimulating learners to grow beyond their existing perceptions to new and more complex ways of knowing. Third, a good holding environment "sticks around," providing continuity, stability, and availability to the person in the process of growth. This means that, whenever possible, the holding environment remains in place so that relationships can be re-known and reconstructed in a new way—a way that supports who the person has grown to become.

While this third characteristic of good holding may be difficult to provide in shorter-term ABE/ESOL programs, we believe that any classroom can include the other two features, namely high support and high challenge. Both are essential for

good holding. It was apparent in our study, despite different design features, that for most participants their learning group became something very much different than "just a class" or "just a group." In all three settings participants spoke of the group as "like a family," or a band of warriors, or fellow strugglers—in short, a cohort. These cohorts served as dynamic transitional growth spaces that helped learners make good use of each other by providing both the *challenge* that encouraged learners to grow and the *support* they needed in order to meet those challenges.

The Learner Cohorts at the Three Research Sites

As mentioned, the three sites in our study provided interesting contrasts in terms of their specific cohort designs. At the BHCC site, students started their program together and were enrolled in the same two classes during their first semester. The cohort disbanded at the start of the second term, and each student independently selected his or her own courses for that semester. At Even Start, each parent determined his or her own entry and exit times from the family literacy program (perhaps the most common design in ABE/ESOL classes). Many parents had enrolled in this program before our study began and continued after its completion. At the Polaroid site, all workers began the adult diploma program at the same time, worked toward a common purpose, and all left the program at the same time.

Despite these differences in the cohort shape and configuration (and differences of age and life-phase), the importance of participating in a learner cohort held true at all three sites. Even though these adults, like adults in general, used quite different ways of knowing, they all described how their cohorts served several key purposes. First, the cohort served to support and challenge adult students in their *academic learning*. Participants at all sites reported that their academic learning was enhanced due to their participation in collaborative learning activities within their cohorts. Secondly, the cohort served as a context where students provided a variety of forms of *emotional and psychological support* to each other. Lastly, the cohort challenged learners to *broaden their perspectives*. What is noteworthy is that both within and across sites, learners who shared a particular way of knowing demonstrated similar conceptions of how the cohort and collaborative learning experiences served to support and challenge them in multiple ways. Furthermore, students with different ways of knowing described important differences in these conceptions. Overall, these findings suggest not only the importance of a cohort, but that elements *other than* a specific structure regarding entry and exit might be crucial to transforming a class into a cohort.

The Learner Cohort as a Holding Environment for Academic Learning

Sharon Hamilton (1994) provides helpful suggestions to teachers who wish to construct collaborative learning activities to enhance academic learning. She describes three distinct models identified by John Trimbur (1993) and relates them to the characteristics, practices, and beliefs about collaborative learning that she has observed within the field over the past decade. In so doing, she illustrates how these three models can be applied to classrooms and suggests that teachers adopt one particular model that aligns with their teaching philosophy or personal style.

Each model has its own goals and suggested processes. The first model, the "postindustrialist model" of collaborative learning, "appears in classrooms in the form of group efforts to solve common problems formulated by an instructor whose curricular agenda determines group structure, time on task, goals, and anticipated answers" (Hamilton, 1994, p. 94). The second model, the "social constructionist model," consists of "engaging students more actively in their learning while concurrently developing social skills of negotiation and consensus building" (Hamilton, 1994, p. 95). Finally, the third model is the "popular democratic model" of collaborative development, where the challenge for learners is "not to obliterate essential differences in the search for commonalties but rather to envision these essential differences as catalysts for the making of meaning within specific concepts of the particular course" (Hamilton, 1994, pp. 95-96). Not only do these models have different goals, but each model also assigns different responsibilities to teachers and learners and recommends different principles for designing classroom environments. In our study, we noticed a remarkable correspondence between these three models of collaborative learning and those preferred in the three different meaning systems that learners demonstrated at each site, raising obvious questions about whether teachers really have the luxury of adopting the one model that most closely aligns with their personal teaching style or philosophy.

Learners who were Instrumental knowers primarily valued opportunities to work collaboratively because doing so helped them achieve specific concrete, behavioral goals. Their reasoning aligns with the goals of the "postindustrial model." Instrumental learners said that cohort collaboration helped them:

- "find the right answers" in math, or the correct sentence structure when writing
- learn how to use the right words to better express themselves in English, and improve their vocabulary

- learn how to communicate better with other people at work, at home, and in their daily interactions with other people in the world (e.g., with school officials, doctors, and/or their children's teachers)
- see classmates and even themselves as holders of knowledge (constructed as an accumulation of facts, and/or parenting practices that they could then implement)
- understand the meaning of words and concepts
- learn how to learn on their own (as evidenced by demonstrating a behavior)

While valuing the supports that were named by Instrumental knowers, Socializing knowers also spoke about appreciating the encouragement they received from peers and/or fellow parents. Socializing learners especially valued the cohort and collaborative work for the important emotional and psychological support it offered as they balanced the multiple demands of work, family, and school. Their experience mirrors the goals of the "social constructionist model" of collaborative learning. It helped them:

- feel "comfortable" asking questions when they did not know the answer or did not know what do to in particular situations
- learn to "socialize with other people"
- feel less "afraid when speaking English" in front of others (both within and outside of the classroom)

Although Self-Authoring knowers mentioned both the functional and psychological/emotional reasons why working with cohort members was helpful, they focused particularly on their appreciation of the different perspectives members in the group brought to any particular activity. Their experience aligns closely with the goals of the "popular democratic model" of collaborative learning. Working with other cohort members helped them:

- enhance their learning and teaching processes because they were exposed to varying perspectives (points of view) on particular issues
- better understand themselves and other learners' academic, parenting, and life experiences
- recognize and, at times, appreciate forms of difference and commonality across and beyond the cohort

That these three groups of learners' descriptions so closely match those described in the literature suggests that, in designing collaborative activities, educators, in contrast to Hamilton's suggestions, should perhaps give less priority to *which* approach *they* personally favor and more consideration to the prospect of

needing to provide *all three* models in any one classroom—the "new pluralism" to which our research directs us more generally. We elaborate on this recommendation in the implication section of this Executive Summary.

The Learner Cohort as a Holding Environment for Emotional Support

The literature on group learning also points to ways these groups can serve as social and emotional support (see, for example Bosworth & Hamilton, 1994; Pedersen & Digby 1995). Our study again demonstrates how learners experienced this emotional support *differently* according to their ways of knowing. While for many of the participants the cohort became "like a family," the meaning of "family" is different according to different ways of knowing.

For students who were predominantly Instrumental knowers, the cohort was a place where their ideas could be compared to those of other people and where peers created an active learning environment. For several of these learners, the cohort sometimes embodied a community of concern. For example, when a student was absent from a particular class, others inquired about the student's wellbeing. Support was discussed in more concrete ways such as help with homework, friendly encouragement, and/or help pronouncing words correctly.

Students who were predominantly Socializing knowers were less orientated to discussing the external facts of a situation and more orientated to their internal experience of the thoughts and ideas of cohort peers. For these learners, the cohort was about being in a relationship with one another, a way of giving an abstract level of support, of accepting and valuing each other. Lack of conflict among cohort members was essential to their comfort. While individuals with any way of knowing might dislike or feel uncomfortable with conflict, those making meaning with a Socializing way of knowing often found conflict with important people or ideas particularly difficult. These students often avoided conflict as it felt like a breach of the loyalty and mutuality they looked for in relationships.

Learners who were predominantly Self-Authoring knowers, however, were able to experience conflict as a necessary and inevitable aspect of the natural back and forth discussions they had with each other and saw it as a way to enhance their own learning. They saw the relationships among group members not as an end in itself but as an enrichment of their own experience and understanding. Like Socializing knowers, they acknowledged and valued the connections with others and identified these connections as important factors in their learning lives. However, for Self-Authoring learners, the connections with others went beyond a need for acceptance and validation to providing a bigger context for voicing, working out, and

challenging their own ideas and thoughts. Self-Authoring learners valued the *process* of working together for the ways it stimulated new ideas and new thinking both for themselves and for others.

The Learner Cohort as a Holding Environment for Perspective Broadening

Interpersonal interactions with cohort members also helped students to become more aware of and to share their own perspectives. Sharing ideas through dialogue and writing challenged and supported learners to broaden their perspectives by listening to and considering others' outlooks. Engaging with others in groups over time *challenged* cohort learners to experiment with and enact new ways of thinking and behaving. Collaboration with other cohort learners often became a catalyst for growth.

Many learners therefore began to understand their relationship to the cohort in new ways. We observed that some learners' notions of these group experiences expanded as they progressed through their programs. (We refer to these changes as a consolidation or elaboration—where learners extended their ideas within their existing way of knowing). Also, several students understood their cohort experience in more complex ways. (We refer to this as transformational change—where students evidenced qualitative and pervasive shifts in their underlying meaning system). The shapes of students' growth varied, depending on their ways of making meaning.

Several learners who were initially Instrumental knowers commented on how the experience of listening to and learning from cohort members transformed their thinking about themselves, their own families of origin, and people from other countries. These students began to think differently about their classmates and about life experiences in general. By coming to know others in the group whose backgrounds were starkly different from their own, several learners grew better able to understand and empathize with other people.

For students with a predominantly Socializing way of knowing, working with others in the cohort created an opportunity for recognizing and exploring cultural differences which permeated cohort sharing and filtered into discussions. Several learners began to recognize commonalties across their cohort group that enabled them to manage their differences, rather than feel threatened by them. A few students grew to be able to generalize their enhanced capacity for perspective taking beyond the classroom and into other domains of their lives (e.g., work). The holding environment of the cohort supported several learners to be better able to take on other people's perspectives, which helped them in many aspects of their lives.

Students who were predominantly Self-Authoring knowers experienced the learner cohort as a context for analyzing and critiquing information which they then used to enhance their competence as learners and in their social roles as students, parents, and workers. The cohort was a safe place that challenged and supported them as they broadened their perspectives on their own and on other people's learning process. Some of these students adopted a broader perspective on their own learning when they came to believe that they could learn from the process of working with other cohort members who were different from them. Working with learners from different countries helped several Self-Authoring knowers to develop a new and deeper understanding and appreciation of what it meant to be a person who came to the United States as an adult learner.

The holding environment of the cohort served as a context where adults were often encouraged by each other, and by teachers, to challenge their own assumptions. We believe this deeply influences the ways in which individuals think and act (Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

Major Finding #3: A New Pluralism: Varieties of Meaning Systems Among Adult Learners

Despite the fact that learners in any one of the three research settings were primarily of similar age and oriented to a common and particular social role (for example, at the Even Start site all participants were parents and tended to be in their 30's; and at the Polaroid site all participants were workers and tended to be in their 40's), we discovered in each setting a *diversity* in learners' ways of knowing—an intriguing and less visible new form of pluralism. To return to our conceptual graphic (Figure One), while many of our participants may have begun their programs as English language *beginners*, situated on the left side of the horizontal, they were arrayed from the beginning *all over the vertical trajectory*. Moreover, these learners demonstrated a range of ways of knowing that was *virtually identical* to the range found in previous studies with samples of *native English speaking adults* when those samples consisted of participants of similarly widespread socio-economic status (see e.g., Kegan, 1994). For example, at each of our research sites there was at least one learner for whom an Instrumental way of knowing was dominant. At each of the sites, there were several learners for whom Self-Authoring ways of knowing were dominant. At all three sites, the majority of learners demonstrated some degree of a Socializing way of knowing. Thus, the diversity in these participants' ways of knowing represents a continuum that is similar to that demonstrated by previous samples examined in prior research. ABE/ESOL learners should *not* be presumed to construct experience less complexly than anyone else. Nor are the differences in complexity of learners' meaning systems highly associated with level of formal

education. That is, some learners with limited formal education did nonetheless demonstrate developmentally complex meaning systems.

As even the brief elaborations here on the previous two findings suggest, interesting regularities and patterns emerged both within and across sites that illuminate how learners bound by a particular way of knowing commonly understood their program learning experiences, themselves as students, teacher expectations, and their social roles. Contrary to what might be "common sense" expectation, adults of markedly different ages, from very different cultures and parts of the world nonetheless shared these commonalities. Furthermore, people of similar ages or from similar cultural backgrounds were sometimes distinguished by very different ways of knowing—hence a "new pluralism" of significance for the teacher began to emerge.

This finding teaches us that ABE/ESOL classrooms are likely to be populated by adults who have a range of qualitatively different ways of making sense of their experiences. Therefore, teachers and programs that recognize students' developmental diversity—and support students' growth accordingly—will be especially effective. We suggest that educators who are alert to developmental differences and similarities among their students possess some very useful tools for understanding and supporting the learners they teach. This kind of developmental attentiveness may allow us to meet and better scaffold students with a diversity of learning needs and ways of knowing.

IMPLICATIONS

The present study demonstrates that a developmental perspective has multiple implications for teaching and learning in ABE/ESOL settings, which we can group in three categories:

1. A richer understanding of the systematic sources of ABE students' experiences, invoking the need for a "New Pluralism."
2. A prescription for optimal features of classroom and program design, invoking the need for new approaches to program planning and evaluation.
3. A call for further meaning-centered explorations of the ABE experience, invoking the need for theory-*complicating* rather than theory-*confirming* sources of data. Such explorations aid us in conceptualizing the functions and purposes of ABE education in ways consistent with the multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory perspectives of the participants themselves.

New Pluralism

Among learners in our study, notable variations in educational background, social class, country of origin, ethnicity, gender, and social role meaningfully shape each individual's classroom experience. Despite these variations we found that participants varied in their developmental levels along a continuum not unlike that shown by participants in previous research studies with samples of similarly widespread SES. This lends credence to the suggestion that developmental position is an important variable even among samples with wide variation in age and background. The profile of ABE/ESOL learners does *not* show a skew toward the low end of a developmental continuum nor were differences in capacity highly associated with level of formal education. This less visible form of diversity in adults' ways of knowing is the first meaning of the "new pluralism" in the title of this study.

Our findings can be extrapolated to suggest that teachers and program developers might likely find and should therefore be prepared to engage developmentally diverse populations in any given ABE/ESOL classroom. We invite adult educators to take these forms of difference into account when considering learners' experiences. Orienting to diversity of developmental level, in addition to the other important types of diversity among learners, can provide ABE/ESOL teachers and program developers with powerful new insights into learners' experiences and the ways that programs can respond to their strengths and needs. This approach demonstrates that there are consistent and predictable ways in which learners who share a developmental position also share important ways of understanding themselves, their learning, and their environment. We see these similarities across a range of aspects of learners' lives, including the ways they conceive of their learning experiences, their aspirations, their classrooms and teachers, the programs and institutions in which they are enrolled, and their relationships to U.S. culture and to their native cultures.

Familiarity with learners' different meaning making systems can help explain how it is that the very same curriculum, classroom activities, or teaching behaviors can leave some learners feeling excited and well-met while others feel deserted or lost. In such cases, teachers may be using materials or teaching strategies that are unknowingly attuned to one way of knowing while neglecting others. For example, asking one student to critique another student's idea may feel quite threatening if the student is a Socializing knower who depends on feeling a sense of empathy and agreement with her peers. Teaching the English language only as a collection of specific and concrete rules to be learned may leave both Socializing and Self-Authoring learners feeling frustrated, while an Instrumental learner may feel

comfortable with this type of learning. A teacher's enhanced capacity to support *all* students in a class, across a range of ways of knowing, can increase the chances of more students feeling recognized and valued for the meanings they bring to their learning. Students who are adequately and appropriately supported and challenged academically are likely to learn more. The call to develop a wider variety of instructional designs, encompassing a better-understood range of adult learners' ways of knowing, is the second meaning of the "new pluralism" in the title of this study.

Against expectation, several of the ABE/ESOL learners in our study underwent qualitative change in their way of knowing. These changes were particularly remarkable at the Polaroid site, where eight of sixteen learners demonstrated higher levels of complexity in their final interviews than they had at the time they entered their diploma program. This is the third meaning of a "new pluralism," a new understanding of the *possible* outcomes of ABE/ESOL learning—that qualitative transformation in the adult's way of knowing, while not necessarily *likely* in as brief a period as about one year, is nonetheless a possibility. While the level of complexity of participants' way of knowing was not statistically associated with a measure of their "satisfaction with life" (persons predominantly using more complex ways of knowing were no more or less satisfied with their lives), those using more complex ways of knowing *did* score higher on a measure of internal locus of control. What might occur with respect to qualitative transformation in way of knowing if one follows learners' experiences and development for a *longer* period of time than just one year?

Optimal Features of Classroom Program Design

Toward More Appropriate—and Various—Expectations

An awareness of different meaning systems can inform the expectations that ABE/ESOL educators cast for their students. Our framework helps us see that many desired skills or competencies can be successfully performed from a wide range of developmental ways of knowing, although the purposes and nature of the performance will differ as a function of the complexity of the way of knowing. It also illustrates that appropriate goals for one student's performance will be inappropriate for another student who is operating with different developmental capacities. To return to our conceptual graphic (Figure One), *any* content goal on the horizontal might be appropriate *if* it is taught at a level of complexity that matches well to the learner's place on the vertical. Developmentally-conscious educators may do well to consider the different ways students can demonstrate competence and to scrutinize their overall program goals and individual lesson objectives for ways that

they might be inappropriately cueing students to perform at a certain level of complexity in their meaning system.

Practitioners can also benefit by remaining alert to the ways that learners' meaning systems might also transform over the course of a program. In recognizing and welcoming ongoing forms and expressions of growth and change, teachers can support students' newly emerging identities and capacities, accompanying and scaffolding learners in this process. In inviting development, educators should consider the potential costs as well as the gains to individual learners. Rather than imposing these expectations upon learners in the form of curricular or programmatic requirements, a necessary first step for meaningful learning depends on how well educators can meet students where they are, orienting to their existing frames of knowing.

From Either/Or to Both/And

A developmental perspective neither favors nor condemns one particular educational philosophy or approach to program design. In the familiar battle between advocates of progressive, student-centered designs and those favoring more traditional, teacher-driven content delivery designs, can either side find support for its position from the present study? The answer is yes—both sides can; but both will *also* find an imperative to consider integrating the opposing view as well!

The present study suggests that student choices or preferences for their learning tend to be shaped by their developmental level. Students primarily operating out of one way of knowing may be more responsive to a teacher-driven approach, while other ways of knowing may prefer a student-driven approach. A straightforward implication of our findings is that adult educators might use a developmental perspective to ensure that students' actual (and inevitably contradictory) preferences are taken into account when debating the merits of different forms of instruction. Considerations of how to pace the introduction of new forms of thinking such as self-reflection or critical inquiry can benefit from a developmental analysis. Program designers and teachers can better or more fairly set expectations for the time it takes to help students build higher order thinking skills if they are made aware of the enhanced developmental capacities such a goal implies.

Staying aware of how curricular demands are perceived by different learners is a first step in improving the fit between learning challenge and learner capacity. A second step is actively interpreting particular educational demands through a developmental lens: what is the program or teacher demanding of students from the perspective of their current meaning system? And a third step is for teachers to ask

themselves: "What way (or ways) of knowing does this particular instructional design favor?" and, now that we are aware of unintentionally ignoring some way(s) of knowing, "What can we do to insure we are *also* engaging the other way(s) of knowing?"

Student-Teacher Relationships

Participants across sites who shared a developmental level consistently identified similar aspects of the student-teacher relationship as critical or advisable. A developmental approach which orients to learners' different meaning systems highlights the differing criteria students will bring to their preferences for teaching processes as well as for the personal and professional qualities of teachers themselves. For teachers who aim to extend themselves to the broadest possible range of students, a developmental perspective can serve to lend meaning to potentially puzzling differences in student responses to the teacher's practice and presence. It may serve to build tolerance for these differences and point to possibilities for enhancing flexibility in teachers' styles. And, it can help teachers gauge how innovations in their own practice might be received by students who have grown accustomed to other forms of pedagogy.

Importance of a Learner Cohort

Across sites, the cohort proved to be an important context for supporting learners' sense of their own safety, confidence, academic learning, and development. This finding suggests several implications for educators about the benefits of creating cohorts and opportunities for students to work collaboratively in groups. We see cohorts and collaborative learning as offering opportunities for students to reconsider aspects of their knowing. By sharing and negotiating with their peers, students may also experience important forms of challenge to their existing ideas and even to their existing ways of knowing. Furthermore, the differences in the ways that students understand these experiences indicate that *any one model of collaborative learning may not adequately attend to the learning needs of all students*. We recommend that teachers incorporate a flexible range of approaches to collaboration (including all three of the models Hamilton discusses) to allow all learners in a classroom to find features of support and challenge. Finally, while we recognize it may not always be practical, there appear to be distinct advantages to program designs that bring a learning group together at the same time, preserve the continuity of the group by discouraging mid-course exits and entrances, aim for a meaningful common goal or outcome, and conclude together.

Overall, our evidence suggests that a developmental framework helps organize our understanding of the different experiences of learners, their goals and

aims for their education, and the concomitant experiences of teachers in classrooms who intend to make their learning a sustained possibility. It also recognizes the significance of individuals' *similarities* in meaning-making, despite important influences of culture, language, social role, and even era of the lifespan. Learners in this study who share a developmental level also share a loyalty and adherence to a way of making meaning that is the product of their own persistent engagement with the struggle to know. The consistencies apparent in these meaning making systems do not dilute their importance or the extent of their influence on each learner's individual experiences.

Toward Further Meaning-Centered Explorations of the ABE Experience

Our study is informed by both our developmental perspective and by characteristic debates in ABE around the fundamental purposes of (and approaches to) adult basic education. These debates are necessarily polarized: advocates for a focus on basic skill-building in support of workforce preparation are likely to be at odds with those who champion an emancipatory approach to curricular reform centered around the development of an empowered, critically-conscious citizenry.

Among learners in our study, however, we encountered more nuanced perspectives. Some of our participants described wanting to build skills in service of more effective advocacy for their school-aged children while others desired greater self-awareness so that they might more generously and substantively contribute to their work team. Learners, in short, did not sound like theorists, policy makers, or practitioners. They talked like people in the midst of making meaning of ongoing complex, vital, purposeful, and surprising experiences. We took pains to capture their sensibilities over time and through multiple modalities of data collection because it was the emergence of these meanings that is of greatest interest and importance for us. In essence, our work responded to the call for learner-centered qualitative explorations because we perceive that the boldest evolution of theory, policy, and practice in ABE will come from closely attending to the articulated yearnings of its constituents. Because learners' meanings are expressed not in service of a dedicated (and therefore entrenched) position, but as an active reflection on real experience, theorists, policy makers, and practitioners can respectfully draw from their pool of knowledge to shape recommendations for new directions in the field.

Our work focused primarily on the understandings of learners. We urge researchers in the field to expand on our work to consider closely also the meaning-making of teachers in ABE settings, who, like learners, typically encounter barriers to their capacities to act in ways they find effective and professionally satisfying.

Active debates over directions for teacher development, teacher socialization, and the professionalization of the field would benefit from richer understandings of teachers' preferences for their own learning. Under-resourced, under-compensated, and often under-appreciated, teachers like learners in ABE settings face issues of social and economic marginalization. And, like learners, some teachers find ways to work successfully in the context of considerable constraints. By studying effective teachers, and exploring their meaning-making, we might identify aspects of professionalism associated with success *in spite of* constraints and *in the midst of* the slow process of systematic reform.

Perhaps the fullest implications of the findings of our study remain to be worked out in practice and in future policy debates as stakeholders of adult education lay claim to the findings either to support their own legitimate purposes or to unseat rival claims to legitimacy. As developmental psychologists, educators, and now proponents ourselves of the profoundly ennobling project that is adult basic education, we invite readers into conversation with us as the results of our work provoke your attention.

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