NCSALL Seminar Guide:

Building Teacher/Learner Collaborations

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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Building Teacher/Learner Collaborations

This seminar guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to introduce adult education practitioners to the research on teacher/learner collaborations. Programs or professional developers may want to use this seminar in place of a regularly scheduled meeting, such as a statewide training or a local program staff meeting.

Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

- Prepare a strategy for collaborating with learners to identify a topic on which to build instructional activities
- Examine the social nature of their learners' literacy practices and how those practices may have changed since beginning instruction

Participants: 8 to 12 practitioners who work in adult education—teachers, tutors, and others

Time: 3 hours

Agenda:

30 minutes	1. Welcome and Introductions
5 minutes	2. Objectives and Agenda
60 minutes	3. Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum
15 minutes	***Break***
45 minutes	4. Social Nature of Literacy Practices
15 minutes	5. Planning Next Steps for the Group
10 minutes	6. Evaluation of the Seminar

Session Preparation:

This guide includes the information and materials needed to conduct the seminar: step-by-step instructions for the activities, approximate time for each activity, and notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. The readings and handout, ready for photocopying, are at the end of the guide.

Participants should receive the following readings at least 10 days before the seminar. Ask participants to read the articles, take notes, and write down their questions for sharing at the seminar.

- 🕮 **Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum that Incorporates Real-Life Materials** by Charissa Ahlstrom (*Focus on Basics*, Volume 6, Issue C, September 2003)

- 🕮 **Taking Literacy Skills Home** by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson, and Marta Soler (*Focus on Basics,* Volume 4, Issue D, September 2001)

- 🕮 **Chapter Eight: Students' Perceptions of Life and Literacy Changes** in *Affecting Change in Literacy Practices of Adult Learners: Impact of Two Dimensions of Instruction* by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophia Degener, Erik Jacobson, and Martha Soler (NCSALL Report #17, November 2000)

The facilitator should read the articles, study the seminar steps, and prepare the materials on the following list.

Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time.)

___ Objectives and Agenda (p. 6)

___ Discussion Questions (p. 7)

___ Reflecting on the Research (p. 8)

___ Next Steps (p. 9)

___ Useful/How to Improve (p. 10)

Handout (Make copies for each participant.)

___ *Literacy Practices Questionnaire*

Readings (Have two or three extra copies available for participants who forget to bring them.)

___ **Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum that Incorporates Real-Life Materials**

___ **Taking Literacy Skills Home**

___ **Chapter Eight: Students' Perceptions of Life and Literacy Changes**

Materials

___ Newsprint easel and blank sheets of newsprint

___ Markers, pens, tape

___ Sticky dots

Steps:

1. Welcome and Introductions (30 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** to the seminar. **Introduce yourself** and state your role as facilitator. Explain how you came to facilitate this seminar and who is sponsoring it.
- **Ask participants to introduce themselves** (name, program, and role) and briefly describe an instance when they have collaborated with learners to determine curriculum, instructional activities, program structure, etc.
- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other housekeeping information.

Note to Facilitator
Since time is very tight, it's important to move participants along gently but firmly if they are exceeding their time limit for introductions.

2. Objectives and Agenda (5 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Objectives and Agenda</u>** and review the objectives and steps with the participants.

Objectives

By the end of the seminar, you will be able to:

- Prepare a strategy for collaborating with learners to identify a topic on which to build instructional activities
- Examine the social nature of your learners' literacy practices and how those practices may have changed since beginning instruction

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions (Done!)
2. Objectives and Agenda (Doing)
3. Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum
4. Social Nature of Literacy Practices
5. Planning Next Steps for the Group
6. Evaluation of the Seminar

3. Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum (60 minutes)

- 📖 **Explain to participants that in this activity they will be using the first article—Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum that Incorporates Real-Life Materials—that was mailed to them to read in advance of this session as background.**

  [Note to facilitator: This article provides practical application of Freirean theory to an ESOL classroom. The author describes her approach to curriculum development as social and contextual. Ahlstrom describes how she develops curriculum with her students.]

- **Post the newsprint <u>Discussion Questions.</u>**

  Ask the participants to form small groups of three to four people to explore the following questions. Ask the group to also note questions that arise during their discussion that they would like to discuss with the whole group.

Discussion Questions

- What were the key points of this article?
- What evidence did she give to back up the practices?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of this evidence?
- Which of the findings or practices did you find surprising or intriguing? Why?
- How might the findings or practices in these articles be applicable to your context?

- **After 30 minutes, reconvene the whole group.** Each group reports back to the whole group about any observations, questions, or issues that arose from the reading or small group discussion. After each group presents, there should be time allotted for questions and comments from other groups. (This should be encouraged by the facilitator.)

- **Ask participants to take 5 minutes to review the ideas** generated during the session on collaborating with students to build curriculum.

Then ask the participants to write down a strategy for collaborating with students to identify a theme on which to build an activity.

- **Reconvene the large group and ask two or three participants** to share their strategies.

Break (15 minutes)

4. Social Nature of Literacy Practices (45 minutes)

-  **Explain to participants that in this activity they will be discussing the social nature of their learners' literacy practices** and using the readings, **Taking Literacy Skills Home** and **Chapter Eight: Students' Perceptions of Life and Literacy Changes,** that they read in preparation for the seminar.

  [Note to facilitator: These readings describe findings and discuss results from the Literacy Practices of Adult Learners study. In this empirical study, the researchers investigate how the use of authentic materials and collaborative learning contributes to learners' increased and new literacy practices outside of the adult literacy classroom.

-  **Post the newsprint <u>Reflecting on the Research.</u>** Ask the participants to take 10 minutes to write down the answers to the questions.

Reflecting on the Research

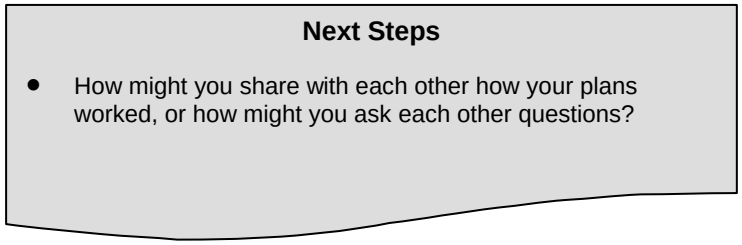
- Which of the findings did you find surprising or intriguing? Why?
- Do you think that your learners have the same perceptions about their literacy practices as the findings in Chapter 8?
- How might that type of information be useful to you in assessing learners and/or providing instruction?

- **Reconvene the whole group.** Ask participants to share their comments and questions, and then lead a general discussion of the article, using the discussion questions as a guide.

- **Distribute the handout *Literacy Practices Questionnaire* and ask participants to share** how they might use this questionnaire with their learners and how it might be useful in their contexts.

5. Planning Next Steps for the Group (15 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Next Steps.</u>** Explain that now that the individual participants have an idea to try for collaborating with learners and a plan for using the *Literacy Practices Questionnaire* in their programs and/or classrooms, the group should make a plan about its next steps**.**



- **Write the next steps** on the newsprint as the participants mention them. After five minutes of brainstorming, ask participants to silently look at the options and decide on two that they think are priorities.

- **Hand a sticky dot to each participant** and ask the group to put their dots next to the idea that they would most like the group to do. If they don't want to do any of the activities, they should not put their dots on the newsprint.

- **Lead the group in organizing its choice. For example:**

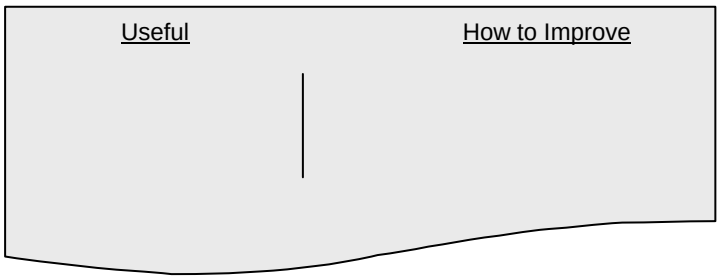
  - If they choose to schedule a follow-up meeting, set the date, time, and place for the meeting, and brainstorm an agenda for the meeting. Determine who will definitely be coming, and who will take the responsibility to cancel the meeting in case of bad weather.

  - If they choose to organize an e-mail list, pass around a sheet for everyone to list their e-mail addresses. Decide who is going to start the first posting, and discuss what types of discussion or postings people would like to see (e.g., asking questions about how to try out their ideas, describing what happened after they tried it, sharing other resources, etc.).

6. Evaluation of the Seminar (10 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in the time left, you would like to get feedback from them about this seminar.** You will use this feedback in shaping future seminars.

- **Post the newsprint Useful/How to Improve.**



  Ask participants first to tell you what was useful or helpful to them about the design and content of this seminar. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "Useful."

- **Then ask participants for suggestions on how to improve this design and content**. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "How to Improve." If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask the person to rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion on the newsprint.

- **Do not make any response to participants' comments during this evaluation.** It is very important for you not to defend or justify anything you have done in the seminar or anything about the design or content, as this will discourage further suggestions. If anyone makes a suggestion you don't agree with, just nod your head. If you feel some response is needed, rephrase their concern: "So you feel that what we should do instead of the small-group discussion is . . . ? Is that right?"

- **Refer participants to the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy Web site (www.ncsall.net) for further information**. Point out that most NCSALL publications may be downloaded for free from the Web site. Print versions can by ordered by contacting NCSALL at World Education: ncsall@worlded.org.

- **Thank everyone** for coming and participating in the seminar.

Reading 🕮

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Collaborating with Students to Build Curriculum that Incorporates Real-Life Materials

By Charissa Ahlstrom
Focus on Basics, Volume 6, Issue C, September 2003, pp. 1, 3-7

My formative experiences as a teacher of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) occurred 10 years ago, as I began teaching in and coordinating Inglés Para la Comunidad, a church-based ESOL program serving Latin American immigrants in New York City. The program's founders were committed to shaping the program around a particular understanding of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. One of their focuses was on Freire's premise that a liberating education needs to be "co-intentional" (Freire, 1972, p. 56). They interpreted this to mean that students and teachers should engage in dialogue, investigating themes as equals and creating new understandings of the world together. The curriculum had to address student needs, reflect collaboration between the learners and the teachers, and include regular student evaluation.

Ever since then, I've tried to create curricula that reflect collaboration between the students and me. Today, my curriculum includes student-identified themes combined with structured language practice, and an emphasis on communication. Sometimes I use the themes in a Freirean way, as ways to enter into an examination of underlying power structures. I often use the themes more simply as a way to ensure that students are learning content that matters to them. I try to use a wide variety of material and media, prioritizing student-created texts and materials that students might encounter in their daily lives. In this article, I'll explain why and how I do this.

The Students' Perspective

In the orientation we provided to volunteers at Inglés Para la Comunidad, we shared this story from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972). Freire describes an educator who was working with Brazilian tenement residents and wanted to do a lesson on alcoholism. The teacher showed the tenement residents a picture of a drunken man and three men talking, and asked them to comment on the picture. Rather than comment negatively on the alcoholism, the residents said:

> *The only one there who is productive and useful to his country is the souse who is returning home after working all day for low wages and who is worried about his family because he can't take care of their needs. He is the only worker. He is a decent worker and a souse like us"* (p. 111).

Freire used this example to demonstrate how teachers should begin "thematic investigations" (p. 112). I like this story because it reminds me not to assume that I know my students' perspectives or needs with regard to a particular theme. Auerbach (1992) also stresses the importance of this collaborative process of identifying "the real (rather than imagined) issues of each group" (p. 1).

It's easy to get carried away with my own excitement in creating curriculum or with my own perspective on an issue. Once, when I was teaching a unit on shopping, I asked the students what problems they encountered at stores. One student complained that cashiers had treated her unkindly because she used food stamps. Hearing that, I immediately planned to have the students practice writing letters to a manager. But then I remembered that I should pose the question to the students and brainstorm ideas so we could collaboratively reach solutions. They said they were more inclined to talk to the manager immediately, so we practiced conversations, in addition to brainstorming multiple ways to respond to the situation.

My Definition of Curriculum

Underlying my use of the term "curriculum" are two interrelated assumptions. First, building on my understanding of Freire (1972), I believe that curriculum is not neutral. The curriculum I use supports the development of English language skills. It also instills values and political views. This transmission of knowledge and values is both explicit and implicit. I also agree with Cornbleth's understanding of curriculum (1990) as a "contextualized social process." Curriculum includes not only the entirety of activities, methods, materials, and physical and social environment of the whole learning center, but also the dynamic processes that shape and change these components. Multiple bodies and forces, for example, the staff, the broader sociopolitical forces, a program's funders, the students themselves, as well as community and national or international events, shape these processes. While the term "curriculum" can refer to the entirety of learning occurring within a center, in my article I often use the term to refer to the environment of my class, including students' input alongside the program's criteria for my level.

-Charissa Ahlstrom

At Inglés Para la Comunidad, we did not consider formal grammar instruction to be ineffectual (Krashen & Terrell, 1995), but, at the same time, grammar was not an end in itself. Communication was the primary focus: we worked on grammar within the context of the themes brought out by the students; and we also addressed grammar in its role as an aid to effective communication. If

students had difficulty with the past tense, and we were discussing health, we had students share past experiences at the doctor, in the hospital, and how they dealt with illnesses in their country. We used these contexts to introduce or review past tense forms, and examined how grammar issues impeded their effective conversation and writing.

Program Framework

I currently teach ESOL at the Adult Learning Program (ALP) of the Jamaica Plain Community Centers, in Boston, MA. I am teaching a class of advanced beginners (level two of six levels of ESOL); the lowest ability level in the class is SPL 2-3 as measured by the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) and the Arlington Education Employment Program (REEP) writing assessment. My students are from Haiti, Somalia, and Latin America; their educational levels range from some higher education to only three years of education. My class is held three evenings a week for a total of eight hours a week. We have classes throughout the year, with on-going entry. We do not have exact "sessions," although September, January, and June emerge as times of greater transition for students entering, leaving, and advancing to higher levels within the program.

In our program, the ESOL teachers have created level guides that identify what standards we use to advance students to the next level. These lists include such items as "demonstrates familiarity [with] and usage of simple present and present progressive" and "able to use a bilingual dictionary." Teachers created the original checklists a number of years ago. Each year, the teachers work together to "tweak" the lists so that they reflect the current students' needs, adjusting them if students' language needs have changed significantly. The level guides are helpful tools to use when talking to students and to other teachers about students' progress, as well as for initial placement. We also use these lists to guide, but not dictate, language and skill instruction at each level. The teacher and the class determine the manner in which a class covers these skills and language.

Soliciting Themes from Students

I build curricula by soliciting themes from students and combining them with language skills typical of our program's level two, using our level guide as the reference. I use a variety of structured activities, such as checklists (with pictures) or brainstorming, to discover what themes are interesting or important to students. I also gain ideas informally, noticing which topics engage students emotionally. For example, during a recent conversation about what people did over the weekend, one woman told us that her car was stolen. This sparked an active discussion, with many students recounting their

experiences of crime, and sharing advice and suggestions on crime prevention. Class members were very concerned, so I included crime prevention as a subsequent free-writing and conversation topic.

Once I have ideas about students' wants and needs, I follow the example of a colleague and place the themes on a list and ask students to vote on which topic to cover next. When I finish that unit, which may take anywhere from six to eight weeks, the list goes back up, the students add more topics if they like, and they vote again. (Since they are level two students, sometimes I put pictures up next to items on the list to help them decipher the vocabulary.) This past year, the students concluded most thematic units with projects. For example, at the end of a unit on maps and directions, the students composed directions to their homes, and we all used one student's work when she invited the class over for dinner. At the end of a unit on reading the newspaper, the students created their own newspaper, writing columns, horoscopes, an advice column, and drawing cartoons.

Spontaneous themes sometimes emerge from my own reading of our class dynamics, or when I want to emphasize alternatives to the dominant US culture. For example, I often highlight Muslim culture and holidays and ask Muslim students if they are willing to present their traditions, since their peers have expressed a lack of knowledge of the words mosque, Muslim, and Ramadan, and why students leave the room to pray. If difficult or large-scale political or news events occur, I provide time in class to discuss and explore them, and develop them further as themes if students are interested. If a difficult issue has arisen in class, such as an offensive comment or a conflict between students, I try to address it quickly through the curriculum and in a class discussion.

Materials

Based on the themes and goals the students have chosen, I use whatever materials are needed to build students' abilities to address their goals: this often includes what I call "real life" material, but not necessarily or exclusively. The term "real-life" implies to me certain survival-level and practical themes related to daily life in the community, such as shopping, getting jobs, and transportation, which are often—but not always—the themes students choose. Others use the terms "real life" and "authentic" fairly interchangeably, and apply them to a wider range of materials. Nunan (1988) uses the term "authentic" materials to describe those that "reflect the outside world," and "have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" (p. 99). Purcell-Gates and colleagues (2001) describe authentic materials, or learner-contextualized materials, as print materials that occur naturally in the lives of learners outside of their adult education classrooms (p. 19). Some

obvious examples are newspapers, magazines, bills, maps, job applications, or novels. Radio broadcasts, music, television, or videos can be considered authentic "listening" materials, and an important element of ESOL.

I also use technology—mostly computers, but occasionally tape recorders, cameras, or camcorders as well—for real life purposes. While I occasionally use an ESOL software program to reinforce a theme or language skill in a traditional "school" way (for a drill, for example), I focus on creating lessons that allow learners to use the computer in ways they want to outside of the classroom. For example, my students have set up e-mail accounts, looked up information from their countries, examined web sites created by other ESOL learners, contacted legislators, learned games, practiced typing, and typed their own writing using the computer.

I use real life materials to connect further the theme the students have chosen to their learning goals. Widdowson (1990) points out that it is not the text or source itself that fosters student learning, but rather students' engagement with it. Poorly selected or presented authentic—real life—materials can be irrelevant or inaccessible to students. Collaborating with students to choose themes and materials is an important aspect of ensuring that materials are meaningful to the learners, but so is ensuring that the materials are accessible.

What It Looks Like

Once the class has decided upon a topic, I ask the students for more details. For example, my students recently voted to review maps and directions, so I asked them what maps they found difficult, and which ones they wanted to practice. A few said the "T" (Boston subway) map was pretty easy, but the Massachusetts or Boston neighborhood maps could be very difficult. Since they were familiar with the "T" map, I used it to introduce and practice new vocabulary and to review prepositions, which seemed to be difficult for them. I introduced the other two maps once they were more comfortable with giving and getting directions."

In that example, the students used actual "real-life" materials as a basis to learn to use more difficult authentic materials. But sometimes students cannot immediately use the materials in the ways that native speakers may use them. Widdowson (1990) discusses how "meanings are achieved by human agency, and are negotiable; they are not contained in the text." I need to present the materials in a way that students can create the most meaning from them, and therefore I may need to scaffold them into a particular text or media. For example, when the class and I look at bills together, we sometimes examine small pieces of the statement at a time. We do preliminary brainstorming on the parts and difficulties of bills. If students want to work together on filling

out job applications, for example, they might create work and education time lines as a first step before jumping to the format of actual applications. We might do some games, activities, or exercises to reinforce new concepts or vocabulary found in the materials.

Last year, students wanted to read newspapers, such as the *Boston Globe*, the *Metro*, and the *Boston Herald*. Yet my students find even *News for You*, a newspaper written for adult learners and published by New Readers Press (see **www.news-for-you.com**), very challenging, and, for a few learners, overwhelming. Many students, for example, have difficulty understanding the difference between "article" and "advertisement," and differentiating an article from an advertisement in the newspaper. Many do not know how to use the index or list of contents. I scoured the popular papers for articles that were short and accessible to some, and also conducted activities that familiarized students with the formats of newspapers. In addition, I provided them with opportunities to discuss and build their knowledge of current events, by watching the TV news or reading newspapers from their home countries online and reporting on the articles in English in class or small groups. So although they did not use the newspapers as full reading texts, they increased their abilities to navigate and understand the media, as well as to discuss current news topics.

Practicing Conversation "Authentically"

Using authentic materials can be a struggle when students want to focus on conversation. This past fall, students chose the theme "conversations with the doctor." How can I replicate individual doctor conversations? I can't bring their individual doctors in, so I created situations to simulate conversations, and had them practice with each other. After they chose health topics they wanted to practice discussing, they used "authentic materials" to do some research. The medical pamphlets, encyclopedias, and health books were often too difficult, so a volunteer tutor and I simplified a few passages, and provided videos and children's health books on the topics as well. Then they used tape recorders to tape spontaneous dialogues on their topics. The students transcribed and edited their dialogue, then retaped them in a more rehearsed way. We used these tapes as the texts for listening and comprehension, as well as the transcripts for reading texts.

This undertaking was our project-based component. In between these activities, we had conversations about problems people had with the doctor, and we compared American hospitals and concepts of health and medicine with those of the students' native countries. The students read photo-stories (created by adult learners) and short books (created for adult learners) on breast cancer and debated the question of prescribing medicine for children

diagnosed as hyperactive. They also shared opinions and stories on these issues, and gave presentations on their stories.

Student-Created Materials

My students often create things, such as the transcriptions of dialogues described above, as well as newsletters, tapes, or stories that, with permission, I can use in future classes. Sometimes, students take pictures at work, or bring in objects from their home as sources for conversation or writing. I use learner-created materials to provide texts that are relevant and meaningful to my students. The materials are usually accessible to others in my class, and they create a base of learning that is centered on the class's own knowledge. Students appreciate reading the work of their peers, and I want to use the inherent power of my position as a teacher to validate students' work as rich texts.

Integrating Specific Language Skills

When students need to review specific language skills, I intentionally integrate activities that focus on those skills. For example, I present the structures, and then incorporate activities for students to self-edit, paying attention to these particular structures in their own texts. I lead a few drills and games to practice an isolated pattern, and I try to draw on the students' native language knowledge to help them understand or analyze a particular language structure. To the extent possible, I use students' own work as well as the thematic topic as the point of departure for work with grammar.

Old Favorites

Regardless of what themes or language topics learners choose, I always assign dialogue journals, which involve correspondence between individual students and me. The journals help students to develop their abilities and provide more individualized opportunities for skill development than activities that are more collectively created. They are by nature on-going and run concurrently to the shorter-term thematic units. I don't mark the journals, but provide students with feedback via the questions I pose. I also model correct spelling or structures within my response letter. The students also keep free-writing journals, in which, twice a month, they write without any restrictions on topic, without any editing or correction of grammar. Both journals give students an opportunity to reflect and explore about personal topics that might interest or concern them. For example, sometimes students write about why their work day was difficult, or that it's their child's birthday. Their entries provide me with insight into what shapes or affects them as learners.

I also have students engage in reading circles or specialized circles throughout the year. In the former, students choose from a list of some longer books to read (often texts created by and/or for adult learners), and separate into groups based on their choices. The books can take up to 10 weeks for the students to finish. These groups meet once a week during class to read and discuss the books together, with pre-reading or post-reading activities specific for their book. When students finish these reading circles, I introduce specialized circles, for which students choose an area of focus: speaking and listening, reading, or writing. These groups then meet once a week and focus on activities for their specific needs, often ending with a small project or presentation to share with the class. Individual spelling or vocabulary cards provide students with reinforcement for spelling or word issues—not theme-based—that have been difficult for them. Some students have fewer cards, and some students do not need the same amount of review. All these activities provide more individualized opportunities for students to focus on vocabulary or topics that are difficult or interesting for them.

In Conclusion

One of my highest priorities in building curriculum is that the material is drawn from learners' lives, and that the students are continually part of shaping the curriculum. As a result, I have an emergent, theme-based curriculum, where I integrate student-created and authentic materials on a regular basis. I use authentic—real-life—materials in multiple ways, and I also integrate other sources such as stories created for adult learners, student-created texts, poetry, as well as some workbook, but more often teacher-created, activities. Sometimes I forget to go to the students for further ideas, and sometimes I get too focused on a student's ability to do isolated skills. Yet the structures I have set in place for building curriculum keep bringing me back to students for ideas and focus.

Collaborating with students to create a theme-based curriculum is always dynamic. Each class has slightly different needs and goals. New facets of a familiar topic emerge as individuals bring their own experiences to the discussions that shape our agenda. Each year brings new topics and interests as well. When I approach a new or repeated topic, the collective process makes each unit unique.

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About the Author

Charissa Ahlstrom has taught in and coordinated community-based ESOL programs in New York City and Boston for more than 10 years. She just completed the Applied Linguistics graduate program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. She is also deeply grateful for the support and integrity of her colleagues at the Adult Learning Program in Jamaica Plain, where she has worked for six years.

Reading 

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Taking Literacy Skills Home

NCSALL research finds that use of authentic reading materials in class increases learners' out-of-class literacy activities

by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson, & Marta Soler (*Focus on Basics,* Volume 4, Issue D, September 2001)

"Before, I would get letters from the children's school and I needed someone [to] read them to me in order to know what they were asking me to do. Now I don't need it."
"I can write a check now."
"I can look at a map now and use road signs."
"I just started using calendars and appointment books."
"I can pick up a newspaper and read the headline now."
"Now I can pick up my Bible, and I can read a scripture."
"I can go to a lunch counter and look on the bulletin board and read it now."

These are just a few of the comments made by adult literacy students who participated in a National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) -sponsored study, Literacy Practice of Adult Learners (LPALS). The study looked at changes in the literacy practices of adults as a result of attending adult literacy classes. Results show that students who participate in classes in which real-life literacy activities and texts are used increase the frequency with which they read and write in their daily lives. Such learners also expand the variety of texts they read and write outside of school. This is in comparison to results in students who participate in classes with fewer or no real-life literacy activities and texts.

By looking at these changes, LPALS was measuring an important - one could argue that it is the most important - outcome of adult literacy instruction: the actual application of newly learned literacy skills. Rather than inferring from other outcome measures, such as achievement tests, that literacy skills are applied in day-to-day life, this study looked at those applications directly. It looked at whether or not the adult learners actually use their new literacy skills to achieve their own personal goals, meet their own needs, and participate more fully in their personal and family life.

The significance of the results goes beyond the adult learners to encompass issues of intergenerational literacy success and failure. Children who grow up in homes where adults read and write more, and read and write more types of texts (e.g., coupons, recipes, correspondence, documents, magazine articles, books, etc.) learn more about the conceptual bases of reading and writing than those in homes where adults read and write less. Children who begin school with higher levels of literacy knowledge and familiarity are more successful at learning to read and write.

The Participants

The LPALS research team collected data on out-of-school literacy practices from 173 adults attending 83 different classes across the United States. The adult literacy students represented the range of students in the various types of adult literacy classes in the United States today. They were both native-born and foreign-born and ranged in age from 18 to 68 years. They were currently learning in classes or in tutorial arrangements that reflected a range of configurations: adult basic education (ABE), preparation for tests of General Educational Development (GED), family literacy, Evenstart, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Upon beginning the classes they were attending, the literacy levels of the participants ranged from preliterate (19.1%) to a level of 11th grade and up (7.5%). The majority of the students were reported by their teachers to be reading around the fourth to seventh grade levels (31.2%) when they first began attending the class involved in the study. Women made up 70% of the sample.

Dimensions of Instruction

To relate changes in adult literacy students' literacy practices to the types of instruction they were receiving, the student participants and their current literacy class teachers were recruited to the study together. Teachers of adult literacy volunteered for the project in response to calls put out through the NCSALL network as well as through contacts known to members of the research team. A class, or site, was defined as one teacher and at least one student working together. Thus, among the 83 classes, about one-third of them were configured as tutor-tutee, a common instructional approach in adult basic education.

The LPALS team thought that two dimensions of adult literacy instruction might relate to change in literacy practice. The first was authenticity of instruction, or how close the activities and texts used in the class are to actual literacy practice in the world outside of formal schooling. The second dimension was the degree of collaboration that existed between the students and the teachers: the degree to which students and teachers share decision-

making for all aspects of their program, including assessment, goal-setting, activities, texts, and program governance. These two dimensions were chosen because they represent best practice among many adult literacy theorists, researchers, and practitioners, and a logical argument can be made for their relationship to literacy practice change among students. Many believe that if adult students are given the opportunity to request instruction around specific texts and activities that are personally important and relevant to them, if they feel a sense of ownership in their schooling, and if they learn the skills of reading and writing through reading and writing real-world texts for real-world purposes, they will be more likely to apply their reading and writing abilities in their lives outside of school. Examples of real life texts include newspapers, driver's license manuals, recipes; real-world purposes include reading newspapers to learn about the news, reading recipes in order to actually cook something. (For a fuller description, see *Focus on Basics*, 2B, pp. 11-14, and 3D, pp. 26-27.)

Each class in the study was assigned a score that reflected the class's location along a continuum of practice for each dimension. For authenticity, the four possible scores were (1) highly authentic; (2) somewhat authentic; (3) somewhat school-only; (4) highly school-only. For collaboration, the four possible scores were (1) highly collaborative; (2) somewhat collaborative; (3)

Using Authentic Materials:
Karen

Karen teaches an adult literacy class to a group of women in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in a large city. Issues that arise in the neighborhood often influence the direction that the class goes on any given day. For example, one day some of the students came to class very disturbed. A young girl in the neighborhood had been assaulted. The learners felt that the police, the school, and the community were being very passive about the case. Many women in the class have daughters about the same age as the assault victim, and as they learned more about the case, they, too, became very upset. Karen realized that this issue really mattered to the students, so she devoted much of the next week's instruction to learning more about this case. She brought in different newspapers that covered the case for the students to read and discuss. The class decided to write a letter to the editor about the incident. As the class wrote the letter together, Karen took the opportunity to teach a short lesson on writing a business letter, as well as to go over some spelling patterns. Karen also proposed that the class do some research on issues of women's rights and safety.

Using the Internet as well as other resources, the class spent much time reading about and discussing these issues. At the same time, Karen pulled out unfamiliar vocabulary words from the different resources to work on with the students. Karen likes the fact that she can cover the reading and writing skills that her students need within a context that interests and motivates her students.

somewhat teacher-directed; 4) highly teacher-directed. These scores were used in the subsequent analysis.

Change

Data collectors visited the volunteer participants in their homes at the beginning of their participation in literacy class and at the end. They asked if students were reading or writing any new types of material since they started attending the literacy class they were currently attending (and on which data had been collected). This information was gathered with the use of a structured questionnaire that asked questions about 50 different literacy practices. The data collector then sent the completed questionnaire to the research office for coding. Each participant was paid $10 per interview.

Results showed that the degree of authenticity in adult literacy instruction had a moderate statistically significant effect on literacy practice change. This was true after controlling for the other factors that also showed independent significant effects on literacy practice change. These factors included literacy level of the student when beginning the program; number of days the student had attended the program; and the non-ESOL status of the student. The degree of collaboration between students and teachers showed no relationship with literacy practice change.

Independent effects are those effects that, after controlling for all other variables that were statistically significantly related to change in literacy practice, is also significantly related to change in literacy practice. The strongest independent effect was students' literacy level when they began the classes. The lower the literacy level at the beginning, the greater the change in literacy practices reported by students. This makes intuitive sense: students who are unable to read or write much at all will not be able to engage in many outside-of-school literacy practices. However, as they gain skill, they will begin to use that skill for many of the basic literacy practices - reading signs, food labels, and others - that, across all of our participants, were for the most part already engaged in by the time students began their reading classes.

Complementing this effect was the fact that the longer the students had attended their classes, the more change in literacy practices they reported. Again, this makes intuitive sense if one concludes that low-skilled students will begin to pick up basic literacy practices and then add to them over time as their skill continues to increase.

The negative effect of ESOL status on change in literacy practices means that ESOL students enrolled in ESOL classes were less likely to report changes in literacy practices than were other students. This is probably because many of

the ESOL students in the participant pool were already engaging in many literacy practices in their native languages by the time they began their ESOL classes, and focused instead on learning to read and write in English. The final participant pool included relatively few ESOL students so this effect is probably more of an artifact of the data-gathering for this study rather than a finding that one would wish to generalize to all ESOL students, according to Purcell-Gates.

Authentic Literacy Instruction

These results provide empirical justification for teachers to include real-life literacy activities and texts in their classes. What do these classes look like that do include authentic literacy instruction? The most authentic classes use many types of texts that occur naturally in the lives of people outside of the classroom. For example, some teachers use actual newspapers, magazines, work manuals, job applications, and coupons for literacy instruction. Furthermore, these texts are often, if not always, used for the actual purposes they are used in real life. Newspapers are read to find out about the news, the weather, or current issues of importance and interest to the students. Driver's manuals are read to prepare for an actual driver's test. Job applications are read and filled in as part of real-life job searches. Stories or reports are written and actually published in

Using Authentic Materials:
Peter & Christine

Peter and Christine teach an adult basic education class in a large working- class community 40 miles from a large city. The students in their class come from a wide range of backgrounds and they all read at different levels. One of Peter and Christine's major challenges is using materials and activities that reflect the lives of all of their learners. They address this challenge by providing a lot of class time for students to explore their own interests and needs. For example, they have a computer teacher come in once a week to work with individual students on exploring the Internet. The students choose what topics they would like to learn more about, and the computer teacher helps them to access that information. One student wanted to learn more about child support and the laws that enforce payment of child support. The time she spent researching on the Internet helped this student to learn about the laws and also find available resources for helping her to obtain back payments from her ex-husband. Peter and Christine also provide time during each class for students to bring in materials they want to read or write. For instance, one student is trying to upgrade his trucking license, and to do so he needs to pass a test. He brings the test preparation manual to class each night to read during this time. Another student uses the time to write letters to her family in El Salvador. Peter and Christine, as well as a couple of tutors, provide assistance to the students, as needed, during this time. While much of the class time is spent doing whole class activities, such as reading novels or sharing their writing, the students also appreciate the time they have to explore materials of individual, personal interest to them.

newspapers or journals connected with the literacy program. Novels are read and discussed in response groups similar to adult book clubs that exist outside of schools.

The next most authentic classrooms used more real-life texts than published textbooks and workbooks but did not use real-life texts exclusively. While the majority of the activities in these classrooms centered around authentic texts, the texts were not always used for authentic purposes. Rather, the activities sometimes mimicked real-life uses of these texts. For example, students wrote letters to an editor of a newspaper in the form found in real newspapers, but the letters were not actually sent.
The results of this study suggest that teachers of adult literacy may want to begin to increase the degree to which they include real-life literacy activities and texts in their classes. These results do not indicate that this is an all-or-nothing change. They indicate that the degree to which authentic literacy activities and texts are included in the instruction is important to think about when teaching for actual use of reading and writing skills outside of the classroom. The LPALS team is currently preparing a teacher handbook designed to help adult literacy teachers apply the results of this study to their own practice.

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Reading 📖

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Chapter Eight: Students' Perceptions of Life and Literacy Changes

Secondary Qualitative Analysis

(Affecting Change in Literacy Practices of Adult Learners: Impact of Two Dimensions of Instruction by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, Erik Jacobson, and Marta Soler. NCSALL Report #17, November 2000)

The primary objective, and ensuing design, of this study was to empirically explore the claim that adult literacy instruction that was more authentic and collaborative would positively impact change in adult students' out-of-school literacy practices. The quantitative analysis, just described, served this end. However, in the course of the coding phase of the analysis, it became increasingly obvious to us that, despite what results would accrue from the quantitative analysis, the participants, themselves, were attributing change in literacy practice to factors other than dimensions of their adult literacy instruction. Although they all seemed to accept our apparent presupposition that the topic of literacy practices was connected in some way to the fact that they were attending literacy classes, few of them explicitly contextualized any reading and writing they did in the past, currently engaged in more frequently, or did for the first time with the dimensions of authenticity or collaboration in classroom experiences. Rather, whenever they did provide context for these literacy practice changes, it was more often reflective of life experiences. In other words, their comments regarding literacy practice change, as captured by the data collectors on the questionnaires, reflected the socially embedded nature of literacy commented upon by Street (1989) and Barton (1998), among others. Wishing to capture this, we initiated an additional analysis, one that was qualitative in nature.

The data for this qualitative analysis came from the home literacy practices questionnaire. Recall that the questionnaires included space for recording comments made spontaneously by participants in response to each of the questions about their literacy practices (e.g., "have you ever read a menu?"). In many cases, the recorded responses involved unelaborated chronological data (e.g., "Began in 1983"). However, a large number of completed questionnaires contained more elaborated comments. These comments were sometimes direct quotes from participants (e.g., "When I got my first job" in response to the question about when the participant began a certain practice).

More often, these comments were data collectors' summaries of students' comments (e.g., "J____ began practice 6 years ago when her husband wanted to go out to eat."). These two types of responses made up the data for the qualitative analysis. The research question for this analysis was: To what do adult literacy students spontaneously attribute their literacy changes?

Data Collection

The home literacy practices questionnaires of the 173 study participants (a total of 321 questionnaires) were divided and analyzed by four research assistants, who looked for elaborated information regarding changes in participants' literacy practices. Comments were treated as data for this analysis only if they provided additional information not captured by the quantitative analysis of the questionnaires. For example, the comment "Reads menus more frequently now" would not have been included in the database since this information would have been captured by the yes/no question, "Do you think you've read any of these items more often since you began attending your literacy class?" However, if a specific reason was given for the change in frequency, such as getting a new job or going out to eat more often, the comment was recorded.

Types of changes in literacy practice that were included in this analysis included: (a) increase in frequency of literacy practice; (b) decrease in frequency of literacy practice; (c) initiation of a new practice; (d) cessation of a literacy practice. Note that this differs somewhat from the operationalization of "change" used for the quantitative analysis. For that analysis, we were only interested in the construct of increase of literacy practice, both in frequency within practice and in new types of practices. However, for this analysis, we wished to explore the ways in which, as perceived by the participants, life events contextualized changes in reading and writing—both as increases in practice(s) or as decrease in practice(s). Further, for this analysis, we included all changes mentioned by the participant, regardless of when they occurred, i.e., we did not limit our analysis to those changes that occurred after the student began the class they were currently attending. For ESOL students, a language shift regarding an existing literacy practice was not coded as a change in practice (e.g., when a student stopped reading menus in Spanish and began reading them in English, after moving to the United States).[1] Also, as for the quantitative analysis, the data related to literacy with children was not included.

[1] Clearly, moving to an English-speaking country constitutes a major life event that contextualizes change to an English-language literacy practice. However, as with the quantitative analysis, we were only interested in this study with literacy practice change, not the language of the literacy practice.

Of the 173 participants whose questionnaire responses were considered for this qualitative analysis, 117 had comments recorded that provided additional insight into their literacy changes. The questionnaires of the 56 participants that were not considered for this analysis either had no comments filled in at all, had comments that did not expand on the information captured by the quantitative analysis, or had comments that did not account for changes in literacy practices. It must be noted that it was up to each individual data collector to decide which comments should be recorded and whether or not to record comments at all. Therefore, one cannot conclude that the 56 participants whose questionnaires were not used for this analysis did not share their thoughts about their changes in literacy practices. It may simply be that their comments were not recorded.

Responses regarding changes in literacy practices from the 117 participants were entered into a Microsoft Access database. The following information was collected for each piece of data: (a) Subject ID; (b) Class type; (c) ESOL status; (d) Date student began current class; (e) Other adult programs student has enrolled in; (f) Student goals for joining; (g) description of interview setting; (h) Literacy practice (question number); (g) Frequency of literacy practice; (h) Comments made by the student; (I) Was change before or after class?

After all of this data from the questionnaires had been entered into the database, one of the research assistants analyzed approximately one-half of it, creating a preliminary list of eight codes to be used to categorize the data. Two other research assistants then reviewed all of the data to refine and augment the initial codes. They independently created a list of codes and then compared and discussed their lists. Initially, they agreed on 12 codes. When their codes varied, they discussed and resolved the differences. In the process, seven of the original eight codes were retained, one was dropped, and ten new codes were added. The same two research assistants then read through the database again, this time using the new codes to categorize the data. The database was reorganized, categorized according to each of the 17 codes, and entered into a new Access database. To check for coding errors, the two research assistants read through each other's data sets to ensure that the data in each category had been coded and sorted correctly. Based on these re-readings, four items were removed from one category and placed in another. Once the database was ascertained to be complete and accurate, frequencies and totals were run.

Results

The results of this analysis reveal a range of life changes that carried with them changes in the types and frequencies of literacy practices in which the literacy students in this participant pool engaged. Table 13 displays the

categories of change and the frequencies with which they were cited by the participants. Following, we briefly discuss each category and provide example comments that exemplify the ways in which literacy practices reflected the lives of the participants at given moments in time. The categories are not exclusive and some clearly overlap, such as child-related changes and changes in family situation.

Table 13
Life Changes Related to Literacy Practice Changes by Adult Literacy Students; *N* = 117

Type of Life Change	*n*	% of Total
Employment	40	34
Schooling	32	27
Living Situation	23	20
Child-Related	22	19
Family Situation	22	19
Marital/Relationship Status	22	19
Location	19	16
Student's Health	17	15
Leisure Activities	16	14
Finances	13	11
Technology	10	9
Driving a Car	10	9
Religious Practices	9	8
Non-School Literacy Support	7	6
Needs or Interests	6	5
Family Member's Health	4	3
Citizenship Status	2	2

Literacy Practice Change Related to Employment

In a literate culture such as this one, almost all jobs require some type of reading and/or writing, and the participant comments reflected this influence on their literacy practices. Often specific jobs brought with them specific literacy tasks, and many of the participants began reading certain types of tasks at the point they began new jobs. Conversely, participants reported that they stopped reading and writing specific types of texts when they quit the jobs that required them. For example, reading instructions was commonly required with the types of jobs the literacy students in this study occupied. Another common practice tied to employment was that of reading and writing notes and memos to other employees or to themselves while on the job. Other types of texts often mentioned within this category included schedules/guides,

incident reports, phone books, and print on envelopes. Several participants reported beginning the practice of creating and using personal appointment and phone books once they started working. Time-management seemed to be the motivating factor for this as well as the fact that employment usually meant they were outside of the home and, thus, needed to carry the phone numbers of important people in their lives with them.

The reading of particularly complex texts was often related to job requirements. One 51-year-old man, who had only finished 6th grade, worked part-time managing the apartments in which he and his family lived. This position required that he not only read applications from people wanting an apartment but also that he read, and understand, apartment leases—a text we considered a "document". He only began this type of reading when he took on the job of apartment manager.

Seeking a new job also brought with it new literacy practices such as reading and filling in job applications, reading notices of job openings, reading phone books to call prospective employers, and so on. Once employment was obtained, these practices—particularly those involving applications—often ceased, and if the participant did not find herself on the job market again, may never have begun again.

At times, literacy practices were reported as peripherally related to employment. There was the case, for example, where a 34-year-old Guatemalan woman reported first reading comics and cartoons during her tenure as a live-in maid. The home contained magazines with comics and cartoons that she would read on occasion. She said that she stopped this type of reading when she left that job. Another Guatemalan immigrant reported that she stopped reading so much print on home entertainment products (e.g., videos) when she started working, citing the lack of time (for, presumably, engaging in watching videos and TV at home). Other participants reported new reading and writing practices related to the money they earned involving texts like paychecks, bank statements, deposit forms, receipts, etc.

Schooling Brings Changes in Literacy Practices

Another life-change that contextualized literacy practice change for our participants was that of attending an adult literacy class. Twenty-seven percent of the participants in this analysis cited this as explanatory for a specific change in literacy practice. For the most part, this change involved either increase in frequency for the practice or the initiation of a new one. Rarely did students report stopping a practice once they began attending a literacy class. However, they did report stopping certain practices at the conclusion of a class.

The two main factors involved in this school-practice change relationship were (a) increase in literacy ability; and (b) text types encountered in school activities that were apparently not part of their lives before attending the class. Other factors included time-management texts such as personal calendars that became necessary once students added school to their regular activities as well as the introduction to U.S.-culturally specific literacy texts and practices encountered by previously low- or nonliterate immigrants.

Many of the respondents in this category gave evidence that their increasing ability to read and write, as a result of attending an adult literacy class, accounted for their adoption of new "everyday" literacy activities. They cited their newly acquired abilities to read ads, coupons, flyers, directions, menus, phone books, schedules, guides, money orders, gift certificates, labels, song lyrics, signs, and tickets. Clearly, all of these students began adult education with very low literacy levels, and many of them were recent immigrants from countries and life situations where they had no opportunity to attend school. It was within this last group of respondents where we saw evidence of new literacy practices tied, not only to learning to read and write, but also to encountering texts for the first time—texts that did not exist in their prior lives and cultural contexts. For example, many recent immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala had grown up in rural, poor, and marginalized communities where such texts as written recipes or classified ads simply did not exist. As these students became literate in English, they turned to these texts as the needs and opportunities to use them arose.

Attendance at adult literacy classes not only brought increased literacy abilities but also exposure to more complex 'school-like' texts like novels, poetry, journals, and essays. The comments by participants indicated that they began reading and writing these types of texts—for the first time, again, or more frequently—because they were assigned in class. There was the very strong suggestion that if the students had not been assigned these texts (i.e., had not attended the class), they would not have engaged in the literacy practices involved in reading and writing them. However, while some students indicated that they had stopped certain of these types of practices once a particular class ended, several others said that they started, for example, writing in a journal as the result of a class but had continued on their own after the class had ended or a literacy practice was no longer assigned.

Some students also reported beginning an everyday-type of literacy practice in class which then became a part of their life. For example, one student who had dropped out of school after 7th grade first encountered store flyers and advertisements in her literacy class. At the time of her interview she reported reading these texts for her own purposes on a weekly basis. Another student,

who also had left school after completing 7th grade, reported reading directions for the first time after she read directions for operating a computer in her class. She added that she continues to read all kinds of directions now on a frequent basis.

Changes in Living Situations

Becoming independent, whether this meant moving into an apartment or house on one's own, or taking a job, was a major impetus for new literacy practices for our participants. Moving into a new living space involved reading ads for housing prior to moving and reading documents such as leases or mortgages at the time of moving. One student began reading documents at the age of 16 when he first had to sign a lease of his own. He continues this practice, reading leases at least twice a year.

Becoming independent also meant reading and writing for oneself such texts as bills, bank statements, paychecks, and receipts. These literacy practices often started when students began new jobs and/or moved away from family or group-support living situations, i.e., when they had to do them for themselves. Other literacy practices that participants tied to changed living situations that resulted in increased independence included reading schedules and guides, reading and writing names and addresses, reading container text like medicine bottles and lotions, and reading labels and titles of household items like toys, books, articles, magazines, and newspapers.

Changes in Family Roles and Responsibilities

By far, the bulk of the reported literacy practice changes that participants tied to family changes involved children in some way. Many literacy practices were initiated at the birth of children and a few were dropped. Students reported beginning to read print on food containers purchased for their children, bills and receipts, ads, coupons, and flyers, leases for apartments, health-related posters, labels and names of toys, print on envelopes, books and encyclopedias, stories and poetry, forms and applications, and instructions following the birth of their first children. Similarly, the birth of a child brought with it new writing practices. Students began writing personal letters to family members after they had children. They started writing lists of responsibilities for their children, filling out forms related to public assistance for their children, and keeping calendars and appointment books for the first time for time management purposes as well as to keep track of their children's appointments with health care workers, friends, and childcare providers.

Some literacy practices stopped at the birth of children. If parents left jobs, then the reading and writing they were doing at work ceased while new, child

and home-focused practices began or increased. One woman reported that she stopped reading stories and poetry, a literacy practice she had engaged in for 12 years, when her daughter was born. One can only speculate that this mother of a two-year-old could no longer find the time or energy for this type of reading.

The onset of schooling also brought with it the reading of school communications, schedules, and menus for the parents in this pool of participants. The need to communicate with teachers also resulted in the onset of note writing to school personnel. These types of literacy practices were always reported as stopped if the children were no longer in school. Also, one woman reported that she stopped reading school communications and information when she lost custody of her children.

Other changes in family situations aside from those related to children were also reported as contextualizing changes in literacy practices. One man reported that he stopped reading bills, writing checks, and dealing with bank statements after his wife took over these responsibilities six years before. Often, students would report beginning the practice of writing messages on greeting cards, captions on photos, or personal letters when members of their family moved away. Another woman reported an increase in the frequency with which she read signs since her daughter moved and she was doing more of her own driving. An older student who had completed 8th grade and who was enrolled in a family literacy program reported reading documents for the first time when her adoption of her grandchildren was in progress. She has continued to read the documents giving her parental rights to "reassure herself that the adoption…is final and to feel good about having gotten them" Increased responsibility for family members for several of the participants resulted in the new practices of reading medicine/prescription bottles, tickets, print on envelopes, ads and coupons, and reading and writing postal letters.

Changes in Relationships Bring Changes in Literacy Practices

Like the birth of a first child, getting married seemed to be a watershed event for our participants when they reported literacy practice change, particularly the beginning of a practice. There was a sense of attained independence and responsibility, doing for oneself and another, that seemed to explain their connecting certain new literacy practices to the act of getting married. For example, students reported beginning the following practices at the time they got married: reading bills, paychecks, receipts, and bank statements, reading print on medicine bottles, lotions, and other personal items, reading directions that go with appliances, reading family histories, reading at home for a job, reading labels on household items, reading menus, reading messages and notes, reading phone books and yellow pages, reading print on envelopes,

reading periodicals, reading books and encyclopedias, reading schedules and guides, reading the lyrics in hymnals, reading print on food containers, reading print on home entertainment objects, writing names and addresses, writing checks and money orders, filling out forms and applications, writing lists, and reading apartment leases.

Divorce or the death of a spouse or live-in partner also was mentioned as contextualizing some of these practices. Reading documents was often mentioned as beginning and ending with the divorce process. Increased independence and responsibility following the loss of a partner also appeared in reports of first-time writing of checks, reading directions, and schedules and guides.

Some literacy practices were stopped when relationships changed. One man reported that he stopped writing checks and money orders when he got married as his wife took on those responsibilities. His wife had recently left him, and he reported that the bills were no longer being paid as he does not engage in this type of practice. This same man said that he also stopped writing postal letters when he got married, with no further explanation. Perhaps his wife took over this type of writing as well. A woman, who had completed 7th grade, had been in the habit of painting and writing captions to accompany her pictures. However, she stopped painting when her husband died and, thus, the caption-writing ceased also. Another woman stopped reading lottery tickets when she stopped purchasing them when her husband died.

One woman's experiences with reading menus perhaps capture the effect of changing relationship status on literacy practice. She reported that she first began reading menus when her first husband died. He did not like to go out to eat, so the need/opportunity to read menus had never arisen before. After he died, she began to go to restaurants, a practice she enjoyed. However, the frequency with which she reads menus is decreasing since she began a new relationship with a man who, also, prefers to eat at home.

Change in Location/Changes in Literacy Practices

Moving to a new geographical location brings with it literacy practice change related to local contexts that tie to literacy practices. This was especially true for immigrants to the U.S., but several native-born participants also experienced literacy practice change in the context of a change in geographical location. Virtually all of the new literacy practices reported by immigrants reflected new textual sources and purposes that were not present for them in their countries of origin. These included ads and coupons, bills, bank statements, and paychecks, print on medicine bottles, personal items, and food containers, calendars and appointment books, captions, tickets, menus,

signs, schedules and guides, print on home entertainment item, forms and applications, documents, phonebooks/yellow pages, and notes to schools or teachers. In addition, the need to maintain relationships with those left behind seemed to dictate first uses of personal letters, their envelopes, messages, and greeting cards by immigrant participants.

A few literacy practices were stopped upon moving to the United States. One 19-year-old Guatemalan woman stopped reading religious writing because she stopped attending mass when she immigrated. Another woman stopped buying and reading lottery tickets when she left El Salvador. She also stopped reading magazines when she came to the U.S. where she no longer purchased them.

Changes in location within the U.S. also contextualized literacy practice change for native-born students. One woman with reported learning disabilities reported that she quit reading the guide to television shows when she moved from Texas to Vermont. There were more channels available to her in Texas so reading the guide was seen as necessary or helpful. However, in Vermont she does not need a guide to choose among the few channels. Several students reported writing personal letters to family members for the first time when brothers or sisters moved far away. Finally, a move to a town was cited as beginning the practice of reading menus for one woman who had completed 7th grade.

Health and Literacy Change Relationships

Changes in the health of the students or their family members were often cited in relationship to a change in literacy practice. A common change reported was the beginning of or increase in reading associated with medicines—print on medicine bottles, prescriptions, and directions from doctors. Another relationship between health and literacy was involved in the need to read the print on food containers for the first time as part of the vigilance required in managing a chronic illness like diabetes. Several people reported increased reading of books and stories as connected to an illness, presumably due to increased time available for such leisure activities. One woman reported that she read road signs more following a car accident in which her son was injured. Medical reference books were discovered and read by people who wished to avoid the cost of a doctor, and personal calendars and appointment books were begun following a health change that necessitated repeated doctor visits.

Several participants reported stopping a literacy practice because of the onset of a health problem. One woman said that she no longer read the newspaper because of failing eyesight. Another woman said that problems with her eyes related to her diabetes caused her to stop reading as much as she used to.

Changes in Literacy-Related Leisure Activities

Literacy practices were begun, increased, or stopped as participants took up different social activities and dropped others. The buying of lottery tickets brought with it the reading of the print on them. When participants stopped buying the tickets, they stopped this literacy practice. The activity of writing to family members was sometimes temporary and this literacy practice thus waxed and waned. Several students began keeping personal journals and writing reflective pieces, often after being introduced to the practice in school. Sometimes, they would stop for periods of time and fill their days with other activities. One woman reported increased menu reading as she and her friends increased the amount of time they spent going out for lunch. This activity was relatively new to this participant and began when she started living alone and not cooking for herself. Song lyrics were read increasingly according to the take-up of activities in which songs were sung. These activities would often change and thus the literacy practice of reading song lyrics would decrease.

Financial Practice Change

Changes in the finances of our participants brought with them changes in their literacy practices. When participants had increased income, they opened bank accounts and thus read and wrote checks, deposit slips, and bank statements. When they lost jobs, they often closed bank accounts and stopped, or decreased, this type of reading and writing. When their finances increased, they could buy items like appliances and thus would read, often for the first time, the directions that came with them. Increased income also meant money for tickets to ball games or shows and the reading of these tickets. The loss of income meant the inability to buy such tickets, thus the stopping of that literacy practice. One woman stopped buying and writing on greeting cards when she lost her job and had to cut back on personal expenses. Ads for apartments were read when participants found themselves in need of cheaper living quarters. Job applications were filled out when finances dictated the need for more income. Finally, one man began receiving personal letters from an aunt when he inherited his house. This constituted an increase in this type of reading for him.

Other Changes/Other Literacy Practice Changes

The remaining categories of life changes cited by the participants in relationship to literacy practice change reflect this same connection between social activity and reading and writing. Increased or new reading of phone books/yellow pages or print on home entertainment items accompanied the purchase of phones or video players. The purchase of televisions brought the new practice of reading a television guide. Directions and signs were read

with increased frequency when participants began driving cars. One woman began reading labels on items in the grocery store when she first obtained her driver's license and was able to drive herself to a store. New or increased practices of reading religious writing and hymn lyrics came when participants began attending church services. Conversely, they stopped when other participants stopped attending church. Several participants reported beginning new literacy practices when they began receiving help from family members or good friends. For example, one woman started reading bills and bank statements when her father sat her down and did this with her. Others reported receiving help reading maps or ads and writing letters and notes from boyfriends or husbands. Access to, or loss of access to, the Internet brought with it concomitant reading practice changes. Finally, several of our immigrant participants reported reading documents for the first time as part of the process of obtaining U.S. citizenship.

Discussion

This analysis of participants' spontaneously offered and captured attributions of change in literacy practices both illustrates the validity of a social practice frame for literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and contributes to this and other theories of situated learning and cognition (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Barton and Hamilton (pg. 7), in explicating the theoretical frame of literacy as social practice, assert that:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- Literacies are associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

As just demonstrated through this analysis, the participants in this study situated their changes in literacy practice within their daily lives. As events changed, as their roles changed, as their finances changed, as their living situations changed, and their interests and activities changed, so changed their literacy practices. Texts and purposes for reading and writing those texts were taken up, engaged in with greater or lesser frequencies, or dropped as part of the ongoing evolutions of the participants' lives in which, according to their

own perceptions and reports, literacy was woven throughout, mediating their social activities, both personal and communal. As Barton and Hamilton state, "People are active in what they do, and literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices" (1998, pg. 11).

Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe the ways that different literacies are associated with different domains of life and our data certainly demonstrate this. Domains are defined by Barton and Hamilton as places where activity is structured and defined, like home, work-place, school, church, and so on. We saw through our data how change within these domains brought about change in literacy practices. When participants started attending church, for example, they took up the texts and literacy practices associated with that church; when they stopped attending church, they dropped those practices. When children entered the lives of the participants, changing the nature of activity in their homes, new texts were written and read for new purposes associated with children. New work places brought new literacy practices, and changed relationships brought change in literacy practices.

The social theory of literacy practice asserts the relationship between networks and roles and literacy activity. Networks are defined as describing how people relate within social groups, and within such networks, people take on specific roles and assert different identities. We certainly saw throughout our data how change in roles affected change in literacy practices. When roles like husband, wife, mother, student, worker shifted, so did literacy practices.

It must be pointed out that this does not mean that literacy practice follows social activity in some sort of passive way. On the contrary, we saw many instances where the actual acquisition of literacy brought about life/social activity change. Many of our participants reported first reading a multitude of everyday texts like signs, labels, ads, etc. for the first time, and thus participating differently in society, as the result of learning to read or to read better in an adult literacy class. So literacy both changes people's lives and reflects change in people's lives. Indeed, this fact justifies the taking of a life history approach to the study of embodied literacy practice, according to Barton and Hamilton (1998, pg. 12):

> …people use literacy to make changes in their lives; literacy changes people and people find themselves in the contemporary world of changing literacy practices. The literacy practices an individual engages with change across their lifetime, as a result of changing demands, available resources and people's interests.

Bringing Together Research Lenses

The participants of this study, in offering their own descriptions of the contexts for their reported literacy practice changes, provide a participant-perspective, or phenomenological, lens into literacy practice change. Again, they very rarely referred to aspects of their adult literacy instruction when offering these contexts of change—the focus of the quantitative, causal-correlational part of the study. When they did refer to their adult literacy classes in relationship to literacy practice change, it was to the straightforward fact that they learned to read and write in class and then they could begin to read and write texts or their own purposes in their lives outside of class. So we have two very different ways of looking at the relationships between adult literacy instruction and literacy practice change.

This does not negate the results of either analysis, in our view. First of all, the study was designed to examine the relationship between the two aspects of instruction of interest—authenticity and teacher-student collaboration—on literacy practice change, either beginning new practices or increasing the frequency of already-engaging-in practices. This design dictated the data collection and subsequent analysis of that data. Thus, the data available to us is most reliable and valid for the purposes of the causal-correlational analysis.

However, the large amount of data reflecting the participants' own contextualizations of literacy practice change that came to us as a by-product of this data collection is still of interest. As just discussed, the analysis of this pool of data reaffirms and illustrates the literacy-as-social- practice theory which fits so well with the dominant paradigm of situated cognition and language learning. The fact that the students failed to draw a connection between changes that occurred in their literacy practices after they began their classes and the types of activities and materials they engaged with in those classes does not mean that the relationships detected in our first analysis do not exist.

Following, therefore, we offer a possible explanation for how these two findings—results of two very different types of analyses on two different, but overlapping, pools of data —might fit together within a singular lens. Recall that the original study was framed by the same literacy-as- social-practice theory as that which so nicely captures the results of the qualitative analysis. However, it is a fact that studies such as the causal-correlational one we have just completed are rarely done by researchers who assume this social-practice theory. Rather, social-practice research is mainly done outside of schools in the homes and communities where participants live their lives. In fact, it is a presupposition of the literacy-associal/cultural-practice frame that the literacy taught and valued in schools is an autonomous literacy which is seen

(incorrectly, according to this view) as decontextualized skill and residing solely in people's heads in a cognitive way rather than the result of and part of the social and cultural lives of people (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984). Therefore, according to this precept, research in literacy practice cannot be done in schools but must be done in communities.

Much social practice research looks at students' potential conflict with the decontextualized literacy of schools and suggests that claims for its autonomy are false, given the social nature of all literacies. Studies such as Heath's (1983) look at what the students bring with them to school in for form of socially based literacy practices. We, through this study, are able to look at the reverse and see what students are able to take from school and actualize outside of school, in this case engagement with specific text types. We believe that this step is a necessary one to begin to explain lived outcomes of instruction.

Our careful statistical analysis of our data indicated a moderate and very real relationship between the offering of authentic literacy activities and texts in school and increases in types and/or frequencies of literacy practices, as we defined them re types of texts read and written, in people's lives outside of school. Authentic was defined as those texts and purposes for reading and writing them that exist in lives outside of school—as part of social activity in communities. Therefore, we found that where school and outside-of-school overlap as regards literacy there is change as defined as increase in literacy practice. We were, in fact, measuring the effect of instruction that did not view literacy as autonomous, decontextualized skill, rather as contextualized, situated practice.

The result of the synthesis of these two analyses provides us with a picture of instruction that can impact the lived literacy of adult students. The students, themselves, experience their literacy practices as they exist in life—situated and bound by social and cultural activity. Educators can see the instructional layer of this in the overlap between literacy instruction that reflects this situated nature of literacy practice and literacy practice as it mediates people's lives. We believe that this bringing together of two research lenses, with their quantitative and qualitative analytic methods, provides the beginning of a much needed bridge that will take us to an elaborated and more explanatory picture of literacy learning and literacy practice.

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Handout

Literacy Practices Questionnaire

In the past week, did you *read* X? (If no) Have you ever read X? Can you show me or tell me about an example?

(If yes) When was the first time you did this sort of reading? How often? Do you still do this sort of reading?

Do you think that you've read any of these items more often since you began attending your literacy class? What else may have influenced what, or how frequently, you are reading any of these items?

- Ads, coupons, fliers
- Bills, bank statements, receipts
- Labels, container print, signs
- Books and stories
- Calendars, tickets
- Comics, cartoons
- Documents (lease, mortgage, portfolios…)
- Directions (recipes, shopping lists…)
- Essays, compositions, text for information
- Menus
- Messages, notes
- Addresses, phone books
- Periodicals (horoscope, sports…)
- Postal letters
- School communication
- Schedules, guides
- Song lyrics

Handout

Literacy Practices Questionnaire (cont.)

In the past week, did you *write* X? (If no) Have you ever written X? Can you show me or tell me about an example?

(If yes) When was the first time you did this sort of writing? How often? Do you still do this sort of writing?

Do you think that you've written any of these items more often since you began attending your literacy class? What else may have influenced what, or how frequently, you are writing any of these items?

- Names, labeling
- Checks, money orders, gift certificates
- On calendars, appointment book
- Speeches, reflection, stories, poems
- Forms, applications
- Lists
- Messages, notes
- Postal letters

Information About NCSALL

NCSALL's Mission

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort among the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

NCSALL's Research Projects

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) student motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge, and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy,* a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy,* an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports* and *Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. In addition, NCSALL sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

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