

**Steps for  
Facilitating the  
Research-based  
Adult Reading  
Instruction  
Practitioner  
Research  
Training**



# TO DO BEFORE SESSION ONE

Send out the Pre-Meeting Packet to confirmed participants two weeks before the first session. It's also a good idea to call participants one week before the first session to confirm that they received the packet.

The Pre-Meeting Packet for the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Practitioner Research Training should include the four items listed below, all of which follow and are ready for photocopying.

We suggest that you organize the handouts and readings for participants in two-sided pocket folders and distribute a folder of materials to each participant.

**A reminder about the cover letter:** You will need to write into the letter the places, dates, and times of the sessions; information about stipends and travel expenses; and your telephone number and e-mail address. Sign it before you make copies.

## Contents of Pre-Meeting Packet

- Information About the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Practitioner Research Training (cover letter)
- Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: Executive Summary\*
- Taking Literacy Skills Home
- Participants' To-Do Form

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\* **Note to Facilitator.** The full 130-page document is not included in this practitioner research training guide, but many participants want to have the full document. You can obtain copies for the participants in your practitioner research training in two ways:

1. To order multiple paper copies of the document directly from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), please contact NIFL at (800) 228-8813.
2. The document is available on the NIFL Web site. You are free to photocopy this document for all participants in the practitioner research training. To download the document, go to: [www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/publications/adult.html](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/partnershipforreading/publications/adult.html).





## INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH–BASED ADULT READING INSTRUCTION PRACTITIONER RESEARCH TRAINING<sup>2</sup>

Date:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for registering to participate in the Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Practitioner Research Training. I really look forward to meeting with you. The practitioner research training was developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL).

We will have [*insert number*] participants in the training. We will meet four times at [*insert location*]. The dates and times of the training sessions are as follows:

**[*insert dates and times*]**

This letter will tell you a bit more about what to expect from the training and from practitioner research, what type of support you will receive, and what to do before the first session.

### Expectations

Practitioner research is a project-oriented approach to professional development that provides participants with the tools and techniques, the structure, and the support to carry out a long term, data-based project in their classrooms and programs. In practitioner research, adult literacy practitioners generate valuable knowledge for themselves and for the broader field in the form of brief reports that they write.

The term "practitioner" is used to denote anyone working in the field of adult literacy education, i.e., teachers, tutors, coordinators and administrators. We believe that research is valuable professional practice because it enables us to question what is happening in our classrooms and programs, try out new ideas and

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from [www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/research/intro\\_application.htm](http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/research/intro_application.htm)

strategies, carefully study the results, and make informed decisions for taking action in the future.

Practitioner research focuses directly on the concerns that participants raise about their own practice. Participants identify the problem or issue to study, arising from their own professional experience or concerns. They decide what questions to investigate and how to conduct their research. In this project we will be focusing on questions about reading instruction.

Practitioner research is a long-term learning process that takes place over several months within a supportive group. It offers a relatively high level of support to a relatively small group of participants. Participants become members of a learning community, which develops as their work does. Practitioner research gives participants the opportunity to share their research as it unfolds.

Practitioner research as professional development is hard fun. The work is rewarding, but it is time consuming. You do not need to have a designed project in mind when you come to the first session, but you do need the interest and enthusiasm to carry your project through to completion over approximately six months.

Practitioner research requires attention to details and deadlines. You must be fairly well organized and have a relatively high tolerance for ambiguity. It's important that you not only enjoy working with others but also work well independently. A willingness to examine one's beliefs and practices—in the company of colleagues and in quiet moments alone—is crucial to the process.

Practitioner research is for new and experienced educators who want the opportunity to think critically and talk openly about problems related to teaching reading that have been challenging them. Practitioner research is about being critically reflective and reflectively critical.

As part of this practitioner research training project, we expect you to:

- Attend all four sessions of the training (as listed above), and complete any assigned readings before each session.

- Carry out and complete a practitioner research project of your own choosing, designed to improve the way you teach reading to adults. To do this, you will use the research skills you learn in the practitioner research training to collect information about how well a new reading instruction activity works when you try it in your classroom. For example, this information might be observational records of students working; reading tests or alternative assessment activities; interviews with students, colleagues, and others; or student work.
- Share your research project with other members of the training group and other interested colleagues at **[insert location]**.
- Prepare a 3- to 10-page summary of your research, covering each phase of the inquiry process (your research question, what reading instruction strategy you tried, what data you collected, what you found, what you conclude, what you plan to do next).
- Participate in e-mail group discussions with other participants.

### Support for Participants

#### **[insert information about stipends and expenses]**

At each session, we will be discussing readings about reading research. Some of these have been produced by NCSALL, and some are from other sources. I will provide you with all of the readings.

Before the first session, please read the enclosed materials:

- Executive Summary (pp. 1-5) in *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* by John Kruidenier.
- “Taking Literacy Skills Home” by Victoria Purcell-Gates, et al., *Focus on Basics*, 4(D), 2001

We will discuss the readings at the first session.

I will check in with you at least once a month to discuss your project and e-mail you as necessary. Participants will also maintain contact between the sessions through e-mail.

If you have any questions about the practitioner research training in general or about what to do before the first session, please call me at **[insert facilitator's telephone number]** or send me an e-mail at **[insert facilitator's e-mail address]**.

Thanks for participating. I'm looking forward to a great training.

Sincerely,

**[insert facilitator's name and title]**





## Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction: Executive Summary

Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy, 1-5.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reading Research Working Group (RRWG), a panel of experts on adult reading research and practice, was established by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) in collaboration with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). It is part of the Institute's efforts to provide educators, parents, and others with access to scientifically based reading research, including research-based tools for improving literacy programs and policies for children, youth, and adults, through the Partnership for Reading.

The purpose of the RRWG was to identify and evaluate existing research related to adult literacy reading instruction in order to provide the field with research-based products including principles and practices for practitioners. This document presents findings from an analysis of the adult basic education (ABE) reading instruction research base and is designed as a resource for practitioners and reading researchers. It focuses on principles that can be derived from the research and a research agenda for the future.

For the purposes of the RRWG, "adult reading instruction research" is defined as research related to reading instruction for lowliterate adults, aged 16 and older, who are no longer being served in secondary education programs. This includes low-literate adults in community-based literacy centers, family literacy programs, prison literacy programs, workplace literacy programs, and two-year colleges. It includes research related to all low-literate adults in these settings, including adults in ASE (Adult Secondary Education) programs, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs, and adults with a learning or reading disability.

### EVALUATING THE RESEARCH

Two recent reports were influential in guiding the work of the RRWG: *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences and *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*. The guidelines used for

selecting and evaluating ABE reading instruction research are based on those developed by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in their review of research related to reading instruction with children (National Reading Panel, 2000a). For the NRP review, major topics for study were established, studies were located through a literature search, and studies were evaluated using a set of “evidence-based methodological standards.”

The RRWG made several modifications to the approach used by the NRP. Important modifications included the addition of topics especially important to adult reading professionals, the inclusion of studies related to the assessment of reading ability, and the inclusion of non-experimental studies as well as those involving the use of control groups.

Like the NRP, the major topics selected for study by the RRWG are those components of reading found by the National Research Council and others to be crucial during reading instruction: alphabets (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The ultimate goal in reading is comprehension. Readers read a text in order to understand and use the ideas and information contained in it. Comprehension is improved when readers understand the key concepts or vocabulary in a text. Reading comprehension may suffer, however, when readers are unable to recognize individual words in a text. A reader may be conceptually ready to understand a text, for example, but will not have the opportunity to do so if he or she cannot read the individual words. To read individual words, the reader must know how the letters in our alphabet are used to represent spoken words (alphabets). This includes knowing how words are made up of smaller sounds (phonemic awareness), and how letters and combinations of letters are used to represent these sounds (phonics and word analysis). The ability to figure out how to read individual words, however, is not sufficient. Readers must also be able to rapidly recognize strings of words as they read phrases, sentences and longer text. Fluent reading is crucial to adequate comprehension.

Effective reading and reading instruction cannot occur without sufficient motivation. Motivation is one of the additional topics selected by the RRWG for study, along with others that are especially important for adult reading instruction: computer technology, reading assessment, program goals and setting (family literacy, workplace literacy, and general functional literacy), instructional methods (strategies, material, teacher preparation, and the intensity and duration of instruction), and specific characteristics of learners that affect instruction (reading level,

whether English is their first language, the existence of a learning disability, and motivation).

## **USE OF K–12 RESEARCH**

One task for the RRWG was to identify gaps in the ABE reading research and to consider how these gaps might be addressed. What research is needed and, of more immediate concern, where should the ABE instructor look for suggestions on the best ways to teach reading to ABE learners when the ABE research has not yet addressed a topic? One strong recommendation from the RRWG was to look to the NRP results for K–12 (elementary and secondary school) students, selecting those approaches to reading instruction that were likely to work with adult learners. To do this, the RRWG established criteria for evaluating the application of K–12 reading research to adult reading instruction. These criteria take into account the existing ABE research, the important differences between children and adults, and the strengths and weaknesses of K–12 research in each of the topic areas. NRP findings were used to help fill gaps in the ABE reading instruction research, to provide support when K–12 and ABE research were compatible, or to signal caution when they were contradictory.

## **A BRIEF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH REVIEW**

Most of the principles derived from the ABE reading instruction research are “emerging principles” because they are based on a relatively small body of experimental research. There is much more research focusing on children, as demonstrated in the report of the National Reading Panel. The small size of the ABE reading instruction research base precludes establishing more than just a few principles based solidly on large numbers of research studies that have been replicated. Some of the topic areas reviewed contain no or very few research studies. This does not necessarily suggest that the quality of ABE reading instruction research is poorer than K–12 reading instruction research or other bodies of research, only that there is less of it.

Approximately 70 qualifying research studies were identified in the literature search based on the criteria used. From the results reported in these studies, eighteen emerging research-based principles and related practices for ABE reading instruction were identified, along with thirty-two additional trends in the ABE research. Twenty-two specific ideas that might be used to supplement the ABE research were derived from the K-12 research. Emerging principles were based on findings from at least two experimental studies (including quasi-experimental studies) and any

number of non-experimental studies. Findings based on fewer than two experimental studies were labeled trends rather than principles.

Findings from the adult reading instruction research show that adults can have difficulties with any of the crucial aspects of reading: alphabets (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension. It is important to assess adult students' abilities in each of these areas in order to identify what they already know as well as what they need to work on during instruction. Assessment for instructional purposes is one of the first tasks a teacher performs. One emerging principle in the ABE research suggests that assessing each component of reading in order to generate profiles of students' reading ability gives teachers much more instructionally relevant information than any test of a single component can.

Some of the strongest ABE reading instruction research has to do with the assessment of adults' phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness among adult non-readers is almost non-existent and is only a little better among adult beginning readers. Adult beginning readers also have poor phonics or word analysis knowledge. Their sight word knowledge (the ability to recognize words on sight without having to sound them out) may initially be better than expected. Research evidence indicates that adults can be taught word analysis skills within ABE programs and, though the evidence is not as strong, that non-disabled readers can be taught phonemic awareness. Trends in the research suggest that phonemic awareness does not develop as easily among adults with a reading disability.

Teaching alphabets leads to improved achievement in other aspects of reading. This emerging principle in the adult research is supported by research conducted with children. Research at the K-12 level, unlike ABE research, has identified specific practices that can be used to teach alphabets. Many of these K-12 practices address topics that are especially important for ABE learners. No research was found related to the alphabets ability of learners in ESOL adult basic education programs (programs that teach English to speakers of other languages).

There is very little research that reports results from the assessment of ABE students' fluency and vocabulary. We do know that young adults with poor fluency have an average silent reading rate that is much slower than that of normal readers. Emerging principles in the ABE research indicate that fluency can be taught to adults who qualify for ABE programs, that teaching fluency leads to increases in reading achievement, and that one specific technique can be used to help adults

develop their reading fluency. This technique, repeated readings of a text, is also supported by a much larger body of research with children.

The one trend related to the assessment of ABE readers' vocabulary suggests that their vocabulary knowledge is dependent on reading ability. Although, as might be expected, their life experience can give them an advantage as they begin to learn to read (their vocabulary knowledge is much better than their knowledge of alphabets), this advantage may disappear at higher reading levels. An important trend from the instruction research, supported by research with children, is that contexts that are more interesting or engaging, such as workplace or family contexts for adults, may be especially useful for vocabulary instruction.

Reading comprehension is the ultimate goal for reading. A largescale national survey of adult literacy provides information about adults' reading comprehension that is more reliable than the information we have about their fluency and vocabulary. Results from this survey indicate that most ABE learners have difficulty integrating and synthesizing information from any but the simplest texts. Although it is likely that poor phonemic awareness, word analysis, fluency, and vocabulary contribute to poor reading comprehension, it is also likely that most ABE adults will need to be taught specific comprehension strategies. Those adults with a learning disability and those whose first language is not English are especially at risk. Although there are more principles and trends related to ABE reading comprehension instruction than for alphabets, fluency, or vocabulary instruction, the research does not address issues related to these adults.

Three important emerging principles from the ABE reading research suggest that participation in an ABE program can lead to increased reading comprehension achievement, that explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies is effective, and that teaching comprehension along with instruction in other components of reading is also an effective way to improve reading comprehension. The effectiveness of reading comprehension strategy instruction is supported by extensive research with children. In addition, K–12 research has identified eight specific strategies that may be of use to adult educators and also finds that instruction in other aspects of reading can lead to improved comprehension.

Trends in the ABE reading comprehension research also address several issues that are important to adult literacy students and teachers. Although more research is needed, these trends suggest that

comprehension can be improved in most ABE settings, including workplace and family literacy settings; use of adult-oriented content material is an effective way to help improve comprehension; and, dealing briefly but directly with issues related to motivation and how adults feel about their reading can have a positive effect.

In general, the review of ABE reading instruction research found that much more research is needed in almost all of the topic areas addressed. Of the existing research, assessment research is the strongest. Emerging principles suggest that reading can improve in ABE settings, that direct or explicit instruction in various components is effective, and that computer-assisted instruction can improve achievement in some aspects of reading. Basic information about the reading ability of ABE learners is known and fairly sophisticated methods for obtaining assessment information and using it for instruction have been developed. Much more information is needed about ESOL learners and adults with reading disabilities. More information about specific teaching strategies is also needed. With the exception of fluency, specific teaching strategies validated by the research are just beginning to emerge. Also beginning to emerge are findings of special significance for adult educators related to adult-oriented settings and contexts, and issues of motivation and the feelings that result from continued failure in learning to read.

While K-12 research does not address these more adult-oriented issues with the same urgency, the much larger body of reading instruction research conducted with children is compatible with the ABE reading instruction research, offering both support for many ABE findings and specific suggestions for instruction in areas where the ABE research is thin.



## Reading: Taking Literacy Skills Home

### NCSALL RESEARCH FINDS THAT USE OF AUTHENTIC READING MATERIALS IN CLASS INCREASES LEARNERS' OUT-OF-CLASS LITERACY ACTIVITIES

Purcell-Gates, V., Degener, S., Jacobson, E., & Soler, M. (2001). Taking Literacy Skills Home. *Focus on Basics*, 4(D), 19-22

*"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



**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.

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

**USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS:****Peter and 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.

authentic; (3) somewhat school-only; (4) highly school-only. For collaboration, the four possible scores were (1) highly collaborative; (2) somewhat collaborative; (3) 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 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.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank Andrea Wilder and the Azadoutioun Foundation, and Jennifer Mott-Smith, Project Manager, for their help with this study.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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*Victoria Purcell-Gates* is Professor of literacy at Michigan State University. She is the author of *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (1995; Harvard University Press) and (with co-author, Robin Waterman) *Now We Read, We See, We Speak: Portrait of Literacy Development in an Adult Freirean-Based Class* (2000, Lawrence Erlbaum Press).

*Marta Soler* is a doctoral candidate in language and literacy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her primary focus is the field of adult literacy, where she has worked as both researcher and practitioner. She is currently a member of the Center for Social and Educational Research at the University of Barcelona, Spain.



## Participants' To-Do Form

Session	Date	What to Do Before Session
One		<p>Read the documents and articles you received in the Pre-Meeting Packet.</p> <p>Highlight interesting points and jot down any questions that come to mind.</p>
Two		<p><i>You will receive these readings during Session One.</i></p> <p>Readings Assigned for Session Two:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS): NCSALL Research Brief</b> – Read the entire 5-page article.</li> <li>• <b>Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles: An Interactive Website for Adult Education Practitioners</b> – Read the entire 4-page article and visit the Web site.</li> <li>• <b>EFF Hot Topics: Read With Understanding</b>– Read the entire 16-page article.</li> <li>• <b>Comprehension Strategy Instruction</b> – Read the entire 38-page chapter.</li> <li>• <i>Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers</i> – Skim through the chapters.</li> <li>• <i>Overview of Understanding What Reading Is All About: Teaching Materials and Lesson Plans for Adult Basic Education Learners</i> – Read the entire 4-page overview.</li> <li>• <b>List of Reading-related Web Sites</b> – Visit selected Web sites.</li> </ul> <p>Be ready with one question or one comment about the research or other resources you read.</p> <p>Think about the instructional strategy or approach</p>

Session	Date	What to Do Before Session
		<p>you will try as part of your research.</p> <p>Bring baseline data or information related to your research question.</p> <p>Send a dialogue journal entry to the group e-mail on “What I think about this practitioner research. I wonder...”</p>
Three		<p><i>You will receive this reading during Session Two.</i></p> <p>Reading Assigned for Session Three:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EFF Research Principle: A Contextualized Approach to Curriculum and Instruction</b> – Read the entire 8-page article.</li> </ul> <p>Highlight interesting points and jot down any questions that come to mind.</p> <p>Write the first four sections of your research report—context and statement of problem, research question, strategy/technique using, and plan for data collection.</p> <p>Revise <i>Action Plan for My Research</i>.</p> <p>Ask students to sign consent forms.</p> <p>Conduct research and collect data.</p> <p>Ask questions and support other participants through the group e-mail.</p>
Four		<p>Prepare a one-page handout and a poster to explain your research. Be prepared to make a three-minute presentation.</p> <p>Write the final four sections of your research report—data analysis, findings, conclusions, and next steps. E-mail the report to your facilitator by <b>[insert date]</b>.</p>