TO DO BEFORE THE TRAINING

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

The Pre-Meeting Packet for the Study Circle Facilitators Training should include the six 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 training; information about stipends and travel expenses; and your telephone number and e-mail address and sign it before you make copies.

Contents of Pre-Meeting Packet

- Information About the Study Circle Facilitators Training (cover letter)

- Agenda and Objectives

- NCSALL

- NCSALL Study Circles: The Basics

- Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS)

- The Relationship of the Component Skills of Reading to Performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)

INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY CIRCLE FACILITATORS TRAINING

Date:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for registering to participate in the Study Circle Facilitator Training. I really look forward to meeting with you. The study circle facilitators 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 at **[*insert* location].** The dates and time of the training is:

[*insert* date and time]

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

Expectations

As a study circle facilitator you will be asked to lead a group of adult education practitioners in a professional development process that involves reading, discussing, and considering the practical implications of recent research in adult education. Your role will be to facilitate learning, not to be an expert!

At the training you will be experiencing typical study circle activities, learning more about facilitation, and planning your study circle work.

Support for Participants

[*insert* information about stipends and expenses]

Before the training, please read the enclosed materials:

- Agenda and Objectives

- NCSALL

- NCSALL Study Circles

- Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS)

- The Relationship of the Component Skills of Reading to Performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)

Please bring the materials with you to the training. We will discuss the readings at the training.

If you have any questions about the study circle facilitator training in general or about what to do before the training, 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]

AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

Objectives and Agenda

Attitudes on Research

What Is a Study Circle?

Examining Research Findings

Overview of Study Circle Guide

Challenges and Supports: A Force Field Analysis

Addressing Facilitation Challenges

Logistics and Next Steps

Evaluation

OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the connection between research and practice and how study circles support this connection

- Name the key elements of NCSALL study circles—professional wisdom, research, and their application to practice

- Facilitate typical study circle activities—introductions, reading discussion, "live" Likert scale, brainstorming, jigsaw, force-field analysis, planning for next steps, and evaluation

- Name the supports and challenges of conducting study circles and identify ways to deal with the challenges

- Utilize the NCSALL *Study Circle Guide: Research-based Adult Reading Instruction*

- Prepare, organize, and facilitate a study circle in your state, region, or program

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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 between 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, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner persistence, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) professional development, and (4) assessment.

NCSALL's 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.

For more about NCSALL, to download free copies of our publications, or to purchase bound copies, please visit our Web site at:

www.ncsall.net

NCSALL STUDY CIRCLES: THE BASICS

What is a NCSALL study circle?

A NCSALL study circle is a professional development activity for adult basic education, adult secondary education, or adult ESOL practitioners. The goal of a study circle is to bring practitioners together to read research articles presenting findings from adult education studies, discuss the relevance of the findings for the adult students with whom they work, discuss strategies for applying the findings in their classrooms and programs, and make plans for trying strategies or changing their practice.

Who participates?

Study circles are designed for teachers, administrators, tutors or other program staff. Ideally, 8 to 12 participants participate in the study circle group.

How long are the study circles?

Usually, a study circle is nine hours long, divided into three, three-hour sessions, spaced every other week for six weeks. The Research-based Adult Reading Instruction Study Circle is 10 ½ hours long, divided into three 3 ½-hour sessions.

Where can study circles happen?

Study circles can take place at a program with all participants who are staff of that program. Or, they can happen at a local or regional level, with teachers from different programs coming together. Or, they can happen as part of an intensive institute with teachers from all over participating.

How much do study circles cost to sponsor?

Study circle guides are free for downloading from NCSALL. The costs to sponsor include paying the facilitators for their time, including prep time and perhaps travel. We figure roughly 25 hours or $500, but that's just an estimate, for the facilitator's stipend plus photocopies for the participants.

Who facilitates the study circle?

Anyone can facilitate the study circle: a teacher within a program, a program administrator, or a professional developer. The study circle guides are designed to be all inclusive. The steps, handouts, readings, newsprint models, and even the advertising flyers are included in the guides.

What training does the facilitator need?

If the facilitator is a professional developer or a teacher with some experience facilitating training, we anticipate that they do not need much training, if any. We have designed the study circle guides to be self-explanatory and stand-alone; the guide even includes tips and strategies for facilitators about running a study circle. However, NCSALL does have this one-day "walk through" training-of-trainers that can be used to train a group of facilitators. This may be useful for teachers who have not had much experience with training or facilitation.

What do study circles produce?

We have an evaluation of the reading study circles underway now, but the results are not yet compiled. However, we believe that study circles meet the following purposes:

- Help teachers, administrators, and other staff learn about the research findings on a particular topic and assess its relevance to the students with whom they work.

- Help teachers, administrators, and other staff read, understand, judge, and plan to use research to improve their classroom or program practices.

- Help teachers, administrators, and other staff learn from each other and share strategies and ideas for changing practices.

How are study circles organized?

A program administrator or professional developer in a region or area decides to sponsor a study circle. He/she assesses the interest of teachers in that region in a particular topic (learner persistence, reading, contextualized instruction, multiple intelligences, accountability, adult development, or alternatives to class-based instruction). He/she finds a teacher or professional developer to facilitate the study circle and downloads the guide. Either the facilitator reviews and sets up the study circle on his/her own, or a group of facilitators are trained in how to conduct a study circle. Either the facilitator, the professional developer, or the program administrator recruits teachers to participate in the study circle. When a sufficient number of teachers are confirmed, the facilitator sends out the initial readings and handouts, plus information about the study circle, and the meetings occur. During the final meeting, the group of participants discusses and decides if they want to come back together again

Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS)

Strucker, J. & Davidson, R. (November 2003). *Adult reading components study (ARCS)* (NCSALL Research Brief). Cambridge, MA: NCSALL.

NCSALL's Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS), conducted by John Strucker and Rosalind Davidson at Harvard Graduate School of Education, was designed to describe the various types or clusters of readers enrolled in US adult basic education (ABE) programs, including both native speakers and those in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. The goal of the study was to help practitioners and policymakers understand who adult learners are as readers and how to gear instruction to their specific reading needs.

Nine hundred and fifty-five randomly-selected learners (676 ABE and 279 ESOL) were interviewed and assessed at learning centers in Texas, Tennessee, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. They were given a battery of reading and language assessments to determine their instructional needs. Over half of this testing was done by local ABE and ESOL practitioners who were trained to administer the battery and conduct the interviews in a uniform manner. Each of the students in the study was tested in phonological awareness, rapid naming, word recognition, oral reading, spelling, vocabulary, and background knowledge. Researchers also interviewed students about their educational history and reading habits.

In this research brief, we present some preliminary findings from the ARCS. These findings and implications for practice related to the findings are presented in two sections: 1. Native English Speakers' (ABE) Clusters, and 2. Native Spanish Speakers' (ESOL) Clusters. Then we refer readers to additional resources based on the ARCS.

NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS' (ABE) CLUSTERS

For the 676 students in ABE classes, 51 percent had repeated at least one grade, and 22 percent reported having trouble with reading in grades K-3. Of those who grew up in the U.S., 53 percent reported getting either Chapter 1 (reading support) and/or Special Education help in K-12.

The mean word recognition score for these students was a 6.62 grade equivalent (GE). Their mean oral reading mastery level was GE 7.9, and their mean receptive vocabulary score was equivalent to a GE 6.5. On a test of background knowledge, the mean for the group was below

average range for the test, and the mean score on a word analysis test (Woodcock-Reading Mastery Word Attack) placed this group of students in the 26th percentile.

From the 676 adult basic education students assessed in this study, the researchers identified 10 "clusters" (students with similar reading profiles) in three groups. The table below details the three common groups and the clusters within each group for the 676 ABE students in this study.

TABLE 1:   PERCENTAGE OF ABE STUDENTS IN THE TEN CLUSTERS IN THREE COMMON GROUPS OF READING SKILL LEVELS

Groups and Clusters of Reading Skill Levels	Percentage of Students in ABE Sample
Group 1: GED/Pre-GED	*34%*
Cluster 1: Strong GED	9%
Cluster 2: Pre-GED with Vocabulary/Background Information needs	11%
Cluster 3: Pre-GED with Vocabulary/Spelling/Rate (fluency) needs	14%
Group 2: Intermediate Students	*56%*
Cluster 4: High Intermediates with Difficulties in Print Skills/Rate	9%
Cluster 5: Intermediates with Stronger Print than Meaning Skills	17%
Cluster 6: Intermediates with Low Reading Rate	5%
Cluster 7: Low Intermediates	16%
Cluster 8: Low Intermediates/Should-be-in-ESOL	9%
Group 3: Lower Level/Beginning Students	*11%*
Cluster 9: Beginners	8%
Cluster 10: Reading/Rate Impaired	3%

In general, many adult basic education students below the GED level have reading skills similar to those of children at risk for reading difficulty. Phonemic awareness problems that existed in childhood persisted into adulthood. Their reading comprehension and reading rate (fluency) seem to have stalled at middle school levels. Perhaps this is because, although they got extra help with reading in the primary grades from Chapter 1 or special education teachers, they got no such

help in middle or high school. Because their reading was stalled at middle school levels, their background knowledge and vocabulary also top off at that level.

Some of the specific findings about this group, and the implications for practice related to each finding, are listed below:

GED-level and low-level/beginning readers have different reading profiles from intermediate readers.

Implication: GED group needs help in passing the test and building skills (in preparation for post-secondary education). Low level/beginning students, because of poor phonemic awareness and word recognition skills, need direct, systematic, sequential instruction in these skills.

In the intermediate group, who comprise the largest percentage of adult students, students appear to have learned some word attack skills; they know basic phonics but don't make strong use of those skills.

Implication: The primary needs for intermediates are increasing fluency and developing a more literate (above grade equivalent 4-5) vocabulary and background knowledge. Without middle school background knowledge in history, geography, science, and math, these students have an inadequate preparation for the GED or for post-secondary education. For the intermediate group of adult students, practitioners should focus on increasing students' reading fluency (using oral reading) and on acquiring background knowledge and vocabulary.

The researchers also advocate for further research aimed at identifying strategies for teaching vocabulary so that students can achieve accelerated growth in reading.

NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS' (ESOL) CLUSTERS (ANALYZING SPANISH SPEAKERS ENGLISH READING SKILLS)

Of the 279 ESOL students tested in the ARCS, 78% were native speakers of Spanish. They were interviewed in Spanish and given both English and Spanish reading components tests. The interview included questions on the learner's childhood educational history; Spanish reading problems, if any; parents' levels of education/years living in the US; time spent studying English; home and work literacy practices and spoken language use in Spanish and English; educational goals; and health.

The researchers used the data from four English tests and five Spanish tests to create clusters of similar learners. While the size of the sample used in this analysis means that these findings shouldn't be

generalized across all Spanish speakers, they can be suggestive. Key findings from this analysis and related implications include:

Contrary to what many ESOL teachers told the ARCS researchers to expect, more than 80% of the native Spanish speakers had adequate or better native language literacy skills.

Implication: For many of these students, who have adequate-to-strong native language literacy skills, an "English-as-a-Foreign-Language" (EFL) approach might produce faster growth than traditional survival/conversational ESL approaches. These students should be given the opportunity to apply their literacy and school-based skills to the task of learning English. This might mean more formal EFL courses that teach grammar and vocabulary sequentially, using basic EFL texts as well as materials taken from a real-world context. For these already literate adults, reading and writing English may actually facilitate the acquisition of oral-aural skills in English.

Unlike the ABE students discussed previously, ESOL Spanish speakers' reading ability in Spanish was directly related to years of Spanish school completion: the more years completed, the stronger the skills. It is also possible that the years of school completion in Spanish is related to the speed of English skills acquisition.

Implication: Most of these students were did not have reading disabilities as children. As discussed above, students with strong skills in Spanish might benefit from a more formal EFL approach, as if they were normally developing high school students taking English as a foreign language.

All participants, regardless of level, were surprisingly weak on English consonant sounds.

Implication: Literacy programs often quickly gloss over English phonemes (letter sounds) in beginning ESOL classes because the learners who are already literate in Spanish seem able to chunk English words correctly into syllables immediately. This is because they transfer this chunking skill from Spanish. But it is important for all ESOL students to practice producing and perceiving English consonant sounds. English has a lot of medial and final consonant blends (-nt, -st,) that are difficult to perceive in the natural speech stream, but they are nevertheless important because they often carry vital syntactic and semantic information. In addition, because English vowels can be pronounced several different ways, formal attention to basic English phonics patterns and rules is a valuable investment for their future pronunciation and spelling, even if learners seem to already know how to decode English.

The two clusters of Spanish speakers who have low levels of education in Spanish also have severe decoding problems and show other signs of reading disabilities.

Despite an average of almost ten years in the US and almost three years of ESOL instruction, unlike students in the other clusters, their English skills remain at early beginning levels.

Implication: Initial instruction in English for these students might emphasize oral-aural conversational skills at first, then introduce English reading and writing later using a direct, structured, and sequential approach such as Wilson, Orton-Gillingham, Lindamood, etc.

The Relationship of the Component Skills of Reading to Performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)[1]

Strucker, J., Yamamoto, K., & Kirsch, I. (May 2005). *The relationship of the component skills of reading to performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)* (NCSALL Research Brief). Cambridge, MA: NCSALL.

This Research Brief highlights key findings from a study that is a subset of a larger study being conducted jointly by NCSALL's John Strucker and Kentaro Yamamoto and Irwin Kirsch of the Educational Testing Service (ETS). This study builds on the proposition that a reader's comprehension performance is largely determined by his or her abilities in two areas—print components and meaning components—and that learners' skills, and therefore instructional needs, vary depending upon their relative strengths and weaknesses in these component areas. Print components include decoding accuracy and fluency; meaning components include oral vocabulary skills.

The study also continues work done by Strucker and NCSALL's Rosalind Davidson to develop reading profiles of IALS Levels 1 and 2 adults that will be informative for teachers, administrators, and policymakers in the field of adult literacy.

GOALS

The study's first goal was to see if specific levels of proficiency—tipping points—in the aforementioned reading components might prefigure higher levels of reading comprehension. To explore this question, the researchers compared the reading component skills of students at Levels 1 and 2 of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) with those of

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[1] The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (Tuijnman, A., 2000) has been administered in over 22 countries and in more than 15 languages. It is a test of real-world literacy skills, based closely on the U.S. National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) (Kirsch, I. et al. 1993). Like the NALS, the IALS has five levels: Roughly speaking, Level 1 ranges from people with very limited literacy up to those with approximately early middle school skills; Level 2 includes those with middle school to early high school skills, and Level 3 begins with those who have literacy skills comparable to solid high school graduates. Across all of the participating countries, IALS Level 3 attainment was associated with dramatic increases in civic participation, economic success, access to lifelong learning opportunities, and reading for pleasure. In addition, people in Level 3 and above also enjoy better overall health and even live longer.

Level 3 students. Level 3 is the IALS level associated with increased civic participation, increased economic success and independence, and enhanced opportunities for lifelong learning and personal literacy.

The second goal was to determine whether levels of proficiency in the key components of reading could be used to describe the strengths and needs in reading of Level 1 and Level 2 adults, and therefore be useful to teachers, administrators, and policymakers to guide assessment design and instructional decisions.

THE SAMPLE

The study sample was a convenience sample rather than a representative sample. It included 950 adult learners from five states who were enrolled in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Eighty-four adults who had completed high school or above were added as a household sample for comparison purposes, for a total of 1,034 participants. Beginning ESOL learners were not included in the study because we did not have the capability to interview them in their native languages. Otherwise, the sample was generally comparable to the nationally enrolled adult literacy population with respect to gender, age, and representation of major U.S. ethnic groups.

	U.S. DOE OVAE* Data	Level 1 Sample n = 1,034
Male/Female	46.8% / 53.2%	41% / 59%
Age Distribution		
16-24	40%	36.4%
25-44	44.5%	48.1%
45-59	11%	10.1%
60 and older	3.5%	5.3%
Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.4%	5.4%
Asian	7%	3.9%
Black or African-American	20%	29.5%
White	30%	51.8%
Hispanic	40%	38.3%**

* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education.
** Following U.S. Census Bureau procedures, Black, White, and Hispanic categories were not mutually exclusive for the Level 1 Sample, so the total exceeds 100%.

All participants were assessed in: 1) receptive (oral) vocabulary, 2) real-word reading for accuracy and speed, 3) pseudo-word reading for accuracy and speed, 4) spelling, 5) rapid naming of letters, and 6) short-term working memory. They also completed prose and document literacy tasks

from the IALS and a modified version of the IALS background
questionnaire covering educational history, employment, reading habits, etc.

Receptive vocabulary	Shortened version of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test created by K. Yamamoto (PPVT-Y)[2]
Real-word reading for accuracy and speed	Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-A)[3]
Pseudo-word reading for accuracy and speed	Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE-B)[2]
Spelling	Adaptation of diagnostic spelling assessment published by Louisa Moats[4]
Short-term working memory	Forward and backward Digit Span subtests from the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale IIIR[5]
Rapid naming of letters	Rapid Automatized Naming of Letters (RAN) and scrambled alphabet letters[6]

THE FINDINGS – PART 1

Proportions Correct by IALS Prose Proficiency

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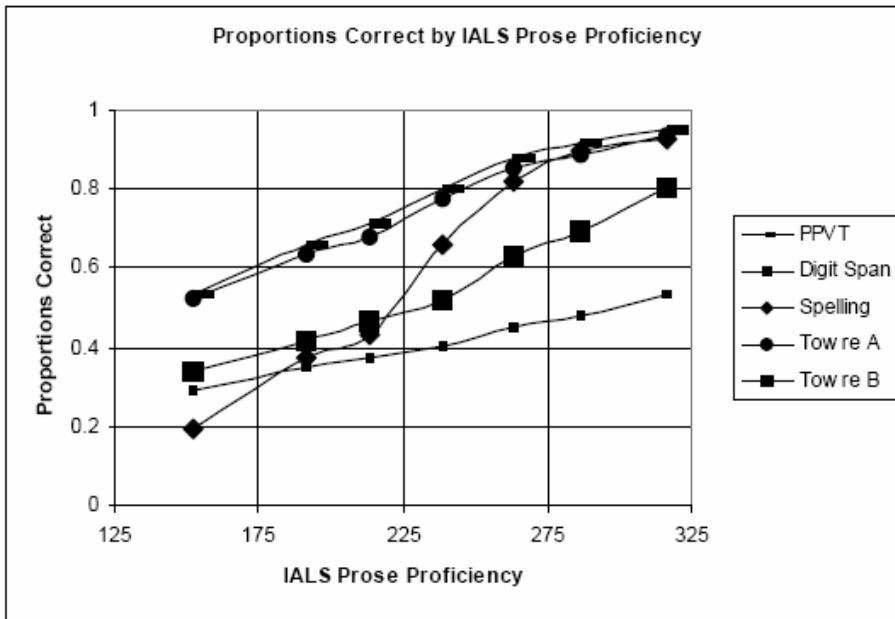
[2] Dunn, L. & Dunn, L. (1997). Peabody picture vocabulary test III (PPVT-III). Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

[3] Torgensen, J.K., Wagner, R.K., & Rashotte, C.A. (1999). Test of word reading efficiency (TOWRE). Austin, TX: PRO-ED, Inc.

[4] Moats, L.C. (1995). Spelling development, disability, and instruction. Timonium, MD: York Press.

[5] Wechsler, D. (1997). Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale III (WAIS-III) Digit Span. San Antonio: TX: The Psychological Corporation

[6] Wolf, M. (1991). Reading speed and naming: The contribution of the cognitive neurosciences. Reading Research Quarterly, 24.

Plotting the relationship of scores in the five key components (y-axis) against proficiency on the IALS prose literacy assessment (x-axis) revealed an interesting pattern. At the transition point between IALS Level 2 and IALS Level 3 (just below 275), readers score .75 to .85 proportion correct on the components of vocabulary, real-word reading, and spelling. This suggests that .75 to .85 proportion proficiency in those components may be the minimum level of skills needed to attain higher levels of performance in real world comprehension. In short, this research begins to answer an important question: "How proficient do ABE/ASE/ESOL readers have to be at vocabulary and word recognition in order to read at high school levels and above?"

The data also showed that up to IALS 275 (Level 3), the nonnative speakers of English read English pseudo-words *better* than the ABE and ASE learners. Many reading researchers consider difficulty with reading pseudo-words to be an indication of the core phonological deficit that is at the root of most reading disabilities. Participants' responses on the background questionnaire confirmed this: ABE/ASE native English speakers reported a very high incidence of childhood reading difficulties, while non-native speakers of English reported a very low incidence of childhood reading problems.

THE FINDINGS – PART 2

We performed latent class analysis of the test data to explore whether proficiencies in vocabulary (PPVT-Y), word recognition (TOWRE A), pseudo-word reading (TOWRE-B), Spelling, and short-term memory (WAIS digit span) could be used to describe patterns of reading strengths and needs among adult literacy students. That analysis yielded five patterns or classes of adult readers whose characteristics are summarized in the table below.

Class	% of Total Sample (n=1034)	% Native English Speakers	% Non-Native English Speakers	IALS Prose Literacy Levels %		
				Level 1	Level 2	Level 3+
1	48 (n=493)	86	14	5 (n=24)	49 (n=242)	46 (n=227)
2	17 (n=175)	72	28	26 (n=45)	61(n=107)	13 (n=23)
3	15 (n=154)	5	95	32 (n=50)	62 (n=95)	6 (n=9)
4	12 (n=123)	<1	99	68 (n=83)	29 (n=36)	3 (4)
5	9 (n=89)	31	69	83 (n=74)	16 (n=14)	1(n=1)

* Class 1, making up 48% of the sample, had the highest range of IALS skills, with 46% in Level 3 or above, 49% in Level 2, and only 5% in Level 1. Native speakers of English predominated, making up 86% of the class. This group was also the youngest overall.

* Class 2 had weaker IALS skills with only 13% scoring at IALS Level 3 or above, 61% in Level 2, and 26% in Level 1. The non-native English speakers in the group had good English skills and were predominantly enrolled in ABE or ASE rather than in ESOL classes. The native English speakers in Class 2 had weak print skills and some signs of reading disability.

* Class 3 is comprised of 95% non-native speakers of English, of whom 75% are enrolled in ESOL classes. Their raw decoding ability (of pseudowords) is nearly equal to that of participants in Class 1, but their vocabulary is much weaker. Sixty-two percent are in IALS Level 2, and 32% are Level 1.

* Class 4 are 99% non-native speakers of English, of whom 92% were enrolled in ESOL classes. Primarily because of their weak English vocabulary, 68% of Class 4 are in IALS Level 1 and only 29% are in Level 2.

* Class 5 is made up of 69% non-native and 31% native speakers of English. Among the latter group, many show signs of reading disability and report severe reading difficulties in childhood. Eighty-three percent of the people in Class 5 are in IALS Level 1 and only 16%% are in Level 2.

IMPLICATIONS

Patterns of strengths and needs in reading vary quite a bit among adult readers. Quick, easy-to-administer and easy-to-score tests of key reading skills, such as those used in this study, can give a useful picture of learners' strengths and needs. Assessing learners in these component skills is the necessary first step in planning efficient, focused instruction.

For adults in IALS Levels 1 and 2, governments should consider assessing not just IALS reading comprehension, but the key teachable components of comprehension—word recognition and vocabulary that ultimately drive comprehension ability.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Finding

It is possible to identify how proficient adults need to be in word recognition and vocabulary to achieve Level 3 performance on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)—the level associated with greatly enhanced life opportunities in many domains.

Related Recommendation

Learners whose vocabulary and word recognition are nearing those of people in Level 3 and above might be candidates for intensive, tightly focused, direct instruction in the vocabulary encountered in written language and in rapid, accurate word recognition.

Key Finding

The IALS is an un-timed literacy assessment containing real-world items embedded in a functional context. This has led some to argue that IALS performance is primarily a function of adults' life experiences and their familiarity with the socio-cultural content of the items. In sharp contrast, this research suggests that well-known basic reading skills like word recognition and vocabulary play critical roles in real-life literacy performances, much as they do in more traditional academic, school-based literacy assessments. The good news about these basic skills is that, unlike life experience and cultural context, word recognition and vocabulary are readily teachable by ABE practitioners.

Key Finding

Adult literacy students can be grouped into five distinct classes of readers:

Class 1: Proficient ABE, ASE, and Household Sample readers with very strong decoding and vocabulary skills

Class 2: ABE and ASE students with weaker decoding skills that tend to undermine their vocabulary skills

Class 3: Advanced ESOL students with strong decoding but noticeably weaker English vocabulary skills

Class 4: Intermediate ESOL students with moderate weaknesses in decoding and vocabulary skills in English.

Class 5: Low intermediate ESOL students and reading disabled ABE native speakers with marked needs in decoding and vocabulary.

Related Recommendation

The adult education system can begin to use these adult reader profiles to identify related instructional profiles as a step towards more focused and differentiated reading instruction for adult learners.

Short, easy-to-administer tests that give information about the learner's component reading skills will help identify the reader's profile and enable teachers to choose appropriate instructional approaches.

Key Finding

Simply knowing a readers' score on a reading comprehension test usually does not give teachers enough information to plan efficient instruction that is focused on the root causes of comprehension difficulties.