

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

Published Jointly by The Commission on Adult Basic Education and Rutgers University

RESEARCH

Literacy, Parental Roles, and Support Systems Among Single Latino Father Families

By Rose A. Santos and Mary V. Alfred

Selecting Fluency Assessments for Adult Learners

By Elena Nightingale, Daphne Greenberg, Lee Branum-Martin and Dariush Bakhtiari

FORUM: RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Research to Practice Connections

By Margaret Becker Patterson

Using Research to Design Integrated Education and Training Programs

By Michele Pappalardo and William R. Schaffer

The Role of Professional Development in Bridging Research and Practice in Adult Literacy and Basic Education

By Cristine Smith

PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

The Academic I-BEST: A Model for Precollege Student Success in College Transfer Programs

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RESEARCH DIGEST

Adult Basic Education and the Cyber Classroom

By Juanita Johnson-Bailey

RESOURCE REVIEW

Strugglers Into Strivers: What the Military Can Teach Us About How Young People Learn and Grow

By Hugh B. Price

Reviewed by Christine Dunagin Miller

WEB SCAN

Online Collections of Books and Articles for Adult Basic Skills Learners

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

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

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THE COABE JOURNAL, CELEBRATING 36 YEARS AS A MAJOR VOICE IN ADULT EDUCATION

Dear Colleagues,

We are thrilled to present the latest edition of this journal. This issue presents two research articles, a practitioner piece, and a forum on the uses of (and the need for) research. In a sense, all of these articles fit together in their emphasis on the ways that research can affect policy and practice.

Elena Nightingale, Daphne Greenberg, Lee Branum-Martin, and Dariush Bakhtiari present a fascinating study about the difficulty of assessing the reading fluency levels of adults. They end by cautioning administrators and teachers to be careful about adopting tests for reading fluency, especially if these tests have not been designed specifically for adults. Rose A. Santos and Mary Alfred explore the ways that single Latino fathers support their children's literacy. This qualitative study provides some interesting dimensions to our understanding of family dynamics with implications for family literacy programs. Finally, Doug Emory, Sean Twohy, Karen Lee and Linda Raymond explore a new use of the Academic I-BEST model from a practitioner perspective. The program that they are describing was one of the first efforts to translate the I-BEST model to an academic transfer environment.

This issue's Forum covers the important topic of how practitioners can use research. It includes a distillation of a presentation made at the 2016 COABE national conference in Dallas. Margaret Patterson provides an overview of the session and the issues raised. In particular, she pointed to the unfortunate lack of opportunity for discussion between researchers and practitioners. Cristine Smith echoes this observation and calls for more ways in which practitioners and researchers can interact in order to provide meaningful research that can inform policy, program formats and structures, and teaching. We hope that this Forum will be the beginning of greater dialogue. Smith goes beyond this call, however, to posit that professional development can provide the opportunity for greater collaboration. She presents an overview of some ways that this can be accomplished. The third article in this Forum is by Michele Pappalardo and William Schaffer of Northampton Community College. They present the myriad ways that their programs utilize research and also, in some cases, help promote it.

Finally, this issue includes three informative columns. David Rosen's WEBSCAN column presents online resources for adult learners. This extensive list of resources should be of great practical value to both teachers and administrators. Christine Dunagin Miller reviews the book *Strugglers into Strivers* by Hugh B. Price. She discusses Price's recommendation to use the model of the military in re-designing education for at-risk young adults. Finally, Juanita Johnson-Bailey's piece discusses research related to bullying in the adult education classroom, specifically the online classroom. While the subject of bullying has begun to be extensively discussed in children's education and higher education, it has been seen as less of an issue in adult education and specifically adult basic education. Johnson-Bailey points out that this lack of interest does not mean that bullying does not exist. Her article is an important introduction to this topic.

In summary, we feel that you will find much of interest in this issue. We would also point you to the newly initiated webinars developed by COABE which are topically related to the journal articles. We are excited about this initiative and hope that it will provide an extensive forum for discussing and implementing the findings of research reported in this journal.

Sincerely,

Amy D. Rose
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Literacy, Parental Roles, and Support Systems Among Single Latino Father Families

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Notes: This study was funded by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. A previous oral presentation was given at the COABE/ProLiteracy Conference (2010) where preliminary findings were shared.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of eight Latino single fathers as primary caregivers and their engagement with the literacy development of their children. The sample for this study consisted of eight single Latino fathers with children of elementary to middle school age. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted face-to-face and by phone. A constant comparative method was conducted to analyze the data. The findings included a profile of the participants' demographics along with the themes of work and learning, relational support, and home literacy practices.

Literacy, Parental Roles, and Support Systems among Single Latino Father Families

Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States, yet limited information is known about how single Latino fathers fulfill their multiple roles as primary caregiver and contributor to literacy development for themselves and the children in their care. According to Seleme-McDermott (2000),

By 2030, Latino youth (ages 5–17) are projected to grow to almost 15 million or nearly 25% of the total school population. Furthermore, Latino 18- to 24- year-olds, part of the age group from which business, industry and the military traditionally draw their workforce will increase rapidly, growing from 13.0% of the population in 1995 to 28.6% in 2050. (para. 2)

Moreover, Hispanics accounted for 54 million or about 17% of the U.S population and are responsible for half of the nation's growth from 2000 to 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2015). In this report, we will use

Hispanics and Latinos interchangeably for according to the Pew Research Center (2015), even though the terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably, at least in Texas, the overwhelming majority of Spanish-speaking residents prefer the term Hispanic. However, some of the research literature informative to this study uses the term Latino.

In addition to the growing Latino population, there is also growing diversity in the makeup of the family structure in the home. Beyond the traditional two-parent family arrangement, today's children live in homes "with two unmarried biological parents, married or cohabiting stepfathers, single fathers, and fathers living with another potential caregiver" (Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider, Curtin, & Hrapczynski, 2013, p. 57). The living arrangements of children under the age of 18 have changed between 1996 and 2008. As Hofferth et al. (2013) noted, the "proportion living with two married biological parents declined 2%, from 62.4% to 61.3%, and the proportion living with two biological cohabiting parents increased more than 50%, from 1.8% to 2.8%" (p. 58). During that same time period, Hofferth et al. (2013) reported that there was a 40% increase in children living with a single biological father, from 2.5% in 1996 to 3.5% in 2008. Single fathers were found more likely to be the primary caregivers in their homes when compared to stepfathers, and they were also found to have more positive fathering attitudes than men in two-biological parent households (Hofferth et al., 2013). In light of the changing family structures with an increasing number of fathers as single heads of household, Hofferth et al. (2013) reported that scholars should focus on understanding men's involvement with raising their children. We know about mothers as single heads of household but we do not know as much about fathers. Therefore, this study will add to the literature on Latino families with information on how fathers navigate their roles as single heads of household and contributors to their learning and development and that of their children.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of the selected single Latino fathers as primary caregivers and their engagement with the literacy development of their children. The study also explored the literacy and learning experiences of the selected participants. The primary research question was: how do these Hispanic single fathers manage the multiple roles of provider, caregiver, and the facilitator/teacher of literacy in the home?

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed within the concepts of literacy and familism. According to Taylor, Evans, and Abasi (2007), literacy is viewed as a single and universal skill whereby adults experience a formal learning process through basic literacy print text type programs, and learning is measured by use of standardized tests. Askov (2000) challenged this dominant view and argued that literacy incorporates meanings beyond oral and written language skills and includes the skills, knowledge, and practices one needs to function in a particular society or culture. Literacy acquisition for the dual language learner, such as some members of the Hispanic population, is particularly complex. Byram (2004), for example, argued that adult dual language learners bring formal and informal schooling to confront challenges of second language speaking, reading, and writing. Oftentimes these challenges are compounded by cultural practices.

For Hispanic families, a prominent value and cultural representation is reflected in the meaning of familism. Familism is conceptualized as comprising three dimensions, namely family obligations (providing material and emotional support), perceived support from the family (the extent family members are reliable sources of support), and family as referents (the use of relatives as role models for positive development) (Stein, et al., 2014). According

to Grau, Azmitia, and Quattlebaum (2009), cultural models suggest that Latino values of familism, such as family obligations and family reciprocity, influenced how they fulfill their family roles and are highly related to the levels by which fathers engage in activities with their children. The concepts of literacy and familism provided the lens through which we examined how a few fathers navigated the roles of provider, caregiver, and contributors to family literacy development.

Literature Review

This literature review will start with a description of the indicators of parental involvement as they relate to educational success followed by a discussion on the importance of families and their home literacy environment. Adults are crucial to helping children master the skills for required reading and writing in school. However, the types of family structures and the level of the adults' engagement influence children's literacy acquisition.

Parental involvement is crucial in children's educational achievement and success (Bernal et al., 2000; Ortiz, 2000; Saracho, 2007). Saracho (2007) and Ortiz (2000) argued for the father's involvement in both formal and informal education and that such engagement can improve the educational performance of Hispanic children and youth. According to Saracho (2002), parents can foster the literacy development of their children at home by the extent to which they value literacy, the communication of expectations for children to succeed and achieve in school, the ownership of reading materials available at home, and the interaction that parents have with their children to discuss reading and learning. Additionally, Farver, Xu, Lonigan, and Eppe (2013) examined the home literacy environment and Latino Head Start children's literacy skills and found parents' literacy engagements, shared reading among siblings, and literary resources in the family promote literacy consistently across English and Spanish households. Moreover, Murillo

(2012) found in bilingual families, parents' support children's literacy development through the practice of Spanish in the home.

Although Hispanic fathers have been negatively portrayed as lacking academic engagement with their children, Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, and Goldenberg (1995) found them to have high aspirations and expectations for their education. However, Bernal et al. (2000) found while both parents are interested in their children's academic success, Hispanic fathers have not been as engaged due to economic reasons when compared to mothers who are typically the dominant caretakers in the family. Moreover, Bernal et al. (2000) found children attain high grades if their fathers are involved in their school, whether the fathers live with the children or not.

Research on parental roles has mainly focused on mothers as they have been the primary caregivers to their children (Ortiz, 2004). This is true in the Hispanic family where fathers play the primary roles of leader and provider (Vega, 1990), with education and development left to the mother. While some fathers contribute to these activities, their experiences have not received much attention in the social science literature. As Ortiz (2000) noted, it is important to understand parent-child literacy practices among single fathers of Hispanic origin. Literacy practices are influenced by the choice of language in the home, particularly in bilingual families, cultural practices, and parents' educational levels (Saracho, 2007). As Bernal et al. (2000) noted, incorporating literacy development activities with the family at home and both in and out of the school environment increases learning success. Saracho (2007) posited that the degree of parental involvement is directly related to their children's experiences with academic success.

Single fathers take on the task of literacy development of their children, which is a role that is often invisible in the literature on fathers of Hispanic descent. Bernal et al. (2000) found fathers' involvement in their children's education

positively influences their success rate despite the demographics of income, ethnicity, or the level of the parents' education. According to Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987), father involvement can be characterized into three areas of engagement or shared activities including: between a father and child, accessibility of the father or his availability to interact with his child, and responsibility of a father to ensure the care of his child.

Bernal et al. (2000) reported that parents' and children's literacy engagement, such as the amount of time spent reading, positively influences the literacy levels of their children. Similarly, Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, and Cabrera (2002) reported that fathers who were more responsive with their children during play were about five times more likely to have children within the cognitive measure of being in the normal range than were fathers who demonstrated low levels of responsiveness to their children. The evidence suggests that Hispanic fathers play an important role in the literacy development of their children, and, with the absence of the mother in the home, their role in their children's development becomes more critical. Since a growing number of fathers are heading households as single parents, are the primary provider in the home, and have the responsibility for child and literacy development (Hofferth et al., 2013), it is important to take a glimpse into how they manage these multiple roles.

Methodology

This study used basic qualitative research methodology that relied on the social constructions of meaning created by individuals (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative inquiry provided an in-depth understanding about the roles of the Hispanic father participants as sole provider, caretaker, and influencing the development of literacy in the home. Texas was selected as the site to locate Hispanic single fathers due to the high Hispanic population. The criteria for participation included Hispanic single

fathers with children of elementary to middle school age who spoke English. The first few participants were recruited with the help of a Hispanic community events director within a Texas school district. Personal and professional networks of individuals were then contacted. The snowball technique was the strategy employed to invite participants personally after they were identified as eligible. Yin (2011) defined the snowball technique as selecting new data collection, in this case more participants, as an offshoot of existing ones, or learning of other individuals who may fit the criteria from other participants who already completed interviews. This process resulted in eight participants for the study.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured, open-ended interviewing (Patton, 2002). The development of the first interview protocol was guided by the literature and the conceptual framework, to include management of their multiple roles, views and attitudes about literacy relative to the single paternal role, and the cultural aspects of familism as it relates to types of support systems, if any, they draw upon. Two interviews were conducted with each participant. The first interview was conducted face-to-face and ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, and the second interview was conducted over the phone, lasting no more than 30 minutes. Before interviews were conducted, each participant was assured confidentiality and were asked to sign a consent form. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

The constant comparative approach was used for data analysis to identify similarities and differences in the participants' responses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, transcripts were read and analyzed to identify patterns in what participants reported about their literacy practices and management of their multiple roles. Second, a thematic analysis was used to code and categorize specific themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), involved the researchers assigning

identifying codes for the purpose of identifying common themes or descriptive information in the interview data. First, charts were created with all of the participants' responses, then codes were assigned to each of the responses in order for themes to be determined. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, member checking and field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), were utilized. The member checking process involved each participant receiving an electronic copy of his transcript to ensure an accurate record was made of his perspective.

Description of Participants

Six of the eight participants were born in the United States. Participants were single fathers of Hispanic origin and ranged in the ages from 29 to 42 years old, with children ages 3 to 14. Out of the eight participants, five had graduated from high school with some participants learning through on-the-job training programs and other participants having attended some college. All names are pseudonyms selected by participants. The majority (Robert, Ivan, Jovan, Armando, Daniel, and Tomas) were divorced and appointed primary custody with allocated times to the biological mothers for visitations. In two instances (Arturo and Fred), the biological mother removed herself from the home and left the care of their child to the father. In table 1, we present their demographic information, education levels, and forms of employment.

Findings

Analysis of the data revealed three major findings in response to how the Hispanic single fathers manage their multiple roles as provider, caregiver, and development of literacy in the home environment. First, the theme of work and learning discussed participants' experiences as sole provider and their learning engagements that aided their abilities to work to provide. Subsequently, the second theme, relational support systems, described the participants'

confrontation and management of daily challenges with the assistance of family and friends. Finally, the third theme of home literacy practices is presented.

Work and Learning

The job descriptions varied, but one consistency was the participants needed to work to sustain their families. All fathers stated that they worked full-time except for one father, Ralph, who said that he worked part-time and reported,

I'm a full-time student. I help out working out of my house. I'm a screen printer. I make t-shirts for schools, for functions, for family reunions, whatever I can, and it helps me stay at home with my son.

In contrast to Ralph, Jovan provided for his family through his full-time employment at a grocery store as well as a part-time job as a deejay on weekends for small family parties. Both Ralph and Jovan reported that they were friends and sometimes Ralph helped Jovan with his deejay jobs. Their part-time jobs were entrepreneurial and forms of self-employment. Three of the eight participants were self-employed and described their entrepreneurial activities and the flexibility it afforded them to take care of their children. Robert, a full-time electrician, explained,

If I weren't self-employed, I wouldn't have the freedom to do the things that I do with my son and stuff. Not every Saturday can I spend with him. Lots of times, I'm working. Not every time I am home at five. Sometimes I work till ten.

Arturo also mentioned how he works on air conditioning units as a self-employed contractor. The stability of self-employment varied depending on the demand for t-shirts as in the case of Ralph or for electrical needs as in the case of Arturo. While the fathers who were self-employed experienced some flexibility with their jobs, those who worked

full-time described their jobs as demanding.

The participants who worked full time were employed at a grocery store, telephone company, and government agencies. Two participants worked for the military as civilian full-time employees. Tomas was the only participant on active military duty and was on assignment in another country at the time of the study. Armando also described his work on a military base as a contractor for the Army Depot. He was the only participant who mentioned his faith as influential in his life, especially when he was searching for work. Armando stated, “My typical day at work is that I come in, and I’m on the computer constantly. I run reports and if there are any problems with the software, they come to me.”

In addition to these two participants who worked for the government, there were four fathers who also worked non-government full-time positions. Jovan explained his job responsibilities as a local grocery store manager. He reported,

I am the central checkout operations manager. I basically coach and develop the carryouts, cashiers, business center partners, and bookkeeping. I’m running the front-end, making sure that everything is going straight with the customer service. And, I have paperwork I have to do. I have meetings. It’s just a hectic 10- or 11-hour day.

Likewise, Ivan discussed how he provides for his four children by working for a company that does drywall and paint. Similarly, Daniel described his work role as a “communications technician for the phone company.” He elaborated that his job was complicated since he has to know how to fix various phone services, such as providing online connections. It was clear that all participants relied solely on their income to provide for their children. The majority of participants had job responsibilities that they learned to fulfill at work and maintained hectic schedules. The participants also discussed how learning at work

contributed to the ability to provide for their children.

Most participants learned job skills through workplace training programs. Arturo, Robert, and Ivan reported they learned their job skills through hands-on or on-the-job learning activities. Arturo discussed how he got involved working on air conditioning units. “I started like at the very bottom as a helper, and I worked my way up. I’m a self-employed contractor.” Robert reported how he learned to become a self-employed electrician; he noted, “I did on-the-job training. I worked with a company for like six, seven years before I even got my first license.” Arturo also reported how he learned to work as a self-employed air conditioning repairman after watching others in his field, as did Ivan who worked doing drywall and painting.

Learning job skills through their work experiences was also evident for some of the participants. For example, Tomas, who works for the Air Force, reported, “I got a job as an assistant apprentice at that time. I shipped ammunition abroad, and I maintained, built, and tested it.” Similarly, Armando discussed how he learned the skills needed for his current job as a contractor for the Army Depot through his prior work experiences. While some participants learned how to function at their jobs through their prior work experiences, others were enrolled into particular training programs.

Workplace training was an avenue by which participants gained new skills and improved on existing ones. Jovan and Daniel learned job skills through their workplace training programs. Jovan, the grocery store manager, discussed how he was involved in his training program. He reported,

It’s basically an eight-week training program to become a manager at a grocery store and line you up with the culture of the chain management, the way they want you to run, to manage a business—basically the culture

of the store. It's part in the classroom and part in the store.

Daniel also described his 18-month workplace-training program that prepared him to develop the skills necessary for employment as a communications technician for the phone company. He reported:

It was ugly. There were 30 of us that started out, and only five of us finished. I didn't like it. Well, it was fun because we got to be with other people. They were kind of not teaching you, but trying to get rid of people. But, it's like you got to teach people to learn. Don't try to cut people. They had the wrong training aspect.

In addition to challenging work-training programs, the fathers described how they encountered struggles everyday fulfilling their roles as fathers and had to rely on support from others.

Relational Support

The participants managed their multiple roles with support and help from their family or friends in caring for their children, preparing meals, and with housekeeping. Relational support was imperative to the fathers' management of their roles as caregivers and providers. They described their daily challenges and difficulties with their schedules, being the head of household, and the primary caregiver to their children. Jovan described his daily schedule, which was very similar to the description of most of the fathers' daily schedules:

Typical workday involves waking up about seven in the morning. Get the kids ready for school. Head to work. I usually get off of work around six or six thirty. My parents pick up the kids from school, so they help me out with that. Go back home. Spend time with the kids. They do their homework. Usually, their homework is done by the time I get home.

The participants also reported difficulties they encountered on a daily basis. Robert testified about his greatest difficulty with single fatherhood.

Everything, like you know being a single dad, you got to put up with the kid all day long. Because you know, you can't walk away from it. There is no turning it off; I'll be right back. It's a constant.

Another difficulty Jovan expressed was the fact that his daughter was aging, and he was not sure how to handle her growing up as the only parent in the house. Ralph reported, "Being the mom and the dad is probably the hardest, because I can only do so much." While the difficulties ranged and depended on the participants' situations, they all agreed that their children motivated them to keep on going during difficult days and challenging situations. Moreover, support from family members and friends also aided in the fulfillment of daily responsibilities as well as the physical and emotional care of the children.

These relational support systems consisted of familial networks such as parents, siblings, and friends who were willing to assist in the caring of the children. Two participants, Arturo and Armando, reported that they and their children live in the same household with their parents. Arturo commented about how his expanded family household structure helps him, "As far as like in the mornings, I can't take him to school. And so, they'll take him to school in the mornings." While Arturo and Armando described how they shared their home with their parents who helped them care for their children, most fathers described their hectic schedules as overwhelming. Robert reported, "Sometimes I don't see him until the next morning, but I have my family that helps me. I'm not leaving him at day care and stuff like that. It's my sister that has boys his age, so he doesn't mind it." Jovan also stated, "My parents are my biggest supporter. My family is my biggest supporter. My brother has three kids, so my kids get along with

their kids. They're pretty close in age."

Family support for these single father families came primarily from the participants' mothers and sisters. Robert explained, "My sisters help me because they watch my son while I work. He also mentioned how his mother helps him. He stated, "Well, she picks him up every day from school." Arturo, who lived with his parents and his son, described how his mother helps him with the cooking, washing, and most daily household tasks. While many of the single fathers received assistance in taking on domestic duties, friends were also reported to be of help and support to participants.

Two of the participants, Jovan and Ralph, were friends who supported one another in fulfilling their roles as single fathers. Jovan described his friendship with Ralph: "He's a friend of mine for about 16 years. He lives four houses down from my parents, and his son is actually in class with my daughter." While Jovan and Ralph supported one another, some participants had to handle the role of being a single parent without as much support.

Tomas was the sole participant who reported that he had no family to help support him in raising his children. As an enlisted Air Force soldier deployed and living in another country, finding relational support was, indeed, a challenge for him. He described his struggles in finding people to care for his children during times when he had to be absent from home. As he noted,

When I'm being sent off, and my kids can't go with me, we have a dependent care plan in the Air Force. Within 30 days of being assigned to this station, I have to find two people that I can trust my kids to be with. Those individuals who I end up trusting will be the ones to care for my children while I'm gone or deployed.

When asked how he chose the two people to care for his children, Tomas stated he was observant and

met two married military couples with children at a barbecue. He felt confident that he could trust them to care for his two sons. As a result, Tomas relied on these two American military families as caretakers of his children when he had to go away for work. All participants, whether they lived far or near their families, received support from others. These support systems aided in the participants' accomplishment of daily tasks including that of learning and literacy.

Home Literacy Practices

Literacy in the home consisted of both formal and informal learning. The fathers mentioned having reading materials in the home. However, the range of reading genres varied as well as the frequency with which the participants liked and disliked reading. Ivan, one of two participants who is from Mexico, mentioned reading Spanish materials like the local bilingual newspaper called *La Comunidad de Latinos* (*The Latinos' Community*). Jovan reported, "For me, it's just like I said, instructional books, like deejaying for dummies or building a website or you know, things like that." Tomas explained "I just like to read about the newest cars that are coming out or car prototypes. Science, I love science, the medical field, solar system, anything like that." Similarly, Armando described his reading materials noting, "I've got a lot of Christian material, a lot of different books." Ralph described his daily reading in a non-print form. He remarked, "I go to websites about screen-printing and blogs." Overall, the reasons for engaging in reading were for information gathering and to fulfill other personal interests.

The participants described their children's reading practices and the various resources used for literacy enrichment to include books, pamphlets, and video games. For example, Jovan reported, "The kids have the books, their library books from the school that they bring home, and their little learners, their little pamphlet books, and whatever I buy them at the book fair." Daniel described how his boys use video

games to enhance their English literacy. As he noted, “There’s not really books or magazines. They’re like cheat codes and the game aspect.” With a variety of reading materials in the homes, there were multiple forms of home literacy practices for both parents and the children in their care.

The home literacy activities of participants varied and included members of the immediate household along with the children’s grandparents and aunts. Ralph described, “My parents are really into getting him flashcards and helping him, and they make games out of it.” The frequency that the participants read to their children depended on different factors, such as schedules, responsibilities, and time. Ralph elaborated, “We’re just reading together. I’ll read to him a story out of the magazine. He brings home books from school.” When asked about the last time that Ivan read to his children, he responded, “I can’t remember.” Jovan admitted, “Not as often as I should, but I do every once in a while. I probably do two to three times a week.” The frequency of home literacy practices ranged from very frequent to hardly at all.

Two participants, Ivan and Arturo, were first generation Hispanic Americans, and expressed challenges in helping their children who were in elementary school. The length of time that they have been U.S. residents influences their parenting practices. As a Mexican immigrant, Ivan reported,

Okay, difficult time is this. The kids don’t know Spanish, and I don’t know that much English. And, reading and writing for me is difficult. I can help them in math, but like writing and reading is difficult for me. I talk to my kids at home in Spanish.

While Ivan was straight forward that his children do not read to him because their books are in English, he admitted he struggles with the English language and his difficulty in supporting his children’s literacy development; Ivan unknowingly contributes to the Spanish literacy of his children by speaking Spanish

to them in the home.

Parents’ value for literacy and learning activities at home emerged as a sub-theme. The participants were asked about their views on the importance of reading and learning. While they reported that they might not spend as much time on reading like they believe they should, they understood the importance of reading and learning. Daniel reported, “I think being that I’ve read so much crazy stuff when I was a kid, I can look at something and see the potential for it.” Tomas elaborated on the value of shared reading, “One of the most important things when I read to my boys is closeness. We’re reading to each other as a family. We’re close, but it’s also about them understanding what I’m reading to them.” A portrait of single Hispanic fathers as they attempt to provide for their children include literacy in which work and learning are valuable for the fathers to be financial providers for their children and necessary literacy practices for educational development both for themselves and their children. Many implications can be drawn from the findings as they relate to working and learning, support systems, and literacy practices at home.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined how the single Hispanic fathers manage their life roles and the development of literacy in the home. A father’s influence on literacy development in his children can be measured by the extent to which he engages in literacy practices, values literacy, and has available reading materials in the home, which agrees with the literature on parent involvement and educational outcomes by Bernal et al. (2000), Saracho (2007), and Farver et al. (2013). The findings imply that the kinds of literacy inherent in their daily work lives are vital for them to perform successfully at their jobs, which agrees with Askov’s (2000) definition of literacy as a means to acquire skills to function in particular roles. Two participants, Ivan and Arturo, whose first language

is Spanish, understood the importance of teaching their children English and placing value on reading and learning, because their school instruction is in English. However, they were not aware that they are also developing their children's bilingual literacy by talking in Spanish at home. This finding agreed with an important factor in developing students' bilingual literacy since most elementary schools emphasize English language instruction (Murillo, 2012).

Even though participants have limited time to engage in literacy practices and activities with their children, they agree on the importance of engaging in literacy activities in opportune times. For example, in the kitchen, the father could have his kids read a recipe, in the car when driving around, children can use the time to take advantage of literacy games such as saying names of things viewed when driving with similar descriptors such as flowers, living things, car colors. Also a bilingual component could be added to such games in bilingual households such as alternating in English and then Spanish.

Second, the support the fathers receive from family members and friends is important for them to get through challenging days and contribute to their management of the multiple roles of provider, caregiver, and facilitator of family literacy engagement. The Hispanic father as the figurehead of the family, according to the cultural trait of familism (Saracho, 2007), can greatly and positively influence the literacy development in children within Hispanic families. Hofferth et al. (2013) found that single fathers were most involved when considering the actual amount of time spent with their children in teaching activities. Third, realizing the many roles that single fathers take on, it is important to recognize all that they endure in order to provide for their families.

Implications for practitioners in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs include possible programs with childcare opportunities so they may receive assistance to further their education. Additionally,

instruction on how to improve home literacy environments may be helpful to include literacy skills and strategies for shared reading engagement with children in both Spanish and English to increase comprehension, recall, and higher order thinking. Due to the increase of Hispanic fathers as head of household, it is important to make resources such as childcare to facilitate their attendance in ABE classes and other learning opportunities. Perhaps more businesses and workplace organizations can bring in more literacy education programs to assist those who have a need to gain fluency with English language learning or gain fluency in Spanish formal language. Such a dual language program can help fathers increase literacy fluency in both English and Spanish, as both languages are especially important in bilingual households since it connects with children and family members. Another implication is to make English and Spanish literature available so the fathers are better able to support the needs of their children. Additionally, ABE classes can be made in two formats of media such as traditional face-to-face classes and online forms to provide increased accessibility to fathers who have the demands of life's multiple roles.

These findings from this research provided information about a family structure that is often overlooked, namely, with single Hispanic fathers as heads of households. The U.S. Hispanic population is vastly growing and is commonly referred to as the least educated racial/ethnic group in the nation. This study explored how Hispanic fathers manage the multiple roles of provider and caregiver, while contributing to the literacy development of their children. The findings suggest that single Hispanic fathers have many trials and tribulations to overcome in their daily lives but, like many parents, they strive to be devoted to their children. They emphasize the importance of education for their children, evidence that is supported by similar findings by Bernal et al. (2000). The single Hispanic fathers reported the importance of taking on the various roles of father,

worker, and teacher to their children. To fulfill their roles, these fathers found support among family members and friends, evidence of the concept of familism in Hispanic cultures.

Oftentimes, studies are conducted on the mother's role with regard to literacy development. This study focused on single fathers and literacy practices with their children. Future research questions may consider the long term educational effects of single father households or how their role as a single parent influence their later interactions with their grandchildren in terms of literacy development. Noting that Hispanic fathers have often been viewed as economic providers in the lives of their children, this study helped to expand the role of Hispanic fathers as primary caretakers and academic coaches with potential to positively influence the future generations of Hispanic children. ❖

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Table 1—Demographic Information of Participants

Name*	Age	Number of Children	Ages and Gender of Children (B=Boy) (G=Girl)	Job	Highest Level of Education	Adult Education Experience	Years as a Single Father
Robert	42	1	7B	Electrician (Self-employed)	9th	Apprenticeship as an Electrician, Worked in a Company for 6-7 years, Test for Electrician License	4 years
Ivan	29	4	3B, 5G, 7G, 8B	Air Condition Repairman (Self-employed)	12th (did not graduate)	Learned job skills hands-on from other people	1 year and 9 days
Arturo	34	1	11B	Drywall & Painter	9th	Learned job skills hands-on from other people	3.5 Months
Jovan	32	2	6B, 8G	Grocery Store Manager	High School Graduate & 1 semester of college	8-week School of Retail Management Training Program to become a store manager	2.5 years
Armando	41	1	12B	Contractor for Army Depot	High School Graduate & High School Graduate & Some college	Training Programs at work, Certificates	10 years
Ralph	31	1	7B	Screen Printer (Self-employed)	Currently in the Physical Therapy Assistant Program 36 hours in	Full-Time Student 36 hours into his program at a community college	5 years
Daniel	32	3	10B, 12B, 14B	Communications Technician for Phone Company	High School Graduate & completed an 18-month training program	18-month Training Program	10 years
Tomas	31	2	3B, 8B	Munitions Work for U. S. Air Force	High School graduate & some college	Military Training	1 year and a couple of months

Selecting Fluency Assessments for Adult Learners

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Abstract

Selecting assessments for adults who struggle with reading can be difficult because few literacy measures used by reading researchers have been normed on this population, leaving uncertainty regarding the validity of these tests for adult learners. This study focused on the performance of 116 adults reading between the 3rd and 8th grade levels on a selection of reading fluency tests and other reading tests. The study examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures, taking into consideration the trait and method represented in the assessments in order to analyze how these reading fluency tests (Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Woodcock Johnson Reading Fluency) function when administered to a sample for whom they were not designed. The results suggest that there may be inconsistent patterns in the convergent and discriminant validity of these measures with this group of adult learners. Based on the findings of this study, suggestions are made for assessment selection for this population.

Reading fluency can be defined as the combination of speed, accuracy, and prosody (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003), and is an area in which adult literacy students struggle (Greenberg et al., 2011; Mellard & Fall, 2012; Sabatini, Sawaki, Shore, & Scarborough, 2010). Fluency is an important skill to possess because it has been shown to be correlated to reading comprehension, the end goal in the development of reading skills (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001). The link between fluency and reading comprehension skills may be attributed to the fact that fluency reduces the cognitive demand of conscious decoding of each individual word and allows the reader to instead move on to higher-order comprehension processes (Rapp, van den Broek, McMaster, Kendeou, & Espin, 2007).

While fluency and its relationship to comprehension has been studied extensively with children (Eason, Sabatini, Goldberg, Bruce, & Cutting, 2013; Kim, Wagner, & Lopez, 2012; Wise et al., 2010), research in this area with adults, particularly struggling adult readers, is limited (readers are encouraged to read the National Academy of Sciences report on Improving Adult Literacy Instruction; National Research Council, 2011). Some studies with adults have indicated that there may be evidence of a relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension in adult literacy learners, though

possibly weaker than the relationship in younger populations (Greenberg et al., 2011; Mellard, Woods, & Fall, 2011; Sabatini et al., 2010). For example, while test manuals cite correlations between fluency and comprehension for typically developing children at .8, fluency has been found to be correlated with adults at .54 (Sabatini et al., 2010).

Literature Review

Selection of Appropriate Measures

As will be described, there are many different fluency tests on the market, and how to determine the best fluency measure to use can feel like a daunting task. One way to select an appropriate measure is by categorizing measures keeping a careful distinction between traits and methods (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Maul, 2013). This approach can be useful in teasing out the similarities and differences between measures. “Trait” simply means the skill intended to be measured (e.g., fluency or reading comprehension). “Method” means the mode, test, or process by which the measure is taken. This approach necessitates practitioners and/or researchers to determine which trait one wants to measure and which method of assessment one wants to use.

Assessments may measure the same trait using the same method, the same trait using a different method, a different trait using the same method, or a different trait using a different method. For example, reading comprehension can be measured in speeded versus unspeeded methods. Alternatively, fluency and decoding could both be measured using passages of connected text or with words out of context. The multitrait/multimethod (MTMM) approach defines trait as the construct the test is designed to measure, and in this study, our focus is primarily on fluency (speed and accuracy).

Practitioners and researchers also need to take into account convergent and discriminant validity issues. Convergent validity is the extent to which two measures which should be related in constructs

measured are actually related, and is important in our ability to interpret the results of the assessment as reflecting the actual ability it is intended to measure (Messick, 1995; Trochim, 2006). For example, we would expect two measures of reading fluency to have similar results if administered to the same examinee. Convergent validity can be determined by calculating the correlation coefficients between the two tests with a given sample (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Similarly, discriminant validity is the extent to which two assessments that are supposedly not related in content are actually unrelated. Discriminant validity can also be evaluated using correlation coefficients, looking for a lower correlation between two tests which measure different constructs. Therefore, we would expect tests measuring different constructs—such as an irregular word reading test and an algebra test—to have a lower correlation than tests measuring the same or similar constructs (such as an irregular word reading test and a general word reading test), and this is called discriminant validity. Among tests with strong validity evidence, one would expect higher correlations between tests that have trait and/or method in common. Because traits must always be measured via a certain method or combination of methods, separating trait from method effects becomes crucial to valid interpretation of test scores. Specifically, one would want to reduce variance based on shared or different methods in order to ensure that what is inferred from the scores is related to examinee ability rather than the methodology of the assessment (Messick, 1995).

Aim of Study

The purposes of this study were to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of a selection of reading fluency tests administered to adult learners as well as to investigate what the correlations among the fluency measures and other literacy measures suggest about their convergent and discriminant validity and the potential influence of measurement

methods. This was done by analyzing how the tests described below are similar and dissimilar to each other as reflected in their correlations. The analysis is done with preliminary data from a larger study, as an illustration of this method. If the tests are working as intended with this population, they will have convergent validity with the tests measuring the same constructs (traits) using the same methods and discriminant validity with tests measuring different constructs using different methods (speeded/not speeded).

Methods and Assessments

Participants

The participants in this study were engaged in a larger, federally-funded project (Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Grant R305C120001) which assessed their underlying reading strengths and weaknesses. As indicated by answers to a demographic questionnaire, of 116 native English speaking participants, 66% were female, 24% were employed, and 81% identified as Black/African American (others reporting as: 2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 9% White/Caucasian, 4% Asian, and 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.) Their ages ranged from 16–70 years old with a mean age of 39 (SD = 15) and a median age of 37.

Participants were recruited through their classes that targeted individuals reading at the 3rd through 8th grade levels in Metro Atlanta. Research staff described the project to the learners, and those who were interested in participating met with research staff to learn about the study, and go through the consent process.

Assessments

On a mutually agreed upon date and time, participants were individually assessed in a private room across approximately 3–4 sessions (sessions ranged from 1–3 hours), a large battery of reading and reading related assessments administered in a fixed

order. The testers were master's and doctoral students in the fields of educational psychology, counseling psychology, and communication sciences, and they all received intensive six-week training in both test administration and adult literacy sensitivity issues. Testers followed test manual procedures, and hand-recorded participants' responses. Upon participant test completion, all tests and scores were carefully reviewed for basal/ceiling and scoring mistakes. Any mistakes were either quickly resolved or treated as missing data. Participants were paid ten dollars per hour of participation.

The measures included in this paper reflect a subset of the larger battery of assessments and were selected based on their being most congruent with the reading fluency aims of this study. Specifically, the following fluency assessments were administered: Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF), Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF), Woodcock Johnson III – Reading Fluency (WJ-RF), and Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE). The following non-fluency assessments were administered: Test of Irregular Word Reading Efficiency (TIWRE), Woodcock Johnson III – Letter Word Identification (WJ-LWI), Woodcock Johnson III – Passage Comprehension (WJ-PC), and Woodcock Johnson III – Word Attack (WJ-WA). To assess convergent validity, this study investigated how the fluency measures relate to each other (TOSWRF, TOSCRF, WJ-RF, TOWRE). In order to assess discriminant validity, the fluency measures were compared to non-fluency literacy tests (TIWRE, WJ III-LWI, WJ III-PC, WJ III-WA).

Fluency Assessments

The Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF; Mather, Hammill, Allen, & Roberts, 2004) is designed to measure silent reading fluency of single words (Mather et al., 2004). It has been normed for examinees aged 6–18 years of age with an average reliability (internal consistency) of .86. The test may

be administered to an individual or group, and is 3 minutes in length, preceded by about 1–2 minutes of instruction for a total length of administration of 4–5 minutes. The examinee is presented with lines of words which are printed without spaces, and is asked to draw lines between as many words as possible in 3 minutes.

The Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF; Hammill, Wiederholt, & Allen, 2006) is intended to measure the speed with which students can silently recognize the individual words in a series of printed passages that become progressively more difficult in content, vocabulary, and grammar. It has been normed on ages 6–18 years old with an average reliability (internal consistency) of .86. The test may be administered to an individual or group, and is 3 minutes in length with a 2 minute practice form and 1–2 minutes of instruction, for a total length of administration of 6–7 minutes. The examinee is presented with passages in which all the words are printed together without spaces and is asked to draw lines between as many correct words as possible in the context of the passage in 3 minutes. (Hammill et al., 2006).

The Woodcock Johnson Reading Fluency subtest (WJ-RF; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) is designed to assess reading speed by measuring the examinee's ability to silently identify whether a sentence contains correct or incorrect information. The test may be administered to an individual or group, and is normed for examinees ages 2–99 years with a reliability (internal consistency) of .90. This speeded test lasts for three minutes, during which the participant is instructed to read each sentence silently and to circle yes or no to identify whether the sentence is correct or incorrect, for as many sentences as they can, within the 3 minute time limit.

The Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE; Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 2012) sight word reading subtest is individually administered and assesses the ability to recognize words which must

be orthographically decoded as whole units. The test is normed for examinees 6–24 years old, and has a reported reliability (internal consistency) of .87. Administration for this speeded subtest is 45 seconds, in addition to time required for directions. During the test, the examinee is asked to read aloud from a list of words, while the examiner scores each item as correct or incorrect, from which a final raw score is gathered.

The Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE; Torgesen et al., 2012) phonemic decoding subtest is individually administered and assesses the examinee's ability to sound out non-words which must be phonemically decoded to pronounce correctly. The test is normed for examinees 6–24 years old and has a reported reliability (internal consistency) of .87. Administration for this subtest is 45 seconds in addition to the time required for directions. During the test, the examinee is asked to read aloud from a list of non-words, while the examiner scores each item as correct or incorrect, from which a final raw score is gathered.

As indicated by the above descriptions, the assessments used to measure fluency can be categorized as requiring individuals to read orally or silently, and providing individuals with the words in or out of context (i.e., single words or sentences). Table 1 summarizes how the fluency assessments can be categorized.

As described, fluency tests are not all alike. Reading fluency is often measured with variations of the words-per-minute method where the number of correctly identified words or non-words in a set time is used to measure speed and accuracy, which can be done with items in and out of context. For example, fluency assessments may use real words out of context (Test of Word Reading Efficiency – Sight word decoding, TOWRE, Torgesen et al., 1999), non-words out of context (Test of Word Reading Efficiency – Phonemic decoding, TOWRE, Torgesen et al., 1999), and real words in context (Woodcock Johnson

III, WJ – Reading Fluency, Woodcock et al., 2001). In addition, reading fluency can be measured orally (e.g., TOWRE, sight word and phonemic decoding, Torgesen et al., 1999) or silently (WJ – Reading Fluency, Woodcock et al., 2001). The Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF, Mather et al., 2004) and Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF, Hammill et al., 2006) are more recent tests of silent reading fluency. The TOSWRF measures silent word reading fluency out of context, and the TOSCRF measures silent word reading fluency in context. These differences in trait and method may influence what the test is actually measuring, and how one can interpret the results in the context of other measures, which is our focus in this study.

Non-Fluency Assessments

Irregular Word Reading Efficiency. The Test of Irregular Word Reading Efficiency (TIWRE; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2007) assesses irregular word reading efficiency by measuring the examinee's ability to verbally identify phonetically irregular words from a list. The test has been normed on individuals aged 3–94 years old and reports internal consistency for all forms in the mid to high .90s. This test is not a speeded measure, and it involves presenting the examinee with phonetically irregular words and letters, which they identify orally until they identify four words incorrectly, after which administration ceases.

Letter-Word Identification. The Woodcock Johnson III subset of Letter-Word Identification (WJ III-LWI; Woodcock et al., 2007) is designed to measure the ability to recognize and orally identify words and letters. This test has been normed on children and adults, ages 2–99 years old with internal consistency reliability of .94. It is not speeded and takes about three to five minutes to administer, which is done by presenting the examinee with lists of words, until six words in a row are identified incorrectly, and moving backward from the starting

point of the test as needed until six words in a row are identified correctly (in this study, all participants started with item number 33).

Passage Comprehension. The Woodcock Johnson III Test of Achievement subtest for Passage Comprehension (WJ III-PC; Woodcock et al., 2007) assesses passage comprehension by measuring the examinee's ability to correctly provide the single missing word in a sentence or passage. The measure is normed for ages 2–99 years old, is not speeded, and can take between 5–20 minutes to administer. The median reliability (internal consistency) reported is .88. Administration involves presenting the examinee with series of sentences with one word left missing and instructing the examinee to read the sentence silently and provide aloud the one word which goes in the blank (in this study, all participants started with the item 14).

Word Attack. In the Woodcock Johnson III Test of Achievement Word Attack subtest (WJ III-WA; Woodcock et al., 2007), phonemic decoding is assessed by measuring the examinee's ability to pronounce nonsense words. The subtest is normed on individuals from 2–99 years of age, at .87 reliability (internal consistency), is not speeded, and takes less than 5 minutes to administer. The examinee is asked to pronounce pseudo-words orally until six words in a row are pronounced incorrectly, and testing backwards as needed until the six lowest items presented are identified correctly (in this study, all participants start with item number 4).

Results

The performance on these assessments (see Table 2) shows that the participants struggled on all of the assessments, but in particular on assessments which pertain to phonemic decoding abilities, such as the phonemic decoding subtest of the TOWRE. Although they were not strong in any one area of the tests given, the area in which this group performed the highest was on irregular (sight) word reading

and the lowest was phonemic decoding. The average grade equivalencies, based on the grade equivalencies used in the manuals for the average total score, for all but two tests were between the 3rd and 5th grade level. Information on missing data is also included below in Table 2, and pair-wise deletion was used to handle missing cases.

This study classified the tests to tease apart potential interactions with trait and method within these assessments (see Table 1). A description of our analysis is provided, followed by a discussion of the results and implications.

1. Same Trait, Same Method (ST/SM): The following three pairs of tests assess similar traits, using similar methods: TOSWRF/TOWRE-S (word identification/speeded), TOSCRF/WJ-RF (sentence fluency/speeded), and TIWRE/WJ-LWI (word identification/not speeded).

2. Same Trait, Different Method (ST/DM): These seven pairs of tests assess similar traits, but do not use similar methods. TOSWRF/TIWRE (word identification, speeded/not speeded), TOSCRF/WJ-PC (sentence fluency, speeded/not speeded), WJ-RF/WJ-PC (sentence fluency, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-S/TIWRE (word identification, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-P/WJ-WA (nonword identification, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-S/WJ-LWI (word identification, speeded/not speeded), and TOSWRF/WJ-LWI (word identification, speeded/not speeded).

3. Different Trait, Same Method (DT/SM): These 13 pairs of tests do not assess the same trait, but do use similar methods. Specifically, they are all matched by the fact that the pairs are either speeded or non-speeded. TOSWRF/TOSCRF (words out of/in context, speeded), TOSWRF/WJ-RF (words out of/in context, speeded), TOSWRF/TOWRE-P (real words/non-words, speeded), TOSCRF/TOWRE-S (words in/out of context, speeded), TOSCRF/TOWRE-P (real words/non-words, speeded), WJ-RF/TOWRE-S (words in/out of context, speeded),

WJ-RF/TOWRE-P (real words/non-words, speeded), TOWRE-S/TOWRE-P (real words/non-words, speeded), TIWRE/WJ-PC (words out of/in context, non-speeded), WJ-WA/TIWRE (non-words/real words, non-speeded), WJ-WA/WJ-PC (non-word identification/passage comprehension, not speeded), WJ-LWI/WJ-PC (words out of/in context, not speeded), and WJ-LWI/WJ-WA (real words/non-words, not speeded).

4. Different Trait, Different Method (DT/DM): The 13 pairs of tests in this category are neither assessing similar traits nor are they using similar methods: TOSWRF/WJ-PC (word out of/in context, speeded/not speeded), TOSCRF/TIWRE (words in/out of context, speeded/not speeded), WJ-RF/TIWRE (words in/out of context, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-S/WJ-PC (words out of/in context, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-P/TIWRE (non-word identification/word identification, speeded/not speeded), TOWRE-P/WJ-PC (non-word identification/passage comprehension, speeded/not speeded), WJ-WA/TOSWRF (non-word identification/word identification, not speeded/speeded), WJ-WA/TOSCRF (non-word identification/passage comprehension, not speeded/speeded), WJ-WA/WJ-RF (non-word/real word, not speeded/speeded), WJ-WA/TOWRE-S (non-word identification/word identification, not speeded/speeded), WJ-LWI/TOSCRF (words out of/in context, not speeded/speeded), WJ-LWI/WJ-RF (words out of/in context, not speeded/speeded), and WJ-LWI/TOWRE-P (word identification/non-word identification, not speeded/speeded).

A summary of the above is found in Table 3, (to make the table visually easy to read, pairs of tests are classified as follows: same trait (ST), same method (SM), different trait (DT), and different method (DM). In addition, the four categories of pairings of trait and method are numbered as: ST/SM (1), ST/DM (2), DT/SM (3), DT/DM (4).

To examine convergent and discriminant validity,

a correlation matrix of the correlation coefficients of the total scores for the assessments is shown in Table 4. The correlations seem to show inconsistent patterns of convergent and discriminant validity, with some cases of tests with different traits or methods having higher correlations than tests with the same traits or methods. More on the specific examples of this is discussed below.

The correlations in Table 4 seem to suggest a method effect: shared methods may consistently result in higher correlations where shared traits may not have as strong of an effect. The highest correlation here between fluency measures (thus, they are same trait/same method) was between the TOSCRF and WJ Reading Fluency ($r = .67$). Interestingly, this was not the highest correlation of all the tests, which instead was the WJ Letter-Word ID and the TIWRE ($r = .80$), which are not fluency measures, but they do measure the same trait with the same method. But looking at the method effect, examples of fluency tests with the same method and different trait often resulted in high correlations. The highest correlation of this kind is also the highest correlation of all the fluency tests; it is between the very similarly structured TOSWRF and TOSCRF ($r = .75$). Other high correlations indicative of a method effect include WJ Word Attack with both the WJ Letter-Word ID and TIWRE ($r = .72$ and $.69$, respectively).

When examining the results for tests with shared traits, however, it is interesting because one can see two cases of a high correlation: the aforementioned TOSCRF/WJ-RF pairing ($r = .67$), and the WJ Word Attack and the TOWRE Phonemic Decoding subtest ($r = .79$). All other cases were far lower ($r = .33$ to $.52$). Consistently low correlations in this category could indicate that a shared method is more important to concurrent validity than sharing traits being measured.

Surprisingly, there are a few instances of high correlations between tests that are measuring different traits and different methods. The highest

correlation of this kind is found between the WJ Letter Word ID and the TOWRE Phonemic Decoding subtest ($r = .77$). Even the lowest correlation of these pairs (TOSWRF and WJ Word Attack, $r = .30$) is not the lowest of the assessments examined.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to analyze the correlations between various reading fluency measures and discuss observed patterns of convergent and discriminant validity while taking into consideration the traits and methods represented. Based on the correlations shown in the results, one can see that correlations ranged from $.28$ (TOSWRF and TOWRE-P) to $.75$ (TOSWRF and TOSCRF), meaning that the interrelationships among these assessments range from very low to very high. The patterns of convergent and discriminant validity, however, do not paint a straightforward picture. For example, the study found a few instances of high correlations between tests that are measuring different traits and different methods. The highest correlation of this kind is found between the WJ Letter Word ID and the TOWRE Phonemic Decoding subtest ($r = .77$). Even the lowest correlation of these pairs (TOSWRF and WJ Word Attack, $r = .30$) is not the lowest of the assessments examined. This means that for this set of tests in this sample, some correlations fit as expected from consistent traits and methods, and some correlations did not.

To interpret the trait/method interaction, examining all four categories of correlations here, and the results show that the top four correlations are representative of each of the four relationships. Specifically, a pair representing same method/same trait (SM/ST) is: TIWRE/WJ-LWI ($r = .80$); a pair representing same trait/different method (ST/DM) is: WJ-WA/TOWRE-P ($r = .79$); a pair representing different trait/same method (DT/SM) is: TOSWRF/TOSCRF - $r = .75$; a pair representing different trait/

different method (DT/DM) is: TOWRE-P/WJ-LWI - $r = .77$. Looking at the rest of the correlations, there are some patterns, such as the mostly low correlations in the category with the same trait and different methods (TOSWRF/WJ-LWI - $r = .34$, WJ-RF/WJ-PC - $r = .33$).

As a whole, the correlations are not consistently in line with a straightforward interpretation that these are valid tests with minimal method influence in this population. Tests that had the same method and measured the same trait had a correlation of .47 (the TOSWRF with the TOWRE-S), while several pairs of assessments which shared neither trait nor method had correlations above .60 (eg: TOWRE-P/TIOWRE, WJ-LWI/TOWRE-P). This seems to indicate that for this population, these tests do not have the level of convergent and discriminant validity that one would hope to find.

Limitations

Several limitations characterize this study. This sample represents a small, preliminary group of participants from an ongoing project, and as examinees may have chosen to participate in order to contribute to research or receive payment, there may be a selection bias present. Additionally, the reading levels were determined by adult literacy programs' previous administrations of their own assessments—for example, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). In addition, the study only included native English speakers, and Hispanics were not represented in this sample. Larger, more representative samples may give more dependable results. The use of these tests on this population also presents a limitation in that the tests were not designed for struggling adult readers, and therefore some of the information provided for each test, such as internal consistency, may not apply to this sample. Finally, in addition to the goal of analyzing the assessments/population discussed above, the current study used visual inspection of correlation matrices

(Campbell & Fiske, 1959). It should be noted that confirmatory statistical models are available, which can be used to better separate trait from method sources of variability (Maul, 2013; Nussbeck, Eid, & Lischetzke, 2006).

Implications for Practitioners

The take-home message for practitioners is that great care should be taken when reading studies about struggling adult readers' performances on reading fluency tests, and/or when selecting reading fluency measures. If a measure is not specifically designed for adults who have difficulties with reading, the results of the test may not be as accurate as they are for the normed population described in the test manual. All standardized tests come with a technical manual. These manuals should be carefully reviewed to evaluate the appropriateness of the intended sample to the norming population, and what types of convergent and discriminant validities are reported. This study shows that when tests are administered to populations for whom they were not designed or normed, they may not be measuring the same trait in the same way and with the same level of accuracy and interpretability as the assessment would on the population on whom it was normed. In addition, convergent and discriminant validities may show different patterns. This information will allow those who are considering tests to make an informed decision when selecting a test, as well as help with understanding of research study results.

Implications for Researchers

This investigation builds upon past research which has indicated that tests not designed for adults—and struggling adult learners—may not function the same with them (Greenberg, Pae, Morris, Calhoun, Nanda, 2009; Nanda, Greenberg, & Morris, 2014), giving further evidence for careful selection and interpretation of assessments for struggling adult learners. The convergent and discriminant

validity patterns of this study indicate that the tests do not relate to established measures in expected patterns and to expected degrees for this population. When examining the convergent and discriminant validity of the reading fluency tests analyzed here, in some instances, the pairs of tests fell in line with expected patterns of convergent and discriminant validity while others did not. For example, while tests which assessed the same trait tended to have higher correlations than with tests that did not share the same trait, indicating there is a level of convergent validity, tests that did not measure the same trait still at times had high correlations, particularly when sharing a method. This indicates that method effects may be strong for these tests in this population.

When looking for one test that does fall in line with what one would hope to find in terms of (a) higher correlations with tests with shared traits and/or methods and (b) lower correlations with test with differing traits and/or methods, it is clear that not one test from this list consistently follows this pattern. Every assessment here has at least one example of a test with no shared trait or method correlating higher than a test with a shared trait or method. However, within this population, the fluency test from this sample of assessments with the highest concurrent and discriminant validity that falls in line with what one would expect is the Woodcock Johnson Reading Fluency subtest, followed by the Test of Word Reading Efficiency Sight Word Reading subtest. Of the fluency tests, these two tests had the highest concurrent validity with other fluency measures. Specifically, in the area of fluency assessments, the potentially complex factors of speed and accuracy create the need to take both method and trait into consideration when working to understand these tests with this population. Further research with larger sample sizes, using confirmatory statistical analyses, is needed before definite conclusions can be reached. ❖

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Table 1—Fluency Assessments

	Oral/silent	Real/not real words	In context/out of context
TOWRE: Sight Words	Oral	Real	Out
TOWRE: Phonemic	Oral	Not real	Out
WJ: Reading Fluency	Silent	Real	In
TOSWRF	Silent	Real	Out

Table 2—Descriptive statistics (raw scores) for literacy tests administered

	Mean	SD (total)	Min	Max	Grade Equ.	n
TOSWRF	94.55	25.68	23	153	5.2	115
TOSCRF	85.46	28.58	14	155	5.2	114
WJ: RF	44.94	12.50	11	82	5.2	112
TOWRE: Sight	65.68	14.50	29	95	3.5	112
TOWRE: Phonemic	20.76	12.88	1	52	2.2	110
TIWRE	37.98	4.82	23	48	7.1	111
WJ: LWI	55.42	8.10	33	72	5.3	102
WJ: PC	29.51	4.41	18	39	4.5	108
WJ: WA	15.66	7.76	1	31	3.1	104

Note: Varying sample sizes are due to missing data. Fluency tests are listed first above the darkened line, followed by other reading assessments below the darkened line. TOSWRF=Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, TOSCRF=Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, TOWRE:S=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Sight Word Reading Efficiency, TOWRE:P=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Phonemic Decoding Efficiency, TIWRE=Test of Irregular Word Reading Efficiency, WJ-III=Woodcock Johnson III, RF=Reading Fluency, PC=Passage Comprehension, WA=Word Attack, LWI= Letter-Word Identification; Grade equivalents are only shown to aid in the practical interpretation of the reported means.

Table 3—Traits and Methods

Test	TOSCRF	WJ:RF	TOWRE:S	TOWRE:P	TIWRE	WJ:PC	WJ:WA	WJ:LWI
TOSWRF	DT/SM (3)	DT/SM (3)	ST/SM (1)	DT/SM (3)	ST/DM (2)	DT/DM (4)	DT/DM (4)	ST/DM (2)
TOSCRF	-	ST/SM (1)	DT/SM (3)	DT/SM (3)	DT/DM (4)	ST/DM (2)	DT/DM (4)	DT/DM (4)
WJ:RF	-	-	DT/SM (3)	DT/SM (3)	DT/DM (4)	ST/DM (2)	DT/DM (4)	DT/DM (4)
TOWRE:S	-	-	-	DT/SM (3)	ST/DM (2)	DT/DM (4)	DT/DM (4)	ST/DM (2)
TOWRE:P	-	-	-	-	DT/DM (4)	DT/DM (4)	ST/DM (2)	DT/DM (4)
TIWRE	-	-	-	-	-	DT/SM (3)	DT/SM (3)	ST/SM (1)
WJ:PC	-	-	-	-	-	-	DT/SM (3)	DT/SM (3)
WJ:WA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	DT/SM (3)

Note: Fluency tests are listed first above the dark line, followed by other reading assessments below the dark line. TOSWRF=Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, TOSCRF=Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, TOWRE:S=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Sight Word Reading Efficiency, TOWRE:P=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Phonemic Decoding Efficiency, TIWRE=Test of Irregular Word Reading Efficiency, WJ-III=Woodcock Johnson III, RF=Reading Fluency, PC=Passage Comprehension, WA=Word Attack, LWI= Letter-Word Identification; DT = Different Trait; ST= Same Trait; SM= Same Method; DM= Different Method, ST/SM (1), ST/DM (2), DT/SM (3), DT/DM (4).

Table 4—Correlations between all measures

Test	TOSCRF	WJ:RF	TOWRE:S	TOWRE:P	TIWRE	WJ:PC	WJ:LWI	WJ:WA
TOSWRF	0.75	0.50	0.47	0.28	0.36	0.33	0.34	0.30
TOSCRF	-	0.67	0.47	0.39	0.47	0.36	0.42	0.41
WJ:RF	-	-	0.59	0.55	0.51	0.33	0.49	0.45
TOWRE:S	-	-	-	0.60	0.45	0.51	0.52	0.39
TOWRE:P	-	-	-	-	0.66	0.51	0.77	0.79
TIWRE	-	-	-	-	-	0.52	0.80	0.69
WJ:PC	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.57	0.36
WJ:LWI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.72

Note: n = 116. All correlations are significant at p < .001. Fluency tests are listed first above the dark line, followed by other reading assessments below the dark line. TOSWRF=Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, TOSCRF=Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, TOWRE:S=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Sight Word Reading Efficiency, TOWRE:P=Test of Word Reading Efficiency: Phonemic Decoding Efficiency, TIWRE=Test of Irregular Word Reading Efficiency, WJ-III=Woodcock Johnson III, RF=Reading Fluency, WA=Word Attack, LWI=Letter-Word Identification, PC=Passage Comprehension

Research to Practice Connections

Margaret Becker Patterson
Research Allies for Lifelong Learning

Unquestionably, adult education as a field could advance if it had more, rigorous research (National Research Council, 2012). At the same time researchers could potentially benefit from interacting with adult educators, and vice versa, as that research happens. Currently, however, a divide stretches between adult education practitioners and researchers. When researchers think of the current state of affairs, they may deplore a lack of “not much current empirical research in adult literacy to inform practice,” as one anonymous participant at a research-to-practice meeting in Washington, DC, wrote (personal communication, April 9, 2016). Adult educators, in thinking of the current state of affairs, may also miss the availability of research and being actively involved in it. “At the community college where I work,” stated another anonymous participant at the same research-to-practice meeting, “literacy and discipline faculty often do not use research to inform their practice... nor do they typically conduct research.” How, then, can adult educators and researchers bridge the divide?

On a sunny Dallas afternoon on April 11, 2016, a small group of researchers and practitioners in adult education met at a session during COABE’s 2016 conference. The topic for the session, hosted by Professor Amy Rose of Northern Illinois University, was research-to-practice connections. After opening

comments by Professor Rose, Dr. Heidi Silver-Pacuilla of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTAE), presented on the federal perspective on research to practice. One of the Department’s 2016 priorities is “using evidence to drive improvements in policies and programs,” including “enabling evidence-based decision making.” As part of OCTAE’s 2016 priorities, the office has been “striving for all youth and adult students to: be ready for, have access to, and complete college and career pathways; have effective teachers and leaders; and have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities on demand.” Among other activities to inform adult education research, OCTAE included research as part of its National Leadership Activities, participated in the National Research Council’s *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction* (2012) effort, and promoted the use of *PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills* data among US researchers (Silver-Pacuilla, 2016).

The Challenge of the Research-to-Practice Divide

The next presenter at the COABE research-to-practice connections session in Dallas was Dr. Margaret Patterson, of Research Allies for Lifelong Learning. Introducing herself as both an adult educator and researcher, Dr. Patterson described a challenge that adult literacy and adult education

researchers in a special interest group (ALAE SIG) of American Educational Research Association (AERA) had taken up: how to strengthen connections of researchers and practitioners. She shared the following points that came under discussion at the ALAE SIG's April 2016 business meeting (Patterson, 2016): 1. Research and practice need to connect. 2. This connection occurs less than researchers would like. 3. Researchers need venues for applied research. 4. Researchers and adult educators need conversations on how to bridge the research/practice divide. 5. AERA's 2016 ALAE SIG leaders are interested in restarting these conversations. Researchers and educators in adult education, both at COABE and the ALAE SIG, were eager to find ways to bridge the divide.

A freshly published paper (Belzer & Bruno, 2016) further clarified the challenge, according to Dr. Patterson. Both adult educators and researchers contribute to and even compound the challenge. Adult educators do not often use research in practice, with the exception of educators in graduate programs or professional development settings. Why? To begin with, research may lack credibility among adult educators. They may see research as lacking utility or as overly theoretical. Some adult educators deem research inconclusive or too difficult to apply. Furthermore, adult educators may not have time, opportunity, or support to access research or interact with researchers.

On the other end of the divide, researchers may lack the experience in practice to enable them to make stronger connections of their findings with the work adult educators undertake every day. Researchers without experience in adult education practice may have little knowledge of the kinds of research questions that would be important and useful to practitioners. This lack of experience may in turn contribute to the reasons adult educators see research as lacking utility, too theoretical, or difficult

to apply in practice. Additionally, researchers are generally not accountable to adult educators, rather to academic standards, funder standards, and other researchers (Belzer & Bruno, 2016).

Why Research Is Vital

With limited funding for research in adult education yet a huge need for services, connecting research and practice is vital. Nearly 29 million adults did not complete high school, according to PIAAC-USA data (Patterson & Paulson, 2016)—that is 1 in 7 of those aged 16 to 65—similar to current U.S. Census (2011) figures. The pool of potential learners continues to grow as 18% of US young adults do not graduate annually (*Education Week*, 2016). An estimated 7 million cannot read English well or at all (Patterson & Paulson, 2016). U.S. adult education programs serve only 1.5 million adults per year, or roughly 4% of the 36 million, according to National Reporting System data from 2014-15 (author calculations). ProLiteracy (2016) reports another .25 million annually, bring the total served annually to 5% combined.

Researcher Recommendations for Bridging the Divide

Researchers offered several recommendations for establishing research-to-practice connections. One proposal is to offer a conference session at the 2017 COABE conference in Orlando. Other recommendations come from Belzer and Bruno (2016) and DC meeting participants. Belzer and Bruno (2016) suggest:

1. Researchers who want research to be used should spend time with practitioners and in the field
 - Establish relationships
 - Understand and identify meaningful problems of practice
 - Understand contextual factors that

- mediate utility of research findings
- Engage in university-field collaborations when possible; when not possible engage in field-informed research
- 2. Make research accessible to practitioners
 - “Double-dip”; publish in academic journals and identify aspects of research that are most applicable to practitioners to publish in practitioner publications
 - Present at practitioner conferences
 - Emphasize concrete implications for practice
- 3. The field needs a research-to-practice, open access journal (again)

The DC meeting participant who noticed a lack of empirical research in adult education recommended that the field “emphasize action research where practitioners and researchers engage in applied research together” (personal communication, April 9, 2016). This participant also recommended that practitioners “partner with university/college researchers so your institution becomes a laboratory for research.” The DC meeting participant from a community college suggested that adult educators and researchers “create professional learning communities with a scholarly focus” or foster a “professional development ‘culture’ with a research / theory focus.” To do so requires not only willingness among researchers and practitioners to collaborate but also adequate funding and resources to support collaboration.

Adult Educator Recommendations for Bridging the Divide

As the Dallas COABE session continued, Dr. Patterson asked session attendees four questions. Practitioners in the group began to discuss the questions and make recommendations.

- What are your thoughts on the need to connect?
- How can research be responsive to practitioners?

- How can we partner together to do research and evaluation?
- How, when, and where can we restart conversations about research-practice connections?

Two practitioner recommendations follow. One practitioner recommended establishing communities of practice, whose members would collaborate to understand and digest research, with topic ideas “bubbling up” from grassroots suggestions of a community of practice. Another practitioner believed that one explanation for practitioners not using research was lack of information on how to evaluate it. He suggested that leadership academies or professional development efforts could meet this need, or that this journal share information on evaluating research. To begin to fill that need, evaluation information is offered in the next section of this article.

What are journal readers’ recommendations on bridging the divide between adult education research and practice? What concerns do readers have about accessing and evaluating research in adult education? How would you, the reader, answer the four questions Dr. Patterson asked adult educators in Dallas? Please share your perspectives and recommendations in the LINC’s online community dedicated to evidence-based professional development at <https://community.lincs.ed.gov/group/evidence-based-professional-development>.

Evaluating Adult Education Research

Many articles and books have been written on evaluating research. The interested reader might consider the “how to” recommendations in Litman (2012), which mixes serious approaches on interpreting research in a variety of fields with tongue-in-cheek humor. A freshly published resource is Martensson, Fors, Wallin, Zander, and Nillson (2016). These Swedish scholars define four major areas of research quality, asking if research is credible,

contributory, communicable, and conforming (see Figure 1).

In reviewing adult education research papers and reports, the adult educator could also consider the following six sets of questions:

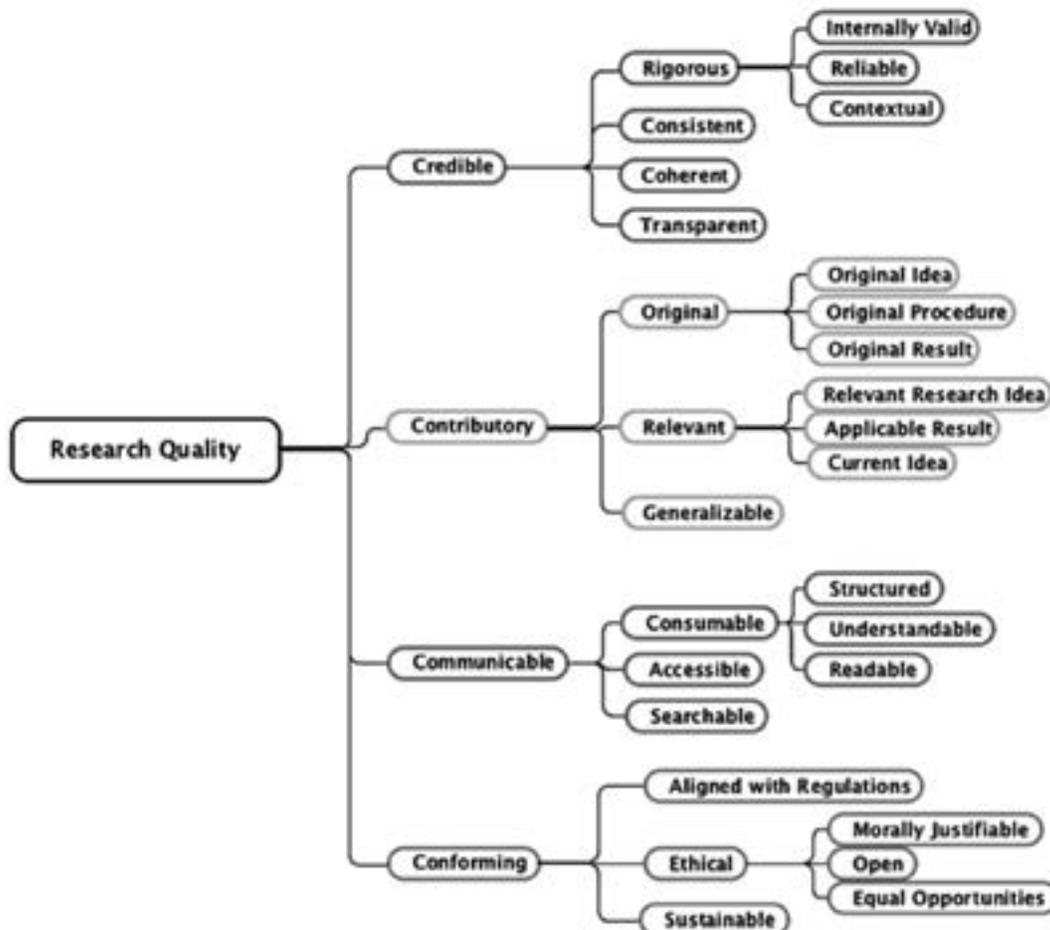
1. **Overarching Question:** What was the overarching question prompting the research—how was it defined, in terms of scope or need? How vital is the need for adult education?
2. **Assumptions:** What assumptions did the researcher(s) make about the program, activity, need, or population researched? How did the researcher(s) double-check those assumptions?
3. **Audience:** Who in adult education is the audience for the research? How might they respond to the research? What might their concerns and questions be?
4. **Effectiveness of Adult Education Programs or Activities:**
 - a. How does the researcher(s) describe the effectiveness of the program or activity?
 - b. What comparison or control group(s) are used, if any?
 - c. What is presented about how the program or activity was implemented?
 - d. Are there cost issues to consider?
 - e. What intended or unintended consequences might result from the program or activity?
 - f. Is it possible to determine the impact the program or activity had (short term and long term)?
5. **Validity Threats:** What threats to internal or external validity might be present? (Michael, 2004)
 - a. Can the reader make accurate inference(s) from the relationship of variables?
 - b. Can the researcher(s) really conclude from the collected data what is necessary to address the research questions?
- c. Might the outcomes be attributable to other causes or explained with other relationships? For example, could outcomes be explained by the design of groups, other events (or interventions) that might confound the results, student growth / development, project attrition, repeated testing effects, or overly positive/negative reactions of participants?
- d. How representative of the adult education population is the sample?
- e. How widely do the results generalize? How do results generalize across settings?
6. **Usefulness:** How useful are the results? (Frechtling, 2010)
 - a. What is the context in which research results will be used to make decisions and improvements?
 - b. How does the research relate to adult education program outcomes and performance indicators?
 - c. How will the stakeholders actually use the findings—and to what end? ❖

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Figure 1—Elements of research quality (Martensson et al., 2016)



Using Research to Design Integrated Education and Training Programs

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With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, Northampton Community College began the creation of Integrated Education and Training (IE&T) programs in October 2015. These programs came to fruition through the collaboration between the College's Center for Adult Literacy and Workforce Development, credit and non-credit departments, workforce development boards, and employers. After a needs assessment was conducted with the partners, programs were created to address the needs in the hospitality and healthcare sectors. The College took into account the Evolution and Potential of Career Pathways report as one of the building blocks for IE&T program creation.

The Evolution and Potential of Career Pathways report (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) provided a comparison of six key elements of career pathways with the Vice President's Job-Driven Checklist and provided the foundation to build IE&T programs. The College embedded four of the six career pathway elements within its programs: 1) build cross-system partnerships, 2) engage employers/identifying key industry, 3) design education and training programs that meet the needs of participants, and 4) identify

funding for sustainability and scale. The other two elements of aligning policies and programs and aligning cross-system data and performance measurement are being discussed with the two workforce development boards within the service area.

As for the job-driven checklist (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), the College has implemented six of seven items listed: 1) establish regional partnerships, 2) engage employers, 3) break down barriers and provide job supports and guidance, 4) incorporate work-based learning, 5) create a seamless progression from one educational functioning level to the next, and 6) analyze data in a better way to drive accountability and inform program and pathways. The College continues to collaborate with workforce development boards and employers to attain the seventh item on the checklist—measure and evaluate employment and earning outcomes.

Creation of IE&T Programs

When creating these programs, the College used WIOA's definition of integrated education and training as "a service approach that provides adult

education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement” (WIOA, 2014, p. 187). In order to provide a seamless, comprehensive approach when integrating instruction, the College built upon its existing College and Career Readiness (CCR)-aligned curriculum framework to incorporate more contextualized instruction focusing on hospitality, healthcare, and manufacturing career pathways.

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) states that:

Career Pathways systems involve employers and other stakeholders in: identifying the skills that are needed by high-demand employers; determining how students are deemed proficient in these skills; identifying the credentials that employers value in making labor market decisions; providing work-based learning opportunities for students; and identifying how to validate curricula and credentials. (p. 15)

McCarthy’s (2014) research shows, “that from the standpoint of the career education student, employer perceptions of program graduates are crucial in determining the value of a program” (p. 16). “Enabling students to accelerate their time to completion by allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities makes sense for both the students and taxpayers. Making learning outcomes more transparent through the use of rigorous assessments builds the confidence of employers who know what they are getting when they hire a graduate” (McCarthy, 2014, p.17). In each of the two programs below, the College has worked closely with employers and other community-based programs

to gather workforce data, create assessment tools to determine student competency, and ensure that program curricula and student skills attainment meet and exceed employer expectations as well as being transparent in the collecting and reporting of program outcomes.

The policy climate is grounded in research that shows a strategic approach is needed to close the skills gap that exists (Tyzko, Sheets, & Fuller, 2014). This involves upgrading the skills of incumbent workers, leveraging professional networks to recruit and employ experienced workers, or building partnerships for newly trained workers from education and workforce providers.

Carnevale, Rose, and Hanson (2012) conclude that community college open enrollment policies and flexible course schedules have resulted in certificate programs being one of the main conduits for adult learners to access postsecondary education, increase job marketability, and upgrade existing skills to become competitive in the labor market. The Lumina Foundation (2013) compliments the findings of Carvenale et al.’s research when stating certificates have the potential to provide low-performing, low-income adults with a pathway to better economic future. Certificate programs provide these opportunities to populations that have been underrepresented in higher education and who will most likely be unprepared for the continual changes in the labor market (Lumina, 2013).

Xu and Trimble (2014) state “certificates have assumed an increasingly important role in the postsecondary landscape” (p. 1). This increase is due to the focus being placed on vocational education and higher completion rates of associate degree programs (Bailey & Belfield, 2013). Within each of the program described below, Northampton Community College has built a bridge connecting the underemployed,

dislocated workers, and incumbent workers with postsecondary opportunities and employers using the aforementioned research.

START Hospitality Program

Based on this research and long-standing relationships with workforce development boards, employers, and community-based organizations within the service area, the College applied for funding through the Department of Labor and Industry to fund 120 training slots for the Skills, Tasks, and Results Training (START) Hospitality Program for residents located in six northeastern Pennsylvania counties. The proposal was a joint collaboration between two workforce development boards, two community colleges, and nine hotels and resorts to create a 300-hour program that delivers 200 hours of hospitality instruction, 45 hours of academic support and 55 hours of fieldwork experience. The program utilizes the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute's START curriculum and adds Guest Service Gold® (customer service training), ServSafe® (food handling), and Responsible Alcohol Management Program (RAMP). Students who successfully complete receive a College certificate, START certificate, and portable certifications in Certified Guest Service Professional®, SafeServ®, and RAMP. For those transitioning to the College's hospitality management associate degree programs, the three-credit Hospitality 101 course will be waived.

Community Health Worker Program

The College also collaborated with the Area Health Education Center and workforce development boards to seek approval of a 100-hour Community Health Worker (CHW) certificate program to be added to the local approved training providers list. This request was in response to local healthcare providers and

hospitals that sought to access this training due to the need for community health workers as outlined in the Affordable Care Act. Community health workers are individuals who contribute to improved health outcomes in the community where they reside and/or share ethnicity, language and life experiences. They serve as a liaison between communities and healthcare agencies, provide guidance and social assistance to community residents, advocate for individuals and community health, and provide referrals and follow-up services for care.

Students will receive 100 hours of instruction in motivational interviewing, communication, care coordination, ethics, preventative care, and chronic diseases. Contextualized academic support is available for an additional 45 hours and is scheduled currently with the CHW training. Students will also benefit from local guest speakers from a variety of health-related organization to speak about their services. Graduates of the CHW certificate program will receive an NCC certificate and certifications in: Youth Mental Health First Aid, CPR/First Aid and AED, and Tobacco Dependence Treatment.

Academic Support

The academic support component of the both START and Community Health Worker programs used the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education document (Pimentel, 2013) to align adult literacy instruction with the CCR standards and develop a curriculum framework. Once the curriculum framework was established, the College utilized the lesson study and student work protocols from the Standards-in-Action: Innovations for Standards-Based Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) to engage instructors in professional development focused on improving student outcomes through lesson re-design and analyzing student work.

Lessons were vetted through these protocols and incorporated into the contextualized instructional set. Students enrolled in the academic support component are provided with contextualized instruction in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, soft skills, workplace activities, interviewing skills, and modeling appropriate workplace behaviors. This component is designed to serve students placing in the high intermediate educational functioning level in either adult basic education or English as a Second Language cohorts.

Economic Benefits of Certificate Programs

The research of Jespen, Troske, and Coomes (2014) provided the first detailed empirical evidence of the labor-market returns to community college diplomas and certificates. Their research found that associate's degrees and diplomas have quarterly returns of nearly \$1,500 for men and around \$2,000 for women while certificates have small positive returns of around \$300 per quarter for men and women. Jespen et al. (2014) found that the highest returns for associate's degrees and diplomas are for health-related awards, and the highest returns for certificates are in vocational fields for men and health fields for women. All three credentials were associated with higher likelihoods of employment, although—like earnings—the largest increases are for degrees and diplomas (Jespen et al., 2014).

Bailey and Belfield's (2014) research states that higher wages for certificate recipients result when the credential is stackable on a lower credential, such as a high school diploma or its equivalent. Furthermore, the research also indicates that the timing of a certificate's attainment is important in maximizing wages only when as long as the certificate is received prior to obtaining an associate or bachelor's degree

(Karp, 2015). Karp's analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics Beginning Postsecondary dataset yielded that “only 7 percent of first-time students who earned a certificate went on to an associate's degree” (p. 12).

For these reasons, it is imperative that certificate program build seamless connections to associate and baccalaureate degree programs in order to set students on a trajectory for careers that pay self-sustaining wages and provide an opportunity for upward mobility.

As we continue to practice continued program improvement and professional development, we must enhance our connectivity to engage workforce development boards, employers, and community-based organizations in the development of stackable credentials that testify to people's skills, knowledge and abilities in order for our diverse population to “secure a foothold in the labor market, keep their existing jobs, and advance to better jobs in the continually changing economy” (Ganzglass, 2014, p. 1). ❖

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The Role of Professional Development in Bridging Research and Practice in Adult Literacy and Basic Education

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Researchers, many of whom are university faculty, are accustomed to disseminating the findings from their studies through writing journal articles and research reports or through conference presentations, which are short, usually one-way information sharing, and reach relatively few practitioners. Adult literacy practitioners may not be in the habit of reading journal articles, and there are few such journals focused on adult literacy, in any case. Practitioners, additionally, have little contact with researchers and limited-to-no input in the design of the research. On top of that, research funding is scarce in the adult literacy field, and funders rarely earmark money for disseminating research, leaving researchers few resources to create additional materials (beyond journal articles and reports) that are accessible to practitioners and usable by professional developers to develop learning activities for practitioners.

How, then, can research findings be accessible to practitioners, so that they can use such information in making decisions about instruction? One way is for researchers to connect with professional development and state staff to think about ways for research findings to be written in more accessible formats, such as research/practice briefs that are easy to read and can be included in state newsletters or listservs. Another way is for state and local administrators to make use of or establish virtual mechanisms so that researchers can discuss research findings with greater numbers of practitioners.

The Role of Professional Development

In the very last year of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), for which I served as Dissemination Coordinator and Deputy Director, my colleagues Beth Bingman, Kaye Beall, and I wrote a report on *Research Utilization in Adult Learning and Literacy*, in which we summarized lessons we had learned about bridging the gap between research and practice over the years. NCSALL invested heavily in dissemination of its own and others' adult literacy research, approximately 20% of its entire budget over the 10 years it was in existence. Our goal was to reduce the gap between research and practice, between researcher and practitioner.

We implemented multiple initiatives during NCSALL towards that goal, including sponsoring the *Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network* (PDRN), where teachers conducted classroom research on topics NCSALL researchers were also studying and then we brought them together to share their findings. We also developed multiple workshops, study circles, and other forms of professional development based on NCSALL research findings; and we supported practitioner research to guide practitioners in adapting implications from research findings into teachers' own classrooms.

The five lessons we wrote about in our summary report included:

1. ***Start with the practitioner:*** *Dissemination of research must start with a focus on practitioners and an understanding of how practitioners view research.*

2. **Aim to help practitioners adopt a different stance towards research:** *The goal of dissemination is not just to help practitioners access, understand, judge, and use the findings of particular research, but also to help practitioners, over the long term, develop stances as questioners, consumers, or producers of research.*
3. **Use the right tools:** *States, professional developers, and program administrators need a range of tools they can use to provide practitioners with opportunities to engage with research in order to access, understand, judge and use research). The dissemination tools that support the most change and provide the best chance of promoting evidence-based practice are those that are inquiry-based, encourage reflection, and create a community of practice.*
4. **Work at all levels over time:** *Changes and improvement in practice and policy based on research take time, planning, and action at all levels—classroom, program, state, and national.*
5. **Keep an eye on the larger system:** *Dissemination is just one piece of a larger system of connecting practice, policy, and research. (Smith, Bingman & Beall, 2007, p. 13)*

In this short essay, I want to focus on #3 above, which is the development and use of professional development activities at the national, state and local program level. Professional development systems and funding exist in every state, and WIOA has prioritized high-quality professional development for practitioners. Models for such professional development and professional learning activities do exist, on NCSALL's website (www.ncsall.net), and can be adapted to help practitioners learn about research through the four-step sequence we proposed in NCSALL:

1. Access research
2. Understand research
3. Judge research
4. Use research

To **access** research, practitioners benefit from having research findings as core topics in the professional development activities they are offered. For example, a three-session study circle can ask practitioners to read a research brief as one of its core activities. Or a webinar, which practitioners can attend via computer from their home or work, can present research findings in a live or video lecture, geared towards practitioners' needs. Program directors or teachers can even give a brief overview of research results as part of a staff meeting.

However, practitioners need professional development activities that will help them, together, summarize, discuss and **understand** the research findings they access. Journal articles and reports may not be the best method of presenting information to those who are not researchers themselves, but together practitioners can parse out findings and discuss them one by one. Again, study circles include time for discussing research and understanding the implications of the findings for practice.

We should not expect, though, that researchers will take findings and apply them immediately in their classrooms, nor should they. After understanding the research and its findings, practitioners must **judge** the research to decide in what ways the design and findings may be relevant to the adult learners with whom they work. Professional development can support practitioners to analyze the methodology, the sample of adult learners with whom the research was conducted, and the research analysis to help practitioners decide whether the findings are valid for their classes and programs.

Finally, professional development, such as study circles, webinars, and workshops, should have a component that supports teachers to talk together about how to **use** the findings to support adult learners' progress. This requires considering how a research finding can be translated into activities, materials, and active-learning strategies or techniques appropriate for adult basic education and literacy classrooms. For this step, job-embedded professional

development, such as teacher learning circles, has an important role to play in bridging the research-practice gap. For example, teachers in programs can adapt the findings to create strategies or techniques they can try out in their classrooms and then come back together to discuss their experiences or share data (student writing or quiz scores, etc.) about how the students responded to such strategies.

Activities to support these four steps, when focused on new research findings, also fall in line with the evidence about high-quality professional development. To wit, in order to access, understand, judge and talk about how to use research findings, professional development and professional learning activities should be longer in scope, support collective participation (two or more practitioners from the same program), focus on research about teaching and learning, and use active-learning techniques (Smith, 2010). Research on professional development indicates that these four professional development features support stronger learning amongst practitioners.

The Role of Funders and Policymakers

Those who fund research and those who, according to WIOA, are responsible for ensuring high-quality professional development and use of “evidence-based practice” need to allocate resources for research results to be the subject of professional development and, ultimately, become integrated with practice. Researchers need expectations and resources to

ensure that findings are written and presented in accessible language and formats for practitioners. Professional developers need resources to create new professional development activities, based on models such as NCSALLs, when research findings emerge. Together, funders, researchers, practitioners, and professional developers can bridge the research-to-practice through professional development activities that reach practitioners where they live and work. ❖

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PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

The Academic I-BEST: A Model for Precollege Student Success in College Transfer Programs



Beginning in 2011, Lake Washington Institute of Technology initiated an I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) program designed to allow upper-level basic education students to directly enter academic courses required by college transfer degrees. This program, the Academic I-BEST, represents one of the earliest examples of the teaching principles used in Washington State's highly successful Professional-Technical I-BEST program being applied to transfer-level academic coursework. Its intended student outcomes are aligned with two state and national initiatives: the desire to reduce or eliminate students' time spent in remedial academic sequences and the effort to transition basic education students into college programs. Although this variation of the I-BEST program has not yet undergone rigorous research, its preliminary results are promising. At Lake Washington, program students have accelerated through remedial sequences and accumulated college-level credits much sooner than would have occurred under earlier systems that required students to progress through mandatory levels of remedial coursework. Because of this, we feel the Academic I-BEST represents a promising method for addressing a long-standing problem of practice in adult education: how

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do we efficiently move community college students through remedial sequences and into courses that count toward their college degrees? This case study outlines our experiences with this program by summarizing existing research on I-BEST in general; by describing our version of the Academic I-BEST; by providing preliminary student outcomes; and by describing those elements that appear to us to make the model worthy of consideration by other precollege programs.

Washington's *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST)* is a nationally-recognized model that "challenges the traditional notion that students must move through a set sequence of basic education or pre-college (remedial) courses before they can start working on certificates or degrees" by integrating instruction and delivering precollege content in the context of career-technical or academic transfer programs (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.). It has been rigorously researched over the past decade, with studies providing strong evidence supporting the model's impact on student learning gains and outcomes. The Community College Research Center has published a series of papers examining the efficacy of I-BEST. A 2009 multivariate analysis found that "students participating in I-BEST achieved better educational outcomes than did other basic skills students who did not participate in the program" (Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzel, 2009). The study revealed that I-BEST students were more likely to continue into credit-bearing coursework, earn credits that count toward college credentials, persist into their second year, earn educational awards and show point gains in basic skills testing (Jenkins, 2009). A follow-on study reinforced the impact of I-BEST programs, finding that "when students were exposed to this program, there was a direct and statistically significant relationship to their actual enrollment in it, which further supports our finding of a causal

relationship between I-BEST and positive student outcomes" (Zeidenberg, Cho, & Jenkins, 2010).

The content delivery systems initially developed through I-BEST are based on a two-pronged theory of change. The first of these is integration: programs are team-taught, with one faculty member teaching technical content and the other basic skills in math, writing, or English language. The second principle is contextualization, defined here as "the merging of basic skills and subject area" instruction (Perin, 2011). *Contextualization* directly challenges two weaknesses generally attributed to traditional remedial academic instruction: 1. the difficulty students have in transferring and applying academic content that seems unrelated to their field of study and 2. the accompanying perception that this content is irrelevant. Numerous sources speak to the benefits of contextualization, with Perin (2011) noting, "Among the many different innovations underway that attempt to promote the learning of low-skilled college students (Perin & Charron, 2006), contextualization seems to have the strongest theoretical base and perhaps the strongest empirical support." (p. 283). Perin draws this conclusion from a perspective that, cognitively, contextualization both improves the transfer of information and increases intrinsic motivation.

Academic I-BEST Overview

While our basic education program at Lake Washington Institute of Technology (LWTech) was an early adopter of the original I-BEST model (now called the Professional/Technical I-BEST), these initial programs were solely designed to allow basic education students access to short certificates in workforce programs. Students with ambitions to earn degree-level academic credits were not served by I-BEST, and when they attempted to make the jump from remedial education to college on their own, they faced quarters to years of remediation.

The likelihood of students persisting through this gauntlet of remediation was slight. According to research compiled for LWTech's 2011 accreditation self-study, only 8% of students enrolled in upper-level basic education reading and writing courses (NRS level 4) ever completed college-level English, with outcomes in math even worse as just under 4% of individuals reached college level.

Because students in the Professional-Technical I-BEST were, conversely, experiencing excellent success, when the state expanded the model to what is now called the "Comprehensive I-BEST Pathway" in 2010, we at LWTech submitted a proposal to offer an Academic I-BEST program, one that allowed upper-level basic education students to bypass prerequisites and directly enter one of the college's transfer degree tracks. Although it must be stressed that our results have not undergone rigorous evaluation, we were immediately struck by what appeared to be vastly improved outcomes from our students in the Academic I-BEST program. Students, who would have been struggling for several quarters to navigate a complex set of prerequisite requirements, were directly enrolled in classes such as Communications, Sociology, and Cell Biology that are generally transferrable across Washington State. With I-BEST support, they were mainstreamed into these classes alongside standard college students. As is discussed in more detail below, they began acquiring college credits immediately, and their grades and course completion rates often exceeded those of students who had placed directly into college.

The Model in Operation

The Academic I-BEST attempts to take many of the current methodologies in adult basic education, especially the concepts of integration and contextualization from the original version of I-BEST, and bring them together in a way that has not occurred before. All classes are linked in a

learning community format, are team-taught, and are contextualized, meaning that the classes teach their disciplines using a similar content. In addition, the system we had used in math or English, which inflexibly mandated student placement into one level in the sequence per quarter, is replaced by one run in an accelerated, outcomes-based fashion, meaning that students have the ability to advance multiple levels based upon the competency/proficiency they demonstrate within the duration of a class.

Because the theory and logistics behind the Academic I-BEST are unavoidably complex, for purposes of this article we will use our longest running pair of classes—a multilevel English class and Communications 210 (CMST 210), Interpersonal Communications, to illustrate the model. (The diagram appended to this article further illustrates this course pairing.) The English class includes lower- and upper-level developmental writing classes plus English 101, our first college-level English class. I-BEST students (about 10 per section of 25) come from the upper-levels of basic education, and they are enrolled alongside students from both developmental education and college. In their initial quarter, I-BEST students are enrolled in CMST 210 and a lower-level developmental English course as well as in a support class (a separate three-hour course reserved for them—during which they can review difficult content from English or Communications in a smaller group setting along with their basic education instructor). Classes are scheduled back-to-back, so that all students move as a cohort from English to Communications, with the I-BEST students then breaking out separately for their support session.

Team-teaching and content integration occur among a three-person faculty team: an English instructor, a communications instructor, and a basic education instructor. Outside of class, all three instructors meet prior to the quarter and again weekly, to sequence lessons and discuss students'

progress. During class time, the basic education instructor is present in each academic class for half of each session, so she co-teaches with both the English and Communications instructors. In this version of team-teaching, both instructors interact with all students with both instructors circulating the room when students are working in small groups or with the basic skills instructor teaching simultaneously during lecture by clarifying terms.

Although the level of contextualization in the Academic I-BEST classrooms can vary, in general we expect a deep level of contextualization with the content from the paired academic class, the “content class” (in this case, CMST 210), serving as the basis for most assignments in the English and support classes. In this example, the communications instructor needs to provide the English instructor with her syllabus, allowing the English instructor to understand the expectations of her course. From there, the content instructor and the English instructor must work together in deciding which communications assignments will translate best into the English classroom. If at all possible, the instructors should negotiate their syllabi in a way that allows the English assignments to capture the content instructor’s learning goals. To tighten this process even further, we have considered having outcomes from both courses in the paired set added as a common section of the syllabus. By the end of the integration process, we have developed a communications class that is slightly more writing intensive than it would be normally, while the English instructor might find some essays that may not fit his ideal vision of a mode of development-based five-paragraph essay. However, both classes should, in the end, achieve their ultimate goals and satisfy the course requirements as outlined by the college.

The actual process of assigning and receiving the assignments is also arranged by the instructors. Generally, the content instructor will teach shared

content during, or slightly ahead of, the English instructor’s assigning of the essays, with the essays moving through the drafting process as the unit progresses. The English instructor and the content instructor both receive a copy of the final essay. The English instructor will grade primarily on the quality of writing, while the content instructor will grade primarily on content.

Student Assessment

Although the academic courses are linked, grading for each course is the responsibility of each instructor and is based on course outcomes. I-BEST students in English and CMST 210 are graded identically to their mainstream peers. Grading in the multilevel English class, for both I-BEST and non-I-BEST students, takes on an added measure of complexity because of the outcomes-based assessment that allows them to accelerate through the writing sequence. I-BEST students are initially placed into lower-level developmental writing on enrollment, but they are assessed against the outcomes for English 101 from the start of the class since completion of that course, which meets degree-level writing requirements, is their goal. Assessment can be done using a variety of methods (essays, exams, in-class writings, etc.) but is based primarily on the essays the students produce. While all students are given the same essay prompts, each student’s ability to meet the general course outcomes is determined individually. For instance, at Lake Washington, an outcome requirement for English 99 (the highest developmental level) is that students be able to “Possess rudimentary editorial skills” while an outcome requirement for English 101 is that students “Draft and edit effectively structured essays to suit audience and purpose.” Students capable of meeting that latter outcome would be assessed as having met the requirements of English 101 regardless of their initial placement.

In addition to assessing student work against

course outcomes, the support instructor and English instructor track the amount of drafting required by each student to bring his/her essay up to college level. Ability and effort are weighed simultaneously, and both of these are considerations when deciding the level of course outcomes the student is achieving. A student's ability to work a draft into college-level writing shows work ethic—a key component of success. However, while students may be able to redraft a single essay to meet college-level requirements, if their subsequent essays do not show their ability to retain knowledge (i.e. if the first draft of their second essay has as many errors as the first draft of their first essay), then it does them a disservice to move them forward.

The final assessment as to which course in the sequence the student shows the best possibility of completing is made in week six or seven, in a conference, with the student given the opportunity to have a voice in his or her placement. During this session, each student is shown which of the outcomes, for which level writing class, he or she is meeting. Students may be advised to stay at the level in which they were originally enrolled, or to accelerate and push to complete the requirements for a higher level class. The class agreed on during this conference then becomes the level in the writing sequence for which the student will ultimately receive a grade. Under this system, then, the placement determination is made weighing both ability demonstrated through students' writing and their effort, and it includes input from the English instructor, the support instructor and the students themselves. Those students who do not complete English 101 within a given quarter can retake the multilevel English course for credit, with that second English course contextualized using content from a second paired academic class.

Student Outcomes Overview

The Academic I-BEST has become increasingly

popular in Washington State, as “12 colleges—roughly a third—have approved Academic I-BEST applications on file” with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (W. Durden, personal communication, March 22, 2016). Currently, analysts in the state's basic education department are developing a tool (expected to be operational by Winter 2017) that will summarize total numbers of students enrolled and track their progress toward their two-year degrees.

On the LWTech campus, Academic I-BEST students have done well relative to their mainstream peers in both their English classes and their paired academic content classes (which at LWTech include General Psychology, Development Psychology, Introduction to Sociology, Interpersonal Communication, Public Speaking, and Cell Biology). Simply in terms of grades earned, the data indicates that the I-BEST model greatly benefits students. For example, in comparing the average grades earned by Winter 2015 I-BEST students to non-I-BEST students in Interpersonal Communication (CMST 210), Introduction to Writing (ENGL 99), and College Writing (ENGL 101) campus-wide, I-BEST students on average received higher grades in all three classes: 3.5 to 3.3 in ENGL 99 and 3.8 to 3.3 in both CMST 210 and English 101. The results indicate that, with the appropriate types of support, basic education students can not only pass college-transfer courses but actually excel in them, earning college credits in classes they would have been precluded from entering under our prior system.

While individual course grades can serve as one measure of student performance, we have begun looking at outcomes more broadly by piloting a data analysis tool that tracks measures such as cumulative grade point, Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) points (a state statistic that tracks student attainment of milestones including credit completion, completion of certain key academic

courses, and certificate or degree completion); and a local measure we are tentatively calling the “acceleration rate”—the number of quarters students in I-BEST save over those in traditional basic education and developmental sequences. The acceleration rate is calculated by subtracting the actual number of quarters a student required to complete English 101 from the quarters that would have been required under our traditional system. This figure gives us each student’s net gain in time, a significant statistic because “we have learned that long sequences of fragmented, reductive coursework are not an on-ramp to college for underprepared students, but a dead-end.” (Charles A. Dana Center, Complete College America, Education Commission of the States, & Jobs for the Future, 2012). Results from the first student cohort (15 students) tracked were extremely encouraging, with students earning a GPA of 3.6; generating nearly 6 SAI points per student (against a state average of 2 points per academic transfer student); and an acceleration rate of 1.93, indicating that the program reduced students’ time in the writing sequence by nearly two quarters.

Three Final Elements for Consideration

Our success with the Academic I-BEST program may at heart reside simply in the manner in which it motivates students. Students, who, in traditional systems, are told they are potentially years away from earning a single college credit instead enter important, foundational courses immediately, and they do so in an environment in which both faculty and their peers are invested in their success. However, any program considering adopting the model should be cognizant of significant technical design elements as well as those more affective factors.

To that end, we advise any programs considering adoption to pay particular attention to the following points:

- The underpinnings of successful contextualization

come from frequent discussions among the faculty involved, not just on general course content but to such specific items as curriculum design and lesson sequencing. Time for this interaction should be built into the program.

- The right team creates the tone for the class and models the behavior we expect of college students. The three-instructor team is an invaluable part of the Academic I-BEST, lessening anxiety for students who have been accelerated into college, and allowing all faculty the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in their particular areas of expertise. The three-person team pushes the Academic I-BEST into being an immersive, contextualized, community-focused program model—one that mimics the way that learning occurs outside of the classroom.
- Finally, this type of instructor class management and cooperation does not occur by magic. Time for professional development and unstructured faculty interaction are paramount. “With anything new comes apprehension and resistance,” noted co-author Karen Lee on her initial experience with the program. One easy way to overcome resistance is by developing faculty confidence through training and opportunities for experimentation. When this time is provided, outcomes for faculty can be as meaningful as they are for students. As co-author Sean Twohy said during one of our discussion sessions, “Really, for me, I think of my career in terms of two eras: before and after the I-BEST program.” The Academic I-BEST can, then, become a powerful tool for developing faculty and students alike. ❖

Doug Emory has been the Dean of the Academic Core at Lake Washington Institute of Technology since 1997 and has been an instructor and administrator in precollege programs since the 1980s. More recently, he has presented to various groups engaged in developmental education reform, including the Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future. An accomplished writer, he has published numerous articles and short stories as well as a textbook for developing writers.

Linda Raymond has a M.A. in Speech Communication and a M.S. in Agency Counseling. She is a psychotherapist and has counseled individuals, couples, and groups with an emphasis on a relationship therapy. She has been an instructor within the college/university system for over 20 years, teaching in several departments.

Karen Lee is a tenure-track instructor at Lake Washington Institute of Technology. She has an M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Intercultural Studies. When she's not in the classroom, she's promoting and advocating for the I-BEST program, advising students, and leading a student mentoring group within the I-BEST program.

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without requiring physical campus expansion (Wake & Bunn, 2015).

Since there is an increase in online instruction in ABE, it is important to ask how this move towards the virtual teaching/learning world affects our field's mission to democratize our citizenry. Another essential question that our field must pose is how does this method of delivery impact our learner-centered environment that prides itself on a reciprocal teaching/learner exchange that is intended to empower learners? Some proponents hail online education as a possible way of leveling the academic playing field because it equalizes access and is more convenient for workers who could be bound by a work day that will not allow them to participate in the traditional school day format of morning to afternoon (Wake & Bunn, 2015; Weller, 2002). The supporters of online education reason that learning in cyberspace erases the need to travel to and from a classroom to sit and learn and eliminates time parameters on education, while concurrently addressing financial and life/balance burdens. Additionally, online education has also been touted as a way of removing biases that interfere in face-to-face classrooms, with the reasoning being that if the students cannot see each other, then learned societal biases, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia might magically disappear (Blum, 2005; Weinbaum, 2016). However, research also reveals that the alleged anonymity of the cyber environment can also embolden learners/participants to be less civil and less tolerant of others (Davis, Randall, Ambrose, & Orand, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Rosenberry, 2011). While research supports both the positives and negatives of each of these positions, the findings appear to be context specific and dependent.

I find the discussions about online education as the possible panacea for eliminating classroom biases and as the possible financial answer to rising costs of education in physical spaces a bit one-dimensional and idealistically optimistic. I am simultaneously troubled by what is not being discussed: the students' perspective. As an adult educator, I am more interested in what is happening to our learners in our cyber classrooms. There are three issues that kindle my concerns regarding learning in the cyber world: the appropriateness of online learning for courses with sensitive subject matter, the comfort level of nontraditional learners in this new setting, and the inability as an instructor to fully engage with the learner in real time. I find myself asking: 1) are our online classes learner-centered in this realm of quasi-connections; 2) what are the student/student and student/instructor relationships in this synchronous/asynchronous world; 3) is the virtual environment empowering to our learners; and 4) is this new world a safe space? It is the latter query,

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People do not perform in an academic cyber vacuum, but exist in this technological space as they exist and behave in the real world.

“Is the online setting a safe space?” that challenges me as an adult educator and pushes me to be ever mindful of facilitating my student/student and student/instructor interactions. My experiences in teaching learners online have shown me that the manifestations of power subtleties that present in the face-to-face classroom, such as interruptions that occur along gender lines (with men interrupting women) and the silencing of working class students by middle-class students still occur. More alarming still is that the pseudo-anonymity of online bolsters incivility (Blum, 2005; Rosenberry, 2011). Additionally, it has been my observations across online courses, from 2003 to 2016, that the offensiveness occurs more often in the cyber classroom than in the face-to-face classroom and that this disruptive behavior often rises to the level of bullying, occurring along the lines of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation (Davis et al., 2014; Misawa, 2010). Bullying, which is defined as using electronic technology to engage in antisocial behaviors such as harassment, malicious banter, unwanted aggressive behavior, and verbal threats (Beauchere, 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008) and which has recently been designated as a public health issue (Edgerton et al., 2016), has been more difficult for me to address in this digital universe where it occurs out of my presence and thus does not give me the opportunity to immediately interrupt it or to directly address the behavior. Although there are researchers that maintain that the lack of physical embodiment in the online classroom creates a prejudice-free world that is empowering to disenfranchised groups, especially women (Anderson & Haddad, 2005; Kramarae, 2007; Weinbaum, 2016) because the inability to see eliminates biased, gendered responses, this premise is contradicted by my experience that in our technological society, the easily accessed and user friendly search engine makes finding the digital footprints of one’s co-learners and teachers a matter of child’s play. Rarely have I gone past the first online discussion without a student revealing something that they have learned about me or another student from a cursory online search. So the notion that gender, race, class, and sexual orientation are lost to the anonymity of virtualness is not valid. Therefore, I conjecture that people do not perform in an academic cyber vacuum, but exist in this technological space as they exist and behave in the real world, with their biases, fears, and socialized conduct in tow (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000).

When online bullying has occurred in my classes, in some instances, I have been able to discover the bullying hours after it has happened, but in some unfortunate instances, it has been days before I was aware of the incident because it occurred in the student/student chat group. In my experiences

of working with one program where—because of limited resources, GED prep students and ESL students shared the same classroom, instructor, and occasionally engaged in the same exercises—negative encounters sometimes occurred when students shared their personal perspectives regarding another learner’s experiences. In one such instance, when an ultra-conservative student began to bully other students I had to insert myself into the online chat and then constructively confront him in a private online chat about his online discussion posts. Unfortunately, he changed his tactics and began to post offensive literature and links to websites that were misogynist and anti-immigrant in nature. It became necessary to assign my two volunteers to alternating shifts so that they could make hourly checks to try to moderate his posting. Eventually, I decided to require the student to run his posts through me for approval.

Pedagogical Strategies to Manage Potential Online Bullying

As we race towards incorporating online teaching and learning into our ABE classrooms that routinely have more disenfranchised learners, I would set forth that active facilitation is even more important as online bullying occurs more often to members of disenfranchised groups (Davis et al., 2014; Sanchez, 2010; Misawa, 2010). Three strategies for fighting online bullying are prevention, intervention, and student reporting. First, posting protocols for online discussions can avoid instances of this antisocial behavior. I have adapted my favorite list of rules for face-to-face classroom conduct from a 1990 list (Cannon, 1990). Secondly, it is important to be a constant presence online and to immediately address any behavior that could be interpreted as bullying conduct, such as belittling statements and the joking use of epithets, which if unchecked can grow into more aggressive practices. The third strategy for working against online bullying is to build an environment where students feel comfortable reporting any interactions that make them uncomfortable (Williford, 2015). This type of trust can be built by using face-to-face classroom rapport building techniques such as reaching out to students privately through email, replicating the after class chat of the traditional classroom. Having the students work to build a safe environment free of bullying is especially effective as collectively students spend more time online than the instructor and are therefore more likely spot the behavior sooner.

Overall, a learning environment is only successful and safe if it is well facilitated. While that applies to all learning settings, I think it takes on

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particular significance for ABE settings because so many of our learners are disenfranchised. As we rush headlong into including more online instruction into the ABE realm, in part because of the benefits to the learners/instructors (such as eliminating travel and time constraints and therefore maximizing convenience), as well as the potential savings for the provider (no additional classroom space and removing the need to have enrollment dictated by space), it is worth pausing to examine and weigh the positives and possible negatives of learning in the dimension of cyberspace and then proceed accordingly. More research needs to be done on the use of online instruction in ABE and that examination must include the voices of the learners. However, I remain hopeful as regards to the use of online learning with ABE because the key to building a successful classroom environment is constructing an environment of shared governance and learning reciprocity; and that is adult education at its core.

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BOOK REVIEW



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Strugglers Into Strivers: What the Military Can Teach Us About How Young People Learn and Grow

By Hugh B. Price

2014; Small Batch Books, Amherst, MA
219 pages, softcover, \$14.99

For adult basic educators, it is impossible to ignore the fact that educational reform is needed in order to resolve issues in public education which have disenfranchised so many youth from academic achievement and attainment. A number of alternatives to traditional public schools have become part of the American educational landscape to help students who are at risk of dropping out. In *Strugglers Into Strivers*, longtime civil rights activist and Senior Fellow with the Brookings Institute, Hugh B. Price, outlines his proposal to employ a quasi-military school model as a public school choice for high school students who are struggling in traditional schools because of academic, social, or behavioral difficulties.

Price argues that the traditional school focus on academics ignores the social and emotional development of young people. The young people who most concern the author are students who are considered "at risk" for not completing their education and who disproportionately live in urban areas, have lower socioeconomic status, and are Black or Hispanic/Latino. Research shows that these groups disproportionately drop out prior to graduation. Price argues that at risk students need more than academic curriculum changes in order to succeed academically.

The idea of using military models as a way of addressing the social

and emotional competency development of troubled young people is rooted in personal experiences for Price. Although he has never served in the military, Price witnessed the transformation of some of his childhood friends who matured into capable and disciplined adults through their military service. As a young law student, Price worked for an antipoverty group mentoring inner city young males and experienced the power of mentoring to foster change. A short while later, Price was able to see how his daughter's school successfully used research-supported curricula addressing the academic and social needs of learners in an urban school serving low income and minority youth.

Over decades, Price extensively studied this concept and has been able to pilot it as the ChalleNGe program through the United States Coast Guard. The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program was designed and implemented as a five-month residential educational program for individuals who dropped out of high school. Evaluations by MDRC and the Rand Corporation were positive about the results achieved by ChalleNGe. His book reviews the research and experiments using quasi-military school models as public education alternatives for struggling students.

Organization of the Text

The book is organized by chapters and begins with a general analysis of the problems in education. There are 16 chapters.

Chapter one provides a concise history of federally mandated education reform efforts dating back to 1983's *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This would be a good primer for a reader who is curious about how American education has changed and some of the controversies including No Child Left Behind, high stakes testing, Common Core, and the growth of public school choice. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part gives the general history of school reform followed by the impacts on student achievement and the unintended consequences of high stakes testing.

Subsequent chapters specifically address the students most often marginalized in public education—lower socioeconomic status, Native Americans, Hispanics, Blacks, and urban youth—along with an exploration of their disengagement in school. Price identifies social and emotional competence as one of the greatest deficits for many struggling adolescent students. He builds an argument supporting the need for a new way of schooling and notes how the military has historically served as both a tool for helping young individuals gain discipline and as a pathway for lower socioeconomic classes into the middle class. Price then discusses the history

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This proposal serves as an important reminder that educational achievement should not be considered as “one size fits all.”

of youth military programs and education. One of the oldest quasi-military youth programs is the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC), which dates back to 1916. JROTC goals run the gamut from academic to physical and personal wellness. Other programs include March2Success and public military high schools.

Analysis

Price provides both a professional memoir and a compelling argument for an alternative way to educate struggling adolescent students at risk of dropping out of high school. The book is a blend of personal anecdotes supported by policy papers and hard data. Price manages to provide a lot of information in a conversational way that is easy to understand. *Strugglers Into Strivers* also serves as a story of perseverance as Price shares how he had to find support for his ideas over time as the political landscape changed.

What makes this book unique is that Price has enjoyed a long career as a civil rights activist and as a scholar of educational equity. He has served as the president and CEO of the National Urban League. He is now a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute. Price is a political pundit who frequently writes and speaks about education. His long term success is due to his intelligence, idealism, and pragmatism. This book is a tome written by an elder statesman.

Recommendation

This book is intended for policy makers and adult literacy practitioners interested in working with younger adults who have not completed high school. Although some chapters feel a bit repetitive and longer than they need to be, this book can serve as a reference guide on educational reform. It can serve as a source of inspiration for the beginning or seasoned individual interested in educational reform. This proposal serves as an important reminder that educational achievement should not be considered as “one size fits all” and that it must take into account the context of the student.

Christine Dunagin Miller is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology at Georgia State University. Her primary research interests include the literacy development of adolescents and adults who struggle with reading and writing. She is interested in motivational constructs, educational history, and perseverance.



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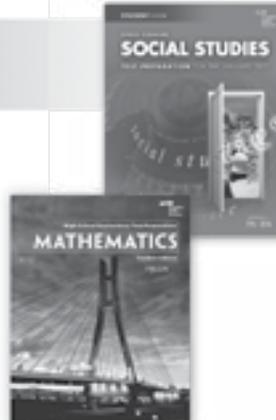
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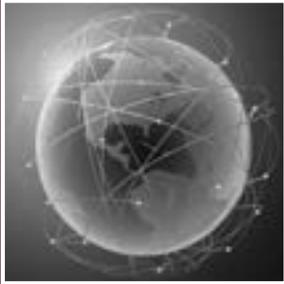


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WEB SCAN



*Reviewed by
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Online Collections of Books and Articles for Adult Basic Skills Learners

Adult educators and their students can benefit from free or inexpensive online collections of engaging readings for adults. You will find an extensive list of these websites in the Easy Reading for Adult Learners section of The Literacy List, a free, online publication I have curated, hosted and updated for over 15 years: <http://bit.ly/29wvJV9>. However, the websites below may be some of the best of these. Some of the websites are designed for adult ESOL/ESL learners or for native speakers of English. Some include whole books and others include short fiction; and some focus on news articles. Some provide a way to search their collections (for example, by reading level). Including one or more of these collections as a link on a class website could enable a teacher to assign, or the students to choose, high interest readings at the appropriate level of difficulty.

1. Center for the Study of Adult Literacy's free online library for adult learners

<http://csal.gsu.edu/content/library>

The Center for the Study of Adult Literacy (CSAL) at Georgia State University offers a free library of adult literacy readings. They have three levels: Easier, Medium and Harder, and include these topics: health, food, babies, children ages 2-12, teenagers, families, advice, non-fiction (real life) stories, fiction (made-up stories), jobs and work, money, history, science, and other.

2. American Stories for English Learners

<http://www.manythings.org/voa/stories/>

The site has 57 free, 15-minute American stories read out loud in Voice of America Special English. It includes the text and an audio file of the story being read in a human voice.

3. Books that Grow

<http://www.booksthatgrow.com/>

While not free, e.g. \$99/year for 45 student accounts, it has an unusual feature that provides three-five different reading level versions for every item in the library of over 100 texts and books. Texts range from biographies, classic fiction, folktales, primary source documents, science, social studies, and more. It also includes quizzes that assess reading progress. Students can read from any web-connected device.

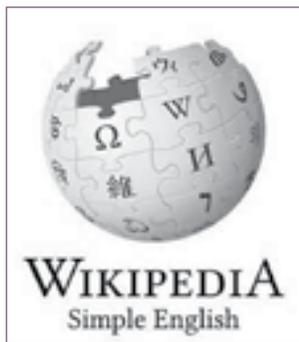
4. California Distance Learning Project (CDLP)

<http://www.cdiponline.org/>

The CDLP site provides hundreds of free articles and follow-up questions at several different levels of difficulty on topics such as working, law and government, family, school, health and safety, housing, money, science and technology, services, going places, and nature.

5. Simple English Wikipedia

http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page



Wikipedias, of course, result from many volunteers working together to make free encyclopedias in many languages. In this Wikipedia of nearly 120,000 articles, writers use simple English words and simple writing structures.



6. ESL YES

<http://www.eslyes.com/> and <http://www.eslyes.com/easyread/>

There are hundreds of free, very short stories and easier stories for ESOL/ESL beginners here. Audio—a human voice reading the story—is an option at the top of each story.

7. News For You

<http://www.newsforyouonline.com/index.asp>

This interactive site uses real news articles to help adults learn to read, write, speak, and understand English. Seven new stories are posted each Wednesday, along with audio, exercises, vocabulary, a crossword puzzle, and a poll. Listen to each article in full, or sentence-by-sentence.

8. Newsela

<http://www.newsela.com>

The site includes popular news articles at various levels that can be read online or printed out. The learner or teacher can choose the reading level of the article. There is no charge for student access to the services, although certain features may require an additional charge.

Beginning readers can start at very low levels, and as they click to increase each level, they can see the depth, complexity, vocabulary, and sentence structure change with each setting. In a class, readers of all levels could all read the same article and then discuss what they understood from the article. Learners could also read at their comfort level, then try the next level up so they can experience some of the differences. As they get more comfortable with what that next level looks like. Students can then start a new article at that next level and revert back to the old level to verify understanding. (Adapted from a post by Ed Latham on June 19, 2015 to the LINCS Disabilities in Adult Education Community of Practice: <https://community.lincs.ed.gov/comment/reply/5795/11537>)

9. The Times in Plain English

<http://www.thetimesinplainenglish.com/wp/>

This is a free, online newspaper written in plain English for adult new readers. Adapted stories come, for example, from: *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Daily News*, and *The Toronto Globe and Mail*. It is not affiliated with *The New York Times*.



David J. Rosen is an education consultant in the areas of adult education, technology, and blended learning.



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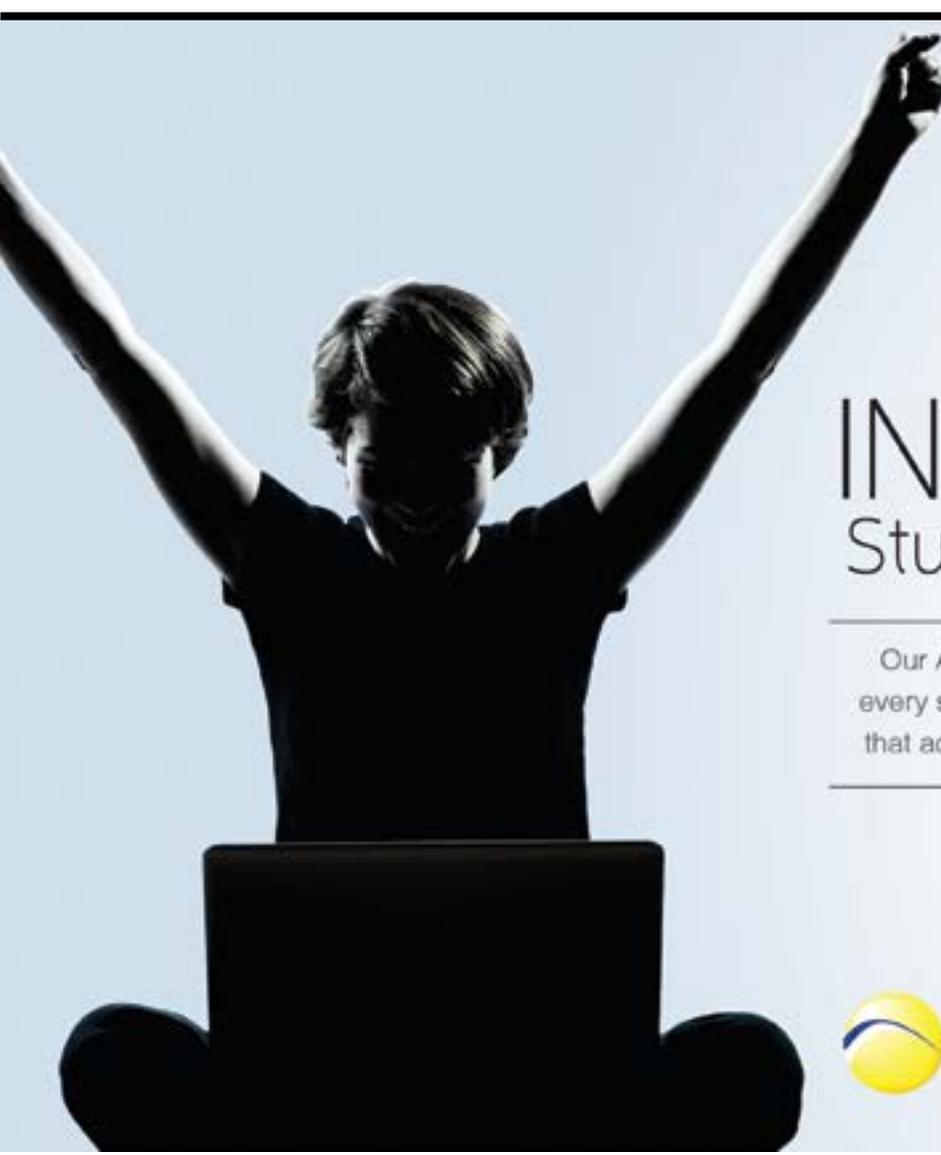




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