The Characteristics and Concerns of Adult Basic Education Teachers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report grew out of a study of professional development for adult basic education (ABE) teachers. The NCSALL Professional Development Study was conducted between 1998 and 2000, with the goal of understanding how ABE teachers change as a result of participating in professional development and what factors influence that change. During the course of that study, which involved 106 ABE teachers from three New England states, we collected information about the background, programs, and work experiences of these teachers. The professional development study found that how teachers change as a result of professional development is influenced by a complex interaction among individual factors (e.g., educational background, motivation, years of experience teaching in the field), professional development factors (e.g., number of hours of professional development attended and quality of the professional development), and program/system factors (e.g., teachers' access to benefits and prep time through their adult education job, and program's history in addressing learner persistence coupled with teachers' access to decision-making in the program).

In the process of collecting information from the teachers in the Professional Development Study, we realized that the data included a wealth of information about teachers' working lives as ABE teachers. Specifically, through questionnaires, interviews with teachers and their program directors, and visits to their programs, we learned about who teachers are as learners, as classroom teachers, as program members, and as members of the field of adult basic education, and much of this information was beyond the scope of the research report about the outcomes of professional development.[*] Since there is very little research in existence that investigates the concerns and working lives of ABE teachers, we decided to produce this second report, which presents a more in-depth view of ABE teachers in these three New England states—of their working lives and the challenges they face.

In this report, we present the results of our analysis of who ABE teachers are, how they approach their work, the challenges they face, and the concerns they have about their work. Using the teachers' own words as often as possible, this report describes teachers within their four roles, as: classroom teachers, program members, members of the field, and learners who are learning how to teach. We found that:

- Adult basic education teachers have limited formal preparation geared specifically to teaching adults, and have limited opportunities for professional development and continued learning. There are three avenues for teachers to learn: (1) on their own through self-study, from students, or from their own experience; (2) informally from

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[*] The full research report on the NCSALL Professional Development Study, *How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education,* published in November 2003, is available on the NCSALL Web site: http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/reports.

colleagues (inside and outside of the program) and directors; and (3) formally through professional development activities. Isolation, part-time job structure, and limited opportunities for professional development may require teachers to rely more on learning from their own experience, a difficult proposition for those teachers who do not have the time to learn on their own or sufficient training to learn from their own experience.

- Adult basic education teachers do not follow clear career paths into the field, and a significant portion don't stay in the field for long. Typically, ABE teachers work under less than optimal conditions, lacking many of the supports that would help them do the best job possible. Teachers are strongly affected by their working conditions, which include **access to:** (1) resources, (2) professional development and information, (3) colleagues and directors, (4) decision-making, and (5) a well-supported job. Their response to lack of access to optimal working conditions was to **cope** with the situation, **challenge** and try to improve the situation, or **leave** their job and, possibly, the field altogether.

- Teachers face unique challenges in their teaching, because of the policies and structure of the ABE field, such as how to organize instruction, assess progress, and develop curriculum. How teachers approach these challenges is influenced by both program and individual factors. Programs' beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction, its curriculum development and assessment practices, and its policies on enrollment shape how teachers then approach these issues. Teachers' own knowledge and skills in curriculum development, their beliefs about the appropriate role for ABE teachers, including how much teachers should know about students' lives, and their beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction also strongly affect how they approached these challenges.

- Programs in adult basic education vary considerably in facilities and resources and in policies and structure. Limited resources and policies imposed by external forces affect the programs' ability to provide the types of services to students that they would like to provide. Teachers' main concerns about their programs were related to facilities and to policies, especially policies related to teachers' involvement in decision-making.

- Although a few teachers in our study were actively involved in ABE activities outside of their programs, many teachers do not play a role in the broader field of adult basic education, either because they are unaware of opportunities or they are not inclined, prepared, supported, or even expected to participate outside of their programs.

The main implication of these findings is that ABE teachers require better preparation, but even that is not enough. Teachers need to be better supported if they are to provide high-quality instruction and services to students. We won't, however, change the current situation by just wanting it to change. Our field needs to recognize the needs of teachers as critical to the improvement of the field as a whole and then create a plan for improving both the training and working conditions of its teachers. This in-depth

exploration documents what is commonly known about teachers in the field but has not been well researched: the challenges they face in teaching, in their programs, as members of the field of adult basic education; the training and preparation they receive; and their current working conditions. This information suggests the beginnings of an improvement plan for teacher support. However, a plan for improving teacher preparation and working conditions should be built upon research that demonstrates the connection among well-trained, well-supported teachers, student persistence and achievement, and impact on students' lives. We need more research that investigates this connection.

Specifically, a plan for improving teacher preparation and working conditions starts with policymakers in programs and states attempting to provide better working conditions for teachers, including more teaching resources, well-supported jobs (including a greater proportion of full-time jobs), opportunities for professional development, access to colleagues to share ideas and information, and input to decision-making in the program. Under such conditions, potential teachers may begin to see adult basic education as a career, rather than an accidental job choice. This process, which may be long-term and certainly will require dedicated funding, should start with a review of how ABE programs in some states have managed to create appropriate working conditions and well-supported jobs.

Second, policymakers and program directors need to work with universities to build formal coursework in adult basic education, and tie this to ABE certification efforts underway in many states to professionalize the field. With more career jobs in adult basic education, the field will have a stronger basis for expecting teachers to invest in their own preparation to teach adults.

Finally, federal and state policymakers need to fund research about teachers, answering two important questions: (1) What is the relationship between well-trained and well-supported teachers and adult student achievement, persistence, and other outcomes? and (2) What are the costs and benefits of investing more heavily in teacher preparation (both preservice and inservice) and support; i.e., what are the improvements in quality when funding serves fewer students and supports teacher training and working conditions instead?

In an era of increased accountability, funders of adult basic education are looking for concrete outcomes from the educational services they support. The findings from this study are an important wake-up call to those who make decisions about how to structure services for students—we suggest that they think seriously about devoting more funding to better supporting teachers, at the expense of serving more students. The field will not improve without significant effort, and we argue that teachers are its most valuable resource. Without better teacher preparation and working conditions, the dedication and commitment expressed by the teachers in this report will not be enough to ensure that adult students reap full benefits from participating in adult basic education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This report grew out of a study of professional development for ABE[1] teachers. The NCSALL Professional Development Study was conducted between 1998 and 2000, with the goal of understanding how ABE teachers change as a result of participating in professional development and what factors influence that change. During the course of that study, which involved 106 ABE teachers from three New England states, we collected information about the background, programs, and work experiences of these teachers. The professional development study found that how teachers change as a result of professional development is influenced by a complex interaction among individual factors (e.g., educational background, motivation, years of experience teaching in the field), professional development factors (e.g., number of hours of professional development attended and quality of the professional development), and program/system factors (e.g., teachers' access to benefits and prep time through their adult education job, and program's history in addressing learner persistence coupled with teachers' access to decision-making in the program).

In the process of collecting information from the teachers in the professional development study, we realized that the data included a wealth of information about teachers' working lives as ABE teachers. Specifically, through questionnaires, interviews with teachers and their program directors, and visits to their programs, we learned about who teachers are as learners, as classroom teachers, as program members, and as members of the field of adult basic education, and much of this information did not fit into the research report about the outcomes of professional development.[2] Since there is very little research in existence that investigates the concerns and working lives of ABE teachers, we decided to produce this second report, which presents a more in-depth view of the working lives of and challenges faced by ABE teachers in these three New England states.

Using the teachers' own words as often as possible, this report describes teachers within their four roles, as: classroom teachers, program members, members of the field, and learners who are learning how to teach. Within each role they play, we present our analysis of the challenges teachers face in their jobs, and the concerns they have about their work. We argue that, overall, teachers need better preparation and better working

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[1] By adult basic education, we mean the field in its broadest sense, including basic education/literacy education for adults (reading 0–4 level), preGED (5–8 reading level), General Educational Development (GED) or ASE (adult secondary education) preparation, 9–12), ESL/ESOL (English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages), native language literacy, and family literacy. We will use the term "adult literacy" to refer to those teachers who teach English-speaking adults with low-level (0–8) literacy skills.

[2] The full research report on the NCSALL Professional Development Study, *How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education*, published in November 2003, is available on the NCSALL Web site (http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/reports).

conditions if they are to stay in the field and deliver the type of quality instruction we want for adults. Based on these needs, we offer a plan for creating new policies and undertaking further research leading to the improvement of teacher preparation and working conditions in the field. Such a plan is critical for the field to meet its overall goal of improving the quality of educational services, and for programs and states to meet their accountability goals.

Organization of This Report

In this report, we first provide an overview of the NCSALL Professional Development Study, out of which this report emerged. We then discuss the rationale for this report on teachers, including what little is known from previous research and from the existing literature about ABE teacher preparation and working conditions (including teacher turnover). We then present the methodology for this study of ABE teachers, and describe the sample of teachers involved.

Teachers don't play a single role within their work lives: in addition to their role as a teacher, they are also an employee in their organization (in their role as a program member) and a professional in their field (in their role as a member of the field). Like all professionals, they are also responsible for continuing to learn how to do their jobs, and keeping up with latest research, new theories, and approaches (in their role as a learner). The heart of this report is organized according to these four roles; the central section of this report presents our analysis of challenges teachers face in their roles as classroom teachers, program members, members of the field of adult basic education, and as learners themselves. Following this analysis is a chapter about teachers' working conditions and the responses they make to the often poor conditions under which they work. The final chapter presents our recommendations, based on the findings in this study, for a plan to improve teacher preparation and working conditions.

The NCSALL Professional Development Study

One hundred adult basic education teachers from Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut participated in up to 18 hours of professional development in one of three models of professional development. The three models were:

- *Multisession workshops*, where up to 16 teachers came together for three or four full-day group sessions, 2-4 weeks apart.

- *Mentor teacher groups*, where up to 5 teachers met for four group sessions over the course of 4-6 months, interspersed with two mentor observations of each teacher's classroom.

- *Practitioner research groups*, where up to 7 teachers met over the course of six months and conducted inquiry projects in their own classrooms or programs.

The topic for the professional development activities all teachers attended was learner motivation, retention, and persistence. Designed by the research team, the professional development was facilitated by experienced teachers or professional development professionals in each state. The objectives of the professional development were to help participants: (1) learn more about the topic of learner motivation, retention, and persistence, (2) be critically reflective about their work, and (3) try out new learning by taking action to address learner motivation in their classroom or program.

An Overview of the NCSALL Professional Development Study

We, the researchers who conducted the NCSALL Professional Development Study, did not set out to write a report about the characteristics and concerns of ABE teachers. Who teachers are and what they think about their work in this field did not make up our research question. However, in the course of answering our research question about professional development, we learned a great deal about teachers in adult basic education, and we came to feel that this information is critical for stakeholders—program directors, state staff, and teachers themselves—if they want to improve the quality of services that students receive. Before presenting what we learned from and about teachers in adult basic education, we explain how this report came to be.

The NCSALL Professional Development Study was funded in 1996 to investigate the effectiveness of different models of professional development in adult basic education. The research question that drove the Professional Development Study was:

How do teachers change as a result of participating in one of three different models of professional development, and what are the most important factors—individual, professional development, program and system—that influence (support or hinder) this change?

To answer that question, we developed professional development, using three different models, in which 100 New England teachers participated (see box). The report from NCSALL's five-year Professional Development Study, *How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education*, presents our findings about professional development and teacher change and is available on NCSALL's Web site (http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/reports).

In order to answer part of our research question—*what factors influence teacher change?*—we collected information from the teachers in the study about their backgrounds, their motivation for attending this and other professional development, their working conditions, and their

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Methodology of the NCSALL Professional Development Study

The 106 teachers in the study signed up to participate in professional development offered by NCSALL. We collected data from these teachers at three points in time—or "waves"—over a 23-month period from July 1998 to June 2000: (1) Wave One, before the professional development began, (2) Wave Two, just after the professional development ended, and (3) Wave Three, one year after the professional development ended.

We collected data from all teachers through three questionnaires (Wave One, Wave Two, and Wave Three). The questionnaires asked about the teachers' backgrounds; their program and teaching situation; amount and type of other professional development before, during and after the NCSALL Professional Development in which they participated; their views about teaching; and their experiences as a learner, a teacher, a program member and a member of the field.

We also interviewed a randomly selected subsample of 18 teachers (6 teachers each from the three states). We interviewed these 18 teachers at the same three points in time (Wave One, Wave Two and Wave Three), observed them once in their classrooms, and interviewed their program directors once.

programs. In questionnaires and interviews, we asked them about their roles as learners, as classroom teachers, as program members, and as members of the field of adult basic education. We asked them closed-ended factual questions (e.g., "Do you receive paid prep time?"); we asked them open-ended questions about their attitudes and experiences (e.g., "What helps you learn best about how to teach, and why?"). In interviews with a subsample of 18 of the 100 teachers, we asked more in-depth questions about how and why they began teaching adults, what their best learning experiences had been, and what barriers and challenges they faced as teachers.

We were then able to use this information in the professional development study in order to determine which factors were most important in influencing the amount and type of change that teachers experience as a result of participating in professional development; the findings about those factors are included in the research report (*How Teachers Change*, mentioned above).

In the process of tabulating and considering all of the information teachers provided about who they are as learners, classrooms teachers, program members, and members of the field, we began to see patterns and commonalities across teachers in their characteristics and concerns. What emerged in our analysis was a portrait of the challenges faced by ABE teachers in their jobs, why they get into and stay in this field, what supports them in doing the best job possible and what hinders them, and what they think of students, their work, their programs, and their careers in adult basic education.

Therefore, we decided to produce this second report, *Characteristics and Concerns of Adult Basic Education Teachers*, to make all of the contextual information about teachers available to program directors, policymakers, and other teachers in the field.[3] We discovered that many of their concerns, in particular, are related directly, specifically, and uniquely to their jobs in this field and as teachers of adults, and these concerns highlight the challenges that ABE teachers face in their work that K–12 teachers do not. For example, there were many teachers in our sample who teach very few hours in satellite sites of programs and they often do not see or talk to other teachers for weeks or months at a time; these teachers feel very isolated. Such a situation is unlikely to be the norm for teachers in K–12 schools. We feel that such situations and concerns have direct implications for the persistence and satisfaction of teachers working in the field of adult basic education, and research from K–12 settings is unlikely to provide us with much in the way of solutions. There are many challenges voiced by the teachers in this report that our field will have to solve, and the significance of this report is that, in it, we provide the beginnings of a plan for changing policies and practices in ways that will

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[3] This can be read as a stand-alone report of how teachers feel about their jobs and the challenges they face, and the importance of teacher training and working conditions for improving the quality of adult basic education. However, for those readers interested in professional development and how to make it more effective, this report is also a companion piece to the *How Teachers Change* report, which deals with the outcomes of a particular professional development intervention.

better support teachers. We hope that this report will serve as a voice from teachers to the field and act as a catalyst for policymakers and program directors to consider how best teachers can be supported to do the best job possible, thereby improving the quality of service that adult students receive.

Background for This Report: What Do We Know about Adult Basic Education Teachers?

What do we already know about who teachers are and the challenges they face? What do teachers need in order to do their jobs well? There are more answers to these questions in the K–12 literature than in the ABE literature, and we can use previous research and existing theories from both fields to provide a foundation on which to build. In this section, through the use of some guiding questions, we review key research and theories about the status and preparation of ABE teachers.

Status of Adult Basic Education Teachers

Who Are Adult Basic Education Teachers?

Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan (1995) found, through the National Evaluation of Adult Education programs (more than 2,000 local programs) conducted in the early 1990s, that:

- Adult basic education program staff were predominantly part time in status: 36% of programs did not have any full-time staff, either in teaching or administration; 59% did not have any full-time instructional staff; and the ratio of part-time to full-time teachers overall was 4 to 1. The authors suggest this makes a difference in student outcomes, recommending that there should be more (at least *some*) full-time instructional and administrative staff in every program, as "the presence of some full-time administrative and instructional staff is beneficial at least for clients in ABE and ESL" (p. 52).

- Only 40% of full-time and 33% of part-time instructors have master's degrees or higher;

- More than 55% of ABE teachers teach more than one instructional component (ABE, GED, etc.), rather than specializing in one.

How Do Adult Basic Education Teachers Start Teaching in Adult Basic Education?

Sabatini et al. (2000), in a study targeting full-time teachers in "quality programs" that surveyed 423 teachers about their backgrounds and professional development preferences, suggest that research should look at why ABE teachers enter the field, when more than 80% of their sample had experience in K–12. Most respondents said they

entered the field not because they specifically had targeted adult basic education as a career but because a position was open, they had been volunteers, or they were retired but wanted to continue teaching.

What's the Rate of Turnover among Adult Basic Education Teachers (and Is It Higher or Lower Than the Turnover Rate in K–12)?

Figures are not available for adult basic education, although almost every major evaluation or survey cites it as a problem. Young et al. (1995) found that part-time ABE staff turn over more frequently than full-time staff: 80% of full-time, but only half of part-time instructors, had taught in ABE for more than three years, meaning that half of all part-time instructors had taught in adult basic education for less than three years; and that "some of the analyses suggest that having a majority of the instructional staff with more than three years of experience in adult basic education is beneficial as well" (p. 52). Boggs and Travis (1982) in a study of retention of 145 teachers found that after seven years, 45 of 145 teachers remained (31%); most left for full-time K–12 jobs or left the field entirely (reported in Darkenwald, 1986). The Sabatini et al. (2000) survey of ABE teachers[4] found that about 40% had taught in the field less than five years, among a sample that consisted of almost 60% full-time teachers; in their sample, 55 of the 128 (43%) part-time teachers (for whom they present length-of-service in ABE data) had been in the field less than five years. Part-time teachers constitute the bulk of the national population of ABE teachers.[5]

In our study of professional development, during which we followed a self-selected sample of ABE teachers for 18 months, we found that (out of 104 individuals who gave us such data) 13 teachers (12.5%) reported they had left the field some time during that 18-month period. Of the 91 still working in the field, 82 reported that they were still teaching in a program and the remaining 9 were still working in an ABE program or in an adult basic education-related organization, but not teaching. This equals a teacher turnover rate of 21% over approximately 18 months (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003).

Teacher turnover in K–12, whether from "transfer attrition" (migrating to another school) or "exit transition" (leaving the field entirely or retiring), is about 14.3% per year, but more than half of these are people who move (or migrate) from one school to another

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[4] This was a self-response survey study, which specifically attempted to target "professional" teachers; sampling was done by mailing surveys to state-identified "quality" programs in large states with greater numbers of full-time teachers, making the self-selected sample deliberately skewed toward more full-time teachers. The final sample was 59% full time, 41% part time (Sabatini et al., 2000), a full-time/part-time ratio that is substantially different from the U.S. Department of Education estimates (see footnote below).
[5] 1998 DOE data on numbers of part-time and full-time ABE personnel: 13% of state-administered ABE program personnel (including administrators) are full time, so the percentage of full-time teachers is probably considerably less than 13%. Thirty-nine percent of personnel were part time, 48% were volunteer (see http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/98personnel.html).

(Ingersoll, 2001). Annual turnover (exit transition) of K–12 teachers who actually leave teaching is around 7%. Olson (2000), in an annual survey of K–12 teachers in all 50 states, found that "Of those who begin teaching, about one in five leaves after three years in the classroom" (p. 2), and "more than 20 percent of newly minted teachers leave the profession after four years" (p. 3).

Why Do Teachers Leave the Field?

While this subject has been much researched in the K–12 arena, there is very little research specific to adult basic education. Ingersoll (2001) found that more than 40% of all departing K–12 teachers in the survey said they left because of job dissatisfaction (low salary, lack of support from administration, problems with student discipline, or lack of decision-making power). Gonzalez (1995) and Ingersoll (2001) also identify lack of decision-making as a factor in teacher attrition. Bacharach, Bauer, and Shedd (1986) surveyed 1,700 K–12 teachers and found that teachers feel they lack critical resources (specifically, time and space), have minimal involvement in school decision-making, and have minimal communication with administrators. Another study found that retention of teachers (or lack of it) was related to salaries, poor school environments, poor student discipline, poor working conditions, and lack of mentoring for new teachers (Olson, 2000). Rosenholtz (1986), in a study of the degree of collaboration in school contexts, found that those schools with higher collaboration also had teachers with a higher level of commitment to working in education. Gonzalez reports that, overall, the research on teacher turnover presents the following snapshot of a person more likely to leave teaching: young (under 30) female, mid- to upper-SES, little experience teaching but high scores on teaching exam, low commitment to teaching, and poor coping strategies. These factors are especially relevant if the following other factors are present: teaching in high school or special education, with a large class size or heavy workload, an unsupportive administrator, lots of paperwork, an ambiguous role, few job rewards, and lack of decision-making opportunities.

Low salary may be a key reason for high turnover. Median annual earnings of K–12 teachers were $37,610 to $42,080 in 2000; the average salary for 1999–2000 school year was $41,820 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2002). The same source, by contrast, lists only median hourly earnings for ABE teachers (including GED instructors): $16.12 in 2000, usually without benefits. Extrapolating, this would be $16.12 x 40 hours x 40 weeks (to put it on par with K–12 teachers who don't work during the summers) = $25,792.

Preparation of Adult Basic Education Teachers

<u>Ideally, How Should Teachers Be Engaged as Learners?</u>

Fullan (1990) provides a framework for the types of activities in which we should expect to see teachers engaging as they learn how to be teachers. They should be involved in:

1. **Building their technical repertoire** (improving their mastery of teaching skills)
2. **Reflective practice** (considering what they do so that it has clarity, meaning, and coherence in teaching practice)
3. **Research** (investigating ways to improve practice)
4. **Collaboration** (exchanging advice and ideas with other teachers)

Joyce (1983) presents three types of learning activities in which teachers engage: (a) formal systems (courses, workshops, coaching/supervision), (b) informal systems (exchanges with other teachers and people), and (c) personal activities (reading, leisure activities). He also describes five types of teachers-as-learners, according to their participation in these learning activities:

- **Omnivores** ("actively use every available aspect of the formal and informal systems available to them," p.163)
- **Active consumers** (keep busy in one or more of the domains or systems)
- **Passive consumers** (go along with opportunities that arise but don't seek them out)
- **Entrenched** (suspicious of change, take courses only in areas where they already feel successful, may actively or surreptitiously oppose new ideas)
- **Withdrawn** (actively opposed to engaging in one or all three domains)

Joyce posits that omnivores generate energy for the system in which they are engaged, while entrenched and withdrawn teachers consume energy from the system. Smith et al. (2003) argue that an easier and more useful categorization may simply be "hungry" and "settled."

<u>What Do Teachers Need in Order to Be Better Learners?</u>

In addition to having opportunities for professional development, teachers need collegiality. Rosenholtz, Bassler, and Hoover-Dempsey (1986) surveyed 1,213 teachers, asking them to rank 10 aspects of workplace conditions by the extent to which each condition supported their ability to learn about teaching. They found that two thirds (67%) of the variance in K–12 teachers' perceptions of their skill acquisition was explained by four factors: leadership (principal's collegiality, principal's evaluation

procedures, school-level management of student behavior), how new teachers were recruited and socialized, teachers' collaboration with colleagues, and instructional coordination and goal setting. Socioeconomic status and school size were not related to teachers' perception of their learning opportunities (Rosenholtz et al., 1986).

In a study of professional development effectiveness and the factors that influence it among K–12 teachers in Australia, Gardner (1996) found that teachers need access to colleagues and directors (principals): after a six-day workshop that was well-liked, teachers who did not have mechanisms for sharing ideas with other teachers or their principals took less action to implement what they learned in professional development. In a nationwide study of K–12 teachers in the United States, 61% of them reported that they networked with other teachers outside their school, but 60% of these teachers did it only a few times a year (Lewis et al., 1999).

How Much Preparation Do Adult Basic Education Teachers Get in Teaching Adults?

Adult basic education teachers appear to get much less preservice training than K–12 teachers, perhaps because there are fewer requirements for preparation before teaching. In our professional development study (which was not a random sampling of teachers but a sampling of teachers who opted to participate in professional development offered by NCSALL), we found that more than half of the sample (53%) reported that they had not completed any *formal* coursework in adult basic education (undergraduate- or graduate-level courses in adult education, adult basic education, adult literacy, or English for speakers of other languages). Less than 20% of the respondents in this study had participated in more than three formal courses in the field of adult basic education (Smith et al., 2003). Tibbetts, Kutner, Hemphill, and Jones (1991) found 11 states that required ABE certification for teachers; 25 states required no certification. Almost 10 years later, the figure had not changed much: Parke (2000) found that 25 states required some type of certification but for the majority of teachers, K–12 certification proved sufficient. Tolbert (2001), in a survey of state certification requirements, found that only 9 states *required* teachers to receive preservice training (but more may provide it) in adult basic education before teaching adults, and only 18 states required any type of certification of teachers before stepping into an ABE classroom. The 1995 National Evaluation of Adult Education programs (Young et al., 1995) found that only 18% of full-time staff and 8% of part-time staff were specifically certified in adult basic education. By contrast, more than 90% of all K–12 teachers are certified (Lewis et al., 1999).

What Types of Learning Opportunities Do Teachers Want and What Are They Offered?

Research has also investigated what teachers want from professional development. Gardner (1996) found that K–12 teachers like professional development when it affirms and recognizes what they already know. Among ABE teachers, Sabatini et al. (2000)

found that teachers' primary purpose for professional development (PD) was getting techniques they could use immediately. Their top two PD priorities were "add to my instructional skills" and "add to my knowledge of teaching adults" (Appendix, p. 13). Teachers with five or fewer years of experience more often chose wanting knowledge about how to teach adults than did more experienced teachers. Teachers who participated in collaborative working groups found them more satisfying than workshops, and they engaged in them relatively frequently.

The most recent national evaluation (RMC Research Corporation, 1996), which surveyed all states' use of federal monies for professional development by conducting interviews with state administrators, trainers, and more than 1,000 adult educators, found that single-session workshops accounted for 38% of all professional development activities, followed by institutes or courses (24%), and statewide or regional conferences (11%). Twenty-seven percent of activities were less structured, or "reform," activities (study groups, technical assistance, independent study). Conferences accounted for 40% of the money spent, even though they accounted for only 11% of the activities. Eighty percent of practitioners surveyed attended at least some professional development the year before the survey (1994); of these, 57% attended a conference. There was no difference in participation between full-time and part-time practitioners, but those 20% who received no training were more likely to be younger, have fewer academic degrees, and be less experienced. When polled, almost half of teachers surveyed listed an activity that had an impact on their work, but 30% said no activities they attended affected them and 18% didn't respond.

What Barriers Do Adult Basic Education Teachers Face to Participating in Professional Development?

Tibbetts et al. (1991) describe a range of factors that affect delivery of training activities for ABE teachers, including limited financial resources for states to fund training activities or to fund teachers to attend, the part-time nature of ABE teachers' jobs, lack of research in the field on which to base professional development, a high rate of teacher turnover, and lack of certification requirements. In their interview survey of 60 ABE "decision-makers" and practitioners in 10 states, Wilson and Corbett (2001) identified the following barriers to professional development of ABE teachers:

- Professional development is not offered locally (through the program) but at state-organized, centrally located venues, requiring practitioners to travel.

- The part-time nature of the field makes it hard for practitioners to participate, and they are not paid to do so.

- Infrequent contact with other practitioners in and out of the program means that program directors and other supervisors serve as "gatekeepers" through which new information must pass.

- There is often a mismatch between the programs' goals and individual practitioners professional interests (particularly where the program's goal is for students to pass the GED and practitioners are interested in preparing students for lifelong learning).

- Lack of face-to-face interaction between practitioners creates a "disjunction" between how they would like to learn and the opportunities for learning that are open to them.

Wilson and Corbett (2001) conclude that:

> *Currently, the conditions of the ABE occupation are such that those in the field will never be able to participate systematically in the very activities they see as necessary to doing their jobs well. Educators claim the desire for professional development is present; readily accessible opportunities to fulfill that desire are most notably not.* (p. 26)

In addition to the part-time nature of ABE work and isolation from colleagues, Lytle, Belzer, and Reumann (1992) report that practitioners involved in an inquiry-based professional development project identified limited space and poor physical conditions as a barrier to learning.

By contrast, Parsad, Lewis, and Farris (2001), in a 2000 nationwide study of K–12 teachers, found that 99% of public school teachers reported participating in professional development, but most participated only for a limited time (from one to eight hours on a single topic). A 1996 NCES survey found that most K–12 teachers receive support (release time, money to attend) to attend professional development.

Rationale for This Study

What we know so far from the existing research and literature is that ABE teachers receive less preservice preparation and, the research hints, less inservice preparation than do their counterparts in K–12, while facing different barriers to learning: part-time status, isolation, and limited resources to fund their participation in professional development. They also face different working conditions than K–12 teachers. Thus, our knowledge and experience at the beginning of the study told us that we needed to pay attention to teachers in our field, in order to understand how to help them do the best job possible. Our rationale for the study, therefore, was the following:

- Better-trained teachers are necessary, but not sufficient by themselves, to improve the system.

- We need a plan for training teachers and also for improving their working conditions; this plan should be based on evidence that better-trained teachers and better working conditions lead to student persistence and achievement and affect students' lives.

- Before we can put forward a plan for training teachers and improving their working conditions, we need to know more about teachers (their concerns and the challenges they face in teaching, in their programs, and as members of the field of adult basic education), the training and preparation they receive, and their current working conditions.

The inquiry reported here provides some information about teacher preparation and working conditions and the beginnings of a plan for improving both, as well as suggestions for further research that will provide information still lacking. Thus, the proposed plan is based on explorations of teachers' preparation and working conditions, rather than hunches or untested theories about what they need.

Methodology

The report is based on information collected from 106 ABE teachers in three New England states: Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. All of the teachers signed up to participate in professional development between July 1998 and June 1999, as part of our study on professional development in adult basic education. To be eligible for the professional development, they needed to be currently teaching at least one class or tutoring a student in the field of adult basic education.

We collected data from the teachers in a number of ways. From the 84 teachers who completed the professional development, we collected questionnaire data at three points in time—or "waves"—over a 23-month period from July 1998 to June 2000: (1) Wave One, before the professional development began, (2) Wave Two, within two months after the end of the professional development, and (3) Wave Three, one year after the professional development ended. The questionnaires generated both quantitative data from closed-ended questions and quotes from teachers' answers to open-ended questions.[6] In the questionnaires, we asked about the teachers' backgrounds; their program and teaching situation; amount and type of other professional development before, during, and after the NCSALL Professional Development in which they participated; their views about teaching; their thinking on the topic; and self-reports of action on and off the topic (as a learner, a teacher, a program member, and a member of the field). We also collected questionnaire data at two points from six teachers who had signed up to participate in the professional development but never attended (a comparison group), and from 16 teachers who dropped out before finishing two thirds of the 18 hours

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[6] "Closed-ended" question asked teachers to choose from the options listed (e.g., "What is your age?" 19–28? 29–40? etc.). Most closed-ended questions also included an option of "other" and "please explain" so that if the option the teacher wanted was not presented on the questionnaire, she or he could write in a new option and check it off. "Open-ended" questions asked teachers to write short answers to questions (e.g., "How do you best learn to improve your teaching?").

of professional development. From these "comparison" and "dropout" groups of teachers, we collected questionnaire data in summer/fall 1998 (before the professional development) and again in June 2000.

In addition to the data collected from the whole sample of teachers, we selected 18 teachers from the group of participants to serve as a subsample. Six teachers were randomly selected from each of the three states. In addition to asking these subsample teachers to complete the questionnaires, we conducted in-depth interviews with them at the same three points in time (Wave One, Wave Two, and Wave Three), observed them once in their classrooms, and interviewed their directors. The interviews with teachers were organized to collect information about teachers' backgrounds, attitudes, and actions as learners, as classroom teachers, as program members, and as members of the field. Most of the qualitative data, which appears throughout this report in the form of quotes, comes from this subsample of 18 teachers.

Having both quantitative data from the whole sample, plus more in-depth qualitative data from the subsample of teachers, permitted us to look for patterns emerging across the whole sample, and then corroborate these findings using teachers' own words in interviews and open-ended questions. We analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. For the quantitative data, we entered all of the information from the three questionnaires into the computer and used standard descriptive analysis (frequencies, means), cross-tabs, and ANOVA to analyze the data across the whole sample. Much of that information is presented in tables and figures throughout the report. For the qualitative data, we transcribed all of the interviews with the 18 subsample teachers and program directors and collated these with site-visit notes and teachers' answers to open-ended questions in the questionnaires. We then created a "profile" for each of the 18 teachers, outlining the most salient information about them as learners, classrooms teachers, program members, and members of the field. We looked for patterns across all 18 teachers, then compared the patterns we saw with corresponding information that emerged from the whole sample in the quantitative data. In this way, we used both the quantitative (from the questionnaires) and the qualitative (from the questionnaires, interviews, and site visits) to identify the major patterns in teachers' characteristics, contexts, and concerns. These are presented in each section as our findings; the findings are used to organize the structure of the report.

Description of the Sample

The majority of teachers in our study were white (91.5%), female (83%), and between the ages of 41 and 60 (67%). Approximately half hold degrees beyond the bachelor's (either a master's or doctoral degree) and fewer than 8% have an associate's degree, a high school diploma, or GED as the highest level of formal education completed. Table 1 below provides some demographic information about the teachers in our study.

Table 1: Demographic Information about Teachers in Our Study

CHARACTERISTICS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	PERCENTAGE
Gender (n=106)		
Female	88	83%
Male	18	17%
Race (n=106)		
White	97	91.5%
Black	4	3.8%
Hispanic	5	4.7%
Age (group) (n=99)		
26–30 years	6	6.1%
31–40 years	17	17.2%
41–50 years	32	32.3%
51–60 years	34	34.3%
61+ years	10	10.1%
Formal education (level of study) (n=106)		
< B.A.	8	7.5%
= B.A.	46	43.4%
> B.A.	52	49.1%

In order to participate in our study, practitioners had to be teaching at least one class or tutoring at least one adult student at the time they signed up for the professional development offered by NCSALL. Teachers in the study often wore several hats—as a counselor, a teacher, an outreach worker, or a program coordinator—and these multiple roles were either formally recognized by the program or informally assumed. Teaching was the *primary* role, however, of most of the teachers in our study: Of the 103 practitioners in our sample at the start of the study who provided complete data about how many hours per week they spent in each role (teacher, administrator, counselor, professional developer), 88 reported that teaching was their primary responsibility (i.e., they spent more hours per week teaching than doing other tasks, such as counseling or administration), and for these 88 teachers the average hours spent teaching per week was 18.7 (*SD*=9.4). Nine practitioners reported spending more time performing administrative responsibilities (e.g., serving as coordinator or director), and their mean hours of teaching per week was 6.1 (*SD*=4.5). Of the remaining six practitioners, two spent most of their time counseling, one spent the most time on professional development responsibilities, two reported equal time spent teaching and directing, and one reported equal time teaching and counseling.

We use the term "classroom" broadly, to include all of the settings in which teachers teach. According to teachers' responses to our question about primary teaching situation, more than 80% of teachers in our study primarily taught students in classes, as opposed to providing individualized tutoring/teaching sessions. However, we feel there was a flaw in the questionnaire, and that, based on teachers' answers to other questions, some proportion of the teachers who say they teach in classes of 2–10 students actually teach in "clinic"-style situations with drop-in, individualized-group-instruction-type classes (which is what we meant in our question by "tutoring different individuals," see Table 2 below). We surmise that they did not list themselves under that category because of our use of the word "tutoring" rather than "teaching." We cannot, however, legitimately estimate the number of such teachers.

Table 2: Primary Teaching Situation

(*n*=102)

TEACHING SITUATION	PERCENT OF SAMPLE[7]
Tutoring one individual over time	8%
Tutoring different individuals, drop-in sessions	9%
Teaching class of 2–10 students	45%
Teaching class of 11–20 students	31%
Teaching class of 21+ students	5%

The majority of teachers in our study taught part time; only 24 out of 106 teachers worked 35 or more hours per week. The mean number of hours teachers *worked* in adult basic education was 23½ hours per week, and the mean number of hours they *taught* was 16½ hours.[8] Roughly one quarter of the teachers were GED teachers, one quarter were ESOL teachers, and one quarter taught a combination of adult literacy/basic education, preGED, and GED, as demonstrated by Figure 1.

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[7] Three individuals indicated that they taught in "other" types of teaching situations but it wasn't clear from their description what those situations were.

[8] Mean hours *worked* per week in adult basic education: Wave One mean (*M*)=23, *SD*=11.5, *n*=103; Wave Three *M*=24, *SD*=12.6, *n*=84. Mean hours *taught*: Wave One *M*=17, *SD*=9.9, *n*=103; Wave Three *M*=16, *SD*=10.9, *n*=85.

Figure 1: Primary Type of Teaching

(n=102)

Other 7%

Basic ed/Lit. 0-4 14%

PreGED 5-8 4%

ESOL 25%

GED/ASE 27%

Basic ed/literacy /PreGED/ GED 23%
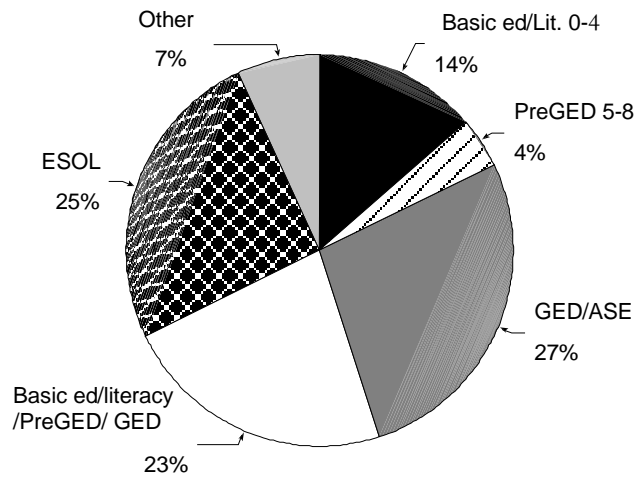
Teachers who classified themselves as "other" included vocational education teachers and family literacy teachers. Although we believe they taught basic skills as part of their job, they did not provide us with enough specific information to allow us to classify them in one of the other categories.

One third of teachers in our overall sample were new, having taught in the field fewer than two years. About half of the teachers (49%) had four or fewer years of experience teaching in adult basic education. Yet, close to one quarter (23%) of the teachers were very experienced, with 11 or more years of experience. Table 3 shows the number of years teachers in our sample had worked in the field of adult basic education.

Table 3: Number of Years Teaching in the Adult Basic Education Field

(*n*=105)

NUMBER OF YEARS	PERCENTAGE
0–2 years	32%
3–4 years	17%
5–10 years	28%
11–15 years	10%
> 15 years	13%

Of the 62 teachers in the sample who had experience teaching in the K–12 system, more than half of them (*n*=34) had taught in K–12 less than four years. Ten percent of the teachers in our sample reported that they were still teaching in the K–12 system.

There were no statistically significant differences between types of teachers (e.g., ESOL, basic/literacy, GED, equal combination of basic/literacy and GED) with respect to years of experience in the field, having ever taught in K–12, hours worked per week and part-time/full-time status, level of formal education completed, number of adult-literacy-related courses completed, and type of program. There was, however, a significant difference between class sizes based on type of teaching: GED teachers and ESOL teachers had larger class sizes (11–20 or more) than basic/literacy, preGED, or combination literacy/preGED/GED teachers (2–10 students). Of the eight teachers who reported working with single individuals over time, five of them taught low-level adult literacy students, two taught both low-level adult literacy students and GED students, and one taught ESOL students.

Subsample Teachers

Our subsample of 18 teachers, who were chosen randomly (six from each of the three professional development models across the three states), included five teachers who taught ESOL, two who taught basic literacy, five who taught GED, one who was a vocational education teacher, one who was a native language literacy (Spanish) teacher, one who was a family literacy teacher, and three who taught a combination of ESOL and either family literacy, ABE, or ASE (adult secondary education). Seven taught full time (35+ hours per week), and 11 were part time. All but one had primary responsibilities as a teacher; one ASE teacher became a program director within six months of the start of our study. Seven were "new" teachers (less than two years in the field).

Limitations

Three factors limit the extent to which our findings can be generalized to ABE practitioners in other states and regions. First, participants in this study were not randomly selected but were self-selected based on their willingness to participate in the professional development we offered. We cannot claim, therefore, that this sample is representative of the ABE teaching population as a whole, since teachers who opt to participate in professional development activities may in some way be fundamentally different from those teachers who do not participate. Second, all of the teachers in the sample are from one region of the country (New England). Although the three participating states have different ABE delivery and professional development systems, there may be similarities in the student and teacher populations within this region that would not be found in other regions of the country. Third, the overall size of sample, while large from a qualitative point of view, is small from a quantitative point of view. On some data points, cell sizes were too small to run statistical tests comparing practitioners on different variables.

That said, readers from other areas of the country may find that the characteristics and opinions of the teachers in our sample mirror those of teachers they know. If so, they should decide to what extent the findings from this report are applicable to teachers in their area. We suspect that there are similarities between the teachers in our sample and other ABE teachers who share the same background, working conditions, and program and system structures.

We also want to recognize our researcher bias. We come from a background as teachers and professional developers in adult basic education. As such, we had already formed beliefs about the purposes of literacy and approaches to instruction in adult basic education. While there were minor differences of opinion about how the professional development research and activities should be designed, based on these beliefs, we shared a common viewpoint about ABE instruction. We favor a broad approach to curriculum development based on students' goals, needs, practices, and contexts rather than on workbooks or predetermined competencies. We value knowing who the adult student is. This view may not be common throughout the field of adult basic education. We may have been biased toward interpreting findings that are consistent with an approach to adult basic education that puts a premium on using knowledge of students as the cornerstone of curriculum and instruction development.

In the next section, we describe the challenges in teaching within the ABE classroom, as expressed to us by the teachers in our study.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Being a teacher is not an easy endeavor, whether one is teaching children or adults. However, in asking ABE teachers how they approach their teaching work, we discovered several challenges that appear to be unique to our field. In this section, we review the characteristics and concerns of ABE teachers in their primary role as classroom teachers, covering the following issues faced by the teachers in our sample:

- How teachers got into the field of adult basic education

- The unique challenges teachers of adult basic education faced: developing curriculum, organizing instruction, and assessing students' progress

- How teachers approach these challenges and the policies, beliefs, and knowledge that influence their approach

Overall, the data indicate the following key issues emerging from teachers' experiences.

Summary of Findings: Challenges of Teaching

- Teachers in our sample entered the field for a range of reasons but most had not chosen it as a career, and a significant portion did not stay in the field for long.

- Teachers faced three challenges in teaching, because of the policies and structure of the broader ABE field and of individual programs:

  1. Developing curriculum

  2. Organizing instruction

  3. Assessing progress

- How teachers approached these challenges was strongly affected by both individual and program factors, including:

  1. Teachers' knowledge and skills in curriculum development, their beliefs about the appropriate role for ABE teachers (including how much teachers should know about students' lives), and their beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction.

  2. Programs' approach to curriculum development and belief about the purpose of literacy.

Ways into the Field

Adult basic education teachers in our sample entered the field for a number of reasons. We asked teachers what their reason was for becoming an ABE teacher/practitioner. We asked them to choose one primary reason from a list of options. Table 4 below presents the percentages of teachers who selected each of the options.

Table 4: Primary Reason for Becoming an Adult Basic Education Teacher

(*n*=95)

REASON	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS
1. Wanted to work with adults rather than children	19%
2. Wanted to work in a part-time teaching job	18%
3. Needed a job	16%
4. Wanted to help individuals in need	15%
5. Wanted to leave K–12 but keep teaching	8%
6. Wanted to help the community	8%
7. Other (started as a volunteer; commitment to social justice; combination of two or more reasons listed)	7%
8. Wanted a second job in addition to teaching in K–12	3%
9. Wanted to work within a more flexible educational structure (e.g., community-based-type program)	3%
10. Wanted to get experience teaching to prepare for K–12 job	2%

The most common reasons for becoming an ABE teacher—wanting to work with adults and wanting to work part time—are not generally feasible through the K–12 system. Eighty percent (*n*=28) of the 35 teachers who gave one of these two answers were former K–12 teachers.

Few teachers, however, deliberately chose adult basic education as a career. As one ABE teacher put it, "It's not anything I just sort of woke up with and said, 'Gee, I want to do this one day when I grow up.'" Many of the teachers "fell" into adult basic education, mentioning that they had not even known that the field of adult basic education existed before they began working in it.

I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd teach anything. It fell into my lap. I wasn't even looking for it. [When a friend explained adult basic education] … immediately, I felt a spark. It was like 'Yes! This is of interest to me and I want to know more about this.' So I went and applied for the job. That's how I fell into it.

—Basic literacy teacher[9]

I walked in cold having the Chapter 1 program that I was involved with at a local junior high totally taken out of the system money-wise. The principal at that time went to the Adult Ed principal and said 'I have a lady here that you don't want to lose. If you have anything open in adult education, let her know.' And they did call me the following summer and I had no idea what it was about. … The lady handed me her lesson plans and the book, showed me where the storage room was, and it was a go.

—GED teacher

The part-time nature of the field was actually a strong draw for teachers who wanted to teach while raising their children, or who were retired K–12 teachers:

[Teachers in adult basic education are] people who want part-time jobs and people who are in a transitional stage. Maybe young mothers are able to … if a child goes to nursery school, they are able to work two or four hours a day. … We have some retired people, and this is a good thing for them. They enjoy it.

—Literacy teacher

People go into it because they want to stay in teaching, but they don't want to work full time. You have kids, you want a flexible job. That's why some people go to adult ed, because they can do it part time: a couple of evenings a week, couple mornings a week … it really fits with having a family. The children grow older, you want to start working more, you want to go back into full time. It's very rare to have full-time work in adult ed ESOL so they'll go back to teaching in regular K–12 ed. It just doesn't seem to be that much of a career track, to stay with adult education. … I did meet a teacher who teaches full-time ESOL adult ed, and to be doing full-time adult ESOL is mind boggling.

—ESOL teacher

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[9] Quotations from teachers are drawn from either interview responses by the 18 subsample participants, or written questionnaire responses submitted by the full sample of participants.

Although "wanting to work with adults rather than children" was chosen by the largest percentage of teachers as the primary reason for becoming an ABE teacher, not one of the 18 subsample teachers told a story with this reason as the entry point. Nor did any subsample teacher give "helping individuals in need" as the reason she or he began working in adult basic education. We hypothesize that many teachers who selected these reasons on the questionnaire actually "fell" into teaching adult basic education, but came to love working with adults, and that they were actually stating here their primary reason for *staying* in the field:

> *Working with adults was just wonderful. It was a new and wonderful moment when I realized that we had stuff in common whereas I had never thought about that with the [adolescent] students because I kept my private life private from them. … So it was a transition from teaching, looking at the high school, learning that that wasn't for me, but at the same time, finding out that the adult basic education was.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *Before I thought it was just a job. It was something to do while my children are young or until something better comes along. I was just looking to go in, teach, and leave. I wasn't looking to do a lot of extra work. But I've since really begun to like this career and see the value in it. It's from the students who learn. I've watched the students learning. I'd see their problems. I'd see their little victories. I see how difficult their lives are, I see how hard they work. I really want to help these people; that's why I went into teaching. I felt it was worthy work, I felt it was important work. I found it enjoyable.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Although only 2% of the whole sample listed "wanted experience teaching in preparation for a K–12 job" as the primary reason for working in the field, the interview data indicated to us that this might have been a far more common reason. Teachers told us that they entered the field to get experience and move on to a teaching job in K–12; they viewed teaching in adult basic education as a stepping-stone in their teaching career:

> *The reason why I started adult education was to get a foot in the door. I needed a job … there was no opening in the day school. I wanted to work within the district [K–12]. I thought if I started in adult education, I'll be in the district and I can go on to day school and day classes. I wanted to go into either first or second grade but then I saw all the accomplishments and the rewards that you get and I'm still here.*
>
> —ESOL and family literacy teacher

I had decided to go to graduate school to get a career in and to become an elementary school teacher, and so I had enrolled in the graduate-level program and then decided to check to see if I had enough credits to teach adults and I did. I happened to call [the program director] at a time that he was going to be needing a teacher and he said, 'Give me your resume.' But the reason for going through adult education was to try to get some real experience in teaching, which has been of great value to me later down the road.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

It's [teaching adult basic education] also a springboard for people who want full-time jobs. You don't necessarily get in from what we're doing, but it's something to do in the meantime.

<div align="right">—ABE teacher</div>

The data indicate that ABE teachers in our sample entered the field for a range of reasons but choosing adult basic education as a career was rarely the primary one. Once they enter the field and begin teaching adults, those who stay recognized an affinity for teaching adults. However, the relatively high number of new teachers in our sample (one third working in adult basic education fewer than two years, one half for less than four years) indicates that a significant portion of teachers do not stay in the field for extended periods of time. Also, out of 104 original teachers in our sample, 13 (12.5%) had left the field sometime between the start of the study and the end (a time span of approximately 18 months); another 9 were still working in an adult education program or in an adult-education-related organization but not teaching. This equals a *teacher* turnover rate of 21% over approximately 18 months.

Without a designated preparation track for a career in adult basic education, teachers enter the field haphazardly. The arbitrary and often accidental nature of their entry into the field means that oftentimes teachers are not prepared for the demands of the ABE classroom, which is the focus of the next section.

Teaching Challenges Unique to Adult Basic Education

There are fundamental differences between teaching in adult basic education and teaching in the K–12 system. Differences between two third grade classrooms are not as extreme as differences we saw between any given ABE classroom and another. Adult basic education teachers struggle with whether and how to develop curriculum based on students' goals in multilevel classrooms, where students enter and exit regularly. They grapple with decisions about the extent to which they should bring the lives of adult students into the curriculum and, if so, how to balance content with basic skills. Making decisions about these issues sometimes rests solely with the teacher; at other times, the

teacher is directed—whether or not they agree with such policies—by program policies. All of these factors contribute to the wide range of teaching situations that existed among the teachers in our sample. Our questionnaires and interviews with teachers focused on learning about their approach to teaching, their goals as teachers, their attitudes about the appropriate actions and roles for them as teachers of adults, and their beliefs about adult students and the purposes of literacy instruction.

As teachers expressed their ideas about and experiences of teaching, three specific challenges emerged:

- **Developing curriculum.** Teachers either used a standard curriculum—often a commercial workbook, organized with a scope and sequence of goals, content, materials, or activities that had been developed by others and deemed appropriate for adult students in general—*or* they pieced together lesson plans of their own or other teachers' making. Rarely did we see teachers create curriculum based on the specific literacy or language goals, needs, and practices of the students with whom they worked. Since 55% of teachers in our sample weren't required to use a standard curriculum, many teachers faced the challenge of adapting or creating one. How they dealt with this challenge was influenced by their program policies about curriculum, as well as by their knowledge and skills about curriculum development and their beliefs about the extent to which they should know about students' lives and the real-life issues important to them. Whether their beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction were the driving force for, or the result of, the curriculum they used was less clear.

- **Organizing instruction.** Teachers grappled with class groupings (individualized instruction versus class instruction), which were complicated by enrollment policies in the majority of programs that allowed students to enter and exit at any time during the semester or cycle.

- **Assessing skills and progress.** Information from standard intake and performance measures used by the program for accountability purposes was not always available or useful to teachers. As a result, teachers were faced with the challenge of acquiring information on their own (as part of their teaching responsibilities) about students' initial skills and subsequent progress in the class.

In this section, we present data relevant to the each of these challenges and discuss how teachers dealt with them.

The Challenge of Developing Curriculum

There is no standard curriculum across the field of adult basic education; curriculum requirements vary by state and program. In adult basic education, teachers are typically faced with two situations related to curriculum development: either (1) the curriculum is

mandated by the program or state, or (2) teachers are free to select or create their own curriculum. Fifty-five percent of the teachers in our overall sample (*n*=102) reported that there was no curriculum that they were required to use in their classrooms. According to the 46 teachers who were required to use a particular curriculum, most reported that the curricula prescribed goals or competencies and content rather than materials and activities: 40 indicated that specific goals or competencies were required, 38 indicated that specific content or topics were required, 16 indicated that specific materials were required, and only 5 indicated that they were required to use specific activities or methods.

Along these same lines, teachers felt they had relatively more freedom to decide *how* to teach than *what* to teach. We asked teachers to rate how much freedom they have to decide *what* to teach (i.e., to make decisions about goals or competencies, content, and topics), using a six-point scale where one equals "no freedom to decide" and six equals "complete freedom to decide." Only 2% of teachers reported that they had no freedom to decide what to teach, and 36% indicated they had complete freedom; the mean for freedom to decide what to teach was 4.9 out of 6 (*n*=102, *SD*=1.13). We also asked how much freedom they have to decide *how* to teach (i.e., to make decisions about materials and activities), and only 1% of teachers responded that they had no freedom to decide how to teach, while 55% indicated that they had complete freedom. The mean for freedom to decide how to teach was 5.4 out of 6 (*n*=102, *SD*=.79).

Despite the fact that more than half of the teachers were required to use a specific curriculum, when we asked teachers to tell us the most important factor in determining what they teach in the classroom, they overwhelmingly indicated students' needs, issues, or goals as the driving force, over other factors, including required curriculum or competencies. Table 5 below shows that most teachers reported that students' needs and goals are the most important factor.

Table 5: Most Important Factor in Determining What Teachers Teach

(*n*=96)

FACTOR	% OF TEACHERS
Students' needs, issues, or goals	71
Required curriculum or competencies	16
Test students will/must take	10
Director's priorities	1

Note: 2 teachers indicated "other" but did not explain.

Neither state nor teaching type (e.g., basic literacy, ESOL, GED) was significantly related to factors determining what teachers taught, but more GED/adult-

secondary-education-prep teachers reported that a required curriculum or a test that students take was the most important factor.[10]

Probing further, we found that 22 of the 40 teachers who said they were required to use a curriculum felt students' needs and goals were the most important factors. Puzzling to us was the apparent contradiction between following a predetermined curriculum and meeting students' goals. We then realized that while we as researchers intended "students' needs, issues, or goals" to mean one thing (i.e., that teachers actually develop their own curriculum based on the goals of the students in the classes they teach, resulting in curricula that look different for each class), many teachers clearly interpreted it to mean something else. We realized that we, as researchers, held a specific view of what it means to plan lessons and curriculum based on students' needs and goals when we asked the question about the "most important factor determining instruction." We believed that the term "learner-centered" refers to the extent to which students' real life goals, issues, and concerns were the basis of planned curriculum and instruction that teachers created in negotiation with students, and some teachers did see it that way:

When I first started, I gravitated toward teaching English because that's what I know. So I taught grammar. I taught English. My interest in the students hasn't changed. However, what has developed is trying to build the curriculum based on what my increasing understanding of what their [students'] needs are. It's very different learning English to function.

—ESOL teacher

However, other teachers used the term "learner-centered" to mean (1) being flexible to students' interests as they arose during class, or (2) individualizing instruction so that it was tailored to the pace and needs of each student:

Sometimes the time would be spent talking about people's problems and it would get carried away to the point where there wasn't much time for learning and teaching. … I used to take the first 15 minutes or so of the class and find out how their week had been or how things were going or what's new, and then we would say, 'OK. Let's get started.' It was separate.

—GED teacher

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[10] Fifty-two percent of GED/adult-secondary-education-prep teachers reported that a required curriculum or a test that students take was the most important factor, whereas only 21% of basic literacy/preGED teachers, 21% of those who teach a combination of literacy and GED in equal measure, and 14% of ESOL teachers felt that required curriculum or tests were the most important factor in determining what they teach (n=78).

> *I've been always really looking towards what the students want instead of just going with the curriculum. Sometimes I'll set aside my planning framework because of the fact that they're not interested in what I write for that evening or whatever so we just go with what they want to do. For example, if we're discussing in a large group and one of the students suggests to divide the group so they can have a smaller group, whereas I thought the large group will be efficient and would be a better way, I just scrap it and say, 'OK so the next time I'll just put them in small groups.'*
>
> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

> *I knew we weren't meeting the needs of our students, by standing up and talking and teaching in the classroom setting. That's a teacher-centered classroom.*
>
> —GED teacher

We have learned that, although curriculum may be called "participatory" or "learner-centered" by many teachers, it actually follows a traditional model, with predetermined curriculum and lessons. A participatory approach to curriculum development, where teachers and students together decide the "what" and "how" of what will be covered in the classroom, is a far less common teacher practice. Through an analysis of teachers' comments about curriculum, we developed several interpretations or definitions of "learner-centered" curriculum that teachers use, and these interpretations helped us understand why teachers felt that using a predetermined curriculum was not incompatible with a curriculum based on students' needs and goals:

- Teachers felt that the curriculum, although predetermined, did meet the needs of the students (accidental "fit").

- Teachers used only the sections of the curriculum that they felt (or the students identified from the curriculum's "menu" or table of contents) were most applicable to students' needs and goals, rather than using the whole required curriculum.

- Teachers adapted their approach to instruction (rather than adapting the content) to best meet students' needs (e.g., being "learner-centered" means letting students have input into whether they want to work in large or small groups, or whether they would like a break).

- Teachers were responding to students' expressed desire to study from workbooks.

The teachers who used a standard curriculum expressed a wide range of opinions about its usefulness. On the one hand, some teachers appreciated the comfort of having a curriculum to guide them in choosing content. They either closely followed workbooks or they used the workbooks to provide them with a rough direction for the class:

I think walking in there, that very first night, I didn't feel prepared at all. Looking at these faces of one person being in his eighties and another person being barely 16 or 17, so the age range there intimidated me. But at the same time, once I got started and handed out books and looked at the books and knew what I was doing with those, where everybody was going to be working, I didn't feel like I needed anything. It was easy for everything to fall right into place. I got more secure, more confident toward the end of the second year than the first, but I remember feeling, even in the beginning, that once I got some books in the classroom and got people working, that it was really a breeze. I just felt I knew the books. I knew what we were working on. I knew the material.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

I follow the book, we use Vistas. I follow it to a very small extent. I plan to do A but somebody asks me a question about B and it opens a whole new door . I basically get my ideas from the book. But I don't necessarily use the book. Also, I get ideas from the tests. I don't teach to the tests, but I figure that it gives me an idea of what the state feels is important.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

On the other hand, some teachers expressed clearly the frustration at being required to follow the state-mandated curriculum:

I've got this real intrigue now for project-based learning. Things that are a little bit more relevant for a more natural approach to teaching as opposed to what a lot of our program involves, which is teach to the curriculum using these books and these binders. … I have some doubts about [the state mandates for curriculum] and the benefit of that for my students, and I know other teachers who also agree with me on this who don't really believe the state tests are worth much. They're something we have to do, and these curriculum topics we're given by the state are something that we have to teach but we all do this because we have to and then we give the students the language study and the grammar that they want. They have jobs. They want to study the language. They don't want to study the post office, yet when the state tests them, if they get the question on certified mail wrong, that could make the difference in going to the advanced class or staying behind. … What I find frustrating is this difference between what my students really need and the push there is to promote life skills and the state requirements related to life skills. They're [the requirements] not related to language and grammar so much. There's so many topics we need to cover, and there's so much that the state covers in their tests that I often feel it doesn't relate very well to what we actually do in the classroom.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

How teachers approached curriculum development was influenced by program and individual factors, including:

1. Teachers' knowledge and skills in curriculum development, their beliefs about the appropriate role for ABE teachers, including how much teachers should know about students' lives, and their beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction.

2. Programs' approach to curriculum development and beliefs about the purpose of literacy instruction.

Individual Factors Affecting Teachers' Approach to Curriculum Development

Curriculum-building knowledge and skills. In the broadest sense, developing curriculum and organizing instruction requires that teachers have three types of knowledge: the content they are teaching (what to teach), the craft or pedagogy of teaching (how to teach), and knowledge of the students they are teaching (who they teach).

We asked teachers two questions about these areas of knowledge: (1) which of these types of knowledge they felt was *most important* in teaching, and (2) in which of these types of knowledge they felt the *most skilled*. As the two pie charts in Figure 2 below illustrate, while about half of the teachers felt that *knowledge of students* was more important to teaching than knowledge of the craft or content of teaching, only about one third (35%) felt it was their strongest skill. The largest percentage of teachers identified the craft of teaching as their primary strength.

Figure 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Three Types of Knowledge About Teaching

(*n*=99)
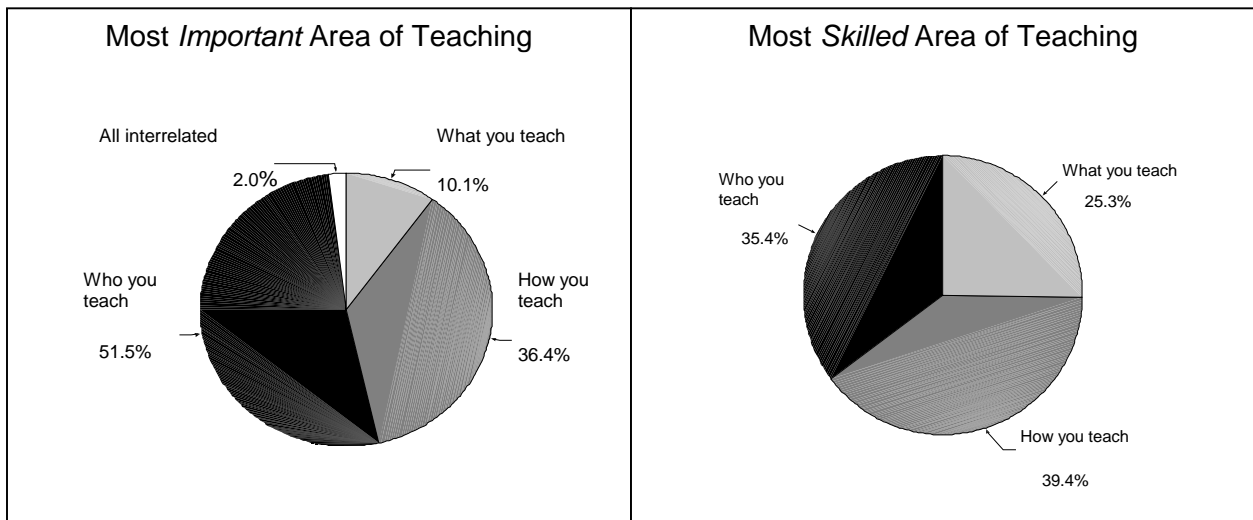
Content knowledge was both the area that the fewest number of teachers viewed as paramount to teaching and the area that the smallest number of teachers rated as their primary strength. Mirroring this, we heard very little from teachers about difficulties arising from lack of knowledge about content, although it presented a challenge to those teachers who try to incorporate students' interests into the curriculum, or to those who feel their own formal schooling did not help them master the content they are teaching:

I have a job where I have to teach so many different things—from cucumbers [gardening] to little children [parenting]—to teach adults anything they want to learn. I have to be sort of everything to everybody. If I were just teaching a smaller number of topics, I would have more time to hone in on what to teach.

<div align="right">—Family literacy teacher</div>

When I got into GED, some of it was pretty difficult and some of it was stuff that I had to really, really think hard on from when I was in high school. It's not stuff you learn in college, so it wasn't a recent learning thing. It was things that you should have picked up in high school. It was more difficult than I thought.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

The apparent lack of preparation, of the kind that enables teachers to create curriculum, was not only a challenge, but also a source of frustration for teachers who knew they wanted to teach differently from how they had been taught, but simply did not know how:

Teaching is such a complicated thing. The field is so complex. It's got so many different techniques and approaches and philosophies and theories, and you can easily get very overwhelmed. And a newcomer can easily make so many mistakes that it's easy to get discouraged, especially in the beginning.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

I've had trouble teaching them using methods that are different from the way I learned in school, and that's been a problem because I don't really want to teach them entirely the way I learned in school. I want to do it better.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

In order to develop curriculum, teachers need to have a concept of what a curriculum is. We discovered that the concept of curriculum was murky for many of the teachers in our subsample. Teachers' responses on questionnaires and in interviews indicated that there was a lack of understanding of what "curriculum" means. In several cases, teachers used the term to mean "lessons planned," as when they reported taking part in 75 curriculum-development projects with a coteacher over the course of a year.

Even when teachers seemed to understand that a curriculum could be a scope and sequence of goals, content, materials, and activities designed to build knowledge and skills over some time period of classes (a month, a semester), or even, in the larger sense, that a curriculum is everything within the classroom experience that helps students to learn, many teachers seemed to lack the knowledge of how to create a curriculum. New teachers, especially, talked about the struggle to create a cohesive curriculum that balanced skills with student needs:

> *There has to be some direction for the students, when they walk in the classroom, of where are we going. I need to know how to put together lessons and how to organize information and put it into the classes so you can use it, and that's where I really struggle. I spend more time, waste more time on that kind of thing.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *I was concentrating on their language proficiency more than their individual personal needs. I was too busy giving them so much information about the English language. [But with my new approach to project-based learning, I find that] they're learning something that they want to learn, but it's still not related to particular skills. It's more little bits and here and there. I could be wrong, maybe the learners are learning what they need to know. But as a teacher, I feel it is sporadic at this point, with the new way that I'm approaching things.*
>
> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

> *I develop massive lesson plans that take me from step A all the way to the end. So the lessons are done. If something didn't click or didn't work well, or they want to know something that's an offshoot and it's not going too far off the topic, then I might have to plan another lesson in between. I usually do an outline of what I want to do for a whole unit and then do lessons from that. I think we need to have the shell, the core, and then they [students] can help with the core.*
>
> —ABE/preGED teacher

For others, curriculum was sometimes derived through an almost random selection of goals, content, and activities:

> *[I taught] math, because it was easy to teach. Well, you know that's relevant [fractions] as far as I'm concerned. I can teach biology because I have a love for it and I read about it in the newspaper and I understand it and I understand the concepts. … I had nothing in particular in mind [when choosing a particular activity mentioned]. At that point, I was a brand new teacher and I was trying anything I could think of. I had no lesson plan in mind; I had no particular goal at that point other than to get them [students] to open up, to get them to talk . If I could have gotten them to write anything it would have been a miracle.*
>
> —GED teacher

I really like a lot of the materials I work with, and basically, I use "Side by Side" and I start on page one and we're going to finish up next week. So that's something that I do every day. Well, I don't do it every day but do it very regularly and I basically just follow along with it. The books I used for reading, I basically do the same thing. I start at the beginning and they become more difficult and I follow that. The "Connect in English," I start with episode one and I move along. But then there are holidays, there are other things I want to cover, like holidays and seasons. Obviously there's a definite time that I'm going to do those things. But I have other topics; I do a unit on health. I'll fit that in sometime during the year when I think it would be effective. I do romance. I don't just do it at Valentine's Day, I do a whole thing on romance. I do a unit on telephone calls. I just sandwich those in as the spirit moves me.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

It was clear from the questionnaire and interview data that the lack of knowledge that teachers grappled with most as they attempted to develop curriculum was knowledge of students, especially students' needs and goals. For teachers who wanted to build curriculum based on students' needs, or who were adapting a required curriculum to specific needs of students, finding out about students' needs and goals and then incorporating them into a clear curriculum that integrated skills and content based on students' lives were real challenges.

Beliefs about teachers' role. While K–12 teachers probably vary in the extent to which they feel it is important to know about children's lives outside of the classroom and how much they use that information in their instruction, they seldom grapple with whether children want or need to know a particular skill or area of knowledge. Most knowledge and skills are seen as building blocks for later use in life. However, many ABE teachers (about 45%, according to our data) have the freedom to choose goals and content for the instruction adult students receive, and at least one impetus for choosing a particular goal over another is whether that goal is relevant to students' lives. In order to choose such a goal, teachers need to know what students' literacy needs and practices are and they need to know about students' lives in order to plan relevant content and activities for meeting that goal. If the focus is primarily teaching basic skills, the teacher has a choice of content in which to embed those skills; e.g., students can learn to read "See Dick and Jane run" or they can learn to read "Seeing a doctor while you are pregnant is important." Knowing whether prenatal care is an issue for a specific group of students, for example, would help a teacher take a content-specific approach to basic skills instruction. Therefore, teachers' views about the extent to which they should get to know students and students' lives is not just a question about the desired relationship between teachers and students; such views are integrally connected to curriculum development.

We found that teachers' views about their role varied tremendously. We asked teachers to rate a set of 14 related activities for getting to know students and incorporating that information into the curriculum. We asked teachers to rate, using a six-point scale, how appropriate they felt it was for ABE teachers to do each activity (with 1 being *not at all appropriate*, and 6 being *very appropriate*). We also asked teachers to rate how often they actually did each activity (with 1 being *never do* and 6 being *do daily*). The activities we listed included the types of curriculum they may develop, and the steps they feel they should or do take to learn more about students. (To get an understanding of how broad they feel their role should be, we also asked questions about teachers' involvement in the program.) Table 6 presents the mean ratings, across the whole sample, for each activity, and orders them from highest mean to lowest, allowing us to compare the activities teachers feel are most appropriate against the activities they actually do most often.

Table 6: Teachers' Perceptions of Appropriate and Actual Activities

(n=97–99[11])

TEACHERS SAY IS *APPROPRIATE ROLE FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS* (1=NOT APPROPRIATE; 6=VERY APPROPRIATE)			TEACHERS SAY THEY *ACTUALLY DO* (1=NEVER DO; 6=DO DAILY)	
	ORDER	MEAN	ORDER	MEAN
Take part in program decisions and program-improvement activities	1	5.52	10	4.20
Develop curriculum based on how students actually use or want to use literacy in their daily lives	2	5.49	6	4.29
Learn about the ways in which students actually use literacy in their daily lives	3	5.39	8	4.23
Develop curriculum for students to work toward solving problems or addressing issues that concern them	4	5.38	3	4.42
Refer students to other services inside or outside of the program	5	5.32	7	4.28
Learn about the issues that concern students	6	5.26	2	4.58
Meet individually with students to assess their educational and life goals	7	5.21	11	3.97
Conduct activities that build a community of students within the classroom and/or program	8	5.18	4	4.30
Learn about the communities from which the students come	9	5.01	9	4.22
Develop curriculum that addresses issues in society such as racism, poverty, or violence	10	4.95	12	3.66
Learn about the personal lives of students	11	4.66	1	4.62
Provide opportunities for students to talk about their personal lives as part of the classroom curriculum	12	4.58	5	4.40
Provide personal counseling	13	3.57	13	3.20
Visit students in their homes	14	2.73	14	1.82

These findings indicate that teachers felt it was very appropriate to learn about students' literacy use in daily life and to develop curriculum based on that. However, they felt that what they actually *did* was to learn about students' personal lives and the issues that concern them, which in their minds was less appropriate for teachers. Why does this discrepancy exist? Even though almost 52% of teachers felt that knowing who students are was more important than having craft or content knowledge, we found in our

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[11] Number of responses for each particular entry on this chart varies by one or two teachers; i.e., for some activities, 99 teachers responded; for other activities, only 98 or 97 teachers responded. Rather than complicate the table, and because such a difference in the "n" between entries makes virtually no difference in the mean, we have not listed the specific number of respondents for each entry.

interviews with teachers that finding out about students' lives was complicated terrain for teachers. It appears, both from this table and from their comments, that teachers struggle with where to draw the line in getting to know students. Even though teachers placed tremendous value on being knowledgeable about students' lives and did find out informally about the lives of students, it seems that many were uncomfortable in this role. It is not surprising, then, that providing students with personal counseling and visiting them in their homes were actions that teachers viewed as the least appropriate, and the most seldom undertaken, of all the actions listed. The more what they learned about students was directly related to literacy and educational concerns, the more comfortable teachers felt. However, they were less likely to gather this education-specific type of information and to use it in building curriculum, than they were to learn—mostly informally—about students' personal lives. Teachers tended to view conversations about students' lives as separate from the "real" work and focus of classroom teaching.

So how did teachers deal with the "boundary" issue of how much information to elicit about students' lives, and whether and how to use that during instruction? This appears to be an area of great controversy within the field (Horsman, 1997), and the teachers in our sample took different approaches: some actively *invited* information, others *accepted* but did not invite it, and others *avoided* such information, particularly in the classroom.

Those teachers who *invited* students to share information about their lives and concerns felt there were benefits, at least in some situations, and didn't see the need for strong boundaries. These teachers wanted students to talk about their personal lives in the classroom and welcomed close relationships with them. In our subsample, the teachers who invited information were teachers who had strong ties to the student community: one was a former adult student, another grew up poor and was the first in her family to graduate from college, and a third lived in the same neighborhood with most of her students:

> *I sit there with them, I cry with them, I eat with them. The relationship's like a mother to daughter, and they talk to me the same way that I'm talking to you [the researcher] with an open heart. For transportation when it's too cold, I myself go and pick them up. For the ones who live far away, I always give students a ride on my way home. I'm trying to help them. I get welfare papers for them to review. I take time for them.*
>
> —Native-language-literacy teacher

> *I became very, very good friends with one of my students as an ABE teacher, meeting for lunch or coming over to my house.*
>
> —GED teacher

*I think it depends on the learner. I think that they [teachers] should know what
the learners are willing to reveal and that takes time. It's not something you're
going to get the first day, maybe not get the first six months. As the learners
reveal who they are, that's what you then build on. Some people walk in the
classroom and that's all they want to do is talk about themselves. And then
they've told everything and they're ready to go on to the next group and tell
everything. The ones who are slower, I think, are more conscientious about
where they're at and what they're doing and why they're there. The one thing I
felt really good about is that I have a good rapport with all my students. We're
friends...*

<div align="right">—ABE/ESOL teacher</div>

While across the whole sample, teachers felt that learning about the communities
from which the students come was not as appropriate as other activities (placing ninth as
both appropriate and as an activity teachers actually do), a few teachers in our subsample
did feel strongly about the importance of learning about students' communities. Through
their own experience living in students' communities and/or through ongoing
conversations with students, these teachers sought to understand the world in which
students live:

*I think they [students] learn within their own environment, and, if you don't know
their environment, you're going to use something from your own environment,
which may not make total sense to them at all. ... A different culture to me is the
whole Medicaid system. I don't understand it. I don't know anything about it.
I've never been there. Most of the students are on Medicaid and their lives are
dictated by it. So I learn a lot about that system, and then you use examples from
that system because they make sense to them. Then you're also able to use
examples from your own experience because you have something to compare it
with.*

<div align="right">—ABE/ESOL teacher</div>

*It makes a lot of difference to me to be able to relate to my students and their lives
and their struggles, and I like to know who they are as people. So I value being
connected to the community and living in it and being part of it.*

<div align="right">—Family literacy teacher</div>

*I don't think you can know who your students are unless you understand
something about where they're from, their native communities, the lives that they
lead now, because otherwise you won't know where are the points you might be
able to act as a resource for those students. Like a student who isn't coming often
or, when she comes, she sometimes doesn't want to try something and then*

discusses the fact that her boyfriend always just calls her stupid, so she feels that she can't do this. If you didn't have that information, you're not going to be able to try to encourage her to persist.

—ESOL teacher

Yet, some of these same teachers also expressed some caution about the extent to which they felt they should get to know students or to keep some distance. Issues that concerned teachers about "crossing boundaries" included not having the expertise to deal with students' problems, not feeling they have the time to contribute to students outside of class, and not wanting to alter the traditional roles of teacher and student:

It can be dangerous to know too much, for the learners or for us [teachers]. How involved we should be is a tough one. As a home visitor, we have to be particularly careful, not to turn too much into our learners' friends, so we talk about those issues with a clinical supervisor, to work out keeping our boundaries. I think it's important for us to be upfront and honest and say, 'I'm not a trained social worker,' but it's my job to break through barriers and to help people identify their own goals, and if doing a little social work is part of that, then I do.

—Family literacy teacher

You'd think, 'OK, where is the line drawn where the respect is still there, that you are the teacher and there's a responsibility here as a teacher to teach and not necessarily to give rides?'

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Teachers who *accepted* information about students realized the importance of learning about students' lives, and were more or less willing to listen when stories emerged, yet were more cautious and less comfortable in this role than teachers who invited such information:

I think there is no hard and fast rule about it. But I would say some teachers bring people's lives into the classroom more than I do. When I first started teaching, I found out things that I didn't want to know. It's hard not to get real personal and sometimes the learners get more personal than I feel comfortable with, so it's hard, but yet you want to know what's going on and why they're not doing as well or why they're doing really well.

—ABE/preGED teacher

You've got to know where to set limits, too, and I think I was afraid of that in the beginning, how much I was going to allow their personal life into the classroom and I think I'm a little less afraid of it now. But I can deal with it a little easier. I

can let more of it in, asking them about their goals, calling them when they don't come in, not being afraid to get a little more of their personal life, not being so afraid to get dragged in.

—GED teacher

We can't be everything. We shouldn't try to be because we can only get the students and/or ourselves into trouble. Just let them know if you have a problem, you can come to me and I will send you in the right direction. So that they should know that they can start with you.

—ESOL teacher

Other teachers *avoided* learning information about students, feeling that it was important to maintain clear separation in roles between teacher and students. These teachers wanted to maintain, in the classroom, a clear and firm boundary between topics they viewed as appropriate for education and information about students' personal lives; they also felt that time spent on students' personal lives would be time taken away from skill building; or they were afraid that issues would come up that they wouldn't be able to handle:

I don't ask personal questions at all, and sometimes I'm willing to listen to what they have to say and there might be times that I need to say that we need to get onto a more academic topic. I value everybody's right to have their privacy, and if it's one-on-one, that would be totally different, not in a classroom. I'm thinking that the information that I'm getting could be stuff that can't be addressed by an adult education instructor unless they have some kind of social service background. If we allow that to drive the curriculum, then you're not going to achieve the curriculum. Some individuals are in states of crisis and that's what I see and then I also see that whether it's counseling or outside resources outside of the education field, that you're mixing so much together that eventually nothing's going to happen.

—Vocational education teacher

Rather than bringing these topics into the classroom, I would rather focus on the language, and have the services there if they need help. Let it be a little more partitioned between, say, what the counselor does, what the teachers does. Because I don't, as a teacher, really want to be dealing with those issues. I'd rather focus on the language. I wouldn't branch out into trying to improve students' lives, because to me that's going a little bit beyond teaching. Maybe I have too strict an idea of what teaching is. I think there's not a lot you can do beyond the classroom that would be sanctioned by my program.

—ESOL teacher

Some of these folks are looking for a support group, and I'm not it. If I'm not in the position to do something about it, then I don't want to know about it. We have no solution for childcare. I'm not talking about complete disregard for their personal (lives), I'm just saying you have to draw the line. If I don't have the solution, I just assume, telling me the problem isn't going to help.

—GED teacher

It [teachers' involvement in students' lives] depends pretty much on the personality of the teacher and of how committed she is to the job ... as much as I love students, and as comfortable as I am with them, I should limit [myself] to the classroom.

—ESOL teacher

Program expectations influenced teachers' views on the appropriateness of getting to know students:

I was told in [my program] not to visit students' home[s]. I just had this very formal feeling that what happens between me and my students has to be in the classroom and that's it. I don't visit students' homes. I've never thought that was appropriate in a professional sense, but personally it has great appeal. I would rather have class at my house or students' homes. This is just a dream.

—ESOL teacher

With the GED program, there's barely any time for discussion of personal life. It's mostly academics.

—GED teacher

> **How teachers say they are similar to *the majority of students with whom they work*** (*n*=97)
>
> - 68% said they share the same language as *the majority of students with whom they work*
> - 51% are the same gender
> - 50% are the same race
> - 18% live in the same neighborhood
> - 14% share the same socioeconomic class
> - 12% share the same work background
> - 8% share the same current income level
> - 7% share the same educational background

Knowing who students are presumably would be easier if teachers already shared background characteristics with students. We wanted to find out from teachers in what ways they felt they were similar or dissimilar from students. In the third questionnaire, we listed nine different ways that teachers and students could be similar, and asked teachers what similarities they shared with the *majority* of students with whom they work. They were instructed to check *all* that applied (see box above).

Since this is self-reported, and we do not have secondary information about the students of the teachers in the sample, there are only a few conclusions we can draw from the information teachers gave us. The greatest similarity teachers felt they have with students is a common language. Since the vast majority of teachers in our sample were white, and three quarters of the teachers taught basic literacy, GED, or an equal combination, we assume that this language is English (even though undoubtedly some of the students in literacy and GED classes speak English as a second language). Overall, the majority of teachers report that they are not like their students in terms of their educational, work, or socioeconomic backgrounds.

In an effort to understand the extent to which program staff overall (and not just the individual teachers in our study) reflect the diversity of the student population, we also asked teachers to tell us what percentage of all staff in their program were people of color. The mean percentage for *staff* of color was only 9.8% (n=102, SD=17.1). Fifty percent of the teachers in the sample indicated that none of the staff were people of color, and 75% of the teachers indicated that 10% or less of the staff were people of color.

By contrast, the mean percentage of *students* of color was 39% (n=102, SD=35.5); the median for percentage of students of color was 30% (i.e., half of the teachers in the sample indicated that 30% or fewer of their students were people of color; the other half indicated a greater percentage of students were people of color). Only 16% of teachers indicated that none of the students were people of color. A *t*-test indicated that this difference in means (between percentage of staff of color and percentage of students of color) was significant (t=11.1, df=101, p<.001, n=102).

Teachers varied in their views of students, some seeing students as fundamentally different from themselves:

> *If [students] come up with 7 over 30 [GED pretest score with 7 out of 30 correct], we just look at them and say to them, 'We'll do what we can but I don't know what we're going to do with it, we're not too sure.' Then of course, you get the excuses, 'Well, I just guessed 'cause I never liked math.' 'I needed to go, my boyfriend was waiting so I just did it quick.' Sometimes those people turn out to be fine and they work through each one, but sometimes there's no concept of percentage or fraction, 'Oh, I hate fractions.' And there's like a mental block. [We're trying to] really [make] sure that these people do have a goal when they go out even if it's just an off-the-cuff thing. I'm not going to say that we want 100% of those who walk in the room to stay because if we've got kids taking their ten minute break and coming back in a half hour and they smell like liquor, cigarettes or marijuana, or something, you don't want them to stay. So we do work to get rid of those. There is an occasional student that we don't want to stay but on the whole we do. We are doing the best we can do to retain their attention, to interest them, to make them see some self worth.*

> —GED teacher

To you and me it was natural, you have a baby, you read to the baby, you talk to the baby, you hold the baby. But to a lot of people it doesn't come naturally. They can take care of the baby's physical needs, feeding and giving her rest, but not necessarily more than that. But also many of the women particularly are illiterate but very, very sweet. They are very eager to please but they're right from a different time as well as a different place. Some of them could be in a beginning class and really not progress. They nod their heads and 'Yes, teacher' but … I would like to help a little more. Yet, they're probably happy. I don't think they're discontented necessarily.

—ESOL teacher

Others identified strongly with students, seeing them as fellow adults struggling to improve their lives:

[The purpose of teaching is] to connect with the students where they are—me learning from them and then they learn from me. The majority in the classroom are struggling. They're struggling financially, they're struggling with terrible things that have happened in their lives, and then you tend to struggle together . I just think that's where life is lived. It's not lived separating yourself. I also know what it feels like to feel stupid. 'I just can't get this.' And how you feel when you feel inferior. [That's given me] a lot of compassion, a lot of patience, a lot of understanding for someone who doesn't get it right off the bat.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I think I can understand maybe why they didn't finish high school, why they have a need to join this program. I'm the youngest of seven children and the first to graduate high school. My grandmother has 50 grandchildren and I'm the first to graduate college. I started with a two-year degree, and then went to the four-year degree, and then I got the master's degree. For me to get even a two-year degree was a really, really big deal. My parents both have eighth-grade diplomas only, they worked in factories. I wasn't raised to go to college and I think many of them [other teachers] were raised with the assumption that they would be in college and they would be very successful. And I think that's why I can understand or feel as if I understand many of these people that come in as students. Even when [the coordinator] that I had difficulties with, she would say things like how she knew she was going to be a teacher when she was in second year of high school. I didn't even know that I was going to graduate high school. I think that sometimes I relate to the students maybe more than the teachers.

—GED teacher

I am one of them. I got nothing better or less. I learn from them a lot. Not to read and write, but sometimes how to have compassion. Sometimes they help me

not to forget who I am. I am not higher, I'm just exactly the same way that they are. I always say, if I could do it, of course you can do better than that. I am a good example.

—Native-language-literacy teacher

For teachers from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds than students, finding common ground and developing a keen understanding of students' lives and needs took time and perseverance. For example, a teacher who had moved to the same community as the students with whom she worked described how she wanted to connect more with students and understand their lives, but how difficult she found it was to do so, given the differences in class backgrounds:

Living in the community and seeing people on a daily basis, it gives you a collegiality, like you're going through things together. [But] no matter how hard I try I can't get into my students' minds. My background was one of growing up in the suburbs and having everything you need to have.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Some teachers were led by their focus on students' strengths, and this perspective made these teachers want to serve the students well:

I'm really in awe of the learners. I can't imagine doing what they do and then coming for four hours, and just really have to concentrate and do it day after day, year after year. The respect I have for them makes me want to do everything I can for them and I don't want them to get bored.

—ABE/preGED teacher

She [my coworker] said [to me], 'I have to tell you that this woman just loves the class. She feels so good.' I'm not saying this is about me but more to bring up the qualities that I think are engaging her in the class. She says she doesn't feel stupid: 'She [the teacher] doesn't make me feel like I don't know anything. She doesn't make me feel bad because I'm in the shelter or anything. She just accepts who I am and we all get a chance to learn.'

—ESOL teacher

Only one program in our 18-teacher subsample appeared deliberately to make a commitment to hire staff from the same populations they serve. Its strong commitment to community development and social activism had shaped staff's belief in the importance of providing role models to students:

All three of our Latina teachers bring something to our program that is amazing. [They are] living examples of people who have studied in the communities, gotten their GEDs through time, have learned English, and now they're back teaching in these programs. That's like a daily inspiration for those students.

—CBO program director

Goal-setting with students is a critical way to learn more about their real lives and needs; yet, teachers struggled with this as well, finding that goal-setting was not a simple process of eliciting answers to goal-type questions:

We did a variety of goal-setting activities. It was fun, it was brainstorming, but I still don't think it was a direction for the class. It was individual goals, not for the class.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I've struggled this year helping adults to set their own goals. It hasn't been a real huge struggle but maybe just because I'm a worrier, I think maybe I'm designing the students' goals too much. Because I'm so invested in them creating their own goals, maybe I worry too much about that.

—Family literacy teacher

It appeared to us that most teachers report using an established or required curriculum (including workbook-driven individualized instruction) for goals and content, or they develop their own goals for classes, based on the skills they think students need. It was the rare teacher who engaged students in an ongoing process in order to identify their evolving goals and needs. The latter requires more time and expertise on the teacher's part, as well as a belief that this is an appropriate way to organize ABE classes. The range in teachers' beliefs about the appropriate "boundary" between teacher and student, and between academics and students' lives as a basis for curriculum, was noteworthy. Some teachers were clearly grappling with this challenge of whether or not to organize lessons around real and sometimes troubling problems and issues in adult students' lives. Others had solidified their beliefs and drawn the boundary line clearly, led by the belief that school is school and such problems should not be part of the classroom or curriculum. Overall, however, more teachers felt they should be developing curriculum based on students' needs and literacy practices than were actually doing so. Only one third of our subsample teachers actively sought students' goals, and then designed activities that fit those goals, struggling with balancing skill development with the content students wanted. No teacher in our subsample (although there may have been some in the whole sample) negotiated a full scope and sequence of goals, content, materials, and activities, based on students' needs and with student input, that covered anything longer than a unit.

Belief about the purpose of adult basic education instruction. There is little argument about the purposes of education for children: in addition to teaching basic reading, writing, and math skills and imparting a broad understanding of science, history, and a multitude of other subjects, the purpose of a K–12 basic education is to prepare students for working, parenting, and contributing to society. With children attending school for 10 or 12 years, states can design curriculum year-by-year that, arguably, works comprehensively to accomplish these purposes. Teachers in the K–12 system usually have a predetermined set of goals and content for the grade or subject they teach, so their purpose is not in question.

However, in adult basic education, adult students usually attend for a much shorter period of time, and, in that time, there are a multitude of purposes across the range of students teachers teach, based on their immediate and long-term needs as workers, parents, and community members. While a third-grade student isn't usually allowed to question whether double-digit addition will be useful to him or her, an adult student may have immediate needs for such skills and will certainly want to apply them to the demands of his or her life. Some of these demands are often extremely distressing and pressing (eviction, termination of welfare benefits, unemployment, lack of health care) and, many adult educators believe that such problems are caused by racism, poverty, or other social injustices that adult students must first tackle in order to solve them. Therefore, there are different beliefs in the field of adult education about the ultimate purpose of adult literacy instruction. Is it to help adult students acquire reading, writing, math, or English-language skills and let them decide how and when to use them? Or is it to help students deal with the demands of daily life, using literacy skills as a practical part of solving their problems? We hypothesized that what a teacher believes about the purpose of literacy instruction might have a great deal to do with how they design curriculum; however, the data about this connection were less clear.

We asked teachers which statement best described what they think is the primary purpose of literacy instruction:

1. Helping students *develop basic skills* (reading, writing, speaking) or *accomplish specific tasks* (e.g., getting a GED, filling out a check), or

2. Helping students develop the ability to *use literacy in their own lives* or work toward social change (e.g., writing health brochures for their own community, working to change welfare laws).[12]

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[12] We struggled with the wording of this question during the piloting of the questionnaire; adding more than the two options to the question confused the pilot teachers. However, providing only two options may have oversimplified the complexity of teachers' attitudes toward the purpose of literacy, as evidenced by the three teachers who, in their answers, refused to choose one or the other. We report the results here as a broad indication of the importance, in teachers' minds, of basic skills.

Sixty-six percent of the teachers (*n*=105) chose the "basic skills" statement (the first item in the list above) as best describing the primary purpose of literacy instruction. Thirty-one percent chose the "use literacy in their own lives" statement (the second item in the list above), and three teachers said both statements were equally important. A chi-square statistical test indicates that belief about purpose of literacy was significantly related to type of program (χ^2=14.16, *df*=4, *p*<.01, *n*=105), with 64% of teachers based in LEAs choosing the "basic skills" purpose, compared to 22% of CBO teachers and 15% of corrections/unions/libraries teachers choosing the "basic skills" statement. The type of teacher was also statistically significantly related to the purpose of literacy (χ^2=18.48, *df*=10, *p*<.05, *n*=102): basic literacy teachers tended to choose the "use literacy in their own lives" purpose; GED teachers were almost evenly split; and a majority of preGED, ESOL, combination literacy/preGED/GED combination teachers, and "other" teachers chose "basic skills" as the primary purpose.

Helping GED students pass the test as quickly as possible was the primary goal of the GED programs in which the teachers in our subsample worked. Even though about half of GED teachers (46%) said that the primary purpose of literacy instruction is "using literacy in life," the GED teachers in our subsample focused almost exclusively on the skills needed for the test, including test-taking skills themselves:

> *How fast can you turn the pages and get it in your head? It's [instruction is] for taking the test and that's what they get. The GED is a stepping-stone into something else.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *Move 'em through, move 'em faster, get 'em in, get 'em done, get 'em gone. What I do is take the 500 pages [of math material], reduce it to ten, teach 'em those ten pages, they can take a test and pass it.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *I'm also aware of the fact that knowing how to test is as important as knowing what's on the test. That was the thing that I was focusing on when I first started. Just trying to figure out how to teach them to take a test.*
>
> —GED teacher

Only a few of the GED teachers we interviewed questioned this singular focus on helping students pass a test. Rather than run their GED classes like Kaplan courses that prepare high school students for college entrance exams—imparting test-taking strategies and the minimum level of skills needed to pass the test quickly—they were also interested in helping students meet the literacy demands of daily life or increase the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a post-secondary-education setting.

In interviews with the 18 subsample teachers, we also asked a direct question about their goals as a teacher: "What are you striving for as a teacher?" The majority of teachers in the subsample talked about a combination of goals: (1) to strengthen students' confidence or sense of self-efficacy, and (2) to build their life-skills in such areas as daily problem-solving, finding a job, or using English in their communities. Teachers seldom mentioned literacy as a path to social justice.

Help students find jobs and become self-sufficient. My goal at the end of all my classes is to have people feel better about themselves. Period. Whether they're learning a new task or trying to find a position or what have you.

—Vocational education teacher

If nothing else, I can give them the confidence and the willingness to pursue learning a language and the significance that has for them no matter where they are in their life. Then I've done my job. If they can feel good about themselves as learners and [want] to continue to learn, then they will learn and the rest of it will fall into place.

—ESOL teacher

I think one of the main things I do in my class is try to instill a confidence in everybody that whatever it is that we're doing, they're capable of [doing it]. A lot of adults have bad memories of school and I find myself spending a lot of time trying to dismantle those misperceptions of what real education is like.

—ASE math teacher/program director

Program Factors Affecting Teachers' Approach to Curriculum Development

Programs' approach to curriculum development and belief about the purpose of literacy. The mission and practices of programs greatly influenced the ways in which teachers developed and used curriculum. Teachers in our interview who talked about their first days of teaching reported that, when they first started, they (quite naturally) used whatever other teachers in the program used for curriculum (whether that was textbooks, a program-developed curriculum, or random lessons—i.e., no curriculum at all). For example, we found one teacher who used both a student-centered approach and a curriculum-driven approach in different programs, since she taught part time in two different programs (a workplace-education program and a community-based program). She described the differences between the programs in curriculum development:

But for the workplace, it's [the curriculum's] much more specific. It's much more detailed. And it' s much more elaborate. At the [community] learning center I have one boss, really, my students. They direct how I'm going to go with that

class. And every year you reevaluate as the year's going on, 'Are we in the right direction?' And we have open enrollment. So that means we even do more evaluating. At the learning center, they [students] totally and completely direct how that program goes. At the workplace, they don't. I have to make addressing their needs fit into that company material that I have to use. And at the workplace, you decide what you need and do it for a unit. You plan daily lessons, but it won't be that every day you question, 'What am I going to do? ' Because I don't like to do that. That doesn't work out well. I don't feel there's any progress made.

—ESOL teacher

The match between teachers' and programs' view of the purpose of literacy is strong. In addition to asking teachers about their *own* view of the purpose of literacy instruction, we also asked them about *their program's* view. Of the 105 teachers for whom we have data on this question, 72 indicated their program held a primarily "basic skills" philosophy of the purpose of literacy, and 31 indicated their program held a "use" philosophy, while 2 teachers indicated that the two purposes couldn't be separated, and both were held equally by their programs. Out of 104 teachers, only 9 teachers indicated that their program held a different view from their own,[13] and program type is significantly related to the program's view of the purpose of literacy, as reported by teachers.[14] While it is possible that, for some teachers, the match between their own and their program's view exists because these teachers sought employment in programs with missions that fit their own views, it seems more likely that programs shape teachers' views (i.e., teachers adopt their program's view).

Overall, the majority (two thirds) of teachers believe that teaching basic skills is the main purpose of ABE instruction, although giving students confidence in themselves was important to many teachers. However, whether belief in purpose of literacy was a driving force in determining the curriculum, or was merely an outcome of the curriculum teachers inherit from the programs within which they work was not clear from the data. Programs exerted a strong influence on the teachers' approach to curriculum development. If a teacher began teaching in a program that created its own curriculum, she followed what the other teachers were doing in order to create her own. If a teacher began teaching in a program that used a set curriculum or, more likely, a set of commercial books for instruction or test prep, they seemed to accept that this was the

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[13] Five teachers who think the purpose of literacy is "use literacy in their own lives" said that their program's purpose was "basic skills." Three teachers who think the purpose is "basic skills" said their program's purpose was "use literacy in own lives." One teacher who said "both were important" indicated her program held a primarily "basic skills" view of the purpose of literacy instruction.

[14] Eighty percent of the 56 LEA programs held a "skills" philosophy, as reported by the teachers who taught in them, as compared to 56% of the 27 CBOs and 55% of the 22 corrections/unions/libraries/workplace programs, and this relationship was statistically significant (χ^2=14.21, *df*=4, *p*<.01, *n*=105).

curriculum to use, partially because they didn't know that other options existed. When programs had no set curriculum, the teacher either used whatever books were given to her by the director or other teachers, or made activities and materials up as she went along.

The Challenge of Organizing Instruction

Since almost all teachers report having relatively complete freedom to decide on the activities they will use in the classroom, we wanted to know how they organized instruction. As we were not able to observe all teachers in their classrooms, we asked them to report on the types of activities they used in their classes, telling us what percentage of a typical class period students would engage in the following activities: (1) listening to the teacher, (2) large-group activities, (3) small-group activities, (4) studying alone, (5) talking or socializing, and (6) computer work.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, we found that a typical class or session, averaged out across our sample of teachers, was structured in a traditional, teacher-directed fashion with 66% of class time devoted to a combination of students studying alone (27% of class time), listening to the teacher (21% of class time), and working in a large-group activity (18%).[15] Small-group activities, where students would have more opportunities to interact and learn from each other, comprised only 17% of a typical class or session.

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[15] Numbers of teachers responding to each of these activities varied because some teachers marked as "not applicable" certain of the activities. For example, for some teachers, having students work on computers was not an option; and for some teachers who taught individual students, a "large-group activity" was not applicable.

Figure 3: Teachers' Reports of Percentage of Class Time Students Spent in Various Activities

Class Activities

Mean percentage of typical class or session
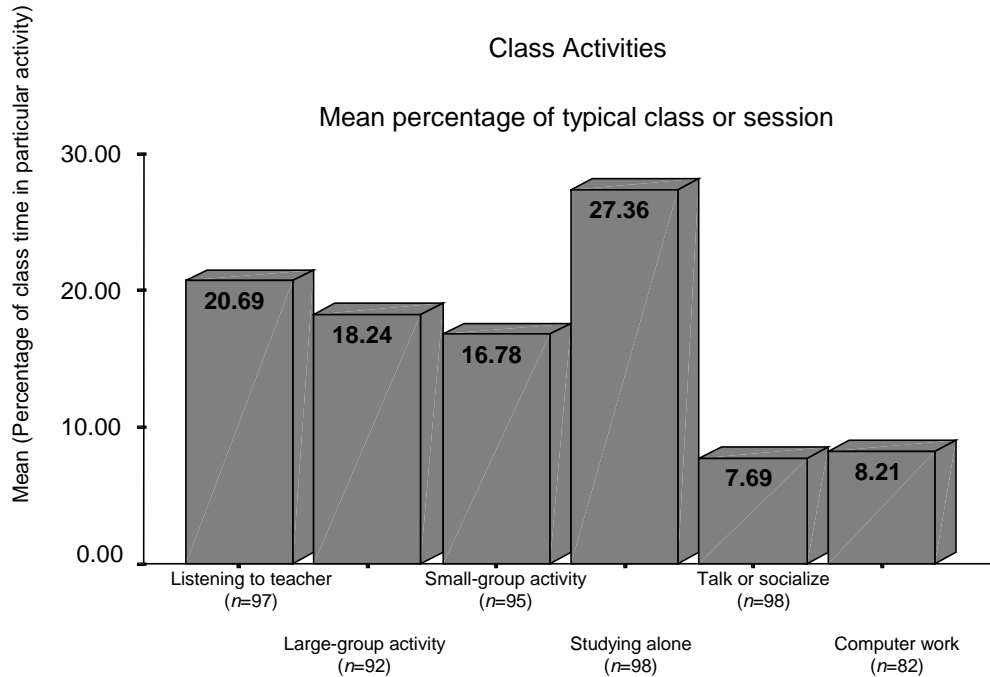
Since students spend an aggregate of 8% of class time on computer work, which is largely individual work, and the largest mean percentage was spent "studying alone," we conclude that individualized instruction within a group context was a major activity within the ABE "classes" in our sample. Although students were together in class, GED teachers especially tended to teach students with an individualized approach, rotating from student to student as students worked out of their GED preparation workbooks. During a site visit to one GED teacher's class, we found her "seating plan" to be an apt metaphor for this approach to instruction: she kept an empty chair next to each student so that she could easily rotate among them, checking their answers in the workbook.

An individualized approach seemed to be used in GED-prep programs for several reason: the limited amount of time that students spent in the program, students' stated goal of "getting a GED," uneven attendance and open enrollment policies that made teaching groups more difficult, and mounting pressure from the state and program to prepare students as quickly as possible for the test. Teachers felt compelled to use an individualized approach, even when they have been trained to use a more "creative" approach to teaching. Some teachers also felt that individualized instruction was a better way to meet students' needs when students in one class were at very different skill levels:

We teach entirely out of the GED prep book, which mirrors the GED test. Because you're teaching to the test, you can't be terribly creative, you can't do these wonderful things. 'Oh, let's go out into the community and have a field trip,' because you're teaching to the test. It's totally different than any other course that you could teach in adult education. I'll never forget my first week in there. I brought a ton of materials. I was going to teach this class. In social studies, I had them all over the floor and maps, and it dawned on me that they didn't know which were oceans, they didn't know anything about this stuff, and so we did a couple of creative things in the beginning, when it was a teacher-directed thing. When I realized the time constraints for taking the test and what you really had to get them to do, I just totally changed to more of a lecture type thing, which was totally what I had learned not to do.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

An individualized approach to instruction did appear in other types of teaching (ESOL, ABE) but it was far less common. When an individualized instruction approach was used in these non-GED contexts, it was usually due to practical—rather than pedagogical—reasons, as demonstrated by the ESOL instructor who shifted from whole-group instruction to a one-on-one approach because of class size: The program cut the budget, she was the only teacher, and she felt individualized instruction was the only way she could serve the increased number of students for whom she was now responsible. Another program used individualized instruction in students' homes because it was based in a rural area, and students did not have transportation to come to the program. These teachers talked of the advantages and disadvantages of individualized instruction:

This individualized learning plan for each student is working well. I think actually our attendance is better this year. I've got a core group of students, and they're still with me. It's better than trying to teach everybody the same thing. [But the students] miss the classes. There's a certain camaraderie that I miss, too, a give and take. Let's face it, if you're working one-on-one in different areas, the conversations that come up about cultural differences, and tell me about your family and kids don't occur nearly as much unless I stop everybody from working and say, 'OK. Let's discuss this topic.' Occasionally, students say to me, 'I really miss the class.' I think I would do a little of both … group the new people and teach a class. Then we'd also have individual, one-on-one.

<div align="right">—ESOL/ASE[16] teacher</div>

One of my chief complaints with the whole thing [home visits] is that it's just me and one student working in their home. I know that the highest quality learning seems to happen when I can get these students together and find some common

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[16] Adult secondary education.

interests and have them teach each other. The more I can get people together, I think, the more learning takes place in the shortest amount of time.

—Family literacy teacher

Another ABE/ESOL teacher tried to deliberately vary the organization of instruction, for the explicit purpose of helping students feel like a community, but also to deal with the issue of multiple levels:

I want them [students] to walk in and feel good about being there, and the way I do this is by greeting them warmly, even if they've been gone a few days. I give them some time for them to talk about what's going on in their lives. They need to connect to one another so they feel we're a group here and we're working together, and then I usually try to do something fun and often it's math. I also try to individually give them attention so that they're not just in the group.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Organizing instruction under an open-enrollment system is another complication for ABE teachers. Since attending ABE classes has historically and typically been voluntary for adult students (mandatory attendance for welfare recipients being the main exception), many programs have used an open-enrollment policy, where adult students are free to enter (and leave) the program any time they choose. We wondered how such policies affected the way teachers organized instruction.

In our questionnaire, we asked teachers whether their program's policy for enrollment was: (1) **open enrollment**, where students can enter the class at any time during the cycle, (2) **rolling enrollment**, where students can enter the class only once a month or at specific times during the cycle, or (3) **closed enrollment**, where students can enter the class only at the beginning of the cycle. The majority (69%) of programs in our sample (*n*=94), according to the teachers, had an open-enrollment policy. Another 12% taught in classes with rolling enrollment, and 19% had closed enrollment. Program type (LEA, CBO, corrections/unions/libraries) was not related to enrollment policy.

The reasons for open enrollment in the ABE field were both pragmatic and well intentioned. Even though programs admitted that open enrollment made it harder for teachers and wondered whether it ultimately worked well for students, they saw it as part of their mission to be as flexible as possible to accommodate students who need to drop in and "stop out" for periods of time:[17]

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[17] Programs then replaced these student "stop outs" with new students, so that program accountability reports appear robust.

In many ways, our program is a program of last resort. A lot of people come here after not being successful in other programs, because we are so lenient and we bend over backwards to meet individual needs. We are a small program so that gives us some luxury to do that. Many people disappear and we welcome them with open arms. If a student calls in and says they have a reasonable problem and can't come, we'll work with them forever. We have open entry and open exit, which makes it much harder on the teachers but makes it more friendly to the students, and students get a lot of individual attention beyond what's required by the program itself. We have always had a tradition of focusing on individuals rather than the group. In some ways that's not helpful to some students because the structure's not there, and some students I've run into on the street and they say, 'Well, it wasn't for me because I wasn't pushed', or 'I didn't have to do anything.' To them, that was not helpful, but for other students, I hope it's helpful even though we look at some people who have been in the program 4 years, 5 years, 6 years. There is a trade-off there but hopefully achieving in 5 years rather than not getting one [the GED] at all. But who knows? Maybe if we were strict, they would get it in 2 years. I don't know.

—Community-based program director

For teachers, open enrollment often meant that, on any given day, they might have a new student join their class, even if the class had been meeting for months. This can create turbulence (Beder & Medina, 2001) in the classroom. We heard from teachers in open-enrollment programs that they were oftentimes not told in advance that a new student was coming to class, and not given any information about the student before he or she arrived. One GED program allowed students to begin a class right in the middle of class time, the policy being that students must be able to "jump on the train" at whatever point they enroll. Students could come and go at any time, based on their needs, and the teacher was required to accept new students any time they walked into the classroom. The teacher attributed this policy to an overriding concern about reporting student attendance:

It's numbers driven. And if they [the administration] think they're going to lose one intake. ... You see? I have a restricted intake policy that says, 'You can't just walk in at ten o'clock in the middle of a math class, and ask me to leave everybody and give you my undivided attention.' But they [the administration] think that if I have that policy, we will lose that one person.

—GED teacher

Directors and teachers had, by and large, mixed feelings about open enrollment, wanting to serve as many students as possible and be as flexible as possible but wondering what this meant for the quality of the teaching. Teachers were generally much more expressive about the difficulties and stress that open enrollment caused in their

classes, while feeling resigned to the fact that it was a policy with which they must cope. They worried, however, about its effect on student persistence:

> *Planning in adult education is difficult. You have an idea of what you're doing to do and it's very difficult because you could plan it for a select group of people and they don't show up, but a whole new group [does].*
>
> —GED teacher

> *[There is] constant interruption in terms of new students coming. We have open enrollment and it's constantly changing and for those people that started out the year, it's very hard because you have to gel as a group and now we're bringing in one more new student. Plus, this middle level has swung from the high end to the low end to the high. Open enrollment is great but it's tough. I don't think we have any other choice [but to support it]. I would rather not do it. I'd rather have a consistent [class]. I think it's very disruptive and I think it holds the students back a bit. … [Ours is] a small program. It's grant-funded and in order to keep those numbers up, and to keep addressing the needs of the area, keep it open.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

In general, GED teachers who use a drop-in clinic style of individualized instruction seemed to be much less worried than ESOL or basic literacy teachers about the effects of open enrollment, perhaps because so many used individualized instruction. In this structure, turnover of students was often considered par for the course. One teacher, who accepted open enrollment, clearly felt that it was her job to work with whoever was there, rather than worrying about who was coming and going:

> *I listen to people complain about open enrollment because they say that it makes it confusing for people who are here and there. I don't see that in my classes. Somebody comes in and somebody disappears. They're all working on different things. It's like one big study hall, I guess, where they come to me for advice about this or that. Definitely that's how the math works. The other subjects, as I say, I'm trying to shrink the units down so that they work for a day at a time, or a week at a time. So that if a student comes in today, whatever they'd doing is going to be OK. They'll fit in from the first day. I don't just work with it. I like it because it helps to keep the room as full as possible. When people start dropping out, I test again ... then I bring in some new people.*
>
> —GED teacher

The data indicate that the challenge of organizing instruction seemed to be driven by the structure of enrollment, which was in turn driven by a desire to be flexible to students' attendance needs and by the program's need to keep student enrollment

numbers high. Questions about dealing with the differing needs of students who came and went regularly were not, apparently, issues that teachers felt well prepared to handle, especially with students at multiple levels, and an individualized approach to organizing instruction was the most common way of dealing with this challenge, especially in GED-prep programs.

The Challenge of Assessing Progress[18]

Teachers need a minimum of two kinds of assessment information in order to design instruction: students' skills and goals coming into the class, and students' progress (increases in skills) as they participate. Typically, students' skills upon entering the program are assessed through an intake process, often not conducted by someone other than the teacher. Programs usually also have some testing at the end of a cycle or semester to determine whether students have progressed, and if so, by how much. Ideally, such mechanisms work well for both accountability and instructional design purposes, and in our sample, there were programs that had strong assessment procedures in place that provided teachers with the information they needed:

> *We have a lot of goal meetings, goal-setting meetings with learners, goal check-up meetings with learners. We're asking people to assess what we just did and also to assess their work. I think that keeps me in touch with what they're doing and what's going on.*
>
> —ABE/preGED teacher

However, getting accurate and relevant assessment information was a challenge for other teachers, and they did not feel they had the skills, knowledge, time, or tools to assess students' skills and progress on their own. Several teachers talked specifically about how they were not given the intake information and, consequently, did not have baseline information for students or a direction for instruction. Other teachers who did receive intake information did not feel that it was helpful in planning curriculum or instruction, which meant that they had to develop such tools on their own:

> *I would get a checkout list of maybe what level they're at. Still, that's just a piece of paper. I want to see what they can write. I want to know whether or not they have a problem with grammar or spelling. I would just do a variety of exercises where I hoped they'd have fun in the process, but give you information that maybe*

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[18] We should note at the outset that our data was collected from mid-1998 through early 2000, just before and as states were beginning to institute stronger accountability data collection as required by the National Reporting System. If similar questions were asked today (2003), answers might reflect the larger role that assessment of student outcomes, in particular, plays in teachers' roles as classroom teachers.

they [students] didn't even realize that they were giving you. [I used] trial and error [to assess student progress]. I had nothing to go by. I had no checklist of what they could or couldn't do. Mostly it was just trying out something new.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

The most bizarre thing was that two poorest performing students had the highest scores and would've placed in an intermediate-level class. The two most competent, communicatively speaking students in my class had the lowest scores and would have been placed in the beginning-level class. Horrible. Those tests have no relevancy whatsoever, and I don't find them useful at all. The state needs it for its own purposes, but from an educational viewpoint, I think in some cases it is actually harmful. I think it serves to misplace students and causes undue anxiety and disruption in the classroom. [I wished the state system would] look at [the adult learner] as a whole person, look at the specific things that the teacher and the student have accomplished in the classroom and assign value to that. As opposed to giving the teacher total freedom, very little feedback, and a test at the beginning and end of the year that has almost no relevance to what actually happens in the classroom.

—ESOL teacher

In other programs, standard progress tests either weren't conducted or weren't useful in providing teachers with information about how their students were doing:

And your students look at you, and if you smile at them sometimes, and you're nice to them, and you're the first American that's been nice to them, and you're gracious, and you try, they think you're wonderful. And that's not enough. I need to know if they're learning anything. I hope my job is something other than somebody that's nice to people, for heaven's sake. Plus, in a program like ours, not only are there not benchmarks, as the program is small, you tend to get repeat students. So now you're really in trouble because any learner plateaus. So it's hard for me to say, 'Has this learner reached a plateau, or are they making enough progress, what kind of progress has this person made?'

—ESOL teacher

When teachers felt that they needed specific information about students, they developed their own methods—either testing or portfolio—for determining what worked for students; their level of satisfaction with these assessment methods varied.

Their [students'] goals are usually to speak better English and hopefully they get there, but I can't measure that. I don't feel like I have any power over that. I would like a better ESOL test but I'm not going to create it. The test we have right now is one of these tests put together by experts. They're test makers.

That's not where I see my expertise. The test I give them is an oral test, and I always do a additional writing and reading part because I know my students have done all that in my classroom; but I just made that up myself. It's not scientific. It's not a legitimate piece to use but it gives me something to look at when I'm trying to decide if this person should go to the next class or not.

—ESOL teacher

I really didn't have a way to assess student progress. The only thing I did was I kept a file for each student and if they chose to, they could put things in their file and then look back and see where they had gone.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

With the increasing emphasis from the state and federal level being placed on programs and teachers to assess students' progress, finding time and methods for assessing progress was a challenge:

We have to drop everything when we do that testing. And then the students who didn't make if for the testing have to take it the next time that they come. I find that between the testing and the beginning and the end of the semester, and all these things that come up throughout the year, there are a lot of weeks where we only have one class or none at all.

—ESOL teacher

Because of the fact that assessment is a big piece in adult education, we're trying to assess everything. Now I learned that maybe I should be doing some type of documentation, especially with some of the growth we see in students that we don't document. We see it but how do we document about a person who had a hard time conversing with others and then all of a sudden within the two years they're in the program and we see the growth? We see the way they were in the beginning and we see how they communicate now. Some of the [assessment] stuff is coming together and some of it is happening but I still have a ways to go.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

GED teachers who taught to the test were the exception in discussions about assessment: the goal was simply to help students pass the test as quickly as possible, and the assessment consisted of attempting and passing the test. Through the use of GED practice tests, teachers were able to identify the areas in which students needed to work, measure students' progress, and determine when students were ready to take the test.

It was clear from the data that, at least for basic literacy and ESOL teachers, assessing students' abilities and progress is an area of concern for classroom teachers. It is possible that, with the greater emphasis on collection of student outcomes through the

National Reporting System now in place, teachers have access to more standardized assessment procedures within their programs. Whether these procedures also help teachers get the information they need in order to organize instruction is a question for future research.

Conclusion: The Challenges of Teaching in Adult Basic Education

Teaching is both a skill and an art that requires training and preparation. It appears from the concerns expressed by teachers in our sample that many do not feel they are adequately prepared to deal with the challenges of developing curriculum, organizing instruction, and assessing students' progress. The result is that teachers are often left on their own, either to teach via commercial workbooks or to figure out what and how to teach in a manner relevant to the unique needs of adult students. Teachers then use curriculum and instruction that are known and comfortable to them—traditionally, teachers teach as they have been taught—or they struggle to find ways to meet students' needs while also teaching basic skills.

Both individual and program factors affect how teachers meet this challenge. The program's established mission and curriculum, based on its views of the purpose of literacy, influence greatly teachers' approach curriculum development. If they are new to the field, it is natural, or even mandated, for teachers to use whatever the program or other teachers are using, and program directives play a major role in the curriculum teachers use. If, however, teachers are left to their own devices to establish curriculum, then the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of the teacher become important. Knowledge about students, while valued by the majority of adult basic educators, is an area about which teachers feel they are weakest. Given the fact that most teachers do not report significant similarities between themselves and students in culture and socioeconomic background, the need to learn about adult students and understand their lives in nonjudgmental ways is that much greater. However, given the lack of paid prep time provided to most part-time teachers, who form the majority of ABE teachers, and given the lack of training specifically related to finding out who adults students are— educationally and culturally—and to using this information to create curriculum specifically focused on those goals that students bring to the educational "table," it is not surprising that there is such a range of approaches to choosing and developing curriculum.

The data indicate that few teachers have had training in developing curriculum that integrates content and literacy practices that students care about with the skills that those students need. Without the structure and support for teachers to learn how to develop and implement such curriculum for groups of students, many teachers feel that instruction, almost by default, requires an individualized approach. Unless the program specifically organizes its curriculum development and instruction differently, teachers use

the workbooks that were given to them when they were hired, and such prepackaged curricula drive instruction. Although we can make no claim in this study about whether such curricula are better or worse in helping students acquire basic skills, the lack of training about how to develop curriculum certainly limits the options that teachers and programs have for using anything other than prepackaged curriculum. The extent to which individualized instruction based on workbook-driven curriculum can also teach other knowledge and skills—such as critical thinking, teamwork skills, problem-solving, and decision-making skills—that are essential to adults' roles as workers, parents, and community members, is a question of considerable controversy in our field, and beyond the scope of our study and our data. Yet, for those who believe that such skills are an important purpose of adult basic education and are best acquired through curriculum and instruction geared to adult students' needs for a broad range of skills, our data support the notion that many adult education teachers lack the training, time, structure, and support to create such curriculum and design accompanying assessment tools.

Open enrollment, unique to the ABE context, presents teachers with another set of challenges in organizing instruction. Dealing with entering and exiting students who are at different skill levels means that either teachers or programs must decide whether an individualized instruction or class structure is feasible, let alone optimal, for students. Finally, lack of informative and convenient assessment processes, even in the face of more stringent accountability, presents ABE teachers with the challenge of planning instruction based on students' entering skill level and goals and of gauging progress on the road to achieving those goals.

While the data indicate that all of the above factors influence how ABE teachers approach the challenges of developing curriculum, organizing instruction, and assessing progress, we do not have enough data to determine which of these factors is most important. Our study did determine, however, that all of these issues—lack of time, lack of skills, boundaries between teachers and students, program and state requirements, beliefs about their role, open enrollment, and class organization—are of concern to at least some of the teachers across the range of teachers in our sample, and they are therefore valid hypotheses for future research. Since our data indicate that most ABE teachers did not set out to enter a career teaching basic skills to adults, these challenges may take them by surprise, even if they have previous experience teaching in K–12 settings. We do not know the extent to which these challenges contribute to ABE teachers' attrition from the field, and further research should investigate the relationship, if any, between teacher turnover and the unique nature of teaching in adult basic education.

Together, these teaching challenges represent a set of concerns about the most effective ways of teaching in this field. They will not be solved through any single policy change or reform, but teachers could be helped to meet these challenges with more preparation and more access to colleagues and fellow teachers who grapple with the same

concerns. Especially for new teachers, even the simple act of talking to others who acknowledge that they face these same challenges and share these same concerns would go a long way toward helping many teachers feel they can approach teaching in a productive way.

CHAPTER THREE: TEACHERS AS PROGRAM MEMBERS

Teachers do not work in a vacuum; they are employed by programs that frame the work they do. Across the country, ABE teachers work in school-district ABE programs, community-based organizations, libraries, unions, community colleges, workplaces, homeless shelters, and correctional facilities. Programs have differing policies, levels of resources, philosophies, and cultures. They are located in a multitude of building types, provide different types of services to students, and are organized according to a range of structures. The information we gathered from teachers in our sample about their programs helped us to identify the most important program factors related to teacher change—paid prep time and benefits, collegiality (opportunities to meet and learn from other teachers in their programs), and teacher input into decision-making in the program.[19] In this report, we focus on the breadth of information teachers gave us about their programs and what that meant for them in their role as program members.

In this section, we present information about the following issues of concern to teachers, including:

- Variability in ABE program structure and design: facilities and resources, policies and organization, services offered to students, and mission or philosophy

- External factors that affect programs: accountability demands, lack of status or recognition, and political/social/economic factors

- The ladder of blame: how teachers and program directors explain their difficulties

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Summary of Findings: Teachers as Program Members

- Programs look very different from one another and vary widely in resources, policies, services, and mission, but the most striking difference is in facilities/resources and organization. Such differences in programs means that the support teachers receive from programs to do their jobs well varies considerably.

- Teachers care deeply about their programs and are strongly affected by the program, even when they are unaware of what is going on in the program.

- A range of external factors affects and limits how programs are structured and resourced. These factors put stress on teachers and programs as they provide services to students, resulting in teachers, programs, and states blaming those below and above them for the difficulties they face.

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[19] See Smith et al., *How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education* (2003) for more information about the program factors that influence teacher change.

Variability in Program Design

To better understand the kinds of programs in which teachers work, we collected information about the type, location, and size of their programs. This information is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: General Program Characteristics

(*n*=106)

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENTAGE
Category (type of program)	
Local Education Agency (LEA)	53%
Community-Based Organization (CBO)	27%
Corrections (jails or prisons)	7%
Workplace	4%
Library	3%
Homeless Shelter	2%
Community College	2%
Unions, Other	3%
Location	
Urban	52%
Suburban	27%
Rural	19%
Size (includes both full- and part-time paid staff)	
Fewer than 5 paid staff	11%
5–20 staff	60%
21–30 staff	9%
30+ staff	19%

The majority of programs were connected to school districts (because both Connecticut and Maine have predominantly LEA-based ABE programs). There was a significant difference across the three states (χ^2=17.55, *df*=4, *p*<.01, *n*=106) related to program type: LEA programs accounted for the majority (69%) of the 35 programs in Maine and the majority (65%) of the 37 programs in Connecticut, but only a minority (24%) of the 34 represented programs in Massachusetts. The majority of programs in Massachusetts within our sample were either CBOs (41%) or corrections/unions/libraries (35%).

Most programs in our sample were small-to-medium-sized, with between 5 and 20 paid staff members; size was not related to type of program.

We found that type of program is statistically significantly related to:

- **Proportion of full-time to part-time staff.** Twenty-four out of 103 teachers (23%) in our sample were full time (working 35+ hours per week in adult basic education). Half of these 24 full-time teachers were in programs that were "other" than an LEA or CBO (corrections, unions, libraries, workplaces, homeless shelters, community colleges). The percentage of part-time teachers in LEAs (school-based programs) was 91%, compared to 75% part time in community-based organizations. The difference between programs (LEA, community-based, "other non-LEA/CBO") in part-time/full-time staff ratio was statistically significant at $p<.001$ level ($\chi^2=17.77$, $df=2$, $n=103$).

- **Whether teachers receive benefits.** Of the 85 practitioners[20] in our sample for whom we have data about benefits, 48% receive one or more fringe benefits (medical coverage, vacation, life insurance, etc.) as part of their ABE jobs. Teachers who work in LEAs were much less likely to receive benefits, perhaps since so many taught part time.[21] Only 33% of teachers working in LEAs received benefits as part of their job, whereas 65% of teachers in community-based organizations and 68% of teachers in correctional facilities/unions/libraries/workplaces received benefits. A cross-tabs comparison of LEAs, CBOs, and "other" programs indicate this difference was statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level ($\chi^2=9.85$, $df=2$, $n=85$).

To find out what teachers thought of their programs, we listed 17 different aspects or features of programs and asked them to rate the strength of their own program on a scale of 1 to 6, with "1" being *very weak* and "6" being *very strong*. Table 8 presents the mean rating, across the whole sample, for each feature, and the features are ordered from strongest to weakest.

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[20] Seventy-eight of whom were still teaching at the time we asked this question; the other 7 were still working in the field or in their programs, but had nonteaching jobs (administration, counseling, staff development).

[21] Another reason that teachers working in LEAs didn't receive benefits might have been that such teachers were receiving benefits in their role as K–12 teachers in the school district; however, that is unlikely in this case, since only 10% of teachers in the whole sample said that they were still concurrently teaching in the K–12 system.

Table 8: Teachers' Perceptions About Their Programs' Strengths and Weaknesses

PROGRAM ASPECTS	*n*	MEAN RATING (OUT OF 6)
1. Support teachers to make class changes	96	4.98
2. Expertise of the director	95	4.64
3. Mission or philosophy of the program	97	4.64
4. Size of program	96	4.56
5. Support teachers to make program changes	96	4.52
6. Access to professional development	97	4.45
7. Support for teachers' professional development (*i.e., encouragement, paid time off*)	97	4.42
8. Amount or quality of support services offered to students (*either directly or through referral*)	95	4.41
9. Quality of leadership	96	4.34
10. Stability of their job	96	4.31
11. Process for ongoing program improvement	97	4.21
12. Program's involvement in the community	96	4.14
13. Stability of program funding	95	4.11
14. Opportunity to meet with/learn from other teachers	97	4.00
15. Quality of program facilities (*physical condition of building, situation of classrooms, etc.*)	97	3.98
16. Percentage of full-time to part-time professionals	95	3.49
17. Involvement of students in program decision-making	97	2.95

Overall, teachers perceived their programs to be strongest in supporting them to make changes in the classroom, in director's expertise, and in the mission or philosophy of the program. They perceived their programs to be weakest in quality of the facilities, percentage of full-time to part-time staff, and involving students in decision-making in the program. Providing opportunities for teachers to meet with and learn from other teachers as a program feature is ranked fairly low, when compared to other aspects; yet a rating of 4 out of 6 indicates a moderate level of opportunity overall.

The data from the whole sample survey and the subsample interviews indicate a strong pattern of differences among programs in four ways: (1) in facilities and resources, (2) in policies and structure, (3) in services offered to students, and (4) in mission and philosophy. These differences, which are sometimes quite striking, mean that teachers' experiences as employees and members of these programs were also strikingly different, even if teachers weren't always aware that not all programs were similar to their own.

Such differences among programs meant that the support teachers receive from their programs to do their jobs well varied considerably from program to program. We discuss the variation in programs below.

Differences in facilities and resources. The physical facilities and the resources available to teachers within the program were defining features of programs. In the questionnaire, we asked multiple questions to ascertain the quality of facilities and quantity of resources. Through the interviews and site visits with the 18 subsample teachers, we learned in greater depth about the range of facilities within which teachers work and how that affects their ability to do their jobs.

Table 9 below shows the numbers and percentages of teachers in our sample with access to resources or facilities that we had hypothesized as being supportive of student learning or of teachers being able to do their jobs better. The table shows the resources and facilities in order from most available to least available across the sample. Almost all teachers seem to have access to photocopiers and materials; far fewer teachers have access to their own classrooms or to resource centers within their programs. Program type—CBO, LEA, or "other" (corrections/unions/libraries)—was not related to available resources and facilities.

Table 9: Program Facilities and Resources Available to Teachers

FACILITY OR RESOURCE	*n*	AVAILABLE IN PROGRAM	
		NUMBER OF TEACHERS	PERCENT OF SAMPLE
1. Access to office machines (*phone, photocopier, FAX, etc.*)	97	90	93%
2. Adequate materials to use in the classroom (*photocopies, student texts, etc.*)	97	89	92%
3. Accessible entry to program and classrooms (*for disabled staff and students*)	97	86	89%
4. Adequate heating, cooling, and lighting	97	83	86%
5. Adequate-sized classrooms with appropriate furniture and acoustics	95	79	83%
6. Computer for teacher to use	97	78	80%
7. Computer for students to use	95	74	78%
8. Teacher's own desk or place to work and leave materials	97	69	71%
9. Access to the Internet	96	65	68%
10. Place for teachers to meet outside of class time	94	61	65%
11. Resource center for teachers inside the program	97	60	62%
12. Teacher's own classroom or space to teach and post materials	96	59	62%
13. Place for students to meet outside of class time (*lounge, work area*)	95	46	48%

Although we, as researchers, had taught in and/or visited dozens of programs during the course of our work in adult basic education, we were again surprised by the diverse range of facilities in which teachers worked and the available resources. While most programs did have adequate facilities, the low end of the range was startling. For example, one teacher we visited taught in a borrowed high school classroom. She was only allowed to use a small square of space on the blackboard, which she wrote in and erased multiple times during the class. Teachers who taught in borrowed space usually could not move chairs, display student work, or store materials. In another program, the teacher's class took place in the storage room of the local police station, and she had to push jackets aside to clear wall space so that she could hang newsprint on which to write, with ventilation so poor that students with allergies had difficulty breathing. Not having their own classroom in which to teach or leave materials was difficult for teachers:

> *Lack of physical space is often a problem—classes are sometimes held in hallways, lunch rooms, etc.*
>
> —GED/ASE teacher

> *I don't teach in my own classroom. I'd really love to. I'd love it if we had our own place, and I could set up things just so like a regular teacher, but I can't. I don't even have a copy machine that I can use. They lock the office at night. I have to buy my own copies at Staples. Anything that I use to teach, I bring in and I have to leave that classroom exactly the way it was when I leave. So I can't really move desks. I can't put a lot of things in the program because I'm going to have to take everything out again when I'm done. In addition, I always carry a big heavy bin that the other teachers make fun of me and call it my hazardous materials box. That's what it looks like. All of the homework and handouts I've given and the things that I planned to use. It's all in there. I carry it with me and that by itself is heavy to carry onto the third floor and then anything else I bring. I bring everything in, I take everything out. … We have to not have class when they have parent-teacher meetings in the evening. We have to not have class when they have a spaghetti supper.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *We didn't even have a space of our own until this year. You carried your stuff in crates and took whatever room was available for the evening … I think it just contributes to their [students'] feeling of being kind of second-class losers.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL program director

> *I'm going to write a book someday about the complaints the day (K–12) teachers make: 'the [adult education] teacher did not clean the chalk board, did not erase the board, used my chalk, stole my pen, ate my candy, ripped the pencil sharpener*

off the wall, broke all the chairs in the room' when there were only 3 students in the room that night. I spend a lot of time dealing with this. They hate it that we're in their space. They drape their desks with blankets and things so no one can touch their stuff and it's just uncomfortable.

—GED program director

If it's really crucial, we [colleagues] will go down to the closet [to meet]. That's where our stuff is stored and we'll go in there; and there's a table in there.

—GED teacher

Even where the facilities were designated only for the adult program, and teachers had specified desks and places to teach, there were often other problems: heating, cooling, or noise problems, or limited space. The lack of textbooks, particularly books students could take home; teaching materials, libraries, or resource rooms; equipment such as computers and overhead projectors; teaching supplies; and access to photocopy machines were other constraints frequently mentioned by the teachers in our study.

I would like to have more materials. We need a place for the materials that all of the teachers have created. We've tried to do that in the file, but it hasn't worked well. You should not have to be rewriting materials every year.

—ESOL teacher

Having old computers is one example. Not having enough books is another. I think it's lousy a student can't take a book home. Also I would like to have round tables instead of big square tables where it's hard to work. I would like to have music, nice background music. I would like to have a lot of color in the room. I would like to have more stuff available to work with, like a big cabinet full of anything I could imagine with paper, glue, brads. I could say, 'Let's try this idea—go get it.' I would love to have a library available.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I would love to take them [students] to a computer. I wish we could have a computer where I can teach them just little by little. I wish that there were more books that could help them.

—ABE program director

I asked on many occasions to get shelves for the correction education room. I finally just got them myself and installed them myself.

—GED/ASE teacher

[There's a] lack of resources in Spanish. Maybe if I have more materials,
Spanish materials, I would do better. Sometimes I can find materials but for kids.
Although in education my students are at the same level as kids, it's so hard to
teach them with kids' materials.

—Native-language-literacy teacher

On the other hand, we visited a very few programs that seemed to have appropriate (although not luxurious) facilities, designated desks for teachers, and a resource center for both students and teachers. Teachers in these programs often recognized and spoke of how lucky they were to have good facilities, knowing that they were the exception rather than the rule.

The programs of several of the teachers in the subsample almost seemed to be divided into two widely dissimilar types: the daytime program and the nighttime program. There was a marked difference between the programs offered during the day and those at night. Daytime programs often had more resources and more full-time teachers, and students attended for more hours (especially if it were a family literacy, welfare-to-work, correctional, or union-sponsored program). These programs also seemed to offer more support services (such as transportation, child care, etc.) to students. The nighttime classes offered through the program often looked very different. Greater numbers of students were served overall at night, and teachers often did not have their own classrooms or desks, teaching instead at the local high school, and the teachers—who were more often part time—were frequently paid less and received less support to participate in professional development. One teacher who works in both the day and night programs talked about the difference:

It makes a big difference because during the day it's my classroom and I have all
the resources I need there.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

One third of the teachers in the sample stated that the quality of the program's facilities was one of their three top concerns about working in the field of adult basic education. Overall, the data indicate that teachers were seriously concerned about poor program facilities and lack of resources and the effect of these conditions on students.

Differences in policies and structure. The key difference in policies and structure that affected teachers as program members seemed to be the role of the teacher in program decision-making. Although there were a few teachers who were not very involved in program matters and seemed to like it that way, the majority of teachers we interviewed wanted to be involved—at some level—in program matters outside of their classrooms. We asked teachers in the Wave Three questionnaire to rate how *appropriate*

they feel it is (1=*not at all appropriate*, to 6=*very appropriate*) for teachers to take part in program decisions and program-improvement activities, and teachers gave it a very high rating: a mean of 5.52 (*n*=99, *SD*=.68) out of 6. Out of 14 activities that we asked teachers to rate according to its appropriateness for teachers, being involved in program activities was rated number one (based on its having the highest mean). However, when we asked teachers to rate the extent to which they *actually do* take part in program decisions and improvement activities (1=*never do*, 6=*do daily*), the mean rating was much lower: 4.20 (*n*=98, *SD*=1.51) out of 6, which placed it tenth out of the 14 activities that teachers said they actually do.

In our interviews with subsample teachers, some talked about not wanting to feel like an isolated teacher but rather like a member of an organization. These teachers recognized that this helped them to feel better about the job they do and how well they serve students.

> *I think teachers have to have some sense of being involved in the program beyond just their classroom ... but I think that to be really good at what you do, you have to have a sense that you are invested in the program and the program's outcomes and other things the program is involved in. ... If you have a greater understanding of the program, you're going to do better by your students. It could be that there are teachers who come in and teach one class and because they're working lots of other places, that's really all they have time for. They might be very good as an ESOL teacher ... but I think there's more than just that, you're a good ESOL teacher. Knowing the students, knowing the community, knowing what [the program] is about, knowing what other programs are going on, so that you could be aware of what to tell your students when something comes up in the class that they're having an issue with. I think without the rest of that, it seems to me you're operating a little bit in a vacuum. ... I've been here for five years and I feel like I live here.*

—ESOL teacher

Perhaps the most important way that teachers feel involved in their programs is by stepping outside of their classroom and being involved in making change at the program level. In order to do that, however, teachers need to be able to influence the decisions that are made. At the very least, they need to have some mechanism or process by which to suggest new ideas. The ability to talk about new ideas or strategies that could be made at the program level can influence how well a teacher is able to do his or her job.

The extent to which teachers had formal opportunities to learn about, discuss, and influence aspects of their program varied greatly. We wanted to know whether programs in our sample had a process for program improvement as well as mechanisms to support teachers to participate in decision-making in the program. If programs did have such processes and mechanisms, we felt it was an indication that the program was not only

focused on developing over time, but had created a mechanism for including teachers in doing so. We asked teachers in the questionnaire whether their program chooses at least one issue each year on which to work toward program-wide improvement. In our sample (*n*=101), the majority (61%) of teachers indicated that their program does have an annual program-improvement issue, while 39% said their program does not choose an issue. This factor was not related to program type.

While most teachers did not talk in depth about their program's process for ongoing improvement, a few teachers in the sample did talk about the importance of teachers having a voice in this process, as expressed by this teacher:

> *The teacher should be involved in the planning for the year. … How are we going to spend money? Is there money available for extracurricular things? I never really understood if it was or not. We always had to ask and then wait and see if it would be okayed. Often it wasn't even verbal. It was written. You'd get an e-mail that said 'yeah, that's fine. You can do that.' … They [teachers] should work along with the students and the upper management to decide where the program's going and what is going to happen. First of all, it's for the students. That's the whole point. It's for the teaching and the learning of the students.*

> —ABE/ESOL teacher

We were interested in the extent to which teachers in our sample had a voice in decision-making. One avenue within which teachers can have a voice in decision-making is at regular staff meetings. We asked teachers in the first questionnaire whether their program had regular staff meetings that all program staff were required to attend, and, if so, how many staff meetings per year were held. In our sample, the vast majority (92%) of programs, across all program types, had at least one annual staff meeting that program staff were required to attend. The mean number of staff meetings per year was 15.5 (*n*=93, *SD*=17.3), with a median of 9, which means that at least half of the teachers reported that their program had 9 or fewer meetings per year (which, for programs that do not operate in the summer, is roughly equivalent to one meeting per month).

We also asked teachers how much they feel (on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1=*not at all*, and 6=*completely*) their director encourages them to have a voice in decision-making. The mean rating was 5.09 (*n*=105, *SD*=1.2) out of 6, indicating that they perceived a relatively high level of encouragement to participate in decision-making. We also asked them (using the same scale) how much they feel their voice was actually used in decision-making within the program. Teachers rated this slightly lower, with a mean of only 4.6 out of 6 (*n*=105, *SD*=1.4)

How much do teachers feel they should be involved in decision-making in the program? Teachers' role in decision-making was a major topic of discussion and emphasis for teachers. We found no teachers who felt they should not have any voice.

Newer teachers, however, tended to place the greatest priority on classroom teaching. In general, program culture very much shaped how teachers viewed their involvement. Where teacher involvement is the norm and expectation, teachers realize the importance of being involved. Where involvement is not expected (or, in some cases, not welcomed), teachers vary in their perception of its importance:

> *Teachers should be more involved than they are. They should have a choice as to curriculum and materials. They should be involved [in deciding program mission]. I don't think the final say should lie with them, but they should have a chance to give input. [But] I don't think they necessarily should be involved in budgets and personnel policies. I just think there'd be so many opinions. We have to have policies and otherwise you don't accomplish anything. I just think too many opinions don't get anywhere.*
>
> —Experienced ESOL teacher

> *I think you have program directors who should be aware of what the program is all about. If they want to find out, they can ask, but I'm not a strong advocate of running up there or running to everybody and saying, 'We ought to do this, we ought to do that.' They give me my mission and give me the means to achieve it and I'm satisfied. I may not agree with it [a specific decision], but I respect it. Go along, get along … that's me.*
>
> —Experienced GED teacher

On the one hand, teachers rated "support teachers to make program changes" relatively high, whereas "quality of leadership" and "process for ongoing program improvement" were less strong overall. Teachers felt that it was appropriate for them to be involved in program decision-making but they were not actually involved as much as they wanted to be. Among the subsample, we found a wide range of involvement by teachers in their programs, and those teachers who had more of a voice in program decision-making were vocal about their satisfaction with it, while many of those— particularly more experienced teachers—were frustrated that they didn't have more access to decision-making:

> *Teachers should have a very important role, a lot more than they do have. Program directors need to really listen and provide teachers with an environment that is positive for them as well as their learners.*
>
> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

> *Teachers and students are the program. They [administrators] won't like it, but teachers form the basis of the program. They have to be involved in the program. The teacher, for example, is the liaison between the students and the administration, about what the students' needs are. So the teacher better tell*

them. The administration doesn't know if there are students that have got transportation problems, or home problems that are interfering [with learning], and the teacher is the one that knows that. So they need to be involved on every level. I don't think teachers rule. I just think that the teachers should have some say.

—ESOL teacher

I haven't been heard, no, I have not been heard. It makes me feel that I am sort of an outsider, I guess. I'm pretty powerless.

—ESOL teacher

I think I always felt a frustration with not knowing where the program was headed. What's the goal here?

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Teachers clearly recognized the difference between having a real voice in program decision-making and simply having the promise of it. In these cases, teachers perceived that the program administration said it wanted input from teachers, but then did nothing to act on the input. The façade of input into decision-making was especially frustrating when teachers did not have "tangible supports" (such as prep time or paid organized meeting times for teachers and administrators):

[The director] is the decision-maker. At times she lets us think that we are, but we're not.

—ESOL teacher

I should say it [encouragement to make suggestions] is strong verbally. We don't have any money to do it, and we're not paid to do it, but we were always welcome to, absolutely, and encouraged to come up with any idea. But we had to do all the work to do it. I know programs where they're not encouraged to voice what they think. We always were. Absolutely about anything. But the mechanism isn't there. There's not a lot of feedback here. And that is a problem. The request is made or the observation is made and that's really the end of it, as far as I know.

—ESOL teacher

I was never clear why we even had staff meetings. To me, they didn't fit what was going on in the classroom. If I could have gotten involved.… I just never felt that it was talked about. It was never said, as a group, 'Why don't we work on this together?' There was never that push. It was more like, 'This is a need, but it's

an administrative problem, not a teacher problem.' We'd talk about [learner recruitment], how could we do that. And again, it never really happened. I'm not paid to do that. I'm not given the time to do that, but somebody should be doing that.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Another factor that prevented teachers from getting more involved or feeling part of the program was the program facilities. Physical proximity to other teachers helped to reduce isolation. Isolation was especially hard for teachers who taught mainly in "satellite" programs housed at ancillary sites (such as high schools, libraries, churches, or workplaces), where the classrooms in which these teachers taught were located, but the main ABE program office was located elsewhere:

I do feel more that I'm a member of a program since we moved to the new building. The program is all together. There's a different sense of my role as part of a program that I did not have previously.

—ESOL teacher

Teachers really aren't involved in the whole program. I walked in the school in the morning and I walked out in the afternoon, never seeing, sometimes, the administration.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

In addition, strong role delineation can sometimes prevent teachers from feeling that they have a role outside of the classroom:

Roles are quite specialized. Teachers don't get materials; the guidance counselor does this. Teachers don't get involved in students' personal lives, they refer them to the counselor. Teachers don't advocate; the director does this. The teachers' domain is in the classroom where they have complete autonomy.

—ESOL teacher

Without some voice in the program, teachers felt they had nowhere to turn if they wanted to suggest change. In cases where teachers did feel they had a voice in decision-making and involvement in the program, what made this so? Program processes or mechanisms for teachers to give input to administration seemed to be the key factor. Among the programs in our sample, there appeared to be two main mechanisms for teachers to give input about the program:

1. **Informal and individual input**, where teachers were encouraged to state their suggestions or complaints—either verbally or in writing—directly to the director or coordinator. Teachers had to take the initiative to approach their directors.

2. **Formal and group input**, where there were established processes, such as meetings, for teachers to make their ideas and input known. In some cases, but not always, teachers had the opportunity to speak with a collective voice.

In programs that relied on informal input from teachers, teachers made use of opportunities to run into and talk to their directors about needed changes. Teachers who had good relationships with their directors felt satisfied with the informality; other teachers were not comfortable approaching their directors on an individual basis to suggest changes:

> *[The director] manages by walking around. … She is the pivot point of the program.*
>
> —Vocational education teacher

> *[The director] is the kind of person who always tends to intimidate me.*
>
> —GED teacher

Programs that have formal processes for teacher input did not always include teachers in the final decision-making. In one program, teachers made their requests in writing to the program director, who brought the teacher suggestions to a staff meeting that teachers did not attend (only the executive director, program director, and guidance counselor did), where the issues were discussed:

> *I just sent a memo to them [the teachers] the other day and I said, 'If you have any interest in changing anything for the fall, submit something to me in writing,' and then I usually deal with it at a staff meeting and we talk about it and any creative ideas that teachers have. They're welcome to send them [suggestions] … and I bring it to the guidance staff and the facilitator and we make it a reality.*
>
> —LEA program director

In programs where formal and group mechanisms existed, there was greater likelihood that teachers met regularly and were expected to make decisions not just about "housekeeping" issues, but about substantial issues such as program design and hiring new staff. Of the 18 subsample teachers we interviewed, the five who worked in such programs were either part of community-based or family literacy programs. One of these programs made decisions by consensus. In these cases, teachers felt a sense of ownership and understanding of the program as a whole.

First of all, all of our decisions are made in staff meetings that include the whole staff. Whenever possible we get learner input. Part of our weekly routine is case conferencing. That's with myself and the two teachers talking about each family as needed so that we can troubleshoot together. ... I'm aware of all the parts of our program so I can communicate about other parts, if they [community members, prospective students] have a question for me.

—Family literacy program director

We have teacher staff meetings that are just teacher meetings and then we have staff meetings that are with the whole staff, which would be day and night teachers versus just day teacher or night teachers. We always have regular Monday meetings. But because we're such a small staff we're always talking and saying, 'hey, this is a problem I have, this worked really well, you want to use it,' and it goes on [on] a daily basis.

—ABE/preGED teacher

Teachers and program directors in programs with more formal and group mechanisms for staff input also recognized the cost of having many staff involved in, or having a real voice in, decision-making —it takes more time to make decisions:

The other thing that is really important for us is the sense of value of every teacher and every teacher's voice within the organization as a whole. I think we struggle with how collective to be. I think we had a time when we thought we could pull it off as a total collective and that's changing because to talk about the whole organization is a little too much; but on the other hand, I don't make, and no program administrator here would make, decisions about the program or the organization without consensus among the teachers. ... This commitment to collectivity around the organizational stuff has incredible bonuses in terms of people's buy-in and commitment to the organization and people feeling like they can honestly represent themselves and the program to the students and transmit how the students feel about the program. But on the other hand, sometimes we operate with a certain lack of ability internally to really prioritize so that if anything needs to go in staff meetings, teacher sharing is sometimes the first thing to go.

—Community-based program director

With the participatory decision-making also comes some confusion around job roles and who is responsible and accountable for what. Our program is so democratic, and we all have a voice, that sometimes it gets difficult to make decisions, and that contributes to blurry job descriptions. I think ultimately it gives people a good sense of ownership and it encourages initiative.

—Family literacy teacher

Teachers also talked about the impact of programs not giving them a voice in decision-making, specifically, the possibility that teachers will eventually leave the program:

> *We are the teachers. We teach the students … we don't have a right to say, 'OK, what if the budget goes this way?' What makes a program is everyone concerned, not the one or two persons to make decisions for others. Programs are going to have to start realizing how to keep their teachers. They want good teachers but yet they won't do anything to keep them.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

What types of program issues interested teachers? Certainly, teachers were interested in program policies that influenced students, such as those relating to curriculum. Some were also interested in financial aspects of program operations, and they clearly believed that teachers should have access to the budget figures.

> *I don't know what kind of monies are available. To me, that was always a problem. There's never enough money … teachers are just given this message, 'Oh, there's not enough money .' Well, tell me why there's not enough money. Let us know where the money is spent, how it's spent. Money is often something that can't be talked about and so teachers need to know how much money is available, where it goes, what they can plan on for the next year, what they could dream about. I think back on ideas that we as teachers had and wanted to do but never understood whether, or never had the support of staff to say, 'Yeah, go do that.' I'm thinking about field trips, monies that were available for us to spend on the students. I think there was a gap there as far as the teachers' understanding what can we do, what are we allowed to do, what's available for us. [It's] a power issue. People in the top positions, if it was revealed where the money was going, then they would also have to reveal how much they make and then, if you're making the most money in the program, what are you producing?*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *We'll get to see the budget next week. So there are some improvements, but it took so long for us to say, 'Hey! We want to be part of this .' Because I've been in the adult education program for eight years and this is the only year that I've seen a grant. Once the teacher does have the budget and understands where the money is coming from, how much is coming in, where it's going, there might be a better understanding about why their income is as low as it is. Teachers would, I think, have a better understanding of that, or maybe they could suggest where some of the money could go so their income could increase. I feel that there is a way that administrators could help ABE teachers get more money, even if it means letting go of something in the program, so that teachers could stay. But*

that's not what's happening . I understand that they're on a budget also, but there are still things that could happen. I'm not the only one who feels that way.

> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Some teachers also recognized the importance of involving students in programmatic decisions as well:

If the students aren't involved, how are we going to know what their needs are? If the teachers aren't involved, how are we going to know what their needs are? If teachers aren't involved, how are we going to know what the director is doing? I think it just makes sense that everybody is involved.

> —ABE/ESOL teacher

I think students learn self-confidence [as a result of having a greater voice in the classroom and in the program]. I think they learn that this is their program. I think it makes a difference when they're able to voice their opinions. They have made changes and seen the changes. They're proud of those changes. Their self-esteem really improves and increases. I think it makes a different learner perception, a different perspective in learning that they can carry through to their own children's learning or their own work in the workforce or in their own lives.

> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Overall, programs were very different from one another in how they involved teachers in decision-making. This was an area of significant concern to teachers: with few exceptions, they held the perception that teachers should be more involved in decision-making and that programs should have formal mechanisms by which teachers (and students) could voice their ideas and suggestions about improvement, resource allocation, and curriculum issues.

Differences in services offered to students. We collected information about the types of services programs in our sample provided to students, since we viewed this as an indicator of the program's breadth and of the emphasis programs place on meeting the entire range of students' needs. We asked teachers in the Wave One questionnaire to tell us whether particular services were made available (either directly through the program or through direct referral to another agency) to all, some, or no students in their programs. Whereas most programs in the sample did not provide job placement, day care, or transportation services to students, the majority provided educational and career counseling to all students, and personal counseling to all or at least some students, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Program Support Services for Students

(*n*=106)

PROGRAM SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED	TO *ALL* STUDENTS	TO *SOME* STUDENTS	NOT OFFERED
Educational Counseling	78%	18%	4%
Career Counseling	60%	31%	9%
Personal Counseling	38%	35%	27%
Job Placement	22%	23%	55%
Day Care	12%	29%	59%
Transportation	9%	20%	71%

A very few programs offer quite extraordinary support: in one union-sponsored program, for example, the union pays for college for the workers.

Another program feature we thought indicative of program breadth was intensity of educational services for students. We asked teachers whether there was any policy for the number of hours of instruction a student in their program was required to attend each week and, if so, how many hours were required. Of the 104 teachers in the sample who provided this information, 26 teachers reported that there was a policy for *all* students for required instructional hours; 31 teachers reported that there was such a policy for *some* students (such as welfare recipients); and 47 teachers reported that there was no policy about required hours per week in their program. Program type was not related to having a policy for required hours of instruction. Out of the 57 teachers who reported that there was a policy for some or all students, 51 teachers provided information about how many hours were required each week. The mean number of hours students were required to attend was 11.6 (*n*=51, *SD*=7.9), with a median of 8 hours (i.e., half of the teachers said that students were required to attend 8 or fewer hours per week).

In our interviews with teachers, intensity of services for students was not an issue that was frequently mentioned, although the program directors we talked to occasionally brought it up when discussing barriers they faced that made it more difficult to do a good job. For example, one director of a program with a maximum of 6 hours per week of classes for students told us:

> *I really think that we should switch to increasing the intensity of classes next year, which will exclude present students from attending and switch our emphasis to a more intense program because it's been proven that if the intensity increases, the students' choice to stay seems to increase too.*

> —Program Director

Although there were differences among programs in types of services to students, these differences did not seem to concern or affect teachers strongly.

Differences in mission or philosophy. Theoretically, any organization's mission or philosophy should be the driving force behind its structure, services, and activities. As such, differences in programs' missions should affect almost everything about teachers' work life. Teachers were clearly interested in program structure and mission: 41% rated it as one of their top three concerns about working in the field. Perhaps this is because the existence, clarity, and use of a mission statement varied dramatically among programs in our sample. On the one hand, there were teachers who never mentioned it as a facet of life in the program, or who said specifically that they didn't know what the program's mission was. On the other hand, there were those few teachers who knew the program's mission and talked about how it was consciously discussed and used to guide the program. The range was striking.

> *When we have to make decisions together about whether to apply for this money or whether to do something, the topic [the mission of the program] comes up a lot … it's not as though we're all assuming that we all think the same think about it. [The director] certainly makes her philosophy clear and she's sort of our guiding light and occasionally we disagree but rarely.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

> *I go in the classroom every day and I try to meet the needs of the students, where they're at right then. But as far as a goal of the program, I never really understood what the goal of the program was.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *I can't tell you what it [program philosophy] is. … We don't have program meetings in which we discuss these things.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

While there is strong correspondence between what teachers believe and what they think their programs believe about the purpose of literacy, the use of mission statements and philosophies by programs is less consistent, and many teachers do not know what their program's mission is. We would hypothesize that this is due to a combination of factors: teachers working predominantly part time and/or working out of satellite facilities (or out of the trunk of their car) and programs failing to provide avenues for teachers to be involved in program decisions.

External Factors That Affect Programs

Overall, the data indicate a wide range of program facilities, resources, structure, policies, student services, and use of mission/philosophy among the programs in our sample. The program features that seemed most to matter to teachers were facilities and resources, and policies and structure, particularly the level of teacher involvement in program decision-making.

Why would such differences among programs exist? There are the natural differences that exist due to differentials in resources, just as K–12 schools with different funding bases do not look alike. But what do teachers believe the explanation to be? Just as teachers need to be viewed within the context of their programs, programs also need to be viewed within the context of the ABE system of the state in which they operate. In talking to both teachers and program directors, we found multiple external reasons why programs look like they do, and why teachers don't always "get" what they want from their program. In the resource-poor field of adult basic education, there was a considerable amount of frustration that environmental conditions that would support teachers and programs to do the best job possible seemed out of reach. Below we discuss some of the "environmental conditions" that teachers (and program directors) felt affected the structure, services, and philosophy of ABE programs, specifically:

- Accountability and funding pressures
- Directives from the state or school district
- Lack of status or recognition
- Political, social, and economic factors

Accountability and funding pressures. The greatest pressure teachers and programs felt from funders and/or the state was to reach a large number of students. This required the program to spread limited resources thinly, affecting both students (fewer support services and hours of instruction) and teachers (limited pay, benefits, prep time, professional development release time):

> *We can understand why people are leaving the program, and we feel OK about that and will do as much as we can while people are there and after to support them. We often feel frustrated that we can't do more after they leave. But we don't feel like we failed, but we're not an open enrollment program, and for every learner that leaves, [it means] declining rates in regards to the [NRS] system. That is felt as a pressure. We struggle not to feel like we need to change ourselves in order to meet that.*
>
> —Community-based program director[22]

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[22] This program later lost much of its funding.

[The director] is very big into numbers, I guess because we have a grant. She will specify a certain amount [number of students] that the state expects us to accommodate in order to comply. I don't know about other programs, but I know that [our director] is big on numbers. I think this permeates from the state.

—ESOL teacher

We're involved in being part of the school system here. We're part of the leadership at the state. We're involved in a number of committees because we need to have [the program] positioned both internally plus statewide. Plus all the agencies that we deal with, we do a lot of collective programming that will help promote activities and opportunities for our students. So when you do all those things, what we really need is other staff.

—LEA program director

It would cost too much money to get day teachers into full-time jobs with benefits as those of K–12.

—LEA program director

Programs also felt pressured to apply for a multitude of grants, simply to piece together enough funding to offer services, resulting in program staff feeling fragmented and overwhelmed:

[The curriculum development grant] paid the rent to this place. ... Come hell or high water, we had to get that grant. That's the bottom line ... frustrat[ing] as hell, that's the way it goes; but we had fun. We got a lot of products out of it, and we put together a nifty mid-term report that said all the right things ... even though it wasn't what I wanted. So that's how these things go, unfortunately. It's a crazy field.

—Community-based program director

So I've really been finding that we really do have probably too many programs going on at once. Everybody expects us to do something with it [the grants].

—GED teacher

However, sometimes these special grants were also viewed as helpful to teachers who have been struggling with limited resources:

We for so long have been in a lifeboat, bailing water, so we were thrilled to get [the curriculum frameworks money] so we could step back and look at what we were doing.

—Community-based program director

Funding pressures and the "soft money" grant nature of most ABE funding also meant instability and staff turnover:

The program was always hampered because of lack of funds. Would we be cut next year because we wouldn't get the funding? So there was always this constant concern that we just don't have the money.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Last year, out of the thirteen, I think there were nine new staff.

—ESOL teacher

In addition to numbers, programs during the time period we studied (1999–2000) were beginning to feel the pressure to provide information about their performance, which added stress and time pressures to teachers' and program directors' jobs:

The pressure we are under, and it looks like it's going to be intensifying, is to have documentation that learners are moving from one level to another.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Directives from the state or school district. In many local education agencies (LEAs), directors themselves were constrained in their ability to implement change. Programmatic changes were often subject to the approval of the director of continuing education or the superintendent of schools. Often program directors expressed frustration over the extent to which their ability to adjust the program to the needs of students was limited by school-wide policies, and directives from the state limited the program's ability to determine its own long-term plans for development.

I'm not in a powerful position. I don't have the contact with the other people in the system, or I don't have the authority. … I sort of end up with the responsibility but not the authority.

—Program director

What has become our program goals for a year has been determined by what the new DOE initiatives were for that year. … As the world of adult education keeps changing, and the DOE's torrid pace of adding new expectations of programs, it's felt directly by administrators but it has its impact on program. Not that their [the state's] goals are bad but ideally program development goals should support teachers in doing their best work possible. Would we have chosen goals in the same order that they've given them to us? Not necessarily. You're getting a lot more money and there are high expectations that go with that. How does that contribute to the ability for tight internal coordination of programs? I think

that's the struggle. Back in the days when the administrator's job ... had a lot more time to support teachers, [but now] to really directly work with students in a way to support teachers, it's harder ... our teachers have had some increased pressure on fulfilling some of those counseling functions.

—Community-based program director

I've been with this program now for three and a half years, and it seems as though just about every year there's a new emphasis that we're required to do, or a paradigm shift. ... The grant has to be written with this framework in mind. I think we lose a lot of credibility when we say, 'This is really it,' and then a year later we say, 'Well, this year we're going to look at it differently.'

—Program director

Where competencies were mandated, teachers and programs felt restricted in accommodating students:

If I were a student and I were involved in a program where nobody did the homework, the state gave tests but it was only at the beginning and at the end of a semester and it didn't relate to what was being taught, and there were students coming in and out all the time and other people's attendance was spotty, and the standards were just not very high, and I had no say as to which class I attended— it was my performance on the placement test that decided where I went, and if I didn't like a certain teacher, or if I wanted to be somewhere else, I couldn't change. Sometimes we're more flexible, but we really go by that testing. I'd like the state to get out of testing and placing. I'd like that to be more curriculum-based and program-based.

—ESOL teacher

Good communication and relationships between the local coordinator and directors at the school-district level was important for programs, even when adult basic education was not high on the school district's priority:

One of the things that the [co]director says is that the feedback that he gets from the school board is that we always have good news. We're always getting a grant or doing interesting things. School board members are dealing on a weekly basis with the day-to-day doldrums of the day school and the problems. ... They don't have time to deal with us so we only go [to meetings] once a year.

—Family literacy program director

Lack of status or recognition of the adult basic education program. A few teachers talked about the overall marginal status accorded to adult basic education by the

larger education system and by the public in general, and how such an environment affected their programs, their feelings about themselves, and their work:

> *There's a perception out there that we are not real teachers. We're not as good or as certified and that hurts our image. Other ESOL teachers have told me that this attitude is out there.*
>
> <div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

> *We've been up against everything, from a principal in one of the schools who didn't want 'those people' in this school building. That was something that made me the angriest. ... I've worked with much more success with the school committee than I have with school administrators. ... The key players in the schools have not been that supportive. We're within the school system and our teachers are not treated like real teachers. And I'm not talking pay. It's a different way of respect. You might arrive at your classroom at night and find that someone has scheduled a concert there for 700 people when we've been having a class there for two years on Thursday nights. It shows that you're not considered real legitimate by someone. That happens a lot within the school system.*
>
> <div align="right">—LEA program director</div>

In one community, however, greater financial support to the ABE program may promise increased credibility:

> *They've [the city] now made it [the directorship] a full-time job, and [the city] has now got a lot more money that they're investing in the learning center. ... It's triple or quadruple what it had been before. ... Once you're paying for it, there's apt to be a lot more accountability, and that accountability may give credibility to what you do. ... And then you'd have more influence. When you're treated as a piece of fluff, it's very hard to get support. You need financial and physical support for these programs. We need buildings to have them in, we need books to have, and the more support of that kind you get, the more credible your situation is.*
>
> <div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

Political, social, and economic factors. Other factors that teachers and program directors identified as affecting their ability to do a good job included changes in welfare policy and the economy, as well as racism and ethnic discrimination.

> *It used to be that the class time was counted toward the [welfare work] requirement; now, it's not.*
>
> <div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

I think we work in a community and we live in a world where ... "the white man's ice" is colder. We need incredible strengths to draw upon. ... Even in finding things that are useful for developing teaching skills, there's the language barriers but there's also the way we conceptualize what is quality work. ... [P]eople [of color] have to travel to that world [dominant culture]. ... Two thirds of our program is in the native language [Spanish], and the level of available resources for professional development, program development, or curriculum development is not anywhere near what it is for ESOL or ABE in English.

—Community-based program director

The "Ladder of Blame"

The external factors that teachers (and program directors) reported as affecting their programs were both tangible (lack of money) and perceptual (lack of respect). One recurring theme of these interviews with teachers and directors that became apparent during the analysis was what we call "the ladder of blame." We noticed a pattern where responsibility for difficulties was assigned to the person above or below, and oftentimes to both. For example, teachers often blamed program directors for lack of support, and, as we heard above, program directors blamed the school district or the state for bad policies and overburdening requirements. In the same breath, program directors suggested that teachers were a barrier to new innovations, and teachers sometimes blamed students for their inability to progress or persist.

So they've [teachers] all had to do one [curriculum] in their classrooms, which they did for me last year, and it was like pulling teeth. The only thing that I feel I'm up against ... would be the teachers. The teachers themselves, in terms of any hindrance I have. [Teachers say] 'I can't do this' or 'This won't work.'

—Union program director

I think some learners give up once they realize how hard they have to work to make small accomplishments. If a student has not learned how to add and subtract, I can't teach them to multiply and divide, and they get bored with the same routine but have to learn it!

—Basic literacy teacher

These people [students] ... you have to handle them with kid gloves, they're not required to be there. When it starts to become difficult for them, unless they've got a vision that they're going to college, they just don't stay. They're so delicate. I'm not convinced myself that all of this training is going to get them a better job, particularly ABE students that are a long way from the GED.

—GED teacher

Although "blaming" is a natural human tendency and happens in most, if not all, organizations, we would hypothesize that it is stronger in situations where students, teachers, program directors, and states face mounting accountability pressure to perform at high standards with limited and, in some cases, diminishing resources. However, we did find examples of a shift from blaming to grappling with understanding the source of the problem. In these examples, the intention seemed to be less about finger pointing and more about finding solutions:

They [the students] are resistant to making themselves better. They're very happy with the status quo. They're resistant to anything. ... But I think it's because they're not getting programs that are suiting their needs. Whatever they [students] need in order to make it, is not being offered to them.

—ESOL teacher

If there's a battered woman and she's in this household, why isn't she making that change? I have a hard time understanding because I never experienced it. [I'm trying to learn not to] judge their situation and try to come to terms with their situation and go from there. There are times as a teacher, and I'm sure I'm not the only one, we feel that learners do not make a change because they don't want to. I feel this is not really the case. I feel that learners do want to change the situation but don't know how.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Conclusion: Teachers as Program Members

Teachers care deeply about their programs and are strongly affected by the program, even when they are unaware of events in the program. Overall, the data indicate that programs vary widely in resources, policies, structure, services, and mission, but the most striking difference is in facilities/resources, structure, and policies. A range of external factors affects and limits how programs are structured and resourced. These factors put stress on teachers and programs as they provide services to students; this results in teachers, programs, and states blaming those below and above them for the difficulties they face.

The variability in programs in our sample meant that teachers in our sample faced a range of workplace conditions. Teachers' concerns about facilities/resources and program structure (especially access to decision-making) present challenges to teachers as program members. Although such challenges are not unique to adult basic education, since there are undoubtedly K–12 schools that are poorly resourced and situated in substandard facilities, we were surprised by the resignation many teachers in our sample expressed about such limitations. We hypothesize that teachers cope with poor facilities and lack of resources because they understand (or have heard from other teachers and

directors) that the field in general is underfunded, and they acknowledge the external factors that programs face in maintaining stable and appropriate funding. However, it does take a toll on teachers and seemed to signal to some their second-class status within the educational system.

We saw programs with limited funding that were still able to create situations where teachers could meet, learn from each other, receive benefits, and have a voice. Oftentimes, teachers in these programs attributed such conditions in large part to their directors. If program directors do play a role in determining how programs are organized, and such organization affects teachers' ability to do their jobs well, then it would seem that program directors also need opportunities to learn from one another and to participate in professional development, particularly around what their role should or could be in supporting teachers. The teachers in our sample who had some involvement in program decisions generally were satisfied in knowing that they had opportunities to make suggestions; many teachers in our sample would have liked to have more of a voice in decision-making, especially around issues of curriculum. Other teachers would like to have more of a voice in making administrative and program improvement decisions.

The challenge of not being involved in program decision-making is also probably not unique to the ABE field; undoubtedly there are K–12 teachers who feel they have no voice or involvement in school improvement. The teachers in our study generally demonstrated a desire to play a larger role in charting the direction of the program, and were willing to help in making decisions about how to improve services to students. However, programs that had formal mechanisms that allow teachers to play a decision-making role were definitely in the minority. We hypothesize that perhaps teachers are more likely to voice their concern about lack of involvement in program decision-making than lack of resources because they realize that policies allowing them to make suggestions are less dependent on funding and more on the will of the director. While there were teachers in our sample who did not want more of a role in determining the structure or policies of their programs, we met almost no teachers who didn't have some suggestions for how services to students could be improved. Without a way for teachers to voice such suggestions, teachers either seemed to revert back to the only role given them—teaching in the classroom—or they continued to be frustrated by their lack of involvement. Since we did have programs in our sample that were managing to involve teachers in decision-making, and the teachers in these programs valued the importance of having a clear role as program members, we feel that further research should investigate what factors allow programs to have policies of teacher involvement. How is it that some programs can give teachers the opportunity to play a role as a program member, in addition to their role as a classroom teacher? Is it due to the full-time/part-time teacher ratio? Is it due to attitudes of leadership? Is it related to the program's mission? Do these programs have fewer hindering external factors? Further research into program design could help programs understand how to foster such involvement.

However, such research need not be formal. Teachers do informal research all the time as they meet teachers from other programs and discuss ideas for improving their work and services for students; in these conversations, teachers themselves discover how other programs operate and what program strategies they feel are successful in supporting teachers and students. Although programs may not be keen on the idea if they are uninterested in teachers' ideas for improvement, professional development and sharing opportunities that bring teachers from different programs together and give them time to discuss policies, structure, and mission will go far in helping ABE teachers contribute to continuing improvement in programs. That requires that programs and states fund teachers to go outside their programs and classrooms, which is the subject of the next section: teachers as members of the field of adult basic education.

CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHERS AS MEMBERS OF THE FIELD OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

In addition to their roles as classroom teachers and program members, teachers can play a role outside of their program. This role can encompass those things that teachers do to participate in the field of adult basic education, including:

- Providing professional development to ABE colleagues outside of their program, in any form: facilitating training, writing for newsletters, designing curriculum for the state

- Participating in professional associations, such as state ABE associations, by attending meetings or serving on advisory boards

- Working to promote adult basic education and funding for literacy services, including participating in advocacy activities (lobbying, writing letters) at the local and state level or assisting ABE policy groups

- Working outside of their program to meet adult students' needs, such as lobbying for changes in welfare, immigration, or fair housing laws, etc.

- Engaging in activities outside of their program to improve the working conditions of ABE practitioners, such as documenting the needs of ABE teachers or programs in the region or state

- Communicating with colleagues and ABE practitioners outside of their program, through listserv participation

       In this chapter, we provide an overview of the major themes emerging from our analysis of our sample teachers' characteristics and concerns as members of the field, including:

- Awareness that there is a "field" of adult basic education

- Beliefs about what their role should be as members of the field

- Actions and activities as members of the field

- Factors that affect teachers' participation in activities and advocacy outside of their program

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Summary of Findings: Teachers as Members of the Field of Adult Basic Education

- Most teachers did not play a role in the broader field of adult basic education; more than two thirds of the teachers in our sample had not participated in activities outside of their program in the previous twelve months.

- Teachers were either (1) not aware of the field, (2) aware but not inclined, prepared, supported, or even expected to take action in that arena, or (3) aware and active as members of the field.

- Most teachers in our sample fell into the first two categories.

- "Active" teachers tended to be those who:

  - Were neither very new nor very experienced in the field, and

  - Worked in programs where playing a role as a member of the field was encouraged and where there were mechanisms to support it (full- or part-time teachers given paid leave to engage in member-of-the-field activities).

- Working conditions in the field—few full-time jobs with dedicated time for teachers to play a role outside of their program—contributed to the relative lack of action by teachers as members of the field.

In the following sections, we discuss teachers' awareness of the field of adult basic education, their beliefs and actions as members of the field, and the factors that either supported them to play a significant role in this arena or hindered them from doing so.

Teachers' Awareness of the Field

We asked teachers about their actions related to adult basic education outside of their programs to see whether such activity was related to teacher change. We asked teachers in the whole sample (through the Wave One and Wave Three questionnaires) and in the subsample (through interview questions) about whether they provide professional development to others, promote adult basic education, advocate for students' needs, participate on listservs, and so on. We were taken aback to find teachers who did not have much knowledge or awareness of the field at all. About half of our subsample teachers were unaware of one or more aspects of the field: journals, resources on adult basic education available through the Internet, how the state systems of ABE delivery and professional development operate, or the existence of state or national organizations in adult basic education. A few teachers were completely unaware of any aspect of the field outside of their programs; as a result of participation in the professional development study, they came to know that there was such a field. Perhaps because we were connecting with teachers through a research study, many teachers in our sample

expressed the feeling that the simple existence of a national study signaled to them that their teaching in adult basic education was tied in to something larger that was worthy of research:

> *[I didn't know] that there are others who are investing in trying to improve adult education.*

> —ABE/literacy teacher

> *I didn't know we even had one [a field]. I mean, other than you're talking about getting CEUs.[23] I don't know anything about it.*

> —GED teacher

> *[Participating in this study showed me that] someone else was interested in it [what teachers do] … this professional development happening and we've got someone coming over from [another town] and we've got you coming up from Massachusetts and you're doing this huge study and it's going to take another year … all these things just made me feel like, 'This isn't just some dumb little program here in my town. This is a national thing that's going on. Why didn't I even know about this?' … I do know that when you start getting people involved, then it energizes you so that you start thinking bigger. I really think that's what happened with the staff development. It started to help me think that there's a bigger world out here and why are we sitting here doing the same thing all the time?*

> —ABE/ESOL teacher

Although our study did not investigate why ABE teachers often are unaware of the field outside their program, we hypothesize that, again, it is due to the largely part-time nature of teachers' jobs, the lack of access to professional development opportunities that take them out of their own program and introduce them to other teachers and practitioners in the state and nation, and the fragmented nature of the jobs of teachers who teach in satellite programs where teachers don't meet regularly, if ever, with others in their program.

Teachers' Actions as Members of the Field

Teachers who were active outside of their programs—and these teachers were a minority of our subsample—explained to us why they felt it important for teachers to be involved:

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[23] Continuing education credits, which some ABE teachers need in order to maintain their teaching certification.

a need to be connected, to have a sense of belonging to something larger than their own classroom, and/or to gain a broader perspective on their own practice and to develop their identities as professionals:

> *I've had so much experience that my focus now is ... where am I in reference to my entire field? Where is this going? What is the future? And if I could participate in that and see that I could bring that to where I am as a teacher. I want to get a better understanding and I want to influence it. ... I think that a good place for me to be would be in the development of that product [curriculum] because I've done it for so long. If you're teaching and there's no real curriculum, you have to be involved as a member of your field. How else are you going to learn about what to do? You can't isolate yourself. Because learning about your content area is from your students, but it's also from your field. It can't just be from your students, it's too isolating.*
>
> <div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

> *If I am actively involved in EFF [a national initiative], it will make me keep certain questions in the front of my mind so that I continue to try for those moments in my classroom where everybody is actively involved, because it's easier to fall back on doing it the other ways. So I want to be involved so that it will force me to continue to look for those opportunities.*
>
> <div align="right">—Family literacy/ESOL teacher</div>

> *The need is to allow the [students'] voice to be heard, and if the teachers need to be involved to allow that voice to be heard, great.*
>
> <div align="right">—ABE/ESOL teacher</div>

In what ways and to what extent were teachers in our sample involved as members of the field? Those teachers who did play a role as a member of the field largely did so through providing professional development to other teachers outside of their program, through advocating for adult basic education or students' needs, or through communicating via national listservs. The next section discusses these activities in more detail.

Providing professional development to others. We categorize providing professional development to others as an activity as a member of the field because teachers are helping their colleagues and, as such, contributing to the field. Unfortunately, we did not ask teachers to indicate whether the professional development they provided to others happened inside or outside of their program, so we do not know whether teachers were acting in their role as a program member or a member of the field. However, we present it here because we view providing professional development to others, even within the context of one's program, as a significant step toward becoming a leader in the field.

Approximately one third (35 out of 103) of teachers in the sample had, in the year prior to the study, provided some type of professional development to others. At the end of the study, 37 out of 99 (37%) reported they had provided professional development to others in the past 12 months.[24] Table 11 shows the particular types of professional development offered to others by these teachers.

Table 11: Types and Amount of Professional Development Provided to Others by Teachers

(*n*=37)*

TYPE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD) PROVIDED TO OTHERS	# OF TEACHERS WHO PROVIDED THIS TYPE OF PD	MEAN # OF THIS TYPE OF PD PROVIDED
Led or facilitated a workshop (either single or multiple session, either part of a conference or stand-alone)	24	1.54
Coached or advised fellow teachers as a formal mentor or peer coach	20	2.29
Led a curriculum-development project	12	.59
Facilitated a study circle or sharing group	11	.49
Wrote for an adult-literacy-related publication (newsletter, journal)	7	.39
Taught a college course/class	5	.19
Provided technical assistance to another ABE program	5	.33

*62 out of 99 (63% of total sample) who responded in Wave Three indicated that they provided no adult-literacy-related professional development to others in the past 12 months.

These data indicate that a minority of teachers from our sample were involved in providing professional development to others—either inside or outside of their program—and those who did were most likely to lead a workshop or to mentor or coach a fellow teacher. Relatively few teachers wrote for publications, taught college courses, or provided technical assistance outside of their programs.

Advocating for adult basic education or students' needs. Another measure of being active in the field of adult basic education is engaging in activities that promote adult basic education and funding for literacy services. These include advocacy activities (lobbying, writing letters) at the local and state level or assisting ABE policy groups, and activities that promote policies to meet adult students' needs, such as lobbying for changes in welfare, immigration, fair housing laws, and so on.

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[24] Since the numbers were similar for both Wave One and Wave Three, we present here the data collected in Wave Three only.

In the questionnaires and interviews, we asked teachers two questions:

- In the past 12 months, have you had the opportunity to take action on a local, state, or national level to **support students' needs** (e.g., working to get public transportation in the community, writing letters to lobby for changes in the welfare laws)?

- In the past 12 months, have you had the opportunity to take action on a local, state, or national level to **promote adult basic education** (e.g., talking to local representatives about space for an ABE program, going to a state house to speak about the need for increased funding, serving as a member of an adult-literacy-related policy group)?

If they answered "yes" to either question, we also asked them to tell us what they did in that capacity. While we did not clearly specify that we were asking about activities that were intended to benefit individuals or efforts *outside* of their immediate program, we were able to ascertain from teachers' open-ended responses whether the action was done primarily as a program member (e.g., "I asked the director whether we could provide transportation to the learning center for some of the students" or "I gave some of my students a ride home") or as a member of the field ("I called my state senator's office to ask him to vote for adult literacy funding"). Of the 99 teachers in our sample who responded to the question, 31 took some type of advocacy action: 11 took action in both areas (support student needs and promote adult basic education), 12 took action to promote adult basic education, and 8 took action to support students' needs. These findings indicate that a little less than one third of the teachers in our sample took action as a member of the field to advocate for adult basic education or students' needs.

Listserv participation. At the time of our study, there were relatively few national listservs related to adult basic education, but several related to instruction, curriculum, or policy did exist, and they provided opportunities for participating teachers to hear the questions and strategies discussed by teachers around the country as well as news about the latest developments in national research, policy, and advocacy. We asked teachers to indicate how many adult-literacy-related listservs on which they participated as both (a) a reader and (b) a writer. While we did not ask teachers to indicate whether these listservs were local, statewide, or national, we take this as an indication (for those teachers who have access to e-mail) of at least an interest in what is happening within their field.

Given the fast pace of technology growth over the past few years, these data may be dated by now, as these figures were collected between March and June 2000. At that time, 58% of our sample who answered this question indicated that they were not subscribed to an adult-literacy-related listserv. Another 27% indicated that they subscribed to two or fewer listservs. A full 87% of those who answered this question indicated that they had never written on or contributed to any adult-literacy-related listserv.

The data indicate that, at least as of 2000, a minority of teachers in our sample was participating in listservs. The reasons for this may be that the teachers did not know of the existence of listservs, did not have easy access to computers, or disliked listservs. It might also be the case that listservs relevant to teachers were not plentiful enough at that time.

Factors That Affect Teachers' Participation as Members of the Field

The first and defining factor related to participation as a member of the field was awareness that the field existed. Without that, teachers did not even know enough to make the choice of participating in that arena. Newer and more isolated teachers often seemed genuinely unaware of what we meant by "the field." The sheer lack of awareness about the field as a whole, however, leads us to conclude that state professional development systems and programs could do a better job of orienting new teachers to the field they are joining, even if they then conclude that the classroom will remain their first priority.

Beyond lack of awareness, there were two factors that emerged from our analysis that we believe prevent teachers from being more involved as members of the field. One was teachers' beliefs about the role they personally felt they should play, and the second was teachers' working conditions (particularly lack of access to a full-time job that paid them to be involved at that level):

> *Teachers that work only four hours a week, they don't even feel like they're members of the field. They feel like it's a part-time job, like they could be working at [a department store]. So the only people who really might consider themselves members of the field are the three full-time people we have, and maybe some of the daytime people, who volunteer to do more and go to conferences.*
>
> —Program Director

> *The problem I have with that [being active as a member of the field] is the amount of time that it takes to do those kinds of things in addition to my class work, and I think that with teaching we're writing curriculum all the time. So the amount of work that goes into doing that and the changes that you have to make also with open enrollment. For me to do additional work, I resent that on my time unless someone were going to compensate me for it.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

However, one program director mentioned that another factor could be the crossing of cultures that would be involved for teachers whose racial and social backgrounds are different from the majority of those who work in adult basic education, if they were to play a role in the field:

> *I think a hindrance for some of our teachers is a perception on their part that engagement with the field is engagement with a whole context that is really different from our community and the communities from where they're coming. 'It's not my community.' For a lot of our teachers, they're coming from here [the local Latino community]. This is their world. They're doing effective work within their world and the field is pretty far from their world. I think there are things that the field has to offer, and we need to continue to support people to navigate the field and take from it what's helpful and offer to it what's helpful. I've always had this mixed, ambivalent sense about the field, because I see myself primarily committed to the Latino community and secondarily committed to adult education. I think that's the thing we need to think about: finding good reasons for people to go and engage with it.*
>
> —CBO program director

The second main factor hindering teachers from being active as members of the field was their own beliefs about what was appropriate for them as teachers: it was beyond the scope of their role as teachers; they did not have paid time in their jobs to undertake such activities; they were uncomfortable playing an advocacy role; they had other activities in their lives outside of adult basic education in which they were involved; or an issue that could compel them to participate had not arisen. Often they felt that particular activities—such as providing professional development to others—were fine to do but that advocating for adult literacy or students' needs fell outside of the limits that they set for themselves as teachers.

> *No, I'm happy to be the frog in the pond. If a policy occurred to me that needed fixing, then I might change. But as of now, I haven't run across anything. So far I've had it pretty easy. I haven't had anything to react against. … If there was a big push … for the EDP program to be expanded [then] I would probably at least write a letter. But I'm not going to be a big flag raiser. It's not my style. … If you have the time and the inclination and the ability to write articles and give workshops, then that's wonderful. But if you don't, that's not bad. You're just a different person.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *I'm not so sure I really participate in the field all that much. It's very marginal. Am I missing something here or is something expected of me that's not happening? We all have lives. I think teachers are so overburdened with so many things. I don't know how we could find the time and energy to do some of*

this other stuff. …That's [activities outside the program] a lot of time for me. I'd like a better ESOL test but I'm not going to create it. It's fine with me if somebody else wanted to do it for me. … When I first started this job it was 2 1/2 hours four mornings a week, which was like 10 hours of teaching. Then it became 15 hours of teaching and now it's 15 plus the prep time, so we're up to 22 hours, so it's become much more teaching. It's not as much as a regular teacher, but it's still much more of a job that it was. I am fearful that I will be offered more hours next year and I don't want them. … There are people who wish they were full time and would be happy to be paid to do a lot of these things. Then there are other people who are either a little bit older or they are not so in need of the money; they have less interest in doing all this stuff; they just want to teach.

—ESOL teacher

The teachers in our program designed a new program for our GED students to meet their individual needs. The GED program is a concentrated 12-week set of classes. Students have a definite goal to accomplish it and then hope to move on in education or employment. No advocacy of the types described [promoting adult education and literacy students' needs or promoting the field] is needed.

—GED teacher

Newer teachers identified the classroom, rather than the field, as their main priority, or weren't sure even where to begin:

Right now I need to take care of myself and do the things I need to do to make me more effective, more confident, and I don't know where that's going to lead me. … Every day is a struggle. I don't have the energy for that [to be involved as a member of the field]. I think that the energy needs to be used here at my program.

—ABE/preGED teacher

I'm still new; I haven't plunged. One thing that's interesting to me since I'm new in the field is that I'm getting a picture of adult education in [the state] and figuring out who my colleagues are. … But that [advocating for students' needs] starts to get into some sort of slippery areas. The thing I enjoy most is the teaching.

—Family literacy teacher

I haven't paid a lot of attention to that type of involvement. I've been too focused on making sure that I'm ready in the classroom so that a lot of the structural stuff around me I'm still not really in tune with.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I think that maybe it's a good idea to be involved [in the field] but I wouldn't even know where to begin. I don't know enough about this to do anything.

—GED teacher

Whether the state in which teachers worked played a role is unclear. If the state had a professional development system organized in such a way that teachers were supported to train other teachers, they would have more opportunities to take action as members of the field. Or, if a state had a strong policy/advocacy system where teachers were supported or encouraged to be involved, they may become more involved at that level. However, because the number of active teachers in our sample was too small to draw statistically valid conclusions, these are only hypotheses about state factors that may play a role.

Conclusion: Who Teachers Are as Members of the Field

Being a member of the field was not the primary (or even secondary) role for most teachers, as less than one third of the teachers in our sample had participated in activities outside of their program in the previous twelve months. We found that the majority of teachers were either unaware of the field and what it comprised or were aware but were not inclined or prepared to participate in that arena. Teachers who were not aware of the field tended to be either new teachers or very part-time teachers who were teaching in programs that seemed to have a minimal connection to the field. A minority of teachers in our sample was active as members of the field. Active teachers tended to be those who had taught in the field for more than few years but not a significant number of years (i.e., were not new teachers or very experienced teachers), who believed that playing a role as a member of the field was the right thing for them as individual teachers, and who worked in programs where playing a role as a member of the field was encouraged and where there were mechanisms to support participation (full- or part-time teachers given paid leave to engage in member-of-the-field activities). Poor working conditions in the field—few full-time jobs that set aside time for teachers to play a role outside of their program—contributed to the relative lack of action by teachers as members of the field.

Why is it important for teachers to be involved as members of the field, other than to satisfy their individual desire to play that role? One reason is that teachers can contribute to the richness and growth of the field by being involved as colleagues outside of their programs. By teaching other teachers and sharing ideas in person, via listservs, and as part of policy and advocacy efforts, they add to the overall depth and breadth of the field. As those individuals who work most closely with students, the field's constituents, they can also help students make connections to the larger educational arena. One teacher eloquently provided another reason—a feeling that one is a

professional in the field—and she questions whether a feeling of being connected to the "bigger picture" has an impact on teacher turnover, which in turn may have an impact on student persistence:

> *This study made me aware of the work going on behind the scenes—this study and others that are trying to bring support and change to adult education. My students were no different. They need to find that support also to help them continue and do their best. It feels like you [as a teacher] don't really belong to the bigger picture. They're [the administration] very interested in your own classroom and you're interested in your students and that's what you work at momentarily. You're there for that class. But as a bigger picture, how does that then keep teachers there? I know there's a huge turnover with ABE teachers. I don't want that to happen. It's very upsetting to the students when a teacher leaves.*

> —ABE/ESOL teacher

Teachers' inactivity as members of the field, relative to their activity levels as classroom teachers, program members, and learners, is a net loss for the ABE effort as a whole, since some teachers have a great deal of commitment and energy to contribute. Teachers also report that both they and students have more to gain when they are involved.

In order for teachers to be more involved as members of the field, programs and states need to recognize that teachers need both information and support. Orientations for new teachers, whether at the program or state level, should include a brief introductory description of the ABE field so that teachers have some initial impression of what they are a part of. Policymakers should work to increase the number of full-time teaching jobs with time set aside for teachers to participate as professional developers, advocates, and professional colleagues outside of their program.

CHAPTER FIVE: LEARNING TO TEACH—THE PREPARATION OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS

No one becomes an effective teacher by just walking into a classroom. Teachers must learn how to teach, and thus, in order to do their jobs effectively, teachers *are* adult learners. In the field of adult basic education, unlike teacher preparation/education in K–12, teachers generally do not follow a standard path to get to the classroom, as we saw in the previous chapter. K–12 teachers typically get at least minimal post-graduate preparation in a formal setting (master's degree, licensure, or certification), and for the vast majority of these teachers, preparation for teaching requires some type of internship, student teaching, or observation practicum in an actual K–12 classroom. Therefore, learning to be a teacher in the K–12 system usually involves formal learning through a course of study planned by a college or university.

In this chapter, we present our analysis of the data about teachers' preparation (initial and ongoing) to teach adults, including:

- Amount of initial preparation to teach received by the teachers in our sample

- Teachers' desire for ongoing learning opportunities

- The types of opportunities teachers had to learn on their own, from colleagues and directors, and from formal professional development

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Summary of Findings: Learning to Teach

- Few teachers received formal preparation to teach adults, even if they were certified as K–12 teachers.

- Orientation and preservice training were inadequate for many of the new ABE teachers in our sample.

- Teachers preferred to learn through formal professional development, but most participated in traditional, one-shot workshops (which research says is least effective), even though half of the teachers would prefer to attend nontraditional models of professional development, such as practitioner research or mentor teaching groups.

- Teachers wanted to attend professional development that fits their learning style; is clearly structured and organized; makes them feel included, validated, and safe; and has opportunities for follow-up.

- Teachers' working conditions, especially isolation, part-time job structure, and limited opportunities for professional development, affected teachers as learners.

In the sections below, we present the data from our sample about how prepared teachers were to teach adults, how teachers said they wanted to learn to teach, and the types of opportunities they had for continued learning.

Initial Preparation to Teach

Many ABE teachers come from the ranks of K–12 teachers (Sabatini et al., 2000). This was true for our sample as well, where 65% of the teachers (*n*=99) had at one time taught in K–12. However, our study found that most of these teachers did not receive specific formal training in teaching adults. We asked teachers (*n*=106) to tell us the number of undergraduate- or graduate-level courses they had completed related to adult education, adult basic education, adult literacy, or ESOL. Slightly more than half of the teachers (53%) had not completed *any* courses in adult basic education; another 28% had completed one, two, or three courses. In other words, slightly more than 80% of the teachers in our sample had completed little to no formal education related to adult basic education, and only 20% of the sample had completed more than three courses.

If the majority of ABE teachers did not have formal training in teaching adults, did they at least have some nonformal preparation for teaching adults before they began teaching? While we did not include a question on the questionnaire about the amount of preservice professional development or orientation that teachers received, we learned from our interviews with subsample teachers that many did not receive much of an orientation at all. The lack of formal education for teaching adults was not compensated for by adequate orientation, training, or professional development either before or immediately after entering the field of adult basic education:

> *I was totally green when I went into it. I had no training in it [teaching] and I thought, 'Well, I probably shouldn't be doing what I'm doing because I have no training.' I have nothing to compare myself to. I know that [K–12] teachers have education. They have to. It's essential. I wouldn't want my children to be taught by people who weren't trained. Why would you expect adults to be taught by me, who doesn't have training?*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *I got very, very little training to teach adults at all. Basically, my supervisor interviewed me for a long time, gave me a stack of books that I was going to use, and said, 'Teach this.' I came home and looked at it ... basically, it was learn by the seat of my pants when I actually had students.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *When I was interviewed, I was hired on the spot. I was brought upstairs to the room I would be teaching in and I was shown this big cabinet. They opened up the cabinet and they said, 'Here are the materials.' That's it. That was my orientation.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *The first few weeks are chaotic. [I wanted] somebody to come in and maybe work with me for a day or a couple sessions and say, 'This is what needs to be done now.' Kind of just talk me through each step and get things rolling, [so] you knew where to look, you knew what to get … getting the answers to your questions.*
>
> —GED teacher

A few teachers in our subsample did receive more comprehensive orientation, either from their state literacy resource centers, their own programs, or a combination of both. Four of the eighteen teachers we interviewed described extensive orientation periods comprised of such activities as a week-long orientation for new teachers sponsored by the state, talking with and watching other teachers in their programs, visiting other sites, being paired up with an experienced teacher, and starting out with a light workload to have the time to learn the fundamentals of their jobs:

> *[I appreciated the] support always being there to answer questions and being shown where all the resources were, and having access to the center-based teacher in the program, being able to talk with her about the resources that she uses. I just felt very supported.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

> *We all do the hiring together and have looked at what does this person need, as an initial package, there's orientation. We do as much as possible to organize one-on-one training in the particular content area when someone's new, before they go into a classroom.*
>
> —Community-based program director

Thus, although the majority of ABE teachers in our sample received formal training and experience in teaching at the K–12 level, most did not receive specific formal or nonformal preparation related to teaching *adults* before they began teaching. One teacher expressed the concern that, without adequate preparation for teachers, services to students could suffer:

*Every year there is some percentage of new teachers, and they're starting at
ground zero, and if they don't have any pretraining and anyone giving them
materials, then it'll be a complete mess of a program.*

—ESOL teacher

Given the lack of formal preparation, it appears, then, very important that teachers
receive multiple opportunities for ongoing learning, both through professional
development offered by the state and opportunities to learn from colleagues and program
directors. The next section discusses teachers' opinions about how they would like to
participate in such ongoing opportunities to learn about teaching adults.

The Desire for Ongoing Learning Opportunities

Teachers had various reasons for wanting to learn more about how to be an effective
teacher, such as helping students learn, filling in the self-perceived gaps in knowledge
and skills, and getting a sense of personal satisfaction from being competent as a teacher.
These reasons were especially applicable for new teachers with no formal training in
teaching:

*I am a person that likes to learn, more and more. … I'm looking for things that
could help them [students] more. There's a lot that I don't know.*

—Native language literacy teacher

*I am an idealistic person and I see the value of adult education. I see its place in
society and that's why I really want to improve my skills and my education so,
ultimately, maybe I can improve my program.*

—ESOL teacher

*I wish I were more creative and so I am always looking for ways that I can do
that, and still be comfortable being the person I am. But also being willing to
take some risks, challenging myself to expand my concepts of what teaching math
is all about. Part of it [risk-taking] is what I speak of for my students and that is
confidence.*

—Math teacher and program director

Needing validation that they were doing a good job was a key theme that emerged
from the interviews. Without any initial internship or observation and feedback about
their teaching, these teachers were simply worried that they were doing the wrong thing,
which led to a strong motivation for them to attend professional development or talk to
other teachers. New teachers felt they needed to learn more about teaching so they could

get perspective about whether they were "on the right track," according to experts or more experienced teachers; this was also true for teachers without much formal education and for more experienced but isolated teachers who seldom received feedback about their teaching:

> *My biggest problem in life is I don't trust myself. I don't trust that I can actually do something … I wish I had that four-year degree. … I only have an associate's degree and who am I? I'm intimidated.*
>
> <div align="right">—ABE and ESOL teacher</div>

> *I've had trouble teaching them … using methods that are different from the way I learned in school and that's been a problem because I don't really want to teach them entirely the way I learned in school. I want to do it better.*
>
> <div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

> *I never feel confident in what I'm doing even though other people will say, 'Oh, she's a great teacher.' They've never seen me teach; no one's ever come in and watched. How do they know? … I still have a lack of confidence. I'm still not as confident in my teaching abilities as someone who's been in the field for years. I feel that I would really like to know what I'm doing in the classroom is good and is what I should be doing. That's why anything that helps me with methods, techniques, or ideas I can use at this stage in my career is what I need.*
>
> <div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

> *We're on our own. … There's no support. … Maybe that's why I gravitated towards mentoring. I was so desperate for some kind of feedback! Am I doing a good job?*
>
> <div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

For new teachers in particular, this need for validation sometimes was much more elemental, in that they wanted to know that, as teachers, they were not "doing harm." The main concern of such teachers was not whether they were doing well but whether they were actually hurting students, an indication of the lack of benchmarks and models for them. Looking back on her first few months, one teacher was relieved that:

> *[Students] are not too bored and I haven't killed anybody. I haven't done too much harm. I think I'm sometimes my own barrier … just because being new and … I don't know [what's] going to work. But I think I'm really getting over that because, what's the worst that happens? Nobody's bleeding on the floor.*
>
> <div align="right">—ABE/preGED teacher</div>

There was greater variation among experienced teachers in their openness to learning and their desire for ongoing learning opportunities. Some viewed learning about teaching as an essential aspect of being a good teacher; others seemed more "settled" or satisfied with their teaching and primarily interested in just refining their practice and gaining a few new ideas:

> *I'm quite content with my classroom role. ... I don't see any big challenges; I see small challenges every day ... [I seek] tricks and techniques, getting refined, polished.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *I'm very confident in what I do which is a terrible way to be because you can always learn. Every year, when they ask, 'what would you like [for professional development]?' I would like a sharing session with everyone in the vicinity. But then, people come to our program and we're the ones with the experience so we end up sharing our ideas and normally rejecting their ideas.*
>
> —GED teacher

What caused teachers to be settled? More years of experience teaching was one factor common to the teachers in our sample who expressed less desire to learn; teachers gained confidence over time as they taught, leading them to feel that what they did in the classroom did not need improvement.

> *I would say the method hasn't changed, but the luxury of more time with fewer students. ... So now when they talk about [new ways of teaching], sometimes I say, 'I've been there, done that.' I have a little bit more, and advancement for me is probably at the apex now. ... I'm in the twilight end of my career.*
>
> —GED teacher

Role and belief about the purpose of literacy seemed to be another common factor for "settled" teachers: there were several experienced GED teachers in our sample who viewed the primary purpose of instruction as helping students pass the GED test as quickly as possible, and these teachers did not express as strong a need to improve their practice:

> *Formally, we don't have a great deal [of professional development]. We deal with problems as they come up, usually at our request. ... We just deal with people as they come in off the street and take the pretest and come into our classroom and our job is to keep them interested long enough to get them to the test.*
>
> —GED teacher

However, eagerness to continue learning fluctuated over time, possibly related to teachers' commitment to adult basic education as a career. For example, in our first interview with a new ESOL teacher (Debbie[25]), she felt excited about the possibility of working in adult basic education as a career, and this increased her motivation to learn:

> *I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to say a lot about professional development because I really haven't gone to a lot of it. I am so relatively new and I haven't been taking this as my career until just recently. I just recently made up my mind about this. Just this past year I decided that maybe adult education is where I want to be going. I just had that realization recently and so I'm going to start treating it like a career.*
>
> —ESOL teacher (Debbie), Wave One interview

However, when we spoke with her for the last time 16 months later, she was considering leaving the field for a while and investigating another career, and she described how her enthusiasm to learn had waned:

> *A lot of teachers maybe have more assertiveness. They see the holes in their learning, they go after workshops, they go take classes. … I guess I'm a lot more passive. I just want to stagnate for a while.*
>
> —ESOL teacher (Debbie), Wave Three interview

In summary, we found that teachers overall had a desire to learn, but the extent of that desire varied, with new teachers needing more immediate feedback than more experienced teachers. Amount of experience in the field was one factor that contributed to motivation to learn, with new teachers expressing the strongest motivation to learn, although there were more experienced teachers in our sample with strong motivation, too. Other teachers, because of confidence in their teaching, appeared more "settled" and less interested in opportunities for ongoing learning. There are implications of this finding for professional developers and program administrators:

- Offer professional development and feedback about teaching to new teachers while the motivation to learn is strong.

- Offer topics and approaches to professional development that meet the needs of experienced teachers.

- Create learning environments in programs where teachers are expected and supported to continue to learn.

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[25] Not her real name. Where teachers are identified by name, pseudonyms are used to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

Since recertification systems often require teachers to attend a minimal number of professional development activities, we would expect, based on our findings, to see teachers in any given professional development activity in attendance more for the continuing education units (CEUs) than out of a burning desire to learn about the topic. However, if professional development systems and programs offered multiple activities on a range of topics, "settled" teachers would have more opportunities to find activities of interest to them. In the next section, we look at the types of learning activities teachers reported that they participated in, both inside their program (with colleagues and directors) and outside of their program in more formal professional development activities.

Opportunities for Ongoing Learning

Since our study focused primarily on professional development, we collected a good deal of data from teachers about the opportunities for learning that they seek, and those that already exist in their program and state. We also wanted to know what teachers thought about these opportunities—specifically, what helps them learn—in order to understand the "design" features of professional development that teachers prefer. We asked specific questions about the types of professional development in which they participated, the types they preferred (and why), and the ideal way or mechanism for them to learn. We also asked all teachers two open-ended questions: "How do you best learn to improve your teaching," and "Why do you think you learn best that way?"

Teachers in our sample were very clear, direct, and reflective about how they preferred to learn and what helped them to learn to improve their teaching. We discovered that there was great variation in how well their preferences and needs were met—from extremely limited options for training and contact with colleagues, to a rich and continuous diet of learning opportunities both inside and outside of the program. The pattern that emerged from the data was that teachers make use of three avenues or opportunities for ongoing learning:

Teachers' preferences for ideal ways to learn to improve their teaching* (*n*=87)

- **53%** said they would prefer to attend formal professional development activities (workshops, peer coaching, practitioner research, conferences, study circles)

- **41%** would prefer to meet regularly with other teachers *outside* of their program to share ideas and materials on particular topics

- **35%** would prefer to meet regularly with other teachers *inside* their program to share ideas and materials on particular topics

- **30%** would prefer to work on a project (e.g., curriculum development, etc.) with other teachers in a group in their program

- **21%** would prefer to work with/learn from/be coached or mentored by an experienced practitioner or professional developer who comes to their program to provide technical assistance (to the teacher alone or to the teacher and other teachers)

- **13%** would prefer to work individually with another teacher in their own program

*Percentages add up to more than 100% since teachers were asked to select two ideal ways.

1. Learning on their own: through self-study, from students, or from their own experience.

2. Learning informally from colleagues (inside and outside of the program) and directors.

3. Learning formally through professional development activities.

Of these three, teachers' first preference was to learn from formal professional development activities. We gave teachers a list of "organized mechanisms"—ways for learning how to improve teaching and practice—and asked them to choose the *two* most ideal ways for them to learn (see box on previous page). These data indicate that, even when alternative options for learning are presented, formal professional development activities are most preferred, with slightly more than half the sample selecting them as one of their two ideal ways to learn. However, it also shows that teachers' preferences are not solely for formal professional development, since three of the other options were also chosen by one third or more of the sample. However, there was no overwhelming "second" choice, and no clear preference for learning from colleagues inside or outside of the program. Rather, teachers preferred a range of modes for learning in and out of the program.

What also emerged is that several interrelated factors unique to the ABE field— specifically, the part-time nature of teaching jobs, the isolation that plagues teachers in this field, and the limited access to professional development—affected how well some teachers were able to take advantage of these opportunities for learning. Programs played a big role in providing opportunities for teachers to learn from their colleagues and directors, and states played a role in providing opportunities for teachers to learn from formal professional development. In situations where neither program nor state were able to offer the types or amount of opportunities that motivated teachers needed and desired, individual teachers were left to learn mostly from their own experience, a difficult proposition at best.

In the sections below, we describe teachers' attitudes toward these three avenues for ongoing learning—learning on their own, learning informally from colleagues and directors, and learning from formal professional development—as well as the extent of their participation in each of these.

Learning on their own: To learn on one's own requires gathering information and knowledge from a range of sources, then processing and utilizing that information using analytical skills. These sources include written publications (either paper or electronic), one's students, and one's own experience. In the questionnaires, we asked

teachers at two separate points in time[26] to tell us how many hours in the previous 12-month period they had spent reading adult-literacy-related materials on their own. The mean number of hours across all teachers in the sample was 33 hours per year in Wave One (n=98, SD=73.6) and 44.3 hours per year in Wave Three (n=79, SD=98.1), with, as seen by the standard deviation figures, wide variation among teachers in number of hours of individual reading they did. The first time we asked this question, almost one in five teachers reported that they spent no hours reading materials related to their adult literacy work, as seen Table 12 below.

Table 12: Number of Hours Teachers Read on their Own

NUMBER OF HOURS PER YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS (WAVE ONE, N=98)	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS (WAVE THREE, N=79)
0	19%	9%
1–10 hours	20%	25%
11–20 hours	22%	19%
21–40 hours	16%	24%
More than 40 hours	21%	23%

According to teachers' own estimates, approximately 50–60% of them read adult-literacy-related materials less than 20 hours a year, the equivalent of less than half an hour a week. Only a few teachers told us that reading was a primary way of learning, either because they were especially hungry for information, because they preferred to access information through reading, or because they felt that other, perhaps better ways to get information were not open to them, such as learning from other teachers:

> *I read whenever I can. Anything on any subject. Right now, I'm reading everything I can get my hands on about family literacy.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *I read the "GED Item." It's amazing to find somebody in Ohio is doing exactly what I'm doing or they're doing something different and I try it and it works. Reading is the key.*
>
> —GED teacher

Type of adult-literacy-related materials teachers say they read most on their own (n=83)

- 31 said they most often read teacher- or student-produced curricula or teaching ideas
- 27 said they most often read adult learning theory or research
- 25 said they most often read commercially produced curricula or teaching ideas

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[26] At Wave One, before beginning the professional development and at Wave Three, one year after completing the professional development.

I think learning from teachers would be maybe more valuable [than learning from experts], except there again we're coming and we're going and we don't have a whole lot of time to see each other. It's "catch as catch can." So it is easier to learn from experts because … I can read on my own.

—ESOL teacher

In the final questionnaire (Wave Three), we also asked all teachers the one type of adult-literacy-related material they *most often* read, giving them three general choices (see box on previous page). No one type of material was read substantially more frequently than others.

However, in our interviews with subsample teachers, we did not hear teachers talk (except in passing) about reading research or theoretical articles, even though they felt it was a good idea, nor did they report reading such types of articles regularly as part of the professional development they attended:

I don't subscribe to anything. I'd like to but I haven't yet, and I don't feel like I have the time to go to libraries, and so I don't do that either. When I'm looking for something new, I go to the resource library in my program. If I have some time, I look through the books that are there, and I talk to one of the teachers. There's usually someone there because classes go on in that building. But these are resources that teachers use. These aren't articles about teaching. So articles about teaching I use almost none. I hate to admit it but I don't.

—ESOL teacher

We walked out of there [the first session of the professional development] that first week with readings, I mean, readings!

—GED teacher

Eighty percent of the teachers in the sample said they had access to a computer within their program, and 68% said they had access to the Internet in their program. However, we did not specifically ask teachers whether and how often they used the Internet for learning on their own. Of the 18 teachers in our subsample, only a couple talked about using the Internet to access information about teaching, finding it a valuable way to learn and get new teaching ideas:

I do get on the Internet. I basically go to the ESL Café, which is just a gold mine of links, and through that Web site I get into all kinds of ideas. There is a discussion board, there are lesson plans. There are things there for students as well as teachers, and I do spend time with that. I have just recently met somebody who teaches out in the Midwest who created a program for teaching conversation-related grammar that I really like. I read about it on the Internet

and I ordered it just to look at it. Turned out that I liked it and we were able to confer back and forth over the Internet through email about this program, and I gave him suggestions and feedback, and he gave me suggestions on how to use it and we're kind of collaborating that way. It's been interesting and I plan to do more of that.

—ESOL teacher

Another source of information for learning about teaching was students themselves. By listening to students, a few teachers deliberately used information about how students best like to learn and what they want to see in the classroom:

Learners are the best sources for creating changes in the classroom. I cannot teach if it is not related to in-depth conversations with learners.

—ESOL teacher

There is that degree to which, when you're just together with other teachers you do have a lot of perspectives but you don't have the really important ones, which are the ones of your students right there and so those to me are really valuable. I learned the most from my students. They teach me much more about how to teach than the teachers teach me how to teach.

—Family literacy teacher

I best learn to improve my teaching from issues/questions that arise in the classroom. I tend to rely on learner responses, direct and indirect feedback. I make changes when it is clear to me something isn't useful or helpful. The classroom is where theory is put to test. When something isn't working, it's uncomfortable—this discomfort is a strong motivation to change.

—ESOL teacher

The most common source of information teachers used in learning was their own experience. Just trying to "figure it out" on their own seemed to be how most teachers learned about their trade. When we asked teachers across our entire sample how they best learn to improve their teaching, the most common response was "I learn by trial and error." Some teachers viewed this "trial-and-error" approach to learning as a practical way to experiment and test new ideas to see what worked. Other teachers did not view it as positively; for them, there were no other ways for them to learn other than to "sink or swim":

In adult education, trial and error is a necessary part of learning how to teach adult learners. When I think back on the days that I used to teach high school, I do not remember feeling that I had the luxury or latitude to try different things.

With adult learners, I feel it is a successful approach and not one that I see as exclusive to my own teaching style.

—GED/ASE teacher

I'll admit it [starting out as a new teacher] wasn't easy. It was all making mistakes and learning from mistakes, familiarizing myself with all the books and materials that we use, familiarizing myself with the curriculum, getting to know the policies and the testing. I was thrown into it [teaching ESOL]. I taught English before and teaching English as a second language is a completely different subject so you learn by doing.

—ESOL teacher

By definition, "trial and error" entails making mistakes. Teachers often feel pressure to be experts, but many ABE teachers' lack of training and preparation before they begin teaching adults makes this difficult. Several teachers spoke of the difficulties they had with making mistakes in front of students and colleagues, and how they learned to transform a "mistake" into a learning opportunity for themselves and students:

We are teaching basic things that all of us need to know, and if I am seen as vulnerable [when I make mistakes], then they [students] too, can be vulnerable. It's also very, very difficult for students to try something they've never tried before ... and they resist it. To get beyond that resistance is sometimes really hard. There's a lot of fear in learning something new ... [but] I want them to feel comfortable that we can all make mistakes. When you laugh about it then it just dissipates any feeling of being dumb or stupid.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I get self-conscious when I make a mistake with math but I think that's because it hits close to home. I'm not that confident with it. But other mistakes don't make a big difference.

—GED teacher

Learning from one's own experience requires teachers to take information about what worked and what didn't in their classroom and process and analyze it, based on their ideas about good teaching practices, in order to determine what to do differently the next time. Teachers talked about how reflecting and learning from experience was not easy to do on their own, and some teachers strategized how to maximize their learning, even if they didn't always carry out such strategies:

You have to think about all the feedback that you get. You have to think about what seems effective for them [students]. You have to be reflective. You have to

try to analyze every day, every lesson as much as you can and try to figure out what worked. It's a continual process. When I find myself confused, sometimes I can pick up and sometimes I can't. ... The problem with personal experience ... you do learn a lot that way, but you really need other points of view because you can get stuck in your own point of view, and it's hard to see yourself.

—GED teacher

Whenever I teach a class I immediately think, 'When can I teach this class again and do it better?'

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

[I want to develop] this skill of being able to see one's practice and learn from it, to get outside myself and see what kind of impression I'm having.

—Family literacy teacher

Learning on their own did not seem to be an easy method for most teachers. Lack of time and skill made this the least attractive and most difficult opportunity for learning how to teach. Although a few teachers seemed well suited to this avenue of learning, our overall impression was that most teachers preferred to learn through formal professional development or from informal contact with colleagues and directors, as we will see in the sections below.

Learning informally from colleagues (either inside or outside of the program) and from directors. Another avenue for ongoing learning is from one's colleagues and director.[27] Research in K–12 identifies collegiality as an important feature of teacher learning and support (Gardner, 1996). Fellow teachers are a valuable source of information and ideas, if there are mechanisms allowing for sharing. "Hallway" conversations between teachers provided a way for teachers in our sample to get immediate input or feedback; in some programs, sharing meetings also allowed teachers to get information from others:

The best professional development is the meetings that our director has once a month, where we meet right here with each other. We're dealing with the same people. So we could compare notes on a specific student's problems and give that student more help. We're dealing with how better to deliver other services within the same framework. So my favorite professional development is the staff meeting.

—GED teacher

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[27] The term "director" can be confusing within the ABE field, where some programs are multisite organizations with an executive director at a main site whom teachers never meet. In this study, when we use the term "director," we are referring to the person who is directly responsible for supervising and supporting the teacher, whether the teacher refers to this person as a "director" or "coordinator."

The spontaneous teacher sharing is what I find to be the richest thing. You're going through the hallway and somebody says, 'I just did this in a class and it worked great,' and I say, 'Oh, give me a copy and let me try it.'

—ESOL teacher

Why do teachers want to learn from colleagues? Teachers reported that learning from colleagues helped them feel that they were not alone in their experiences, perspectives, and struggles as teachers. Teachers also gained practical ideas, teaching techniques, and ways to solve problems by sharing with other teachers:

Being engaged with the teachers is very, very vital to your sense of yourself in the field. The more outside things you do, outside meetings away from the classroom that you're in, it brings you into what's going on in the world out there, what other people are doing, the things that aren't working for them. You can feel isolated and can feel that everyone else is doing things so well. Sometimes it's good to know that we're all struggling with this. I think it's pretty hard to operate in a vacuum. You can feel isolated and you don't have a chance to find solutions to what you do, to do things better or to figure out what's not working. Even just sharing that nobody can find the answer but you're not the only one who has that problem. … The creativity of different people to come up with different ways of doing something [is what I like] and it's not something that's in a textbook; it's not something that's been published.

—ESOL teacher

Isolation is difficult and gets in the way of me learning. I need to be stimulated and I need the ideas of other people. I would give anything for us to be together and share.

—ESOL teacher

If I learned nothing else [from the training], I learned that every teacher teaches differently. It makes me feel I want to know more.

—GED teacher

Teachers held different ideas about the types of colleagues from whom they felt they could best learn. We found at least three types of collegiality: **unselective**, **selective by expertise,** and **selective by role.** Teachers who were "unselective" about collegiality valued learning from a cross-section of teachers who taught different subjects, in different types or programs, and with differing philosophies and approaches to teaching. The simple fact that the other individuals were teachers was enough:

Anyone who teaches is likely to have an idea. It is always possible that it's one that you can use.

—ABE/GED teacher

You know that when another teacher tells you something, they have been interacting with students and they have a basis for what they're saying. It's a real trust that goes beyond an intellectual, 'Ok, you're very smart. Your theories are very good.' That person teaches, she's really done it.

—GED teacher

Teachers who wanted to select colleagues "by expertise" wanted to learn from other teachers whom they considered to be experts:

When standards are set high and I have a question as to how to best proceed, technical help from someone who is proficient, not necessarily just experienced, is helpful. ...I need help from people who are good at that topic, not just people who have been teaching a long time.

—GED/ASE teacher

Other teachers placed a premium on learning from colleagues who held the same role, or taught the same subject area or the same population of students. So, for example, there were ESOL teachers who most wanted to learn from other ESOL teachers, and GED teachers who most wanted to learn from other GED teachers. We called this type of preference for collegiality "selective by role."

I find that ESOL students have very different needs. At least most of the students that I've had have very different needs from the students who go to ABE or GED classes. And yet they're all kind of lumped together under this adult education umbrella and sometimes it's frustrating not to be considered a separate field. Yes, they do have some of the same needs but, for example, most of my students are not on welfare. ... Maybe we need our own ESOL conference, our own ESOL workshop. Having our own conference, our own workshops might be a good thing, instead of lumping it all together under adult continuing education.

—ESOL teacher

I would love to get together with a bunch of GED people and share ideas, share concepts and maybe that's what we do when we go to the conferences. We just have to pick the ones where it would apply. But there [are] so many things that just don't apply.

—GED teacher

The desire for collegiality "by role" is more often expressed as a desire for formal professional development opportunities rather than informal contact with other teachers, perhaps due to the nature of fragmented or small programs, as this teacher points out:

One of the things I miss from when I taught high school was I met and spoke every day with other people who taught math. I'm the only math person in this program. So there isn't anybody I can really have a good conversation about math issues with unless I go to a professional development that other math people are there. That would be another way that I feel isolated.

—ASE math teacher/program director

Teachers who enjoyed a lot of interaction with colleagues within their programs, as well as those who were more isolated, recognized the importance of interaction in better supporting students:

There should be more meetings between teachers in the program so that we all have more of a sense of what's going on in each other's classrooms, so that we have more continuity between the classes. We could generate ideas from each other for things that we can do. I see that as a lack in my program.

—ESOL teacher

Staff need to be supportive of each other, and in the situation I was in last year, it was lacking. If they're supportive of each other, it'll help the students support each other. Also if the staff are in agreement, it's easier to have the program run smoothly. The main thing, which is part of feeling safe, is knowing that people are going to help them [students] through.

—GED teacher

If collegiality is important to teachers' learning—and ultimately, to students' learning—how much was it happening within our sample? We wanted to gauge interaction not only between teachers within a program, but also interaction between teachers across different programs. In order to find out just how much interaction the teachers in our sample had with colleagues, we asked teachers in the questionnaire in each wave how often, in the past 12 months, they had interacted with colleagues in the following ways:

- Number of adult literacy education, ESOL, or GED classes in last year cotaught?

- Number of curricula in last year developed jointly with another teacher or team of teachers?

- Number of times per month shared ideas with or sought advice from staff in your program?

- Number of times per month shared ideas with or sought advice from staff in another program?

- Number of times per month shared ideas with or sought advice from professional development or technical assistance professional?

In Table 13 below, we report the means and frequencies reported by teachers in our sample in the Wave One questionnaire.[28]

Table 13: Interactions with Colleagues, by Event

INTERACTIONS WITH COLLEAGUES	n	MEAN	SD	% FREQUENCY
Times per month you shared ideas with or sought advice from staff **in your program**?	102	5.84	6.3	7% never did; 68% less than 4 times per month
Times per month you shared ideas with or sought advice from staff **in another program**?	102	2.33	4.1	31% never did; 25% once a month
Times per month you shared ideas with or sought advice from **professional development or technical assistance professional**?	102	1.52	3.19	49% never did; 21% once a month
Times per year **curricula developed jointly** with another teacher or team of teachers?	101	1.52	7.0	52% never did; 31% once a year
Times per year adult literacy education, ESOL, or GED classes **cotaught**?	101	3.84	12.19*	67% never did; 12% once a year

*Note: This mean is misleading because six teachers reported coteaching between 20 and 72 times in the past year.

As one might guess, teachers more often interacted with other teachers in their own program than with teachers in other programs. In turn, they shared ideas more often with teachers in other programs than they did with professional development leaders or staff. Coteaching was rare; two thirds of the sample did not do it once over a 12-month period (although a very few teachers did it regularly). About half of the teachers did not engage at all in curriculum development with other teachers.

We also asked teachers in our sample whether their program had regular staff meetings that teachers were required to attend. Across the whole sample, while the majority of programs (71%) had *monthly* staff meetings, other programs met together as a whole staff much less frequently, and these meetings were primarily administrative:

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[28] Because the means and frequencies did not vary much at all for the same questions across all three waves, we report Wave One since the largest number of teachers responded in that wave.

> *We have a beginning [of] August meeting that just goes over the housekeeping details and the paperwork that will be involved.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

We asked teachers how many times a year the teachers in their programs attend meetings where the focus is professional development or sharing ideas about instruction (i.e., where teachers talk about teaching and not about parking policies or paperwork). The mean number of such "sharing" meetings was 6.4 (n=97, SD=9.9). Ten percent reported that it never happened in their program, another 11% reported that it happened once a year. The median number of sharing meetings was three (in other words, half of the teachers reported three or fewer such meetings annually; the other half reported more than three meetings each year).

> *I think the purpose [of our once-a-year meeting] was to pull all of the instructors together, because we do teach at six or eight different sites and at different times of the day, to introduce one another, to share some success stories and helpful hints, etc.*
>
> —Vocational education teacher

Both informal and formal means for learning from colleagues require time and proximity, two resources that were in short supply in teachers' programs. It was often a challenge when teachers taught part time, at different sites, and did not have mechanisms for real sharing with other teachers on a regular basis. While a few teachers in our subsample enjoyed daily interaction with colleagues, the majority wanted more, and about 7% of teachers in the overall sample seemed very isolated from one another, indicating they had few informal opportunities to get together. The lack of collegiality for very part-time teachers was difficult, even when teachers knew the reasons for it:

> *ABE can be a lonely job: on your own with not a lot of interactions with other teachers. That can tend to make me question or get discouraged in what I am doing.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *Everybody is part time. Since we don't regularly meet, where do you picture these informal conversations taking place? If we pass each other in the hallway, we might have a five-minute conversation. It's not like we have a lounge where we all gather because if we're not physically teaching, we're not usually physically present. It's not the same as in public education where you might have forty minutes in the day when you're not busy. That doesn't happen when nobody is full time.*
>
> —ASE Math teacher/program director

> *It's very difficult in this type of a program [multisite program], where you've got part-time people, to find the time when you can get them together.*
>
> —ESOL program director

> *We'd see each other on our way into the office. We'd talk in the hallway for a few minutes and we'd happen to pass each other in the hallways and say, 'Hello, how are you doing?' … It was all fly in, teach your class, fly out.*
>
> —GED teacher

Only a few teachers in our subsample described themselves as working in collaborative-teaching environments. In these sites, program directors were frequently former teachers, and teachers met regularly to reflect, plan, and solve problems. Mentoring and "eavesdropping" were encouraged:

> *We do a staff meeting, we think about our needs. We started to do a peer observation because it was important for all to see how we are doing things. We talk about everything. For whatever works in my class, I come here and share, and whatever doesn't work, I share, too. We share books, we share everything: news, happiness, and [sometimes] I feel so sad that I don't even want to talk. When things don't go well, that's what teachers share.*
>
> —Native language literacy teacher

> *In our staff meetings, in our informal discussions, we talk about the students all the time and how best to meet their needs. [The program structure] is not a hierarchical system, so usually we discuss because we want to provide services better for our students.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

For one teacher who, because she taught at night, had never really met with the other teachers in her program, the professional development activity (a mentor teacher group where all the participants were from her program) provided the first chance for learning from program colleagues. The experience was powerful enough that, together, they lobbied the director to structure a regular, once-a-week sharing session for them:

> *This was so new to us, we were able to talk as a group. We were able to voice our opinions to try to do something. We had that ability and we were [able] to plan things. Otherwise, we would have felt lonely. It was so exciting to be together and be able to voice our issues: 'This is what I'm going through and what should I do?' Just that really brought a positive in the program. We were starting to feel like a team. It made a world of difference to all of us, it was incredible. I never*

realized support was important because I was too busy with my students. Now that I have received it and I know it's there, I don't want to go without it any more.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Directors served as a different type of colleague for teachers, and we discovered that teachers' feelings about learning from directors were more complex than their feelings about learning from fellow teachers. When asked to rate a number of aspects about their program (see Table 8, p. 64), teachers rated their "director's level of expertise" at a mean of 4.64 out of 6 (*n*=95), placing it as the second strongest out of 17 program aspects. However, "quality of leadership" was perceived as lower: a mean of 4.34 out of 6 (*n*=96), ninth out of 17 program aspects. This difference between teachers' perception of director's level of expertise and their perception of quality of leadership was significantly different, using a *t*-test (*t*=-3.038, *df*=94, *p*<.01, *n*=95). In another question, which asked teachers to state their top three concerns from a list of issues related to working in the field, "support from program administration" was cited as a top three concern by 33% of the teachers in our sample.

According to the teachers in our subsample, directors ran the gamut from completely absent or unapproachable, to intimately involved on a daily basis and completely supportive, almost acting as a mentor. Our overall impression, from both questionnaires and interviews, though, is that directors tended to be more hands-off than we would have expected. We were surprised to find how seldom directors or coordinators ever observed teachers in their classes, even to provide formal evaluations, and how seldom they offered actual feedback about teaching. Slightly more than half of the teachers in our subsample indicated that they had very limited interaction with their directors, typically hearing from them only if there was a concern. They reported that there were few structured opportunities to learn from their directors since their directors rarely, if ever, visited their classrooms. On one hand, directors saw their "hands-off" approach as an expression of confidence in the teachers. However, some of our subsample teachers—particularly the new teachers—often wished for more supervision and structured feedback:

[The director provides] uninvolved support—she doesn't interfere with what we do, nor does she help, advise or observe.

—ABE/literacy teacher

There's a lot of freedom in adult education. That's why a lot of teachers really like it. There's freedom to do what I want to do in the classroom, to go as far as I want in my own learning, and there's freedom to stagnate … it's not a very demanding or stressful environment to work in. In the beginning, that freedom was absolutely frightening … what am I going to do, and in what order? I remember going to my supervisor. I always got that, 'Yes, it's all right, it's fine,'

but I always had the question in the back of my mind, 'Is it good?' No one was watching. ... He [the director] pops in, he says hi. He chats for a few second, 'See you later, you're doing a great job.' That's about it. ... He believes in his teachers, he believes he's hiring good people, and instead of keeping tabs on us, or checking up on us, or giving us feedback, he trusts us. And that can be good and bad. He doesn't feel that he needs to work on us. I feel that, to become a better teacher, I certainly need to be worked on.

—ESOL teacher

[My director] never came into my classroom to observe either. I look back on that and I think, 'You know, that's really odd. Here I was, a brand new teacher, how do they know me from anybody? Wouldn't they want to know how I was doing?' She [the director] really had no idea what we were doing. She doesn't come into my classroom at all except maybe to give a note or a message. I think she should know what's happening in here, and I don't feel that she's particularly interested. As long as the program is working, things are running well, students are coming, no one is complaining, everything must be fine.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

This is a big problem. The teachers did not feel that their needs, actually that their job was respected by the administrator. It's hard enough to get credibility in the world at large, but they did not feel that their administrator also really thought they were worth a lot. No, instead [teachers felt that) they were easily replaceable. It's important for the administrator to let her people know that she thinks they're great.

—ESOL teacher

In the few programs where structured feedback and teacher performance evaluations had been institutionalized, teachers were typically disappointed in the quality of the feedback. Teachers attributed this to the director's lack of teaching expertise. (Some teachers who had little respect for their director's expertise were just as happy the directors didn't seem interested in their teaching.)

[The feedback was] not real useful. I don't think that she [the director] has as much background as maybe some of us. It's always positive. She hasn't made any suggestions or anything. I also find it a little frustrating because she doesn't come at the beginning of a class necessarily. She'll come at a certain point, and she doesn't know how you led up to what you are doing. She doesn't see the whole picture. She sees a small part of it.

—ESOL teacher

It [feedback] wasn't good. Somebody watching us that didn't have a clue. It's not that simple to observe somebody. You have to set that all up. It's not just,

'I'm going to go just watch you.' There has to be a lot of prep. I think you need to know what it is that you're going in for, what it is your teachers are doing, what it is your teachers want to do with the classes.

<div align="right">

—ESOL teacher

</div>

Other teachers had ready and informal access to directors—and appreciated it. In some programs, hiring program coordinators to supervise teachers was an effective way to give teachers the feedback they needed, while not expecting the director to develop teaching expertise:

I feel a need to tell her [the director] what I am doing, especially if I think that I'm really wacky with something. It's because she's accessible. And I don't feel like it's speaking to a supervisor. If you felt you were being judged every time, I don't think we'd have that kind of rapport. She just knows, based on what she hears, what's going on in different groups, what she sees, what she hears us talking about, what we're working on. It's informal.

<div align="right">

—ABE/preGED teacher

</div>

She [the director] might be there two days later, but she's always there. [I can get help from her] informally, any time I pick up the phone and call her. And if I didn't have that, this couldn't exist. Teaching would not exist for me.

<div align="right">

—Vocational education teacher

</div>

I would talk with her [the program coordinator] about everything. I just felt that she was my lifeline to doing this job and doing it well. I felt very comfortable just asking her the most mundane questions, and she was also the one who was such a resource that, if I ever had a question, she always came up with more than you ever needed.

<div align="right">

—ABE/ESOL teacher

</div>

If learning from colleagues and directors is so important to teachers, how can programs support opportunities for such interaction and sharing? The field of adult basic education will find no answers to this problem in the K–12 literature, since most K–12 teachers work full time within a defined school setting. Finding ways for even part-time and geographically isolated teachers to meet and share—either informally or formally—while they are at the program was a challenge that a few programs had overcome but most had not. Further research should investigate the specific strategies that such programs used to ensure that teachers had opportunities to learn from one another. Programs also need to grapple honestly with the gap between program administration and teachers that seemed to exist for most programs represented in our sample. They should find ways for teachers—particularly new teachers—to get the supervision and feedback

that they needed and, for the most part, seemed not to be getting within their program. However, for those teachers who did have access to professional development opportunities outside of their programs, these activities often served the important function of connecting practitioners to each other and increasing collegiality, which is discussed in the next section.

Learning from formal professional development. The third avenue for ongoing learning opportunities was formal professional development, which could be organized either by the program or by the state. We found that teachers in our sample showed a slight preference for formal professional development over informal learning from colleagues, but both of these were preferred to learning on one's own. What is it that teachers like about formal professional development? One benefit teachers mentioned was that it was a condensed way to acquire "bits" of knowledge about a topic and insights about teaching. Over time, this information added up to cumulative knowledge about teaching:

> *So maybe it's [the best way to learn is] the snapshots. … I'm a great believer in all kinds of things that you might go to, you bring back maybe one little nugget. … A lot of things that you learn in small ways can influence your teaching.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *There's a grain, a kernel in each one. … [The workshop on domestic violence] gave me some courage to ask questions and do a little advocating for a person.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

In the following sections, we present teachers' perspectives about their preferred models and design features of professional development, and their participation in and satisfaction with professional development.

Preferred models of professional development. In Wave One,[29] we asked teachers to select their most preferred approach to professional development from the three options that we offered as part of our study: workshops or trainings, peer coaching/mentoring, and practitioner research groups. Workshops are better known to teachers because they have traditionally been the most common professional development activity, and 52% of the teachers (*n*=106) said they preferred workshops. However, the other 48% of the sample stated that they would prefer "reform" type activities, such as peer coaching/mentoring and practitioner research.

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[29] We use the first wave of data for this question since teachers' subsequent participation in one of these models may have affected preference. See our other research report (*How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education*, published by NCSALL (2003)) for more information about changes in teachers' preferences for professional development models.

Those teachers who preferred workshops cited a workshop's ability to convey a broad range of practical information in a condensed period of time as the reason they preferred them. Although both experienced and new teachers preferred workshops for this reason, the preference supports the hypothesis that teachers were not getting the preparation they needed to teach adults, and so looked for avenues to acquire many new and useable ideas in the limited time they had available for professional development. Teachers mentioned lack of time as another reason why they preferred workshops, which may explain why 21 of the 52 teachers who preferred workshops to other forms of professional development preferred single-session workshops.[30] Another reason may be that workshops are more available, being the most commonly offered professional development activity in most states: teachers' preference for single-session professional development could be less an expression of what they wanted than what they feel is realistic in their part-time jobs:

> *A good workshop [hands-on] can give a lot of ideas in a short length of time.*
>
> —GED/ASE teacher

> *I would prefer single session workshops due to time constraints, and I would also like to put a few new ideas into practice at a time.*
>
> —PreGED teacher

> *Workshops are easier to fit into a hectic schedule.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

On the other hand, of the 52 teachers who chose workshops as their first preference in the Wave Three questionnaire (*n*=86), 31 indicated they would prefer multisession workshops over single-session workshops, and subsample teachers explained that the primary reason for this was the desire to learn over a longer period of time with the same group of teachers:

> *The workshops [at our statewide conference] are always with people you're never going to see again and there's no follow-up. I learn things I take back to my class, but there's no follow-up on that and there's no sense of an ongoing group.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Learning from colleagues in a formal setting was also a strong reason why some teachers chose practitioner research groups as their preferred model of professional development. These teachers cited elements of the practitioner research group model that matched their style of learning: an in-depth focus, with a small group of colleagues, on a

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[30] In the final questionnaire, we changed the question slightly, so that teachers could choose not just "workshops," but "single-session workshops" or "multisession workshops."

problem they themselves faced. For some, it also represented a "new" approach to professional development, something different from the same old workshop:

> *The very most important thing is that it actually allows for change to occur because it's coming from the inside. Because it's something that a teacher creates ... then the chances of change occurring are much greater than sitting at a workshop listening to someone talk and then going back and trying to apply that to your own classroom. Fundamental change ... go through a learning experience in a completely and totally new direction.*
>
> —ESOL/ASE teacher

> *I enjoyed taking one problem in depth. The small number [of teachers] in an inquiry group, compared to a workshop, allows more contact. Also, they [the facilitators] supply reading material I might not find.*
>
> —ABE/literacy teacher

Teachers who preferred peer coaching or mentoring also felt this type of professional development matched their learning style in ways that workshops couldn't. This approach shares many of the features of practitioner research (small size, working with colleagues), but it had the added feature of learning via a one-to-one interaction with an experienced colleague. We found that this was attractive to newer teachers who sought feedback about whether they were doing the right thing in the classroom, as well as more experienced but isolated teachers without many opportunities to learn from colleagues and directors:

> *I understand and remember more when I am one-on-one. I want to spend time with someone who has done what I am doing. Questions are answered, usually causing more questions to come up. Also, I feel I can more easily understand just what I am doing. I like the quick feedback, actual in-class example of how I am doing, or seeing someone else and how they work—what works and doesn't as it is happening.*
>
> —ABE teacher

> *By actually doing the activity and having another observe, with discussion of pros and cons following, it can help me see what others in the field are using in their "rooms" and what has worked/not worked for them ... work directly on issues which apply to me and my situation. Workshops don't always apply to my classroom setting, which is correctional.*
>
> —GED/ASE teacher

> *Mentoring [is my preferred model for professional development] because programs don't have a lot of money and I don't know if they're ever going to have a lot of money. I don't know if teachers are ever going to have a lot of time to really take a course, but they can do work within the program, in observing each other and working together. The time to do that should be built into the program.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Teachers also described other professional development models—such as curriculum development/reform projects—where teachers had structured opportunities to work with their colleagues on a specific project (either inside or outside of their programs). Examples included the Equipped for the Future project, where teachers develop materials and contribute to this national effort for standards-based reform:

> *It [the curriculum frameworks project] is a lot of work but it's one of the greatest teacher trainings that we've had because we've had to think about our curriculum. Because we've had to design. Because we've had to talk with each other about how we're going to do something. Because we've had to review what we have done and because we've had to write it for whoever is coming up and talk about it. And we argue. I think that's a good idea.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Design features. Teachers, responding in both questionnaires and interviews, identified several factors within the design of professional development that they felt supported them to learn best. **Learning by "seeing"** was a common theme from teachers who saw themselves as "visual" learners, so demonstration of techniques and activities was important. This was true for both new and experienced teachers. "Seeing" seemed to help teachers understand the activity better and move from theories about teaching to actual instruction. For teachers who expressed having difficulty staying focused over extended periods of time, learning through several senses was particularly important.

> *I am a visual person and if I can see it, it is easier to learn.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *I need to see something that has actually worked and I need to feel it, touch it, and get some feedback from the person. It doesn't help me to know that so-and-so is teaching phonics. It helps me to know how they did it, what book they used, and then I need to see the book and touch the book and I need to look at the pictures. Otherwise, it doesn't make any sense to me.*
>
> —GED teacher

For teachers who see themselves as "kinesthetic" or active learners, **learning by "doing,"** or trying out and practicing what was modeled or discussed in professional development, was important to their learning. They favored professional development that included "hands-on" activities, and they wanted to try the activity as soon as possible once back in the classroom:

> *The doing is the big thing. I couldn't just go to a professional development for five minutes and have them hand me a tool and say, 'Use this.' It would have come in the context of talking about the issues, whatever it is, and practicing it and seeing it in application. I can't really feel I've learned something until I've practiced it. Another thing that really helps me is to have to either re-teach it or write about it, or put into my own words. That helps me to learn. If I had been asked to come back to my program and teach what I had learned at the professional development, I may have gotten more out of it than I did.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

> *I come out kinesthetic so I'm not a reading learner. It isn't automatically learned just by reading it. If I can apply it to something it helps. [When reading] I have to cut it [articles] out; I have to make notes about it; and I have to incorporate it physically. Otherwise it's not going to stay in my mind. The best way for me to learn is to tie it to something real.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *[I prefer] a combination of lecture, hands-on, going back, trying out ... then coming back and reporting, saying, 'help—I'm having problems with this.' [I like] information-giving, a little bit of trying out, right then and there, and then taking home, synthesizing it and then using it.*
>
> —ABE/preGED teacher

Clear structure and organization in the design of professional development is important to other teachers, particularly those who identified themselves as having learning difficulties or disabilities. Seven percent of the sample said they shared the same learning disabilities or difficulties as students; ten teachers in our sample (*n*=106) made some reference to learning difficulties, affecting their ability to pick up and retain ideas learned through professional development. They appreciated professional development activities that were clearly laid out and organized, and those in which they knew what to expect and could understand the flow and sequence of activities, making it easier to absorb the information presented.

> *First of all, everyone [in the tutor training] was given a very large handout book and we followed that book through. It was organized in that way. You knew*

where you start and where you're going to finish. I'm not a real good organizer, that's a weakness that I have, so things never came real easy for me.

<div align="right">—ABE/ESOL teacher</div>

What is difficult for me is I'm disorganized. I don't know how to get it down, all of the good things that I might have come across, either tried or heard—and they go by the wayside because I have not filed them or put some order to that.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

"Inclusion" (feeling accepted) and **"validation"** (feeling valued and respected) are important to many teachers. Given the marginalized nature of the ABE field and the teaching profession in general, being cared about and paid attention to is a powerful way to promote teachers' sense of worth. This happened when professional development facilitators viewed teachers as "knowers," drawing on their existing knowledge:

[Professional development is most useful when] the person [the facilitator] can actually bring something out of you that you might not have known you have. And it might not be the instructor, it might be another teacher.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

[I want a facilitator that] listens and provides input that respects what I did, heard what I did, and could present 'what if you did it this way?' that wasn't threatening and wouldn't put my back up against the wall.

<div align="right">—ESOL teacher</div>

Day in, day out, who cares what I do, you know, who really cares? I keep the classroom under control, nobody's complaining, the students are still coming. But who knows what I do or how I go about doing it or that I'm having trouble. That there are some days when I just think I can't do this anymore. Then I find that some project cares about those things. They don't want to lose the strength of the teachers in the classroom that put out, put out, put out every day. So that to me was extremely valuable. I believe it is not different with my students. Strength and accomplishment happens when restraints [power, status, education] are removed.

<div align="right">—ABE/ESOL teacher</div>

Teachers in our sample who, due to issues of race and class, were different from the majority of white, middle-class teachers and professional development facilitators in the field expressed the need for inclusion and validation most strongly. The few teachers from poor and working-class backgrounds, one of whom was a person of color, expressed

their strong need to be seen, heard, and respected by the facilitator and the group. Reflecting on her experience in the workshop sponsored by this study, a Latina teacher who grew up poor described the importance of having been included in this way:

> *The facilitator, she was really nice. She took time to understand my needs. She made me feel like the person I am. Just because I'm Spanish, they [other teachers] look at you. She treated me like one of you [a white woman]. Made me feel important and listened to the point that I had. … If the facilitator was another kind of person, it doesn't matter, how good or how nice the paper [handouts] … I wouldn't learn that much.*
>
> —Native language literacy teacher

Teachers also cited **"safe"** professional development as an important design feature, defining "safety" as a condition, setting, or atmosphere within the professional development where they could be free to ask questions (even if others may already know the answers) or make mistakes, where they didn't feel threatened by others and would not be ridiculed for who they are or what they may not know. Again, teachers who had racial and/or class identities that were different from the majority of their colleagues emphasized their need for safety while learning:

> *[I felt the] fear of disclosure that I'm not really doing a good job or I'm making mistakes or, 'How could you do that?' kind of response. But the people with whom I share this right now are people that I'm comfortable with. Within, say, a grouping of everybody within my program I might not be so likely to speak out about what's happening.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *I also try to make myself do these kind of things [such as the professional development] because they're uncomfortable. It's a little intimidating for me to be in this group. … I need to know that, if I have a question, the atmosphere is such that I can ask a question. I don't have fear of someone saying, 'Why don't you know that? You should have known that.' Being in a safe environment, to me is very crucial.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

Follow-up was a critical feature for teachers who wanted structured opportunities to continue to learn, particularly from colleagues:

> *It seems like professional development is a one-shot thing and then it's gone. It might be nice to have a sort of immediate follow-up, something that you put into practice quickly and you have feedback and follow-up on. It's not just in isolation.*
>
> —Family literacy teacher

> *There's no system to do that kind of [teacher] sharing. There are no meetings, and so the learning dies. All those good things that you learn, and you forget, too, after a while, yourself.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Participation in professional development. In addition to finding out how professional development should be designed in order to best support teachers' learning, we asked teachers in Wave One and Wave Three questionnaires to tell us how much of each type of professional development they had participated in over the past 12 months (see box at right). Ninety-four percent of the teachers in our sample had participated in at least some professional development offered by their state literacy resource centers over the course of a year. Participation in professional development among our sample of teachers mirrored the finding of previous research (Tibbetts et al., 1991; RMC Research Corporation, 1996) that workshops and conferences were the most common forms of professional development in the field of adult basic education. Most teachers participated in a single-session workshop or two and attended the state's annual ABE conference: just less than three quarters of teachers reported attending at least one conference, and three quarters reported attending at least one workshop (*n*=99) during the twelve months prior to our first questionnaire. Perhaps because workshops are of shorter duration, teachers attended more of them than any other form of professional development; the mean number of workshops attended in the previous 12-month period was 2.4 (*n*=99), whereas the mean for number of conferences attended in the same period was 1.6 (*n*=98).[31]

> **Attending Staff Development**
>
> According to the teachers' self-reports (*n*=99), in the 12 months prior to the first questionnaire:
>
> - 75% of teachers in the study attended at least one workshop
> - 74% attended at least one conference
> - 47% engaged in at least one curriculum-development project
> - 36% participated in a study circle
> - 35% participated in peer coaching
> - 34% attended at least one lecture
> - 26% participated in practitioner research
> - 14% attended at least one college course

However, although only a handful of teachers did not attend any professional development in the previous year, the amount of participation overall was limited, particularly considering the needs teachers had for ongoing opportunities to learn about teaching adults. The main barriers to teachers' participation in formal professional development included lack of funding, part-time status, and—sometimes—lack of motivation on the part of the teachers themselves:

> *The three things that I see as a problem at the learning center with educating teachers. … The director does need to be the one that encourages it because we need that. Well, people need that. They need to have to have to do it sometimes.*

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[31] It is unclear whether teachers counted workshops that were part of a conference.

Two, there needs to be money, and there's not money. And people are not willing [to participate in professional development without being paid]. And, three, because some people in adult education really are supporting themselves, they have to have several jobs. And so the time is not there for them to do it. We had a lot of difficulty getting people that have the time to go to courses at the state college, because they're working a day job.

—ESOL teacher

Even though I get full support, others don't. I understand and realize that I'm full time. Some ABE teachers are not, but even though the teachers are part time, they should also be supported in going to the [statewide literacy conference], for example.

—ESOL/family literacy teacher

[I want professional development to] leave me alone. Professional development keeps getting thrown down your throat. I like the idea of professional development being available as a resource. But don't tell me I have to go turn around and develop my skills in whatever because it's Tuesday.

—GED teacher

Satisfaction with professional development offered. Not knowing when (or what) professional development is being offered around the state, or feeling that the professional development offered was not of high quality or relevance, were also barriers to participation for some teachers. In addition to finding out about the amount of professional development they received, we also wanted to learn what teachers thought about the quality of the professional development they attended. We asked teachers how they viewed ten different aspects of the professional development offered and/or organized by their state. Teachers were asked to rate each aspect on a scale of 1 (*very weak*) to 6 (*very strong*). Table 14 presents the ordered means of their ratings.

Table 14: Teachers' Rating of Key Aspects of Professional Development Offered to Them by their States

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASPECT	MEAN	*n*
1. Quality of facilitation	4.21	97
2. Information about professional development activities offered	3.98	98
3. Frequency of professional development opportunities	3.96	97
4. Relevance of activities to your needs	3.90	97
5. Support for collegiality (i.e., teachers having opportunities to learn from and share with each other)	3.87	97
6. Range of professional development models (e.g., workshops, practitioner research, mentoring, etc.)	3.80	97
7. Accessibility of activities	3.78	97
8. Teacher involvement in conducting activities	3.62	95
9. Duration of professional development (i.e., teachers having opportunities to meet over time on a particular topic)	3.49	97
10. Teacher involvement in planning activities	3.42	96

Teachers were most satisfied with the quality of facilitation and the information they received about the professional development, and least satisfied with the extent of their involvement in planning activities and in the duration of activities. An ANOVA test of means by state indicated that there were no significant differences by state between ratings about state professional development systems. Comparing these means (where only one of the ten aspects receives a mean rating over 4 on the six-point scale) to means for teachers' perceptions about their programs (see Table 8, p. 64, where 14 of the 17 aspects of programs had means above 4 on the same six-point scale), it appears that teachers generally find the quality of professional development offered by their state to be average, at best.

About one third of the teachers in the subsample had a generally high opinion of their state system. They appreciated receiving regular newsletters describing upcoming training opportunities and summarizing new materials available at regional resource centers. They knew about and could choose from activities such as multisession workshops, teacher mentoring opportunities, curriculum development work, participatory research activities, and collaborative Internet-based projects. Those who felt the professional development system in their state was good described the features that contributed to its high quality:

> *I think they [the state literacy resource center] really are what they are supposed to be, which is a central place where you have people gathering the latest on what's happening in the field but really connecting to teachers, so that when*

teachers come there, they're able to connect with other teachers in a way that's really fruitful or effective. They provide the resources and the techniques. They seem to be able to get to the heart of what it is that teachers need and then help them find ways of getting what they need, sharing with each other, so I'm always impressed by that.

—ESOL teacher

You sign up and next thing you know you get this call from [the state literacy resource center]. 'You signed up for this, are you coming?'

—GED teacher

The other two thirds of the 18 teachers in our subsample were unsatisfied with their state's professional development system. Several of the newer teachers were so uninformed about the professional development available through their state that they were unsure of how to rate it. The more experienced of the unsatisfied teachers complained that their professional development systems tended to fall short (largely due to offering activities that were not well-promoted), did not meet the teachers' needs, and/or were poorly designed or facilitated. These teachers were frustrated that they were not made aware of professional development activities, or that the activities were not clearly described. They reported not getting the information at all, because they were not directly on the state's mailing list and the information given to program directors was not getting into the hands of teachers:

We basically have to find it [information about professional development] ourselves. I called [our state literacy resource center] and she said, 'Sorry, you can't get on the mailing list, because you're not a coordinator or a director.' Ewww! I don't get it.

—ESOL teacher

I'm sure there's a listing somewhere, but I honestly haven't cared to look, to research it, and there's no one really notifying me. It's something I'd have to go after myself. I'd like to see a course schedule, I'd like to see a brochure coming out on what's available to take. They must do this, but I just don't get the information about continuing classes and workshops on things that would help our teaching. That would be really good. The adult ed teacher training ... I have the feeling that it's out there, I just haven't been accessing it. And most teachers I know don't access it. I think there's this training department and then there's a library you can go to. But nobody was using it, so they moved it into this building that was difficult to access. I tried to get something at the library a couple of years ago, and it wasn't there anymore, so that was kind of strange. That would be nice though, to have a centralized resource center.

—ESOL teacher

> *I used to go to workshops. I tend not to go anymore, because—I can say as a criticism—I haven't seen much new coming out.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *Many of these other things [workshops] are solitary. There's a presenter and instructor, and there's me listening and taking notes and there's no interaction.*
>
> —GED teacher

In summary, we found that teachers preferred formal professional development to other avenues for learning, and that they most often attended workshops and conferences, the more traditional forms of professional development (probably because these are the most commonly offered forms), even though half of our sample would prefer nontraditional models, such as practitioner research and mentor teacher groups. While almost all teachers in our study had attended some professional development activities within the previous 12 months, overall, teachers attended a limited number of activities. In comparison to the ratings they gave to their programs, the ratings given to their state professional development systems were relatively lower; the lowest ratings were given to duration of professional development activities and teachers' involvement in planning and conducting them.

Conclusion: Learning to Teach

We found that few teachers received formal preparation to teach adults, even if they were certified as K–12 teachers, and that orientation and preservice training were inadequate for many of the new ABE teachers in our sample. Most teachers received their training to teach adults through traditional, one-shot workshops, even though half of the teachers would prefer to attend nontraditional models of professional development, such as practitioner research or mentor teaching groups. Teachers' first preference was for learning through formal professional development (rather than on their own or through informal working groups), and they wanted the professional development they attended to fit their learning style; be clearly structured and organized; make them feel included, validated, and safe; and provide opportunities for follow-up. Overall, however, teachers gave their states' professional development system an average rating. Teachers' working conditions, especially isolation, part-time job structure, and limited opportunities for professional development, affected teachers as learners.

The fact that not all teachers had a continuously strong desire to learn more about theories and practice of good teaching for adults should be of concern to professional developers. At the very least, professional developers should realize that not all teachers who take part in any given professional development activity are there because of a strong desire to learn about *that* topic or about teaching in general. We would categorize

most of the teachers in our subsample as teachers with a desire to learn. New teachers with less formal education and less teaching experience were strongly motivated to learn and to be part of a learning community of teachers and colleagues. However, we would categorize about six of the eighteen teachers in our subsample as teachers who were confident in their teaching but enjoyed talking with and learning from colleagues (particularly if they could "select" colleagues by role or expertise). They did not feel particularly compelled to attend professional development and sometimes voiced the opinion that they wanted to be "left alone" to teach.

We have to conclude that there is something essentially different about GED-prep programs. We are not referring to GED as a whole, but rather to those programs that are structured and geared toward helping students get just the minimal skills and test-taking abilities to pass the test as quickly as possible. Many of these programs, it appears from our sample, utilize an individualized instruction, workbook/practice-book approach to reaching this goal. Separate from the issue of whether preparing students *only* to pass the test is a good idea—and recent research (Tyler, Murnane, & Willett, 2000) on the impact of acquiring the GED seems to indicate that it is the literacy skills, and not just the degree itself, that seems to make a difference in students' earning potential over the long run— there is the issue of whether it makes sense to "lump" GED-prep teachers together with ESOL and ABE teachers in the same professional development. Although all ABE teachers had concerns about their working conditions, the data indicate that those GED teachers who worked in programs where test preparation was the main target had an approach to craft and content essentially different from other types of teachers we interviewed. We would advocate that professional development systems target professional development specifically to GED-prep teachers, based on the specific questions they have about preparing students to pass the test. Such professional development should also include discussion of the question of ultimate goals for adult students (a GED, higher skills, entry to postsecondary education or further training, or all three) and what program responsibilities are to help students compare and weigh these goals for themselves.

The range of access to ongoing learning within our subsample was wide, and problems of time and funding were cited as the main barriers. A few teachers in our subsample received extensive orientation, plus comprehensive, ongoing, and systematic support for structured and informal learning, both inside their program and through their state professional development system. On the other hand, other teachers in our subsample received no real orientation within their program, had attended only minimal structured professional development (usually a day at a statewide conference), and had little ongoing formal or informal contact with other teachers or the director in their programs. For about half of the teachers in our subsample, access to continual learning through either formal, structured professional development opportunities or through informal sharing with colleagues and directors was limited. Some teachers were not even aware that there was a mechanism at the state level to provide formal professional development.

All professionals need ongoing learning; two experts in the educational field call teaching "the learning profession," since effective teachers are continually learning and studying how to serve students better (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). However, since most teachers in our sample had completed almost no formal courses related to teaching adults, the need for orientation, professional development, and ongoing learning opportunities related to working in the field of adult basic education should be an issue of concern to policymakers and administrators. Since we did not gauge the impact of lack of formal preparation on teacher quality, we can make no claims about whether it makes a difference for adult student achievement or persistence in programs, but the recent increase in interest (see Sabatini, Ginsburg, & Russell, 2002; also Tolbert, 2001) in certification within the field may attest to the worry that some teachers are not sufficiently prepared to do their job. Requirements for teacher certification specific to teaching adults may increase the training and coursework ABE teachers receive, but it is hard to imagine why teachers would invest in formal education before starting to teach, since the lack of "well-supported" jobs (well-paid, full-time, stable jobs with benefits, paid prep time, and paid professional development release time) will continue to keep teaching in adult basic education from being a conscious career choice, as teaching in K–12 is. It is also hard to believe why colleges would create a formal course of study and internship for adult basic education without a ready market of students (potential teachers). Therefore, until teaching in adult basic education is seen as—and has the compensations to be—a real career choice, the training of teachers will probably continue to be largely in-service, and will fall on the shoulders of programs and state professional-development systems.

Providing access to continued opportunities to learn—including opportunities to learn how to learn on one's own—is important for two reasons. First, we want to be sure that teachers of adults are adequately *prepared* to deliver high-quality educational services. Second, we want to be sure that teachers of adults are adequately *supported* to deliver services. Where even the most minimal access to professional development and colleagues was available to teachers, they often spoke of that support as their "lifeline." We discovered a few teachers—two who were new, one who was more experienced—for whom having a person to talk with, or being able to attend professional development with other teachers, made enough of a difference that they decided to stay in the field longer. These opportunities for contact provided them with a sense of renewed energy and inspiration and helped them feel that they were not alone in their work and worries.

The nature of much of adult basic education—isolation, part-time job structure, limited opportunities for professional development—affects teachers as learners. When the program or state does not overcome these aspects of the profession, it results in a lack of "fit" between the desire teachers have and the opportunities they get, both in access and in design. Different avenues for ongoing learning put responsibility on different players to make those opportunities accessible and of high quality. Individual teachers were responsible for learning on their own, but they attributed the responsibility for

learning from colleagues and directors to the program. We hypothesize that, in cases where teachers' working conditions (access to professional development, access to colleagues and directors) are limited, teacher must rely more on learning from their own experience. This avenue for learning appeared to be the most difficult when teachers did not have time or skills for learning on their own. If teachers lack the time, support, skills, and opportunities for learning, it is difficult to imagine how they can continue to learn about new research and adopt the type of "evidence-based practice" that funders feel is key to providing high-quality services to students. As one teacher put it:

> *Limited support for adult education leads to less qualified teachers.*
>
> —GED/ASE teacher

Limited support affects teachers' overall working conditions and influences how they react to the conditions under which they teach; this is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: THE REALITY OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS' JOBS

Adult education teachers often feel they are not as respected by education departments as their general education peers. Many work with out-dated computers or in spare rooms with few resources. Funding is rarely adequate and class sizes are often large. Many adult education teachers work part time. Some have several part-time teaching assignments or work a full-time job in addition to their part-time teaching job, leading to long hours and a hectic schedule. Classes often are held at night or on the weekends to accommodate students who may have a job or family responsibilities.

> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics,
> *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2002–2003*[32]

One of the major issues that emerged during the course of our study (which focused on professional development and teacher change and did not set out to document how teachers felt about their jobs), was the difficulty and reality of teachers' jobs in the field of adult basic education. While almost every ABE evaluation or publication that makes reference to teachers has mentioned the part-time, unstable nature of working in this field, hearing—firsthand—teachers' concerns about their working conditions over and over again in interviews and questionnaires made it striking, immediate, and real. We hypothesize that the working conditions of ABE teachers, which by and large are very different from those of K–12 teachers, have a tangible effect not only on teachers but also on students and ultimately on the quality of the field as well, as teachers consider whether to cope with or challenge the situations within which they work—or whether to leave altogether.

In this chapter, we cover:

- Teachers' overall concerns about working in adult basic education

- How committed teachers said they were to staying in the field

- Teachers' working conditions, especially their access to a well-supported job

- The impact of working conditions on teacher turnover, on programs, and on students

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[32] Available at http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos064.htm.

Summary of Findings: The Reality of Adult Basic Education Teachers' Jobs

- Teachers' top concerns are their program (structure and mission, facilities, and administration support) and their job (salary, security, benefits, and number of working hours). In addition to retiring, the main reasons teachers gave for why they would leave their ABE job were low salary, lack of benefits, limited working hours and, to a lesser extent, lack of job security.

- Teachers reported a fairly strong desire to stay in the field, but they were less likely to want to work in the field five years from now (as opposed to one year from now), and even less certain they viewed work in the ABE field as their long-term career.

- We defined teachers' working conditions in terms of having access to:
  1. Resources
  2. Professional development and information
  3. Colleagues and program directors
  4. Decision-making
  5. A well-supported job

- A well-supported job in adult basic education would include being paid a living wage, having access to benefits, more working hours, job security (or at the very least, program stability), paid prep time, and paid professional development release time.

- Well-supported jobs were the exception, rather than the rule, among the teachers in our sample.

- Teachers had three responses to poor working conditions, which also affected programs and students:
  - Cope
  - Challenge
  - Leave

Teachers' Concerns About Working in Adult Basic Education

During the Wave One and Wave Two interviews, teachers' concerns about their working conditions were stated so clearly that we decided to add questions to the Wave Three questionnaire that would gauge perceptions about working in the field of adult basic education among the whole sample of teachers. We presented a list (gleaned from interviews with the subsample) of eleven aspects that had stood out as concerns for teachers in this field; teachers could also check "other" and provide an explanation. We asked teachers to check their top *three* concerns about working in adult basic education. Table 15 presents the percentage of teachers in our sample who checked each aspect as one of their top three concerns, ordered by highest percentage to lowest.

Table 15: Teachers' Concerns About Working in Adult Basic Education

(*n*=99)

CONCERNS ABOUT WORKING IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION	PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE
Type of program structure or mission	41%
Amount of salary or pay	34%
Quality of program facilities	33%
Support from program administration	30%
Amount of benefits	28%
Job security	28%
Number of working hours available	23%
Amount of opportunities for professional development	22%
Amount of contact with colleagues	17%
Amount of paid prep time	14%
Status of ABE teachers	14%
Requirements from funders	3%
Others	2%

Concerns about their program (structure and mission, facilities, and administration support) and concerns about their job (salary, security, benefits, and number of working hours) top the list for teachers. As we discussed in the chapter on teachers as program members, teachers care about their programs, particularly the facilities, and want to have access to support from directors and to decision-making within their programs.

In an ancillary question in the Wave Three questionnaire, we also asked teachers to tell us the primary reason why they would leave the field of adult basic education. We provided multiple reasons (plus the option to write in "other") gleaned from our first interviews with teachers. Teachers were asked to check only *one* reason. Table 16 presents the results, also ordered by highest percentage to lowest:

**Table 16: Primary Reason Teachers Say They Would Leave Adult Basic Education
          in the Future**

(*n*=83)

| PRIMARY REASON TO LEAVE	PERCENTAGE
Need for more pay	16%
Need for some (or more) benefits	13%
Retire; age	13%
Need for full-time work	12%
Desire work in another type of social service	12%
Need for some (or more) job security	10%
Desire to try a nonteaching or non-social-service career	7%
Other (e.g., lack of time, move, laid-off, return to school, etc.)	9%
Need for some (or more) opportunities for professional development or professional growth	6%
Desire to work in K–12	2%

Concerns about the job (salary, benefits, and number of working hours) top the list (with "need for job security" coming in just after "desire to work in another type of social service"). The appearance of "retirement" near the top of the list probably reflects the higher age of the sample (10% of the sample were 61 years of age or older). Interestingly, no teacher in the sample identified (selected) three of the choices that we gave to teachers: "need for better physical working conditions," "need for some or more interaction with colleagues," and "desire to work in a higher-status, more respected field of work." Although these were concerns raised by teachers during the interviews and in some open-ended questions on the questionnaire, it is clear that these were not strong enough reasons for teachers to leave the field, whereas lack of pay and benefits *were* strong enough.

Out of 104 original teachers in our sample, 13 (12.5%) had left the field by the time of the final wave (approximately 18 months after the start of the study). Of this group, one could not be located, four had left the field for reasons unrelated to working conditions (relocation, grad school), and two left the field to work in the K–12 system. The reasons the others cited for leaving were all related to working conditions (two cited need for benefits, two cited need for more pay, two cited job stability). In other words, half of the teachers who left the field reported that they left for reasons related to working conditions. Of these thirteen, at the end of our study, four were not working, four had taken jobs teaching in the K–12 system, one was working in business, one in a nonprofit organization, and two had gone back to graduate school; one teacher who left the field did not supply us with data on this question.

Commitment to Working in Adult Basic Education

One hypothesis about the factors that influence teacher change was that teachers would change more as a result of professional development if they had a deeper commitment to working in the field of adult basic education. Therefore, in both Wave One and Wave Three questionnaires, we asked about commitment; this information is relevant to the discussion of teachers' concerns and the reality of teachers' jobs. In the Wave One questionnaire, we asked teachers to tell us to what extent they would say that working in adult basic education is their "long-term career" (on a six-point scale, where 1= *not at all* and 6=*completely*). We asked this same question in the Wave Three questionnaire. In addition, in the Wave Three questionnaire we asked teachers to tell us to what extent they desired to be teaching/working in the field of adult basic education *one year from now*, and to what extent they desired to be teaching/working in the field *five years from now* (on a six-point scale, where 1= *no desire* and 6=*complete desire*). The results are presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Teachers' Commitment and Desire to Work in Adult Basic Education

$(n=87)$[33]
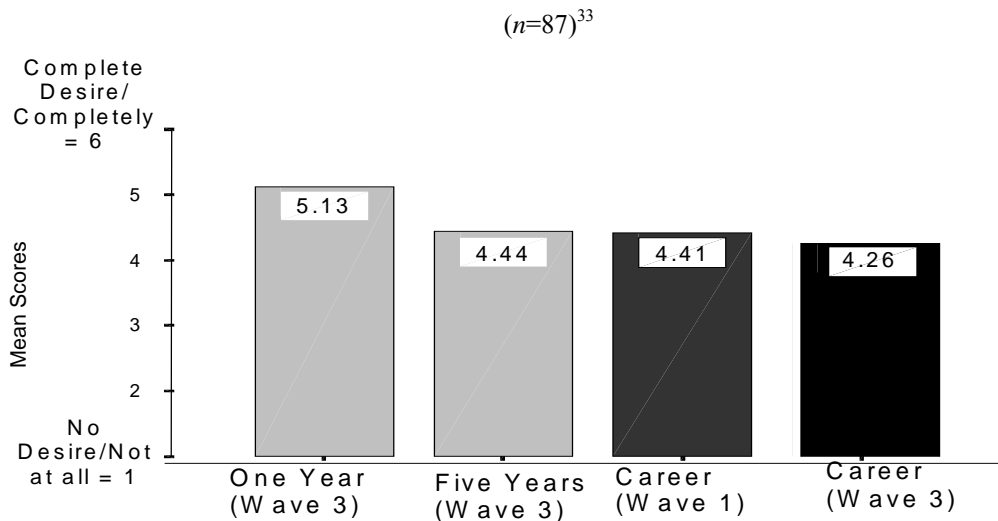
On average, teachers reported a fairly strong desire to stay in the field. However, as the time commitment increased, their desire to work in the field decreased. Teachers were less likely to want to work in the field five years from now, and even less certain they viewed work in the ABE field as their long-term career.

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[33] Although 105 teachers answered the question about "adult basic education as my long-term career" in the first questionnaire, for a mean of 4.38 (SD=1.2), in this figure we report the means for the 87 teachers who answered all four questions across both questionnaires, for the sake of consistency in comparing the means.

Making a positive difference in students' lives was the overwhelming reason why teachers said they stayed in the field:

But their life will change. I see them. We have a small enough community that I can walk around the community and my wife says 'who's that?' and I say 'That's one of my students.' I'll say, 'What are you doing?' They'll say, 'I've got this job.' That keeps me motivated and I know that I've accomplished the only thing I can do, which is give them a change in status from no-grad to grad and convince them that it makes a difference.

<div align="right">—GED teacher</div>

But then when I started working with families and seeing how intensive and how much need is there for teachers to help adults to get the education, I decided to stay. So at the beginning, it was just a position and then it started to become more personal. I saw how some K–12 schools have really let some children go through the cracks, and we receive them in the adult education program. So I started thinking about staying in the adult education program and not going into the K–12 school.

<div align="right">—Family literacy/ESOL teacher</div>

Such commitment notwithstanding, 13% of teachers in our sample did leave during the 18 months of our study, and we hypothesize that working conditions are a major contributor to turnover in the field of adult basic education. In the next section, we discuss in more detail why and to what extent a "well-supported job" was important to teachers in our sample.

Teachers' Working Conditions

Teachers' working conditions are largely defined by "environmental factors" that affect their ability to do their jobs well. These factors include the physical facilities where teachers work, the amount of time and support they have to do their jobs, and the training or development opportunities they have. Although these conditions exist within teachers' programs, they are greatly influenced by the policies and practices of the local, state, and national ABE delivery and professional development systems in which these programs operate. We identified five categories of factors that most influence teachers' ability to do their jobs well in adult basic education:

1. **Access to resources.** These include the resources that affect how teachers do their jobs, such as classroom and program facilities, and access to materials and technology.

2. **Access to professional development and information.** These include opportunities for teachers to acquire the knowledge and information they need, primarily through professional development and through access to written and electronic material that help them better understand their classrooms, their programs, and their field.

3. **Access to colleagues and program directors.** These include opportunities and mechanisms that allow teachers to talk to and get feedback from those within their program, their state, and in the larger field of adult basic education.

4. **Access to decision-making.** These include opportunities and mechanisms for teachers to participate in improving the quality of services that students receive, particularly through program policies and practices.

5. **Access to a well-supported job.** These factors include sufficient working hours to complete all of the teaching, program, and other tasks required of teachers; paid prep and professional development time; job stability and benefits.

While we frame these factors as problems of "access," the fact that teachers don't have enough resources, support, or opportunities for growth is, in some instances, not just a function of access—in some cases such resources do not even exist.

The first four environmental factors were discussed in earlier sections of the report. However, we have not yet discussed access to a well-supported job; based on teachers' concerns about working in the field and reasons for leaving it, we discuss teachers' need for a well-supported job in this next section.

Access to a Well-Supported Job

Everyone deserves a well-supported job. ABE teachers, like their counterparts in K–12, need jobs that offer a living wage and benefits, as well as sufficient working hours for teachers to do their jobs well, paid time to prepare for classes and attend professional development, and a modicum of job security from one year to the next. This includes being paid not just a salary or hourly wage for time in the classroom, but also for the time required to prepare for classes, follow up with students, contribute to program improvement, and learn about the job. It is worth noting that every one of these issues except salary—i.e., the need for benefits, more hours of work, prep time, and job security—are issues that are not a daily concern for most K–12 teachers, since the majority work in full-time jobs with benefits and paid prep and professional development time, in schools that are funded through local tax money and not through annual soft grants made by the state department of education or donated money.

For the teachers in our sample, well-supported jobs were the exception, not the rule.

For us it was a major struggle to get full-time jobs and get health benefits. ... I think we had clear concerted efforts about the development of solid jobs where this could be a real job for people.

—Community-based program director

The money is low. There's no perks, no benefits, or anything like that. I would like to see them make [teaching] a full-time job. It's too bad. I would like to see fewer of us teaching more hours. We have expressed it, and we're always told that this is the way it is.

—ESOL teacher

We define "well-supported jobs" as full-time, relatively well-paid, and stable jobs that include benefits (medical coverage, paid vacation and sick time, pension plans, etc.), paid preparation time, and paid professional development release time. In the sections below, we present data and teachers' comments about each of these components.

The need for a living wage. We did not ask teachers any questions about their salary, so we have no specific data to report about either hourly wages or salaries. However, it was clear that low salaries were of real concern to teachers, whether they work full or part time:

They [the ABE program] consider you a paraprofessional and they throw it [the position] in the aide pool, and said to me, very point blank: 'We can only pay you $6.67. Shall we continue with this interview?' I'm not working for the money, obviously, or I wouldn't be in that position. ... I've never gotten a raise in adult basic education. And the people who have been in there since before me haven't gotten a raise.

—GED teacher

If anything were to happen to my husband, there is no way I could support a household ... there's no way I could support myself on that wage. I'd have to go on food stamps.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

The need for benefits. Out of 78 teachers who provided such information, 45% received benefits. (Of the whole sample who were still working in the field at the time we asked this question, including those who were no longer teaching but working as administrators or professional development staff [*n*=86], 48% received benefits.)

As noted in the program section, program type was related to benefits, with significantly fewer teachers working in LEAs receiving benefits as part of their ABE job, as compared to teachers working in CBOs or corrections/libraries/unions. Massachusetts' practitioners were also significantly more likely to receive benefits (χ^2=9.3, df=2, p<.01, n=85) than practitioners in the other two states in our study. As we would suspect, full-time status is significantly associated with receiving benefits: the mean hours of work per week for those who received benefits was 32 (n=40, SD=3.98), whereas the mean hours of work per week for those who don't receive benefits is 16 (n=44, SD=10.7). All of the full-time teachers (35+ hours a week) in our sample received at least some benefits (paid vacation or sick time, medical insurance, etc.).

The most common benefits received were medical and sick-pay benefits. Of those who received some benefits, few received paid vacation or retirement benefits. Ten teachers in our sample indicated that they received all the benefits; all of these teachers worked 30+ hours per week. There were three teachers who indicated that they received all benefits listed, plus other benefits such as personal days, life insurance, tuition assistance, etc.; one was a full-time teacher working in an LEA; the other two were full-time teachers working in unions. Table 17 shows the results for types of benefits teachers received.

Table 17: Benefits Adult Basic Education Teachers Received

(*n*=85)

TYPE OF BENEFIT	# TEACHERS RECEIVING THIS TYPE OF BENEFIT	% OF TOTAL SAMPLE
Medical	34	40%
Sick pay	32	38%
Pension plan	26	31%
Paid vacation	24	28%
Other (*e.g., personal days, life insurance, housing or tuition assistance*)	9	11%

Teachers attributed the lack of benefits primarily to cost, the belief being that fewer full-time jobs were made available so that programs could avoid paying higher salaries and benefits, which then allowed the program to hire more part-time teachers to serve a greater number of students:

> *It would cost too much money to get day [adult basic education] teachers into full-time jobs with benefits as those of K–12. It seems that day teachers don't get benefits.*

> —LEA program director

I was teaching fewer hours because at that time they would only allow us to teach one two-hour class during the day. Teaching two classes came about in the late eighties. They've [the program administration] always been careful about keeping it part time rather than full time. Some of the teachers who teach during the day teach at night, too. In other words, if one taught two classes during the day and then a night class, it may have pushed the hours to a full-time position. ... I think they didn't want to give the benefits and everything that goes along with it [full-time teachers]. And the pay.

—ESOL teacher (Beth)

The need for more working hours. Twenty-four out of 103 teachers (23%) in our sample worked full time (35+ hours per week in adult basic education). The mean hours of work per week across the whole sample was 23 (n=103, SD=11.5). The minimum number of hours worked was 5. Nineteen percent of the sample worked 10 or fewer hours per week, and median hours was 22 (half of the sample worked 22 hours or less). Program type (corrections/libraries/unions, F=5.68, df=2, $p<.01$, n=103) and state (Massachusetts, F=4.97, df=2, $p<.01$, n=103) were also significantly related to working more hours. Older teachers (61 years and older) tended to work fewer hours (F=4.35, df=4, $p<.01$, n=97).

There was a decided split in our sample between teachers who wanted to work part time and those who wanted to work full time. As was discussed in the section about ways of getting into the ABE field, adult basic education was attractive to some teachers specifically because they could work only a few hours a week, which suited some young parents or people who had retired from other fields (including K–12) but wanted part-time teaching or tutoring work.

I'm very happy in the field but I don't know if I would even work again if I stopped doing this job. ... I'm fearful that I will be offered more hours next year and I don't want them.

—ESOL teacher (Elizabeth)

However, lack of more options for full-time work in the field created problems for those who wanted to stay in the field but needed more hours. With so few full-time jobs available, some teachers worked several part-time ABE jobs, to the detriment of the program and the students:

I was constantly trying to piece together enough work to make a living because in adult education very few positions are full time. At one point, I was teaching for three different programs, and so a lot of my time was traveling, but of course you don't get paid for that.

—ASE math teacher/program director[34]

Sometimes they have more than one job. Basically, they're only meant to be here in the mornings, then some of them go off to a second job in the afternoon.

—Community-based program director

Part-time staffers speeding off to their next job have little time to meet to strengthen existing programs, to determine the needs of their learners, and to form an action plan. Full-time staff trained and supported in their work with adult learners and a decrease in staff turnover would yield a consistent staff more able to develop effective strategies to meet the needs of their learner population.

—ABE teacher/counselor

Another option for teachers who wanted full-time work was to move into an administrative or director position, more of which are full-time (and higher-paying) jobs. In fact, of the 99 teachers who provided us with the data in the last wave, 7 had moved into nonteaching jobs as administrators or professional developers. One teacher who obtained a new position as a curriculum coordinator, after 15 years of teaching in adult basic education, reflected on her transition into what society now viewed as a "well-supported job":

The first criteria is that I'm being paid for what I'm doing, makes it a real job. Well, it makes it a real job to the outside world. I don't know if I feel that. I'm not going to work any harder. I always worked hard. But I don't get credibility on the outside world. In this country it seems, even to my husband, that it's a real job if you have money, and also the hours, too. This is going to require 40 hours a week or more. In the [new job], I have an office, they gave me a phone. I've got a real classroom. I've got a real place to put my books. I've got a file cabinet that I can keep stuff in. I don't have to keep it in my car. All of those things contribute to, 'is it credible?' to me.

—ESOL teacher

Also attached to part-time jobs was the feeling that they don't "mean" as much as full-time jobs, even when teachers put in extra hours:

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[34] This comment was made during the first interview with this teacher. During the course of the study, she became a program director in a full-time job.

Well, it's not as if I'm working 'full time.' We [part-time teachers] are constantly saying that. In a way, almost devaluing how much we're doing: I finish at 1:00 but a student needs help with something, and I get involved with that student.

—ESOL teacher

The school system ... we're at the bottom of the pole, and maybe that's the way it has to be. Children have to come first. We're not given a sense of being professionals, we're given this little part-time job, do what you want. But I also think that comes from the state as well.

—LEA program director

The need for job security. Adult basic education is a field, unlike K–12 and higher education, funded through "soft" money. Most ABE programs apply and reapply—sometimes annually—for grants from the state department of education, the local city, or from foundations and other donor organizations. These grants usually cover basic operating costs such as salaries, materials, and, in many cases, physical facilities. As such, ABE programs are subject to the fluctuations of the federal, state, and local budgets, and basic education for adults can be one of the first items cut in any budget that needs tightening. For this reason, many teachers—and many programs—don't know from one year to the next whether they will have a job or a program.

Teachers were asked their view on the stability of their jobs and their perception of the stability of funding for their primary program. They were asked to rate these two items on a scale from one to six (1=*very weak* and 6=*very strong*). The mean score for job stability was 4.3 (*n*=96, *SD*=1.3), ordering it 10th out of 17 aspects of program strength, and the mean score for program-funding stability was 4.1 (*n*=95, *SD*=1.3), ordering it 13th out of 17. Ten percent of the whole sample (*n*=83) indicated that it was the primary reason why they would leave the field of adult basic education.

I don't see that [adult basic education] job as something where someone is going to walk in and say, 'Wow! I've got this awesome job and I'm going to stay here for a long period of time.' It's a stepping-stone for someplace else. [What is needed is] more job security. From season to season you could lose your job, there are no medical benefits, there's no benefits whatsoever. It's definitely part time; they don't even offer the thought of full time. I think those are some real reasons why [teachers leave].

—ABE/ESOL teacher

I've worked in programs that disappeared from under me.

—GED teacher

The need for paid prep time. Of the 78 people who were still teaching at the time we asked the question, 42 teachers (54%) reported they received at least some paid preparation time. The way preparation time is calculated by programs varied greatly. Of the 42 teachers who received prep time, 15% received one hour of paid preparation time for every hour of teaching, 17% received one hour for every two hours of teaching, 22% received one hour of prep for every three hours of teaching, and the remaining 46% received prep time in a wide variety of lesser configurations (e.g., one hour prep for every four hours of teaching, one hour prep for every five hours of teaching, one hour for two classes, one hour a week).

Prep time was associated with hours worked per week: for the teachers from whom we have data on this question, three quarters of the full-time teachers (35+ hours per week, n=20) received prep time, whereas only 40% of part-time teachers (n=57) received prep time, and this difference was significant at $p<.01$ ($\chi^2=7.11$, $df=1$, $n=77$). Receiving paid prep time was not related to program type. Prep time was significantly related to state (Massachusetts' teachers were more likely to receive prep time ($\chi^2=23.7$ $df=2$, $p<.001$, $n=78$).

Paid prep time was not listed as a primary reason to leave the field, and only 14% of our sample said it was one of their top three concerns about working in the field. Yet subsample teachers identified it as an issue. Lack of prep time was especially hard on new teachers, who were generally more nervous about teaching and felt they needed to carefully prepare for classes. The main reason teachers did not receive prep time seemed, again, to be related to cost; teachers were only paid for the hours that they taught in order to keep costs down, hire more teachers, and serve more students:

> *I feel like I'm a professional, and I like getting paid, but it's tough when you're part time because you really only get paid for the hours that you're physically present. That doesn't involve how much prep time that you do. That's an issue.*
>
> —ABE teacher

> *I also know back then I spent way too much time planning and was frustrated with that because I like to do a variety of other things at home. What goes against it is lack of time. I have a life outside of a job. If I'm not getting paid for spending time discussing what is going on, you tend to put it off. Unfortunately, money talks very loud for all of us.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

One program dealt with the issue of prep time by increasing teachers' hourly rate and not requiring them to do their prep time on site. The arrangement worked well for this particular teacher:

[Before], I got paid a half an hour for every two-hour session, but to be paid for the extra half hour of prep time, we had to show up a half an hour before class started. That was the catch ... now I just have a higher hourly rate. We don't get paid for prep time but it works out just the same. I get to do my preparation at home.

—ESOL teacher

The need for paid professional development time. As we discussed in Chapter Five (learning to teach), teacher preparation and training in adult basic education was limited for the teachers in our sample. Direct support for attending teacher workshops, other training activities, and participating in conferences varied considerably but for most it was fairly low, given the overall lack of formal preparation and orientation for teachers coming into the field. On the one hand, mean number of hours of paid professional development release time across all teachers in our sample was 18.9 hours per year (n=103, SD=22.6). On the other hand, almost one fourth of all teachers in our study (23%) reported that they received *no* paid release time for professional development at all; and the median number of paid professional development hours per year was 12 (i.e., half of all the teachers in the sample received 12 or fewer hours).

Table 18: Hours of Paid Professional Development Release Time Per Year

(n=103)

NUMBER OF DAYS (HOURS)	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
None	23%
2–12 hours	32%
13–25 hours	21%
26–50 hours	15%
51–75 hours*	8%

There were outliers at the upper end: one individual reported receiving 150 hours.

A one-way ANOVA test indicated that full-time teachers (those who worked 35+ hours per week in adult basic education) received more paid professional development release time (mean 34 hours per year, n=21, SD=23.5) than part-time teachers (mean 13.71 hours per year, n=78, SD=14.70, and this difference was significant (F=23.90, df=1, p<.001). Getting paid to attend professional development not only meant that it was possible for teachers to attend but that learning was important:

The ability to get paid to do professional development [helps me to learn]. It's not that I'm saying, 'Oh, we get paid for it.' I guess what I'm really saying is that it's encouraged and therefore, if it's encouraged, you're getting paid. And it just really means to me that somebody cares that we do it.

—ABE/preGED teacher

> *I just don't see how you can expect people to commit to any kind of staff development and find out more about best practices when you pay them for 4 hours a week. I don't go for paying someone 40 hours a week and expecting them to work 80 or paying them for 20 and expecting them to work 40. I just don't believe in it and I think it's been done so much to women.*

> —Community-based program director

Based on both the quantitative and the qualitative data, we conclude that the majority of ABE teachers in our sample lacked adequate access to at least one of the five working conditions (resources, professional development and information, colleagues and director, decision-making, a well-supported job). We estimate that probably less than 5% of teachers had what they might call *adequate* access to all working conditions. While teachers in the K–12 system—indeed, people in any occupation—might say that they also lack access to adequate working conditions, we can't help but conclude that the range existing in the ABE field is quite dramatic and is skewed to the lower end, particularly in ABE teachers' access to a well-supported job.

Impact of Working Conditions

Impact on teachers. Given the working conditions described above—low salary, lack of paid prep and professional development release time, lack of benefits, limited job stability—how do teachers adapt? Our study suggests that teachers made one of three decisions when they were cognizant of less than optimal working conditions: they decided to *cope, challenge,* or *leave.* In our subsample of 18 teachers, we did identify teachers who were so isolated that they did not have a point of comparison for what good working conditions might look like and thus did not even realize they were coping. One teacher, who expressed her frustration about open enrollment and other program policies to the researcher but did not express them to anyone in the program, explained that:

> *It's all I knew. I just figured that's the way it was always done. I was OK with it.*

> —ABE/ESOL teacher

Other teachers, however, even though they didn't necessarily use the terms *cope, challenge,* or *leave*, realized that they were making some type of decision about how to react to an environment that made it difficult for them to do their jobs as well as they would like. We hypothesize that teachers *cope* with lack of access to resources, professional development and information, and lack of access to directors; that teachers *challenge* lack of access to collegiality and decision-making; and that teachers *leave* because of lack of access to a well-supported job. We discuss each of these three responses in the section below.

Cope. Even when faced with difficult working conditions, some teachers deliberately chose to accept those conditions, often rationalizing them as being part and parcel of working in the field of adult basic education. For some teachers, coping meant simply "putting in your hours" and doing the same thing year after year; for others, it meant striving to improve their practice within the areas over which they had control, such as classroom activities:

> *I've learned to roll with the punches. If you can't change it, accept it. Frustration would accomplish nothing. My policy in life has always been only to commit those resources that you directly control. I think you have program directors who should be aware of what the program is all about. There are aspects of the program that I feel should probably be a little bit more intertwined into the harmony of the classes. If they want to find out, they can ask, but I'm not a strong advocate of running up there and saying, 'We ought to do this, we ought to do that.' They give me my mission and give me the means to achieve it, and I'm satisfied.*
>
> —GED teacher

> *I just assume as a teacher that I'm going to do hours that I'm not paid for. It's just part of the job. Even though I see it as a problem, it's also part of the job.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Why do teachers cope? Reasons included lack of energy to mount a challenge; perceived futility of challenging; the belief that things will get better in time, of their own accord; and fear of conflict or repercussions (i.e., teachers might lose their job if they challenged):

> *I do what is required and I think I don't make waves because it doesn't seem to get you anywhere. But I don't have any waves to make especially. I'm simply quite happy with everything about this program. If I have an opinion about something like that, I feel free to say it. I might not respond if they say something. It kind of varies how confrontational [I am]. I don't like to be confrontational. Would I take some action? I would say right now, I would probably not take action, beyond maybe saying, 'Well, I don't feel that way.'*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *I don't feel that I'm listened to and that my feelings are heard. It makes me feel that I am sort of an outsider, I guess. I'm pretty powerless. So if you feel powerless, you're not going to try to institute change, are you, on a program level?*
>
> —ESOL/ASE teacher

> *Teachers are already tired. They've had a rough year. Then to try to fight the administrators all the time. They give up. ... If we talk too much, then they're going to make it hard for us. It's this perception that you as an individual have no right to say or voice your opinion ... there's nothing as far as ABE teachers or any type of support or like an organization or a union or anything. There's nobody there to support this individual, to say it's OK to voice your opinions ... their fear of losing their position is a reality. It does happen.*
>
> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

One teacher recognized that how she handled the problem of poor working conditions determined how her students would handle it. For fear of creating negativity in the classroom, she coped by "making light" of the fact that the classroom was located in a storage closet with bad ventilation:

> *And they [students] see that [space is a problem] but I think that a lot of their attitude toward that as we go along the year is reflective of my attitude toward that. So I make a joke of that or I make light of that. I see the lack of space as a problem for me much more than I think it is for them. If you tend to make light of it [the deplorable classroom conditions], then they tend to. They don't like it. They know that [the conditions are awful] but if you say, 'This is really the best. We're so lucky to have the program,' then they tend to take on that attitude.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Even when teachers knew that the environment was not as conducive to learning as it could or should be, they often learned to accept the limitations. One teacher talked about having classes of more than 35 students when she first started teaching:

> *At first, I thought, 'oh my God' and I do feel sorry for the students because obviously they get so much more in a smaller class, but I'm used to it. It doesn't bother me at all. I actually prefer a big class now.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Another form of coping, when working conditions were perceived as inadequate, was to leave the program, rather than the field entirely, or to seek a different role within the field. Of the 104 teachers from whom we got data in Wave Three, 91 were still working in adult basic education[35] (82 were still teaching in the field, and 9 were working in the field but not teaching). The nine teachers working in the field, but not in teaching, all took nonteaching jobs as counselors, program directors, and professional developers.

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[35] A dropout rate of 13% over 18 months.

Out of 85 practitioners still working in the field who provided us with data,[36] 10 had left their previous program to work in another program. Of these 10, 2 practitioners changed programs because their prior program ended or lost funding, 2 changed because they wanted to teach a different population of students, and another 2 changed because of staffing and other changes to their program's schedule. One practitioner changed programs because she wanted to work full time, another for more professional development opportunities, another due to problems with the director, and one changed due to changed family circumstances. These findings indicate that teachers sometimes seek nonteaching jobs within the field, many of which have more working hours, better pay, or more benefits, and others cope by changing programs in search of different working conditions.

Poor facilities, lack of resources and materials, minimal opportunities for professional development, and invisible or difficult directors were factors that teachers seemed more likely to cope with. Teachers did not see them as factors that could be challenged, but also not consider those factors serious enough to cause them to leave the field. Since there are no national or statewide organizations or unions for ABE teachers to voice their concerns collectively, a teacher who feels she or he cannot challenge (or has unsuccessfully challenged) poor working conditions must either choose to cope or leave.

Challenge. Teachers "challenged" by voicing their concerns and suggestions for change to those with decision-making power within the program leadership. In cases where teachers had a strong voice in decision-making within their program, challenging the program or system to improve was regarded positively. These teachers often saw themselves as part of a team made up of their colleagues, their director, and often the students as well. Although their working conditions were not always what they would have liked them to be, they felt a sense of ownership of their programs and an investment in a process of program improvement. For other teachers, the choice to try to challenge or change their working conditions would have entailed rocking the boat:

> *We tend to get the older equipment, we tend to be less funded, we tend to have to go into other people's classrooms and these are things if we got into this field we have to tolerate. But if we're going to improve the field, maybe we should stop tolerating some of these things and start to demand to be more professional and to have more standards. It's dismaying when you get into this field to find that some people don't take you seriously.*

> —ESOL teacher

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[36] Six practitioners still working in the field did not answer our question about whether they had changed programs in the previous 12 months.

One teacher who had been coping with a lack of resources realized that she did have a choice to challenge, and that by challenging she also served as a role model for her students:

I use her classroom at night. It has all kinds of notes written on the board, and I can't use the board because I can't erase the notes. At the time it was something that I was just dealing with because I didn't really have a choice. But now I'm saying, 'Yes, I do have a choice here because I do a lot of writing on the board.' Whatever rooms the night school teachers are using, they have access to all areas of the classroom, all resources in the classroom. ... As a teacher, we are always looking toward making sure that learners' needs are met. I can't do that if my needs are not met. No wonder learners are giving up. No wonder they're afraid to go talk to administrators when teachers are even afraid to follow up on their issues. If I'm going to teach students to voice their opinions and to make changes, I need to do it also.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Why did teachers challenge inadequate working conditions? Exposure to other programs and practitioners—seeing what else was possible—was often the turning point and the reason teachers began to challenge:

I don't have anything to compare this [program conditions] with, because I've never taught anywhere else before. I think that might make a difference, too. The interesting thing is, [I learned] at [the professional development], that different programs obviously get a lot more money and I don't know why. There was one program, and the stuff that they did amazed me. I was thinking, 'Why can't we do anything?' We don't even have our own building. [We] had to use the school. How come [the other program] has their own building? There are a lot of things like that. Again, people come and they're so concerned about keeping their jobs that it takes away from what could be really exciting about the program. Exciting for the students. Money has to do with it. You have to look at the whole state and where it's going.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

Before it was like, 'OK, this is what I think should be changed, but am I the only one feeling this way?'

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

In many programs, there were no mechanisms for teachers to state their concerns, making the process for suggesting changes in the program a mystery. Needed changes then depended on the courage or will of the individual to speak up:

How do you get the organization you work for in line with the changes you want made?

—PreGED teacher

I want to make changes, but am somewhat afraid and feel lost as to how to make it happen. I coordinate the learning center and work with all levels of students. I am the only person there.

—ABE/GED teacher

Challenging could be successful in generating change within the program, and the results of the challenge were sometimes enough to help teachers stay in the field. In one program, in which the teachers who participated in the professional development lobbied their director for paid teacher sharing time, it had a positive affect on one of their colleagues:

He was going to quit. He was going to leave. He felt very alone. He felt he was going nowhere. This was his first time teaching adults. He didn't know what to do, what to expect. So when he found out that hey, we're going through the same things, too, he didn't take things personally. So he decided to stay.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Leave. While some teachers left teaching for reasons that had nothing to do with environmental factors or working conditions (retirement, relocation), others did see leaving the field as a decision they were forced to make. When working conditions became unbearable, and challenging was not successful or not perceived as an option, teachers left. Not receiving a living wage was a key issue:

Part time in ABE is an oxymoron. Since I am new to this field this past year, I have become aware of the added responsibilities, largely unpaid, in ABE. Perhaps [I will] leave the field of adult basic education.

—ABE/GED teacher

Right now, ABE teachers throughout the state, and I'm sure it's true in other states, we're leaving because of the finances. This is why teachers are leaving; and that's why teachers that do come in do not give their all to programs. I see it and I hear it. I love what I do but the politics of everything and the bureaucracy also have an effect on teachers and the way they feel about the way they're teaching. I think if you have the complete support of your administrators, as well as financial … it makes a difference. Good teachers want to stay in their programs. But what's been happening is that, like every other program, finances are a problem. Lately I've been feeling that I definitely am not getting paid

enough for what I'm doing. Finances are an issue, wages are an issue. So basically it is just going out and finding a better job that pays more.

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Being respected and being involved in determining program direction is another area of concern for teachers:

I'm not sure how long a person is going to stay at a job where they're really not respected for what they do. Maybe that's too hard a word, but people want to be involved. They want to have changes happen, and their inputs made to feel like it's important so that you're energized. As much as I want to energize my students, I also need to be energized.

—ABE/ESOL teacher

One teacher told us that burnout and teacher turnover was actually expected in the program and accepted as a reality of the field:

When I was told about this position, I was told it's a two-year position, period. People burn out at that point; you just don't go on past that. I'm starting my third year, and I'm understanding what they were saying to begin with, and yet I don't want to give up because I do enjoy it a lot. … At this point, I think I have the systems for this class; it's now the system for me that I need to figure out. I don't want to get to the point when I'm starting to be negative.

—Vocational education teacher

One anecdote from the professional development study illustrates the problem with teachers' leaving the field: teacher turnover (like student attrition) causes turbulence. In one program, by Wave Three data collection, all three of the teachers who had participated in our professional development, as well as the program director, had left the field during the previous year. Another teacher in our study felt as though her colleagues had "disappeared":

When I started eight years ago, there was a core teacher group that we all hung out with, especially at conferences and stuff. Now it's like we see all new faces. I thought, 'Where'd they go? They were good, bright teachers. How come they left?'

—Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Frustration with the structure of the program was the explanation one teacher gave for why she was leaving the field and she described what it would take to make her stay:

I'd stay in it, and I'd be an entrepreneur. If I had guaranteed employment, work 20 hours a week, seeing my students three hours a day, five days a week, this is ideal. I would dump the state test, I would dump the binder, dump the curriculum, I would offer electives, tailor the teaching a little bit: 'This is a conversation-based class, this one is almost entirely on the computer.' Students having options and picking and choosing what they want would be my dream program.

—ESOL teacher

Even when teachers were in good programs where challenging—or suggesting change—was encouraged, the poor salary and opportunities for advancement made them think about leaving:

I'm tired of not making money. Also, it sounds kind of funny for somebody so new in the field, but I'm not sure I'm so crazy about the way that they [Department of Education] want us to go in. It has the Workman's [Workforce] Investment Act and being much more of a factory for putting out better workers. ... The reason why I would still like to be involved in [volunteer] tutoring is because at that point I wouldn't have to be responsible for making sure that I'm following the proper guidelines. I would be able to help. But I think the main thing is that I'm tired, and I have two master's degrees, and there's no place to go with this [teaching in ABE].

—ABE/preGED teacher

For some of them, they hope that it's [teaching in adult education] a step towards getting full-time employment, because some of them aren't employed either in public school or aren't full-time teachers so they look at this as a good thing for their resume and move on.

—GED program director

Perhaps one explanation for why, if true, teachers *cope* with lack of access to resources, professional development and information, and directors; *challenge* lack of access to collegiality and lack of access to decision-making; but *leave* the field due to lack of access to a well-supported job is because poorly paid jobs are systemic within this field, but other working conditions are more program-specific. In other words, getting a job in another ABE program may result in better access to facilities or resources, colleagues and director, or professional development, but most likely will not result in a high-paying, full-time job with good benefits, since the field as a whole consists largely of part-time jobs with low pay and no benefits. Another explanation is that challenging program structure in order to improve access to colleagues or decision-making seems much more feasible than challenging a fixed budget that does not have money for raises

or benefits. One can learn to live with poor materials or isolation, but spending an entire career receiving low pay or no benefits may not be an option for those whose family depends on a living wage and health coverage.

Impact on programs. Teachers are not the only ones who were affected by poor working conditions and poorly supported jobs. Teacher turnover due to low wages affected program stability, and programs often had to count on the "good will" of the teachers to stay:

> *Because we're dealing with part-time staff, and most of the staff including myself hold full-time day jobs. I think we're extraordinarily lucky that we have such a strong commitment of the staff to the students. It's extremely difficult to keep staff. I think that's a constant challenge and I think, in the future, if programs are going to focus on adult literacy and hope that these programs will be successful, I think that issue needs to be looked at. Would it be better to look at providing more security for staff and eliminating the turnover issue? It just becomes extremely problematic to maintain any consistency for the students. Certainly the salaries are not motivating. We're the second lowest in the state in terms of our tutor pay rate. It's a serious problem. It's because we're nice people and people like us is why the come and work for us. It's not the money.*
>
> —GED program director

Impact on students. Teachers were very concerned about what poor working conditions and the turnover of teachers meant for students. In teachers' perception, high teacher turnover and teacher burnout were key reasons why students might leave:

> *I don't think she's [the student] in the program this year. And I feel real bad about that because she needed that program, and I think it would have made a vast difference for her, the way she could help her kids out in school. And that's where the change in teachers is devastating, and that's when students drop out because they don't have the continuity that they need. There's so little continuity in a lot of their lives as it is that they don't need that in the classroom. When you lose a teacher in the middle, or even after a year, it's a huge issue. I'm sure we've lost some students who will never come back because their teacher is gone.*
>
> —ABE/ESOL teacher

> *There has to be a connection between learner motivation and teacher motivation. If the teacher's not motivated, then learners will not be. We came to realize that we need to do something to make sure the teacher is motivated.*
>
> —Family literacy/ESOL teacher

Teachers also cited lack of access to adequate facilities or resources as having a negative impact on students:

> *They [the students] came in the first day when they saw this [the classroom in the storage closet]. There's no mistaking how the town feels about us when this is where we are and a minor department in town has got a newly painted office and this is where a school is.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

> *Having old computers is one example. Not having enough books is another. I think it's kind of lousy that a student can't take a book home.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Several teachers and directors cited the benefits to students of teachers and administrators having access to each other:

> *One of the things that could affect the students could be a feeling of consistency and interaction among the different instructors they're involved with. What you do in those meetings is you brainstorm how to serve your students. Also, what happens there is there's some consistency between other people's philosophy about instructing and their own. There's some consistency in terms of what are reasonable policies to enforce.*
>
> —ASE math teacher/program director

> *The administrator has to work a little harder to make sure he or she is in touch with those [off-site] teachers, or any teacher that's at a different site, because you grow into your own world, and I think that, ultimately, not only does your teaching suffer, but your students suffer from that. Because you need to have that community.*
>
> —ESOL teacher

Conclusions about the Reality of Teachers' Jobs

Teachers' top concerns were their program (structure and mission, facilities, and administration support) and their job (salary, security, benefits, and number of working hours). In addition to retiring, the main reasons teachers gave for why they would leave their ABE job were low salary, lack of benefits, limited working hours and, to a lesser extent, lack of job security. Although teachers reported a fairly strong desire to stay in the field, they were less likely to want to work in the field five years from now (as opposed to one year from now), and even less certain that the ABE field would be their long-term career.

We defined teachers' working conditions in terms of their access to: resources, professional development and information, colleagues and program directors, decision-making, and a well-supported job. A well-supported job in adult basic education would include a living wage, benefits, more working hours, job security (or at least, program stability), paid prep time, and paid professional development release time. Well-supported jobs were the exception, rather than the rule, among the teachers in our sample.

Teachers had three responses to poor working conditions: they could cope, challenge, or leave. All three responses also affected programs and students. We hypothesize that teachers *cope* with lack of access to resources, professional development and information, and directors; that teachers are most likely to *challenge* lack of access to collegiality and lack of access to decision-making; and that teachers *leave* because of lack of access to a well-supported job.

Those teachers who had well-supported jobs recognized that such jobs were rare and considered themselves lucky. Teachers who weren't concerned about *some* aspect of their job (pay, benefits, stability, working hours, prep time) were also rare. It was evident that teachers were concerned not just about the effects of the poorly supported jobs on themselves and their family but also on students and programs.

Given the growing shortage of K–12 teachers in many states, we wonder how ABE programs will compete with the attractiveness of K–12 jobs. The system will probably continue to rely on teachers and volunteers, such as those in our sample who entered or stayed in the ABE system because they wanted to work only part time or to work with adults and didn't need their ABE jobs to pay a living wage to subsist. However, many teachers do need a job that can support them or their families. What, then, is the impact on our field, in both teacher and student turnover, of a system where the majority of jobs are not well-supported enough to allow teachers to be fully involved as learners, program members, and members of the field?

In the next chapter, we offer a plan, with recommendations for how to begin to change the way teachers are prepared for, and supported to work in, adult basic education, in order to improve and sustain the quality of instruction and services that students receive.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review of ABE teachers' characteristics and concerns was an exploratory study. Our sample was not randomly selected and did not survey teachers from across the country. However, on the basis of the data presented here, this chapter will set out a proposed plan and recommendations for addressing teachers' concerns. Further research[37] should confirm the extent to which the concerns of our sample teachers reflect the concerns of ABE teachers nationally. The readers of this report—teachers, program directors, state policymakers, professional developers—who hear an echo in these results of the characteristics and concerns of teachers they know should review the recommendations and plan presented here to determine for themselves whether they are applicable to the needs of the teachers in their program or state.

After analyzing and reflecting on the data, we conclude that the two most urgent issues for our field in relation to its teachers are:

- the lack of preparation teachers receive to teach adults, and

- the poor conditions under which they work.

Although there were exceptions in the form of model programs and full-time teachers in well-supported jobs, the picture we are left with overall is one of relative disarray, where teachers enter the field from every walk of life; receive minimal preparation (little formal coursework, training, or orientation) before walking into the classroom; receive little guidance, mentoring, support, or feedback about how they are performing once they are there; have few opportunities for learning through professional development; know little about the larger field of adult basic education; burn out quickly because of poor working conditions; and leave the field in frustration after a few short years. While our study did not address the quality of instruction provided by teachers without much training in teaching adults, nor the quality of instruction provided by a constantly changing teacher workforce, further research should tackle this question. We are not questioning the commitment and quality of the teachers in our sample, or of teachers everywhere, but it is hard to imagine how teachers who are poorly supported and trained can do the best job possible—as they desperately want to do.

These results confirm and provide greater depth to what has been commonly known but not well-documented in the ABE literature: teachers and programs are stretched, stressed, and challenged as they try to provide the best possible services to the

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[37] In another publication, *Survey and Methodology for Assessing Adult Basic Education Teachers' Characteristics and Concerns,* available online at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu, we provide the revised questionnaire and interview protocols used in the Professional Development Study, plus suggestions for sampling, so that programs or states who want to get a better portrait of their own teachers may use or adapt our protocols for their own specific informational needs.

greatest number of students each year. The importance of this in an age of accountability cannot be underestimated. If programs are to improve outcomes for students, they will have to make hard choices about resource allocation, one of which is to consider the impact of a cadre of undertrained and poorly supported teachers on student achievement. Considering high turnover of teachers, programs and states will have to address the question of how they can keep more teachers in the field and give them the training they need to provide high-quality services to students.

In this chapter, we provide the beginning of a plan of action for improving teacher preparation and working conditions in the field of adult basic education. The plan is based on the belief that the field will only improve to a limited extent without attention being paid to these issues. The plan consists of recommendations for federal and state policymakers, for program directors, for professional developers, and for teachers themselves. We also present a series of research questions that would provide the field with more definitive information about teachers, their concerns, and their challenges than we have been able to in this exploratory study. Such research will have to be funded and conducted through the ABE system, as many of these questions are not relevant to the K–12 system, and we can neither wait for nor expect K–12 researchers to answer them for us.

Improve Teacher Preparation

A plan for improving the preparation teachers receive to teach adults requires both short-term and long-term solutions. The short-term solutions pertain to **improvement and funding of professional development** and **continued learning opportunities for current teachers.** The long-term solutions pertain to **building career paths in ABE teaching jobs** (parallel to those of K–12 teachers) and **improving the concomitant formal coursework** that should be part and parcel of a career job in adult basic education. Specifically:

Policymakers should begin to organize funding and structures that:

- Reduce the number of students served (or seek increased funding) to provide teachers adequate preparation before and during their work in the classroom.

- Provide incentives or pay teachers to participate in professional development, inside and outside of their program.

- Work with universities to build formal coursework in adult basic education, and tie this to ABE certification efforts underway in many states in an effort to professionalize the field.

Program directors should organize funding and structures that:

- Provide every incoming new teacher with a full orientation to the program, the field, and the principles of teaching adults.

- Build expectations (into every teacher's job) that teachers will access learning opportunities on a regular basis.

- Provide every teacher with access to the Internet, to listservs, and to better in-program material resources.

- Set up mechanisms for teachers to have regular informal and formal contact with their fellow teachers and with the director.

- Diversify the teaching staff to better reflect the population of students.

- Provide teachers with feedback about their teaching in a humane and safe way. If program directors do not themselves have teaching experience, ensure that every teacher has a trained coordinator or mentor teacher who can provide such feedback.

- Pay special attention to the needs of newer, less educated teachers, who can benefit from exposure to other teachers and from multiple opportunities for learning about their various work roles.

Professional developers should:

- Provide training to help teachers learn strategies for creating curriculum, organizing instruction, and assessing progress.

- Help teachers analyze their attitudes and beliefs about teaching adults, and recognize and acknowledge the differences and similarities between themselves and students.

- Expose teachers to a broad range of ways to teach to student needs, including developing curriculum based on student needs (a relatively rare skill among teachers).

- Provide mechanisms for teachers to share the strategies they have developed for developing curriculum, organizing instruction, and assessing progress.

- Provide professional development specific to the needs of teachers by role (basic literacy, ESOL, GED).

- Organize professional development for program directors, so that they can learn from each other how to create the mechanisms for ongoing learning opportunities and the working conditions that will support teachers.

- Create mechanisms to better support teacher self-study if barriers of time, proximity, and lack of access to ongoing learning opportunities cannot be overcome. Help teachers develop the skills to reflect on what works and doesn't work in their own classrooms, elicit and then listen to students' feedback about what helps them, read new research and analyze its importance or applicability to their work.

- Create accurate mailing lists of teachers' home addresses, so they may be contacted directly with information about professional development offerings in the state. Investigate whether new computer-based management information systems used by states (initiated as part of the National Reporting System) could help update, at least yearly, the names and addresses of teachers.

- Improve their own craft and content skills as professional developers.

- Recognize that adult basic education teachers are not all the same when they attend workshops, study circles, or conferences.

- Build into the design of professional development activities those elements that teachers identified in this study: understanding of teachers and their contexts, and willingness to build on what teachers know, help them feel safe and included, challenge them, structure ways for them to learn from colleagues, provide structure for learning with goals, and give them ways to assess and document their progress as learners.

Improve Teachers' Working Conditions

A plan for improving working conditions for teachers (access to resources, to professional development and information, to colleagues and director, to decision-making in the program, and to well-supported jobs) means organizing funding and structures so that programs can make such conditions possible.

Policymakers should:

- Organize funding and set expectations for programs in order to make the *majority* of teaching jobs full time, with benefits, good salaries, and paid preparation and professional development release time. This would probably mean, unless resources were increased, serving fewer overall students—but serving those students better. Under such conditions, potential teachers may begin to see adult basic education as a career rather than an accidental job choice.

- Organize funding to conduct a review of how ABE programs in some states have managed to create appropriate working conditions and well-supported jobs.

- Organize funding to create formal mechanisms by which teachers can have input into their state systems on issues that affect them. Regular teacher meetings and the creation of a statewide teachers' council are examples of ways for teachers to collectively voice their needs, desires, and concerns about their profession.

Program directors should:

- Work with teachers and other program staff to figure out how teachers in the program can increase their access to colleagues in order to share ideas and information, and

have input into decision-making in the program. Set up mechanisms to make this happen.

- Organize funding to make the majority of teaching jobs in the program full-time, with benefits and good salaries.

Fund Research on the Connection between Teacher Preparation, Working Conditions, and Student Achievement

A plan for improving the preparation teachers receive before teaching, and fostering better working conditions must include research to answer two important questions:

1. What is the relationship between well-trained and well-supported teachers and adult student achievement, persistence, and other outcomes?

2. What are the costs and benefits of investing more heavily in teacher preparation (both preservice and inservice) and teacher support?

Other research questions that will require funding include:

- What is the turnover rate of adult basic education teachers, and what causes them to leave the field?

- Is there a difference in quality of services, teacher stability, student persistence, and student achievement between programs where teachers do play a role outside of their program (as a member of the field) and programs where they do not, and, if so, is it worth the cost of supporting teachers in this role?

Much of this research will be difficult, if not impossible, without a way to randomly select teachers for statewide or national studies. States do not know who their teachers are, how many there are, or how to contact them directly to participate in research. The U.S. Department of Education should provide funding and technical assistance to help each state create an annual roster of teachers (perhaps using the NRS management information systems in each state) that state-level and national researchers could use to generate random samples of teachers for research.

A Special Note to Teachers

Although our plan for improving teacher preparation and working conditions includes recommendations mostly for policymakers, program directors, and professional developers, teachers will need to play a part as well. The biggest contribution teachers can make is to support and advocate for the training and working conditions they need in order to do the best job possible. If there are no mechanisms for input within a program

and state, teachers will need to work together to create one, such as the statewide Teachers' Council recently established within the State of Mexico,[38] and teachers can join the Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers (AALPD[39]), a national network of people interested in professional development, which is emerging as an advocate for the support of professional development for practitioners in the ABE field. However, little discussion nationally focuses on the working conditions of ABE teachers, and this might require a national organization of teachers, such as exists in K–12, to provide teachers with an organized mechanism to make their voices heard.[40]

In Closing

If researchers were to talk to people in any occupation, they would undoubtedly find that any occupation has its difficulties. Adult basic education is no different. However, in adult basic education, built as it is on unstable soft money grants, with such low levels of funding, people must struggle harder to deliver the kinds of services that students deserve. Teachers are the critical link to student success, and they need preparation and support to do their jobs well.

The mandate for teacher excellence does not rest with professional developers and teachers alone—it needs to be shouldered by federal, state, and program-level administrators as well. Supporting teachers to learn requires a systems approach: teacher preparation is related to teachers' working conditions, in that teachers will not be able to access training unless funding and structure support them to do so, and teachers are unlikely to invest in their own training unless they are preparing for jobs that are well-supported and stable. The field needs to be strengthened to provide more financial support to programs; programs need to use that financial support to provide more tangible support and opportunities for teachers; professional development needs to be funded and designed to be relevant to teachers' needs and must be of high quality; and teachers need to hold themselves to a high standard of continually improving to best meet the needs of their students.

The recruitment and retention of good teachers are key to the improvement of adult basic education. System reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach well. Even though there are teachers finding ways to do a wonderful job, they are laboring under a system with multiple barriers to success, both for them and their students, and our findings here indicate that the field needs to act

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[38] Personal correspondence, Judy Hofer, May 2003 (judy@nmcl.org).

[39] To become a member of AALPD and/or join their listserv, go to http://wvabe.state.k12.wv.us/aalpd/.

[40] In the ABE field, state program directors have a national organization (National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, NAEPDC, http://www.naepdc.org/) that serves as a network for professional development and a voice for directors, and adult students also have organized their own national organization (Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education, VALUE, http://www.literacynet.org/value/).

on what teachers say about their working conditions, particularly their need for well-supported jobs. Our field cannot develop without a majority of such jobs, where teachers have funding to learn about teaching and then to take action as a program member and member of the field.

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APPENDIX A: PROFILES OF TEACHERS

Profiles of Teachers as Classroom Teachers[41]

David: David was a part-time, experienced teacher working in an LEA program. He had retired from the military and viewed teaching as a satisfying way to spend his retirement years. In his program, students could come and go at any time from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. based on their needs. Teaching to the test determined his curriculum. His goal was to help students who did not finish high school get their GED as quickly as possible, which he saw as a ticket to the next step, which may be a job, a promotion, or further education. "I want to be able to get 'em in, get 'em done, get 'em gone." He utilized individualized instruction except for math when he would group students to teach a lesson, and relied on GED exercise books, using the thinnest ones. David described his teaching approach as pragmatic: evaluate the parts of the tests on which the students are likely to do poorly and teach to those areas exclusively. When teaching math, for example, David described how he concentrated on 17 topics and needed students to grasp only 8 of the 17 to be able to pass. When teaching writing, he also reduced what students need to learn to a few "tricks," which, in the case of writing, was to personalize the essay. Although he would like to spend time with students reading history or discussing current events, he felt, with students coming and going through his program so rapidly, that these activities would be a "luxury" that the students couldn't afford. While he expressed some desire to be able to practice a different way of teaching, saying, for example, "I wish I had the same five people in my class all the time. They have a real relationship," his teaching approach had not changed much over his more than 10 years as a teacher.

David obviously got some results. He more than tripled the number of GED graduates within his first two years. David felt that his approach to GED instruction was strongly sanctioned by his program, and the program director appeared to feel David was doing a good job of graduating students and mostly did not interfere. His primary struggle as a teacher was with the program's policy that he must accept students at any time that they walked into the classroom, even if they did so right in the middle of instruction. David was unsuccessful in persuading the administration to make one change to their open-enrollment policy and to allow students to enter class only at 8:00 a.m.—when class began—to avoid interruptions. He interpreted the administration's reluctance to make such changes as being caused by the extreme pressure the program was under to "reach their performance numbers" of graduating students.

Lucy: Lucy taught ESOL classes in a union program. She was full time and had been teaching for more than 20 years in adult basic education. When we first met her, she utilized a more-or-less learner-centered approach, tailoring her speaking and writing

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[41] We have changed their names to protect their anonymity and respect the confidentiality we promised them.

classes for ESOL students to the particular language practices that they seemed to need in their work and in their lives. She was very familiar with the students' lives, inviting them over to her house, and she sometimes participated with them in union actions within the workplace. Although teachers met monthly to discuss administrative concerns, there was quite a bit of tension in the program, resulting in Lucy's feeling that she did not have much positive interaction and sharing with many of the other teachers.

Lucy's teaching situation changed dramatically by the end of the study. The union had decided to "streamline" the program, so they had reassigned the other teachers to different locations and increased the number of students that Lucy served. In order to deal with this change, Lucy changed to one-on-one, individualized instruction focusing on basic skills and competencies. She felt that instruction via this approach was driven by students' goals, but those goals were specifically educational, and no longer directly based on students' real lives and everyday needs. Sometimes there was an impromptu group formation if she was teaching one student and others joined in. Students who were working on their own seemed to be so eager for instruction that they "stop what they're doing just so that they can get the teacher to teach them."

Lucy had developed new materials around math and nursing preparation (the educational goals towards which the program has geared itself). Eventually she wanted to organize all the materials in such a way that students could direct themselves through all the various lessons without having her guide them so that "students could move through the program faster." These changes in her practice seemed to result from the shift in her teaching situation, rather than a conscious adoption of new practice based on philosophy and growth. She recognized that her new individualized approach affected community-building in the classroom; conversations about cultural differences and students' lives no longer came up naturally as they did in the classes she used to teach, and students have occasionally told her that they missed the style of the original classes. However, she felt that the individualized instruction had some real benefits for students, and had led to some students coming more regularly and staying enrolled.

Esther: Esther was a part-time ABE and ESOL teacher in her second year of teaching when we first met her. She taught in an LEA-funded program that was housed in the high school of a rural community. From the first time she heard about adult basic education, Esther described how she had felt "a spark" and a keen interest in this type of work. As Esther received no formal orientation or training once on the job, she learned through a "sink-or-swim" approach, where she tried out activities and then reflected on how she could do them better the next time. Highly critical of a system that would allow a teacher to teach without any prior training, Esther often questioned how well she was performing and challenged herself to improve. Esther frequently sought the advice of the program coordinator, whom she deeply respected, and, given her teaching situation (she cotaught three of her seven class sessions per week), she typically spent a half-hour after class talking through ideas with her colleague. Esther taught 18 hours per week and not

until the end of our study did she receive any paid preparation time (one hour per week). She did not receive any paid professional development release time.

Esther lived in the same community as the students with whom she worked. Having struggled herself as a learner, she was empathetic toward students, and felt that she had developed friendships with many of them. Relationship building between students, and between students and herself as the teacher was a cornerstone of Esther's practice and one of the primary ways by which she assessed whether she was doing a good job.

As formal schooling did not work well for her, Esther rejected the use of workbooks and was interested in teaching in creative, multisensory ways. She tried to respond to the needs of students, but was frustrated by the inadequate formal assessment information that came from her program, and by her own inability to move from students' individual goals to designing curriculum for the entire class. The NCSALL Professional Development strengthened her idea of basing lessons on students' lives, but it did not show her how to put goal-setting, curriculum development, and lesson planning all together. "We did a variety of [goal-setting activities] … but I still don't think it was a direction for the class. It was individual goals, not for the class. … I need to know how to put together lessons and how to organize information."

Tied to Esther's difficulty with getting initial baseline information on students' skills and goals was her struggle with assessing students' progress. She developed a type of portfolio assessment process where students kept their work in a file and could look back on what they had done, but the process was very informal and did not provide Esther with guidance for next steps. Although frustrated by her difficulty in creating a curriculum for the class, Esther did engage students in several activities/mini-projects that stemmed from students' desires. She added a nutrition component to her class that culminated in students eating lunch together at the cafeteria and spent many class sessions supporting students to promote the ABE program in the community through television and newspaper interviews. One of the students from her class received the learner of the year award from her state literacy resource center.

Profiles of Teachers as Program Members

Brenda: Brenda was a new, part-time ABE and GED teacher in her first year of teaching adults at the outset of our study. She was hired under a collaborative grant between two different programs and taught ABE in a site-based volunteer program and GED in an LEA program. This was Brenda's first teaching position. She was in a K–12 teacher-education program, and viewed teaching adults as a way to get a little experience as she prepared to enter elementary education.

The programs where she worked held different views about teaching. The director of the site-based volunteer program had developed a life-skills curriculum that he wanted Brenda to implement, but she did not feel that she understood it. The director of the LEA program expected her to teach basic skills and GED from workbooks. When we interviewed Brenda's director in the volunteer program, we learned that she was hired to fulfill the requirements of a grant that was applied for primarily because of the need to get additional money to keep the program going. Although the grant stipulated that the teacher pilot the new practice-based curriculum, Brenda was apparently unaware of this stipulation, feeling that she could "pick and choose" among activities that best suited her teaching abilities. Brenda's knowledge about each of the programs in which she worked was so limited that she did not know the formal name of each program and referred to them by their respective directors' names. She was not clear about which of the directors supervised her. In the LEA program, she was not given any intake or assessment information about the students with whom she worked, even when she had asked the director for the pretest information.

Brenda had very limited interactions with her directors and with colleagues. When asked whom she turned to for support in teaching, she replied: "Nobody. No one." Conversations with other teachers were limited to informal chit-chat in the hallways. Her isolation within the program was worsened by her lack of access to professional development. She received no formal orientation, nor did she participate in any professional development during her first year on the job. The NCSALL workshops were her first professional development experience.

Brenda's predominant focus was on learning how to teach and she felt that teachers should have only some input into shaping the programs in which they worked. "Their [teachers'] input should be somewhat important, not totally ignored." By her third year of teaching, Brenda had left the field, apparently to pursue her interest in teaching K–12.

Deirdre: Deirdre was a part-time, experienced ESOL teacher who worked between 20 and 30 hours per week in an urban, community-based multiservice agency that had been in existence for 35 years. The majority of the 30 ABE/ESOL teachers were part time, and some of them worked only six contact hours per week. Yet the program had regular monthly staff meetings where teachers helped set the agenda and had a voice in making program decisions. The program had also hired an ESOL coordinator who instituted formal meeting times with the ESOL teachers to bring more program and professional development to staff. When she began her job at the agency, Deirdre received one of the most comprehensive orientations of any teacher in our study, with a month to review materials, visit teachers in their classrooms in other programs, and attend an orientation for new teachers sponsored by the state.

For Deirdre, there was much overlap and integration among her roles as a learner, teacher, program member, and member of the field. When she went to professional development, for example, she thought both about how the knowledge she brought back could benefit learners directly and improve her program as a whole. When she was out in the larger ABE field and her community, providing technical assistance to another program, she felt that she was representing her entire program. The program expected teachers to be involved in a number of projects where teachers worked together to improve aspects of the program and better meet the needs of students. For example, Deirdre participated in a program-wide effort to create curriculum around nutrition that culminated in a program-wide luncheon and recipe books. Another example was an ESOL curriculum frameworks project, in which both Deirdre and other teachers from the program actively participated.

Deirdre was proud of her program, and repeatedly talked about how she was "invested" in it, leading her to want to think about and contribute to its improvement. She talked about her program as her home: "I've been here for 5 years and I sort of feel like I live here … I feel an integral part of the program. I think the directors would think so, too … I'm invested. I think of things from a program level many times." Deirdre often took a leadership role in her program and spoke up about issues that concerned her and her fellow teachers. For example, she raised teachers' concerns about how the computers in the program were being controlled by the technical coordinator in ways that weren't conducive, from their perspective, to learning and the program's philosophy, and she was successful in instituting policy changes around computer use by students.

Deirdre felt strongly that teachers needed to be involved and invested in their programs, both to achieve excellence in their profession and to best serve learners: "I think teachers have to have some sense of being involved in the program beyond just their classroom… I think that to be really good at what you do … you have to have a sense that you are invested in the program and the program's outcomes and what other things the program is involved in because … I think you bring a greater understanding, and if you have a greater understanding of the program, you're going to do better by your students."

Beth: Beth was a part-time ESOL teacher who had more than 13 years of experience, all in the same urban, multisite, LEA-funded program. She held a master's degree in ESOL, taught 16 hours per week, and saw adult basic education as her long-term career. Beth did not experience much difficulty with learners dropping out of her class; in fact, her class size often grew over the course of a semester as students brought friends and family to class.

Her program was large, with approximately 2,000 students and more than 40 staff. All the teachers worked part time and received no benefits, no paid preparation time, nor paid release time to participate in professional development activities. As

teachers got paid for only the hours they worked, the program had money to hire substitutes. Beth worked in the day program, where there was higher quality and more continuity than in the evening program, where many of the teachers worked only four hours a week and there was a much higher teacher turnover rate. The teachers only met formally once each semester for "morale and getting back into the swing of things." The program also sponsored between three and four workshops per year, the content of which was primarily decided by the director. Although the administrators asked teachers "from time to time" for their suggestions, Beth did not think the teachers' ideas were considered seriously.

In the main site where Beth worked, there was a meeting room for teachers to meet between classes for a few minutes to share. Beth found the informal sharing among teachers to be invaluable: "Someone will just come into the teachers' room and say, 'I don't know what to do about such and such,' and the others will be able to offer some kind of a solution." Dialogue between teachers and the administration was far less frequent. Without staff meetings, the only way for teachers to communicate with the director was to take the initiative to meet with her. According to Beth, teachers in the program did not know the program's philosophy: "I didn't know either because we don't really discuss it. Don't forget all the teachers are part time so I don't think they give it that much thought."

Beth felt that teachers had very limited decision-making power in the program. "[The director] is the decision-maker. At times she lets us think that we are, but we're not." Even though she felt teachers should be more involved on a program level than they were, she also saw the importance of the administration setting policy without teacher input, "otherwise you don't accomplish anything … too many opinions don't get anywhere."

There were a number of policies and practices that Beth wished to change in the program. For example, for fewer teachers to teach more hours, for teachers to receive paid preparation time, and for her to be allowed to accept students into her ESOL parenting class even if they did not have children, as it was the only ESOL class available to them in the community. Beth had a positive relationship with her director and felt she could approach her to talk about her concerns and ideas for improvement. Yet Beth was not optimistic that her suggestions would go anywhere: "We have expressed it (the teachers' need for more hours and paid prep time) and we're always told that this is the way it is. … I think they didn't want to give the benefits and everything that goes along with it [full-time positions]." After Beth asked her to director whether she could accept nonparents into her ESOL parenting class, Beth reflected: "I spoke to the director … she really didn't answer me. It's not in the cards right now. … I accepted what the director said."

Despite her concern about her working conditions, Beth appeared to feel good about her program and felt it was "strong" in comparison to other programs. She admired her director's skill at expanding the services offered to students and increasing the number of students served. Although she understood that the pressure to serve more students "permeated from the state," she wished nonetheless that with expansion would come better jobs for teachers. Overall, Beth coped with her teaching situation and accepted the status quo.

Profiles of Teachers as Members of the Field

Meg: Meg was a full-time, experienced family literacy teacher in an LEA program during the day; she also taught an ESOL class at night. Although she entered adult basic education as a stepping stone to securing a job in elementary education, she rapidly became "hooked" by the successes she witnessed in the lives of adult learners and began to view adult basic education as her long-term career.

Unlike her part-time counterparts, Meg received paid release time to participate in professional development and attended an extraordinary amount of professional development, sometimes up to 35 workshops/conferences per year. She participated not only in local and statewide professional development, but also had the opportunity to attend two national conferences, one on family literacy and the other on the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Initiative. Meg had played a role as a member of the field—largely by providing professional development to other teachers—from the very beginning of her career. With a bachelor's degree in elementary education, she was invited—on her second day of teaching—to present at an institute on early childhood intervention. Over the course of her teaching career, she also presented on a math technology curriculum that she had developed, sat on an EFF panel, and was asked by the state literacy resource center director to present at the next national family literacy conference. The director of Meg's program positioned the program to take a leadership role in the field and strongly encouraged his staff to share ideas with other programs and present at conferences, saying: "We give a little, we take a little."

Meg's role as an active member of the field began to broaden in scope to include advocating for improved working conditions for teachers. As a result of her participation in the NCSALL Professional Development, she made the connection between learners' retention and teachers' retention, realizing that ABE teachers needed better pay and stable jobs to bring down the high turnover rate of teachers and to keep teachers motivated to do the best job possible. Meg informally surveyed other administrators and teachers throughout the state about teachers' working conditions and, based on the information she collected, became a spokesperson within her program and the state about the need for the field to take teachers' poor working conditions seriously and make substantial improvements. However, the last time we spoke with Meg, she had become

increasingly disillusioned with teachers' status in an already marginalized field and was uncertain whether she could afford to stay in the field that had become her passion.

Debbie: Debbie was a relatively new, part-time ESOL teacher, having taught for two years in an LEA program. She held a master's degree in special education and had taught in the K–12 system prior to entering adult basic education. At the beginning of our interview with Debbie, she knew little about the field of adult basic education, largely because her classes were held in a church and a middle school after hours and she rarely saw other teachers. Staff meetings were held only once a year and her interactions with her director occurred infrequently.

Debbie participated in a minimal amount of professional development. In the year prior to the onset of our study, she had attended two workshops and one conference. She found out about professional development offerings through word of mouth. "I'd like to see a course schedule … a brochure coming out on what's available … they must do this, I just don't get the information." Debbie was required by the state to take a semester-long course on ESOL methods as part of her certification. Once on the job, however, she received no orientation to the field or to teaching. The NCSALL workshop that she attended was her first opportunity to talk with the same group of colleagues over time and she spoke of how invaluable those interactions were to her: "I thought getting the chance to speak with and learn from other professionals in my field was a rare and most valuable prize."

When we first asked Debbie about her involvement as a member of the field, she was not sure what we meant, and responded that her professional affiliations were limited. Although she had had very little exposure to the larger field, she seemed to have a natural inclination to think critically about the "big picture." For example, Debbie felt strongly that the second-class nature of adult basic education needed to be challenged: "[W]e tend to get the older equipment, we tend to be less funded, we tend to have to go into other people's classrooms and these are things if we got into the field we have to tolerate. But if we're going to improve the field, maybe we should stop tolerating some of these things and [start] to demand to be more professional and to have more standards." She expressed her concerns about the harmful effects of the state-mandated curriculum and testing on teaching and the services students received. Debbie was also able to envision solutions to problems and better programs for students, and helped write a grant to fund a program that was centrally located for students and open 24 hours a day with many support services available to students.

Taking a leadership role seemed a natural fit for Debbie: "I would eventually like to be in the position to make program decisions. … I think I can take on just about as much as I'm willing to take on here in the field. It's exciting." The year following the NCSALL Professional Development, Debbie presented for the first time at a statewide conference. However, by the last time we met Debbie, she felt that teaching was not her

calling, and had lost her self-confidence in her ideas and motivation to stay in the field: "A lack of confidence in my ability to be better than the state program, and my ability to be better than the state competencies … the testing is there for a reason … I guess I have more faith in that than I have in myself." Without the environment to support her, Debbie decided that rather than advocate for change, she would leave the field.

Elizabeth: Elizabeth had been teaching ESOL for about four years at the onset of our study, but came to teaching with nine years' experience working as a counselor in adult basic education, as well as experience teaching in K–12. She held a master's degree in education. She worked part time (22 hours per week) in an LEA program in a small town and received benefits as well as both paid preparation time and paid release time. About 30 teachers worked in this fairly large program; all were part time. Elizabeth worked in a building separate from most of the teachers in her program and felt isolated from her colleagues.

Elizabeth appeared to be strongly and happily focused on classroom teaching and wanted her job to have a limited role in her life. She wanted her job to stay part time and did not want the job to spill over into her personal life. As a program member, she was relatively disengaged. Elizabeth felt that much of the decision-making was out of her control and determined by external factors such as grants and state requirements. She seemed content with this situation: "I do what is required and I think I don't make waves because it doesn't seem to get you anywhere. But I don't have waves to make especially. I'm simply quite happy with everything about this program." Her attitude seemed to mirror the program's relatively passive stance toward teachers' involvement in decision-making—the program relied mostly on teachers feeling confident enough to bring issues to the counselor or director. Although the program held weekly staff meetings in the day program, the director himself did not participate, leaving teachers without much formal opportunity to influence program decision-making.

Elizabeth did not see herself contributing in a major way to the field and did not seem to be aware that there might be an expectation for teachers to be involved at this level: "I'm not so sure I really participate in the field all that much. … I think teachers are so overburdened with so many things … I don't know how we could find the time and energy to do some of this other stuff. … But it's fine with me if somebody else wanted to do it." Her program also did not emphasize teachers' involvement on this level. The director did not seem to be sure who on staff was and was not involved in the field, and felt that lack of time most prevented participation at this level: "Sometimes they [teachers] have more than one job and … basically, they're only meant to be here in the mornings, then some of them go off to a second job in the afternoon." Elizabeth also felt that full-time teachers with a need to make adult basic education their career were more likely to be involved than she was: "There are people who wish they were full time and would be happy to be paid to do a lot of these things. Then there are other people who are either a little bit older or they are not so in need of the money, that they have less

interest in doing all this stuff, they just want to be teaching. I think that has an effect on how my program feels about these things." Elizabeth did, however, find a meaningful way to engage with the larger field when she wrote an article for the newsletter for teachers in her state and was proud of her accomplishment: "It's a little feather in my cap."

Profiles of Teachers as Learners

Pamela: Pamela was a part-time ESOL teacher with more than 14 years of experience. She taught 10 hours per week in an LEA-based program in a suburban area. Pamela's program was funded through a grant to the local school board. The program funded only a part-time director, 13 part-time teachers, and a part-time counselor. The program was housed in three separate buildings with evening classes held at the high school and classes at five workplace sites. The classes were taught in borrowed spaces. One of Pamela's classes was taught in a storage room with ventilation so poor she had to leave the door to the hallway open. She had no desk or other place where she could work. There was no common meeting place for teachers. Because of the part-time nature of the teaching staff and multisite nature of the program, program-wide staff meetings were held only twice a year. The staff turnover was high.

Pamela regarded herself as "a perfectionist by nature," and felt she was constantly striving to learn more about how to improve her practice. With a background in teaching high school English, she did not feel that she was prepared to teach adults ESOL upon entry into the field. So she took just about every class and workshop that she could find, often paying for much of it on her own. Pamela worked in a state with a well-developed professional development system and, at the time we met her, she received 10 hours of paid professional development release time per year and another 10 paid hours to participate in program development activities. She clearly spent much more than the allotted time participating in professional development activities offered by the state. In the year previous to the start of the study, she participated in five workshops, two conferences, a teacher inquiry project, an ongoing curriculum frameworks project, and 10 sessions of a study circle or sharing group. She said she studied and read 10 hours on her own. By the second interview, she had also attended technology training on using computers in the classroom and was reviewing software for the program, using in-house program development time.

Pamela took her job as a teacher very seriously and continually challenged herself to improve. She carried a notebook with her at all times to capture her ideas about teaching, sometimes stopping her car to jot down ideas for new lesson plans. Pamela's preferred way of learning was from other teachers in a peer coaching or mentoring situation. As there were very few structured mechanisms within her program for her to learn from colleagues, she arranged on her own to observe other teachers in the program.

She was frustrated when trying to share what she had learned in the NCSALL Professional Development because there were no designated times set aside by the program for teacher sharing. Overall, the sense of isolation that she experienced in her program hindered her ability to learn: "Isolation is difficult and gets in the way of me learning. I need to be stimulated and I need the ideas of other people."

After all her years of teaching, Pamela did not have a handle on her own performance and program and how she "stacked up" relative to other professionals in the field. She desperately desired feedback to see if she was doing a "good job." She wanted an expert to observe her practice and challenge her and was frustrated by the overall lack of quality feedback because: a) the state literacy resource center did not have a mechanism for providing direct teaching feedback to her; b) her director did not have the expertise to challenge her; and c) she felt students were too gracious to provide her with a serious critique. Pamela dreamt of going to graduate school yet was held back by her own insecurities about her abilities to do well: "I absolutely do not have confidence in my ability to go back to school. I don't know how to measure how much my experience … has given me … academically." Pamela seemed to us to be a good example of an experienced but "hungry" teacher.

Penny: Penny, a part-time GED teacher with seven years of experience in adult basic education, also taught remedial reading in the K–12 system during the day. She worked in an LEA in a suburban area and tutored anywhere between 2 and 20 GED students in a drop-in situation, two nights a week for two and one-half hours a night for 12-week sessions.

Penny entered adult basic education with a master's degree in education but no formal coursework in adult basic education. She participated very infrequently in professional development. There was no formal orientation to her job; she said that she "walked in cold" to her GED teaching position and was handed a set of lesson plans and the GED workbooks. The annual regional statewide conference was the only professional development she had attended other than that sponsored by our study. She had not heard of any other professional development being offered. There was no in-house professional development sponsored by her program but she did work very closely with a colleague who also taught GED in the evenings with her, sharing ideas and talking through problems that arose. Penny received no paid release time to attend professional development and had to take time off from her day job to participate.

Penny seemed to feel that professional development was largely irrelevant to her individualized, test-taking approach to GED instruction, and to the learners with whom she worked: "Formally, we don't have a great deal [of professional development]. … We just deal with people as they come in off the street and take the pretest and come into our classroom and our job is to keep them interested long enough to get them to the test. … [M]ost professional development, you're very motivated … [but when] I would get back

to my job, my hands were tied … cooperative learning things, and then you have three students who could have cared less if you were remediating them … it was a little deflating to come home … knowing you can't use the things."

Even though she recognized the limitations of a one-on-one, straight-from-the-workbook approach to teaching, she felt it was the most effective way to prepare students for the GED test in a short period of time and that it solved the problem of "teaching to the middle." Having switched to this approach about two years prior to the onset of our study, Penny's satisfaction with it had grown to the point where she felt increasingly confident about teaching her colleagues about this way of teaching rather than learning from them: "[W]e try to get something out of it [professional development] but we end up giving our ideas because they're working for us." We characterized Penny as a "settled" teacher.

Emmanuela: Emmanuela was in her first year of teaching when we first met her and taught native language literacy in a uniquely community-centered and collaborative program. There, teachers came from the same communities as learners and shared the same linguistic, class, and cultural identities. She taught two native language literacy classes for a total of eight hours per week. Emmanuela had a commitment not just to individual students but also to her community. She wanted learners to see her as a role model: "I want them to do good, like I did … I was in the same position they were. I am one of them. I got nothing better or less, I sit there with them, I cry with them, I eat with them."

Her program strived hard to achieve good working conditions for its small staff of five, most of whom were full time, received paid preparation time, benefits, and when funding allowed, paid release time. Teachers were also funded to engage in program development. A priority for the coordinator, who shared decision-making with teachers, was to "create a supportive environment for teachers." He went to great lengths to arrange professional development opportunities that would meet the needs of teachers, including arranging for mentors to come into the program to help teachers with specific needs, and organizing peer observations where each teacher visited another teacher's classroom each cycle and received one visit. The coordinator helped arrange a mentoring opportunity over the summer months for Emmanuela, in which she worked with a former native language literacy teacher and together they developed curriculum.

Staff meetings took place frequently, with teachers meeting every week for one and one-half hours; the focus of the meeting rotated each week from an administrative meeting to a teacher-sharing meeting. Emmanuela saw the teacher-sharing meetings as an opportunity not only to talk about lessons and teaching concerns, but also to share the emotional highs and lows of teaching: "Sometimes we go full, with news with happiness, sometimes I [feel] so sad that I don't even want to talk. When things don't go well, that's what teachers share." Emmanuela received a two-week initial teacher orientation, which

she felt was insufficient given her lack of experience. She also participated in professional development offered by the state. The year prior to our study she participated in a curriculum-frameworks project and learning disabilities training, both of which were ongoing, and also attended a native language literacy conference and computer training. One of the few reservations that Emmanuela mentioned about professional development sponsored by the state was that it tended not to be geared to her language and culture.

Emmanuela eagerly attended professional development that she felt would help her better serve learners: "That's why I go everywhere [to many trainings] … as information from workshops comes right there to me; it doesn't pass from person to person to me." She appeared to hold a belief that there was a "right" or "magic" way of teaching that came from expert knowledge, and she seemed to underestimate the role of active reflection on her own practice: "I'm looking for a magic thing, but I haven't found it. … I'm always looking for what can help me, I'm looking for things that could help them [students] more." She seemed to eagerly try out what she learned from professional development, perhaps in hope that it would be the "magic thing" that would make the difference in her classroom: "After I learned all that, they give me materials and they give me papers, then I start to teach her that way, the way I was supposed to teach it … I'm a copycat … I'm the kind of person that if you tell me it might help, them I'm going to try this … if it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but I have to try it." We characterized Emmanuela as a "hungry" teacher but one who did not yet have a well-developed theory of good teaching and learning or skills that would help develop that theory. She concentrated on taking in new techniques and adding them to her toolkit.

NCSALL's Mission

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) provides information used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, and adult secondary education. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research in four areas: learner motivation, classroom practice and the teaching/learning interaction, staff development, and assessment.

NCSALL conducts basic and applied research; builds partnerships between researchers and practitioners; disseminates research and best practices to practitioners, scholars, and policymakers; and works with the field of adult literacy education to develop a comprehensive research agenda.

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NCSALL's Dissemination Initiative

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that the research results reach practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education through print, electronic, and face-to-face communication. NCSALL publishes research reports, occasional papers, research briefs, and teaching and training materials; a semi-annual policy brief *Focus on Policy*, a quarterly journal *Focus on Basics*; and *The Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, a scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices.

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