

Giving Literacy Away, Again:
New Concepts of Promising Practice

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Adult literacy programs commonly aim to help adults increase their literacy proficiency through improving their skills and knowledge and/or through increasing their utilization of written language and engagement in literacy practices. Broadly speaking, this programmatic support of adult literacy development may occur in two ways: *bringing people to literacy* and *bringing literacy to people*. More programmatic attention has been given to the former. New directions for program development are needed for implementing the latter.

This chapter presents some results from an ongoing longitudinal study of adult learners that suggest some promising new directions for bringing literacy to people, a process that Reder and Green (1985) called “Giving Literacy Away”. We will see that adults regularly engage in *self-directed* efforts to improve their basic reading, writing and math skills and prepare for the GED Tests. Such self-study is widespread both among adults who participate in adult literacy programs and those who do not. In considering the implications of these findings for adult literacy education, the chapter suggests some new program designs that have the potential to significantly expand and deepen participation in adult literacy education. The paper ends with a description of an ongoing effort to implement a research-driven prototype of such a program, called the *Learner Web*.

Two Approaches to Supporting Adult Literacy Development

In most societies, literacy education has involved much more than merely teaching individuals to read and write. Whole systems of values and institutions have become historically

associated with the use of writing in most societies (Goody & Watt, 1963; Goody, 1968). These contextual features of literacy are so deeply entrenched in cultural practices that it is conceptually and practically difficult for us to separate the *technical* dimensions of literacy (i.e., the information processing involved in reading or writing activities) from the *functional* dimensions of literacy practices (i.e., the social uses made of written materials) or the *social meanings* engendered in particular literacy practices (Reder & Green, 1983). In most Western societies, it is indeed difficult to “unpack” literacy from its social and cultural contexts (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Bringing people to literacy

The deeply contextualized nature of literacy practices has had profound implications for literacy education. In Western societies, literacy has been socialized within contexts of powerful institutions, especially organized religions and schools (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977). Individuals typically acquired basic reading and writing skills as participants in these institutions. Access to literacy entailed access to these powerful institutions. It is thus not surprising that early efforts to teach literacy to adults were based on a conception of *bringing people to literacy*, of inculcating in the adult learners not only the technical skills required to read and write, but also the system of values and practices associated with the institutional sponsor of literacy. Over time, the number and types of these sponsors has increased in western societies including the United States (Brandt, 2001).

This approach to facilitating adult literacy development is based on engaging adults in basic skills programs or other *new* social practices that involve the use of writing. This involves *recruiting* adults to participate in those basic skills programs or other new social practices and *retaining* them sufficiently long to develop new skills and knowledge. Such efforts often entail

large differences between the settings, materials, and literacy practices of the program and those of the learner. These contextual differences may create logistical or cultural barriers to participation for many learners. These contextual differences sometimes engender conflicts between the goals, needs and assumptions of program providers and those of the learners they seek to serve (Brandt, 2001; Purcell-Gates et al, 2000; Reder & Green, 1985; Street, 1995).

Bringing literacy to people

Another approach to facilitating adult literacy development is based on embedding or expanding the use of writing in *existing* social practices. “Giving Literacy Away” is the name Reder and Green (1985) gave to such literacy development strategies based on bringing literacy to people. This approach attempts to support literacy development directly within the settings and contexts and with the materials of the learners as opposed to the settings, contexts and materials of program providers or “sponsors”. We will see that giving literacy away can offer new modes of supporting adult literacy development as well as new ways to expand and increase the quality of existing programs.

Self-Study as an Ethnopedagogy of Adult Literacy

Much more is known about adult learning among participants in education and training programs than among adults who do not participate in such formal programs. Research in general tends to focus on adults in institutional settings if only because they are more readily accessible for study. This leaves us relatively uncertain about the characteristics of learning that take place outside of these formal programs. Reder and Green (1985), in their original formulation of giving literacy away, explored how informal social networks of “literacy helpers” (i.e., individuals who assist or collaborate with individuals to perform everyday literacy tasks) function as contexts for adult literacy development. The more recent notion of a “community of

practice” (Wenger, 1998) significantly broadens the theoretical framework available for understanding adult learning as a socially constructed process. Application of this framework to adult literacy development is beginning to occur (e.g., D’Amico & Capehart, 2001).

Adults’ participation in literacy programs and other activities associated with literacy development reflect their beliefs and practices about how individuals acquire or improve their literacy abilities. I have termed these beliefs and practices about adult literacy learning as the *ethnopedagogy* of adult literacy (Reder, 1992). “Ethnopedagogy” refers to cultural beliefs and practices about teaching and learning in the same way that “ethnobotany” refers to cultural beliefs and practices about plants. We will see that adults’ self-directed learning practices to improve their literacy proficiencies reflect their ethnopedagogy for literacy development. Although self-directed learning has been a heavily researched topic within the field of adult education (e.g., Brookfield, 1985; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1992; Hammond & Collins, 1991; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Knowles, 1975; Long, 1993, 1988; Oddi, 1987; Penland, 1979, 1977; Tough, 1971), very little of it has considered the self-directed learning of basic literacy proficiencies. Some large scale surveys of self-directed learning (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Penland, 1977) found ample evidence that “self-initiated” or “self-planned” learning and “learning projects” are undertaken by large segments of the American adult population, including adults with relatively little formal education. But these seminal studies – that generated many secondary analyses and theories of the self-directed learner – did not differentiate the content of such independent learning in ways that enable us to examine self-directed efforts to improve basic literacy skills. Nevertheless, the prevalence of self-directed learning activities in general among adults with relatively little schooling certainly suggests considering the possibility of self-directed learning in adult literacy development. For clarity, we

will designate adults' independent study activities specifically to improve their basic skills as *self-study*.

There are many indications that adults engage in self-study to improve their basic skills. The NCSALL Persistence Study (Comings, Parrella & Soricone, 1999), for example, found such self-study to be one learning strategy used by some participants they interviewed from adult literacy programs. The extent to which such self-study occurs among non-participants has not been examined in previous research. The learning outcomes attributable to self-study have not yet been investigated, either. An ongoing research project, the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL), can provide some new information about adults' self-study to develop their literacy skills. LSAL includes both adult literacy program participants and non-participants from the target population for adult literacy education. Information that LSAL provides about self-study in the target population will help us better understand the ethnopedagogy of adult literacy.

The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning

The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning has been described in detail elsewhere (Reder & Strawn, 2002a,b).¹ LSAL addresses four major research questions about adult literacy:

- To what extent do adults' literacy abilities continue to develop after they are out of school?
- What are adult learners' patterns of participation over time in literacy training and education? In other learning contexts?
- What life experiences are associated with adult literacy development? How do formally organized basic skills programs contribute to these learning trajectories? Workplace training? Other contexts and activities?
- What are the impacts of adult literacy development on social and economic outcomes?

The LSAL was designed as a panel study, representative of a local (rather than a national) target population for adult literacy education. This target population was defined as residents of the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area, age 18-44, proficient but not necessarily native English speakers, high school dropouts (i.e., did not receive a high school diploma and were no longer

enrolled in school) and had not received a GED or other high school equivalency credential, although their status may change during the study period. A statistically representative sample of this population was drawn from a combination of random-digit-dialing and enrollment forms provided by the three major adult education programs serving the Portland metropolitan area. Sampled households were called and screened for members in the defined target population. The resulting LSAL sample contained 940 individuals and was weighted so that population statistics could be estimated from the sample data.

The LSAL is conducting a series of five periodic interviews and skills assessments in respondents' homes. Respondents are paid for each of these sessions, which take an average of about 1.5 hours to complete. The five sessions or "waves" of data collection are being conducted according to the following schedule:

Wave 1:	1998-1999
Wave 2:	1999-2000
Wave 3:	2000-2001
Wave 4:	2002-2003
Wave 5:	2004-2005

Individuals are interviewed at about the same time in each wave so that there is approximately constant spacing among individuals' successive interviews and assessments (e.g., a respondent interviewed in February 1999 in Wave 1 is interviewed during February 2000 in Wave 2, February 2001 in Wave 3, etc.). As this chapter is being written in late 2003, Waves 1-4 have been completed and data from Waves 1-3 have been processed. LSAL staff maintain regular contact with respondents between waves, and about 93% of the original sample has been retained in the study through Wave 4.

Characteristics of the LSAL population have been described elsewhere (Reder & Strawn, 2001a). Table 1 shows some features of this target population at Wave 1. The population had

an average age of 28, was evenly divided among males and females, approximately one-third were members of minority groups, about one in ten were born outside of the United States, about one third describe themselves as having a learning disability, and one in three reports having taken special education classes while they were in school.

insert Table 1 about here

Self-Study in LSAL

There are several reasons why LSAL initially decided to include a few questions about respondents studying on their own to improve their basic skills. To begin with, some adult education students anecdotally report that they have studied by themselves before starting classes. Comings et al (1999) reported that some of the adult education students interviewed in NCSALL's Persistence Study included self-study as one of their learning strategies. Some individuals taking the GED Tests similarly report preparing for the tests by studying on their own (Baldwin, Kirsch, Rock & Yamamoto, 1995). There were thus converging indications that self-study could be an important learning process for adults striving to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED, though this had not been examined systematically among education students let alone among those in the target population who never participate in programs or take the GED Tests.

LSAL operationalized self-study as “studying on your own to improve your reading, writing or math skills or prepare for the GED”. In Wave 1, only a few questions were included about self-study, asking individuals who indicated they had self-studied to provide further details about the recency and intensity of their self-directed efforts to improve basic skills.

Initial snapshot of self-study. Results from the Wave 1 interviews are shown in Figure 1. Among the LSAL population who had at some time participated in a formal adult education class,

nearly half (46%) had also engaged in self-study to improve their reading, writing or math skills or prepare for the GED. Even more interesting is the finding that among those in the target population who had *never* participated in an adult education program, one in three (34%) had engaged in self-directed efforts to improve their basic skills. This represents a large group of adults who do not turn up in programs, but who nevertheless are engaged in activities to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED. It is possible of course that some of the individuals who have self-studied but have not attended a basic skills class will *later* enroll in a program. Although we will have the opportunity to observe such transitions as we follow the LSAL population over time, there are already some indications of such transitions within the Wave 1 data. When we look at data about recency of participation in formal programs and in self-study among individuals who report at Wave 1 having previously done *both*, we find individuals who clearly did self-study before they had ever attended a program as well as individuals who attended a program before their first period of self-study. Although the temporal precision of many of the retrospective reports at Wave 1 is limited, we will be able to track such transitions more accurately in later interviews since subsequent transitions will be reported as relatively recent events.

insert Figure 1 about here

Literacy level and self-study. Because self-study may not be a viable strategy for adults with relatively poor basic skills (e.g., because there may not be appropriate materials available), it is important to examine the relationship between literacy proficiency in the target population and the tendency to engage in self-study. In particular, we can examine the extent to which there is a literacy threshold affecting the tendency of LSAL’s adult population to engage in self-study.

Figure 2 displays the proportion of adults who had self-studied to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED as a function of their assessed literacy proficiency at Wave 1. The literacy measure is the Test of Adult Literacy Skills (TALS) developed by the Educational Testing Service. The TALS measures adults' proficiencies at performing simulated everyday functional literacy tasks such as filling out forms, locating information in charts and maps, extracting key information from written materials, and so forth. The TALS assesses literacy proficiencies on three 0-500 point scales: Prose, Document and Quantitative. These scales have been widely used in national and international studies of adult literacy.

insert Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 displays the proportion of adults who had self-studied prior to Wave 1 in relation to their assessed Document proficiency levels. If there were indeed a literacy threshold below which such self-study became infeasible, or if weak skills generally made it difficult for adults to engage in self-study, then we might expect adults to show an increasing tendency to engage in self-study with increasing proficiency. The LSAL data, in fact, show exactly the opposite trend: as literacy proficiencies rise, adults' become less likely to engage in self-study to improve their basic skills. About half of the adults performing at the lowest proficiency level (Level 1 in Figure 2) have engaged in self-study, with progressively declining proportions as the skill level increases. At relatively higher levels of proficiency, of course, we might well expect adults' felt needs for improved basic skills to diminish along with their tendency to self-study to improve those skills. The fact that a substantial proportion (more than 30%) of adults at even the highest levels of proficiency have engaged in self-study may indicate that adults seek to improve their skills even when they are well above the levels needed to pass the GED tests (Kirsch, et al., (1993) and Baldwin, et al, (1995) have found that those passing the GED average

proficiency to be about 275 on the NALS/TALS, the threshold between levels 2 and 3).

Although additional analyses are needed to interpret the relationship between literacy proficiency and self-study shown in Figure 2, one finding seems already clear: a broad spectrum of the target population engages in self-study, including adults with relatively weak basic skills.

Self-study over time. The field interviewers, debriefed at the end of Wave 1, were certain that respondents were reporting only their self-study activities intended to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED. Knowing the significance of such self-study for the field of adult literacy education, we wanted to probe further to learn more about the nature of these activities.

In Wave 3, we asked respondents about self-study activities they might have undertaken during the two-year period since their first (Wave 1) interview. Self-study was defined in Wave 3 and beyond in exactly the same way as it was in Wave 1. In Wave 3, we probed more deeply into the nature of self-study activities, asking respondents about the purposes, timing and intensity of their self-study activities, the particular skills they had worked to improve and the materials they used in self-study. We also were careful to distinguish, for respondents who reported both self-study and participation in formal literacy programs, teacher-assigned and self-initiated study activities.

Combining the information respondents provided in Wave 1 about their self-study prior to that time with the information they provided in Wave 3 about self-study over the two years between Waves 1 and 3, a chronology of self-study was pieced together for each respondent. Figure 3 displays over time the cumulative percentage of the LSAL population that had self-studied. The leftmost bar shows the percentage that had self-studied as of one year before the Wave 1 interview (i.e., had reported self-study activities occurring at least a year before their Wave 1 interview). The middle bar shows the percentage of the population that had self-studied

prior to Wave 1. The rightmost bar shows the comparable percentage as of Wave 3. The estimated percentage rises from 29% a year prior to the onset of the study to 55% three years later at Wave 3. This is a steep rise but is consistent with high rates observed for other indicators of basic skill development activities in the population over the same time period, including program participation and GED test-taking.

insert Figure 3 about here

Individuals often engage in multiple periods (i.e., during disjointed time stretches) of self-study. Nearly half (46%) of those who had reported at least some self-study through Wave 3 had engaged in two or more discrete periods of self-study.

Figure 4 shows the percentages, cumulative through Wave 3, of the population in four exhaustive, mutually exclusive categories of participation: individuals who had neither self-studied nor attended a program (25%); individuals who had attended a program but who had never self-studied (10%); individuals who had self-studied but never attended a program (27%); and individuals who had both self-studied and attended a program (38%). Again we see that for this target population, self-study and program participation appear to be partially complementary approaches used to improve basic skills or prepare for the GED. There are individuals who use only one of the two approaches (and quite a few more use only self-study than use only program participation), many who use both, and of course some individuals who use neither. The largest group within the target population has tried both approaches. When we look closely at the temporal patterns among those who use both approaches, we see examples of individuals who begin with a period of self-study and later attend a program, as well as individuals who attend a program and later engage in a period of self-study. These patterns are consistent with a notion of

an active learner who considers both approaches as strategies or resources to support learning, perhaps using each as their life circumstances permit or needs for assistance require.

insert Figure 4 about here

Goals, skills, content and materials in self-study. Individuals who had self-studied were asked whether their self-study was intended to (1) prepare for the GED Tests, (2) improve their reading, writing or math skills, or (3) both prepare for the GED and improve their skills. About one in four (24%) of those who had self-studied indicated they had done so only to prepare for the GED; nearly half (45%) indicated they had self-studied to improve their skills (but not to prepare for the GED); and nearly one in three (30%) indicated that they had self-studied both to improve their skills and prepare for the GED. Thus over half (54%) of those who self-study do so (at least in part) to prepare for the GED.

Respondents who indicated their self-study was directed in part towards skill improvement were asked about the particular skills they had tried to improve through their self-study. Interviewers listened to and probed respondents' descriptions of the skill content and categorized responses into the set of skill content categories shown in Table 2. The most commonly reported skills were reading comprehension, vocabulary/spelling, arithmetic and punctuation/grammar. If the two categories of business writing and creative writing were merged into a single category of writing, then writing would have been the single most common skill targeted by the self-study activities. It is important to note that most individuals mentioned self-studying several of the skill areas. Not all of the skills mentioned were necessarily "basic"; many individuals mentioned levels of math, for example, considerably higher than arithmetic, including algebra/geometry and even more advanced math. These data help us appreciate the wide range of skills individuals try to address through self-study. This is consistent with our

previously mentioned finding that many individuals in the target population engage in self-study to improve their basic skills for reasons other than GED preparation. The sophisticated level of some of the targeted skills is consistent with the high level of literacy skills demonstrated by some individuals in the population (as indicated by their TALS scores).

insert Table 2 about here

Individuals who indicated their self-study was, at least in part, to prepare for the GED were asked about the topics (or Tests) for which they were preparing. Table 3 shows the GED topics in which they had focused in self-study. Since obtaining a GED requires passing each of the individual tests, it is not surprising that the majority of those self-studying to prepare for the GED would focus on each of the test topics. Math is the topic that almost everyone focuses on, though more than three quarters also focus on Writing and on Language Arts. We will be able to better interpret these content differences when we also examine the particular GED Tests that individuals have taken.

insert Table 3 about here

Table 4 exhibits the frequency that various types of materials were used in self-study activities. The most common types of materials used in self-study were workbooks –workbooks designed specifically for GED preparation and workbooks designed to help individuals improve their math skills or their vocabulary, spelling or writing. It is notable that more than a third (35%) reported using computer-based materials for self-study. Apparently the computer is already more commonly used as an educational resource in this population than educational television.

insert Table 4 about here

Program participation, self-study and GED attainment. By the time the Wave 3 interviews were conducted, two years after the Wave 1 interviews, 16% of the population had received a GED. Considering the broad age range of the target population, this seems to be a fairly high rate of obtaining the GED over just a two-year period (we recall that, by definition, no one had a GED at Wave 1). Since many individuals in the target population are not interested in obtaining a GED, the effective “success” rate for obtaining a GED is considerably higher.

Figure 5 displays the percentage of various subpopulations that had received a GED by Wave 3. The four subgroups of the target population displayed in Figure 5 are the same as those shown in Figure 4: individuals who had never self-studied nor participated in a program; individuals who had participated in a program but had never self-studied; individuals who had self-studied but never participated in a program; and individuals who had both self-studied and participated in a program.

insert Figure 5 about here

Only 6% of individuals who neither participated in a program nor self-studied received a GED. Many in this “Neither” group have no intention of obtaining a GED, but those in this group who received a GED are among the sizable number of GED test takers who report not preparing at all for the tests (Baldwin et al, 1995). About 12% of those who participated in a basic skills program but did not self-study received their GED compared to 18% of those who self-studied but did not participate in a program. The highest percentage of GED attainment (20%) was observed among those who did both.

These data seem to indicate that both program participation and self-study, whether occurring alone or in combination, are associated with GED attainment. This is of course what we expect to see from program participation, since GED attainment has been the historical

mission of adult education programs. Perhaps less expected is the apparent association between self-study and GED attainment, a relationship that appears at least as strong and perhaps stronger than that between program participation and GED attainment. Once LSAL data are completely collected, other variables such as age, gender, and whether individuals had the goal of obtaining a GED can be considered in more systematic interpretations of these outcome data.

Self-study summary. Self-study -- defined in LSAL as working on one's own to prepare for the GED or improve reading, writing or math skills -- is a widespread mode of basic skills development among adults who did not complete high school. It occurs widely among participants in basic skills programs as well as among adults who do not participate in such programs. The utilization of self-study does not appear to be closely related to assessed literacy proficiency; individuals with relatively weak basic skills are just as likely to engage in self-study as those with higher levels of proficiency. For some learners, periods of self-study are followed by periods of participation in programs; for other learners, periods of self-study follow periods of program participation; and for yet other learners, both types of activities occur during the same time period. In general, self-study appears to be a bridge between periods of program participation and to facilitate persistence of learning. When we examine the percentages of individuals engaged in various combinations of self-study and program participation, self-study appears to be at least as strongly related to GED attainment as program participation. For the LSAL population through Wave 3, more individuals engage in self-study than in programs, and the GED attainment rate is higher for self-study than for program participation.

It is likely that many of these early findings from LSAL will endure as the longitudinal study continues over time. The longer term impact of self-study on skill development, continuing education, and social and economic outcomes remains to be seen in future LSAL data.

The extent to which these findings, based on a representative local, rather than national, target population, may generalize to other locales must of course be established by other research. It is reasonable to expect that the quantitative profiles of self-study may vary considerably from one area to another, depending on differences in local target populations, school systems, employment opportunities, and provision of adult education. With these caveats in mind, we can reasonably expect self-study to be an important component of adult literacy development in diverse locales and populations in the United States. There is much anecdotal evidence supporting such a generalization. The generality of self-study is also supported by other research. NCSALL's Persistence Study, for example, which looked closely at program participants from a range of programs in a different region of the United States, found qualitative evidence of the importance of self-study among the adult education students it followed (Comings et al, 1999).

Implications for Adult Literacy Education

The prevalence of self-study activities among adults seeking to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED has major implications for policy and program design in adult literacy education. By broadening the conception and design of an adult literacy program to support self-study as well as provide classes, adult literacy programs could serve more learners (since many adults self-study who never come to formal classes), attract new learners to classes (since some adults who self-study might later attend classes) and increase the overall persistence of adult literacy learning (since many adult literacy learners engage in self-study and attend classes at different points in time). Comings and Cuban (this volume) explore some of the ways in which self-study and program participation might be combined to enhance the persistence of learners already in programs and thereby improve program quality. In addition to enhancing programs' capacity to increase the persistence of students who are already participating in

programs, LSAL's findings on self-study also suggest increasing program quality through outreach efforts and delivery modalities that may engage new learners not participating in presently available programs.

Along with this broader model of the adult literacy program comes a broader conception of the adult literacy learner. This is an adult literacy learner who chooses among a range of literacy development strategies and resources, including self-study, attending classes, working with a tutor or mentor, and so forth (Wikelund, Reder & Hart-Landsberg, 1992). Differences among learners' preferred modes of learning, their life circumstances, and the accessibility of learning resources such as classes shape their choices about how to pursue literacy development. Over time, as learners' needs and goals, life situations, and understandings of learning resources change, the literacy learning strategies and resources used may change as well (cf. Beder, 1991; Belzer, 1998).

To support this expanded notion of the adult literacy learner, programs need to expand their services to support learning among adults engaged in self-study activities as well as learning in the classroom. Such expansion may require changes in policy and program design. Policy changes at the federal, state or local levels may be needed for programs to utilize adult education funds to support self-study. Issues may need to be resolved about the eligibility of self-study learners for official enrollment counts, about assessing their skills and progress, and about other aspects of accountability required by various categories of federal and state funds. In many respects, these policy and administrative issues may be similar to those already being addressed by some programs for students engaged in various forms of distance rather than on-site learning activities.

New program designs are needed to facilitate and support the learning of adults engaged in self-study and link self-study activities with program services. Learners engaged in self-study may benefit from various types of goal identification, skill assessment, selection of learning materials (whether print-based, online, or multimedia), mentoring or tutoring, progress assessment, and so forth. Not all such support materials and services may need to be newly developed; many usable materials and services may exist and others could be repurposed for use in facilitating self-study. LSAL has identified a range of materials in terms of content and media already being used by adults engaged in self-study. Examples already mentioned include study guides for the individual GED Tests, workbooks for specific clusters of skills, and GED practice tests.

An important step in developing programmatic capacity to facilitate and support self-study will be mapping *types of learners* (specified perhaps in terms of their learning goals and life circumstances), *skill development needs*, and individually appropriate *resources for supporting learning* (which might be a classroom-based course, a distance-delivered course, a volunteer tutor, online or print-based materials for self-study, etc.). Such a system might assist learners with goal identification, needs assessment, direct instructional support, progress monitoring and feedback, advising and referral to other needed services. Not all learners would choose or receive the same package of materials or services; the successful support and facilitation of self-study will likely entail customizing materials and services to learners in ways that fit their individual learning goals, meet their self-identified needs for skill development, and are compatible with their individual life circumstances and preferences for modes of learning.

Within this broad system of adult literacy education, self-study should be seen as being on a continuum with, rather than a polarized alternative to, classroom-based programs. The

LSAL research points this out very clearly. Most adults who have tried in one way or another to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED have tried *both* self-study *and* participating in a course. Furthermore, the majority of the LSAL population who had participated in programs, when asked to describe them, indicated the programs included a substantial amount of individual work in non-classroom settings as well as direct instruction in larger groups or classroom settings. Many of the local ABE and GED programs in Portland – and across the nation – include “learning centers” or “computer labs” or classroom-based “individualized group instruction” (Robinson-Geller, in press) where learners work individually, supplemented by on-demand instructional assistance. Thus, in some respects, existing program practices already include activities similar to forms of facilitated self-study. Other types of adult literacy services could also be included as learning support resources in the type of system being described here. On-demand tutoring or mentoring, for example, could effectively be provided to some learners engaged in self-study at home, similar to the way that program participants working in a learning center access direct instructional support from time to time. Models of “homework hotlines” developed by school districts, in which students working at home call in for assistance to teacher-staffed or volunteer-staffed tutoring call centers, may provide some useful experience that adult programs can draw upon. Many community-based organizations – both those that provide adult literacy programs and those that do not -- offer a range of services, social networks and contexts essential for engaging, motivating, and supporting adult learning. Library-based adult literacy programs have developed services, materials, and expertise that could be drawn upon, linked into and coordinated with a community-wide model of adult literacy education (Porter, Comings, & Cuban, 2005). Developing the appropriate tools and structures for

coordinating such services with learner needs and goals would be the central challenge in such a system.

An important design element for such a system is active collaboration among adult literacy education providers, tutoring programs, libraries, and community-based organizations. The collaboration needs to be learner-centered. Although this term has been used with many other meanings, learner-centered in this context means mapping learning resources (whether classroom programs, online curricula, etc.) to the individual learner's characteristics, goals, skill needs, and desired mode of learning. It is essential that such a mapping of programs, services and materials does *not* retrofit them to a narrowly prescribed framework. Instead, existing resources are to be evaluated and crosswalked with respect to a key set of learner characteristics. This would enable learners to be referred to appropriate resources, perhaps self-study materials at one point, perhaps a local program or tutor at another moment, and so forth. This learner-centered indexing of and referral to resources would promote continuity and persistence of learning from the learner's perspective and increase program retention from the perspective of the broadened adult literacy education system. The focus of the system would be on individual learners not on self-study per se, although many learners would likely self-study at various points in their literacy development. Efforts to facilitate self-study, when appropriately implemented, will be leveraging important ethnopedagogical practices in adult literacy and thereby giving literacy away and increasing the capacity and quality of the adult literacy education system.

A project called the *Learner Web* is attempting to construct a prototype system in this manner. This project, with initial funding from the Oregon State Library through federal LSTA monies, involves a partnership among Portland State University; Oregon Literacy, a statewide nonprofit umbrella organization that supports local community partnerships and tutoring

programs in adult literacy; and local adult education programs, libraries and community-based organizations in three pilot communities.

Although this prototype system is being designed initially for three local communities, its design is scalable so that other communities' local resources and learners can be added to the system as it evolves and grows. Using an emergent, research-driven, and learner-centered design for the Learner Web, it is hoped that this system for facilitating self-study and connecting it with other elements of the adult literacy education system will help give literacy away.

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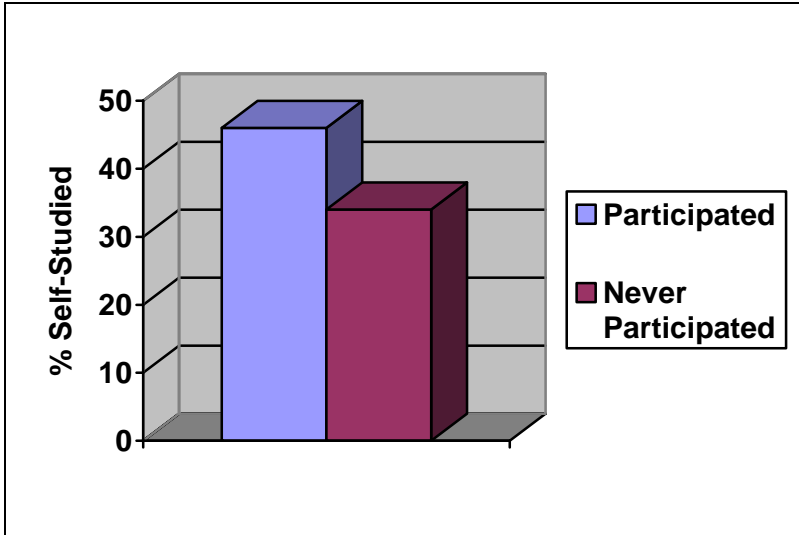


Figure 1. Percent of adults in target population who have self-studied to improve their basic skills, shown for those who have previously participated and those who have never participated in an adult basic skills program adults in target population.

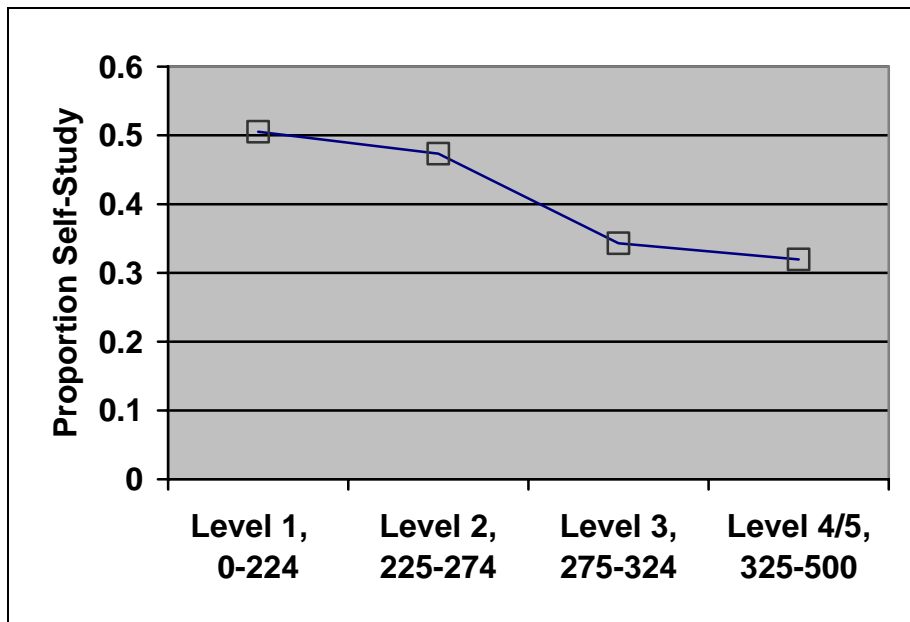


Figure 2. Proportion of adults who have engaged in self-study (prior to Wave 1) to improve their reading, writing or math skills or prepare for the GED, as a function of their assessed level of literacy proficiency.

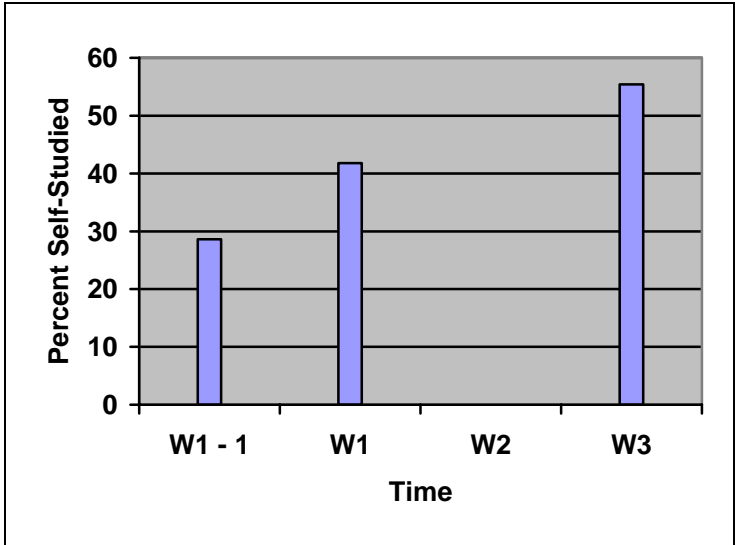


Figure 3. Percentage of LSAL population that had ever self-studied at three time points: one year prior to Wave 1 (“W1-1”), Wave 1 (“W1”) and Wave 3 (“W3”).

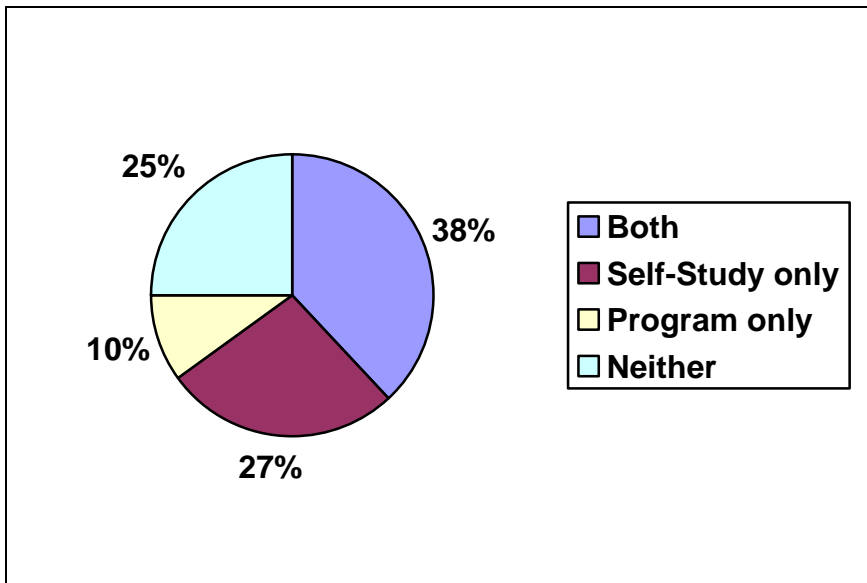


Figure 4. Percentage of LSAL population that, through Wave 3, had participated in various combinations of self-study and formal programs to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED.

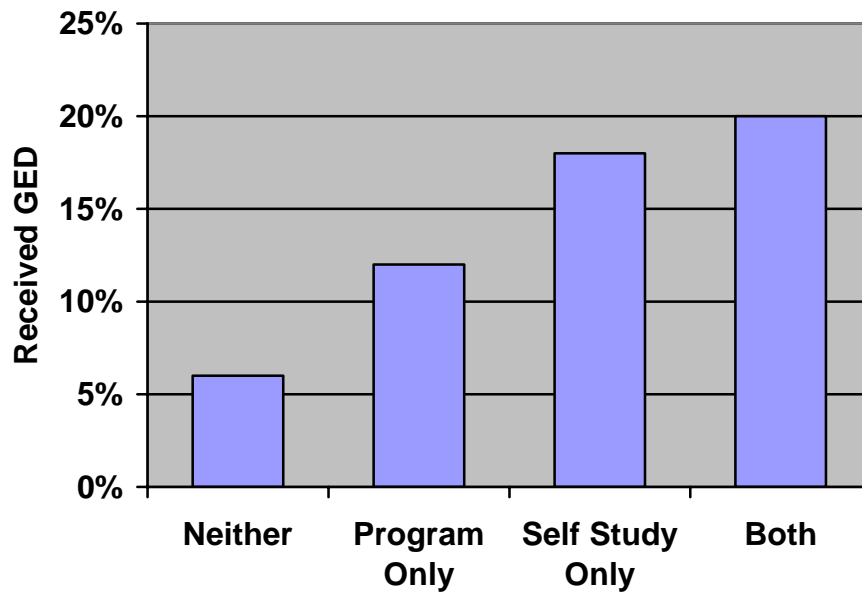


Figure 5. Percent of individuals in target population receiving a GED as a function of whether they participated in a basic skills program and/or self-study.

Average age	28 years
Female	50%
Minority	35%
Foreign born	9%
Live in poverty	34%
Have a learning disability	29%
Took special education classes	34%

Table 1. Some characteristics of LSAL population at Wave 1.

<i>Skill Studied</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Vocabulary, spelling	45.4
Punctuation, grammar	40.8
Business writing	23.4
Creative writing	30.3
Reading comprehension	48.1
Reading speed	29.6
Arithmetic	44.5
Algebra, geometry	36.9
Advanced math	11.6
Other	3.8

Table 2. Skills targeted by individuals engaged in self-study. For each skill, the percentage shown is based on individuals who reported self-study was directed in part towards skill improvement. Percentages add to more than 100% because individuals could report multiple skills.

<i>GED Topic Studied</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Language Arts	76.9
Writing	78.9
Math	92.8
Science	70.5
Social Studies	68.5

Table 3. GED topics focused on by individuals engaged in self-study. For each topic, the percentage shown is based on individuals who reported their self-study was directed in part on preparing for the GED. Percentages add to more than 100% because individuals could report multiple topics.

<i>Type of Material</i>	<i>Percent</i>
GED workbooks	48.6
Vocabulary/spelling/writing workbooks	57.0
Math workbooks	50.8
Educational TV/video	22.0
Audio cassettes	7.6
Computer	35.2
Other	13.1

Table 4. Materials used by individuals engaged in self-study. Percentages add to more than 100% because individuals could report multiple materials.

2012. Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/13242. —. how to achieve desired goals ultimately chips away at motivation to persist because individuals often think they are taking appropriate steps toward goals, when, in reality, their daily practices interfere with taking appropriate and realistic steps toward achievement. Dynamic assessments, although they need further development, are promising in this regard because they can provide the feedback needed to target supports and instruction within the learners'™ zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Start by marking "Promising Practices for Engaging Families in Literacy (Family School Community Partnership Issues)" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving... Want to Read. Practices include connections between home and school across age groups, developmental needs groups, universities, community groups, and technologies. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. Information literacy practice is shaped by the modalities of information and the sociocultural and material affordances furnished by the site, its actors and objects. This results in particular ways of saying (ways of talking about information and knowledge), doing (ways of accessing and using information) and relating (ways of engaging with information). As a practice, information literacy is also composed of a number of interwoven activities within a given social domain (Schatzki 1997). These are identified as: Information work which is focused towards the development or refinement of practi...