

# An Evaluation of the NCSALL Publication *Focus on Basics*

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Let me take this opportunity to thank those who, since 1997, created *Focus on Basics*: the more than 300 writers and editorial board members; designer and illustrator Mary White and layout artist Tom Philbrook; layout artists Anita Patwardhan, Diem Nguyen, and Mark Holmes; and copy editor and proof readers Celia Hartmann and Ki Kim.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is to conduct high-quality, relevant research that contributes to the improvement of the quality of education provided by adult basic educators. NCSALL has a commitment not only to conducting research but also both to ensuring that it is shared with practitioners in formats that are accessible to them and to supporting them in putting research findings to use. To accomplish this, the publication *Focus on Basics* was created.

NCSALL undertook an evaluation of the impact of its publication *Focus on Basics* upon its readers. At the time of the survey, 28 issues had been published, the first in February, 1997. A total of 292 readers responded to a Web-based survey asking why adult basic education practitioners read *Focus on Basics*, how it influences them, and what impact it has on their practice.

The findings were overwhelmingly upbeat. The readers who completed the survey reported that *Focus on Basics* has had a positive impact in the following ways:

- It has influenced their beliefs about adult basic education.
- It has helped them feel connected to the larger education community as professionals.
- It has contributed to the development of communities of practice.
- It has enabled them to make a connection between research and practice.
- It has provided them with concrete ideas they have used to change their programs and practice.

Unlike many professions, adult basic education does not have a proscribed career path. No set academic path or certification qualifies teachers for their roles. Many adult basic educators get jobs as adult basic education teachers without realizing that they have, in fact, entered a “field.” **The evaluation revealed that *Focus on Basics*, with its national scope and articles targeted to the state, program, and classroom level, provides practitioners with a sense of the broader field to which they belong.**

***Focus on Basics* is a mainstay for professional development providers. Teachers and program administrators, as well as professional development providers, report that it is the publication they turn to for ideas, information, and materials.**

**It is a success at making a connection between research and practice.** The resources that NCSALL has invested have had a positive impact.



## INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) undertook evaluation of the impact of its publication *Focus on Basics* upon its readers. NCSALL believes that it is not enough to do high-quality research, but that equal effort must be made to disseminate the findings of that research. *Focus on Basics* is one of NCSALL's main dissemination tools. We know that people read *Focus on Basics*: at conferences and workshops, adult basic educators often identify themselves to NCSALL staff as *Focus on Basics* readers, and subscribers to the *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list (listserv) engage in discussions of specific articles. But what impact does reading the publication have? Are the resources being spent on *Focus on Basics* being put to good use? The results of this evaluation, presented in this report, indicate that they are.

The report consists of eight sections:

- the history of *Focus on Basics*, including the goals of the publication;
- a review of literature on the role and impact of publications in professional development;
- the evaluation questions;
- the methodology and limitations of the evaluation;
- the evaluation sample;
- the findings and their implications;
- the conclusion; and
- next steps.

Included in the appendices are the survey instrument used in this evaluation, descriptive statistics from the evaluation, and a substudy of the use of *Focus on Basics* by four providers of professional development to the adult basic education field.<sup>1</sup>

The evaluation serves a number of audiences. Publishers of other professional development publications can refer to it for ideas on how to strengthen their publications. Academics can turn to it when looking for evidence that professional reading leads to professional development. Researchers can use it when seeking to understand more about the professional lives of those playing different roles in adult basic education. Adult basic education professionals can refer to it when deciding whether to invest in subscriptions to the publication, or to use the publication as a staff development tool. Professional

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term *adult basic education* includes English for speakers of other languages, adult literacy (adult basic skills), and adult secondary education: external diploma programs, adult high schools, and preparation for tests of General Educational Development (GED).

development providers can turn to it for ideas on how to use the publication as a professional development tool. As publishers of *Focus on Basics*, we will turn to the evaluation for ideas on how to strengthen the publication; we will also use it as evidence that *Focus on Basics* is a valuable component of ABE as we seek funding to continue to publish beyond 2006.

The evaluation was a team effort. *Focus on Basics* editor Barbara Garner, NCSALL Deputy Director Cristine Smith, NCSALL Dissemination Director Ki Kim, and NCSALL Director John Comings conceptualized and oversaw the process. Kelly McClure conducted the literature review and drafted and tested an early version of the survey; Marco Boscolo participated in revising the survey and formulating the analysis framework; he also did the data analysis. Steve Quann and Steve Linberg put the survey on the Web. Donna Curry conducted a substudy on how ABE professional development providers use *Focus on Basics*. She also analyzed the written responses to the Web survey. Stella Hernandez, Nancy Waite, Donna-Miller Parker, Janet Fulton, and Brett Miller read and commented on drafts.

## HISTORY

When the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)<sup>2</sup> was established in 1996, publishing *Focus on Basics* was a priority. NCSALL's goal is to conduct high-quality, relevant research that contributes to the improvement of the quality of education provided by adult basic educators. NCSALL not only conducts research but also has a commitment to ensuring that practitioners access, understand, judge, and use research findings. Years of research work would have to take place before NCSALL research findings would be ready for the public. In the meantime, we wanted to establish a connection with adult basic educators, especially teachers. We wanted to support them in becoming critical users of research. To accomplish this, we launched *Focus on Basics*. The theme of the first issue of *Focus on Basics* was "Research." It contained articles explaining qualitative, quantitative, action, and teacher research, as well as reflections by teachers who used research to make changes in their practice. In subsequent issues, we described each of NCSALL's research projects.

From the beginning, we worked to make *Focus on Basics* a national publication that was in touch with its readers. Writers and editorial board members were solicited from across the country. Each issue had a unique editorial board, comprised of teachers, program directors, professional development providers, and researchers, who met by phone to review and advise on articles. In addition to the invaluable contributions of the

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<sup>2</sup> NCSALL is a partnership of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, Portland State University, Rutgers University, and Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee. World Education's role within NCSALL is to connect practice, policy, and research through the development and dissemination of publications and integration of research results with professional development for adult basic education teachers.

editorial board and the hard work of the writers, we hoped (and found) that they would feel connected to the publication and to NCSALL, and introduce it to their colleagues.

In 2000, we evaluated the publication (for the 2000 evaluation report, go to [http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/op\\_garner.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/op_garner.pdf)). We held two focus groups to solicit feedback on content and layout. We also conducted 75 telephone interviews to learn why and to what extent readers valued what they read in *Focus on Basics* and what impact, if any, reading *Focus on Basics* had on them. Readers provided concrete examples of how they changed practices based upon articles they read. Reading the publication, they reported, gave them the feeling of belonging to a profession: an understanding that the work they did was part of a national system. This was an unanticipated but very exciting finding.

Since then, as the use of email has grown, we have been pleased to receive unsolicited positive feedback whenever we publish a new issue. *Focus on Basics* is read and appreciated. However, in 2004, we decided we wanted to know more. What impact does reading *Focus on Basics* have? Does this impact vary depending upon the role of the reader, and in what way? Are readers continuing to use what they read to make changes in their practice and in their programs, as they described in our first evaluation?

Professionals are, by definition, expected to keep up with the literature in their fields to stay current with new approaches and practices. Does reading *Focus on Basics* enable professionals to turn new information into new practice? We needed to conduct another, more extensive, evaluation to find that out.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

We began by reviewing the literature about the relationship between journals and professionals' development and growth. Only those articles most relevant to the proposed evaluation of *Focus on Basics* are discussed here. To be included, books, articles, and reports had to have a clearly stated research question, purpose, or focus; a description of their research design; a description of the participants; a description of the data collection procedures; a description of the analysis procedures; and results and interpretations based on the data. We opted also to include a section on the anecdotal and descriptive accounts, because they highlight the nature of assumptions concerning the efficacy of literature as a tool for professional development.

Broadly construed, the sharing of information through scholarly publications is thought to be essential to the development of a “learned society” (Bennett, 1997). Today, the competence of specialists in most fields is assumed to be related to engagement in professional activities, which includes the reading of professional journals. Willis & Tosti-Vasey (1988) state that the exchange of information among members of a field and remaining *au courant* with related research has come to be associated with professional competence.

Throughout the literature on professional development in education, refereed journals and other publications appear to be accepted as important in enhancing professional development in the field. The bulk of the literature asserts that:

1. journals have the potential for providing “the clearest channel of communication about educational change and innovation,” and
2. teachers and other educational professionals should read research and literature from the field (Pearce, 1984).

It is assumed that the knowledge gained will be directly applied to practice. Brewbaker (1983) notes that there exists a *prima facie* acceptance of journals as tools for professional development across various fields. Smith (2002) includes “synthesizing the knowledge base” and effectively disseminating information as important but challenging components needed to enable professionals to improve cognitive and social outcomes for children with disabilities. In other accounts, Perrin (1984) discusses the need for extensive reading and discussion of professional journals in order to train English majors and minors in the teaching curriculum.

Providing information about resources available for use in professional development is also the goal of many programs, networks, and dissemination systems nationwide, including The Clearinghouse of Resources for Educators of Adults (CREA), where the “dissemination of resources, a major objective, is accomplished through a [...] series of publications, conferences, bibliographies, and special projects” (Charters, 1980). In the case of adult literacy, as discussed by Lytle and colleagues (1992), a critical component of developing the professional work force is the inclusion of “new knowledge [and how it] generated in and for the field” to assist practitioners who are learning and improving their practice.

Research findings should be a key element and content of resources and information for professionals. The American Federation of Teachers’ (2002) standards of practice in professional development require that journals be “rooted in and reflect the best available research.” Clough (1992) asserts that “research is required reading [...] in order to keep up with [the] profession of teaching the sciences.”

**Today, the competence of specialists in most fields is assumed to be related to engagement in professional activities, which includes the reading of professional journals.**

Our review of the literature revealed more descriptive accounts about the importance of publications as tools for professional development than detailed, scientific inquiry on the “impact” of publications on professionals and their practice. We found anecdotal accounts of how publications are and might be used in the continuous training of teachers. For example, in their discussion of how journals assist to bridge the gap between research and practice, Rehorick & Edwards (1995) describe principles for self-directed study for educators with tips on how to “read journals efficiently,” without addressing the underlying warrant that connects this practice to improved teaching practice. Bruce (1996) asserts that librarians, as professionals whom he claims are expected to, in large part, take responsibility for their own continued professional development, must consume professional literature as part of this responsibility. Guidelines for using professional publications are also presented in numerous other works (Sanacore, 1995; Shearer, et al., 1997; Stopper, 1982). Yet evidence supporting a positive correlation between reading journals and change in practice remains scarce.

To understand the “impact” of publications as professional development tools for teachers and other education practitioners, one must contextualize such publications within the broader domain of information dissemination and utilization. The study of information dissemination theory and practice goes back to the 1920s (NCDDR Review, 2003, p. 4). Most of what is now known about dissemination comes from research conducted within the fields of rehabilitation, education, sociology, psychology, and marketing (ibid, p. 4). The use of the term across a wide expanse of literature appears to have precluded consensus about the precise definition and meaning of the term *dissemination*, however. The National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR), a leader in the study of information dissemination and utilization, establishes that there are four basic elements in information dissemination: the intended users, the dissemination source, the content to be disseminated, and the media used for specific audiences (NCDDR, 2003).

Thus dissemination, which is often construed to mean the *distribution of information*, is thought to be insufficient as a goal in and of itself. Whether and how the information is used is of greater concern. As Machlup (1993) writes:

Does use of information – the process of transmission and reception, for example of a letter – mean (1) receiving it and thus getting a chance to read it; (2) receiving and actually reading it; (3) receiving, reading, and understanding it; (4) receiving, reading, understanding, and appreciating it; (5) receiving, reading, understanding, appreciating, and making it the basis of a decision; or (6) receiving, reading, understanding, and appreciating it, plus letting it help you in making a decision and taking an action (or refusing to act) in line with the decision reached with the help of the knowledge obtained? (pp. 449-450)

The *effective use* of information is a critical aspect of the “impact” of information dissemination because it places emphasis on learners and their use of information (Mills, 1990) rather than on the mere distribution of information.

A few studies focused on factors that support the use of information disseminated through professional publications. For example, George and Ray (1979) found that levels of teaching experience, administrative support, opportunities for discussion, availability of information resources, and reading at home contributed to the successful consumption of literature by elementary school teachers. The characteristics of the publication itself also play an important part in its consumption and use. One group (Regional Exchange, 1981) found that information use was related to the content and layout of the publication, including its foundation in a “sound research base,” its question-and-answer format, and its interactivity with questions from practitioners in the field. Wood (1995), investigating the perspectives of 125 elementary school teachers and principals in South Dakota involved in professional development, found that publications that disseminate information with clear and immediate practical application are used with greater frequency than those that do not. By incorporating users’ input, publications increase the chance that they contain information readers want and will use (Pennsylvania Adult Basic and Literacy Education Dissemination Newsletter, 1994; Professional Literature Exchange, 1984).

How should publishers get feedback on the effectiveness of their publications? NCDDR recommends continuous monitoring and assessment of “the extent to which a dissemination effort reaches its intended audience and promotes use [that] can be measured” ([www.ncddr.org/du/products/faq.html](http://www.ncddr.org/du/products/faq.html)). Among the useful indicators the Center advocates are: the number of contacts between disseminators and practitioners; the characteristics of information recipients; the extent to which recipients indicate changes due to dissemination; [and] the level of interactivity with the potential user group(s) in promoting dissemination, among other factors (ibid).

In summary, the literature tells us that professionals are expected to keep current in their field by reading journals, although few empirical data provide evidence that reading journals leads to incorporation of new practices. The literature also suggests that journals find ways to promote interaction with readers and make choices about design and content based on the insights gained from those interactions; interactivity makes it more likely that readers will use the information. Those with more experience, administrative support, and time to read are thought to be more likely to put information to use. Based on this information, and drawing upon some of the survey instruments used in the research studies we examined, we designed the second evaluation of *Focus on Basics* to add to the slim body of empirical data on the impact of journals as professional development tools.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

In 2000, NCSALL collected data from *Focus on Basics* subscribers via telephone interviews. The evaluation demonstrated that the publication was being “shared” among colleagues and that the content of *Focus on Basics* encouraged teachers to be thoughtful about their practice. Some participants also claimed that it inspired them to change their



instructional practices, in designing programs, and in facilitating professional development activities. Subscribers reported that their interest in and use of the information contained in the publication encouraged them to seek new resources such as teaching materials, curricula, research reports; increase their appreciation of research; and feel part of a larger professional network.

This second evaluation, conducted in the spring of 2005, builds on the first evaluation by trying to determine:

1. Why do adult basic education (ABE) practitioners read *Focus on Basics*?
2. In what ways does *Focus on Basics* influence ABE practitioners?
3. How do practitioners use *Focus on Basics* (what impact does it have on practice)?
4. Is there a relationship between the impact *Focus on Basics* has on the reader and:
  - the level of formal education the respondent has completed?
  - the length of time the respondent has been teaching adults?
  - the number of hours a week the respondent teaches?
  - whether the respondent currently teaches in the K-12 system?
  - whether the respondent interacts with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics*?
  - whether the respondent has a high degree of satisfaction with *Focus on Basics*?
5. What challenges to using the information they gain by reading *Focus on Basics* do practitioners face?
6. How do professional development providers use *Focus on Basics*?
7. How can *Focus on Basics* be improved?

**Why do adult basic education practitioners read *Focus on Basics*? In what ways does *Focus on Basics* influence them?**

## METHODOLOGY

The literature review validated our sense that the connection between reading professional publications and changes in readers' knowledge and practice was more of a professional "myth" than a proven occurrence; it also provided ideas for the types of questions to ask in the study.

To reach teachers and program administrators, we wrote, tested, and revised a 35-question survey that included multiple-choice and written response questions (see

Appendix B for the survey). We based the demographic section of the survey on the demographic section of a NCSALL study on professional development conducted by Smith et al. (2003). We knew from the number of Web hits the publication receives, and from responses to a query made to the *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list, that hundreds of readers access *Focus on Basics* over the Web instead of subscribing and receiving a printed version, so we made the survey available over the Web rather than distribute it by mail. The questionnaire was launched on Monday, April 11, 2005, and was available to be completed until May 18, 2005. Advertisements about the survey (with links to it) requesting that readers complete it were sent out via email to all the National Institute for Literacy's (NIFL) electronic discussion lists and to about 50 state- or locally run email lists. At any given time, about 500 people subscribe to *Focus on Basics*; 8,500 additional copies are distributed to state adult basic education offices for distribution to local programs; and countless people access *Focus on Basics* on the Web (all issues are available on NCSALL's Web site, <http://www.ncsall.net>). While it is impossible to determine how many people — *Focus on Basics* readers and nonreaders — saw the solicitations, it is safe to estimate that at least 800 did. We received 292 responses; of this group, only one person had not read *Focus on Basics* prior to completing the survey.

**It is a study of the impact that *Focus on Basics* has on those who choose to read it and who chose to complete a survey about it.**

### **Limitations**

This evaluation did not include questions about the influence of *Focus on Basics* on policymakers, nor did we attempt in any special way to solicit their participation. Although we sometimes include articles geared towards the interests of policymakers and disseminate those articles via a special network for policymakers, NCSALL has other vehicles that address their interests more specifically. We also did not include questions about the impact of the publication on researchers; we know from anecdotal reports that many academics whose research is relevant to adult basic educators believe that to reach teachers, their work must be published in *Focus on Basics*.

This is not an evaluation of the impact of *Focus on Basics* on a random sample of adult basic educators, readers or not. It is not an evaluation of the efficacy of *Focus on Basics*' marketing and distribution system, although that would be a worthwhile study. It is a study of the impact that *Focus on Basics* has on those who choose to read it and who chose to complete a survey about it. Although the findings of this evaluation are consistent with the informal feedback we receive on a continuing basis, the self-selected nature of the sample is undoubtedly biased in favor of the publication and the impact it has.

In addition, the study relies on self-report: respondents told us how they use *Focus on Basics*; we did not observe this use. Nonetheless, the size of the sample (292) and the consistency of responses indicate that, although these findings can not be

generalized to the global population of adult basic educators, they provide substantive information about the impact that *Focus on Basics* has on its readers.

## STUDY SAMPLE

Practitioners in all roles responded to the evaluation survey. The population was surprisingly balanced in terms of job category. Teachers and administrators responded in strong numbers, and staff development providers, of whom there are fewer across the field, responded as well.

We asked about job role in three different ways: What is your primary work? If you are a teacher/tutor, what is your primary teaching situation? and How many hours a week do you spend working in the following roles: teacher, counselor, administrator, staff developer, other? As displayed in Table 1, of the 292 respondents, 39% reported their primary responsibilities as program administration. Program administrators are often gatekeepers to professional development and to programmatic change, so reaching them is important. In addition, more than half indicated that they spend some time doing administrative work. Teaching is the primary duty of 33%, mainly GED or adult secondary education preparation and ESOL; but more than half indicated that they spend some time teaching or tutoring. Only 7% reported their primary responsibility to be staff development; an additional 33% indicated that they do spend some time providing staff development. A sixth indicated that they spend some time as counselors. Of those who teach or tutor, 64% teach in group settings, 24% identified their primary teaching situation as tutoring; the remaining 11% identified their teaching situation as “other.” Of all 292, 22% identified their primary role as “other” — a fault of the survey is that we did not ask them to identify what they meant, but we assume it includes counselors, researchers, college professors, students, editors, policymakers. Along with performing multiple roles for one institution, many adult educators work multiple jobs. Some 180 respondents indicated that they work for only one organization.

**Table 1. Primary Role in Adult Basic Education**

<b>PRIMARY ROLE IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (n=292)</b>	
<b>Role</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Program administrator	38.70
Other	21.58
GED / Adult secondary education preparation teacher / tutor	15.41
English for speakers of other languages teacher / tutor	9.25
Staff developer / Professional developer	6.85
Pre-GED teacher / tutor	5.14
Basic literacy teacher / tutor	1.71
Math teacher / tutor	1.37

The ABE workforce is predominantly female and white. As shown in Table 2, so, too, are the respondents to this survey: 87% are female and 84% are white. The education level of the respondents is high: 59% have master's degrees. Many adult educators have experience in the K-12 system, and this group was no exception: 57% of the respondents indicated that they currently teach or have taught in the K-12 system. Despite time in the K-12 system (concurrent or sequential), their experience in adult basic education is considerable: respondents have worked an average of 13.5 years in ABE.

**Table 2. Study Sample Demographics**

<b>STUDY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS (n=292)</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	86.99
Male	13.01
<b>Ethnic Group/Race*</b>	
White or Anglo American	83.56
Black or African American	5.70
Hispanic or Latin American	4.70
Asian American	2.35
Other	2.01
Native American or Alaska Native	1.01
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island	0.67
<b>Highest Level of Formal Education Completed</b>	
High School or GED	1.03
Associate's degree	1.03
Bachelor's degree	30.82
Master's degree	59.25
Doctoral degree	7.88

\*Some respondents belonged to multiple ethnic groups

## THE FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

### Why Do Adult Basic Educators Read *Focus on Basics*?

ABE practitioners read *Focus on Basics* for the variety of reasons that professionals turn to professional literature: to keep up with research, to find concrete solutions to problems, and to feel connected with their field. They read it because it is easy to read, inexpensive, and can be found on the Web. Only 35% of the respondents have subscriptions, of those who do, many do because they enjoy reading their own printed copy. They share it with others, informally and formally, passing it on and initiating discussions about particular articles. In doing so, they increase its reach and increase their understanding of the information it provides. The responses to the question "Why do adult basic educators read *Focus on Basics*?" are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Reasons Practitioners Read *Focus on Basics***

<b>WHY DO YOU READ <i>FOCUS ON BASICS</i>? (n=292)</b>	
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
To know more about research	81.85
To learn new teaching techniques	79.45
To feel connected with the field	71.58
To learn more about a specific topic	70.89
To look for ideas about program design	65.07
To assist in planning staff development activities	55.82
To find ideas about management	42.81

*Respondents could choose multiple responses*

Most readers who responded to the survey (82%) indicated that their primary reason for reading *Focus on Basics* is to know more about research. This is gratifying; the goal of the publication, to disseminate and encourage the use of research by ABE practitioners, is being met. *Focus on Basics* also fulfills NCSALL’s goal of disseminating information in a format that can be easily accessed: *The more formal research journals are often too abstract and I don’t have the time or patience to read them...* wrote one respondent.

Most readers (79%) read *Focus on Basics* to learn new teaching techniques: *Looking for a new twist on teaching the basics that I can implement on Monday!* This surprised us since NCSALL chose to refrain from making *Focus on Basics* a “how-to” publication. Early issues did not include teaching tips. Respondents to the evaluation we conducted in 2000 indicated an interest in teaching techniques, however, so we have included some in each issue over the past few years.

NCSALL made what seem to have been worthwhile decisions about the design of the publication and its availability, enabling readers to use it as a reference material. Each issue is theme-based and includes research, theory, and practice about a particular aspect of ABE. All issues are available, and indexed by topic, on the NCSALL Web site (25% of the respondents indicated that they download *Focus on Basics* from the Internet). Realizing that readers return to certain issues years after they are published, we try not to include time sensitive information such as notices of conferences, which tend to make a publication seem dated once the event has passed. Many readers do use *Focus on Basics* as a reference document that remains relevant over time. Many (71%) turn to it to learn more about a specific topic, 65% look to it for ideas about program design, 56% use it in planning for staff development activities, and 43% find in it ideas about management. This comment sums it up: *It’s one of the most useful tools I’ve found. The information is relevant and current.—it’s simply a great resource covering a lot of issues related to being in an Adult Education environment – from the admin side to the instructional side.*

**In What Ways Does *Focus on Basics* Influence ABE Practitioners?**

Not only do practitioners read *Focus on Basics*, but they also report being influenced by it: it changes their beliefs and practices, validates choices they make, and enables them to see themselves as part of a larger profession. As indicated in Table 4, reading the publication has, report 78%, influenced practitioners beliefs about ABE. Some 79% report that reading the publication has led to changes in their teaching, training, or managerial practices; and 90% report that reading *Focus on Basics* caused them to see themselves as part of a larger profession a professional field in fact, with a literature, research, and established practices. *Focus on Basics* helps to create professionals; it provides practitioners with the sense that they are not working in isolation.

“It’s not an expensive journal, but has high-quality articles with current research and techniques. I feel it helps me stay connected with the profession.”

**Table 4. Reported Influence of *Focus on Basics***

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?			
Reading <i>Focus on Basics</i> has:	Agree	Disagree	Does Not Apply
-- Influenced my beliefs about ABE	78.08%	9.59%	12.33%
-- Led to changes in my teaching, training, or managerial practices	78.77%	10.96%	10.27%
--Caused me to see myself as part of a larger profession	89.73%	5.47%	4.79%

*Focus on Basics* readers report being influenced in overlapping areas:

- *Focus on Basics* keeps readers updated on adult education research, issues, policies, and related information; and
- *Focus on Basics* helps readers feel connected to the larger adult education community as professionals.

The following quotes were provided by survey respondents as examples of how *Focus on Basics* influences them. We have organized them by theme. The first group relate to how *Focus on Basics* keeps them updated on adult education research, issues, policies, and related information. Of 114 written responses, about half specifically mentioned the publication’s emphasis on connecting research and practice.

*Gives me the research base I need for topics I present on in PD [professional development] to practitioners. The research bases give me confidence. I’m*

*confident that what I'm advocating/presenting to practitioners is sound and supported by experts in the field.*

*Information at the right times. I can count on Focus on Basics to come out with an issue about topics which are hot at the state or federal level.*

*Keeps me on top of what the hot questions are in the field in a very readable way. Usually I feel like the authors are people I would like to have a conversation with.*

*It is a major tool for me in keeping up to date in the field of Adult Education. It also gives me clearly written articles to share with volunteer tutors who are not always up to date on best practices in the field.*

*It's the only resource I've found specific to Adult Basic Ed that's directly from action research in the field, provides relevant and useful info in an approachable language and consistently addresses issues I encounter specific to ABE.*

*Focus on Basics provides a needed degree of credibility to the profession.*

Each issue of *Focus on Basics* contains information about other resources. A total of 65% of respondents have sought out other references mentioned in the publication. The references at the end of each article are more often a source for other references (82%) than the Blackboard, where resources related to the theme of the issue are grouped (52% reported using references listed in the Blackboard). The availability of Web links seems to be appreciated: 88% who went to other resources from *Focus on Basics* used Web links (although not necessarily exclusively).

*Citations and references are complete and allow me to follow up or delve deeper into a topic.*

*I also like the Web site addresses in the magazine. I would never find the resources without them.*

The second theme, *Focus on Basics* helps practitioners feel connected to the larger adult education community as professionals, was noted as important by 90% of respondents. Helping individuals feel connected occurs in theory and in practice. By reading *Focus on Basics*, readers feel connected to the field and use *Focus on Basics* as a catalyst for discussion with others. It provides validation for choices often made in isolation.

*Usually the information in Focus on Basics validates existing programs and confirms that we are on the right track.*

*As a practitioner it is good to see that other organizations across the US face similar challenges and successes.*

Several practitioners referred to the feeling of being alone and the value of *Focus on Basics* in easing that feeling.

*FOB keeps me in touch with the field as a whole and reduces that sense of isolation as an adult educator.*

*The publication gives me new ideas and helps improve my sense of professionalism. It helps me feel less isolated in a state which puts a very low priority on adult education programs or their staffs.*

*It keeps me connected with other people in the field. I no longer see myself as the only one with certain frustrations or concerns. It helps me to find new ways to promote student success and to take pride in my work. I know I'm not alone.*

*Focus on Basics* reduces isolation in other ways: 72% of the respondents reported that they interact with their colleagues regarding what they have read. They interact informally (56%), in staff meetings (35%), during staff development activities (31%), and in study circles (6%). Many readers share it with others, increasing its reach: *I usually send articles or portions of articles to staff...* reported one reader. Another wrote that she shares it *...through our newsletter.*

*Assign teachers reading assignments for research to study and report back to the entire group of teachers as possible ideas and plans for our local program as well as those which they believe would work best for us.*

*I used topics from Focus on Basics at staff lunch meetings for program improvement. The dialogue that resulted was very productive.*

*My instructors were looking for ways to improve gains in reading and writing. I provided copies of several Focus on Basics articles to help them with planning changes in their classrooms.*

Sharing does not only take place within programs:

*Often we find FOB to be an excellent springboard for discussion/investigation at the local level.*

*It serves as a stimulus for conversation with other adult ed directors whom I meet through State and Regional administrators' meetings.*



**How Do Practitioners Use *Focus on Basics* (What Impact Does It Have on Practice)?**

The responses to the survey indicate that *Focus on Basics* is having an impact directly and indirectly on individuals and on the profession as a whole. Administrators and teachers report reading and putting into practice ideas they have found in it. Administrators and professional development providers report sharing specific articles and issues with others, building a constituency for new practices. As indicated in Table 5, 78% of respondents report being able to put what they read into practice. Some 73% report using the information to develop a plan to improve existing programs or practices, 77% report using the information to modify improvement plans and 66% report using the information to justify existing programs. Smaller percentages report using the information to reconsider plans of action (35%) or to initiate new programs or practices (32%). However, 85% report using the information in *Focus on Basics* to make minor (more often than major) improvements in programs or practices.

**Table 5. Reported Impact of Reading *Focus on Basics* on Practice**

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?			
I have been able to:	Agree	Disagree	Does Not Apply
-- Put what I read into practice	78.08%	10.28%	11.64%
-- Use the information to develop a plan to improve existing programs or practices	72.60%	13.36%	14.04%
--Use the information modify or alter an existing plan for improvement	76.72%	10.95%	12.33%
--Use the information to <i>justify existing</i> programs or practices	65.76%	10.96%	23.29%
--Reconsider a plan of action that was underway	34.59%	26.71%	38.70%
--Use the information to initiate a <i>new</i> program or practice	31.85%	30.83%	37.33%
--Use the information to make <i>minor</i> improvements in a program or practice	84.93%	4.79%	10.27%
--Use the information to make <i>major</i> improvements in a program or practice	26.72%	42.81%	30.48%

Here is a small sample of the concrete actions respondents report initiating as a result of reading *Focus on Basics*.

*Implemented time structured reading/writing activities into a beginning level reading course.*

*I have used more options in teaching including small groups in order to meet the needs of more 'social students.' I've attempted to use more 'real life' situations in order to address the concerns of youth and seniors.*

Teachers report sometimes sharing information from *Focus on Basics* with their students:

*I had my advanced ESL students work with the transitions issue and write and talk about transitions they have had in their lives. It led to good discussions about some big and not so big transitions.*

Both administrators and teachers (65% of respondents) get programmatic ideas from *Focus on Basics*.

*Started a Transition to College Program in collaboration with a local two-year state college. Used some of the strategies in the issue on working with youth to design new retention strategies for our program.*

*I have discussed several articles from FOB with members of my staff, our supervisory team and our program improvement team. Some of our most extensive discussion/investigations have related to learner persistence. John's [Comings] article, "Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports", has been particularly interesting to us. We have not only used it with our program as a basis for collecting and analyzing data related to these supports, but we have also included this article in our statewide program improvement family literacy training and have challenged agencies to collect and analyze their own data related to the effectiveness of these supports.*

*We do counsel our learners more often now as a result of our reading and studying the subject.*

About 25% of the written responses suggest that *Focus on Basics* provides new ideas and new ways of thinking about the field of adult education.

*Being well written, succinct and makes me think about my philosophies for Adult Education. And to sometimes step outside current knowledge to explore a different perspective.*

*It does help to keep me 'focused' on Adult Education and how we are unique in the education opportunities offered in our community. It helps affirm what we are doing and gives me ideas to discuss with staff and possibly implement in our program.*

More than 20% of respondents appear to use *Focus on Basics* in formal professional development activities such as workshops, study circles, and trainings.

*Information in your issue on Technology is incorporated in a workshop I facilitate entitled Integrating Technology Into Adult Education Programs. I also include copies of the entire issue or articles in the workshop binder. I also include articles from other issues of Focus on Basics in other workshops that I facilitate including Using a Multi-media Approach to Teach Adult Learners.*

*It's the only resource I've found specific to Adult Basic Ed that's directly from action research in the field, provides relevant and useful info in an approachable language and consistently addresses issues I encounter specific to ABE.*

Staff development providers use ideas from *Focus on Basics* as well as the actual document:

*Incorporated information about retention and student persistence into presentations after reading articles about it.*

*Gives me the research base I need for topics I present on in PD to practitioners. The research bases give me confidence. I'm confident that what I'm advocating /presenting to practitioners is sound and supported by experts in the field.*

Administrators especially appear to appreciate the research-related articles in *Focus on Basics*, using it for grant-writing purposes (such as locating *supporting statements for grant proposal*) or to support efforts within their program.

*From the Transitions issue, using the article "The Open Door Policy" we presented the information to a group during a round table discussion consisting of college administration. From this same issue we used the information from the article 'Approaches to ABE Transition to Postsecondary Education' to reinforce our transitional plan already in place.*

*An article on reading by Purcell-Gates supported my arguments about changes that should be made in the reading instruction in our program.*

*I have also used FOB articles related to reading research to write grants and consult with literacy programs.*

A number of respondents mention that *Focus on Basics* is helpful in their own education, which is another form of professional development:

*I use some of the content in my dissertation work.*

*Supported my graduate research on self-directed learning and learning disabilities in adult basic education (and a host of other topics).*

*It is the best collection of articles on adult literacy education in the country. The quality of work and ability to connect research and practice has been a model for my own writing.*

Respondents with higher levels of education report a higher rate of change in their attitudes and behaviors about adult basic education and a higher rate of putting into action ideas they learn as a result of reading *Focus on Basics*.

**Is There A Relationship Between the Impact *Focus on Basics* Has On the Reader and:**

- **the level of formal education the reader has completed?**
- **the length of time the reader has been teaching adults?**
- **the number of hours a week the reader teaches?**
- **whether the reader currently teaches in the K-12 system?**
- **whether the reader interacts with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics*?**
- **whether the reader has a high degree of satisfaction with *Focus on Basics*?**

To understand the relationship between the impact of *Focus on Basics* and attributes such as level of formal education, length of time teaching adults; number of hours spent teaching per week, the existence of interaction with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics*, and the degree of satisfaction with *Focus on Basics*, correlations were computed. In this section, we highlight these key findings. See Appendix C for a discussion of the correlations and the related table.

We were curious to see if our results would mimic those of NCSALL researcher Cristine Smith and colleagues (2003), who found that teachers with master's degrees were less likely than those without to act upon information learned in staff development activities. We were surprised to find that our data revealed that respondents with higher levels of education report a higher rate of change in their attitudes and behaviors about adult basic education and a higher rate of putting into action ideas they learn as a result of reading *Focus on Basics*.

We also found that those who report seeking out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics* are, on average, more educated than respondents who report not seeking

out additional resources. They have, on average, almost two more years of experience than respondents who do not seek out other resources. Respondents who interact with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics* are less likely to seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics*.

Although many teachers responded to the evaluation survey, teachers who teach fewer hours a week report a greater likelihood of putting into action ideas they learn as a result of reading *Focus on Basics*. This may be a reflection of the power and leeway that teachers who are predominantly administrators and staff development professionals have within their jobs to initiate new practices rather than a drawback on the part of *Focus on Basics* or a lack of interest on the part of teachers in initiating change. It may also be a reflection of the fact that those who teach more have less time to try new practices, particularly if they do not receive paid prep time. This certainly merits more study.

The literature indicates that interactivity increases use of information. Our data support this. Respondents who interact with colleagues over *Focus on Basics* report finding their beliefs about adult basic education more strongly affected by *Focus on Basics* than those who do not interact with colleagues.

The length of time the respondent has been teaching adults has an impact. More experience is associated with a higher likelihood of putting into action changes in teaching, training, or managerial practice, and with a higher likelihood that *Focus on Basics* helps keep the practitioner aware of developments in the field. This, too, contrasts with the findings of Smith et al. (2003), and merits further study.

Respondents who express satisfaction with *Focus on Basics* are the ones who are more influenced by it, which is an unsurprising finding. Satisfied respondents are also more likely to seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics*.

### **What Challenges to Using *Focus on Basics* Do Practitioners Face?**

As was noted in several of the responses to other questions, adult educators often face many challenges. More than 25% of the responses comment on some challenge that inhibited their use of *Focus on Basics*. Administrative support, time, and money are listed as the elements *Focus on Basics* readers need to be able to put into practice ideas and practices garnered from reading.

One individual feels what is needed is:

*Support from administrators to make teaching/curriculum review and development an ongoing reflective priority.*

**Administrative support, time, and money are listed as the elements *Focus on Basics* readers need to be able to put into practice ideas and practices garnered from reading.**

Of the responses, 20 focus specifically on the challenge of finding time to engage in the information provided in *Focus on Basics*. One individual commented:

*What is really needed? A 36-hour day, increased professional development funds; a more narrow job focus.*

Of the 292 survey respondents, 46% report wanting but being unable to put into practice specific activities or ideas learned about via *Focus on Basics*, indicating lack of time as the biggest deterrent to implementation, followed closely by lack of funds. After that, lack of support from their programs is reported as having an impact on readers' abilities to implement new ideas. Only 8% report that the publication does not provide enough information to enable them to implement change.

### **How Do Professional Development Providers Use *Focus on Basics*?**

Since many practitioners are introduced to *Focus on Basics* via participation in staff development activities, and since many staff development providers use *Focus on Basics* in their work, we were curious about how professional development providers use the publication. In addition to combing through written responses to the survey for information that pertained to the use of *Focus on Basics* by professional development providers, NCSALL conducted a series of four guided conversations with four professional developers. Their responses matched the findings that emerged from the surveys. *Focus on Basics*:

- has an impact on professional development providers' thinking;
- is a source of articles and ideas they use to “plant seeds” in other practitioners via professional development activities; and
- gives them a sense of connectedness — to the publication and to NCSALL.

The impact that *Focus on Basics* has on the thinking of professional development providers was reported as ranging from the specific to the general. For example, one respondent noted that *Focus on Basics* articles about effective staff development models were the impetus to change to a new model of training delivery. Another mentioned articles by John Tyler on the GED as the reason for his organization having reorganized some of its literacy programming.

Professional development providers describe themselves as a conduit between *Focus on Basics* and practitioners: bringing the publication to the attention of teachers and ensuring that teachers have time — in their staff development events — to absorb the information *Focus on Basics* offers. They variously read and use specific *Focus on Basics* articles in training; sometimes they adjust activities to incorporate information gleaned from a new issue of the publication. They are quite selective in choosing articles to share, looking for those that offer specific teaching tips rather than more generalized theory. They appreciate *Focus on Basics* for being written in a way that draws teachers

in, acknowledges and respects their experiences in the classroom, yet tries to move them to a different place in their thinking. *Focus on Basics* is the tool, they feel, that helps them translate research into practice; their role is to ensure that the field is exposed to it to stimulate professional growth.

Professional development providers’ sense of affiliation with *Focus on Basics* and NCSALL grows out of an understanding that they share a philosophical stance with NCSALL. *I don’t consider Focus on Basics a self-contained product. NCSALL is the resource; Focus on Basics is one of its products.*

For more on professional developers and *Focus on Basics*, see Appendix A.

### How Could *Focus on Basics* Be Improved?

**Table 6. Recommendations on How to Improve *Focus on Basics***

RECOMMENDATIONS (n=292)	
Include more teaching techniques	59.59%
Include more on research	30.82%
Include book reviews	28.77%
Include guidelines on how to discuss articles in groups	24.32%
Increase the amount included in the Blackboard (resources)	16.44%
Increase the amount of white space	2.74%
Make the publication shorter	1.71%
Other	18.15%

Although the publication is popular, readers are ready with ideas on how to make it more useful, displayed in Table 6. Respondents (60%) continue to want more on teaching techniques, which could be interpreted as a request for more on how to turn research into practice. On the other hand, the request may be a reflection of the most pressing thing on teachers’ minds: what to do in class the next day. It may also reflect the limited number of publications and resources in adult basic education and teachers’ desire for more of these.

In addition to content, readers’ written comments request more information on how to help readers reflect on, digest, and put into practice what they read in the publication. This is a heartening response, in that research on how teachers change indicates that change requires reflection, experimentation, further reflection, and that peers should play an active role. Thus requests for online discussions, workshops, and study circles indicate what the future could hold. [We actually sponsor an online discussion group which has infrequent discussions. Whether these media would be successful is a different question.] What follows is a selection of specifics offered via written responses to the category “other.”

Many technology-related ideas were offered, including having an online discussion group on the Web site for support and ideas, sending emails indicating when new issues are online, and connecting *Focus on Basics* and the Adult Literacy Education Wiki.<sup>3</sup> These suggestions point to the lack of success we have had with the *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list, which sends emails when new issues are on line and is designed to be an online discussion group for *Focus on Basics* readers.

*I would like to see a relationship between Focus on Basics and the ALE Wiki. I see them as having the same purposes: increasing practitioners' use of research and the dialogue between researchers and practitioners. Are there ways they can strengthen each other?*

Resources readers would like to see include more URLs, Web reviews (*Web sites that have been researched and graded*), more commercial product reviews, more family literacy and library literacy resources, and book reviews for adult education classes. Funding information was requested:

*Include more on funding – how are programs funded? How to find new funding?*

*Provide information about funding sources. Do more articles linking adult ed with other groups – e. g. college, K-12.*

While not a suggestion for including a new section, this recommendation is worth noting:

*Don't be afraid to go back to basic topics that have been covered before. What was the last Reading or Writing issue? A long time ago (by my reckoning). Surely there's new research or techniques that could be covered.*

Readers suggest some strategies for helping disseminate *Focus on Basics* articles:

*It needs to be visible/publicized at all adult learning institutions. I never see it around my college/general studies division. We need a marketing campaign.*

For those who access *Focus on Basics* via the Internet, a simple path that would lead to *Focus on Basics* without having to click through NCSALL was requested. In addition to making it easier to find *Focus on Basics*, several respondents suggest using technology to make the information more accessible, via online courses.

Many readers request study circles. This is similar to the 24% who support the inclusion of guidelines on how to discuss articles in groups. An individual who has used other NCSALL material offered this idea:

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<sup>3</sup> The Adult Literacy Education (ALE) Wiki is a Web based collection of information to which readers can add and comment. It is at [wiki.literacytent.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wiki.literacytent.org/index.php/Main_Page).



*...at least 5-8 discussion questions at the end of each FOB issue would really be helpful for SC [study circle] facilitators.*

Because respondents use *Focus on Basics* in staff development activities, it was not surprising that one staff developer wrote:

*When discussing a new method/technique, have outlines accessible either in FOB or on web that could be used for staff development.*

Six respondents want more on staff development ideas, which could be interpreted as wanting guidelines on how to conduct discussions, workshops, or lead practitioners through reflective practice over time. A total of 30 readers wrote that workshops would better enable them to use information from *Focus on Basics*. When “workshops” were mentioned, it wasn’t always evident what types, but some respondents did provide specifics:

*Hold hands-on regional workshops or study circles once a year in each state specifically for different audiences such as ABE teachers, GED teachers, program administrators, etc.*

*It would be great if FOB staff would present workshops at state wide conferences (like NJ States NYACCE Conference, or the Adult Ed conferences that each State hold annually), or have a list of workshops that states can hire them for.*

Some practitioners would like to see practical how-to information on teaching, such as curriculum guides, lesson plans, worksheets, and materials lists.

## CONCLUSIONS

The readers who completed our survey report that *Focus on Basics* has had a positive impact in the following ways:

- It has influenced their beliefs about adult basic education.
- It has helped them feel connected to the larger education community as professionals.
- It has contributed to the development of communities of practice.
- It has enabled them to make a connection between research and practice.
- It has provided them with concrete ideas they have used to change their programs and practice.

In the simplest terms, this evaluation demonstrated that *Focus on Basics* is having an impact. Reading professional literature does help produce change in practice: it is not a myth. Entertaining new ideas is the first step to action. ***Focus on Basics* is reported to be successful in influencing beliefs about adult basic education**, thus helping readers initiate the first step to action. Implementing new ideas takes not just motivation by the potential implementer, but also time for planning, resources, and, in some cases, the political will necessary to persuade program administration or even learners that a new approach is worthwhile. Thus it is not surprising that more respondents reported that reading *Focus on Basics* enables them to modify existing plans and make minor changes to existing programs or practices than those who report being enabled to initiate major improvements in a program or practice.

The publication continues to play the role we learned it was playing in our earlier evaluation: **it gives its readers the sense that they belong to a larger community of professionals**. Unlike many professions, adult basic education does not have a proscribed career path. No set academic path or certification qualifies teachers for their roles. Many adult basic educators get jobs as adult basic education teachers without realizing that they have, in fact, entered a “field.” The evaluation revealed that *Focus on Basics*, with its national scope and articles targeted to the state, program, and classroom level, provides practitioners with a sense of the broader field to which they belong.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of those who completed the survey reported that they interact with their colleagues around *Focus on Basics* articles. Given the isolation that plagues many adult basic educators, and the positive role collegial support plays in helping teachers develop new practices, this is a positive finding. *Focus on Basics* is helping to create contact between practitioners and thus **contributing to the development of communities of practice**. One could easily speculate that it has made a major contribution to the field just by providing a sense of professionalism and connectedness to its readers.

*Focus on Basics* is a **mainstay for professional development providers, who draw upon it for ideas, information, and materials**. It is the publication that adult basic education practitioners — teachers, program administrators, and professional development providers — turn to.

**It is a success at making a connection between research and practice**. The resources that NCSALL has invested have had a positive impact. [This was not a controlled study; we cannot say that the resources had more of an impact used this way than if they had been used in another way.]

We also conclude that *Focus on Basics* could be improved. *Focus on Basics*, and, by extension, NCSALL, could take additional steps to ensure that more teachers are introduced to the publication, and that the ideas and information in the publication are effectively accessed and applied. We could strengthen our marketing efforts to raise

awareness of the publication. We could create more forums and suggest activities through which practitioners could come together and digest the materials, plan for its use, and then reflect on that use. We could add more “classroom-ready” articles that entice teachers who are primarily concerned with — as they should be — preparing for tomorrow’s classes.

## NEXT STEPS

This information informs *Focus on Basics* staff in planning for improvement and it informs readers and potential readers about the utility and value of the journal. The good news is that, while we were writing this report, we were already putting into practice some of what we learned from the data. In Volume 7D, for example, on corrections education, we included teaching techniques (a two-page guide to conducting writing workshops) and questions to use to lead a discussion about research findings published in the issue. Our frequently quiet electronic discussion list is being re-energized by the appointment of a new list moderator who has a mandate and time in her job to invite guest speakers and spark a dialogue between readers and the researchers whose work appears in the publication.

At the same time, the future of *Focus on Basics* is very much in doubt, as NCSALL’s federal grant comes to a close in mid-2006. Current funding will take *Focus on Basics* through Volume 8C; NCSALL and World Education staff are working to secure future funding. We will share the positive results of this evaluation with potential investors in *Focus on Basics* and hope that they are persuaded that the publication plays an important role in adult basic education.



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## APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDERS

Soon after NCSALL began publishing *Focus on Basics*, NCSALL staff began receiving from professional development providers in the field of adult basic education unsolicited descriptions of how they used the publication in their work. Many teachers get their first introduction to *Focus on Basics* via professional development activities, where they, for example, receive it as a handout in a workshop or discuss specific articles in study circles. Professional development providers, whether program directors, topic experts, or trainers, seemed to be a natural conduit for bringing *Focus on Basics* to its target audience. We therefore decided to conduct a series of guided conversations on why and how professional development providers choose to use *Focus on Basics*. On January 23, 2005, we posted a request on the *FOB* electronic discussion list, which is hosted by the National Institute for Literacy and has at any given time from 400 to 500 subscribers. Twelve subscribers volunteered to be interviewed; four were selected, representing a range of adult education venues: ESOL, corrections, urban, and workplace environments.

Taken together, the four interviewees' adult education experience amounted to more than 90 years. Their titles and specialty areas are as follows:

- *Interviewee A: **Project director** of a state literacy resource center for the past 8 years, with 25 years in adult education, most of it involving instruction for low-level ESOL learners (M.A. in ESL/cross cultural studies).*
- *Interviewee B: **Adjunct professor** and adult literacy consultant with special interests in work-related learning and leadership development; 29 years of experience, including work for the Peace Corps (Ed.D. in adult literacy).*
- *Interviewee C: **Education administrator** for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice, 24 years in literacy (Ph.D. in adult literacy).*
- *Interviewee D: **Director of professional development**/regional adult education network, with more than 12 years' experience in adult education (M.Ed. in education).*

This section of the evaluation is based on interviews with only four respondents. It is descriptive, examining how the four practitioners described above use *Focus on Basics* in their work as professional developers.

Three major themes emerged from the interviews:

- interviewees' connectedness to *Focus on Basics*,
- the notion of "planting seeds" through the use of *Focus on Basics*, and
- the impact of *Focus on Basics* on the interviewees' thinking.

First, interviewees indicated their sense of affiliation with *Focus on Basics* and NCSALL, the organization that produces it. A major reason for that affinity stemmed from the interviewees' understanding that NCSALL (and hence *Focus on Basics*) shares a philosophical stance similar to their own. Interviewees also saw themselves as promoters of effective practices. For them, *Focus on Basics* was a tool to help them in that role, providing a way to expose more practitioners to the ideas about effective practice planted in the *Focus on Basics* articles. Lastly, interviewees felt strongly that *Focus on Basics* articles have influenced their own thinking about adult literacy.

### Feeling Connected to *Focus on Basics* and NCSALL

All of the interviewees expressed a feeling of "connection" with *Focus on Basics* (FOB) and its sponsoring organization, NCSALL. Two of the interviewees, the adjunct professor and the educational administrator, talked about how they became involved with *Focus on Basics* through graduate studies with NCSALL partners. The educational administrator and the project director had each undertaken fellowships at NCSALL, and the project director and the director of professional development had participated in the piloting of NCSALL projects: Health Literacy and Professional Development Resource Network.

Individuals who had taken graduate courses with other researchers connected to NCSALL were introduced to *Focus on Basics* through that connection. The adjunct professor summed it up by saying, "What attracted me to FOB was that it came from World Education. [The NCSALL partner at which *Focus on Basics* is housed.] I had dealt with them for a lot of years. We're 'partners in crime' so to speak."

From initial exposure to NCSALL came other opportunities for all interviewees to develop a closer association with NCSALL. For example, two interviewees each served a one-year internship with NCSALL. The director of professional development piloted a health literacy curriculum in which NCSALL was involved. The project director piloted the NCSALL professional development resource network study and used the results to improve her own work. In all the conversations, individuals linked *Focus on Basics* with NCSALL. For example, the educational administrator stated, "I don't consider FOB a self-contained product. NCSALL is the resource; FOB is one of its products." And the director of professional development stated, "FOB was our way into NCSALL. Now we know more about NCSALL and use it as a resource. For others [practitioners], it's also an 'in' to NCSALL."

Regardless of how the four interviewees were introduced to *Focus on Basics* or NCSALL, they felt a bond with the organization because of its philosophical stance. As the educational administrator put it, "FOB – and NCSALL – is what I was looking for in life."

The adjunct professor explained how his philosophy meshed with NCSALL's. "We all believe in participatory education. I always liked World Education and I read



their resources when I was in the Peace Corps. Those resources were one of the few things that helped me out in the field alone. I believed in their approach. They [World Education reports] were one of the few practical things that talked my language. They're still doing the same things that they did 10 to 15 years ago. They still have the participatory philosophy as before."

The educational administrator considered *Focus on Basics*'s philosophy to be learner-focused. "In *FOB*, you can't help but read that our adult learners are human beings. We have to get to know them as humans. We have to think about goal-setting, and so forth, if we are going to reach them." This individual also explained that, after trainings using *Focus on Basics*, he has had teachers "tell me that they didn't know anyone cared about our [incarcerated] adults and literacy issues." That these teachers work in a corrections environment partly explains their feeling about the publication: nonetheless, the interviewee explained, *Focus on Basics*'s focus on the learner is a philosophy he wants to instill in his corrections practitioners.

Trust in *Focus on Basics* was basic to the feeling of connectedness for the individuals interviewed. All felt strongly that they could trust the material published in *Focus on Basics*. "*FOB* is 'symbolic' – it has some of the best tools for teachers. It keeps you honest. What else can you give them that is grounded in a hands-on way, yet is from the cutting edge research?" This comment, from the educational administrator who devoted several years to his doctoral training in adult literacy, illustrates the high regard in which he holds research.

## Planting Seeds

All four individuals interviewed regard themselves as "facilitators" of learning, in contexts including college classrooms, national trainings for teachers, and urban professional development environments. As part of their role, they comb through *Focus on Basics* looking for articles that will be appropriate for their customers. At other times, simply reading the latest issue of *Focus on Basics* moves them to adjust staff development activities to incorporate some of the findings described in *Focus on Basics* articles. The four interviewees generally agreed that the teachers they serve do not make connections between research and practice; they often do not see the relevance of the research to what needs to happen in their own teaching environment.

Although the interviewees believed that teachers' practice should be informed by the kind of information *Focus on Basics* articles provide, they did not feel that practitioners know about or take time to find out about publications such as *Focus on Basics*. Therefore, the interviewees felt that they play a key role in disseminating the information from *Focus on Basics*. As the project director stated, "Planting seeds is what *FOB* does." Once the seeds have been planted, the four interviewees infuse ideas from *Focus on Basics* articles into their trainings. A director of professional development uses it as a "springboard for thinking about curriculum design."

It appears that consideration of the type of audience with which material from *Focus on Basics* will be used influences the choice of articles. For a GED conference, for example, the director of professional development chose *Focus on Basics* articles that would encourage teachers to adopt more interactive learning approaches. Articles related to project-based learning and multiple intelligence (such as T. Coustan and L. Rocha's "Putting Theory into Practice") were selected over other GED-related articles such as John Tyler's "NCSALL Research Finding: The GED: Whom Does It Help?" However, Tyler's "NCSALL Research Finding" was used in a corrections setting – but only with the executive staff – to plant a seed for change about what the mission of the organization should be.

The interviewees reported being quite selective in choosing articles to share, looking for those that offer specific teaching tips rather than more generalized theory. For example, for a group of corrections instructors, the educational administrator chose articles on reading (such as John Strucker's "What Silent Reading Tests Alone Can't Tell You" and Ashley Hager's "Techniques for Teaching Beginning – Level 1 Reading to Adults") that provide concrete suggestions on how to incorporate research findings into reading instruction. These were handed out to all the corrections instructors with whom he works. He also explained that, while some articles were shared in their entirety (such as those listed above), he also used the information gleaned from other articles such as Victoria Purcell-Gates' "Taking Literacy Skills Home" for his talking points. Corrections instructors whose focus is reading or special education receive more detailed information gleaned from a variety of other sources, often from the NCSALL research reports but not specifically *Focus on Basics* articles.

The adjunct professor assigned more generic articles that describe different approaches to teaching to college students interested in adult literacy. Later, this same professor suggested further reading for students based on their specific interests. He also provided a resource list that includes articles from *Focus on Basics*. Two of the interviewees specifically named Amy Prevedel's "Values and Beliefs: The World View behind Curriculum" as key for people new to adult literacy. They felt that because the article provides an overview of the terms specific to adult literacy and of various instructional approaches, it is especially helpful to new practitioners.

Often articles that readily show the connection between theoretical considerations and concrete suggestions for practice were selected for use. Interviewees felt that *Focus on Basics* articles articulated the research succinctly. Authors know "how to take big ideas and show how to incorporate them into the classroom," according to the director of professional development. The articles on project-based learning (Issue 2D, 1998) were frequently referred to as examples of how to provide teachers with concrete ideas. The interviewees felt that articles without specific strategies for teachers are not as useful.

The director of professional development felt that "teachers have enthusiasm but don't have knowledge of the broader discourse of the field, the broader debates such as standards, high stakes testing, and research in adult education. If they are introduced to

this research, they can go back and know what to do tomorrow – and the next day.” In order to ensure that training participants are exposed to this broader research, he shares *Focus on Basics* articles using three different strategies: single articles are handed out and then discussed during a professional development session; practitioners within a training session are asked to read different articles, and then share what they learned from the articles (jigsaw approach); and supplemental readings are listed in packets that participants take home at the end of a training session.

The project director suggested that teachers are reluctant to admit that they don’t know something that they think they should already know. “There is a constant struggle to value teachers. They think [the research is] not about them. They think they already do it right. Or that the research doesn’t connect to them.” According to this interviewee, no matter where teachers are coming from, *Focus on Basics* connects to them. The authors of *Focus on Basics* articles “respect teachers.” For this director, many of the articles in *Focus on Basics* are written in a way that draws teachers in, that acknowledges and respects their experiences in the classroom, yet tries to move them to a different place in their thinking. He offered as an example Mary Ann Cunningham Flores’s “Beginning ESOL Learners’ Advice to Their Teachers.”

All four interviewees believe that *Focus on Basics* articles are appropriate for the field. The educational administrator reflected, “I have been so steeped in theory that it’s hard to know what’s important to teachers when it might not be the same for researchers. It’s challenging for me to translate research to practice for the teachers.” *Focus on Basics* is the tool, the interviewees feel, that helps them translate research to practice; their role is to ensure that the field is exposed to it in order to stimulate professional growth.

### The Impact of *Focus on Basics* on Their Thinking

All interviewees stated that *Focus on Basics* has had an impact upon their own thinking. The director of professional development commented that his organization had decided to change their strategy for delivering staff development. Instead of single-session workshops, his team wanted to design longer-term models such as study circles. They felt that there should be more focus on taking what one has read and incorporating it into instructional design. *Focus on Basics* was the ideal tool to facilitate this process. While *Focus on Basics* could also be used as a tool within this new delivery system, the interviewees observed that *Focus on Basics* articles about effective staff development models were the impetus to change to a new model of training delivery.

When asked if *Focus on Basics* has influenced her attitude and practice, the project director commented, “It provides validation for me. It affirms what I believe. And when there’s dissidence – which is rare – if I can hold the thought long enough, the article helps me to refocus, to think about [the reasons why I disagree] and then use [that thought process] in workshops.” The article by Eileen Barry (“Finding Out for Myself”) was pivotal to changing her own thinking about research.

The educational administrator stated, “I really think FOB makes a difference. We’re reorganizing the prison literacy work around some of the NCSALL ideas.” One idea specifically mentioned was Tyler’s article on “The GED: Whom Does It Help?”

The director of professional development, who had been a teacher before becoming a trainer, commented that as a teacher he was not familiar with the discourse on adult literacy. *Focus on Basics* helped him get up to speed quickly. “They’re like Cliff Notes in the best sense. It’s like a crash course in the most pressing topics and debates in the field.” What he learns through *Focus on Basics*, he shares through formal and informal technical assistance. “FOB has shaped my understanding of the field practices and research.” Reading about the research on learner persistence prompted him to provide more pre-service training around goal-setting. The research reinforced for him the critical need for teachers to encourage students to have clearly defined goals in order for them to persist in programs.

## APPENDIX B: *FOCUS ON BASICS* SURVEY

Thank you for participating in our evaluation of the impact of *Focus on Basics*. This survey should take from 10 to 20 minutes to complete. The information will be used to understand how readers use *Focus on Basics* and improve the publication. Please complete each question. Be careful not to press the "enter/return" key as you move from question to question, so that you don't accidentally submit your survey before completing the form. You may click in each field or use the tab key to move through the questions. Only one survey per person, please. We have requested your email address so we can notify you when the results -- which will be posted on the NCSALL Web site -- are available. This survey will be on-line until May 18, 2005.

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name of person completing survey:

1a. Email address of person completing survey:

2. What is your primary work (e.g., in terms of hours worked)?

Basic literacy (reading 0-4 level) teacher/tutor

Pre-GED (reading 5-8 level) teacher/tutor

GED/Adult secondary education preparation teacher/tutor

ESL/ESOL teacher/tutor

Math teacher/tutor

Staff developer

Program Administrator

Other (Please list):

----

(Please choose an answer above)

2a. If you do more than one type of work, what other types do you do?

(Please check all that apply.)

Basic literacy (reading 0-4 level) teacher/tutor

Pre-GED (reading 5-8 level) teacher/tutor

GED/Adult secondary education preparation teacher/tutor

ESL/ESOL teacher/tutor

Math teacher/tutor

Staff developer

Program Administrator

Other (Please list):

3. If you are a teacher/tutor, what is your primary teaching situation?

(Non-teacher/tutors, skip to question 4)

One-on-one teaching with the same individual over a specific period of time

One-on-one teaching with different individuals during drop-in sessions

Teaching a class of 2-10 students  
Teaching a class of 11-20 students  
Teaching a class of 21+ students  
Other (Please list):

----

(Please choose an answer above)

4. With how many different adult education and literacy organizations do you currently teach or work?  
different organizations (Please use numbers only)

5. At the present time, how many hours a week do you spend in the following roles?

(Please complete, using numbers, all that apply)

Teacher/tutor  
Counselor  
Administrator/Director  
Staff Developer  
Other

6. What is your gender?

Male  
Female

----

(Please choose an answer above)

7. What is your race or ethnicity?

(Please check all that apply)

Asian American  
Black or African American  
Hispanic or Latin American  
Native American Indian or Alaska Native  
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
White or Anglo American  
Other:

8. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

High school or GED  
Associate's degree  
Bachelor's degree  
Master's degree  
Doctoral degree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

9. Do you currently teach or have you ever taught in the K-12 system?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, please indicate number of years.

years

10. How many years in total have you been working in the field of adult basic education and literacy?

(Please round to the nearest whole number; i.e., working 4 months=00 years, working 8 months=01 year, working 1 year, 7 months=02 years)

years

### *FOCUS ON BASICS*

11. Do you subscribe to *Focus on Basics*? (If yes, please answer question 12; if no, please skip to question 13.)

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

12. If yes, why do you subscribe?

(Please number all the reasons that apply to you, 1 being the most important reason, 2 being less important but a consideration, etc. If a reason doesn't apply, leave the drop-down list set to "n/a".)

n/a 1 2 3 4 5 I like to have my own copy.

n/a 1 2 3 4 5 I like to read a printed copy.

n/a 1 2 3 4 5 It is inexpensive.

n/a 1 2 3 4 5 It was required.

n/a 1 2 3 4 5 Other:

13. If no, how do you get it?

I download it from the Internet.

It is available within my agency.

I read it at the library.

Other:

----

(Please choose an answer above)

14. What are your reasons for reading *Focus on Basics*?

(Please check all that apply)

To know more about research

To learn new teaching techniques

To find ideas about management  
 To look for ideas about program design  
 To feel connected with the field  
 To learn more about a specific topic  
 To assist in planning for staff development activities  
 Other:

15. Which of these best describes how you read *Focus on Basics*?

I review the Table of Contents and then choose particular articles to read.  
 I flip through the issue and then choose articles that catch my interest.  
 I read it straight through, from front to back.  
 I read it only when I am looking for specific information.  
 I use the index on NCSALL's Web site to find articles on specific subjects and read only those.

Other:

----

(Please choose an answer above)

16. Do you interact with your colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics* articles? (If yes, then please answer question 17.)

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

17. If yes, in what ways do you interact?

(Please check all that apply)

In staff meetings

During staff development activities

In study circles

Informally

Other:

18. Within the past two years, have you read any part of the following issues?

(Please check all that apply)

Workplace Education, November 2004

Youth, June 2004

Transitions, February 2004

Curriculum Development, September 2003

"Isms", February 2003

Counseling, October 2002

Other:



19. Of the issues you have read, which did you find helpful? (Please check one Response -- Does not apply; Very helpful; Somewhat helpful; A little helpful; Not Helpful; Not Applicable-- for each issue you checked in Question 18)

Workplace Education, November 2004  
Youth, June 2004  
Transitions, February 2004  
Curriculum Development, September 2003  
"Isms", February 2003  
Counseling, October 2002  
Other:

20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
(Please check one response for each statement)

Reading *Focus on Basics* has influenced my beliefs about adult basic education.

Does not apply  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Reading *Focus on Basics* has led to changes in my teaching, training, or managerial practices.

Does not apply  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Reading *Focus on Basics* has caused me to see myself as part of a larger profession.

Does not apply  
Strongly disagree  
Disagree  
Agree  
Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how your practice has been informed by reading *Focus on Basics*?  
(Please check one response for each statement)

I have not been able to put what I read into practice.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to develop a new plan to improve existing programs or practices.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to modify or alter an existing plan for improving programs or practices.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to justify existing programs or practices.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

The information caused me or others in my organization to reconsider a plan of action that was underway.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to actually initiate a new program or practice.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to make minor improvements in a program or practice.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I have been able to use the information to make major improvements in a program or practice.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

The information helped me to keep aware of developments in the field.

- Does not apply
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree

Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

I was able to provide information to others who needed it.

Does not apply

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

The information gave me a better understanding of my work.

Does not apply

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

The information helped me to conduct research or evaluation.

Does not apply

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Other (please specify):

22. Please provide us with one or two examples of activities you have carried out as a result of reading *Focus on Basics* (aside from accessing other information).

23. Have you ever sought out another resource mentioned in *Focus on Basics*?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, did you turn to a publication listed as a reference at the end of an article?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, did you turn to a resource listed in the Blackboard?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, did you follow a web link or go to a URL in the publication?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

24. Have there been activities or ideas that you learned about in *Focus on Basics* that you wanted to put into practice but could not?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, why not?

(Please check all that apply)

No support from program

No funds

No time

Not enough information in the publication to guide me in implementing change

Other:

25. Are there other ways that *Focus on Basics* has had an impact on you about which we have not yet asked?

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

If yes, please describe.

26. In general, how satisfied are you with *Focus on Basics*?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied

----

(Please choose an answer above)

27. What is the most important way in which *Focus on Basics* meets your needs?

#### OTHER RESOURCES

28. To what extent has engaging in the following activities been helpful in improving your practice?

Reading professional journals such as *Focus on Basics*.

- Does not apply
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- A little helpful
- Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Attending conferences, workshops, or seminars.

- Does not apply
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- A little helpful
- Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Talking/ planning with colleagues.

- Does not apply
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- A little helpful
- Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Taking college courses.

- Does not apply
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful

A little helpful

Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Working with ABE-specific textbooks.

Does not apply

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

A little helpful

Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Engaging in peer coaching or observation.

Does not apply

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

A little helpful

Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Participating in practitioner teacher/tutor inquiry projects.

Does not apply

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

A little helpful

Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Participating in a study circle or sharing group.

Does not apply

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

A little helpful

Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

Studying and reading on my own.

Does not apply

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

A little helpful  
 Not helpful

----

(Please choose an answer above)

29. How often do you seek information from these sources?

(Please check one response-- Does not apply; DailyWeekly; Monthly; Less than monthly; Rarely; Never--for each line.)

Web Sites:

Adult Numeracy  
[www.std.com/anpn](http://www.std.com/anpn)  
 LINCS (NIFL)  
[novel.nifl.gov/lincs](http://novel.nifl.gov/lincs)  
 National Center for Family Literacy  
[www.famlit.org](http://www.famlit.org)  
 TESOL  
[www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)  
 State or regional websites  
 Other:

Electronic Discussion Lists:

Does not applyDailyWeeklyMonthlyLess  
 than  
 monthlyRarelyNever  
 Adult Education Network  
[www.nova.edu/~aed](http://www.nova.edu/~aed)  
 Focus on Basics  
[www.ncsall.net/?id=481](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=481)  
 TESL-L  
[www.hunter.cuny.edu/~tesl-l](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/~tesl-l)  
 State or regional electronic discussion lists  
 Other:

Publications:

Does not applyDailyWeeklyMonthlyLess  
 than  
 monthlyRarelyNever  
 Adult Education Quarterly  
 Adult Basic Education journal (COABE)  
 Focus on Basics  
 Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy  
 Lectura y Vida  
 Reading Research Quarterly  
 State or regional newsletters  
 Other:



IMPROVING *FOCUS ON BASICS*

30. How could *Focus on Basics* be improved?

(Please check all that apply)

Include more teaching techniques

Include guidelines on how to discuss articles in groups

Include more on research

Include book reviews

Increase the amount included in the Blackboard (resources)

Make the publication shorter

Increase the amount of white space

Other:

31. What would better enable you to use the information provided in *Focus on Basics* (for example, workshops or study circle guidelines, etc.)?

32. What suggestions do you have for topics for upcoming issues? Please list them.

INTERVIEWING SURVEY PARTICIPANTS, FEEDBACK ON THE SURVEY

33. After this survey is collected from all participants, we will be conducting 15-minute telephone interviews with selected persons to learn more about themes that emerge from the survey.

Would you be willing to participate in a 15-minute telephone interview? (If yes, then please answer questions 34 and 35.)

Yes

No

----

(Please choose an answer above)

34. If yes, what days and times would be best to reach you?

Days

Times

35. If yes, please enter your telephone number.

Thank you for your participation in this evaluation. Your responses will be invaluable in helping us learn more about how adult educators acquire knowledge about teaching and learning. Should you have comments concerning this study, please feel free to make them in the space provided.



## APPENDIX C: CORRELATIONS

This section summarizes correlations between key respondent attributes and the impact of *Focus on Basics* on practitioners. Three levels of impacts were considered:

1. Changes in attitudes and beliefs (3 questions from 20\_1 to 20\_3)
2. Changes in behavior and initiatives (9 questions from 21\_1 to 21\_9)
3. Use of references and resources (4 questions from 23\_1 to 21\_4)

Hypotheses were formulated (see analysis framework) that linked the impact *Focus on Basics* has on its readers to the following variables:

- Level of formal education (question 8): the higher the level of education a participant has, the less likely he or she was to put into action things learned in professional development
- The length of time the respondent has been teaching adults (question 10): the less experience in ABE a participant had, the more likely he or she was to put into action things learned in professional development
- The number of hours a week the respondent teaches (question 5): the more hours a person teaches, the more likely he or she was to put into action things learned in professional development
- Current teaching responsibilities (or ever taught) in the K-12 system (question 9): if a teacher does not identify as a K-12 teacher, he or she may be more likely to get professional identity and professional input via *Focus on Basics*
- The existence of interaction with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics* (question 16): collegial support influences change
- The degree of satisfaction with *Focus on Basics* (question 26): a satisfied reader is a reader who then uses the publication as a source of inspiration or guidance

### Summary of results

Table 4 summarizes the results of the correlations computed. Spearman rank correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between two variables where at least one of them was ordinal. An example is the relationship between the level of education (a 5-point scale) and the impact of *Focus on Basics* on beliefs about adult education (a 4-point scale). Spearman rank correlation coefficients together with their level of statistical significance are reported in the unshaded cells of Table 4.

Certain questions were answered in a Yes/No format. Whether the respondent interacts with colleagues about *Focus on Basics* or whether he or she ever taught in the K-12 system followed in this category. Relationships between impact and these questions

were assessed by comparing the mean of the Yes respondents with the mean of the No respondents. For example, when asked about the impact of *Focus on Basics* on their beliefs about adult basic education, respondents that interact with colleagues scored 4.07 (on a scale from 2=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree, with 1=does not apply) compared to 3.88 of respondents that do not interact with colleagues. In this case the difference, +0.19, was statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Table 2 reports the difference between means and the level of statistical significance in the shaded areas.

Level of formal education. Spearman rank correlation coefficients indicate that, for all answers, changes in attitudes (q20) correlate positively with the level of education. The correlation was statistically significant (at the 10% confidence level) for answer q20\_2.

Level of education also correlated positively with all impacts on behavior and initiatives: the higher the level of education a participant had, the more likely he or she was to put into action things learned in *Focus on Basics*. This result is in contrast with what was found in the Staff Development study. The correlation was statistically significant at the 10% confidence level for sub-answer 3 and at the 5% confidence level for sub-answers 4 and 9.

Finally, t-tests indicated that respondents that seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics* are, on average, more educated than respondents that do not seek out additional resources.

The length of time the respondent has been teaching adults. This attribute had mixed relationship with indicators of impact. In some cases, correlations were positive and in other cases they were negative. Spearman rank correlation coefficients were statistically significant in only two cases (q20\_2 and q21\_9). In both of these cases, the coefficient was positive, meaning that more experience is associated with a higher likelihood of putting into action new lessons. This is in contrast with the results from the Staff Development study.

Respondents that seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics* have, on average, almost 2 more years of experience than respondents that do not seek out other resources.

The number of hours a week the respondent teaches. Most of the coefficients computed for this indicator have a negative sign, meaning that the fewer hours a person teaches, the more likely he or she was to put into action things learned in *Focus on Basics*. In 4 cases (out of 11), the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was statistically significant.

Respondents that seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics* teach, on average, 2.5 hours per week less than respondents that do not seek out other resources.

Respondent currently teaches or has ever taught in the K-12 system. Because this was a dichotomous variable, relationship between attribute and impact was assessed by looking at the means of respondents who said Yes and comparing them to the mean of respondents who said No.

The difference between Yes and No was significant in only 3 cases. Also, the coefficient was positive in some cases and negative in others (see Table 4).

Interaction with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics*. Respondents that interact with colleagues turned out to be influenced more markedly by *Focus on Basics* than respondents that do not interact. For questions 20 and 21, the difference was consistently positive, meaning that respondents that interact consistently agreed more with the statements made in 20 and 21 than respondents that do not interact. This difference was also consistently statistically significant (with only one exception).

An interesting finding was that respondents who interact with colleagues regarding *Focus on Basics* are less likely to seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics*.

High degree of satisfaction with *Focus on Basics*. It was not surprising that respondents who expressed satisfaction with *Focus on Basics* are also the ones that are more influenced by it. The coefficient was consistently positive and always statistically significant. Satisfied respondents were also more likely to seek out other resources mentioned in *Focus on Basics*.

**Table 7. Relationships Between Respondent Attributes and Impact of *Focus on Basics***

	Level of education	Experience (yrs teaching adult educ.)	Teaching load (hours/week)	Ever taught in K-12	Interaction with colleagues	Satisfaction
		Mean = 13.5	Mean = 17.3	Yes=57.2%	Yes=72.3%	Mean = 3.43 (range=1-4)
<b>Questions 20</b> <i>For these three questions, responses ranged from 2 = strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (1=does not apply)</i>						
<b>Reading <i>Focus on Basics</i> has influenced my beliefs about adult basic education</b>	0.04	-0.02	-0.09	-0.12	0.19***	0.36***
<b>Reading <i>Focus on Basics</i> has led to changes in my teaching, training, or managerial practices</b>	0.11*	0.11*	-0.17**	-0.04	0.25***	0.31***
<b>Reading <i>Focus on Basics</i> has caused me to see myself as part of a larger profession</b>	0.06	0.01	-0.04	-0.00	0.14**	0.35***
<b>Questions 21</b> <i>For the next nine questions, responses ranged from 2 = strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (1=does not apply)</i>						
<b>I have been able to put what I read into practice</b>	0.04	0.03	-0.01	-0.02	0.19**	0.30***
<b>I have been able to use the information to develop a new plan to improve existing programs or practices</b>	0.09	0.07	0.06	-0.03	0.15**	0.33***
<b>I have been able to use the information to modify or alter an existing plan for improving programs or practices</b>	0.11*	0.06	-0.06	0.02	0.25***	0.36***
<b>I have been able to use the information to justify existing programs or practices</b>	0.15**	0.06	-0.19**	0.03	0.30***	0.24***
<b>The information caused me or others in my organization to reconsider a plan of action that was underway</b>	0.04	-0.08	-0.07	0.13*	0.21**	0.33***
<b>I have been able to use the information to actually initiate a new program or practice</b>	0.08	-0.08	-0.00	0.16**	0.20**	0.43***
<b>I have been able to use the information to make minor improvements in a program or practice</b>	0.07	0.02	-0.20***	0.01	0.19***	0.22***
<b>I have been able to use the information to make major improvements in a program or practice</b>	0.04	0.02	-0.14	-0.02	0.20**	0.31***
<b>The information helped me to keep aware of developments in the field</b>	0.13**	0.13*	-0.14*	-0.01	0.20***	0.39***
<b>Questions 23</b> <i>These questions had yes-no answers</i>						
<b>Sought out another resource in FOB</b>	0.16**	1.79*	-2.44*	0.08*	-0.20***	0.63***
<b>If yes, a reference at the end of an article</b>	0.35***	-2.06	-2.88	-0.02	-0.04	0.23**
<b>If yes, blackboard</b>	0.05	1.55	-2.96	-0.07	-0.17**	0.19***
<b>If yes, URL</b>	-0.16	-0.15	-5.29*	-0.02	-0.09**	0.36***

Notes: For questions 20 and 21, responses varied from 2=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Question 23 had Yes/No answers. Shaded areas contain differences between the means of "Yes" respondents versus "No" respondents. Un-shaded areas contain Spearman rank correlation coefficients.

\* significant at the 10% confidence level; \*\* significant at the 5% confidence level; \*\*\* significant at the 1% confidence level.



National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

### **NCSALL's Mission**

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort between the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

### **NCSALL's Research Projects**

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner persistence, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) professional development, and (4) assessment.

### **NCSALL's Dissemination Initiative**

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge, and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy*, a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports* and *Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. In addition, NCSALL sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

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