

**TOWARD A NEW PLURALISM IN
ABE/ESOL CLASSROOMS:
TEACHING TO MULTIPLE “CULTURES OF MIND”**

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

How do ABE/ESOL programs shape adult learners, and how do adult learners, in turn, shape their programs? Beyond the acquisition of important skills (such as greater fluency in the English language) what are the bigger internal meanings for adults of participating in ABE/ESOL learning? And how do the systematic ways adults are making meaning when they enter their programs affect how they will best learn in them, and what they will most need from them?

As adult developmental psychologists, we carefully followed for a year or more the inner experiences of 41 ABE/ESOL learners from all over the world. They were enrolled in three different U.S. programs oriented to greater English language fluency and improved effectiveness in learners' roles as parents, workers, or students.

In the process, we found ourselves increasingly drawn into two simultaneous worlds of inspiring aspiration: a world of courageous learners and their dedicated teachers, on the one hand; and, on the other, a scholarly world of passionate contributors to a fast-developing ABE/ESOL literature filled with challenging questions, rich debates, and direct requests for more colleagues to join in the good work. Our own hope is that what we have discovered in the first world may be of some use to the second for the continuing benefit of both.

In this first chapter, we give you our understanding of several key questions, pleas, and debates in the ABE/ESOL literature which we believe our study engages. We introduce you to the three settings in which we were welcomed and to the learners we followed. Primarily, we seek to provide here a picture of **a new bridge** between these two worlds which our own perspective and experience led us to discover. We begin to suggest the kinds of benefits to practitioners we think may result from a walk along this bridge. In the chapters ahead we are going to invite you to join us on this walk—a long, Golden Gate-sized walk, to be sure!—and, in the concluding chapter, we try to sum up what seem to us the practical consequences of the walk, both for teachers' choices in the classroom and for new understandings of a number of ongoing debates in the ABE/ESOL literature.

Situating Our Approach In The ABE/ESOL Literature

Contributors to the ABE and ESOL literatures seem continuously to call for more in-depth, qualitative accounts of the inner experiences of adult learners to balance equally valuable but perhaps over-represented quantitative, demographic, and large-sample summary approaches (Skilton-Sylvester and Carlo, 1998; Macias, 1986; Rockhill, 1982; Valentine, 1990; Hunter and Harman, 1979). Macias (1986), for example, contrasts “national data sets” with “local and qualitative research,” suggesting that “both are needed, and each can contribute answers to questions that the other cannot” (p. 19). Malicky and Norman (1996) lament that there is too little

research “focus[ing] on the lives of adult literacy learners or on their perceptions of changes in their lives as they participate in literacy programs” (p. 3). Our study, which re-interviews each learner open-endedly on several occasions over the course of a year or more, certainly hopes to be responsive to these felt needs for richer accounts of learners’ broader spheres of living and their internal experiencing.

We are interested, however, in the way several contributors to the field make clear that what is needed is not merely more qualitative, thickly descriptive case accounts in simple contrast to quantitative, large sample approaches, but qualitative approaches which are not so markedly framed from the perspective of either the ABE/ESOL “mission,” in general, or the intentions and purposes of the specific ABE/ESOL program in which the learner is enrolled. Wiley (1993), for example, writes about the fact that many studies, even those which are qualitative in nature, tend “to be framed from the expectations of the receiving society” (p. 6). The learner's perspective tends to be considered *in light of* a program’s expectations, or the U.S. host society’s definitions of the learner’s needs, rather than considering the perspectives of learners as *they* would define their own experiences, their own hopes, their own needs.

This call for attention to the *learner’s meanings* as the fundamental starting point is picked up even more directly by Lytle and her colleagues (Lytle, 1991; Lytle and Schultz, 1990) who are themselves at work on, and calling others to help develop, a literature of “adults’ *own* evolving conceptual frameworks or theories about language, literacy, teaching, and learning” (emphasis hers) (Lytle, 1991; p. 120). Lytle explicitly urges researchers and practitioners to draw on the “considerable literature of theory and research on children, adolescents, and adults in the areas of meta-cognition . . . and social-cognition” among others (p. 120). “Adults’ beliefs,” she says,

may function as the core or critical dimension in their movement toward enhanced literacy. As beliefs are articulated and sometimes restructured through interactions with teachers, texts, and other learners, the other dimensions of development—adults’ practices, processes, goals and plans—begin to reflect, and in turn, to inform these changes. Although these developmental processes appear to be reciprocal and recursive, there is evidence that beliefs may be a primary source or anchor for other dimensions of growth. (p. 121)

Working in a longstanding theoretical and methodological tradition that follows closely the *development* of individuals’ ways of *constructing* their inner and outer experience (Kohlberg, 1969; Perry, 1970; Gilligan, 1982; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Basseches, 1984; Kitchener and King, 1994; Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Belenky, et al., 1986), we represent precisely one of the intellectual approaches Lytle urges be joined to the study of adult literacy. Our study involves meticulous attention to both

the *meaning-constitutive* and potentially *transformable* nature of adult learners' *beliefs*—how these shape a field of action and experience, constituting a lens through which the learner looks out at the world within and beyond the classroom; and how that lens can potentially change over time, reconstituting the field of action and experience. The approach we bring to our study of adult learners' experience is thus radically drawn from the learners' perspective (rather than that of the host nation or literacy program), and fundamentally anchored in the constitutive nature of adult learners' beliefs, as Lytle calls for.

Our approach is referred to as “constructive-developmental” because it considers the way a persons' beliefs *construct* the reality in which they live, *and* the way these beliefs can change or *develop* over time. Our work is thus an extension of the tradition of Jean Piaget who helped us to see each *child* as a kind of philosopher (1959)—someone whose beliefs and understandings arose from a distinctive way of knowing, with a coherence, wholeness, and dignity all its own. In an identical way, our approach looks at each *adult* learner in our study—and by extension, each adult learner in *any* ABE/ESOL classroom—as a kind of philosopher. **What value might there be in better understanding the “philosophies” ABE/ESOL learners bring into our classrooms?** This is a fundamental question in our study.

In the third chapter of this monograph we try to acquaint the reader with the look and feel of a number of qualitatively different “philosophies” or ways of knowing¹ to which our own research and earlier research suggests adult learners may be partial when they enter an ABE/ESOL classroom. This research also suggests that our relationship to our ways of knowing are not at all casual. We do not tend to take them on and off from one day to the next like sweaters from a drawer. Our ways of knowing may feel more to us like the way we *are* rather than something we *have*; and the world we construct through our way of knowing (including the learning and teaching world of the classroom) may seem to us less the way things *look to us*, and more like the way things *are*. Learning new information or skills can be difficult, and when it is accomplished we may feel like the person we know ourselves to be knows more, has more capabilities, greater interior and exterior access. But changing our fundamental way of knowing—developing a whole new “philosophy”—can be qualitatively even more difficult; it can feel less like the self

¹ The important work of Belenky et al., especially *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), has achieved such understandable prominence in the field of adult education, that it may be useful to point out that we are using the term “ways of knowing” in its literal and ordinary sense here; we are not referring to their specific taxonomy. A *way of knowing* (as distinct from something that is known, a *product* of knowing) is what in philosophy is called an *epistemology*. The underlying structure of an epistemology is the subject-object relationship—what can this way of knowing reflect upon, look at, have perspective on (“object”)? What is it embedded in, attached to, identified with (“subject”)? The distinctly different meaning-systems defined in our study are identifiable as distinctly different ways of organizing the subject-object relationship; i.e., they are literally different “ways of knowing.”

we know has taken on greater capabilities and more like the self we *knew* has changed in some fundamental way. This is “constructive-development.” We have undergone a *development* in the fundamental way we *construct* experience.

Anyone who has spent any time with children is familiar with such changes in the young. A typical ten year old is not just physically bigger than a typical four year old; the ten year old is more complex. Four year olds are more captive of their impulses; ten year olds can sit still. Four year olds do not distinguish between fantasy and reality; when a ten year old is imagining himself flying he knows he is “pretending.” Four year olds live in the moment; ten year olds begin to think about consequences, and what will happen next. The differences between childhood and adolescence are also well known. We realize now that teenagers do not just have different hormones and biochemistry from children. They gradually begin to construct a whole different way of knowing.

But how much do we know about the differing unconscious “philosophies” *adults* tend to construct? For more than 40 years teachers of the young have considered the importance of paying close attention to their students’ ways of knowing or making meaning. It has been understood and accepted that learning goes on, after all, as Piaget was fond of saying, “in the home of” the learner, not in the home of the teacher. Even if the teacher’s purpose is “to lead out” from that home (the literal meaning of “educate”) the teacher must still know from *where* he or she is trying to lead the student. For forty years teachers have thought about their students’ “homes”—if their students were children and youth. *But we have barely begun to think about our students’ “homes” when our students are adults.* It is our hope that this long monograph can be a resource for doing just that in the world of ABE/ESOL learning.

If we, the authors of this study, believe that our constructive-developmental perspective may help to better understand teaching ABE/ESOL learners, we also hasten to acknowledge that the ABE/ESOL learners we were privileged to study helped us in turn to modify our own perspective. ABE/ESOL learners inevitably have a precious relationship to at least two kinds of “home”—one’s personal philosophy or way of knowing, in which all learning goes on, and from which one might be tempted to venture out; but also the homeland of a familiar culture one is both leaving and in some way carrying forward into the new home. As our study progressed, we came to feel that processes of acculturation and leaving the “home” of one’s native country were so powerful a part of the mental landscape of the learners we studied that our central category for observation—the learner’s “way of knowing” or “implicit philosophy”—was best considered a kind of “culture of mind.” That is, in addition to the many forms of diversity that may be obviously present in an ABE/ESOL classroom, and which good teachers do their best to

recognize and include—differences of gender, age, race, cultural origin—our study suggests the importance of a less obvious difference, namely different ways of knowing, which may also be precious to learners, also in need of the teacher’s recognition, and which inevitably color the learners’ ways of working out the processes of leaving a familiar culture for an unfamiliar one. **What would it mean to create a new conception of the “resource-rich classroom”—one that was filled with ways of connecting well to the inevitable *diversity* of “cultures of mind” which will populate any ABE/ESOL classroom?** This is another fundamental question in our study.

The idea of “connecting well” reflects another critical dimension of our constructive-developmental approach—namely, that the exercise and transformation of our ways of knowing always go on in some *context*. The British psychologist, D. W. Winnicott, was the first to coin the term, “holding environment,” in reference to the psychosocial surround that must support the healthy development of the infant (1965). Winnicott himself raised the question of whether the need for a good “holding environment” was an idea exclusively responsive to the fragility and vulnerability of infancy, or whether there might be a need for successively reconfigured holding environments at each new stage of development. Others, notably Erikson (1968) and Kegan (1982), have since worked out conceptions of the holding environment *throughout the lifespan*.

Kegan identifies three crucial functions of a holding environment, at least two of which have obvious relevance for thinking about an ABE/ESOL classroom: First, a good holding environment must “hold well”—i.e., it must understand, accept, and acknowledge the way the person understands; it must take the person *where he or she is*, without disappointment or impatience. Secondly, it must, when the time is right, “let go”—i.e., it must support the person's need for a gradual psychological separation from, and disidentification with, the holding environment with which it is, for a time, inevitably fused. Third, if possible, it should “stick around”—i.e., it should be available, after differentiation, to be re-known, or newly connected with according to new terms consistent with the ways the developing person has grown and changed.

This third characteristic—a wholesome feature of long-term relationships in which people inevitably grow and change—may be harder to provide in the shorter-term context of ABE/ESOL enrollment; but the first two characteristics essentially amount to a fresh perspective on the need for any classroom to be both a “high-support” and “high-challenge” environment. Too much of the first without the second may be comfortable but insufficiently stimulating. Too much of the second without the first generates defensive resistance and withdrawal. Our approach suggests that every ABE/ESOL classroom is a collection of individual makers of

meaning, and that ABE/ESOL learning is, in one way or another, a constructive-developmental *event*—i.e., the adult’s chances for a powerful learning experience depend on proper supports to exercising, and even possibly to transforming, the way one makes meaning. **How might a better understanding of the differing “ways of knowing” our students bring into the classroom enhance our chances to connect well with them?**

In addition to all the obvious gains that may be possible by better understanding the mental home of each individual adult learner, it became apparent to us, as we were drawn further in to the ABE/ESOL literature, that our “cultures of mind” approach might shed new light on a number of especially prominent areas of exploration and debate, more generally:

- **Motivation to Learn.** We detect in the literature a growing restlessness with the way ABE/ESOL participants’ *motivations to learn* are conceptualized. Peirce (1995), for example, regards the widespread distinction between “instrumental” and “integrative” motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) as too static and unidimensional (Ullman, 1997). *How can our “cultures of mind” approach help us see a wide variety of qualitatively different ways of knowing which may lie behind a learner’s motivation to, for example, secure a new job (an example of the “instrumental” stance) or, for example, become more a part of the PTA at one’s children’s school (an example of the “integrative” stance)?* The literature suggests that despite the conceptually neat distinction between these kinds of motivations, real learners trouble this neatness by demonstrating both kinds of motives. *How can a “cultures of mind” approach help us to see the consistency in a given person’s “motive mix”?*
- **Classroom Community.** There is a growing recognition in the literature that, even for adults, positive relationships between the student and teacher, and among fellow students are important to learning (Chevalier, 1994; Atwell, 1987; Brookfield, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1991; Heard, 1989; Meyers and Erdmann, 1985; Wrigley and Guth, 1992; Kegan, 2000). But what constitutes “positiveness” is different for different learners. It can be puzzling for well-intentioned teachers, for example, to find that the same behaviors which leave one student feeling well-attended-to leave another feeling abandoned. A student who wants to be helpful to her fellow learners can find that some people feel supported and others condescended to by the identical behaviors on her part. *How can a “cultures of mind” approach help us better understand the differing criteria students will bring to their constructions of*

supportiveness or trustworthiness in a teacher? Within one's cohort of fellow learners?

- **Classroom Pedagogy.** Do all adult learners prefer and benefit from student-centered, teacher-as-coach, “democratic” classroom designs? Sometimes the literature seems almost to suggest that a capacity and appetite for these kinds of pedagogical designs automatically comes along with the “condition” of adulthood (Knowles, 1975; Grow, 1991; Mezirow, 1981). The implication is that if you are going to be an effective teacher of grown-ups you must eschew the teacher-centered, teacher-as-expert, “authoritarian” designs which if ever appropriate are only so for children and youth. Similarly, discussions about “cooperative,” vs. “collaborative,” vs. “traditional teacher transmission” models (Hamilton, 1994; Flannery, 1994; Eble and Noonan, 1983) tend to frame the possibilities in terms either of philosophical differences and ideological preferences among educators, on the one hand, or unresearched assumptions about “how the adult mind works,” on the other. *But is it possible the question of optimal classroom teaching designs should not be one of “either/or,” but optimal matches to the learner's current way of knowing? Can a “cultures of mind” approach help us create a more “plural” set of teaching designs in any one classroom?*
- **Self Re-creation.** A line of exploration in the literacy literature that is especially fascinating to us attends to the way that literacy learning and the life circumstances that occasion it (e.g., immigration) often involve a process of self-creation (Rouse, 1995; Peirce, 1995; McKay and Wong, 1996; Huizenja and Weinstein-Shr, 1996; Munoz, 1995; Ullman, 1997). The learner may literally “find herself” in a new world.

The act of immigrating to a new country can profoundly affect a person's social identity. In fact, some people experience this change more as an act of re-creation than as a temporary process of readjustment. For example, it might necessitate re-creating one's potential role because one's child can more quickly acquire the new language and perform tasks such as talking with a landlord or paying bills. It might mean a shift in one's collective identity, so that being from the coastal village of Bucay in Ecuador is overshadowed by becoming or being seen as “Latin American.” These transformations are complex and continual, redefining all aspects of self. (Ullman, 1997)

This line of exploration is interested in how teachers, in Ullman's words, “might support students in the process of self-creation” (p. 1). *How can a “cultures of mind” approach help us to see the ways a learner's lens*

filters the process of self re-creation? And how, for some learners, the filters themselves may change, enabling and necessitating new forms of self re-creation?

- **The Power of Context/Context of Power.** Many researchers discuss the importance of attending more explicitly to the reality-shaping dimension of the social context of ABE and ESOL learning (McKay and Wong, 1996; Ullman, 1997; Peirce, 1995; Weinstein-Shr, 1995). These researchers highlight the relationships between the role of the student, speaking, sense of one's personal "voice," and language on the one hand, and mediated attributions, structural inequality, and unequal power, on the other.

In her study of immigrant women learning English in Canada, Peirce (1995) found that the women sometimes had ambivalent feelings about speaking English. This hesitation seemed to come from their resistance to the identities others were creating for them, not from lack of motivation (Ullman, 1997). *How can a "cultures of mind" approach to the study of ABE/ESOL learning help us better understand learners' differing experiences of these power dimensions? Their differing constructions of social attributions? Their differing vulnerabilities to structural inequalities?* For example, structural inequalities create obstacles for everyone who is placed on the less powerful side of the equation; but there is a big difference between the internalization of these obstacles (where we come to feel they reflect in some way our own unworthiness) and the experience of them as largely external.

- **The Purpose and Outcome of ABE/ESOL Learning.** Goals for ABE/ESOL programs range from helping adults to become better prepared to join and/or participate in the work force or civic life, to increasing skill development, to personal empowerment, to engaging in social and political change (Evers, Rush, and Berdrow, 1998). While increasing "competence" is the hoped-for outcome of any adult learning program, with so varied an assortment of favored goals, "competence" comes to mean a host of different things (Green, 1995; Chappell, 1996; Ecclestone, 1997; Hyland, 1994; Kerka, 1998). And yet, whether one's favored goals orient to the acquisition of basic skills or to the personal growth of the learner; whether goals are first derived from a consideration of academic disciplines that need to be mastered or from consideration of the adult's real-life demands, the fact remains that whatever learning one seeks to promote must go on in the mental home of the learner. *How can a "cultures of mind" approach help us better to engage the learner's*

“mental home,” whether our goal is, for example, to increase the accessible skill base within that home, or for example, to facilitate the learner’s move to a qualitatively more expansive and complex mental home?

Our study has been influenced by our collaboration with Sondra Stein and “Equipped for the Future” (EFF), a National Institute for Literacy initiative with a new approach to conceiving the purposes and assessing the outcomes of adult basic education:

The Equipped for the Future Standards for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning have been developed to answer a complex question: What do adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members? (Stein, 2000, p.1)

Our study shares the philosophical view of EFF in “conceptualizing adult literacy as something bigger than the acquisition of basic skills” (Popp, Portnow, Broderick, Drago-Severson, & Kegan, 1998, p.25), and in defining competence within the context of the individual adult learner’s life demands. More particularly, the “something bigger” is the meaning-making person “behind the skills,” the person possessed of generative mental capacities that frame an understanding of what behaviors are called for and need to be exercised. And the adult learner’s “life demands,” more particularly, can be looked at in the context of his or her many social roles. Like EFF, we have been interested (Kegan, 1994), in the “hidden curriculum” that inheres in each of the frequented social roles common to most adult lives: In their private lives—e.g., parenting, partnering—and in their public lives—e.g., work, citizenship—adults take up a number of roles each of which has built into it a set of largely unrecognized mental tasks that must be solved satisfactorily in order to succeed in the role. EFF has identified a number of these role-related tasks.

Our work raises the specific question of whether the ways people will understand and carry out the tasks of a given social role are importantly influenced by their more general “way of knowing” or “culture of mind.” In Chapter Six we look at the tasks EFF identifies in various social roles through the lens we develop in the preceding chapters—i.e., **What do the same tasks look like from the perspectives of differing “cultures of mind?”** This is a question with myriad implications for ABE/ESOL teachers, as discussed in our last chapter—e.g., **With regard to the performance of any role-related task, how well matched are the teacher’s expectations with the current capacity of the adult learner’s current “culture of mind?”** **What is the appropriate, next-more-complex way in which a given task might be better understood and performed by the learner, toward which the teacher can appropriately hope to support the learner’s progress?**

The Learning Opportunity In Our Study

By now we have posed a great many questions, all suggesting that attention to a new variable, “culture of mind” may bring us some fresh help on a variety of learning and

teaching fronts in the ABE/ESOL world. In response to these questions you may have developed a few questions of your own. We can imagine both polite and less polite forms of these questions.

A polite form might go something like this: Alright then, how can I gain a greater understanding of this new dimension—adult learners’ systemic ways of knowing—as it expresses itself in the real particulars of the learning and teaching enterprise, or the real demands of adults’ lives outside the classroom? How can I learn about “ways of knowing” in action?

Less polite forms might go something like this: How can I test my own skepticism about this new dimension? How powerful a dimension is it really, in comparison, for example, to more familiar differencing dimensions like gender, age, cultural origin? In the midst of all those differences that so characterize the ABE/ESOL classroom, am I really likely to be impressed by what is shared among people of different ages, genders, and cultural origins who just happen to be making use of the same “way of knowing”? How consistent, for any one person, is a “way of knowing” anyway? Persons’ “culture,” after all, is their culture when they are both in and out of the classroom, when they are at work, and when they are at home with their families. Is “culture of mind” as cohering a variable? Does the way I see my students making sense as a learner in my classroom really have much to do with the way they understand their work in a factory or their role as a parent?

We intend our study to be an opportunity for the reader to pursue here both sets of questions—How do I learn about “cultures of mind” in action? How do I decide how important this variable is? In many respects these were our own questions as well, as we took a psychological perspective familiar to us into a world that was unfamiliar to us. The constructive-developmental perspective has been brought to a great variety of investigations, but we are unaware of any previous studies from this perspective of ABE/ESOL learning, or of adults so varied in cultural origins or socio-economic circumstances.

Before the first word of this study was written, it was designed to create the opportunity to learn answers to the polite and less-polite questions above. We wanted to study ABE/ESOL learners in the context of a variety of real-life social roles. We wanted the adults whose learning experiences we would study to be enrolled in programs that seemed to look to educate and not just to train—i.e., exemplary programs, from our point of view—to have the best chance to engage the broader, generative capacities behind behaviors. We wanted the opportunity to follow a relatively small group of learners closely for a substantial period of time—to really get to know them; to gather a lot of “thick” data from a relatively small group rather than a lot of “thin” data from a very large group; to provide the learners

in our study the opportunity to show us their ways of knowing in rich detail; and to follow them long enough that we might have some chance to see how those ways of knowing may, for some learners, actually change.

The nature of our actual sample and cooperating ABE/ESOL programs in many respects exceeded even our own ambitious list of wishes. Three sites—each attending to ABE/ESOL learning in the context of a specific adult role, and each seeking to engage the whole learner—generously agreed to participate in our study, and each stuck with us throughout the whole study, making many hours of interviewing time available in their program schedules over the course of the 10 to 14 months we studied learners in each site. The three sites were a high-school diploma program oriented especially to the work role, staffed by the Continuing Education Institute of Watertown, Massachusetts, and provided to factory workers at the Norwood, Massachusetts plant of the Polaroid Corporation; a Massachusetts Even Start program oriented especially to family literacy; and a pre-enrollment program oriented especially to the role of higher education student, offered by the Bunker Hill Community College of Charlestown, Massachusetts. (A full description of each site can be found in the chapters ahead.)

A total of 41 learners across the three sites participated in the complete study, making time available on three (and, at one site, four) separate occasions for tape-recorded, open-ended qualitative interviews, structured exercises, paper-and-pencil quantitative measures, and classroom observations. Each visit lasted several hours and permitted us to gather data on a wealth of questions about participants' experience of a variety of aspects of the learning and teaching enterprise: e.g., What are your purposes in pursuing this learning? What, in your view, makes a person a good teacher? What effect is your learning having on your work, or in your relationship with your child, or in your role as a prospective college student? Revisiting the same participant over the course of a year or more also allowed us to ask of the data (as well as the participant): Are there changes over time in the learner's views on these kinds of matters? (A full account of our research method is presented in Chapter Two.)

The full sample of 41 learners was characterized by rich diversities and intriguing commonalities. The learners were men and women; people in their early 20s to midlife and from every part of the world; adults whose prior schooling experiences were negative and marked by shame and failure, and those whose prior experiences were positive and marked by pride and success. At the same time, within each site there was an interesting concentration of learners around a given age and life-phase. The learners at the Bunker Hill Community College site were mostly unmarried young adults in their 20s; the learners at the Even Start site were mostly in their 30s and parents of young children; and the learners at the Polaroid plant were

frequently midlife adults, men and women in their 40s and the parents of older children. If ever one wanted to explore a sufficiently diverse group of adults to test the strength of a new variable like “culture of mind”—Can it suggest unrecognized *commonalities* that apply across such apparently *different* people? Can it make apparent unrecognized *distinctions* among people who seem to be so *similar*?—this group of adults surely provides an outstanding opportunity to do just that! (A full account of the characteristics of our sample of adult learners will be found in the chapters ahead.)

One valuable feature of our study for which we can take no credit is the unexpectedly resourceful opportunity the settings provided for exploring the importance to the adult learner of participation in a learner cohort. It is now commonplace in the adult learning literature in general to assert that the need for a strong connection to a group of fellow learners is less important for adults than it is for youth who are in the process of separating from their families of origin and have not yet created a new community of affiliation and identification. Adults, who in most cases have already created social networks around their families and friends and fellow workers, can be presumed, so the conventional wisdom goes, to be less in need of such community. In the ABE/ESOL literature, more specifically, there is the further suggestion that one-on-one coaching or training may be superior to classroom learning. But in our study, across all three of our research sites, adults consistently made reference to the importance to them of an unusually close-knit, reliable, common-purpose group (“members of a family,” “part of a community,” “fellow warriors”). Thus we have the opportunity here to learn how group learning was important and to raise questions about these accepted wisdoms as to the presumed unimportance or ineffectiveness of this aspect of adult learning.

At the same time, the three sites provide fascinating contrasts in their particular cohort “designs.” At one setting learners entered and exited the program at their own distinct times. At another, every learner began the program at the same time, all worked toward a common purpose, and all exited the program at the same time. Still another group began with a common starting point, built a strong cohort, and then, in the middle of the year, disbursed into a wider population of learners. In the pages ahead we thus also have the opportunity to learn about the effects of these differing cohort design features. How did learners make sense of these cohort experiences and how well do different designs serve different ways of knowing?

This monograph is organized in the following fashion: In Chapter Two we present our research method. In Chapter Three we acquaint you with the look and feel of a number of qualitatively different ways of knowing in adulthood, generally, and as they may make sense of aspects of teaching and learning, in particular. The following four chapters explore our three research sites—first the student-oriented

program at Bunker Hill Community College; then the parent-oriented program at Even Start; and finally two chapters on the work-oriented program at Polaroid. After these chapters we explicitly address issues of role-related competence and our collaboration with Equipped for the Future. The last chapter sums up our findings and their implications for ABE/ESOL teaching and program planning. Two appendices then follow, reviewing, respectively, our quantitative findings and developmentally oriented competency charts identifying the way similar tasks might be performed within differing “cultures of mind.”

We now heartily invite you into the various learning opportunities of this study. If ABE/ESOL classrooms inevitably present teachers with a rich mix of durable ways of knowing—not mere “habits of mind” but veritable “cultures of mind,” each possessed of a systemic dignity, each engendering the learner’s deep loyalties—our study may constitute a kind of encyclopedia for the development of a new kind of resource-rich classroom—one that includes a wide range of responses to a *variety* of adult ways of knowing.

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