If Only I Could…

Read
Write
Spell

Identifying and helping adults who find learning difficult

Tennessee Literacy Resource Center
Center for Literacy Studies
If Only I Could...

Read

Write

Spell

Identifying and helping adults who find learning difficult
Action Research Group on Learning Disabilities

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To our students

I need to learn to read much better and I wish to get better at it at some point in time. My level of "proficiency" is short at this time. My life is a little upside down given some time. maybe! just maybe. [I think I'm mad at myself for not learning to read, spell, and understand math in school some times. I think only if I could.

-Ruz, a student participant in action research
April, 1994
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Adults who have great difficulty learning to read and write, even after instruction, have been a continuing concern of Tennessee adult basic education practitioners. At the request of practitioners, in 1989 the Center for Literacy Studies staff produced Learning Differently, a booklet for teachers and tutors to help them work with students who may have learning disabilities. It remains our most asked-for publication. In 1991, a committee of practitioners worked with Center for Literacy Studies staff to create a day-long workshop dealing with learning disabilities. The workshop drew about 250 practitioners at three sites across the state. Resource materials on learning disabilities are frequently requested from the Tennessee Literacy Resource Center Library, and practitioners who have developed expertise on this topic are sought out by their peers. It wasn’t surprising that many practitioners identified learning disabilities as the topic of most interest that they would like to pursue.

Action research as staff development. Since the Center for Literacy Studies was designated as the state literacy resource center in 1992, we have seen the exciting potential of teachers coming together to reflect on their practice. Problem-solving through creative solutions, the offering of new ideas, support and encouragement for each other are

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“I was hoping for the answers to all our questions. The students pushed us—they fueled the urgency to find solutions.”

“We were all looking for the magic bullet.”

— Action Research Participants
hallmarks of these interactions. We were further intrigued by reading about inquiry and action research methods of staff development, as described by Wrigley and Guth in *Bringing Literacy to Life* (1992). Cockley and Fingeret’s emphasis on teachers formulating their own questions and designing their own learning experiences in *Teachers Learning: An Evaluation of ABE Staff Development in Virginia* (1992) was also influential.

The staff of the Tennessee Literacy Resource Center conceptualized three action research projects, one in each of the state’s grand divisions. We wrote to District 2 ABE programs and asked that teachers interested in action research with their students who have learning difficulties contact us. From these applications, seven adult basic education practitioners came together. These practitioners are Level I teachers, focusing on beginning readers. Some group members also have administrative or other responsibilities, but each spends time with students at the literacy level. “I came to this because of frustration—my students were hitting a rock wall,” one participant in the action research group said. “I was hoping for the answers to all our questions,” another added. “The students pushed us—they fueled the urgency to find solutions.” One participant summarized the hopes of everybody: “We were all looking for the magic bullet.”

The group enlisted the help of Dr. Diane Sawyer, Murfree Chair of Excellence in Dyslexic Studies at Middle Tennessee State University. Dr. Sawyer and Susan Westberry, Maury County ABE Supervisor, have worked for several years on modifications for learning disabled students taking the GED. We felt our work with literacy-level students would complement and enhance these efforts.

From September, 1993 through May, 1994, the group met six times, four of those meetings with Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Sawyer’s presentations focused on topics such as understanding how spoken language, life experiences and schooling experiences combine to help develop the ability to read; the physical, social and educational factors that can become barriers to learning; the need to comprehend underlying concepts and conventions of printed language in order to begin to read; using assessment to plan instruction; and cueing and other instructional strategies. Our readings provided
additional theoretical underpinning for the things we were discussing and trying out. We read much of Marie Clay’s *Becoming Literate* (1991), as well as Kemmis and McTaggart’s *Action Research Planner* (1988).

A typical workshop began with welcomes and a time to go around the table with each participant talking about what had happened with her work in the preceding month. We discussed the activities we tried and what our results were. If Dr. Sawyer was with us, she would join in the discussions and suggest possible next steps to try with a particular student, blending those examples with her presentation for the day. We had lunch together and continued our discussion. After we had met a few times, we began using part of each workshop to draw conclusions about what we were seeing as we tried out assessment instruments, instructional strategies and resource materials. For example, after most of the group had used several assessment instruments, we began analyzing across instruments and individuals to come up with recommendations for use and ideas for modifications to the instruments.

Before closing for the day, we would clarify participants’ interests, plans and agreements for things to try out over the next month, and the methods of documentation. Participants would return to their home programs and try out assessment instruments, instructional strategies, or resources we had identified. We documented using notes, journals, and audio tapes, and came back to the next month’s workshop full of stories, ideas, and questions for each other about our experiences.

The nine months passed quickly, and although we didn’t feel “finished,” it was time to begin summarizing our conclusions and the things we had learned. We spent the next three months collecting and organizing our documentation and other materials, writing, and editing this publication.

**Role of the resource person.** Action research does not necessarily require an “expert.” The strength of the model is that participants define their own questions and methods, and draw their own conclusions. Yet each participant and TLRC staff felt that Dr. Sawyer’s involvement was key to the success of the project. “We needed a lot of input in this par-
ticular case,” wrote one participant. Dr. Sawyer brought not only extensive knowledge and expertise, but just as importantly, an ability to convey information in ways that made sense to us.

“She was so compelling, an easy person to listen to,” a participant said. Dr. Sawyer also respected the process of the group, and built her presentations around the group’s interests and questions. She conceived her role as helping us understand what we were seeing in our students, rather than directing the project. “I was really upset when I had to miss one of her sessions,” wrote a participant, “the theory she talked about was exciting.”

**Role of the facilitators.** The facilitators from TLRC understood their role as helping the group move forward, not controlling the process, decisions or outcomes of the action research group. We judged our success as facilitators by the degree of involvement of group members in speaking, making suggestions, offering insights, determining direction, carrying out the work between workshops, bringing questions, finding and evaluating resources, writing in teams and singly, editing each others’ work, and evaluating results. In those terms we were very successful; the group took a great deal of responsibility and each member was actively involved.

The TLRC facilitators took lead responsibility for documenting the proceedings of the workshops, facilitating contact among group members between workshops, coming up with a draft agenda (subject to change) for each workshop, based on the group’s decisions of the past meeting, and keeping the “big picture” in mind. This last task included helping shape the action research project to reflect what we know about good staff development, thinking through the next steps and possibilities for the work to go forward past this phase, and finding ways to help other practitioners in the state benefit from the action research project.

**Terminology.** We have used the term “learning disability” being aware that it has a very specialized meaning to assessment specialists. Those specialists “certify” an individual as “learning disabled” or “having a specific learning disability”
when he or she is tested and found to have severely depressed achievement compared to expected potential as measured on intelligence tests. We recognize that in our literacy classes, many students have learning difficulties and a number of them would likely be certified as “learning disabled” if tested. However, time and resource restraints may block or delay the certification process, and our work with students must go on without the aid of a battery of tests and interpretation by a psychologist.

We understand that a learning disability is a chronic condition that is likely of neurological origin, and interferes with the development or demonstration of verbal or non-verbal abilities. We understand that a learning disability is not the same as mental retardation; learning disabled persons have average or greater intelligence. It is not the result of sensory impairments, emotional disturbance or economic disadvantage. According to Public Law 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, (1975):

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

There are also adults who have difficulty learning in the classroom for a variety of reasons who may not be learning disabled. As teachers, what we are looking for is not diagnosis so much as “ways in” to working with a student who is struggling—tools to help identify specifically what the problems are, and that point us to concrete teaching/learning strategies. The assessment tools and instructional strategies outlined here may be helpful for adults with learning difficulties whether or not they might be officially certified as learning disabled.

In this publication, we have used the terms “learning disabilities” and “learning difficulties” interchangeably to indicate students who do not learn in the ways we expect, and
who display a pattern of characteristics associated with learning disabilities. For more on those characteristics, see page 72.

Using this publication. The publication is arranged according to the questions we took up as a part of our action research project. The first two chapters, on assessment and instructional strategies, have an introduction followed by detailed information on specific tools and strategies. They are illustrated by actual experiences with students in our classes. The names have been changed but the people are real. In the third chapter, group members write their reflections on the experience of participating in this action research project. The final chapter offers a listing of print and video materials we have used and found helpful. The questions that organized our publication are detailed at left.

Chapter 1
Assessment
What assessment tools exist to help us identify learning difficulties? How can we choose the most helpful for our own students? What can we expect them to tell us about our students? How can we amend them to fit our needs?

Chapter 2
Instructional Strategies
What strategies are useful in teaching adults with learning disabilities or learning difficulties? Includes a discussion of cueing strategies for reading, spelling strategies, and strategies for reading comprehension.

Chapter 3
Reflections
Overview of this action research project. What did we learn about ourselves as teachers? As researchers? What did we learn about the process of action research?

Chapter 4
Resources
What resources are helpful in working with students who have learning difficulties? Includes a listing of available resources and how to get them.
INTRODUCTION

The Action Research Group

Suzanne Howard teaches both literacy and GED classes in the Athens City School System. Her interest in learning disabilities began when her son was diagnosed with dyslexia twenty-three years ago. Recently Suzanne was a part of the Participatory Trainer’s Institute and has enjoyed continuing to learn as a member of the action research group on learning disabilities.

Barbara Parks, a work-place literacy instructor for Pellissippi State Technical Community College, joined the project to explore ways of teaching people with learning difficulties. Prior to instructing in workplace literacy, Barbara taught high school students, many of whom were obviously highly intelligent in their daily problem solving abilities, but were unable to read on a comparable level. Barbara has an M.S. in Human Ecology with additional course work in educational psychology and adult education. She is married to Jim Parks of the U.T. physics department, and has four grown children.

Carol Ergenbright, a former high school English teacher, has been involved in Adult Basic Education for 12 years, teaching everything from literacy to GED classes. Currently, she is ABE 1 Literacy Coordinator in Blount County. Carol first became interested in learning disabilities when teaching “slow learner” classes in high school, and her interest increased as she became active in adult education. She and her husband, Bob, have two children, two cats, and one dog.

Margaret Lindop has taught Adult Basic Education for eight years in Knox County. She is also Training Coordinator for ABE I teachers and volunteer tutors in the same program. Several of her students, bright but frustrated people, are the driving force behind her search for answers regarding learning difficulties. “In so many ways they are my teachers,” she comments. She continues to study and do research with her students and in her Master’s program in Adult Education at the University of Tennessee. She also works as a Graduate Research Assistant at the Center for Literacy Studies/Tennessee Literacy Resource Center.

Kathy Tidwell has worked in all levels of adult basic education for seven years in Roane County. Kathy is an advocate for the learners in her program and genuinely cares for them. Kathy firmly believes that even though every teaching method will not work for every student, by trying different methods and strategies, teachers will find at least one good “fit” for every student. Kathy says of the action research project, “I’ve never had so much fun in my life! I mean that from my heart. The strategies I’ve used in this action research have worked and I’ll continue to follow through on them.” Kathy is working on a Master’s degree in Leadership Studies, with a major in adult education.
Janet Malone Tidwell is a part-time ABE Level I teacher with the Knox County Schools. A graduate of George Peabody College for Teachers, she has taught elementary school in several Southern states. Janet sees in her adult students many of the learning problems she observed during her years of working with young children. One of Janet's goals is to more readily identify the special needs of adult learners and help develop and use strategies that will best meet these needs. She and her husband, John, have two adult daughters and two granddaughters. They enjoy many travel opportunities related to John's job. An avid history buff, she gives tours at a historic site and at a museum in Knoxville. Janet's ambition is to "wear out, not rust out!"

Janice Upton is Interim Director and Literacy Coordinator in Hamilton County. She supervises instructors at thirty sites including several work places and an IBM PALS computer-based reading laboratory. Janice is greatly concerned with the needs of adults with learning difficulties and has read widely and identified resources in this area, especially since her involvement in the Tennessee Literacy Resource Center's Institute for Participatory Training, where she was a member of a learning group on the subject. Janice, who enjoys gardening, hiking and swimming, says "my wonderful husband and three lovely children give important and ongoing support for all my work."

Diane J. Sawyer is the chairholder for the Katherine Davis Murfree Chair of Dyslexic Studies. She holds an appointment as Professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education at Middle Tennessee State University. The recipient of the Garcia Prize and the author of numerous articles on dyslexia and learning disabilities, Dr. Sawyer has focused on the cognitive/linguistic basis of reading acquisition and the difficulties encountered by dyslexic and learning disabled individuals. As resource person for the Center for Literacy Studies’ action research group on learning disabilities, Dr. Sawyer builds on and extends her earlier work on GED modifications for learning disabled adults.
Brenda Bell is manager of the Tennessee Literacy Resource Center, coordinating its work across the state. “Even though I played a background support role in this action research project,” says Brenda, “I felt the excitement of the group as they pulled together their findings.” Brenda’s current area of focus is electronic communications, and ways groups like this action research project can use TLRC’s America OnLine network to support their work. Brenda lives in a rural area of Blount County with her husband and three daughters.

Connie White is staff development specialist at the Center for Literacy Studies and coordinates the Community in the Classroom project there. A former special education teacher in elementary and middle school, Connie has enjoyed finding out more about adults with learning difficulties. “The best part of this work for me,” Connie says, “has been seeing teachers sharing their experiences helping students with learning difficulties, identifying what else they want to know, and planning how they will learn it. It’s amazing what can be learned from examining our own lives in a supportive and encouraging group.” In her spare time, Connie is a farmer, a student, and active in community and regional citizen’s groups and environmental efforts.

Juliet Merrifield has been Director of the Center for Literacy Studies since its beginning in 1989, and has been working in adult education for almost twenty years. In her previous job with the Highlander Research and Education Center, Juliet discovered and helped develop participatory research with communities on issues including environmental and occupational health. She has been especially interested in action research as a tool for change—personal, teaching/learning and programmatic. With three children and an ever-changing pet menagerie she doesn’t have much spare time for anything beyond reading mysteries.
Abe is in his early forties. He is hard-working, holding a full time job in a nursing home and a part-time job cleaning cars. He attends class faithfully, although he is often tired. He is separated from his wife but maintains close contact with his two teenaged sons. He is very concerned about their educational opportunities. Abe attended a local school before dropping out in the eleventh grade. He was in the vocational program at school and was placed in special classes.

Allie, a single, thirty-eight year old woman, has struggled with a number of obstacles in her fight to be happy and independent. Although she has never been officially tested for learning disabilities, she shows many indications of dyslexia: reading ability which varies greatly from day to day, the inability at times to remember how to form a particular letter, and slow processing of language. Despite depression and probable dyslexia, she has in the last five years progressed to the point of reading short novels and writing letters to friends in other states. She also enjoys quilting.

Alvin is a married, sixty-seven-year-old retired plant manager. He dropped out of school at an early age to support his widowed mother and siblings. He had a highly successful career, despite the lack of skills he deems so important. As a “class cheerleader,” he motivates and encourages his classmates to work hard and learn all they can. This most remarkable man wants very much to be able to read to his grandchildren.

Daniel is a divorced, forty-seven-year-old skilled factory worker. When his plant closed and he was displaced, he took a job as a hospital maintenance worker. He is eager to increase his basic skills in order to secure a better paying job.

D.J., an easy-going person of forty-three, is a working man, loving father of two children, and concerned citizen. Even though he reads adequately he has always found reading and spelling difficult. In informal conversation D.J. mentioned that neither his father nor his son read very well, although his daughter has no difficulty. He laughs easily, and it shows in his writing of real life stories with wonderful punch lines!

Jack is an unmarried, twenty-four-year-old with a special education high school diploma. He expresses his thoughts on paper easier than he can verbally. His lack of syntax, spelling and grammar skills are a source of frustration for him. His goal is to be a rap musician.

Joe is an unmarried twenty-two-year-old who attended an occupational high school before coming to the adult basic education class. He lives at home with his mother and works daily in a small, factory-like setting of a sheltered workshop. Joe struggles for the skills that would help him live a more independent life.

Lyle, a bright and talented young man of thirty-two, owns his own cabinet making business. Although he has a high school diploma, he entered adult education out of frustration with his difficulties with spelling. When he taught Bible studies at his church he needed to write on the board during class and write his thoughts as he prepared his lessons. In the last year he learned a lot about organizing his thoughts in the writing process. He also discovered that, for him, technology meant freedom to get on with meeting his goals.

Mark is a thirty-eight-year-old factory supervisor who works two jobs. He wants to increase his skills in order to insure his job status. Married and the father of
two teenagers, he expresses anger over the fact that the public school system failed to meet his needs even though he really wanted to learn.

**Mattie** is a 58-year-old married home maker who has been in the class for three years. A delightful, enthusiastic woman, Mattie came to class as a non-reader who couldn’t write her name. Mattie is now writing her name as well as copying the names of others in the class. She can now write and recognize many words.

**Roseanne** is the 47-year-old mother of Lynn. Both Roseanne and Lynn have attended classes at their literacy program for a year. Much of Roseanne’s adult life has been spent taking care of Lynn, who has multiple health and learning problems. Through persistence and commitment, Roseanne has made much progress.

**Roy**, in his late forties, is very proud of his part-Cherokee heritage. He completed eighth grade but his educational background was very inconsistent. Roy is married and has one child who is in the first grade. He is attending ABE classes at his wife’s suggestion. Despite a lack of transportation, Roy attends class once a week. He was a non-reader when he entered the program, unable to recognize many of the letters of the alphabet. Roy is unemployed.

**Ruby**, in her early fifties, was a non-reader when she entered the ABE program. Ruby is married and has a daughter and two grandchildren. She suffers from persistent health problems that affect her attendance, but she and her tutor maintain close telephone contact and exchange audio tapes when Ruby is ill.

**Ruz**, a charming man of forty-three, has always had it all...except for being able to read and write well. Successful financially, talented artistically, he finds it hard to understand why “this is so difficult! If it was something I could buy, I’d buy it tomorrow.”

**Ted** is a 51-year-old man who was tutored for three years before entering an adult basic education class. Although he came to class unable to recognize or write letters, Ted improves every week. He is able to recognize and write most of the alphabet. He can now write and recognize number words and color words, and is able to do many of the word sorts described in this publication.
We came together as a group of practitioners with one common concern—some of our students had much greater difficulty learning than did their peers. Their progress was extremely slow and they often became very discouraged. The students kept asking, “What’s wrong with me?” “Why can’t I learn like everybody else?” Or else they would say, “I guess it’s no use, I’m just stupid!” We realized we had a big problem but we didn’t know where to turn for an answer.

As teachers we were also discouraged. We suspected learning disabilities, but we had no means or method for getting a diagnosis. We had tried numerous teaching strategies with varying degrees of success. Still we saw a tremendous need for a screening tool that could assist us in determining, as closely as possible, if a student did indeed have a specific learning disability and what that problem area might be.

We continue to use several of the assessment tools traditionally recommended, because they are required for state funding and serve a function. The Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT) and the Slosson DST Math yield a grade level and can demonstrate progress. But such tests are not diagnostic and offer no help in planning instruction. We recognized that to be useful the assessment tool also had to help us identify instructional strategies to try with particular students.
Assessment Tools. Although we believe it is helpful for both the teacher and student to know if a student has a measurable, identifiable learning disability, it isn’t always possible to find out quickly or easily. We needed some way to pin down what was happening with our students, to find out what was going on, and to use that information in planning their instruction.

We know there may be many reasons why adults haven’t learned to read. Reading and writing are complex processes that develop out of life experiences, spoken language and literacy (schooling) experiences (see figure 1 at right). Not every adult who has difficulty learning to read is learning disabled. Some may have missed out on educational opportunity. Others may have limited intelligence. Some may have lacked the foundation of life experiences that would enable them to learn to read at the expected time. Some may have physical barriers, such as uncorrected vision problems. Even chronic ear infections at sensitive developmental periods, when the ability to hear sounds becomes important to the formation of spoken language and the later development of written language, can be very disruptive to literacy learning.

However, the underlying difficulty may be neurological—some interference in linguistic processing—the kind of problem that psychologists identify as a specific learning disability. Despite average or greater intelligence, the learner may have very slow and limited word recognition even after lengthy instruction. He or she may have a general resistance to writing and very poor written expression compared to oral expression. Writing samples may show persistent problems with sentence structure and punctuation, and extremely poor spelling. These characteristics of dyslexia—a language learning disability—are summarized in Appendix 3 on page 72.

As our action research group talked, we were reminded that assessment is not just initial screening, but is on-going. And it isn’t only standardized tests. In fact, a standard score may not give us much help at all in planning day-to-day instruction. We also really wanted tools that would help us include the student in figuring out where to go with instruction. In an attempt to find answers, we investigated five screening and assessment tools. We used them with our
Informal Assessment Methods: Observations and Work Samples

Description. Some vital information can be obtained by talking with the student informally and observing his or her actions and reactions while taking tests and during class situations. Informal observations can be a very valuable assessment strategy. Carol learned from participating in a language experience class that Roy had a very disadvantaged childhood, living with various relatives in different states with only sporadic educational opportunities. She learned that he had also suffered physical abuse when he made mistakes as a child. Carol can use this information to create a learning environment that pays careful attention to relating fragmented skills to a meaningful whole, makes risk-taking safe, builds upon strengths, and emphasizes success.

Information to gather. The type of information obtained in an informal assessment would include background on family history, school experience, and medical problems that might affect learning. An informal survey could also provide an opportunity to discuss the student’s attitudes about education, themselves, and their goals as well as learning strategies that they have used in the past.

An informal assessment might also consist of a period of careful observation of a student at work on learning tasks, and conversations about how he or she learns. Checklists of characteristics of learning disabilities can help structure an observation.

The Jordan Checklist of Signals of Specific Learning Disabilities is an example of an informal assessment. The Jordan Checklist provides guidelines for informal observation and a quick method for taking notes unobtrusively. The teacher carefully observes the student’s behavior and body language while he or she is working on a task. The teacher looks for student actions and demeanor such as whispering over and over while writing, very slow processing, frequent erasing, requests to hear things again. The
Developing our observation skills. The action research group was surprised at how much we learned about our students by careful observation. In watching Dr. Dale Jordan on Kentucky Educational Television’s videotape “Assessment Instruments for Adult Populations,” we found that we could train ourselves to be even better observers. (The tape is described on page 62 of this report. We recommend that all teachers watch this tape to sharpen observation skills.) For most of us, it took considerable effort and concentration to watch a student work, and to refrain from doing the other hundred things that competed for our attention at that moment. After careful observation, and using a checklist or other documentation, we were able to talk with students about how they learn, the strategies they use, and their preferences, in a much more focused and productive manner. We were able to involve our learners more, and to help them as well as ourselves become more aware of how they learn.

Work Samples. We’ve found that our own careful examination of student writings is one of the most important assessment tools we have. Work samples, especially writing samples, can be a valuable tool for determining students’ instructional needs. In addition to the obvious spelling, sentence structure and grammar, writing samples can provide

When I read to myself the words come fairly easy. Most all the words, big or small, work out in the sentence. By reading and trying to understand the content, I find myself going back to those words that are hard and being able to understand them. (But reading out loud I seem to fall all over the place.)

—Ruz
insights into a student’s educational background, learning styles, goals and everyday concerns as the examples indicate. D. J. and Ruz write about the things each would like to do but can’t.

Appropriate Level. Informal assessment can be useful for students at all levels. Information gleaned from informal screening may give an instructor valuable insight into a student’s background needs and may suggest appropriate modifications of instructional strategies.

Strengths. There are many advantages to informal screening. Often, an informal survey will yield important information about the student’s background, needs and expectations that is not available from more skill-oriented tools. An informal survey does not require a professional administrator but can be administered by a staff person who is a careful observer. Students’ descriptions of their own learning background, as well as problems and strategies they have tried can also be very helpful.
Informal assessments and observations were tremendously helpful, we found. But it was important to watch carefully, with few other distractions, and to document the things we were seeing. Informal observations were especially helpful in noticing \textit{discrepant} abilities and behaviors, an important signal of learning problems. For example, Abe has strong math scores (5.2), but they contrasted with his reading scores (0.2). In our observations, we noticed he needed instruction presented in a very concrete manner. Despite high motivation, tremendous oral vocabulary, persistence and strong support at home, Richard cannot seem to retain the skills he learns. He says he feels “ashamed and stupid.” Informal assessments can encourage us to “put it all together”—to combine information gathered from carefully watching students in learning situations, from their backgrounds and life experiences, and from students’ own knowledge of their learning styles, preferences and strategies.

\textbf{Limitations.} Informal screenings are not meant to yield standardized scores, so cannot be used to provide an “objective” score to indicate progress (not always a very helpful process anyway, we’ve found). Without grade levels, they do not meet the state reporting requirements so other forms of assessment must also be used. The observations may be affected by stress during testing (“white coat syndrome”). Documentation may be time consuming for the tester if done after the assessment is completed and may be distracting for students if done while the assessment is in progress. Questions need to be specific in order to elicit the necessary information.

\textbf{Instructional Implications.} Depending on the information discovered, informal assessments can suggest kinds of learning environments that students need, modification of teaching style or materials, and learning strategies to be attempted. Work samples can form an important basis for instruction.

\textit{(Note: for information on viewing or purchasing the assessment instruments described here, see Appendix 1)}
Maury County Screen

**Description.** This screening device was developed by the Maury County ABE program in middle Tennessee. It elicits a wide range of valuable information about an incoming student.

The first section is a brief medical history, focusing on illnesses, conditions and medication that might affect the student’s ability to think and learn. Questions deal with such issues as vision and hearing problems, incidents of high fever, stroke, anxiety or depression. The next section is school history, and inquires about length of schooling and special services received. The third section, about how the student thinks, works and remembers, asks questions that indicate the student’s ability to retain information, to work within time limits and to work in a distracting environment. There is a sentence dictation segment and four simple math problems—two multiplication and two division. Also included are number and letter sequencing questions. Finally, a reading comprehension section, composed of six selections with multiple choice answers, is repeated as a listening comprehension task to assess differences in reasoning and recall in oral and print settings.

**Appropriate Level.** The personal information and “How You Think, Work, & Remember” portions readily apply to all ABE levels. The reading selections are too difficult for Level One.

**Strengths.** The screen identifies past and present physical problems that may affect learning. Vision and hearing difficulties, present and previous head and brain trauma and other physical handicaps that might make reading and writing difficult are identified through very specific questions. The student is also asked whether medication is taken for a specific problem.

There is an inquiry concerning any special services the student might have received while attending public school. This is most helpful in establishing any special help he or she may need in the future and may indicate a prior diagnosis of learning disabilities.
The “How You Think, Work, and Remember” section is useful in identifying thinking, learning, concentration, and memory problems. The responses to the specific questions in this portion of the screen can enable the teacher to use those learning strategies that best meet the student’s particular needs.

By having both language and math sections within this screen the teacher can see if there is a discrepancy between these two scores—a relatively high performance on one section but relatively low on the other. Such a finding might indicate a learning disability, and that information would be extremely important in working with the student.

When this screen is done in a group situation the “Personal Information” and “How You Think, Work, and Remember” questions generate a most revealing dialogue about previous schooling and learning experiences. The students tend to “loosen up” and “open up” in discussing their prior frustrations and problems and how they perceive themselves in academic endeavors and in the world in general. This device is easily given in a group situation. The administrator can screen several people at the same time.

**Limitations.** The reading comprehension selections are much too difficult for lower level students even when read to them.

**Adaptations.** There is a need for easier text in the reading comprehension segment. Easier text, accompanied by pictures, would make the test much more helpful to teachers dealing with ABE I students. As it is, many ABE I students do not even attempt the reading portion of the test because it simply “looks too hard.” Even when that portion is read to them they have great difficulty following along and attempting to answer.

It would be helpful to include a checklist of signals of specific learning disabilities that the test administrator can watch for as the student completes the test. Such observations could be very beneficial, since many ABE students do show signs of learning disabilities. This type of input might be very important as a teacher develops specific strategies with which to work with a student. If the screen is done in a
group setting it could possibly place undue stress upon some very sensitive individuals who might fear being embarrassed in the presence of other students. One way of dealing with this is for the teacher to read the screen aloud and ask each student to mark his or her own sheet. The teacher and student could discuss privately later if needed.

*What we learned when we gave our students the Maury County Screen*

We found we learned important things about our students by using the Maury County Screen. Although we already knew our students, we learned a lot about them when administering the Maury County screening device, and even more in the informal conversation it generated.

Ruby says half her family members have reading problems. Her parents did not read well. She attended a county school with three classrooms and eight grades. She received no special help in school. Ruby stuttered badly as a child, and her teacher told her that she would never be able to read. When Ruby dropped out of school—in the eighth grade at age sixteen—the stuttering ceased. Years later, Ruby happened to meet her elementary teacher again. The teacher apologized to Ruby and said she had always regretted not being able to help her.

Jack checked special education/resource room on the screening form and then erased it. When we talked later, he said his teacher used a special technique to teach him in elementary school. Everything was somehow related to football. He said he understood the lessons when he could relate them to the game.

Abe has no vision at all in his left eye. He had a difficult time with missing alphabet letters, but had very strong math skills and found the missing numbers in the math section of the Maury County screen right away. Abe glanced at the reading section and said it was too hard. He did not attempt it.

Alvin was in special education. He couldn’t talk plainly until he was nearly eight years old, and he had numerous ear infections and occasional bouts with vertigo. He could not remember the alphabet in order, and has difficulty recalling parts of the multiplication tables. Yet he held very responsible positions at work and memorized complicated lists and recipes related to his job for years.

Mark needs glasses to see anything clearly, yet he seldom remembers to wear them until he is suffering severe eye strain. Mark says he always had a hearing problem. He was in speech therapy while in school.
**Instructional Strategies Indicated.** Errors in the sentence dictation flag potential problems. Teachers can look for patterns of omission, phonetic spelling of simple words, leaving off endings, reversals of letters, etc. These problems may also indicate possible problems with segmentation, or the ability to hear word parts. Each problem, once spotted, can be dealt with individually.

The teacher may need to start with simple dictation and build. Mistakes in letter and/or number sequencing lets the instructor know that an emphasis on instruction in ordering things properly is needed. Observation and discussion of the reading portion of the test can be useful in identifying cueing strategies a student is already using and recognizing those that need to be taught.

*Jordan Oral Screening Test*

**Description.** This screening tool assesses a student’s language skills. It is administered one-on-one. The first section of the test is a series of word lists, increasing in difficulty. The student is asked to identify as many of the words as possible. This is followed by some sequencing exercises in which the student is asked to write the alphabet, the days of the week, and the months of the year. Then there are twenty or forty spelling words, depending on what reading level the student reached on the first part of the test. The last portion of the test is sentence completion.

**Appropriate Level.** This could be used with ABE students at all levels who may have learning disabilities.

**Strengths.** The student works at his/her own pace. No pressure is exerted in this one-on-one situation. The test administrator gives the student individual attention and avoids any activity that might distract or interrupt the student’s concentration. The sequencing items identify any problems in this area and are helpful in determining future learning strategies. Errors in the spelling section signal the specific problems the student may be having and stage of spelling development at which the student is working. The

“When I gave the Jordan I was surprised by the results. Though I have worked with these students a while, still I was able to observe new things about them...new strengths, new needs and different strategies for learning. For instance, I saw that Mark could list nine months, using the first letter of each. Interestingly, he left out his own birth month.”
sentence completion gives good indication of how the student can organize and put ideas down to convey a complete thought.

**Limitations.** It takes a good deal of time to administer this screening tool. The test administrator needs to have keen observation skills and attend to the task at all times. There are no personal data concerning physical or medical conditions the person may be dealing with. And there is no information about the students’ learning styles or past school experiences.

Since this test deals exclusively with language, with no math component, there is no way to see if there is a discrepancy between the language and math scores. There is very limited opportunity to observe the student’s use of cueing strategies related to context.

**Adaptations.** This test was found most useful when coupled with the Maury County Screen’s identification of physical and personal information and the questions on “How You Think, Work, and Remember.” A math component might be helpful to determine discrepancies between language and math skills—a strong indication of specific learning disabilities.

**Instructional Strategies Indicated.** The spelling section offers excellent data for the development of specific strategies. Letter reversals and letter order errors are easily spotted. Knowledge of vowel sounds, and use of inventive spelling is apparent. The inconsistency in ending sounds and difficulties with r-controlled vowels are seen.

All these clues help the instructor determine what stage of spelling development the student is in. Knowing this, the teacher can closely relate the spelling instruction to the student’s needs. A student’s written language and reading levels are related to the stages of spelling development, and this gives the teacher a better overall picture of where the student is and what are the best ways to help him or her progress. For suggestions on ways to relate written language and reading levels to stages of spelling development, see page 41 of this report.
**Concepts About Print**

**Description.** Concepts About Print is a brief screening tool originally constructed for children and used to determine if the learner recognizes and understands basic terms used in describing the conventions of the printed language. In approximately 10 minutes this scripted survey checks a student’s understanding of basic concepts that underpin readiness to read. In *Understanding Reading Problems: Assessment and Instruction* (1994), Gillet and Temple write that Concepts about Print checks a student’s knowledge that:

1) a book has a front and a back, and a ‘right side up’
2) we read the words in a book and not the pictures
3) print is arranged left to right, top to bottom
4) language is made out of words
5) words are made out of sounds
6) sounds are matched with letters
7) there is a limited set of those letters
8) the letters have names
9) other parts of print have names, too, like sentence, word, letter, beginning and end

**Appropriate Level.** Concepts About Print is most appropriate for non-readers who lack previous school experience or who show evidence of mental retardation or brain damage. Janice used Concepts About Print when she tested Terry, who possibly had brain damage, to find out where to start instruction. She discovered that he had difficulty with the concept of letters. He could not pick out specific letters on the page and could not distinguish between upper and lower case letters.

**Strengths.** This survey can be a valuable guide in that it identifies problem areas that the instructor may not have anticipated. In a sense, it gauges readiness for reading instruction. Its’ greatest benefit is to uncover any lack of clarity about the basic conventions of print, so that they may be made clear.

**Limitations.** There are some problems with using
Concepts About Print with ABE students. It is only appropriate for a small percentage of adult students so its usefulness is limited. Even when use of this tool is indicated, adult learners may feel that the test is too childish or simple.

Adaptations. Considerable modifications are necessary to make the test appropriate for adults. Several items may be omitted and directions revised. One idea that has been suggested is to learn the script for the more relevant items, and then apply it to the newspaper or other adult reading material.

Instructional Strategies Indicated. If Concepts About Print indicates a lack of understanding, that must be remedied, unknown concepts must be taught, and confusions untangled before reading instruction can proceed effectively.

Test of Awareness of Language Segments (TALS)

Description. The Test of Awareness of Language Segments is designed to measure a learner’s language segmenting skills. The TALS has three sections. Part A checks the ability to separate sentences into words. For example, the teacher reads “Tomorrow is my birthday,” and the student moves four markers—one for each word in the sentence. Part B checks separating words into syllables. The instructor reads the word “classroom” and the student moves two markers to represent the two syllables in the words. Part C checks separating words into individual sounds. The instructor reads the word “wave” and the student moves three markers—one for each sound in the word (w-a-v).

Appropriate Level. The TALS is designed for the beginning reader and can be used successfully even with non-readers. It can help the instructor determine a student’s starting point; the TALS may also be helpful in evaluating students who have not been progressing satisfactorily in a traditional phonics-based reading program.

Strengths. The TALS is a valuable tool for determining a learner’s ability to analyze or “break down” language ele-
ments. It is relatively quick, easy to administer and score, and gives concrete results that point to useful instructional techniques. Although originally designed for children, it has been used effectively with adolescents and adults who have developmental and learning disabilities. TALS is a good concrete tool to use when talking with students about their skills because it clearly demonstrates particular problems. In working with the TALS, Carol found that William tends to blend the vowel with its preceding consonant, while Abe divided the initial consonant from the ending word family. William and Abe became more aware of their approach to decoding, and Carol was able to customize instruction.

**Limitations.** A weakness of the TALS is that it only tests segmentation skills orally. A student with poor listening skills may have undue difficulty. Administration of the TALS may be confusing at first. Viewing the video (see the Resources section, page 65) or seeing the process demonstrated is very helpful. The TALS is diagnostic in nature and does not yield a grade level equivalent, but does suggest a starting place for instruction.

**Adaptations.** Our action research group administered TALS in its entirety. Although Part B: Words to Syllables is optional, the success learners experienced cushioned the distress they frequently felt when they had difficulty with Part C: Words to Sounds.

**Instructional Strategies Indicated.** The TALS has many instructional implications. Learners need to receive instruction that will address the areas where they have difficulties and build on the skills where they will most likely experience success. For example, adult learners who have serious problems on Part C: Words to Sounds would probably benefit more from an instructional program emphasizing whole word recognition and word patterns/families than from a traditional phonics program. See “Implications of Metalinguistic Awareness for Beginning Reading Experiences” on page 26. The chart on the following page, from “TALS” by Diane J. Sawyer, illustrates the possibilities of instructional implications of TALS.
Implications of Metalinguistic Awareness for Beginning Reading Experiences (Figure 2)
Based on the work of Diane J. Sawyer, Ph.D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage in Auditory Segmenting</th>
<th>Suggested Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Not yet isolating words in 4-6 word sentences (insists a phrase is a single unit) | Aural/Oral cloze activities—slotting single words  
Listening to stories and poems  
Audio tape—book experiences |
| Isolating words and syllables | 1 Teach/practice sight recognition of personally important words (~a la Sylvia Ashton Warner) as whole words  
2 Teach/practice recognition of several of the high frequency words of series the learner will enter (e.g., it, the, said) as whole words  
3 Language experience stories to develop recognition vocabulary  
4 Drill/practice on letter names |
| Isolating initial and/or final consonants | 1 Drill/practice on letter names and sounds  
2 Language experience stories to build recognition  
3 Vocabulary to promote visual likenesses and differences between words that sound alike at beginning, at end  
4 Introduce a reading series |
| Beginning to isolate vowel (e.g., t-e[tea]) | 1 Likely ready for any traditional series or phonics based reading program  
2 Supplement with language experience stories to promote focus on reading for meaning, recognition of high frequency or high interest words, opportunities to apply segmenting principles and sound/symbol correspondences to decoding process within familiar content |
What We Have Learned About Assessment

Traditionally, literacy practitioners assess all entering students to obtain a grade level score and, by inference, a beginning level for instruction. This procedure is required by the State Department of Education and is used for program accountability to measure student progress.

When we began trying out assessment instruments, we were looking for a tool that did not just produce a score, but, in Dr. Dale Jordan’s words, identifies “why a struggler struggles.” We were seeking an assessment device that would be diagnostic in nature, one that would suggest appropriate instructional strategies for the specific learning problems of the individual.

These two purposes of diagnosis and instructional strategies, however, are not mutually exclusive. While no one assessment tool fulfills both purposes, a process of modification and synthesis could lead to a comprehensive diagnostic assessment tool or battery that would indicate instructional strategies for learners with possible learning problems and yield evidence for measuring a learner’s progress. This synthesis would include some of the most helpful features of the assessment tools studied. We offer the following recommendations for screening incoming literacy students.
SEEDS OF INNOVATION

Assessment Recommendations from the Action Research Group

We make the following recommendations for screening incoming literacy students.

1) Informal Observation and work samples. Observation of the student and examination of work samples, especially writing, is helpful.

2) Jordan Checklist of Specific Learning Disabilities. Teacher observes a student and completes the checklist, noting behaviors that are indicative of a learning disability.

3) Portions of the Maury County Screen. Use the personal and school information sections, along with the “How You Think, Work and Remember” section.

4) Portions of the Jordan Oral Screening Test. Administer the sequencing, sentence completion and spelling portions.

5) Slosson word list. Similar to the Jordan, but it yields a grade level acceptable to the state. Careful notation of miscues can give valuable information.

6) Slosson DST math. Administer to get a basic math component. Discrepancy between math and reading scores may be one indication of learning problems.

7) Reading Comprehension/Cueing Strategies Use. The action research group feels there is a need for ABE teachers to develop a reading comprehension component that would demonstrate the learner’s use or need for cueing strategies—the strategies all good readers use to cue themselves when reading new material with unknown words. We would suggest short selections with appropriate illustrations from various reading levels from beginning to moderate difficulty levels. Results of this screening tool may indicate the need for additional specific screening devices such as TALS or Concepts About Print.

8) Concepts About Print. With non-readers and/or people with extremely limited school experience, Concepts About Print may help identify reading readiness.

9) Test of Awareness of Language Segments. The TALS is helpful in determining a starting point for beginning readers, or for evaluating students who have not been progressing well in a traditional program.
We began our search for a systematic method for teaching reading and spelling by sharing the strategies each of us had tried. We reported stumbling around and trying anything that would work: context cues, humming in place of attempting the unknown word, and sounding out words. Our discussion resulted in a summary of the teaching insights we had accumulated prior to joining the action research group, frustrations we had experienced, and questions we hoped to have answered.

As we began examining our practice, we realized we had gained insight from our teaching experience. We learned to talk with students about their learning. Conversations with the learner about past experiences and accomplishments provided vital information that assisted us in planning a program with him or her.

We also realized that paying attention to students’ self esteem is always important in teaching reading, but it is especially important to adults who may have many memories of unsuccessful reading attempts. We acknowledged that being aware of the learner’s comfort level helped us guide the lesson. We realized that we watched our students’ body language to get clues to comfort levels. We also started reading instruction below the students’ instructional level to increase chances of reading success.

"Conversations with the learner about past experiences and accomplishments provided vital information that assisted us in planning a program with him or her."
Each of us had accumulated knowledge about different approaches to instruction. We knew that sounding out words helped some students while others responded best to sight reading. We all believed that encouraging students to use logical guessing increased independent reading skills, and that some students required more time to master skills.

Kathy believes that for every student, there is an approach, or combination of approaches, that is a good “fit.” “But you may have to try a lot of them before you find it!” she added. Janice said that persistence should be encouraged at every turn. “We tried lots and lots of things with Roseanne before she started making good progress. But her commitment has really paid off.”

We also found that our students with learning difficulties experienced many of the same frustrations. All of us taught adults who wanted to learn to spell, but made little progress. Many of us felt very little success in teaching spelling. Many adults believe they must perform perfectly and were reluctant to try reading or spelling techniques or permit themselves to use “invented spelling” on their way to learning the correct ways to spell words.

Kathy related the story of Bob, a participant who became very frustrated when he could not spell a word correctly. When asked to write short sentences leaving blanks for the words he could not spell, he would get angry and leave the classroom. He refused to do invented spelling, stating that he had to do it “right.”

Kathy also told about Sara, an adult woman who had previously been diagnosed by a professional and told she could not learn to read. The process of finding the right class and providing encouragement by comments and phone calls was lengthy. Kathy has been working on cueing strategies with her. After two years of work, Sara is making progress. Recently, Sara commented that her husband, an educated leader in the community, had expressed his pride in her when she read billboards in their community.

These experiences helped us formulate our research questions: What are the best strategies to use in helping learning disabled students read? How do you determine if or when to stop emphasizing spelling with an adult with learning difficulties and move on to coping skills? What are some effective...
methods to teach spelling? Should approaches differ for “slow learners,” or does their learning resemble that of students with learning difficulties?

To find answers, we tried instructional strategies in three areas: 1) cueing strategies for reading; 2) spelling; 3) and reading comprehension. In each area we describe the strategies, include examples from our experience, and analyze strengths and weaknesses. Although they are treated as separate areas in our description, we see them as parts of an integrated whole.

Cueing Strategies for Reading

**Description.** Cueing strategies are simply the strategies all good readers use to cue themselves when reading new material with unknown words. We use everything we know: background to the article/story, drawings or photographs, our knowledge of the way our language works (syntax, semantics), phonetic knowledge (sound-symbol correspondence), and whole word recognition. As we read we monitor for meaning, re-reading when necessary to get the sense of a phrase or sentence. Good readers do this unconsciously, unaware of the array of strategies being used.

Although all improving readers would benefit from such strategies, people with learning difficulties need them even more than others. For a person with learning disabilities, reading must be embedded in meaning, so these cueing strategies are essential. As with many other skills, use of cueing strategies must be explicitly taught to a person with learning difficulties. Modeling seems to be a particularly effective way to do this. Since we can’t model the use of cueing strategies for readers of this publication, we’ve tried to do the next best thing. We’ve included transcripts of demonstrations of cueing strategies.

After modeling the cueing strategies with students for several sessions, the teacher needs to review the strategies over a period of time by asking pertinent questions to guide the student toward independent use of them.
Cueing Strategies

The cueing strategies are listed in order of importance.

1) Background knowledge
What do we already know about—
the time of the story?
the setting of the story?
the people in the story?
the events in the story?

2) Pictures
What can we predict about the story from the pictures?
Pictures can jog background knowledge of setting, time, or familiar experience.

3) Meaning
Understanding the context of a story helps to get the particular meaning of a word, e.g. the word “warrant” in text. What does it mean in this passage?

4) Structure/Grammar
What word would “make sense” here? e.g. “She ate _____ and eggs for breakfast.”

5) Sound/Symbol Correspondence
This helps to support/deny our guess about what a word might be, based on past experience or common sense. For example, in the sentence above, the initial consonant would help us to support/deny a guess.

“She ate b____ and eggs for breakfast. "If we had guessed "bacon", our guess would be supported. If we had guessed “ham”, our guess would be denied and we would think again.

In addition to teaching the cueing strategies themselves, we found several other supporting techniques to be very useful.

➤ Re-tell periodically during the discussion of the background and pictures. What do we know so far? Use symbols for who? what? where? how? as memory devices (see figure 2 at left).

➤ Re-read when needed to consolidate meaning. This also helps in proof-reading.

➤ Pause-Prompt-Praise. When teaching cueing strategies, we as teachers need to use these as our guide. When a student is struggling with an unknown word or has mis-read a word we pause, prompt and praise (see figure 3, top right).
The following excerpt from Margaret’s (M.L.) modeling session with her students illustrates the use of background knowledge and pictures as cueing strategies.

**ML:** When you’re about to read a story, there are a lot of things you can do to help yourself get ready to read. We already know some of these, don’t we? Now, what do we already know?

**CW:** Scan over it.

**DJ:** Look for big letters at the top. Go over them first.

**ML:** O.K. Anything that’s in big print, in a caption, a box.

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1) **Pause:**

giving the student a chance to independently cue himself or herself. If the student is unable to do so, we

2) **Prompt:**

   Look at the picture. You said.________.
   Does that sound right?
   Does it look right? (referring to sound-symbol match of word read)

3) **Praise (being very specific):**

   I like the way you were rereading to get the meaning.
   I like the way you cross-checked the letters in that word with the word you had predicted.

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Figure 3.

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The following excerpt form Margaret’s (M.L.) modeling session with her students illustrates the use of background knowledge and pictures as cueing strategies.

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Look at the pictures. See, you already know how to do a lot of this kind of thing. We’re just going to go a couple of steps further. By the way, when you do this ahead of time, why does that help you to read it easier? Do you know WHY?

DJ: It gives you an idea of what you’re headed for.

ML: Yes. So that you’re kind of prepped ahead of time.

O.K. So if we were going to look at this story before reading it, we would look at the pictures. As you look at the first one, tell me, what can you guess about this story just by looking at...

K: He’s handicapped.

CW: He’s in a wheelchair, racing.

K: He’s moving fast. He’s in a hurry.

D: He’s got gloves on, so he’s going to be definitely trying to go fast.

ML: Good observations. Look up close at HIM, at his face. See if you can pick up any clues at all about this man... anything—his age, his attitude? O.K. You see determination in his face. How old is he?

K: Forty something...late thirties?

ML: Can you make any guesses about WHERE this is, what kind of place?

My brother, Martin, is one tough person. One day about three years ago, he was playing stickball. A car came tearing around the corner and hit him. It threw him across the street.

Figure 4.
My brother Martin is one _______person. One day about three years ago he was playing _______. A car came _______around the ____ and hit him. It ______ him across the street.
(Second reading)
My brother Martin is one _______

continued on page 35
K: High school, cause there’s a stadium.
DJ: Not a real expensive one, so it could be a high school, just old wooden bleachers.
ML: All right. Looking at him carefully, do you see anything that tells you what might have happened to him?
Allie: He had an accident somewhere.
CW: Yeah, He’s a para...what do you call it...paraplegic?
DJ: He’s got his legs tied together so they don’t flop around.
ML: The picture gives us a little more information.
DJ: It’s an organized race.
K: It’s over with for him. He’s got his hands down beside him.
ML: You’re very good observers. You really picked up a lot of information. A lot of time as adults we read things that don’t have any pictures, but if there IS a picture of any sort, or a chart, we get a lot of information. O.K. Now, having done this, can you make any guesses about what words you’re going to run into when you read?
(More discussion follows with predictions about the story line.)

Next Margaret models the use of meaning, structure/grammar, and sound/symbol correspondence as Cueing Strategies as a student reads aloud (see figure 4 at left). Re-reading is used as a means of accessing these cues. The instructor’s “thinking aloud” is shown in italics.

But what if there aren’t any pictures? There are several things we can do:

➢ Read ahead and pick out the theme of the article/story, e.g., “This is a story about a dog named Charlie. What kinds of things do you suppose we’ll read about in this story?” (List responses, discuss, predict.)

➢ Read a “loaded sentence” as a starter for predicting the story line, e.g., “On the night before the party, Charlie showed his true colors!” (What could have happened? Predict.)

➢ Write down some of the most difficult words. Pronounce.
Use in context so students understand the meanings.

➤ Think of a few fairly hard words. Write cloze sentences e.g., What am I going to do with that _______dog? Use these to explain and model cueing strategies.

Carol says that in working with Abe on a reading lesson, they concentrated on developing cueing strategies. Carol compared the process to a detective looking for clues—the detective needs to use all possible clues to help solve the mystery. They discussed the picture first: type of neighborhood, size of houses, who might live there, the sign in the front yard. (This also drew on Abe’s background knowledge.)

Carol continues: “When Abe began reading the story, he hesitated on the word ‘rented’ in the title, but recognized the word when I pointed to the sign (use of picture). In the first paragraph, Abe had initial difficulty with the word ‘country’, but was able to figure it out from context cues (meaning and structure/grammar). In the second paragraph, he had difficulty with the words ‘health’ and ‘rules’. After finishing the paragraph, he went back to the word (re-reading, using meaning and structure/grammar to assist). Context cues alone were not sufficient, so we tried using beginning sounds as well (sound/symbol correspondence). He figured out ‘rules,’ but I had to supply ‘health.’ We followed up with the continuation of the story at the end of the unit. Although there were no pictures to initiate discussion, we talked easily about nursing homes since Abe’s primary job is in a nursing home (background knowledge). He read the story well, hesitated on ‘upset,’ but figured it out on his own. His comprehension was excellent. He had strong opinions about the irresponsibility of the nurse and the care of nursing home residents.”

Janet gave each student a copy of the material to be read, Jonathan Livingston Seagull. They read aloud together with the students setting the pace. As the class came to a word they could not pronounce, Janet modeled the various strategies.

Kathy coached Joe, her student, in using cueing strategies. Here are her notes (see figure 5 at right).
Janice used cueing strategies with a class of readers beyond the literacy level. She provided students with the selection “The Discovery” which contains some of Victor Frankel’s reflections on his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. Janice says: Before reading the article, I asked students to tell me what they knew about Auschwitz and other Nazi prisons and I listed it on the board. We were all impressed by the length of the list! (Use of background knowledge). We used questions such as, “What is this story about? What’s the title? What is happening in the pictures?” When they didn’t know a word, they learned to question.
themselves: “What do I think it would be? What makes sense? Could this be a character’s name?”

Many of us found that an activity as simple, quick and enjoyable as discussing and listing prior knowledge made all the difference in the student’s interest, confidence level, and ability to make meaning from the written word. These kinds of activities also opened up the class to discussion of ideas, opinions, and values and provided opportunities to develop critical thinking skills.

Ruby uses cueing strategies all the time. She has good decoding skills and can usually figure out a word if the misreading is brought to her attention. Janet says, “I often have to ask her to reread a phrase. She then realizes something doesn’t make sense, and she knows what word she must look at more closely. In other shared readings we have continued to follow this procedure. The students are using the strategies more and more instead of getting bogged down and giving up or struggling until someone tells them the word in question.”

Kathy tried cueing strategies with Mattie, a non-reader. When she first came to the literacy program two years ago, Mattie could not write her name or recognize letters of the alphabet. She did not have the opportunity to go to school. She and her sisters stayed home to work and care for members of their family. Over the past two years, Mattie has learned to recognize six letters of the alphabet and can copy almost any written text. By standardized oral reading tests she is still a zero reader but she can recognize eight words. Kathy says: “One day I gave Mattie the book **Amanda and the Flying Carpet**. I sat down with her to look at the book and to encourage her to use her background knowledge to give meaning to the book. With Mattie looking at the pages, I told her that the story was about a girl who has a carpet that is magic and can do many things. When we got to the picture of the little girl unwrapping the carpet, Mattie said, “We didn’t have a rug, we just had wood floors, and I had to clean them with sand!” So I jotted down the word rug. Throughout the book, Mattie was relating to things in her background. Seeing the picture of Amanda floating on the carpet to reach a jar of jelly in the cabinet, Mattie told about the time she climbed on a chair to get something from the
cabinet, and fell. As we went through the book I wrote down words that I felt were pertinent to the meaning of the story – girl, carpet, rug. These words are the beginning of Mattie’s word bank.”

**Analysis of Cueing Strategies**

**Strengths.** Cueing strategies help adults become independent readers. The strategies, once understood, can be used to decode words, confirm meaning, and self-correct errors. The adult becomes the director of his or her learning and takes responsibility for progress. In addition to increasing reading skills, the adult increases in self esteem.

Cueing strategies are of particular value to someone with a learning disability. For someone who has difficulty with more traditional or “one track” approaches such as “phonics only” or sight word memorization, these strategies provide an integrated approach. Drawing on their own background knowledge to aid reading is a needed tie-in between their experience and the written word. Finally, cueing strategies are taught in an explicit way, even modeled, an essential facet of instruction for those with learning disabilities.

**Limitations.** Cueing strategies may require some “selling” to learners who are not independent and prefer to have the teacher “tell” the answer or to learners who expect perfection and are unwilling to try “best guesses” as they figure out what a word may be. They also represent quite a different approach to many of us who as teachers will have to struggle with the pull of old habits as we attempt to learn a new way.

**Best Uses.** We found the use of cueing strategies effective in most learning situations. Even true non-readers can draw from background and pictures to give meaning.
Spelling Strategies

**Background: Developmental Spelling Stages.** As teachers, we have often tried to reduce the spelling anxiety of our students by saying things like, “Your thought is what’s important. Don’t worry about your spelling.” While we still believe this to be generally true, we cannot deny the importance spelling has to adult learners. The inability to spell well is a constant frustration in daily life and a serious obstacle to good self esteem.

Our students with learning difficulties seem to have very frustrating experiences with spelling. They work hard to learn to spell words; then their minds go blank. They find it difficult to hear sounds accurately, and even if they can, they discover that English spelling is not consistently phonetic.

With the help of Dr. Diane Sawyer we attempted to gain perspective by studying and discussing normal developmental spelling stages. As a resource we read Gillet and Temple’s *Understanding Reading Problems* (1986).

Spelling is sometimes thought of as rote memorization. In contrast, this perspective encourages the teacher to see spelling as stages a learner goes through to produce a correctly spelled word. It is important that practitioners know the developmental stages of spelling and their relationship with reading and the written word that is produced by the learner. The following is a description of the different developmental spelling stages with examples for each stage. (See Developmental Spelling Stages top right.)

This information was helpful to us in understanding the normal developmental spelling process. It may have limited instructional use, however, since in our opinion, learning disabilities tend to be of a processing rather than developmental nature.

Some of us really wondered if there were any techniques which could help learning disabled students improve their spelling. We were eager to learn more and try new approaches that might hold promise.
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Developmental Spelling Stages

1) Pre-phonemic spelling: Learners have an idea of what written language looks like, but their “spellings share a basic attribute: there is no discernible relation between the sounds of the word spelled and the letters put down to spell those sounds.” For example: fish = SRY (Gillet and Temple, page 279).

2) Early phonemic spelling: Learners “discover that spelling honors a relationship between speech sounds (phonemes) and letters,” but represent this in a limited way. For example: fish = FSS (Gillet and Temple, page 281).

3) Letter-name spelling: Learners “choose the letter name that most closely resembles the sound they want to represent.” (Gillet and Temple, page 284) For example: boat = bot, little = ledl, trouble = shrubl (Gillet and Temple, page 293).

4) Transitional spelling: Learners show many features of standard spelling patterns, but don’t always use them accurately. For example: rope = roap, feature = fecher. Often the ‘ed’ ending is spelled the way it sounds. For example: peeked = peekt, wanted = wontid. (Gillet and Temple, p. 294-295). It’s our observation that adult basic education students often begin at this stage.

5) Correct spelling: Learners have memorized spelling of some words and are able to apply patterns to spell other words.

Spelling Instructional Strategy 1:
TALS follow-up analysis/instruction

Description. Several of us realized that the discoveries we made when we gave the TALS assessment led easily to instruction on sounds learners had not heard. We tried to create spelling strategies on this basis. In these extensions of TALS our experiences form the strategy.

1) The use of colored blocks in phonics (sound) instruction.
When students show difficulty with the “word to sound” part of the TALS assessment, they can benefit from further instruction using the same colored blocks used in TALS.
Example: The word is ‘pot’. The student has incorrectly shown the sounds using blocks. The teacher might say, “You heard po-t” (demonstrating with the blocks). “I heard p-o-t” (again moving the blocks as the word is said). More
This was done with Ted who is in the beginning stages of reading, writing and spelling. I chose four words with which Ted was familiar. I did this activity just to see if Ted did hear sounds and if he connected the correct letters with sounds. I chose pig, dig, big, and red, three of which had the same endings and one that did not follow the pattern.

I gave slips of paper to Ted. Each paper had three lines, one for each letter. I explained to Ted the lines were for each letter sound he heard.

The first word was pig. This is what Ted heard. He did not hear i.

```
p g
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Next came big. He heard the b, but wrote d. He heard the ending g.

```
d g
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Then dig. Dig was similar. He got d and the ending g.

```
d g
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Finally, red. With red, Ted heard these sounds. He got the beginning sound r, but wrote b for the d ending. He did not distinguish the vowel sounds, writing a for e.

```
r a b
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Kathy continued this activity and then she tried an open sort activity with Ted. (See “Word Sorts,” page 44)
Analysis

**Strengths.** This approach provides added information on what a student is hearing, and shows if a student is connecting sound to symbol. Instruction can strengthen awareness of sounds heard.

**Limitations.** This strategy does not help with visual memory, which is essential to English spelling.

**Best Uses.** The approach may be helpful with any student having difficulty with spelling.

[Note: Spelling strategies 2 and 3 are closely related, but have different functions. Strategy #2 provides guidelines for putting together individual student spelling lists. Strategy #3 outlines activities in which those lists (along with other words) are used to raise students’ awareness of visual and structural spelling patterns.]

**Spelling Instructional Strategy 2:**
**Using the learner’s own context**

**Description.** In Graham, et al.’s article, “The Spelling for Writing List,” we found a very helpful strategy that describes a different approach to teaching spelling to children who have learning disabilities. We feel it can be easily adapted to adult learners. Instead of having a traditional spelling list, the authors suggest a list comprised of words that are applicable and relevant to the learners. The three principles which guide the formation of the list are:

1) Words that learners commonly use as they write are the best source for the list.
2) Words should be from different types of writing assignments.
3) The list should include words used by people from all walks of life.

This list begins by pulling from the learners’ own writing, leading into high frequency words which are often mis-
Spelled. Instruction for learning to spell the words is along the lines of “word-sorts”, discussed below. Word-sorts use the grouping of words with common phonetic and visual features to aid spelling (see figure 6 at left).

Analysis

Strengths. With this approach, spelling is directly drawn from students’ own language and expressed needs. Instruction incorporates strategies for both auditory and visual memory.

Limitations. No limitations were identified in our action research.

Best uses. This is a useful approach with any adult learner. It is especially useful with students who have learning difficulties since the selected spelling words are embedded in meaning.

Spelling Instructional Strategy 3: Using Word Sorts

Description. In Diane Sawyer’s article “Using Word Sorts to Aid Spelling,” we learned another spelling strategy. Word sorts help students to identify and remember spelling patterns by associating words with the same visual or structural formation, e.g., pine, rate, like, all of which have the final silent e that has an effect on the preceding vowel. Word sorts change the learner’s perception of spelling from the attempt to spell hundreds of unrelated words to a more systematic approach.

Words for word sort activities are printed on cards or pieces of paper. The sorts are either open (sorted into whatever categories students can identify for themselves) or closed (sorted with the direction of a teacher who wants to demonstrate a particular pattern at that time).

Words for open sorts are drawn from the learner’s own source of words so they can be identical to the list composed in the manner described in Spelling Strategy 2. Learners...
work from their own source of words to form categories of words. Categories contain words with a specific trait, e.g., the initial consonant r, three syllables, the double vowel combination oa, or the suffix -ness. Ruz has, in fact, used his spelling list, partially shown in the section above, for open word sorts. His sorting categories included words that drop an e before a suffix (arrive, arriving) and words with the ending -ought (bought, brought).

Closed sorts are used to determine the learner’s ability to recognize certain features of words. Words are selected by the teacher, who has learning objectives in mind and leads the learner to discover specific spelling traits. The teacher:

1) Selects a feature to sort (plural ending, beginning blends). Example: Final e
2) Applies the feature to selected words.
   a. Selects four to six words known to the learner. At least one of the words should not have the feature. Example: like, hate, same, made, run
   b. Selects a few words to use to in application. Example: mate, tape, rebate
   c. Presents the lesson.

   Write a word known to the learners; have them read it. Point out the spelling pattern. Example: final e. Present words that have different meanings when a final e is added (mat-mate; tap-tape). Discuss the principle. Use nonsense syllables for pronunciation. Have the learner write words on slips of paper and sort words that have the trait from words that do not.

   While we as teachers are helped by TALS to identify sounds which students hear, we still have a need to deal with the visual aspect of English spelling. Word Sorts are a real help here. As students sort words by patterns they have common visual features reinforced.

   Margaret used open sorts with a group of students. “Students collected spelling words from their writings. We used these words (written on cards) for open sorts. They chose to put all their words together at first. Later, as the
number of words grew, they worked in pairs. The categories corresponded to some other work we were doing on suffixes, as well as some general categories such as nouns and adjectives. Students did these sorts with great interest, appearing to enjoy the game flavor of the activity. The reinforcement of visual spelling patterns is the point. In addition there are other benefits: improved thinking skills, increased reading vocabulary (everybody was learning to read everybody else’s words) and FUN!”

Margaret also used closed sorts (see figure 7 at left).

“I followed the directions for closed sorts. Not only were they able to see the pattern, but they were able to do what students with learning disabilities often find so difficult, generalize the pattern. When asked a week later to change new words (e.g., calculate, dictate), they did so easily.”

Kathy tried an open-sort activity with Ted, a beginning reader with a limited vocabulary. Previously, she had worked with him on a variation of a TALS activity, and wanted this time to see if he understood categorization. Kathy chose words from the TALS word bank. “Three words were alike and one was different: mouse, cat, dog and red. We talked about the meaning of each word. The words were written in big letters on index cards, making them easier to handle. Ted said red was a color, not an animal. He also noticed that cat, dog and red have three letters and mouse has five. Ted has made a good start in recognizing categories in meaning and structure. This activity also shows that Ted is beginning to make visual connections between letters and sounds. The spelling growth is evident in that Ted is able to see the difference in the beginning sounds of dog and cat and verbally make the respective beginning sounds.”

Analysis

Strengths. This strategy draws words from students’ own writings. It provides multi-sensory instruction and reinforces visual spelling patterns, aiding visual memory. It has the added benefit of building vocabulary.

Limitations. None were identified in our action research.
Best Uses. This approach is extremely valuable as an instructional strategy with any adult learner. It can be implemented even with a beginning reader using words from his or her dictated writings as well as with those at much higher reading levels.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Some of us shared the experience of having students who can word-call fairly well, but who say, “I can read the passage, but I can’t remember what I’ve read. What’s wrong with me?”

Reading comprehension, we know, is a process of combining new information with prior knowledge, a process that involves both understanding and memory. It is an active process with the participant interpreting and making inferences from readings. We also know that students with learning difficulties often find this hard to do.

The strategies included here are designed to increase understanding by giving meaning to new information by relating it to past experiences and to increase memory skills by providing strategies that trigger memory associations. They include:

1) A Strategy for Reading and Understanding Stories
2) A Strategy for Finding the Main Idea
3) A Strategy for Reading and Understanding Textbooks

These strategies have been separated from cueing and spelling strategies for explanation purposes only. The cueing, spelling, and reading comprehension strategies are all part of a holistic approach to instruction.

Reading Comprehension Strategy 1:
A Strategy for Reading And Understanding Stories

Description. Joanne Caldwell (1993) describes a model in which learners are encouraged to think about the story while reading, and to focus on understanding so that reading has meaning. The instructor models the strategy by reading a story aloud to the students and asking the ques-
Displaying the visual aid and pointing to the appropriate one for each question will help to trigger the learner’s memory. Students can demonstrate their understanding of this strategy by marking the symbols in the margin of the material they are reading.

Janice modeled this strategy for a class. Then the students read stories, using the questions and visual aid. “They were very expressive in sharing what they understood about their stories and the use of the strategies. They asked for copies of the questions and visual aid afterward.”

Reading Comprehension Strategy 2: A Strategy for Finding the Main Idea

Description. The strategies that help learners identify main ideas/topics increase both understanding and memory. The outline below and the graphic at the top of page 49 (see figure 9 at right) provide a tool to help the learner categorize main ideas/topics and recall information. The visual aid of the graphic triggers memory associations to recall information.

Procedure

» Divide reading into sections (paragraphs).
» After reading the paragraph, summarize the topics in two or three words (reread, underline, write in margins, or highlight).
» List the important points about the topic (underline or highlight with second color).
» Find or write a main idea sentence (underline, write in margin, or highlight with a third color).
» If the passage does not have a main idea, focus on topics.
» Using the following Main Idea Grid, make notes as to the topic, details, and the main idea sentence.

Margaret tried this with a class using short passages on a variety of subjects. “After reading a passage we tried to put into words what the main idea was. This was a little difficult at first, but got easier after doing several passages. It was also hard for the students to distinguish between the ‘main idea’ and the ‘main idea sentence’, but that also got clearer as we...
repeated the exercise. This actually was a very valuable process to work through. In the days that followed, students used the visual aid to do several more passages on their own. We talked a lot about the application of this technique to GED questions.”

**Reading Comprehension Strategy 3:**

*A Strategy for Reading and Understanding Textbooks*

**Description.** This model makes explicit what all good readers do: think about what they’re reading and monitor their understanding by recognizing

➤ what they already know
➤ what new things they are learning
➤ what questions remain or have been raised.

Janice tried this with a more advanced reading class during their work with a story about concentration camps, mentioned earlier in this chapter. “I put the symbols on the board (see figure 10 at right) and explained how they could be helpful. I read a small paragraph to them concerning a Nazi concentration camp, asking for their input in applying the use of the symbols as we went along. A very lively discussion developed from the discovery of how much they already knew.”

**Analysis of Reading Comprehension Strategies**

**Strengths.** This approach provides a systematic way to teach reading comprehension. It provides visual association cues. The approach has a logical sequence, making it easy for the learner to understand why he or she is doing each strategy. It involves the learner’s past experience and knowledge, and is especially good for the adult with learning difficulties who needs learning embedded in life experiences.

**Limitations.** None were identified in our action research.

**Best Uses.** All strategies are suitable for reading students, but some are more applicable to beginning readers, while
others are more suitable for readers who had some experience reading:

➤ Strategy for Reading and Understanding Stories—beginning readers
➤ Strategy for Finding the Main Idea—more advanced readers
➤ Strategy for Reading and Understanding Textbooks — more advanced readers

What We Learned About Instructional Strategies

We saw initial improvement from use of all of the strategies. In particular, we came to see cueing strategies as extremely important. There wasn’t enough time in the project to experiment fully with spelling strategies, and we still need to learn a lot more about individual learning styles. In using all the strategies, we were reminded of the importance of being explicit in instruction to students with learning disabilities.

Action We Want to Take. We want to continue using all these strategies over a longer period of time, documenting the results. We still hope to find answers to some of our beginning questions since we didn’t have time to even start on some of them. We want to try other spelling strategies, in particular the ALBSU: Look, Cover, Write, Check. (See Resources Chapter for materials from ALBSU). We want to use Marie Carbo’s Reading Styles Inventory (See Resources, page 50). We will encourage other practitioners to use these strategies with students.

Questions. We have some remaining questions: Will these strategies used over time bring about a real academic improvement? Will they increase self esteem and independence?
Guidelines for Our Future Work.

Although we did not find a complete system for teaching students with learning disabilities, we did arrive at a set of guidelines for selecting instructional strategies. We also acknowledged that compensation is an important part of addressing learning disabilities.

Instruction
➤ Build from students’ knowledge and draw from their experience.
➤ Embed instruction in meaning. Avoid teaching skills in isolation.
➤ Be explicit in all instruction. Learning disabled students keep what they know in isolated compartments and do not integrate it. The connections don’t take place automatically. Break learning into small components and do not assume transfer of knowledge or generalization.
➤ Provide practice and repetition.

Compensation Using Technology. We found that students are often able to compensate for learning difficulties, given the opportunity. Increasingly, technology is providing help. Personal computers, tape recorders, spell-checkers and other equipment can really make a difference.

Suzanne has worked a long time with Brad, a bright young man who had a vivid imagination but was never able to express it in writing. With hard work, special assistance and the aid of technology, Brad was able to graduate from college. Alvin, Mark and Daniel all agreed that purchasing the Franklin Language Master was the best investment they had ever made. It enabled them to learn with a much greater level of independence.
What difference has this action research experience made to us? What have we learned? What changes have we made? As we reflected on our time together and our work as action researchers, we have begun to see research and the production of knowledge about teaching approaches in a different way. We have felt transformed as teachers.

We began to see the body of knowledge regarding teaching methods and approaches in a different way. “We were all looking for the magic bullet,” Suzanne said in one of our workshops. We didn’t find a magic bullet or one sure-fire approach to make learning to read and write easy for our students who struggle. But we did learn some important things—specific approaches, strategies, information and resources as well as a different way of thinking about how we teach. During a workshop Kathy said, “The surprise was that nobody knows ‘the answer’—just the strategies to try.” Janice added, “There are no quick fixes.” We began to understand that working effectively with students, and especially with those who find learning difficult, is a process of learning for us as teachers. We have to work hard at it. We have to be willing to take risks. We have to examine our own experience and constantly question ourselves about what works and what doesn’t, for which students under what conditions.
We began to understand research in a different way. Margaret commented, “I began to learn about action research: trying something, documenting it, drawing conclusions with a group, starting the cycle again. Research isn’t something you have to do in a lab coat.” We saw that many are capable of becoming researchers, especially in a group setting where we can draw on the strengths of others.

We learned that even though much of what we did in our action research project looked like our regular teaching, there were some important differences. We realized that we learn best when we plan to learn. When we purposefully articulated our questions, found ways to answer them in our practice, documented our observations, shared them with each other and drew conclusions with the group, our learning was greatly enhanced.

The role of structure and documentation is vital in being able to learn effectively from our own experiences.

Margaret said, “I have been doing this kind of action research the whole time I’ve been teaching, but in a much less focused sense, in a much less following-through-on sense. Trying stuff, seeing what works, what doesn’t. Don’t we all do that? What I hadn’t done was documenting or taking careful notes and then talking with people who had tried the same things.”

We realized that we learn about teaching in many ways, including talking with co-workers and students, reading, and hearing presentations. But to learn most effectively from our own practice, we need to structure in ways to be reflective, and to document our observations and thoughts. “I saw that I needed to keep more accurate and organized notes and documentation. This is much different but of equal importance to talking with co-workers and students,” Suzanne wrote. Most of us need the “data” of our own teaching lives—the recorded observations—in order to systematize, organize, reflect on and make decisions about our teaching.

Even when we know the value of documentation, still it isn’t easy. It doesn’t come naturally. This conversation between Barbara and Carol is telling:

“None of us find documentation an easy thing to do. It’s
time consuming and we don’t want to spend the time. You know, ‘I did it, I know what the answer is, now let’s move on.”

“And yet you don’t remember.”

“I know it. That’s it. We need to document.”

We needed structure and accountability to each other in order to “make” ourselves do the documentation. We found that it was much easier to do the documentation—to write our observations, to make careful notes of questions and comments, especially journals—when we knew that others were going to see it and use it. We felt a responsibility to each other to participate fully in documenting, even when we didn’t feel that responsibility to ourselves. So documentation that we knew someone else was depending on, that we would be sharing with other participants on a regular basis was much more likely to be done thoroughly and consistently. We found that in structuring our own learning experiences, we need to take advantage of this “built in” tendency to be accountable to our co-workers, and use it to get better documentation. We think this is yet another advantage of learning in groups versus on our own.

We learned about ourselves as teachers as well. Even though we feel we’ve only just begun to understand learning disabilities and how they affect adults learning to read and write, we have come a long way from where we were. Most of us started out believing that we didn’t know much about the topic, that somebody out there had all the answers if we could just find that person or approach and use it. At the beginning we didn’t much believe in our own ability to produce knowledge about teaching people who struggle with a learning disability. But through trying things out and documenting them and talking with each other and our resource person, we began to trust our own capacity to make good judgements. We found ourselves being less tentative, more confident in our willingness to talk about our own approaches and methods with other teachers. We became more flexible, quicker to take a risk and try something new.
Confirming what we believe we know is important—sometimes just as important as learning new things. “I already knew some important things—I just doubted my opinions,” Janet wrote. Many times over the past months, we have had the experience of hearing our own thoughts spoken by another participant or our resource person. This confirmation became a way to verify and make more credible our own thinking, and this was a powerful experience. Learning to believe in yourself, your observations, intuition and knowledge is an empowering process!

It’s important sometimes to put ourselves in the role of a learner—a student in a class—to be reminded of how it feels. We know we aren’t the first to say it, but as teachers it really is easy to forget how it feels to be a student. In the action research workshops, we sometimes forgot our books and papers, didn’t always get done the work we agreed to do, occasionally came in late, or had transportation and family problems that kept us from class. From our point of view as participants and facilitators, none of that meant we weren’t motivated. It just meant we had full lives and other obligations. It drew us closer as a group to help each other and to recognize that we had support and concern from other members.

We also learned the value of presenting information in different ways to accommodate various learning styles. We realized the importance of opportunities for discussion, questions and repetition, of varying the pace and mixing different kinds of activities. Some of these we learned from doing them well in the action research project. Margaret commented, “Modeling is a very effective teaching strategy. It was an enormously effective thing when Diane modeled instructional strategies for us.” Some we learned from making mistakes. “We should try to do more instructional stuff in the morning. I found myself going brain dead about 2 o’clock in the afternoon,” Margaret added. Whether we learned from doing it right or doing it wrong, all of it was a learning experience that we have been able to apply to the classes we teach or administer. We believe our students will benefit from their teachers’ practice in creating a good learn-
We found that taping our sessions was very helpful. So much was discussed, it seemed near impossible to absorb it all. Margaret said, “There was one group of tapes I listened to over again, two months after the fact. I could not believe how much I’d missed the first time.” Despite problems of quality of the recording (and sometimes forgetting to turn the machine on!) the tapes were useful to help us review, and allowed us to transcribe a couple of important segments.

A stimulating and vibrant learning experience “bubbles over” into other areas of our lives, especially teaching. It can transform a teacher’s approach to creating a learning situation for her students. Suzanne wrote, “I have not really allowed students to think for themselves as often as I should—I am now consciously aware and doing much better at this.”

She explained how this awareness came about for her. “I was hearing conversations here at the group meetings, then going back and reflecting on that. I realized that the students can tell me more about what works for them than I know.” For this participant, an awareness of her own unstated assumptions about students had come into focus while participating in action research. She made changes and judged herself to be a better teacher because of it.

We saw that learning stimulates more learning. A dynamic learning experience encourages us to go further. Janice said, “It got me interested in looking at a lot of materials, not just what I got here, but other things too. It stimulated my thought processes.” Janice continued, “We had a contained body of things we were going to try, but I started trying other things, too. It teaches you that you can try different things and it motivates you to do more.”

Action research group members want to keep learning and sharing. Group members want to continue using the assessment tools, instructional strategies and resources they identified. Along with Center for Literacy Studies staff, we plan to share what we have learned with other practitioners in a series of workshops across the state. Already group
members have accepted two invitations to national conferences to talk about our work. Our hope is eventually to help teach an institute for other teachers who would give a full week to intensive study, discussion and reflection about helping adults with learning disabilities. “This is the most fun I’ve ever had,” concludes Kathy. “I mean that from my heart! I want to keep on learning.”

So do we all.
Resource Materials

These materials have been used effectively by members of the action research group in dealing with adults with learning disabilities. The reviews of the resources were written by the group of practitioners involved in the action research. Each entry details the publisher and a description of what the material is and how it can be used effectively with the adult learner. We’ve divided the bibliography into three sections: background, assessment and instruction. Entries which contribute in more than one area are cross-referenced for easier use.

Many of the resources in this annotated bibliography are available for loan from the library of the Tennessee Literacy Resource Center. (☞) indicates the items available for circulation. Materials may be borrowed for one month by Tennessee practitioners by contacting Sandra Blackburn, librarian, Tennessee Literacy Resource Center, 615-974-4109. Borrowers are responsible for paying return postage.

Background

☞Bingman, Mary Beth. Learning Differently: Meeting the Needs of Adults with Learning Disabilities. Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee (2046 Terrace Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37996-4351). 1989.
This booklet, aimed at adult education teachers and tutors, takes a very practical approach to understanding learning disabilities. The focus is understanding the effects of learning disabilities and helping the student to discover ways of coping with them. In addition to offering information about direct instruction for reading, this publication contains an interesting and useful section on “metacognition”—learning about learning. Learning Differently suggests that teachers help their students develop metacognitive skills by means such as discussion of what reading is (gaining meaning from print) and skills needed in reading for different purposes. This publication may be purchased from the Center for Literacy Studies for $3.00.

Marie Clay’s Becoming Literate is a very useful book for adult edu-
cation practitioners. Although Clay’s writings are based on her work with children, much of what she has to say can be applied to the development of reading and writing in adults. For our action research group, the portion of her book dealing with the development of processing strategies was particularly helpful. Clay maintains that reading is about making meaning from print, and that an individual “learns to read by reading.” She argues against exaggerated attention to “sound-ing out” words beyond the first letter or two, and other strategies which remove focus from meaning. Clay advises the development of visual scanning and exploration to pick up relevant information—“cueing strategies”—as central to the reading task, along with choosing, checking and correcting, skills based on thinking about the meaning of a passage.


Although Gillet and Temple are writing for teachers of children and youth, this book is very applicable to adults. Teachers of adult basic education students can find many ideas and activities here. One of the strengths of this book is that it thoroughly discusses “emergent literacy” and helps a teacher see stages that students go through in developing writing, spelling and reading skills. Gillet and Temple’s approaches fit very well with our emphasis on reading and writing for meaning.

*Understanding Reading Problems* describes concept maps, reading response journals, guided comprehension strategies and other ways of helping students make meaning from print. Their use throughout the book of student’s original writings and extended examples of particular students, detailing their instruction and progress, was also very helpful and made for interesting reading.


Dr. LaVoie has made several videos on learning disabilities, including “F.A.T. City.” In Part 1 of his 1991 Middle Tennessee State University presentation, Dr. LaVoie identifies learning with a learning disability as a “Quantum Experience.” Often there is no gradual improvement as in the “normal” learning process, and both student and teacher are ready to give up because no progress is seen. But then unexpectedly, there is dramatic improvement. Because of this he says, “Don’t Quit!” Development may come together at age 18, 20, 30 or even older with no explanation. One myth that he discusses is that it is not true that “the more you put into it (studying) the better you will do.” Dr. LaVoie quotes Dr. Mel Levene: “the entire experience of adolescents is an on-going, 24 hour-a-day battle not to be embarrassed.” Dr. LaVoie suggests that adolescents prefer the consequences of their misbehavior rather than the embarrassment of having their learning problems exposed. Positive and negative feedback is illustrated as well as how to help the learning disabled student be accepted by peers. Dr. LaVoie also answers the big question: How do
I keep the learning disabled student motivated? This video is not commercially produced and is not edited.


In Part 2 of his 1991 presentation, Dr. Richard LaVoie addresses the issue of social skills as a part of the curriculum. The teaching of social skills as a part of the curriculum is vividly examined. To understand the impact of the use of inappropriate social skills, immediate evaluation of what went wrong is recommended. For example, if someone makes a social error of eating food improperly within the eating setting the person is shown how to eat properly. This will hopefully eliminate the social error the next time or make the situation better. Increasing social information helps to increase better social skills. Without this information the learning disabled student is not able to pick up signals, read a room or read the body language of a friend. This video is not commercially produced and is not edited.


Richard D. LaVoie is a well-known specialist in the field of Special Education. His video presents a unique format, in the F.A.T. City workshops, to help parents, educators, psychologists and social workers understand better the mind-set of the child who is learning disabled. To understand someone is to see life from their perspective. In the F.A.T. city workshop the view of the classroom from the learning disabled child’s perspective is very sobering. Empathy is easily experienced when the practitioner is able to feel what the child feels when presented with certain learning activities. LaVoie is very insightful in presenting activities that are encountered by learning disabled children constantly. This video gives parents and practitioners, as well as siblings more insight into what is really happening inside learning disabled children as they function in a traditional classroom. These insights can be applied by adult education practitioners to their own students and classrooms. This understanding will hopefully alleviate some frustration experienced by learning disabled students, practitioners, parents and siblings.


Dr. Levinson, director of the Medical Dyslexic Treatment Center in Great Neck, New York, has written Total Concentration “about people—for people.” He has researched attention-deficit disorders and related problems for more than 25 years, tracing A.D.D. to an inner-ear infection. Dr. Levinson reports that 80% respond to combinations of anti-motion-sickness antihistamines and stimulants in a favorable way. Five distinct types of concentration disorders were delineated, each with unique origin and each responding to different treatments. This book is written in a clear and simple way, using many case histories. It makes for both informative and interesting reading. It should be noted that Dr. Levinson’s theories and practices remain controversial within the medical and educational community.
Background continued


This booklet discusses the difference between self-concept and self-esteem. Examples of how a teacher can be the one to make a real difference in the life of a student are numerous in this booklet. A seven step system for energizing your life is presented, along with goal-setting guidelines that can be integrated within the classroom curriculum. There is a self-esteem assessment included for the student's self-evaluation.


Clifford Willard is a learning disabled adult. He is a dyslexic who never completed high school but has an Associate Degree in Liberal Arts, a Bachelors Degree in Marketing and Business and Masters Degree in Communication as well as in Counseling. Currently he has a private practice, specializing in working with high school and college age learning disabled students.

The presentation covers Language Learning Disabilities (word blindness) only, not Attention Deficit Disorder or other learning disabilities. Learning disabled adults can probably identify better with this tape than can young people, but teachers of children or adult learners can get a better understanding of their students. Areas Mr. Willard discusses include tips on identifying learning disabilities; how we learn; feelings; process of reading by a language disabled person; compensation and coping skills; assuming responsibilities for their own education. This tape is not commercially produced and is unedited.

✎ Yard, George J., Editor. *Journal of the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs (NAASLN).* Behavior Studies Department, University of Missouri–St. Louis (8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121).

The official journal of NAASLN, this publication contains articles “on issues of concern to professionals who work with special adults.” Articles often address policy issues and administrative delivery systems. There are also contributions by teachers and researchers who present information about instructional methodology. The Journal is published twice yearly and can be purchased for $4.50 per issue from the address listed above.
Assessment


Reading Style Inventory is a diagnostic approach to an individual’s learning style. Reading Styles Inventory is a computer-based inventory that provides a print-out based on answers from a series of questions answered by the student. The questions relate to stimuli that address an individual’s preference for learning. The print-out, called a diagnostic profile, is on three easily read sheets. The print-out not only identifies the most desirable stimuli the student needs to produce effectively, but it shows the best methods to use in teaching the student. The print-out also gives a list of materials ranging from highly recommended to not recommended, to use with the student.

Each student has a different need that must be met before he or she can begin to learn. For example, one student’s profile showed that he is a tactual and kinesthetic learner. He needs instant feedback about his work, and needs to have a choice in the selection of reading materials. The Reading Style Inventory may not be the answer, but it does give a new approach to teaching. This inventory emphasizes that one way to reach students is through their own learning styles, since students do not all learn the same way.

Hollander, Lori and Mary Palamar. Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities. See page 66.


Presented as a live national teleconference with a question and answer period at the end, this videotape is part of the ten-program series developed by the Kentucky Educational Television Network, entitled “Working With Adults With Learning Disabilities.”

Dr. Dale R. Jordan gives a broad overview of what the term “learning disabilities” means. Using a brain map, he explains what occurs when there is incomplete development of neuronal pathways within the left brain (dyslexia).

Once the problem is defined, Dr. Jordan discusses the various types of assessment instruments used to diagnose a Specific Learning Disability. Standardized tests such as the Wechsler and Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery are discussed.
The WRAT and ABLE achievement tests are mentioned along with the new Power Path instrument, which combines both formal and informal evaluations, plus a visual screen.

A careful explanation and demonstration of how to administer an informal test, such as the Jordan Oral Screening Test for Dyslexia, is shown via a video Dr. Jordan had made as he gave this test to one of his students. Viewers are able to pick up on all the obvious and subtle things to watch for when administering informal screens. Once the test is completed the student discusses his feelings, thoughts, reactions, etc. while taking the test. His comments are most revealing and helpful to teachers.

Dr. Jordan’s goal is to help teachers select assessment tools that give an accurate picture of a student’s areas of need and then utilize the findings in order to meet those needs productively.


Presented as a live national teleconference with a question and answer period at the end, this videotape is part of the ten-program series developed by Kentucky Educational Television.

Dr. Dale R. Jordan discusses Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D.) and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (A.D.H.D.). He draws upon examples from his past experiences and explains how a person with A.D.D. may "drift" away during instruction and how an A.D.H.D. person might “jump the track.” The viewer is enabled to see how “the plugs keep falling out” for these individuals.

The Jordan Executive Function Index for Adults is shown as a device useful in determining strategies for helping A.D.D. and A.D.H.D. students. Since there is, as yet, no specific diagnostic tool for use in determining these disorders, Dr. Jordan discusses the various symptoms, and the professionals who are helpful in making a diagnosis. Medications found helpful in treating the disorders are reviewed.

Of particular interest is the videotape discussion between Dr. Jordan and three of his male college students, all of whom have residual A.D.H.D. This open, honest dialogue is very revealing and helpful to anyone dealing with learning disabled individuals. Before the tape is shown Dr. Jordan lists the numerous things to look for and be sensitive to during the discussion. These young men vividly demonstrate and verbalize their needs through their actions and words. Viewers have a very clear picture of A.D.D. and A.D.H.D. after watching this tape.


Presented as a live national teleconference with a question and answer period at the end, this videotape is part of the ten-program series developed by the Kentucky Educational Television Network, entitled “Working With Adults With Learning Disabilities.”

Jean Lowe, Director of the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education, and Fred Edwards, Assistant Director of GED Testing Services, discuss detailed information concerning their agency’s special testing provisions for adults with learning disabilities.

They explain what the GED Test measures; the role of the GED Testing Service in developing the GED Tests and in setting policies for their use; the background of special testing policy for adults...
with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD); and how to assist GED candidates in applying for special testing.

Ms. Lowe gives in-depth information about the various test formats and special accommodations available to candidates with properly documented learning disabilities. She explains, step-by-step, how to complete correctly the detailed application form in order to insure a speedy processing of a request for special help. The question and answer section at the close of the tape addresses many specific subjects of interest to viewers.


Adult literacy practitioners will find *Diagnosing Dyslexia* an enormous help. Klein’s diagnostic assessment is not a replacement for the psychological testing needed to certify a person “learning disabled” (necessary to obtain accommodation to the GED or other services such as books on tape), but it is a very helpful tool which any teacher can learn to use. It is a clear guide to analyzing a student’s reading, writing, and spelling, as well as a guide to talking with a student about dyslexia. *Diagnosing Dyslexia* is a real help in developing instruction and provides a solid basis for referral for certification tests.

The diagnostic assessment has several parts:
1) Diagnostic Interview—includes a learning history and profile of areas of difficulty.
2) Reading analysis—including a miscue analysis to determine strategies being used, reading style, and comprehension.
3) Spelling error analysis—which distinguishes logical phonetic alternatives; visual sequential errors; rule-based errors; sounds that are missed, mis-heard, or mis-sequence and motor errors.
4) Writing analysis—of free and dictated writing.

Note: Klein’s British spellings, reading selections, and references require some adaptations. The diagnostic assessment described by Klein is appropriate when a teacher has worked with a student for some time and suspects a dyslexic-like difficulty. It is not an intake procedure.


This placement guide is useful in assessing a student’s reading comprehension and cueing strategies. The guide does not yield a grade level equivalent or relate to a specific curriculum series. Instead it helps the teacher and student make decisions about the student’s interests and reading level—beginning, intermediate or advanced. This assessment tool contains five components: an informal interview, reading selections, writing exercise, spelling exercise, and letter identification. We found the reading selections to be of particular value because they allow the teacher to see the student’s use of cueing strategies. The interview is also valuable. It helps the teacher and student discuss how he or she learns best and student interests and strengths.

Sawyer, Diane; Craig Dougherty; and Sally Lipa. *Diagnostic Inventory*. New Reader’s Press (Box 131, Syracuse, NY 13210). 1987.

Although developed to correspond with the Laubach Way to Reading Series, Skill Book 1, this inventory provides good information for a teacher of any begin-

**Assessment continued**
assessment continued

ning reader. Questions and activities check the student’s ability to demonstrate knowledge of the concepts which underlie printed language; the ability to hear beginning, ending consonants; letter names and sounds; basic word recognition; writing and identifying sentences and paragraphs; capitalization and punctuation; and finally, comprehension. Teachers and tutors can find out if the student is missing any of the basic concepts and understandings needed by readers and will have a better idea of where to start instruction.

Sawyer, Diane. “Test of Language Segmentation (TALS)” (Middle Tennessee State University, Office of Dyslexic Studies, P.O. Box 69, Murfreesboro, TN 37132) Video, 60 minutes. 1987.

This video tape demonstrates administering the TALS. Dr. Diane Sawyer, a specialist in learning disabilities and author of the test, administers the TALS to several children. The video shows how the test reveals students’ ability to separate words into syllables and separate sentences into words. The step-by-step demonstration of the test clearly explains the test-giving procedure and is extremely helpful to teachers who are learning to administer the TALS.


The BCD test is designed as a diagnostic/prescriptive instrument for adult learners functioning at the 0-4 grade level. The test measures skills in five areas: Functional Background Knowledge, Alphabet Recognition, Reproduction and Sequencing, Auditory Perception and Discrimination, Visual Perception and Discrimination, and Sight Vocabulary. The test includes a separate student booklet and administrator’s manual.

The test does not diagnose learning disabilities, but the skills measures may indicate learning problems when compared with the educational background of the adult student. The Sight Vocabulary test seems especially useful. It assesses a student’s ability to recognize words both in isolation and in context. In addition, a personal paragraph offers insight into students’ use of re-reading and use of context. The Auditory Perception and Discrimination test measures listening skills, beginning sounds and syllables. It does not have a subtest to assess a student’s ability to recog-
**Instruction**


BLADE is a completely individualized remedial reading, writing, and speaking system designed to bring reading skills up to the grade 5.0 level. Non-readers can use the program successfully and the step-by-step approach is appropriate for students with mild learning difficulties. BLADE is an example of a cognitive modeling approach. Booklets, audio cassette tapes, exercises, and unit end tests are used in the program. All the materials are adult in context. The program is directed toward success with the teacher playing an important role in the learning process— not as the giver of information, but as the guide, tutor, and encourager of the student.


This video-print kit is designed as a three day workshop for adult education teachers. It is divided into two parts: Identifying Characteristics and Instructional Strategies. Whether it is used as a workshop or as a reference for individual teachers, it is an extremely valuable resource.

The kit is structured so that each of ten abilities or characteristics is examined in relation to three areas: vocational impact, compensations/accommodations and modifications/strategies. The characteristics examined include attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, interpersonal skills/emotional maturity, coordination/motor function, reading, writing/spelling, and math calculation/application.

The activities and exercises can be used within the classroom schedule. They fit easily within each classroom subject and can serve as spring boards for discussion and classroom interaction resulting in an atmosphere of classroom trust and community.


One of the major hurdles that many times has to be faced by the adult learner is the lack of a positive self-concept. Oftentimes the adult learner feels like a failure academically and needs to be built up in areas of self-confidence. The book is written for middle/high school levels, but it can be easily adapted to the adult learner. The book is divided into four sections: getting to know others; getting to know yourself; getting to like yourself; and getting ready for the future. This book includes strategies that build self-awareness, positive attitude and life skills.

The activities and exercises can be used within the classroom schedule. They fit easily within each classroom subject and can serve as spring boards for discussion and classroom interaction resulting in an atmosphere of classroom trust and community.

Presented as a live national teleconference with a question and answer period at the end, this videotape is part of the ten-program series developed by the Kentucky Educational Television Network, entitled “Working With Adults With Learning Disabilities.”
Dr. Dale R. Jordan, former Director of the Jones Learning Center at the University of the Ozarks, in Clarksville, Arkansas, discusses three learning styles and two personality styles shared by teachers and students. He stresses the importance of adult educators being aware of these differences and using that awareness to individualize learning processes and strategies.

An in-depth explanation is given of the various styles of learners: type one is quiet/passive, type two is talkative/active, and type three is talkative/active/toucher. The “splitter” (breaks everything into minute details) and “lumper” (views the whole picture) personalities are also described.

Dr. Jordan makes numerous suggestions concerning accommodations that can be made to ensure an environment more conducive to learning and freer of conflict and frustration for students and teachers. His specific examples, often drawn from his personal experiences, are extremely helpful to teachers wanting to make adjustments in their teaching styles in order to facilitate optimum learning and classroom harmony.

In this paper Cynthia Klein discusses the importance of using an overall support group for students with learning disabilities. Klein writes about the difference in working with adults with learning disabilities versus children with learning disabilities. She also discusses the Dyslexic Learning Styles (the need for a structured, multisensory approach to learning) and then discusses a Diagnostic Approach to Teaching, The Learning Support Model, Setting Up a Spelling Program and Developing Learning Strategies. Klein’s long experience in working with and writing about adults with learning disabilities is a real asset here. She offers practical advice, and the information is useful to all teachers of adults.

This paper is geared to be a practical response to all those who, when faced with a dyslexic adult ask, “What do I do to help this student?” Materials covered are: Criteria, Relevance to Individual Needs and Goals, and Immediate Experience of Success in Learning which is broken down into five areas. These are: (1) unlearning (2) learning how to learn (3) selecting words to learn and linking spelling to writing (4) finding strategies for remembering and (5) following the method. The five issues are connected to spelling which plays such an important role in setting up a learning program for dyslexic students. It attempts to show how a learning program can be adapted to specific needs of students with varying difficulties, abilities and goals.
Enabling Students to Take Charge of their Own Learning is another portion of this booklet. Issues covered in this section are:

(1) helping students to identify their own learning style, including strengths and difficulties
(2) making the conventions of written language explicit and
(3) working with them to develop practical skills and self-monitoring tools.

The booklet concludes with examples of three individual students and their learning programs.

LaVoie, Richard.
"Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop."
See page 60.

Pace Learning Systems, Inc.
IRIS: Individualized Reading Instructional System. (P. O. Box 020983 Tuscaloosa, AL 35402-0938). 1988.

IRIS was designed specifically for adults and is an effective system for teaching adult nonreaders to read and for low level readers to increase their reading skills. IRIS works exceptionally well for many students with severe learning difficulties. Each IRIS “track”, or unit, teaches reading skills that approximate one full grade level. It begins with sequencing, left-to-right tracking and phonics; then builds through four tracks. When the student completes track IV, he or she should be reading at about 5th grade level. The material is self-pacing and may be used independently or with a tutor on a one-to-one basis. Included in IRIS is a placement test, work sheets, word lists and complete teachers guide.


The uniqueness of each individual is enhanced as students are able to identify strengths and weaknesses of the learning styles they possess. Help Yourself is a “How-to manual in understanding what your learning style is and how you can best use it.” The easy-to-read format of the book has outlined the strategies for each learning style and how you can best use it in a learning situation.

There is a very simple inventory to help the learner determine his/her particular learning style. The six learning styles covered are reading, writing, listening, speaking, visualizing and manipulating.

This book is a very helpful classroom tool for the teacher and student in identifying how you think and what to do to get things done.


In this video and accompanying print packet from a 1992 Center for Literacy Studies workshop, Ms. Westberry discusses GED accommodations, places to find evaluators, insurance coverage and various resources available to aid students with learning problems. Ms. Westberry describes characteristics that are present in students with learning problems and offers possible strategies and techniques that are effective in helping them learn.

Willard, Clifford.
Dyslexia From Within.
See page 61.

Yard, George J., Editor.
Journal of the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs (NAASLN).
See page 61.
Bibliography


Appendix One

We used these assessment instruments in our action research project. They are available for review from the Center for Literacy Studies. Tennessee practitioners may check the packet out for one month. If you plan to use these assessment instruments in your program, you can order them from the addresses listed below.

MAURY COUNTY SCREEN
Available from:
Dr. Diane Sawyer
Murfree Chair of Excellence in Dyslexic Studies
Middle Tennessee State University
Elementary and Special Education Department
P.O. Box 69
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
(615)898-5642

Susan Westberry
Maury County Adult Basic Education
501 West 8th Street
Columbia, TN 38401
(615)388-8403

JORDAN ORAL SCREENING TEST
Available from:
Dr. Dale Jordan
College of Education
University of Arkansas
2801 South University
Little Rock, AR 72204
(501)569-3113

CONCEPTS ABOUT PRINT
Available from:
Heinemann Publishers
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
(603)431-7894

TEST OF AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE SEGMENTS (TALS)
Available from:
Pro-Ed
8700 Shoal Creek Boulevard
Austin, TN 78757-6897
(512) 451-8542
Appendix Two

Jordan Checklist —
Signals of Specific Learning Disabilities*

_____ 1) Very slow processing
_____ 2) Whispering over and over while writing
_____ 3) Many pauses as memory gets stuck
_____ 4) Non-language sounds: gasping, breath
    sucked-in, breath blown out, grunting, sighing
_____ 5) Apologizing for mistakes
_____ 6) Soft laughter when mistakes are made
_____ 7) Frequent erasing
_____ 8) Pause for periods of time searching the memory
_____ 9) Nervous overflow: pencil tapping, finger
    tapping, foot tapping
_____ 10) Requesting to hear it again

*from Dr. Dale Jordan as described in the videotape
“Assessment Instruments for Adult Populations.” See page 62.
Appendix Three

Characteristics of Dyslexia
Abstracted from Clark, *Dyslexia: Theory & Practice of Remedial Instruction*, Chapter 2, (York Press/Parkton, Maryland 1988)

Prepared by:
The Office of Dyslexic Studies,
Middle Tennessee State
University,
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

➤ extreme difficulty learning to read and spell words, despite conventional instruction.
➤ believed to be the consequence of specific brain dysfunction in processing written language.
➤ dyslexia persists despite maturation and instruction.

Specific Reading Problems: (Pages 19-23)
➤ phonological analysis (have difficulty breaking down words into sounds and in blending parts together to pronounce written words).
➤ word decoding (incomplete mastery of letter-sound correspondence as a result of poor phonological analysis).
➤ automatic word recognition (slower, less accurate).
➤ use of context (inefficient).

➤ comprehension of text (poor due to slow, inaccurate decoding or poor use of syntactic/grammatical relationships).

May have:
➤ deficits in listening comprehension.
➤ difficulties understanding complex sentences in speech as well as reading.
➤ deficient in grammatical understanding and knowledge of morphological units (e.g., affixes). (All may be due to difficulties in processing language)

➤ difficulty processing function words, articles, conjunctions, and other lexical items that serve to make clear relations between phrases or clauses (perhaps due to poor phonological processing).
➤ insufficient, weak knowledge base (often due to limited reading experience).

Spelling Problems: (Pages 23-25)
Spelling deficiencies may include:
➤ poor analysis of sounds, poor sequencing of sounds, poor coding of sounds to letters.
➤ difficulty remembering visual details of words with nonphonetic spellings.

Expressive Writing Problems: (Pages 25-27)
➤ poor written expression compared to oral expression.
➤ poor punctuation, word omissions, lack of subject/predicate numbers agreement, lower percentages of compound/complex sentences.
➤ general resistance to writing.
➤ better quality dictated material suggests that the mechanics of producing text may interfere with the fluency and quality of written text.

Phonological Processing Deficits: (Pages 27-30)
Weakness in:
➤ phonological awareness (segmenting sounds in words).
➤ phonetic coding to maintain information in working memory (coding print to sound).
➤ phonetic perception to create a phonological code (auditory perception or discrimination of speech sounds).
➤ phonological receding in accessing the mental dictionary (ability to retrieve names for symbolic stimuli).
Visual Problems: (Pages 30-32)
➤ word and letter substitutes.
➤ letter reversals.
➤ letter sequencing confusions (overt signs of reading problems).
➤ erratic eye movement (might be the result of reading problems).

Intersensory Deficit: (Pages 32-33)
➤ problem integrating information that must be processed simultaneously in two or more modalities (e.g., auditory and visual as when learning sound/symbol associations).

General: (Pages 38-39)
➤ difficulty processing written language (reading and writing).
➤ do not readily acquire metalinguistic knowledge (e.g., ability to think about language as a system independent of meaning).
➤ less aware of units of sound in spoken language.
➤ less able to conceptualize the translation of sound units into written symbols and vice versa.
➤ problems with decoding unfamiliar words.
➤ word recognition is slow and inaccurate.
➤ slower reading speed and poor ability to utilize surrounding context for word recognition.
➤ poor reading comprehension.
➤ poor spelling.
➤ poor short-term memory for verbal information.
➤ problems with written language syntax.
➤ name retrieval problems.
➤ subtle speech perception deficits.
➤ reverse and transpose letters and words, but no more than nondyslexic people.
➤ unstable letter-sound knowledge.
➤ some have visual-spatial deficits.
➤ some have grapho problems.
➤ presume a neurologically based disorder.
➤ language areas of brain must be implicated (dyslexic brains, examined postmortem, show deviation from normal asymmetry—left hemisphere is larger in brains of normal readers; brains of dyslexics seem to be symmetrical).