

Accessing and Using Research for Evidence-based Practice

How can NCSALL help YOU?

You organize professional development for your state or program, and you need ideas and materials that meet the needs of your learners, your teachers, and your programs. You've also been hearing the terms "evidence-based practice" and "scientifically based research."

Federal and state policies either already require or will be requiring your state and program to demonstrate how your instruction and services to students are evidence-based. Apart from funders' requirements, research can be a valuable tool. Information gleaned from research can complement your own experience as you make decisions about what to do in the classroom. Teachers and programs need your help in finding and learning about research in our field.

Since NCSALL is the national Department of Education-funded center that conducts and disseminates research for the adult literacy field, we want to help you meet this need. We've created a wide range of resources to help you help teachers access, understand, judge, and use research to make decisions about teaching and supporting students.

Let's begin by defining terms.

• What is "evidence-based practice"?

According to the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) Institute of Education Sciences (IES), "evidence-based practice" is the "integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction."* Importantly, this definition values the insights of both researchers and practitioners in determining how best to provide educational services.

• What is "professional wisdom"?

Professional wisdom is the judgment that individuals acquire through their experience, including the

"effective identification and incorporation of local circumstances into instruction." Professional wisdom is also the field's consensus views on issues of importance.

• What is "scientifically based research"?

As defined by the U.S. DOE, scientifically based research is: rigorous, systematic, objective, empirical, and peer-reviewed. It also relies on multiple measurements and observations, and is preferably conducted through experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

• What's the difference between "evidence-based practice" and "scientifically based research"?

"Evidence-based practice" is about what should drive practice—that is, using empirical evidence and professional wisdom to make decisions. "Scientifically based research" is about what type of research should generate the empirical evidence. According to the U.S. DOE, this is research that, ideally, meets particular criteria (based on experimental design, published in peer-refereed journals, meets thresholds for sample size and selection, etc.).

Understanding this difference is important, since you may find that these terms are often (incorrectly) used interchangeably.

What is NCSALL?

A federally funded research and development center focused solely on adult learning, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is a partnership of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, World Education, Rutgers University, Portland State University in Oregon, and the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. NCSALL's efforts are dedicated to improving practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma.

* IES Director Grover Whitehurst, quote can be viewed at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/presentations/evidencebase.html>

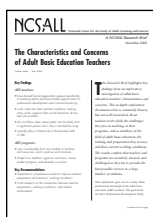
What has NCSALL created that can help teachers and programs learn about research?

If you want to learn about research findings, go to...



Focus on Basics, NCSALL's quarterly magazine for practitioners. Each issue is theme-based and features articles written by practitioners and researchers.

Both HTML and PDF versions of all issues can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=31



NCSALL *Research Briefs* and *Report Summaries*, which offer short synopses of research study findings.

Research Briefs are based on the executive summaries from full-length NCSALL research reports and provide “sound bites” describing the study, its findings, and implications for practice, policy, and further research. These can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=27

Report Summaries are substantially abbreviated versions of the full-length research reports to which they correspond. These can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=28



Focus on Policy, NCSALL's semi-annual magazine for policymakers. Like *Focus on Basics*, *Focus on Policy* is theme-based, with each issue offering an in-depth look at a specific NCSALL research study and its implications for policy.

Focus on Policy can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=32

If you want tools for assessing your students' reading skills, go to...



Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles Web site. Based on NCSALL's Adult Reading Components Study (ARCS), this Web site provides assessment tools that help teachers gauge students' reading levels and plan instruction appropriate to those levels.

www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles

If you want to read more in-depth reports of research, go to...



NCSALL *Reports*, which are full-length reports from NCSALL's research studies.

NCSALL *Reports* can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=29



NCSALL *Occasional Papers*. Usually shorter than *Reports*, *Occasional Papers* examine different aspects of NCSALL's research.

NCSALL *Occasional Papers* can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:
www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=26

If you want to read **scholarly articles** about key topics in adult learning and literacy, go to...



Review of Adult Learning and Literacy. NCSALL's annual volume of articles reviewing research on important issues and best practices, the *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy* serves as the scholarly journal of record for the adult literacy field. Complete text from volumes 1–3 and chapter summaries from volume 4 can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at:

www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=493

If you want to **organize professional development** for other teachers and colleagues, based on research, go to...

NCSALL Training Materials, which are guides for professional development activities that help teachers develop their own knowledge and skills in a specific area. NCSALL has created the following types of training materials.

◆ **Study Circle Guides**—designed for professional developers and practitioners who want to organize and conduct study circles that help practitioners read, discuss, and use research to improve their practice. The guides provide facilitators with the information and materials needed to carry out a study circle, including detailed, step-by-step guidance on how to conduct sessions.

Topics of *NCSALL Study Circle Guides* include:

- *Research-based Adult Reading Instruction*
- *Adult Multiple Intelligences*
- *Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education*
- *Teaching and Learning in Authentic Contexts*
- *Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education*

◆ **Health Literacy Study Circle “Plus” Guides**—designed for professional developers and practitioners who want to organize study circles about health literacy and incorporate health literacy skills development into adult literacy classes. Participants examine health tasks, identify related skills, teach sample lessons with their students, and develop their own lessons. The inclusion of this practice component, as well as a variation in structure, distinguish these study circles “plus” from NCSALL's other study circles.

Topics of *NCSALL Health Literacy Study Circle “Plus” Guides* include:

- *Health Care Access and Navigation*
- *Chronic Disease Management*
- *Disease Prevention and Screening*

(Note: each of these guides is slated to be published in 2005, at various points in the year.)

◆ **Mentor Teacher Group Guides**—designed to give practitioners an opportunity to learn about and, where appropriate, use the results of research in their work. Mentor Teacher Groups combine the approach of study circles with mentoring, where an experienced teacher comes to each participant's classroom, observes her teaching, and provides feedback that helps the teacher apply those theories and strategies and learn from her own practice. The guides provide facilitators (i.e., mentor teachers) with the information and materials needed to carry out a mentor teacher group, including detailed, step-by-step guidance on how to conduct sessions.

Topics of *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guides* include:

- *Adult Multiple Intelligences*

◆ **Inquiry Guides & Seminar Guides**—designed to engage practitioners, program directors, state staff, and other policymakers in reading and discussing research or policy papers on topics of importance to the field.

Topics of *NCSALL Inquiry Guides & Seminar Guides* include:

- *How Are We Doing: An Inquiry Guide for Adult Basic Education Programs*
- *Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System*

IMPORTANT NOTE: We designed all of these guides to be self-contained and self-explanatory. All the materials needed to conduct sessions are contained in each guide and no “outside expert” need be called to run them.

If you want activities to use in the classroom with learners, based on research, go to...

NCSALL Teaching Materials. Unlike NCSALL Training Materials, which are guides to professional development FOR teachers, NCSALL Teaching Materials are guides for teachers to use in the classroom WITH learners. Teaching Materials provide lesson plans and accompanying guidance on how to use those lesson plans.

As with Training Materials, NCSALL Teaching Materials are designed to be self-contained and self-explanatory: All the materials needed to conduct lessons are contained in each guide and no “outside expert” need be called to train a teacher on how to use them.

Topics of NCSALL Teaching Materials include:

- *Understanding What Reading Is All About: Teaching Materials and Lessons for Adult Basic Education Students*
- *Multiple Intelligences and Adult Literacy: A Sourcebook for Practitioners* (available from Teachers College Press)
- *Creating Authentic Materials and Activities for the Adult Literacy Classroom: A Handbook for Practitioners*
- *Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices about the GED and Your Future*
- *Adult Reading Components Web Site: Described above as an assessment tool, this site also provides materials teachers can use with adult learners* (www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles)

All of NCSALL's Training and Teaching Materials (except the AMI Sourcebook) can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site at: www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=25

How can I get NCSALL materials?

As noted throughout this brochure, with the exception of certain chapters of the *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy* and the AMI Sourcebook, all NCSALL materials can be downloaded free from NCSALL's Web site. The site's main address is:

www.ncsall.net

Printed copies of NCSALL materials can also be ordered either by logging on to NCSALL's Web site and clicking "Order Publications" or by contacting NCSALL's Dissemination Team at:

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Boston, MA 02210
617-482-9485 (tel)
617-482-0617 (fax)
ncsall@worlded.org

Prices vary, depending on the product, but they are nominal, as we seek only to recover our costs for production and shipping.

What is the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research (CPPR) initiative?

NCSALL has a dissemination initiative called **Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research (CPPR)**; CPPR's goals are to improve the quality of practice in programs that serve adult learners and to understand how states can integrate research findings into their professional development and policy setting systems. As part of their work, NCSALL's CPPR coordinators provide technical support to state staff and adult education organizations about how to help practitioners access, understand, judge, and use research. Contact Cristine Smith (csmith@worlded.org), Beth Bingman (bingman@utk.edu), or Kaye Beall (kbeall@worlded.org) to talk about how you might use NCSALL's resources in your state.

NCSALL

National Center for the Study
of Adult Learning and Literacy