In Community, Strength

Changing Our Minds
about U.S. Adult Foundational Education

Book 3
Vision and Voices for Multi-Purpose, Collaborative,
Empowerment-Focused AFE

A Resource Book Series
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Illustration: *Gateway to Freedom*, sculpture by Edward Dwight
at the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad, Detroit, Michigan

Contents

Summary of Book 3

Part 3.a. Summary

Book 2 (in Parts 2.a. and 2.b.) summarized what diverse sources say about the strengths and limitations of current adult foundational education (AFE) in the U.S.[1] We can use that report card to help us understand what we might do to both further develop and build on current strengths while avoiding or eliminating the limitations. The goal would be to help us transition to AFE that better serves more learners and communities.

To help us stay on track in that transition process, it would be useful to have a "vision" of a better system and how to create it. Part 3.a. presents a brief "draft vision statement" that those who want to improve AFE in the U.S. might adapt to guide their work. In four parts, the vision statement describes these key components of a systems reform effort:

- Purposes: empowerment of learners, community stakeholders, and AFE itself.
- Partners: adult learners and the diverse social communities they participate in (e.g., their families, neighborhoods, workplaces, labor unions, healthcare, criminal justice, and other service providers; democratic institutions).
- Practices: use of AFE professionals who understand the learners and communities to be served, involve other relevant stakeholders, use effective practices for instruction and program management, continuously monitor and improve services, and invest adequate, timely, and sustained financial and in-kind supports.
- Principles: respect, resourcefulness, resilience, reason, relevance and responsiveness, constructive collaboration, commitment to high quality, honor, honesty, and humility.

Readers are encouraged to review this draft and then create and periodically update their own statement that reflects their own experience and realities.

[1] See the Glossary in the Appendix for definitions of *adult foundational education (AFE)* and *community-oriented.* The term AFE is also explained in Part 2.a.

Part 3.b. Summary

Prior to and since the mid-1990s (when the shift toward a more employment-focused AFE described in Part 1 got underway), diverse voices have made the case that AFE should (a) respond more effectively to a wide range of interests, needs, and realities of more learners and other stakeholders; (b) use participatory, contextualized approaches to instruction and collaborative, integrated strategies for working with other community stakeholders; and (c) help to empower learners to understand and manage challenges and opportunities they and their communities face.

Despite those voices, federal AFE funding has since the mid-1990s focused primarily on "employment" as a central goal. Those calling for a broader range of learner goals generally state that, while employment is in fact an important motivator for many learners, other learner interests should also be recognized and supported in substantive, sustained ways.

Part 3.b gives examples of AFE advocates who have called for multi-purpose, collaborative, empowerment-focused AFE. Such an approach . . .

- is guided by a vision of adult learners and AFE as valuable partners in the building of a better society;
- responds to the real-world interests, strengths, and needs of learners who come from diverse backgrounds;
- focuses on empowering learners to effectively perform work, family, civic, and lifelong learning roles and tasks that are meaningful and rewarding for them in the social contexts (aka, "communities") they interact with;
- uses effective, evidence-informed strategies for service delivery, administration, and support;
- partners in multiple ways with other stakeholders who have an interest in a well-equipped adult populace;
- is supported and sustained by adequate investments of financial and in-kind resources from diverse sources;
- learns from and builds on good work that has already been done – and is now emerging --in AFE and other fields.

Part 3.c. Summary

In addition to the above-described advocates from the AFE field, others operating in public- and private-sector institutions have also been calling for some of the elements (e.g., stakeholder collaborations, integrated services, systems-thinking, responsiveness to customer needs, high-performance work organizations, evidence-based decision making, community-building, strengths-based development, responding to inequities) reflected in the above messages from AFE advocates. By studying these models from other fields, AFE advocates might find some ideas and partners that they can apply to their own work in AFE.

Book 3 Wrap-Up

Those wishing to strengthen and expand AFE services/supports in the U.S. should have a principled vision to guide this important but challenging work. To develop such a vision, they should learn from and adapt past and current good thinking and work in AFE and other fields, to maximize efficiency and avoid too-familiar reinventing of the wheel and use of ineffective practices.

PART 3.a.

A Draft Vision
to Guide AFE Systems Reform

To strengthen and expand adult foundational education (AFE) as a valuable service for learners and their communities, it will be important for those doing this work to have a vision of purposes, partners, and practices (strategies and tools) of a better AFE system. That vision should also identify underlying principles (values) to guide and encourage this challenging but potentially vital systems reform work. Outlined below is a "draft vision statement" for what we will now refer to as a "community-oriented AFE systems reform initiative."[1]

This draft statement draws on the kinds of arguments and models developed within AFE and other fields that are outlined in Parts 3.b and 3.c. Those undertaking this work are encouraged to consider this draft and create and periodically update their own statement that reflects their own experience and realities.

Purposes

Community-oriented AFE systems will:

- help to empower adult learners – at lower, intermediate, and higher levels of foundational skills – to more effectively manage opportunities and challenges in personally-meaningful work, family, civic, and lifelong learning social contexts (aka, communities);

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[1] The term *community-oriented adult foundational education* is explained in the Glossary in the Appendix of this book and in several places throughout this series, including in Part 3.b.

- thereby benefit (empower) both individual learners and the families and other social communities that learners interact with;
- serve learners and other stakeholders while also developing an infrastructure of human and material resources (e.g., evidence, models, tools, procedures, funding) that others can use to continuously build high-quality AFE systems.

Partners

Community-oriented AFE systems will be built around the interests and strengths of AFE adult learners, AFE providers, and diverse communities (social systems) that learners are part of.

Adult learners can include individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds (e.g., age, gender, income, education, occupational interest and status, race/ethnicity, country of origin, first language, disability, housing, legal status, location) and foundational-skills-related limitations (e.g., gaps in particular foundational skills and technical knowledge, educational and occupational credentials, career and life plans, social-emotional strengths).

Learners' "communities" can include learners' families and other stakeholders who have – or might have – an interest in supporting the success of adult learners and the AFE programs that serve them. Potential stakeholders include individuals and organizations/institutions (e.g., service providers, funders, policy makers, researchers from public and private sectors) that support equitable and efficient:

- workforce and economic development (e.g., employers, labor unions, workforce development and economic development agencies, and supporters of small businesses);
- public health (including healthcare services and others who provide health-related supports for individuals and communities);
- public safety and correctional services (e.g., criminal justice organizations, public safety agencies, parole boards, and correctional facilities, alternatives-to-correction agencies, and prisoner re-entry services);

- refugee and immigration integration/inclusion and general well-being;
- academic and general life success of children (e.g., pre-K-12 school systems and other child services);
- the well-being of families (e.g., supporters of childcare, eldercare, health, housing, transportation, and financial security);
- the well-being of individuals with various kinds of disabilities (e.g., social-emotional, neurodiversity-related, physical);
- environmental sustainability;
- access to digital technologies and other tools that learners need to perform work, family, civic, and lifelong learning functions;
- lifelong learning for adults (e.g., libraries, higher educational institutions, occupational training programs, museums and other cultural development institutions);
- democracy.

Practices

Community-oriented AFE systems will use evidence-informed strategies to:

- understand and serve diverse populations of adults and out-of-school youth who face foundational (basic) skills-related challenges;
- involve diverse stakeholders as potential partners for AFE providers to work with in ways that are appropriate to the learners, service providers, and others involved;
- provide learners with high-quality, adequate educational and other supports to help them develop basic/foundational skills and other assets/strengths they need to participate effectively as problem-solvers in personally meaningful work, family, civic, and lifelong learning roles. ("Other assets/strengths" include educational and occupational credentials, background knowledge, social-emotional strengths, support networks, life and career plans, and digital technologies and other tools);
- provide opportunities for learners to develop skills and knowledge in multiple venues (including face-to-face instruction,

self-directed learning, situated learning) and modes (such as in-person groups and one-to-one tutoring, remote/virtual learning);

- continuously document, monitor, and share information about activities to guide continuous improvement;
- provide adequate, timely, and sustained investments – from diverse public and private sources – of financial and in-kind resources to service providers;
- ensure that AFE systems are led and managed by AFE professionals and others who have relevant technical expertise and the values outlined under "principles" below.

Principles

Those creating, implementing, strengthening, and sustaining community-oriented AFE systems should take the time to identify principles (values) that can guide their work. These might be the same principles that we hope will guide the learners we serve and the partners we work with. Principles might include:

- respect for learners, providers, communities, and our ourselves as a profession;
- resourcefulness and resilience to creatively and effectively use resources to continuously improve our work;
- reasoned, rational, reflective thinking to ensure that we learn from and build on our experience and that of others;
- relevance and responsiveness to the interests, strengths, needs, and realities of learners and other partners;
- constructive collaboration in how we work with others to positively build on experience and the strengths of learners and other stakeholders;
- commitment to providing high quality services in time-sensitive, efficient ways;
- honor, honesty, and humility in how we do this important work.

Voices from the AFE Field Calling for Multi-Purpose, Collaborative, Empowerment-Focused AFE

Since the 1980s, a steady stream of AFE voices -- researchers, practitioners, learners, funders, policy makers, and others – have presented evidence and arguments in support of AFE that:

- empowers learners to improve their own lives and the lives of their communities by constructively dealing with obstacles and opportunities they face in personally-relevant life roles (e.g., work, family, civic, lifelong learning);
- collaborates with other stakeholders to provide high-quality instructional and other supports customized to equip learners with skills and other assets they need.

Highlighted below are a sampling of those voices, organized around three themes:

- Theme 1: Contents and Purposes of AFE
- Theme 2: Strategies for Organizing AFE Programs
- Theme 3: Strategies for Supporting AFE Programs

Theme 1: Contents and Purposes of AFE

1. a. AFE should focus on skills that the diverse populations of adult learners need in personally-relevant life roles.

- The Adult Performance Level Study (University of Texas at Austin, 1977) said that AFE should focus on teaching contextualized basic skills relevant to real-world uses of literacy rather than "skills out of context." Such uses included literacy tasks related to work, health, financial, and consumer roles.

- David Harman (May 1985, p.9) stated:

  If literacy programs are to take root among those most in need of assistance, attention will have to be paid first to their overall environments and conditions of life. Social policy cannot be segmented; most people do not believe that increasing their reading abilities will help solve other issues as an independent variable. Literacy, then, can be introduced effectively as one component in a broader, more encompassing social action program that succeeds, among its other tasks, in inculcating a literacy consciousness into environments where it is currently lacking. If literacy requirements do not become embedded in contexts and environments as though they are expected, desired, and rewarded competencies, it is unlikely that future attempts to teach reading and writing will fare any better than they have in the past.

- SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991, p. vi) identified the "foundation" skills that U.S. workers need for emerging workplaces. These skills included basic language and math skills, thinking skills (e.g., thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, knowing how to learn), and several personal qualities (e.g., responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity/honesty). SCANS, along with the above Adult Performance Level Study, the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future skill standards (Stein, 2000), and other research and development initiatives pushed the AFE field to go beyond defining "literacy" as only a few traditional, and often decontextualized, "basic skills" like reading, writing, and/or math and toward a more comprehensive view of what adults need to succeed in the economy and larger society.

- The National Commission on Adult Literacy (NCAL) (June 2008) advocated for a major re-working of U.S. adult basic skills education. Though particularly concerned about the work-readiness of U.S. workers, NCAL also argued that AFE should

serve parents of young children, the burgeoning U.S. prison population, and the growing population of immigrants.

- The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network (ALL IN) (Cacicio, Cote, & Bigger, June 2023) proposed an AFE system that (a) better equips learners to use the "many literacies" they need to manage health, financial, and other opportunities and challenges they face in life and (b) is supported by partnerships with stakeholders who share an interest in corresponding social functions such as public health, poverty reduction, criminal justice reform, immigrant integration, and economic development.

- The Migration Policy Institute (Hofstetter & McHugh, October 2023) emphasized that immigrant adults have different types of learning and other needs that need to be responded to by AFE services. These needs include (a) lower levels of education in their home countries, (b) low-wage jobs (which tend not to offer training opportunities), (c) lack of legal status, and (d) unfamiliarity with U.S. society, culture, and institutions. These challenges can make participation and success in AFE programs difficult. Inappropriate performance measures and use of curricula and other support services not customized to immigrant needs can also make it difficult for AFE programs to serve immigrant learners. AFE should also recognize that, because immigrant families have disproportionately larger numbers of children, two-generation (family) education services are particularly important for immigrants.

1.b. AFE can be a tool for democracy and social justice.

- Frank Adams and Myles Horton (1975) described how, in the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists in southern states helped basic skills-challenged African-Americans to read the state constitution, a requirement to register to vote. The Citizenship Schools (of the 1950s) and Freedom Schools (of the 1960s) also helped learners develop more-general skills of cooperative problem solving. Black community members served as

instructors and used meaningful vocabulary and literacy activities taken from learners' lives and interests.

- David Harman (May 1985, p.12) stated:

  The continued incidence of illiteracy and functional illiteracy is inimical to the core beliefs and aspirations of a free, democratic, and meritorious society constantly striving to advance the quality of its environment and the lives of its citizens. It is for this reason above all that the goal of universal literacy must be pursued assiduously. It is for this reason that society must undertake a continuous re-evaluation of its educational needs and requirements, constantly updating its definitions of effective literacy. . . (as) new conditions and new realities. . . pose new challenges.

- Francis Kazemek (November 1988) proposed using collaborative learning circles as venues for helping learners to develop basic skills and other strengths:

  They involve a small group of students and (usually) a facilitator who helps to "animate" and focus the group. Meeting together over a common text, issue, or concern, ideas and conversation are generated from within, rather than being passed down from the instructor to the students hierarchically. A learning circle relies on such activities as discussion, writing and sharing journals, writing and reading language-experience texts, reading with the assistance of a partner, modeling by instructor and peers, and group rereading of various texts . . . (p. 481).
  Learning and caring circles in which the teacher and students work collaboratively as co-learners build on the strengths of adults, foster mutual support, empower adults to act collectively on their world, and allow individual teachers to work with many more students (p. 482).

- The AFL-CIO and other labor organizations made the case for a "worker-centered" approach to worker training. Anthony Sarmiento and Susan Schurman (April 1992, p. 9) wrote:

While job-linked training has its place in an overall plan for economic development, it must be worker-centered, reflect an equal partnership between the union and employer, and be situated in a more comprehensive view of the future. . . (But) Exactly how do we achieve our vision of an equitable workplace and society? There are important lessons to be learned by recalling how management practices have changed in the past. How did workers come to enjoy a forty-hour work week, safer working conditions, paid sick leave and vacations, retirement and health insurance? A better understanding of how these workplace improvements were obtained might indicate how training opportunities for workers might be expanded. . . Perhaps we need to become more literate about workplace change as we promote workplace literacy programs.

- Writing for the New England Literacy Resource Center, Andy Nash (1999) stated:

One of the primary purposes, historically, of adult education has been to prepare people for participation in a democracy" through, for example, "English and civics lessons for newcomers who wanted citizenship, or literacy for emancipated slaves who faced literacy requirements quickly erected to keep them from voting.

We believe, however, that to really have a voice in the decisions that affect our lives, we need to go beyond voting to more direct forms of participation, such as community education, advocacy, and organizing. We also need, in a culture that celebrates the individual and the myth of the equal playing field, to recognize our interdependence, and to acknowledge and address our inequalities. Building community, in this way, is one aspect of civic participation (p. ix).

- In an essay for the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, Forrest Chisman (February 2002) wrote:

Any case for adult education and literacy – any rationale for why it matters and why the federal government, the states, and ordinary citizens should care about it – must be based squarely on mainstream American principles and the American experience" (p.1).

Adequate education is essential to the economic prospects, the social standing, the civic participation, the personal safety, and the self-esteem of every person. Central to American democratic values is the equal worth of each and every man and woman. To deprive these Americans adequate education is to diminish their worth – in their own eyes, and in very practical ways, in the eyes of the nation. This would be a grave violation of one of this country's most important founding principles" (p.11).

The need for adult education and literacy challenges us to act on those values – to rise above personal interest, partisanship, or ideology so that every individual in this nation can share in and help shape the American dream" (p. 13).

- Ira Yankwitt (Spring 2020, p.59) of the New York City Literacy Assistance Center wrote:

In the 20 years since the implementation of WIA (the federal Workforce Investment Act), federal funding for adult literacy education has remained largely stagnant, and actually decreased in inflation-adjusted dollars from FY2001-FY2019, despite the fact that the field serves fewer than 5% of those in need. Yet over these two decades, the field has moved away from identifying itself as part of the broader struggle for human rights and social justice. I contend that for those of us working with and in marginalized, exploited, and under-resourced communities, we must align our programs fully and explicitly with the grassroots movements for racial, social, and economic justice that are working to dismantle systemic inequities. . .

. . . this is both a moral imperative and . . . a smart political strategy. . . it is only by aligning ourselves with grassroots movements for justice that we can hope to also

build the movement we need to elevate the importance of adult literacy education, increase funding, and advocate for a system that makes it possible for our students to truly realize their lifelong and life-wide goals.

- In a 2021 White Paper for ProLiteracy, Paul Jurmo (April 2021) described how AFE programs – working with other partners – can help adult learners better understand and respond to challenges and opportunities they face in various areas of their lives. AFE can help learners to mitigate the impacts of social injustices, navigate around those impacts, eliminate unjust policies and social practices, and create alternative ways that support human rights.

- In 2023, Paul Jurmo (March 27, 2023) traced the history of two intertwined concepts in AFE: participatory (aka, learner-centered) education and adult learner leadership development. He identified potential benefits of participatory models and learner leadership activities and proposed actions that stakeholders can take to create more effective, community-oriented AFE systems that have participatory practices and learner leadership as key features. He re-defined learner leadership development not as an "add-on" but as a primary purpose of AFE (i.e., helping learners be better problem-solvers in the various communities – work, family, civic, lifelong learning -- they operate in.)

1.c. AFE can support family development.

Early work in family/intergenerational literacy pointed to the need to integrate adult basic skills education with early childhood education, a specialized and complex endeavor that required a different way of doing adult education (Business Council for Effective Literacy, April 1989.a. and April 1989.b.) Such programs were seen as helping children, parents, and the family as a whole in a number of ways. These include strengthening children's ability to succeed in school and in their adult lives, improving the literacy and other skills adults need as parents and in other roles, strengthening bonds among family members and between families and their communities, among others

(Clymer, Toso, Grinder, & Sauder, January 2017; Peyton, September 7, 2007).

1.d. AFE can support criminal justice reform and public safety.

The importance of integrating AFE into services for incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated individuals has been a recurring theme in the field since the 1980s. Though inmates face multiple challenges (e.g., limited educations, health problems, lack of positive support systems) as do prison-based educators (e.g., institutional barriers, resistance to idea of "helping criminals"), educators have nonetheless built models that help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals develop foundational skills and other assets (e.g., self-efficacy, support systems) they need to avoid reincarceration and move forward positively with their lives (Kerka, 1995; Open Door Collective, December 10, 2018; Patterson, 2022; Spangenberg, February 2004; World Education, August, 2005).

1.e. AFE can support public health.

- Health literacy expert Rima Rudd (February 2002 p. 7) described research indicating that adults with lower literacy skills have higher incidence of health problems and difficulty in understanding and dealing with health challenges. The research also suggested that AFE providers often felt under-equipped to focus on health-related topics in learning activities and healthcare providers were similarly challenged in providing care to basic-skills challenged adults.

  > . . . strategies must be twofold: increase adults' health-related literacy skills and increase health professionals' communication skills. Adult educators can contribute to these efforts. Their skills and experience can help health professionals to better understand better the factors that contribute to reading and oral comprehension. Educators can also help health professionals to improve written materials and, perhaps, verbal presentation of information as well. . . Studies of participatory pedagogy and efficacy-building in classrooms, community programs, and doctors'

offices indicate that learning is enhanced and change is supported through experiential learning opportunities.

Theme 2: Strategies for Organizing AFE Programs

2.a. "Community" can be a venue and goal for AFE.

Many AFE practitioners who worked with particular learner populations in their communities have advocated for a "community-oriented" or "community-based" approach to AFE that they described in these ways:

- The Association for Community Based Education (1983, pp. 11-12) stated: "Literacy for a broader social purpose is a major theme in community-based literacy education . . . it concentrate(s) on the whole learner . . . helping (learners) to develop 'human,' 'economic,' 'social,' and 'political' literacy, as well as the technical ability to encode and decode written language."

- Nina Wallerstein (January 1984, Abstract) proposed "community literacy . . . in which the curriculum is derived from the needs of students and in which students and teachers are actively engaged in the process of learning and community development.". . Because literacy is only one of the many problems adults face, other supportive services should be provided; community sites for satellite centers should be developed; in addition, literacy instruction should be incorporated into existing community programs."

- The Business Council for Effective Literacy (April 1986, p.1) said community-based organizations are ". . . the agents most successful in reaching and teaching those most in need of help. . . (They) bring about a larger change within individuals and the greater community. . . A common thread (is) 'empowerment'. . . to equip individuals (with) more control over their own lives."

- Hanna Arlene Fingeret (1992, p.13) said community-oriented (versus individually-oriented) AFE emphasizes critical reflection and action. Curricula reflect . . . "community residents'

concerns, such as jobs, housing, childcare, transportation, care for the elderly, and crime." In participatory activities . . . "students work as partners with literacy workers to . . . (tailor services) to their needs and . . . backgrounds" while supporting learners to also work with their communities to develop a better quality of life for everyone." "Communities" can include "classroom," "geographical," or "cultural" communities.

- Writing for the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville Juliet Merrifield, Connie White, and Mary Beth Bingman (1994, Abstract) described how AFE can support democratic community development:

  Literacy programs that would build communities not only teach specific basic skills, but also provide opportunities for students to learn teamwork, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making in a democratic environment.

- In a presentation for the the National Alliance of Urban Literacy Coalitions, Margaret Doughty and Raymond Hart (2005, slide 4) said that Community Literacy . . .

  o is the practice of incorporating literacy into all community initiatives to build healthy neighborhoods, strong economies, and successful families.
  o creates a discourse around shared problem solving to promote the vision of 100 percent literacy through 100 percent community engagement.
  o allows people and organizations to do together what they cannot do alone.

- In "Adult Literacy and the Work of Community Building," Erik Jacobson (2022) wrote that the nature of AFE programs is "shaped by the work of the people committed to building them. (Thus) the concept of community has long been central . . . and is deployed in a number of different ways" (p.11) Programs were "organized around a collaborative decision-making process . . . explicitly intended to give students a role in the

running of the program" (pp. 12-13). Community is also seen in AFE "groups who share certain goals and have similar needs. Once organized, they can advocate on their own behalf" (p.13).

2.b. AFE should use participatory methods to actively involve and empower learners.

- <u>Hanna Arlene Fingeret and Paul Jurmo</u> (1989, Editors' Notes) stated:

    The participatory . . . model shares power among learners and staff; learners have substantial amounts of control, responsibility, and reward vis-à-vis program decision making and operations. . . students' knowledge, skills, and experience are valued and respected and provide the foundation upon which further learning is built. . . adoption of this model is essential if we are to make a substantial impact on (U.S. adult literacy).

- <u>Heide Spruck Wrigley and Gloria Guth</u> (1992, pp. x-xi) recommended:

    o "Meaning-based" instruction;
    o Group work (the most effective strategy for multilevel classrooms);
    o Wise use of computer and video technologies in instruction;
    o Appropriate use of native language literacy;
    o Program-based assessments (superior to standardized tests);
    o Staff equipped with both a philosophy and technical expertise.

- <u>Jaye Jones and Alisa Belzer</u> (December 2021) argued for "culturally responsive" adult education "committed to responding to differences in learners' race, cultures, and communities . . . includes learners in decision making about their learning" (p.1) . . . helps learners deal with racial justice, housing, and food security (p.3).

- The Teaching Skills That Matter (TSTM) in Adult Education project of the U.S. Department of Education[2] was created to "identify, develop, and deploy high-quality, evidence-based materials and training to integrate transferable skills development in the areas of civics education, digital literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, and workforce preparation into adult education and literacy instruction."

    Its *TSTM Toolkit* and Videos describe three effective instructional approaches (e.g., project-based learning, problem-based learning, and integrated and contextualized instruction) that can be used to teach nine "skills that matter" (adaptability and willingness to learn, communication, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, navigating systems, problem solving, processing and analyzing information, respecting differences and diversity, and self-awareness) as they are applied to civics education, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and, workforce preparation.

    A lesson titled "Community Involvement as Social Change" has learners exploring their involvement in their communities and how to "counter intolerance and build cross-cultural understanding," while developing speaking and listening skills needed for clear communication. "Digital literacy" units show how adults can use digital technologies to solve problems and manage information found in various types of media.

2.c. AFE should be integrated with other supports for learners and their communities.

- Workplace literacy initiatives of the later 1980s and early 1990s emphasized collaboration among diverse stakeholders (especially employers, labor unions, and AFE providers). AFE researchers

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[2] For information about "Teaching Skills That Matter in Adult Education," visit https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/teaching-skills-matter-adult-education

developed both participatory instructional models focusing on skills and knowledge workers needed in diverse workplaces (Jurmo, Spring 2020) and collaborative planning and evaluation strategies that were adopted in a number of U.S. states and in Canada. The research concluded that, while workplace education collaborations can take many forms and produce multiple benefits, they require a number of ingredients (e.g., time, trust, well-executed steps, expertise, material resources, authority to make and act on decisions) if they are to succeed.

o <u>In the period of 2012 to 2016, several projects focused on the question of how AFE could better collaborate with workforce development agencies.</u> The resulting reports and guidebooks pointed to factors that contribute to effective partnerships, such as prior collaborations between potential partners, willingness to expand partners and activities, perceived benefits of collaboration, and strong professional communities (Alamprese, 2016). Those creating, implementing, strengthening, and sustaining effective partnerships need to use effective processes for partnership development, methodical planning and analyzing new systems, creating effective policies, providing technical assistance for those doing this work, and dealing with challenges that arise (Alamprese & Limardo, November 2012).

- <u>ProLiteracy's Kevin Morgan, Peter Waite, and Michele Diecuch</u> (2017) pointed to research (Reder, 2012) that showed the positive impacts of AFE on learners' literacy proficiency, income, attainment of high school equivalency credentials, and success in higher education. It concluded that "to reach more students and better serve them:

  > . . . adult literacy programs need additional funding to expand capacity and build partnerships with other social service agencies and with constituents who are impacted by low literacy skills, including homeless shelters, domestic violence centers, anti-poverty programs, addiction rehabilitation programs, food banks and nutrition programs, housing projects, faith-based organizations, and corrections re-entry programs. These and other organizations can be important

allies in efforts to share the importance of greater investments in ABS programs and the resulting return on investment for local communities (p. 12).

- From 2018 to 2020, <u>Research Allies for Lifelong Learning</u> conducted a series of studies in collaboration with the national adult learner organization, VALUEUSA. The resulting reports documented factors that blocked potential adult learners from participating in and completing AFE programs. The reports also pointed to the need for various kinds of support systems (e.g., social services, learners' families, friends, and community institutions) that adult learners could rely on to enroll, persist, and succeed in AFE (Patterson, March 2016; Patterson, September 2016; Patterson, December 2016; Patterson, February 2017; Patterson, June 2018; Patterson, Rasor, & Hunt, August 2020; Patterson & Song, May 2018a; Paulson & Patterson, January 2017).

- In 2021, <u>an 18-member Re-Imagined Adult Education System Working Group of the Open Door Collective</u> drafted a vision for a new kind of AFE system for the U.S. It recommended recognizing the connections between AFE and other social issues (e.g., poverty, homelessness, poor health, employment) and strengthening collaborative, integrated services in "dramatically new and innovative ways." Other service providers should also be helped to understand how they can better serve basic skills challenged adults (Rosen, October 5, 2021).

2.d. AFE should be thought of and organized as a "system" rather than a collection of uncoordinated "programs."

Multiple sources recommended that AFE move to a well-organized, adequately-supported, and comprehensive support system for learners rather than a single "adult literacy program" model or collection of uncoordinated resources:

- <u>Forrest Chisman </u>(January 1989, p. iv) stated that the U.S. "must adopt a new outlook toward adult literacy . . . and we must form

a better understanding of how to approach this complex field. In particular, we must understand that:

- o "Valuable as it is, school reform will not solve the problem of adult literacy – the 20-30 million adults with inadequate basic skills are already out of school;
- o "Volunteers alone cannot solve the problem, nor are they a 'cheap way out' . . . whjle supporting them we must also enlarge and enhance our professional teaching corps;
- o Business, labor, and the public sector working together in partnerships can accomplish a great deal;
- o Technology is not a dehumanizing factor nor is it a substitute for teachers – it is an essential ingredient in any adequate nationwide literacy effort;
- o There is no single ideal service delivery system for literacy – the national effort is and must be pluralistic.

- From 1994 to 2006, <u>the National Institute for Literacy, in its Equipped for the Future (EFF) adult basic education system reform initiative</u>, laid the groundwork for a new national AFE system that used research-informed practices to help learners participate effectively in personally-relevant work, family, and civic roles. EFF identified relevant research that supported this perspective; identified 16 basic skills adults need; created guidelines for and models of curricula and assessments; trained a cadre of resource persons; and showed how policy makers and funders could support using EFF at national, state, and local levels (Chisman & Spangenberg, October 8, 2009; Stein, 2000).

2.e. AFE should collaborate with other stakeholders who share an interest in empowering adult learners.

Beyond describing what should be done at the level of individual AFE programs, some advocates stressed the need for networks of AFE practitioners and other stakeholders who could share expertise and advocate for a community-oriented approach.

- <u>Carman St. John Hunter and David Harman</u> (1985 pp. xix-xxi) called for:

- o developing and funding "a network of community-based educators" who teach "reading, language skills, social analysis, and programs of general and specific information" contextualized to local community needs;
- o using "democratic processes" to strengthen "linkages between . . . local initiatives and larger political movements;"
- o "enact(ing) legislation that both affirms the legitimacy of these movements and provides fiscal support for making democratic educational renewal a national priority."

- Nina Wallerstein and Elsa Auerbach (2004, p. 6) stated:

  We also believe that education alone is not the solution to the problems our students face in their work, their lives, or in society. We believe that education is only one piece of a larger process of social change, and the closer we can align our education to historical and current social movements, labor or environmental organizing, or community change processes, the more likely that people will have the support to participate in change.

- Jen Vanek, Heide Spruck Wrigley, Erik Jacobson, and Janet Isserlis (Spring 2020) argued for new and stronger collaborations to better serve immigrant and refugee adult learners:

  - o New types and levels of collaboration are required to push back against anti-immigrant and anti-refugee discourse and to ensure that immigrants receive the resources they need to support learning and integration into communities and workplaces. Collaboration aimed at sustaining well-coordinated programming, support services and advocacy can create a powerful synergy, amplifying the reach of all organizations involved (Kallenbach et al, 2013) (pp. 41-42).
  - o The authors recommend that policy makers focus on supporting cross-sector partnerships which have greater ability to help learners succeed than funding and

evaluating education programs and other services (e.g., public health and social services) as separate, siloed entities. They also propose (1) AFE programs use contextualized curricula relevant to particular learner goals and needs and (2) learners have more easy (open) access to learning opportunities. The article concludes with "a call for unified advocacy" (p. 46).

- o The article says that adult educators, advocacy groups, resettlement agencies, social services and immigrant-serving community-based organizations need to work together to assure equitable access to programs offering relevant language instruction and fair distribution of federal and state education funds for refugees and immigrants. Such collaboration can help us find common ground and meet a common goal: linguistic, economic, civic and social integration that benefits newcomers while at the same time strengthening communities (p. 46).

- Kimmell Proctor and Dawn Hannah (2023, p. 42) described a collaborative goal-setting and planning process that two AFE organizations in Philadelphia (the Center for Literacy and the Community Learning Center) went through when they merged in 2020. "The charge to our newly merged organization was threefold: to integrate the two organizations as seamlesslv as possible, to establish high performance expectations across the organization, and to position the organization for growth and long-term sustainability – all while navigating the lockdowns and health consequences of COVID-19." The new leadership team hoped to "move the new organization as quickly as possible into a strategic planning process that would center equity and leverage the shared resources of the merged organizations."

Theme 3: Strategies for Supporting AFE Programs

3.a. Current AFE policies no longer support the community-oriented approach developed in earlier decades.

- John Gordon and Dianne Ramdeholl (2010, pp. 27-28) stated that, despite the promising results of community-based AFE programs in the 1980s and 1990s, shifting policies and funding were making it difficult for such programs to operate and survive:

  > . . . in New York City and elsewhere . . . federal and state adult literacy policies have focused increasingly on reductionist outcomes that deny local knowledge and experience. The National Reporting System for adult education defines student success primarily by standardized test scores and job placement (Sparks and Peterson, 2000). Increasingly, conversations among practitioners about teaching have been reduced to how best to meet these demands. In this landscape there is no space to honor the complex realities (that students bring with them). Nowhere is there room to grapple with questions such as: As practitioners, how can we utilize students' voices to inform and shape our practice? How do we structure a learning environment to address students' lived realities?

  The authors quoted "one of the primary architects of adult literacy policy in New York City" about "changes in policy within the last two decades:"

  > It felt like there was more space for progressive dialogue in the '80s. When we developed literacy funding proposals, they were rooted in progressive philosophies. In the 1980s the struggles were about building capacity that was high quality. We looked at all the key elements, not just federal accountability measures. We asked, "Do we have the voices of learners? Are we collaborating in ways that make the best use of resources? Can we strategically expand the resources available in equitable ways?"

We were constantly asking people, "What do you think?" That's much less the case now. Before, funders and practitioners would talk about how we could make learning relevant to students' lives. How can that learning be transformational? How does it impact the community in ways that create more equity? Now that has changed. Data collection has come more to be seen as an accountability measure as opposed to informing policy and developing quality practices. The students' voice at the table and active participation have been totally lost or marginalized. Welfare reform also shifted things enormously. Literacy programs were forced to shift their focus from education to employment. Popular education, as practiced by the Open Book (a community-based program in New York City), without sufficient funding, will be marginalized forever.

3.b. AFE policies and funding need to support multipurpose services responsive to a wider range of learner interests, needs, and realities.

- For the Migration Policy Institute, Margie McHugh and Catrina Doxsee (October 2018, pp. 1-2) wrote:

    While federal adult education provisions formerly allowed a more balanced approach to teaching English and meeting learners' needs in their roles as parents, workers, and citizens, WIOA (the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act passed in 2014) instituted mandatory performance measures that focus mainly on employment outcomes and the attainment of postsecondary credentials, placing no value on other essential integration skills or topics . . .
    Without adult education programing that is not bound to employment-focused outcome measures, it is extremely difficult to meet the needs of immigrants and refugees seeking to integrate into the social fabric of their communities, support their children's educational success, and ultimately become naturalized citizens.

- Stephen Reder (Spring 2020) argued for "A Lifelong and Life-Wide Framework for Adult Literacy Education":

  It would move AFE away from primarily (a) helping "adult students increase their standardized test scores, obtain high school equivalency, find training or postsecondary education" and (b) focusing on "the needs of employers and workforce development stakeholders rather than the needs of the adult students" (pp. 48-49).

  While recognizing that work-related outcomes are important for many adult learners, a more comprehensive AFE approach would also serve the "many other adults needing stronger basic skills (who) have other learning goals and motivations" (p. 49). These include the "millions of adults (who) are not in the workforce due to age, disabilities, poor health, family care responsibilities, etc." as well as others who "wish to improve their basic skills for other reasons entirely such as assisting their children with schoolwork, understanding and addressing their own health issues or those of family members, or participating in civic affairs such as voting or understanding political issues." (p. 51).

  "Authentic literacy instruction, structured around the literacy activities and purposes in individual adults' lives, is associated with increased engagement in literacy practices after students leave the program. (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002). Besides helping adults to apply their basic skills in activities to meet their personal goals, there may be important side effects of their increased literacy engagement. Recent research indicates that broad social outcomes such as social trust, general health, political efficacy and volunteerism – to name but a few – are positively associated with basic skills including literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2013)" (p.51).

  "By designing and evaluating programs in terms of the longer- term outcomes they produce, it becomes easier to assess the actual impact that programs have, which in turn could make a more compelling case for funding. By using

longer-term outcomes as criterion measures in program improvement processes, it should become easier to identify more promising program designs and implementations, thereby strengthening programs over time "(p.51).

"We should position this reform as adding to rather than replacing existing WIOA programs. With their narrow and short-term focus on employment, WIOA programs are part of a workforce development system that helps meet the needs of many adults in the workforce and their employers. This serves an important function in our economy and society. We nevertheless need public funding for other kinds of adult basic skills programs organized in a lifelong and life-wide framework" (p.52).

- Judy Mortrude (Spring 2020) agreed with Stephen Reder's arguments above. She then added:

    "It is time for our field to seriously revisit how we demonstrate skill gain" (p. 55).

    "It isn't healthy to have all your performance measures dictated by one fund. We need other measurements supported by other funds" (p. 56)

    Programs might, for example, be funded to help learners work in teams to solve "tangible community problems" such as "Latinx injuries and deaths on construction sites; aging community members in need of home care; historic, systemic trauma impacting individuals and community systems" (p. 57).

    Such a "reframing of adult education's impact" could be woven into emerging federal funding (e.g., Digital Equity Act, SKILLS Act for working learners, and the New Deal for New Americans bill to support positive immigrant integration) (p. 57).

    "Finally, our solutions need to be driven by our community needs . . . Working with the people in our classrooms and communities, we can and must develop new practices,

measures, partners, and funding opportunities to broaden our work and lengthen our impact" (p. 57).

- In a message emailed to its members on April 14, 2023, the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) encouraged members to give input to the U.S. Department of Education about the performance measures used by the federal AFE National Reporting System:

    As you are likely aware, the NRS is an outdated accountability system that does not fully capture all the skills learners gain in programs. COABE believes this comment request presents an opportunity to share its proposal included in the Adult Education WORKS Act to establish an innovative pilot accountability system as an alternative to the NRS. If enacted, this pilot would allow states and programs to test out different approaches to measuring and reporting the skills gained by learners.

PART 3.c.

Voices from Other Fields

In addition to the above-described advocates from the AFE field, others operating in public- and private-sector institutions have also been calling for some of the elements (e.g., stakeholder collaborations, integrated services, systems-thinking, responsiveness to customer needs, high-performance work organizations, evidence-based decision making, community-building, strengths-based development, responding to inequities) reflected in the above messages from AFE advocates. By studying these models from other fields, AFE advocates might find some ideas and partners that they can apply to their own work in AFE.

In rough chronological order, below is a sampling of such thinking from non-AFE stakeholders.

The Learning Organization

In the later 1980s and early 1990s, the "Learning Organization" concept was popularized inside and outside the U.S. by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor, Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1990). Specialists in workplace literacy in the 1980s and 1990s adapted this concept into their work with employers, seeing worker education as a mechanism for helping companies to make ongoing employee learning and professional development key strategies for high performance. Some adult educators adopted this concept to their own organizations, emphasizing collaborative professional development, problem-solving, and continuous improvement. According to Senge, learning organizations are . . .

> . . . organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (p.4).

He continues (p.13):

> When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest. Some spend the rest of their lives looking for ways to recapture that spirit.[3]

Total Quality Management & Reinventing Government

In the 1990s and early 2000s, some government agencies adopted a "reinventing government" approach to making their agencies more in line with "total quality management" (TQM) ideas pioneered in the private sector (Buntin, 2016). The basic idea was that a work organization should focus on helping its customers (both "external" customers out in the marketplace and "internal" customers who are co-workers within the work organization itself) meet their needs. Work systems should be organized in ways that do just that and, through a continuous improvement process, transform the organization to a "high performance" model. "Entrepreneurial public organizations" that adopt this approach, "empower families and communities to solve their own problems. It is simple common sense: families and communities are more committed, more caring, and more creative than professional service bureaucracies. They are also a lot cheaper" (Osborne, January 1993, p. 1).

Integrated Workforce Development

In the mid-1990s, workforce development efforts were encouraged to take an "integrated" approach in which – rather than working in

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[3] For more about Peter Senge, visit https://www.siue.edu/~mthomec/LearnOrg-Senge.pdf .

isolation from each other – diverse agencies (employment centers, job training programs, AFE providers, and others)) would collaborate in various ways. These integrated workforce systems would better serve clients by developing community workforce development plans, making services more easily accessible, using common data management systems, focusing education more directly on work-related skills that clients need for available jobs, and cross-training staff of partner agencies to improve understanding and communication and share effective practices. Such collaborations would also help agencies operate more efficiently (Grubb, 1999).

Collective Impact

In recent years, the term "Collective Impact" has become popular in AFE and other human service fields. As defined by Wikipedia:[4]

> The concept of collective impact hinges on the idea that in order for organizations to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large scale, they need to coordinate their efforts and work together around a clearly defined goal. The approach of collective impact is placed in contrast to "isolated impact," where organizations primarily work alone to solve social problems . . . Collective impact is based on organizations forming cross-sector coalitions to make meaningful and sustainable progress on social issues.

Community Building as a Public Health Strategy

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023) says that the mental and physical health of many U.S. adults is threatened by loneliness and isolation. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19, but is part of a longer-term trend that predates COVID-19 lockdowns and continues

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[4] See how Wikipedia defines "collective impact" at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_impact .

now after those lockdowns have ceased. Other contributing factors include an aging population, reduced participation in traditional community institutions, declining trust ("a fraying of the social fabric"), marginalization of particular populations, an increase in single-person households, increased reliance on social media and remote work that displace face-to-face interaction, and even the physical layout of communities (e.g., in which residents move about in cars rather by walking or public transportation). The report calls for a national recognition of how this loneliness impacts the health and general well-being of individuals, families, and communities and recommends actions such as creating a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection, with six pillars: (1) strengthening communities' social infrastructures, (2) enacting pro-connection public policies, (3) mobilizing the health sector, (4) reforming digital environments, (5) deepening our knowledge, and (6) building a culture of connection.

Renewing Civic Participation & Democracy in the U.S.

Social scientist Robert Putnam has for years studied and written about the decline in Americans' participation in civic institutions. He is the author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Putnam, 2000), which touches on many of the themes covered in the above-described "loneliness and isolation" report of the U.S. Surgeon General. A recently-released documentary titled *Join or Die* describes America's civic unraveling as tracked by Robert Putnam. The film analyzes America's decades-long decline in community connections and offers examples and hope for a renewal of civic life and potential answers to our democracy's present crisis. Watch the *Join or Die* trailer here: https://vimeo.com/737884603

Poverty's Impact on Communities & How Communities Can Abolish It

In *Poverty, by America*, sociologist Matthew Desmond (2023) makes the case for a national effort to abolish poverty. He argues that poverty is in many ways the result of conscious decisions made by policy makers and everyday citizens. Poverty not only impacts individuals but the larger communities in which all of us live. It can be eliminated by a larger collective effort. This view might be of special

relevance to adult educators, as he points to the inefficiencies of well-intended and potentially useful anti-poverty programs, some of which are due to the hard-to-navigate – and sometimes expensive -- paperwork and other requirements that can be especially difficult for individuals with basic skills limitations. (For an interview with Matthew Desmond, visit https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/21/podcasts/ezra-klein-podcast-transcript-matthew-desmond.html and see the NY Times review at https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/13/books/review/poverty-by-america-matthew-desmond.html).

Integrated Approaches to Basic Education in International Development

The following three international agencies support basic education as a tool for integrated community development:

- **The U.S. Agency for International Development** (2018) calls for a "holistic approach to improving education around the world" (p. 10). U.S. government agencies would work together to optimize the strengths of each agency, maximize efficiencies, and achieve maximum impact. These cross-agency efforts would be guided by an Agency Advisory Group and an Interagency Basic Education Working Group. Other non-governmental partners would work with governmental agencies to carry out local level projects. Basic education would be a key component of other initiatives related to health, economic development, environmental protection, democracy, and peace and security. Local-level "Communities of Learning" would engage stakeholders, with education centers as resource hubs for relevant community services (p. 20).

- **The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning** (2022) recognizes the connection of AFE (which UNESCO calls "ALE" or "adult learning and education") to other social and economic issues. It calls for greater involvement of diverse stakeholders in coordinated basic education efforts. The Institute describes how "citizenship education" can be an important component of such efforts:

Today, humanity is faced by threats and challenges no less urgent than those of 1945. Protecting the planet and ensuring peace constitute key priorities for the international community. After two years marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and . . . immense disruption. . . humanity has proven yet again its resilience and ability to adapt and collaborate in response to a short-term threat. However, the pandemic has also exposed many . . . fault lines in our societies, among them a deficit of trust in political processes, the fragmenting and polarizing potential of information technology, the persistence of "us versus them" narratives, "failures to pursue the ideals of solidarity and multilateralism, and growing inequality within and between countries" (p. 15).

Rather than merely reacting or adapting to work-related, technological or environmental change, however, ALE must be reconceptualized to empower adults to be active citizens contributing towards shaping their own future and that of the planet . . . Indeed, the development and application of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of citizenship are themselves lifelong and life-wide processes. This entails understanding civic principles and institutions, knowing how to engage in civil society, exercising critical thinking, and developing an appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. . . the key characteristic of learners will not be their age but their willingness to bring about personal and social change. (Citizenship education can) yield benefits . . . such as increased self-esteem, empowerment, and openness to change and the resumption of learning. Citizenship education also plays a vital role in promoting tolerance, respecting diversity and preventing conflicts. . . (It) enables individuals to care about each other, embrace alternative perspectives and experiences, and engage in responsible practices with regard to the environment and shared natural resources (p.17).

- **Peace Corps** has, in its 60+ years, pioneered many of the ideas proposed by USAID and UNESCO above. Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have worked in diverse projects related to health, food production, construction, technology, small business, and other areas. Rather than "do the work themselves" (of, say, running a village childcare center or developing a small business), PVCs are to help build the capacities of host-country counterparts to plan and manage community-relevant projects. Many PCVs serve as basic skills (e.g., English, math) instructors in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools while also carrying out secondary projects with their communities. PCVs working in education projects are typically trained to use participatory, student-centered instructional methods and work with communities to develop and carry out community action plans. The Volunteers organize their work within project frameworks structured around goals that emphasize building the capacities of local communities to deal with immediate and longer-term needs (Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support, May 2015).

These examples from USAID, UNESCO, and Peace Corps show how basic education can build the problem-solving capacities of learners and their communities. These models are in line with many of the elements of community-oriented AFE proposed in this resource book series.

Communities as Venues for Social Well-Being & Environmental Sustainability

The mission of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) is "to help communities around the world address environmental, economic and social challenges to build a better future shaped and shared by all:"

> Throughout the world, people want the same things: access to clean air and water, economic opportunities, a safe and healthy place to raise their kids, shelter, lifelong learning, a sense of community, and the ability to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. . . We have concluded that **climate change,**

income inequality, and social injustice are the biggest threats to building strong, sustainable communities. . . hence these challenges define our current priorities.

ISC described its approach to "education for sustainability" on August 25, 2007[5] as follows:

> At ISC, we believe that true cultural change begins and ends at the grassroots level, and so we focus on helping ordinary people transform their communities. To build the next generation of leaders, we train teachers and help them develop curriculum that promotes informed and involved citizenship, creative problem solving, and cooperative action aimed at balancing today's needs with future consequences. This is called education for sustainability.
>
> Through education for sustainability, ISC and our longtime partner, Shelburne Farms, make learning action-oriented and relevant to everyday life and local and global issues. Rather than relying solely on teachers to provide learning experiences, our projects bring community knowledge and expertise into the formal education process.
>
> Above all, we see education for sustainability as a critical element in solving some of the world's most pressing problems—ones that require action and commitment at the individual and family level to create the groundswell that results in real change. Climate change, environmental degradation, social justice, and a peaceful world all depend on the action of the individual.

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[5] Taken from https://web.archive.org/web/20101214221426/http://www.iscvt.org/what_we_do/education_for_sustainability/ on October 8, 2023.

ISC's "Elements of a Sustainable Community" is organized in four categories: Leadership, Civic Engagement and Responsibility, Economic Security, Ecological Integrity, and Social Well-Being.[6]

Community of Practice for Professional & Organizational Development

Professionals in education and other fields have used "communities of practice" to facilitate collaboration and communication among individuals who have similar interests. Here is one definition of "community of practice" (COP):[7]

- . . . a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals.
- Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice. Interaction on an ongoing basis is an important part of this.
- Many communities of practice rely on face-to-face meetings as well as web-based collaborative environments to communicate, connect and conduct community activities.

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[6] Learn more about the Institute for Sustainable Communities at (https://sustain.org/about/what-is-a-sustainable-community/#:~:text=A%20sustainable%20community%20manages%20its,are%20available%20for%20future%20generations)

[7] Learn more about "communities of practice" at https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice/ Also see: https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/ .

This concept is being used within the U.S. AFE field and might be used to describe the discussion groups of the U.S. Department of Education's Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS), the Adult Numeracy Network, and the AAACE-NLA discussion group.

Strengths-Based Community Development

"Strengths-based" (or "assets-based") is a concept that has been adopted by a range of human development professions:

- Community development advocates in Australia and other countries have developed a "strengths-based" (aka, "assets-based") community-driven approach to social change and working with families and communities. It builds on positive strengths/assets and goals of stakeholders and avoids a "deficit" approach that focuses on filling gaps, removing weaknesses, and remediation.
- A strengths-based approach (SBA) is seen as "an emerging approach in development practice to operationalize participatory development principles" (Willetts, Asker, Carrard & Winterford, 2014).
- The University of Kansas School of Social Welfare states: "The Strengths Perspective is an approach to social work that puts the strengths and resources of people, communities, and their environments, rather than their problems and pathologies, at the center of the helping process. It was created as a corrective and transformative challenge to predominant practices and policies that reduce people and their potential to deficits, pathologies, problems, and dysfunctions." [8]

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[8] For more about the Strengths Perspective used at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, visit https://socwel.ku.edu/principles-strengths-perspective

- "Community capacity building" is described as follows by UK-based Skills for Care:[9]

> Community capacity building is about supporting and strengthening the skills and abilities of people and groups to develop their communities. The aim of community capacity building is participation and empowerment. A community does not have to be geographical – it can be a community "by interest" . . . this approach . . . enriches the community and supports people to develop their skills and confidence and be an active participant in their community, rather than just a recipient.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

DEI is a concept developed to promote fair (equitable) distribution of power, responsibility, and reward within workplace cultures. Within U.S. AFE, it relates in part to the diversity of AFE's workforce, which has historically been led primarily by white people. DEI can be seen as not only a way to provide fair opportunities to individuals and groups who historically have not had them but as a strategy for enabling organizations to make use of the strengths (e.g., knowledge, skills, networks, and other resources) that diverse groups can contribute. (See the Winter 2020-2021 issue of *COABE Journal* at https://coabe-connects.myshopify.com/collections/racial-integration-immigrant-integration .)

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[9] Learn about Skills for Care's "community asset building" approach at https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Workforce-commissioning-planning/Community-asset-and-strengths-based-approaches-a-guide-to-terminology.pdf

Book 3 Wrap-Up

Those wishing to strengthen and expand AFE services/supports in the U.S. should have a principled vision to guide this important but challenging work. To develop such a vision, they should learn from and adapt past and current good thinking and work in AFE and other fields, to maximize efficiency and avoid too-familiar reinventing of the wheel and use of ineffective practices.

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A P P E N D I X

Glossary

Adult Foundational Education (AFE)

This term was introduced by the Open Door Collective (ODC) in 2022, to provide a name that more fully captured the diverse types of services provided in adult literacy/basic skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages, high school equivalency ("GED"), and other related programs (e.g., workplace/workforce basic skills, citizenship preparation, health and family literacy programs). For more about how the ODC defined this term, visit https://nationalcoalitionforliteracy.org/2022/05/adult-foundational-education/ and https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BTroPf5NCwcQIy_drWO5pzd44GE2fbmWNp71VyrqZCc/edit

Because I have long agreed that our multi-dimensional field needs a more comprehensive and accurate way of describing itself, I have adopted this term "adult foundational education" ("AFE ") and use it throughout this resource book series, adding my own interpretations of the term. (See a more detailed description of "AFE in the U.S." in Part 2.a.)

I also recognize that others in the field might not want to use this term and use other terms like "adult literacy education," "adult basic education," "English for Speakers of Other languages education," "high school equivalency education," or simply "adult education." I hope that this discussion of "What do we call ourselves?" is not a source of confusion, distraction, and division. I hope that this discussion instead helps us better understand the learners and communities we serve, what we can do to better serve them, and how talk about our field internally and externally.

In Part 2.a. of this series, I present my own interpretation of this term, based on my years of study and work in AFE and related fields. Though it does not use the exact wording used by ODC, I believe that how I describe AFE is in keeping with the general sense and spirit of ODC's definition. ODC itself has also encouraged the field to help to further develop this term.

In a nutshell, I'm saying that *adult foundational education (AFE)* refers to the diverse types of instructional and other services that help U.S. adults and out-of-school youth to (a) strengthen their "foundational skills" (e.g., oral and written language, numeracy, digital literacy, problem-solving, collaboration, and others); (b) build social-emotional strengths; (c) develop content knowledge; and (c) develop credentials, personal plans, support systems, and other tools they need to perform work, family, civic, and academic roles. AFE services are based in multiple institutions and communities, serve diverse populations of adults and out-of-school youth, and often involve other stakeholder partners.

Community-oriented adult foundational education

This is an approach that focuses AFE services on helping learners participate effectively in the various *communities* (social contexts) they operate in. *Communities* are not limited to geographic neighborhoods but can include settings like workplaces, families, healthcare facilities, prisons, clubs, religious institutions, social services, and other social contexts where learners use foundational skills to communicate and solve problems with others. The term *community-oriented* is borrowed from Hanna Arlene Fingeret (1992)[10] who used it in a 1992 ERIC monograph and from the *community-based* adult literacy movement of the 1980s and 1990s. As used in this document, *community-oriented* AFE programs often work with other stakeholders who provide supports that help learners manage particular life issues they are concerned about. Such an integrated, collaborative, community-oriented approach can, in turn, also help those other stakeholders be better able to work with basic-skills-challenged adults and the AFE programs that serve them. In these ways, *community* is both a venue and resource for, and a product of, adult foundational education.

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[10] Fingeret, H.A. (1992). *Adult literacy education: Current and future directions: An update.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED354391