

A MODEL LITERACY FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT LEARNERS:  
ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF A COMPONENT-SKILLS APPROACH

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the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

A MODEL LITERACY FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT LEARNERS:  
ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF A COMPONENT-SKILLS APPROACH

presented by Johannah D. Lynch-Baugher,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## Dedication Page

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To my husband, Blake, who has willingly supported me along this three-year educational journey we call, pursuing my doctorate degree. Night after night when I was working, writing, or thinking about working and writing, you were self-sufficient and left me uninterrupted to make progress. I love you!

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## **Section One: Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice**

Worldwide, adult illiteracy statistics in the 2015 calendar year are projected to reflect approximately 742,799 adults as reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization for all named Education for All regions, with the exception of North America and Western Europe (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013). Viewed from a cause-effect paradigm, adult illiteracy stagnates every adult learner and ultimately prevents them from understanding their role and rights as a member of the global community, leads them into a life of poverty because of their ineptitude in skill development, and leaves them inactively hopeless to change societal problems because they are unable to self-educate themselves in hopes of bringing about positive change (ProLiteracy, 2014). Outcomes such as these do not exist solely from the global canopy, but permeate the inner layers of society to include specific nations, states, and even regions.

In the United States alone, approximately 36 million American adults are functioning at a literacy level equivalent to an average 9-year-old (ProLiteracy, 2014). Yet, the more saddening statistic is that only one-twelfth of the total 36 million can be helped due to the gradual decline of available resources, as well as the funding sources that have previously sustained them (ProLiteracy, 2014). Financial implications relating to this epidemic, named adult illiteracy, are extremely costly in that it significantly impacts unemployment rates, poverty, and even hospitalization frequencies (Calhoun, Scarborough, & Miller, 2013; ProLiteracy, 2014; Roman, 2004; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013).

Similar impact is evident in specific state populations and for the purposes of this study, Missouri, commonly referred to as the Show-Me State, is no different.

Comprising a total state population of 4,321,763, the adult illiteracy rate reflects 7% of the state population which accounts for approximately 302,523 adults (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In response, the state of Missouri has too joined the fight to reverse the pattern of adult illiteracy by supporting the work of one regional, non-profit organization whose focus is on adult literacy education, named *Mission Liberation* (pseudonym).

Of the 36 million American adults, approximately 225,000 adults residing within the service region of Mission Liberation are functioning at the lowest literacy level (Mission Liberation, 2015). In other words, those functioning at the lowest literacy level reflect greater than half of the entire city's population, according to the 2013 population estimate of the United States Census Bureau (2015). Celebrating 30 years of success this calendar year, Mission Liberation has been working to promote "literacy for all" (Mission Liberation, 2015) since its inception and as an affiliate of ProLiteracy America, aims to attain that goal through one adult learner at a time.

Aligning the mission of this bounded (Merriam, 2009) organization with program evaluation, situated within the context of a qualitative case study, has the potential to bring about positive change on a national level. Despite the efforts made by national legislation, policy mandates, and formula-driven funding, adult illiteracy remains a central concern impacting the individual, their immediate family, household finances, and even economic trends of employment and poverty (Roman, 2004). Given this research, a defense is built for the casing of this broader case study and program evaluation to be completed within the Mission Liberation organization.

Researching the life stories (Kazemek, 2004) of Mission Liberation program participants would unveil conditions and experiences that prevented or enhanced their success in literacy. Simultaneously, knowing the life context of each program participant will justify the need for specific instructional components in conjunction with their service delivery. To this end, the holistic aim of this qualitative case study would be to (a) understand each adult learner's background and the precursors for illiteracy (Roman, 2004) as an adult, (b) determine the effectiveness (McDavid, Huse, & Hawthorn, 2013) of the program's instructional framework through a formal program evaluation, and (c) offer recommendations for change based on the outcome measures (Bardach, 2012) of program effectiveness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Independent of the known predictors (Roman, 2004) and present adult education programming options, the United States' adult illiteracy rate persists as an alarming statistic, national concern, and societal problem. Thus, justifying the need for such a case study capable of redesigning adult literacy education in every effort to grow a literate population equipped to reverse the statistic and make societal contributions that will positively transform our nation, and world.

### **Problem of Practice**

Adult illiteracy persists as a problem, in part, because of challenges constituted by limited research, sparse instructional programming evaluations, and even students' fluid persistence rates in adult literacy instruction programs. Sabatini, Shore, Holtzman, and Scarborough (2011) claim that "...little is known about the effectiveness of interventions... which instructional components have the greatest impact on

outcomes...or...what kinds of instruction are more suitable for improving the basic reading skills of adults” (p. 119). Additionally, Sabatini et al. (2011) found that “...50% of the students dropped out of interventions before final post-testing” (p. 121). Coupling the daunting statistic of adult illiteracy in the United States with the absence of a model instructional framework deemed effective for adult learners, a significant problem of practice is constituted.

### **Existing Gap in Literature**

Comparable to the research noted previously, authors Scarborough et al. (2013) claim that “...instruction programs for this population are needed and wanted...[in order to] move a given individual to a state of functional proficiency” (p. 611). Adult learners seek instruction at Mission Liberation for a variety of reasons; “...to hold a job, get a new job, read to their child, or be able to read the Bible” (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015), yet research lags behind in determining the essential, instructional components for adult learners in their pursuit of literacy (Sabatini et al., 2011). Additionally, interpreting indicators for program effectiveness and reasons for students’ attrition in programming are adjacent gaps in the professional literature (Sabatini et al., 2011; Scarborough et al., 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is three-fold: (a) to understand the pathway of illiteracy (Roman, 2004), (b) to evaluate the effectiveness of programming options available to adult learners (McDavid et al., 2013) and (c) to provide recommendations for continued improvement (Bardach, 2012). This three-fold purpose is best represented as a visual in the shape of a triangle, as in Figure 1, showing the interrelationships between context, instructional design, and indicators of effectiveness.

To better understand the working relationships between these elements, a program evaluation will be completed on Mission Liberation to better evaluate the program's overall level of effectiveness by "...understanding whether, and to what extent, the program's actual results are consistent with the outcomes we expected" (McDavid et al., 2013, p. 17).

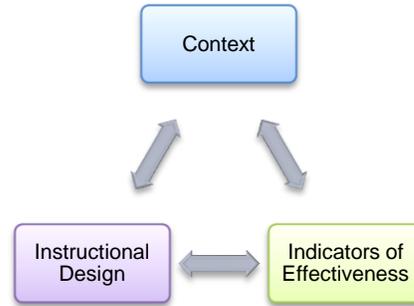
### **Elements of Program Effectiveness**

Because adult learners are both "...situation-motivated and experience-centered" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 46), the context appropriate for maximum learning to occur must be free of any "...barriers to learning and [efforts should be made] to reward behaviors that facilitate learning" (Gill, 2010, p. 27). Similarly, instructional design should be tailored to fulfill the aim of adult education, as described in the quotation below by Mezirow (2000).

The goal of adult education itself is to help adults realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous learners...to make more informed choices by becoming more critically reflective in their engagement in a given social context. (as cited in Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 95)

When instructional design and its delivery in the learning context join together, meaningful instruction is the likely outcome. Meaningful instruction facilitates positive student growth and there, indicators of effectiveness can be further examined as "...observed outcomes" (McDavid et al., 2013, p. 17).

**Figure 1.** Interrelationships of Program Effectiveness Elements



*Figure 1.* Triangulated relationships between context, instructional design, and indicators of effectiveness.

### Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study is:

1. What instructional components comprise a model literacy framework for adult learners?

The secondary research questions guiding this study are:

1. How is illiteracy perceived by adult learners?
2. What instructional components are perceived to be most effective by adult learners?
3. Is there a difference in pre/post TABE test scores with Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 sample participants at Mission Liberation?

### Theoretical Frameworks

Casing for this qualitative case study will be validated through two existing theoretical frameworks: *Adult Learning Theory* (Speck, 1996) and *Theory of Andragogy* (Knowles, 1984). Understanding the intricacies of how adult learners learn is primary to instructional design, as the needs of the learner will guide instructional planning efforts.

#### Adult Learning Theory

Drawing from the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996), the following

approaches promote learning among adults. In order for maximum learning to occur among adults, Speck (1996) suggested the following building blocks: attainable and relevant aims, self-directed learning activities, authentic opportunities to recall personal experiences, repeat opportunities for practice and open discussion, comfortable atmosphere, respect for diversity, and a supportive environment.

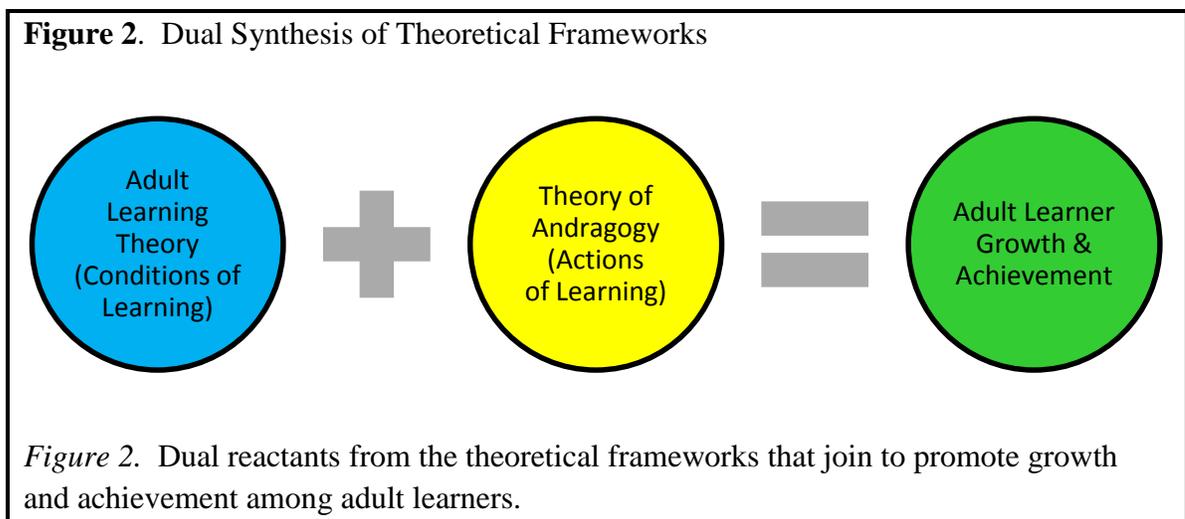
Comparable to setting a SMART goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely, documentation of goals is key for adult learners too (Jacobson, 2011; Layne, 2009; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002). Adult learners need opportunities to engage in self-guided learning activities (Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni, & Deng, 2006). Pairing self-directed activities with adult learners' life experiences foster the arrival of authentic learning opportunities that promote greater student engagement (Padak & Bardine, 2004; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002; Taylor, 2006). Practice opportunities coupled with consistent feedback and open discussion throughout the learning process is integral (Binder, Snyder, Ardoin, & Morris, 2011; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Pillars for learning to occur remain true to a culture built on mutual respect and genuine support for one another (Levi, 2013).

### **Theory of Andragogy**

Compliments of researcher, Malcolm Knowles (1984), the Theory of Andragogy emerged. Simplified, this theory has application to all adult learners and is central to four key principles represented in Figure 3: (a) "adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, (b) adults need to learn experientially, (c) adults approach learning as problem-solving, and (d) adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value" (Culatta, 2013).

## Dual Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks

Merging the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) and the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984) is easily justified. While both theories share in the vision to understand how adults best learn, the building blocks of the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) ground, or frame the principles extracted from the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984). Many of the building blocks pertain to contextual factors as it relates back to the aesthetics of the learning environment, while the andragogical principles more specifically frame the roles that adult learners must assume in order to gain the most from every learning experience of which they are apart. Given this defense, it could be supported that while the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) clearly depicts the learning conditions necessary for adult learners to be successful, the Theory of Andragogy specifies the action required of adult learners, as well as the degree of each action as it relates to the specific learning task. Figure 2 supports this position in a pictorial representation below.



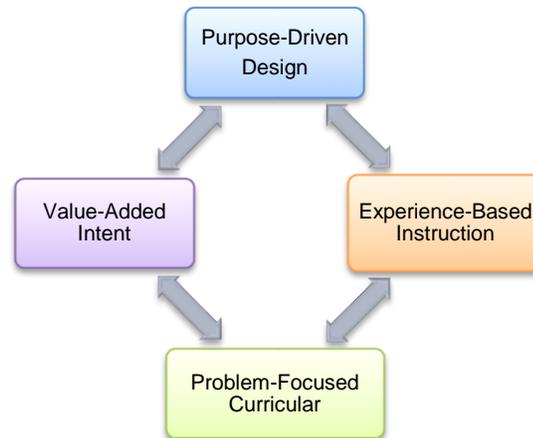
## Underlying Pillars

Designing an instructional framework that upholds the named andragogical

principles constitutes the conceptual underpinnings of this qualitative research study.

Pillars extracted from the Theory of Andragogy include: (a) purpose-driven design, (b) experience-based instruction, (c) problem-focused curricular, and (d) value-added intent (Knowles, 1984) and are noted below in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Interrelationships of Core Andragogical Pillars



*Figure 3.* Interrelationships between purpose-driven design, experience-based instruction, problem-focused curricular, and value-added intent.

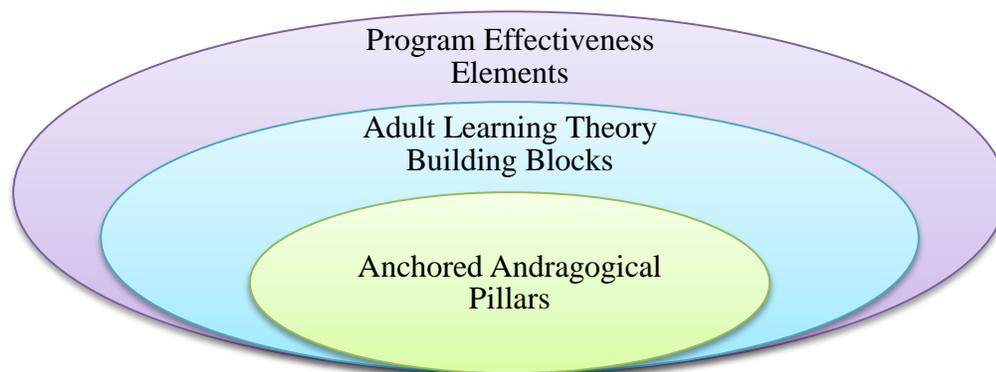
Aligning with the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996), continuous goal-setting is necessary and as research suggests, an achievable goal is one with a clear purpose (Padak & Bardine, 2004; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Enabling adult learners to draw upon their personal, life experiences lends itself to rich, authentic learning opportunities (Houp, 2009). Redirecting attention to problem-focused curricular as opposed to content-specific instruction is more appropriate for adult learners (Padak & Bardine, 2004). Working to help adult learners understand the value of literacy is significant in their involvement as a lifelong reader (Layne, 2009).

### **Contextual Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks**

The named andragogical pillars coupled with the building blocks native to the

Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996), as well as elements of program effectiveness will join together to provide a contextual synthesis for this qualitative case study. As noted below in Figure 4, the andragogical pillars will anchor this study and symbolically, reflect the core of the pictured figure. The building blocks of the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) will support the pillars in the second tier, while simultaneously benefitting from the structural support provided from the elements of program effectiveness. From this representation, it is evident that no tier functions independently, and so, remains reliant upon the support of existing structures (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and the fluid collaboration (Levi, 2013) between all tiers evident within the organization in this middle-up-down management approach (Nonaka, 1994).

**Figure 4.** Contextual Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks



*Figure 4.* Contextual synthesis of theoretical frameworks. Hierarchical interrelationships woven between these principles will ground this qualitative case study.

### **Design of the Study**

Characteristics of design for this qualitative case study will specify parameters for a program evaluation, the study's setting, participant sample, as well as tools for data collection and analysis. Additionally, the study's evaluation approach and selected methodology will be identified.

## **Program Evaluation**

Holistically, this qualitative case study will be completed through a program evaluation. Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) define program evaluation as the “...use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (p. 16). Within this frame, Rossi et al. (2004) identifies five separate domains of program evaluation including: “...the need for a program, the program’s design, its implementation and service delivery, its impact, or outcomes, and its efficiency” (p. 18). For the purposes of this case study, facets of program design, implementation, and impact will be considered for qualitative evaluation.

## **Setting**

Context for this qualitative case study will be housed in Mission Liberation, a non-profit organization which aims “...to advance literacy within the region through direct services, advocacy, and collaboration” (Mission Liberation, 2015). Established in 1985, Mission Liberation offers “...no-cost individualized tutoring services to adults in the greater area” (Mission Liberation, 2015). Guided by a board of 13 members, this organization shares a united vision to attain “literacy for all” (Mission Liberation, 2015). In compliance with Mission Liberation’s aim to break the pattern of adult illiteracy through what has been named the *Impact Initiative*, four separate program options are currently available to adult learners. They include: *Ticket to Read*, *The Family Reading Program*, *Open Doors*, and *Guided Educational Access to Reading Skills (GEARS)*.

## **Participants**

Effective this calendar year, Mission Liberation has completely revamped

programming options in an attempt to “...bring adult education into the 21<sup>st</sup> century...” (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015). As a result, enrollment for participants is now tracked as individual cohorts, fall and spring of each academic year (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015). Based on the 2014 annual report, Mission Liberation reported a total enrollment of 341 participants (Mission Liberation, 2015). In this case study, a representative sample from the larger population will be configured to accurately reflect the demographics, academic achievement, age, etc. of the larger population (Field, 2013). Specifically, the representative sample will reflect the larger Fall 2015 cohort, which is anticipated to begin mid-September and instructional sessions would persist through December (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015). Students in the Spring 2016 cohort will also be sought to participate. Purposeful sampling (Siedman, 2013) will also be utilized to better “...select participants who will facilitate the ability of others...” (p. 55).

### **Data Collection Tools**

Specific to this research case study, multiple collection strategies will be utilized to aid in the triangulation of data (Creswell, 2014). Qualitatively, the following strategies will be employed: repeat, on-site observations (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009), fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), administration of an adult learner survey to representative sample (Field, 2013; Fink, 2013), collection of program-specific artifacts including curriculum guides and instructional plans (Merriam, 2009), individual interviews (Merriam, 2009; Siedman, 2013), and targeted focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

On-site observations, in conjunction with narrated fieldnotes, will be narrowed to only instructional time, assumed to be in a variety of formats including both small group

and individualized tutoring sessions (Creswell, 2014; Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). Observations will be completed in an “...observer as participant” role (Merriam, 2009, p. 124) where “...researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; [yet] participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124).

Participants in the representative sample will be given the opportunity to voluntarily participate in an anonymous survey (See Appendix B). Survey will reflect the characteristic of brevity, as it will not exceed 10 items total. Additionally, survey items will be reviewed by members of an expert panel for a pilot test (Fink, 2013) and necessary revisions will be made, prior to survey’s dissemination. Due to the range of reading levels that will likely be reflected in the representative sample, the survey will be administered orally to eliminate this potential barrier and to also increase survey response rate (Fink, 2013).

Collecting artifacts specific to the program’s history and evolvment, instructional programming design, and elected assessment tools is essential to this qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009). The majority of artifact collection will occur prior to completing the study as a means to better educate the researcher before engaging in both “...narrative analysis [and] critical research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 37).

On-site interviews, as well as targeted focus groups will be two primary methods of data collection for this qualitative inquiry (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Focus groups will consist of no more than eight participants at a time, as topic complexity, study’s intent, and number of questions must be considered (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Semi-structured interviews will be completed individually with sample

participants, with an interview guide being made previously to better facilitate each interview (Merriam, 2009; see Appendix C). With the permission of sample participants, all interviews and focus group conversations will be recorded for transcription purposes (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Quantitatively, archival data in the form of pre/post learner achievement scores following an instructional sequence will be analyzed (Field, 2013) to determine the program's effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013), in addition to each learner's self-assessment that is completed during the initial enrollment process (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015). Self-assessment information includes primarily demographic and educational background information; however, the final portion of this form is specifically related to the individual's goals and reason for enrolling in the Mission Liberation program, as well as proactively identifies any potential barriers that could impede their success in the program. Enrollment form lists several materials that can be read, and participants have the option to indicate what types of resources they are most interested in being able to read upon program completion (P. J., personal communications, April 22, 2015).

Pre-post comparisons will be drawn to measure various indicators of program effectiveness. As described by McDavid et al. (2013), the "...before-after design is the classic experimental design and is often used when evaluators have sufficient resources and control to design and implement a before-after outcome measurement and data collection process" (p. 99). Before-after data points will be collected from the following assessment tools that are currently utilized for learner placement in the Mission Liberation program: *Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)*, *San Diego Quick*

*Assessment of Reading Ability*, and various writing rubrics (P. J., personal communications, April 3, 2015).

### **Data Analysis**

Demographic data of all representative sample (Field, 2013) participants will be pre-existing data points as Mission Liberation will have previously collected this information at the time of the participant's enrollment in the program. Additionally, participants' pre-assessment score(s) will be gathered from the program-entry data. At the end of the instructional program sequence, those same participants will be evaluated on a post-assessment and performance will be compared to their pre-assessment scores. Proportionate to the duration of instruction, learner achievement through the pre/post comparison will be evaluated and recorded as an indicator of program effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013). In the event participants of the representative sample do not persist in the program at the time of the post-assessment, program effectiveness would be counteracted with that indicator. A "...key about [the program] working is...are learners persisting" (P. J., personal communications, February 23, 2015). Observations, structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) and focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009) will be coded and common themes extracted (Merriam, 2009) to further validate the study's findings by triangulating the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

### **Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls**

Known limitations of this qualitative case study are not central to one. Mission Liberation is the only program being considered and it would be a fallacy to assume that comparable programs would achieve similar results, based on the findings specific to this study. Additionally, this program evaluation considers a program specific to the state of Missouri and more specifically, only a region of the state. This research inquiry does not

entertain regional or cross-state comparisons in terms of effectiveness indicators. Aside from instructional programming, all other variables evident in this study will be consistent. Methods for data collection will be consistent in design and implementation.

One key assumption specific to this qualitative case study is in the focus groups and interviews. It will be assumed that participants' responses are honest, authentically reflective of their experiences at Mission Liberation. Because of this assumption, findings will be deemed valid (Merriam, 2009; Siedman, 2013).

Design and implementation of focus groups and interviews will be controlled in this study. Participants will be read the informed consent notice (Creswell, 2014), prior to their voluntary participation in the study. Qualitative findings offered through these data collection tools will be recorded, transcribed and later coded for theme extraction, as described previously (Creswell, 2014). Participants will be asked the same series of questions, with necessary deviations made at the discretion of the interviewer in response to each participant's answers.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Terms specific to this qualitative case study are framed below for clarity purposes. The terms listed reflect central components of the study, but are not a comprehensive list.

- *Instructional program*: “one or more structured learning experiences designed to accomplish a predetermined objective or set of allied objectives, such as preparation for advanced study, qualification for an occupation or range of occupations, or solely to increase knowledge or understanding” (Malitz, 1981, p. 3).

- *Instructional effectiveness*: “the extent to which the observed outcomes of a program are consistent with the intended objectives; also the extent to which the observed outcomes can be attributed to the [quality of instruction associated with the] program” (McDavid et al., 2013, p. 483).
- *Literacy*: “an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential” (National Literacy Act of 1991, p. 1).
- *Adult learner*: “those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adults” (Merriam & Bierema, 2007/2014, p. 11).
- *Learner achievement*: “status of subject-matter knowledge, understandings, and skills at one point in time” (NBPTS Student Learning, Student Achievement Task Force, p. 28).
- *Learning*: “growth in subject-matter knowledge, understandings, and skill over time” (NBPTS Student Learning, Student Achievement Task Force, p. 28).

### **Significance of the Study**

Completing this qualitative case study is necessary in order to make a contribution to research and refine practices for combatting this national issue (Black, 2005; Roman, 2004).

### **Practice**

As time accounts, conversation has been held to redirect the pattern of adult illiteracy, yet strides of actually doing so remain comparably marginalized (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Evaluating the perceptions of adult learners on

illiteracy and instructional programming will work to align best practices in instructional design with the adult education population. Additionally, determining whether a relationship exists between instructional design and program outcome measures is key to fully evaluate a program's level of effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013). Discovery of adult learners' perception of the issue and the instruction will work to frame a model literacy framework. To that end, that is the goal and instead of working to promote literacy for some, it can be achieved for all (Mission Liberation, 2015).

### **Scholarship**

Continuing from literacy promotion and achievement, a final piece would be to educate all stakeholders through readily available literature on the topic of adult illiteracy. Findings from this qualitative case study will be presented as contributions to scholarship to better educate and inform the knowledge base on adult illiteracy. At this point, all stakeholders (Cervero & Wilson, 2006) involved in educating adult learners would have improved access to more research to better inform their instructional programs, as well as improve their level of effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013). Changes within the adult learner reflect not only program change, but global change. To that end, from the scholarship perspective, making it again possible for literacy to be achieved *by* all (Mission Liberation, 2015).

### **Summary**

Implications of adult illiteracy on American society are large. Not only does it remain a statistically-alarming concern influencing functionality on many tiers (ProLiteracy, 2014; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), but it remains, more often than not, a hidden struggle for many American adults absent from society's visual radar. Efforts to highlight contextual

factors predicting illiteracy (Roman, 2004) as an adult coupled with measures of program effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013) will join together to frame a model literacy framework (Scarborough et al., 2013). This model literacy framework would target adult illiteracy at its very core and bring about positive change to not only benefit the individual, but also their family, national economy, and our nation.

Threaded through both the *Adult Learning Theory* (Speck, 1996) and the *Theory of Andragogy* (Knowles, 1984), purpose-driven design, experience-based instruction, problem-focused curricular, and value-added intent will act as the foundational pillars for this qualitative case study. A representative sample (Field, 2013) from Mission Liberation will be configured for qualitative data collection and analysis, involving individual interviews, targeted focus groups, an adult learner survey, and on-site observations (Creswell, 2014; Field, 2013, Fink, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Findings from the study will be used to better combat the pattern of adult illiteracy on regional, state, national, and global scales.

To that end, just as one particle of sand contributes to the creation of a pearl, so too can one adult learner equipped with the gift of literacy change the world. Changing the life of one adult learner could likely change the life for all; indeed, returning to the ultimate goal – literacy for all (Mission Liberation, 2015).

## **Section Two: Practitioner Setting for the Study**

Rooted in the “each one teach one” (Christoph, 2009, p. 99; North Bay Literacy Council, n.d.) philosophy, Mission Liberation adopted its vision for literacy from the work of Dr. Frank Laubach. As history accounts, Dr. Laubach dedicated a large portion of his life to his work as both a missionary and teacher in more than “...100 countries in an effort to bring literacy to the ‘silent billion’” (North Bay Literacy Council, n.d). Laubach (1970) believed that “...the ability to read and write was essential for them to begin to solve their problems” (North Bay Literacy Council, n.d) and in the end, “lift them[selves up] out of [a life of] poverty [and distress] (as cited in Christoph, 2009, p. 86).

Spending better than 40 years of his life to this work, he established Laubach Literacy in 1955. Primary goals for this non-profit organization worked to “...enable illiterate adults and older youth to gain the listening, speaking, reading, writing and math skills they need to solve problems they encounter in daily life; to take full advantage of opportunities in their environment; and to participate fully in the transformation of society” (North Bay Literacy Council, n.d.). Therein, this organization laid the foundation for one program in particular named, Laubach Way to Reading (Ashley, 2005), which framed many other adult literacy programs in their origination, including Mission Liberation.

Just as time elapses, philosophies and mindsets change. Practices in adult literacy education are no different and 2002 marked a pivotal point of change for such programs. “ProLiteracy, claim[ed] to be the largest adult literacy organization in the United States, formed out of a merger between Laubach Literacy International and Literacy Volunteers of America” (Christoph, 2009, p. 83). Separating itself from the missionary mind of

Laubach, one practice remained the same, the implementation of a one-on-one tutoring model (Christoph, 2009). Commonplace to this instructional design is a “...scripted exchange [when] students are introduced to new letters, as well as to words and short stories, reading comprehension questions, and writing exercises that make use of the letters and key words introduced in the lesson” (Christoph, 2009, p. 89).

To date, ProLiteracy has approximately “1,200 affiliate organizations” (Christoph, 2009, p. 91), with Mission Liberation being one of them. Comparable to all organizational affiliates, Mission Liberation too seeks to redesign instructional programming to offer a more “student-centered reading philosophy” (Christoph, 2009, p. 100) that will foster a more “contemporary, individual goal-oriented, technology-infused, cognitive psychology model built on the principles of learner-centered and social learning” (P. J., personal communications, June 8, 2015). Sharing the vision of Dr. Laubach, he encouraged others to “...hunt out the deepest need you can find” (North Bay Literacy Council, n. d.). Like other adult literacy programs, Mission Liberation has engaged in that quest and for three decades, has been working to provide “literacy for all” (Mission Liberation, 2015) throughout their organization’s lifetime.

### **History of Mission Liberation**

Built out of a “passion[ate] dream [and] perceived need” (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 1), Mission Liberation began 30 years ago. That which began in the basement of a congregational church has stood the test of time through financial fluctuations, program enrollment changes, and a current change, instructional programming redesign (Mission Liberation, 2013). Credited for starting Mission Liberation is a leader who exercised the initiative to respond to the need and begin providing literacy tutoring to adults in the area. Her vision led her to organizing several volunteers that were willing to assist as tutors

and sought out resources from the National Laubach Literacy Council to formalize an adult literacy program (Mission Liberation, 2013). Thirty years ago, Mission Liberation likened its title to the Laubach Literacy Council (Mission Liberation, 2013).

Over the period of three decades, Mission Liberation has encountered several benchmarks impactful, both positively and negatively, to their organization's longevity. 1994 marked the onset of one of Mission Liberation's most significant fundraising events, the Corporate Spelling Bee. Corporations would elect representatives to compete in a spelling bee, with all proceeds from the event benefiting Mission Liberation. In 1996, Mission Liberation was granted their first six-figure monetary award; however, 1998 was the final year for the grant and since then, has been discontinued. Also occurring in 1996 was the hiring of two, full-time employees including the Executive Director and the Program Coordinator. Literacy Works program was established in 2000 and continued until 2007, as external factors beyond the organization's control led to its end seven years later. Mission Liberation changed locations in 2006 and the increase of \$4,000 proved to be the catalyst for the organization's financial struggle that ensued for several more years, including the near "demise" (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 2) of the organization in 2008 (Mission Liberation, 2013).

Mission Liberation continued forward in their mission, particularly after the reenergizing funding allocation as a finalist of the Human Foundation grant, in the amount of \$10,000. Strategic planning efforts were heavily underway in 2008 and to that end, led to the funding and commencement of the Open Doors program and the hiring of approximately five new positions. In 2011, the Guided Educational Access to Reading Skills (GEARS) program was established, despite continued financial strain. Executive

Director was hired in 2012, coupled with an additional six, program staff positions (Mission Liberation, 2013). Presently, Mission Liberation provides “...one-on-one tutoring [while using] evidence-based [practices to help] students with all areas of learning to read, including phonics, alphabets, and comprehension” (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 4). Program volunteers are “...certified through a 15-hour training process that combines theory with applicable adult teaching techniques” (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 4). Effective this calendar year, Mission Liberation has “...reevaluated its general program methodology and [is working to incorporate] a classroom plus tutoring approach that builds on student success” (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 4). After analysis of the “phenomenal growth rate [that occurred with students in the] GEARS program...[with this new approach]” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015), “...it is believed that all individuals will improve literacy skills at a rate that surpasses any approach previously used by Mission Liberation” (Mission Liberation, 2013, p. 4). Now, in calendar year 2015, Mission Liberation is still working to achieve their mission of “literacy for all” (Mission Liberation, 2015) that as we now know, all started with one individual’s response to a need (Mission Liberation, 2013).

### **Organizational Analysis**

Like other organizations, Mission Liberation houses a structure that enables the work of the organization to be accomplished. This framework serves as the backbone to the organization and enables it to accomplish tasks through the aid of human resources, symbolism, and political interactions.

### **Structural Frame**

Under the direction of both an advisory board in addition to a 13-member Board

of Directors, organizational stakeholders of Mission Liberation are divided into four separate directional committees including: Board Development, Executive, Fund Development and Finance, and the Program Committee (see Appendix A).

Duties of the Board Development Committee include: “board member recruitment, orientation and training, by-laws, conflict of interest policy, board effectiveness evaluation, and strategic planning” (Mission Liberation, 2014). Members of this committee include: board members, executive director, and volunteers (Mission Liberation, 2014). Duties of the Executive Committee include: “act[ing] in case of emergency when board cannot be convened, review Executive Director performance, and determine E.D. compensation” (Mission Liberation, 2014). Members of this committee include: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Executive Director (ex officio) (Mission Liberation, 2014). Duties of the Fund Development and Finance Committee include: “budget, annual audit, monthly financial statements, financial policy, investment policy, fund development, special events, endowment, capital needs, planned giving, and literacy works” (Mission Liberation, 2014). Members of this committee include: Treasurer, board members, Executive Director, and volunteers (Mission Liberation, 2014). Responsibilities of the Program Committee include: “fund development, special events, endowment, capital needs, planned giving, and literacy works” (Mission Liberation, 2014). Members of this committee include: board members, Executive Director, Development and Marketing Directors, and volunteers (Mission Liberation, 2014).

Hierarchically speaking, Mission Liberation is arranged in a one-boss (Bolman & Deal, 2008) system that is guided by the Executive Director. Immediately under the

Executive Director are 11 positions including: Instructional Specialist, Director of Programs, Fund Development Manager, Director of Information Systems, Support KC Financials and Contract, Administrative Assistant, two representatives from Administrative Support, Communications Support, IT Support, and Project Management Support. Level three from this top-down approach (Bolman & Deal, 2008) includes: the lead GEARS instructor, GEARS Coordinator, Student Coordinator, Communications and Resource Development, Volunteer Coordination, Family Reading Program Coordinator, and Lead Instructor. The fourth tier on Mission Liberation's organizational chart is comprised of two members including: Family Reading Program Instructors and Impact Initiative Instructors (Mission Liberation, 2014).

### **Human Resources**

Mission Liberation houses numerous human resources including: administrative, contracted, and program staff, in addition to the countless volunteers that endlessly support the organization's mission.

Currently, Mission Liberation has "two, full-time instructors and four that are contracted, [which means] not [classified as an] employee and are paid by the term" (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Aside from these instructors and administrative personnel described previously, the remainder of Mission Liberation's staff is comprised of volunteer tutors. Currently, Mission Liberation has "60 active, one-on-one tutoring pairs that meet at any public place twice weekly for 1 hour and 30 minutes", while the remaining student population is receiving instruction within a classroom setting where there is approximately "5-12 students per class" (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015).

Beyond administrative, contracted, program, and volunteer staff members, Mission Liberation partners with other organizations and their stakeholders to broaden their service region through outreach program offerings. Present outreach sites include various community centers and public libraries (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Just as Mission Liberation models this trait from the numerous communication channels presented above, Bolman and Deal (2008) also cite the value of ongoing interaction within the human resource frame. “Individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness depend heavily on the quality of interpersonal relationships” (p. 187).

### **Political Frame**

Networking (Bolman & Deal, 2008) is imperative to Mission Liberation’s longevity as a non-profit organization for not only funding allocations, but continued development and service expansion. Mission Liberation “...rel[ies] heavily on partners” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Recently, “a dinner [reception] was held at a congregational church and all proceeds from the event went to Mission Liberation” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Additionally, Mission Liberation received “a grant...to fund the Open Doors program” and “[a] bank will host the Big Bash to fund the Career Online High School, where students can receive their high school diploma from an accredited body” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). In addition to the partnering organizations named previously in conjunction with human resource frame discussion, Mission Liberation also networks with these organizations including: “AmeriCORPS VISTA, Operation Breakthrough, Connecting for Good, public school districts, Connections to Success, Rainy Day Books, United Way, The Upper Room, Turn the Page, Parks and Recreation, and Reconciliation Services”

(Mission Liberation, 2015). Applying effort to build coalitions is essential to any organization's fruition and to that end, reflects organizational excellence as referenced by Kotter (1985) in the following quotation:

Organizational excellence... demands a sophisticated type of social skill: a leadership skill that can mobilize people and accomplish important objectives despite dozens of obstacles; a skill that can pull people together for meaningful purposes despite the thousands of forces that push us apart; a skill that can keep our corporations and public institutions from descending into a mediocrity characterized by bureaucratic infighting, parochial politics, and vicious power struggles. (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 213)

### **Symbolic Frame**

Just as a ship is held in place by an underwater anchor, so too is true of an organization's culture as it sustains it through both storms and sunshine. Bolman and Deal (2008) explain that “the way we do things around here’ culture anchors an organization's identity and sense of itself” (p. 278). Many practices native to Mission Liberation constitute its organizational culture.

Cultural norms associated with Mission Liberation include a “collaborative” environment united through “shared, common goals” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Mission Liberation serves a diverse population in “...ethnic groups, race, religions, socioeconomic status, [and] non-native English speakers” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015) and “...at the core of teamwork” lies diversity (Levi, 2013, p. 242). Open communication, “...one of the central activities of a team” (Levi, 2013, p. 116), also reflects a cultural norm as “weekly staff and directors’ meetings are

held, Google calendars are shared with all employees, and Google shared drive is used for lesson planning with feedback given in real time” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Also, from an operational standpoint, is the use of “information database, Salesforce, which tracks student achievement, [enables the user] to pull reports, or assign tasks for someone else to complete” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015).

Driven by organizational success, Bolman and Deal (2008) acknowledge that “...peak performance emerges as a team discovers its soul” (p. 290). Therein also lies the need to “lead with heart...as well as head” (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007/2011, p. 164) in order for successful leadership to be achieved in turn, effectively leading the organization forward in direction, mission, and aim.

### **Leadership Analysis**

Mission Liberation reflects tri-fold leadership (Northouse, 2013) in its practice of team, servant, and transformational leadership. Best summarized by Bolman and Deal (2008), conditions for successful leadership are outlined. “Successful leadership is having followers who believe in the power of the leader. By believing, people are encouraged to link positive events with leadership behaviors (p. 307).

### **Team Leadership**

As described previously, Mission Liberation is hierarchically arranged in a one-boss system (Bolman & Deal, 2008); however, “[one person] doesn’t have all the answers, so full and equal participation of all [members] is expected” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). This same belief is supported by Bolman and Deal (2008) in this statement; “though leadership is essential, it need not come from only one person” (p. 186), thus justifying the need for “...clear goals, results-driven structure, competent team members, unified commitment, collaborative climate, standards of

excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership” (Northouse, 2013, pp. 300-302).

Team leadership does not occur only among employees through the examples previously described, but also among its students. Students receiving instruction in a class setting have been observed to “share housing recommendations [and] get jobs” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). A similar example of team leadership can be considered in regard to geographical barriers of Mission Liberation students, particularly those in rural settings that are unable to attend classes at main sites. “If we have a tutor outside in a rural area, then [the likely solution] is scheduling one-to-one tutoring” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). Thus, turning our attention to the role of servant leadership within this non-profit organization.

### **Servant Leadership**

Comprising the majority of Mission Liberation’s workforce, the volunteer tutor population is an integral piece to the organization’s 30-year anniversary. Mission Liberation tutors can volunteer their time in the following service opportunities: “literacy tutor, student assessor, staff and office support, or special events support volunteer” (Mission Liberation, 2015).

Mission Liberation tutors must submit a “...volunteer application [where they indicate how they wish to help]...in outreach, math, reading, office, [or] fundraising” (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015). After completing orientation, tutors have to complete three separate trainings including: “General Training, Mission Liberation Programs, and Wrap-Up” (P. J., personal communications, April 3, 2015). Content specific to the General Training includes: “Introductions, Mission Liberation History and

Policy Overview, Course Descriptions and Schedule, Adult Literacy, Adult Learners, Diversity Training, Reading Skills (Alphabets and Phonics Instruction, Phonological Awareness, Decoding, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension), Effective Tutoring Practices, Writing (Composition, Spelling, and Mechanics), Dictionary Use, and Diverse Learners (ELL and Dyslexia)” (P. J., personal communications, April 3, 2015). Mission Liberation Programs training includes the following elements: “Assessment and Placement at LKC, Foundations of Basic Reading, Ticket to Read 1, and Ticket to Read 2” (P. J., personal communications, April 3, 2015). The last training session, Wrap-Up, includes “roundtable, resources, and certificates” (P. J., personal communications, April 3, 2015).

In closing, Cheney (2004) explains that “...while Americans are willing to volunteer, and *are* for specific causes, they have much less time and want to use it where they see the greatest benefits” (p. 84). So, with over “10,000 volunteer hours” (Mission Liberation, 2015) being accumulated through Mission Liberation’s services, it is evident that this organization’s servants see great benefits, as well as impact from this organization. Similarly, Greenleaf (1970) describes the foundation of servant leadership to be rooted in the “...natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*” (as cited in Northouse, 2013, p. 220). At Mission Liberation, it is truly an act of service in the aim to provide “literacy for all” as lives are transformed forever (Mission Liberation, 2015).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Defined as a process that “changes and transforms people...involv[ing] an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them...creat[ing] a connection that raises the levels of motivation and

morality in both the leader and the follower” (Northouse, 2013, pp. 186-186), Mission Liberation epitomizes transformational leadership.

Effective this calendar year, Mission Liberation has launched a programmatic redesign effort named, the Impact Initiative. Mission Liberation sought to see the same achievement results from other programs as documented from students’ achievement in the GEARS program (H. E., personal communications, July 1, 2015) and so, catalyzed a need to redesign current, instructional programming. Sustained on the pillars of “community, cultural context, preparation, growth mindset, responsive and individualized, high expectations, and results” (Mission Liberation, n. d.), Mission Liberation has a newborn philosophy that mirrors the aim of this initiative.

We believe each learner is a unique and valuable individual with valid personal goals that can be supported through improved literacy. Optimal improvement is best achieved within a secure, caring, and stimulating environment wherein appropriate and challenging curriculum is presented. We further believe the personal, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of students are relevant to their education and achieving their personal goals. A collaborative and rigorous classroom environment with an established growth mindset to promote lifelong learning will assist in achieving the desired educational outcomes as related to family achievement, academic preparedness, employment readiness, and personal success. (Mission Liberation, n. d.)

It remains through such a philosophy that lives of all organizational stakeholders are positively impacted and transformed. All adult learners, regardless of background,

barriers, or experiences, now have the gift of literacy in their possession, thanks to the transformational efforts of this organization, Mission Liberation and each leader therein.

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Implications for research in the practitioner setting are vast. Not only will Mission Liberation benefit from the conclusions and recommendations gathered from completion of a formal program evaluation (McDavid et al., 2013), but also engagement in such an "...external event can...support transformation" (Rooke & Torbert, 2005/2011, p. 153) within the organizational body.

Knowing instructional components that comprise a model literacy framework for adult learners will aid other adult literacy programs in their efforts to redesign related instructional programs. Similarly, adult learners who are enrolled in these various programs will ultimately benefit as the program methodology will align with their varied needs as an adult learner (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Understanding the perception of illiteracy by adult learners as it is situated within their life's context is equally significant because positive self-efficacy and learners' self-concept are critical to both the learner's success and commitment to overcoming illiteracy (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Also, understanding adult learners' perception of illiteracy will help researchers better understand the affective influence of such a debilitating barrier. Instructional components named most effective by adult learners will aid in cross-comparison analyses with what instructional components research suggests as equally effective. Considerations and recommendations (McDavid et al., 2013) will also be viable, especially in regard to revisions made to existing adult literacy programs and instructional design. Analysis of adult learners' achievement in a pre/post comparison following instruction will help to validate the components that are revered to be the most

effective (McDavid, et al., 2013). Learner achievement will be available and will have the potential to evaluate future instructional redesign efforts and programming.

### **Summary**

Fifteen years shy of a century ago, the efforts of Dr. Frank Laubach forever transformed the efforts to provide literacy education to adult learners through non-profit organizations (North Bay Literacy Council, n. d.). In this near-century journey, Mission Liberation embraced this fight against ignorance and through the vision of one volunteer (Mission Liberation, 2013), has been working to better the lives of adult learners in the area ever since. This organization is multi-dimensional (Bolman & Deal, 2008) in its design as its structure, human resources, culture, and social interactions with partnering organizations propel its longevity, despite the most daunting of financial constraints. Mission Liberation practices team, servant, and transformational leadership (Northouse, 2013) in its aim to provide “literacy for all” (Mission Liberation, 2015). Coupling this non-profit organization with this qualitative case study has the potential to forever change the direction of adult literacy programs. In the review to follow, eliminating ignorance and a life of illiteracy has direct correlation on global healthcare, financial stability, employment rates, and educational attainment (Roman, 2004). A fight for national literacy leads to national freedom and there, it is the aim for all to see the light and then, allow themselves to be forever transformed by it!

### Section Three: Scholarly Review for the Study

Greater than 40% of the United States population lack proficiency in rudimentary literacy tasks (as cited in Binder, Snyder, Ardoin, & Morris, 2007/2011), involving an attempt to “...read and understand information in short texts...documents...or locating information and using it to solve simple, one-step problems...” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In response to this intellectual epidemic, national legislation was enacted to increase literacy nationwide (Public Law 102-73, 1991; Public Law 105-220, 1998). Yet, time exceeding that of 15 years has elapsed and in effect, the problem of adult illiteracy persists. Knowing the impact of adult illiteracy on both fiscal and economic scales (Greenberg, 2008) should induce a sense of urgency to determine a viable solution as “adults with lower literacy levels are less likely to be employed, earn less when they do work, are less likely to vote, and have difficulty reading to their young children” (as cited in MacArthur, Konold, Glutting, & Alamprese, 2007/2012, p. 588). No longer is adult illiteracy just impacting the individual, but it has evolved as an influential factor negatively impacting unemployment rates, wage earnings, voter turnout, and generational patterns of persistence (Roman, 2004).

*Illiterate*, an adjective, is a defining characteristic for many American adults. Current research suggests that adult illiteracy is recognized as a national, widespread concern (Black, 2005), despite research contributions that have reported known predictors of illiteracy that include, but are not limited to: age, ethnicity, educational opportunity, and socioeconomic status (Roman, 2004). Additionally, potential roadblocks of attendance, individual frustration, fear, level of engagement, and locus of motivation impede adult learners’ success in adult education programs, causing illiteracy among adults to persist (Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni, & Deng, 2006; Roman,

2004). Adult illiteracy presents a national concern, reflects a societal problem, and plagues adult education programs, defending a need for an instructional framework that would work to increase adult literacy nationwide.

### **Purpose of Study**

A variety of instructional approaches have been implemented in adult education programs across the United States, yet research is blurred as to what approach has proven to be the most effective among the pool (Perin & Greenberg, 2007). Current research suggests principles for adult reading instruction (Kruidenier, 2002) that would support the intent of a component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012), yet an entire framework developed to equip adult learners with the essentials of literacy remains an apparent and significant literature gap. Sealing this literature gap has the potential to reverse the pattern of adult illiteracy nationally, positively contribute to society by equipping adults with the skills necessary to equalize competition in the job market and gain long-term employment, and lastly, increase adult learners' success in an adult literacy program in hopes of overcoming this descriptor named, illiteracy.

### **Elements of Program Effectiveness**

#### **Context**

Program effectiveness elements threaded through this study hold *context* as its pinnacle. According to Merriam (2001), "...learning is situated in a context that involves both 'tools' and social interaction" (p. 2). Yet, penetrating the very core of context leads us to environmental enhancers as summarized by Caffarella (2002) to include: positive efforts toward "innovation and change" (p. 212), offering of tangible feedback, evidence of a support system, resource accessibility, and timely acknowledgement of growth.

Danis (1992) shared this paradigm as “...context must be taken into account...” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 9) to reflect its pivotal relationship to the learning process. Just as context enables maximum learning to occur, so too does instructional design play an equally critical role and thus, our attention shifts.

### **Instructional Design**

Drawing from the work of Caffarella (2002), learning processes are enhanced through *instructional design* in part because of “...active learning [and] application...useful [instructional] strategies... [and] relevant, useful, and practical [content]” (p. 212). Similarly, Kegan (2000) identified that learning occurs as learners venture beyond their normed territory by “...extending already established cognitive capacities into new terrain” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 16). These features of design paired with a conducive, environmental context ultimately guides programs in evaluating their program’s level of effectiveness.

### **Indicators of Effectiveness**

Effectiveness indicators can be measured through formal program evaluation (Caffarella, 2002). Environmental context, instructional design and delivery, and linked program outcomes are all avenues that will aid in an organization’s ability to “...realize [their] performance objectives” (as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 19). Moving past realizing enables the organization to determine their “worth” (Caffarella, 2002, p. 227), or through the lens of this study, the organization’s indicators of effectiveness.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Paired theories for this qualitative case study include both the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) and the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984). Consideration of

both theories unveil a holistic paradigm that seeks to better understand the process of learning from the lens of every adult learner.

### **Adult Learning Theory**

Grounded in the essential building blocks, the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) examines specific conditions necessary for maximum adult learning to occur. True to the foundation of this theory is the unconditioned commitment of adult learners “...when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them” (Speck, 1996, p. 36). Key to crafting realistic and significant goals for adult learners is allowing them to actively participate in the decision-making process through the power of choice (Houp, 2009; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002; Scarborough et al., 2013) and permit them to be “collaboratively determined” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 57). In the absence of this condition, designed learning experiences can be met with much resistance, particularly if evidence of judgment is surmised (Speck, 1996). Merriam and Bierema (2014) further purports that the initial resistance can likely evolve to rejection of both “...their experiences [as a learner, but also] themselves as [a] person” (p. 50).

Detouring from the potential pitfalls of resistance and rejection justifies the need to invest in learning experiences that are pertinent to the lives of adult learners. Speck (1996) emphasizes the need for activities to be “direct, concrete experiences in which they apply the learning in real work...[ensuring that] activities are related and relevant” (p. 37). Moreover, providing learning experiences that will enable adult learners to connect their prior knowledge with new information will foster their automated skill of immediate application (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). With every opportunity for applied learning, so comes the avenue for constructive feedback and praise.

Similar to the building blocks named previously, Speck (1996) presents regular feedback as a need for adult learners. Research by Binder et al. (2011) also claims that “feedback about growth can also serve as a mechanism for motivating students” (p. 158) and from that motivation, learners’ negative, fixed mindset of themselves can be overcome as their skill set strengthens (Dunston, 2007) and their toolbox grows more fully strategized (Sabatini, Shore, Holtzman, & Scarborough, 2011). Additionally, feedback acts as a scaffold to open discussion and as Speck (1996) emphasizes, facilitates a “transfer of learning” (p. 37) and works to diversify instruction through collaborative exchanges (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) that inevitably will promote greater synthesis of the learned content, which targets the core of the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984).

### **Theory of Andragogy**

Through every decision and instructional action, the aim of andragogy is to “...plan meaningful instruction for adults” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 56). Simultaneously named the *Andragogical Model of Adult Learning* (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984) is comprised of five, equally-influential components including: learners’ self-concept, intrinsic motivation, experience, problem-centered orientation, and readiness to learn (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Learners’ self-concept is reflective of many climate conditions. Knowles (1984) claimed the following as essentials for the most conducive climate including: mutual respect, trust, authentic sense of collaboration (Houp, 2009; Levi, 2013; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002; Scarborough et al., 2013), supportiveness,

authenticity, pleasure, and humanness. Not only will these essentials positively impact learners' self-concept, but in the same way, they will also foster learners' independence and readiness to learn.

Characterized as being “situation-motivated [and] experience-centered” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 46), adult learners seek immediate application as they interact with the content by making meaningful connections to their own life experiences. Simply stated, “adults want to know why they need to learn something and how what they learn will apply to their immediate situation” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 55). Knowledge of these integral components led to the subsequent extraction of the following four, andragogical pillars that will ground this qualitative case study in conjunction with the essential principles discussed earlier.

### **Underlying Pillars**

Underlying pillars for this qualitative case study include: (a) purpose-driven design, (b) experience-based instruction, (c) problem-focused curricular, and (d) value-added intent.

**Purpose-driven design.** Purpose-driven design reflects intentional teaching (Slavin, 2000) with an awareness of learners' “interests and plans” (Mikulecky, Smith-Burke, & Beatty, 2009, p. 71), guided by collaborative planning, continued, diagnostic assessment, and suitable modifications (Knowles, 1984; Kruidenier, 2002; Sabatini et al., 2011) to further aid learners' development. Because adult learners' experiences are so vast, understanding their “...unique skill sets are essential for building effective instructional plans” (Binder et al., 2011, p. 158) and to that end, necessitates not only purpose-driven instructional design, but also experience-based instruction.

**Experienced-based instruction.** Referenced by Merriam and Bierema (2014) as “resources for learning” (p. 51), experiences of adult learners are unpredictable, as well as diverse in nature (Petty & Thomas, 2014). Knowles (1984) further claims that “...adults are themselves the richest resources for one another” (p. 10) primarily due to their life experiences, as well as the roles and responsibilities that they have assumed, fulfilled, and “invested attention [into]” (Padak & Bardine, 2004, p. 127). For these reasons, attention to providing experience-based instruction is imperative for adult learners, as is problem-focused curricular.

**Problem-focused curricular.** Adult learners automatically trigger a problem-focused orientation (Knowles, 1984) as their purpose for learning is generally sought to “...complete a task, solve a problem, or to live in a more satisfying way” (p. 12). Thus, unveiling the significance of the third pillar, problem-focused curricular and providing support for the idea of applied comprehension noted by Jacobson (2011) which allows for learners to “accomplish the tasks [they] have set for themselves” (p. 136), while simultaneously acknowledging the impact of value-added intent.

**Value-added intent.** Even for adult learners, understanding the value of the gift of literacy makes all the difference. Massengill (2003) suggests that the “adults who see [the] value in the instructional methodology are more likely to want to stay in the program and make significant gains” (p. 186). Alongside understanding the value, learners must be motivated enough to apply what they have learned through value-added intent, as Purcell-Gates et al. (2002) warns of regression and even, complete loss. Culmination of these milk stool pillars lie in the following quotation as stated by Mayne (1915). “It should be the teacher’s aim to give every [learner] a love of reading, a hunger

for it that will stay with [them] through all the years of [their] life” (as cited in Layne, 2009, p. 6). Through a genuine intention to design appropriate instruction, embrace all experiences, target relatable problems, adult learners will not only acquire the gift of literacy, but they will come to value it and when that is achieved, these pillars have stood the test of time.

### **Program Evaluation**

Through this qualitative case study, program outcomes and impact will be assessed from the lens of program evaluation (Rossi et al., 2004).

Despite outcomes being “observable characteristics” (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 205), one challenge remains that is specific to “... assess[ing] not only the outcomes that actually obtain, but also the degree to which any change in outcomes is attributable to the program itself” (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 205). Because pre- and post-assessment comparisons will be considered, “outcome level” and “outcome change” will be known as well (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 207).

In response to programming changes at Mission Liberation, the second portion of this program evaluation, impact, is justified. According to Rossi et al. (2004), “...programs are modified and refined to enhance their effectiveness or to accommodate revised program goals...warrant[ing] impact assessment” (p. 235). Program impact is defined as the “...change in the target population or social conditions that has been brought about by the program...a change that would not have occurred had the program been absent” (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 234). Similarly, understanding the program history and implementation provides aid when framing parameters for potential impact evaluation (Rossi et al., 2004).

### **A Present-Day Concern**

Illiteracy among adults is a present concern nationwide. Greater than 20% of United States' adults are "...functioning at the lowest level of literacy...[and] older adults have higher rates of illiteracy than any other age bracket" (Roman, 2004, pp. 83-84). Extant literature suggests that adult illiteracy rates have grown significantly over time, causing concern nationwide. Specifically, Black (2005) names literacy "...in crisis" (p. 70) as our nation houses millions of struggling adult readers. Despite efforts of the Adult Education and Literacy System within the United States, the nationwide illiteracy rate persists as a present-day concern.

### **History of the United States' Adult Education and Literacy System**

Conception of the United States' Adult Education and Literacy System occurred more than 45 years ago, through the development of the *Adult Education Act of 1966* (Sticht, 2002). Forward motion from that document found federal legislature amending the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* to fully include contents of the Adult Education Act of 1966. Following these legislative amendments, the issue of national literacy remained unvisited for 25 years until the formal approval of the *National Literacy Act of 1991*. Seven years later, the National Literacy Act of 1991 was imbedded and renamed within the shell of the *Workforce Investment Act of 1998* as *Title II: The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act* (Sticht, 2002). Presently, the Workforce Investment Act is under consideration for reauthorization and dependent upon the outcome, it is likely that the Adult Education and Literacy System could undergo additional systematic revision.

### **The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy**

Attempts to evaluate the national status of adult literacy within the United States

began in 1992 with the administration of the *National Adult Literacy Survey* (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). A secondary attempt to assess adult literacy in the United States occurred 11 years later through the aid of the *National Assessment of Adult Literacy* developed by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Key findings extracted from the report reflect adult illiteracy as a present-day concern, as well as a growing societal problem as the results indicate: "...higher percentage of adults with Below Basic...literacy lived in households with income below \$10,000...adults with higher literacy levels were more likely to be employed full-time and less likely to be out of the labor force than adults with lower literacy levels...individuals with lower literacy levels were employed in service occupations" (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, pp. v-vi).

### **A Growing Societal Problem**

Adult illiteracy, as extant literature suggests, persists as a societal problem (Jacobson, 2011). Roman (2004) summarizes economical and financial implications of adult illiteracy to include hurdles of unemployment, individual health, and fiscal stability, causing need for a "...comprehensive shakedown" (Bishop, 1991, p. 25).

### **Affective Impact of Adult Illiteracy**

Feelings of embarrassment, defeat, doubt, and disgrace propel unmotivated actions commonly reflective of illiterate adults (Bishop, 1991; Roman, 2004). Numerous stories account of the lengths illiterate adults will take to hide what they perceive to be a weakness, downfall, or to some, a failure. Feelings such as these described that are caused by adult illiteracy paralyzes progress and heightens the reliance for survival on the shoulders of others around them (Roman, 2004). Nonetheless, perpetuating the

staggering attrition rates that exist as a significant roadblock to be discussed later (Bishop, 1991). Comparable to the affective impact of illiteracy on adults, its impact from an economic standpoint comes with a high fiscal cost.

### **Economic Impact and Cost of Adult Illiteracy**

Adult illiteracy remains "...a limiting factor on educational and occupational success" (Calhoun, Scarborough, & Miller, 2013, p. 489). Illiteracy no longer limits its impact to the individual, but as research by Roman (2004) suggests, adult illiteracy is closely related to factors such as socioeconomic status, healthcare access, unemployment rates, welfare assistance programs, household income, and fiscal comfort. Baker et al. (2007) suggests that "...the price tag of illiteracy in America is in the billions as a result of health care costs, low productivity in the workplace, and strains on the welfare system" (as cited in Roman, 2004, p. 88).

### **Potential Roadblocks to Success**

Numerous roadblocks plague adult literacy programs, dismantling potential for adult learners' success. Barriers of engagement, attendance, and motivation (among others) challenge the level of success achieved by learners in most adult literacy programs (Beder et al., 2006; Greenberg, 2008).

### **Rates of Attrition, Persistence, and Attendance**

Attrition rates among adult literacy programs commonly match or exceed that of 40% (Sabatini et al., 2011). Adult learners' persistence and attendance in the program for its full duration is quite comparable and is perceived to be of the greatest challenges that adult literacy programs currently face (Greenberg, 2008; Greenberg et al., 2013). Even degree of difficulty is a factor that influences an adult learner's persistence in an adult

literacy program, with the fixed mindset that if something becomes too difficult, quitting is an option (Greenberg et al., 2013). Cyclical in nature are attrition, persistence, and attendance, equally influential of another, yet other roadblocks arise through the implementation of a top-down approach (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

### **Funding and Professional Development**

Inadequacies of adult literacy programs' funding allotment and opportunities for professional development reflect two additional roadblocks to success (Greenberg, 2008; Sabatini et al., 2011). Teachers that commonly staff adult literacy programs are "...part-time, underpaid, benefitless, and not specifically trained to assess or teach adults literacy skills" (Greenberg, 2008). Additional research by Bishop (1991) suggests that adult literacy programs utilize "...misguided teaching methods that do more to frustrate students than to teach them..." (p. 20), thus implying a need for professional development specific to adult literacy teachers.

### **Generational Ties**

The phrase, "...intergenerational trend...", coined by Costa (1988) suggests that illiteracy typically follows a generational pattern and is a descriptor commonly passed down between generations (as cited in Roman, 2004, p. 87). Knowing this pattern exists would support the claim by Kutner et al. (2007) which suggests "...adults with lower literacy levels have difficulty reading to their young children" (as cited in MacArthur et al., 2012, p. 588). One finding from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy acknowledges that a lower percentage of "...adults with Basic or Below Basic prose literacy read to their young children 5 or more days per week" (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. vi).

## **Access to Technology**

Acting as an equalizer in many situations, research suggests that limited access to technology can also prove to be a stumbling block for illiterate adults. Research by Bynner (2008) claims that there is "...barely any job in the modern labor market that fails to involve some exposure to computers" (p. 20). Illiteracy impacts competition in the job market already and as technology adds another layer, it marginalizes employment potential for illiterate adults. "Unless the technologies that are becoming commonplace in society are incorporated into these advances, illiteracy will have heightened consequences as the definition of literacy continues to evolve" (Roman, 2004, p. 91). Just as technology will continue to evolve and redesign itself, so too is true of the need for revision in adult literacy instruction through the utilization of a learner-centered, targeted instructional framework.

### **A Targeted, Instructional Framework**

A targeted, instructional framework is essential for growing literate adult learners. Pillars of "...alphabeticity, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension" (Kruidenier, 2002, p. 19) currently guide a number of instructional approaches used in adult literacy programs throughout the United States, yet as research suggests, does not encompass all that is necessary for adult learners to succeed.

### **Authentic Application**

Connecting real-life experiences with academic tasks is vital for adult learners (Lester, 2012; Mikulecky et al., 2009; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Additionally, research by Padak and Bardine (2004) concludes that "...authentic instruction...led to more positive changes in adults' literacy practices outside the classroom" (p. 127).

Experiences of adult learners can and often do simultaneously act as “...resources for learning” (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 51), thus justifying their application within the context of adult learning. Similarly, Merriam and Bierema (2014) warn of the impact that neglecting adult learners’ experiences could have; “...in any situation in which the participants’ experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience, but rejecting themselves as persons” (p. 50). Understanding the significance of experience-based instruction (Knowles, 1984) enables adult learners’ background knowledge (Jacobson, 2011) to be better utilized and also, appropriately scaffold for a whole language experience (Taylor, 2006).

### **A Whole Approach**

Reading, by nature, is an interdisciplinary action and to that end, requires a balanced approach. Research by Pheasey (2002) deems the whole language experience effective as “...speaking, reading, listening, writing, and understanding language is being literate” (as cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 500). Layne (2009) synthesizes that in order for a reader to be complete, both the mechanics and aesthetics of reading are necessary. Specifically, a complete reader should exercise proper mechanics of: “...phonetics... fluency...comprehension...semantics...[and] syntax” (Layne, 2009, p. 7). Likewise, a complete reader should display related aesthetics for reading including: “...interest... attitude...motivation...[and] engagement” (Layne, 2009, p. 7). Meaningful integration of literacy skills in other areas is useless in the absence of foundational principles.

### **Building a Firm Foundation**

Keeping in mind the framework of any complete reader (Layne, 2009), foundational principles of fluency, word recognition, and decoding (Binder et al., 2011;

Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002; Sabatini et al., 2011) are necessary components in a model literacy framework tailored for adult learners and children alike. “...The basic reading skills of low-literate adults often resemble those of children with limited word recognition and decoding levels” (Sabatini et al., 2011, p. 120). Massengill (2003) too supports the inclusion of these principles in an ideal literacy framework as “...recognizing words efficiently and rapidly is fundamental to reading” (p. 169) and understands the connection these principles have to the “meaning-making process” (Massengill, 2003, p. 170) or as it is otherwise known, comprehension. Analyzing adult learners’ progress as skills are acquired justifies the need of value-added (Knowles, 1984) assessment tools (Binder et al., 2011).

### **Role of Assessment**

As the saying goes, assessment drives instruction. With the intent to positively impact the progress of all learners, ongoing assessment remains an integral part of the model literacy framework. Continual assessment (a) enables learner-specific, tailored instruction, (b) regularly tracks learner progress (Petty & Thomas, 2014), (c) fosters greater potential for learner gains during instructional sequence, and (d) increases instructional effectiveness (Binder et al., 2011). Yet, as current literature suggests, the optimal assessment tools most conducive for evaluating the adult learners’ current skill level remains undiscovered and so, a strong majority of adult education programs perpetuate the use of standardized assessments in the names of availability and access.

Native to adult education programs is the TABE, commonly referred to as the Tests of Adult Basic Education. Binder et al. (2011) claims that as it “...provides a general indication of individual performance...it does not provide information regarding

students' strengths and weaknesses" (p. 151). To that end, the use of both a diagnostic assessment, as well as a progress-monitoring tool becomes necessary components of the model literacy framework. Kruidenier (2002) further supports the implementation of diagnostic assessment tools as "...[we] need to have knowledge of students' strengths and needs in reading in order to ensure the most effective instruction possible" (p. 107). Identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses fosters collaboration through regular exchanges of feedback and praise (Dunston, 2007; Jacobson, 2011; Lester, 2012; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002).

### **Opportunities for Learner Feedback and Open Discussion**

Integral components to the model literacy framework include practices of regular feedback and open discussion (Binder et al., 2011; Bishop, 1991). Independently, feedback acts as a motivational tool (Lester, 2012; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mikulecky et al., 2009) for learners in evaluating their progress; yet, it is multi-dimensional as it also provides "impact data" (Perin & Greenberg, 2007, p. 130), while also fostering ongoing collaboration (Jacobson, 2011; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002; Padak & Bardine, 2004) as learners interact with the content, engage with one another, and participate in a sequential exchange of dialogue (Charan, 2001/2011; Bruffee, 1999). Because motivation is, at times, difficult to stimulate, Wise (2003) shares of a motivational formula that equates to learners' success if applied as follows: "...challenging tasks + good instruction + success + recognition = motivation" (as cited in Petty & Thomas, 2014, p. 476). As Speck (1996) projects, "...learning must be facilitated" (p. 37) and part of the facilitation process is to acknowledge success by offering formal recognition, and that in its simplest construct reflects an exchange of feedback.

### **Applied Goal Setting**

Present research supports the role of applied goal setting throughout any instructional sequence. Goal setting is important for several reasons including: retention, improved alignment between instruction and indicators of effectiveness, persistence, and documentation of achievement (Houp, 2009; Mikulecky et al., 2009; Petty & Thomas, 2014). Layne (2009) further supports the concept of applied goal setting as it can be “...tremendously motivating...used to build rapport...refer[enced] often...[and can prompt discussion] about goals one-on-one” (p. 28). Greater visibility and awareness of established goals will help to educate all learning community stakeholders (Cervero & Wilson, 2006), while maintaining a culture of accountability (Levi, 2013).

### **Contextual Synthesis of Model Literacy Framework Components**

In Figure 1 below, the key components for a model literacy framework are identified in the circular visual below. As the component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012) is interdisciplinary, the components are likewise integrated as each component constitutes an equivalent role and purpose, reflective of no definite beginning or end, as the level of interconnectedness surpasses the individual component parameters. At which point all of these components are balanced effectively within an instructional program, a model literacy framework will reside therein.

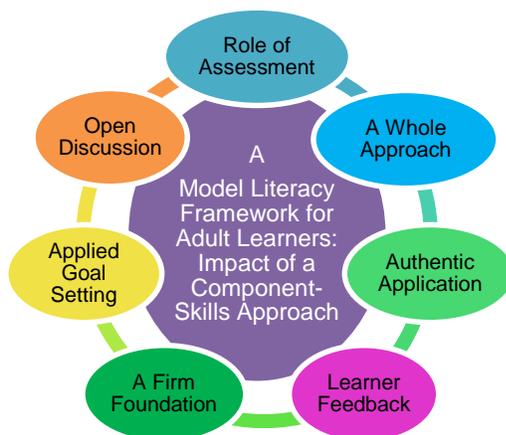
### **Summary**

Contents of this literature review give support to adult illiteracy as it exists as a national concern, societal problem, and a descriptor difficult to overcome due to a wide distribution of roadblocks. This qualitative case study will attempt to utilize a

component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012) to guide the development of a model instructional framework for adult literacy programs across the United States. Drawing from both the Adult Learning Theory (Speck, 1996) and the Theory of Andragogy (Knowles, 1984), underlying pillars reflective of purpose-driven design, experience-based instruction, problem-focused curricular, and value-added intent were extracted. Driven by present research, model instructional components were named and reflect themes pertinent to assessment, the whole language approach, authentic tasks, learner feedback and discussion, role of foundational principles, and applied goal setting. With every effort to achieve closure (Charan, 2001/2013), the next steps propelling this research study forward are briefly summarized below.

Once the model instructional framework is developed, the next step in the research sequence would be to implement and evaluate the instructional framework's effectiveness in an adult literacy program within the United States. From the evaluation results, two potential outcomes exist: affirmation of the framework's current design or findings reflective of a need for framework revisions. At which point, the outcome is determined, direction for continued research would be revealed.

**Figure 1.** Contextual Synthesis of Model Literacy Framework Components



*Figure 1.* Contextual synthesis of model literacy framework components. Circular interrelationships woven between these components frame a model literacy framework, as based on a component-skills approach.

## **Section Four: Contribution to Practice**

### **Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution**

Practitioner contribution will be shared with the following individuals of Mission Liberation: Executive Director, Director of Programs, Instructional Specialist, and Board Member at Large. Beyond these four organizational stakeholders, the practitioner contribution will also be shared with Mission Liberation's Board of Directors. It will be left to the previously-mentioned stakeholders to share the practitioner contribution with other members of the organization, via electronic mailing of given contribution or duplication of the provided contribution. Additionally, the organization will also receive an executive summary, in a slideshow presentation form. Both will be shared with the organization following formal dissertation defense, late March 2016.

### **Practitioner Contribution Documents**

Documents to be offered as the practitioner contribution will be both the technical report compiled as part of the complete dissertation-in-practice, as well as a program evaluation executive summary, reflective of clarity and brevity (McDavid et al., 2013). Summary contents will include: findings, conclusions, and "feasible" (McDavid et al., 2013, p. 38) recommendations that would propel the organization forward in both their development and mission. These resources will be made available to all organizational stakeholders mentioned previously.

### **Rationale**

Rationale for practitioner contributions described previously are simple. "Evaluators have an obligation to produce a report and make a series of presentations of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations to key stakeholders" (McDavid et al., 2013, p. 38). In one of my earliest conversations with Mission Liberation, it was

communicated that information from this research study needed to aid myself along the journey to obtaining my doctorate degree, but also the organization and its direction. As an ethical practitioner (Mihelic, Lipicnik, & Tekavcic, 2010), it is my duty to hold up my end of the bargain and leave the organization with resources that can be used to make the organization more fruitful in their aim to provide literacy for all (Mission Liberation, 2015).

### **Introduction**

In this section, attention will be directed to the following elements of this qualitative case study including: both qualitative and quantitative findings made available through the varied data collection instruments, apparent conclusions, identified limitations to the research study, and finally, named recommendations for application to present practice.

### **Qualitative Findings**

#### **Classroom Instruction Observations**

As suggested by previous research, necessary components for a model literacy framework for adult learners include: the role of assessment (Binder et al., 2011; Petty & Thomas, 2014), an integrated, whole approach (as cited by Pheasey in Taylor, 2006), authentic application opportunities (Padak & Bardine, 2004), learner feedback (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mikulecky et al., 2009), firm foundation (Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) in principles such as phonemic awareness and alphabetics, applied goal setting (Houp, 2009; Layne, 2009), and open discussion (Bishop, 1991). Extracted from seven class observations total at Mission Liberation, observable evidence of each of the named components was noted.

**Role of assessment.** Evidence of the assessment component (Kruidenier, 2002; Petty & Thomas, 2014) was collected from scenes where students, as well as the learning applications they were using (e.g. Newsela and Book Groups) were matched with their present performance level. This same practice was evident in classroom activities, as well through the implementation of tiered assignments that were adjusted based on ability groups. Differentiated instruction was reflected in multiple activities as student groups would be working on a similar skill, yet would be elevated to the degree necessary to match their current performance (Binder et al., 2011). Simultaneously, the classroom instructor would monitor students' progress closely, while working with individual tutors to ensure that all components of the instructional activity were effectively fulfilled.

**Whole language approach.** Support to the whole approach component was gathered from integrated activities that allowed reading, writing, listening, and speaking to play an equitable role (as cited by Pheasey in Taylor, 2006). Specifically, the whole approach was achieved several times over with this three-step process: read, write, and discuss. Journaling was the beginning point for two different classes and at first, the writing prompt would be written on the board and then, read orally to students. At that point, students would begin their individual responses and once all students were finished, those crafted responses were shared. Other instructional activities permitted for steps in similar likeness.

**Authentic application opportunities.** Evidentiary support for the third component, authentic application opportunities (Padak & Bardine, 2004), was collected as well. Students at Mission Liberation were frequently provided with options and choices that were used, in part, to guide their learning. A couple examples in context

include: different note-taking options (e.g. post-it notes, or the five W's + H activity page) or the option to either read independently or participate in a high school equivalency test (HiSET) prep workshop (Lester, 2012; Mikulecky et al., 2009). An observation that was found particularly noteworthy here is the heightened level of student engagement when options were provided as students had the leverage to guide their own learning in terms of a) what worked best for them as a learner and b) what was more relevant to them in their present life.

**Learner feedback.** Component four, learner feedback (Bishop, 1991), was consistently apparent across observations. Classroom instructors were frequent to interact with students, while offering both thoughts for continued growth and statements of praise (Dunston, 2007; Jacobson, 2011; Speck, 1996). In the same way, when students shared their work, their peers were equally supportive (Bruffee, 1999; Speck, 1996). Specifically, a student read an emotional play that they had written (outside of class) to their peers and one of the students responded, "...you almost got a pregnant girl crying...". Although verbal feedback was offered regularly and equitably, non-verbal communications were equally observed. Encouraging smiles was a theme across all observations, as was laughter. During small group activities, the classroom instructors would walk throughout the room and offer feedback to individual groups. In one specific moment, a learner was struggling with confidence and the instructor made the student say many times over, "I'm doing!" to foster new confidence.

**Foundational principles.** Practices that will allow learners to build a firm foundation (Massengill, 2003; Sabatini et al., 2011) were also reflected in classroom observations. In one class, students were interacting with *Vowel Town*, in addition to the

*Segment and Write* boards (Pathways to Reading, 2016). The instructor stated to learners that “[...we are] blending sounds into a cohesive whole”. Similar strategies were offered when practicing word segmentation, in part, through the use of the whiteboards, but also the visible rubber bands that allowed students to kinesthetically stretch the individual sounds that comprise a whole word. In a separate class, learners were given an opportunity to take ring card words and identify how many syllables each given word had. Students in a different group were taking word syllables and matching them to produce a whole word (e.g. trem/ble → tremble).

**Applied goal setting.** Applied goal setting (Houp, 2009; Mikulecky et al., 2009) was encouraged as part of classroom instruction, as well as independently. A listing of *Today’s Goals* were reflected in two different classes. For example, in one of the class sessions observed, the instructor had three goals and they included: 1) freewriting exercise, 2) pick a book (for Book Groups), and 3) Read short story or HiSET prep. A second example was in a different class when students were given their *Reading Plus* (Reading Plus, 2016) reports that summarized how many lessons they had completed independently. The instructor encouraged students to review their individual reports and revisit their goals to determine how many lessons they were going to work to complete weekly (Layne, 2009; Perin & Greenberg, 2007). Students interacted with their table tutor, as well as the instructor to determine what a feasible goal was for them (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Levi, 2013).

**Open discussion.** Lastly, the seventh component, open discussion (Binder et al., 2011; Bishop, 1991), was repeatedly observed. Students shared their work often, and it was evident that that practice was encouraged by classroom instructors in part to build

students' confidence and celebrate learner growth (Perin & Greenberg, 2007). In one class, students were given a journal prompt on the topic of courage and after students had written their individual responses, time was taken for students to share their work (Lester, 2012; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). At the end, the classroom teacher communicated, "We all have different definitions of courage." A separate example occurred in a different class following students' interaction with *Vowel Town* (Pathways to Reading, 2016). Students were encouraged to talk about their experience with *Vowel Town* (Pathways to Reading, 2016) now, comparably to their interaction with it before. Also, in preparation to the starting of Book Groups, students were given their book in class and then were encouraged to discuss in their small group why they selected that book and why it was important to them. Personal connections reflected a significant portion of the open discussions that occurred across the classes observed.

### **Interview Themes**

Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) were conducted with each of the 16 study participants, with the same six questions asked of each of them (see Appendix D). From those 16 interviews, interview transcripts were coded and resulting themes extracted (Merriam, 2009). In the paragraphs that follow, common themes for each question will be identified and summarized, drawing from respondents' responses.

**Question 1.** Question 1 asked respondents to "Summarize your life story and how you came to enroll in services at Mission Liberation" (see Appendix D). Common themes extracted included: pattern to secede, oppressive environmental stimuli, presence of an academic deficit or exceptionalities, and lastly, students' acquaintances frequently linked students to Mission Liberation.

Of the themes identified, approximately 10 responses offered comment in regard to the presence of an academic deficit or exceptionalities. To better frame the spectrum of responses, respondents answered with dyslexia, learning disability, aphasia, and even, depression, to name a few examples. The second highest theme with approximately seven relating responses was the pattern to secede. By definition, secede means to quit or leave one's affiliation with something. All seven responses tied back to dropping out, which leads us to the next common theme, oppressive environmental stimuli. Five responses linked back to oppressive environmental stimuli and responses ranged from poor decision-making at a young age to being pushed through school to teen pregnancy. The final theme necessary to include is the apparent link to Mission Liberation's services through students' acquaintances. Three responses alluded to the fact that either family members or friends informed them about services offerings through Mission Liberation.

**Question 2.** Question 2 asked respondents "What barriers (challenges) are you aware of that contributed to (led to) your limited literacy (reading and writing) as an adult?" (see Appendix D). One common theme was extracted from all responses and that theme linked to conditional imperfections (Goffee & Jones, 2000/2011) that were driven by a rooted barrier, hurdle, or as described in an earlier chapter, stumbling block (Beder et al., 2006; Greenberg, 2008; Kutner et al., 2007; Roman, 2004).

From this primary theme, respondents' answers could then be broken down into four subset categories of conditional imperfections (Goffee & Jones, 2000/2011). They include: physical barriers, cognitive barriers, environmental barriers, and affective barriers. Raw tallies will not be provided for each of these as the imperfections could relate to multiple subset categories. Examples of physical barriers named by respondents

include: eyesight, diabetes, mental health, and stroke. Cognitive barriers named related to: not understanding, as well as the practices of reading and achieving correct punctuation. Environmental barriers included: misdiagnosis in the PK-12 system, absence of a support system at home, seceding from school, being in the DFS system, not being pushed to remain in school, absence of parent(s), kids' conversations in school, and job responsibilities. Affective barriers named by respondents include: trauma catalyzed by cases of abuse and neglect, lack of focus at a young age, being bullied, low self-esteem, feeling incapable, and being uncomfortable.

**Question 3.** Question 3 asked respondents “How have those literacy (reading and writing) barriers (challenges) impacted your life as a child, learner, and adult?” (see Appendix D). Common themes extracted included: being academically and/or professionally restricted, reactionary, socially withdrawn, and being impacted by fearful failure.

Six responses reflected the theme of being reactionary. Example responses included: being hesitant, greater vigilance, being grouchy, embarrassed, or feeling hurts. The remaining themes were tied at four relating responses each. Being academically and/or professional restricted tied back to an inability to read books, struggle to complete paperwork-oriented tasks, unable to obtain a good job or effectively complete job applications. Social withdrawal reflected the following example responses: avoidance to talk to others or go anywhere, as well as an inability to maintain any friendships. Fearful failure was the resulting theme after considering these example responses: avoidance to read out loud, incapability mindset, and fear to even try or attempt it.

**Question 4.** Question 4 asked respondents “Why is overcoming illiteracy (learning to read and write) important to you as a learner and as an adult?” (see Appendix D). Three common themes were extracted based on respondents’ answers. They included: gainful independence, visible value (Massengill, 2003), and life necessity. Six respondents’ answers related back to gainful independence and related to: independence, personal advancement, goal to own individual business, get off Social Security benefits, and intrinsic motivation. Four responses related to the visible value of literacy as corresponding respondents compared it to a gift, being the light, and being the key. Lastly, four responses tied back to literacy being a necessity for life and the claim that life is not worth living without it.

**Question 5.** Question 5 asked respondents “What aspects (parts) of Mission Liberation have most motivated you to persist (stay) in the program, to continue your learning, and in the end overcome illiteracy (learn to read and write) as a barrier (challenge)?” (see Appendix D). Two lead themes came from respondents’ answers and they included: a personal commitment to growth and the Mission Liberation learning community.

Eleven responses related to a growth commitment and example responses include: becoming a lifelong reader, becoming the most functional human being possible, establishing goals, continuing to learn, seeing progress, and intrinsic, self-motivation. The learning community at Mission Liberation was a huge pattern across respondents with nine responses coming back to: the hands-on approach, the fact that tutors volunteer their time, classroom instruction, encouragement received and lastly, the people, staff, and tutors of Mission Liberation.

**Question 6.** Question 6 asked respondents “How will your life be transformed (forever changed) because of the gift of literacy (reading and writing); what will you be able to do now successfully that you were not able to do before?” (see Appendix D). Themes extracted for the first question included: independent productivity, forward stability, and likeness of a whole.

Seven responses related to respondents’ ability to be independently productive. Example responses included: ability to fill out job applications, read harder words, ability to read, ability to read to grandchildren, and overall, greater independence. Six responses reflected the idea of forward stability and example responses included: enabled to achieve more, become unstuck, control life better, and ability to prepare for a brighter future. Likeness of a whole was the final theme extracted from this question’s responses. Example answers include: being complete, having a peace, and possessing an understanding.

Themes extracted from the second part of Question 6 included: skill attainment, being fearless, and paying it forward to help others in similar situations. Sixteen responses tied back to skill attainment. Example responses include: reading text, writing thoughts, sounding out words, learning math, having a portable skill, understanding technology and word meanings. Four responses related to being fearless and included these example responses: being unafraid, being more positive, staying dedicated, and being able to interact with others. The ideals to give back, help others, and pay it forward reflected four responses and serves as the last theme from this interview question.

## Quantitative Findings

### Survey Findings

Each of the 16 study participants completed a survey (Creswell, 2014) that required them to rank a series of instructional components on a scale of effectiveness in terms of the extent to which the given component contributed to their growth as an adult learner (see Appendix C). In addition, there were two open-ended questions that study participants were asked to respond to as well. Survey findings from all items are summarized in the paragraphs and figures that follow.

Table 1 summarizes Mission Liberation respondents' effectiveness ranking of all listed instructional components in the form of a raw tally. Ranked instructional components, in order included: vocabulary instruction, decoding strategies, alphabets, reading fluency, writing mechanics, expository and creative writing, individualized tutoring, classroom instruction plus tutoring, computer skills, phonics instruction, collaborative opportunities, relevant activities, assessment, opportunities for feedback, and goal setting.

Table 1

*Mission Liberation Respondents' Effectiveness Ranking of Instructional Components (Raw Tally)*

| Ranked Component          | Very Effective<br>(3) | Somewhat Effective<br>(2) | Not Effective<br>(1) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| C1 (vocabulary)           | 11                    | 4                         | 1                    |
| C2 (decoding)             | 8                     | 7                         | 1                    |
| C3 (alphabets)            | 9                     | 6                         | 1                    |
| C4 (fluency)              | 7                     | 7                         | 2                    |
| C5 (mechanics)            | 9                     | 4                         | 3                    |
| C6 (writing)              | 7                     | 4                         | 5                    |
| C7 (individual tutoring)  | 10                    | 5                         | 1                    |
| C8 (classroom + tutoring) | 6                     | 7                         | 3                    |
| C9 (computer)             | 8                     | 5                         | 3                    |
| C10 (phonics)             | 9                     | 3                         | 4                    |
| C11 (collaboration)       | 8                     | 4                         | 4                    |
| C12 (relevant activities) | 10                    | 4                         | 2                    |
| C13 (assessment)          | 10                    | 3                         | 3                    |
| C14 (feedback)            | 13                    | 1                         | 2                    |
| C15 (goal setting)        | 12                    | 2                         | 2                    |

Table 1 suggests numerically that Component 14, opportunities for feedback, ranked highest in Most Effective. Three components tied highest in Somewhat Effective and they included: Components 2, 4, and 8. The named components are decoding strategies, reading fluency, and classroom instruction plus tutoring. Similarly, ranked highest in Not Effective was Component 6, expository and creative writing.

Table 2

*Mission Liberation Respondents' Effectiveness Ranking of Instructional Components (% Equivalency)*

| Ranked Component          | Very Effective<br>(3) | Somewhat Effective<br>(2) | Not Effective<br>(1) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| C1 (vocabulary)           | 68.75%                | 25%                       | 6.25%                |
| C2 (decoding)             | 50%                   | 43.75%                    | 6.25%                |
| C3 (alphabets)            | 56.25%                | 37.5%                     | 6.25%                |
| C4 (fluency)              | 43.75%                | 43.75%                    | 12.5%                |
| C5 (mechanics)            | 56.25%                | 25%                       | 18.75%               |
| C6 (writing)              | 43.75%                | 25%                       | 31.25%               |
| C7 (individual tutoring)  | 62.5%                 | 31.25%                    | 6.25%                |
| C8 (classroom + tutoring) | 37.5%                 | 43.75%                    | 18.75%               |
| C9 (computer)             | 50%                   | 31.25%                    | 18.75%               |
| C10 (phonics)             | 56.25%                | 18.75%                    | 25%                  |
| C11 (collaboration)       | 50%                   | 25%                       | 25%                  |
| C12 (relevant activities) | 62.5%                 | 25%                       | 12.5%                |
| C13 (assessment)          | 62.5%                 | 18.75%                    | 18.75%               |
| C14 (feedback)            | 81.25%                | 6.25%                     | 12.5%                |
| C15 (goal setting)        | 75%                   | 12.5%                     | 12.5%                |

Table 2 captures Mission Liberation respondents' effectiveness ranking of instructional components, providing a percentage equivalency that was computed from the raw tallies provided Table 1. The highest Very Effective percentage equivalency mirrors Component 14, opportunities for feedback with a numerical value of 81.25%. In the same way, Components 2, 4, and 8 or as named, decoding strategies, reading fluency, and classroom instruction plus tutoring individually totaled a percentage equivalency of 43.75%. Lastly, the percentage equivalency reflected by the highest ranking Not Effective instructional component was Component 6, expository and creative writing. The percentage equivalency was 31.25%.

Table 3 showcases a comprehensive ranking of effectiveness across all surveyed instructional components. Linearly, the top three Very Effective instructional components included: 1) Component 14, opportunities for feedback, 2) Component 15, goal setting, and 3) Component 1, vocabulary instruction. Three instructional components tied for first ranking across the Somewhat Effective category and included: Components 2, 4, and 8. Specifically, they are decoding strategies, reading fluency, and classroom instruction plus tutoring. In the number 2 overall ranking in the same category was Component 3, alphabets. Placement of number 3 comprehensive ranking found two components tied including: Component 7, individualized tutoring and Component 9, computer skills. Moving to the Not Effective comprehensive ranking, Component 6 placed in the first position. In addition to expository and creative writing, Components 10 and 11 held the number 2 spot in the Not Effective category. Those components named are phonics instruction and collaborative opportunities. Four components tied for third place on the Not Effective comprehensive ranking and they include: Components 5, 8, 9, and 13 or named are writing mechanics, classroom instruction plus tutoring, computer skills, and assessment.

In the figures that follow Table 3, they showcase separate ranking hierarchies according to survey results with the Very Effective (see Figure 1), Somewhat Effective (see Figure 2), and Not Effective (see Figure 3). Figure 4 compiles a hierarchy by combining the rankings of both Very Effective and Somewhat Effective.

Table 3

*Comprehensive Ranking of Effectiveness Across Instructional Components*

| Ranked Component          | Very Effective<br>(3) | Somewhat Effective<br>(2) | Not Effective<br>(1) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| C1 (vocabulary)           | #3                    | #4                        | #5                   |
| C2 (decoding)             | #6                    | #1                        | #5                   |
| C3 (alphabets)            | #5                    | #2                        | #5                   |
| C4 (fluency)              | #7                    | #1                        | #4                   |
| C5 (mechanics)            | #5                    | #4                        | #3                   |
| C6 (writing)              | #7                    | #4                        | #1                   |
| C7 (individual tutoring)  | #4                    | #3                        | #5                   |
| C8 (classroom + tutoring) | #8                    | #1                        | #3                   |
| C9 (computer)             | #6                    | #3                        | #3                   |
| C10 (phonics)             | #5                    | #5                        | #2                   |
| C11 (collaboration)       | #6                    | #4                        | #2                   |
| C12 (relevant activities) | #4                    | #4                        | #4                   |
| C13 (assessment)          | #4                    | #5                        | #3                   |
| C14 (feedback)            | #1                    | #7                        | #4                   |
| C15 (goal setting)        | #2                    | #6                        | #4                   |

Ranking fourth in Figure 1 below includes Components 7, 12, and 13. That reflects individualized tutoring, relevant activities, and assessment. Components ranked fifth on the Very Effective scale are Components 3, 5, and 10. In other words, the instructional components ranked fifth on the Very Effective scale are alphabets, writing mechanics, and phonics instruction. Instructional components holding at the sixth ranked spot includes: Components 2, 9, and 11. Named, they are: decoding strategies, computer skills, and collaborative opportunities. Ranking seventh according to the Very Effective scale is Component 4, reading fluency and Component 6, expository and

creative writing. The Very Effective rankings are finished with Component 8, classroom instruction plus tutoring fulfilling the eighth placeholder.

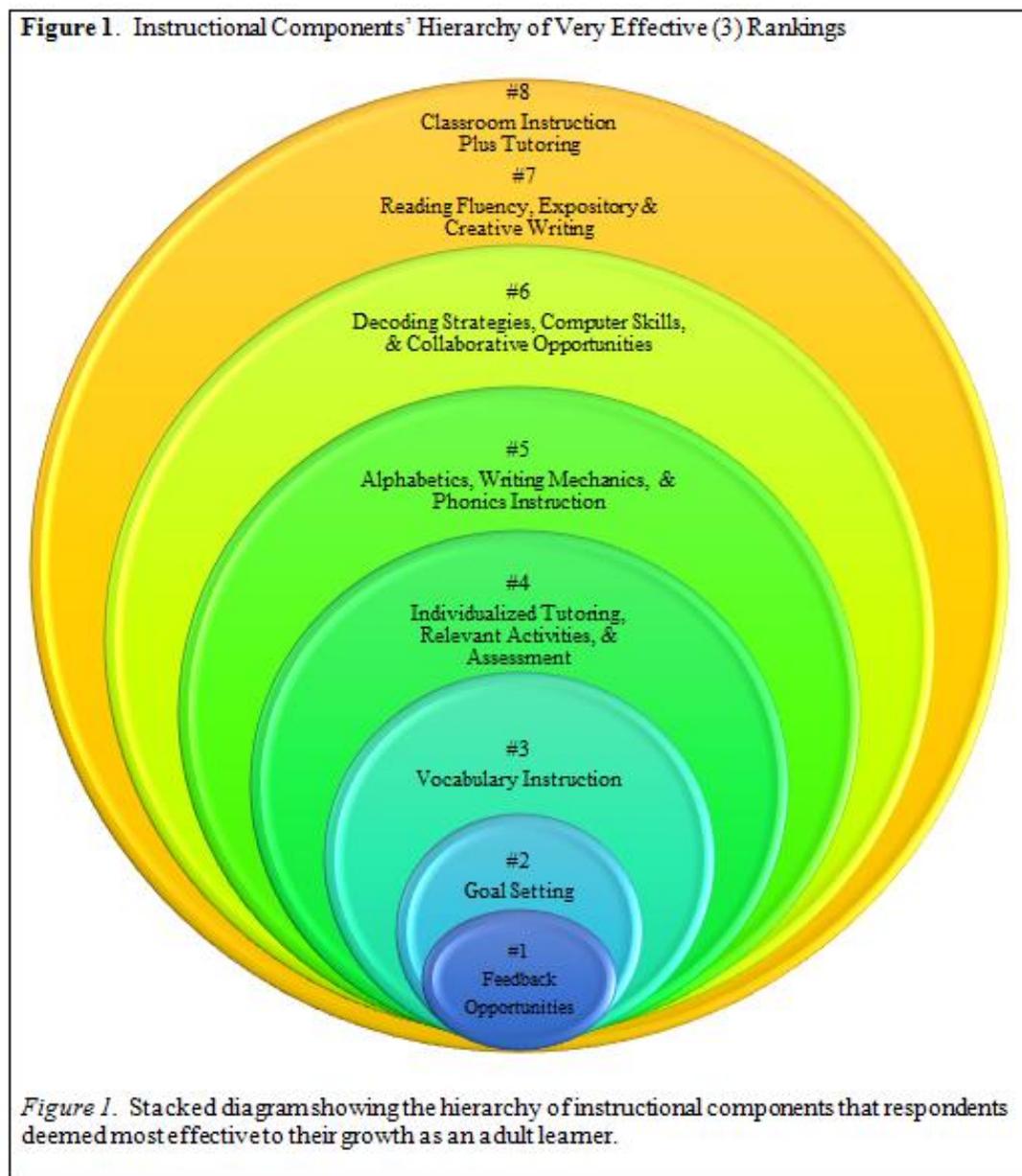
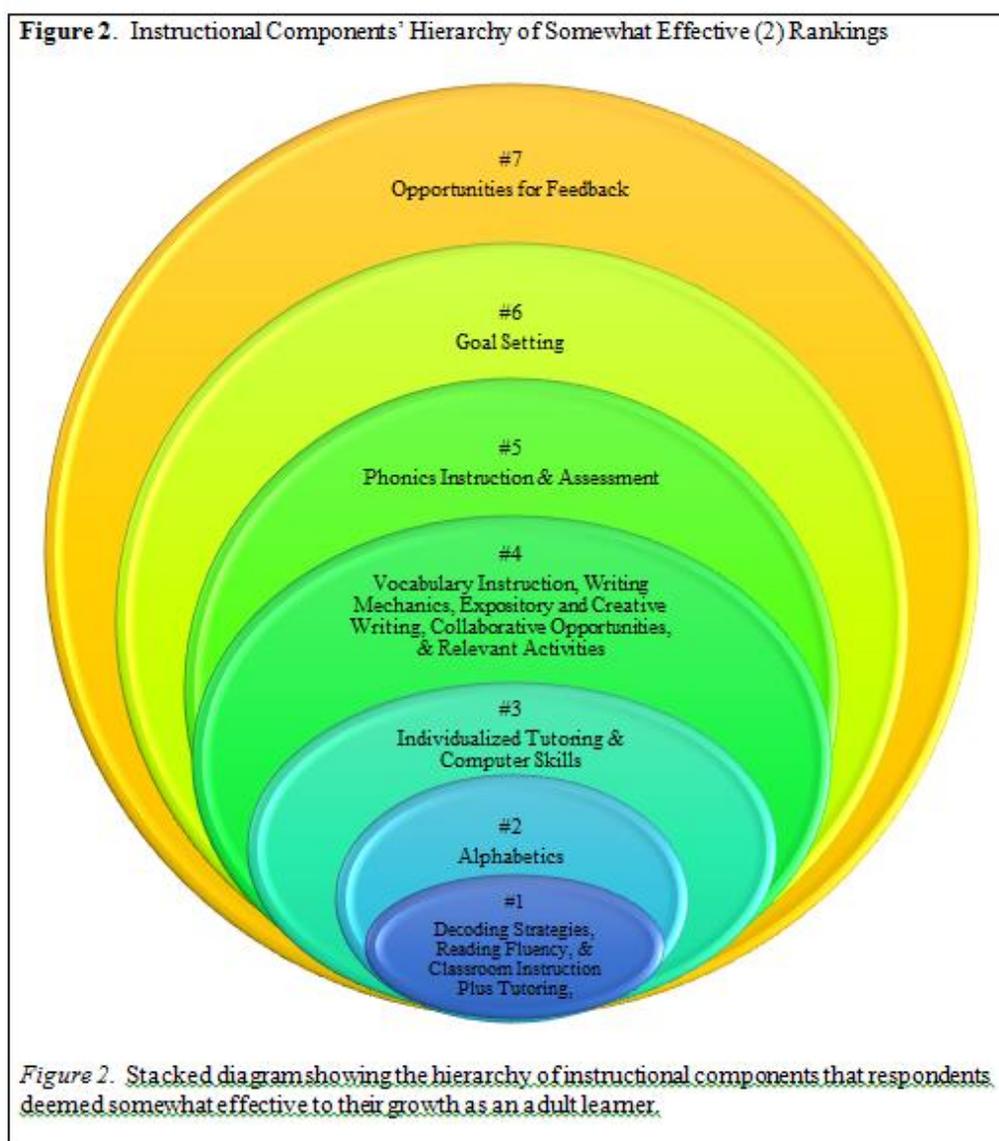
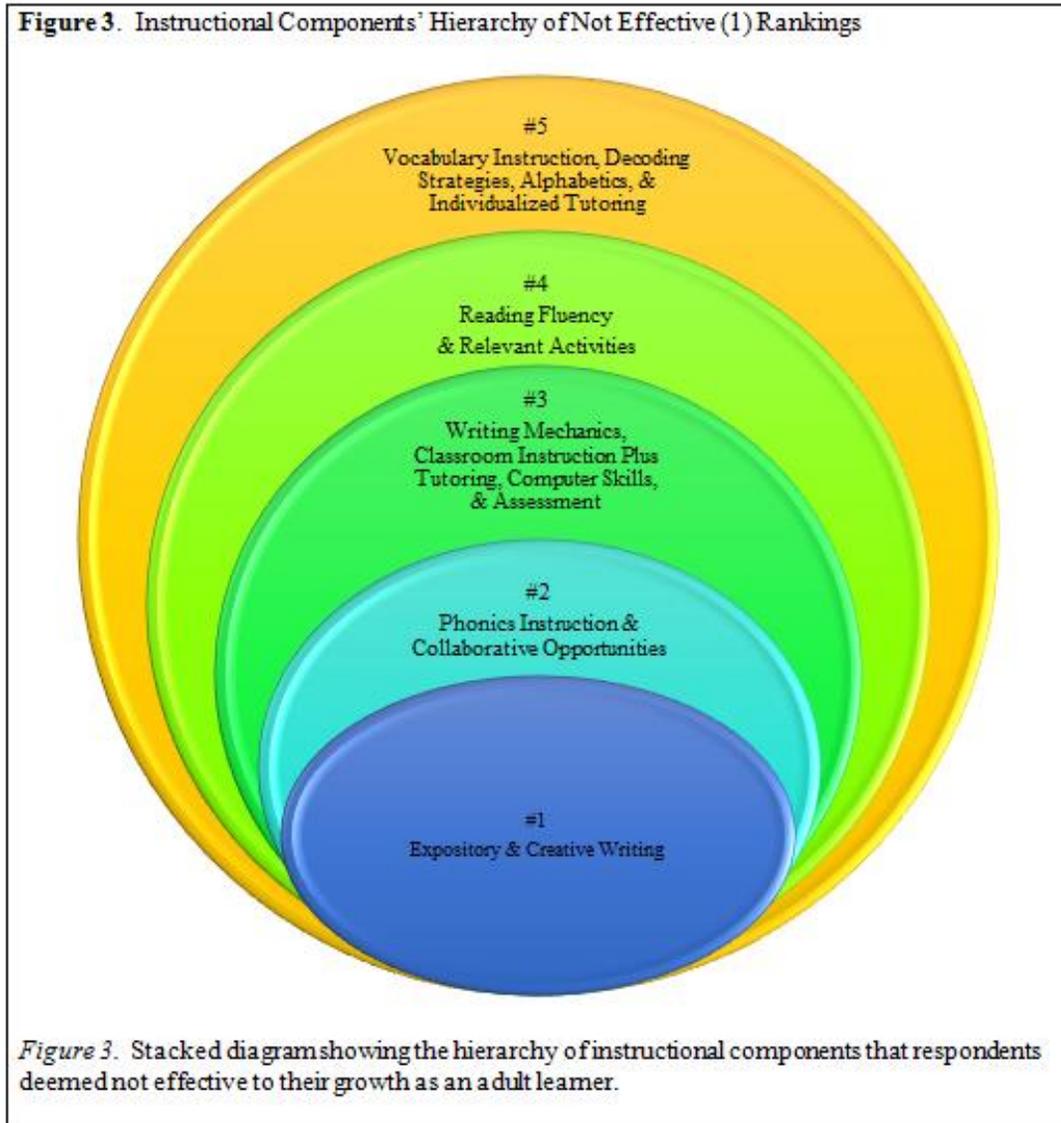


Figure 2 synthesizes comparable information; however, instead of the rankings according to the Very Effective scale, it considers the rankings in the Somewhat Effective category. Ranking fourth according to the Somewhat Effective to growth as an adult learner are multiple components including: Components 1, 5, 6, 11, and 12.

Respondents perceived vocabulary instruction, writing mechanics, expository and creative writing, collaborative opportunities, and relevant activities to be fourth in their level of Somewhat Effectiveness to their growth as an adult learner. Component 10, phonics instruction and Component 13, assessment, hold firm the fifth spot. Respondents ranked Component 15, goal setting as the sixth most Somewhat Effective. Figure 2 closes out with Component 14, opportunities for feedback ranking seventh most Somewhat Effective.





Ranking fourth, according to the comprehensive Not Effective hierarchy, were Components 4 and 12. These components are reading fluency and relevant activities. Similarly, instructional components considered the fifth most Not Effective instructional components are vocabulary instruction, decoding strategies, alphabets, and individualized tutoring. Components 1, 2, 3 and 7 reflect these categories.

Compilation of rankings in Very Effective and Somewhat Effective categories, permitted for the following findings to be gathered. Instructional components ranked in

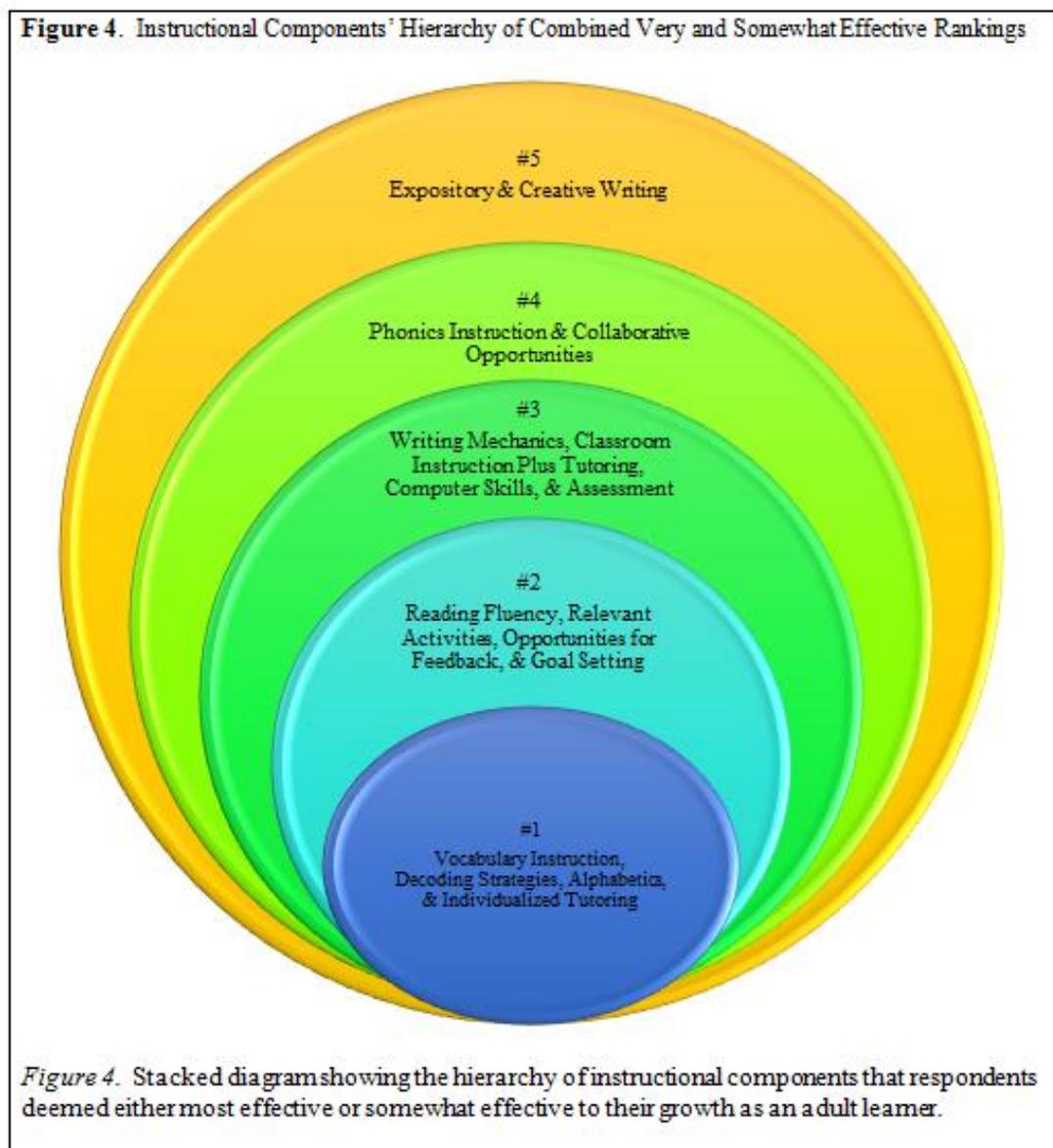
first position were vocabulary instruction, decoding strategies, alphabetics, and individualized tutoring. Ordinarily, these are Components 1, 2, 3, and 7. Ranked second in the combined Somewhat or Very Effective hierarchies are Components 4, 12, 14, and 15. In other words, reading fluency, relevant activities, opportunities for feedback, and goal setting are perceived by respondents to be, at minimum, second-best Somewhat Effective instructional components. Placing in third according to the same hierarchy are Components 5, 8, 9, and 13. Writing mechanics, classroom instruction plus tutoring, computer skills, and assessment constitute this hierarchical placeholder. Instructional components deemed fourth most Somewhat Effective, at minimum, is Component 10, phonics instruction and Component 11, collaborative opportunities. Ranked in fifth is Component 6, expository and creative writing.

Table 4

*Mission Liberation Respondents' Effectiveness Ranking of Very and Somewhat Combined (% Equivalency)*

| Ranked Component          | Very Effective & Somewhat Effective<br>(3+2) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| C1 (vocabulary)           | 93.75%                                       |
| C2 (decoding)             | 93.75%                                       |
| C3 (alphabetics)          | 93.75%                                       |
| C4 (fluency)              | 87.5%                                        |
| C5 (mechanics)            | 81.25%                                       |
| C6 (writing)              | 68.75%                                       |
| C7 (individual tutoring)  | 93.75%                                       |
| C8 (classroom + tutoring) | 81.25%                                       |
| C9 (computer)             | 81.25%                                       |
| C10 (phonics)             | 75%                                          |
| C11 (collaboration)       | 75%                                          |
| C12 (relevant activities) | 87.5%                                        |
| C13 (assessment)          | 81.25%                                       |
| C14 (feedback)            | 87.5%                                        |
| C15 (goal setting)        | 87.5%                                        |

Percentage equivalencies for combined rankings of either Somewhat Effective or Very Effective are presented in Table 4 shown above.



The adult learner survey (see Appendix C) concluded with two, open-ended questions. Question 2 asked respondents “In your opinion, what other instructional components (learning activities) not listed above has been effective (or helped) in your growth as an adult learner (reader)?” Common themes extracted from this item were

specific to none, other learning strategies, and interactive opportunities. While eight responses came back to none, or the idea that no other instructional components have contributed to respondents' growth pattern, five responses reflected additional learning strategies that included: pattern of repetition, journaling, highlighting, and individualized curriculum. Three responses suggested for learners to engage in interactive opportunities. Specific examples mentioned getting involved with churches, visiting libraries or museums, and even listening to music.

Question 3 asked respondents "What instructional component (learning activity), if any, would you add to help adult learners in their literacy development (reading and writing)? Common themes extracted were none, participating in interactive opportunities, and being fearless and/or bold. Seven responses suggested that they had no other instructional components to add, while five suggested engaging in interactive opportunities such as participating in discussion and role-playing opportunities, getting feedback, sharing progress, as well as own work. Three responses suggested that adult learners need to be bold and fearless. Example responses encouraged seeking help, avoid being afraid, and to celebrate encouragement.

### **Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) Pre/Post Comparison**

Findings from this research study also included pre/post comparisons (McDavid et al., 2013) made from study participants' TABE scores, as collected by Mission Liberation. Because participants' test points ranged in number from two to six, the decision was made by the researcher to use each participants' two, most recent test points. The most recent of the two will serve as the post-test indicator, while the least recent will represent the pre-test indicator. Table 5 below illustrates the following data points reflective of each participant and their corresponding performance, with each

given row provided: TABE pre-test scaled score, TABE post-test scaled score, elapsed time interval between test points, grade level equivalency range, and the indicator of growth in terms of learner gain or loss.

In addition to the numerical information provided below, it can be concluded that Student 1 achieved a gain of 24 points on their scaled score. Student 2 achieved a gain of 37 points on their scaled score. Student 3 reflected a 123-point loss on their scaled score, and it is unknown what potential contributors impacted that individual's decline. Student 4 achieved a gain of 94 points on their scaled score. Student 5 reflected a 91-point loss on their scaled score; contributing factors to this decrease are unknown.

Based on the three students who reported performance gains, the average point gain was approximately 52 points. Similarly, the average gain in terms of grade level equivalency was 1 grade level. Holistically, three of the four students reported gains between assessment points and the remaining two students reflected a decline in performance more numerically significant than the average gain made by those whose performance increased.

**Table 5]**

*Students' TABE Pre/Post Test Comparisons (Based on Students' Two, Most Recent Test Points)*

| Pre-Test Scaled Score | Post-Test Scaled Score | Elapsed Time Interval | Grade Level Equivalency Range | Growth (+/-) |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 427                   | 451                    | 15 months             | 2.9-3.7                       | +0.8         |
| 428                   | 465                    | 6 months              | 2.9-4.1                       | +1.2         |
| 417                   | 294                    | 10 months             | 2.6-0.8                       | -1.8         |
| 294                   | 388                    | 7 months              | .8-1.8                        | +1.0         |
| 440                   | 349                    | 8 months              | 3.3-1.8                       | -1.5         |

## Conclusions

### A Program Effectiveness Showcase

Program effectiveness is triangulated (Creswell, 2014) between instructional components previous research claims as appropriate for adult learners, observational analysis of classroom instruction against research-based instructional components, and finally, evaluation of what instructional components adult learners perceive to be most instrumental in their growth. In response to the approach taken above, an answer to the leading research question, “What instructional components comprise a model literacy framework for adult learners?” is found.

As identified previously, components necessary for a model literacy framework, as suggested by present research, include: ongoing assessment (Binder et al., 2011; Petty & Thomas, 2014), an integrated, whole approach (as cited by Pheasey in Taylor, 2006), authentic application opportunities (Padak & Bardine, 2004), learner feedback (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mikulecky et al., 2009), foundational principles to constitute a firm footing (Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002), applied goal setting (Houp, 2009; Layne, 2009), and open discussion (Bishop, 1991). Observed classroom instruction sessions indicate and serve as evidentiary support that all seven named components are equitably balanced and effectively integrated as part of the program approach taken by the Mission Liberation learning community.

Comparing that which was observed across multiple classroom instruction sessions to the adult learner survey, two primary conclusions can be drawn. As reflected from the results of the adult learner survey, respondents deem learner feedback (Binder et al., 2011; Bishop, 1991; Lester, 2012) and applied goal setting (Cervero & Wilson, 2006;

Levi, 2013; Mikulecky et al., 2009); most effective to their growth as an adult learner. Substantial evidence reflecting both components was observed as part of regular classroom instruction. This finding effectively answers the second, secondary research question, “What instructional components are perceived to be most effective by adult learners?”

The second conclusion necessary to be drawn here is the ineffectiveness of expository and creative writing, as perceived by adult learners. Drawing again from classroom observations, the majority of texts shared were non-fiction. Similarly, writing opportunities provided were often tailored back to the learner and required them to draw upon their personal, life experiences. Fictional writings were virtually obsolete across observed classroom instruction, and gleaning from students’ response, this observation is acceptable, as learners feel like this component is not effective to their growth as an adult learner.

### **A Multi-Faceted Perception of Illiteracy**

A secondary research question that guided this qualitative case study was “How is illiteracy perceived by adult learners?” The answer to this research question was discovered through the themes extracted from the individual interviews and reflects none other than a multi-faceted perception of illiteracy, comprised of many layered perspectives. In the paragraphs that follow, those layers are described.

### **A Chained Perspective**

Chains of illiteracy have every potential to be paralyzing for an entire lifetime according to many different scales (Calhoun et al., 2013; Kutner et al., 2007; Roman, 2004); however, those chains can be broken with the right weapon. Based on interview

findings from study participants, education is the tool to setting oneself free and achieving the ultimate release from the restrictions driven by illiteracy. One respondent likened having an education in this way, "...education is light and it's the key." Another respondent communicated that "...a closed mouth never gets fed", suggesting that in order for education to be the freedom tool, individuals must be receptive to its extensive offerings.

### **A Flawed Perspective**

Individuals worldwide are flawed, and despite many positive qualities or traits uncover that one unwarranted imperfection. From the lens of this qualitative case study, the single most unwarranted imperfection across respondents was illiteracy. Findings from this study suggested that whether illiteracy results in direct response to an environmental imperfection or physical, affective, or cognitive flaw (Bishop, 1991; Kutner et al., 2007; Roman, 2004), found imperfections thread ultimate perfection. Put simply, one interviewee communicated that, "[With literacy], I'll be a complete person". It could be said that what one goes through has the potential to make us stronger, and based on the findings from this study, the same claim could be made about overcoming illiteracy.

### **A Value-Added Perspective**

Age, time, and experiences have a way of molding all human beings. One of the key conclusions gained from this study is in the surprising evolution of the once camouflaged value of literacy to the now, transparent value of literacy (Knowles, 1984; Massengill, 2003). As stated best by one of the study participants, "Learning is a gift that we all have the ability to do and not to pursue that is just a waste." Due in part also

through individuals' intrinsic motivation the value of literacy is rooted. Yet another important conclusion to be drawn here is that those who once were quitted learners (Greenberg et al., 2013) have now emerged into committed learners, with the intrinsic motivation and desire to learn, succeed, and grow (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In the words of another respondent, "I'm not a quitter. I'm a go-getter."

### **A Mission Liberation Perspective**

Students enrolled at Mission Liberation offered very strong perspectives about the program itself, the people that comprise it, and the sense of belonging felt when they walk through the door. With the help of Mission Liberation, one respondent commented, "I can do it for myself today!" The level of investment (Padak & Bardine, 2004) from its staff, teachers, and tutors says it all. Several respondents offered dialogue (Charan, 2001/2011; Bruffee, 1999) in regard to how Mission Liberation is different for them compared to other programs that they have been in and again, the recurring theme was the level of investment (Padak & Bardine, 2004) by the full, Mission Liberation learning community.

Although this was not verbalized, two extensions of that reflect the ideals that members of Mission Liberation are passionate (Layne, 2009) about their role and have established meaningful relationships with students that convey the heightened level of investment and efficacy (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Padak & Bardine, 2004) that is felt by students. At the end of each day, one respondent shared their final thought that they have about Mission Liberation and it reads, "I thank God every night for this program."

### **TABE Impact Data**

The third, secondary research question that guided this study was, "Is there a

difference in pre/post TABE test scores with Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 sample participants at Mission Liberation?” The simple conclusion that can be drawn here is yes, there is an apparent difference between pre/post TABE test comparisons. More specifically, it is, for the majority, a positive difference in learner performance. Despite an even smaller sample size of participants who reported multiple test points, the following key conclusions remain to be drawn.

Initially, of the five students’ data that was available, three-fifths or approximately 60% reflected a performance gain across multiple points according to the TABE scaled score, as well as an increase of several months when compared with their individual grade level equivalency range. Remaining two-fifths or 40% reflected a significant decline in performance when their pre/post assessment data was considered.

Additionally, from this data, a larger inference can be made about the effectiveness of Mission Liberation’s instructional program. It can be concluded that the instruction students are receiving as part of Mission Liberation’s program offerings are found effective for the larger majority, as reflected by individual learner gains.

To this end, members of the Mission Liberation instructional team should be commended for their efforts as the instructional design selected by the organization itself proved effective in terms of learner growth and overall gain. Efforts of the program director, instructional team leaders, classroom instructors, and volunteer tutors unify the vision (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Levi, 2013; Marsh, 2010; Northouse, 2013; Rooke & Torbert, 2005/2011) to achieve “literacy for all” (Mission Liberation, 2015) and available test data validates both mission and its level of effectiveness.

### **Limitations**

Despite diligent efforts to recruit as many study participants as possible, the sample size for this qualitative case study totaled only 16 respondents, which as research would support, is a small sample size (Field, 2013). As noted in an earlier chapter, the aim was a minimum of 30 subjects; however, subjects' participation in the study was voluntary and as a result of approved recruitment efforts, only 16 subjects voluntarily sought to be an active participant in this study.

A secondary limitation relates to this being an evaluation of data collected from one organization, reflecting limited generalizability (McDavid et al., 2013). Cross-comparisons from the results of this study were not feasible, as an identical study was not completed in similar organizations, as part of this qualitative research study. All findings from this study reflect learners within the same organization, same site, and same geographic location.

A third limitation to this study was that subject participants reflected approximately 75% of the class hierarchy. Within the organization, classes are structured A through D and as part of this study, findings relate to classes B, C, and D. So, the lowest tier, in terms of ability level, was not included within the voluntary sample that frames this study's findings.

Lastly, the analysis of the pre/post TABE scores is extremely restricted as an even smaller sample size of those participating have persisted in the program long enough to have completed sufficient instruction to constitute a valid post-assessment. Some of the study's participants are new to Mission Liberation and because it is their first term, only pre-assessment data was available, making it impossible to compute growth achievement because there was not a post data point available.

## **Recommendations**

Following thorough analysis of this study's findings, the following four core recommendations are offered for continued improvement of services offerings available at Mission Liberation and in the end, to benefit the adult learners it serves.

### **Value of Modeling**

Based upon the class instruction sessions observed, a lead recommendation is to incorporate more modeling (Merriam & Bierema, 2014) for the small group learning activities, as led by table tutors. Greater symmetry was observed between practices of the classroom teacher and tutors, following thorough modeling of the given activity and its separate steps or components. Also, numerous class activities were tiered in their development and with improved consistency with the modeling, greater assurance can be fostered in knowing that all components of the learning activity are being effectively achieved, as modeled.

### **A Fun Welcome**

Mirrored in both classroom observations, as well as all 16 individual interviews, the continuous learning atmosphere (Gill, 2010) evident at Mission Liberation is bar none, one of the very best, to have had the opportunity to observe. The recommendation offered here is not to change anything, but maintain an atmosphere free of barriers reflective of all elements of a learning culture (Gill, 2010; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Members of the learning community are influential in maintaining this environment and elements of support, care, and genuine investment in students is observable. A greater facet of the learning community at Mission Liberation that is noteworthy is the presence of laughter throughout the space. Learning can be fun (Layne, 2009), and that too should be maintained as students respond positively to that. It is, in part, because of the

successful marriage of these individual elements that students persist as a learner within the organization.

### **Maintaining Balance**

From the survey findings presented in an earlier chapter, respondents had the opportunity to rank the corresponding effectiveness of each named instructional component. Using the information gleaned from that survey, the recommendation offered is to use those findings to consider ways in which the program curricula could be revised to better capture the perception of effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013; Rossi et al., 2004) that reflects the learners who Mission Liberation serves. In other words, the classroom observations reflected a balanced approach of all the components that are suggested to comprise a model literacy framework for adult learners. Yet, evaluation of specific program curricula could be re-evaluated by the instructional team members to ensure that the hierarchy of effectiveness, as perceived by adult learners, mirrors the hierarchy of effectiveness of which Mission Liberation has built their instructional framework upon.

### **Testing Patterns**

Based on the TABE test data analyzed, the elapsed time window between test points was inconsistent and varied significantly. Understanding that this pattern varies based on individual students' completion of a said number of instructional hours, reaching a uniform test window (McDavid et al., 2013) may not be holistically feasible because of external factors beyond the organization's control. However, it is a recommendation for it to become a consistent goal for as many adult learners as possible. Patterns of class attendance and persistence (Beder et al., 2006; Greenberg, 2008;

Sabatini et al., 2011) in general contribute significantly to whether this goal is attainable. Attempting to maintain the same evaluation schedule on all students will enable the organization to better evaluate student gains over a more defined period of time. This, in turn, could lead to additional goals for continued improvement and greater fruition of the effective practices honored by Mission Liberation.

### **Reporting Progress**

A final recommendation offered as a result of this study's findings is in regard to learners' assessment progress reports. Understanding that the TABE computes a scaled score, as well as a corresponding grade level equivalency, it was evident that other progress reports utilized by Mission Liberation report in a Lexile equivalency. Across individual interviews and responses from the open-ended survey items, respondents valued being able to visually see their progress (Merriam & Bierema, 2014), but more importantly, track it themselves. In order for this data to be most useable to students and their individual progress, the recommendation offered is to report progress according to a universal scale (McDavid et al., 2013) and maintain that.

Consideration of the scale(s) utilized within students' resources should guide scaled equivalencies on other comparable reports. In other words, the scaled equivalencies that students see on their own individual reports should mirror the scales utilized by the organization for pre/post assessment points. Greater transparency will be achieved as continuity is addressed (McDavid et al., 2013; Rossi et al., 2004). An additional thought in this regard that was identified across interviews was that learners seek to grow more independent, and as a result of their learning, they are. Equipping

them with progress reports, according to the same scale, will foster greater accountability and independence for their own learning and achievement.

### **Summary**

Key findings extracted from this qualitative case study came from observations of classroom instruction (Merriam, 2009), individual interviews (Siedman, 2013), an oral survey (Fink, 2013), and test comparisons (McDavid et al., 2013). Study findings suggest that Mission Liberation offers a balanced component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012) across the elements named to compile a model literacy framework for adult learners.

Interviews showcased common themes including, but not limited to: the pattern to secede among adult learners, the impact of oppressive environmental stimuli, and conditional imperfections driven by either a physical, environmental, cognitive, or affective barrier. Respondents communicated that being illiterate caused them to be restricted in one or more facets, reactionary, socially withdrawn, and a victim of fearful failure. Additionally, adult learners believed obtaining the gift of literacy to act as a provision for gainful independence, visible value (Knowles, 1984; Massengill, 2003), and a life necessity.

Factors of persistence were motivated by a personal commitment to growth, as well as members of the Mission Liberation learning community. As a result of literacy, respondents believed they would grow more independently productive, stable, and reflect completeness as a whole person. Skill attainment, a newfound fearlessness, and an opportunity to pay it forward were common themes from respondents in terms of next steps and now, attainable opportunities.

Additionally, survey findings tabulated opportunities for feedback to be considered the Most Effective instructional component in terms of its effectiveness to the growth of an adult learner. On the contrary, expository and creative writings were considered the most, Not Effective to the growth of an adult learner. Computed TABE analyses reflected a positive difference in pre/post test comparisons for the larger majority.

Identified limitations to the study included: a small sample size (Field, 2013), a narrowed perception as only one organization was considered within the parameters of this study's findings, omission of the lowest tier of adult learners, and an even more restricted sample size for analyzed test data (Field, 2013).

Recommendations offered for continued improvement of service offerings available at Mission Liberation included: (a) increased modeling opportunities, (b) maintenance of the welcoming climate, (c) maintenance of a balanced approach, (d) more consistent testing patterns and intervals, and (e) unified reporting progress in terms of scaled equivalencies.

## **Section Five: Contribution to Scholarship**

### **Article Abstract**

Validated through the *Adult Learning Theory* (Speck, 1996) and the *Theory of Andragogy* (Knowles, 1984), a targeted literacy framework effective for adult learners was crafted as part of this qualitative case study to include the following components: assessment, the whole language approach, authentic application, learner feedback, foundational principles, goal setting, and open discussion. Components were cross-evaluated with the programmatic approach taken by Mission Liberation to determine that for the larger majority, this instructional design is found conducive to the academic growth of adult learners. Following a review of existing literature that identified the precursors for illiteracy, symmetrical findings of stumbling blocks in the lives of study's respondents were reflected as well. Increased modeling opportunities, maintenance of a welcoming climate, preservation of a balanced approach, implementation of more consistent testing patterns and intervals, and lastly, a more unified reporting design are offered as recommendations for continued improvement within this non-profit organization.

### **Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy Submission-Ready Journal Article**

#### **Introduction**

In the United States alone, approximately 36 million American adults are functioning at a literacy level equivalent to an average 9-year-old (ProLiteracy, 2014). Similarly, the adult illiteracy rate within the state of Missouri reflects 7% of the entire state population, which accounts for approximately 302,523 adults (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Of the 36 million American adults, approximately 225,000 adults residing within the service region of Mission Liberation are functioning at the lowest

literacy level (Mission Liberation, 2015). Holistically, the aim of this qualitative case study was to (a) understand each learner's background and the precursors for illiteracy as an adult (Roman, 2004), (b) determine the effectiveness of the program's instructional framework (McDavid et al., 2013), and (c) offer recommendations for change based on the outcome measures (Bardach, 2012) of program effectiveness.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions that guided this qualitative case study included one primary question, with an additional three, secondary research questions. They included: (1) What instructional components comprise a model literacy framework for adult learners?, (2) How is illiteracy perceived by adult learners?, (3) What instructional components are perceived to be most effective by adult learners?, and (4) Is there a difference in pre/post TABE test scores with Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 sample participants at Mission Liberation? Driven by these research questions and validated through two existing theoretical frameworks, this qualitative case study was formulated.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Casing for this qualitative case study was corroborated through two theoretical frameworks: *Adult Learning Theory* (Speck, 1996) and *Theory of Andragogy* (Knowles, 1984). According to Speck (1996), maximum learning among adults occurs in the presence of the following elements: attainable and relevant aims, self-directed learning activities, authentic opportunities to recall personal experiences, repeat opportunities for practice and open discussion, comfortable atmosphere, respect for diversity, and a supportive environment.

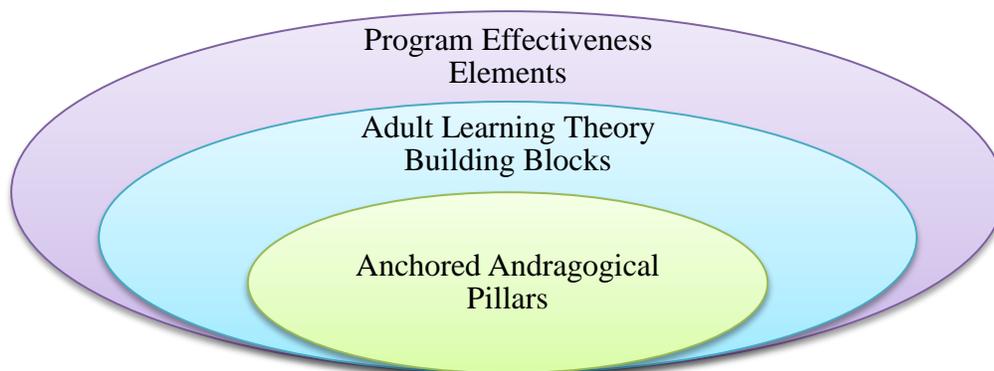
Comparably, the central andragogical principles framed by Knowles (1984) permitted the extraction of four pillars that established the conceptual underpinnings for this qualitative research study. Pillars include: (a) purpose-driven design, (b) experience-based instruction, (c) problem-focused curricular, and (d) value-added intent. Purpose-driven design reflects intentional teaching (Slavin, 2000) with an awareness of learners' "interests and plans" (Mikulecky, Smith-Burke, & Beatty, 2009, p. 71), guided by collaborative planning, continued, diagnostic assessment, and suitable modifications (Knowles, 1984; Kruidenier, 2002; Sabatini et al., 2011) to further aid learners' development.

Additionally, experience-based instruction reflects the second pillar and as likened to "resources for learning" by Merriam and Bierema (2014), adult learners' experiences are diverse and unpredictable (Petty & Thomas, 2014). Problem-focused curricular fulfills the third pillar as adults' purpose for learning is task-oriented, problem-generated, and for an improved quality of life (Knowles, 1984). Through value-added intent, adults conceptualize the worth of learning and that directly impacts factors of continued achievement and persistence (Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Through a genuine intention to design appropriate instruction, embrace all experiences, target relatable problems, adult learners will not only acquire the gift of literacy, but they will come to value it and what that is achieved, these pillars will have stood the test of time.

To this end, the andragogical pillars, principles, as well as elements of program effectiveness joined together to provide a contextual synthesis for this qualitative case study (see Figure 1). The andragogical pillars anchored this study and symbolically,

reflect the core of the pictured figure. The core andragogical principles will support the pillars in the second tier, while simultaneously benefitting from the structural support provided from the elements of program effectiveness.

**Figure 1.** Contextual Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks



*Figure 1.* Contextual synthesis of theoretical frameworks. Hierarchical interrelationships woven between these principles will ground this qualitative case study.

### **Literature Review**

Adult illiteracy presents a concern nationwide as greater than 20% of United States' adults are "...functioning at the lowest level of literacy...[and] older adults have higher rates of illiteracy than any other age bracket" (Roman, 2004), pp. 83-84). Prevalent as an equally debilitating societal problem (Jacobson, 2011), the economic and financial implications of adult illiteracy reflect even greater hurdles of unemployment, healthcare access, and fiscal stability (Roman, 2004). Not to mention the affective paralysis that exists among illiterate adults to include feelings of embarrassment, defeat, doubt, and disgrace (Bishop, 1991).

Adjacent to the impact of illiteracy upon adult lives, numerous roadblocks including: barriers of engagement, attendance, persistence, and motivation (Beder et al., 2006; Greenberg, 2008; Greenberg et al., 2013) plague adult literacy programs,

dismantling potential for adult learners' success. Also, inadequate funding and restricted opportunities for professional development showcase two additional roadblocks to success (Sabatini et al., 2011), not to mention the generational patterns that accompanies this cyclical restraint of illiteracy (Roman, 2004). Lastly, illiteracy impacts competition in the job market and as technology add another layer of selectivity, it marginalizes employment potential for illiterate adults further (Bynner, 2008; Roman, 2004). Thus, formulating the need for a model literacy framework for adult learners built upon a component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012).

A targeted, instructional framework is essential for growing literate adult learners, and as research suggests, a significant disparity exists in determining the essential, instructional components, or even more so, what interventions are deemed most effective to the growth of adult learners (Sabatini et al., 2011). Framed within this qualitative case study, components necessary for a model literacy framework, as suggested by present research, include: ongoing assessment (Binder et al., 2011; Petty & Thomas, 2014), an integrated, whole approach (as cited by Pheasey in Taylor, 2006), authentic application opportunities (Padak & Bardine, 2004), learner feedback (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mikulecky et al., 2009), foundational principles to constitute a firm footing (Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002), applied goal setting (Houp, 2009; Layne, 2009), and open discussion (Bishop, 1991).

Continual assessment (a) enables learner-specific, tailored instruction, (b) regularly tracks learner progress (Petty & Thomas, 2014), (c) fosters greater potential for learner gains during instructional sequence, and (d) increases instructional effectiveness (Binder et al., 2011). Effective scaffolding for a whole language experience (Taylor,

2006) works to build complete readers who house mechanical skill, as well as an aesthetic desire for the reading process (Layne, 2009). Connecting real-life experiences with academic tasks is vital for adult learners (Lester, 2012; Mikulecky et al., 2009; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) and as defended by the research of Padak and Bardine (2004), authentic instruction facilitates positive change for reading practices of adult learners.

Independently, feedback acts as a motivational tool (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Lester, 2012; Mikulecky et al., 2009), enabling learners to further evaluate their own skill progression. Foundational principles of fluency, word recognition, and decoding (Binder et al., 2011; Massengill, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002; Sabatini et al., 2011) are also necessary components in a model literacy framework tailored for adult learners and children alike. Greater visibility and awareness of established goals help to better educate all learning community stakeholders (Cervero & Wilson, 2006), while maintaining a culture of accountability (Levi, 2013). Ongoing collaboration and open discussion is the last ingredient necessary to compose a model literacy framework for adult learners and provides learners with an opportunity to interact with the content, engage with one another, and participate in a sequential exchange of dialogue (Bruffee, 1999; Charan, 2001/2011).

### **Design and Methodology**

Context for this qualitative case study will be housed in a non-profit organization named Mission Liberation (pseudonym) that was established in 1985 with the intention to provide free literacy instruction to adult learners across their service region. Findings from this case study reflect a 16-member sample size, comprised of voluntary, adult

learners within the Mission Liberation non-profit organization. Learners represented different class placements, ability levels, and backgrounds.

Specific to this qualitative case study, multiple collection strategies were utilized to achieve data triangulation (Creswell, 2014). Qualitatively, the following strategies were employed: repeat, on-site observations of classroom instruction (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009), fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), administration of an adult learner survey to complete sample (Field, 2013; Fink, 2013), collection of program-specific artifacts including curriculum guides and instructional plans (Merriam, 2009), individual, semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009; Siedman, 2013), and pre/post TABE test comparisons (McDavid et al., 2013).

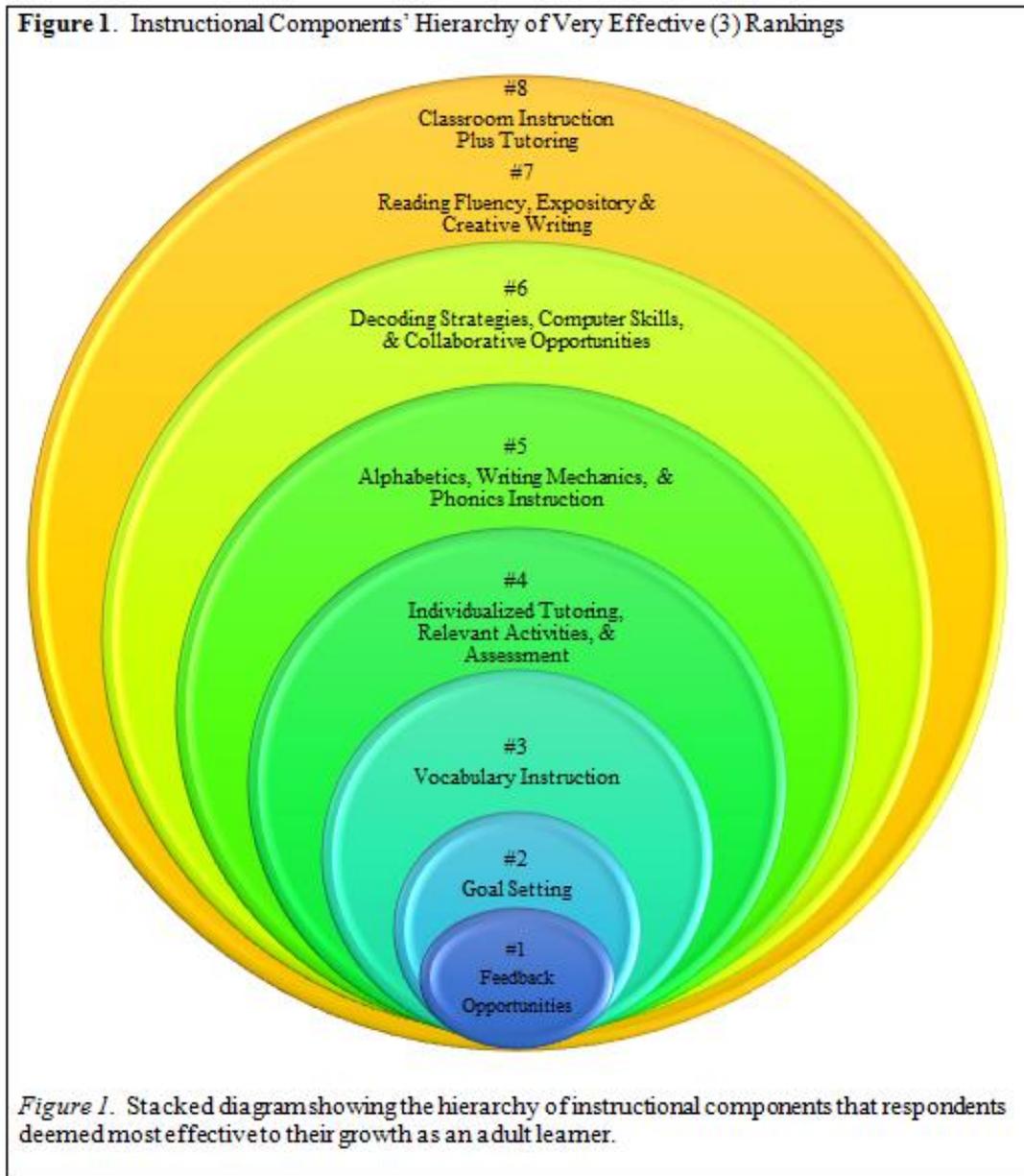
Collected data was analyzed by the following means. Observable evidence reflecting each of the seven, previously named instructional components was extracted from seven classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) were conducted with each of the 16 study participants, with the same six questions asked of each of them. From those 16 interviews, interview transcripts were coded and resulting themes extracted (Merriam, 2009). Each of the 16 study participants completed a survey (Creswell, 2014) that required them to rank a series of instructional components on a scale of effectiveness in terms of the extent to which the given component contributed to their growth as an adult learner. In addition, there were two open-ended questions that study participants were asked to respond to as well. Findings from this research study also included analyses of pre/post comparisons (McDavid et al., 2013) made from study participants' TABE scores, as collected by Mission Liberation.

## **Conclusive Findings**

Observed classroom instruction sessions indicate and serve as evidentiary support that all seven named components including: the role of assessment, whole language approach, authentic application, learner feedback, foundational principles, goal setting, and open discussion are equitably balanced and effectively integrated as part of the program approach taken by the Mission Liberation learning community.

As reflected from the results of the adult learner survey, respondents deem learner feedback (Binder et al., 2011; Bishop, 1991; Lester, 2012) and applied goal setting (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Levi, 2013; Mikulecky et al., 2009) most effective to their growth as an adult learner. A secondary conclusion drawn here is the ineffectiveness of expository and creative writing, as perceived by adult learners. Fictional writings were virtually obsolete across observed classroom instruction, and gleaning from students' response, this observation is acceptable, as learners feel like this component is not effective to their growth as an adult learner.

Themes extracted from the individual interviews reflect none other than a multi-faceted perception of illiteracy, comprised of many layered perspectives. Chains of illiteracy have every potential to be paralyzing for an entire lifetime according to many different scales (Calhoon et al., 2013; Kutner et al., 2007; Roman, 2004); however, those chains can be broken with the right weapon. Based on interview findings from study participants, education is the tool to setting oneself free and achieving the ultimate release from the restrictions driven by illiteracy. Additionally, the single most unwarranted imperfection across respondents was illiteracy. Findings from this study suggested that whether illiteracy results in direct response to an environmental imperfection or physical,



affective, or cognitive flaw (Bishop, 1991; Kutner et al., 2007; Roman, 2004), found imperfections thread ultimate perfection.

Furthermore, an added key conclusion gained from this study is in the surprising evolution of the once camouflaged value of literacy to the now, transparent value of literacy (Knowles, 1984). Yet another important conclusion to be drawn here is that those who once were quitted learners (Greenberg et al., 2013) have now emerged into

committed learners, with the intrinsic motivation and desire to learn, succeed, and grow (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Two extensions of that reflect the ideals that members of Mission Liberation are passionate (Layne, 2009) about their role and have established meaningful relationships with students that convey the heightened level of investment and efficacy (Merriam & Bierema, 2014) that is felt by students. Also, it was notable that several respondents offered dialogue (Charan, 2001/2011; Bruffee, 1999) in regard to how Mission Liberation is different for them compared to other programs that they have been in and again, the recurring theme was the level of investment (Padak & Bardine, 2004) by the full, Mission Liberation learning community.

The final chief finding is that yes, there is an apparent difference between pre/post TABE test comparisons. More specifically, it is, for the majority, a positive difference in learner performance. Initially, of the five students' data that was available, three-fifths or approximately 60% reflected a performance gain across multiple points according to the TABE scaled score, as well as an increase of several months when compared with their individual grade level equivalency range. Remaining two-fifths or 40% reflected a significant decline in performance when their pre/post assessment data was considered. Additionally, from this data, a larger inference can be made about the effectiveness (McDavid et al., 2013) of Mission Liberation instructional program. It can be concluded that the instruction students are receiving as part of Mission Liberation program offerings are found effective for the larger majority, as reflected by individual learner gains.

Table 2

*Students' TABE Pre/Post Test Comparisons (Based on Students' Two, Most Recent Test Points)*

| Pre-Test Scaled Score | Post-Test Scaled Score | Elapsed Time Interval | Grade Level Equivalency Range | Growth (+/-) |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 427                   | 451                    | 15 months             | 2.9-3.7                       | +0.8         |
| 428                   | 465                    | 6 months              | 2.9-4.1                       | +1.2         |
| 417                   | 294                    | 10 months             | 2.6-0.8                       | -1.8         |
| 294                   | 388                    | 7 months              | .8-1.8                        | +1.0         |
| 440                   | 349                    | 8 months              | 3.3-1.8                       | -1.5         |

### **Final Discussion**

Key findings extracted from this qualitative case study came from observations of classroom instruction (Merriam, 2009), individual interviews (Siedman, 2013), an oral survey (Fink, 2013), and test comparisons (McDavid et al., 2013). Study findings suggest that Mission Liberation offers a balanced component-skills approach (Binder et al., 2011; Carr, 1990; MacArthur et al., 2012) across the elements named to compile a model literacy framework for adult learners.

Interviews showcased common themes including, but not limited to: the pattern to secede among adult learners, the impact of oppressive environmental stimuli, and conditional imperfections driven by either a physical, environmental, cognitive, or affective barrier. Respondents communicated that being illiterate caused them to be restricted in one or more facets, reactionary, socially withdrawn, and a victim of fearful failure. Additionally, adult learners believed obtaining the gift of literacy to act as a provision for gainful independence, visible value, and a life necessity.

Factors of persistence were motivated by a personal commitment to growth, as well as members of the Mission Liberation learning community. As a result of literacy, respondents believed they would grow more independently productive, stable, and reflect completeness as a whole person. Skill attainment, a newfound fearlessness, and an opportunity to pay it forward were common themes from respondents in terms of next steps and now, attainable opportunities.

Additionally, survey findings tabulated opportunities for feedback to be considered the Most Effective instructional component in terms of its effectiveness to the growth of an adult learner. On the contrary, expository and creative writings were considered the most, Not Effective to the growth of an adult learner. Computed TABE analyses reflected a positive difference in pre/post test comparisons for the larger majority.

Identified limitations to the study included: a small sample size (Field, 2013), a narrowed perception as only one organization was considered within the parameters of this study's findings, omission of the lowest tier of adult learners, and an even more restricted sample size for analyzed test data (Field, 2013).

Recommendations offered for continued improvement of service offerings available at Mission Liberation included: (a) increased modeling opportunities, (b) maintenance of the welcoming climate, (c) maintenance of a balanced approach, (d) more consistent testing patterns and intervals, and (e) unified reporting progress in terms of scaled equivalencies.

## **Summary**

Closure is achieved in this qualitative case study after having identified that adult

illiteracy and corresponding statistics remain a concern on local, state, national, and global scales. Validated through the *Adult Learning Theory* (Speck, 1996) and the *Theory of Andragogy* (Knowles, 1984), a targeted literacy framework effective for adult learners was crafted to include the following components: assessment, the whole language approach, authentic application, learner feedback, foundational principles, goal setting, and open discussion. Components were cross-evaluated with the programmatic approach taken by Mission Liberation to determine that for the larger majority, this instructional design is found conducive to the academic growth of adult learners. Following a review of existing literature that identified the precursors for illiteracy, symmetrical findings of stumbling blocks in the lives of study's respondents were reflected as well. As best synthesized by a statement made by one of the study participants, "The pen [meaning education] is mightier than the AK47 that I was taught to carry." The value (Messengill, 2003) of literacy and education, as a whole, cannot be likened to anything else bolder, and so investment (Padak & Bardine, 2004) should be made to provide literacy education for all in the most meaningful way according to many different scales.

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## **Section Six: Scholarly Practitioner Reflection**

### **A Changed Educational Leader**

With only a blurred memory and failed attempts to recall, I have no recollection of the process that I completed to learn how to successfully ride my bicycle for the first time, saddle my mule, take my parents' vehicle out for my first driving lesson, or even, years later, my first interaction with detailed lesson planning as a new teacher. This statement might suggest to readers that I am in the earliest onset of Alzheimer's disease; however, that is not the case at all. In fact, as I think about processing in general, it is common knowledge that as tasks are rehearsed, we, in turn, enable ourselves to complete the same tasks in a more automated fashion.

As I ponder how the process of completing my dissertation has influenced my practice as an educational leader, my gut response is that nothing about this process reflects automaticity, unlike many other processes in my life. Instead, the whole process to obtaining my doctorate degree has reflected a stilted, labor-intensive process that is completed from, at best, a very typhlotic paradigm. That said, to measure the growth that I perceive to have occurred within myself, as a result of completing this program and yes, my dissertation, is bar none comparable to any other processes that I have engaged in throughout my 28-year lifespan.

To this end, my practice as an educational leader, as a result of completing this doctorate journey, has been influenced by three leading facets. First and foremost, this experience revolutionized my self-confidence levels, not to mention the renewed assurance I have in my ability to lead students, fellow colleagues, teams, peers, and others in general. Secondly, this conscious process has helped me to discover my considerate voice to a greater extent, among audiences whose members I previously

perceived to be superior to myself, or my status. Finally, engagement in this process has impacted my practice as an educational leader by rekindling the degree to which I am capable of making a positive impact in professional practice on local, state, national, and global scales.

### **Revolutionized Self-Confidence**

Completion of the dissertation process, in part, has influenced my practice as an educational leader; however, as described in the previous paragraph, its extension stretches to an even greater change in self-confidence. According to Northouse (2013), confidence is likened to another affective characteristic, self-efficacy.

Confidence refers to having self-efficacy – the belief that one has the ability to successfully accomplish a specified task. Leaders who have confidence are more likely to be motivated to succeed, to be persistent when obstacles arise, and to welcome a challenge. (p. 265)

Even as a toddler, I sought to share my gifts, talents, and skills with those around me; however, as a result of some oppressive obstacles as an adolescent, that self-confidence was shattered and to bring this story up to the present, has now taken approximately a decade to fully reconstruct.

Despite ten years of elapsed time, my self-confidence has resurrected itself and now, more than ever, I am confident in myself, my capabilities, and in my ability to lead effectively. Additionally, I know that I possess the self-efficacy (Northouse, 2013) necessary to climb and conquer any mountain that presents itself before me. Obtaining a doctorate degree is not a feat accomplished by all, and for that reason alone, I have

greater confidence in myself and in the prestige that comes with this bestowed, academic honor.

### **A Considerate Voice**

Completing this post-graduate doctoral program and the dissertation itself has enabled discovery of a more considerate voice within myself. Sharing my God-given opinions has never been difficult for me, but as suggested by Garvin & Roberto (2001/2013) a voice negligent of careful consideration can be detrimental to any organizational community or individual relationships. Merriam (2014) coins the phrase “radical openness” (p. 225) to convey the importance of honoring and evaluating others’ viewpoints prior to making an opposing claim that counteracts paradigms previously communicated.

A recent example to illustrate the point occurred approximately six weeks ago at a statewide Community College Teacher Education Division meeting. The intent of the meeting was to begin redesign efforts on the existing Associate in Arts in Teaching transfer degree. Essentially, of the institutions represented at this meeting, there were those in favor of maintaining existing degree requirements, those in favor of decreasing the credit hour requirements, and those in favor of increasing the credit hour requirements. Needless to say, the complexity of voices (George et al., 2007/2011) around the table was multidimensional.

After having yielded to “radical openness” (Merriam, 2014, p. 225), it was time for my voice to be shared with the larger group. Now, in previous years in my current role, very seldom would I submit myself to the evaluation of others after sharing my opinion. On the contrary, I am now much more confident in expressing my voice,

opinion, and feedback in a constructive manner (Drucker, 2004/2011). A statement extracted from Andy Grove (1999) synthesizes the importance of expressing one's viewpoint in a meaningful way, with every united vision to achieve the best solution for all involved. "Your criterion for involvement should be that you're heard and understood...All sides cannot prevail in the debate, but all opinions have value in shaping the right answer" (as cited in Garvin & Roberto, 2001/2013, p. 85). Thus, turning our attention to an impact, rekindled.

### **Rekindled Impact**

An upbringing in a small town has the potential to skew one's perspective of conquerable impact, or as better described by Northouse (2013), influence. Growing up, I knew everyone in my community, and even worse, they knew everything about me. Completing this program has forced me to broaden my scope and consider the impact of individual actions, decisions, and movements on a much larger scale, beyond my own back yard. Supported by Kotter (1990/2011), greater acts of leadership are constituted by increasing agents of change. In other words, completing this educational journey has reminded me of the degree to which I am equipped to make a positive impact in educational practice, across local, state, national, and global scales.

Returning to my present work in Teacher Education, multiple new program and certification mandates have recently been communicated for new candidates who wish to complete an undergraduate degree in education in the state of Missouri. While these mandates are intended to increase rigor and accountability for programs and the completers they graduate, many elements of the plans for implementation have placed teacher candidates across the state at a significant disadvantage. Despite the fact that our

Teacher Education program is by far one of the smallest across Missouri community college campuses, it remains my responsibility to sustain vigilance (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2003/2013) in regard to the educational changes that will directly impact the teacher candidates our campus serves.

This ideal of rekindled impact provides justification for the very act of influence which Northouse (2013) defines. “[Influence]...is concerned with how the leader affects followers. Influence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without influence, leadership does not exist” (p. 5). Experience has always been a great teacher for me, and over time, I have learned that influence (Rooke & Torbert, 2005/2011) is not always portrayed in the statements made, but rather, more by the model that is displayed. Through the aid of this program, I have a clearer vision of impactful leadership and understand that no longer is what you say what constitutes leadership, but more so by one’s actions. Additionally, those actions are interconnected through many different scales and respecting the potential impact that could result is also the trait of a mindful leader (Banaji et al., 2003/2013). As a Doctor of Education, practicing mindful leadership is what I seek to achieve in all facets of educational and scholarly practice.

### **A Changed Scholar**

My experience as a doctoral candidate has been both intricately perplexing, yet also very empowering at the same time. It is a humbling thought to begin to think of yourself as a scholar, as a result of achieving your doctorate degree. As a result of this educational process and more specifically, completing my dissertation, I have been influenced as a scholar in three primary ways. Initially, the level of accountability that comes with your writings as a new scholar ranges to incomprehensible heights.

Secondly, the selfless paradigm that comes with being a new scholar has greatly influenced me to desire to give back to the research base for others' benefit and gain. Lastly, this process has influenced me as a new scholar in terms of the vigilance that is required to really understand the prestige and resulting credibility that is conceived through such a title, Doctor.

### **Held Accountability**

Greater accountability is a given with pursuit of a doctorate degree, as such educational attainments are not achieved by all people. In turn, the level of commitment required to ensure that all recordings are accurately represented and valid (Merriam, 2009) is an adjacent responsibility. Not only is the expectation of accountability established by those who comprise this terminal professional community, but it becomes an internalized norm for all new entries into the most elite professional community organized by academia (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Levi, 2013). From the perspective of Tinsley, Dillon, & Madsen (2011/2013), "demand[ed] accountability" (p. 52) roots as an intellectual act of compliance, on the part of the scholar. This too coincides with the selfless mindset, to which we now direct our attention.

### **Selfless Mindset**

As a new scholar, engagement in this process has cultivated a great desire within me to share my research findings with the larger, global community. Just as I leaned on the giants in the field to formulate my own research topic, others need to lean upon current research to bring advancement and intended gain to their existing situation or present standing in life. That will only be permissible if individuals remove themselves and their individual gain from the equation and begin to see from a selfless lens (Bolman

& Deal, 2008). Goleman (1996/2011) identified the power of collaboration as an enabler to problem resolution on a variety of ladder rungs. “And motivation...makes such people excellent collaborators; their passion for the work spreads to others, and they are driven to find solutions” (p. 19). At the end of the dissertation process, the goal of every scholar is to inform literature in hopes of catalyzing positive change. Efforts to seed positive change will only happen with a vigilance (Banaji et al., 2003/2013) that exceeds any awareness one has ever known before.

### **A Scholarly Vigilance**

Titles suggest categories, as well as statuses and Doctor is the highest among titles in the world of academia. In response, this title accompanies highly regarded levels of prestige and honor, yet silently mandates an even greater regard for credibility and vigilance (Banaji et al., 2003/2013). Attaining the title of Doctor stimulates greater self-regulating behaviors that foster improved awareness (George et al., 2007/2011). As a new member of this exclusive learning community, I desire to consistently possess the vigilance (Banaji et al., 2003/2013) of a scholar in all that I do to sustain the level of integrity, trust, and example that is displayed by those who have obtained their doctorate degree.

### **Summary**

Holistically, these few remaining sentences will bring closure to a three-year educational journey named pursuing a doctoral degree and in turn, creates much weight in terms of what final thoughts I wish to leave my readers with. Commencing this journey three years ago was envisioned to involve a significant amount of time, energy, money, and work. Three years later ending this journey, I would say that while those

ingredients were necessities, so much more was required of me. It was not the basics that ignited the growth that has occurred within me as both an educational leader and new scholar. Rather, it was the additional amenities that I applied over the course of my journey that caused the life-long changes within me that I described in the previous paragraphs.

Completing this arduous and at times, blinded process has reformulated my self-confidence in my authentic (Northouse, 2013) ability to lead effectively. No longer do I see my voice as unimportant, but instead, an invaluable resource that considers the paradigms of other stakeholders in order to bring about the most appropriate and feasible resolutions. Also, a rekindling of the potential impact I can make in my professional practice was sparked. To a greater degree, I believe that the influence I have can extend beyond the local scale. I have the potential to be a global change agent!

As a scholar, personal accountability has taken on a completely new interpretation, in terms of the level of accountability expected from members of this learning community. Likewise, I now hold myself to an even higher standard to remain selfless, making quality contributions to the research base that allowed for me to commence my research footprint. While simultaneously, remaining vigilant to forever respect the prestige, honor, credibility, and responsibility that comes with such a title as Doctor.

In closing, scripture tells us in Ecclesiastes 3 that "...to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" (Bible Gateway, 2016). I do not

know where completion of this journey will lead me next, nor how the findings of my research study will weave into the larger research base on adult illiteracy. Yet, I rest assuredly in the palm of my Maker's hand knowing full well that the contents of this very document were destined by Him, for His people, and for the betterment of His kingdom. I close this document with newfound humility and obedience in knowing that God destined for me to complete this doctoral journey and as I end this very sentence, I have. Be reminded however, that it is only because of Him that I achieved my portion!

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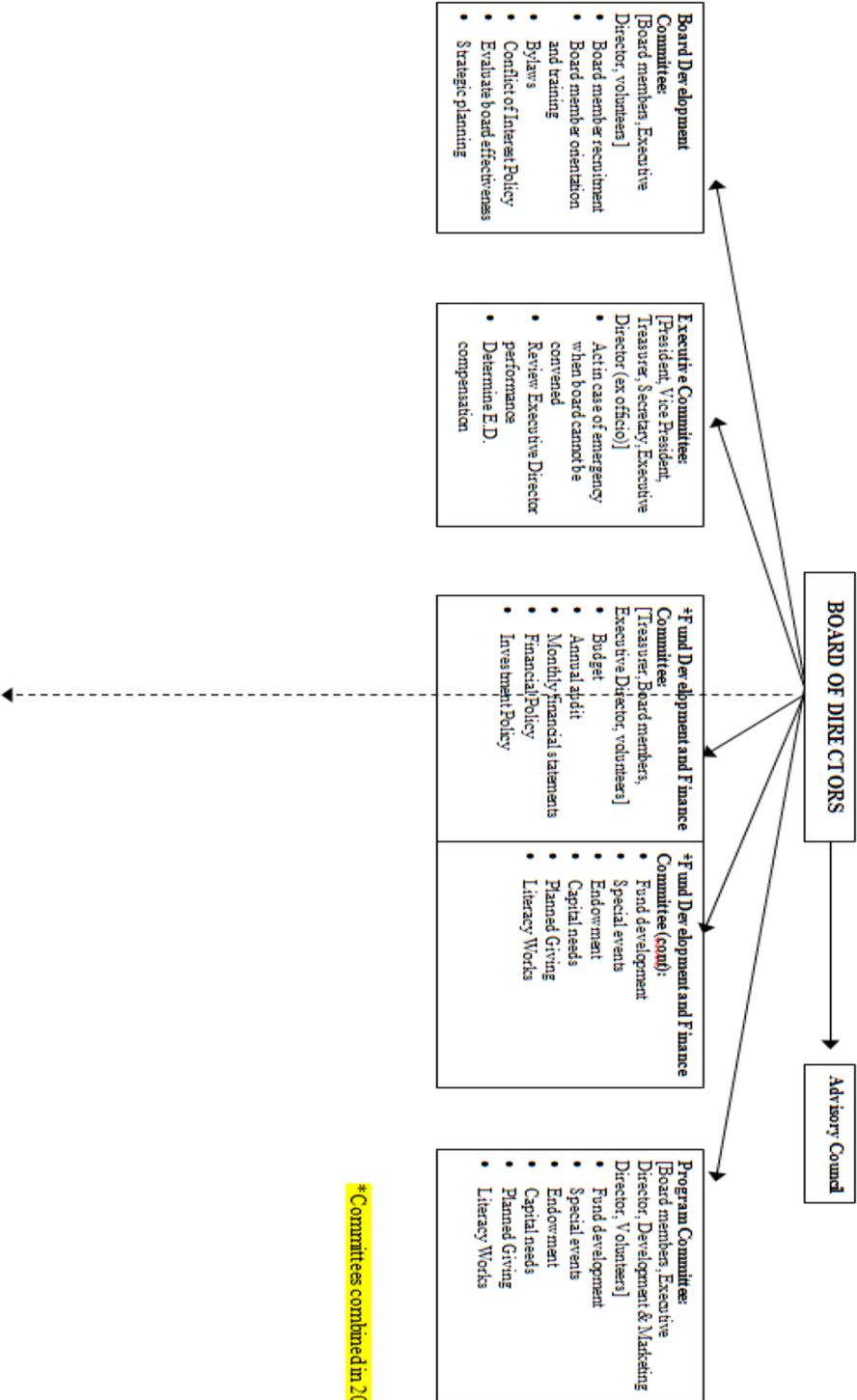
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Organizational Chart April 2014



*Appendix B***CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY****Researcher's Name(s): Johannah D. Lynch-Baughner****Project Number: \*was not provided a project number\*****Project Title:***A Model Literacy Framework for Adult Learners:  
Analyzing the Impact of a Component-Skills Approach***INTRODUCTION****This consent may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted through the University of Missouri-Columbia as part of the Statewide Cooperative Doctoral Program housed in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA).

When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. If you wish to withdraw your participation, that simply needs to be communicated to the researcher.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this research is to better frame instructional components necessary for adult learners, as well as their perception of illiteracy. Also, the broader purpose of this study is to examine (a) instructional components necessary for a model literacy framework for adult learners, while engaging in a (b) program evaluation of service offerings available through Mission Liberation.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?**

A representative sample of the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 cohorts at Mission Liberation will participate in this study. The minimum number of participants for the study would be 30. In other words, I wish to consent a minimum of 30 subjects.

**WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups that will be recorded while also completing an oral survey. In addition, on-site observation(s) of literacy instruction will be completed and corresponding student work samples will be reviewed. In addition, pre/post test data collected by Mission Liberation will be examined for each program participant to evaluate the amount of growth obtained through instruction. This test data would be specific to the *Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)*, *San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability*, as well as the writing rubrics used by the organization for assessment purposes.

**HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?**

This study is anticipated to begin in December and is anticipated to end by May 2016; however, those times are approximate and if additional time is needed, the data collection process could continue further into 2016. Participants' time will be spent completing the survey and participating in an individual interview, focus group(s), or both. Allotted time for interviews and focus groups is flexible; however, should not exceed 2 hours. On-site observations will occur in alignment with the instruction schedule, so would not be in addition to the normal instructional time. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

Your participation will benefit the research gap on adult illiteracy as this study will work to better frame instructional components necessary for adult learners, as well as their perception of illiteracy.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?**

The only foreseeable risk associated with this study is that the topic of adult illiteracy generally accompanies feelings of embarrassment, shame, and doubt for those of limited literacy skills. Because of the study's topic, questions will be asked of participants that will require them to explain the precursors for illiteracy in their life as an adult. This could likely be a vulnerable place for study participants to discuss, but it is necessary in order to uncover how adult learners perceive illiteracy in their life.

## **WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?**

You have the option of not participating in this study, and will not be penalized for your decision.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information given will remain confidential as recorded responses will be transcribed and coded for general reporting purposes. Once the recorded information has been transcribed and coded, it will be kept for seven years after the study has been completed. After that time has elapsed, the data will be appropriately destroyed for confidentiality purposes. Information from this study will be shared with Mission Liberation, as well as my lead instructor and committee advisors for completion of my doctorate degree. As part of the requirements for my degree, findings from this study will be used in the writing of a journal article that will be offered for publication; however, information presented will remain confidential with the name of the organization and its participants to remain anonymous as pseudonyms will be used to protect all identities.

In addition, audio recordings of interviews and focus groups will be taken that could identify you.

## **WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?**

Each participant will receive a \$10 gift card to the store, *Dollar Tree*.

## **WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

Subjects' participation may be terminated by the research without regard to subjects' consent if their contributions to the study become unprofessional or unethical in manner.

## **WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Please contact researcher, Johannah D. Lynch-Baughner if you have questions about the research. Additionally, you may ask questions, voice concerns or complaints to the researcher in a professional manner.

## **WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to

participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu).

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact [Johannah D. Lynch-Baugher](mailto:Johannah.D.Lynch-Baugher@missouri.edu) at 660.359.7498. Additionally, my doctoral advisor is Carole Edmonds and she can be reached at [cake@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:cake@nwmissouri.edu).

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

## **SIGNATURES**

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

---

Subject

---

Date

*\*The presence and signature of an impartial witness is required during the entire informed consent discussion if the subject or subject's legally authorized representative is unable to read.*

*\*\*The "Additional Signature" line may be used for the second parent's signature, if required. This line may also be used for any other signature which is required as per federal, state, local, sponsor and/or any other entity requirements.*

*"If required" means that the signature line is signed only if it is required as per federal, state, local, sponsor and/or any other entity requirements.*

## **Final Thank-You Statement**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. Your perspective is valuable and will aid in better understanding the instructional components necessary for a model literacy framework for adult learners. Your voluntary contributions as an active participant in this qualitative case study are much appreciated.

## Appendix C

**Draft Survey Template**

**\*\*Survey will be administered orally to the entire representative sample.\*\***

1. Please rank each instructional component according to the following scale:

**1 = not effective** to your growth as an adult learner,

**2 = somewhat effective** to your growth as an adult learner,

and **3 = very effective** to your growth as an adult learner

| <b>Instructional Component Description</b>      | <b>Rank</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Learn new words                                 |             |
| Read unknown words                              |             |
| Identify sound-letter relationships             |             |
| Read smoothly without hesitation                |             |
| Write with correct punctuation                  |             |
| Write factual and fictional stories             |             |
| Receive instruction one-on-one                  |             |
| Instruction with others and in smaller settings |             |
| Use computers to complete tasks                 |             |
| Identify patterns in words (e.g. vowels)        |             |
| Work in groups to complete tasks                |             |
| Complete tasks that relate to your life         |             |
| Evaluation of what you have learned             |             |
| Get comments from your instructor or peers      |             |
| Name goals that you want to work to achieve     |             |

2. In your opinion, what other instructional components (learning activities) not listed above has been effective (or helped) in your growth as an adult learner (reader)?  
How?
3. What instructional component (learning activity), if any, would you add to help adult learners in their literacy development (reading and writing)?

*Appendix D*

Draft Interview Protocol Template  
(Adapted from Creswell, 2014, p. 194)

**Interview Summary**

|                    |                                               |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Date of Interview  |                                               |
| Time of Interview  |                                               |
| Place of Interview |                                               |
| Interviewer        | Johannah D. Lynch-Baugher, Doctoral Candidate |
| Interviewee        |                                               |

**Interview Questions**

1. Summarize your life story and how you came to enroll in services at Mission Liberation.
2. What barriers (challenges) are you aware of that contributed to (led to) your limited literacy (reading and writing) as an adult?
3. How have those literacy (reading and writing) barriers (challenges) impacted your life as a child, learner, and adult?
4. Why is overcoming illiteracy (learning to read and write) important to you as a learner and as an adult?
5. What aspects (parts) of Mission Liberation have most motivated you to persist (stay) in the program, to continue your learning, and in the end, overcome illiteracy (learn to read and write) as a barrier (challenge)?
6. How will your life be transformed (forever changed) because of the gift of literacy (reading and writing); what will you be able to do now successfully that you were not able to do before?

**Final Thank-You Statement**

Thank you <insert interviewee's name> for your willingness in giving of your time today to complete this interview. Your feedback is valuable and will help me to better frame adult learners' perception of adult illiteracy. I greatly appreciate your voluntary contributions as an active participant in this qualitative case study.

*Appendix E*

Draft Focus Group Protocol Template  
(Adapted from Creswell, 2014, p. 194)

**Focus Group Summary**

|                          |                                               |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Date of Interview        |                                               |
| Time of Interview        |                                               |
| Place of Interview       |                                               |
| Interviewer              | Johannah D. Lynch-Baugher, Doctoral Candidate |
| Focus Group Participants |                                               |

**Focus Group Questions**

7. Summarize your life story and how you came to enroll in services at Mission Liberation.
8. What barriers (challenges) are you aware of that contributed to (led to) your limited literacy (reading and writing) as an adult?
9. How have those literacy (reading and writing) barriers (challenges) impacted your life as a child, learner, and adult?
10. Why is overcoming illiteracy (learning to read and write) important to you as a learner and as an adult?
11. What aspects (parts) of Mission Liberation have most motivated you to persist (stay) in the program, to continue your learning, and in the end, overcome illiteracy (learn to read and write) as a barrier (challenge)?
12. How will your life be transformed (forever changed) because of the gift of literacy (reading and writing); what will you be able to do now successfully that you were not able to do before?

**Final Thank-You Statement**

Thank you <insert interviewee's name> for your willingness in giving of your time today to participate in this focus group. Your feedback is valuable and will help me to better frame adult learners' perception of adult illiteracy. I greatly appreciate your voluntary contributions as an active participant in this qualitative case study.

*Appendix F*

## Subject Recruitment Script

My name is Johannah D. Lynch-Baughner and I am seeking adult subjects enrolled at Mission Liberation to participate in the research study entitled *A Model Literacy Framework for Adult Learners: Analyzing the Impact of a Component-Skills Approach*. This study will work to better understand adult learners' perception of illiteracy and identify what instructional components are most effective in a targeted, instructional framework for adult learners. Study would begin in December 2015 and is anticipated to conclude by May 2016; however, those dates could fluctuate if data collection takes longer than anticipated. Specific time commitments, as well as other information pertinent to the study are outlined in the Informed Consent document which is readily available. Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 study participants will be asked to participate in an oral survey, interview and/or focus group.

## VITA

Johannah D. Lynch-Baughner was born in rural, North Missouri, the daughter of supportive parents, Tom and Karen Lynch and older sibling to Mattie Place. She calls Spickard, Missouri her home. She graduated from Princeton High School in 2006, North Central Missouri College in 2008, and Northwest Missouri State University in May 2009, with her undergraduate degree in elementary education. Her next three years were spent teaching grades four, fifth and sixth, and then, third grade prior to transitioning to a new, full-time faculty role as Teacher Education Instructor at North Central Missouri College in Trenton, Missouri. She is now in her fourth year at NCMC and driven by her passion in literacy that reignited following completion of her Master of Science in Education (Reading) graduate degree, will graduate as a Doctor of Education this year. She is married to her husband, Blake of seven years, lives on a farm in the country, and anxiously awaits the next chapter of their life, raising a family together.