Preface

The Development of
*Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice*

The *Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice* resource book was produced by the Center for Literacy Studies (CLS), University of Tennessee (UT) with funding from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), in cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education. It was developed in response to a need by adult education teachers for information, guidance, and strategies on how to work with adult students who have learning disabilities. While *Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice* was designed as part of a larger project involving teachers in Tennessee’s welfare reform program, Families First, it is appropriate for any practitioner working with adults with learning disabilities.

Method of Research

Action research is an approach to research grounded in practice. It involves a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and evaluating. It is a model well suited for practitioners who, while working with students, hope to learn more about the dynamics of teaching and learning.

The LD Action Research Project

From Fall 2000 to Spring 2001, a group of eight Tennessee adult educators participated in an LD Action Research Project, sponsored by CLS, focusing on assisting students with learning disabilities. They studied LD-appropriate instruction, practiced methodology with each other and their students, and developed ways of building self-advocacy in their students. The teachers in the LD Action Research Project used the principles of *Bridges to Practice*, a series of guidebooks produced by the National Institute for Literacy, as their foundation. Excerpts of their work, in addition to experiences and writings from three LD specialists, comprise the text of *Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice*. 
Acknowledgements

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Contributors

Editor

Margaret Horne Lindop is a Senior Research Associate at the UT Center for Literacy Studies. Her work is focused on learning disabilities, both in professional development with Tennessee teachers and as coordinator of LINCS Literacy and Learning Disabilities Special Collection for the National Institute for Literacy. Ms. Lindop has been an educator for 30 years, more than half of which have been in adult education. Her master’s degree is in Adult Education/Educational Psychology with an emphasis on learning disabilities. She is a member of the Bridges to Practice training team for Tennessee.

Consultants

Dr. Sherry Mee Bell is an assistant professor of special education at the University of Tennessee. With more than 20 years’ practical experience as a special education teacher, school psychologist, and instructional consultant, her scholarly interests include assessment and treatment of learning disabilities, particularly dyslexia; motivation; and action research in education.

Dr. Bell contributed the resource guide, explaining psychological evaluations, at the end of Chapter 2. She shows the connections between a person’s strengths and weaknesses and the strategies and accommodations that will improve chances for success.

Amanda Keller is an adult education instructor in Blount County, Tennessee. She has been involved in adult education for 11 years and has experience in basic literacy, GED, workplace training, and Families First instruction. She has completed various training programs in teaching adults with learning disabilities and is a member of the Bridges to Practice training team for Tennessee.

Ms. Keller worked with the action research project as a consultant and workshop leader. She has developed lessons and approaches that incorporate Bridges to Practice guidebooks’ instructional frameworks. She uses them with her own students and shares many of them in this publication.

Action Research Grant

Teacher Participants

Brenda Burgess is the adult education Families First teacher in Bledsoe County. She has a degree in special education, a visually impaired certification, and a degree in interpreting for the deaf. Ms. Burgess taught in special education for several years and in adult education for the last 10 years.

“I have worked with several students who were in special education and, because of learning problems, they just dropped out of school. They have very low self-esteem; a short attention span; and difficulties in recalling details, problem solving, memorization, and reading simple directions.”
Carol Clamon is the Families First teacher at Oakland Adult Learning Center in Jefferson County. She has 10 years of teaching experience at the high school level and has taught adult education and Families First for the last 6 years.

“I’ve seen so many adults enter the program with learning problems. They never learned to read very well, or they have never been able to remember math facts. I wanted to join the LD project to learn teaching techniques that are effective with learning disabled adults.”

Dana Clark is the adult basic education manager at the Bethlehem Centers of Nashville/Davidson County (BCN). A former high school English teacher, Ms. Clark has taught adult basic education to Families First participants for more than a year.

“All of my students enter BCN below sixth-grade level in reading and math and many appear to have learning disabilities. Watching so many students struggle with basic skills and wanting to help them prompted me to be a part of the LD project.”

Charline Feuchtinger has taught adult education to Families First clients in Lincoln County for more than 3 years.

“During this time, I have experienced the joy and thrill that comes from having more than 30 of my students graduate from the GED program and, and students currently are attending Motlow State Community College. On the other hand, I feel the pain of those who, in spite of all their efforts, struggle with basic reading, math, and problem-solving skills. By participating in the LD Action Research Project, I am equipping myself with the resources and teaching techniques to effectively instruct, encourage, and empower my students in becoming successful in life.”

Carol Simmons has been an adult education teacher in Dickson County for 4 years, with 3 of the 4 as the Families First teacher.

“I am a high school dropout who earned a GED at age 30. I then enrolled in college and graduated with a BS in elementary education. I first became interested in learning disabilities when my son was in school and I was trying to find a way to help him with his difficulties. Later, when I started teaching adult education, I received a first-hand look at the results of those with learning disabilities who had "fallen through the cracks" while in elementary and high school. I became involved with the Learning Disability Action Research Grant because I wanted to help students with LD reach their fullest potential.”

Joe Spoon teaches Adult Education programs for Workforce Connections in Knoxville.

“I helped develop educational goals geared to enrich my students’ lives. Many of them moved on to become ‘handi-capable’ in many areas that affected everyday living. When the Families First program began in Tennessee, I became part of the Knoxville Families First staff. I look back sometimes to the many struggles I have had as a handicapped individual. I realize that any success I may claim is because some caring person was there when I needed help. When I am asked, ‘Why do you care?’ I say, ‘I’ve been there.’ That’s why I’m here.”

Glenda Turner has been teaching in the Blount County adult education program for 15 years. She has been an instructor with the Families First program since it began in the fall of 1997. Ms. Turner retired from the Blount County School System with 30 years’ teaching experience, 25 of which were as a special education instructor.

“I enjoy the flexibility of teaching adults in the Families First program, and I find it challenging to help them learn to attain their goals of employment and self-sufficiency.”

Rebekah White-Williams is the Families First instructor and assistant program director for Crockett County adult education program. During her 4 1/2 years in Crockett County, she has taught adult education, Families First, and GED +2.

“Most of my students from the Families First program entered the class with an average grade level of 4.5. Because of this, I became interested in how to develop better learning strategies. I felt the need to do whatever I could for these students, just as someone had helped me with my learning difficulties when I was in college working on my bachelor’s degree.”
Introduction

Building on the Foundation of *Bridges to Practice*

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) sponsored *Bridges to Practice: A Research-Based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults With Learning Disabilities* (National ALLD Center, 1998), a comprehensive five-volume guide on how to identify and better serve adults with learning disabilities. The publication was part of a larger initiative aimed at bringing about systemic change in the area of learning disabilities (LD) and adult education. This valuable resource sets out a framework through which the adult education (AE) field can improve services in its programs for the many adults who struggle with learning disabilities (LD).

This resource book, *Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice*, while not a direct product of *Bridges to Practice*, builds on its foundation. Two of the contributors are *Bridges-to-Practice* trained adult educators. Working with an action research group of Tennessee teachers (referred to as the LD Action Research Project), the editor has built a collection of ideas, activities, and lessons—based on the principles of *Bridges to Practice*—that adult educators can use as they start “crossing bridges” to effective practice with their students who have LD.

The *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks address the following areas:

1. **Preparing to serve adults with LD:**
   Awareness, understanding, legal issues.
2. **The assessment process:**
   Screening, diagnosis.
3. **The planning process:**
   Curricular options.
4. **The teaching/learning process:**
   LD-appropriate frameworks and characteristics.

Professional Development Moments

Throughout the sections outlined above, this symbol (:inline) suggests that the reader stop, think, talk with a colleague, or write down thoughts. It is hoped that the reader will interact with other practitioners, the LD Action Research Project teachers, and the ideas in this book in a way that is helpful to her own professional development.