



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Why Can't Johnny's Parents Read?

Searching for the Roots of Low Literacy

> by Bruce Carmel *Turning Point/Discipleship Educational Center*

Why do some people not learn to read? The answer to this rarely asked question could help us better understand our students and their experiences. Yet there is little published research on why some people can't read. That's why I did some research of my own by interviewing beginning adult learners.

The Big Question

When I say, "people who don't know how to read," I am talking about adults who really can't read at all, not those who can read a little but have trouble with more complex tasks. I mean people who can, for instance, write their name and call out most of the letters of the alphabet, but who cannot begin to read even simple texts. According to

the National Adult Literacy Survey, that's 4 or 5 percent of the population, or about 8 million people. That's a smaller number than is usually defined as "functionally illiterate," but 8 million is still a lot of people.

What happened to those 8 million? In reviewing the existing literature, I found that a lot has been written on definitions of literacy: what it means to be literate and what it has meant historically. A lot has been written about how children learn to read. A lot is known about demographics: where people who cannot read live, how old they are, their gender, their income, and so on. Evaluators have studied instructional materials and adult learning programs to

measure their effectiveness. But there's very little research on why adults can't read—which might help us understand the best ways to teach them. Many assumptions are floating around, mostly concerning learning disabilities and lack of opportunity, but few are committed to writing. We also don't know much about the capacity of adults who did not learn to read as children to do so later in life.

Interviews with Adult Learners

I talked to about a dozen beginning readers in NYC adult literacy programs to see what they had to say. My intention was to generate

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Hats off to the Volunteers

> by Dianne Powell *Director of Outreach and Referral*

Besides referring potential students, the LAC's Literacy Referral Hotline also connects potential volunteers to programs that need them. I'm pleased to report that the number of people calling the Hotline or using our online Adult Education Locator to find literacy volunteer opportunities has increased dramatically over the last two years, currently averaging 150 potential volunteers each month.

If you put together all the programs in New York City whose paid (though usually not well-paid!) teachers help adult students learn English, improve their literacy skills, or get their GED, we still haven't served a tenth of the need. City-funded programs with paid teachers serve about 50,000 students. About 1.5 million need literacy services. That's why volunteers are so important. NYC's three public library systems, along with a few other organizations such as Literacy Partners, recruit and train volunteers to help meet this need. Outside the city, volunteers are even more critical in the effort to help all New Yorkers attain the literacy skills they need to become self-sufficient.

In the state of New York, almost 7,000 people volunteer in adult and family literacy programs. The vast majority tutor individuals or small groups; some provide administrative support or specialized services such as counseling. As you know, these people come from all walks of life and have various motivations for helping others improve their literacy or English skills. Most are passionate about reading and communicating, and they want to share their passion with those who don't know what it's like to escape to another world in the pages of a novel, much less to understand the fliers sent home from school with their children. These volunteers care about people who haven't had the same advantages they themselves enjoy. Most importantly, they have the commitment to act on that care, donating hundreds of hours a year not only during their scheduled time at their literacy centers but even during their "off" hours, preparing lessons and reading learners' writing at lunchtime or late at night after their children are in bed.

Those of us in the literacy field can expand our reach by talking to those outside the field about the rewards of helping someone improve their reading or English skills. Your friends or neighbors or family members may be potential literacy volunteers. If so, have them call us at 212.803.3333 or go online at www.lacnyc.org/hotline to find a program that's convenient for them.

And maybe those of us in the field should think about matching the commitment of our dedicated literacy volunteers by volunteering in some other field. You probably don't want to do the same thing in your volunteer hours that you do in your work time, so think about another area you're passionate about. Our local free medical clinics, food pantries, and housing rehab programs need us as much as we need our literacy volunteers. Almost any volunteer you speak to—in the literacy field or any other—will tell you: By serving others, volunteers also serve themselves. There's great satisfaction in knowing you are making a contribution to another person's life and to the greater good of the community. Together, we can make a difference. ●

Beyond the Surface

Developing Critical Thinking Skills

> by **Dianne Ramdeholl** *Adult Basic Education Coordinator, Department of Youth and Community Development*

The challenging process of incorporating critical thinking skills into reading and writing instruction can open spaces for students to imagine the possibilities that education can hold. Critical thinking involves reflecting with students on the thinking process itself, going beyond the surface to ask difficult questions, and recognizing one's own and others' assumptions. Because assumptions are based on conventional wisdom, they are almost never critiqued, yet examining such beliefs about the world, and one's place in it, is central to promoting critical thinking.

Critical Thinking about Education

Teachers can encourage critical thinking from the beginning by starting with a scrutiny of underlying assumptions about education itself. For instance, show beginning learners a photograph of a school building. Ask them to write a quick response to the picture and read their pieces to a partner or small group. Then ask each group to jot down on a piece of newsprint past school experiences. Were they positive or negative? Why? On a second sheet of newsprint, have each group write what they want their classroom to look like physically, what they want to have happen in class, and why. After reporting back, the class can decide whether they want this list to be posted as their Classroom Guidelines. The class should revisit and amend the list throughout the year.

This kind of activity opens up dialogue on decision making in the classroom, shifting ownership and responsibility toward the learners. According to adult educator Stephen Brookfield in his book *Developing Critical Thinkers* (Jossey Bass, 1987), uncovering and questioning power relations in order to redirect the flow of power more democratically is essential in critical thinking.

Selecting Texts

Another facet of critical thinking is critiquing hidden, often harmful ideologies behind texts so that these ideologies aren't replicated to the point that they eventually represent reality. Students can learn to explore multiple written perspectives of the same topic—for instance, different newspaper articles on the same event. Beginning learners can examine the accompanying photographs. Whose agenda is being represented in each version? Whose voices are excluded? From a critical perspective, there are no neutral or innocent texts. Remind students to keep this principle in mind when they select texts for independent reading.

Reading and Critical Thinking

Lucy Calkins suggests many powerful tools for teaching critical reading skills in her book *The Art of Teaching Reading* (Addison-Wesley, 2001). Understanding a text, after all, is more than just knowing what happened in the story. Just as critical thinkers question their own assumptions and those of the people around them, so they must question the texts they read. Talking about books in pairs or small groups is a good way to encourage students to ask questions of texts.

- > Retellings of the basic story elements—characters, plot, settings—are a good way to begin book talks.
- > Helping students to read so they will be able to retell the story encourages active reading.
- > Forming theories about characters and finding evidence grounded in the text forces readers to analyze the text in relation to their theory. Students can and should change theories for which they find scant supporting evidence.
- > Re-reading books, savoring them in different ways, helps readers examine underlying assumptions more thoroughly than on a first reading. What is the author's message behind the text?
- > Entering into dialogue with the text improves analytical thinking. For instance, students can paste sticky notes on places of interest in the text with comments such as “I don't get this” or “This is really interesting.”
- > The book talks themselves can be a subject for critical reflection. Try posting a transcript of a book talk and asking the class how the conversation could have been improved.

Writing and Critical Thinking

Similarly, Calkins suggests, in *The Art of Teaching Writing* (Heinemann, 1994), techniques for writing instruction that also encourage critical thinking. Teachers and learners must create a classroom space where everyone can hear others' stories and tell their own.

- > Model good writing strategies. For example, bring in several examples of good endings, and then ask students to come up with their own good endings.
- > Conferences should focus on teaching the writer, not the writing. Start with an open-ended question such as, “How's it going?”
- > Focus each conference on one strategy, rather than on one written piece. For instance, in one conference you might help a student to focus on his use of detail by encouraging him to ask, “Would someone who wasn't there understand what happened?”
- > Helping students to reflect and talk about their writing is essential. The student should be able to ask herself: “What do I do as a writer and what do I need to do to make myself better?”

The process of talking about their own and others' writing encourages students to think about their own thinking process and to analyze what they're trying to do and how they can accomplish their goal.

Posing questions as a group, imagining alternative scenarios, talking about the rationale behind classroom activities, discussing whether an activity worked—these are all part of the process of promoting critical thinking, a process that engages learners in a dialogue toward a more democratic vision of education. ●

RESOURCES >> Reading Instruction

“Research-based practice” is one of the current buzzwords in literacy education. As the National Institute for Literacy’s Reading Research Working Group noted, there is little research on effective literacy instruction in adult basic education (ABE) programs—so the Working Group recommends examining not only ABE research but also the far larger body of research into K–12 literacy education (John Kruidenier, *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*, Partnership for Reading, 2002).

In preparing for its upcoming professional development work around research-based reading instruction, the LAC has drawn on the work of K–12 educators and researchers. Ira Yankwitt, director of adult literacy services at the LAC, recommends four books that, though they are written for K–12 teachers, can help inform the work of adult literacy practitioners. All four are available for browsing in the LAC’s Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse.

Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High Schools
by Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, and Lori Hurwitz
(Jossey-Bass, 1999)

The authors based their program, which they call reading apprenticeship, on an in-depth study of ninth-grade students who had difficulty understanding their assigned texts. In reading apprenticeship, a subject-matter teacher acts as a master reader, first becoming aware of and then modeling her own reading strategies for her student apprentices. Four dimensions of classroom life make possible students’ progress toward mastery: The personal, social, cognitive, and knowledge-building dimensions must all be linked by metacognitive conversation, in which teachers and learners think and talk about how each of the four dimensions affects reading. The book offers suggestions for developing each of these dimensions in positive ways. Specific techniques, from ways of dealing with distractions to mapping and questioning strategies for difficult texts, can help teachers support learners who are stuck at the “decoding” stage and having difficulty moving toward true comprehension. Pre-GED and GED teachers will find this approach particularly useful, though the underlying theories can help any teacher understand what is—or could be—happening in the classroom.

Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy 6–12

by Jeffrey Wilhelm, Tanya Baker, and Julie Dube
(Boynton/Cook, 2001)

Wilhelm starts off by insisting that every teacher is a researcher. What are your students going to know and be able to do when the class is over? How are you going to get them to that point? How will you know if you’ve succeeded? The methods espoused in this book are based on the work of Lev Vygotsky—the psychologist who taught us that students learn to do increasingly complex tasks by being guided through their “zone of proximal development.” Vygotsky’s learning-centered (not learner-centered, not teacher-centered) approach moves from “I do, you watch” through “I do, you help” and “you do, I help” to “you do, I watch.” The “transactional reader response” literary theory also informs the instructional strategies in this book, which are inquiry-based. Specific techniques include “frontloading” (pre-reading on steroids) and a variety of schemes for encouraging students to ask more—and more useful—questions of a text.

Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children (Heinemann, 1996)
Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3–6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Literacy
(Heinemann, 2001)

by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell
Guided reading is one of eight elements in the Reading Recovery framework for balanced literacy instruction. (The others are reading aloud, shared reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing.) Fountas and Pinnell’s earlier guide focuses specifically on guided reading, a strategy that uses group work to foster beginning literacy. Their 2001 book moves to the next level of reading instruction and expands to include writing as well as reading, with a workshop model providing the basis for literacy instruction.

Technology Training Opportunities

Looking to learn more about how to make your computer work for you? Check out these free and low-cost training programs.

Nonprofit Computer Academy

In 1986, the Fund for the City of New York established the Nonprofit Computer Academy (NCA, www.fcny.org/nca) to give NYC’s nonprofit organizations quality, low-cost assistance in acquiring and using information systems. The academy offers computer classes, Internet classes, seminars and conferences, and technology consulting. Currently, NCA offers over 45 different workshops and seminars, including basic through advanced level instruction in word processing, desktop publishing, database management programs, website design, and Internet use. Some classes are conducted entirely in Spanish. Most classes cost \$70. For more information, contact Alison Wittcoff, awittcoff@fcny.org or 212.590.9447.

DYCD Technical Assistance Program

Programs funded through the Department of Youth and Community Development are eligible to receive free and low-cost technology support and training through Data Link. Classes include introduction to Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Access; Managing Office Technology; and Fundamentals of Database Management. For more information, visit www.data-link-mhra.org/dycd, or call 212.385.4520.

New York Cares Tech Volunteers

New York Cares continues its technology volunteers program with opportunities for organizations to receive technology-related assistance from knowledgeable and trained volunteers. For more information, contact Grace Kong, manager of technology programs, email grace_kong@nycares.org.

Pre-Service Institute

The LAC has revised its popular Pre-Service Institute. This three-day, 21-hour professional development offering introduces new instructors, program managers, and counselors to key concepts and exemplary practices in adult literacy education. Several developments—including the increased role the National Reporting System (NRS) plays in adult literacy program design, the implications of standards-based education reform in New York State, and the focus on research-based reading instruction—prompted the decision to restructure the institute.

The Pre-Service Institute builds on the knowledge base practitioners bring to their work as both educators and adult learners. Through individual exercises, small-group activities, and classroom simulations, participants reflect on their own education and use their experiences as a springboard to discuss principles of adult learning and promising practices in adult education. The Institute explores characteristics of adult learners; instructional strategies for multilevel classes; foundations of reading, writing, and English language instruction; orientation and intake; federal and state policy; integration of technology into instruction; NYS adult learning standards; instructional planning; and resource development. To learn more, contact Ira Yankwitt, director of adult literacy services, at 212.803.3356 or iray@lacnyc.org.

Health Literacy Launch

The launch of the NYC Health Literacy Resource Center, originally scheduled for October 21, has been rescheduled to Tuesday, December 9, 8:30 am–12:30 pm, at the New School University, 66 W. 12th St., Room 407. The resource center was created in collaboration with the NYC Mayor's Office. Hosted by the LAC and ALMA (Adult Literacy Media Alliance), the introductory breakfast will feature Dr. David W. Baker, a leader in the field of health literacy, presenting on current trends in health literacy research and promising practices in the field. ALMA will preview TV411's new season of video- and web-based materials specifically designed for adult health literacy instruction. Health practitioners, literacy providers, funders, and policymakers are encouraged to attend. For more information, visit the LAC website at www.lacnyc.org/events.

Adult Students Available to Speak to Classes

The Grassroots Literacy Coalition, an organization of adult literacy students, teachers, and administrators, came together last March, in the midst of NYC's budget crisis, to fight for adult education. Since then, the group has met monthly in an effort to develop a campaign to promote adult education, develop student leadership, and advocate for increased funds for literacy.

In response to recent reductions in classes, the coalition has formed a speakers' bureau of literacy and ESOL students. Student representatives will visit literacy programs to discuss their adult education experiences, address why it is important for students to raise their voices, and describe how people can get involved. If you would like a group of students to visit your program, contact Calvin Miles at calvinm@literacypartners.org. To find out more about the Grassroots Literacy Coalition, contact David Greene at eagle3372@aol.com.

Thirteen/WNET Instructional Programming

Thirteen/WNET has announced its current instructional television schedule. Programs for adult educators include:

- > *Another Page*
 - > *Crossroads Café*
 - > *Workplace Essential Skills*
- For more information, visit www.thirteen.org/edonline/itv.

African-American Children's Book Festival

Brooklyn's African-American Children's Book Festival will be held on Saturday, December 6, 10 am–4 pm, at Plymouth Church, 75 Hicks Street in Brooklyn Heights. Al Roker of NBC's *Today Show* and Deborah Roberts of ABC's *20/20* will be guest readers. Famous storytellers and children's authors and illustrators will be on hand, and thousands of books, including Caribbean children's books, will be featured. Tap dancing and a children's steel drum band round out the attractions. Admission to the festival is free.

Penn State Offers Online Certificate in Family Literacy

The Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State and the National Center for Family Literacy have collaborated to offer an online Certificate in Family Literacy through Penn State World Campus. Courses include Introduction to Family Literacy, Early Literacy Development and Parental Involvement, and Interactive Literacy: Parents and Children. The certificate can be earned entirely online by successfully completing five courses, for a total of 15 credits. Individual courses are also available. Courses cost \$1,110–1,251. For more information, visit the Penn State World Campus website at www.worldcampus.psu.edu/pub/famlt/index.shtml.

December and January Conferences

National Reading Conference 53rd Annual Meeting

December 3–6, Scottsdale, AZ
nrc.oakland.edu/conference/conference.asp

Strategies for Increasing Math Achievement for Career and Technical Education

National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education, Ohio State University
December 4, 3–6 pm, live webcast
www.nccte.org or call 800.678.6011

7th Annual Workplace Learning Conference Institute for Work & the Economy

December 8–12, Chicago
www.workplace-learning.net or call 815.753.2090

Nov. 4

ALIES for Program Managers

Tuesday, November 4, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman

Designed for program managers who have never attended an ALIES training, this session covers effective procedures for managing ALIES, from setup and implementation through reporting and data analysis. The workshop will feature a plan for ALIES implementation, including staff and technology resource preparation, management tactics for programs using ALIES, the ALIES support system and website, and hands-on experience with high-level data entry and reporting.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 5

Program Managers' Series

Session 1: Overview of New York State Adult Education Policy and Initiatives

Wednesday, November 5, 10 am–1 pm

Presenters: Tom Orsini & Robert Purga, New York State Education Department

At this session, the first of this year's Program Managers' Series, Tom Orsini and Bob Purga of NYSED's Adult Education and Workforce Development/Program Development Team will update participants on federal legislation, state policy, and new initiatives being developed and supported by their office. Topics to be discussed include NYSED's partnerships with the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative and the LAC, WIA reauthorization, NYSED's National Reporting System manual and its policy on TABE and ESOL assessment, NYS learning standards and the Adult Education Resource Guide, NYSED's model for program monitoring and technical assistance, ALIES and data collection, the role of volunteer agencies in serving low-level students, health literacy education, distance learning, and GED testing. This session will serve as the training for new administrators described in NYSED's WIA Title 2 RFP.

RSVP is essential.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

For more information, contact Ira Yankwitt at iray@lacnyc.org, or 212.803.3356.

Nov. 7

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, November 7, 2–4:30 pm

This study group will explore practical approaches for teaching adults to develop an awareness of social justice issues, both in and out of the classroom. Teachers will read materials on popular education and discuss how to apply those theories in the classroom.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 7

Using Documentary Film in the Classroom Series

P.O.V. is the award-winning PBS series that features thought-provoking independent point-of-view films. In this series, participants screen P.O.V. documentaries, are introduced to P.O.V. resources for the classroom, and discuss ways to integrate film and video into instruction.

Lost Boys of Sudan

Friday, November 7, 1–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

For the last twenty years, civil war has raged in Sudan, killing an estimate two million people and displacing more than four million. The Dinka tribe has been hardest hit. *Lost Boys of Sudan* follows two young Dinka refugees through their first year in America. The screening will be followed by a discussion of how to use the video in the classroom.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 11

ALIES Data Gathering with Turnaround Documents

Tuesday, November 11, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Designed for people who collect data, this workshop will introduce participants to the nuances of completing ALIES turnaround documents, including the rationale for every column. Highlights include documentation of student activity, demographics, test scores, contact hours and outcomes, rules for gathering data, and a discussion of the importance of accurate data collection.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 12

Adult Education Web Portals

Wednesday, November 12, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

In this hands-on workshop, participants will be introduced to three web portals that can be used as resources for both instructors and students. Participants will explore the resources offered by NIFL LINCS, OTAN, and Firstfind, discussing ways to integrate these resources into classroom instruction.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 14

Working with Beginning ESOL Literacy Students

Friday, November 14, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitators: Susan Dalmas and Christopher Jornales, Queens Borough Public Library Adult Learner Program

In this workshop, participants will learn successful techniques, strategies, and activities for teaching very basic literacy to beginning ESOL learners. Dalmas and Jornales will share insights from the class model "Basic Literacy for ESOL," developed by the Queens Borough Public Library. Participants will also discuss student screening, exit criteria, and the development of curricula and appropriate materials.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 18

Family Literacy Website Launch

Tuesday, November 18, 9:30 am–noon

Presenter: Marguerite Lukes

Open to the general public, this event will present the findings from the LAC's survey of the family literacy field, which examined where and how family literacy services are being provided throughout the city. Participants will preview the interactive website (see page 8) and learn about other electronic resources in family literacy. There will also be an opportunity for participants to offer feedback on the website.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Nov. 20 & 21

ALIES Data Entry Training

Thursday, November 20, 10 am–4 pm
Friday, November 21, 10 am–4 pm

From ALIES installation through ALIES reporting, this training provides a step-by-step introduction to the ALIES software and the data entry process. Highlights include installing and upgrading ALIES, inputting data, updating data, generating Data Management Reports, using the Ad-Hoc Reporting tool, and running the NRS Data Check Reports. New data entry users, as well as those in need of a refresher, are invited to attend this event. **Please attend both days.**

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 5

Using Documentary Film in the Classroom Series

State of Denial

Friday, December 5, 1–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

State of Denial by Elaine Epstein reveals the human experience behind one of the world's greatest tragedies—the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. The film takes viewers into the lives of six people struggling to survive with HIV in the face of social stigma, a severe lack of access to life-saving treatments, and President Mbeki's controversial denial of the connection between HIV and AIDS.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 12

What's New in ALIES Release 5.0

Friday, December 12, 10 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Megan Whalen

This workshop will introduce participants to the new features of the ALIES software for FY2004. It will introduce new data entry features and the changes that have been made to existing features. It will also demonstrate new reporting features and the changes that have been made to existing reports. It will conclude with a discussion of the data that will be carried over from last fiscal year, followed by a question-and-answer period.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 3

Family Literacy Grantees Forum

Wednesday, December 3, 9:30 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Marguerite Lukes

At this forum, the LAC will welcome new family literacy grantees funded by the Department of Labor, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the NYS Education Department. This forum will help family literacy programs develop a network of peers, identify and share resources, get support and ideas, take advantage of the LAC's programs and services, and pinpoint specific needs and how LAC family literacy staff can help meet them. The new grantees, as well as existing family literacy programs, are encouraged to attend.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 5

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, December 5, 2–4:30 pm

See November 7 for description.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 17

ALIES Reports

Wednesday, December 17, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

This hands-on training will feature an overview of the different types of ALIES reports and the applications of these reports in real-world scenarios. The training will also include a discussion on how to make better use of ALIES reports for program management and improvement. Highlights include Data Management Reports, Ad-Hoc Reports, Data Check Reports, and Funding Reports such as EPE and NRS. This training is for experienced ALIES users who want to learn more about reports.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 12

Using Arts in the ESOL Classroom

Friday, December 12, 9:30 am–2 pm

Facilitator: Regina Ress, ESOL teacher and storyteller

Drama, storytelling, music, and visual arts are not only enjoyable outlets but also educationally sound teaching tools. In this highly participatory workshop, participants will learn how to use a variety of arts activities to help promote the four foundational skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), to encourage vocabulary development, to facilitate the teaching of functions and grammar, and to foster cross-cultural awareness and personal expression.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 19

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, December 19, 1:30–4 pm

Teachers will have an opportunity to hear and discuss the promising and innovative practices that their colleagues are pursuing. Teachers will explore various aspects of English language teaching, with a particular focus on the four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

RSVP: LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org.

Dec. 5

ALIES Knowledge Sharing Session

Friday, December 5, 10 am–1 pm

Facilitators: Gregory Jacques & Pushpa Kunder

Designed for experienced ALIES users at both the data-entry and manager or director level, this participant-directed meeting is designed to allow ALIES users to share knowledge, discuss problems, and answer each other's questions. The session includes demonstrations of ALIES issues and their resolutions, tips and tricks for easier data entry, policy discussions, and a brainstorming session on improving the software.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

NYC READS AT “NEW YORK IS BOOK COUNTRY”

The LAC and its literacy awareness program, NYC Reads, set up shop on Sunday, September 21, at the New York Is Book Country street fair. Joining us on Fifth Avenue was our corporate partner, Verizon Reads, which supports national and local literacy programs all across the country. We distributed 10,000 pieces of literature describing the importance of adult and family literacy instruction, along with information about the LAC's literacy referral services and professional development programs. We talked with hundreds of people who wanted to learn more about the impact of low literacy on their communities or about how they could help a family member or friend get literacy services. Floating above the crowd, estimated at more than 250,000 people, was a sea of 1200 NYC Reads balloons attached to the arms and strollers of children who, with their parents, enjoyed the sights and sounds of the book fair. ●



Interactive Family Literacy Map Online

The LAC's interactive family literacy map for New York City is now available online at www.lacnyc.org/familylit. The map will provide both networking support among family literacy programs and an easy referral source for educators in adult, family, or K-12 programs, as well as for social service programs that want to refer clients. In addition to searching by the name of a program, users can search by location and category. Search results provide a site's contact information; family literacy programming; and supplementary services, such as computer training, after-school programs, counseling, and health services.

The map is part of the LAC's two-year family literacy initiative. The online database includes over 150 programs that responded to our survey of possible providers; more will be added as they respond to either the survey or additional contacts. (To have your family literacy program included in the database, please email familylit@lacnyc.org.) A print directory will be available in November.

Future phases of the LAC's family literacy initiative include professional development around family literacy (see page 6), efforts to increase public awareness of family literacy programs and their needs, and identification and dissemination of exemplary practices. ●

>> JOBS in literacy

A more extensive and up-to-date list of employment ads is available online at www.lacnyc.org/jobs.

Literacy Hotline Volunteers

The LAC operates a Literacy Hotline that refers over 24,000 students annually to appropriate education & employment programs. To assist us in effectively meeting student needs & responding to caller requests, we seek volunteers who can provide efficient customer service via telephone contact; dedicate a minimum of 4 hrs a day, 1 or more times a wk (M-F, 10 am-2 pm and/or noon-4 pm); commit to volunteering for a period of at least 3 months; speak English, Spanish, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, or Russian. The LAC assures a secure & comfortable working environment for each volunteer. Volunteers will be trained to clarify caller needs & to use a computerized database to identify appropriate programs to meet those needs. Contact Dianne Powell, Director of Outreach & Referral, at 212.803.3355.

ESOL Instructors (PT)

Openings anticipated in January to teach ESOL evenings in branch libraries in Staten Island & the Bronx. 5 hrs/wk. TESOL degree & related exp. pref. Résumé to Leslie Robbins, Riverside Language Program, Inc., fax 21.870.6841, email lrobbins@riversidelanguage.org.

GED Instructor

Prepare 5-10 students to take the GED exam. Teach all five subjects (language arts reading, language arts writing, social studies, science, & math). BA req. Masters in ed. or related field pref. Exp. working with immigrant youth & teaching exp. pref. Cover letter & résumé to Won Kang, YWCA-NYC Flushing Branch, email wonniethepoo@mac.com.

To place a free employment ad, email publications@lacnyc.org or fax 212.785.3685.

Please indicate whether you would like your ad to appear in the January/February issue of the *Literacy Update* (due date December 1) or on the web only.

Why Can't Johnny's Parents Read? *continued*

some hypotheses for future testing and some ideas about teaching that might fit my experience as a literacy instructor and administrator. The adults I spoke to were all at the very lowest levels of literacy; all but one were native speakers of English, and that one spoke English very well. They came from the American South, Puerto Rico, the West Indies, and England. Men and women were equally represented, and they ranged in age from 22 to 42.

I asked these learners about their home life: Who were their caregivers, who read at home, who read *to* them, what sort of books and other reading materials were around? I asked them about school: Did they go to school and for how long, what was school like, how was reading taught in school? I asked them about other aspects of their childhoods: Who were their role models? Did they read in church? Were there people outside the home—relatives, neighbors, other community members—whom they saw reading or who helped them read? I also asked them what they thought might have helped them learn to read.

What the Interviews Revealed

Interestingly, all of the interviewees had trouble telling their stories in a logical or sequential manner. I wonder if they have issues related to the processing of language that affects their ability to acquire literacy skills.

My questions about home life revealed that none of the learners in my small sample came from affluence. None got much attention at home; there were many children, parents worked many jobs or were absent, some were cared for by other relatives. My interviewees reported that their homes had few books, usually the Bible and sometimes the schoolbooks of older siblings or cousins. None of them had books of their own. All said they had their siblings, cousins, or caregivers reading and writing, but that they had been rarely if ever been read to.

When I asked about school, I found that all of my interviewees had gone to school, all but one regularly, long past the age at which basic literacy skills are usually acquired. Not one reported having liked school. All said they had had the negative experience of being asked to read in school and being unable to do so. Some of the interviewees had gotten other students to help them with homework or had cheated on tests. Some said their teachers seemed disinterested and overburdened, but all said that other students in their schools did learn to read. None of my interviewees got any extra help in school: no tutoring, no special classes, not even any recognition that they might have a problem.

None of my interviewees thought that their problem was lack of intelligence. Some of the students suggested that emotional or psychological issues affected their ability to learn: One student was angry that no one noticed her, and another said she had a hard time learning because she missed her mother. Men and women in my small sample differed in their opinion of who was responsible for their inability to read: The men tended to blame themselves; the women tended to blame the environment. Some of the men I interviewed said they were “bad” or “lazy.” Some men thought there was something about reading in particular that was difficult for them—they could learn other things! The women, on the other hand, tended to blame their environment; I heard them say, “not enough help,” over and over again.

All of my interviewees said that reading is something a child *should* learn to do, but none saw it as something a child would *want* to do. One student said that he would have learned to read if he had been forced, if people had been more “on top of” him to learn. All the interviewees defined reading as the ability to identify sounds, letters, and words; reading for pleasure was not on their radar screens.

Conclusions

I didn't really discover why some people don't learn to read, but my review of the literature and my own research suggest areas for further investigation, such as the effects of the home environment, of brain function and language processing, and of psychological and emotional issues.

But there's another point to this kind of research. Teachers who work with adult beginning readers might want to ask students questions about reading at home and in school, about what they learned and didn't learn, about what they wish would have been different, about what they need now in order to learn to read. Such conversations won't answer the “big research question” any more than my interviews did, but they can help teachers understand their students' needs and motivations. If we know more about the causes of low literacy, we can do an even better job of helping adult literacy students. ●

SPOTlight Family Literacy

Family literacy programs in New York State serve primarily low-income and immigrant communities, serving the families of children from infancy through elementary school. They operate in a broad range of settings: day care centers, adult literacy programs, settlement houses, clinics, libraries, shelters, faith-based programs, schools, and homes. They offer ESOL and adult basic education classes, help parents navigate the public school system, promote and model early literacy to ensure academic success, and provide early childhood education. These programs can play a critical role in improving access to educational and social services, healthcare, recreation, and the arts.

The LAC would like to congratulate this year's New York State family literacy grantees.

New York City

Borough of Manhattan Community College
Brooklyn Chinese-American Association
Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Women
Highbridge Community Life Center
LaGuardia Community College Center
for Immigrant Education and Training
NYC Department of Education Office
of Adult & Continuing Education
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation
Project Reach Youth
Queens Borough Public Library

Upstate and Long Island

Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Economic Opportunity Program
of Chemung County
Herkimer County BOCES
Literacy Volunteers of Westchester County
Long Beach City School District
Madison Oneida BOCES
Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES
Rochester City School District
St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES
Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES
Ulster County BOCES
Western Suffolk BOCES

The Literacy Assistance Center has an array of services to support work in family literacy, including:

- > **Family Literacy Resource and Referral Database** at www.lacnyc.org/familylit; see page 8 for details
- > **Internet resources**, including a workshop on Parent and Family Resources on the Web at www.lacnyc.org/resources/workshops/parents.htm, as well as adult and family literacy resources on our Links page
- > **Professional development events**; see the Calendar on pages 6 and 7 for the first of these ●

WIA Reauthorization

Most literacy practitioners are keenly aware that the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) is up for reauthorization this year. Title II of WIA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, is the federal stream under which adult literacy programs—in their many forms from employment training to ESOL to basic literacy and GED programs—are funded. About \$3.3 billion in funds were allocated to states in fiscal year 2003 for employment and training programs under WIA.

Many in the literacy community, as well as in groups that advocate for the poor and for immigrants, have criticized WIA's perceived "work first" emphasis. Under WIA, people with low literacy or English-language skills have sometimes been moved quickly into low-wage jobs with little hope for future improvement. Literacy and advocacy groups believe that such people should have the opportunity to gain the skills that would enable them not only to qualify for better jobs but also to function more effectively as family members and as citizens of their communities.

The House passed its version of the reauthorization, the Workforce Reinvestment and Adult Education Act (HR 1261), on May 8, 2003. As we go to press in early October, the

Senate bill, the Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2003 (SR 1261), has been passed by the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee but has not yet reached the Senate floor. The House bill was Republican-sponsored and passed along a largely party-line vote; the Senate bill is sponsored by members of both major parties.

The literacy and advocacy communities have expressed both optimism and concern over the House bill. Language about developing strategies to meet the needs of "hard-to-serve" populations would make it easier for job seekers to enroll directly in training programs, though, in order to do so, they would have to demonstrate that they are "unlikely or unable" to obtain employment through core One-Stop services. Other provisions of the House bill that inspire optimism include improved access to ABE and ESOL funding for community-based organizations and the fact that "immigrants who are not proficient in English" are specifically included in the target population of the Adult Basic Skills Education Act. Also, the bill *requires* that One-Stop Centers include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs, which should improve coordination among TANF and employment and training programs.

One provision of the House bill that raises concern is the proposal to block-grant adult, dislocated worker, and Wagner-Peyser (employment One-Stop) funding streams, a provision that some believe will limit future funding of WIA programs. The Senate bill, as it currently stands in committee, maintains separate funding streams for these three programs.

SR 1621 does not improve on WIA's sequence of services language, which requires people to move through the core and intensive levels of One-Stop services before becoming eligible for training. Advocates have also raised concerns over the lack of provision for early release of Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) funds, which has allowed programs to conduct recruitment and worksite development activities before SYEP actually begins each year.

It may not be too late to influence the final version of this legislation. If the Senate has not yet voted on its version of the reauthorization, you can write or call your senator. It seems likely at this writing that the House and Senate bills will have to go to a joint committee to be reconciled, at which point letters and calls to committee members can at least help preserve the provisions of either the House or Senate bill that are most favorable to adult literacy programs and the learners they serve. ●

Changes in the NYC Literacy Scene

New York City continues to see reorganization of people and positions working together in adult education.

The New York City Department of Education, Office of Adult and Continuing Education, welcomes Sherry Zekowski, local instructional superintendent, who will work closely in the

adult education division with Victor Gathers, co-director for adult basic education, and Lisa Clark, co-director for career and technical education. Stephan Poppick will be working on grants and contracts at the Regional Operations Center. Judy Alladice is retiring with the thanks of the entire NYC literacy community for her many years of service in adult education.

At the Department of Youth and Community Development, Suzanne Lin, formerly of

Manpower Research Development Corporation, takes over the post of deputy director. Richard Fish will be moving to a consulting role.

At Queens Borough Public Library, Susan Dalmas is assuming the role of manager of adult learner programs. Susan has served QBPL for many years, most recently as director of ESOL instruction. Bruce Carmel has moved to Discipleship Education Center. ●

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

Take advantage of our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab to explore ways to use computers to enhance instruction. Sample instructional software, browse the web for sites that complement your curriculum, or build a project that uses popular office software to improve communication skills. For information, contact Mariann Fedele, 212.803.3325 or mariannf@lacnyc.org.

Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse

Explore the city's largest collection of materials for adult literacy education. From professional development references to ABE curricula, our collection features a diverse array of books, journals, and audiovisual resources. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

Visit us on the web at www.lacnyc.org



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