



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Making the Case for Adult Literacy Education

> Elyse Barbell Rudolph *Executive Director*, and Jan Gallagher *Director of Communications*

The Bush Administration proposed budget for 2006 slashes state grants for adult education from \$569 million in 2005 to \$207 million in 2006. This is a 64 percent reduction. Most programs would suffer an even more drastic cut, since the proposal keeps state grant funding for English Language/Civics at its 2005 level of \$68.5 million. Prison literacy is eliminated entirely in the administration proposal, along with Even Start and a host of other educational programs. The National Institute for Literacy and national leadership activities are level-funded. Overall, the proposed budget represents the first time that the Bush Administration has called for a net decrease in Education Department spending.

The proposed budget would also allow state governors to combine a variety of “job

training” funding streams, including those for adult literacy, into the “WIA Plus Consolidated Grant Program.” In effect, such a merger would reduce adult education to workforce education. It would cause additional problems in states such as New York, where the education department is under the control of the Board of Regents, not the governor.

As *Literacy Update* goes to press, literacy practitioners locally and across the nation are coming up with strategies to battle the cuts. Everyone in the literacy community recognizes that protecting programs that serve thousands of people—people who have little and make great effort to learn—will require a massive and concerted campaign. The LAC will keep you informed of these efforts on our website, at www.lacnyc.org/support/fedbudget.htm.

Ultimately, the future of literacy in this country depends on people like you. Your senators and congressional representatives need to hear that you are following this issue and think it is extremely important. You can also speak to state and local officials, especially those with whom you or your program already has a relationship. Their voices are heard in Washington, and they will have ample reason to speak out when they see how significantly the proposed cutbacks would affect their own budgets and constituencies. Letters to the editor are another powerful way to be heard. Finally, you can tell your friends, local business people, and anyone else you encounter how vital literacy services are, not just to participants, but to the community as a whole. Here are some talking points and resources that you can use in your advocacy efforts.

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Think BIG

> Elyse Barbell Rudolph *Executive Director*

The other day I had the chance to ask Ed Koch, “So, how’m I doing?” Since his administration spawned the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), being able to reflect his question back to him was a particular thrill. Mayor Koch remembered minute details about the adult education system and was delighted to hear we are still in business.

Koch had called me to express concern about the data in the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) report *The Newest New Yorkers* (<http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dcp/html/census/nny.html>). While publicly funded ESOL programs serve the same number of people as they did during the Koch administration, the need has skyrocketed. According to the DCP report, the number of foreign-born New Yorkers has doubled since 1970, and more than one in four adult New Yorkers cannot speak English well.

Koch suggested we ask Hollywood to donate all NYC movie theatres every morning to serve as ESOL instruction sites. OK, that’s a tall order. But I am delighted that a person like Ed Koch sees the size of the need and thinks BIG to try and fill it. His is the only idea I’ve heard so far for increasing the number of ESOL students receiving free literacy education from 33,000 (those currently served by publicly funded programs) to 1,500,000 (those who need to learn English). If Koch’s proposal attracts the attention of just one movie producer, he will have accomplished something for the NYC literacy community.

Thinking BIG is especially relevant right now. As we go to press, the Bush administration has just released its 2006 budget. In the proposal, adult education is cut 64 percent, from \$569 million this year to \$207 million in 2006. We need to begin mobilizing immediately to get at least some of that cut restored before the budget is finalized in October. The LAC will keep you informed of local and national advocacy efforts via our website, www.lacnyc.org. We will also continue to work at the city and state levels, where we have a better chance of directly influencing policy and funding.

Still, the writing is on the wall. I’m confident that a portion of the proposed cut will be restored—but I don’t think we can expect even level funding for 2006. We know the proposal is shortsighted, but we must face facts: Literacy programs cannot rely solely on public funding. However, we are not going to stop helping low-income and immigrant New Yorkers improve their futures by improving their basic skills. So we need to think BIG about where the money is going to come from.

Joseph Salvo’s brilliant work in *The Newest New Yorkers* captured media attention just as the LAC was facilitating the city’s first immigrant family literacy summit. With the help of the LAC, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Altman Foundation, the New York Times Company Foundation convened this summit in order to recruit other corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and city departments to join an Immigrant Family Literacy Alliance. The goal is to get new city money for immigrant family literacy, matched by private contributions—on a scale that definitely falls under the category of thinking BIG.

By all means, let’s fight to restore federal funding, and let’s leverage existing funds (bridge-to-college, adolescent literacy) to serve our students. But we can’t stop there. We have to show people how literacy affects the issues they care about: poverty, unemployment, failing schools, health care, crime, and on and on. Let’s think BIG about ways to mobilize both public and private support for a more literate New York. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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SPOTlight

> **Suri Duitch** *Program Development Director, and*
Lisa Grossman *Program Development Coordinator,*
CUNY School of Professional Studies

Will I lose my visa if I take a job working off the books? How can I bring my brother to the U.S.? What do I need to do to get my green card? If I get laid off, will I be deported? If I have a work visa, can I leave the country and then come back? I've been here for 13 years; I don't have papers but my children are U.S. citizens. Can I become a citizen?

These are just some of the kinds of questions CUNY and the *New York Daily News* received when they hosted a call-in event in 2004 entitled "Citizenship Now." During the event, trained legal professionals were on hand to respond to immigration law problems. Over the course of two weeks, more than 100,000 individuals reached out for assistance.

This is not surprising.

Immigrants and their children make up more than half of New York City's population, and 40 percent of New Yorkers were born outside of the U.S. From issues of residency to citizenship to work status, these individuals and their families must negotiate complex and ever-changing legal challenges. While there are a variety of places for immigrants to receive legal assistance—Legal Services, Legal Aid, the New York Immigration Coalition's hotline, to name a few—the demand for these services far exceeds the supply. Nonprofit organizations and government agencies tend to be understaffed, and those working in facilities that provide counseling and representation are in many cases not sufficiently trained and up to date on current laws and regulations.

As a result of this demand, those of us who work with immigrants—including literacy and adult education instructors and social services providers—have been frequently called upon to provide counseling and guidance on these issues. While there are a number of quality workshops and conferences throughout New York City, until now, there has been no place to go for a comprehensive understanding of the laws, regulations, and processes surrounding the status of immigrants in New York and the U.S.

The City University of New York School of Professional Studies recently created a graduate-level certificate program that offers up-to-date knowledge and skills to help provide immigrants with legal assistance. Designed by Allan Wernick, a highly respected immigration lawyer, Baruch College professor, *New York Daily News* columnist, and Chairman of the CUNY Citizenship and Immigration Project, the program's goals are to:

- > Increase the number of professionals working with immigrants who can provide accurate advice and referrals
- > Improve the skills and knowledge of those already engaged in this work, particularly individuals working in nonprofit agencies

The CUNY Certificate Program in Immigration Law Studies program is composed of three courses. Those who complete all three courses receive a graduate certificate in Immigration Law Studies that is

Responding to a Need for Immigration Law Expertise

New Immigration Law Studies Certificate Program

registered with the New York State Education Department. Credits can also be applied toward a master's degree in public administration or be taken (at a discounted rate) for non-credit.

The courses include:

- > **Introduction to Immigration Law**, which offers a basic overview of immigration and citizenship law, particularly family-based immigration, adjustment of status to permanent residence, citizenship, and naturalization. This course is particularly helpful to professionals working in literacy and basic education programs; it offers an understanding of the law and an excellent general overview of the field, as well as the basic vocabulary used in immigration law and regulation.
- > **Business Immigration Law**, which covers business immigration laws and regulations, including how to assist and advise immigrants and their employers in resolving immigration problems related to work status.
- > **Proceedings in Immigration Court: The Removal Process and Applications for Relief**, which covers the legal process of removal (previously called "deportation") proceedings.

The program, designed to serve a broad range of individuals, can be of particular use to adult educators. Because a large percentage of adult education and literacy learners are immigrants, issues of residency and citizenship status can be serious obstacles to an adult learner's success in school. Learning about the laws, regulations, and processes surrounding the status of immigrants will not only help educators understand and appreciate the concerns and problems their students face, but will also better equip them to direct and refer their students to more in-depth legal assistance. ●

The City University of New York School of Professional Studies (SPS) will work with interested organizations to customize individual courses or the entire certificate program to meet their specific needs, offering courses onsite, at CUNY campuses, and in other convenient locations. SPS offers professional development programs in other fields, including teacher education and disability studies. To register for Introduction to Immigration Law, or to find out more about SPS, visit the school's website at www.cuny.edu/sps, or contact spsadmissions@mail.cuny.edu.

RESOURCES >> A Look at Adult Literacy Education Policy

> Thomas Sticht *International Consultant in Adult Education*

Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education: In Quest of a U.S. Democratic Politics of Literacy

By George Demetrios

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005

With three million enrollments per year, adult literacy education is a fairly substantial activity in the U.S. Yet as an enterprise serving undereducated and socially excluded youth and adults, it is largely unknown to the public. It remains marginalized, with meager federal and state funding, compelled to rely heavily on part-time teachers and volunteer tutors. In *Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education: In Quest of a U.S. Democratic Politics of Literacy*, George Demetrios, of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, examines why this is so.

According to Demetrios, federal and state governments currently justify spending tax dollars on adult education and literacy development in terms of human capital development. The logic goes like this: Adult education provides a return on investment because, as adult learners increase their education and literacy skills, they improve their ability to support themselves and their families and to contribute financially to their communities and to the nation. Demetrios wants to substitute democracy for economy. He maintains that federal and state governments should justify spending tax dollars on adult education and literacy development because the very enterprise of improving adults' literacy skills sustains and improves our nation's commitment to a free society. Adult education promotes democracy and democratic principles, such as civic participation, discussion, debate, and voting. That's what Demetrios is talking about when he subtitles his book "In Quest of a U.S. Democratic Politics of Literacy."

Over the course of 11 chapters, Demetrios covers some of the key issues in adult literacy education from the mid-1980s to the present. In the first three chapters, he outlines the government's focus on workforce development as the primary justification for adult literacy education in order to establish his argument that we should "shift the value system from economics to the strengthening of democracy."

In the next several chapters, Demetrios addresses how outcomes are assessed in adult literacy education. Drawing extensively on discussions from the National Literacy Advocates (NLA) listserv, he critiques the federal government's National Reporting System (NRS) and its use of standardized tests to track accountability in adult education and literacy development programs funded through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). The requirements of NRS have caused so much consternation in adult literacy circles at least in part because of the economic justification Demetrios criticizes. He questions whether such tests offer valid representations of what adults actually learn in most programs.

In chapters seven and eight, Demetrios examines the federal government's Equipped for the Future (EFF), a project of the National Institute for Literacy. He considers that a mandated, one-size-fits-all approach to program accountability, such as the NRS, imposes arbitrary standards of what adults need to know and the skills they need to develop. Standardized assessments based on limited samples of adult learning then restrict instructional freedom because teachers must adhere to the standards on which the assessments are based. Demonstrating how the EFF project became caught up in these issues, Demetrios argues that the new politics of literacy he envisions would be necessary in order for all of the potentialities of the EFF project to bear fruit.

In chapter nine, the author discusses research traditions. He contrasts what he refers to as the "positivistic" and "objective" research tradition of empiricism, measurement, and quantification with the more "subjective," theoretical, reflective, and qualitative research tradition that he (and others) refer to as "post-positivistic." For Demetrios, "post-positivistic" research provides more convincing support for adult literacy education.

In the final two chapters, Demetrios returns to his argument that the public in general—and policy makers in particular—need to substitute democracy for economy as the philosophical justification for spending tax dollars on adult education and literacy development. Though he does not say so directly, Demetrios seems to presume that this shift in values from economics to democracy would lead to better financial support for adult education and literacy development in the nation.

This book is not an easy read. It's academic and, at times, difficult to wade through. However, it covers many of the main issues that the field of adult literacy education has encountered during the last decade of the 20th century. It is a good start for those who want to avoid repeating some of the mistakes of the past, and his argument about the politics of democracy versus economics deserves further discussion. ●

Family Literacy Conference

On Saturday, March 19, the LAC will hold “Celebrating Literacy,” a free collaborative conference for parents, caregivers, families, youth, children, and parent educators across New York City. This free, all-day conference represents a collaboration between the LAC and the St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation, with support from the Altman Foundation, Scholastic, and others. It will take place at the Williamsburg Beacon Center, Grand Street High School Campus, 850 Grand Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

The conference is expected to serve over 800 community members from Williamsburg, Bushwick, Cypress Hills, and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn and around New York City. It will feature an extensive resource fair, introducing parents, community workers, and family literacy programs to a wide variety of programs and services. In addition, there will be workshops for professionals, for parents, and for children and parents together. This conference will highlight a variety of resources for children and families, make connections across service providers, and build on the strengths of families. For more information, go to www.lacnyc.org/profdev/flconf/flconf2005.htm.

2005 Tri-Library Adult Learning Conference

The 2005 Tri-Library Adult Learning Conference for volunteer tutors will take place on Saturday, March 19, at the Flushing Branch of the Queens Borough Public Library. Entitled “Balanced Literacy for Lifelong Learning,” the conference will offer a series of workshops on tutoring adult literacy and ESOL learners. Educators from the LAC, DYCD, Literacy Partners, and the three New York library systems will present on various topics, including:

- > Strategies for basic literacy group tutoring
- > Helping students become independent learners
- > Working with beginning ESOL students

This event is sponsored by the NYC Regional Adult Education Network. For more information, contact Roberto Cruz at rcruz@queenslibrary.org or call 718.480.4234.

Grassroots Literacy Coalition Leadership Institute

The Grassroots Literacy Coalition (GLC) will hold its second Leadership Institute on Saturday, April 9, at New York University. The Leadership Institute is designed to help adult students and educators become more effective leaders and advocates for adult education in New York City. The GLC also needs volunteers to help with mailings, publicity, registration, refreshments, and organizing and running workshops on leadership-related topics. For more information or to volunteer, email Paul Jurmo, pjurmo@comcast.net.

Third Annual EL/Civics Conference

The third annual EL/Civics Conference, “Active Participation and Engaged Learning in the ESOL Classroom,” will take place on Saturday, April 16, at the Queens Borough Public Library in Flushing. Participants will learn new strategies to engage their students in active learning. For more information, contact Susan Dalmas at sdalmas@queenslibrary.org or Roberto Cruz at rcruz@queenslibrary.org, or call 718.480.4234.

54th Annual NYACCE Spring Conference

New York Association for Continuing/Community Education is hosting its 54th annual conference, “On the Right Track: Leading the Way in Lifelong Learning,” on May 15–17 in Saratoga Springs. The keynote speaker is Vivyan Adair, a former welfare recipient and single parent who is now Elihu Root Peace Fund Associate Professor of Women’s Studies and Director of the Access Project at Hamilton College. The conference will feature workshops, as well as a variety of opportunities to share strategies, ideas, and successes. For more information, go to www.nyacce.org/.

Earned Income Tax Credit

Workers between the ages of 25 and 64 whose household income is less than \$34,692 may be eligible for Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) simply by filing their federal, state, and city tax returns. Those who qualify for the EITC can receive potentially thousands of dollars; they can also have their taxes filed free of charge at a NYC Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Voluntary Income Tax Assistance Site. DCA has developed bilingual palm cards that provide information about the EITC in eleven languages (including Spanish, Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Korean, Russian, and Urdu), as well as a poster in English and Spanish. The palm cards are perfect for distribution in adult education classes. To order palm cards or posters, download a request form at www.lacnyc.org/announcements/ or fax a request to DCA at 212.487.4282. For more information on DCA’s efforts to encourage New Yorkers to file for the EITC, go to www.nyc.gov/eitc/.

CAAL Report on Adult ESL and the Community College

The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy recently released number 7 in its series of working papers on adult education and community colleges. The paper, *Adult ESL and the Community College*, was written by JoAnn Crandall of the University of Maryland and Ken Sheppard of the National Foreign Language Center. It examines some of the key issues in community college ESL programming and contains four appendices including profiles of exemplary ESL programs in five community colleges. The report is available in PDF format, along with all other titles in this series, at the CAAL website, www.caalusa.org.

Mar. 1

GED Testing Office Statewide Videoconference

Tuesday, March 1, 10 am–noon

In this videoconference, NYSED GED Testing Office staff members will review and answer your “most asked” questions, such as queries relating to age eligibility, the correct use of attachments, and testing accommodations. They will share 2004 statewide and regional testing data and any 2005 testing changes. In addition, adult literacy regional representatives will be on hand to answer questions on a variety of GED preparation program issues.

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

Mar. 3

Helping Learners Navigate the NYC Health Care System

Thursday, March 3, 9 am–noon

Facilitator: Christine Molnar, Director, Community Health Access Department, Community Service Society

How can I help students with no insurance obtain health care? Who is eligible for public health insurance? What are the managed care options for low-income New Yorkers? What services are covered and how can students access those services? This workshop will familiarize adult educators with the NYC health care system and health care options for low-income and immigrant New Yorkers.

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

Mar. 10

ALIES Reports Workshop

Thursday, March 10, 9 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman

In this hands-on exploration of the ALIES reports, learn how to use ALIES data for program management and improvement. Exciting new reports from ALIES Release 5.3—including the ability to disaggregate NRS data—will be featured. Highlights include data management reports for student and class information, ad-hoc reports, NRS data check reports, turnaround documents, and mailing labels.

This workshop, which is designed for experienced ALIES users, will also be held on April 13. Please attend only one session.

RSVP: ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or aliessupport@lacnyc.org.

Mar. 11

Popular Education Study Circle

Friday, March 11, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

This series explores practical approaches for teaching adults to develop an awareness of social justice issues, both in and out of the classroom. 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.

Mar. 15

ALIES Data Entry

Tuesday, March 15, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman

This newly formatted one-day training provides a comprehensive introduction to the ALIES data entry process. Highlights include navigating ALIES data entry screens; upgrading ALIES; backing up data; inputting student, class, and instructor information; and updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours.

New data entry users, as well as those who need a refresher, are invited to attend.

RSVP: ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or aliessupport@lacnyc.org.

Mar. 18

Mathematical Exploration and Inquiry in the Pre-GED and GED Classroom

This four-session workshop series is designed to introduce math instructors to methods and resources that will enable them to better facilitate instruction around the four major strands of the new GED math test: Number, Data, Geometry, and Algebra.

Session 2: Data

Friday, March 18, 1–5 pm

Presenters: Charlie Brover and Solange Farina, NYC Math Exchange Group

Explore a series of engaging math problems appropriate for pre-GED and GED classes. Many of these problems will be drawn from math curricula, including that currently used by the NYC Department of Education, funded by the National Science Foundation. Develop your own problem-solving strategies, and learn how to generate a similar problem-solving culture in your classroom.

This is an encore presentation of last year's series designed for those who have not already participated.

Additional sessions will be held on May 6 and June 3. Attendance at all four sessions is not required; however, space is limited.

Registration is essential.

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

**All LAC events take place
at 32 Broadway, 10th floor.**

Mar. 23

Instructional Methods for the Adult Literacy Classroom

Are you interested in using student-centered practices in the classroom? Are you looking for new ways to encourage student participation? Designed for ESOL, GED, and ABE instructors, this hands-on, activity-oriented series introduces three instructional methodologies for the adult literacy classroom: project-based learning, co-operative learning, and thematic curriculum development.

Session 3: Theme-Based Curriculum Planning
Wednesday, March 23, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Review examples of theme-based curricula, an instructional approach where instructors and learners explore a topic or idea—usually based on learners' cultures, environments, or shared experiences—through a variety of classroom and out-of-classroom activities. Explore methods for developing your own theme-based curriculum, and create a model theme-based unit.

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

Apr. 8

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, April 8, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

Explore and discuss appropriate methods for teaching English language learners (ELLs). Share promising practices from your own classrooms, and receive feedback from your colleagues. Designed for ESOL instructors, the ESOL Teacher Share is an opportunity for you to develop a network that you can go to for professional advice and support.

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

Apr. 12

Exploring Family Literacy

Tuesday, April 12, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Alecia D'Angelo

Examine the federal definition of family literacy, explore models of instruction, discuss goals of programs, review lesson plans, and familiarize yourself with resources and organizations that can help family literacy practitioners. Designed for those who would like an introduction to the principles and practices of family literacy, this workshop offers group-learning activities and opportunities to actively engage with authentic family literacy texts. You'll leave with resources for making referrals to family literacy programs and for supporting intergenerational learning.

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

Apr. 13

ALIES Reports Workshop

Wednesday, April 13, 9 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman
See March 10 for description.

RSVP: ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or aliessupport@lacnyc.org.

Apr. 15

BEST Plus Score Norming

Friday, April 15, 1–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Designed for certified BEST Plus test administrators, this workshop provides an opportunity to review the BEST Plus scoring rubric and to discuss the BEST Plus scoring benchmarks. There will also be an opportunity to practice and to discuss scoring video taped tests.

This workshop will also be held on April 20. Please attend only one session.

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

Apr. 20

BEST Plus Score Norming

Wednesday, April 20, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele
See April 15 for description.

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

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

Visit our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab to explore ways to use computers to enhance instruction. Try out instructional software, browse the web for sites that lend themselves to your lessons, or build a project that uses common office software to enhance 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. The collection of books, journals, and audiovisual materials encompasses professional development materials as well as curriculum and reading materials for ESOL, ABE, and GED learners. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

Interactive Literacy

Building on the Strengths of Families Using Project Based Learning

> Alecia D'Angelo *Professional Development Associate*

Interactive literacy is a time when parents and children can connect in the classroom. However, it often presents a challenge for family literacy programs. Not only must instructors find ways to engage both parents and children, but they must also organize activities to meet both generations' literacy proficiency levels.

This becomes even more complicated when we invite children who have more advanced English literacy skills than their parents into family literacy programs. When children are more proficient in English than their parents, family roles can become unbalanced, leaving parents less able to assert authority and establish leadership. This is often the case in families with adolescent children.

Project based learning (PBL), an approach to instruction that focuses on developing a project or solving a problem, is one way to build on the strengths of participants while helping parents and children connect. In PBL, participants choose their own projects and create learning opportunities based on their individual interests and strengths.

By drawing on these interests and strengths, a well-planned PBL activity can increase confidence and affirm multiculturalism. It can also provide participants with an opportunity to develop basic literacy skills as they simultaneously exercise less traditional modes of learning, such as kinesthetic, visual, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and musical modes.

Getting Started

PBL does not rely on a pre-determined curriculum—students develop the projects themselves. To do this, students must engage in a series of tasks. They must identify a problem, issue, or theme of interest; explore the problem, issue, or theme; plan the project and assign roles for group members; research the problem, issue, or theme; create a product; present or share the product with others; and evaluate the process.

Talking to families is a crucial first step. In order to successfully facilitate a project that draws on the strengths of parents and children, teachers must first ascertain what those strengths are. Having conversations with participants about their lives before moving to the U.S., their lives after the move, their values, and their interests will enable teachers and participants to identify areas of expertise and interest.

Benefits of Project Based Learning

Integrating PBL activities into parent-and-child interactive time can engender enormous benefits for parents and children of all ages.

Specifically, PBL can:

- > Equalize the playing field for parents and children by requiring families to work together. This often helps parents take back their leadership role.
- > Help both parents and children build self-esteem. In most cases, children are proud of their history and heritage when they learn about it from their elders. At the same time, building literacy and navigation skills allows parents to more effectively meet the needs of their family.

> Create an outlet for children and parents. Music, drama, and art activities can be a vehicle for family members to express their fears, frustrations, and struggles.

> Connect the worlds of adults and children. In a well-orchestrated interactive parent-and-child class, each generation will learn more about the other. As a result, they will be better able to understand and to appreciate the others' experiences and beliefs.

Family Literacy Projects for Parents and Children of All Ages Family Websites

Creating a family website is a popular and effective PBL activity for family literacy programs. Parents can provide the content—the family's history and lineage—and parents and children can work together to build the actual site. This project also provides participants with an opportunity to reach out to other family members. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins can be interviewed, and their stories can be incorporated into the site. Parents and children can then post their pages online for other families to look at and learn from.

Community Garden

Community gardens are another possibility for building on the strengths of families. In a program with parents who were farmers before moving to the U.S., parents could offer their expertise in the creation of a community garden. In this case, parents could provide their knowledge of climate, plants, and cultivation. Children, who may have more advanced English language and computer skills, could create posters and flyers to advertise the garden. Together, parents and children could harvest vegetables or flowers and sell them at local farmers' markets.

Story Quilts

Story quilts offer another way for families to engage in PBL. As with family websites, children can interview parents and elders about the family history. Then parents and children can create a quilt of pictures to illustrate the stories. These quilts could be presented at a family celebration night, when each family shares their story quilt with the others. Programs can also display the quilts and invite the community to view the exhibition.

Guidebooks

Creating a "USA Guidebook" is another way for parents and children to work together. Families can base the books on their own experiences and include information they wish they had known before they moved. Parents and children can compare their experiences acclimating to new environments, such as school and work. They can then work collaboratively to create the book; parents may do the writing and children the illustrations, or vice versa depending on their strengths. The families can then pass their guidebooks along to new families entering the program and act as tutors or ambassadors, helping the new family adjust to life in the U.S. ●

Making the Case *continued*

Talking Points

When advocating with your representatives in Washington, stories of how individual adult learners you know have benefited from literacy classes are very effective. They should be accompanied by the kind of concise, informed arguments you would use in a letter to the editor. You can find statistics on the value of literacy education all over the Internet, including on the LAC website. Here are a few:

Literacy and employment

- > Sixty-three percent of adult New Yorkers do not have the skills necessary to compete in the global economy, based on the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). That total includes 36 percent who scored at Level 1, plus 27 percent who were at Level 2.
- > About half of unemployed adults performed at Level 1 on the NALS.
- > Seventy percent of the incarcerated population in New York performed at NALS Level 1 or 2.
- > A college graduate earns \$1 million more over a 40-year career than does a high-school dropout, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Literacy and immigration

- > Thirty-eight percent of New York City residents are foreign born.
- > In New York City, one adult in four, 1.5 million people, does not speak English well, according to the NYC Department of City Planning.

Literacy and children

- > The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says that parent education level is the strongest single predictor of whether children will be raised in poverty.
- > Thirty-nine percent of NYC public high school students arrived in the U.S. when they were 13 years of age or older.
- > In 2003, only 18 percent of NYC public high school students who entered four years earlier graduated with a Regents diploma.

Literacy and health

- > Forty-six percent of Americans are functionally illiterate in dealing with the health care system, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.
- > The cost of low literacy on the health care system—in the form of longer hospital stays, more emergency room visits, and so on—has been estimated by health experts at \$73 billion dollars annually.

Bottom line: Raising literacy levels is probably the single most cost-effective way to improve income, employment, health, children's educational achievement, and civic participation, while reducing crime and poverty.

One justification for the proposed budget cut is that adult literacy education is ineffective, as measured by the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) of the Office of Management and Budget. State literacy programs received a zero for results in the PART survey because they had not provided numeric data. However, they didn't do so because the federal Department of Education's National Reporting System requires states to submit their results in percentages, not absolute numbers. NRS data for New York prove that literacy programs *do* achieve positive results (see box). The data show that in the year ending in June 2004, 35 percent of adult learners in New York City and 33 percent

New York's Literacy Programs Achieved Their Targets in the Year Ending in June 2004

Educational Gain			
	New York City	New York State	State NRS Targets
ABE Beginning Literacy	35%	29%	22%
ABE Beginning Basic Education	37%	32%	30%
ABE Intermediate Low	40%	32%	32%
ABE Intermediate High	28%	24%	35%
ASE Low	32%	27%	37%
ESL Beginning Literacy	35%	38%	31%
ESL Beginning	42%	43%	30%
ESL Intermediate Low	51%	49%	35%
ESL Intermediate High	49%	50%	35%
ESL Low Advanced	44%	43%	32%
ESL High Advanced	2%	5%	30%
Total	35%	33%	
Goals Achieved			
Entered employment	69%	30%	30%
Retained employment	29%	21%	42%
Obtained a GED or secondary school diploma	38%	26%	31%
Entered post-secondary education or training	72%	21%	32%

throughout New York State made educational progress, as defined by federal standards (generally meaning an increase of two or more grade levels). In New York City, 69 percent of the students who said their goal was to find a job got one; 72 percent of the students whose goal was to enter post-secondary education did so. In almost every category, New York literacy programs met or exceeded their NRS targets.

Resources

As of this writing, the LAC website is the country's most comprehensive source of information on literacy advocacy efforts. Here are some other websites where you can find regularly updated news on budget or advocacy developments:

- > For official budget news, www.whitehouse.gov/omb or www.ed.gov
- > For comprehensive analysis of budget choices, www.cbpp.org
- > For advice on advocacy in general, www.npaction.org

Other literacy sites that we expect will have valuable information include the National Literacy Advocacy listserv at lists.literacytent.org/pipermail/aaace-nla, the National Coalition of State Directors of Adult Education at www.ncsdae.org, the National Coalition for Literacy at www.national-coalition-literacy.org, and ProLiteracy Worldwide at www.proliteracy.org. ●

Workplace Literacy Education

Definitions, Purposes, and Approaches

> Paul Jurmo *Gallatin School of Individualized Study, New York University*

Workplace literacy became a focus of attention for news media, policymakers, employer organizations, and labor unions in the U.S. from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. Many advocates argued that employee basic skills were key factors in keeping workplaces productive, safe, and competitive. Some also argued that worker basic skills played a role in workers' personal and professional development, such as their ability to retain their jobs, qualify for promotions, manage their benefits, earn high school credentials and move on to higher education and training. In response, employers and labor unions set up basic skills programs for their employees that taught reading, writing, math, and oral language skills. Occasionally, "soft" skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, and research, were incorporated into the curriculum.

Workplace literacy education—which has evolved in response to lessons learned through experience and research, changes in workplace conditions and available resources, and shifts in the political environment—can be broadly organized into two major categories: decontextualized and contextualized.

A Decontextualized Approach

The earliest workplace basic skills programs generally adopted academic curriculum models used in schools; they focused on reading, writing, speaking, listening, and/or math skills with little connection to how participants might use the skills in their work or other real-life contexts. Proponents argued that it is important to teach the basics (for

example, vocabulary, rules, letter-sound combinations) in discrete pieces on the assumption that learners will eventually be able to combine these pieces and apply them to real-life tasks. Commercial workbooks or software that require learners to produce answers predetermined by the authors often accompany this approach.

Those who favor a contextualized curriculum argue that this approach has certain advantages:

- > It requires limited planning. Teachers can be handed lessons and jump right into teaching.
- > The model is familiar. Most learners, employers, and other stakeholders have experienced this approach. They tend to prefer a hierarchical teacher-student relationship in which the teacher is positioned as the holder of knowledge to be dispensed to learners.
- > Discrete skills are relatively easy to assess using standardized tests.
- > Some research supports the view that literacy skills should be taught in a discrete, carefully sequenced way, particularly for low-level learners who may have learning disabilities.

Critics of the decontextualized approach argue that the limited time available for workplace education should focus more directly on teaching skills immediately relevant to learners. Otherwise, learners might master discrete literacy and language skills in a vacuum but never learn how to apply them in actual situations.

continued on next page

CONFERENCES

April

Rutgers Graduate School of Education 37th Annual Conference on Reading and Writing

Rutgers School of Education
April 7–8, Somerset, NJ
Call 732.932.7496 x8202

14th Annual National Conference on Family Literacy

National Center for Family Literacy
April 25–27, Louisville, KY
www.famlit.org/Conference/index.cfm

May

International Reading Association 50th Annual Convention

International Reading Association
May 1–5, San Antonio, TX
www.reading.org/association/meetings/annual.html

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) 2005 Conference

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE)
May 4–7, Anaheim, CA
www.coabe05.org

4th Annual Health Literacy Conference

Institute for Healthcare Advancement
May 5–6, Irvine, CA
www.iha4health.org/index.cfm?MenuItemID=123
or call 800.434.4633

Workforce Alliance 2005 National Conference

Workforce Alliance
May 18–19, Washington, DC
www.workforcealliance.org/conference/twa-conference-2005-02.htm

June

2005 Adult Education Research Conference

Adult Education Research Conference (AERC)
June 3–5, Athens, GA
www.gactr.uga.edu/conferences/2005/Jun/02/aerc.phtml

Workplace Literacy Education *continued*

Expert-Driven, Functional Context Approach

Researchers argued that if improved job performance was the goal, workplace literacy programs should focus on job-related content, build on job-related knowledge and motivations, and teach the strategies needed to apply basic skills to job-related tasks. A functional context model, supported by the National Workplace Literacy Program, was held to a fairly narrow interpretation of contextualization: Curricula had to focus on skills employees needed for their jobs, as defined by the employer and identified by a basic skills specialist. The resulting curricula might, for instance, teach carpenters how to make precise measurements or bank tellers how to explain new financial services to customers.

This functional context approach has several advantages, according to its proponents:

- > Learners are more likely to see the relevance of developing literacy skills that have tangible effects on their job performance and prospects.
- > Involving internal experts—production managers, human resources specialists, supervisors—in shaping content increases the likelihood that they will provide resources, such as release time and classroom space, necessary to keep the program on track.
- > Employers and public funders can easily see how job-focused workplace education can contribute to increased productivity and competitiveness.

However, a number of criticisms have also been raised about this approach:

- > Programs may focus on the wrong skills. For example, workers may have created alternative strategies for handling job tasks and therefore not need a particular literacy skill that planners assumed they did.
- > Planners may focus on job skills that will soon become irrelevant either because the workers change jobs or because their jobs change.
- > Key decisions are made solely by high-level experts, ignoring the importance of learner motivation.
- > Learners might master particular job-related knowledge but not strengthen the underlying reading, writing, and basic skills they need for work or other life roles.

Collaborative, Problem-Posing Approach

Proponents of an alternative to the functional version of contextualized learning argued for an approach that involved a broader range of stakeholders, including workers, to set program goals; to balance the goals of improving performance and employee development; and to integrate traditional basic skills with problem posing, problem solving, and other key ingredients of team-based, high-performance organizational models.

Collaborative programs build stakeholder involvement through a systematic decision-making process—including representatives of company departments, adult educators, and labor union representatives—to clarify how basic skills fit into the company's strategic plan for workplace and worker development. The result might be a curriculum in which workers are organized as teams rather than as classes. The teams then identify workplace problems, the sources of the problems, and steps to solve them. In the process, participants develop problem-solving, listening and speaking, research, teamwork, math, and presentation skills, all while contributing to improvements in workplace operations.

Advocates for this collaborative approach to contextualized education point to several advantages:

- > Along with employers, participating workers become key stakeholders in workplace education. The approach takes the desires and interests of both groups into account.
- > Learners bring lots of expertise to their jobs. Rather than assuming that workplace education is a mechanism for getting learners to memorize information developed by others, the collaborative approach taps that expertise.

Concerns about the collaborative approach include assertions that:

- > Involving large numbers of stakeholders in making program decisions is too time-consuming.
- > The approach is naive, since relationships among employers, workers, and unions are inherently adversarial.
- > Inviting workers to identify and solve problems can lead to conflict. Workplace education programs should stay focused on having workers build the skills they need to carry out procedures defined by employers.

Call to Action

Government support for workplace basic education has declined in the past decade, though study after study shows that employers are concerned about workers' basic skills. In New York City, some labor unions operate programs for incumbent workers through joint labor-management agreements. New York once had a statewide workplace education initiative with its own funding, special projects, and staff training; however, that is no longer the case. (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and other states currently have such programs.) If adult educators, employers, and union representatives work together to create an initiative that both helps incumbent workers develop the basic skills they need for good jobs and ensures that employers have access to a highly skilled workforce, New York could again become a leader in this area. Studying the various approaches and models that have already been developed is a good first step. ●

This article was substantially adapted from the version originally published in *Focus on Basics*, volume 7A, November 2004.

That Was Then, This Is Now

Then The Language and Literacy Project is a new high-school based in-service program funded by the Literacy Assistance Center and the Board of Education's High School Division. Operating in 3 high schools each year, the Project is designed to meet the needs of two groups: students in high school literacy programs and their teachers.... The Language and Literacy Project is designed to support teachers with resources and a setting where they can meet as a professional community to further their expertise in literacy instruction.

Unsigned "Spotlight on Programs" article in the LAC's *Information Update*, vol. 1, no. 1, September 1984

Now When I read this excerpt to Ira Yankwitt, the LAC's director of professional development/NYC RAEN, he said, "You mean we've reinvented a 20-year-old wheel?" He was referring to his recent work with Sherry Zekowski and the NYC Department of Education (DOE) on research-based literacy

instruction for adolescents in DOE's alternative, adult, and continuing education programs.

The literacy community is still dealing with the same problems, so it's only natural we would come up with similar solutions. But surely the *content* of the recent adolescent literacy project was different from the earlier one; the whole point of the move toward research-based literacy development is to ensure that the latest knowledge informs instruction. More importantly, by establishing the position of "literacy coach" in the alternative high schools two years ago, the DOE made it possible for Ira's staff development efforts to have an impact on more at-risk youth. His predecessor 20 years ago reached maybe 20 or 25 teachers in three schools. By working with literacy coaches and staff developers, Ira could influence the pedagogy of *all* of the literacy teachers in the 17 schools represented by his seminar participants.

Jan Gallagher, Director of Communications

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