



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

IN THIS ISSUE

3 The Poverty Commission's Omission 4 Is Professional Development Really Useful?

6 & 7 Fall Professional Development Events

8 A Case Study in Professional Development 10 What Students Can Teach

Eliot Spitzer on Workforce Development

Shortly before his election, Governor-elect Eliot Spitzer responded to a series of 10 questions on workforce development issues submitted jointly by Community Voices Heard, the Fiscal Policy Institute, and NYC Employment and Training Coalition. His responses, reprinted here in full, will be of interest to all adult educators.

1) Governor Pataki very rarely mentioned the importance of workforce development as an economic development and poverty reduction strategy. What will you do differently to set direction for workforce development and its relation to economic development policy?

Workforce development is essential if we are to provide good paying jobs for both younger workers coming into the new economy and older workers displaced by the transitioning economy. Whether it's our inability to graduate high school and college students with the hard skills they need for emerging industries, or the State's failure to help the

existing workforce upgrade their skills to remain competitive, the State needs a complete overhaul in its approach to human capital production. We must stop approaching this issue in a piecemeal and passive manner and start developing an integrated workforce development system that is strategic, demand-driven and accountable.

Unfortunately, like the state's economic development system, New York's workforce development system is completely fragmented. Hundreds of different funding streams and programs are overseen by dozens of different agencies which use multiple databases and performance standards to inform decision making. This system – which is not really a system at all, but a patchwork of uncoordinated parts – leads to inefficiencies and unmet goals. We must align New York's education and workforce systems with its economic development system to increase efficiency, accountability, and strategic direction.

2) Workforce development resources have been reduced at the federal level. In addition, New York State does not utilize its TANF funding to the extent that it could to support workforce development programs for welfare recipients and the long-term unemployed. Yet, in order for New York State to remain competitive in the global economy, the existence of a strong prepared workforce is essential. What ideas do you have for how to fund this critical work? Would you be interested in investing state tax-levy funds in workforce development, as Massachusetts has done?

Funding workforce development is critically important. But accountability for where these dollars are going is just as important. Currently, New York State spends \$1.3 billion on workforce development programs. Before adding significant additional funding to our workforce development system, I will

continued on page 9

Six Degrees of Connection

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

My daughter turned 13 this summer. Immediately, she grabbed her teenager kit from the box beneath her bed. Our vivacious little girl who couldn't spell her own name was gone, and in her place we have an articulate, petulant computer expert who Instant Messages at 100 words per minute (none spelled correctly, but no one seems to mind). This overnight change in persona has been accompanied by the (mistaken) notion that it comes with freedom to roam the neighborhood, hit the mall (sans mom), and just hang out.

In my few lucid moments as a mom, I realize that my daughter needs to learn her boundaries by testing them, and will benefit from successful and safe encounters with what she perceives to be her freedom. I can let her have a little rope: The community that I live is full of moms who know we're all in this phase together. We keep our ear to the ground, stay connected by phone and email, and try not to mind when our daughters tell their secrets to someone else's mom—because anyone is smarter and hipper than your own. Little sisters and brothers are also a great source of information. Together, these connections form part of an invisible net that will keep our children secure and on the right track until they are ready for real freedom and responsibility.

My daughter may not realize it, but I've gotten plenty of experience in youth connections here at the LAC. We are supporting Department of Education efforts to keep the 140,000 overage, under-credited teenagers who are in the school system from walking out the door. We have also developed programs to expand opportunities for the 200,000 youths who are neither in school nor in the workforce. The common term for these young adults is "disconnected" youth, but we don't see them that way. Based on our parent engagement and family literacy experience, we know that many of these kids have parents, relatives, and caregivers who are connected to literacy and other educational programs, as well as to siblings who are in after-school and Beacon programs. One challenge for all of our educational institutions and agencies and programs is to activate these connections, coordinate our activities, and leverage our resources to encourage these young adults to complete their education, get job training, and reach out as peer mentors to help others. Dynamic organizations are already committed to this effort. When they invite our agencies and programs to join in, I hope we will be able to show them the power and reach of the adult literacy community.

Let me put it more strongly: If this opportunity does present itself, we must seize it. All teenagers and young adults need a safety net, not only to catch them when they fall, but to keep them secure and on the right track. Literacy is woven into that fabric. Understandably, many New Yorkers may not realize this; they assume that everyone who has been to school has adequate math and reading skills. In the adult education community, we know how mistaken that assumption is, and see the consequences every day. Our task is to explain this to policy makers and the broader public in a way they can understand. We have to make clear to them that without a strong and well-funded literacy component, any activities program, any jobs program, any anti-poverty program, no matter how sincere and well-intentioned, that the city constructs to assist the hundreds of thousands of our city's youth who are neither working nor going to school is destined to falter. Conversely, if the initiative is intertwined with literacy, in almost every case the net will hold; the youths that it supports will be poised to make the leap to full adulthood and a happy, fulfilling life. Isn't that what all of us want for our children? Of course. And as a community, all of these children are ours. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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Editors JoAnne Steglitz and Jon Steinberg
Design Inessa Shkolnikov



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> Jon Steinberg LAC Director of Communications 2.21.4

Last March, Mayor Bloomberg appointed a commission of corporate executives, policy makers, and leaders of non-profit organizations to make recommendations for a frontal assault on poverty. As chairs, he chose Geoffrey Canada, head of Harlem Children's Zone, and Richard D. Parsons, CEO of Time Warner. The commission recently issued its report, "Increasing Opportunity and Reducing Poverty in New York City." Solicited by the mayor and likely to influence his policies over the remainder of his tenure, this ambitious document deserves the attention of anyone who cares about the plight of the city's poor and underserved communities. Although not represented on the commission, the adult literacy community will be particularly interested in what it says, and what it doesn't.

At the outset, the report states that in framing its recommendations, "the Committee kept in mind the funding limitations that exist.

While we neither anticipate nor advocate massive new expenditures by New York's public or private sector, it is clear that new strategic investments are a required part of any targeted approach to reducing current levels of poverty."

[Italics in the original document.] The introduction goes on to say that current funding could be used more effectively.

Before offering recommendations, the report lays out some of the major issues in New York City poverty. The picture isn't pretty, and in many respects is getting worse. Between 1973 and 2003, productivity continued to increase and earnings of college graduates climbed 19 percent nationally, but real hourly wages for men with less than a high school education dropped 20 percent. In New York City, more than 19 percent of the population lives below the poverty line—1.5 million people, including 185,000 children age five or younger. Another 19 percent of residents have incomes less than twice poverty level. The poverty rate is 21.4 percent among African Americans and 28.6 percent among Latinos. For many of these people, getting a job isn't the solution—they already have one: "In over 46 percent of households living below the poverty level, the head of household is working."

In 2000, the report says, 19 percent of native-born workers earned less than \$10 an hour; almost 35 percent of foreign-born did.

In this summary of the problem, only one explanation is offered. It isn't discrimination, or lack of unionization, or a New York State minimum wage of \$6.75 an hour (rising to \$7.15 on January 1). The preferred metaphor of the report is a ladder. You don't shift the rungs on a ladder; you make it possible for people to climb higher. "Poverty," the report states, "is clearly related to education."

Almost a third of those who lack a high school diploma or GED live below the federal poverty line. However, additional education decreases the likelihood that a person will live in poverty. For example, among those who graduate high school or obtain a GED, the poverty rate drops to 17 percent.

Similarly, in setting the context for reducing poverty, the commissioners declare that "Education is a fundamental prerequisite of any solution. Orchestrated efforts to increase the education and build the skills among the poor must be a priority."

In establishing this framework, affirming that the door to prosperity can be opened, and identifying education as the key, the report has opened the way to a serious discussion of how we can strengthen adult literacy. Unfortunately, the commissioners never quite get the key in the lock. Although they make important and valuable recommendations, many of them related to adult literacy, the report never once uses the term, or suggests that increased funding of adult literacy programs is essential to realizing the commission's vision for reducing poverty.

The range of recommendations is impressive. They include better coordination of workforce training, expansion of apprenticeship and credentialing programs, encouraging businesses to fund education and job training programs ("Limited English speakers, for example, could use funds such as educational training to enroll in literacy courses."). Another recommendation is to encourage enrollment in income-enhancing work support programs, such as food stamps, public health insurance, and the Earned Income Tax Credit, with the suggestion that city agencies "ensure that marketing materials are culturally and linguistically appropriate for New Yorkers with limited English proficiency."

The report notes the importance of financial literacy, and affirms that to increase assets and savings, "low-wage workers must obtain financial planning skills to better manage cash flow, savings and debt." From whom, the reader must determine. A discussion of how to engage disconnected 16 to 24 year-olds states that it requires a collaborative approach "among the City's youth-serving entities, including city agencies, community-based organizations, philanthropy and the business sector." A while later, the report recommends increasing "the availability of GED-to-College programs and other support services for young adults to continue with post-secondary education." To reduce recidivism among ex-prisoners, the commissioners say the City "should expand work readiness and literacy during incarceration and post-discharge."

As is evident, virtually every recommendation in the report points to the need for strengthening the city's already over-crowded, understaffed adult literacy programs. Yet looking for affirmation of this need is like playing a literary version of Where's Waldo—except no matter how hard you look, this Waldo isn't there. Let us hope that when the City begins thinking about how to transform the report's words into reality, it will notice, and make the relatively small additional investment in adult literacy that will be essential to achieving many of its major goals. ●

Is Professional Development Really Useful?

> Sandra Kerka

Although most adult educators who have participated in professional development workshops would agree that both they and their students benefited, as researchers Alisa Belzer and Ralf St. Clair have observed, “[a]n evidence-based connection between professional development of almost any kind and learner outcomes is tenuous at best, and elusive in practice.” One reason for this lack of hard data may be that some types of professional development are more effective than others. The field appears to be operating on this premise, as evidenced by the shift from discrete events focused on transmission of knowledge and information to practitioner engagement in sustained knowledge construction and collaboration. After assessing the impact of stand-alone workshops, Mark Kutner, *et al.* concluded that they may be a useful way to provide information and raise awareness of issues, but changing behavior and practice requires longer-term approaches.

Nevertheless, when J.P. Sabatini, *et al.* asked 423 adult literacy instructors around the country what type of professional development format they preferred, two of the top three choices were workshops led by consultants or colleagues. For many educators, the crucial issue isn't single versus series, but form and content: Adult educators in Washington told researcher Barry Sheckley that prepackaged workshops did not meet their needs, particularly when they focused on state mandates, with little or no emphasis on issues related to learning.

Some experts have been brave enough to identify what they consider to be keys to a successful workshop. For example, that they may be most effective for certain learning styles; when sessions are based on learners' assessed needs; and when attention is given to such elements as modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching. The Pelavin three-phase process model is one approach: Practitioners attend a traditional daylong workshop session, leaving with an assignment to accomplish or a “guiding question” to explore over a 6-week period. Then they return to discuss results they achieved and problems they encountered.

Another increasingly popular form of professional development is collaborative practitioner inquiry/research, supported by theories of constructivism and critical reflection. Alisa Belzer concluded after an intensive study that literacy instructors participating in a learning community for ongoing and in-depth discussion engaged in more reflection and problem solving, and changed their classroom practices. This impact is cumulative, but not necessarily slow to appear: When Christine Smith assessed the impact of National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy's (NCSALL) study circles, in which adult basic education (ABE) teachers organized research-based professional development, conducted research and discussed it over an extended period of time, she found that classroom change was “immediate.”

Part-time literacy tutors in Britain launched a study circle to find out what constitutes effective professional support and development discovered that their research process itself helped them focus on the broader issues of teaching and learning, according to researcher Andrew Jackson while increasing their learner-centered teaching, critical awareness, and reflectivity. At the same time, they noted some caveats: Study circles are time-consuming, especially for part-time staff; they require administrative support.

Despite this evidence that inquiry-based professional development can result in significant changes in practice, it must be said that there is no substantial evidence that the learner outcomes it produces are superior to those of other models. Comparing the results achieved by workshops, mentoring, and practitioner research, Christine Smith and Judy Hofer found that the model of professional development was less significant than the amount of time spent, quality, personal motivation, working conditions of participating teachers, and program structure.

Asking which professional development method or model is most effective is the wrong question, according to Kathleen Cranton and Patricia King; the crucial issue is whether the process promotes a transformative process of critical reflection: “Meaningful professional development must go far beyond learning to use a new piece of software or a new trick for increasing student participation,” they assert. “It must involve educators as whole persons--their values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and their ways of seeing the world.”

The Impact of Professional Development

Everyone agrees that the ultimate goal of professional development is improved outcomes for learners. The debate comes over how outcomes should be assessed. One approach, used by many states, is to monitor numerical indicators and gains of adult learners. However, as Renee Sherman and Mark Kutner point out, learner achievement is an imperfect measure. The results can be skewed by many factors, including inconsistent attendance, differing learning styles, and looking for short-term changes rather than measuring possible long-term benefits.

Experts have suggested many other ways of assessing impact, often incompatible. After comparing 13 lists of characteristics of effective professional development, Thomas R. Guskey concluded that they were derived in very different ways, used different criteria to determine “effectiveness,” and varied widely in characteristics identified. Although most of the lists cited sufficient time and resources as essentials, some research has found that time is unrelated to learning outcomes. In the real world, notes Guskey, a complex web of factors influences the results.

Alisa Belzer's solution is to broaden the definition of impact to encompass changes in classroom practice, ideas about teaching and learning, attitudes, programs, and the broader field. Her perspective is that different kinds of professional development have different impacts. To be useful, measurement must take objectives and method of delivery into account: who/what is the source of knowledge; process/content/outcome; conceptions of change; relationships of theory/research and practice; transmission or knowledge construction. Thomas R. Guskey takes a different approach, delineating five levels of evaluation, with more complex measurement required at each successive level: (1) participant reactions; (2) participant learning; (3) organization support and change; (4) participant use of new knowledge and skills; and (5) student learning outcomes.

continued on page 11

Arts and Families

Experience and Engagement with Arts and Museums (EEAM) a project of the Literacy Assistance Center and the Museum of Modern Art, has developed a beautifully designed curriculum framework and toolkit to assist teachers who want to get integrate the arts into their family literacy program. It is available on the LAC website (lacnyc.org). A link to the EEAM description can be found on the home page under What's New.

Statewide Professional Development

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has awarded federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Title II, Section 223 of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act funds to the LAC to be the leader of a three-year (2006–2009) professional development project. We welcome your ideas. To find out more about this project and how you can contribute to this project, go to the link under What's New on the LAC home page (lacnyc.org).

Selected Shorts

Bring your students to the acclaimed adult literacy program Selected Shorts: ALL WRITE! at Symphony Space theater. Professional actors will read poems and stories at the first performance and selected, original student work at the second. Texts, study guide, and workshops provided. The program runs from December through May. There is an evening and a daytime version of the program. Space is limited. For an application, contact Madeline Cohen at 212.864.1414 x221 or madeline.cohen@symphonyspace.org.

NIFL on Worldwide Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy has launched a series of web pages on its website (www.nifl.gov) that provide information on worldwide efforts to promote literacy. The International Perspectives pages allow American adult literacy and English language teachers and students quick access to information about:

- > Adult literacy education in other countries and cultures, including both developing and industrialized countries, and including curriculum and outcomes standards for adult education in other countries;
- > International comparative studies of adult literacy and PreK-12 education; and
- > International efforts to raise literacy levels (e.g. UNESCO, International Reading Association, and the Venezuelan and Argentinian literacy campaigns) The Institute plans to expand these pages to create a central site for worldwide literacy resources. The International Perspectives pages can be found at <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/international/intro.html>.

Research on the Economic Impact of the GED Diploma Panel

The National Institute for Literacy has produced a 30-minute video of a panel discussion on Research on the Economic Impact of the GED Diploma. The discussion is based on a review by John Tyler of 8 recent research papers. Several of them were authored by John Tyler, Richard Murnane, and John Willett, researchers with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). Presenters include John Tyler, Sara Fass, and Sue Snider; the moderator is David Rosen. To view in streaming format, go to: http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/webcasts/ged/webcast_ged.html. To order in DVD for \$5.00 from NCSALL, go to: www.ncsall.net/?id=675. To order DVD version from NIFL, send request with mailing address to: info@nifl.gov

Access New York

New York City has created a new website, ACCESS NYC, to “promote self-sufficiency among New York City’s residents by providing greater access to benefit programs offered by City, State, and Federal government agencies.” Although this site could use plain language editing, this is an important step in the effort to get benefit information to those who need it. The url is https://a858-ihss.nyc.gov/ihss1/en_US/IHSS_homePage.do.

CONFERENCES

November

California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO)

November 30–December 2, Sacramento, CA
www.air.org.

March

COABE

March 26–28, Philadelphia, PA
www.coabe2007.org

May

2007 Florida Literacy Conference

May 2–4, Lake Mary, Florida
www.floridaliteracy.org.

The New York Association for

Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE)

May 6–8, Albany, NY.
www.nyacce.org

CALENDAR of events >>

Nov. 1

Exploring Family Literacy

Wednesday, November 1, 9:30 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Alecia D'Angelo

Family Literacy is a term that applies to many different models of instruction for adults and children. This workshop is designed for those who are very new to family literacy. During this session participants will examine definitions of family literacy, explore models of family literacy instruction, and discuss goals of family literacy programs. Participants will leave with resources for supporting intergenerational learning. There will be hands-on and participatory group-learning activities. Space is limited. Registration is essential.

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

Nov. 3 & 17

Health Literacy Navigation Study Circle

November 3 and 17, 9 am–1 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence; Estella Natal
Venue: Literacy Assistance Center

In these sessions, teachers will explore the concept of health literacy and new ways of teaching it. Participants will learn how to integrate health literacy navigation skills into their curriculum and have an opportunity to develop lessons based on these skills and try them out in their classes.

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

Nov. 10

Teaching Very Basic Literacy to Beginning ESOL Learners

Friday, November 10, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Susan Dalmas

This workshop will introduce techniques, strategies and activities that have proven to be successful in teaching very basic literacy to beginning ESOL learners with little or no literacy in their first language, as well as in English. The presenter will share insights from the Basic Literacy for ESOL class model that has been developed by the Queens Borough Public Library. The workshop will include discussions of screening of students, exit criteria, and the development of curricula and appropriate materials.

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

Nov. 10 & Dec 1

Health Literacy Navigation Study Circles

November 10 and December 1, 9 am–1 pm

To be held in the Bronx Library Center of the NYPL, 310 East Kingsbridge Road, Bronx, NY 10458.

These study circles will introduce teachers to the exploration of the concept of health literacy and a new approach to teaching about health issues and integrating health literacy into the adult literacy curriculum. Teachers will have the opportunity to develop lessons and try them out in their classrooms. These sessions will also look at ways in which programs can establish partnerships with a nearby health center or hospital.

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

Nov. 15

BEST Plus Administrator Training

Wednesday, November 15, 9:30 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Alecia D'Angelo

Become a certified BEST Plus administrator. Practice administering the print- and computer-based versions of the test and familiarize yourself with the scoring rubric. Participants will receive a test administrator guide and practice CDs.

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

Nov. 17

ALIES Data Entry

Friday, November 17, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

This 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.

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

Dec. 5

ALIES and NRS Program Managers Workshop

Tuesday, December 5, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

This workshop will include a review of third wave NRS policy and the corresponding changes in ALIES, and an opportunity to discuss strategies to improve your program's data.

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

**Unless otherwise noted,
all LAC events take place
at 32 Broadway, 10th floor.**

Dec. 8

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, December 8, 2–4:30 pm
(Follow-up to October 6th session)

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

In this series, teachers are exploring practical approaches to developing awareness of social justice issues within and outside the adult classroom. Teachers will read selected materials and discuss ways to implement theoretical perspectives. Participants will also engage in reflective writing about the process and their reactions to what is read and discussed.

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

Dec. 12

Family Educator Network

Tuesday, December 12, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Alecia D'Angelo

Open to adult and family literacy educators, parent coordinators, and K-12 educators. This is the first in a series of meetings provided to share expertise and experience working with parents and caregivers. The goals of the network are to: share resources and examine effective instructional strategies for supporting parental involvement in schools, and identify and discuss research on best practices in parent education. There will be hands-on and participatory group-learning activities. Space is limited. Registration is essential.

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

Dec. 15

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, December 15, 2–4:30 pm
(Follow-up to October 13th session)

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

In these sessions, teachers get an opportunity to hear and discuss promising and innovative practices that colleagues are pursuing. They explore various aspects of English language instruction, particularly teaching the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Participants are encouraged to bring materials to share with their peers.

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

Dec. 15

TABE Test Administrator Training

Friday, December 15, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

This workshop will introduce participants to the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Forms 7 & 8 and 9 & 10—the main test used by adult literacy programs funded by the State Education Department to place students in adult basic education (ABE) classes and to measure educational gain. Participants will become familiar with the content and format of the test; learn about effective test administration and use of the scoring tables; and discuss the relationship between TABE test scores and National Reporting System (NRS) levels.

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

Dec. 18

ALIES Reports Training

Monday, December 18, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

Beginning with a general overview of the tables, fields, and calculations, this training will help prepare programs for troubleshooting NRS Reports. Participants will learn how to apply the ALIES data check reports to troubleshoot NRS data. A step-by-step process for determining “Why this student does not show up on my report” will be highlighted.

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

Dec. 19

BEST Plus Test Administrator Training

Tuesday, December 19, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Become a certified BEST Plus administrator. Practice administering the print- and computer-based versions of the test and familiarize yourself with the scoring rubric. Participants will receive a test administrator guide and practice CDs

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. 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.

Serendipity: A Case Study in Program Development

> Laretta Goforth and Mary Ann Gray

Adult education programs generally have more than enough work. That is certainly true at SPELL (the Saturday Program in English Language Literacy), a community outreach ESL program at Hunter College that is part of a CUNY-wide literacy initiative funded by New York City and State. The continual search for new teachers, ordering the latest materials, improving technology, generating statistical reports, grant writing, and a myriad of other tasks take up so much time that it would be easy for the program director to get sidetracked from the most important task in any literacy program, holistic development. SPELL works hard to make sure that doesn't happen.

From the beginning, collaborative development of teachers has been at the core of our program. SPELL teachers have always partnered with each other to work with students, created their own syllabi, observed each other, and written reports at the end of each semester in which they reflect on different aspects of their own professional growth. This is the way a collaborative development program should work, and we would be proud to declare that it is exactly what we envisioned would happen at the program's inception. Except that isn't true. The process of creating our development program has been, and continues to be, as collaborative as the program itself.

One of the keys to our success in collaborative development has been the plenary session, where the director and teachers have an opportunity to share learning experiences each teaching day and come up with solutions to classroom challenges. Last year, one of our teachers mentioned to the director that she had been frustrated by a student's response to her correction of an error. Recognizing that this incident raised a complex problem that merited extended discussion, we raised it at the plenary. Error correction soon segued into a more general discussion of student attitudes about making errors and how these attitudes relate to class participation, homework, and ultimately success at learning. Most of the teachers agreed that fear of making errors kept many of their students from speaking, which severely hindered their ability to learn. After the staff had considered this issue from a variety of perspectives, everyone enthusiastically agreed that we should work together to devise solutions.

During the same discussion, teachers raised the issue of students who attended class but did no work, said little, and did not make progress—no matter how many semesters they stayed in the program. Fear of making errors was the root problem here as well, some of the participants suggested. Students who were afraid of getting something wrong had no way of expressing their lack of understanding. A good solution, we decided, would be for teachers to take a few minutes at the beginning of each session to suggest clarification questions that students might ask if they didn't understand something. We then brainstormed, and came up with possible questions appropriate for each class level.

Fine, one teacher commented, but what if the student's passivity is due to a "sponge approach?" That is, believing that learning is something the teacher imparts, and a student can soak up a new language simply by being present in the classroom. This phenomenon is common among students who come from countries where students

are expected to be silent and passive in class; their primary task is to avoid errors. Every teacher at the plenary was familiar with this attitude, and eager to find ways to change it.

By the time our discussion was over, we had sketched out a plan to achieve three goals:

- 1) Helping students understand that learning is their responsibility and requires active, not passive, behavior;
- 2) Teaching students how to seek clarification and giving them a lot of practice in how to do it; and
- 3) Helping students learn that errors are a necessary part of learning and should be seen as an aid to learning, rather than something to be feared.

In several meetings, we brainstormed methods, techniques and activities suitable for each of the 6 levels the SPELL program offers. Each teacher developed a personal implementation plan for an entire semester, employing both scaffolding and repetition.

By making the three goals an explicit part of the curriculum, we hoped to promote active learning among new students, strengthen it in returning students (a large percentage of SPELL's student body), and ensure that the teachers could steadily refine their skills in presenting and reinforcing this approach. We were confident that encouraging students to ask clarification questions would be relatively easy, and we would probably be able to show measurable progress in a short period of time. Changing a deeply ingrained culture of learning would be more difficult, we realized, especially since many of our learners are older than the typical pre-college student; it would probably be a while before any significant change in behavior was discernable.

Testing our ideas in the classroom

The following semester, all of the teachers introduced the three goals in their classroom right away. We discussed their experiences in several plenary meetings, and shared new ideas. By end of the semester, we were pleased to find that students were asking significantly more questions for clarification. "The students do use the questions, but I usually have to get it going each class by pointing to the newsprint, Cindy Wishengrad, a Level 1 teacher, later wrote. "When they use the questions, they seem pleased with themselves, which is great for their confidence." Level 2 teacher Young-Ju Cho decided to leave the clarification questions on the board for the first half of the semester and then remove them. "By the time they're taken off," she reported, "most students have learned them by heart and when somebody makes a mistake using one, other students can help the student correct it."

Unfortunately, our prediction that the other two goals would be harder to realize also proved accurate. Many of the students remained both passive in their learning and afraid to make errors. We agreed to continue our efforts to change their classroom culture for at least one more semester, and then decide whether our efforts were effective.

By the end of our second semester, the teachers had developed a variety of techniques to promote active learning and reduce student fear of errors. "I encourage students to self-correct and to correct one

continued on page 12

Eliot Spitzer on Workforce Development *continued*

work to make sure our current funding is being directed towards effective programs, programs that are strategically aligned to the economic development goals of the state. As it stands, the State has few metrics and performance measures by which it judges our myriad workforce development programs. This must change so we can direct funding to those programs that really work.

3) *Currently, 46 percent of New York City's poor households are headed by a working person, up from only 29 percent of poor households in 1990. New York State faces a similar situation. What will your administration do to assure that those who are working are not in poverty? What role, if any, do you see the private sector playing in achieving these goals?*

While much has been written about the decline in welfare caseloads in New York State, there has been no concurrent decline in poverty. In fact, while welfare caseloads have declined, poverty in New York has actually gone up in recent years. Clearly poverty, and its human and economic consequences, must be a priority of the next governor. It is time we begin integrating welfare reform into a broader agenda of economic growth, educational reform, and effective public administration to ensure that we continue to reduce the welfare caseload while at the same time ensuring that those who do leave welfare have the supports and skills necessary to live in economic security.

4) *This year was the tenth anniversary of federal welfare reform. In New York State, the welfare rolls have dropped precipitously over the last ten years, but many of those who left the rolls are working in poverty level jobs or not working at all. How will your administration ensure that public assistance recipients and those who have left the rolls can advance toward economic self-sufficiency?*

As was said above, while much has been written about the decline in welfare caseloads in New York State, there has been no concurrent decline in poverty. In fact, while welfare caseloads have declined, poverty in New York has actually gone up in recent years. Clearly poverty, and its human and economic consequences, must be a priority of the next governor. Today, many of those left on the welfare rolls are among the hardest to connect to the labor markets, which is why we'll need new thinking and new strategies if they are ever to live a life independent of public assistance. At the same time, we need to address the economic conditions of those recently removed from the rolls, too often mired in low-wage jobs without the skills to compete and the opportunity to achieve a decent quality of life. The new TANF requirements provide every state with an enormous challenge, but also an opportunity to do welfare reform the right way. It is time we begin integrating welfare reform into a broader agenda of economic growth, educational reform, and effective public administration to ensure that we continue to reduce the welfare caseload while at the same time ensuring that those who do leave welfare have the supports and skills necessary to live in economic security.

5) *New York City work experience programs require welfare recipients to "pay off" their benefits by doing jobs for the public sector. Unlike other workers, these workers are unable to access the EITC or pay into Social Security, and are not afforded the basic benefits considered standard for most employees, such as sick*

and vacation days. Simultaneously, good paying jobs—often union jobs—are displaced by this new second tier workforce. What is your position on workfare (the Work Experience Program—WEP—in NYC)?

I do not have a position on this issue at this time.

6) *New York State's economic development subsidies and benefits packages generally do not provide meaningful workforce benefits or requirements to invest in the skills of workers. What is your position on attaching wage and benefit standards and workforce development requirements to economic development subsidies?*

The State gives away millions of dollars in economic development subsidies without really knowing where that money is going and whether or not it is actually doing anything to create jobs and to grow the economy. There is no question we need better benchmarking and performance measures so we can ensure that tax dollars are being spent wisely. Part of that evaluation should include an analysis of the kinds of jobs are being created by our tax dollars. There is little use in job creation if those jobs do nothing to elevate people out of poverty.

7) *Nearly a quarter-million New Yorkers between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither in school nor working. Besides working to lower the state's high school drop out rate, what does New York need to connect these older teenagers and young adults to education and employment?*

These disconnected youth are a critical segment of the population that we must aggressively target in order to provide them with a second chance for opportunity. This is not only a moral imperative, but it is an economic imperative. These youth have untapped potential that can help drive the economy. The alternative is for those disconnected youth to become disconnected adults who weigh heavily on our public welfare and criminal justice systems.

To address the needs of this population we must work to prevent it from growing in size, which means preventing these youth from becoming disconnected in the first place. This will take investment and reform in our education system, which I have detailed throughout this campaign. For those youth who have already fallen out of the education system and into this disconnected population, we must have focused and integrated programs that not only offer workforce development services, but support services that range from basic education to life counseling.

8) *Tens of thousands of people leave the state penal system each year and reenter society with bleak employment prospects. All too often, the result is that they return to the behaviors that lead to their re-arrest and endanger public safety. How do you propose to end this cycle of joblessness, crime, incarceration, release, and recidivism?*

We must first address the challenge these men and women face during incarceration. We should do so by providing real educational and job training options, substance abuse treatment, and engaging them in meaningful discharge assessment and planning. The next step is to follow through once people reenter society by making sure there are housing and employment opportunities, as well as substance treatment programs in their communities.

continued on page 11

What Students Can Teach

> **David Greene** *Adult education teacher in East Flatbush, Brooklyn; UFT member; and Co-Chair of the Grassroots Literacy Coalition*

Last year, when Katrina created havoc and destruction and our government failed to act responsibly, millions of people throughout the country and the world were eager to do what they could. For my GED class, the disaster became both a stimulus for collective action and a multifaceted learning experience.

Under the leadership of Sophie Romain and Bianca Armstrong from Trinidad-Tobago, several women from the Caribbean mobilized the class to hold a bake sale. Like many women all over the world, they had a strong commitment to community and the skills to achieve it. Together, they took charge of the entire project, arranging to hold it at the church where our class meets, and masterfully mobilizing the materials, the bakers, and the sellers. Of the 40 students in the class, 30 participated actively, along with many members of their families. The Saturday of the sale, around a dozen students stayed the entire day, managing everything—including recruitment of customers off the street. Even though it turned out to be the rainiest day of the year, the event raised nearly \$600.

The enthusiasm generated by the bake sale fueled a rich thematic learning project. Students spent many hours discussing and planning the event and where they should send the money that they collected. They enriched classroom dialogue and critical thinking by sharing expectations and perspectives based on widely varied experiences. They wrote letters of support to the people of the Gulf Coast, which helped prepare them for the GED essay and writing test. They strengthened their reading comprehension skills by collecting, reading and discussing newspaper articles about the disaster. They did research on climate, meteorology, and global warming, and explored the role of the federal and state governments and FEMA.

Both at the bake sale and in class discussions, students compared and contrasted the New Orleans disaster and its aftermath with their own hurricane experiences on the islands. Most of them viewed the people in Katrina's path as their brothers and sisters. This perspective, and the sense of community and collaboration these students developed within the class, imparted lessons we could all learn from and use here in New York City.

When students lack English language skills or remain silent out of deference to the teacher, it is easy to believe that they have little to contribute in the classroom. Drawing them out sometimes takes considerable effort and trust, but with sufficient encouragement most students are willing—and often eager—to share their knowledge and insights with the rest of the class, just as the women from the Caribbean did in the aftermath of Katrina. I think of Jude from South Carolina, who shared some of the harsh realities of the African American experience with students from Pakistan, Jamaica and China; the two women from Sierra Leone who described the almost unimaginably

brutal civil war they had escaped; brilliant, sensitive Miguel, who began our education in the history of Mexico and its relationship with the U.S.—before his visa expired, forcing him to return home without achieving his goal of using his Mexican nursing credentials here in the States.

The enthusiasm generated by the bake sale fueled a rich thematic learning project.

In future years, I hope and expect that some of these students will return to share their lifetime of knowledge and recent experiences with new generations of learners, just as other graduates have in my classes and those of many other teachers. Last year Nadia from Morocco, an incredibly smart and diligent student who helped me learn and teach African history, came back for a visit. She described how international market forces caused the closure of a major textile factory in her home town of Oued Zem, compelling many families to move elsewhere in search of employment. This led to a lively discussion on the world job market, outsourcing, and the disappearance of many manufacturing jobs here in the U.S.

To be honest, when I was young, this wasn't a career I would have chosen. Literacy and adult education get little respect from the government and the public. It is assumed that anybody can teach adults, and the task isn't important enough to merit ample funding. Like many other people, I visualized adult education not as a field, but as an avocation, a sideline to a real job. It has taken me many years to become aware of all the highly specialized skills necessary to do this work well, and to appreciate just how fortunate I have been to teach adults and learn from my students every day. ●

Professional Development *continued*

Ultimately, reaching a fair judgment on whether professional development makes a difference in adult education depends on how the question is framed. Kathleen Cranton and Patricia King, as well as Barry Sheckley, advocate an inclusive definition of professional development that encompasses a wide range of activities for different contexts, with the goal of transformation. Belzer suggests using a broad conception of impact that looks at how practitioners, programs, and the field change the way they do things, as well as learner progress.

Above all, according to Christine Smith, giving professional development a fair trial requires developing a culture in which learning is embedded in day-to-day activities, and educators collaborate in a continuous learning process designed to improve their own practice and the knowledge and skills of their adult learners.

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Sandra Kerka is the Communications Manager for University Outreach and Engagement at the Service-Learning Initiative & P-12 Project of Ohio State University. This is an adaptation of her article in the ERIC Myths and Realities Series, available at <http://www.calpro-online.org/eric/docgen.asp?tbl=mr&ID=121>.

Eliot Spitzer on Workforce Development *continued*

9) *In much of New York, immigration is fueling population growth. But English language instruction and other services to help newcomers assimilate and join the workforce is woefully insufficient. How do you propose to offer much-needed ESOL and vocational training for these groups?*

Education has and remains the single best way to give immigrants an equal opportunity in this country. We need to make sure adequate funding is given to English language learning programs and that students and parents have the in-school supports necessary.

10) *Workforce development blends employer-driven hard skills training, education and soft skills attainment. Yet our limited funding for these services rarely allows for integrated program design that meets the needs of both the trainees and the employers. How will you assure appropriate integration of services?*

We must streamline the hundreds of different workforce development programs and funding streams spread out over dozens of different state agencies. We must also consolidate the reams of labor market data diffused throughout the system. Data means everything in a rapidly changing economy. Unfortunately, the state is largely flying blind. To address this problem, the state should integrate the labor market and education data from across government agencies for dynamic, accurate and real-time analysis. ●

Serendipity *continued*

another,” Level 5 teacher Michael Plant explained in a paper on his experience. “I often state how many students produced a particular construction incorrectly so that students will see how common these errors are, and feel less self-conscious about making them.”

Ruby Taylor MacBride, a Level 6 teacher, reported that “Many students are keeping up with their Error Notebooks, and I have been hearing fewer errors such as ‘He has 20 years old’ or ‘She don’t.’”

In our discussions at the plenary, we identified a number of factors that affected progress, including the student’s level in the program, age, learning style, educational background, and motivation. Despite the obstacles, we all agreed that this project had brought very positive results in the classroom. In addition, it had given us a model of successful program development that complements and supports our work

in staff development, administrative streamlining, and program planning.

At least as important, this experience has taught us—teachers and director—that just as students can learn from their errors, program staff members can benefit from being alert to problems they encounter in the classroom that raise broader issues. Identifying these problems gives us an opportunity to collaborate on finding solutions that dramatically improve our program’s services to learners. ●

Lauretta Goforth, Director of SPELL at Hunter College, City University of New York, has worked as an ESL teacher and teacher trainer in New York City, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Mary Ann Gray, has taught ESL at SPELL for 11 years; she is the program’s senior teacher.

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