



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Cheryl Keenan Comes to New York

Director of US Office of Vocational and Adult Education Speaks at LAC

> Jon Steinberg

Even at one of the busiest times of year for adult educators, Cheryl Keenan, Director of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education spoke to a packed house at the LAC Clearinghouse on April 2. For more than an hour, members of the NYC Regional Adult Education Network listened intently as the nation's highest adult education official discussed new federal policies and answered their questions.

Dr. Keenan began with a discussion of a new initiative on transition to higher education and how "the collective wisdom of the field" had helped shape it. "Around 2005," she related, "the Secretary of Education established a commission on higher education. When it began, the commission was driven by concern with four-year institutions. Once the members were at the table, the conversation expanded to include two-year and technical schools." One fac-

tor in this shift was a realization that 18-to-22 year-olds attending undergraduate institutions full time represent only 16 percent of the total post-secondary population. The OVAE director noted that at a time when baby boomers are reaching retirement age and 80 percent of new jobs will require post-secondary education, the commission proposed three goals for higher education in the United States: It should be accessible, accountable, and affordable.

Adult education programs are only serving 2.4 million learners, Dr. Keenan pointed out, and programs in many parts of the country emphasize GED preparation to such an extent that learners who complete their course often go on to post-secondary classes totally unprepared. Frequently they have to take remedial classes and use up their Pell grants before they even begin post-secondary studies.

In response, Dr. Keenan said, the President's 2009 budget has allocated \$5 million for a Bridges to College demonstration program to test approaches designed to prepare non-traditional students for higher education. In another new initiative, the proposed budget allocates \$2.8 million for a demonstration project for out of school youth.

New funding is also provided for the Career Connections project, which mobilizes connected educational and training strategies and support services to help students secure a job within a particular sector and advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment. The program was originally designed for Adult Basic Education, but now includes ESOL students as well.

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Professional Wisdom

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

I have heard the term professional wisdom many times over the years but it never struck me quite the way it did last month. That was when I heard Cheryl Keenan, Director of the US Office of Vocational and Adult Education, refer to it during her visit to the LAC. In describing the development of a new reading initiative, she related that after a pilot test, the initiative revised its curricular strategies based on the “professional wisdom of the field.” Like everyone else in the audience, I knew in a general way what she was referring to, but I decided to look up formal definitions.

One that I liked describes the professional wisdom of educators as:

- The judgment that individuals acquire through experience; and
- Consensus views.

It then goes on to explain that “increased professional wisdom is reflected in numerous ways, including the effective identification and incorporation of local circumstances into instruction.”

I may be biased, but it seems to me that adult educators are particularly skilled at this. That shouldn't be surprising. If we are experienced and perceptive instructors, our teaching is based on the premise that each of our learners has a great deal to contribute to the learning process of the entire class, and can use his or her knowledge and experience to learn new skills and integrate new information. In effect, every class of adult learners has professional wisdom. Skilled instructors know how to draw that wisdom out and ensure that everyone benefits from it. That's our professional wisdom.

What a wonderful concept. Finally, I know how to explain to my mother what the Literacy Assistance Center is: a place where professional wisdom is collected, shared, nurtured, and developed. I can feel it every time I walk into our Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse and see it filled with dozens of you-- practitioners with hundreds of years of collective experience, and a pool of wisdom too vast to measure. I am always struck by your generosity of spirit in sharing that wisdom and your willingness to listen, reflect, construct, and learn together.

This is why I was so pleased to hear Cheryl Keenan use the term professional wisdom. The Institute of Education Sciences at the US Department of Education defines evidence--based education as “the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction.” That statement goes on to note that practitioner knowledge is a critical component of evidence-based adult education.

Day by day, our practitioner knowledge grows deeper and richer. Lately the LAC has been host to many training sessions for health and social service workers who serve the same constituencies as adult educators but in other contexts. The atmosphere is very different from when our “regular crowd” is here: alive with curiosity and eager expectation, but without the same well of knowledge and wisdom (yet) about adult learning. Watching our talented professional developers introduce the basics of adult literacy to this new audience fills me with excitement and pride. It makes me appreciate all the more what we have built here in the New York City adult literacy community and too often take for granted.

Listening to Dr. Keenan, it occurred to me that what we have developed here could be of great value to the field in other parts of the country. We need to figure out ways in which we can share it more effectively. I will be giving that task some thought through the remainder of this very stressful funding season.

I am sincerely grateful to all of you who contribute so much to our professional wisdom and wish all of you good luck.

Elyse

LITERACY UPDATE

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SPOTlight

Connecting the Disconnected

> *Emily May, Special Projects Coordinator at Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow and director of its adult literacy program*

Whether their chosen network is MySpace, FaceBook, or the more professional LinkedIn, you would be hard pressed to find an adult under 35 who isn't somehow "connected." Presidential nominees are tapping into social networking tools (remember Guiliani's daughter caught being "friends" with Obama on MySpace?), and organizations aren't far behind. To cite just a few, relatively small progressive groups, the National Lawyer's Guild has 779 MySpace friends and the Labor Movement has 1624.

As adult literacy educators we seek to connect the "disconnected." The vertiginous growth of social networking over the past five years has transformed it into an essential medium for that process. Most of our young adult students are economically disadvantaged minorities and confront barriers to self-sufficiency that may include lack of a high school diploma, deficiency in basic skills, chronic unemployment, single parenthood, past drug abuse and/or criminal records, and limited English proficiency. Even so, a remarkable 88 percent of them have MySpace pages, according to one survey. To plug into this network that connects students to each other, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow launched its own MySpace page, www.myspace.com/obtjobs.

When we told our students that we were launching an OBT MySpace page they were surprised, to say the least. Our program culture is often described as "tough love." Our students are expected to dress and act like they are in the workplace. But even the most dedicated professional has a life outside work, and MySpace seemed a wonderful platform for gaining access our students' world, their space, and helping us meet program goals.

Our students are expected to dress and act like they are in the workplace.

We have been using our page to:

- Announce upcoming events or agency news. The Bulletin Board and Blog features help students and graduates stay connected.
- Educate current and past students on issues they may be facing. Using the Blog feature, programs can post links to articles or websites that reinforce what is learned in the classroom.
- Facilitate professional networking among past and present trainees. Every profile has a place to list current and past employment. Students can search through OBT's list of friends to find alumni who

may be able to help them advance their career.

- Complement our alumni program by facilitating easy access to other students and staff after trainees graduate. Students can look up profiles of their colleagues and teachers and send them emails and/or instant messages using the Myspace Messaging service.
- Enhance agency marketing materials and proposals. "Friends" can write testimonies about their experiences at OBT in the Comments section. Many are using it as a forum to say "thank you."
- Give new recruits a way to explore our program from a distance. Current and past students can send a link to our Myspace page to potential recruits.

A remarkable 88 percent of our students have MySpace pages.

Our work has been tailored to MySpace, however Facebook, LinkedIn, MIXXER, and Ning have similar capabilities. Each has its own features that can be leveraged in different ways. The trick is to find the social networking tool or tools that are most popular among your potential recruits and best help you reach your educational and/or programmatic goals.

Facebook began on college campuses and was only recently opened up to the general public. These origins have shaped its user base. "The goodie two shoes, jocks, athletes, or other 'good' kids are now migrating to Facebook," researcher Danah Boyd has found. MySpace remains the home of choice for Latino/Hispanic teens, immigrant teens, and what Boyd describes as "kids whose parents didn't go to college, who are expected to get a job when they finish high school."

That observation may soon be out of date. Based on anecdotal evidence from our students, it appears that the popularity of Facebook is increasing among our target population as well.

If MySpace and Facebook are about meeting students where they are at, LinkedIn is about getting them where you want them to go. Every company in the Fortune 500 is represented on LinkedIn; 499 of them are represented by employees at the director level or above. Whether you are a disconnected youth or an executive director, LinkedIn is an excellent venue for professional networking. That said, many of our young adults think that professional networking seems "fake" or "not their style." I recently did a lesson on networking for a group of 30 young adults, ages

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Why The LAC Chose MOODLE

The online component for our new core curriculum

> Marilyn J. Rymniak

This fall the Literacy Assistance Center examined the full range of Internet-based online teaching and learning course management systems (CMS) to find the one that could best support NYSED's new seven-module Adult Literacy Education Core Curriculum (ALECC). After careful analysis of the benefits and potential drawbacks of each, we chose MOODLE.

Since the core curriculum will be required for all new teachers throughout New York State and many of them would have to travel a long way from home to meet peers outside of the classroom, a distance learning component was essential. In addition, the curriculum has to cover so much material in only 24 hours of class time—everything from basic concepts to teaching numeracy and quantitative literacy to adults—that it would not be strong enough without supplementary resources. In the past, they would have consisted of huge quantities of handouts; probably more than most participants would find the time to read. Unless they found a study partner, those participants who did extra readings would have to assimilate them on their own, with no opportunity to raise issues or pose questions. As a result, their ability to absorb what they read, reflect on it, integrate it with their prior knowledge, and put it to use would in all probability be lower than if they had an opportunity to share their learning with peers.

At their best, course management systems offer a wonderful solution to this dilemma. They make it possible to offer hybrid, or blended, courses that provide most of the content online and free up class time for discussion, questions, and problem solving. The discussions can continue online.

A combination of collaboration, activity-based learning, and critical reflection.

For some course management systems, that is sufficient. They are designed to replicate the traditional classroom, in which the teacher imparts knowledge and asks the class to respond, one on one. In effect, they make distance learning as much like a lecture as possible. This might be useful for a high school student in a small town in Wyoming who wants to take a course in Sanskrit, but even then it's hardly the optimum approach to learning. Participation consists of responding to tasks and questions the teacher assigns and asking questions on that material. Instead of keeping the classroom under surveillance to make sure no one has a comic book hidden behind the history text, the teacher can view charts that indicate when participants visit the site, review resources, and submit assignments. When someone doesn't, the teacher can send off an email reminder. When the need for one-on-one interaction arises, the teacher can arrange that through a chat room.

MOODLE includes those charts and chat rooms, but it functions more like face-to-face group learning. As a participant, you can share your

thoughts with peers 24/7. This means you have as much time as you wish to formulate and articulate your ideas. If you get a wonderful idea in the middle of the night, you can rush to the computer and put it up for everyone else to mull over at breakfast. Ideally, the rest of the group will respond, adding to your contribution and developing it further. Collaboration may involve the instructor or be entirely peer-to-peer. This is the social constructivist philosophy behind MOODLE: a combination of collaboration, critical reflection, group learning, and the creation of professional learning communities. The underlying premise is that people learn best when they are engaged in a social process of constructing knowledge through social interaction.

The LAC found this social constructivist model of learning very similar to its own approach to professional development, with the emphasis on small-group activities in which peers come up with new ideas and solutions based on their pooled knowledge and experience.

MOODLE has been adopted by thousands of business groups, colleges, schools, and UNESCO.

In case you're wondering if MOODLE pays the LAC a commission on future sales, you should know that it is open source software—that is, distributed free and available for downloading online at www.moodle.org. In effect, it operates as a social constructivist tool. Educators and developers can (and do) go to the site on a daily basis to suggest enhancements. This is certainly gratifying to Martin Dougiamas, the computer scientist and educator in Perth, Australia, who developed MOODLE out of frustration with existing online course management tools. Even the products with good concepts, he felt, had been designed by software engineers who had made them far more difficult to use than necessary, intuitive only to other people who happened to be software engineers themselves. He gave his creation the name "MOODLE" a combination of "muse" and "doodle." Yes, it is an acronym, for Modular Object Oriented Development Learning Environment. (Only a computer scientist could have come up with that one.) However, according to one account, moodling is an Australian aboriginal term meaning "to let the mind or body wander and do something creative." Clearly, other people throughout the world think Dougiamas is onto something. In the last year or so MOODLE has been adopted by thousands of business groups, colleges, schools, and UNESCO.

Like similar online tools, MOODLE requires server space, but a company called Moodlerooms.com sells it for a nominal fee. The same company offers instructor-led, interactive online (of course) courses that model as well as teach how to use the software. Taking one is a good idea. The software has a lot of features, including uploading and sharing materials, forums and chats,

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23rd Annual Literacy Recognition Awards

The Literacy Assistance Center cordially invites you to attend the 23rd Annual Recognition Awards Ceremony honoring outstanding practitioners in the New York City literacy community.

Thursday, June 19th

9:30 am-12:30 pm

Scholastic Inc. , 557 Broadway

Continental breakfast will be served.

Pathways to CUNY

The City University of New York (CUNY) Central staff developers, in collaboration with the NYSED/NYC RAEN, are pleased to announce two "Pathways to CUNY" campus events. The first of these separate sessions will take place at the Hostos Community College campus on Thursday, May 22nd and the second at the LaGuardia Community College campus on Thursday, May 29th. Both of these events are designed for high level ESL students, GED students, and recent "grads" who wish to explore their college and career options.

For more information, please contact Hilary Sideris (CUNY) at 646-344-7348 or Mariann Fedele (NYSED/NYC RAEN) at 212-803-3325.

New York College Transition Network

The New York College Transition Network (NYCTN), a joint initiative of the Literacy Assistance Center, the New York City Regional Adult Education Network (NYC RAEN), and the National College Transition Network, invites you to become a charter member of this new organization. NYCTN will work with adult education programs

and staff to establish and strengthen college transition services for adult literacy students. The network will provide technical assistance, professional development, collegial sharing, advocacy, and activities to increase visibility.

The NYCTN will also be a venue where New York-based adult education providers can explore issues associated with post-secondary transition for adult students; discuss policy and share best practices; participate in local, national, and online professional development events; and connect and contribute to the national movement to strengthen post-secondary transition services.

Free memberships provide access to all professional development activities convened and facilitated by the NYCTN through the NYC RAEN. Premium memberships include access to professional services and materials produced by the National College Transition Network and free registration for the Effective Transitions Conference in Providence, Rhode Island.

The application form can be downloaded from the Literacy Assistance Center website, www.lacnyc.org. For more information about the NYCTN, please contact Mariann Fedele at mariannf@lacnyc.org.

CCNY MA in Language & Literacy

The English Department, City College, CUNY will be accepting applications for admission to its Language & Literacy program through August 2008 for the Fall 2008 Semester. To apply for matriculated status, prospective students should submit applications by May 1st. Applications for non-degree status will be accepted through mid-August 2008.

The CCNY English Department is also offering a July 2008 graduate course (4 weeks/3 credits, Mon/Wed 6-9:15pm). Community Colleges as Sites for New Literacy will be taught by Professor Lynn Quitman Troyka.

For more information on the CCNY program, please contact Barbara Gleason, Program Director. Office Phone: 212-650-6329.

Email: bgleason@ccny.cuny.edu
CCNY Home Page: <http://www1.ccny.edu>
Application Forms available online and from the CCNY Admissions Office.

CONFERENCES

May

NYC Consortium for Adult Basic Education, 29th Annual Conference

Literacy Across Generations

May 3, 2008, Fashion Industries High School, Manhattan

For more information, contact Carolyn Fernando at (212) 243-5458 or sonofhendrick@yahoo.com.

57th Annual New York Association for Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE) Conference

Promoting People, Programs, and Partnerships

May 4-6, 2008, Albany
www.nyacce.org

This conference offers an opportunity for practitioners to come together for professional development and networking. The focus will be on addressing the needs of a diverse student and community population, improving the quality and capacity of programming, and promoting greater coordination and partnerships within communities and the state at large.

International Reading Association, 53rd Annual Convention

Engaging Learners in Literacy

May 4-8, 2008, Atlanta
www.reading.org/association/meetings/annual_program.html

May 6 & May 20

Reading for Adult English Language Learners (CAL Study Circle)

Tuesday, May 6, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, May 20, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

This series will acquaint participants with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to teach reading effectively to adult nonnative speakers of English. The focus will be on identifying types of native language literacy and different models of reading, and on how to foster the four skills essential to reading.

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

May 8, & June 5

Family Literacy Leadership Initiative

Thursday, May 8, 9:30 am–3:30 pm
Thursday, June 5, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

Facilitators: Barbara Sparks, Be Jensen

The Leadership Initiative is for new family literacy program managers and includes both peer coaching and skill building workshops. This series is by invitation only.

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

May 13

BEST Plus Test Administrator Training

Wednesday, May 13, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

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

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

May 13

ASISTS Transition Training

Tuesday, May 13, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

This training introduces users to the Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) web-based data system. Highlights include navigating ASISTS data entry screens; inputting student, class, and instructor information; updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours; and running management and funding reports.

We ask that no more than three people from each program attend any one training. All staff who will need to enter data in ASISTS must attend this training session in order to receive a username and password for the system.

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

May 14, May 21, May 28

Adult Reading Instruction

Wednesday, May 14, 9:30 am–1:30 pm
Wednesday, May 21, 9:30 am–1:30 pm
Wednesday, May 28, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: Barbara Sparks

Developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard, this three-session study circle will provide an overview of current research on adult reading development and instruction.

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

May 16

The ABCs of the Lexical Approach

Friday, May 16, 8:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn J. Rymniak

An exploration of the basic theoretical and practical beliefs underlying one of the most popular and effective approaches for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. The workshop will provide practice in implementing the approach in the ESOL classroom, as well as hands-on resources. Open to both new and continuing participants.

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

May 22

Building Job Readiness Skills

Thursday, May 22, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Barbara Sparks

This session focuses on using experiential learning, integrative units and reflective assessment, all patterns of instruction that are research-based, rigorous, specific, and tightly organized.

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

May 23

Explorations in Corpus Linguistics: From Corpus to Classroom

Friday, May 23, 8:30 am–12 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn J. Rymniak

This workshop is an introduction to the world of corpus linguistics and the increasingly important role it now plays in curriculum and materials development and selection for ESOL classes. Participants will learn what is meant by a corpus, how one is made, and how corpora influence language teaching. They will learn how corpus findings can improve their teaching and their choice or creation of instructional materials. The workshop will also explore how student language acquisition speed and fluency improve through the use of corpora. No previous knowledge of corpus linguistics is required. This workshop is open to all participants, new and continuing. Space is limited, however, so please register early.

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

May 27

BEST Plus Refresher

Tuesday, May 9:30 am–2:00 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Designed for previously trained BEST Plus test administrators, this workshop offers a comprehensive review of the BEST Plus test. Only previously certified Best Plus test administrators may attend.

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

May 29

Family Educators Network

Thursday, May 29, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Each session will provide opportunities for participating family literacy educators and parent coordinators to develop mutually beneficial connections and to consider best practices in family literacy.

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

May 30

Teaching Health Literacy

Friday, May 30, 9:00 am–1:00 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

Participants in these workshops learn a new approach to teaching health literacy. The focus will be on identifying the skills needed to navigate the health care system. Participants will develop lesson plans and try them out in their classrooms.

This is the third of three sessions. Registration is limited to educators who participated in the first two.

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

June 4

ASISTS Transition Training

Wednesday, June 4, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

This training introduces users to the Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) web-based data system. Highlights include navigating ASISTS data entry screens; inputting student, class, and instructor information; updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours; and running management and funding reports.

We ask that no more than three people from each program attend any one training. All staff who will need to enter data in ASISTS must attend this training session in order to receive a username and password for the system.

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

June 6

Language and Literacy Through American Film

Friday, June 6, 8:30 am–12 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn J. Rymniak

This workshop will demonstrate an innovative, high-performance-outcome methodology, effective for both multi-level ESOL and ABE/GED students. Using a carefully selected (for language chunks and cultural elements) 60-unit American Film component, the presenter has aligned the content to both the EFF standards and CASAS competencies. This program, launched in five diverse venues around the country, including immigrant/refugee, correctional facility, workplace, community-based volunteer, and college transfer programs, has not only consistently resulted in remarkable gains in educational levels based on standardized test performance but has increased both learner retention and engagement rates while providing a community bonding mechanism within the classroom. This workshop is open to all participants, new and continuing. Space is limited, however, so please register early.

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

June 10

BEST Plus Refresher

Tuesday, June 10 1:30–5:00 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Designed for previously trained BEST Plus test administrators, this workshop offers a comprehensive review of the BEST Plus test. Only previously certified Best Plus test administrators may attend.

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

June 27

ASISTS Transition Training

Friday, June 27 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

This training introduces users to the Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) web-based data system. Highlights include navigating ASISTS data entry screens; inputting student, class, and instructor information; updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours; and running management and funding reports.

We ask that no more than three people from

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

Building management is now requiring that all visitors have picture ID and sign in. Please leave extra time for this procedure.

each program attend any one training. All staff who will need to enter data in ASISTS must attend this training session in order to receive a username and password for the system.

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

Please note: You will receive a confirmation email after registering. If you do not, please contact us again. Without that confirmation we cannot guarantee your space at the training.

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, including books, journals, and audiovisual materials on professional development as well as curricular and reading resources for ESOL, ABE, and GED classes. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

TEACHERS' corner >> Electronic Portfolios in the Adult Education Classroom

> Ellen Quish, ESOL Instructor and Faculty Developer, La Guardia Community College

I first heard about student portfolios in the adult education classroom in the late 1980s, when they attracted interest as an alternative form of assessment. Today, student portfolios have gone electronic, and offer a range of unique learning opportunities to the adult education student.

Whether a portfolio is paper or electronic, creating one involves three major activities: collection, selection, and reflection. Briefly, a portfolio is a collection of learning artifacts (writing samples, speech files, research projects, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) that a student selects from her or his work and then reflects on in a written summary, letter, or introductory statement. My students begin the electronic portfolio process by collecting their assignments and depositing them in an electronic storage area called My Collection. Over the course of a semester, I ask them to select assignments that are representative of a specific criterion, such as early work or progress in a particular language skill. I also ask them to write reflective descriptions of these assignments and upload those as well. All of this work can be made available to others--teachers, peers, friends, employers, etc. (This sharing process could include evaluation, celebration, or additional portfolio development activities, depending on your program's culture.)

Three types of electronic portfolios serve distinct purposes: process, showcase or assessment. A process portfolio is a collection of student work that illustrates the learner's effort and achievements in a particular area or class. A showcase portfolio may provide a more comprehensive portrait of what the student has learned; it may be used to highlight career or workplace skills for a prospective employer or some other audience. An assessment portfolio facilitates external evaluation of learning.

At LaGuardia Community College, our students construct their electronic portfolios (commonly known as ePortfolios) using commercial software. Whether our students are Basic, Intermediate or Advanced level, their ePortfolios include Welcome, About Me, Educational Goals, Classes and Projects, My Links, and Contact Me. Students in my ESOL courses create basic ePortfolios by choosing a template and then focusing mostly on developing the About Me and Classes and Projects pages. Throughout the semester, I ask them to select course work, complete reflections on these assignments, and upload what they produce to their My Collection page in Classes and Projects.

In addition to facilitating the sharing process, ePortfolios offer several other advantages over paper ones.

In addition to facilitating the sharing process, ePortfolios offer several other advantages over paper ones. Students in my ESOL class upload writing assignments, PowerPoint projects, and audio projects such as digital stories. They illustrate and observe their growth in the major skill areas of English and have access to their ePortfolio anywhere. They can share their

accomplishments with family and friends or anyone else they choose, or send a digital resume to an employer. As the instructor, I can view any class ePortfolio at any time to assess student strengths and progress, or simply to learn more about a particular student that I am working with.

An ePortfolio also offers a powerful opportunity to promote student learning and reflection. To promote this metacognitive learning, instructors must give their students clear, well-structured assignments that require them to think about their learning processes as they complete their coursework. For example, when my students were writing a reflective summary of an inquiry-based project, I asked them to answer the following questions:

- What did you need to know to complete this assignment?
- What did you need to do to complete this assignment?
- What was difficult or challenging about this assignment?
- What did you like best about this assignment?

Learning artifacts posted on the ePortfolio are context rich. They include the assignment, a description of what was done to complete the assignment and/or a reflection about the assignment (instead of just a grade). This "richness" provides the student as well as the teacher with a more comprehensive description of what is or is not being learned and can become the foundation for a conversation between them.

An ePortfolio offers a powerful opportunity to promote student learning and reflection.

Collaborative reflections provide another opportunity to build metacognitive awareness. In a pilot project that I have been conducting, ESOL students meet weekly to share what they have learned with a small group of peers. They use their ePortfolios to monitor their language learning and write reflective descriptions based on questions similar to those listed above. In this assignment, however, I ask two students to share a particular work that each has put in the ePortfolio and discuss it, identify their partner's strengths and weaknesses in English language proficiency and provide strategies that can strengthen his or her language skills.

In addition to sharpening specific skills, this collaborative work expands learner experience and connects it to a larger community of learners. I reinforced this process by asking the students in the pilot project to share their ePortfolios with someone outside of our class, such as a friend or family member. In our post-assignment discussion, students described feeling validated upon hearing that family members were impressed by their accomplishments. "My husband was happy to see that I am not wasting my time going to English class," one student said. Another told us that he had enjoyed sharing his work with his aunt in New York so much that he was

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ePortfolios *continued*

going to share it with family members in his native country as well.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument for integrating ePortfolios into instruction is what students have to say about them. At a minimum, most adult students either want to or need to develop or strengthen computer skills that will allow them to participate in the technologically savvy world of their children and today's job market. But they also see other important benefits. At a recent LaGuardia student ePortfolio showcase, several learners reported that they had developed a greater awareness of self through completing assignments for their About Me page. Other students said that they had developed their technology and writing skills. Several mentioned that the ePortfolio had made it possible for them to share their achievements and interests with friends in their native countries.

Some of our students have expressed pleasure that reviewing their work on the ePortfolio—a writing sample from an earlier time, an audio file of themselves speaking English, or a PowerPoint presentation they had created—had enabled them to see how much progress they had made in learning English.

Before you introduce ePortfolios, you have to make a range of decisions,

including their purpose, how they will be used, and how much time you will carve out of the course schedule to create and develop them. You then have to make sure that the students have a clear understanding of why, when, and how they will be using their ePortfolios.

Ideally, you should have program support. I have found discussing and exchanging ideas about ePortfolios with colleagues invaluable. If possible, a class using ePortfolios should have weekly access to a computer lab. The system you will use will depend on the resources available. Options include vendor-based systems, open source systems, Netscape, or Google Docs.

Successful implementation of ePortfolios in the adult education classroom requires a great deal of advance thought and preparation, and a lot of time and work throughout, but the rewards in student achievement and satisfaction are well worth the effort.

To learn more about ePortfolios and see samples of student portfolios go to: <http://eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu> ●

Connecting the Disconnected *continued*

17 – 24. It bombed. The students thought that networking was totally beyond their reach. They thought a job opportunity would come when they “bumped into” someone who had the right connections, and doubted that was likely. Sure, they agreed, their classmates might be able to help them out in five years, but what about now?

Then I took the students into the computer lab and gave them an opportunity to set up their LinkedIn account. Suddenly everything clicked. Thanks to their experience with MySpace and other social networking technologies, the students were immediately comfortable with LinkedIn (and consequently professional networking). They walked out the door with an already established network that, with little work, could lead them to career opportunities.

Social networking helps us meet our recruitment, engagement, and retention goals.

A couple other sites of note are MIXXER (www.language-exchanges.org/) and Ning (www.ning.com). MIXXER is designed to help language students find conversational partners and connect them using voice-over-IP software (i.e. Skype). Ning, unlike most social networking sites, allows users to set up their own private social networking groups.

In a program like ours, social networking helps us meet our recruitment, engagement, and retention goals. That doesn't mean these tools are only for them. In cases where a majority of your students barely know how to use a mouse and have certainly never heard of MySpace, integrating social networking into your program can be mixed with lessons on com-

puter literacy. Familiarizing these students with a social networking page and helping them to understand what their “crazy kids” are doing can be very significant achievements.

Social networking is rapidly evolving from a novelty to a platform for living, just as the Internet itself did.

Whoever you teach, social networking is in your future. Whether your students have never heard of MySpace or use it three hours a day, social networking is rapidly evolving from a novelty to a platform for living, just as the Internet itself did. Students at OBT write 20 pages of formal writing assignments during a given cycle, but during the same period they are likely to be writing over 200 pages of emails, blog posts, and instant messages on their own. Technology is changing our world, but our challenge as adult literacy practitioners remains the same: to translate how our students live into how they learn.

For more information on OBT, visit www.obtjobs.org or www.myspace.com/obtjobs. ●

Online Learning That Works

Building Persistence in Your Own Professional Development

> Jane Greiner, > Professional Development Coordinator, ProLiteracy America

Forget the million dollars, the yacht, the mansion. If I scrawled the right combination of marks on my PDA and out popped a genie offering me fulfillment of one wish, it would be for an extra four hours each day that were mine and only mine. Time is precious. Think of it: no phone calls, e-mail, meetings, dishes or laundry— just freedom to pursue interests and questions, to play and learn.

Unfortunately, there's no PDA-genie offering up extra hours, so like most of us I squeeze learning time into the gaps of my life. More and more I turn to the Internet. It's there with me in the wee hours of the morning. It doesn't take a lunch break. It doesn't get lost in the two-year-old stack of "must-read" articles. It's an essential component of my ongoing learning.

The Internet comes with challenges, of course: The amount of information is overwhelming, sources can be suspect, links are sometimes unreliable, and the results of Web searches can be utterly ridiculous.

Luckily, several online resources can make your adult literacy professional learning more productive. You can:

- Get quick access to information on a range of adult education topics, check out ALE Wiki (<http://wiki.literacytent.org>).
- Join discussion lists hosted by the National Institute for Literacy (www.nifl.gov).
- Dig deeper through online courses on ProfessionalStudiesAE.org, a site hosting free and fee-based online courses for adult educators.
- Browse Thinkfinity Literacy Network resources for literacy instruction and lifelong learning (<http://literacynetwork.verizon.org/TLN/>).

These resources can get you started in online professional learning, but here's the rub: It's easy for online learning to become "anytime learning." We still need to make time to take advantage of them.

Here's one way to do it: Take the recommendations for supporting adult learner persistence developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) and apply them to ourselves. In its Adult Student Persistence Study, NCSALL was careful to distinguish learner persistence from participation in a specific program. Rather, it is "Adult students...

- staying in programs for as long as they can;
- engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their program; and
- returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow."

Adapting this definition, we can think of professional learning as not simply participation in a workshop or course, but a continuous endeavor to improve practice. Sometimes we work independently, sometimes with others, but always within the boundaries of what we can accomplish while fulfilling other life and career demands.

NCSALL identified four supports to student persistence:

- Manage the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence.
- Build self-efficacy about reaching goals.
- Establish a goal.
- Measure progress toward that goal.

Let's look at ways in which each of these can further our own learning.

Manage Positive and Negative Forces: What factors support your online professional learning: Is it a question you're passionate about? Supportive or co-inquiring colleagues? Conversely, what factors get in the way of online professional learning? A jam-packed schedule? Little or no funding for professional learning? Lack of comfort with computers?

Write these supports and barriers down and analyze what you see. Which supports can help you manage your barriers? For example, if you don't have blocks of time for learning, schedule five minutes—and hold yourself to that time—to post an inquiry to a discussion list. Collect responses in one file, and set aside 15 minutes to read and respond to them, or check a recommended resource. A well-managed 20 minutes can keep you motivated to continue your learning.

If your inquiry is a priority, treat it as such. Make a non-negotiable appointment with yourself and tell others you will not be available. Make this a weekly appointment so you and others get used to it.

If you have trouble committing to yourself, make a date with a colleague to share your learning. Better yet, find a partner (either in person or online) to learn with.

Of course, life happens. You will need to take breaks from your learning schedule. Create a "pausing point" – that will allow you to pick up the project again easily, like a memo to yourself listing the next three steps in your learning project. If you're falling behind in an online course, communicate with the instructor about your need to take a break, and negotiate a date when you can complete the course activities.

Build Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is the feeling of being able to accomplish a specific task. The sheer volume of information on the Internet and the opportunities to interact online can be overwhelming. For your professional learning, focus on the specific knowledge and skills you want to develop. Create a study plan with weekly activities and benchmarks. Approach each block of learning time, however small, with a specific goal in mind, and congratulate yourself when you meet that goal. (Even something as simple as checking off a "to do" time can provide positive reinforcement.)

Another aspect of building self-efficacy is to understand the kind of environment you will be most successful in. Do you need absolute quiet or the low buzz of other conversations around you? Do you prefer a bright space, or a dim environment with a reading light?

Establish a Goal: Decide what you want to learn and why you want to learn it. What three or four things do you want to know or be able to do? Without a goal in mind, online professional learning can easily slip into unproductive Internet surfing.

Along with your goals, write down your learning objectives. How will you know when you've accomplished your goal? Are you building knowledge, solving a problem, testing a new idea? What will you do with the knowledge and skills you gain? Put your goal in the context of your

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Cheryl Keenan *continued*

The OVAE director then turned to Project STAR (Student Achievement in Reading). OVAE, she explained, is committed to introducing research-based programs and instructional strategies in the field, and intermediate-level students often receive less attention than learners in ABE or GED programs. Nationally, only 17 percent of adult education students are in this category, Dr. Keenan noted, and in New York only 10 percent. (Program managers in the audience pointed out that this low figure is deceptive, since WIA funding was not available for these students. Their programs are funded through other sources so they are not generally included in National Reporting Survey data.

“We brought in Mary Beth Curtis, a noted reading specialist, to work with us using research by John Strucker at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard showing that learners have different profiles,” Dr. Keenan related, and these were based on the four components of reading—comprehension, fluency, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary; students learn best when instructors use strategies designed for their particular profile. “STAR is not a curriculum,” she stressed, “It is a set of strategies.”

OVAE launched STAR in a six-state pilot program managed by DTI Associates. It is now rolling out a revised version in 14 additional states. Tom Orsini of the NY State Education Department interjected that New York is one of them—DTI will train 45 educators here begin-

ning September 1; the application deadline is May 15th. So far, said Dr. Keenan, OVAE has found that STAR increases the time teachers devote to reading, talking to administrators about reading, and talking to students about reading. Some of the teachers who participated in the pilot “talked about how the program improved student retention in ways that would bring tears to your eyes,” Dr. Keenan added, though she noted that implementation was uneven: “Some teachers did not group students well; some were slow to change their enrolment strategies.” OVAE is now conducting an evaluation of learner outcomes.

The OVAE director closed her presentation with a discussion of the Adult Basic Education Career Connections Project. The concept, she explained, is to promote career pathways for participants, consisting of a series of connected educational and training strategies and support services that enable students to secure employment within a particular occupational sector and advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment.

Following her formal presentation, Dr. Keenan took more questions. Audience members said afterward that they were pleased to have an opportunity for a dialog with the head of OVAE and hoped that they would have another one soon. ●

Building Your Persistence *continued*

daily life and work, and identify the evidence that you will use to demonstrate what you have learned.

Measure Your Progress: Take time to reflect on what you’ve accomplished—even random moments of reflection while you’re stuck in traffic can keep you energized about your learning process.

Tangible evidence is even better. Create an electronic portfolio for storing work. For example, if you tried a new lesson, like using computers for a previously paper-based classroom activity, file a copy of the lesson plan along with notes to yourself about how it went. An online portfolio enables you to store documents and easily revise them as your ideas de-

velop. You can keep helpful articles and documents, shortcuts to Internet links, discussion list posts, and contact information for people you meet on your learning journey. Keeping an electronic portfolio allows you to share the products of your learning easily within your online community.

When learning touches daily life—as it should—it’s easy to miss how quickly bits of acquired knowledge and skills add up to serious expertise. Talk about what you’ve learned and how you learned it with your students and colleagues. Share your new knowledge in an online newsletter, on the ALE wiki, or on a discussion list. Your contributions will not only inspire others, but will keep your motivation up as well ●

MOODLE *continued*

quizzes and surveys, gathering and reviewing assignments, recording grades, database activities, content managing (resources), and blogs and wikis. Even if you had the time and enthusiasm to figure all of them out on your own, it would be hard to fully exploit their potential without expert guidance.

MOODLE 100, the prerequisite for more advanced courses, includes 10 contact hours with the instructor and costs \$125. It introduces the entire course management system through tasks and assignments that give practice in using its features. The course also covers basic navigation; course layout

and settings; and the basics of enrollment, resources, and preparation for course creation. Participants should expect to spend half an hour to an hour a day for 14 days, in which they would complete the activities and prepare to build their own practice course. Actual course creation comes in Moodle 101, which costs \$200 and runs 14 days. This course doesn’t require a high level of computer skills, but it is demanding. LAC staff members who have taken it found that it requires about two hours a day of intensive work. ●

The Program Changed My Life

By Kari Huggins-Carter
(ABE Student)

The adult literacy program at CAMBA has changed my life because of its improvement in my social, logical and critical thinking. The program has also allowed me to raise the bar as far as their consideration towards my future.

The confidence in knowing that your views are heard, the interest in you as an individual, the professionalism and the advantages that the program provides has built in me a new person. These are some examples of how CAMBA has earned my personal motto to strive for excellence.

I admire and respect the opportunity to come to CAMBA and obtain my General Education Diploma (GED). While in this process, I have learned about people skills, boundaries pertaining to, ethnic backgrounds and the ability to share personal opinions.

CAMBA has taught me to be open-minded based on their curriculum. These advantages have expanded me unto a new direction and a greater outlook of how discipline and responsibility should expose the realm of education. This is why and how the literacy program has changed my life.



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