



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Getting Better Every Year

The Leadership Excellence Academy and Program Improvement

> Dr. Lennox L. McLendon *Executive Director, National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium*
and Kathi Polis *Project Manager, Leadership Excellence Academy*

Our adult education world has changed. For many years, we insisted that state and local staff should be able to analyze state and local needs and set priorities to match. After all, adult learners' needs are different in New York City than in Buffalo or Skaneateles. They vary, too, from one part of the country to another. To accommodate these differences, we asked Congress for more flexibility and fewer Department of Education regulations governing how we were to run our programs.

In 1998, Congress granted our wish when it passed the Workforce Investment Act. The legislation specified only a few funding percentages and limited direct priorities. Instead, it gave us performance measures, saying, in effect, "You decide the priorities in your state—just show us that adults are

learning, those who want to get a GED do so, those who want to go to the community college do so, and those who want to get or keep a job do so." The intent was to give us more flexibility in designing and delivering services as long as we could document that our students were succeeding.

The adult education community has spent the last six years adapting to these criteria, developing appropriate data systems, policies, and procedures to measure and report our successes. Now we're ready to turn our attention to the next task Congress has set for us: getting better on these performance measures every year.

In some ways, life was easier in the bad old days, when all we had to do was check off a list of requirements handed down by

Congress or the Department of Education. Now we have to get better every year! How do we do that systematically?

To lead their programs through an annual improvement initiative, local program managers must acquire an entirely new set of skills. First they have to figure out what is working and what isn't. Once they pinpoint a problem, they must find another way of doing things that will fix it. Then they have to test this new approach to see if it really works. If it does, they have to cobble together the resources (money, professional development, new guidelines) to integrate the new strategy into the program as a whole—and then measure the impact on program performance, as reflected in the new national criteria.

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Change in the Air

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

I have been thinking a lot about change lately. Sometimes it hasn't come as anticipated—fall weather this year. Occasionally it has arrived much sooner than I expected: My baby girl is now a high school cheerleader. Sometimes it has been unwelcome—the sudden, unexpected loss of major funding by wonderful adult literacy programs that have been serving New Yorkers for decades. Other times, it has been challenging—the increasing demand from both public and private funders for hard evidence that our work is substantively and measurably changing the lives of our learners.

Every once in a while we experience a change that approaches slowly, gathers speed, and then hits with such overwhelming force that the world around us is never the same. That may be happening with global warming. More happily, it appears to be happening with health literacy.

A couple of days ago the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion came to New York for its first Town Meeting to improve health literacy. The excitement was palpable from the time people began filling the large meeting room at Baruch College. They came from up and down the East Coast—health care providers, adult educators, public health workers, policy makers, and representatives from foundations—to spend an entire day sharing what they had learned.

The morning began with a strong challenge from Rima Rudd, Senior Lecturer on Society, Human Development, and Health at the Harvard School of Public Health and a long-time collaborator of the LAC. “There is a strong relationship between reading skills and health outcomes, and people’s ability to use the printed word is not as great as we thought,” she noted in her presentation. “We’re looking at the interaction of people with the health care system and it makes sophisticated demands on them. This is the crisis.”

Nobody in the room had a panacea, but in the panels, smaller discussion groups, and individual conversations between sessions, it became clear that a remarkable number of agencies and organizations have created innovative programs that have been highly effective in enabling people with limited literacy skills to gain greater control over their own health and the health of their family. These ideas are coming from health care providers and literacy programs, from large government systems and small grassroots organizations. The conference provided a wonderful opportunity to share them. Penny Royall from the Surgeon General’s office was able to chat with Dianna Raisses from the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center. Cynthia Baur from the Centers for Disease Control took copious notes on local projects in preparation for a presentation to the Surgeon General himself.

Each of the five breakout sessions came up with its own action steps. Together, they make a long list—ambitious but feasible. It would be safe to say that everyone left that afternoon with renewed optimism. It seems very possible that the Surgeon General will share our sense of urgency and promise, and make health literacy a major point in his 2008 agenda. Perhaps we’ll have to wait a few more years for that to happen, but one thing we can be sure of: Change is coming. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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> LAC Staff

Until recently, adult literacy advocacy in New York City followed the usual pattern. A relatively small number of stalwarts carried the banner, with other adult educators swelling their ranks only in response to crises—if they joined at all.

This situation began to change on September 29, 2006, when 40 staff members from the City University of New York, the city's three library systems, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, umbrella agencies, and a variety of other organizations gathered to discuss how they could invigorate adult literacy advocacy. The meeting was held at the law and consulting firm of Manatt, Phelps, and Phillips, which has a history of advocacy work around health care issues. Having heard about "health literacy," the firm had become familiar with adult literacy in general and extended an offer of pro bono technical assistance.

The adult literacy educators who sat down together knew the environment was ripe for advocacy work. Research, data, and policy publications covering the field were drawing considerable attention among professionals, politicians, and occasionally in the media. Recently published data derived from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy had revealed that prose literacy levels had not improved in the U.S.; in fact, they had slightly decreased since 1992. *Lost in Translation*, a report by the Center for an Urban Future, had drawn attention to the inadequacy of New York City resources for English language instruction. The Mayor's Commission for Economic Opportunity had recently recommended increasing literacy services for recent immigrants and disconnected youth. A number of new publications, such as *Black Males Left Behind* (Urban Institute Press, 2006), had brought attention to the plight of African American men with limited education. Statistics showed, for example, that African American men in their late twenties who had not finished high school were more likely to be in prison than employed.

Despite this increased media attention, the adult literacy field faced a funding crisis in 2006. The CBO funding process changed dramatically and the State Education Department did not accept the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) proposal for Workforce Investment Act Adult Literacy money. Although some agencies did win funding directly from the state, others were struggling to keep their heads above water. Many CBO representatives spent a desperate summer on the steps of City Hall, fighting for survival and unsure what they needed to do to influence city and state budget priorities.

Despite a sense of urgency generated by the funding crisis, the September 29 meeting also convened in an atmosphere of optimism. One reason was stronger collaboration between adult literacy professionals and umbrella groups such as UJA-Federation, United

Neighborhood Houses, the New York City Employment and Training Coalition, and the New York Immigration Coalition. A group combining the political savvy and policy expertise of these organizations with the commitment, passion, and knowledge of literacy practitioners seemed to hold great promise. At the same time, the mayor had begun taking an interest in adult literacy. He had recently created the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, appointed Anthony Tassi director, and hosted a reception for adult literacy staff, students, and volunteers at Gracie Mansion to commemorate the occasion.

The meeting opened with a discussion of the basics of advocacy. Then David Rosen, the director of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute and a member of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education board, described the highly successful and sustained advocacy efforts in his state. Since 1991, he told participants, the MCAE had helped to install a state-appointed task force on adult education, secured a \$35 million

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increase in funding over a five-year period, and speedily and successfully mobilized to head off a 2001 crisis that arose when the legislature threatened to cut adult education funds by 50 percent. Hearing about these achievements in Massachusetts inspired the experienced New York-based advocates in the room to renew their commitment. Those who had not done much in the past gained a new sense of the possibilities. To spearhead its advocacy work, the group decided to reinforce the Coalition for Adult Literacy, an already vibrant and effective entity.

Over the past year, the coalition has met regularly, formed a steering committee, set up a listserv, and kept adult literacy on the radar screens of politicians through letters, faxes, emails, and phone calls. On April 19, 2007, a coalition rally in support of adult literacy at Union Square drew nearly 1,000 students, staff, and volunteers, as well as elected officials and media representatives.

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The Cost of Literacy

> Kevin Smith *Executive Director, Literacy New York*

Anyone involved in adult education can recite statistics about the staggering human toll exacted by limited literacy and language skills. From stories of individual learners to the cumulative impact created when millions lack the capacity to function fully and independently, we see and know the cost of illiteracy. We are endlessly perplexed by the failure of government, business, and the citizenry to focus on the issue.

We know the cost of illiteracy—but do we know the cost of literacy? How much does it cost to help an adult move from National Reporting System (NRS) Level 1 to Level 2? How long does it take for the average student to progress that far? What services most efficiently produce NRS results? How do learning differences, difficulties, and disabilities affect the cost of producing a positive NRS outcome?

With limited resources, we provide, or attempt to provide, literacy services to all ESL and native-born students who walk through our doors. A majority of these students pre-test into our programs with limited literacy skills and need significant assistance to meet their personal goals and NRS outcomes. We do and should aim to provide this assistance—but how much does it cost?

Julie Strawn, a senior analyst for the Center for Law and Social Policy, has written for the National Commission on Adult Literacy that “Adult education programs are especially hampered . . . by the severe under-funding of the system. The most recent available data shows that the federal government, states, and localities together spend a median amount of just \$645 per student in adult education annually.”

If the adult literacy network wants to survive and provide services that will help students succeed, we must step back and take a new look at our business. We must better understand the inputs (assessment, instruction, mentoring, etc.) needed to help students from intake to program completion. Rather than asking how many students *are* being served by current government funding, as we have done in the past, we should ask how many students, at what level of ability and learning need, *can* be served by this investment. Clearly, NRS Level 1 students require different inputs than Level 4 students. What are the most efficient and effective inputs for each student and how much do they cost to deliver? Which programs have the capacity to deliver these inputs? Are we providing sufficient resources to pay for delivery?

The answer to most of these questions is: “We don’t know.” We don’t know because there is no standard economic model in the adult education and literacy business. One state spends hundreds of dollars per student less than another but is expected to achieve the same results. One program invests significantly less per student than another yet shows similar results. We must create a new business model. We must better understand and communicate the cost of helping an adult achieve functional independence.

Is the cost per student more than the average \$1,000 per year some programs receive or the \$600 others use to produce NRS outcomes? Recent New York State guidelines set the state investment at \$625 per student for group instruction and \$312 per student for one-to-one providers. Is this enough to produce consistent results? Again, what is the cost of literacy? The current answer is different for every program.

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literacy business.

Is the cost in New York City one-and-a-half times what it is in Syracuse? We don’t know. Does it cost twice as much to serve a Level 1 student as it does a Level 4 student? We don’t know. How much does it cost to help a student go from NRS Level 1 to post-secondary placement? We don’t know. Does it cost three times as much to serve a student in California as it does in South Dakota? We don’t know. Until we know what it costs to produce more consistent NRS and other outcomes, we will be at a loss to define the system’s capacity.

What if we could say, with some certainty, to the United States Congress that the \$535M appropriated under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title II will serve only 2 million of the 30 million adults who have below basic skills according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)? What if we could say to the New York State Legislature that of the 2.7 million adults who have below basic skills, the Employment Preparation Education (EPE), WIA, Adult Literacy Education (ALE), and Work Experience Program (WEP) together can serve “this number of students at these levels”? If the cost of serving 2 million adults is \$535 million, Congress will know what it would cost to serve 2 million more students. More importantly, they might understand the price of failing to make the needed investment.

So how much does literacy cost? Until we know the cost per student and receive enough money to provide the inputs/services our students need, we will continue to create false expectations—for ourselves, our sponsors, and, most unfortunately, those we serve. ●

Call for Student Artwork

The LAC is seeking an outstanding piece of student artwork to serve as the logo for the 2008 and future Literacy Recognition Award materials. We would like a two-dimensional black-and-white or color piece that suggests the power that literacy has to change lives or make connections. The program that submits the artwork we select will be awarded a library development grant from the Bookbinders' Guild of New York. Our submission deadline is February 28. For more information, including submission guidelines, go to www.lacnyc.org/about/announcements, email lacpublications@hotmail.com, or call 212.803.3332.

Call for Student Essays

The Literacy Assistance Center would like personal essays from adult education learners for publication in the LAC *Update*. This is a wonderful opportunity for learners to get their work in print in a publication read throughout the literacy community. Essays that have appeared on the back page of the *Update* have been used by teachers to generate class discussions and have inspired many students.

Health Literacy Survey Results

The National Institute for Literacy hosted a webcast on August 29, 2007, to discuss the *Health Literacy of America's Adults: Results of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) 2003*. Health literacy was reported using four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient. The majority of adults (53 percent) had Intermediate health literacy. About 22 percent had Basic and 14 percent had Below Basic health literacy. Relationships between health literacy and background variables (such as educational attainment, age, race/ethnicity, where adults get information about health issues, and health insurance coverage) were also examined and reported. For example, adults with Below Basic or Basic health literacy were less likely than adults with higher health literacy to get information about health issues from written sources (newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, or the Internet) and more likely than adults with higher health literacy to get much of their information about health issues from radio and television.

Participating presenters were Dr. Sheida White, Project Director, National Assessment of Adult Literacy at the National Center for Education; Dr. Ian Bennett, Assistant Professor at the School of Medicine and a Research Associate at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and a National Institutes of Health–funded investigator whose work focuses on literacy and the obstacles that literacy creates for maternal and child health care; Toni Cordell, an adult learner who recently served as an expert panel member on the Joint Commission (an independent, not-for-profit organization, which accredits and certifies nearly 15,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States) and a nationally known speaker on the topic of health literacy, who draws from her personal struggle with dyslexia. The moderator was Dr. Sandra L. Baxter, Director of the National Institute for Literacy.

The webcast can be found at <http://nifl.gov/nifl/webcasts/NAALhealth/webcasto829.html>.

CONFERENCES

November

7th Annual

National Health Communication Conference

Advances in Health Literacy
November 28, 2007, Washington, DC
<http://foundation.acponline.org/hl/hcc2007.htm>

The American College of Physicians Foundation is requesting submissions for presentations at the 2008 Eighth Annual National Health Communication Conference, to be held on November 19, 2008. This conference will focus on research and implemented solutions with measurable outcomes that address the problems of low health literacy.

March

17th Annual

National Conference on Family Literacy

Literacy Grows Families and Communities
March 29–31, 2008, Louisville, KY
www.familit.org/conference

Proposals are now being accepted online for Concurrent Session presenters and Poster Session presenters. For information and guidelines, go to www.familit.org/conference.

May

International Reading Association,

53rd Annual Convention

Engaging Learners in Literacy
May 4–8, 2008, Atlanta, Georgia
http://www.reading.org/association/meetings/annual_program.html

Nov. 8, 15, 29 & Dec. 6

Teaching Reading Study Circle

Thursday, November 8, 9 am–12:30 pm

Thursday, November 15, 9 am–12:30 pm

Thursday, November 29, 9 am–12:30 pm

Thursday, December 6, 9 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Barbara Sparks

This four-session study circle will acquaint participants with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to teach reading effectively to adult nonnative speakers of English, and will help participants develop their skills in creating coherent, comprehensive, and appropriate reading lessons based on promising practices and research on adult reading instruction. Specifically, the sessions will focus on identifying types of native language literacy and how these types might affect learning a new language; identifying models of reading and creating activities that foster vocabulary development at a variety of language levels; selecting appropriate materials for specific student levels; developing pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities for specific texts; and creating a coherent, comprehensive, and appropriate reading lesson that will help students develop each of the four skills important to reading. This curriculum was developed with a federal English Literacy and Civics Education grant from the Office of Adult Education and Literacy of the Virginia Department of Education and prepared by the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Participants are expected to participate in all four sessions.

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

Nov. 9

Teaching Health Literacy Series

Friday, November 9, 9 am–1 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

In this series of workshops, teachers explore the concept of health literacy and new directions for teaching it. They learn how to integrate health literacy navigation skills into their curriculum. Teachers have an opportunity to develop lessons on these skills and implement them in their classes.

Open only to participants in the October 5 workshop.

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

Nov. 9

Using Arts in ESOL Classes

Friday, November 9, 1–5 pm

Facilitator: Regina Ress

Many funding streams mandate fusing ESOL/Literacy instruction with broader content, including the arts. This workshop focuses on teaching language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, functions, vocabulary, grammar) while exploring the arts. The arts can enhance foundational skills while encouraging cross-cultural awareness and personal expression. They engage the "whole learner" and the "multiple intelligences." They make teaching and learning fun!

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

Nov. 16

Teaching with Socially Relevant Content

Friday, November 16, 12:30–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Andy Nash

Adult education students are deeply interested in (and affected by) the issues of the day, such as immigration policy, teen drop-out rates, and globalization. They understand that finding just solutions to these problems is as important for the well-being of their family and community as learning how to read clothing labels in English, to calculate an area of floor tiles, or to write a 5-paragraph essay. This workshop will be an opportunity to explore the pros and cons of teaching with socially relevant content, to see some lessons modeled, and to consider strategies for developing integrated lessons from a wide array of timely source materials. Participants will receive two recent issues of *The Change Agent*, a quarterly publication about social justice issues that engages students in thinking about the world around them and examining issues from many angles.

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

Nov. 30

ESOL Teacher Share Series

Friday, November 30, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

In these sessions, teachers will have an opportunity to hear and discuss promising and innovative practices that colleagues are pursuing. Teachers will explore various aspects of English language teaching, particularly the teaching of the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Individual teachers will bring materials and share them with the rest of the group.

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

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

Dec. 7

Valuing Diversity and Appreciating Difference

Friday, December 7, 8:30 am–12 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn Rymniak

This is the third workshop in a new seven-module, 24-hour core knowledge curriculum for adult educators and practitioners new to New York State-funded adult education programs. This workshop will explore the issues of diversity and difference in the adult education classroom. Through the use of proven models and techniques, participants will improve their ability to manage and benefit from the multidimensional differences (culture, age, race, ethnicity, learning styles, socioeconomic levels, gender) that our adult learners bring to the classroom.

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

Dec. 7

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, December 7, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

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

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

Dec. 10 & 11

Effective Methods for Teaching the U.S. Civics for Immigrants Curriculum

Thursday, December 10, 9 am–4 pm

Friday, December 11, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

This two-part workshop will prepare participants to teach the U.S. Civics for Immigrants curriculum effectively. Specifically, participants will learn about the student population—English language learners with little or no literacy in their native language—and how this population learns best. The workshop will also cover basic strategies for teaching ESOL. Participants will leave with a structure of lessons, the contents of the curriculum, and the materials used in the lesson modules.

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.

Getting Better Every Year *continued*

The Leadership Excellence Academy, a joint initiative of the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium and ProLiteracy America, is designed to help local managers engage their entire staff in identifying what is and is not working, devising alternatives, pilot-testing them, and integrating them into the program. The LEA combines face-to-face workshops with online courses, webcasts, interim activities, and a learning project to pilot-test a program improvement strategy.

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One premise of the LEA is “wisdom of the crowd”—the notion that a “crowd” of well-informed people can make better recommendations than experts from other parts of the country. In keeping with this principle, the LEA encourages program managers to engage teachers and tutors in the program improvement process. After all, who knows more about what is and isn’t working—in all aspects of the program—than the instructional staff? Once the whole staff begins working together, a “culture of learning” arises, in which staff members

automatically make adjustments in their procedures to serve adult learners better.

Many programs simply analyze their National Reporting System (NRS) data, identify their problems, and go from there. The approach presented in the LEA is more comprehensive and offers a broader view of program improvement needs. In the first year, the emphasis is on three starting points for program improvement: self-assessments, research, and data. Together, they help local programs identify needs as perceived by both internal and external audiences. Teachers, tutors, administrative and support staff, stakeholders, and students each use a different self-assessment. The training also provides managers with the latest research findings in adult education. Finally, managers engage staff members in examining program data to identify problems and isolate probable causes. This analytical process goes beyond NRS data to look at program and performance data holistically.

The second year of the LEA focuses on specific strategies to address problems identified in year one. Participants examine research related to student persistence, instructional leadership, and staff orientation and motivation, and then devise policies and procedures to strengthen program performance both inside and outside the classroom.

The LEA philosophy is that “if we always do what we’ve always done, we’ll always get what we’ve always gotten.” We help program managers aim higher. Managers who complete the LEA can obtain a national certification—Certified Manager in Program Improvement (CMPI). Ultimately, of course, the primary beneficiaries of program improvement are the students. They are the reason we do what we do in the first place. ●

Mobilizing for Adult Literacy *continued*

The sustained activity of the coalition has enabled it to develop long-term strategies—and to respond quickly when necessary. By approaching the Mayor’s Office and the City Council at crucial times, the coalition was able to influence the city budget. Coalition representatives met with the mayor’s director of adult education and with Deputy Mayor Walcott, and found a City Council champion, Sara González, who sponsored and fought for an Adult Literacy Initiative. Thanks in part to these efforts funding for adult literacy has gone up by more than \$5 million in fiscal year 2008. The increase in 2009 should be even bigger.

When the DYCD produced a concept paper on the Beacon Program that threatened to swallow up city funds that had been available to CBOs, the coalition immediately went into action. Dozens of students and staff crowded the Beacon City Council hearing chaired by Council Member Lew Fidler. A short time later, the Council reinstated the separate procurement process for adult literacy. City support for adult literacy has increased even further in recent months. The City Council has conducted hearings on adult literacy, the need for ESOL classes,

and the problem of disconnected youth. At the beginning of the year, coalition members were just showing up at Council hearings and asking to testify. By the end of the year, they were getting invitations. The Mayor’s Office of Adult Education is currently in the midst of a re-visioning process; a number of coalition members are participating.

In other arenas, the coalition still has to make its presence felt. Increases in the state Adult Literacy Education (ALE) budget have been more than offset by a reduction in Education for Gainful Employment (EDGE) funding, resulting in a net loss for New York City programs. The coalition has yet to address federal, corporate, and foundation funding.

Effective advocacy is never easy. It requires a sustained and informed effort. The more people who join in, the more effective it can be. If you are interested in the Coalition for Adult Literacy, please contact newyorkcal@gmail.com. ●

Bruce Carmel, Deputy Executive Director of Turning Point, provided background information for this article.

Leadership Excellence At Work

A Learner's Perspective

> **Michael Hunter** *Family Literacy Program Manager, University Settlement Society of New York*

During the 2006–7 academic year I had the opportunity to participate in a pilot version of the Leadership Excellence Academy (LEA), a professional development workshop for managers of adult education programs. The LEA was launched by the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium and ProLiteracy America in 2006. Following a national competition, they chose New York as one of three states to participate in the pilot program.

The workshop took place in person and online over the course of the year. In addition to program managers such as myself, participants included officials from the New York State Education Department and from upstate BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services). Having people with so many different perspectives in the room was a very positive experience. Together, we explored a variety of principles and tools, and thought about how to apply them in diverse educational programs.

I've seen more than a few confrontations over the years between State Education personnel and local program managers, and I must say that one nice thing about the LEA was seeing these same officials doing their homework like all the rest of us (though as the year wore on, for whatever reason they didn't seem to participate with the same intensity as they had at the outset.)

I have always preferred training sessions that help my staff not just to gain knowledge, but to devise strategies that we can implement. Our first LEA module, "Using Self-Assessments to Identify Strengths and Needs," was designed to do that. After considering various methods of self-assessment that could be used by both individual teachers and program managers, we set about tailoring them to fit the needs of our own programs. Applying the LEA self-assessments at University Settlement, I asked my staff and returning teachers to decide on three top priorities for professional development for the year. This helped me become more responsive to the teachers in my program and at the same time encouraged them to take the lead in their own professional development.

Another LEA module, "Integrating Research into Teaching and Learning," built on the foundation I had acquired through earlier training with the state Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN). Learning about the latest research in reading instruction was my teachers' third-highest priority for staff development. During our winter quarter we got right to work.

In the final LEA module, "Going to Scale: Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Program Improvement Initiatives," each participating program manager examined his or her data to identify areas where the program might be falling short of its potential. In my case, this process revealed that a large percentage of our ESOL Level 1 students were not completing 12 hours of class time or being post-tested. If students aren't making 12 hours and aren't being enrolled for National Reporting

System (NRS) purposes, then time and resources spent on the intake process are going to waste. To change this pattern, we immediately launched a Program Improvement Initiative that focused on this issue. We'll be able to report back on the results by the end of December.

It would be impossible to speak about the Leadership Excellence Academy without saying something about the initiative's own leaders, Lennox McLendon and Kathi Polis. They are knowledgeable teachers and trainers, and they have developed a very good curriculum. Plus, their homespun charm made the training sessions seem a lot shorter than they actually were (McLendon and Polis not only developed the national LEA program but also facilitated the New York pilot project). Both trainers were engaging and responded quickly and completely to all questions, in the classroom as well as during the online portions of the workshop. Further, Lennox lobbied in Washington for the State

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professional development.

Adult Education Directors; he gives us a national perspective and can carry information from program managers to the capital to help shape legislation important to the adult literacy field.

The state's decision to offer the Leadership Excellence Academy to all program managers in New York City in 2007–8 speaks volumes about the quality of this approach to program improvement, the quality of the city's programs, and the commitment of the State Education Department to providing professional development to program managers. ●

TEACHERS' CORNER >> Students Write Their Future

> Cynthia Peters *Editor, The Change Agent*

Teaching in a union-based adult education program, over and over again I would see students arrive in class exhausted. They weren't just tired from waking up early, preparing food for their families, and working a full shift starting at 7:00 a.m.; they were depleted from doing rote work, from being bossed, and from coping with management's dehumanizing speed-up strategies. They often presented themselves in class with a demeanor that said, "I don't have the energy to be here, and I probably can't accomplish anything or contribute anything anyway."

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of teaching was to see that attitude turn around in the subsequent two hours. If the materials affirmed students' experience and knowledge and used that as a starting place from which to grow, and if the class created pathways for us to treat one another as if our minds and our thinking mattered, participants often left the class feeling energized and positive. Such interactions shouldn't be a radical departure from everyday life. Unfortunately, for many people they are.

The adult education classroom can be a place where messages of powerlessness are challenged and contradicted. When I was an ABE and ESOL teacher, I found *The Change Agent*, an adult education newspaper, was one of my most effective tools in that effort.

On one occasion, I brought a *Change Agent* call for articles for a special issue on "Building Peace" to one of my classes. One of my very quiet students, Mariela Bustamante, responded by sharing her childhood experiences dealing with the death squads in El Salvador. Having a chance to tell her story transformed her role in the class. Indeed, it transformed the entire class. The more Mariela shared about the violence she had experienced in El Salvador, the more people in the class turned to her to learn how someone could experience such terror and not just survive but be hopeful. Listening to the questions, concerns, and appreciation of her peers, Mariela developed a certain authority rooted in her experience and the insights she had gained over time. "Before," she said, "I only talked to my husband about these things, and we cried a lot. This is the first time I have talked about this with other people."

In her article, Mariela wrote about how her grandmother forgave the death squads. She died peacefully, Mariela related, after asking for a tortilla with lime and salt—the food that had sustained their family during the harshest of times. Mariela is not ready to forgive. The lesson she learned from her experience is to give all you can in life today, as "tomorrow might not come."

Another student, Luisa, was an adult in El Salvador during the civil war. She described her own experience, which included organizing general strikes to protest government support of the death squads. This helped fuel discussions about organizing in general, as well as an analysis of strategies used by the hospital workers union several of the students belonged to here in the U.S.

In the midst of this, students talked about tortillas—how you make them and hide them in times of war, how they taste with lime and salt, and how Mariela had never learned how to make them because her family had always been on the run. Luisa brought in the ingredients for

tortillas. We slapped tortillas into shape and blurred the boundaries between learning and teaching. Quietly, we broke the fire code in the hospital that day with Luisa's electric frying pan, blending in things we knew and using the mix to sustain us.

When the issue came out with Mariela's article and byline, we all celebrated, imagining how other classes around the country were reading it, thinking about it, and growing in their own ways as a result. Not long after her piece was published, Mariela came to class full of enthusiasm and pride. To her own surprise, she had spoken up at a PTA meeting at her child's school.

Anne Erde, who used the "Building Peace" issue in her ESL class at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, found it "tremendously successful, because the students could find ways to directly connect with the articles they read." During the third year of the Iraq war, which was also a time of heightened urban violence in Boston, Erde says that issue helped her students link historically specific issues of war and inner-city violence with universal themes of reconciliation and forgiveness.

"We spent a lot of time on the essay about the mother who went to meet the man who had murdered her son," she says. "The students asked themselves, 'Could I do that?' My students were people who had had awful experiences as immigrants coming from war-torn countries and now lived in the inner city, where violence and racism and fear were common. People wrote in the evaluations at the end of the year that they really loved the topic, and that it influenced them a lot in their own lives—especially because it made them think about forgiveness and reconciliation, about how it can be important to move on and not hold on to anger."

"I used a lot of other material for this class, too," Anne added, "but I think *The Change Agent* was the best resource. The readings are short but deeply meaningful. They're manageable but challenging enough. We could read an article every day. We could go through it and fully understand it. The students did lots of writing in response to what they read and lots of discussing."

My own belief in *The Change Agent* is evident. Now, instead of a teacher who used it in my classroom, I have become its editor. More than ever, I am convinced that its power lies in the interconnected processes of creating it and using it. This form of newspaper is designed to give adult learners a chance to be heard (through their writings), a chance to listen (through reading), and a chance to be heard again (through their comments on the readings). It's not surprising to me to learn that articles such as Mariela's resonate in Ann Erde's classes as authentic voices that speak directly to their own experiences and provide a context not just for learning but for empowerment. *The Change Agent* is dedicated to helping people see themselves as thinkers and actors who can, by sharing with others, become agents of change.

The latest "Call for Articles" for *The Change Agent* and subscription information can be found at www.nelrc.org/changeagent. ●

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Students Take the Lead

The VALUE Leadership Institute

> David Greene *Grassroots Literacy Coalition*

This summer, adult students Calvin Miles, Ryan Springer, Jamel Walton, Paulette Henry, and Jeanette Cayenne-Jobity, along with ESL teacher Mara Komoska, represented Students of Adult Literacy United (SALU) of New York City at the national conference of Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE).

VALUE is the only nationwide literacy organization led by adult students. Its conference, held July 5 through 7 in Hartford, Connecticut, drew representatives from 20 states with a theme of “Literacy and Leadership Equals Independence.” The agenda emphasized organizing and training adult student leaders for the coming year’s fight for more and higher-quality literacy programs in every community. Workshop topics included “How to Organize Student Boards,” “How Practitioners Can Support Student Leadership,” and “What Is Student Leadership?”

One workshop discussed the ongoing effort to pass a New York Bill of Rights for Adult Education, how other states could work on similar projects, and the possibility of a national campaign. Another considered the role learners can play in strengthening adult student recruitment and retention.

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“Students know what to do,” declared VALUE president Calvin Miles of New York City. “They can be taught. They make the most effective advertisements for classes and they can motivate people in a powerful way. We know that this works for recruitment, for retention, and for leadership. We encourage programs to hire student leaders to build their programs.” Jamel Walton, a former student at Young Adult Learning Academy in Manhattan who obtained her GED, commented, “This is being done in other states, so why not do it here in New York?”

One of the highlights of the conference was the announcement of the first Susan Green Award for Leadership in Literacy. Ryan Springer received it for his work organizing adult students in New York City over the past three years. “This is a tremendous honor for me,” he declared in a rousing speech to the delegates, “but it comes with

It was great to see so many women in positions of power and leadership at the conference.

an understanding that you are all serious fighters for student needs in literacy programs. The fight for literacy is just beginning and it is not yet what it should be. We need a real movement to end illiteracy in America. I want us to join together in this fight.”

Paulette Henry, who immigrated to the U.S. from Jamaica and attends classes in East Flatbush, commented after the conference that it had motivated her to become more involved in student leadership. “It picked me up, listening and talking to women from around the U.S. Women from Delaware who were organizing had achieved so much and it inspired me. They were excited by our work with the Bill of Rights for Adult Education and said that they would build on it in Delaware.”

It was great to see so many women in positions of power and leadership at the conference, Jamel Walton added. Jeanette Cayenne-Jobity, another New York delegate, was also enthusiastic. “We were asked to get to know each other, as family, by sharing tables and helping others,” she reported. “The workshops were so lively with heated discussions and I believe that they motivated everyone.”

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All of the delegates agreed with Ryan Springer’s point that the fight for literacy is just beginning. In New York City, adult education classes are still a well-kept secret, serving less than three percent of those who need them.

The institute was sponsored by the Anderson-Rogers Foundation, Dollar General Literacy Foundation, and World Education, Inc. The SALU delegation was sponsored by the Literacy Assistance Center and individual donations. ●

Spirit, Mind, and Body

> Lourdes Lliguichuzhca

I became involved with the YMCA when I came to the USA on June 14th, 1998. From 1998 through 1999 I study English at the ELESAIR Program. I had this wonderful opportunity to go to a Computer Training Program in Jobs For Youth. At that time I didn't had any work experience and went for an internship at the Bellevue Hospital. In 2002 I worked as a tutor on the after school program at McBurney Chelsea Center on 14 St. On 2005 I had a great opportunity to volunteer one of the most important events "The Panel Discussion about Discrimination Against Employees." It opened my eyes. I didn't know there was an organization that helps all employees to stop and say NO to their employers when they are wrong.

By learning English I was allow to understand, communicate (speak, write, and read) with others who don't speak my language. Being a part of the Y, I have the ability to perform better on my job duties; also, I got my GED. After getting GED, I went to TCI (The Institute College of Technology) and got my Associate Degree in Office Technology.

Regardless to what I am learning every day, as one of the International staff, I will be ready to face new adventures, and solve difficulties that will be on my way. I'll be prepared as a person in spirit, mind, and body. I found out that the Y is the only place where families can meet each other and be together. For me the Y is the door to succeed, personal as a mother, wife, sister, and daughter, and professional as a student, colleague, and worker.

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