



LITERACY UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 07 Vol.17 No. 1

Literacy Assistance Center

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Creating a Core Curriculum

> Marilyn Rymniak *Project Leader, Statewide Professional Development System*

Up until now, new adult educators without academic training in the field have been pretty much on their own. A lucky few have had an experienced teacher willing and able to devote many hours to mentoring them. A larger group has enrolled in pre-service institutes and offered by the Literacy Assistance Center and other organizations and perhaps followed up by taking a variety of other workshops on specific topics, such as health literacy or teaching basic math. Quite a few instructors, however, have learned their pedagogical skills almost entirely through experience. In New York State, this haphazard approach to professional development is about to change.

With prompting from the federal government, all states have begun developing formal programs to train new teachers. For a little over a year, the LAC has been coordinating development of a comprehensive teacher trainer program under a contract with the Adult Education and Workforce Development Team of the State Education Department. Our goal has been to develop a program that reflects the best practices of adult education, presenting strategies and theory in a manner that is accessible, engaging, and immediately applicable. The fruit of that year-long effort, *The Foundations of Adult Education Core Curriculum*, is nearing completion. The initial draft of the *Teacher Trainer's Manual*

for the curriculum incorporates the ideas of educators in many regions of the state. An editorial board comprised of RAEN directors, program directors, instructors, and other adult education workers from all over the state is offering comments and suggestions.

The *Teacher Trainer's Manual* is designed as a framework to convey the general learning principles and training guidelines essential to teaching the course materials, rather than a rigid curriculum. The trainers themselves will provide the energy and creativity that bring the materials to life and enable participating instructors to see how they can use what they are learning in the classroom. As more and more instructors complete the curriculum, their common foundation of

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Back to the Future

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

I have been thinking a lot about the future. Every aspect of my life seems to be crying out for a crystal ball. My oldest starts high school this week and if she hears me say the word “college” one more time she is going to put me through a wall. I also have the privilege of participating in the NYC strategic visioning being conducted by the NYC Mayor’s Office of Adult Education, and the LAC itself is developing a five year strategic plan.

My kid and many of my colleagues have their eyes fixed firmly on the future. My gaze usually is as well, but I can’t help looking back over my shoulder to see if the wisdom I need to get through this phase is somehow behind me.

As I write this the LAC is in the process of dismantling one of our most precious resources: the Hotline will make its final referral on August 30th. This is heartbreaking. The critical bridge between adults searching for appropriate adult education services and the array of programs waiting to serve them is disappearing. My only solace is to remember that we were in the exact same position five years ago, when the LAC lost its New York City funding. The Hotline closed. The staff scattered. Thousands of New Yorkers made a dozen calls in an often vain effort to get the information and support that we had provided in one. Within 6 months, the need for a referral Hotline became so evident that New York State provided funding that enabled us to resurrect the whole program and begin again. Painful as that experience was, it did remind us that our most precious resource is our learners. Today, just as five years ago, we have that memory firmly in our minds. Meeting their needs will be our primary focus as we plan for the future.

Although closing the Hotline is a déjà vu experience, when I look at the LAC specifically and the field in general, I can’t believe how much we have grown and changed for the better over the past five years. I’ve wondered how much of this progress can be attributed to sound strategic planning and how much is the fruit of a vibrant system that meets unexpected challenges with creativity and flexibility, continuing to serve learners in spite of enormous barriers to success. My conclusion is that both planning and resilience deserve credit. This combination has enabled the LAC and the entire NYC adult literacy delivery system to flourish, not just for the past five years, but the past quarter century. As we go forward and plan for the future, I hope we all take the time to review the lessons of the past, our successes as well as our setbacks, and learn them well. ●



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Funding for the LAC is provided by
the New York State Education Department
and a wide range of philanthropic
foundations, corporations, and individuals.

> **Marian Thacher** *Director of the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network, a technology leadership project in California*

Even ten years ago, when you asked almost anyone to define literacy, chances are they would have said something about having basic reading and writing skills. Maybe they would have added math skills as well. Today, terms like media literacy, financial literacy, and technology literacy are used all the time, reflecting the most massive change in our culture since the spread of universal education. Over the past decade, computers and the Internet have assumed a primary role in how we communicate with each other, get information, make plans, and keep track of things. Handwriting is giving way to keyboarding. Online dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference sources are making print versions obsolete. Almost every job requires some contact with a computer.

To keep pace with this radical transformation in communication, adult literacy programs have begun bringing computers, the Internet, and other technology such as digital cameras, portable keyboards, and electronic whiteboards into their classrooms, even those devoted to basic skills. True technology integration, however, means more than putting a computer in the room. “Technology integration is the use of technology resources—computers, digital cameras, CD-ROMs, software applications, the Internet, etc.—in daily classroom practices,” according to a useful definition offered by The George Lucas Education Foundation. “Technology integration is achieved when the use of technology is routine and transparent. Technology integration is achieved when a [student] or a teacher doesn't stop to think that he or she is using a computer or researching via the Internet.” At least by this definition, most adult educators would agree that they have a lot of work to do, particularly since keeping up with changes in educational technology is a challenge in itself. Finding peers who can share ideas and experiences on some aspect of teaching English or writing is much easier than locating instructors who have already integrated a particular piece of new equipment into their lesson plan.

Starting this month, teachers will be able to determine how well they are doing on technology integration and where they need to improve using a self-assessment tool available at AdultEd Online (www.adultedonline.org), a federally funded free site dedicated to helping teachers learn how to better use technology in their classrooms and reach learners studying at a distance. Developed by a team at the University of Michigan and the Sacramento County Office of Education after a literature review and consultation with adult education technology experts, including Mariann Fedele at the LAC, this tool has already been tested by a group of New York literacy teachers and program directors. Anyone can create an account and take the assessment. Completing its 12 sections takes about 15 or 20 minutes. The developers have designed the tool to be an educational experience as well as a way for teachers to see where they are. The question concerning a class website, for example, shows one that an Intermediate ESOL teacher created for her class.

On completing the self-assessment, teachers will see a summary of the results and be invited to choose one or more technology competencies they would like to strengthen and create their own professional development plan for the next year. The site will suggest appropriate strategies they can choose from, such as “Attend a

True technology integration, however, means more than putting a computer in the room.

conference,” or “Find a tech buddy.” It will also provide links to Web resources they can use for independent study. The site makes it possible for teachers to save their plan online or download it and email it to their teaching partners or an administrator. Another option allows teachers to request a monthly email reminder of the goals and objectives they included in their plan.

Another tool on the site makes it possible for program directors to generate agency-wide professional development. After opening an administrator account, the program director can email invitations to every teacher, inviting them to take the self-assessment. After they do, the program director will receive an overall profile of their skills. This can then be used to plan agency-wide professional development activities. Program directors who tried this tool out in last year's pilot project were very enthusiastic. “I'm definitely going to have my teachers take this assessment at the beginning of the year,” commented one. “These questions will help us focus on making better use of the technology we already have.”

The AdultEd Online website offers a third self-assessment tool, this one to help teachers determine whether they would enjoy distance teaching, and if so, what skills they might need to develop. The assessment walks them through intake and orientation, instruction, supporting and motivating students, recruiting, and other roles that an online teacher can play, as well as the skills and knowledge associated with each. It also shows how an actual teacher handled different situations, such as a student misinterpreting an email.

Distance learning has come of age. This new website is a state-of-the-art example of the benefits it can provide. ●

Seeing What Technology Can Do

> David J. Rosen *President of Media Library of Teaching Skills*

Until recently, when adult educators talked about professional development, everyone understood they meant face-to-face groupings such as workshops, courses, study circles, and sharing groups. Now, thanks to the new technologies, educators no longer have to be in the same room to learn together. Exchanges are taking place through online courses, discussion groups or lists, “wikis” (web pages that visitors can add to as well as read), “webinars” (online meetings in real time, often with two-way video and audio), podcasts (audio files that can be downloaded to individual computers and mobile phones), “blogs” (Web logs), and video teleconferencing. California, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, have all developed their own programs using some of these formats. Other states have adopted joint initiatives, such as *Project IDEAL* and *AE Pro Online*.

Face-to-face interaction is hardly in danger of extinction, but online professional development has several advantages. The asynchronous online orientations offered in many states give new adult education teachers opportunities to learn the ropes quickly, instead of having to wait for scheduled face-to-face orientations. A broad menu of Internet offerings can greatly expand the professional development opportunities available to part-time teachers who must meet other part-time or full-time commitments. Adult educators who can only squeeze in a few hours of a face-to-face course can expand their participation to a full course by blending face-to-face and online learning. Online formats such as the National Institute for Literacy discussion lists give educators unprecedented access to eminent researchers and professional developers.

Like television or the telephone, the Internet is only as good as its content. In professional development, online formats require at least as much planning and skilled facilitation as their face-to-face analogs. Unless an “online page-turner” provides essential information available nowhere else, educators are apt to avoid it or drop it. On the other hand, online courses in which an engaging and skilled course leader combines stimulating materials, a good mix of educator-to-educator discussion and teacher projects, and regular email communication win high ratings from participants. In a recent study for the National Institute for Literacy, Noreen Lopez found that teachers who participated in an online course reported that it had more impact on what they did in the classroom than the face-to-face professional development courses they had attended. (A video of her presentation at the Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers 2007 COABE pre-conference in Philadelphia can be found at <http://nmercury.educ.kent.edu/aalpd/aalpd1.html>.)

I found out how much effort and imagination successful online programming takes several years ago, when I became involved in developing Internet courses. We started with workshop materials, tried-and-true objectives, and handouts. All of them had been very effective in face-to-face sessions. Online, it was another story. We discovered that when teachers use the Internet for professional development, they had different expectations. They wanted dialog. Yes, they appreciated high quality print materials, but they also wanted digital videos, especially

short videos showing excellent teachers in their classroom. This posed a problem: We found very few videos that were both high in quality and readily available. Our field, I realized, would have to start making more.

Some years ago, I had taken a different approach. When I was Director of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI) in Boston in the 1980's and 1990's, I frequently asked adult education teachers what kind of professional development would be most meaningful to them. Almost invariably, they expressed a desire to see what other teachers do in their classrooms. ALRI responded by assigning an experienced staff member to help teachers develop a plan for visiting other classrooms, conferencing with peers about lesson objectives and activities, and sharing post-lesson observations. To facilitate the observations, the ALRI staff member often served as a substitute when teachers visited a colleague's classroom. This approach was certainly effective. It was also very expensive—a major issue in a field where financial resources are modest at best.

Micro-teaching, another professional development technique, has used video, but in a similarly labor-intensive manner: A teacher prepares and delivers a short lesson, which is then videotaped. Afterward, a master teacher, the students, and the teacher review the video together and offer feedback on what happened in the classroom, and how well the students understood the lesson's objectives and main ideas.

My colleague, Owen Hartford, and I had both seen the virtues of micro-teaching early in our adult education careers. We thought that it could be adapted to meet the widely expressed need for video learning at far less cost per teacher. The cost of quality digital video recording equipment has dropped considerably in the past few years. Partly for this reason, amateur video-making and publishing has increased enormously, as evidenced by the growth of websites such as YouTube (youtube.com). On another site, TeacherTube (teachertube.com), educators – including some adult education teachers – are posting inexpensive videos showing their own classroom instruction techniques. The missing piece, Owen and I thought, was an organization that encouraged direct teacher involvement in creating digital videos, and provided training, support, and professional editing to ensure professional or near-professional quality. Rather than send an expensive team of professionals around the country, the organization would assist teachers in producing short, digital videos of exemplary colleagues in the classroom, showing how they apply their skills and best practices to achieving specific state adult education content standards. Their work would be brought together in a searchable online library of digital videos of adult literacy teaching and learning on a broad range of topics, including English language lessons and classes on basic skills such as numeracy. We founded the Media Library of Teaching Skills (MLoTS) to fill this role.

The MLoTS Classroom Video Project will match teachers selected by a state, regional, or urban literacy resource center with another teacher, as in a peer-mentoring model. We will try to pair teachers who can get to each other's classroom easily, have particular skills related to adult literacy education best practices or content standards, and are motivated to work together. In two days of intensive training, teams

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New LAC Staff Members

The LAC was pleased to welcome two highly experienced adult literacy specialists to its staff this summer.

Barbara Sparks, our new Director of Professional Development, comes to us with many years of experience in adult education. Her jobs have included evaluation specialist at the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems at the University of Colorado, Director of the Nebraska Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, and Distance Learning Project Coordinator for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. She has taught at North Carolina State, as well as in a variety of adult education programs in Colorado and Wisconsin, and is the author of *The Struggles of Getting an Education: Issues of Power, Culture, and Difference for Mexican Americans of the Southwest*. Barbara has a Ph.D. in Urban Education/Adult Education from the University of Wisconsin. Her LAC email address is barbaras@lacnyc.org.

Begonieta Jensen has joined our professional development unit as Project Leader, Community and Family Programs. She came to us from the New York YMCA, where she was Senior Director, Services for New Americans. She has been involved in adult education for more than two decades. After finishing college in her native Philippines, she taught English to Vietnamese refugees in a UNHCR camp there for two years. In 2006 she won an LAC Literacy Recognition Award for her outstanding work building the YMCA ELESAR program. Her email address is bej@lacnyc.org.

Student Writing Workshops

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

Positions with the LAC

GED Coaches

The LAC is looking for 8-12 experienced GED staff developers (preferred) or teachers who are willing to travel to the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Queens to coach part time DOE teachers in Young Adult Boro Centers and Transfer Schools with modest GED experience. Coaching involves face-to-face meetings, monitoring classes and exchanging ideas via email/telephone to acquaint teachers with resources, techniques and strategies of teaching the GED. It also entails a minimum of two visits per month during the evening (as early as 4 pm) to each school. In addition, coaches should be willing to participate in paid professional development sessions intended for teachers (the coach should be prepared to follow up the content in their individualized coaching with teachers). Coaches should also expect to prepare a one page monthly report and invoice for services rendered. They may be asked to facilitate portions of professional development workshops or may collaborate with DOE on ad hoc working groups to further refine the GED model or other program intervention. Successful candidates will be engaged by the LAC as independent contractors. Cover letter and resume to lisavb@lacnyc.org.

Partnership Facilitators

The LAC seeks two or three experienced administrators or supervisors with experience in partnership development who are willing to travel to the five boroughs to facilitate the relationships with Multiple Pathways leadership teams (DOE Assistant Principal and CBO senior staff). Facilitators will meet once or twice monthly with the leadership team. The facilitator should also plan to participate in two or three citywide meetings sponsored by the Office of Multiple Pathways during the course of the academic year. Depending on need and the capacity of the facilitator, relationships could grow to involve interactions with key DOE and CBO staff members. Successful candidates will be engaged by the LAC as independent contractors. Cover letter and resume to lisavb@lacnyc.org.

Health Literacy Facilitators

The LAC seeks two or three teachers or staff developers who have completed one or more modules of the Health Literacy Study Circle to facilitate health literacy workshops for literacy practitioners or health educators. The facilitator will spend half a day becoming acquainted

with the LAC training model and the training curriculum and deliver training initially with members of the LAC staff. These training sessions will take place during the business day and are generally held in the Information Clearinghouse of the Literacy Assistance Center. Facilitators should expect to conduct up to 6 sessions during this fiscal year. Successful candidates will be engaged by the LAC as independent contractors. Cover letter and resume to lisavb@lacnyc.org.

ASISTS Trainers

The Literacy Assistance Center seeks talented professionals to join its Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) team as training consultants. The LAC is working with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to provide a state-of-the-art web-based data collection system for all publicly funded adult education programs in New York State. The training and support of program staff are critical to the success of this project. The LAC will certify a select group of trainers who will train adult education program staff at all levels of the organization and also have the capability to provide some level of technical support. Qualifications include experience in software training and using database systems for managing information, preferably in educational settings.

Trainers will be required to attend a two-day Train the Trainer event in either New York City or Albany and will, at that time, be required to demonstrate their training ability. Compensation for training related activities will be as follows:

- > Train the Trainer Event: \$25.00 per hour for up to a total of 12 hours
- > Conduct Regional Trainings: \$50.00 per hour, with a maximum of 6 hours per training day
- > All related travel and lodging expenses will be reimbursed.

Trainers are supervised by the ASISTS administration and will contract directly with the LAC. Trainers must commit to providing a minimum of two full-day regional trainings in fiscal year 2007/2008. The possibility of becoming an expert resource on data management for adult education programs exists for selected individuals. Final selection will be at the sole discretion of the ASISTS director of operations. Successful candidates will be engaged by the LAC as independent contractors. Cover letter and resume to ASISTStrainer@lacnyc.org

Sept. 6

TABE Test Administrator Training

Thursday, September 6, 1–5 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

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

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

Sept. 11

BEST Plus Refresher

Tuesday, September 11, 9:30 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Judy Trupin

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

Sept. 13

BEST Plus Test Administrator Training

Thursday, September 13, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitators: Judy Trupin and Mariann Fedele

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

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

Sept. 28

Building Partnerships for Economic Empowerment

Friday, Sept 28 & Friday, Oct 26
9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitators: Be Jensen and Barbara Sparks

Target Audience: Family literacy, community, and service program managers working with low income and immigrant families.

This two-part workshop is designed to:

- Increase awareness of the role that partnerships with financial institutions can play in developing the skills that families with limited English language literacy need to strengthen their financial stability.
- Provide a model for developing successful partnerships
- Mobilize family literacy, community and service programs to utilize this model
- Evaluate the benefits of these partnerships for the program and its students
- Assist each participating program in developing its own partnership plan.

Participants will explore ways to develop economic and financial literacy skills and navigate the financial system. They will review existing partnerships with financial institutions and agencies in their communities, and examine the challenges and opportunities they present. The workshop will consider keys to developing successful partnerships. The second session serves as a follow-up on the action plans that participants will develop in the first session, a chance to review what worked and what areas require additional attention and support.

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

Sept. 28

Using the Arts and Technology in the ESOL classroom

Friday, September 28, 1–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Regina Ress

Many funding streams mandate fusing ESOL/Literacy instruction with broader content, including technology. This workshop focuses on teaching language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, functions, vocabulary, grammar, etc) and computer skills (Internet browsing for research, website navigation) while exploring the arts. The arts can enhance the practice of 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

Oct. 5

Teaching Health Literacy

October 5, November 2, & November 30
9 am–1 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

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

Participants are expected to attend all three sessions.

Oct. 5

ESOL Teacher Share Series

Friday, October 5 & November 30, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: TBA

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. Participating 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.**

Oct. 12

Teaching Very Basic Literacy to Beginning ESOL Learners

Friday, October 12, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Susan Dalmas, Queens Borough
Public Library/Adult Learner Program

In this workshop teachers will learn successful techniques, strategies, and activities for teaching very basic literacy to beginning ESOL learners who have zero or very limited literacy, in their own first language as well as in English. The facilitator will share insights from the Basic Literacy for ESOL class model that has been developed by the Queens Borough Public Library. Participants will have an opportunity to discuss screening of students, exit criteria, and the development of curricula and appropriate materials.

Oct. 19

NYC Regional Adult Education Network Pre-Service Institute, Part I

Introduction to Adult Literacy Education

Friday, October 19, 8:30 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn Rymniak

This is the first workshop in a 7 module, 24-hour core knowledge curriculum for adult educators and practitioners new to New York State-funded adult education programs.

This workshop will provide a comprehensive introduction to key concepts, research, policies, resources, and evidence-based practices in the field today so that participants will be able to continue to learn effectively on their own.

Topics to be covered include:

1. Knowing Yourself as a Learner—Knowing Your Students as Learners
2. The Reflective Teacher
3. Adult Learning Theories
4. Standards + Frameworks
5. Science-Based Research and Evidence-Based Practice in Adult Education

All 7 modules of this 24-hour core course will be offered at the LAC during the 2007-2008 program year. It is recommended that participants attend all seven modules in sequence in order to gain the most from this course.

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

Oct. 25

NYC Regional Adult Education Network Pre-Service Institute, Part II

Digital Literacy: Accessing Resources
On Line

Thursday, October 25, 8:30 am–12 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn Rymniak

This is the second workshop in a new 7 module, 24-hour core knowledge curriculum for adult educators and practitioners who have recently joined New York State-funded adult education programs. Participants will gain hands-on experience using the Internet to supplement their own learning and professional development. This workshop will focus on introducing participants to the most important on-line websites, listservs, resources, policy documents, and professional development offerings that support adult education and literacy programs.

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

Oct. 26

NYC Regional Adult Education Network Pre-Service Institute, Part II

Digital Literacy: Accessing Resources
On Line

Friday, October 26, 8:30 am–12 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn Rymniak

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

Oct. 26

Building Partnerships for Economic Empowerment

Dates: Fridays, Sept 28 & Oct 26

9:30 am–12:30 pm at LAC Clearing House

Description on page 6 under September 28.

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.

What's So Different About Math? Math Myths and Literacy Learning

> Charles Brover, Denise Deagan, and Solange Farina *Math Exchange Group*

"A teacher's goal must be to help students understand mathematics; yet understanding is not something that can be taught directly. No matter how kindly, clearly, patiently, or slowly teachers explain, they cannot make students understand. Understanding takes place in the students' minds as they connect new information with previously developed ideas, and teaching through problem solving is a powerful way to promote this kind of thinking. Teachers can help and guide their students, but understanding occurs as a by-product of solving problems and reflecting on the thinking that went into those problem solutions."

Diana V. Lambdin, "Benefits of Teaching Through Problem Solving," *Teaching Mathematics Through Problem Solving*, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics: 2003.

"Working in groups—I do it all the time in my writing class, but I don't think to do it in math." That's a comment we often hear when the New York City Math Exchange Group (MEG) facilitates workshops in mathematics instruction. Literacy teachers, who regularly employ cooperative work, reflective writing, critical problem-posing perspectives, strategic literacy and constructivist learning approaches, seem to take a pass when it comes to math instruction. They invoke a math exception to what they know about how students learn best and seem to say, "Yes...but math is different." This article will ask: Is learning math really so exceptional?

The rationale for math exceptionalism is based upon a number of pervasive myths. Like all myths, the stories interlock and overlap; different tellers will present the myths differently for different purposes. Here is our annotated list of some of the myths of math learning. We have added a few notes about resources and our own classroom practice.

Myth #1

Unlike reading and writing, math is not really meaning based.

In fact, like reading, doing math is also the construction of meaning. We try to make sense of quantitative situations. Math is not non-sense, although it would be difficult to reach this conclusion from observing most math classrooms in the U.S. Consider this version of the now famous problem that appeared on the fourth grade NEAP test (National Educational Assessment of Progress): A class of 53 students is going on a field trip. If a school van holds a maximum of 12 children, how many vans will be needed? Frequent answer: 4, remainder 5. We see over and over again that the mechanically learned algorithm—an isolated rule or procedure—undermines sound number sense.

The difficulties many of our students have with mathematics stems from having learned too well what was taught in school. They learned that math doesn't make sense. They learned that math is merely computation. They learned that math is knowing procedures. That is why so many say, "tell me what to do, and I'll do it." They learned that you have to follow "magic" formulae cooked up by teachers. They learned that math is boring and irrelevant to their experiences and interests.

In the classroom: We try to approach mathematics instruction as we would good literacy instruction. We ask students: "Does this make sense?" "Do you understand the problem?" "Can you retell the problem in your own words?" Students who have learned the lesson that math makes sense are more likely to test their solutions for reasonableness. When students do come up with an answer, we ask them to explain and defend it.

For additional background, see *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics: 2000.

Myth #2

Unlike reading and writing, math is objective, socially neutral, and context-free.

School mathematics has been generally accepted as a color blind, socially neutral discipline, but like literacy, mathematics is, in fact, socially and culturally situated. Teachers can help students to challenge mathematical arguments used to advance political agendas critically.

This myth of social and cultural neutrality makes mathematics a more ideologically acceptable gatekeeper than literacy and undermines educational equity. It supports a tradition of math instruction that particularly fails to reach students of color and women. William Tate notes, "Few if any attempts are made to build on the thinking and experiences of African American students." ("Race, Retrenchment and the Reform of School Mathematics," in *Rethinking Mathematics*, 2005).

In the classroom: Newspapers and other media can be rich sources of mathematical problems, particularly with regard to "big numbers," probability, and statistics. The Iraq war, hurricane Katrina, and the movie *Sicko* present engaging opportunities for students to think about high-end quantitative situations in the context of social justice. Many of these problems can be open-ended.

Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers, edited by Eric Gutstein and Bob Peterson (*Rethinking Schools*: 2005) is full of socially relevant and contextual mathematics problems for adults. One project titled, "Driving While Black or Brown," presents sample data on police discretionary traffic stops from Illinois police reports from 1987-1997 and asks students to consider the data in terms of social justice.

MYTH #3

It is not important for our students to engage in non-routine problem solving in math classes.

Problem solving is central to all learning, including reading and writing. Although most adults approach learning as problem solving, rich, challenging, relevant, non-routine problems are reserved for "elite" students. Continuing the groundbreaking work of mathematician George Polya (*How to Solve It: 1945*), a pedagogical tradition has emerged that views problem solving and the mathematical discourse generated by those problems as the focus of the math class for all students. MEG places itself within this tradition and has adopted teaching through problem solving and problem posing as its pedagogical stance.

In the classroom: *Puddle Questions: Assessing Mathematical Thinking*, by Joan Westley (Creative Publications: 1994), offers many open-ended and rich problems and activities.

MYTH #4

Unlike literacy, mathematics learning does not have a social dimension.

Learning depends on social interaction no less in math classes than in literacy classes. Just as there is a "literacy club" of social practice, there is also a "math club." A problem solving culture develops a safe, learning environment. Thinking is valued. Students see their classmates and teachers as learning resources and mistakes as sites of learning.

A problem solving approach seeks to establish a community of guided practice and mathematical discourse. So a problem-solving classroom provides ample opportunities for students to explain their solution methods and verify conjectures. Students solve from different

continued on page 11

Creating a Core Curriculum *continued*

knowledge and skills will create a statewide peer-learning community in which ideas and experiences can be shared easily and widely. The manual will be introduced next spring through a train the trainer approach, in a series of 2-day institutes held in different parts of the state. After completing the institute, participants will be ready to use the manual to teach the curriculum.

The Foundations of Adult Education Core Curriculum itself is divided into an introductory 6-hour Pre-Service Institute and 6 three-hour modules, to be taken sequentially: Digital Literacy: Consuming Scientific Research and Using the Internet; Valuing Diversity and Appreciating Difference; The Art + Science of Teaching Reading to Adults, Teaching English to Adult Speakers of Other Languages; Teaching English to Adult Speakers of Other Languages; Teaching Numeracy and Quantitative Literacy to Adults; and Indicators of Program Quality.

New York City teachers will have the first opportunity to take the curriculum. The LAC will offer a pilot of the first two modules here this fall as this year's Pre-service Institute. The responses, ideas, and evaluations of the participants will be incorporated in the final version of the curriculum disseminated statewide in the spring.

Recommended Reading for Teacher Trainers

These background readings will be recommended to teacher trainers participating in the course. Other adult educators will also find them illuminating.

Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, US Congress

Tough Choices or Tough Times, National Center on Education and the Economy, 2006.

America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future, Educational Testing Center, 2007.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy: A First Look at Literacy of America's Adults in the 21st Century, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization, Second Edition, Peter M. Senge, Currency/Random House, 2006.

Pursuing Professional Development: The Self As Source, Kathleen M. Bailey, Andy Curtis and David Nunan, Newbury House Teacher Development, Heinle & Heinle, Thomson Learning, 2001.

Teaching in Mind: How Teacher Thinking Shapes Education, Judith Lloyd Yero, MindFlight Publishing, 2002.

Building Professional Pride in Literacy: A Dialogical Guide to Professional Development for Practitioners of Adult Literacy and Basic Education, B. Allan Quigley, Krieger Publish Company, 2006.

Making Sense of Adult Learning, Second Edition, Dorothy MacKeracher, University of Toronto Press, 2004 ●

Seeing What Technology Can Do *continued*

will learn how to design a lesson plan suitable for taping and use inexpensive, high quality digital video equipment to record the teacher and students engaged in the lesson in the classroom.

After recording the lesson, the pair will send 15-30 minutes of raw video footage to MLoTS, which will work with both the team and the state education office or state or regional literacy resource center to create a clear video less than 10 minutes long that authentically reflects both the lesson and the standard or best practice that it illustrates. Edited versions of the videos and links to background materials will be posted on the MLoTS website, where teachers throughout the state have access to them, as well as to classroom videos from other states. The website already has four sample videos made by the MLoTS staff: three of ABE reading teacher Wendy Quinones giving lessons at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one

of Abby Magee teaching ratio and proportion at the Notre Dame Education Center in South Boston.

Our goal is to create digital videos that professional developers can use in both face-to-face and online courses and workshops. Each will be designed to stimulate discussions on what the teacher and students do, what standards or research findings underlie the lesson, and what other ways a teacher might choose to achieve the same learning standards, objectives, or themes. Participants may also be able to email teachers featured in the videos to obtain answers to questions such as why they chose certain particular objectives or activities.

MLoTS is just beginning. We invite you to visit our website, www.mlots.org. After you do, we would love to hear your response, and explore ways that we can work with your state's adult education teachers. ●

David Rosen can be reached at djrosen@comcast.net.

CONFERENCES

October

2007 International Visual Literacy Association Conference

October 10–13, Curitiba, Brazil
<http://www.ivla.org>

29th International Conference

on Learning Disabilities

October 12–13, Myrtle Beach, SC
<http://www.cldinternational.org/Conference/conference.asp>

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) Annual Conference

October 30–November 2, Norfolk, VA
<http://www.aaace.org/conferences/index.html>

Teach Division and Benefits Multiply

> *Tim Reedy English teacher in Queens since 1990*

The conversation started with work schedules. Ramiro, a cook, said he worked from 3 pm to midnight. At my prompting, a classmate asked him how many days a week he worked. "Every day but Tuesday," he responded.

"How many hours a week does he work?" I asked the class. A couple of students answered 54. When another said 9, one of students who had gotten 54 hours explained that Ramiro works 9 hours a night 6 days a week. "You have to do 6 for 9," she said.

"Very nice," I said, "But how do you say this in English?" I wrote 6×9 on the board. "Fifty-four," everyone called out in unison. "That's the answer" I responded, "But how do you say the entire mathematical sentence in English?" Now I wrote $6 \times 9 = 54$.

"Six for 9 equal 54" one student offered. I shook my head. "Six by 9," another called out. I shook my head again. "Six multiplied for 9?" At last, a student suggested "Six multiplied by 9."

"Good, that's correct," I responded, "but what do your kids say when they come home from school?"

Just as we're willing
to teach English to everybody,
we should be willing to talk about
math vocabulary with everybody,
particularly parents
who want to help their children
with homework.

A mother's face lit up. "Six times 9!" she called out, launching the parents in my class into an animated discussion about helping their kids with homework. Listening to them, I realized that although I'd often talked with my students about being able to understand homework instructions and letters from school, we had never really had a conversation about math in particular. On the spur of the moment, I decided to go through the four basic operations, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. We then went on to talk about what it meant when their kids had to learn their "times tables." We even got into perimeter and area, which opened the way for us to look at the relationship between saying "6 by 9" to describe the dimensions of a rectangle, and "6 times 9" for multiplication.

Since that day several years ago, I've included a math lesson in nearly every class I've taught. It's never that hard to find time to squeeze some in; classes at my school meet five days a week in two-month cycles. The purpose of these lessons isn't so much to teach math as to provide

vocabulary for math skills that virtually every ESOL student has. Wherever they came from, nearly everyone in my classes has been able to add and subtract, even the ones who are barely literate in their own languages. Likewise, nearly all of them understand the concepts of multiplication and division even if many of them are a little rusty. Sometimes, if enough students are interested, we go beyond basic math and get to talking about square roots, at which point the different educational backgrounds of the students start to become evident.

ESOL teachers often teach classes in which education levels vary widely. Over time, we develop strategies to engage all of our students in our lessons. This certainly doesn't mean that students with more education always learn English faster. We've all seen students who haven't finished elementary school outpace classmates with post-secondary education. The point is, just as we're willing to teach English to everybody, we should be willing to talk about math vocabulary with everybody, particularly parents who want to help their children with homework.

Many of them say that when they've tried to help their kids with math the conversation ends in confusion and frustration. Long division is a common source of difficulty. In many countries, students learn to work out long division using a method that can only be described as a sort of inverse of the way students do long division here. People from these countries are used to running subtraction problems in their heads. Obviously, division is division. The underlying concept is the same no matter how you write it on the page, but the method children learn here requires that each of the proceeding subtraction problems be written out. Many students have talked about not being able to explain their method to their kids and not being able to understand what their kids are trying to do. I often approach this issue by asking students from countries that use the same method as the U.S. to explain it to other students. During their explanation, I jump in to talk about the special phrasal verb we use in division, as in "bringing down the two," or other terms particular to math.

The response is invariably positive. Even immigrant parents who speak English well enough to get by in most other situations frequently lack the vocabulary to talk about math. The topic doesn't often come up in day-to-day conversation. But those occasions when it does are usually important. I've found that setting aside time for a few math lessons provides major benefits for my students, giving them words they can use to express themselves more clearly the next time they're helping their kids with homework, figuring out a work schedule, or arguing about a bill. ●

What's So Different About Math? *continued*

perspectives, making effective use of their diverse experiences. Teachers orchestrate discourse to highlight mathematical meaning, thinking, generalizing, seeking the most efficient or insightful solution methods, and eliciting the “what if” questions of problem posing.

In the classroom: *Get it Together: Math Problems for Groups, Grades 4-12*, by Tim Erickson (Equals, Lawrence Hall of Science: 1989) is full of excellent cooperative problems that foster group work, math discourse, and a mathematics community in the classroom.

Myth # 5

Unlike reading and writing, math is not recursive and must be learned one step at time—No algebraic thinking, for instance, until students learn their times table.

Math learning spirals around a number of “big ideas.” For instance, algebra is a strand that crosses all areas of mathematics, a way to model mathematical situations and generalize patterns. Teachers can “pull out” and highlight the mathematically “big ideas” in the problems for particular attention in a pedagogical strategy not unlike the practice of literacy teachers who take a “whole-part-whole” approach to reading.

In the classroom: *Problem of the Week* series by Linda Griffin and Glenda DeMoss (Instructional Fair: 1998) embeds algebraic thinking within engaging problems that students at different levels can approach with different ‘big ideas’ highlighted in the solution.

Also see these suggested curricula: *Connected Mathematics Curriculum, 6th grade*, Pearson Prentice Hall; *EMPower*, TERC; *Navigations Series*, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

Myth #6: Teaching real world mathematics means that teachers don't need to worry about mathematical structure.

Important as context is for establishing meaning, we must also promote understanding of the structure of mathematics. Numbers also derive meaning from their relation to other numbers in the number system. Frank Smith, who has written extensively on literacy learning, wrestles with the difficulties students have learning math. In *The Glass Wall* (2002), Smith draws a bright line between the natural language of context and mathematical language. Our students should have the opportunity to enter the world of mathematical language rather than just view it with frustration from the other side of “the glass wall” to borrow Smith’s metaphor. Although traditional school math has failed so many of our students, they should not be relegated to a second-rate “consumer” numeracy curriculum that is the staple of too many ABE programs.

In the classroom: We provide plenty of opportunities for students to play with numbers and number systems. We want students to be able to understand and explain why the algorithms they use work. They explore non-standard and multicultural base systems. Our classroom problems and puzzles are often “artificial” insofar as they lay bare the mathematical structure, particularly when we are scaffolding for a challenging non-routine problem.

A resource for teachers that provides problems, math history, and mathematical explanations and theory is *Math Matters: Grades K-8, Understanding the Math You Teach*, 2nd Edition, by Suzanne H. Chapin and Art Johnson (Math Solutions Publications: 2006).

Myth #7

Unlike reading and writing, mathematics isn't essential.

Our students need math not only to get a job and pass through the various gates guarded by math tests, in this digitalized and quantified

society they also need mathematical understanding to read a newspaper and participate actively in civic discourse as citizens. The civil rights leader and educator Robert Moses, who founded the Algebra Project for African American youth, declares the demand for quality mathematics education the “new civil rights” movement: “So algebra, once solely in place as the gatekeeper for higher math, now is the gatekeeper for citizenship; and people who don't have it are like the people who couldn't read and write in the industrial age.” (*Radical Equations*: 2001)

MYTH #8

Although literacy teachers should have professional knowledge of the reading process to teach literacy, similar professional knowledge is not required for math instruction.

Good literacy teachers develop deep understanding of the reading process and an expert knowledge of appropriate materials to be better able to assess and engage student thinking about text and meaning. Similarly, good math teachers have professional knowledge of students' mathematical thinking, and they have a repertoire of engaging problems. Literacy teachers take their students' reading miscues as occasions for planning effective instruction. What would we think of a reading teacher who merely corrected her students' mistakes? Yet many math teachers limit their teaching to corrections and practice. In math as in reading, mistakes can be a rich site of learning for individual students, small groups, or an entire class.

A Collection of Math Lessons Series (Marilyn Burns, Math Solutions Publications) provides classroom lessons and discussions that help teachers support and scaffold student learning.

MYTH #9

Unlike reading and writing, it is not important to do math for pleasure.

Literacy learners become more proficient readers through engagement with a wide variety of authentic texts, including texts that are read for pleasure. Similarly, students develop as better mathematical thinkers and problem solvers when they experience the pleasure of “figuring it out.” Solving math problems and puzzles is fun.

See <http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html> and <http://www.setgame.com/> for fun online games and activities.

MYTH #10

MEG meetings are for math nerds who never have trouble with algebra.

In fact, very few MEG members have a math background, and MEG especially welcomes literacy teachers who want to build on their knowledge of literacy learning to become better math teachers. MEG monthly meetings are open to all who are interested in teaching mathematics to adult learners. E-mail us at nycmeg@yahoo.com to join our mailing list. ●

Basemah Atweh: We Hear of Things, We Change

> Basemah Atweh enrolled in a beginning class at the Open Book (a community-based literacy program in Brooklyn from 1985 to 2002) in 1986. From the outset she was a leader, participating in the decision-making process and encouraging other students to do the same. She was an early member of Adult United Voices, a city-wide student advocacy group. Later she helped found the Arab American Support Center in Bay Ridge, which offered ESOL classes and other services. Tragically, she died in a car crash.

This is an excerpt from "Ittebad Means Unity," one of three stories published by the Open Book in I See a Part of Myself: Voices from the Community (1993).

John Gordon

I started meeting other battered women, mostly Arabic women. I see worse from what I went through and sometimes I feel it's too much for me. But no, it's not too much, because I was

there, in their place, and at the beginning I didn't get any help. ... I didn't even know about these things.

So I think, let me get involved more. Maybe from this person to the other person, we hear of things, we change....

A couple of years ago, I started a group with some Arabic women. We named it *Ittehad* which means "united" in Arabic. Every week we meet, and we see what's going on with them and help. Most of the women call every day just to talk. They leave messages on my machine and I don't even have the time to call them back. Lots of women stop by without even calling. My house is a place where they feel safe and welcome.

I see part of myself inside each woman the first time I meet them. I hope I can take some of their fear away. I share some of my experiences so they know they are not the only ones being abused. I dream of us working together and helping each other. I want all women to be able to stand up for themselves the way I did.

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