



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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When Words Get in the Way

The Importance of Health Literacy

> by Rima Rudd, Sc.D., MSPH *Harvard School of Public Health*

Health policymakers, researchers, and practitioners are recognizing that *when words get in the way*, the health of adults and their families can suffer: low-literate adults can get lost in the health-care system, lose their benefits and their rights, and endanger their lives. Surgeon General Richard Carmona notes that health literacy is the “currency of success” for improving emergency preparedness, eliminating health disparities, and preventing disease. One of the goals in *Healthy People 2010*, the document that sets 10-year health objectives for the nation, is improving health literacy. Policymakers are starting to recognize the important role adult

education can play in improving health literacy. Adult educators work, after all, with the same populations those in the health field call “vulnerable” or “at risk”: people who have less than a high school education, who are poor, who are members of minority groups, who are immigrants, or who are over the age of 65.

The Health Perspective

These groups are more likely than others in our country to have poor health and to die of a chronic disease; they are less likely to make use of disease prevention services. A report by the Department of Health and Human Services entitled *Health, United States, 1998*

documented the links between health and education and between health and income described in many studies over the years. The more recent report, *Health, United States, 2002*, notes that differences in health status persist between those who are poor and those who are not, between those who are from racial and ethnic minority groups and those classified as “White, non-Hispanic,” and between elderly and working-age adults. The poor and near poor are much more likely than others to be uninsured but are in greater need of access to health services.

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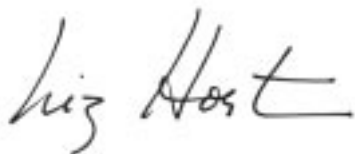
Change and Commitment

> by Elizabeth Horton LAC Board of Directors

Stepping down as chair of the Board of Directors of the Literacy Assistance Center has brought out the teacher in me: I've been thinking about how hard it is to bring about change, to help a learner (or an organization) grow and become stronger, to lead people toward the fulfillment of their dreams and goals. I began my professional career as an adult literacy teacher, so I know the importance of flexibility, of seeing challenges as opportunities, and of finding the resiliency necessary to open new doors when the usual ones seem closed. I understand the pleasure of working with a committed community of learners and educators. And I have experienced the satisfaction of making a difference, of having a positive effect on the quality of life of our city as a whole.

In my five-plus years as board chair, there's been plenty of call for all those qualities, and there have been many opportunities to share the pleasures and satisfactions. The LAC has undergone deep changes. Some were reactions to social, economic, and political forces beyond our control; the past two years have been particularly tumultuous in that respect as we weathered 9/11, a change in leadership, and a deep cut in public funding, taking each crisis as an opportunity for growth. Other changes were undertaken more intentionally to strengthen the LAC and the NYC adult literacy community in general; for instance, we've taken on new areas of focus such as health literacy and family literacy in response to the needs of the community. All these changes have taken hard work on the part of a lot of people; they've required every ounce of our flexibility, resilience, and persistence. As a result of these efforts, the LAC has become a strong, independent organization with clear program goals, exceptional leadership and staffing, a stable and diversified financial base, and a growing constituency of educators and programs who are involved in our work.

Though I am handing over leadership of the LAC board to Karen Proctor, vice-president for community relations at Scholastic, Inc. (see back cover), I will continue to serve as a member of the board, and so I look forward to continuing to be part of the LAC and of the city's adult literacy community. Change may be a constant, but the one thing that never changes is our mission. I believe deeply—all of us here at the LAC believe deeply, as you do—in the power of education to address the challenges we face as individuals and collectively as a society. And I can't think of any people with whom it could be more satisfying to share a mission than all of you! ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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> by **Leslie Martin** *Sgt. Henry Johnson Youth Leadership Academy, South Kortright, New York*

Where do they go and what do they study—your former students (or family members and friends of students) who end up being incarcerated? What finishing schools do the felonious dropouts, the slow readers, the brilliant underachievers attend? Do books exist, and are they read, in prisons? What stimulation can bars and stainless steel offer?

The kind of literacy instruction offered in upstate New York correctional institutions depends on the governmental level of incarceration, the age of the incarcerated person, the institution's attitude toward rehabilitation, and the mandatory status of the academic program.

County Jails

The 60 counties in New York State have a comparable number of jails, which hold short-term local offenders and those awaiting trial. Time for these people is full of the stress of not knowing what the future holds for them and the loneliness and boredom that result from a dearth of programmed activities.

County jails rely on volunteers and per diem tutors to provide individual or small-group literacy instruction. Attendance in education programs is neither mandatory nor a right unless the inmate is under 21; education is viewed as a privilege. The state's regional adult education staff development consortia work to provide ABE and GED instruction. In addition to a literacy component, this instruction includes vocational and life skills to prepare inmates to return to society.

State Prisons

Seventy state correctional facilities house approximately 70,000 adult inmates. More than half of these have committed nonviolent crimes; fully one-third are drug offenders serving long prison terms under the Rockefeller laws. Time for these people is somewhat more programmed than at the county level; many are remanded to drug treatment centers after serving part of their sentences.

Literacy education in state prisons is limited. The state employs instructors to provide education to inmates who do not have high school diplomas. Often trained as elementary and secondary school teachers, these educators may work in a public school during the day and in the prison system at night. One exception to this model is the shock incarceration camps, where education is mandatory regardless of the inmate's educational level. All inmates attend heterogeneously grouped classes, functioning in cohort groups during a stringent six-month behavior modification programs. Full-time and part-time teachers deliver ABE and GED instruction to shock inmates.

Juvenile Detention

Approximately 30 juvenile detention centers in New York State house young people whose offenses range from skipping school to violent crimes. They are frightened, angry, and teenaged. Since the state is responsible for their education, the instructional program aims to replicate high school education.

Full-time teachers employed by the state deliver literacy programs in three sequences, depending on the student's age and aptitude. Those young enough to return to regular public school after detention, with a reasonable hope of graduating in a timely fashion, take Regents courses. Those who are old enough and have accumulated few high school credits study for the GED. Those who are functionally illiterate—often classified as special education students—receive ABE instruction and prepare for high school competency tests or pre-GED programs.

Change and Second Chances

Literacy education in upstate correctional facilities is as varied as adult education can be. Its clients are nontraditional students who often have behavioral and emotional problems as well as learning disabilities. Its teachers vary immensely: retired military personnel, per-diem employees covered under someone else's insurance, second-job teachers putting their own children through college, well-intentioned volunteers who believe in change and second chances.

I have worked in corrections in upstate New York for many years: at a shock incarceration camp, with mandated clients at a residential drug treatment facility, and at a boot camp juvenile detention center. The literacy instruction I have delivered has been as varied as the levels and learning styles of my students. I have teased vowels from the mouths of 200-pound men and made boys cry with the joy of learning. My students are a captive audience, and I am the best show in town. How do I teach literacy? By any means necessary: phonics, whole language, begging, pleading, even dancing and singing. In fact, I probably approach the teaching of literacy the way most adult educators who believe in the power of reading do: I teach reading as though I am the student's last chance for autonomy and real participation in civic life. ●

RESOURCES >> Websites for Students with Low Literacy Levels

> by Mariann Fedele *Coordinator of Instructional Technology*

The LAC's Instructional Technology staff receive many questions from practitioners who want to introduce learners to the Internet but are having difficulty finding websites—beyond those designed to provide instruction or language drill—that are appropriate for students with low-level literacy skills. Most content-rich web sites don't target adult new readers; even those that do can be difficult for students with very limited skills. Still, there are sites out there that are content rich, navigable, and written at an appropriate reading level. This article suggests criteria for evaluating websites for use with low-literacy students and recommends sites that meet those criteria.

Choosing Websites for Low-Literacy Students

The most important criteria in choosing websites for low-literacy students are readability and navigability. Reliability—currency of content and “knowing the source”—is always important, no matter what the students' level.

Readability

- > Clear, uncluttered pages
- > Text in large type with simple fonts
- > Simple graphic support that adds meaning to text
- > Contextualized writing
- > Simple vocabulary with limited jargon or technical language

Navigability

- > Intuitive organization, so you get where you expect to go
- > Limited need to scroll in order to read the text
- > No pop-up windows or distracting graphics or ads
- > “Bread crumb” trails showing where you are and how you got there
- > Clear buttons for moving back or forward

Setting Up for Success

You can help adult new readers have successful browsing experiences by structuring and facilitating their web sessions. The good news is that, even if a website is just beyond a student's reading level, compelling content that speaks to her real-life needs and interests will motivate her to tackle the text; good graphic support can help. Below are a few content-rich websites designed for adults with low-level literacy skills.

The Learning Edge

<http://thewclc.ca/edge>

The Learning Edge is one of the few resources available that is fully appropriate for students with very limited literacy skills. Produced and maintained by the Wellington County Learning Centre in Arthur, Ontario, this online newspaper offers many supportive features such as an animated audio introduction and a tour that guides readers step by step through site navigation. Unfortunately, the site is not being regularly updated; it includes only four editions, the last of which was created in June 2002. However, the feature articles don't focus on news; covering such topics as “Missing Work” and “Street Safety,” they remain relevant despite the lack of new content. Many features consist of listening activities accompanied by animation and followed by related quizzes and games.

The Beehive

www.thebeehive.org

A project of One Economy, a Washington-based multi-service nonprofit, Beehive offers easy-to-read text on a variety of topics including money, health, jobs, school, and family. Each section includes interactive features such as tutorials; for example, in the Money section, students can get a brief tutorial on how to write a check. Pre-GED students can explore the site independently, but students with more basic skills will need support.

The Key

www.keynews.org

This monthly periodical, also available in print, is published by the Milwaukee Area Technical College Office of Grants and Development. The Key targets adults reading at grade levels 4–8, with the aim of moving them toward using regular newspapers. Many articles are rewritten from mainstream news sources. Editor Ginny Balistreri points out that, while many of the articles are beyond the reach of very low-level readers, others are designed specifically for this population.

Easy to Read and Remember Pamphlets on HIV/AIDS Treatment

www.bcpwa.org/pubs_treatment_easy.php

Maintained by the British Columbia Persons with AIDS Society, this site offers PDF pamphlets on HIV/AIDS treatment. Written in plain, clear language, the pamphlets offer information on eleven subjects such as “Starting HIV Drugs” and “Women and HIV.” Short statements in a large, clear font are accompanied by graphics. Since these documents were produced in March 2000, some of the more technical information may be outdated, but general information on such topics as working with doctors remains relevant.

Read Your Road

<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/media/ryr.htm>

Easy to navigate and visually appealing, this U.S. Department of Transportation guide to driving safety is written for adult new readers. It, too, appears not to have been updated recently, but then, basic safety information on such topics as traffic signs and sharing the road doesn't change much. Each chapter begins with a question on its topic and ends with the answer. This is a handy resource for students interested in obtaining a driver's license. ●

Literacy Recognition Award Nominations

The LAC is soliciting nominations for its 19th annual Literacy Recognition Awards, which honor outstanding practitioners working in New York City literacy programs. Candidates may be nominated by peers, supervisors, or students. The 2004 award ceremony will take place in the spring, date and place to be announced. Eligible candidates must be:

- > Program administrators, teachers, volunteers, counselors, staff developers, or support staff members
- > Currently employed in a BE, ESOL, math, BENL, GED, family literacy, health literacy, or related program
- > Outstanding in their contribution to their students, their program, or the NYC literacy community

Nomination forms are being mailed to NYC program managers. The form can also be downloaded from our website at www.lacnyc.org/announcements. Nominations are due January 23, 2004. If you have questions, contact Tony Pupello at 212.803.3330 or tonyp@lacnyc.org.

Family Literacy Conference

The LAC and the St Nicholas Community Development Corporation will sponsor "Making Community Connections for Education" a collaborative conference for parents, caregivers, families, youth, children and parent educators on March 13, 9 am–4 pm, at Grand Street High School in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. Over 800 community members from Brooklyn and around NYC are expected to attend this free, day-long conference supported by the Altman Foundation, Scholastic, Verizon, and others. The conference will offer workshops for professionals, parents, and parents and children together; it will feature an extensive resource fair. Please see the LAC website or the March/April issue of *Literacy Update* for more details and registration information.

Media Literacy and Video Production Project

Are you interested in true civic participation? Do you wish you and your students could be creators, rather than just consumers, of what's on TV? The LAC, with funding from Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN, Manhattan's public access cable channel), is offering a small group of teachers the opportunity to receive intensive training and technical assistance to introduce media literacy to their classes by designing and creating, with their students, short videos on autobiographical themes. All training will be free of charge and will take place at the LAC and at the studios of MNN. This is an excellent opportunity to implement a short project that integrates technology and media with participatory education concepts. Finished videos will be shown on MNN cable channels and aired at public screenings.

Training will take place over five sessions. To qualify, applicants submit a short application, with the approval of their program manager, by February 4. The application has been mailed to program managers and is available on the LAC website at www.lacnyc.org/announcements. For more information, contact Mariann Fedele at 212.803.3325 or mariannf@lacnyc.org.

NYC ABE Conference Call for Presenters

The planning committee for the 25th Annual New York City Adult Basic Education Conference, "ABE 2004: Remembering Our Roots, Strengthening the Journey," has issued a call for presenters. The conference will take place on Saturday, May 8, at Fashion Industries High School in Manhattan; several concurrent workshop sessions will be scheduled. Suggested topics for adult literacy practitioners include GED preparation, health literacy, civics, oral communication, multi-level EOSL instruction, math, technology, workforce preparation, and others. Application forms have been mailed to program managers and are available on the LAC's website at www.lacnyc.org/announcements; applications are due January 31. For more information, contact Carolyn Fernando, 212-620-0340, x355.

ABE/GED Classroom Practices Survey

The National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Rutgers University solicits responses from ABE and GED instructors to an online survey on classroom practices. Results of this survey, part of a research project intended to classify the types of instruction typically used in adult literacy classes, will help literacy professionals, researchers, and policymakers better understand what takes place in adult literacy classrooms. Those who teach or have taught ABE or GED classes within the last five years are invited to take the survey, found at http://ncsall-ru.gse.rutgers.edu/surveyProgram/surveys/Ncsall_Ru_Classroom_Practices_Survey.html. Survey respondents will be entered in a drawing to win one of three \$250 professional development grants.

Register Early for March Conferences

National Conference on Family Literacy

National Center for Family Literacy
March 1–3, Orlando, FL
www.familit.org

National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs

March 5–9, Tampa
www.naasln.org or 800.496.9222

Leaning Disabilities Association of America

March 17–20, Atlanta
www.lदानatl.org or 412.341.1515

TESOL

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
March 29–April 3, Long Beach, CA
www.tesol.org or 703.836.0774 ●

Jan. 7

What's New in ALIES? Release 5.0

Wednesday, January 7, 10 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Megan Whalen

This workshop will introduce participants to new features of the ALIES software for FY2004. It will introduce new data entry features and the changes that have been made to existing features. It will also demonstrate new reporting features and the changes that have been made to existing reports. It will conclude with a discussion of the data that will be carried over from last fiscal year, followed by a question-and-answer period.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Jan. 12

BEST Plus Training

Monday, January 12, 9 am–4 pm

Presenter: Center for Applied Linguistics

The State Education Department (SED), in accordance with the accountability provisions of the National Reporting System (NRS)/Workforce Investment Act (WIA), has mandated that the BEST Plus test be used as an oral assessment tool in all SED-funded ESOL programs, replacing the NYSPlace test. Accordingly, SED has contracted with the Center for Applied Linguistics to conduct a series of training sessions on how to administer the BEST Plus test. Each SED-funded program is required to send the person responsible for overseeing ESOL testing to one of these all-day training sessions. Each session is limited to 25 persons. **Only one person from each program is allowed to attend.** The deadline for registration is Wednesday, January 7.

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

Jan. 13

BEST Plus Training

Tuesday, January 13, 9 am–4 pm

See January 12 for description. **The deadline for registration is Wednesday, January 7.**

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

Jan. 20

GED Teleconference

Tuesday, January 20, 9:45 am–noon

Staff from the State Education Department's (SED) GED Testing Office will provide a review of, and answer questions on, the "most asked about" areas, such as age eligibility, correct use of attachments, and testing accommodations. New information will be shared on 2003 statewide testing data and 2004 Spanish and French testing changes. In addition, SED adult literacy regional representatives will be on hand to answer questions on a variety of GED preparation program issues.

The teleconference will begin promptly at 10 am.

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

Jan. 20 & 21

ALIES Data Entry Training

Tuesday, January 20, 10 am–4 pm

Wednesday, January 21, 10 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman

From ALIES installation through ALIES reporting, this training provides a step-by-step introduction to the ALIES software and the data entry process. Highlights include installing and upgrading ALIES, inputting data, updating data, generating Data Management Reports, using the Ad-Hoc Reporting tool, and running the NRS Data Check Reports. New data entry users, as well as those in need of a refresher, are invited to attend this event. Please attend both days.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319 or donc@lacnyc.org.

Jan. 22

BEST Plus Training

Thursday, January 22, 9 am–4 pm

See January 12 for description. **The deadline for registration is Wednesday, January 7.**

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

Jan. 23

ESOL Teacher Share

Using Video Cameras in the ESOL Classroom

Friday, January 23, 1:30–4 pm

Presenter: Silvana Vasconcelos, Queens Borough Public Library

Vasconcelos will describe how she used the video camera in her project-based ESOL instruction to help students take charge of their own language learning. Hands-on activities will illustrate the entire process, documenting a project in process. Students use the video footage to reflect on the progress of their literacy and language learning.

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

Feb. 6

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

Session 1: Number

Friday, February 6, 1:30 pm–5 pm

Presenters: Denise Deagan & Solange Farina, NYC Math Exchange Group

This is the first workshop in a four-session series designed to introduce pre-GED and GED math instructors to methods and resources that will enable them to better facilitate instruction around the four major strands of the new GED math test: Number, Data, Geometry, and Algebra. Participants will explore a series of engaging math problems appropriate for pre-GED and GED classes; many of these problems will be drawn from several National Science Foundation-funded math curricula, including the math curriculum currently being used by the New York City Department of Education. As participants further develop their own problem-solving abilities and strategies, they will learn how to generate a similar problem-solving culture in their classrooms. Many useful classroom handouts will be provided.

Attendance at all four sessions is not required; however, space is limited, and registration is essential.

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

Feb. 11

Foundation Training: Instructional Technology Curriculum Development

Use of technology has become a central part of what it means to be a literate adult. Adult language and literacy instructors, therefore, need to integrate technology into their curriculum—but they want to do so intentionally, keeping in mind the basic principles of adult education and the needs of the learners. This three-session series builds on the foundation theories and principles of adult literacy instruction, such as active learning, to help instructors make technology a central part of their program. The series features research-based methodologies, examples from practice, and specific projects that participants can use in the classroom. Each session will build on the previous one, so we encourage participants to attend all three. By the end of the training, participants will have developed a project plan for their classrooms. This series is intended for GED, ABE, and ESOL instructors who want to make better use of technology in their programs.

Session 1: Technology and Adult Learning
Wednesday, February 11, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Learn about and discuss some of the foundation principles of adult learning and how they can inform the integration of technology into the classroom.

See the March/April issue of *Literacy Update* for future sessions in this series:

March 19: Cooperative Learning in Instruction
April 16: Project-Based Learning

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

Feb. 17

BEST Plus Training

Tuesday, February 17, 9 am–4 pm

See January 12 for description.

The deadline for registration is Wednesday, January 7.

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

Feb. 18

BEST Plus Training

Wednesday, February 18, 9 am–4 pm

See January 12 for description.

The deadline for registration is Wednesday, January 7.

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

Feb. 24

ALIES Reports Training

Tuesday, February 24, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitator: Olga Gazman

This hands-on training will feature an overview of the different types of ALIES reports and the applications of these reports in real-world scenarios. The training will also include a discussion on how to make better use of ALIES reports for program management and improvement. Highlights include Data Management Reports, Ad-Hoc Reports, Data Check Reports, and Funding Reports such as EPE and NRS. This training is for experienced ALIES users who want to learn more about reports.

RSVP: Don Campbell at 212.803.3319
or donc@lacnyc.org.

Feb. 27

Perspectives on Family Literacy

Friday, February 27, 9:30 am–4 pm

Presenters: Janet Isserlis, Assistant Director, Literacy Resources/RI, Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University
Marguerite Lukes, Literacy Assistance Center

There's more than one way to promote family literacy. This workshop will explore models of family literacy that build on families' resources and strengths rather than approaching families as "problems" to be solved or remediated. One approach to such a stance is the multiple-literacies approach—the recognition that parents may have many ways of sharing language with their children that go beyond reading storybooks encountered in school. This workshop will help participants to examine their own approaches to family literacy and explore ways to incorporate a multiple-literacies approach.

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

Learn how to select the software and websites most appropriate for your curriculum and how to integrate popular office software into project-based learning in our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab. 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. From professional development resources to ABE curricula, our collection features a diverse array of books, journals, and audiovisual resources. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

STOPPING ILLITERACY AT THE SOURCE

The Case for a National Adult Education and Literacy System

> by Tom Sticht *International Consultant in Adult Education*

Q: Why do we have all these adults who are practically illiterate? Why can't they read?

A: Because the high schools are graduating functional illiterates. So we need to fix the high schools so they stop sending functional illiterates out into the world.

Q: Why don't the high schools teach students to read before they graduate?

A: It's too late. The middle schools keep sending the high schools students who can't read, so the high schools can't teach the academic subjects they need to teach while also teaching students to read. The middle schools need to stop sending students who can't read to high school.

Q: Why don't the middle schools teach students to read before they send them on to high school?

A: It's too late. The primary grades keep sending the middle schools students who can't read, so the middle schools can't teach the subjects they are supposed to teach to prepare the students for high school and also teach the kids to read. The elementary schools need to stop sending students to middle school who can't read.

Q: Why don't the elementary schools teach students to read before they send them on to middle school?

A: It's too late. Parents keep sending children who have not been prepared to learn to read to elementary school. We need a preschool, like Head Start, to prepare children to learn to read so they can learn to read in elementary school so they can learn pre-high school subjects in middle school so they can learn high school subjects and graduate from high school fully literate and able to contribute to society.

Q: Why do so many children have to go to Head Start to get prepared to learn to read? Why don't parents prepare them at home?

A: It's too late—it's already too late when the children are born. Too many young parents are themselves functionally illiterate. It's not just that they can't prepare their children to learn to read. Such adults with low literacy skills can't make informed choices about good prenatal and postnatal care, and they can't afford such care anyway because they can't qualify for well-paying jobs.

What we need is a high-quality, well-funded Adult Education and Literacy System that will prepare adults for parenting and for profitable work that will permit them to provide for their own and their children's health. Then they'll be able to send their children to school prepared to learn to read and to support them through elementary, middle and high school. Then high school students will graduate with the literacy skills they need to participate fully in society.

It is not too late. Adult literacy education contributes to the solution of both present and future problems of adult literacy.

Adapted from the AAACE-NLA listserv, posted October 8, 2003, with the permission of Dr. Sticht.

>> JOBS in literacy

A more extensive and up-to-date list of employment ads is available online at www.lacnyc.org/jobs.

Literacy Hotline Volunteers

The LAC operates a Literacy Hotline that refers over 24,000 students annually to appropriate education & employment programs. To assist us in effectively meeting student needs & responding to caller requests, we seek volunteers who can provide efficient customer service via telephone contact; dedicate a minimum of 4 hrs a day, 1 or more times a wk (M-F, 10 am-2 pm and/or noon-4 pm); commit to volunteering for a period of at least 3 months; speak English, Spanish, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, or Russian. The LAC assures a secure & comfortable working environment for each volunteer. Volunteers will be trained to clarify caller needs & to use a computerized database to identify appropriate programs to meet those needs. Contact Dianne Powell, Director of Outreach & Referral, at 212.803.3355.

Literacy/GED Instructor (PT)

Work with adolescents, ages 16-21. 20 hrs/wk. M-F; 9 am-1 pm. MA in ed. & 3 yrs. exp. working with youth pref.

Job Developer (PT)

Work with adolescents, ages 16-21. Teach work-readiness skills & monitor youth in subsidized work placements.

15 hrs/wk. MA & exp. working with youth pref.

Résumé to Aileen Halleran, SC, Flowers with Care, Youth Services Program, 23-40 Astoria Blvd., Astoria, NY 11102; fax 718.728.8817.

Teacher

Even Start project seeks 2 part-time or 1 full-time experienced teacher(s) for Basic Education, GED, &/or ESOL classes for parents in Project STARS, an Even Start family literacy program.

Résumé to Genevieve Vincent, Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College CUNY, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. West, Bronx, NY 10468-1589; or email geneviev@lehman.cuny.edu

To place a free employment ad, email publications@lacnyc.org or fax 212.785.3685.

Please indicate whether you would like your ad to appear in the March/April issue of the *Literacy Update* (due date February 2) or on the web only.

When Words Get in the Way *continued*

The Adult Education Dilemma

Studies by researchers at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) indicated that adult education directors, teachers, and students were all interested in health issues. In addition, health topics engaged adult students and increased interest, motivation, and persistence. Though the directors and teachers participating in the NCSALL studies were quick to point out that a focus on health topics is not really the business of ABE, ESOL, or GED programs, they agreed that health subjects can and should be incorporated in lessons to enrich discussion and to engage students, as long as the focus remains on improving reading, writing, language, and math skills.

Recent developments at NCSALL can help both health and literacy practitioners to shift their attention from health *content* to health *skills*. Reading, writing, vocabulary, verbal presentation, oral comprehension, mathematical computation—these are all critical skills needed in managing one’s health. These skills represent, of course, the very core of adult educators’ expertise. Health literacy study circles, like those currently being implemented in New York City, enable teachers to incorporate needed health literacy skills in their curriculum.

Focus on Health-Related Skills in Adult Education

To develop such study circles, the NCSALL researchers began by defining and delineating critical health literacy skills. First, we looked at the many kinds of tasks adults undertake to safeguard their health and that of their loved ones. They make decisions about food purchases and preparation. They buy home products including over-the-counter medicines, cleaning chemicals, appliances, and equipment. On the job, they conform to safety rules and reduce exposure to harmful chemicals. They may take action in their communities or in the voting booth on public health issues such as air and water quality. They may take action to prevent disease later in life, such as quitting smoking. They may have screening tests for early discovery of disease or be immunized against communicable diseases. Our health system also requires that people have some kind of insurance, which means that adults have to fill out forms and compare health care plans.

These activities all involve critical skills: prose reading skills for gathering health information from newspapers, magazines, or booklets; document reading skills for making sense of labels, charts, and graphs; writing skills for completing forms; math skills for calculating risk, comparing benefits, and measuring medications and determining when to take them. Patients also need presentation skills, along with a broad vocabulary related to symptoms and feelings, in order to describe illness onset and health history to health workers.

The health studies team of NCSALL is developing materials to help teachers address such skills. Based on documented disparities and on the goals set out in *Healthy People 2010*, we decided to focus on three critical areas: navigation, management of chronic disease, and screening and early detection.

The interest in *navigation* grows out of a recognition that many people in the U.S. do not find or receive the services to which they are entitled. The set of skills under this heading will help adults obtain health care services and maintain their rights as they interact with health and social service agencies. The group of skills under the heading *management of chronic disease* is of critical concern because of the documented burden of chronic disease among the poor and because of unnecessary deaths among people with less than a high school education. The focus on *prevention and early detection* grows out of the recognition that most adult learners do not use or do not have access to preventive services. The NCSALL health literacy studies are available at ncsall.gse.harvard.edu.

A focus on skill development with attention to health-related demands can increase learner interest and motivation. Lessons that use health examples or actual health-related materials or that focus on application of math and writing skills in health care can actually help learners lead healthier lives—while enhancing, rather than detracting from, the central mission of adult education programs. Partnerships with public health officials and medical and dental providers can supplement these efforts.

Partnership with Health Practitioners and Health Services

Health professionals are beginning to see the value of partnering with adult education specialists in order to understand how adults learn, as well as to improve their communication skills and the design of health messages. Dentists, doctors, pharmacists, nurses, psychologists, and other health practitioners can certainly learn from the experiences of adult learners. In return, they could come to classes to engage adult learners in problem solving and discussion, provide vital health information, and even offer tours of health facilities.

We can support health literacy by considering both the skills needed for active engagement and the barriers erected by currently available materials and demanding processes. The skills of the lay public and of health professionals must be enhanced, while the barriers must be decreased. Because adult education programs already focus on many of the skills adults need to become active partners and decision makers for their own health and that of family members, coworkers, and neighbors, such programs are vital to the effort to improve the nation’s health literacy.

For more information about health literacy and for links to other health sources, go to the Harvard School of Public Health website at www.hsph.harvard.edu. ●

Teaching Soft Skills in Employment Programs

> by Petra Harris Maxwell & Dan Farbman *Vocational Foundation, Inc.*

Founded in 1936, Vocational Foundation, Inc., (VFI) is one of the country's oldest workforce development agencies serving educationally and economically disadvantaged 17- to 21-year-olds. VFI provides students with six months of full-time occupational and academic training along with counseling and job placement assistance. Recently we have considerably expanded the "soft skills" portion of our curriculum.

Challenges and Solutions in Workforce Development

Historically, our curriculum focused on vocational or "hard skills" training, with only 105 hours per semester devoted to "soft skills" such as résumé writing and business communication. Over the past few years, however, social and economic changes forced us to take a hard look at our training program. The population was becoming harder to serve, and employers were raising the bar considerably for entry-level workers. As our placement and retention rates declined, we knew we needed to make some changes.

A six-month study revealed that we needed, among other things, to place a great deal more emphasis on both literacy and soft skills training. We more than doubled the number of hours devoted to soft skills, including lessons in diction, effective listening, interview techniques, self-esteem development, nonverbal communication, stress management, decision making, financial management, and handling conflicts in the workplace.

The paradox posed by a soft skills program is that students need to have already the skills they are there to acquire—essential classroom tools such as respect, listening, and clear communication—in order to learn. Any population in need of a soft skills program is also in danger of failing to complete that program. Teaching such students requires creativity, agility, and, above all, patience, as instructor Dan Farbman explains below.

Challenges and Solutions in the Classroom

The stated purpose of the Soft Skills curriculum is to help socialize students to the work environment so that they can retain jobs. Each class is composed of 20–25 students, ages 17–21, whose educational level ranges from remedial to advanced. Classes meet for an hour and a half every weekday. The overt content of the sessions focuses on workplace issues: résumé writing, interviewing skills, appropriate attire, vocabulary, etiquette, and other such outward manifestations of soft skills. However, my challenge is to structure our discussions about these topics so as to tease out the more fundamental lessons of the program: respect, self-esteem, patience, and open-mindedness. These concepts are difficult to approach head on. More often I find it is better to let the students discover them for themselves.

To create a classroom structure that (somewhat covertly) promotes these essential values, I start with a set of daily traditions that provide a healthy structure no matter what the content of the lesson. Every class begins with five minutes of free writing: writing that will never be read by a teacher; writing that is meant to be quiet meditation. The remaining time is divided between practical exercises—role plays, mock interviews, games—and more abstract class discussion. For example, I may write a broad topic, such as "violence," on the board and have students brainstorm their reactions. Then I'll use their answers to guide the discussion toward more focused conversation on handling workplace conflict.

Every Friday is devoted to a class meeting: a forum in which students can speak on whatever topic they chose, from sex and drugs to frustrations with the program; the only restriction is that the discussion remain mature and controlled. Making such activities into a routine creates the beginnings of a classroom culture in which open communication and respect are the rule. Students have a forum in which they can really be heard—which is often a new experience for them.

I work to create an atmosphere where breakthroughs can happen, and then to encourage my students to take advantage of them when they do. I have to be flexible and willing to relinquish even the most cherished lesson plan when the class is moving in a positive direction along another path. Thus, beyond the overarching structure, it can be difficult to predict what a given session will look like. Every day, I use inappropriate behavior—outbursts, laughter, rudeness, or boredom—as teaching tools. Since such problems usually arise from lack of the very soft skills I'm trying to impart, discussion gets us closer to our goal than does punishment. Recently, for example, a shouting match between two students, one of whom is homosexual, turned into a discussion on tolerance that energized the whole group. Some in the class were forced to see their own prejudices in a new light. This valuable moment would have been lost had I simply kicked the students out of class for being disruptive.

The experience of the classroom culture I'm trying to promote ends up being more instructive than any specific lesson could possibly be. Ideally, my students leave class with skills they never knew they were acquiring. ●

GED Testing Office Update

The state GED testing office issued the following updates in November.

French and Spanish Tests

There will be no French GED testing during the month of January 2004. The GED Testing Service has just informed us that there will be a delay in the release of the new 2004 French GED test. Due to this delay, testing on the new version of the French GED test is now scheduled to begin in New York State on February 1, 2004. The current version of the French GED tests will not be administered after December 31, 2003, and all French language candidates with partial passing scores prior to January 1, 2004, must retest on the complete test battery beginning February 1, 2004; they will be considered first-time testers.

The release of the new version of the Spanish GED test is on schedule and will be administered after January 1, 2004, as planned. Spanish testers with partial scores prior to January 1 will also be treated as first-time testers.

Test Information

Test information for all testers, including those from 2002 and 2003, can now be accessed through the automated **GED Testing Hotline** at 518.474.5906. The system has been reformatted and has all new prompts, so listen carefully to the instructions. This system will give only pass/fail results and will not release scores or diploma numbers.

Beginning around the first of the year, GED testers will receive something new with their diplomas and transcripts. A congratulatory letter from NYSED Commissioner Richard P. Mills, along with contact information for education and employment services, will be sent to individuals who have earned a high school equivalency diploma. Those who were not successful will also be acknowledged by Commissioner Mills and will be encouraged to participate in a GED preparation program.

Preparation Program Reports

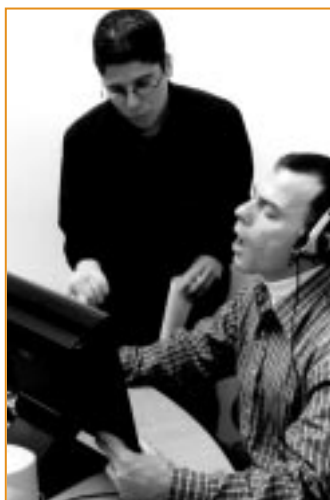
The accuracy of GED preparation program reports has improved this year due to the use of valid preparation codes on Attachment C for Alternative High School Equivalency Preparation (AHSEP) program students and Attachment M for HSE/GED students. However, we have had reports of improper use of Attachment M. This form is **only** for those students who were **enrolled** in a HSE/GED preparation program and **were referred to test by that same program**. Though all GED test sites must honor a valid Attachment M, individuals without an Attachment M cannot be barred from taking the test; they simply will not be allowed to use a GED preparation program code on testing materials.

Although we strongly recommend that test candidates take the Official Practice Test (OPT) before being referred to the GED test, documentation of OPT scores is not required at this time. However, this may be required at some time in the near future.

Please contact the state GED test office at ged@mail.nysed.gov if you are aware of any discrepancies with the use of Attachment M or the requirement of OPT scores. ●

La Familia Technology Week

On October 18, 2003, the LAC hosted an open house for La Familia Technology Week, a nationwide effort, sponsored by Career Communications Group (CCG) and IBM, to address and bridge the digital divide. Guided by Mariann Fedele (left), coordinator of instructional technology, participants explored the wealth of free web-based applications and multimedia resources available to Spanish-speaking ESOL students. Ellen Quish (center) of Laguardia Community College Adult Learning Center presented her instructor's guide "A Practitioner's Guide to Narrowing the Digital Divide between ESOL Adult Learners and Their Children." ●



Remembering Barbara Smith

Along with the rest of the literacy community, the LAC mourns the death of Barbara Smith, founder of the Hudson River Center, who succumbed to cancer on December 1, 2003. Barbara will long be remembered for her untiring efforts to produce high quality and nationally

recognized educational resources. Her contributions to adult literacy, education for homeless adults, AIDS and HIV prevention, corrections education, health literacy, and alcohol and substance abuse prevention provided guidance to many and helped to improve the lives of countless learners.

Memorial contributions in Dr. Smith's name may be made to Caring Together, Inc., 167 Winne Rd., Delmar, NY 12054, or Glens Falls Hospital Foundation/Cindy's Retreat Pruyn Pavilion, 102 Park St., Glens Falls, NY 12801. ●

NEW CHAIRPERSON FOR LAC BOARD

The LAC is pleased to welcome Karen Proctor as the new chairperson of our Board of Directors. Karen has served on our board for three years and replaces Elizabeth Horton of the National Council for Research for Women as chairperson effective January 1. (See Liz's letter as outgoing chair on page 2.)

Karen is vice-president of community affairs and government relations at Scholastic Inc., the global children's publishing and media company. In this role, she is responsible for design and implementation of Scholastic's corporate citizenship initiatives and for overseeing government relations practice. Under Karen's leadership, Scholastic has initiated programs and partnerships to meet the company's social mission of improving the well-being of children and families by promoting reading and literacy, particularly among underserved children in urban and rural areas.

Prior to joining Scholastic, Karen was the director of community relations at the National Basketball Association, where she worked to develop and implement national and local public service programs. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, Karen has also held public affairs and producing positions at C-SPAN, the cable television network, and KSFO/KYA radio in San Francisco.

Besides serving on the LAC's board, Karen is also a member of The Center for Corporate Citizenship's International Advisory Board; is on corporate advisory boards for the National Alliance of Urban Literacy Coalitions and the Children's Aid Society; and is vice-president and trustee of the M.R. Robinson Fund.

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