



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Environmental Literacy
- 4 Family Literacy Resources
- 6 New Instructional Methods Series
- 8 Integrating Civics into the Adult Education Classroom
- 10 Early Gains for Health Literacy Initiative Students

Beyond Compliance

Using NRS Data for Program Improvement

> Megan S. Whalen *Associate Director of ALIES & Data Analysis*

The Pros and Cons of NRS

When I was explaining an aspect of the National Reporting System (NRS) to my husband a couple of weeks ago, he asked a question that gave me pause. My husband is a teacher who has just moved from a private to a public high school. As a result, he's adjusting to a whole new level of assessment and accountability. Since the NRS—the government accountability system for state-administered, federally funded adult education programs—is at the core of what I do, we often compare notes on accountability systems in adult and K–12 education. As he listened to my explanation, he interrupted with a key question.

“Well, do you agree with it?” he asked.

My first instinct was to say, “Yes, these programs are receiving funds from

the Workforce Investment Act, and they need to provide evidence of their impact on the workforce. Plus, standardization provides a common language that enables the government to discuss and compare programs fairly across the nation.”

Then the voices of frustrated program managers I've worked with entered my head. While a common language may make comparing programs easier, many adult educators find NRS definitions difficult to implement. For instance, NRS policy dictates that a program cannot get credit for helping a student obtain a job until the student leaves the program. Though this is consistent with the goals of a workforce preparation program, where students learn a trade and then obtain a job, literacy practitioners (like many others) have a

broader view of education. They point out that teaching specific skills for one narrowly defined job does not actually prepare learners for today's rapidly changing job market. A student who gets a job as a home health aide, for instance, has achieved an important goal—but she is not “done” learning and should not have to leave the program if she also wants to obtain her GED.

The way NRS policy measures student learning has also created frustration for many program managers. NRS defines educational gain as movement from one of six educational functioning levels to the next; programs don't get credit for student learning until the student moves up a level. Program managers argue that monumental amounts of growth take place *within* NRS levels. For example, movement from NRS

continued on page 9

Where We Stand

> Elyse Barbell Rudolph *Executive Director*

The highlight of 2002 for the LAC—a rough year for us and for the NYC literacy community generally—was our participation in International Literacy Day at the United Nations. We mobilized the local literacy community, including learners, to attend the event and to learn about literacy as an international issue. The following February, the LAC also helped launch UN Literacy Decade 2003–2012.

Since then, our nation's reputation has plummeted internationally, and not only in terms of foreign relations. The U.S.—the richest and most powerful nation in the world—is far from being the most literate or the most involved in promoting the cause of literacy.

In every international survey I've found, the U.S. falls somewhere in the middle of literacy rankings of industrialized nations. The Program for International Student Assessment, for instance, tests the reading, math, and science literacy of 15-year-olds: In 2003, the U.S. ranked 23rd in the world. U.S. adults also demonstrate a mediocre level of literacy skills. Scholars Andrew Sum, Irwin Kirsch, and Robert Taggart compared International Adult Study of Literacy (IALS) test scores from the U.S. and 20 other high-income countries. The average score for all nations on the IALS test was 270 out of a possible 500. The U.S. average was 272, ranking us at number 9.

Meanwhile, we're not keeping up with other nations in raising awareness of literacy needs and literacy successes. In 1999, UNESCO's General Conference approved International Adult Learners' Week to encourage nations to organize learning festivals recognizing both the need for literacy services and the achievements of adult learners. Adult Learners' Weeks were held in other countries even before this international recognition. The U.S. may have initiated the idea with the American Association for the Advancement of Education in the late 1980s; however, the United Kingdom, in 1992, was the first nation to hold an Adult Learners' Week, closely followed by Australia, Jamaica, and South Africa.

You've probably never heard of Adult Learners' Week. That's because we don't have one. Countries that celebrate ALW include not only British Commonwealth nations but also a host of other nations from all the continents and from all levels of income and development. Over forty nations officially observed Adult Learners' Week last year. The U.S. was not one of them.

In this country, it has fallen to private enterprise, nonprofit organizations, and foundations to raise awareness of adult literacy needs. And it has fallen to us—the literacy community—to raise adult literacy levels. Largely because the need is unrecognized and the accomplishments of adult learners unsung, we don't get the support we need. We don't have a national infrastructure to support adult learning. We don't have the benefit of a No Parent (No Worker, No Citizen) Left Behind Act. Need I mention that we simply don't have enough funding?

I don't honestly think we'll be celebrating Adult Learners' Week in the U.S. in 2005 or 2006. The federal commitment just isn't there. But I do honestly think—no, I honestly know—that you'll be out there, in 2005 and 2006 and beyond, helping students improve their literacy levels and change their lives. Though the U.S. doesn't have a national literacy infrastructure, New York City has one of the best local infrastructures in the nation. Let's work to make it better. Let's step up our efforts to advocate together for our learners' interests. Let's keep on learning from and supporting each other. If the federal government won't make a commitment to you, I will. The LAC will be here, in 2005 and 2006 and beyond, serving as your support system in the best way we can. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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> *Christina Zarcadoolas, Ph.D. Center for Environmental Studies, Brown University*

Environmental hazards—such as asthma, lead poisoning, and toxic exposure—disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, toxic facilities are most often located in low-income neighborhoods. Approximately 66 percent of U.S. Latinos—25.6 million people—live in areas that do not meet the federal government’s air quality standards. Hispanic children are twice as likely as non-Hispanic white children to have blood lead levels above the threshold established by the Centers for Disease Control for risk of lead poisoning.

From understanding the risks of secondhand smoke to participating in discussions of abandoned industrial sites, environmental literacy refers to the wide range of skills and competencies needed to seek out, comprehend, evaluate, and use environmental information. As with health literacy, environmental literacy enables people to make informed choices, reduce their health risks, and improve the quality of their lives. Environmental literacy also equips people with the skills needed to help protect the environment.

A Comprehensive Model of Environmental Literacy

In my experience investigating health and environmental risks, I have found that individuals, especially those living in environmentally compromised communities, are willing and motivated to address environmental injustices, such as trash and rodent management issues, air pollution, indoor air quality, and toxic exposure. However, they need the skills to do this.

The most obvious barrier to environmental literacy is that much of the information is presented using complex, technical language. This language is often difficult for all people—not just ABE and ESOL students—to decipher. However, bridging the gap between the fundamental literacy of adult education students and the reading level of environmental/health information—by both teaching basic literacy and encouraging organizations to simplify their language—is not enough. Understandings of environmental literacy must go beyond addressing the language complexity of environmental content. Like current models of health literacy, environmental literacy must focus on helping individuals develop the skills and knowledge they need to make informed choices and to advocate for the health and environmental safety of themselves, their families, their communities.

To do this, environmental literacy requires an understanding of mass media, civics, and cultural dynamics, such as ethnic beliefs, customs, and peer group interactions. The ability to use the Internet for research as well as email correspondence is also a valuable skill. Along with basic literacy—that is, reading, writing, speaking, and numeracy—three additional types of literacy should be incorporated into a comprehensive model of environmental literacy. These include:

> Scientific literacy—competence with science and technology, including some awareness of science processes

> Civic literacy—abilities that enable citizens to become aware of public issues and political systems, to participate in critical dialogue about them, and to become involved in decision-making processes

> Cultural literacy—abilities to recognize, understand, and use the collective beliefs, customs, world-view, and social identity of diverse individuals to interpret and act on information

Obviously these literacies go beyond the basic skills addressed in most ABE and ESOL classrooms. Yet adult learners in those classrooms are among the populations at highest risk for environmental hazards. Because environmental issues are likely to have direct consequences for the lives of your students, you may find that incorporating these literacies into project-based and problem-posing basic literacy instruction can meet your students’ interests and needs.

Classroom Strategies

The following guidelines can help you incorporate environmental literacy principles into your curriculum.

> Use local environmental issues that are important to your learners. For example, new medical findings linking specific air pollutants with asthma can be the basis of units and lessons to teach basic literacy skills.

> Highlight the practical and empowering payoff of focusing on the environment. For instance, if a developer is planning to build a mall on an abandoned factory in your program’s neighborhood, you might have your students research the Internet for potential health hazards, practice civic literacy by writing letters to city officials, or explore ways to use the media to assist with advocacy efforts.

> Plan units with interdisciplinary goals in mind so that you can bring together science, social studies, math, civics, and culture in meaningful ways.

Incorporating scientific, civic, and cultural literacy along with learning basic literacy skills can be challenging, but the advantages are clear and powerful: greater self-efficacy for your students, as well as improved health and quality of life for individuals, communities, and the planet. ●

RESOURCES >> Family and Intergenerational Literacy

> Alecia D'Angelo *Professional Development Associate*

Understanding the K–12 school system is a challenge for many parents and caregivers. From navigating the school system to supporting their children's education, parents bring numerous multi-faceted and complex questions to family literacy classes. Common questions include:

- > “How do I find out what my child is learning at school?”
- > “Which option is best for my child, an ESOL, a dual language, or a bilingual program?”
- > “I don't read enough English to understand my child's homework. How can I help her?”

As adult literacy educators, we may not be experts in the K–12 school system procedures and policy. We are also aware that often there are no simple and easy answers to some of these questions. The following resources provide support for both parents and educators, addressing many of the expectations, issues, and questions parents face. Used in the context of family literacy programs, these resources can help parents and caregivers strengthen their reading skills and build their confidence. They can also familiarize immigrant families with cultural and educational systems in the U.S.

Navigating the Educational System

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.

www.advocatesforchildren.org

From online publications to a comprehensive list of state standards, the Advocates for Children website offers a wealth of information to help parents and educators navigate the New York City public school system. Publications include *Know Your Rights: A Guide to the Legal Rights of Immigrant Students and Parents in the New York City Public Schools*, an essential reference for any NYC family literacy program, as well as *Choosing An Effective School*, *No Child Left Behind*, and *The Basic List of Students' Rights in NYC Public Schools*. These guides offer practical information for parents, caregivers, teachers, and social service providers in an easy-to-read format. Many of the publications can be downloaded for free. This site also contains information on special education, options for gifted children, and early childhood programs.

Every Person Influences Children

www.epicforchildren.org

The organization Every Person Influences Children (EPIC) offers free online workshops for parents on a range of topics, from children's self-esteem to volunteering in schools. EPIC also operates Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRC's) in schools in-need throughout the city. These resource centers offer support for parents, including the Parents as Advocates Program, Parent Leadership Institute Training, and Creating Home School Partnerships and Parent Involvement Training.

Supporting Children's Education

Connect for Kids: Better Policies for Kids

www.connectforkids.org

Connect for Kids is a news source that highlights political issues important to children and families. News stories, which are updated weekly, are written in clear and concise language. This is a great resource to trigger discussions in parent classes and to support parent engagement in the political process.

Family Information Center

<http://reading.indiana.edu/www/index.html>

The Family Information Center offers information for parents through online magazines. *Parent Talk* and *Parents and Children Together Online* feature articles on general parenting questions, as well as stories from families in intergenerational literacy programs.

Study Dog

www.familit.org/studydog

The National Center for Family Literacy, with the makers of *StudyDog*—an interactive computer-based learning program that supplements reading instruction for pre-K–2nd grade students—has launched a new reading development project that provides free *StudyDog* literacy skill building software to educators and families. Children can use lessons independently or with their parents. The program focuses on phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension.

From Home to School

By Ana Gianola

New Readers Press, 2003

From Home to School presents stories that can serve as conversation starters in family literacy classes. The stories—which are written for adults—touch on situations children encounter in schools, such as receiving report cards, doing homework, getting eye exams, and taking standardized tests. Each story is introduced with a photo, which can be used to trigger a pre-reading conversation. Stories are written in simple language. The teacher's guide suggests ways to begin a conversation around each situation and encourages an environment of sharing amongst parents. Series levels include literacy, beginner, and intermediate.

Dial-A-Teacher

212.777.3380

Sponsored by the United Federation of Teachers, Dial-A-Teacher is a free homework help service. Teachers are available to assist parents and children with reading, math, writing, or science homework. The phone lines are open Monday–Thursday, 4–7 pm. Help is available in Spanish, Italian, Chinese, French, Haitian-Creole, Greek, Hebrew, Korean, and Russian.

If you are already using one of these resources, we are interested in how you have integrated it into your curriculum. Contact Alecia D'Angelo, Professional Development Associate, at aleciad@lacnyc.org or 212.803.3349.

Family Literacy Call for Presenters

The LAC invites you to present at “Celebrating Literacy,” a collaborative conference for parents, caregivers, families, youth, children, and parent educators across New York City. This free, all-day conference, which will be held on March 19, represents a collaboration between the LAC and the St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation, with support from the Altman Foundation, Scholastic, and others.

The conference is expected to serve over 800 community members from Williamsburg, Bushwick, Cypress Hills, and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn and around New York City. It will feature an extensive resource fair, introducing parents, community workers, and family literacy programs to a wide variety of programs and services. In addition, there will be workshops for professionals, for parents, and for children and parents together. This conference will bring together and highlight a variety of resources for children and families, make connections across service providers, and build on the strengths of families.

Please consider sharing your experience, skills, or craft talents. Sessions can be targeted towards family literacy professionals and volunteers, small children or youth, parents, or parents and children together. You are invited to submit more than one idea and can do as many as three different sessions. We may ask you to repeat a session if demand is high. There is also a call for sessions in Spanish and Creole.

For an application, go to www.lacnyc.org/profdev/flconf/flconf2005.htm. For more information, or if you would like to discuss presentation ideas or topics, please contact Reion Evans at 212.803.3344. Proposals are due on January 29, 2005.

NYC ABE Conference Call for Presenters

The New York City Consortium for Adult Basic Education is currently accepting applications for presentations for its 26th annual conference. Entitled “Learner Needs, Limited Resources, Positive Outcomes,” the conference will be held on Saturday, May 7, 2005, at Fashion Industries High School in Manhattan.

NYC ABE is interested in presentations that highlight outstanding and innovative practices, as well as capture issues that are relevant to the field. Organizers are looking for workshops that help teachers and administrators confront the myriad challenges facing adult education. Presenters are encouraged to actively involve teachers and students in the workshop, to use audio-visual aids, to organize group activities, and to include open/panel/roundtable discussions in their presentations. NYC ABE also welcomes team presentations. An auditorium will be available for any workshop format involving large numbers of attendees.

For an application go to www.lacnyc.org/about/announcements/. For more information call Carolyn Fernando, 212.243.5458.

Reading Is Fundamental Guarantees Grants

Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF), which has been partnering with educational and community programs for almost 50 years, guarantees grants to purchase and distribute books for programs serving at-risk families. Specific RIF programs include Family of Readers, a book distribution program geared for children ages 3–5, and Shared Beginnings, a program designed to help young parents support their children’s interest in reading. Applying for a RIF contract is not competitive. All programs get funded, but there is a wait list. To be eligible, 80 percent of children in your program must meet RIF’s at-risk criteria. Partnering with RIF is a way for family literacy programs to encourage the building of home-libraries for families.

For more information visit www.rif.org.

Online Certificate in Family Literacy

A partnership between Penn State’s Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy and the National Center for Family Literacy offers an online certificate in family literacy. The five-course series, designed to meet professional development needs of educators from a variety of settings, explores an integrated approach to family literacy. For more information visit www.worldcampus.psu.edu/.

Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education

George Demetron, director of Basic Literacy Programming at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, has published a new book, *Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education: In Quest of a U.S. Democratic Politics of Literacy*, available from Erlbaum.

Erlbaum describes it as follows: “The book provides a historical overview of adult literacy theory, policy, practice, and research from the mid-1980s to the present. The main focus is a descriptive analysis of three distinctive schools of literacy: the Freirean-based participatory literacy movement grounded in oppositional politics and grass-roots community activism; the British-based New Literacy Studies that focuses on the ways in which diverse students utilize various literacy practices in their daily lives; and the U.S. federal government’s focus on functional literacy linked to a 45-year policy emphasis on workforce readiness.”

NCLE Becomes CAELA

The new Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) recently launched its own website at www.cal.org/caela. Formerly the National Center for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) and still part of the Center for Applied Linguistics, CAELA works with state representatives to help states with emerging ESOL populations to promote English language learning. Over the next few months, the CAELA website will undergo revisions that will make the site even more useful to states, programs, and practitioners who work with adult English language learners.

Jan. 19

Instructional Methods for the Adult Literacy Classroom

Are you interested in using student-centered practices in the classroom? Are you looking for new ways to encourage student participation? Designed for ESOL, GED, and ABE instructors, this hands-on, activity-oriented series introduces three instructional methodologies for the adult literacy classroom: project-based learning, cooperative learning, and thematic curriculum development.

Additional sessions will be held on February 23 and March 23. Attendance at all three sessions is not required.

Session 1: Project-Based Learning

Wednesday, January 19, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Get your students to actively participate in their own education by using project-based learning (PBL) strategies. In this workshop, you will explore how to use PBL, see classroom examples, and participate in a PBL experience.

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

Jan. 21

Supporting Family Literacy through the Arts

Creating, viewing, and studying the arts can help adults and children develop visual literacy and creative thinking skills. This interactive workshop series is designed to introduce family literacy practitioners to cultural institutions and arts programs that work with families.

Session 3: Promoting Visual Arts and Literacy Learning through Book-Making

Friday, January 21, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Presenter: Trina Lion

In this interactive hands-on session, explore how book-making can support literacy learning and engage parents and children in family literacy classes.

Attendance at previous sessions is not necessary. **Registration is essential.**

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

Jan. 21

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, January 21, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

This series explores practical approaches for teaching adults to develop an awareness of social justice issues, both in and out of the classroom. Read materials on popular education and discuss how to apply those theories in the classroom.

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

Jan. 27 & 28

ALIES Data Entry

Thursday, January 27, 10 am–4 pm

Friday, January 28, 10 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Don Campbell

From ALIES installation through ALIES reporting, this training offers 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.

Participants are required to attend both days.

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

Feb. 11

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

This four-session workshop series is 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.

This is an encore presentation of last year's series designed for those who have not already participated.

Sessions will also be held on March 18, May 6, and June 3. Attendance at all four sessions is not required; however, space is limited.

Registration is essential.

Session 1: Number

Friday, February 11, 1–5 pm

Presenters: Charlie Brover & Solange Farina, NYC Math Exchange Group

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. Develop your own problem-solving strategies, and learn how to generate a similar problem-solving culture in your classroom.

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

Feb. 15

Culture and Technology: National Black Family and Technology Awareness Week

Tuesday, February 15, 9:30 am–noon

Presenter: Versonya Dupont, Long Island University & Randal Pinkett, BCT Partners

Sponsored by IBM and The Career Communication Group, this presentation will feature Versonya Dupont and Randal Pinkett, who will share their research on the digital divide in the African-American community and the role new technologies play in connecting the African diaspora.

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

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

Feb. 17 & 18

ALIES Data Entry

Thursday, February 17, 10 am–4 pm
Friday, February 18, 10 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Don Campbell
See January 27 & 28 for description.

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

Feb. 18

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, February 18, 2–4:30 pm

Explore and discuss appropriate methods for teaching English language learners (ELLs). Share promising practices from your own classrooms, and receive feedback from your colleagues. Designed for ESOL instructors, the ESOL Teacher Share is an opportunity for you to develop a network that you can go to for professional advice and support.

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

Feb. 23

Instructional Methods for the Adult Literacy Classroom

See January 19 for series description.

Session 2: Cooperative Learning and Small Group Methods

Wednesday, February 23, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

In this second session of the Instructional Methods series, explore the concepts of cooperative learning, an approach to instruction that encourages students to work together in a group setting to create projects and solve problems. Walk through the process of creating a cooperative learning project and develop your own project plan.

Attendance at all three sessions is not required.

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

Feb. 28

Research in Parent and Child Interactive Literacy

Monday, February 28, 9:30 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Eugenio Longoria Saenz, Goodling
Institute for Research in Family Literacy,
Pennsylvania State University

Learn about the latest findings from the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy's current research on parent and child interactive literacy, also known as PACT (Parent and Child Together). Discuss the outcomes and share your own experiences with this component of family literacy. This roundtable discussion is designed for program managers as well as teachers.

Registration is essential.

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. Try out instructional software, 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 mariannfi@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.

Integrating Civics into Adult Literacy Education

> **Hillary Gardner** *Center for Immigrant Education and Training, LaGuardia Community College*

How do you best conduct an English class for immigrant adults of various ages, from numerous countries and backgrounds, who have different levels of education as well as diverse interests and skills? Would it surprise you to know that the answer is by teaching civics?

A Pedagogical Model

In her November 2000 article, “Q&A: Civics Education for Adult Language Learners,” Lynda Terrill of the National Center for ESL Literacy Education (now, the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition) outlines three key aspects of civics education:

- > Instruction on how to gain U.S. citizenship
- > Instruction about U.S. history and culture
- > Instruction and guidance on becoming active participants in the community

Her article also details various historical approaches to teaching civics, from a set of discrete facts that students must learn—such as the 100 questions from the U.S. citizenship exam—to the more contemporary outlook of civics as community participation.

When I began teaching in the English and Civics program at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training at LaGuardia Community College in April 2002, I had to reflect on what exactly we mean by civics and what civics education should be. In the course of my transition from *English* to *English and Civics* instructor, I have discovered that a little civics can be found in everything we do.

Take, for example, an everyday activity like grocery shopping. If we explore this topic, we find many questions surrounding it that relate to community. Where does our food come from? Where should it come from? What were the laborers paid? Is it safe? What does the label say? What is the FDA? Teaching English through civics education sometimes simply means taking the extra step to help students acknowledge and evaluate the relationship between their daily lives, the government, and their community. In turn, we can help them better understand their roles as citizens of the world.

Putting Pedagogy into Practice

Raising pertinent questions is a skill I learned in a six-month long workshop on Paulo Freire’s problem-posing method at the LAC. Through posing questions about the newspaper articles, poems, and stories we examine in class, I can encourage students to compare their experiences and perceptions. They become the authors of their classroom experience, and my role is to help direct them to the resources available to further their understanding of an issue.

In addition, I always encourage students to contribute to the decision-making and curriculum-planning process of the classroom. Together we prioritize the skills that are important to us as learners using the Equipped for the Future Standards for Adult Literacy and

Lifelong Learning. We look at different books and vote on which one to read as a class. We research possible field trips and rank our preferences. Finally, we write about our goals over the next few weeks and years. These activities not only help students develop English language skills—for instance, students practice future tense when writing about goals—but also create a group sense of “we.” Students see themselves as responsible for what they learn and practice the language they need to participate as members of a community, both within and beyond the classroom.

For me, no student-guided classroom would be complete without students taking responsibility for an independent research project. I may assign them a specific topic to research—a U.S. state or president, or a health issue—or allow them to pick a topic of their choice. If the project is successful, my role becomes that of facilitator. I design lessons to help students complete research and organize content—how to use the library or how to take notes—but the students become the authorities on the subject of inquiry. In sharing their expertise with their peers, students become the problem-solvers and leaders of the classroom.

Civics is what we all have in common. Teaching and learning English through civics education has many advantages. It provides students with confidence to deal with real-life situations; it gives them the background knowledge they need to understand the history and geography of their communities; and it helps them locate resources, share perspectives, solve problems, and achieve their goals, all in the context of learning to read, write, and speak English more proficiently. For teachers, it enables us to meet citizens of the world, and hear stories and traditions we probably never encountered in our own educations. At the same time, it forces us to explore our own traditions, history, and government through a more critical eye.

There is another constituency that is also profoundly affected by civics classes, probably without even knowing it: the general populace. Civics classes improve all of our lives by providing our communities with members who are more informed, conscientious, and capable. ●

Beyond Compliance *continued*

Level 3 to Level 4 is the equivalent of three grade levels—and these levels don't even measure qualitative skills, such as reading a medication bottle or using a recipe. Therefore, a student can progress two grade levels in language skills, open a checking account, and improve computer skills—but still not receive credit for educational gain.

Program Improvement

The pros and cons I shared with my husband all relate to NRS reporting and accountability. The most valuable aspect of NRS data, however, is that programs can use the information they have gathered to improve their effectiveness. As the New York State Education Department (NYSED) states, “The greatest value of the NRS data is not to identify low performing agencies. Nor are the agencies identified as in need of improvement the only agencies that can—or should—make use of data. Regardless of performance level, every funded agency is expected to engage in a continuous process of improvement.”

To support this process, NYSED sponsored a workshop this fall entitled “Using NRS Data for Program Improvement.” However, there is still confusion about what program improvement means. When I facilitated the Train the Trainer for this workshop session, the team and I discussed many examples of using data for program improvement to help us grasp the concept. The following scenarios, which came out of discussions and opinions solicited from the trainers during the brainstorming sessions, are concrete examples of how data can actually be used.

A program manager ran an analysis of NRS data for each class in her program, and determined from the initial reports that students from three GED classes were not meeting New York State targets for GED attainment. At least 50 percent of the students in the program's other GED classes were passing the test. However, only 10 percent of these students were passing. As it turned out, the same teacher, one of the most experienced and well liked in the program, taught all three classes. The manager continued her analysis and learned that the program's counselor was placing all of the students with diagnosed learning disabilities into this teacher's class because of her experience and reputation for patience. A further investigation revealed that the teacher had not received training in how to instruct students with learning disabilities. By examining the data, the program was able to identify the source of the problem and come up with a solution; the program provided staff development for the teacher so she could better meet the needs of her students.

A second program did an in-depth analysis of its NRS data and determined that young adults were dropping out of the program at a significantly higher rate than older adults. These drop-out numbers were impeding the program's ability to perform according to NYSED targets. Initially, suggestions were made that the program should discontinue its out-of-school youth program in order to better meet state targets. However, a data-savvy program manager dug deeper into the class data while also investigating the latest research on the most conducive learning environments for out-of-school youth. The NRS data revealed that each class in her program consisted of a wide range of ages. According to the latest research, out-of-school youth learn best in classes that are composed of students their own age. Instead of discontinuing the service, the program changed its class structure.

In a final example, a program did a comparative analysis between its NRS and census data. According to the census data, the program

Successful Submission

When I joined the Literacy Assistance Center four years ago, electronic data collection was still in its infancy. While New York City programs were gathering data electronically, many upstate programs submitted data on paper, which then had to be processed by NYSED. Most programs, both city and upstate, had trouble submitting data in a timely fashion or with any consistency. To facilitate this process, NYSED began the rollout of the Adult Literacy Information and Evaluation System (ALIES) and a protocol for consistently collecting electronic data across the state.

As most program managers know, the first year of the rollout was painful. The LAC worked hard to establish communication channels with program managers across the state, providing training in the ALIES software, assisting NYSED in delivering consistent policy messages, and updating the ALIES software to meet the needs of over 220 programs. However, the submission process was arduous. Many programs spent hours inputting data, fixing glitches, working on the phone with ALIES or other software providers. Staff members gave up summer vacations. They hand-delivered data, because they were afraid the data would get lost in cyberspace, and made sacrifices to comply with this new system. Despite these issues, New York State was relatively successful. Approximately 70 percent of programs submitted electronic data—an impressive number, considering that the fiscal year 2002–03 was the first year of full NRS policy implementation.

Fiscal year 2003–04 was an entirely different story. ALIES received significantly fewer panicky phone calls, and no data was lost in the vast space of the Internet. In fact, 95 percent of programs successfully submitted their data. The LAC is proud of the progress. New York State adult literacy programs have made data and compliance a priority while continuing to meet the needs of their students.

Megan

	FY03	FY04
Programs	220	220
Submitted late or did not submit	46	18
Submitted	174	202

was located in an ethnically diverse community; however, the NRS data indicated that 85 percent of the students who were enrolled in the program at the end of the year were white, middle-aged, and female. In order to represent the entire community, the program director decided to launch an outreach campaign, targeting churches, local stores, and community centers. Before initiating the outreach, however, the manager did an analysis of the schedule and types of classes offered. There were no evening classes, no early morning classes, no weekend classes, and no distance learning opportunities. In addition, the manager considered the types of classes offered. There were no classes for senior citizens or out-of-school youth. There were no citizenship classes. By examining the data, the manager was able to determine that perhaps it was the program's schedule and offerings, rather than poor publicity, which had led to the lack of diversity. As a result, the program restructured its offerings before initiating the marketing campaign.

I hope these examples help elucidate the concept of using data for program improvement. As programs continue to make data collection a part of their efforts, the LAC looks forward to hearing more examples from the field.

Can you add other examples? Please email me at meganw@lacnyc.org. ●

Health Literacy Evaluation Shows Learner Gains

In spring 2004, the LAC engaged Magi Educational Services, Inc., to conduct an independent evaluation of the pilot phase of our Health Literacy Initiative (HLI). Magi, a private research and consulting firm based in Albany, collected quantitative and qualitative data on 13 teachers and 183 adult learners from four pilot program sites: Sunset Park Adult and Family Education Center, Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Women, Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center, and Queens Borough Public Library.

Because the evaluation involved only four sites and was conducted over a short period, it must be considered preliminary. However, early results are promising for the LAC's health literacy model, which involves engaging ABE and ESOL teachers in study circles designed by Rima Rudd, Sc.D., of the Harvard School of Public Health. The study circles focus not on teaching health *content*—a subject many adult educators feel ill-prepared to tackle—but on developing the *skills* needed to become health literate. In 2003–2004, the first year of the project, the study circles focused on the skills needed to navigate the health-care system. The other two topics are management of chronic diseases and preventive health care.

Adult literacy practitioners will be interested in the educational gain—as defined by the National Reporting System (NRS)—demonstrated by learners in the HLI pilot sites (see Table 1 on the next page). Because the number of learners at the HLI sites is very small compared to the total number of learners in NYC adult literacy programs, these results do not allow us to draw broad conclusions. However, the early findings are encouraging; they suggest that health

literacy instruction may help improve learners' educational achievement overall, not just in health literacy. In ABE programs, 31 percent of learners in the HLI, as opposed to 23 percent of the total ABE population, achieved educational gain as defined by the NRS and measured by the TABE. In ESOL programs, 44 percent of HLI learners achieved educational gain (as measured by NYSPace, which was the official ESOL test last year) vs. 31 percent of all ESOL learners.

Learners in the pilot sites also showed progress in health literacy. As part of the evaluation, learners were assessed using the Test of Functional Health Literacy for Adults (TOFHLA) as both a pre- and a post-test. As shown in Figure 1, 20 percent of the learners tested scored at the “inadequate” level on the pre-test; in the post-test, the percentage went down to 14 percent. The percentage of learners at the “marginal” level also decreased—from 14 percent to 5 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who tested at the “adequate” level increased from 66 percent to 81 percent.

In addition to the study circles, part of the HLI is to create partnerships between literacy programs and health-care providers. While such partnerships can enhance learning, the Magi evaluation shows that implementation proved difficult in the first year of the HLI. In the second year of the HLI, the LAC is using the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations to improve our program model as we expand beyond the original four pilot sites. A summary of the report is available on our website at www.lacnyc.org/profdev/healthlit/.

continued on next page

CONFERENCES

March

Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education

March 1–5, Phoenix, AZ
www.aace.org/conf/site/

Teaching Adults to Read with Understanding

Oklahoma State Department of Education
March 2–4, Oklahoma City, OK
Email pam_blundell@sde.state.ok.us or call 405.521.3321

Learning Disabilities Association of America Annual Conference

Learning Disabilities Association of America
March 2–5, Reno, NV
www.ldanatl.org/conference/index.asp or call 412.341.1515

Fourth Adult Learner Leadership Institute

VALUE, Inc.
March 8–10, Washington, DC
www.valueusa.org/whatsnew/2004/2005alli.html or call 610.876.7625

2nd Annual (Net)Working Conference on Women & Literacy

WE LEARN (Women Expanding—Literacy Education Action Resource Network)
March 11–12, Providence, RI
Email welearn@litwomen.org or call 401.383.4374

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) Annual Conention and Exhibition

March 30–April 2, San Antonio, TX
www.tesol.org ●

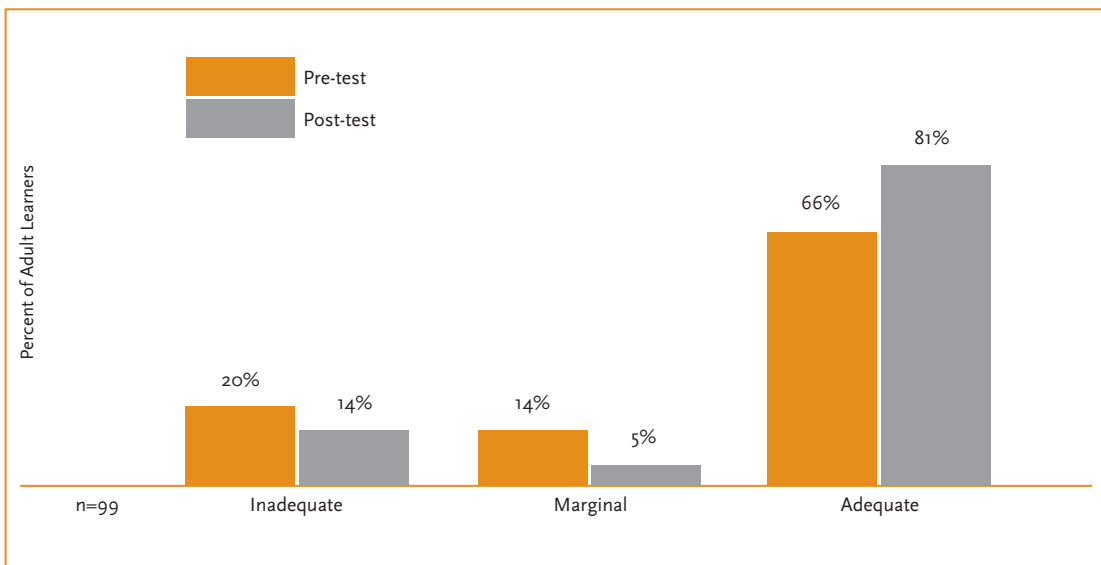
Health Literacy Evaluation *continued*

Table 1 Educational Achievement of Adult Learners
(as measured by performance on the TABE and NYSPLACE assessments)

Educational Level of Adult Learners	Total Number of Learners Enrolled in Adult Education Programs*	Number of Learners in HLI	Percent of Learners Achieving Educational Gain	Percent of HLI Learners Achieving Educational Gain
ABE Beginning Literacy	135	0	24%	N/A
ABE Beginning Basic Education	221	4	29%	50%
ABE Intermediate Low	354	20	36%	55%
ABE Intermediate High	418	16	13%	0%
ASE Low	160	1	16%	0%
ASE High	111	1	14%	0%
Total ABE Students	1399	42	23%	31%
Percent of ABE Students Achieving Educational Gain			23%	31%
ESOL Beginning Literacy	1828	12	32%	58%
ESOL Beginning	1339	13	33%	62%
ESOL Intermediate Low	627	11	42%	64%
ESOL Intermediate High	417	12	39%	58%
ESOL Low Advanced	310	13	31%	54%
ESOL High Advanced	436	24	1%	4%
Total ESOL Students	4957	85	31%	44%
Percent of ESOL Students Achieving Educational Gain			31%	44%
Total	6356	127	29%	39%

* Includes adult learners in the HLI. However, because proportion of HLI learners was very small (2%), their effect in the analysis is negligible.

Figure 1 Functional Health Literacy Levels of Adult Learners



That Was Then, This Is Now

Then

New York State Education Commissioner Gordon Ambach recently announced plans for increasing the requirements for obtaining the New York State High School Equivalency Diploma (GED).

One out of five high school diplomas awarded in New York State is a GED; last year 50,000 GED diplomas were awarded. Clearly, many people will be affected by the increased requirements for passing the test. . . . [S]ince possession of a diploma is necessary to get in to trade schools, to enlist in the armed services, or to obtain more than marginal employment, it has been suggested by many in the field that these changes be implemented in a more gradual fashion so that we can prepare our students to meet the new standards set for them.

Lynn Ornstein of Fortune Society, in the LAC's *Information Update*, vol. 1, no. 3, March 1985

Now

The response to last month's (unsubstantiated) rumor that New York wouldn't offer GED tests in 2005 just goes to show how much the literacy field has invested in the GED. Every change feels cataclysmic—because what hasn't changed is the value of the GED credential. Besides changes in scoring standards, the test itself has changed twice in the past 20 years. Though they understand the importance of keeping the GED aligned to the K–12 curricula, each time the test has changed, literacy practitioners have voiced concern about the impact on learners. Each time, the LAC has supported local practitioners in preparing students for this all-important test. We devoted a major part of our professional development in 2001 and 2002 to effective teaching for GED 2002. And there's no question that the local literacy network is stronger than it was in 1985, enabling us to present a unified voice as we advocate with government officials for the needs of our learners.

Jan Gallagher, Director of Communications

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