



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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A Practical Approach to Student Leadership

From Vision to Action

> Will Grant *Voice of Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE)*

Most of us who work in the field of adult education want our students to have a say in their own education. We want our students to be ambassadors to the public, to mentor other students, to help train teachers, and to have a role in shaping policy. In other words, we want our students to be leaders. As a concept, student leadership simply makes sense.

Unfortunately, turning the concept into a reality hasn't been so simple.

In the past, we've seen students unite around issues that have mattered to them, with their passion as their power. However, passion is rarely enough to sustain momentum over long periods of time or to make student leadership a permanent part of a program. Part-time, over-worked, and underpaid teachers, who rarely had a voice in their programs themselves, did not see where they could find the time to help their students make an impact. For most of us, student

leadership felt out of reach—a noble ideal, but one reserved for super teachers and hip programs that held Paolo Freire discussion circles at lunch.

More recently, however, teachers and students have figured out ways to maintain the momentum, proving that student leadership can be more than just a concept. Programs across the country are using leadership to increase retention, recruitment, and learning gains. Student leadership projects have also been used to support gains in standardized testing, NRS outcomes, and accreditation. In fact, for many programs, student leadership is no longer a supplemental activity; rather, it is an integral part of program structure.

Developing Leadership Training Skills

Some have assumed that adult educators should intrinsically know how to cultivate student leadership projects. Too often, we

act as if organizing a student leadership project were simply an extension of teaching. It is not. Supporting student leadership requires a different set of skills, such as the ability to coordinate programs, build teams, plan, and facilitate.

In the past, most successful student leadership projects have been coordinated by students or teachers who have learned about leadership through other fields, such as churches, unions, community organizations, or business. Educators and programs with deep roots in popular and alternative education have also been successful in providing student leadership training and launching student leadership projects.

But what about teachers and students who have not been exposed to these ideas and opportunities?

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Not a Hurricane Story

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

This is not a story about Katrina, or Rita, or whatever other hurricane has swept through by the time you read this. This is a story about the heart and soul of the literacy community; it's about compassion and generosity and commitment in the face of overwhelming loss.

Rachel Nicolosi of the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans has been posting to the Literacy USA listserv. With her permission, I'm excerpting posts she made throughout September, when she was at her mother's home in northern Louisiana.

[I] visited a few shelters in Baton Rouge to informally ask evacuees what kinds of training or continuing education they might need once they get settled. It was really great for me just to be around these folks.... I also participated in a conference call with the leaders of some of the other social service collaboratives from New Orleans.... Some of the things we talked about included making sure everyone has the right to return if they want to, not just those with the most resources....

I finally read ... something I ordered pre-K[atrina]. It's the autobiography of an unsung heroine of the Civil Rights Movement who also happens to be an adult educator—Septima Poinsette Clark. She started the first citizenship school on St. John's Island in South Carolina—teaching “Negro” adults how to write their names and read and understand the rules of voter registration so they could pass the literacy tests required. This is us ... an adult educator who helped facilitate the voter registration of hundreds of thousands of African American adults.... A journey through the past and revisiting the theory behind what we have done and will ultimately need to do again, I hope, will ease these days of not being able to actually do the work I want.

We talk about getting back to normal, but that doesn't exist anywhere anymore. We will have to make a new normal for ourselves and our beloved community.... We'd like for help and caring to be a simple one-stop place where all resources can flow in and out of, but in my personal experience and in everything I've read and heard of, it's the countless instances of small groups of people helping out other small groups of people that seems to be effective.

Remembering our own sense of loss following 9/11, the LAC decided to be one of those small groups. We asked literacy practitioners to raise money and send letters to Gulf region students. Programs are sending what they can, and the letters are truly moving (see back page).

One example of such generosity comes from Charlie Brover of HRA-BEGIN Managed Programs. As one of last year's Literacy Recognition Award honorees, Charlie received a \$1,200 library development grant from the Bookbinders' Guild of New York. He and his colleagues are donating their award to the New Orleans literacy community: “We have enough books. They have none.”

That's the heart and soul of the literacy community. That's our compassion and generosity and commitment. The LAC is currently assembling the last installment of our donation. If you want to take part, send a check, made out to the LAC with the notation “New Orleans,” by November 15—and please send it to my attention. Every donation reminds me of the value of our partnership in creating what Rachel calls “a new normal.” ●

> Charlie Brover HRA-BEGIN Managed Programs

Literacy teachers preparing for fall classes found their summer lesson plans washed away by the urgency of Hurricane Katrina. As social and political experience, Katrina starkly reveals the barbarity and heartlessness of capitalist society in the U.S. The hurricane itself—the natural disaster—was only the proximate cause of the death and devastation. The abandonment and torment of the poor and infirm of New Orleans was caused by social disaster—systematic denial of access to transportation, medical care, housing, even food and water. “Everyone evacuate now!” was a directive not intended for those trapped and isolated, left behind to face the raging floodwaters. The Katrina story breaks through the surface of governmental incompetence to the deeper causes of historically developed socio-economic and racial structures of U.S. society. So in the media, on street corners, and over the dinner table, Americans continue to talk about topics usually concealed: poverty, race, social class.

Good ABE teachers will help their students participate in this crucial episode of civic discourse as informed and active citizens. Reading and writing teachers will develop penetrating lessons based on the meaning of Katrina. But what about mathematics? Can we also develop math lessons for a post-Katrina world?

Not Non-Sense

Like reading, doing math is also the pursuit of meaning. Math is not non-sense, although you are not likely to reach that conclusion from observing most math classes in the U.S., where students mainly drill and practice isolated rules and decontextualized procedures. It is a common assumption in literacy classes that learning ought to be meaning-based and contextually relevant. Why not bring the same assumption to math classes? The journalistic coverage of Katrina is packed with math and science—numbers, maps, and data that refer to levees and elevations, computer models, environmental degradation, social and economic stratification, big money expenditures. If we help our students better understand this mathematical discourse, they will be better equipped to participate in the post-Katrina world.

But first we must reject the myth that mathematics is a color-blind, socially neutral discipline. Like literacy, mathematics is, in fact, socially and culturally situated. Mathematical statements refer to the real world, and mathematics is used to advance particular social agendas: “You’re safe because the levees will withstand a Category 3 hurricane,” or “We have enough money to rebuild New Orleans and stay the course in Iraq.” Teachers who help their students learn to bring a critical perspective to a text can also help students learn to analyze and challenge the mathematical arguments used to advance political agendas. To paraphrase Paulo Freire, we need to calculate the world as well as the word problem.

A World of Structured Relationships

Important as context is for establishing meaning, good math instruction also supports understanding of the structure of mathematics. Numbers derive meaning from relation to other numbers in the number system. In *The Glass Wall* (Teachers College Press, 2002), Frank Smith explores the difficulties students have in learning math, drawing a bright line between the natural language of context and mathematical language. He argues that educators often fail to teach students the difference. Number as pattern and relationship generates the whole world of mathematics. Our students should have the opportunity to enter that world rather than view it from the other side of Smith’s “glass wall.” Although traditional school math has failed many of our students, they should not be relegated to a second-rate “consumer math” curriculum, a staple of too many ABE programs. Revealing the mathematical structure and concepts embedded in the context is part of the art of teaching mathematics.

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Where’s My Ride?

Poverty, Race, and Survival in New Orleans

According to the 2000 census (*New York Times*, September 4, 2005), there were 37,216 African-American households living in poverty in New Orleans. Of these households, approximately 58% had no car; of the 7,636 poor white households, 34% had no car; and of the 2,756 “other” poor households, 50% had no car.

1. Make a table to show this data.
2. How many families in each group did not have cars when the government directed people to evacuate the city before Hurricane Katrina?
3. How many people do you think that represents?
4. Working in groups, develop a graphic representation of the data. What graph do you think will best express the meaning of the data? A bar graph? A pictograph? A circle graph?
5. Use your graph, adding words and images, to make a poster for our bulletin board.
6. What does your group think *should* have been done to meet the needs of people without cars? Can you show mathematically how this could have been done? For instance, if you think people should have been bused out of New Orleans, how many buses would be needed?
7. Who do you think should be responsible for evacuating a city facing disaster? The government or individuals on their own? What does mathematics have to do with it? Can you extend your ideas to other areas of concern such as medical care or education?
8. What does this data tell you about poverty, race, and survival in New Orleans?

New Technology Resources for the Adult Literacy Classroom

> Mariann Fedele *Coordinator of Professional Development*

Keeping up with the latest trends in technology can be a challenge for the most dedicated techie. Often, it feels as if innovation in information and communication technology (ICT) develops at a lightning pace. Most of us recognize that ICT has great potential to enrich adult literacy education, but we may not know how to harness that potential. We've heard of—and maybe even participated in—blogs, podcasts, and wikis, but we don't know how to take advantage of their strengths in our classrooms. Fortunately, a handful of adult literacy practitioners are paving the way, taking advantage of new ICT to create their own dynamic online learning environments and resources.

Blogs

Blog is short for *weblog*: a frequently updated online journal intended for general public consumption. Free web publishing tools have brought an explosion in the number of blogs available online. Blogs allow students to post their ideas and their learning for others to share.

ESL/EFL Blogs

<http://esl.osu.edu/staff/bloch/weblog/esl.htm>
Cathryn Crosby and Joel Bloch of Ohio State University have compiled dozens of blogs for and about ESOL/EFL instruction. The site includes activities for students, resources for teachers, student blogs that can serve as models for classroom work, and information about how to start your own blog.

Our Class

<http://ourenglishclass2.blogspot.com/>
The class blog of a group of adult ESOL learners in Sydney, Australia, features “quizzes, competitions, students' own texts, students' recipes, photos, and a lot more.” It includes links to other student and classroom blogs and to an array of sites for students and teachers.

ESL Teacher

<http://www.pacoimaesl.blogspot.com/>
Barry Bakin of Los Angeles provides a good example of how an individual ESOL teacher can use a blog to provide different modes of instruction and different kinds of learning opportunities. The site includes an array of grammar activities as well as links to other sites.

Blogger

www.blogger.com

Creating your own blog with this free, easy-to-use tool is an excellent way to become familiar with blogging before you undertake it in the classroom. Of course, you might be surprised at how much your students already know; they may be able to guide you through the process of creating a blog!

Podcasts

Podcasting makes audio files, usually in MP3 format, available for download so you can listen at your convenience. You don't need an iPod; any computer media player can play the files. Podcasts are particularly useful for ESOL learning. You can connect to others' lessons or create your own.

Englishcaster

www.englishcaster.com

This rated compilation of podcast sites is intended for both ESOL learners and teachers—though students may need assistance in navigating it. Students will find links to grammar, idiom, news, song, vocabulary, and joke podcasts. Teachers can use the tutorials on creating podcasts or on posting existing podcasts to the Englishcaster site.

ESL : Listening : Podcasts

<http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>
The Internet TESL Journal's podcast page features a well-organized and easy-to-read selection of podcast links, providing “one-stop shopping” for a wide variety of podcasts.

Podomatic

www.podomatic.com

PodOmatic is one good site for starting your own podcasts. It's easy to use, so you can set up a site in just a couple of minutes. It's also free—at least for the moment.

Wikis

A *wiki* is a web application that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content. The name is based on the Hawaiian term *wiki wiki*, meaning *quick* or *informal*. Wikis are great for collaborative projects or for presentations that allow students to share their learning. They can also be good for your own professional development.

Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

Wikipedia is perhaps the best-known example of wiki technology. You can use this groundbreaking collaborative encyclopedia to get a sense of the power of wikis in facilitating learning.

Writing Together

http://seedwiki.com/wiki/writing_together
Susan Gaer and David Rosen created the Writing Together wiki to encourage collaborative writing among both ABE and ESOL students. Students who live thousands of miles apart can still learn from each other and produce writing together.

Adult Literacy Education Wiki

<http://wiki.literacytent.org/>

Founded by David Rosen, the ALE wiki is for practitioners rather than students. On this site, adult literacy practitioners share research and professional wisdom on a range of topics from GED or numeracy research to public policy.

Sites for Your Own Wikis

Here are two sites that allow you to start your own wiki for free:

- > **Mediawiki**, www.mediawiki.org, is the software used to create Wikipedia. You can download instructions and software to start your own wiki..
- > **Seedwiki**, www.seedwiki.com, is easy to use and navigate. The site also includes examples of other people's wikis.

As the moderator of the National Institute for Literacy's Technology and Literacy listserv, I invite you to join the forum. Our primary goal is to improve the use of technology in literacy practice by fostering discussions and information exchanges among professionals and volunteers in the field. To join the listserv, go to www.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/nifl-technology/about_nifl-technology.html. ●



Literacy Harvest Call for Papers

Adult, youth, and family literacy practitioners and researchers are invited to submit articles for the fall 2006 issue of the *Literacy Harvest*, the LAC's annual peer-reviewed journal. For our theme of Supporting Immigrants' Success, we are soliciting articles on the theory and practice of literacy education that supports first- and second-generation immigrants in meeting the goals that brought them to this country. Such articles might examine the role of research and continuous program development, discuss current research and practice in the field, or explore practical ideas for enhancing the literacy development of immigrant adults and families. Manuscripts are due March 1, 2006. For more information, including submission guidelines, go to www.lacnyc.org/harvestcall.htm, email publications@lacnyc.org, or call 212.803.3332.

The 2005 issue of *Literacy Harvest*, Community Connections in Family Literacy Programming, came out last month. This journal is a collaboration with the National Even Start Association's *Family Literacy Forum* and was supported in part by the Altman Foundation as part of our ongoing partnership in family literacy. If you haven't yet received your copy, email publications@lacnyc.org.

Call for Student Artwork

The LAC is currently seeking one outstanding piece of student artwork to serve as the logo for the 2006 and future Literacy Recognition Award materials. Specifically, we are looking for two-dimensional black-and-white or color artwork that suggests the power of literacy to change lives or make connections. The program that submits the selected artwork will be awarded a library development grant from the Bookbinders' Guild of New York. The submission deadline is December 1. For more information, including submission guidelines, go to www.lacnyc.org/about/announcements, email publications@lacnyc.org, or call 212.803.3332.

Selected Shorts: ALL WRITE!

Bring your students to the acclaimed adult literacy program Selected Shorts: ALL WRITE! at Symphony Space theater, where professional actors read original student work. Texts, study guides, and workshops will be provided. The program is free and runs from December to May. For more information, contact Madeline Cohen at 212.864.1414 x221 or email madeline.cohen@symphonyspace.org.

National Book Scholarship Fund Application

ProLiteracy Worldwide is currently accepting grant applications for the National Book Scholarship Fund (NBSF). NBSF grants distribute New Readers Press books and educational materials to qualified adult literacy providers. Special emphasis is given to family literacy programs, followed by ESOL projects, adult basic educational programs, and projects that involve women-focused basic literacy or ESOL programming. For more information or to apply for a grant, go to www.nbsf.org. The deadline is December 8.

CONFERENCES

December

National Workforce Association 4th Annual Conference

December 2–6, St. Petersburg, FL
www.nwaonline.org

EFF Institute

EFF Center for Training and Technical Assistance
December 14–15, Atlantic City, NJ
www.nifl.gov/nifl-4eff/2005/0117.html

National Head Start Association Annual Parent Training Conference

December 16–20, Washington, DC
www.nhsa.org/training/Parent/index.htm

January

National Association for Bilingual Education 2006 Conference

January 18–21, Phoenix, AZ
www.nabe.org

Technology, Reading & Learning Disabilities (TRLD) Conference

January 26–28, San Francisco, CA
www.trld.com

February

Soul Speak: Plain Talk about Health Literacy and the Physician-Patient Partnership

University of Tennessee Graduate School
of Medicine
February 8–11, Jackson Hole, WY
<http://gsm.utmck.edu/cme/courses/Mo20806.cfm>

Bookbinders' Guild of New York

Promoting Literacy



13th Annual Softball Game

The Bookbinders' Guild of New York annually holds a softball game in Central Park as part of its Promote Literacy campaign. The 13th annual game, held on Saturday, August 27, was one of the most successful in memory, raising over \$17,000 for NYC literacy programs. Every child who passed by received a free book donated by the publishing community. Funds raised through ad sales, a raffle, and onsite donations go to local literacy programs through Bookbinders' Library Development Awards, distributed by the LAC.



1st Annual Silent Auction

Dean Olsher of public radio's *The Next Big Thing* (left) hosted the first annual Autumn Soiree & Silent Auction, a fundraiser organized by the Bookbinders' Guild. Also pictured are Elyse Barbell (right) of the LAC, and Paul Stanley (center) of Bookbinders' Guild, who spearheaded the event. Held on October 11, the silent auction raised over \$15,000 to benefit literacy in New York.

Nov. 10

Reading Instruction 101

Thursday, November 10, 1–5 pm

Facilitator: Ira Yankwitt

This workshop will introduce practitioners to several techniques for teaching reading to adult basic education students. Participants will explore the skills and strategies that proficient readers employ to make meaning from text and will examine a variety of instructional techniques (including the Language Experience Approach and Directed Reading Thinking Activity) and strategies for improving word recognition.

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

Nov. 16

ALIES Data Entry

Wednesday, November 16, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitator: Kate Tornese, Literacy Volunteers of Westchester County

This one-day training provides a comprehensive introduction to the ALIES data entry process. Highlights include navigating the ALIES data entry screens; upgrading ALIES; backing up data; inputting students, classes, and instructors; and updating outcomes, test scores, and contact hours. New data entry users as well as those in need of a refresher are invited to attend.

RSVP: ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or aliessupport@lacnyc.org.

VALUE Student Leadership Core Training

Following the recommendation of its advisory board, which identified student leadership as an area in need of development, the NYC RAEN has invited VALUE (Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education) to conduct a two-day student leadership training for adult students and educators. The training is scheduled for December 5 and 6. Visit the LAC's website for a more detailed description. For an application, email iray@lacnyc.org. For more information about VALUE, see page 1.

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

listed on page 11

Nov. 17

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 five instructional methods and techniques for the adult literacy classroom: cooperative learning, project-based learning, ways of using authentic materials in the classroom, ways of using new technologies in the classroom, and ways of applying multiple intelligence theory and individual learning styles inventories in the classroom.

Cooperative and Small Group Learning

Thursday, November 17, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

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 five sessions is not required.

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

Nov. 29

BEST Plus Training

Tuesday, November 29, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

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

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

Dec. 2

BEST Plus Score Norming

Friday, December 2, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

Designed for certified BEST Plus test administrators, this workshop provides an opportunity to review the BEST Plus scoring rubric and to discuss the BEST Plus scoring benchmarks. There will also be opportunities to practice scoring the test.

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

Dec. 2

Popular Education Study Group

Friday, December 2, 2 pm–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence, Ed.D.

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.

Dec. 9

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, December 9, 2 pm–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence, Ed.D.

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.

Dec. 13

Family Educator Network

Tuesday, December 13, 9:30 am–1 pm

Facilitator: Alecia D'Angelo

Open to adult and family literacy educators, parent coordinators, and K–12 educators, this meeting is an opportunity for educators to share their expertise and experiences working with parents and caregivers. The goals of the network are to share resources and examine effective instructional strategies for supporting parental involvement in schools, and to identify and discuss research on best practices in parent education. There will be hands-on and participatory group-learning activities. Space is limited. Registration is essential.

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

Staff Development That Works

The CUNY Model

> Kate Brandt and Gayle Cooper-Shpirt *The City University of New York, Adult Literacy/GED Program*

Daily conversations among teachers and administrators about effective teaching practice are the heart of professional development. In the City University of New York (CUNY) Adult Literacy/GED Program, staff developers join teachers and administrators in honing and sharing their teaching practice so that students can have the richest possible learning experience. CUNY's content-based approach—in which students improve their literacy skills by studying a theme that also broadens their background knowledge—asks a lot of teachers. For the curriculum to be effective, teachers must blend the content with reading, writing, math, and oral communication instruction. There is no single way to do this. Since teaching contexts and teacher preferences vary widely, CUNY staff developers offer a range of formats, including seminars, customized site-based models, and large-scale annual events.

Intensive Seminars

The multi-session seminar format encourages teachers to try out various approaches over time. It also provides welcome opportunities for teachers to meet and network with colleagues from different campuses. Participants attend all seminar meetings, try out approaches during the sessions and in their classrooms, and create a product that incorporates what they have learned.

A recent seminar on Writing in Content-Based Instruction, for instance, enrolled eight literacy, GED, and ESOL teachers from five campuses. The 12 sessions, which met over a four-month period, introduced techniques for responding to writing, using writing as a tool for learning, and a workshop model for teaching writing in an adult classroom. Each of the 12 sessions consisted of modeling or rehearsing techniques that could be used in the classroom, discussing relevant reading assignments, and swapping stories about how teachers had used the ideas from previous sessions in their classrooms. Participants relied on the group's collective expertise to solve problems that arose during the time between sessions. Sometimes teachers brought in "artifacts" from the classroom, such as student drafts they wanted to think about with the group before shaping their response, or assignments they were considering for future use.

Another example of the seminar model for staff development brought math teachers from 10 CUNY programs together to discuss and teach a series of math lessons focused on the history and operation of the NYC subway. In addition to meeting in person, teachers kept in touch through website postings that allowed them to communicate regularly about their attempts to teach the same material in 10 different places. They wrote about how they were using and adapting the math lessons, and shared their observations on student learning.

Site-Based Staff Development

Staff development at individual campuses allows us to get to know teachers in their actual teaching environments. We typically ask the teachers to identify an issue or topic they would like to explore over time. Depending on the group of teachers and the campus context, the structure of the sessions varies. Teachers may plan lessons together, observe the staff developer modeling a technique and then practice it, discuss an article or a piece of student writing, or talk about their teaching.

Recently, groups of teachers at several campuses explored methods for using strategic literacy activities with literature. After reading articles from *Strategic Reading* by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, Tanya N. Baker, and Julie Dube (Heinemann, 2001), and *You Gotta Be the Book* by Jeffrey D. Wilhelm (Teachers College Press and NCTE, 1997), participants brought in short stories they wanted to teach in their classes. The groups read the stories and planned lessons, using ideas from the readings and from each other. Teachers then taught the lessons and were offered feedback on how the lessons might be improved. Finally, staff developers compiled the lessons and made them available to teachers throughout the program.

This model challenges staff developers to adapt beautiful theories to the messy and varied contexts of programs and classrooms. The model also encourages teachers to become a resource to each other, strengthening the community of teacher-learners. At several programs, teachers have begun to observe one another teach, provide feedback, and co-teach classes.

Conference and Curriculum Roundtable

Staff developers also organize two annual events—a full day/evening conference and a curriculum roundtable—for all CUNY teachers and administrators. The conference offers workshops, panel discussions, and presentations by teachers, staff developers, and outside speakers on a variety of topics, from poetry writing in the ESOL classroom to advising GED students on applying to college. At the curriculum roundtable, staff developers and teachers present content-based curricula and lesson sets they have written. Close to 100 teachers gather for this event each year.

Each of these models has its individual strengths, but all stem from one conviction: We owe our students nothing less than our best collective thinking and ongoing efforts to continually enhance instruction. ●

The CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Program operates on thirteen campuses of The City University of New York, through the Office of Academic Affairs under the direction of Leslee Oppenheim. The program serves more than 10,000 adult learners a year.

A Practical Approach *continued*

In December, the LAC will host a series of student leadership trainings run by VALUE (see box for details). Founded in 1997 and run entirely by students and graduates of adult education programs, VALUE (Voice of Adult Literacy United for Education) is a national student leadership organization. The trainings—designed to teach both students and educators the skills to develop and support student leadership—present best practices from programs across that country that have made student leadership work.

VALUE Strategies for Student Leadership

Programs that helped develop the VALUE student leadership training workshops used the following strategies to overcome barriers to sustaining student leadership.

Time and Dependability

Most adult students are juggling work and family along with school. Where do we expect them to find the time for leadership projects? Rather than struggle to maintain permanent student leadership groups, some programs have created student leadership projects that last between two and six weeks. Over the course of a year, programs can do a series of projects, allowing students to join ones that interest them without having to make an open-ended time commitment. Having students speak at orientation is one example of a short-term leadership project. Short-term projects let students and educators start small and have quick successes. Unsuccessful projects can be discontinued, allowing programs to learn from their mistakes and move on.

The beauty of short-term projects is that they often create long-term student leaders. Students who participate in projects usually “get the bug.” They enjoy making a difference and therefore make time to become long-term student leaders.

Relevance to Administrators and Teachers

Between securing funding and fulfilling NRS requirements, adult education programs are under enormous pressure from a variety of sources. Time and money for student leadership projects are scarce. Some programs have addressed this hurdle by aligning student leadership projects to existing program goals on critical issues such as retention, recruitment, and professional development.

This strategy not only helps to secure the support of administrators but also helps programs to more successfully achieve their goals. On many issues, students provide unique and valuable contributions. For example, the best people to recruit new students are current students. The VALUE training has eight project templates with step-by-step guides for how to include students in recruitment, retention, fundraising, teacher training, program evaluation, and curriculum development.

Organization

If we want student leadership to become an integral part of adult education, then we must treat it with same weight and respect as we do other aspects of the field, such as goals, outcomes, sustainability, and evaluations. At the same time, we want the projects to be both interesting and fun, so students are excited about getting involved. Both goals require careful planning.

The VALUE training spends an entire day on ways to plan fun, constructive, and flexible student leadership projects. Good planning helps everyone—students, teachers, and administrators—commit to student leadership.

VALUE Student Leadership Training

The VALUE leadership training is a two-day workshop designed for both students and educators.

Part One: *Lighting the Fire* for Student Leadership—how to mobilize students and educators into student leadership

Part Two: *The Big Picture*—how student leadership fits into adult education programs and strategies to solve barriers to student leadership

Part Three: *How To*—planning and implementing student leadership projects

Student Leadership at Work

New Mexico and Delaware have sustained student leadership projects by implementing the strategies mentioned above.

New Mexico

In New Mexico, student leaders and administrators are working together to shape the state’s teacher credentialing system. The project began three years ago, when paid student leaders held focus groups with students around the state to identify the qualities of effective instructors. The student leaders, working with educators, compiled the student voice into a report. The report was then used as the foundation of workshops for new ABE teachers.

New Mexico teachers and student leaders have also worked together to create “Classroom Toolboxes for Student Voice.” The toolboxes begin by prompting students to discuss an issue of adult education. The discussions are then turned into academic lessons that become student leadership mini-projects. The “Toolbox on Student Retention and Persistence,” for instance, prompts students to discuss this topic. Using their notes from the discussion, student then write memos to their program directors about student retention, including why some students stop coming to class and what strategies might encourage retention. The toolboxes are aligned to standardized tests used to demonstrate gains so that teachers and students know how their work on student leadership relates to National Reporting System requirements.

Delaware

In Delaware, every ABE program offers paid part-time positions for students to do what students do best: connect with other students, share their experiences as an adult student, listen to the experiences of other students, help students navigate through confusing classes, and assist students in finding services they need.

Delaware’s student organization, OAASIS, trains and coordinates the paid student leaders. As a result, local ABE programs get a student specifically trained to help other students improve their retention and learning gains.

Evolution, Not Revolution

Both these states received state money for student leadership because they earned it. Teams of students and educators did several short-term projects to prove the effectiveness of student leadership. They picked projects that were aligned with administrative priorities at the local and state level. They planned the projects carefully. They established clear goals and met them. Over time, they earned the respect of their state administrations.

Student leadership is finding its place in adult education. The goal is not a revolution that results in student committees running adult education programs. The goal is students collaborating with educators to run the programs together. ●

Power Is the Point

Using Technology in Collaborative Learning Projects

> Wendy W. Wen School 2, OACE, Dept. of Education

A Chinese proverb says, “A smart housewife cannot be a good cook without cooking materials.” When I started using PowerPoint in my ESOL level 4 (intermediate) classes, my materials were limited—I had access to only one computer. More importantly, however, I might not have qualified as a “smart housewife”—I had no computer training. Nonetheless, I wanted to help my students develop the skills to participate fully in the 21st century workforce, which meant integrating basic computer technology into my teaching. I attended workshops at the LAC and educated myself in the use of computers and common software. In the past three years, and I have seen how collaborative technology-based projects can help ESOL students learn English as they pick up essential computer skills.

The Learning Process

With their limited language skills and economic resources, most of my students have little or no experience with computers. When I show them PowerPoint presentations made by a previous class, they're captivated and immediately motivated to create their own—though many have to overcome some initial “computer anxiety.” The process of creating a PowerPoint presentation is similar to that of writing or project-based instruction, with a few additional steps on computer learning.

Modeling. I begin the process by presenting successful PowerPoint projects made by previous students.

Brainstorming topics. As in writing, brainstorming—by individuals, then groups—is a good way to pick a topic that students are interested in, familiar with, or curious about.

Outlining. I've developed an outline sheet to help learners focus and organize their ideas, slide by slide. These outlines also help me prepare suggestions for graphics and Internet research. As in the writing process, planning includes conferences with me.

PowerPoint basics. Advanced students or I demonstrate basic features of the computer and the application, and students practice. A few students with computer experience are trained as tutors for the next stage.

Whole-class learning. Either a student leader or I dictate a step-by-step operation for creating a title page. Three or four students and a trained tutor sit at each computer: Two students take notes on the dictation, one operates the computer, and one checks the computer work. Then group members take turns working on their own title pages.

Mini-workshops. Mini-workshops cover more advanced topics such as clip art, downloading from the Internet, transitions, and animation.

Quality check. Each student's presentation is reviewed first by other students and then by me. In this process, students learn from each other, and I check spelling and grammar.

Presentation. We invite students' families and friends to share our presentations. Students have to present orally as their presentations are shown on screen.

Evaluation. After the presentation, students write a summary of their learning experience, noting skills gained, problems encountered, and suggestions for the future.

Worth the Work

PowerPoint projects are an opportunity for students to learn computer and English skills hand in hand. Students can practice their listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills at the same time as they develop essential computer skills, such as typing on a keyboard, using a mouse, and surfing the Internet. PowerPoint projects also provide an opportunity for students to work collaboratively, a crucial skill in the modern workplace. Students don't complete their presentations alone; they offer and receive help. This is one way in which the common shortfall of most adult education programs—too few computers—can actually be an asset; it forces students to work together.

There are always some students who are reluctant to use the machines, particularly if they have never touched one before. I like to pair these students with more confident learners. The more computer-savvy students learn as much as the reluctant learners they're helping. Student tutors have noted in their journal that helping others not only reinforced what they've already learned but also motivated them to learn more.

Time and again, I've seen this collaborative aspect extend beyond the classroom. Fifty percent of my students reported that their children and spouses participated in the learning process, from writing a draft to downloading pictures. A third grader told me that his mother had never touched their home computer, but then began to ask him to teach her.

Creating PowerPoints—a process that is both challenging and enjoyable—provides my students with a concrete product that demonstrates their second-language skills, their mastery of technology, and their hard work. By the end of the semester, every student has accomplished something that he or she can be proud of. Though the computer skills they learn are quite basic, the experience has prompted many of my students to consider job possibilities that they might not have otherwise, while others have used the skills they learned in their current job and earned promotions. ●

Students Testify to Increased Self-Esteem

“My counselor said, ‘You're doing PowerPoint! You got to teach me!’ I feel like SOMEBODY...”

“Now when I see those people in the train, dressed like lawyers with their laptops to do computer work, I feel more equal to them. Because I can do computer work, too.”

Math Matters *continued*

The New York City Math Exchange Group (MEG) tries to strike the balance between mathematical structure and relevant context by teaching mathematics through problem solving. It is a pedagogical stance that views problem solving not as practice or a bonus to spice up the math curriculum. Instead, rich, challenging, relevant, non-routine problems—usually reserved for elites—and the mathematical discourse generated by those problems anchor our math classes. The problems are the vehicle for learning math content as students construct math knowledge for themselves. The rhythm of classroom attention between problem context and embedded math concept will be familiar to teachers who use a “whole-part-whole” approach to reading instruction.

This fall, MEG will focus on developing problems and lesson sets for ABE students in a post-Katrina world. The draft problem, “Where’s My Ride?” (see box page 3) for instance, requires considerable scaffolding in the interpretation, analysis, and representation of data. It also asks the salient question that spans the ground from mathematical probability to social justice: Is it fair?

MEG monthly meetings are open to all. Most of us who participate in MEG’s joyful, problem-solving culture do not have a mathematics background; we particularly welcome teachers who want to build on their knowledge of literacy learning to become better math instructors. For more information, contact MEG at nycmeg@yahoo.com or fax 718.488.5115. ●

Who Are Our Students? 16–24 year olds

> Venu Thelakkat *Director of ALIES & Data Analysis*

Part 1 in an occasional series that uses ALIES data to shed light on the demographics of literacy students in New York City and State.

When the ALIES staff recently analyzed statistics on 16–24-year-old students in NYS literacy programs at the request of the State Education Department, we noticed some interesting patterns in the characteristics of this age group. These young students make up 27 percent of the total of adult learners in publicly funded literacy programs statewide, 44,856 out of 165,618. But there are some discrepancies between the demographic characteristics of the total student population and those of the 16–24-year-old segment, such as those shown in Tables 1 and 2.

ALIES staff were also interested to find that the proportion of 16–24-year-olds in ABE instruction generally, and particularly in the top two levels, was considerably higher than that of the total student population, while there was a correspondingly lower level of 16–24-year-olds in ESOL instruction at all levels than in the general population. We also found that the percentages of 16–24-year-olds who live in rural areas and who identify themselves as having a learning disability are higher than the corresponding categories in the total student population.

The growing proportion of teens and young adults in adult education programs has engendered a lot of discussion. Interestingly, the proportion of 16–24-year-olds here in New York State, at 27 percent, is lower than the nationwide average of 38 percent in 2004, as documented by the U.S. Department of Education. Whatever the proportions may be, serving increasing numbers of under-prepared young people confronts programs with new issues. See Susan Imel’s 2003 ERIC Digest “Youth in Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs” (www.cete.org/acve) to learn ways programs have responded to the trend. ●

Table 1. Gender

	all students	16–24 yr olds
male	41%	51%
female	59%	49%

Some columns do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Table 1. Ethnicity

	all students	16–24 yr olds
Asian	8%	4%
Black	24%	25%
Latino/a	44%	42%
White	23%	28%
Other	1%	2%

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

Visit our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab to explore ways to use computers to enhance instruction. Browse the web for sites that lend themselves to your lessons, or build a project that uses common office software to enhance communication skills. For information, contact Mariann Fedele, 212.803.3325 or mariannf@lacnyc.org.

Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse

Explore the city’s largest collection of materials for adult literacy education. The collection of books, journals, and audiovisual materials encompasses professional development materials as well as curriculum and reading materials for ESOL, ABE, and GED learners. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

Solidarity

In response to the LAC's solicitation of support for Gulf region literacy programs, students from the Queens Borough Public Library Adult Learning Centers sent colorful cards full of heartfelt messages of compassion. Here are just a few.

I cannot imagine what it is like to lose your home and belongings. My prayers are with you that you find some solace in knowing that we as a nation will do everything we can to help you. Dennis

There is strength in numbers. Queens, New York is hoping for a brighter future for all of you! Michelle

How can I help you? What we call the beginning is often an end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. After the start comes calm. Good wishes with you. Zakesa

I will pray for you! Everybody in the world are thinking in you! Thanks to God that you are alive! I understand how you feel! Take my hand whenever you need! With all my love, Betty

I'm so sorry for everyone. My heart hurts like yours. I am so sorry I couldn't come to visit you. Mahin

Queridos hermanos, Cuando la fatalidad se presenta en nuestras vidas, el mundo entero se torna de una sola raza, de un solo color, de un solo credo religioso y político, y se une a un solo corazón: el de la RECUPERACION, que es el idioma de la SOLIDARIDAD. Omar

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