



# LITERACY UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 05 Vol.15 No. 1

Literacy Assistance Center

## IN THIS ISSUE

3 & 4 Student Leadership Development

6 & 7 Fall Professional Development Events 10 Health Literacy & Technology

11 Funding Update 12 Learner Story

## A Better Chance for Babies

### Health Literacy Initiatives Address Infant Mortality

> Jan Gallagher, Ph.D. *Director of Communications*

In 2003, after years of steady decline, the infant mortality rate (IMR) in New York City increased to 6.5 deaths of infants under one year of age per 1,000 live births. According to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), this number was actually below the national rate of 7 deaths. In low-income NYC neighborhoods, however, IMRs were substantially higher: 11 in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, for instance, and 10.2 in the Tremont section of the Bronx.

Concerned about a 32 percent increase in the Bronx IMR between 2002 and 2003, New York City Council members convened a Bronx Working Group on Infant Mortality. In June, this working group—which includes city council members, representatives of DOHMH and of the Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), health care advocates,

hospitals, and community-based organizations—released a report, naming access to health care as the first of three areas that affect IMRs. (The other two are environmental health and sudden infant death syndrome.)

The report subdivides access to health care into three areas that will immediately resonate with literacy practitioners: affordable health care, health literacy, and cultural competency. The report's acknowledgement of these issues illustrates the ways in which the adult literacy field is often "ahead of the curve." We understand the needs of learners; we know that literacy skills are key to a wide range of life issues, including health and health care; and we know that as learners improve their literacy skills they improve their ability to manage these crucial life issues. In fact, the local literacy community

has already begun to address many of the report's recommendations through the LAC's Health Literacy Initiative.

#### **Baby Basics New York**

Baby Basics New York (BBNY) is a new project that addresses several of the keys to infant health identified by the Bronx IMR report. A partnership of the LAC, the What to Expect Foundation, the Medical and Health Research Association (MHRA) of New York City, and the Primary Care Development Corporation, BBNY provides comprehensive health information and education to help address health disparities for low-income and immigrant women.

Building on previous What to Expect Foundation projects in Houston, Newark, and other cities, BBNY launched its first pilot site at the MHRA Mothers in Care (MIC) site in Jamaica, Queens, this summer.

*continued on page 9*

# Change for the Better

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

This spring, I spent more time worrying than ever before in my life. Adult education has been under siege for as long as I can remember; however, this time the threat seemed plausible—even imminent. Now that we are experiencing at least a temporary reprieve from the federal budget ax, I am taking time to reflect on the source of my unease. Was I afraid that the adult literacy system would have to change? I hope not. I have always believed that our field must remain flexible in order to meet changing needs. Was I afraid that adult literacy education would cease to exist? Not exactly. But I *was* afraid that thousands of programs nationwide would close or curtail services, and, by corollary, I feared for the continued existence of the LAC and similar organizations that exist to serve those programs.

Robert Frost says, “Most of the change we think we see in life is due to truths being in and out of favor.” Our truth is that everyone is entitled to an education. Period. How did such an obvious truth fall out of favor? How did we get to the point where education as a basic right must fit into such a small age-defined box? I have never been prouder to be a member of the literacy community than this spring, when we raised our collective voice—in the form of thousands of individual voices—in support of our truth. We kept the federal government from putting adult education out of business.

However, I don’t for a minute think that we have succeeded in getting adult education back “in favor” with either the government or the general public. We accomplished a lot this spring; but we only restored an unacceptable status quo. I’m looking for a sea change. I’m looking for a society and a political system that shares our vision—that education is a basic human right—and is willing to invest in that vision.

So while we’ve prevented a negative change, we need to bring about a larger positive change. I’ve been guided in my reflections on change by John P. Kotter, professor of leadership at Harvard Business School. Kotter’s eight-stage model for implementing change might help us formulate next steps in the battle to expand adult education opportunities.

Our fight against the federal budget cuts took us through Kotter’s first four stages, which are designed to defrost a hardened status quo:

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Create the guiding coalition
3. Develop a vision and strategy
4. Communicate the change vision

As we shift the emphasis from preventing a negative change to bringing about a positive one, we will not only have to re-take these steps; we will also have to re-take steps 5–7, which introduce new practices:

5. Empower a broad base of people to take action
6. Generate short-term wins
7. Consolidate gains and produce even more change

Kotter’s final stage is the most challenging: Institutionalize new approaches in the culture. If we don’t want to find ourselves fighting the same battle during the next round of budget negotiations, we must accept the challenge. We must reinstate the notion of “opportunity for all” as a core value of our culture—and make it stick. ●

**CORRECTION:** In the May 2005 Spotlight, we stated that Literacy Partners (NYC) is entirely funded by the private sector. We have learned that Literacy Partners also receives government funding. We apologize for the error.

## LITERACY UPDATE

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

In 18 years of teaching adult students, I have been exposed to and learned from the cultures, histories, and experiences of hard-working people from across the globe. Though their learning, achievements, and knowledge often go unrecognized, they bring a treasure chest of lessons and perspectives that need to be heard.

The voices of students are missing from many literacy discussions and policy meetings. When students are invited, they often feel intimidated by teachers and administrators, who often override their viewpoints, or can be limited by their own lack of confidence. Thus, students need to organize themselves to represent their own interests. When student organizations are set up only to meet a program requirement or appeal to funders, they do not have the independence necessary to provide meaningful input on program design and delivery—yet students' input is essential because our programs exist to serve their interests and needs. Furthermore, students and their stories offer powerful and persuasive arguments for continued support and expansion of literacy programs.

### **In the Classroom: Drawing on Student Experience**

Adult students bring vast experience and varied histories and perspectives into the classroom. Educational approaches that engage their knowledge not only generate student participation but also empower students. Popular education is an especially useful model for helping students to develop their leadership skills.

At Our Lady of Refuge Church (OLOR) in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn, where I teach basic education and GED classes, students come from a variety of countries. In order to encourage participation and create an open dialogue, I often use their histories as the basis for class content. For instance, during one session, Antoine Brunvil, a young man from Haiti, co-taught a class on the nation's history and politics. Anne Mackall, a woman from North Carolina, helped lead a class on the civil rights movement, in which she had direct experience. During another class, two women from the Middle East shared their stories, teaching us all about life and war in that part of the world.

In each of these examples, students discussed some of the real-life issues they faced. When we connected the classroom to the community and brought the community into the classroom, active problem solving and community action became our themes. As their roles shifted from passive learners to active educators, students were developing their leadership skills.

### **In the Streets: Students as Organizers**

In the fall of 2003, a cut to adult education programs by the NYC Department of Education (DOE) was a subject of many class discussions at OLOR. These discussions led to the development of a student organization and a student action plan. As part of the plan, a student committee met with the DOE Superintendent Bernard Gassaway and other administrators to voice its concerns and demands. Through these meetings, students obtained books, computers, and a promise for continued classes. These same students participated in, and helped to organize, the fight against federal cuts to adult education last spring.

In March of this year, four New York adult students and I attended the VALUE conference in Washington, DC. VALUE is the only national organization of adult students led by students. The trip to DC—which was sponsored by the Grassroots Literacy Coalition and supported by individual donations, a small grant from the Anderson Ford Fund, and the LAC—gave us the opportunity to meet with, and learn from, students from 27 other states. Attending the conference was a first step in planning a student organizing campaign for New York City.

Following the conference, the four students began visiting classes throughout the city. They went to 20 different programs, speaking directly to students about their concerns and needs. During the visits, the four student leaders encouraged students to speak up for their needs. Specifically, they helped students organize independent student councils and committees to take action around local issues. Some of these councils have advocated for new supplies; others have advocated for computers in the classroom. They are all, however, united in their demand for more classes.

### **What's Next?**

Student leadership and student committees can—and *should*—play a critical role in the educational process, from helping to develop relevant curricula to building strong literacy programs to winning the fight for literacy and adult education in New York City. To do this, students need leadership training, which literacy practitioners can—and *should*—provide.

The Grassroots Literacy Coalition is an organization of students, teachers, and administrators that not only fights for more literacy and adult education programs in the city, but primarily focuses on promoting the voices of adult students and helping students to organize together. In preparation for a fall organizing campaign, adult students from across the city have begun to meet and to attend leadership trainings. Calvin Miles and I will lead a workshop at the LAC on October 28; see page 7. If you are interested in having student leaders speak to your classes about student committees and student voice, please contact Ryan Springer of the Grassroots Literacy Coalition at 917.733.9876 or 212.803.3336. ●

# RESOURCES >> Student Leadership Development

> David Greene *Grassroots Literacy Coalition*

Adult students bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their classes. In order to tap into this knowledge and help students develop their leadership skills, both the methodology and content of adult education should build on learners' strengths. Encouraging dialogue in the classroom and exposing students to new concepts through accessible media will establish a basis for student leadership. These basic—in some cases classic—texts on the theory and practice of adult education will help teachers establish a participatory classroom. The second section recommends content consistent with such a social action methodology.

## Theory and Methodology

### **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

By Paulo Freire  
Continuum, 2000

First published in 1970, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is essential reading for educators interested in leadership development and social action. In this groundbreaking book, Freire examines the differences between education for the dominant culture and education for liberation. He argues for an alternative “problem-posing” approach to learning and teaching. The problem-posing methodology of popular education engages students in real-life problems that face their communities. Basing education on the students' experiences will develop their consciousness and creativity, with similar benefits for educators and for society as a whole.

### **We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change**

By Myles Horton and Paulo Freire  
Temple University Press, 1991 (reprint edition)

*We Make the Road by Walking*—a dialogue between Myles Horton, a major figure in the civil rights moment, and Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator—is filled with stories of the educational process that demonstrate how individuals learn and develop critical thinking and leadership skills. An inspirational book filled with hope, passion, humor, guidance, and humility, it is an excellent resource for people interested in linking participatory education and social change.

### **“Developing Community Leaders”**

By Ella Baker  
In *Black Women in White America*  
Vintage, 1973

In this essay, the civil rights leader Ella Baker connects education and organizing for social change with concrete historical examples from the civil rights movement.

## Content

### **Rethinking Schools**

[www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)  
Written by teachers, parents, and educational activists, this grassroots quarterly journal is an excellent resource for materials that look at social issues and history from alternative points of view.

### **The Change Agent**

New England Literacy Resource Center  
*The Change Agent* features news articles, opinion essays, cartoons, lesson plans, poems, and resources by learners and educators. Developed to promote social action as a part of adult education, each issue is based around a specific social topic. Past issues—all of which can be found online at [www.nelrc.org/changeagent/](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/)—include Women and Literacy, Economic Security and Justice, Connections to Our Environment, and Civic Participation.

### **A Very Popular Economic Education Sampler**

Highlander Research and Education Center, 1997  
*A Very Popular Economic Education Sampler* is an excellent tool for examining the relationship between adult education and the economy, using local experience. The book includes skits, role-plays, and group building activities, as well as a comprehensive resource guide for popular economic education. Highlander also offers a manageable selection of additional resources including books and audiovisual media at [www.highlandercenter.org](http://www.highlandercenter.org).

### **The Popular Education News**

[www.popednews.org](http://www.popednews.org)  
Published by the Popular Education Resource Collection Circle, *The Popular Education News* is a monthly newsletter about popular education and community organizing resources. The newsletter includes reviews of resources, links to popular education websites, news, and feature articles. ●

### **More Popular Education Resources**

*We Are All Leaders: The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s*  
Edited by Staughton Lynd, University of Illinois Press, 1996

“A Talk to Teachers”  
In *Collected Essays* by James Baldwin, Library of America, 1998

*The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*  
By Paulo Freire, Bergin & Garvey, 1984

*Teaching, Questioning, and Learning*  
By Norah Morgan and Juliana Sexton, Routledge, 1991

*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*  
By bell hooks, Routledge, 1994

*Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults  
to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*  
By Steven Brookfield, Open University Press, 1987

## NCSALL Research Update

The following are among the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's current research activities:

- > The Learner Persistence Study (Harvard Graduate School of Education) investigates the forces that support or discourage adult learners' persistence in adult education and tests promising strategies that programs can use to support persistence.
- > The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learners (Portland State University) tracks the lives of almost 1,000 adults over an eight-year period, collecting and analyzing data to understand how adult literacy develops for those with limited formal education.
- > Adult Reading Studies (Harvard Graduate School of Education):
  - > The Level One Study investigates "tipping points" in component skills that prefigure advanced reading on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) test.
  - > The Improving the Instruction of ABE Intermediate Readers study investigates the effectiveness of a reading instructional approach shown to accelerate growth in reading among older adolescents.

For more information on these projects and more, visit NCSALL's website at [www.ncsall.net](http://www.ncsall.net).

## Call for Papers

The editors of *Perspectives: The New York Journal of Adult Learning* invite adult educators, program directors, graduate students, and faculty to submit articles that address the needs and interests of those involved in educating adults in the specific areas of adult literacy, adult education, community education, continuing education, workforce training and development, and higher education around the world. *Perspectives* is a peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the New York Association of Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE) and Fordham University's Graduate School of Education. Manuscripts are accepted for review on a continuous basis. For more information, go to [www.retc.fordham.edu/perspectives](http://www.retc.fordham.edu/perspectives).

## New LAC Publications

We are pleased to announce the release of three new publications. Our annual report for 2004 provides a snapshot of both the local literacy field and the LAC, under the theme Literacy Opens Doors. Running headlines highlight the positive effects of our work: Literacy gives immigrants their chance for a new life; Literacy builds stronger communities; and so on. Copies have been mailed to literacy program managers and to our funders. You can pick up a copy next time you visit the LAC or download a PDF at [www.lacnyc.org/about/annrep.htm](http://www.lacnyc.org/about/annrep.htm).

As noted in "A Better Chance for Babies" on page 1, we have also recently published a guide to partnerships between health care and literacy organizations called "Healthy Relationships." It, too, is available on our website, at [www.lacnyc.org/resources/healthlit](http://www.lacnyc.org/resources/healthlit). While you're there, read about other aspects of the LAC's Health Literacy Initiative.

Later this month, watch for the 2005 edition of *Literacy Harvest*, the LAC's annual journal by and for literacy practitioners. This issue, whose theme is Community Connections in Family Literacy Programming, is a collaborative effort with *Family Literacy Forum*, the journal of the National Even Start Association. For a free subscription to *Literacy Harvest*, email [publications@lacnyc.org](mailto:publications@lacnyc.org).

## The TV411 Think Math DVD

With a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), ALMA has produced the TV411 Think Math DVD for use in adult education classrooms across the county. The DVD features:

- > Eight video segments from the TV411 broadcast series that embed useful math lessons in everyday situations to engage adults and motivate them to learn
- > Lesson plans for teachers of adult learners on fractions, basic geometry, ratios, data analysis, and more
- > Links to lessons and interactive online games that reinforce math content
- > A link to public television schedules posted on [www.tv411.org](http://www.tv411.org)

ALMA has also kicked off an outreach initiative. If your local public television station does not currently air TV411, contact Shelley Ruchti at 212.807.4244 or email [sruchti@edc.org](mailto:sruchti@edc.org) with the contact information for your local station. ALMA will then send you a free TV411 Math DVD.

## CONFERENCES

### October

#### National Council for Workforce Education Fall 2005 Conference

*Creating Pathways for Success*

October 22–25, San Antonio, TX

[www.ncwe.org/conference/index.htm](http://www.ncwe.org/conference/index.htm)

#### Foundations in Family Literacy

National Center for Family Literacy

October 24–26, Louisville, KY

[www.familit.org/Training/foundations.cfm](http://www.familit.org/Training/foundations.cfm)

#### ProLiteracy Worldwide Annual Conference

October 24–31, Tucson, AZ

[www.proliteracy.org/conference/](http://www.proliteracy.org/conference/)

### November

#### National Even Start Association Conference

November 4–9, Arlington, VA

[www.evenstart.org](http://www.evenstart.org)

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

November 6–11, Pittsburgh, PA

[www.aaace.org/conferences/index.html](http://www.aaace.org/conferences/index.html)

#### National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs (NAASLN) 2005 Conference

November 12–15, Denver, CO

[www.naasln.org](http://www.naasln.org)

#### Fourth Annual National Health Communication Conference

*Practical Solutions to the Problems of Low Health Literacy*

American College of Physicians Foundation

November 30, Washington, DC

[http://foundation.acponline.org/healthcom/hcc\\_reg.htm](http://foundation.acponline.org/healthcom/hcc_reg.htm)

## Sept. 14

### Nuts and Bolts of TABE

Wednesday, September 14, 9:30 am–4 pm

**Facilitator:** Ira Yankwitt

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

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Sept. 15

### ALIES Data Entry

Thursday, September 15, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

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, tests scores, and contact hours. New data entry users as well as those in need of a refresher are invited to attend.

This session will also be held on Oct. 21. Please attend only one session.

**RSVP:** ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or [aliesupport@lacnyc.org](mailto:aliesupport@lacnyc.org).

## Sept. 16 & 23

### Preservice Institute

Friday, September 16, 9 am–5 pm

Friday, September 23, 9 am–5 pm

**Facilitators:** Ira Yankwitt & Mariann Fedele

This two-day institute is designed to introduce practitioners new to the field to key concepts and practices in adult literacy education. Topics include characteristics of adult literacy students; intake and goal-setting; federal and state policy, and the National Reporting System (NRS); principles of effective adult literacy instruction; New York State adult learning standards; and instructional planning. Participants are required to attend both days.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Sept. 22

### BEST Plus Training

Thursday, September 22, 9:30 am–4 pm

**Facilitator:** Alecia D'Angelo

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](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Sept. 27

### Exploring Family Literacy

Tuesday, September 27, 9:30 am–4 pm

**Facilitator:** Alecia D'Angelo

Examine the federal definition of family literacy, explore models of family literacy instruction, and discuss goals of family literacy programs. Participants will leave with resources for supporting intergenerational learning. Designed for practitioners new to family literacy, this workshop will feature 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](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Oct. 7 & 21, Nov. 11

### Managing Chronic Disease: Teaching Health Literacy

Friday, October 7, 9 am–1 pm

Friday, October 21, 9 am–1 pm

Friday, November 11, 9 am–1 pm

**Facilitator:** Winston Lawrence, Ed.D.

Health literacy—the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions—is a vital part of adult literacy education. This three-part series focuses on integrating health literacy—specifically, the skills needed to manage chronic disease—into the ABE and ESOL curriculum. Develop lesson plans, try them out in your classes, and reflect on their success.

Participants are required to attend all three sessions.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Oct. 14

### Family Educators Network

Friday, October 14, 9:30 am–1 pm

**Facilitator:** Alecia D'Angelo

Open to adult and family literacy educators, parent coordinators, and K–12 educators, this is the first in a series of meetings 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](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

## Oct. 14

### Storytelling and Visual Art in the ESOL Classroom

Friday, October 14, 1:30–4 pm

**Facilitator:** Regina Ress, ESOL Consultant

In this highly participatory workshop, popular storyteller Regina Ress will demonstrate how to integrate storytelling and visual art into the ESOL classroom. Learn how to use the arts to enhance the practice of the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and to teach vocabulary, functions, and grammar, all the while encouraging cross-cultural awareness and personal expression.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

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

**Oct. 20 & 27,  
Nov. 3 & 10**

**Research-Based Adult Reading  
Instruction Study Circle**

Thursday, October 20, 1–5 pm  
Thursday, October 27, 1–5 pm  
Thursday, November 3, 1–5 pm  
Thursday, November 10, 1–5 pm

**Facilitator:** Mariann Fedele

Developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard, this four-session study circle will provide an overview of current research on adult reading development and reading instruction. Learn about different theories of the reading process and explore their implications for the classroom. Research is drawn from the National Institute for Literacy/Partnership for Reading, the Equipped for the Future project, and the Adult Reading Components Study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Participants must attend all four sessions. This study circle is limited to 20 participants. Early registration is encouraged.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

**Oct. 28,  
Nov. 4 & 18**

**Arts and Family Literacy**

Friday, October 28, 10 am–1 pm  
Friday, November 4, 10 am–1 pm  
Friday, November 18, 10 am–1 pm

**Facilitator:** Amir Parsa, Community Educator, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Explore ways to integrate arts instruction into family literacy programming. Specific topics include encouraging life-long and self-directed learning for families, encouraging families to seek out learning opportunities in the community, providing culturally and linguistically rich learning opportunities for children and adults, and drawing connections between art and language. Sessions are interactive and may include hands-on arts activities.

Participants are required to attend all three sessions.

The Oct. 28 and Nov. 18 sessions will take place at the LAC. The Nov. 4 session will be held at MoMA.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

**LAC Professional  
Development  
Center Open Hours**

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

**Computer Learning Center**

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

**Oct. 21**

**ALIES Data Entry**

Friday, October 21, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

See September 15 for description.

**RSVP:** ALIES Support at 212.803.3357 or [aliessupport@lacnyc.org](mailto:aliessupport@lacnyc.org).

**Oct. 28**

**Popular Education:  
Civic Leadership and  
Student Engagement**

Friday, October 28, 1–5 pm

**Facilitators:** David Greene & Calvin Miles, Grassroots Literacy Coalition

Explore how to facilitate the growth of student leaders while helping students develop their language and literacy skills. Specific topics include the nature of leadership, the dynamics of power, the classroom as a community, teacher-student relationships, student engagement, and writing and presenting effective messages.

**RSVP:** LAC Reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or [rsvp@lacnyc.org](mailto:rsvp@lacnyc.org).

# NYC RAEN Professional Development Highlights for 2005–06

> Ira Yankwitt *Director of Professional Development / NYC RAEN*

The NYC Regional Adult Education Network (NYC RAEN) is one of seven regional adult education networks funded by the NY State Education Department (SED) to provide professional development, technical assistance, and network-building opportunities to SED-funded adult and family literacy programs. Combining this core professional development project with such innovative initiatives as our health literacy and family literacy projects, the LAC aims to provide literacy practitioners with an unprecedented range of opportunities to grow in their ability to meet learners' needs.

NYC RAEN's professional development opportunities balance and integrate SED priorities with local concerns. The NYC RAEN advisory board, consisting of 21 practitioners from a wide variety of local literacy organizations, helps us determine those local concerns. We also draw heavily on the research literature and cutting-edge work in the field. Putting these resources together with the LAC's 20 years of experience in serving the local literacy community gives NYC RAEN an exciting array of professional development opportunities for the coming year.

## At the Core

**Revised Preservice Institute.** This year's streamlined preservice/early inservice training for new practitioners focuses largely on the connection between goal-setting and instruction, highlighting the relationship among intake practices, data collection, and instructional planning.

**Instructional Methods for the Adult Literacy Classroom.** This series introduces ABE, ESOL, and GED instructors to evidence-based classroom practices that build on students' experience, strengths, and interests. Constructivist learning theory provides the framework for understanding and incorporating such approaches as project-based learning, use of authentic materials, and multiple intelligences theory.

**Research-Based Reading Instruction Study Circles.** Building on the success of the LAC's health literacy study circles, NYC RAEN once again draws on materials developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to introduce practitioners to research on reading development from, for example, the National Institute for Literacy/Partnership for Reading, Equipped for the Future, and the Adult Reading Components Study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

## New & Noteworthy

**Targeted Technical Assistance.** NYC RAEN provides onsite technical assistance to programs that did not meet SED's National Reporting System targets for educational gain. After I conduct an initial site visit to discuss the program's needs, the LAC's ALIES and professional

development teams provide follow-up training and support on such topics as data management, assessment, intake and goal-setting, and curriculum and instruction.

**Family Educators Network.** Furthering work the LAC began last year with parent coordinators in NYC public schools, NYC RAEN brings parent coordinators and family literacy practitioners together to examine parent-education research and to share resources and strategies for supporting parental involvement in schools. The network also helps to cultivate partnerships between state-identified schools in need of improvement and adult and family literacy programs.

**One-Stop Partnerships.** To enable adult and family literacy providers to more effectively help their students achieve their employment goals, NYC RAEN continues to work with the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) to facilitate linkages between literacy programs and Workforce One Career Centers ("One-Stops"). In addition to hosting site visits at One-Stops in all five boroughs, NYC RAEN works with SBS to develop more effective approaches to cross-referrals and information sharing.

**Staff Developers Network.** NYC's literacy practitioners receive much of their professional development from their literacy-providing agencies. NYC RAEN convenes regular meetings of staff developers from these organizations to discuss exemplary practices and to identify ways to address the needs of local practitioners.

**Student Leadership Initiative.** The NYC RAEN advisory board identified student leadership as a major local priority. The NYC RAEN student leadership initiative draws on successful local and national efforts in order to promote student leadership at the classroom, program, system, and policy levels, providing training and technical support to students and practitioners alike. Sample projects include student councils, student newsletters, student-led instruction, and student involvement in professional development. See David Greene's article on page 3 to learn about current student leadership initiatives.

## And There's More!

Those are the highlights of the upcoming year, but by no means the definitive list of NYC RAEN professional development offerings. We continue to offer the Program Managers' Series, ALIES and NRS trainings, TABE and BEST Plus workshops, health literacy study circles, Integrating the Arts into Family Literacy, ESOL teacher shares, math workshops for pre-GED and GED teachers, and workshops on supporting students with learning disabilities. To view the complete NYC RAEN workplan, go to [www.lacnyc.org/nysprojects/](http://www.lacnyc.org/nysprojects/). For further information, contact me at [iray@lacnyc.org](mailto:iray@lacnyc.org) or 212.803.3356. ●

## A Better Chance for Babies *continued*

MIC annually serves 2,500 pregnant women, all of whom are eligible for Medicaid's Prenatal Care Assistance Program.

According to the Bronx report, health literacy is one of the keys to improving IMRs—particularly for women whose first language is not English. The keystone of the BBNY Initiative is the book *Baby Basics: Your Month by Month Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy* (in Spanish, *Hola Bebé*). During the first prenatal visit, each expectant mother receives a copy of this comprehensive prenatal guide, which has been adapted for low-level readers from the best-selling *What to Expect When You're Expecting* by Heidi Murkoff. To ensure that vocabulary remains consistent, every MIC staff member, from the receptionist to the health educator to the doctor, is trained to use the book's language to communicate with patients. In this way, the training addresses another issue identified in the Bronx report: cultural competency. Health care providers who have been trained to use *Baby Basics* can speak with expectant mothers in simple language—language that is reinforced by the book's pictures and organizers—to minimize cultural barriers to communication.

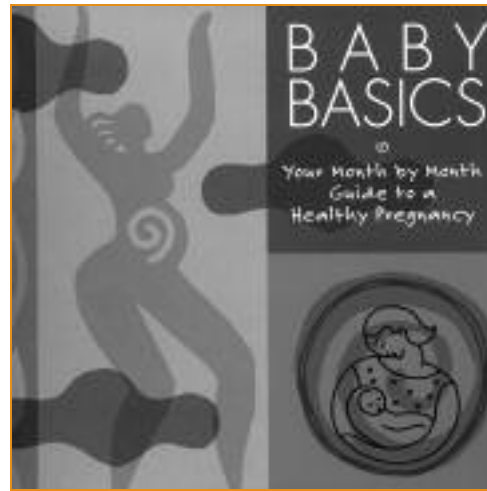
Acknowledging that many of the services that provide free or low-cost health care are under-utilized, the Bronx report recommends the development of “a comprehensive maternal health resource guide.” This is something that BBNY has also already addressed. For each participating site, copies of *Baby Basics* and *Hola Bebé* will come with a customized Baby Basics Planner, including a list of local community resources for pregnant women and new mothers, such as the local WIC office or a community-based program that offers used maternity clothing.

BBNY further addresses the issue of health literacy with BB Mom's Club meetings. Facilitated by a health educator who has been trained not only in the use of *Baby Basics* language and concepts but also in effective adult education strategies, these meetings provide an opportunity for expectant mothers at all stages of pregnancy to learn together, so they can make the most of their prenatal visits.

The Bronx IMR report cites a study by the Centers for Disease Control, which demonstrates that infants of mothers who received no prenatal care had an IMR of 33.8, while infants whose mothers received prenatal care beginning in the first trimester had an IMR of 6.1. Though pregnant women who go to MIC have, by definition, already entered the prenatal care system, BBNY has implemented several strategies to make it easier for expectant mothers to return for subsequent appointments:

- > All staff members are trained to welcome clients in culturally sensitive ways.
- > Clerical staff members assist clients in filling out intake and Medicare forms.
- > The Baby Basics Planner includes information on registering for HMOs, as well as a place for women to note their next appointment.

The next step for the Jamaica site involves integrating *Baby Basics* and the Planner into home visits, which are often recommended for high-risk pregnancies. Though BBNY cannot implement the Bronx IMR report's recommendation to “increase funding for nurse home visit programs,” it can help ensure that the visits that do take place are as helpful as possible. The visiting nurse can open the client's Planner to see what her doctor has recommended, use the same vocabulary the



client hears at her clinic to reinforce the doctor's advice, and help the client write questions in her Planner to ask at her next visit.

“The mothers at the Jamaica site love *Baby Basics*,” says Lisa Bernstein, executive director of the What to Expect Foundation. “I'm seeing mothers clutching the books and reading them in the waiting room. One mother said it's the best piece of information she's received since she got pregnant.” Rigorous evaluation of the pilot program will enable the creation of a citywide initiative and a national model for improving prenatal care for low-income women.

### CBO-Hospital Partnerships

In terms of access to health care, a key recommendation of the Bronx IMR report is to “foster more partnerships between CBOs [community-based organizations] and hospitals and large health clinics.” Noting that CBOs are “a trusted and accessible resource” in their communities, the report states that such partnerships “would assist both hospitals and CBOs to provide better services to their clients.” This recommendation coincides with the advice of the LAC's recently published “Healthy Relationships: A Guide to Forming Partnerships between Health Care Providers and Adult Education Programs” ([www.lacnyc.org/resources/healthlit/Health.pdf](http://www.lacnyc.org/resources/healthlit/Health.pdf)).

One of the emphases of the LAC's Health Literacy Initiative is to facilitate the formation of partnerships between literacy and health care organizations. The partnership guide points out that the health care and literacy providers who formed partnerships with the help of the LAC were often “unaware of how much their work with the same constituencies overlapped.” Collaborations between health and literacy providers have included hospital orientation tours for literacy students, co-hosting booths at street fairs, mock consultations with family health educators, and health literacy study circles for senior center staff members.

These partnerships also enable literacy programs to help doctors address cultural barriers to quality health care. Noting that 29 percent of Bronx residents are foreign-born (this number is actually lower than the percentage for the city as a whole, which is 38 percent), the Bronx IMR report emphasizes the importance of helping health care providers “understand and respond effectively to the cultural and linguistic needs of patients.” Literacy providers—who are expert in both clear and simple communication and the cultural backgrounds of their communities—are uniquely suited to assist doctors and other health care providers in communicating more clearly with patients.

Building on the success of pilot partnerships established in 2004, the LAC is reaching out to leaders of the city's Health and Hospitals Corporation to recruit additional health care partners for literacy programs. ●

# Merging English, Health, and Technology

## The ESOL Health Literacy Project

> Tamara Kirson ESOL Coordinator/Instructor, City College, City University of New York

Like most ESOL instructors, I want to provide my students with authentic English language learning experiences. Recently, health literacy has emerged as one way to accomplish this. Adult education instructors across the city have started to teach literacy skills through the context of health-related content and health care situations. In my advanced ESOL class at City College, we took this principle one step further by incorporating a technology component. In a yearlong project, my students created their own health literacy website, The ESOL Health Literacy Project, at [www.zeroshouse.com/healthlit.htm](http://www.zeroshouse.com/healthlit.htm).

When introducing the concept of health literacy, I asked my students three questions:

- > Why should we study health?
- > What should we study about health?
- > How can we transmit what we've learned to the world?

As they answered these questions on the blackboard and in pair-share discussions, the idea of creating a website naturally emerged.

### Language Learning through Health Research

Over the course of the first semester, my students engaged in a variety of activities to learn about health topics. They read and analyzed columns about health in *The New York Times*, documents provided by the LAC and the Harvard School of Public Health, and articles on the internet. They watched and dissected the documentary *SuperSize Me* and discovered how to interpret nutrition labels. They participated in student-led stretching and balancing exercises. They purchased and used pedometers to determine the number of miles they walked each day, and they began to eat bananas instead of potato chips!

Every day, students responded in their journals to teacher- and student-generated prompts about health. They produced an array of writing, from anecdotes to essays about their readings and their related experiences. Working independently, in pairs, and in groups, they discussed and edited their work.

Community resources were an integral part of the learning process. Students welcomed one guest instructor who helped them improve their writing skills and another who helped them explore the field of mental health.

While students were reading and writing about health—and engaging in health-related activities—they were also building their computer literacy. During computer labs facilitated by the City College science librarian, they learned how to navigate reliable online sources, such as [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov), [www.noah-health.org](http://www.noah-health.org), and [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com). During bi-weekly computer classes, they practiced their word processing skills and learned how to use FrontPage, the program they used to design their website.

### Sharing What We Learned

To create the actual site, we followed several important organizational steps. The first step was to determine the objectives and the “voice” of the website, the make-up of the homepage and the authors’ page, and a list of potential topics. Next, we created a “Page Masters and Page Members” schema to identify the topic for each page on the site; the “master” or person responsible for the content and quality of each page; and the “members,” those students who formed the team for each page. We also selected a student photographer to take relevant photos.

After that, we needed to determine the process for producing each page. For our website, students recommended excerpts from their writings. Page masters and members made the final choices based on the quality and diversity of information. I approved all content and design. The lab instructor was responsible for the appearance and integrity of the website. During this process, I made sure that students had time in class and in the computer lab to work together in their teams. I also encouraged students to use email to exchange ideas.

So they could share what they learned and receive feedback on their work, I had my students send the URL to friends and family.

### The Final Product

Creating the website was hard work. It took a fair amount of my students’ time and energy. The payoff, however, was worth it. Students learned about diseases, modified their eating habits, introduced exercise into their lives, became proactive patients, and experienced a strong sense of accomplishment, all the while developing their literacy, language, and computer skills. In the words of one student, “All individuals are eventually in charge of their own health by becoming a CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of themselves.” Creating the website helped my students become CEO’s of their own health, in a non-native language. ●

#### Excerpts from The ESOL Health Literacy Project website

“Learning is a process of increasing knowledge, developing skills and building intelligence. With this in mind, we have been studying English, taking computer classes and, at the same time, obtaining important information about health.”

“As a proactive patient, I should ask about the doctor’s background and experience. I decided that I won’t be afraid anymore... I will ask even though my English is not perfect.”

“When I hear people... talking about their usual stress at their job, I recommend that they take at least one session of yoga practice a week.”

“When I was a child  
I didn’t like broccoli, beets or spinach  
Now I’ve learned to eat them fast  
Until I’ve finished.”

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”*

> Margaret Mead

## Policy Update

### Federal Funding

When the Bush administration cut adult education by 64 percent in its 2006 budget proposal last spring, the adult literacy community sprang into action. Locally and nationwide, coalitions were activated, emails flew, and advocacy webpages were updated virtually daily. Literacy students and teachers emailed or called their congressional representatives, rallied in public demonstrations, enlisted the media, handed out leaflets, and talked to anyone who would listen about the importance of adult literacy education. It appears our hard work has paid off. Though the appropriations bill that governs adult education has yet to go through conference committee at this writing, the House has approved level funding for adult education state grants. The Senate Appropriations Committee

has also recommended level funding, though the bill has not yet (and may not) come to a floor vote.

Administration proposals for reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) also raised concern last spring. The House has rejected the “WIA Plus Consolidation Block Grant,” which would have lumped funding for adult education with employment programs, with potentially disastrous results for literacy programs. The Senate version is out of committee, but, as of this writing, has not yet been scheduled for a floor vote.

### New City Funding

A budget deal between Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council has allocated over \$7.3 million for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, which would fund critical immigrant services throughout the city. The amount represents a significant enhancement over the current funding level of \$2.8 million.

Together with the mayor’s \$1.8 million for immigrant family literacy and \$335,000 for ESOL and citizenship classes at senior centers, the total city “pot” is now at \$9.451 million, a significant increase from last year’s \$2.8 for IOI and \$335,000 for senior ESOL.

So far there is no RFP process for this additional funding, and lack of time suggests that there won’t be one this year. Nell Eckersley of Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst suggests that programs that want to access this funding should write letters to:

- > Miguel Martínez and Kendall Stewart, who head up the city council’s immigrant committee
- > City council members who represent your learners’ districts

In your letter, describe how you would better serve the immigrant community with expanded funding.

## 2005 Literacy Recognition Award Ceremony



**Left Photo:** Paul Stanley of Bookbinders’ Guild, Elyse Barbell of the LAC, LAC board chair Karen Proctor, and Tom Roche of Bookbinders’ Guild present Osmara López, center, with her award.

**Right Photo:** LAC board chair Karen Proctor and LAC executive director Elyse Barbell present Karen Rosa, vice president and executive director of the Altman Foundation, with a special award honoring the Altman Foundation for its leadership in health literacy and family literacy.



Recipients of the 2005 Literacy Recognition Awards, from left: James Bell, Charles Brover, Stephen Meyerson, Bruce Carmel, Karen Rosa of the Altman Foundation, Eileen Duffell, Mary Ann Gottlieb, Osmara López, and Elaine Sohn.

The LAC is proud to devote the back page of this year's issues of *Literacy Update* to the ultimate beneficiaries of our work with literacy practitioners: adult learners. Our thanks to the learners who wrote these inspiring stories and the practitioners who made it possible for them to do so.

## My Success Story

> Lucinda Swift, *Wakefield Center for Reading and Writing New York Public Library*

My name is Lucinda Swift. I have been coming to the Wakefield program for over 2 years. When I came to this program, my goals were to get my drivers' license and a promotion on my job. I also wanted to help my children with their homework and be able to read and understand their school report.

Coming to the program has helped me achieve those goals. When I started at my job, I was a housekeeper. With the help of the program, I have improved my reading and writing and was promoted to supervisor. I have 5–6 people working under me. I got my drivers' license and now have my own car. On many evenings I help my tutor with a ride home.

About a month ago, I started using E-mail to write my friends every Monday and Wednesday when I come to school. I read the letters that my children bring home from school and can talk to their teacher. As I drive, I am learning to read road signs better. I know that this program is a good thing and will help me achieve other goals. I want to express my thanks to all the people who make this possible.

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