



# LITERACY UPDATE

MARCH 06 Vol. 15 No. 4

Literacy Assistance Center

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## How Are We Doing?

Using Evaluation to Inform Program Decisions

> Anne Lawrence *The Robert Bowne Foundation*

Four years ago I jumped the fence. After nearly 30 years as an adult educator, I became a program officer for the Robert Bowne Foundation, which funds programs that support literacy development for children and youth in their out-of-school time. When I arrived at the foundation, one of my first goals was to integrate evaluation into the fabric of our own work.

As someone who had served on evaluation committees in every program I ever worked for, as well as the LAC Assessment Group and state assessment committees, I was aware that traditional “accountability” evaluation is rarely useful for programs. My goal as an educator had been to make evaluation truly useful to me, as well as to the rest of the staff and the program participants. I wanted our

reports to give funders useful information on how well we were fulfilling our mission and accomplishing our goals. When I became a funder, I wanted the foundation to have the same information. I was a firm believer that integrating a well-designed evaluation was essential for any organization striving for excellence, whether it was a classroom, organizations we funded, or my own institution. This was not a hard sell at the foundation, which has been training evaluators and now program staff in participatory evaluation for more than ten years.

### **The Robert Bowne Foundation Evaluation**

In developing our process, I was fortunate to be working with Dr. Kim Sabo, an experienced participatory evaluator. Our

first step was to ask the staff and consultants what information would be useful to them in evaluating the effectiveness of what they were doing. Since the foundation's strategic goals are directly linked to assisting programs in building organizational capacity, we wanted to know whether our grantees believed our management and programmatic technical assistance truly helped them. As the program officer, I also wanted to know what I could do better to assist them in reaching their full potential. Over the four years that I have been program officer, we have modified our evaluation design and questions as we learn what information is most useful to us. Here is our current version, which will no doubt evolve further over time.

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# LITERACY UPDATE

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or 212.803.3332.

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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.

## Listening and Learning

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

Recently, the LAC board chair suggested that I think about becoming a more active listener. That is, someone who reacts less viscerally and spends more time in thoughtful reflection before responding. This is a bit of a challenge for someone like me who runs on instinct and values speedy decision-making. Nevertheless, I saw the wisdom in her advice. Being a good active learner, I decided to start my listening program by observing some masters at it.

My first and most exciting lesson was with Hillary Clinton. On a regular basis, she convenes listening sessions on a particular topic in advance of legislative sessions in DC. Recently, I was invited to one devoted to determining the proper balance of education and work requirements for TANF recipients. About 35 practitioners were there and five elected officials—mostly city council members. Hillary was a very good listener, but she also dominated the room. She had clearly done her homework and formulated her own opinions before the meeting began. Her questions were informed and insightful. Her responses were cogent. I am not sure how far we moved her from the position she came in with, but I enjoyed the dialogue and the lesson in how to lead a discussion while listening.

My next lesson came from the Mayor's office. Alan Gardner, chief of staff to Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, led a task force that also included Anthony Tassi and Deborah Taylor on a very thorough listening tour of the adult education community. The task force convened all of the literacy provider agencies and groups of practitioners and learners, as well as entities such as churches and hospitals that have a deep interest in literacy levels among the general public. Their listening style was impressively reflective and thoughtful. They also did an excellent job of telling us what they were learning—teachback, a key element of good adult literacy instruction! Their use of teachback assured us that they heard our concerns, understood key issues, and were willing to take action. We look forward to increased attention and support from the Mayor's office adult literacy team, led by Anthony Tassi.

After completing this on-the-job training, I decided it was time to challenge myself with one of the hardest tests imaginable: listening to my 7th-grade daughter. Firmly biting my tongue, I let her finish her thoughts completely. I asked informed questions. I let her take the lead in the decision-making process. To my delight, my daughter was able to develop a strategy that resolved her issues in a way that worked for her.

Now, if I can just convince my board chair that I am capable of remaining silent and listening for more than four minutes straight.... ●

## What's in Your Wallet? From Financial Literacy to Community and Family Economics

> Lisa Gale Van Brackle *Deputy Director*

Every literacy student is concerned about money issues. Many programs have been eager to introduce more economic, consumer, and financial topics into their lessons in a systematic way, both as a context for math instruction and to assist their students in establishing greater control over their lives. The challenge has been to find an approach that is relevant, useful, and respectful of student concerns and sensitivities.

To find out the specific needs of students, the LAC convened two focus groups, one with students and a second with instructors.

### The Student Perspective

Our students had plenty to say, and were very articulate in saying it. They all agreed that many of their concerns involved very basic needs: food, shelter, and transportation. Finance and money were generally not discussed in their classes, they told us, but some of the most thought-provoking lessons had dealt with economic literacy and civics.

Unanimously, they were eager to learn more, not just about money matters per se, but about consumer rights and strategies to help them advocate for themselves in situations involving money. They told us that they and their peers had developed a host of strategies for getting by. One student related how several students share an unlimited MetroCard to get to school. The gap between uses has to be at least 20 minutes, he explained, so one of them always arrives late to class. Another said that some students he knows pay for goods and services with large bills because they have difficulty adding and subtracting and want to avoid the embarrassment of asking for help or making a mistake.

When we asked the focus group participants to suggest specific areas that they would like to see covered, their suggestions fell into these areas:

- > **Money basics**—What is the value and how can I differentiate bills? What change should I expect back when I make a purchase?
- > **Consumer finance**—What are the fees involved with sending money home via remittance services to people in my homeland? Why shouldn't I get payday loans? What should I be looking for on a box of \_\_\_\_\_ to help me understand which offers the most value for the price?
- > **Finance options**—What's the difference between check cashing establishments, commercial banks, credit unions, and other community development financial institutions?
- > **Government**—Am I eligible for food cards, child care vouchers, housing subsidies, earned income credits? Why do I have taxes taken out of my paycheck?

### The Instructor Perspective

Literacy instructors in our focus groups also welcomed our project, unanimously agreeing that it was much needed. Students do not plan, they told us, and have no concept of “tomorrow.” To make matters worse, many immigrant students have no familiarity with financial concepts that middle class Americans take for granted, such as savings and credit; they rely upon a network of community “helpers” to guide

their financial decisions. Satisfying the most basic needs is a constant struggle, particularly in single-parent families. Bankruptcy filings have become increasingly common. Many students come from households in which several families live together to save on rent. Not surprisingly, they are very skeptical about the economic system and are always looking for stratagems that will reduce their obligations. A significant number are trapped in bad relationships as a result of financial needs and can't figure out how to extricate themselves and their children. Finally, several instructors expressed their desire to encourage students to model more positive financial behaviors.

In the past, program managers told us that their instructors were hesitant to address finances in the classroom. However, focus group participants said money issues do come up in class, and they provide instruction on some of them. Many develop their own curriculum. The focus tends to be on money basics—little more than how to count and spend it. Instructors frequently lack the knowledge to delve into greater depth, our participants explained, and could use guidance in economic matters themselves.

### Toward a Skills-Based Framework

In analyzing all that we had read and learned from program directors, instructors, and students, the LAC established a basic premise that immediately set us apart from every existing program we had encountered: Although directing instructors to teach students what they should be doing would be the easiest approach, encouraging them to meet students where they are, with no value judgments, would be far more effective and beneficial. Based on our focus groups, we knew that students would be likely to want and need information on consumer issues and broader economic issues, as well as personal finance. What we really want to bring to the table, we realized, isn't just financial literacy, it's consumer literacy and broader economic issues as well. Our term for this is Community and Family Economics.

Rather than expect instructors to become experts in the entire spectrum of topics that might be included, we decided that the LAC could be most helpful by offering them strategies for identifying student needs and building the skills necessary to satisfy them. In some cases, the lesson could be based on existing materials that we would help them identify. Our primary role, however, would be to give instructors techniques to create their own lessons, based on needs their students express and resources in their community. For example, a lesson could be built around a Medicaid enrollment form, or the prices of three different-sized boxes of the same detergent, or a student survey of how their friends send money abroad.

Thanks to the grant from the American Express Foundation and additional funding from the Altman Foundation, the LAC is able to offer a four-session pilot institute this spring. Our hope is that when instructors start asking their students, “What's in your wallet and what would you like to see in there?” we will be rewarded with a wealth of new ideas. ●

# Building Literacy through the Arts

> Amir Parsa *The Museum of Modern Art*

In the spring of 2005, the Museum of Modern Art joined forces with the Literacy Assistance Center to explore ways in which arts education can support literacy development, enhance instruction offered to parents and children in family literacy programs, and, very specifically, be offered to parents participating in beginning level ESOL classes.

In the fall, we ran an eight-week pilot project with a class of mothers and grandmothers (and one father) run by the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation. The program combined creative learning experiences with outings for caregivers and children to the Museum of Modern Art.

This pilot project was a resounding success. In quantitative terms, this is what a comparison of pre- and post-project participant surveys found:

> Number of students able to state specific ways to visit museums and use them to provide learning opportunities for their family:

At start of project	47%
At completion	97%

> Number of students that said their children liked to visit museums

At start of project	68%
At completion of project	100%

When asked in the post-survey how the program had been beneficial, participants said it had provided:

- > Expanded learning opportunities for children
- > An opportunity for new experiences and to expand horizons
- > A sense of confidence in visiting museums
- > Opportunities to enjoy art and learn about it
- > Ways to learn about life and culture through art
- > Opportunities to expand their imagination and creativity
- > A realization of the importance of new life experiences
- > Lessons to use with their children at home

Asked at the beginning of the program about their previous visits to museums, most of the participants said they and their children had found them tiring. After engaging in the project's learning experiences while visiting the museum and after, their attitudes changed dramatically. As one participant eloquently put it in the post-participation survey, "I learned to paint, to observe, to create, and through these experiences I learned to ask questions about what I had seen. I was really enthusiastic about continuing to paint in the sketchbook the museum gave us." (The survey questions were in English; participant replies were in Spanish.)

The following is a brief guide to setting up an arts literacy program.

*"Museums are a good place to learn because children develop their imagination and creativity. They see much more than an adult, and it is wonderful to listen to their stories."*

> Participant in the LAC/MoMA pilot program

## Getting Started

> **Select works of art.** Most museums have portions of their collection online. Many also provide hard-copy lesson plans arranged thematically with CDs or DVDs. Images are also all around us: Asking students to bring in copies of favorite paintings or their own photographs can launch discussion. Of course, the best viewing experience is seeing the originals at museums or galleries.

> **Go over the project with your students.** Explain what you hope they will gain from the experience, what exercises and activities they will engage in, what skills they will obtain, and how these skills will relate to their lives and the tasks their children perform in school.

## Activities

Adult learners bring a wealth of experiences, knowledge, and skills to the classroom. Their lives are full of rich stories and insights that can greatly facilitate their learning through the arts. Here are some ideas for activities.

> **Observing and describing a work of art.** This is a wonderful way to learn new vocabulary and language structures, as well as to develop comprehension and interpretative skills.

> **Sketching and drawing.** These activities encourage careful observation—picking out details and connecting them—and concentration. Even adult learners who have never drawn before are usually very pleased to take up sketching in a museum.

> **Creating.** Creating art can involve various materials and mediums. Collages, photo-texts, a video scenario, multi-media projects can involve any number of skills or concrete uses of language. These activities can be envisaged as long-term projects or as fruitful exercises. Any of them can be used to stimulate storylines, as well as spark imagination, promote creativity, and encourage self-expression.

> **Reading.** It's possible to introduce literature related to museums, artists, or art movements in a variety of ways that motivate parents and their children while stimulating engagement with alternative literature. Specific art works can also prompt activities where parents and kids read together and make a host of connections to their own lives. These experiences create *alternative motivations and dynamics for reading*. Possible follow-ups include art-making connections, viewings and discussions, and further readings connected to themes explored in the museum.

> **Writing.** When students are engaged with works of art, related activities can offer them many motivations for writing in a variety of different genres: letters, descriptions, dramatic monologues, biography.

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# 21<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL LITERACY RECOGNITION CEREMONY

The LAC is pleased to announce that City Council Member and Chairperson of the Education Committee Robert Jackson is scheduled to be the keynote speaker for the 21st Annual Literacy Recognition Ceremony.

This year's ceremony will be held on  
FRIDAY, JUNE 2  
FROM 9:30 AM—12:30 PM

SCHOLASTIC, INC., AUDITORIUM  
557 Broadway, 2nd floor  
(between Prince and Spring Sts.)

For more information about the ceremony, visit our website [www.lacnyc.org/support/recog](http://www.lacnyc.org/support/recog) or email [tonyp@lacnyc.org](mailto:tonyp@lacnyc.org).

## The 2006 Tri-Library Adult Learning Conference

The LAC, Literacy Partners, the New York Public Library, the Queens Library, and the Brooklyn Library are sponsoring the annual Tri-Library Adult Learning Conference for volunteer tutors on Saturday, March 18, from 9:30 am–3 pm, at the Flushing Library. The conference offers a series of workshops on tutoring adult literacy and ESOL learners in small group settings. Presentations are aimed to keep tutors abreast of the new trends in adult literacy. Educators from the LAC, DYCD, Literacy Partners, and the three New York library systems will present on various topics including strategies for basic literacy, group tutoring, helping students become independent learners, incorporating a balance of skills throughout the levels, utilizing technology, and working with beginning ESOL students. For more information, contact Roberto Cruz at 718.480.4234.

## NYACCE Conference

The New York Association for Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE) is holding its 55th annual conference on May 7–9 at the Marriott Hotel in Albany. For more information, go to the NYACCE website at [www.nyacce.org](http://www.nyacce.org).

## Pennsylvania State University Open House

The Adult Education Program at Penn State University is holding its spring open house on April 1, from 11 am–2 pm. Dedicated to advancing knowledge and improving practices regarding teaching and learning of adults in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts, the adult education program offers three graduate degrees—M.Ed, D.Ed., Ph.D—and three graduate certificates—Distance Education, Family Literacy, and HRD/Workplace Learning. The open house, which will take place at the Nittany Lion Inn in University Park, PA, is a time for prospective students to meet faculty and students and tour the campus.

For more information, call 814.863.5580, email [hnn107@psu.edu](mailto:hnn107@psu.edu), or visit their website at [www.ed.psu.edu/adulted](http://www.ed.psu.edu/adulted).

## New from NCSALL

NCSALL recently released a new study circle guide, *Research-Based Adult Reading Instruction*, which provides comprehensive instructions for facilitating a ten-hour study circle that explores differing theories of the reading process, the four major components of reading and the implications for teaching those components, the development of learners' reading profiles, and the Equipped for the Future framework.

NCSALL has also released the *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy: Connecting Research, Policy, and Practice*, Volume 6, edited by John Comings, Barbara Garner, and Cristine Smith. This volume presents chapters on demographic change and low-literacy Americans, the role of vocabulary in ABE, implications of research on spelling for ABE, issues in teaching speaking skills to adult ESOL learners, the preparation and stability of the ABE teaching workforce, the adult literacy system in Ireland, and broad-based organizing as a vehicle for promoting adult literacy.

For more information, or to order the guide or the review, go to [www.ncsall.net](http://www.ncsall.net). ●

## Mar. 6

### ALIES Data Entry

Monday, March, 6, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

**Facilitator:** Kate Tornese, Literacy Volunteers of Westchester County, Inc.

This one-day training provides a comprehensive introduction to the ALIES data entry process. Highlights include navigating ALIES data entry screens; upgrading ALIES; backing up data; inputting student, class, and instructor information; and updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours. New data entry users, as well as those who need a refresher, are invited to attend.

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

## Mar. 10

### ESOL Teacher Share

Writing Open-Ended Picture Stories Using the Language Experience Approach  
Friday, March 10, 1:30–4 pm

**Presenter:** Jovy de La Paz, ESOL Coordinator, CAMBA

This presentation is designed to show teachers how ESOL students can write down their own ideas or experiences, ask questions, and obtain information based on visuals produced during the session. Teachers can use this approach to elicit discussions on common social issues, such as health literacy, emergency, family, housing, employment, and the environment. The exercise is suitable for beginner, intermediate, and advanced ESOL levels.

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

## Mar. 21

### Troubleshooting NRS Reports

Tuesday, March 21, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

**Facilitator:** Kate Tornese, Literacy Volunteers of Westchester County, Inc.

Beginning with a general overview of the tables, fields, and calculations, this training will help prepare programs for troubleshooting NRS Reports. Participants will learn how to apply the ALIES data check reports to troubleshoot NRS data. A step-by-step process for determining “Why this student does not show up on my report” will be highlighted.

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

## Mar. 23

### 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.

### Using New Technologies in the Adult Literacy Classroom

Thursday, March 23, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

**Facilitator:** Mariann Fedele

From wikis to podcasts to blogs, this workshop will introduce some of the latest technologies being used to support adult literacy instruction. There will be examples of teachers who have successfully integrated technology into their students' learning experiences, as well as opportunities to practice using the technologies. This is a repeat of the Jan. 31 workshop. Registration is limited to the first 16 people.

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

## Mar. 30

### Exploring Family Literacy

Thursday, March 30, 9:30 am–4 pm

**Facilitator:** Alecia D'Angelo

In this workshop, which is designed for those who are new to family literacy, participants will 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. There will be hands-on and participatory group-learning activities.

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

## Mar. 31

### Popular Education Study Group

Friday, March 31, 2–4:30 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. Participants will read materials on popular education and discuss how to apply these theories in the classroom.

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

## Apr. 7

### ESOL Workshop

Advancing Learning through Class Visitation  
Friday, April 7, 1:30–4:30 pm

**Facilitator:** James Chang, ESOL Coordinator, 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund

This workshop will show participants how to take advantage of being visited by supervisors in the classroom. Participants will engage in interactive tasks, such as role-play exercises; critique specific teaching methods using aids, such as background music, Chinese fortune cookie slips, and cue cards; and view two short video clips of actual classroom teaching.

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

## Apr. 21

### Career Development Institute

This three-part series will introduce practitioners to instructional strategies that support career exploration and development, and workplace readiness. Sessions will also be held on April 27 and May 5. Attendance at all three sessions is strongly encouraged.

**The Educational Demands of the 21st Century Workplace**  
Friday, April 21, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

**Facilitator:** Mariann Fedele

In this workshop, participants will explore the educational demands of the 21st Century workplace and discuss how to draw those demands into instruction. The SCANS skills and Equipped for the Future (EFF) Worker Role Map will be used as a framework for instructional planning.

**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.

Apr. 27

### Career Development Institute

See April 21 for series description.

#### Taking Action for a Safe Workplace

Thursday, April 27, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

**Facilitator:** Marsha Love, New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health

This workshop will introduce participants to the field of occupational health and safety. Participants will be asked to take on the role of learners, practicing activities of the curriculum. Participants will then explore ways to enrich student vocabulary and create grammar lessons that relate to this content. Though intended primarily for the ESOL classroom, this workshop offers insights and materials that are also useful for BE, pre-GED, and GED classrooms.

**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).

Apr. 28

### Family Educator Network

Friday, April 28, 9:30 am–1 pm

**Facilitator:** Alecia D'Angelo

Open to adult and family literacy educators, parent coordinators, and K-12 educators, the Family Educator Network is designed for participants to share their expertise and experiences working with parents and caregivers. Specifically, 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. Attendance at previous sessions is not required. Space is limited. Registration is essential.

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

## More March & April Dates

Don't forget to attend the final sessions of these multi-part workshops.

### Teaching Health Literacy: Disease Prevention and Screening

Friday, March 3, 1–5 pm

### Health Literacy Study Circle

Friday, March 10, 9:30 am–1 pm

Friday, March 24, 9:30 am–1 pm

### Consumer and Family Economics

Tuesday, March 14, 9:30 am–1 pm

Tuesday, April 4, 9:30 am–1 pm

## How Are We Doing? *continued*

RBF Evaluation Design 2005	
<p><b>Evaluation Questions</b></p> <p>What is the current service delivery model in RBF grantee programs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Which activities are most often employed?</li> <li>&gt; How integrated is literacy?</li> <li>&gt; How strong is the overall management model within each grantee program?</li> <li>&gt; In what areas do RBF grantees need assistance?</li> <li>&gt; Which are the most significant areas of need?</li> <li>&gt; What are common program goals for the year?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Methods</b></p> <p>Support visit questionnaire Final reports</p>
<p>How and to what extent have grantees changed due to their interaction with RBF technical assistance (TA) providers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Which types of TA were recommended and utilized?</li> <li>&gt; How and to what extent have TA learnings been integrated into practice? Why?</li> <li>&gt; How effective/useful is the new site visit strategy?</li> <li>&gt; Which RBF technical assistance providers are most often engaged by RBF grantees? How effective are these services?</li> </ul>	<p>Support visit questionnaire Final reports TA Survey</p>

As we developed our own evaluation design, we noticed that some of our grantees had less staff turnover than others and were able to implement and sustain what they learned through technical assistance. To give us more information on how we could better support programs, we asked Dr. Sabo to look more closely at five that appeared to have successfully integrated our technical assistance and were able to sustain its benefits. Her case studies revealed that “quality” after-school programs share many of the traits found in other types of successful organizations, including large corporations. In most of them, directors and staff members believe that people and organizations have the ability to change and become more effective, and that change requires open communication and empowerment of community members, as well as a culture of collaboration. In his book *The Fifth Dimension* (Currency Doubleday, 1990), business strategist Peter Senge calls them “learning organizations.” These are what I look for.

### In the Field

Evaluation plays an essential role in a learning organization. It gives all stakeholders information about how the program is operating and how it can be improved. That said, a good evaluation process can be found in many forms. Here are examples of how some of our grantees have integrated and used evaluation in their programs.

Riverdale Neighborhood House began evaluating their program in 1999. One of the tools it uses is focus groups (six to eight individuals are interviewed on a particular topic). They conduct them with each

grade level of their program. The children are selected randomly and the focus groups last around 30 minutes. Students are asked what they like and dislike, and what they would like to change about reading and writing activities. Program changes made based on the information collected during the focus groups include adding magazines (such as *Sports Illustrated*) and books to the curriculum that the students said they enjoyed reading and giving students more opportunities to select what they read. (RNH describes its experience of integrating evaluation into the program in *Participatory Evaluation in the After-School Program, a Practical Guide*.)

At Global Kids, a program for young adults, the staff regularly solicits the opinions of participants. For example, the members of its Human Rights Activist Project (HRAP) choose a topic to investigate through discussion and exploration of human rights issues of major importance in their lives and the lives of others. They then determine the most effective way to use their collective skills to organize a campaign for social change. Participants are asked to fill out a survey form at the end of the year. Based on feedback from their first survey, as well as staff observations, the staff determined that HRAP members hadn’t had enough time to explore the year’s chosen theme in sufficient depth. As a result, subsequent year-end surveys have asked program participants to suggest themes they might like to explore during the next year.

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## How Are We Doing? *continued*

### Developing an Evaluation Process

Ideally, according to *A Participatory Model for Evaluating Social Programs* (The James Irvine Foundation, 2002), a program evaluation should:

- > Involve all stakeholders (the funders, the staff, the students, the board, and the community served)
- > Inform stakeholders and decision makers whether the program is successful
- > Identify ways to improve quality and inspire innovation
- > Increase responsiveness to the needs of students and other stakeholders

Integrating evaluation into a program is not a short-term project. About 30 percent of our former and current grantees have begun the process; most of them have devoted several years to evaluation training and tool development. To initiate the process, the staff should discuss their experience with evaluation, their views of current program work,

and what information they would like to collect if they didn't have to worry about time or other limitations. Regular meeting time should be set aside for staff members to read articles and share their own expertise. The staff should then experiment with a variety of evaluation tools. Finally, the program should bring in experts to offer advice. (An increasing number of foundations are willing to consider evaluation as a part of the program expenses they will fund. However, before bringing in an outside evaluator, the staff needs to be clear about what they want evaluated and how they want to be involved.)

As with most things, you learn about evaluation by doing it. This takes a lot of time and effort. It's worth the investment. As we have found in our own work at the foundation, an evaluation process woven into a program's everyday life gives all stakeholders, especially staff and participants, input into program design. It helps practitioners understand what they are accountable for. It gives participants continuous feedback on their progress. Finally, evaluation gives everyone involved a sense of what's working—and what's not. ●

## CONFERENCES

### March

#### 15th Annual National Conference on Family Literacy

National Center for Family Literacy  
March 19–21, Louisville, KY  
[www.familit.org/Conference/index.cfm](http://www.familit.org/Conference/index.cfm)

#### TESOL Academy 2006

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)  
June 23–25, Chicago, IL  
[www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)

### April

#### Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) 2006 Conference

COABE and the Texas Association for Literacy and Adult Education  
April 26–29, Houston, TX  
[www.coabe06.org/](http://www.coabe06.org/)

#### 2006 Reading Research Conference

International Reading Association  
April 29, Chicago, IL  
[www.reading.org/association/meetings/research](http://www.reading.org/association/meetings/research).

### May

#### The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) Technology Conference

*Beyond Technology: The Bigger Picture*  
May 1–2, Springfield, MA  
[www.beyondtechnology.org](http://www.beyondtechnology.org)

#### 5th Annual Health Literacy Conference

*Beyond the Written Word: Alternative Solutions to Low Health Literacy*  
Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA)  
May 4–6, Irvine, CA  
[www.iha4health.org](http://www.iha4health.org)

#### 47th Annual Adult Education Research Conference

*The Many Faces of Adult Education*  
May 18–21, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN  
[www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/informat.htm](http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/informat.htm)

### June

#### Functional Context Education Workshop

June 1, North Bay, Ontario, Canada  
[www.nald.ca/WHATNEW/hnews/2005/stchjl28.htm](http://www.nald.ca/WHATNEW/hnews/2005/stchjl28.htm)

## JOBS IN LITERACY

A more extensive and up-to-date list of employment ads is available online at [www.lacny.org/jobs](http://www.lacny.org/jobs).

### Executive Director

Literacy Nassau, an affiliate of ProLiteracy America, is seeking a new executive director. Responsibilities include resource development; program, staff & volunteer management; & advocacy for adult literacy. Bachelor's degree & nonprofit leadership/management experience req.

For more information, email [literacyn@hotmail.com](mailto:literacyn@hotmail.com).

## Building Literacy *continued*

Writing games or fiction exercises, such as an imagined dialogue between two people in a painting, are a playful way to learn about art works and movements while practicing real language. These activities provide a wealth of opportunities to practice important grammatical and linguistic concepts and introduce new ones. Often, they can eliminate obstacles to writing.

### Bringing It Back to the Children

Caregivers should be encouraged to see how modes of creation and critical expression they are encountering can stimulate their children's emotional, psychological, and intellectual

development. Class discussions might also include the relationship between the arts and learning, cognition, and academic achievement. The caregivers should certainly discuss or even model activities that they can engage in with their children. The more prepared and excited they are about the arts, the more their children will enjoy them and learn.

### Planning and Taking the Trip

A visit to a museum or gallery is fun as well as a great educational opportunity. It can constitute a diversion from everyday concerns, a social event, and a chance to explore new areas of the city where the families live and work. Students have an opportunity to create worlds of their own and to experience something new

and exciting. The trips also put the group in English-speaking environments in which language acquisition is stimulated by everything from a subway sign to an encounter with a museum official. The trips, and the entire class experience, can become a forum for discussion and debate; not only an alternative learning space, but a path to new encounters and new understandings of oneself and the world—transformative experiences within a context that furthers literacy goals and objectives. ●

*Details of this framework, along with the full list of outcomes, lesson plans, and instructional approaches will be posted soon on the LAC website, [www.lacnyc.org](http://www.lacnyc.org).*

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## NEWS >> STAR Teachers Test Evidence-Based Reading Strategies

One hundred and twenty adult education teachers, newly trained in evidence-based methods to teach adults reading, returned to six pilot states this month for the implementation phase of STAR (Student Achievement in Reading). STAR is a nearly \$6 million, seven-year OVAE investment running through spring of 2008. Pilot states participating in STAR include California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Ohio, and South Dakota.

In the first phase of STAR, experts developed a reading toolkit of assessments and strategies for intermediate level adult reading instruction. STAR-trained teachers will now identify students' strengths and address students' limitations using evidence-based toolkit strategies. STAR teachers are excited about the project because they can identify key areas in which students need help, and students appreciate teachers who have tools that address their specific academic needs. For example, two adult

students may be assessed at a fourth grade reading level. One adult may perform at that level due to problems with vocabulary, but the other student may have problems with comprehension. While appearing to be identical, these issues differ and must be addressed by different techniques. After using assessments in the toolkit to determine student reading levels, STAR teachers will pull evidence-based strategies from the toolkit to address specific reading components and help each student develop particular skills.

This implementation phase will also determine to what degree teachers can use techniques from the toolkit supported by research in their classrooms, given any administrative barriers that exist. STAR participants are discovering the importance of changing how local programs are organized. They are identifying issues such as managed enrollment, differentiated instruction in multi-level classes, teacher planning time,

and instructional leadership as being key to their plans for success. States are discussing how funding policies may help or hinder implementing evidence-based reading practice and how to deliver professional development that supports site-based reform. Over the next several months, STAR teachers will bring research and reality together. Stay tuned for updates on how STAR is combining the two successfully in adult education classrooms.

For more information, go to [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/reading.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/reading.html). ●

# Measuring the Gaps

## Who Needs Literacy Services in New York State and Who Gets Them

> Venu Thelakkat *Director of ALIES and Data Analysis*

Despite the best efforts of literacy practitioners, the literacy community is reaching only a fraction of the New Yorkers who could benefit from its services. To find out how far off the mark we are, the LAC compared an analysis of the 2000 Census data compiled by the US Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) with ALIES data on New York State students in FY2005. Although the data aren't strictly comparable, since the OVAE and ALIES were using different methodologies in different contexts, what we found is still illuminating.

The OVAE study estimated the state's need for adult education at 24 percent of the state's population, or 3,525,022. Less than four percent of them, 140,000 students, were in New York State adult education programs in FY05. (Nearly 89 percent of literacy students had no high school diploma.)

The comparison also revealed significant demographic disparities between who needs literacy services in New York State and who gets them. OVAE characterized the state's target population as almost equally divided between women (51 percent) and men (49 percent). Yet ALIES data show that women make up a much higher proportion of adult literacy students—59 percent, versus 41 percent men. The ALIES data also revealed that exactly half of New York's literacy students were between the ages of 25 and 44. In contrast, the age distribution of the target population was evenly distributed, according to OVAE. Thus people over age 60 made up 30 percent of the target population, but only five percent of the student population.

The difference in employment statistics was even more striking: Only 32 percent of the OVAE target population was employed; nearly 60 percent were characterized as "not available for employment." On the other hand, nearly half (48 percent) of the student population already had jobs.

Whatever the disparities in New York State between who needs literacy classes and who is enrolled in them, they should not obscure the more important concern that not enough people of any age, race, class, or employment status who have limited literacy skills are getting the education they need and deserve.

### About the Data

"Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population," prepared for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) by Beth Lasater and Barbara Elliott of RTI International (2004), defines the adult education target population as "individuals aged 16 years and over, who have not attained a high school diploma or equivalent and are not currently enrolled in school." The paper provides national as well state-by-state

## OVAE versus ALIES Data

Statistics	NYS target population (OVAE study)	Students served by NYS programs (ALIES data)
Total numbers	3,525,022	139,807
Percent of total population	23.8	88.7
Percent of males	49	41
Percent of females	51	59
Age group percentages		
16 – 24	26	28
25 – 44	26	50
45 – 59	18	17
60 and older	30	5
Employment status percentages		
Employed	32	48
Unemployed	6	33
Not in labor force	62	19

statistics using data from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing—specifically, the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) derived from responses to items on the long census form. It can be downloaded at <http://www.cde.state.ny.us/cdeadult/download/pdf/ProfilesAdultEdTargetPopAll.pdf>.

The statistics on students served in New York State come from data compiled through the Literacy Assistance Center's Adult Literacy Information and Evaluation System (ALIES), the system used by all of the state's publicly funded adult literacy programs to meet their reporting requirements under the National Reporting System (NRS). Under NRS guidelines, data is only reported for students who have received 12 or more hours of instruction and been tested using a standardized assessment instrument approved by New York State. Nevertheless, ALIES data provides a good approximation of how effectively the state's publicly funded adult literacy programs serve the target population defined by the federal researchers in the OVAE study. ●

# Tomatoes, Baby Carrots, and Some Broccoli!

> Neide Godinho *Adult Literacy/GED Program Graduate, City College of New York*

In 2003, I, a girl who was born in Angola and grew up in Portugal, came to the United States with my sister and my sister's children. Thinking about pursuing a degree in Architecture and Interior Design and becoming a successful professional, I started attending ESOL classes in the Adult Literacy/GED Program at the City College of New York.

Fortunately, I moved quickly from intermediate to advanced ESOL. At the beginning in my advanced class, I felt so strange like an alien, but there I found support and belief from my instructor and companionship from my classmates to improve my language skills. We discussed other subjects besides English/literacy such as being successful in our studies, the health insurance system in the United States, and specific health issues, like nutrition and exercise. The study about

health issues was the most interesting because it gave me an insight about my own health.

Leafy greens such as lettuce and spinach were the only vegetables that I used to eat. After I learned about some benefits that vegetables provide like blindness prevention, I realized that I definitely have to eat more vegetables even though they taste horrible and smell terrible. I started looking for recipes that contain vegetables. When I'm in the cafeteria with my classmates, they encourage me to eat vegetables. Right now, I eat not only lettuce and spinach but also tomatoes, baby carrots and some broccoli!

Ultimately, my classmates and I created a website based on health topics whose purpose was not only to show our language skills improvement but also to teach people how to become healthier, as we have become. You can visit our website on [www.zeroshouse.com/healthlit.htm](http://www.zeroshouse.com/healthlit.htm) and read more about my experiences and those of my classmates.

The *Literacy Update* is printed by Alvin J. Bart and Sons, Inc., Lithographers

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