



LITERACY UPDATE

MARCH 07 Vol.16 No. 4

Literacy Assistance Center

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Tortillas: A Recipe for Parent Involvement
- 4 When ESOL = Basic Literacy
- 6 & 7 Fall Professional Development Opportunities
- 10 The Importance of Discussing the Weather

Non-Vocational Adult Education in Europe

> *Jon Steinberg* Director of Communications

Amidst the debates within the adult education community of New York and the U.S. in general, it might be useful to step back and look at how the 25 countries that comprise the European Union serve school dropouts, large immigrant populations, and other constituencies similar to the populations we assist here. A January 2007 working document, "Non-Vocational Adult Education in Europe," provides a useful overview of their current systems.

Despite many differences in approach, Europeans in general share a powerful starting premise: non-vocational adult education (NVAE) is not simply an individual concern or a way to strengthen the economy in a highly competitive

international marketplace, it is part of a global education project to create a "knowledge society," in which every adult is learning continuously. Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are leaders in implementing this vision. All four have established broad cultural, political, and social goals for individuals and society as a whole, in addition to economic objectives.

The German national and provincial governments have taken another approach, developing a flexible strategy for encouraging learning in each phase of every citizen's life based on existing educational structures, activities, and experiences. The participation rate in both vocational and non-vocational studies is already extraordinary in some

countries: Responding to a 2005 survey, 34.7 percent of Sweden's working population reported engaging in some form of education and training in the previous four weeks.

In other countries, however, the common vision has not yet been translated into action. As the report notes, "Policy statements espouse a holistic approach to adult learning, stressing both economic and non-economic outcomes, but, in reality, policy implementation privileges the economic agenda, thus providing greater support for vocationally-oriented adult learning than for general adult learning." Some Eastern European countries do not offer any non-vocational adult education at all.

continued on page 9

Planning Ahead

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

Recently I had the privilege of attending a briefing by The Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Board on Plan NYC, the city's plan to improve and expand New York City's infrastructure during the next 25 years to organizations that provide services to immigrants. The plan (available at www.nycgov/plannyc2030) breaks 10 major goals into three broad categories:

- > Open NYC—goals relating to affordable housing, improving transit, and building new and better parks
- > Maintain NYC—goals relating to the water supply, repairing roads and subways, and increasing energy capacity
- > Green NYC—goals for reducing global warming emissions and reducing water and air pollution

The presentation was both fascinating and reassuring. It was good to find out that policy makers are worrying about these things: We need to leave our children a city that works and has all systems moving. It was also clear that the city's population is getting older and living longer—so planning to care for aging baby boomers is more important than ever. I was struck by the effort the advisory board has made to get input from a wide variety of stakeholders—including many of us who rarely give these kinds of long-term city planning issues a second thought until things break down and disrupt our busy lives.

For me and I suspect most of the rest of the audience, the most riveting presentation was the one offered by our great city demographer, Joe Salvo. He showed us the patterns of migration into and out of the city. Two stunning points he made were that 54 percent of all births in NYC are to foreign-born mothers, and that non-Hispanic whites are steadily moving out of the city and being replaced in large part by non-English-speaking immigrants. So while our population is steadily increasing—from 8.2 million today to 9 million by 2030—the ethnic breakdown will be changing far more dramatically.

At this point, all of the immigrant service providers in the room were fully awake! How will we serve this population over the next 25 years? Who will teach them English? Will they need to learn English? How will they navigate our country's complex infrastructure? How will the school system address the changing demographics of its students? Comments and suggestions began to flow. Most were very insightful. Everyone was energized and excited. For me, it was a wake-up call. I left more certain than ever that the adult literacy community has to begin thinking about how we can advocate for a social service infrastructure that will develop fast enough to keep New York the world's most vibrant center of access and opportunity for people from all over the planet. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

Copyright ©2007 by the
Literacy Assistance Center, Inc.
All rights reserved.

For permission to reprint any portion
of this newsletter, please contact
the Director of Communications
at jons@lacnyc.org
or 212.803.3332.

Editors JoAnne Steglitz and Jon Steinberg
Design Inessa Shkolnikov



Board of Directors

Karen M. Proctor, *Chair*
Scholastic, Inc.

Elizabeth Horton, *Vice-Chair*
National Council for Research on Women

Elyse Barbell (*Ex-Officio*)
Literacy Assistance Center

David C. Bloomfield
Brooklyn College School of Education

Suzanne C. Carothers
New York University

Jacqueline Cook
Consultant

Matthew Goldstein (*Ex-Officio*)
The City University of New York

Pamela M. Haas
IBM

Michael Hirschhorn
Coro New York Leadership Center

Joel Klein (*Ex-Officio*)
New York City Department of Education

Linda Lam
Ernst & Young

Paul LeClerc (*Ex-Officio*)
New York Public Library

Christy Porter
ABM

Amina Rachman
United Federation of Teachers

Marian Schwarz
Adult Literacy Media Alliance

Paul Stanley
*Courier Companies, Inc./
Bookbinders' Guild of New York*

Paul H. Zumbro
Cravath, Swaine & Moore

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

Enhancing Immigrant Parental Involvement in Public Schools through Educational Projects

> *Silvana L. Vasconcelos Queens Library, Adult Learner Program*

Time constraints. School rules and guidelines. Limited English proficiency. Cultural differences. These are only some of the barriers that immigrant parents must surmount to become involved in their children's schools. Such challenges aren't news to parents and educators—or to government officials. Although the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires parental involvement in children's schools, it acknowledges the importance of "identifying barriers to greater participation by parents...with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background."

Engaging immigrant parents in public schools often takes careful planning, but it can be done—in meaningful and empowering ways. The Queens Library Family Literacy Program makes this effort a priority.

Opening the School Doors

One approach that we have used very successfully is to encourage parents to share their knowledge with their children's teachers. In many countries, schools are the domain of the staff alone. Parents, particularly those with low incomes and little education, are expected to stay outside the door. When this estrangement is coupled with limited knowledge of the language and culture of their new home, newcomers are likely to be extremely reticent about entering their children's school for any reason. The challenge is to make these immigrant parents aware that they have something to teach and their contribution is welcome. Once that happens, they are far more likely to be confident about becoming involved in the school—and eager to do so. We developed ways to achieve this breakthrough with parents of children at PS 78 Queens.

Like many other elementary schools, PS 78 devotes considerable time to studies of other cultures. In the fifth grade, it's Mexican. Two and a half years ago, parents in our Family Literacy Program who came from Mexico agreed to help by leading a staff development workshop at the school. They taught the teachers how to make tortillas and guacamole, listing the ingredients, where they come from in Mexico, and when they are harvested. Participating parents found the experience empowering. Once they found that they could make a real contribution and it was welcomed, they were ready to do more. Some parents in our program volunteered for the school's reading week. Some read children's books aloud in English; others read in their first language. Some acted out a story with their children.

Parents can also bring their knowledge into the school outside of the curriculum. Last year, for example, participants in our family literacy program put favorite recipes from their native countries into a cookbook and sold it from a table at the PS 78 spring fair. They donated the

proceeds to the school's Parent and Teacher Association (PTA). After practicing the English they learned in the classroom in the real world and talking with the principal of the school, teachers, and other parents and visitors, the participating parents felt that they were part of the school community. By the end of the day, they went home from a place that they could feel comfortable returning to.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM), a gifted educational model adopted by PS 78 and other elementary schools throughout the city, provided another opportunity to involve parents. Children participating in SEM choose a topic or subject they are interested in and explore it for eight to ten weeks. The school seeks out volunteer experts in the community to come into the classroom and work with students.

Last fall, teachers at the Queens Library Family Literacy Program took the initiative for SEM participation by asking parents to list their talents. Some parents in our program turned out to be good at knitting; others wanted to learn how to knit. Our teachers responded by organizing a knitting group that met once a week to knit and discuss what they were doing. After this prep work, the group created flyers to distribute to the children at PS 78, and met with two teachers at the school to get their support. Then they distributed the flyers to children at the school "advertising" an eight-week knitting project, and followed up with a presentation. When their presentation was over, 34 children enrolled; every Friday for 50 minutes, the parents are teaching them how to knit.

Conclusion

Not only are the parents who participated in these projects and activities much more familiar with the public school system and the PS 78 teachers, administrators, and curriculum, they have developed a sense of ownership in our family literacy program. Together with our program staff, they worked on outreach and enrollment for fiscal year 2007, distributing flyers and participating in two open houses for prospective families. Thanks in large part to their efforts, our program has exceeded its enrollment goal.

Participants in our program know that their children are the greatest beneficiaries of their activities. Seeing their parents engaged in the school community, providing information and services, encourages the students to feel more comfortable and happier in the classroom. Their pride is enhanced. Their identity is reinforced. ●

Teaching Basic ESOL Literacy

> Susan Dalmás *Queens Library*

A. was a highly intelligent taxi driver. He knew how to navigate the entire city, and had the names of hundreds of streets imprinted in his memory. He had to. A. couldn't read, not in English, not in his native language. His greatest fear was that one day he would get lost and not be able to find his way back to a place he recognized.

Many beginning and intermediate level ESOL teachers also have a secret fear: that their next class may include students like A. Teaching them is one of the greatest challenges in the field of adult education. That challenge is all the greater when these learners are put in a class with students who have more advanced written English skills. This happens frequently, since most ESOL programs assess incoming learners based on their aural and oral skills exclusively.

In a group with divergent written skills, experienced teachers know that they will have to pursue two very different strategies simultaneously. ESOL classroom activities for beginning and intermediate level literacy students who have strong writing skills in their native language focus on basic vocabulary, sentence building, reading comprehension, speaking English, and other life skills. These learners are usually bored by a curriculum for students with more limited or no writing experience that emphasizes building skills related to fluency, decoding, phonics, comprehension, and meaning that prepares them to learn how to read and write.

At Queens Public Library, we avoid conflicting needs and achieve high retention by providing special ESOL literacy classes for adult students who have had less than five years of schooling in their native country. Our curriculum is entirely based on their needs; they develop their language and literacy skills at a gradual pace. Although we recognize that ideally students should first learn to read and write in their native language, this isn't always possible due to a number of factors, including the variety of native languages represented in a class and the lack of a teacher who speaks the student's language. At QPL, we have adapted to this situation by developing a three-stage curriculum designed to teach learners to read and write in English without prior written skills in their native language. By the end of the course, our students have the fundamental academic and practical communicative skills they need to function in a level one or beginning ESOL class. Here is a brief outline of our approach.

Stage 1: Pre-literacy

The first stage of literacy development and language acquisition is pre-literacy, when students learn that texts have a beginning, middle, and end. In this stage, we develop readiness skills, such as learning the directions in which we read in English—left to right, top to bottom—and the relationships of letters on the line. We also assist students in strengthening their hand/eye coordination skills and visual discrimination skills—the ability to differentiate features of abstract shapes, letters, and numbers. Our aids include realia, visuals, and special blackboard and worksheet exercises.

We ask our learners to practice forming block letters and numbers from 1 to 30. We introduce letters by configuration and shape groups:

Verticals	T	I	L	H	E	F
Diagonals	A	V	X	W	Y	
Diagonals and Verticals	M	N	K	Z		
Circulars	O	C	G	Q	S	
Verticals and Circulars	P	R	B	D	J	

As they learn these skills, students practice writing basic personal information, such as their name, address, and phone number. We also use the Total Physical Response (TPR) strategy to develop oral language skills—for example, by asking students to open a window or close the door.

Stage 2: Beginning Literacy

The second stage is beginning literacy, when students develop phonological processing. Our objective is to give learners the skills to recognize and reproduce letters and other graphic symbols relating to language, and to identify and combine sounds to make up words. Aids we use include sight words, where students match pictures with words, and cloze passages, where students fill in words that have been deleted from a passage.

During this stage, students should also be expanding their vocabulary. We have found that one very effective method for encouraging this is to have students create vocabulary banks, into which they slowly add new words by content area, such as personal information, days and months, weather, health, and food. We also ask learners to practice adding and subtracting and learn the numbers up to 100.

Stage 3: Initial Reading

In the third stage, initial reading, students develop an understanding of the structure of texts and make connections among words in a sentence. To assist them in this process, we continue to use sight words and cloze passages exercises, as well as the Language Experience Approach (LEA), in which students use their own words to create reading material. At this stage, games, such as bingo, charades, and tic-tac-toe can make learning fun. Our students practice scanning receipts to find the total and writing checks. We also introduce cursive writing, so students can sign their names.

Stage 3 is the time when students are ready to become familiar with patterns of English. To encourage this, we introduce grammatical structures and language functions, such as requesting information, responding to a request, making an apology, making an appointment, and writing short notes regarding absences. We also prepare learners for beginning ESOL classes by integrating the four basic skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—into each lesson plan.

Outcomes

Teaching ESOL literacy can be a very slow and painful process. It requires a lot of creativity, preparation, and, most of all, patience: Often, it takes six months of intensive instruction for students to show educational gain. But at some point the moment comes when a student who didn't know the alphabet can finally sign her name. I won't forget the woman who had been afraid to leave her house alone because she could not read signs on the street or prices in the supermarket and now felt independent for the first time. The only problem, she noted, was that her husband was feeling insecure about it. And A.? One day he came up to thank me profusely. "I can read the street signs now," he explained. "I don't have to worry what happens if I get lost." ●

The NYC Consortium for ABE Conference

The New York City Consortium for Adult Basic Education will be holding its 28th annual conference on Saturday, May 5, at Fashion Industries High School in Manhattan. The theme of this year's conference is "Creating Success Stories for Adult Learners." For more information, contact Carolyn Fernando at 212.243.5458 or email sonofhendrick@yahoo.com.

Shared Journeys: Learning English and Civics through the Stories of Immigrants Past

Shared Journeys is a series of workshops that opens the resources of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum to adult ESOL programs. Each workshop will focus on a different challenge that immigrants face, such as housing, health, and labor. The series includes a tour of the museum's historic tenement at 97 Orchard Street and a discussion of the connections between immigrant experiences from the past and the present. The program provides a unique context for English language learning and helps students place their own immigration experience within a broader historical and political framework. A limited number of workshops will be offered free of charge.

To reserve space, call 212.431.0233, ext. 241, or email groups@tenement.org.

New Educational Website for Family Literacy

Author and educator Bill Zimmerman recently launched a free educational website, www.makebeliefscomix.com, where children and parents can create their own comic strips. Zimmerman is offering the website to educators as a resource for family literacy and ESOL programs. Visitors can select from 10 animal and human characters with different moods—happy, sad, angry, worried—and write words for their characters in blank talk and thought balloons. The site also offers story ideas and prompts to help users create graphic stories on themes such as Travel to a Mysterious Place, A Day at School, Write a Love Story, Finding Your Courage, Making Wishes Come True, and A New Fairy Tale.

Jobs

Community and Family Projects Leader

The LAC seeks a community and family projects leader (CFPL) to direct our family literacy initiative and projects relating to services for families. The CFPL will create a vision and direction for the LAC's family-related work through the design, implementation, and evaluation of programming relating to family literacy, family support services, family services in community sectors, K-12 public school connections, and parent engagement.

Specifically, the CFPL will:

- > Manage multiple family literacy contracts from various public and private funders
- > Establish and nurture partnerships with outside sectors to enhance support for adult literacy initiatives
- > Develop relationships with new partners and clients in social service, medical, cultural, financial, and K-12 educational sectors
- > Design and implement needs-based professional development and consultation services for literacy, family education, and social service providers
- > Support a network of more than 200 family literacy programs citywide
- > Develop proposals for future funding and nurture funding relationships
- > Supervise data collection on outcomes of family-related projects
- > Analyze data and report on outcomes to current and potential funders
- > Coordinate family and community initiatives with other inter-organizational initiatives, including health literacy, the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN), the literacy hotline, and ALIES

The CFPL will also disseminate information on research and best practices to the NYC network of family literacy providers through various modalities; compile resources on family literacy and intergenerational learning; develop and maintain contact with family literacy providers; conduct regular meetings with family literacy network members; direct updating and maintenance of an online directory of family literacy network members; respond to inquiries about the initiative from professionals and members of the public; and represent the LAC at conferences. The CFPL may also support the LAC's RAEN initiative through provision of workshops on assessment and instructional methodology, and support the LAC's literacy hotline through community outreach sessions.

Requirements: 7–10 yrs related experience, MA or equivalent, willingness to do some travel. Experience in the field of adult education, parent education, or K-12 education is preferred.

Résumé and salary requirements to Elyse Rudolph, Executive Director, email elyser@lacnyc.org.

ESOL Instructors

The Migrant Youth Programs in New York is seeking two ESOL instructors who can also teach English in content areas during the summer of 2007. The program will operate a residential summer English Immersion Program (EIP) for 11 LEP migrant high school students under a grant. Teacher salary includes on-campus room and board, plus \$310 per day. This program will be held on the campus of Hartwick College in Oneonta, July 24–Aug. 6. The goal of the EIP is to help high school LEP students quickly learn enough academic and social English to allow them to function easily in their school setting.

Contact Robert Apicella, Director, phone 800.304.5579, or email apicelra@oneonta.edu.

Mar. 2

Teaching Health Literacy: Navigating the Health Care System

Friday, March 2, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence and Estella Natal

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. In the second part of this two-part series, participants will identify the skills needed to navigate the health care system and develop ways to integrate these skills into the ABE and ESOL curriculum. Participants will develop lesson plans and try them out in their classrooms.

This workshop is reserved for participants who attended the first session.

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

Mar. 2

Popular Education Study Circle

Friday, March 2, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

This series explores practical approaches for teaching adults to develop an awareness of social justice issues, both in and out of the classroom. Participants will read literature on popular education and discuss how to apply the theoretical concepts presented in the classroom.

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

Mar. 15

Teaching Math through Problem-Solving in the GED/ABE Classroom

Workshop I: Problem Solving
Thursday, March 15, 2–5 pm

Facilitators: Charlie Brover, Denise Deagan, and Solange Farina, the New York City Math Exchange Group (MEG)

Recent research on the GED math test shows that adult students have most difficulty with questions that require problem-solving proficiency and flexibility, particularly when these involve unfamiliar mathematical situations. Math educators agree that eliminating this difficulty requires a deeper understanding of the relevant mathematical concepts. As Diana Lambdin says, “No matter how kindly, clearly, patiently, or slowly teachers explain, they cannot make students understand. Understanding takes place in the students’ minds as they connect new information with previously developed ideas—understanding occurs as a by-product of solving problems and reflecting on the thinking that went into those problem solutions.” (Teaching Mathematics Through Problem Solving, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics: 2003). This four-part series features workshops in Problem Solving, Number Sense, Algebra and Geometry, and Data and Probability. Participants will explore essential elements of a problem-posing, problem-solving classroom and consider recent work from the OVAE-funded GED Mathematics Training Institute. Workshop materials will be classroom-based; teachers who attend the entire series may participate in ongoing teacher research. Participants are not required to attend all four sessions.

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

Mar. 5

NRS Reports Training

Monday, March 5, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Beginning with a general overview of the required tables, fields, and calculations, this training will prepare participants to use ALIES data check reports to troubleshoot NRS data. The training will pay particular attention to a step-by-step process for determining “Why this student does not show up on my report.”

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

Mar. 9

Assessment Basics for Adult Education

Friday, March 9, 9:30 am–5 pm

Facilitator: Marie Cora, ABE Consultant

Participants will explore the landscape of assessment in adult literacy, how the assessments required in New York State fit into that landscape, and what other methods programs might use to assess adult learners. Specifically, the workshop will discuss activities related to participant needs assessment and definitions of significant assessment terms. The session will also include a survey of assessment tools and frameworks, such as the BEST Plus and TABE tests, as well as discussions on the functions, purposes, benefits, limitations, and challenges of classroom assessments.

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

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

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

Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse

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

**Unless otherwise noted,
all LAC events take place
at 32 Broadway, 10th floor.**

Mar. 16

**Teaching Health Literacy:
Chronic Disease Management**

Friday, March 16, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitators: Estella Natal and
Winston Lawrence

Participants in this study circle will explore ways to integrate the language and literacy skills needed to manage chronic diseases into their classroom instruction. Participation is limited to those who have already attended a Navigating the Health Care System study circle.

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

Mar. 23

**Teaching Health Literacy:
Disease Prevention and Screening**

Friday, March 23, 9:30 am–1:30 pm

Facilitators: Estella Natal and
Winston Lawrence

In this session, participants will explore how to integrate the skills needed for disease prevention and screening into the ESOL and ABE curriculum. Participation is limited to those who have attended a Navigating the Health Care System study circle.

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

Apr. 12

**Teaching Math through
Problem-Solving in the
GED/ABE Classroom**

Workshop II: Number Sense
Thursday, April 12, 2–5 pm

Charlie Brover, Denise Deagan, and Solange Farina, the New York City Math Exchange Group (MEG)

See March 15 for an event description.

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

**Mar. 20,
Apr. 3, 10 & 17**

**Teaching Reading to Adult
English Language Learners**

Tuesday, March 20, 9:30 am–4:30 pm
Tuesday, April 3, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, April 10, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, April 17, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Mariann Fedele

This four-session study circle will acquaint participants with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to teach reading effectively to adult nonnative speakers of English, and will help participants develop their skills in creating coherent, comprehensive, and appropriate reading lessons based on promising practices and research on adult reading instruction. Specifically, the sessions will focus on identifying types of native language literacy and how these types might affect learning a new language; identifying models of reading and creating activities that foster vocabulary development at a variety of language levels; selecting appropriate materials for specific student levels; developing pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities for specific texts; and creating a coherent, comprehensive, and appropriate reading lesson that will help students develop each of the four skills important to reading. This curriculum was developed with a federal English Literacy and Civics Education grant from the Office of Adult Education and Literacy of the Virginia Department of Education and prepared by the Center for Applied Linguistics. Participants are required to attend all four sessions.

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

Mar. 23

ESOL Teacher Share

Friday, March 23, 2–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

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

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

Mar. 29

**Student Leadership Workshop:
Civic Literacy and Leadership**

Thursday, March 29, 4–9 pm

Facilitators: David Greene and Calvin Miles,
Grassroots Literacy Coalition

Designed for both students and teachers, this workshop will explore advocacy and organizing efforts to promote literacy development in New York City. Using an experiential and participatory approach, the workshop will focus on identifying leadership skills and roles, as well as an analytic framework. Participants will also sketch out the kind of literacy system needed for leadership activities and identify possible ways of developing it. Finally, participants will plan upcoming conferences, workshops, and organizing efforts.

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

Apr. 19 & 20

**Effective Methods for
Teaching the U.S. Civics
for Immigrants Curriculum**

Thursday, April 19, 9 am–4 pm
Friday, April 20, 9 am–4 pm

Facilitators: Be Jensen and Alicia Broggio,
Literacy Volunteers of Westchester County

This two-part workshop will prepare participants to teach the U.S. Civics for Immigrants curriculum effectively. Specifically, participants will learn about the student population—English language learners with little or no literacy in their native language—and how this population learns best. The workshop will also cover basic strategies for teaching ESOL. Participants will leave with a structure of lessons, the contents of the curriculum, and the materials used in the lesson modules.

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

Apr. 27

ALIES Data Entry

Friday, April 27, 9:30 am–4 pm

This training session 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.

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

Higher Goals for Higher Ed ESOL in Community Colleges

> Marilyn Rymniak *Project Leader, Statewide Professional Development System*

Unless education or immigration policies change dramatically in the coming decades, much of the future growth in our workforce will come through employment of additional immigrants with limited English proficiency. In an economy heavily dependent on high-level skills, this trend presents clear dangers.

Three new reports offer suggestions on what could and should be done to raise the quality of our workforce and safeguard the health of our economy. “America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future,” by Irwin Kirsch et al, (www.ets.org), focuses on the need for radical changes to our entire educational system in response to three challenges: substantial disparities in skill levels (reading and math), seismic economic changes (widening wage gaps), and sweeping demographic shifts (less education, lower skills). “Tough Choices or Tough Times,” published by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (www.skillscommission.org/), also makes recommendations for revamping our educational system.

The third new report, “Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL,” by Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, published by the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, (www.caalusa.org/eslexecsummary.pdf), deserves more attention than it is likely to get. Although vitally important to our country’s economic wellbeing and future as a learning society, ESL receives far too little attention—and, as the report notes, far too little funding. The authors, both recognized experts in the field, conducted a two-year study of the effectiveness of adult ESL programs in selected community colleges around the country. What follows is a brief outline of their executive summary.

Early on, the authors of this study frankly admit that “Like English as a second language (ESL) service offered by other providers, non-credit ESL instruction at colleges has disappointing results. The federal government’s National Reporting System for adult education... reports that only about 36 percent of ESL students advance one level per year. Longitudinal research prepared for CAAL by two community colleges indicates that only a small percentage of ESL students are enrolled in programs for as long as four semesters (the equivalent of two years or less)—either consecutively or at any time. As a result, few ESL students experience significant learning gains from adult education ESL programs. Moreover, only about 10 percent of non-credit ESL students make transitions to credit ESL, and an even smaller percentage make transitions to college academic or vocational programs.”

To learn how those dismal results can be improved, Chisman and Crandall looked at the experience of five community colleges that “have achieved learning gains and transition rates that significantly exceed national norms and the norms for their states”: Bunker Hill CC (Charlestown, MA), The City College of San Francisco (San Francisco, CA), The College of Lake County (Grayslake, IL), Seminole CC (Sanford, FL), and Yakima Valley CC (Yakima, WA). The bulk of the report is devoted to describing innovative strategies that they have developed:

High intensity instruction. All of these colleges have at least some programs that meet 12–24 hours per week. In most cases, students can only enter at the beginning of the semester; they are dropped if they do not attend regularly. Students in the high intensity program offered by City College of San Francisco achieve learning gains per year that are twice to three times as great as students at comparable levels enrolled in the college’s lower intensity program.

Learning outside the classroom. All five colleges have devised strategies to increase learning time and encourage students to practice their English with native speakers outside the classroom. All of them make extensive use of instructional technology for this purpose. Lake County, Seminole, and Yakima have devised instructional modules that require students to interact with native speakers in conjunction with class projects. Many of the colleges also make extensive use of informal conversation groups, homework, and individual tutoring.

Adapting curricula for learner needs. All five colleges have taken special measures to accommodate the major differences in English proficiency and prior education levels of ESL students. Because virtually all of Yakima’s students have very low levels of English proficiency and prior education when they enroll, the college has adopted an instructional approach often used in third world countries: Classes are structured around study projects selected by students.

Curricular integration. Instead of concentrating on life skills English throughout all their non-credit ESL courses, most of these colleges offer “pre-collegiate” programs that provide high intensity instruction in skills that would be taught in credit ESL. This instruction commences at the beginning of the intermediate level. Yakima uses a variant on this strategy. Beginning at the low intermediate level, students enroll in an increasing number of adult basic education (ABE) courses taught in English and eventually become fulltime ABE students.

Co-enrollment. The colleges allow non-credit ESL students to enroll in vocational or academic courses. This gives them an opportunity to gain valuable skills and practice their English in authentic situations.

Vocational ESL (VESL). The VESL programs examined in this study have three elements: high intensity, combining English language, math, and other skills essential for a particular vocation; enrollment in a pre-existing vocational program taught in English; and an ESL support course to assist students in overcoming language or basic skills challenges they encounter in the concurrent vocational course.

Enhanced guidance and counseling. Several of the colleges have created systematic programs, including mandatory workshops and seminars, group discussions, and individualized support to assist non-credit ESL students in making the often long and complex transition to academic and vocational studies.

High quality faculty. Each of the colleges uses at least one of these four strategies for developing and sustaining an effective faculty: establishing high standards in hiring, such as an MA in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL); giving all faculty appropriate status within the college by providing them with fulltime employment opportunities, adequate compensation, benefits, and professional opportunities; providing robust professional development opportunities through strategies such as mentoring and a TESOL certification program; and establishing faculty resource centers and websites.

Even at these five colleges, progress toward a stronger ESL program has been episodic and slow, Chisman and Crandal admit. Although they attribute this partly to inadequate funding, they also observe that “most colleges have not adopted the managerial strategies to optimize the resources they have.” Their recommendations: Community colleges should make a strong commitment to strategic planning in their ESL
continued on page 9

Non-Vocational Adult Education *continued*

Europeans divide NVAE into two segments, formal and non-formal. Formal NVAE, generally provided through educational institutions, is explicitly regarded as a way to increase equity in the society, and largely publicly funded. Non-formal NVAE, in contrast, generally takes place outside educational institutions and does not lead to a diploma. That said, despite the “non-vocational” in its name and its definition as “a social movement and socio-educational activity without a direct link to the labor market,” in practice, as the report recognizes, “vocational and non-vocational learning experiences are increasingly overlapping,” and participants in most of these programs don’t divide their goals so neatly.

Whatever form it takes, adult learning is the area of education most vulnerable to budget cuts. Most countries in the European Union, however, have enacted some form of legislation mandating formal and/or non-formal adult education; a number have laws integrating all aspects of adult learning, and a few—the Scandinavian countries and Lithuania—have passed legislation on non-formal NVAE specifically. As in the U.S., implementation is provided by a mix of different levels of government, public agencies, non-profit organizations, and private for-profit providers. In most countries, the efforts of these entities are not well coordinated. Although a number of governments have attempted to create more coherent systems, this is often accompanied by an effort to bring decision-making authority as close as possible to the level where the education is actually provided. “Decentralization,” says the report, “is seen as increasing efficiency and effectiveness...affording funders, organizers and providers greater autonomy to cooperate in identifying and meeting local needs.” In some countries, this devolution has extended down to the local level, with the national government retaining responsibility for policy development, setting national goals, and quality assurance.

For their formal NVAE programs, Europeans generally apply the same exam and other standards that they use in the regular K–12 school system, and graduates get the same diploma, rather than something like a GED. The approach in non-formal adult education also differs from ours: A program’s eligibility for public funding is determined by evidence that it has achieved specified quality standards or is making efforts to improve, not by scores its learners achieve on standardized tests. Methods include accreditation or licensing of providers, requirements for annual reports, self-evaluation, staff skill requirements, and involvement in European co-operation projects on the topic of quality. To provide a degree of uniformity, a number of countries are establishing national frameworks of qualification (NFQs) that learners will be able to use both within the country and, eventually, within the European Union as a whole. So far, however, governments have been developing NFQs based on practical experience, and they are taking different forms in each country.

As in the U.S., language study is a major challenge for adult educators. Immigration to the wealthier West European nations has been substantial, from both the eastern members of the European Community and poorer countries beyond the continent. In response, the European Commission, in which all 25 European Union countries participate, has declared communication in the mother tongue as the first key competency for lifelong learning. First-language literacy and numeracy is offered in both stand-alone programs and as part of instruction in practical skills such as cooking, vocational skills, and family literacy. In addition, every country with a large immigrant population offers classes in the local language alone or in combination with education in the local culture.

Digital literacy is another basic skill designated as essential for all citizens. Although most of the countries haven’t yet established a national strategy for ensuring that adults have an opportunity to acquire it, some have established a government body to implement online distance learning, including France, Ireland, Spain, and Sweden. Another major difference from the U.S. adult education system is in the efforts made to encourage participation by specific target groups. In most countries, these include the unemployed, older adults, adults in rural areas, adults with physical and sensory disabilities, adults with learning difficulties, members of ethnic minorities, prisoners, recent immigrants, and adults who are experiencing economic and/or social difficulties. A few countries require immigrants to participate in language classes. Most offer financial incentives to all participants in adult education. By American standards, they are generous to say the least, ranging from a housing benefit (Finland), to childcare (Germany, Greece, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway), to adult learner grants in a dozen countries. Some countries have introduced an Individual Learning Account, which learners can use for an educational program of their choosing. Effectively, this introduces a competitive market in adult education.

Even an 85 page report—not to say this summary—is too brief to do justice to non-vocational adult education in the 25 countries of the European Union. With their varied languages, cultures, economic levels, and independent governments, they are far less uniform than the states of the United States. All of these differences are reflected in their adult education systems. If their progress toward establishing a learning society has one lesson to teach us, it is that once different levels of government and the adult education programs within them have agreed on a mutual, extraordinarily ambitious goal, many routes will enable them to achieve it.

The full working document can be found at www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/0_integral/083EN.pdf. ●

Higher Goals for Higher Ed *continued*

program and establish managerial responsibilities that support it. They should also expand their research on program outcomes and modify their program based on what they learn.

Even without the recommended enhancements, high-quality programs cost money. As Chisman and Crandal observe, this country isn’t funding ESL adequately. On average, they say, the U.S. spends \$600 a year per student, and the programs at the five colleges cost \$1,500–\$3,000 a year

per student. “This forces colleges and other providers to choose between serving a large number of students with standard ESL instruction and serving a smaller number with enriched service that improves their learning gains and transition rates,” note the authors. Not a happy choice. As this study shows, we know many ways to make ESL programs better; the question is whether or not our government is willing to make the investment necessary to implement them. ●

Teaching Soft Skills in the ESOL Classroom

> **Melinda Thomsen** *Center for Immigrant Education & Training, LaGuardia Community College*

Even after I began teaching “soft skills,” I felt uncomfortable with the idea. Instructing adults in what I considered to be “manners”—something that was basically common knowledge—struck me as patronizing. It took a couple of years of actually doing it before I realized that what I was teaching wasn’t manners at all, it was work culture.

Perhaps the most obvious example of soft skills is register—the structure of language that determines the degree of formality in speech. ESOL students in my Hotel TEACH classes (a Department of Labor/ETA-funded project) had encountered formal polite speech in their years of working at New York City jobs. They simply were not attuned to how its import varied from their own “street talk.” Without someone drawing attention to it, the difference in meaning between “What do you want?” and “What would you like?” can be too subtle for someone who is not a native English speaker to pick up. For employees in the hospitality industry, this distinction is crucial. Unless workers understand register, they will not be able to communicate appropriately with the range of people they are likely to encounter. Once they do understand, they can readily grasp what Sheraton Hotels means when it says all employees must greet guests in a friendly, professional way. Then they can learn how to do it.

Soft skills are also essential in ensuring that hotel guests are at ease during their stay and feel that they are receiving quality service. Many hotels look for employees who know how to “read the guest,” as the industry terms it, and respond appropriately to nonverbal clues as well as stated requests. In addition, workers need skills in what the industry calls internal customer service—interacting with supervisors and co-workers. Students who master these skills not only get hired, they receive votes of confidence from their supervisors and co-workers, which open up opportunities for more responsibility and promotions.

Each lesson in our Hotel TEACH classes is based on practical applications of American Hotel and Lodging Association and Equipped for the Future standards. When students learn about appropriate ways to speak with guests, supervisors, and co-workers, they practice talking in more formal registers. They also explore the advanced language structures that underlie them. We discuss, for example, how and why hotel workers should use the passive voice in their comments for “Report Completed or Uncompleted Tasks.” By the end of the lesson, they are reporting “Room 1204 hasn’t been cleaned yet,” rather than “Nadine hasn’t cleaned Room 1204 yet.”

Since most of my students are at an intermediate level with fairly good fluency but limited skills in using auxiliary verbs, in the early lessons I use the X-Word Grammar method (teaching grammar from a syntactical perspective) to identify sentence structures. In this method, students focus on grammatical patterning. I can work with students on

all the tenses early on in the course, rather than teach the present tense first, then present progressive, past, future, perfect tense, and so on as I had done before.

Small Talk, one of the first lessons in the curriculum, fits into this model perfectly. Using yes/no and tag questions in present, past, or future tenses, I can give my students an opportunity to practice both their English language skills and a social skill that has particular importance in the U.S. hospitality industry.

Small Talk Lesson Plan

Not all cultures are as concerned about prolonged silences as we Americans are. Here, polite behavior includes engaging in a conversation that has no real point other than avoiding the awkwardness of people waiting on something as mundane as a slow computer or elevator. Failure to do so may be considered socially inept, if not unfriendly. Fortunately, students on the intermediate level already have some of the skills necessary for small talk, and can learn the rest fairly easily.

I begin the class by asking one of these questions:

- > Did you hear about (*local news story*)?
- > Did you see the game last night?
- > It is really cold out today, isn’t it?

Students respond in different ways. Some remain silent. Others simply say “yes” or “no.” Still others offer much more elaborate replies. I then ask my class to break up into small groups and have each of them write down five questions that I dictate:

- > Why did I start the class by asking about the weather?
- > What is small talk?
- > Where and when do you have small talk conversations?
- > Can you list three small talk conversation topics?
- > Do people use small talk in your country?

When the dictation is done, I ask them to write the five questions on the board and discuss possible answers in their groups. After the class goes over their answers, I ask students to think of topics that should not be broached. I then write their suggestions on the board. Usually, they come up with many of the same topics you or I would: politics, personal issues, physical appearance, sex, and religion. All of these questions encourage students to use and reflect on prior knowledge. Their responses to the dictation also help me identify vocabulary, spelling, or listening issues that I should address later in the course.

Next, I ask students to look up the weather forecast in the local newspaper. After the students find and read the forecast for the week, *continued on page 11*

Teaching Soft Skills *continued*

I ask, “Isn’t it cold out today?” This prompts a dialog:

> Student: Oh yes, and it will be colder tomorrow. Saturday it will only be 15 degrees.

> Teacher: Oh no. I hate it when it is so cold, don’t you?

> Student: Yes. It is nothing like my country.

I then give each group a slip of paper with a guest, supervisor, and co-worker written on it. Their task is to rehearse a small talk conversation they might have with someone while waiting for the elevator and then to present it to the class. After each presentation, I ask three questions that draw attention to the soft skills involved:

> How did the student start the conversation with the guest?

> Did the conversation sound natural or did it go on too long?

> Was the register correct for the person they spoke to?

After all the answers are on the board, we look at the initiating questions, which may be something like:

> Do you know if it will be cold tomorrow too?

> It is really cold out, right?

> Did you see the snow last night?

I ask the students if these are yes/no questions or information questions. After they respond, we do a review of yes/no questions using X-Word Grammar exercises or continue on to an exercise on tag questions. The students may use either of the following forms for the second question:

> It’s really cold out, right? or

> It’s really cold out, isn’t it?

Using “right?” as the tag is fine, I explain, but the auxiliary form “isn’t it” has slightly higher register, is a little more formal. Besides, saying “right?” all the time gets boring. I find students at this level are very interested in exploring new ways to express themselves. Using tag questions gives them an opportunity to stretch their vocabulary and practice a variety of tenses.

Throughout the year, classes are full of energy. Role playing and drama are the natural mediums for heightening awareness of audience, register, body language, and work culture. Teasing out shades of meaning engages adult students much more than simple repetition. The high level of student language makes it possible for me to introduce patterning and syntax. Modal auxiliaries are the basis of polite speech and students must be proficient in using them. They must also be able to report incidents or conversations with clarity and accuracy. Our classroom curriculum also benefits from the contributions of Tania Ramirez, the career counselor, who works with students on emotional intelligence strategies that help them communicate with confidence.

The Rewards

One of the greatest rewards of teaching soft skills is that they are so closely integrated with workplace success. Last fall, when we went over questions like “Where is the ladies’ room?” in the Greeting the Guests lesson, students exclaimed, “This is good, Melinda; we hear this all the time.” At the next class, they came in with reports of how they were speaking to guests with more confidence and giving clearer directions. Some said they were also using the language they’d practiced in class to help their co-workers.*

As the year progressed, more and more students came to class with stories of how they had benefited from applying what they learned on the job. For an adult educator, this constant flow of positive reinforcement represents a dream come true. When learning has immediate value and is fun as well, no matter how tired students may be from keeping up with work and family responsibilities, they come in eager to learn. In just months, their progress is remarkable. The sense of confidence and feeling of mastery they have gained is apparent in their demeanor as well as their language. Looking back, I have to smile at my own discomfort of a few years ago. At this point, it would be hard to imagine a class that would give me greater pleasure. ●

* Some of this information is also documented in *Hotel TEACH Formative Evaluation Final Report* by Charles Goldberg and Gene White, Commonwealth Corporation. June 2006

CONFERENCES

March

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL),

41st Annual Convention and Exhibit

Spanning the Globe: Tides of Change

March 24, Seattle, WA

www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=1244a

ndDID=6071

No Teacher Left Behind: A Practitioner’s Conference

The Teacher Education Program and the Arts

Literacy Project at Brown University

March 23–24, Providence, RI

www.artslit.org

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), 2007 Annual Conference

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Learning

March 25–28, Philadelphia, PA

www.coabe2007.org

April

American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2007 Annual Convention and Exhibition

The World of Educational Quality

April 9–13, Chicago, IL

www.aera.net/annualmeeting

May

Sixth Annual Health Literacy Conference

“Health Literacy and

Chronic Illness Management”

May 3–4, Anaheim, CA

www.ih4health.org

June

National Education Computing Conference 2007

Learning and Leading with Technology

June 24–27, Atlanta, GA

<http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/NECC2007/>

Student Success Story

> Ludmila Kundinova *Center for Immigrant Education and Training, LaGuardia Community College*

My name is Ludmila. I am a refugee from Uzbekistan. I arrived in the USA 15 months ago. My native language is Russian. Also, I am not a young woman. You cannot imagine how I felt the first months living here. I was very nervous and I was like a child. Often I asked my relatives to help me but they were very busy. I was embarrassed when somebody tried to talk with me. I already understand that my English class for workers here at LaGuardia Community College is so very important for my classmates and me. I finished the CUNY Plus Immersion program at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training in November 2004 and now I am continuing my studying at the CIET at LaGuardia Community College. I am very happy that

I can study here. Now I feel I can express myself. I can explain what I want and what I need everywhere I go. I can make appointments at different offices and can go to American doctors. I can watch the news on American TV. I read newspapers now too.

I remember how before I was lost on the subway and I could not ask anybody how I could get home. But now I can ask what I need. Before I was afraid of the phone when somebody spoke English and now I understand a lot. I couldn't use the computer and now I can get a lot of information using it. Finally, I have decided to take the test for a nurse's license because I have a nursing diploma from my country. I hope I will be able to pass it thanks to my studying English at LaGuardia Community College.

Visit us on the web
at www.lacnyc.org

For a free subscription
to *Literacy Update*, email the
Communications Department
at lacpublications@hotmail.com.



32 Broadway, 10th floor
New York, NY 10004

Literacy Assistance Center

Nonprofit Org
US Postage
PAID
Permit No.
08206
NY NY 10004