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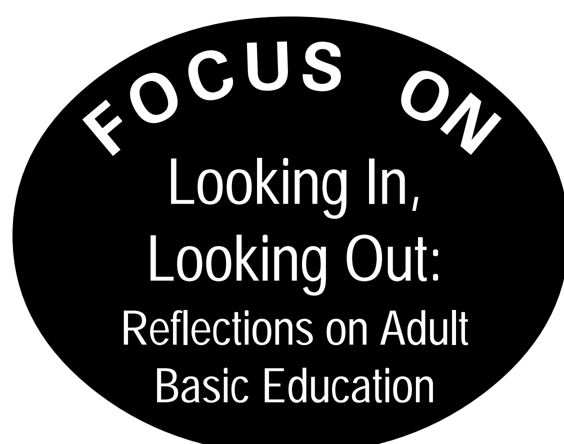
THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

September 1999 Issue 9



Now that you've read all of your summer beach reading, you might want to add this issue of *The Change Agent* to your fall reading list as you prepare to return to the classroom. This issue is a bit different from past issues in that it is focused not so much on the classroom level, but rather on the programmatic level, and is more geared toward teachers and administrators rather than students. In fact, this issue could be a good orientation resource for new adult educators.

As you will soon see, this issue is chock-full of thought-provoking articles offering a variety of opinions and perspectives. The goal of this issue was to explore some of the current and sometimes controversial topics in adult basic education today. We use the term adult basic education as an umbrella term for basic literacy, ESOL, GED, and High School Preparation instruction. Topics range from the growing emphasis on accountability and discussions on how to measure success and effectiveness in adult education to the increasing number of teens in ABE. Other articles address issues of funding, the role of volunteers in adult education, and the challenges facing participatory classrooms and programs. We also offer you an international perspective of the state of adult basic education in England and Wales, and a visit to a literacy program in Barcelona, Spain. Some adult learners have written about their educational histories and used poetry to conveyed their thoughts about learning.

This collection of articles, we hope, will spark dialogue and provide an opportunity for teachers, administrators, and policy-makers to reflect on the field and on their practice. We've condensed a lot into this issue and would not expect readers to read this issue from cover to cover in one sitting.

We welcome your feedback. Perhaps you will find some creative ways of using some of these articles in your classrooms and, if so, we would encourage you to share your ideas with us.

Stay tuned for our next issue that will focus on the environment and environmental health issues. We're excited about this topic and are interested in collecting descriptions of classroom projects that explore an environmental issue. If you are interested in submitting an article, lesson plan, or class project description, please read the back page for more information about submissions.

~ Marie Horchler, Co-Editor

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A Short History of Adult Basic Education

by Carey Reid

It would take a very thick book to hold the entire "history of adult education." For example, if we go back far enough in time, we would find ourselves in a world that did not have schools at all or even printed books. The best way to get an education in Ancient Greece (hundreds of years before the birth of Christ), was to walk around with Plato or Socrates and ask them questions. Up until the 15th century in Europe, most information was shared orally because the few books that existed were written out by hand! Very few people could afford to own such expensive items. But then again, with very few schools around, there were very few people who could *read* them. Most local citizens depended on poets, elders, and other "storytellers" to hold in memory important facts to share orally — still true of many cultures today.

Most of the school systems we see around us today have their roots in Europe. Few people know that perhaps the first "system" in the western hemisphere was the many monasteries that were spread across Europe. Back in the days of King Arthur and his famous Knights of the Round Table, "wandering scholars" traveled from country to country to study with famous teachers, usually monks living in monasteries. These learners could travel from Italy to Ireland and have no trouble communicating because there was a common language of learning: Latin. Many of the monks who lived in these monasteries were expert "scribes;" that is, people who copied out books by hand.

The idea of "adult" education really developed only after the schooling of children and adolescents became more formal. European society had to become less elitist before large groups of young people could be educated. It took more than weakening the class system, though, to bring education to large numbers of people. Again, as with the monasteries, religion played a big part. In fact, it was a monk, Martin Luther, who in the 15th century started a movement in opposition to the Catholic Church that indirectly gave adult education a huge push. The leaders of Luther's Protestant Movement believed that human beings did not need priests to act as go-betweens with God; adults had the mental and moral abilities to deal with God themselves. But, to do so they would have to understand the Bible, and to understand the Bible *they needed to know how to read!*

Among the first European immigrants to the American continent were Puritans, Quakers, and Calvinists, religious folk who held strongly the Protestant conviction that people must be able to read the Bible and interpret it for themselves. Many of us have seen images of the one-room schoolhouses that they built for their children in every community. Gradually, more and more communities enacted laws that *required* children to be in school (except for planting and harvest times, because most American families worked farms until the early decades of this century). Thus, "compulsory" education was born. This was an important development, because the American government was founded on principles of equality; that is, "education for all."

But what about all the adults who could not speak or read English? After all, many of the huge waves of immigrants that followed from 1800 on were from lands such as Sweden and Germany where English was *not* the common language. There were good political reasons too for increasing the number of opportunities for adults to learn. Many new immigrants were coming from countries with strongly classed systems, countries with kings, queens, or dictators, for example. The thinking was (and still is!) that if these newcomers were going to be effective "Americans" — that is, people who would vote and be directly involved in other ways with government — then they would need to know how the system works. Being able to read newspapers, books, and proposed laws would make them more effective citizens.

All of these forces contributed to Americans' hunger to know things, to be involved, and to be informed (though sometimes far too few of us exercise these important privileges). Few people know that in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were thousands of adult education centers called "lyceums" (named after Plato's first school in Ancient Greece) across the country. Nearly every town had one, mostly halls with benches and a lectern. Farmers and merchants flooded in to hear lectures from local experts or traveling speakers. If you were living in a small Midwestern town in 1859, you might have heard Abraham Lincoln debating his presidential rival, Steven Douglas, at one of these lyceums. If you lived in Upstate New York around 1875, you could have heard the famous Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina, speaking out against slavery. The fact was that thousands of people came from miles around just to see a woman at the lectern, a very rare sight in those days.

The belief in "education for all" prompted many citizens to set up their own schools in poorer neighborhoods, especially those where large numbers of new immigrants had settled. The most famous of these "settlement houses" was Hull House, established in Chicago in 1856 by Jane Addams, where thousands of newcomers learned to speak English. Addams' neighborhood school stands as the model that many community programs have taken, with teachers recruited locally, and with volunteers and fellow students doing a good bit of the teaching.

Unfortunately, newly arriving adult immigrants, especially those of color, found themselves barred from enrollment in many schools. Native Americans, shunted to reservations, were often overlooked by efforts to educate the nation's adults. Some of these groups, however, took matters into their own hands. One of the most famous examples is the Freedmen's Schools movement that began during the Civil War, when millions of newly-freed African-American slaves were expected to find their way within the larger society with little or no education. This movement remains one of the brightest spots in American history because African-Americans and Whites alike joined forces and shared power in creating a quickly growing network of schools for freed slaves and their children. They formed racially mixed faculties and set up non-segregated schools, many of which were later segregated by state government laws. They also attracted the financial support of dozens of charitable institutions. Already by 1865, the sheer size of this network of over three hundred groups and their many hundreds of schools was so impressive that the U.S. Government established a federal office, the Freedmen's Bureau, to help support and coordinate the efforts.

Religion and politics are not the only forces that have fueled the steady growth of adult education. Economics has played a very large part, too. As the United States became more industrialized at the turn of the century, business leaders recognized their need for literate workers. Thousands of immigrants learned to speak English right in Henry Ford's big automobile factories in Detroit, and thousands of young women learned to read and write in special schools set up for millworkers in Lawrence, Lowell, and Methuen, Massachusetts, among many other towns. Military leaders realized that modern armies needed educated soldiers (the GED test was developed by the military). In the early part of this century, economic, military, and educational leaders joined to launch the Progressive Education Movement, based on the conviction that for the U.S. to remain healthy and secure, its "workforce" needed reading, writing, and math skills. After all, most Americans were no longer working on farms, but in factories and businesses.

It wasn't until the 1920s that some very lucid thinkers began to notice that in many publicly-funded programs, America's credo of "education for all" did not really include *all.* Too many still denied enrollment to Native Americans, Asians, and African-Americans. Even women found themselves denied entry at most colleges. (Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts was the first college in the U.S. to accept women, back in 1837.) U.S. Education Secretary Raymond Wilbur was one courageous individual who has never been adequately celebrated in the history books. He launched the nation's first literacy campaign in 1924, and he made sure that it was down in writing that all programs must be open to everyone, regardless of cultural heritage or gender.

Today, we are the beneficiaries of some powerful federal laws: the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Adult Education Act of 1966, and the National Literacy Act of 1991. These and other important acts have directed millions of dollars to adult education programs, usually by giving funds to state departments of education. In some ways, adult education looks very much like it did back in the days of Jane Addams and Henry Ford, with programs in schools, libraries, churches, and workplaces. But what is changing is that nearly everyone now agrees that the *need* for adult education is a critical one. America was once an *agricultural* society, then it became an *industrial* society, and now it's becoming an *informational* society. With every new age has come a greater need for educating our adult citizens to the highest degree that their lives allow.

Carey Reid is a Staff Development Specialist for SABES at World Education in Boston, MA.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITY:

1. What happened to the Freedmen's Schools?
2. What were some of the important ideas of the Progressive Education Movement? How are these ideas still important today?
3. As a class, draw an educational timeline for the United States marking important moments of the 20th century. Visit the History of Education web site for more information and links at [http://www.socsci.kun.nl/ped/whp/histeduc/index.html]. Another helpful web site to look at is Education in the 20th Century: Selected Moments at [http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_schugurensky/assignment1/index.html].

Is Education a Right?

by Jim Carabell

Picture this: Tens of thousands of children in your state cannot attend school. What's the problem? The state has failed to set aside adequate funds to build enough schools and hire enough teachers to handle all the children in need of a basic education. The capacity of the K-12 system can only serve 5% of the state's children. What happens? Parents are in an uproar. They hire constitutional lawyers to begin a class-action lawsuit, phone and write their representatives in Congress, organize community action groups, and protest — loudly. They demand that the state come up with the funds for education. They point out that a basic education for their children is a constitutional right; that, in the future, their children will need to know how to read, write, and compute so they'll be able to carry out their basic responsibilities as workers, parents, and community members.

The state points out that it simply doesn't have enough money to educate all of its children. It suggests that communities channel their energies toward finding creative solutions to this problem. The state proposes that more children could be educated without additional funds if parents and other community members would become volunteer tutors for the children who can't go to school, and that churches and libraries might lend their space for classes. The parents are unhappy about this solution. They say that volunteer teachers in makeshift settings are no substitute for the education services being given the students who have found a place in schools. They say their children are being discriminated against. They decide to take their case to the Supreme Court, to force their state to come up with enough funds to build more schools and hire more teachers to serve all the children who have been denied attendance.

What do you think will be the outcome of this scenario? The thought of denying children a basic education angers most people. Most would say that children have a right to an education. After all, education is an essential ingredient in ensuring an informed citizenry and maintaining a democracy, not to mention enhancing an individual's "pursuit of happiness." While the U.S. Constitution does not specifically mention this right, the constitutions of most states, and federal and state legislation have mandated that every child be accorded a free basic education.

Few would argue that a child who completes the fourth grade has obtained the necessary knowledge and skills required to fully participate in the varied responsibilities of adult life. But what of the adult who reads, writes, or computes at that educational level? When an adult is in need of basic educational services, why do our communities, politicians, and courts treat that person differently? If a basic education is important for a child who will become a future worker, a future parent, or a future voter, is it any less important in the life of an adult, for whom those responsibilities are a present reality?

According to the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, 21% of adults function at the lowest level of literacy (NALS Study, 1994). In Vermont, where I live, this translates to approximately 88,000 people who lack the basic skills to read and understand a note from a teacher, a recipe, a newspaper article, instructions on a medicine bottle, or a voting ballot. Certainly, these abilities would be considered rudimentary outcomes of a basic education. But millions of adults who need to improve their literacy skills are, in effect, being denied a basic education because states and the federal government fail to set aside enough funds for them. Adult education programs can afford to serve only about 5% of the total number of adults in need of their services. While a basic education is secured as a right for children, it seems to be considered a luxury for adults. When adults turn 21, have they "used up" their right to basic education services equivalent to those provided by the K-12 system?

One reason for the double standard may be the outmoded, but still active, notion that adults have had their chance at education already. When they were children, they were given their opportunity to learn. If they didn't learn successfully during that time, then it's just too bad. They simply didn't take full advantage of their right.

Another reason might have to do with invisibility. In a society where "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," adults in need of basic education are notably silent. Most adults who have difficulty reading, writing, and doing math often go to great lengths to hide this from others. They may feel dumb, embarrassed, and incapable, so they're not about to advertise their situation. It's not that adults don't want to learn, but earlier failure in school sometimes reduces their confidence about being able to learn. They blame themselves, not the schools.

Placing the entire blame on these adults for failing to successfully acquire necessary knowledge and skills while they were in school is like faulting a tree for not producing fruit in a time of drought. Blaming the individual absolves the educational system; it supports the assumption that its services are unquestionably effective.

Education policy-makers are fond of borrowing concepts from corporate America and applying them to their enterprise. Their latest acquisition is the word "customer." Students and the community at large are seen as consumers of the education services provided by schools, which must be responsive to consumer needs to successfully carry out their mission. On behalf of adults, a case might be made that, at least 21% of these customers were shortchanged — and the community didn't get its money's worth.

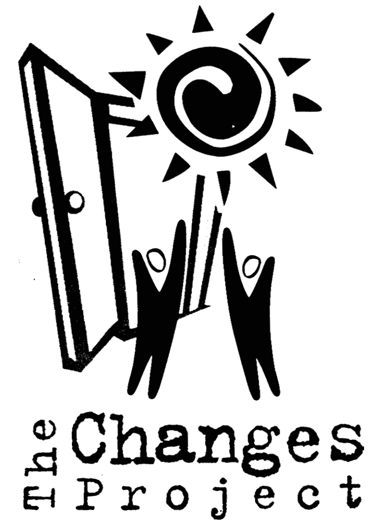
When a basic education is granted as a right for children, society has a duty to ensure those services are sufficient. What if they fall short? Where do consumers go when the services they've paid for are inadequate? In the case of adults who didn't succeed in school, the states' customer-service remedy has been a poorly-funded adult education system, where only a fraction of the number in need are served.

Why aren't communities up in arms about this picture? Why aren't lawsuits flying to the Supreme Court on behalf of the unserved adults? Is a two-tiered education system fair? Is it constitutional? Does the right to basic education only extend to children? Do we have the luxury to remain silent?

Jim Carabell lives in Randolph, Vermont and works for Vermont Adult Learning, a statewide non-profit organization.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITY:

1. Do you believe that adult education is a right? Why or why not?
2. If adult education got substantially more funding, how would you like to see the money used?
3. Do you agree with the statement, "Placing the entire blame on these adults for failing to successfully acquire necessary knowledge and skills while they were in school is like faulting a tree for not producing fruit in a time of drought"?
4. Role play a discussion between a customer (ABE student) and a service provider about the need for better services.



"Usually in my country, the students are young people and when they are around 50 years, they are not interested in educational stuff. In USA is different, you could do whatever you want and the age doesn't matter."

"I already know that it's not going to be easy and it's going to be a long bumpy ride, but with the help of my peers I know I'll be able to complete my education to my satisfaction."

"My family plays a big role in my life, and without the support of my family I don't think I would be here in school right now. My wife and my kid, they motivate me and they help me to come back to school, and without them I won't be here right now."

"I learned that by experience, if I don't get up on my feet, ain't nobody going to come and drag me and say well come and go with me I have to find a job. That's why I'm still hanging in this program. That's why I'm trying to get where I want to get, so that way I don't have to be asking nobody for money or anything, that would be my own money."

"Setting goals is easy, the difficult part is concentrating and learning how to overcome the obstacles that appear in life. I believe that life is all about what you make it and how you do it."

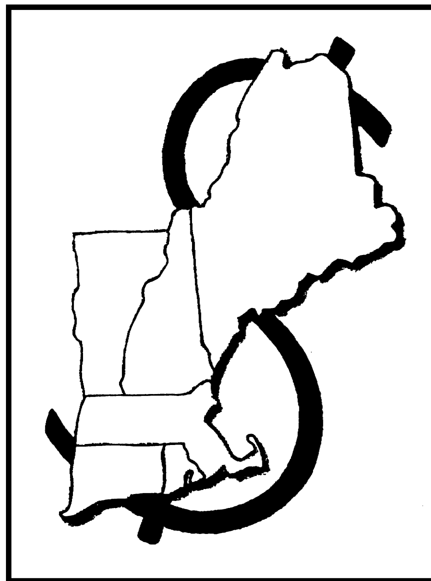
Student quotes reprinted with permission from *Voices Making Change*, March 1999, a publication of The Changes Project. The Changes Projet is a research project, conducted in large part by adult learners, looking at the impact of welfare reform, the changes in immigration policies and the changing nature of work on the learning and achievement of adult students enrolled in five Western Massachusetts adult literacy and education programs. For more information contact Alex Risley Schroeder at SABES, Holyoke Community College, 303 Homestead Avenue, Holyoke, MA 01040 or email at arisleysch@hcc.mass.edu

Money Matters: Adult Basic Education Funding in New England

by Silja Kallenbach

If education is a public value, we do not walk the talk, especially when it comes to adult basic education. Massachusetts, for example, is willing to spend $70 million on a stadium for the New England Patriots, a figure that is considerably more than the $61 million the six New England states together spend on adult basic education. The winning score clearly belongs to sports.

In the world of education, ABE is greatly neglected compared to K-12 and higher education. Our field's marginal status is clearly evident in the distribution of public dollars. In most state budgets, the ABE allocation is less than 1% of the state's public education dollars. (Massachusetts has made it up to over 2% now, thanks to years of advocacy by the field, aided by supporting documentation of the need from the adult education office at the Department of Education.) Nevertheless, we are expected to make up for the deficiencies in up to 12 years of schooling and achieve outcomes many public schools could not, and did not, deliver for our learners. At the same time, we must address the psychological damage to people's confidence in their ability to learn. It is fair to say that the expectations of what we are to accomplish are exceedingly high, while the resources we receive to meet them are in many states pitiful.



All state legislatures allocate funds for education, but there is great disparity in how much they are willing to spend. In New Hampshire and Rhode Island, the total state allocation for the year 2000 is $500,000, whereas in Massachusetts it is expected to be $26 million, and in Connecticut $16 million, with an additional $14.5 million in local contributions. At roughly $2 million, the funding for the SABES staff development system alone in Massachusetts is double what New Hampshire and Rhode Island spend on their entire adult basic education systems, federal funds aside. Granted, both are much smaller in terms of population. It should still come as no surprise that New Hampshire relies quite heavily on volunteers in its adult basic education system. The state adult education director, Art Ellison reasons, "If we did a better job with mobilizing the people who receive educational services, we'd have more money."

In Maine, the way the money is distributed to adult education programs compels the programs to connect with their surrounding community in very real ways that go beyond referrals of students to social service agencies. Individual school districts are permitted through legislation to raise public tax dollars for the purpose of adult education. About 70% of school districts in Maine choose to do so. The decision is made in the town meeting. If Lewiston, for example, is willing to raise $100,000 in tax dollars for adult education, they can get 66% of that reimbursed by the state. That creates some incentive to spend money on adult basic education. The rest of the incentive comes from the fact that all adult education programs also offer courses that appeal to the population at large like word processing, astrology or crafts. "It's an exceptional system because it means keeping the school board informed, and keeping the local town members informed, and offering courses that respond to their needs. If the school really becomes a part of the community then programs really don't have a problem in getting it funded," according to Bob Crotzer from the Maine Department of Education.

Like Maine, adult education in Connecticut is primarily provided by local school districts per state mandate. School districts can either provide the program themselves or cooperate with another surrounding district to offer the program for the residents of their town. The state then ranks each town in Connecticut and provides a reimbursement to the town for a percentage of the cost of operating the program within the fiscal year. It is a complex formula that takes into consideration population, wealth, unemployment, etc. The current formula is 0-65%. For example, if Hartford's cost of operating the district's adult education program is $1 million dollars and their reimbursement rate is 65%, the state will give them $650,000 and the district will need to come up with $350,000 in cash to make the $1 million. The wealthiest town in Connecticut receives no money from the state, yet it must provide local funds for adult basic education or fund another district to offer it to its residents.

Vermont programs also receive local dollars disbursed in town meetings, but the amounts are a smaller percentage of the programs' total revenues than in Maine or Connecticut. What may be peculiar for non-Vermonters is that only four non-profit adult education providers cover the entire state. Money is allocated on a needs-based formula for each of the state's counties which are combined into eight adult education regions. The four providers then divide up the regions. There has been no real competition for funding since this system was instituted.

Across the border in Massachusetts, a lack of competition is a foreign notion. Every five years, programs must compete with each other for funds. As of next year, they must do a community planning process. As Bob Bickerton, the Massachusetts State Adult Education Director explains: "Community planning is meant to address coordination, what are the needs and assets of a community around adult literacy. It aims to end the disconnect between human services and adult education, and to create more coordination and partnerships between them, to bring all kinds of stakeholders together to plan for adult education services in their community. All applicants from one community will need to sign off on a needs statement for the next round of five-year funding."

Add to that an elaborate, and possibly unparalleled rate system that determines adult basic education funding levels for individual programs, and you can see that with the increased funding come vastly increased expectations. The rate system identifies "every little thing that needs to happen" for quality instruction, e.g., direct instruction, counseling, prep time, staff development, audit, and office supplies. The rates are done per student instructional hour, depending on the level and intensity of instruction. The current annual per student average is $1,500, but the goal is $2,500. "The rates ensure educational equity so that no student is shortchanged," says Bob Bickerton.

Meanwhile, even Massachusetts has not achieved what Vermont has had in place for years: virtually 100% full-time teaching staff in all programs. Nevertheless, the Vermont adult basic education director, Sandra Robinson, feels stymied in making further system reforms. For one, she says,

> We cannot even come to an agreement on what adult education is in our tiny state. The post-secondary education people say they are adult education. We have no systemic terminology for how to describe ourselves. This conversation of what we call ourselves has been going on ever since I began working in adult education in the early 70's. As a result, there is also no system of adult education that we can agree on.

Perhaps Sandra's point is a clue to why it is so much easier to win public support for a sports stadium than for adult basic education.

Silja Kallenbach is Coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center in Boston, MA.

Class Project

Look at the list of expenditures for ABE for fiscal year 1994. (This is the most current data we could find.)

1. Rank the states from greatest to least in cost per student. Rank the states from greatest to least in total expenditures. Are your two lists the same? What are some of the factors that could account for the difference?

2. Make a bar graph using either cost per pupil or total expenditures to use in convincing a state politician to vote for increased spending.

3. In the same years, Massachusetts and Rhode Island spent an average of at least $7,000 per pupil to educate elementary and secondary school students. How does that relate to the amount these two states spent on adult education programs? Divide into two teams and debate whether or not this is a fair distribution of tax dollars.

4. Make a poster you could use to convince taxpayers in your area that more money should be allocated to adult education.

Fiscal Year 1994

State	Cost Per Student	Total Expenditures
Connecticut	$902	$24,328,637
Maine	$209	$6,759,663
Massachusetts	$934	$14,635,708
New Hampshire	$288	$1,832,1000
Rhode Island	$498	$3,235,532
Vermont	$698	$3,486,018

The national average cost per student is $300.

Excerpted from statistics prepared by the U.S. Department of Education, July 1997.

A Second Chance:

Adult Learners' Stories

What has your educational experience been and how has adult education impacted your life? This is a question Lindy Whiton asked a group of students at the Pioneer Valley Adult Education Center in Northampton, Massachusetts. They brainstormed, wrote, shared their writings, and talked.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITY:

1. How is your experience the same or different from the authors'?
2. How is adult education different from your other school experiences?
3. Write your own educational autobiography.

Growing up, my family moved all over the place. One time we moved twice within a year. When we went from state to state, how you were graded in school was different. When we stayed in Connecticut and moved around, the curriculum was always different (books, rules, activities). I was always trying to adjust, never mind being able to learn. If you were shy and very quiet, the teachers left you alone and just pushed you along with the rest of the people.

My father wasn't big on school and didn't have a high school diploma himself. He felt that he got along just fine without one and that his children didn't need one either. Because the law said you could legally leave school at 16, I had to leave on my 16th birthday in 10th grade.

I tried to go back two other times — once at 19 and the other in night school at 21. Because my basics were messed up, it was hard for them to be able to help me, and they didn't have any information on where to send me for help. At that point I had my first child and I luckily started to read a lot.

When my children started school, they also had trouble. I made sure we stayed in one area so they could bond with friends and teachers. My oldest child had trouble in 1st grade with reading. They kept telling me she would catch up, but it just got worse and by 4th grade she would hide her papers and cry all the time. Luckily her teacher at the time fought for her and they listened to what she said, whereas they didn't hear what I had to say. After they tested her, they found that she had a learning disability and placed her in the resource room. Now she has just finished her 4th year of college.

At this time in my life, my youngest child is a senior in high school and it's finally time for me. My brother is in this adult education class and suggested I come to school. He keeps saying that I would like it and have a good time. I told him that I was very uncomfortable because of past experiences and was embarrassed about someone knowing how limited my education was. I know I'm someone who got by because I have a lot of common sense and can find ways to solve problems, but for me to come here through the front door was exposing myself publicly that I'm not educated and didn't have a high school diploma. That was always a sore spot. At this age could I get one? I don't think I could have stood it if I felt like I did at 21 — hopeless, couldn't be taught, laughed at, etc.

I made the call. I came in and did some testing. I first was worried that I wasn't good enough. Then I was worried I was too good. I didn't realize I had been learning all these years!

Trying to learn to sit still and work on one thing at a time was very difficult for me. After I finally got here, my only goal was to get my GED. Now I would like to go to college. I'm not sure what I want to be or study, but I do know I want to learn more.

Because of this step I have taken, I feel that I have learned more about who I am as a person and there are no limits on who I can be in the future.

~ Pat

When I started at the Northampton Adult Education Center I could not read or write. In school, it was easier to pass me then it was to teach me. I attend [classes] and I can read and write better than I did before I started. The adult education helped me to read and write better.

~ John

The best thing that ever happened to me is when I got to know there is a place to go to help me with my education. I found a flyer on the wall in the transitional office about adult education. So I took down the number and called and Jean Marie answered the phone. She gave me the time and directions and I searched for the place. I have been searching for a job and I could not find one. I decided not to sit in the home, I must find something to do. And I know with education you can turn the world around so I decided to take a step forward towards my GED and my goal and determination is to be a nurse and a writer. Thank God for adult education and I wish that this project would be spread all over the country and I wish it would be advertised on the radio or newspapers so that people, young and old, could take a step forward instead of sitting down at home doing nothing.

~ Josephine

At 16 I quit school. They wanted me to stay back – they wanted me to do the 8th grade again. In the 2nd grade they put me back in the 1st grade. I can take a car apart and put it back together with my eyes closed and they can't change their own oil. You can't know everything, no one can. The books don't tell you everything. I wanted to go to trade school, but they said I didn't have enough education. Back then people didn't learn at home. My parents were working. My father worked 2nd shift and my mother worked days and had housework at night. Every day I worked on cars to take out my frustration.

~ Ron

The Power of the Pen

by Wai Hung Billy Chan

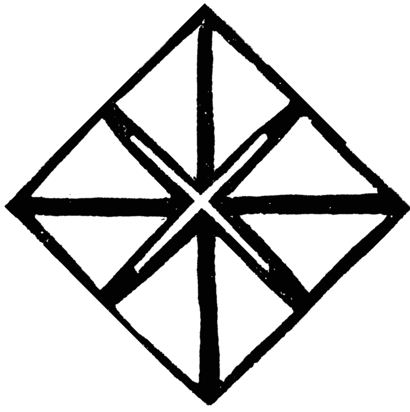
When I was young, my mother used to tell me how powerful the pen is. My mother is afraid of people who have this power because my mother experienced a situation where she did not have enough knowledge to defend herself. My mother is still hoping that she can have a chance to complete school some day and feel the power of the pen.

My parents were aware that English plays an important role in Hong Kong. Therefore, they sent me to the best Catholic primary school and one of the few English schools on Hong Kong Island. Luckily and unfortunately, they accepted my application. Luckily, because I was the only member in the whole family who had a chance to go to the best school; my parents were proud of that. Unfortunately, because I was not supposed to go to that school — that school was supposed to educate students who could speak English well. At that age, I was only about six years old, I did not even know the numbers or the alphabet in English. My parents knew I had this problem; they thought I would be fine after a year. However, everything went contrary to my parents' wishes. I learned nothing from that school because I was not able to understand the teacher. All I could do was memorize all the reading because I was not able to understand or analyze it. Of course, this strategy would not work for passing an exam, especially the English exam. Therefore, each time after an exam, I was the first person in school to be punished by the principal. I will not forget that long stick. Two years later, my parents could not bear this punishment, so I withdrew from that school and went to the regular primary school to continue to pursue education.

Since then I have felt that education is painful. Notwithstanding, I was told that education is the only way to have a bright future. My parents always said if they had enough education people would not look down on them because they were just workers. They used to say that education could give me the opportunity to be a successful and famous man. This is one of the reasons that I want to have a college degree. Frankly, there is one more reason, this is my parents. I would like to pay them back.

I am not sure that my mother is right or not to believe that education sharpens our pen, but the truth is I do feel the power of my pen is now bigger than before.

Wai Hung Billy Chan was a student at the University of Massachusetts - Boston where he took an English Composition class. He will be transfering to Northeastern University. He has been in the United States since June 6, 1997.



Broken Promises/ Forgotten Dreams:

Adult Education Practice in a K-12 Schooled World

by Brenda Peters

For the last 10 years, I have worked with adult basic education programs while also teaching in a small liberal arts college specializing in K-12 teacher preparation. From conversations, both informal and formal, with over 100 practicing and pre-service teachers, adult education practitioners, learners, and leaders in the field of both andragogy, the teaching of adults, and pedagogy, some interesting general comparisons have been drawn.

A common theme among both the adult education practitioners and learners was that they were, in the words of one subject, "a forgotten and broken field," desperately in need of new vision and commitment. "Disappointment," "frustration," and "abandonment" were phrases used to describe how they felt about specific critical incidents in their practice/learning experiences. A feeling of being "second class citizens," marginalized by a traditional K-12 system from which they had come was also expressed in interviews. Other emerging themes include the following:

SIMILARITIES

- Both K-12 practitioners and adult educators have become increasingly focused throughout the last decade on assessment and achievement gains based on traditional standardized measures of academic success. These traditional standardized measures have become the impetus to drive the curriculum in both arenas.
- In both K-12 and adult education professional circles, discussion has intensified over "quality of teaching," and what steps can be taken to ensure quality, regulate outcomes, and frame these measures in a more standardized way. In the ABE sphere, this has led to diminished resources afforded to those programs that embrace non-traditional approaches to both teaching and teacher preparation. All of this has occurred under the guise of "raised standards."
- In both the K-12 system and adult basic education, dismal statistics in regard to student retention, parent/student satisfaction, and student growth on traditional measures of academic success in basic literacy skills are evident. At the same time, we continue to emphasize increased academic standards as measures of success, while sufficient alternative models of teaching and testing have not been provided to staff.
- In both arenas, there is little evidence of alignment of assessment measures (i.e., standardized tests) to the curriculum being touted to teach important life functioning skills (i.e., SCANS, Universal Foundation Skills, School to Work Skills, Employability and Career Readiness Skills, etc.).
- Many teachers in ABE have a background of teaching or teacher preparation in traditional K-12 settings. This is particularly true in paid professional teaching experiences in public education settings. Based on interviews with practitioners in the private, non-profit, community based organization sectors, this is not as often true.

DIFFERENCES

- Students in ABE programs have significant life experiences that K-12 education students do not. Adult learners come to the education endeavor initially with notions of what "teaching" and "learning" are; in many cases these have been achieved through struggle and pain.
- Most adult education practitioners and learners come to the field after having spent part of their careers "somewhere else," either in traditional K-12 settings, child-rearing, social work, counseling, etc. Most traditional K-12 teachers, on the other hand, have come to the field directly from their own educational experiences, from high school to two to four year college settings, to graduate education programs, and entering the classroom by age 22 or 23. They have experience of traditional "schooling" in which teaching methods include: the lecture approach, emphasis on the content areas, and a "banking concept" of education, as described by the late Paulo Freire (1970), where information and knowledge are "deposited in the students' account, to be withdrawn by the teacher at some future time."
- Most of what adult education has considered the foundation of adult development is steeped in the teachings of both child development and adolescent psychology. While Piaget, Erickson, and other pioneers in their field have provided valuable insight for traditional K-12 educators, the extension of those same learning theories to adult education leaves significant gaps in what constitutes development in adulthood. Kohlberg, Gilligan, Dominice, Finger, and others have addressed some of this in research on adult development. The field, however, continues to base its practice on research of cognitive development of children and adolescents.
- Most traditional K-12 teachers are full-time, salaried professionals with benefits, and are represented by collective bargaining units which guard their interests in the "political" arena. Most adult education practitioners are part-time, paid hourly, without significant benefits or job security. Additionally, they are not often represented by collective bargaining units. Many have had to take multiple part-time teaching positions in order to piece together a career and support themselves and/or a family.

IMPLICATIONS

What does all this mean for the field of adult education, and more importantly, what are the implications here for adult learners? It is clear, based on the data of retention and success, that we must examine alternative models of both adult education delivery and teaching. For some, this has resulted in a debate regarding the appropriate credentialing criteria, necessary skills, and abilities needed by adult educators. Others are exploring a variety of models as alternatives to a test-driven one based in a mechanistic, traditional, outmoded K-12 setting. Perhaps we need to examine our teacher certification and training processes to include components of self-reflection, critical examination of one's life experiences, and exposure to diverse populations of learners in alternative settings (homeless shelters, incarcerated settings, family literacy settings, etc.).

When students have not met with success in the traditional K-12 setting, many times it is because that system has not validated their identity. For a variety of reasons including culture, ability, interest, motivation, and personal realities, we did not "build it so they would come." When these learners return to the educational setting as adults, the similarities cited above would indicate that we often offer "more of the same." The low self-esteem and past experience with traditional ways of teaching are often their only frame of reference. Thus, we have a cycle of student expectations of "schooling" driving and reinforcing an adult education model based on the traditional K-12 system.

If we seek to "break the cycle" and forge the field of adult education into its own rightful discipline (as was begun in the early 1990s), then we must critically examine a variety of models of both professional adult education training and classroom practice. We've been so focused on measuring traditional standards of success (TABE, grade equivalents of language proficiency, reading, math, GED), we might be ignoring some very significant successes and gains that fall outside the traditional means of assessment. Exploration of life histories, learner goals, and self-reflection in journals, as well as more diligent efforts to contact and follow up with learners once they transition from formal programs, can yield data which could frame these measures of success. During the latter half of the 1990s, we have opted for the safe and familiar TABE and traditional assessment measures for that "proof of success."

We have an opportunity to reverse a trend that indicates that more learners are falling outside the realm of "traditional education" than are meeting with success within it. It will take diligence by all parties to collect data on "non-traditional measures of success." This will enable us to provide credible, alternative outcomes reflective of what truly happens in adult education, making it a professional discipline distinguishably different from the K-12 model which we have adopted. The outcomes from this data can and should drive both adult education training and practice.

For adult learners, we need to find ways that will fulfill the promise to teach them, broken by the traditional K-12 system, and help them to retrieve their forgotten dreams.

Brenda Peters is Assistant Professor/Department Head for Teacher Education, The College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY and former Director of Adult Basic, Family, Community, and Continuing Education. She is currently Executive Director for Student Programs, Oswego County Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Oswego, NY.

References: Dominice, Pierre. Composing Education Biographies: Group Reflection Through Life Histories in Jack Mezirow. (1991). *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*; Finger, Matthias. (1984). *Biography and Hermeneutics*; Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Gilligan, Carol. (1985). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development;* Kohlberg, Lawrence. (1972). *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Development;* Piaget, Jean. (1962). *Development in Early Childhood.*

A+ Measuring Success in Adult Education

by Dvora Zipkin

What constitutes "success" in adult education, and how do we measure it? Take a look at the situations described below; assume that all of these people are or were enrolled in adult education classes. Now, rank these situations in terms of educational success: (1) for most successful to (7) for least successful.

___ A 26-year-old mother of three leaves her abusive husband.

___ A 17-year-old high school drop-out earns his GED and gets a minimum wage job at McDonald's.

___ A young woman who has never written before finds her voice — and a community — in her weekly women's writing group.

___ A group of formerly battered women create a video about domestic violence.

___ Residents of a rural working class town launch a transportation project.

___ A 72-year-old grandmother learns to read to her grandchildren.

___ A 35-year-old factory worker earns his GED and enrolls in community college, becoming the first in his family to attend college.

Take a look at how you ranked these scenarios. Ask yourself what set of values or measures you used to determine educational success. If you balked at this exercise, or had difficulty ranking the scenarios, ask yourself why. It may be that, like myself and many in the adult education field, you dislike linear evaluative tools and are hard-pressed to measure success in formulaic and quantitative terms. (Yes, this was a trick question! I personally dislike these kinds of ranking questions and I had no hierarchy in mind when I wrote it.)

How we determine and measure educational success depends in large part on how we define success itself, and how we define education. If to succeed is, as Webster defines it, "to turn out well" or "to attain a desired object or end," then all of these scenarios constitute success.

Who are we to say whether any one of these success stories — all examples of the types of successes experienced by students at The Literacy Project — is any more or less valuable or worthy than any other? And, yet, that is precisely what we are constantly asked to do when our programs are evaluated in terms of numbers, whether it's the number of GEDs earned or the number of class hours attended.

Just as the debate rages in K-12 about the value of standardized tests to measure success, many in adult education would argue that we cannot measure student success by numbers alone. Standardized tests only measure limited types of intelligence, and performance on such tests mostly measures how good a test-taker someone is. Good attendance or a GED diploma only measure one aspect of success, one aspect of learning.

When I taught at a school for students with learning disabilities, I was shocked to learn that placement in classes was determined by performance on placement exams — for students with learning disabilities for whom test-taking was historically a major problem. In the same regard, I find it ludicrous to be forced into measuring success in narrow numerical terms, particularly with students for whom school has been equated with failure, and for whom obstacles to attend abound, from lack of transportation and child care to attitudes and negative associations with schooling. These adult students need a warm and welcoming learning environment that responds to their individual needs, not one which streamlines students into "success tracks" to meet program funding requirements. This sort of thing only reinforces students' negative experience of and attitudes towards school. They leave, and we all lose.

I recently completed a grant proposal that required pages of budget documentation, but requested that the narrative section be kept "brief." Apparently, these funders were more interested in how we would use the money than in what we actually *do*. As an administrator, I understand the need to document and support how funds will be spent. But I have been a teacher far longer than I've been an administrator, and I also understand the need to respect and respond to students' needs.

We need to see the whole picture. What is needed is a more holistic way of evaluating program effectiveness. If a primary goal of adult education is the empowerment of formerly disenfranchised and marginalized people — and I argue that it is — we as educators need the freedom to allow that personal growth and change to develop on its own terms. We need to feel empowered ourselves, and not have our hands tied by rigid, solely quantitative measures of success and accountability. We have to have the freedom to measure education's impact on people's lives in qualitative terms as well — through narratives, portfolios, interviews, videos, testimonials, journals, logs, community projects, and the like — and have these measures carry as much weight and import as quantitative data. For a student's affirmation of having found her voice, or a community, or re-gained an interest in learning, or overcome a fear of math — these are all outcomes just as valuable and important as how many students attended regularly and how many earned their degree. This kind of evaluation demands time, patience, flexibility, creativity, and the ability and willingness to see and work with the big picture and the whole person; it demands that we respect each individual as unique and irreplaceable. Aren't our students and our profession worth it? Isn't this what education is all about? We are in the business of education, yes, but we are also in the business of social change — changing society one life at a time.

Dvora Zipkin is the Executive Director of The Literacy Project in Greenfield, MA.

"Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts."
Albert Einstein

"I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."
Bill Cosby

"Success is a journey not a destination. The doing is usually more important than the outcome."
Arthur Ashe

Great-Grandma Back to School

by Maude Higgins

I am a 70-year old lady going back to a day learning center to get my high school diploma. I like school, and I'd like to have a diploma. I want to be able to shake my diploma in the air and say, "I've got one!" Some day when someone asks me whether I have a diploma, I want to be able to say "yes." I had forgotten much of what I had learned when I went to school as a child.

Teaching is very different today than when I was first in school. When I was a kid, we didn't even know what a computer was. These days a student has to use a computer. Even math is done differently than when I went to school years ago.

I've had to overcome several challenges in order to stay in school. I don't drive so I have to get transportation to go to school. I also had some sickness that held me back, as well as family problems that held me back.

That has not stopped me yet. I am going to get my diploma as long as I keep my grades up.

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Maude Higgins is an adult learner at Belfast Adult Learning Center in Maine.

Sick and Tired of Accountability

by John Comings

I am sick and tired of accountability because it's the main topic of almost every meeting I attend, yet the discussions sound the same today as they did several years ago. The discussions focus on ways to assess student progress (achievement) and measure positive change in their lives (impact). Often this leads to arguments about standardized tests, alternative methods for assessment, objective and subjective outcomes, and the negative effects of testing on recruitment and instruction. In my opinion, the endless debates about accountability have taken the focus away from teaching and learning.

Measuring student achievement is complicated because funders require aggregate data that can be compared and used to evaluate programs. Most approaches to measuring student achievement are based on standardized tests like the TABE or the CASAS, which don't capture many important outcomes, and most teachers don't follow a curriculum that is built around the skills and knowledge measured by standardized tests. Instead, teachers put together lessons that they believe will meet the needs of their students.

Measuring impact on students' lives is no easier than measuring achievement. Jobs, higher income, children doing better in school, and greater community involvement are all outcomes that can come from participation in programs. These positive outcomes, though, are dependent on many factors outside the control of programs. For example, if the economy turns down, participation in the program will not result in job entries or higher incomes.

If measuring the outputs (achievement and impact) of adult education programs is difficult, then maybe we should measure inputs. Looking at inputs (teachers, curriculum, materials, technology, and teaching approach, for example) provides a measure of the quality of the learning experience a program delivers to its students. Most states have already developed criteria for measuring inputs in the form of indicators of program quality. These indicators can be turned into measures, which can be documented and observed. In fact, this is how institutions of higher education are held accountable, through an accreditation system that is focused on inputs.

In my opinion, the endless debates about accountability have taken the focus away from teaching and learning.

Since program quality is easier to measure than achievement or impact, all programs could be held accountable for providing good quality instruction. Taking this approach would require a commitment to describe good practice, fund the development of programs that can function under that definition of good practice, and provide staff training and program improvement services that would help programs achieve that level of quality. Evaluators would then visit programs to assess their quality, which is how the higher education accreditation system works.

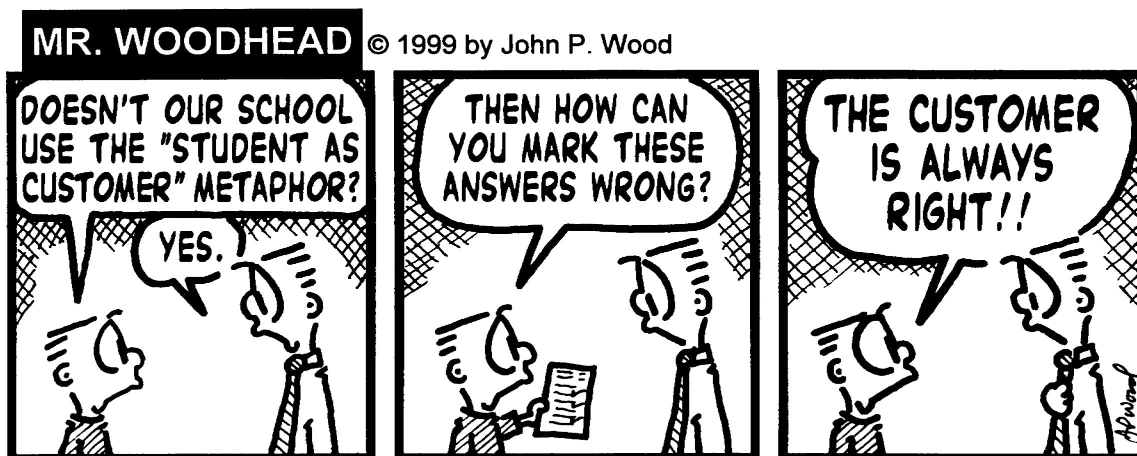
A few examples might make this concept clearer. Under this system, programs would be required to articulate what they are trying to achieve for different groups of students and why the materials and instructional approaches they use are consistent with those objectives. When evaluators observe classes, they should see that instruction matches the stated objectives. In high quality programs, teachers and students would be aware of student progress and be able to explain it to the evaluator. These programs would also have recruitment, intake, orientation, and counseling services that help students to persist and be successful in their studies, and evaluators would see these components at work.

Funding agencies would still be justified in wanting proof that participation in these quality programs leads to improved skills and positive impact in the lives of the adults who studied in them. The higher education system has proof that successfully completing their programs of study leads to positive impact, but this proof does not come from measurements of every student. Higher education's proof comes from research studies, usually longitudinal studies that follow a small group of graduates for many years. Achievement and impact should be measured by careful studies that have the resources to assess academic skills and to look at impact over several years.

The research component would prove that participation in these quality programs is leading to achievement and positive impact in the lives of the adults who study in them. This accountability system would assure funding agencies that their money is supporting programs that meet criteria for effective practice.

In conclusion, if we hold programs accountable through standards of good practice, then teaching and learning should improve. Research could then look at the achievement and impact for adults who study in the programs that meet these criteria for good practice. I am positive we would find clear and reliable proof that participation in good programs leads to achievement and positive impact by students.

John Comings is Director of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, MA.



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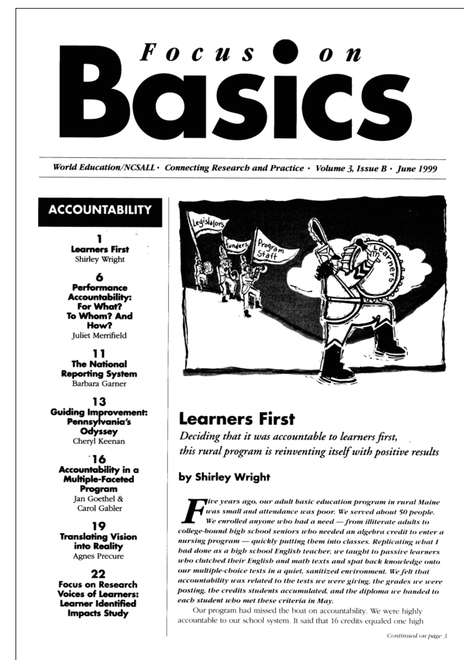

Focus on Basics

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Learners First

Deciding that it was accountable to learners first, this rural program is reinventing itself with positive results

by Shirley Wright

Five years ago, our adult basic education program in rural Maine was small and attendance was poor. We served about 50 people. We enrolled anyone who had a need — from illiterate adults to college-bound high school seniors who needed an algebra credit to enter a nursing program — quickly putting them into classes. Replicating what I had done as a high school English teacher, we taught to passive learners who clutched their English and math texts and spat back knowledge onto our multiple-choice tests in a quiet, sanitized environment. We felt that accountability was related to the tests we were giving, the grades we were posting, the credits students accumulated, and the diploma we handed to each student who met these criteria in May.

Our program had missed the boat on accountability. We were highly accountable to our school system. It said that 16 credits equaled one high

Continued on page 3

The June 1999 issue of *Focus on Basics* on accountability offers a snapshot of diverse approaches to and opinions about accountability and its role in adult basic education.

In one feature article entitled "Performance Accountability: For What? To Whom? And How?" Juliet Merrifield writes:

Adult basic education is facing serious demands from policy-makers and funders to be accountable for its performance. The 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) requires that each state report on performance measures. The emphasis on results shifts attention from simple delivery of services to the outcomes of learning: learning gains measured on standardized tests or social and economic outcomes such as getting a job, getting off welfare, and children's school success.

The key issues in the development of performance accountability in adult education are:

- What does good performance mean?
- Do programs have the capacity to be accountable?
- Are the tools commonly used for measuring and documenting performance adequate and useful?
- Are accountability relationships in place to link ABE into a coherent system?

Focus on Basics is available on NCSALL's web site at [http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall]. To subscribe call Mark Holmes of World Education at (617) 482-9485.

NCSALL

PUBLICATIONS

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) has recently published a monograph on accountability (*Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education* by Juliet Merrifield), which has been summarized in a NCSALL *Research Brief* and in the May 1999 issue of *Focus on Basics. Contested Ground* provides an in-depth look at the issue of accountability, and reading either the full report or one of the summaries provides a comprehensive overview of this problem.

To order copies, contact Mark Holmes of World Education at (617) 482-9485.

EFF and Accountability

by Marty Duncan

Equipped For the Future (EFF) is a national initiative of the National Institute for Literacy to reform the adult education system so that it better prepares adults to meet their goals as workers, family members, and community members. The EFF framework helps adults identify the activities they want to accomplish, the skills needed for those activities, and the evidence of progress they will look for. The framework helps teachers collaborate with students to plan a curriculum responsive to their purposes and interests, and to gather and report meaningful assessment information.

A comprehensive, full-time program is as unusual in rural Maine as it is in rural areas of many other states. Yet, Sumner Adult Education is just that. Our program offerings include family literacy, office skills certification, certified nurse's aide training, adult basic education, GED, adult diploma, English as an additional language, enrichment, college preparation, distance education, and employability/career counseling. We are center- home- and community-based. Adult learners and their families participate in one-to-one sessions, family activities, parent and child together time, field trips, individual and group sessions in learning labs, conventional classes, a parent corner at a local school, a weekly coffee hour at the learning center, and sessions at libraries.

Our work is going very well, but at this time we find ourselves immersed in the struggle with the fundamental issues of accountability. We repeatedly return to discussion of the questions examined by Juliet Merrifield in *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education.* (See box on previous page.) To whom are we accountable and for what? How do our definitions of what we do and its purposes influence what we choose to measure and how? What can we use to measure and document learning? How can we collect evidence of learning? How can data systems accommodate the data we collect? How and for what purposes do we use the data?

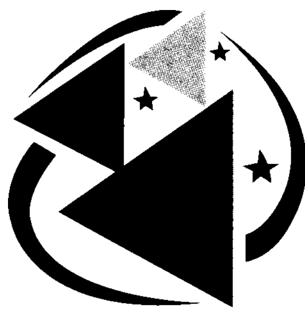
While we sort through our thoughts on these questions, we work under the same pressures as others: to reach as many learners as possible; to engage them in thoughtful, accurate assessment; to design learning situations that arise from these assessments; to collect what data we can; to learn the data systems required by our funders; to fit our data collection into their systems; to evaluate our program; and to use data from our evaluations to improve the program.

We have been using the Equipped for the Future (EFF) framework to examine and address these issues for the past three years. We are now at the point of embarking on a more comprehensive integration of the framework into our program. EFF now influences a wide range of efforts at Sumner, such as initial interviews with learners; lesson planning and assessment; state grant-writing and reports; and reports to the school board and the family literacy advisory council. However, our plans for the next year include increased use of EFF for assessment and for our state reporting.

Currently, we introduce EFF during the initial student interview. At this stage we talk mostly about people's roles as workers, family members, and community members. We also discuss their goals and purposes for learning. The response from learners has been positive, especially because we present the information and ask the questions in the spirit of interest in their opinions and assessments of themselves. All staff and learners who have used EFF at Sumner agree that it is useful for self-assessment.

Teachers in our program with EFF experience are now using the framework for lesson planning and, increasingly, for assessment of student learning. One teacher in our program said, "[Using the framework] ...reminded me to keep coming back to look specifically at progress without making too many assumptions, reminded me of the importance of evidence to the learner. This caused me to question whether or not I was overlooking any skills the student needed to accomplish the task. I had to look for what was missing."

Staff in our program agree that the framework is useful for assessing learning far beyond the definition of literacy as reading and writing skills. Use of standards such as "Plan" and "Cooperate with Others" gives us an opportunity to assess learning that occurs in a wide range of activities, and that is necessary for adults to participate fully at home, at work and in the community.



Staff in our program agree that the framework is useful for assessing learning far beyond the definition of literacy as reading and writing skills.

Standardized testing has never been the primary source of assessment at Sumner though we see limited value in some testing; we see no reason that, for some purposes, test results cannot be included in a learner's portfolio. We have not used EFF in GED preparation, but we're moving in this direction in our tutoring for GED preparation. Since our GED preparation is done on a one-on-one basis, our experience doesn't speak to the larger programs that offer classes. But it seems that the kind of options-building we encourage in our individual sessions could be even better used in a group. There is no discrepancy between the skills needed to pass the GED and the skills outlined in the framework. Moreover, combining use of the role maps and common activities with a focus on the generative skills would encourage more "real learning."

A learner, when asked, "What is the best way to prove to people that you've learned something?" replied: "Show 'em!" She went on to say that she can "go into stores and know things I didn't know before. I feel like I've learned something I wanted to learn. I want to learn more."

Recently, staff at Sumner contributed to a list of ways, other than testing, that EFF could be used to assess learning:

- documenting real life events (for example, if a learner's goal is getting a better job, driver's license, respite care for children, a GED, EFF is closely related and the accomplishment of these goals incorporates the use of many skills such as reading critically, listening, researching.);
- participating in self-assessment linked to goals (any part of the framework);
- assessing skills used in community involvement, documented by attendance records, records of meetings, etc. (related to the citizen role map);
- portfolio reviews; and
- presentations (any part of the framework).

No one in our program pretends that the problems of reporting the results of the kinds of assessments we are proposing are easily resolved. Yet, we believe that reporting concrete evidence of learning should be as much a priority of funders as of learners and teachers. We think that documentation gathered in portfolios is transferable to reporting outcomes.

At Sumner Adult Education, we are able to address issues of accountability because our learning center coordinator and director have worked to provide full-time positions for staff. This means that we have adequate time to communicate, to assess, to plan, to evaluate. At this point in our program's development, all staff participate at some level in grant-writing. The involvement in various projects, the grant-writing, the documentation, the self-examination is not always easy nor fun. We complain and question and sometimes resist.

As I have described above, we believe that EFF fits with our program philosophy and that it's useful and well worth developing further. We are not yet at the point of clarifying in exactly what ways we are accountable in all instances, but we have certainly discussed and outlined general expectations. Equipped For the Future, as well as our state director through his involvement with EFF, has supported us and given us a structure for grappling with the issues we would be facing with or without it.

Marty Duncan is a teacher and Student Services Coordinator at Sumner Adult Education Program in East Sullivan, Maine.

To learn more about EFF, contact Kevin Brady at [kevin.brady@phila.gov] for the most recent EFF Publications or join the EFF listserv where practitioners are discussing their use of the EFF framework. To join, send a message to [listproc@literacy.nifl.gov], leave the subject area blank, in the message write: subscribe nifl-4eff (space) first name (space) last name.

A Fresh Start?

Adult Basic Education in England and Wales

by Jay Derrick

INTRODUCTION

These are exciting times for people in England and Wales involved with Adult Basic Education. Over the past two years we have seen a series of influential reports from government commissions making powerful recommendations aimed at developing a "learning society." In March of this year, the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) published *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy,* known as the Moser Report. It's the first significant government-sponsored report focussing on Adult Basic Education (ABE) for 20 years. It suggests that 1 in 5 adults are "functionally illiterate" and 1 in 4 "functionally innumerate." It makes 21 recommendations, including a call for a national strategy, an entitlement to ABE for those who need it, a quantum leap in the number of programs funded, measures to raise the status and qualifications of teachers, increased funding for each student, etc.

Though the signs are good, and an Implementation Group has started work, we do not yet know if these recommendations will be realized. However, it is clear that Basic Education, or Basic Skills as it is more often described in official documents, is near the top of the Blair government's internal policy agenda. Those of us working in the field might be excused for feeling a little light-headed, because already this year significant new funds have actually begun to arrive. It really does seem as if we will be able to start tackling long-standing problems such as the very low proportion of permanent staff working in ABE, the relatively low levels of professional qualifications of these staff, the shabby classrooms, the lack of up-to-date equipment and materials, and the inadequate number of programs available in most parts of the country.

However, it is important that we don't get carried away. The Moser Report powerfully argues the case for more programs and better funding for them, but is weak on the key questions of curriculum, assessment, and performance accountability. We now need to develop effective and modern policies in each of these three areas, or there is a danger that the new programs will fail to improve the confidence and educational achievements of new and returning learners.

A BROAD CURRICULUM

The present official definition of Basic Skills is reductive, limiting, and dumbs down the curriculum. The use of the word "Skills" rather than "Education" is telling: Literacy and Numeracy are isolated in policy terms from the social contexts in which they are used, and the social practices of everyday life and work are dissected within a syllabus in which the successful repetition of abstracted skills is assumed to turn people into "confident, independent, fully literate citizens." The mechanistic, clockwork view of literacy remains dominant in the UK, in spite of research clearly demonstrating the inadequacy of a uniform definition of literacy and emphasizing the importance of multiple literacies mediated by social and cultural relations of power. This inadequacy is apparent in the face of 25 years of public funding during which illiteracy has officially gotten worse by a factor of three.

A further issue is the relative neglect in policy terms of English for Speakers of Other Languages. The United Kingdom is becoming an increasingly multi-cultural society: at the center where I work in central London, over 70 different first languages are spoken by about 3,000 ABE students, who are from all parts of the world, and have greatly different experiences of previous education. The mechanistic approach to literacy allows all these students to be conveniently incorporated into a single curriculum that results in many of their needs being unaddressed. For example, large numbers of Kosovar speakers of Albanian have been arriving in Britain for the past 18 months, many of them young and unaccompanied, some traumatized by their experiences. By treating the educational needs of these students as more or less indistinct in policy terms from those of first language speakers with adult literacy needs, we make it harder for these students to settle, and then perhaps to contribute economically and culturally to the country as a whole.

ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

It's essential that ABE programs funded from public taxation should be monitored for value and effectiveness. The question is, of course, what criteria should be used, and who should set these criteria? In Britain at present we have an unbelievably chaotic system in which major stakeholders such as students and teachers have almost no role in the setting of the criteria used for evaluation. An increasingly large majority of ABE work is evaluated primarily on the basis of its effectiveness in getting students to obtain qualifications. (Someone who is qualified has to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a particular field at a particular level — as defined in a syllabus — to the satisfaction one of our many national awarding organizations, and has a certificate to prove it.) There is little consistency in the Basic Education qualifications available in Britain. Though most of them are portfolio-based and were intended to be used as a framework rather than a syllabus, the funding system's emphasis on gaining qualifications has encouraged teachers to make the skills listed in the qualification the priority rather than students' real needs. These qualifications have value in giving students a sense of achievement, and as milestones for progression, but they are often worse than useless in the job market. An ABE certificate, after all, proves to an employer that you have been an ABE student! Besides, a system that prioritizes the gaining of qualifications will work best for those students with least "distance to travel," leaving the rest even further behind.

CONCLUSIONS

A system that encourages teaching and assessing decontextualized skills does not address the demands of a swiftly-changing and globalized employment and social context, or the needs of a democratic and participatory learning society. My belief is that the mechanistic approach to ABE is powerful because it justifies centralized control of the curriculum and materials. The Blair government, like the Major and Thatcher governments before it, seems to believe that the way to deal with inefficiency and ineffectiveness in education is to control the curriculum. On the contrary, this will result in a curriculum that will fail students again. We need a 'loose-tight' arrangement, in which the curriculum is loose and the assessment regime tight. In practice this means that desired outcomes will be best achieved by allowing as much freedom as possible in the curriculum and delivery modes, but operating very tight, simple, clear, and widely-agreed assessment procedures. Developing these procedures (not a simple task!) is the heart of the practical challenge immediately ahead of us. Secondly, we need to develop effective, transparent, and participatory systems of performance accountability. This will require time, careful thinking and debate. Juliet Merrifield's article on this, though written about the US situation, is perfectly applicable to Britain, and is a solid starting point.

Desperately needed in Britain is a national organization that can take an effective leadership role in this process. This organization will need to be independent, open, participatory, supportive, and communicative in order to gain the respect of teachers and students. It will need to work in partnership equally with employers, trade unions, student organizations, and government departments. Such an organization will encourage and support the appearance of periodicals like *The Change Agent* and *Focus on Basics* from Boston, and *Literacy Across the Curriculum* from Quebec, with which we have almost nothing to compare in Britain. It will also encourage student organizations, recognizing that literacy is used, learned, and re-learned in social practice.

In the exciting times ahead, this is the agenda for Adult Basic Education in Britain. Wish us luck.

Jay Derrick is Head of English and Basic Skills at City and Islington College, London, UK.

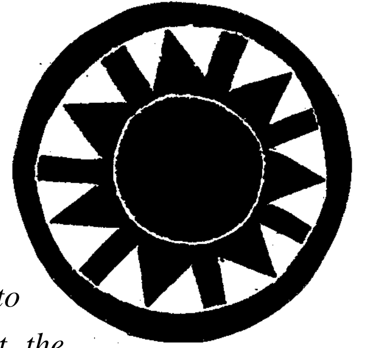
Note: A comprehensive overview of the British system of Adult Basic Education by Juliet Merrifield and Mary Hamilton will be published as a NCSALL report in the fall. This article refers mainly to England and Wales. In the British system, Scotland and Northern Ireland have significantly different arrangements for education.

References: Further Education Funding Council. (1997). *Learning Works*; Department for Education and Employment. (1998).*The Learning Age*; Department for Education and Employment. (1999). *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (Available on the web at: www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/mosergroup/index.htm); Sticht, Thomas. (1997). The Theory Behind Content-Based Instruction. *Focus on Basics* Dec. 1997; Merrifield, Juliet. (1998). *Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education*, NCSALL Report No. 1, 1998; J. Gee, G. Hull, and C. Lankshear, Allen and Unwin. (1996). *Literacy and the New Work Order.*

Teens in ABE:

Some Perspectives on the Matter at Hand

by Alisa Vlahakis Povenmire



Seething with tension, a sixteen-year-old woman arrives into the classroom on the first day of class just waiting to explode. Her demeanor is challenging, daring anyone to look her in the eye. After receiving her first assignment, the young woman flips through her book gasping and sneering. She slams the book on the desk whining loudly, "I have to do ALL this?!"

MICHELLE

This scenario is becoming almost routine for Michelle Ede, a GED instructor at Community Action in Haverhill, Massachusetts. She laughs as she tells the story, but she is exasperated. Adult education has always served students who have left high school for any number of reasons. But in the past, these students first went through a process of maturing, thinking about what they really wanted in life, realizing they wanted higher-paying jobs, and then returning to school with a clear purpose and a commitment to education.

Now, she says, it seems that high school students walk out the "back" door of their high school and into the front door of the adult education program without ever having thought about or resolved the issues that caused them to leave high school.

Michelle and other adult educators attribute some of this trend to high school administrators who, frustrated with "difficult" students, recommend that they leave the high school environment and "just get a GED" because "that will be easier for you." Not surprisingly, many high school drop-outs do not find it so easy to obtain a GED and often feel that they have been misled by those who were supposed to give them guidance.

Michelle adds that many teens are mandated to attend a GED program by the Department of Transitional Assistance or by a parole officer. Forcing teens to go back to school, even part-time, often perpetuates the same negativity that led the teens away from school in the first place. Most adult learning centers are not prepared to handle the anger, disruption, and challenging issues that many teens bring with them. Many teachers, unprepared to deal with the emotional strain that can come from working with challenging teenagers, feel that there should be a separate institution for teenagers. These teachers do not want to see adult learning centers become alternative or reform schools.

After venting her frustration about her most recent difficult students, Michelle acknowledges that for every difficult teen enrolled in her program, there are 4 or 5 other young students who are respectful and mature enough to learn alongside their older classmates. She realizes that experience with a few disruptive teens can color one's perception of teenagers as a whole. Still, this insight does not ease the burden of the unique problems that adult educators identify as particularly heightened in classes with teens: behavioral issues, sexual tension, racism, and aggression.

NANCY

Nancy Coffey is an ABE and GED instructor at Operation Bootstrap in Lynn, Massachusetts. She acknowledges the unique difficulty that teens can bring to an adult learning center, but she enjoys their energy and perspective. And so do the students in her GED class, where ages range from 17 to 49.

Nancy allowed me to visit her GED class to find out how the teen members feel about being in an adult education classroom and how the "adult" members feel about learning alongside younger students. I interviewed "older" (those over age 20) and younger students separately. I was surprised at how readily the students shared their stories.

Elizabeth Charette is 18 years old; she dropped out of high school during her sophmore year. It didn't take long for her to realize that she couldn't get a good job without a diploma or a GED. But there were so many things she didn't like about school, none of which had to do with academics. She cited the long hours, teachers' attitudes, and the tendency of teens to form cliques as the reasons why she left high school. Her teachers told her she wasn't "smart enough" and she felt picked on.

Laitheia Flamer, 19, nods in agreement as Elizabeth tells her story. Laitheia was looked at and treated as a gang member, because of the clothes and hairstyles she wore. She says she did have friends in different gangs, but that she never belonged to one. Ironically, the colors she got in trouble wearing — red and white — were both gang colors and school colors.

Both Laitheia and Elizabeth articulate with strong conviction that they want an education but not at the expense of their individuality and self-esteem. If they didn't feel their teachers and principals cared about them, then they were not going to care about school. They express disappointment in their peers: "Kids can be cruel to people. If you aren't perfect, you're an outcast."

Matthew Queen, 20, was less vehement in stating his reasons for leaving high school, although he admits that he didn't feel comfortable in high school, and he didn't enjoy his teachers or his peers. He does not blame the high school, though. He feels his own lack of maturity played a part in his dropping out. Now that he is older, he feels he has the patience to "sit and learn."

The young people in Nancy's class echo what other adult educators have found to be true of their younger students: they want to be respected and trusted. In adult education, the low-key, permissive environment, while difficult for some teens to handle, is just what others need. Teens are pleasantly surprised when they realize that they can leave the room without a pass or they can have a snack or drink in class. Also, smaller class sizes mean that much more one-on-one interaction takes place in an adult learning center than in high school — and for students who need extra help and care, this is a big plus.

Parenting and pregnant teens also find adult learning centers a much more comfortable place to be. In adult education, where many students are parents themselves, pregnancy is not as conspicuous or shocking as in the fashion-conscious and cliquish high school atmosphere.

It is important to note that teens and adults who are serious about getting an education are just as upset by disruptive students as teachers. And students who are not far from being teenagers themselves do not like to be derailed by their less-focused younger classmates.

Barbara, 24 years old, says teens have a different mentality about school — she knows because she tried to get her GED right after she left high school. She tried to attend a GED class with adults but was uncomfortable because of her young age. Now that she is older, she does not want to deal with childish behavior of teen students when she is trying so hard to move on.

In spite of this discomfort with teens in her classroom, Barbara agrees with Beverly Robinson, 49, who says "the teacher plays a big part in helping the situation." Beverly was uncomfortable at first with being in the same class with teenagers. Now, however, she realizes that "we all have the same goals." She says she appreciates the different points of view and perspectives of all the different people in her class. As an added bonus, she feels that the young people in her class have helped her to understand her own teens at home better. She feels that her learning experience is rich because of the different ages and cultures represented in her classroom. As Elizabeth says of her experience at Operation Bootstrap, "This is where I learned to take people for who they are on the inside."

CONCLUSION

While there are no easy solutions to these problems, teachers and centers are finding ways to work with classes of mixed ages. Michelle has found more holistic programming to be highly beneficial to teens, especially those who are teen parents or who have learning disabilities. Extensive counseling, a strong life skills component, and character building activities contribute to success in integrating teens into adult education classes. Community Action in Haverhill has also found that staffing a classroom with two teachers for 8-12 students is a particularly good arrangement for both teens and the teachers who work with them. Finally, Michelle finds that a "non-school" environment helps to shift the mindset of potentially difficult students. If the classroom is furnished with homey chairs, round tables, and perhaps a sofa, students are less likely to associate their new learning environment with the more traditional high school they left behind.

Communication between the intake staff and the teachers is also essential. Often teachers do not know who is going to show up in their classes or when, and they are even less likely to know the background of any particular student before they come to class. This surprise factor can make difficult situations even more stressful. It is ideal for counselors and intake staff to make teachers aware of the background, attitudes and issues of incoming students, especially young ones, so that they might prepare accordingly for class.

Finally, both Nancy and Michelle agree that building the classroom as a community where teachers and students come to care for and support each other, regardless of their differences in age or background, is the key to a positive "adult" learning experience.

Adult education, which reinvents itself constantly to fit the needs of its learners and its community, has always been in the business of serving "people for who they are on the inside." This business has never been easy, but with our young people, as with our ESOL learners and older ABE students, it is the matter at hand.

Alisa Vlahakis Povenmire is Associate Coordinator at Northeast SABES in Lawrence, MA.

QUESTIONS:

1. What's your opinion? Do you think there should be separate programs for teens and adults? Why? What do your classmates think?
2. What are some of the reason's Nancy's younger students give for leaving high school?

The "Youthification" of Adult Education

by Pat Nelson

At Second Start, we first experienced an unusual influx of adolescents in 1980. Our Adult Basic Education program had been designed to specifically address the needs of adults, but we had always believed that it was good to have both adults and adolescents in the program as long as the adolescents were in the minority. That year, however, our student body consisted of 41 adults and 109 youth between the ages of 16 and 18. This preponderance of teenagers had a negative effect on the program as a whole. The adults who were afraid to be in school with kids withdrew. The youth returned to negative attitudes and lack of motivation which had been the causes of their dropping out of school in the first place. We had to act to meet the needs of both adults and adolescents.

In response to this problem, we worked with local high schools to set up an alternative high school program designed to meet the needs of adolescents. We hired a staff skilled in working with youth. We moved the program into its own building, separating it from the adult programs. This experiment was highly successful, and both the ABE and the alternative high school programs flourished. Adolescents could be helped in deciding which was the more appropriate option for them; balance returned to the adult program.

Recently, however, not only at Second Start but all across New Hampshire, the old theme has returned: "There are too many kids in our ABE classes." Too many adolescents are seeing the GED as a quick fix for their problems with school. For a variety of reasons, not all the adolescents who are applying to Second Start can attend the alternative high school program, and many do not want any part of it. So they come to ABE, and, if they are 16, we are required to give them a chance.

As a result, the staff room resonates on a daily basis with teachers venting their frustrations. "I didn't sign on to work with kids; I came here to work with adults!" Why are these dedicated teachers so upset? They feel they have been turned into disciplinarians instead of educators. They spend valuable class time dealing with tardiness, lack of preparation, inattention, foul language, and attempting to motivate changes in behavior. The counselors spend hours with adults who are intimidated and annoyed by adolescent behaviors that are interfering with their attempts to reach their goals. Kids are very good at ignoring adults, but adults are hard put to ignore the behavior of kids. Adult learners require a lot of support and encouragement so they don't give up on themselves or these younger learners.

Attempts to deal with situations that have become intolerable also take up a lot of staff and student time: group meetings to set standards of behavior and to give students the opportunity to express their concerns, often about the impact that others' immature behavior has on them; time spent working with students to create policies on attendance, punctuality, and behavior guidelines that adults resent because they make them feel as if they are back in elementary school. This frustration is also felt by teens who came to get away from the behaviors that plagued them in high school. They deserve the second chance they came looking for.

It does not help matters that most of the more difficult youth leave because they cannot conform to the new rules or perform up to expectations. These are teenagers in trouble who have needs that deserve to be addressed, whom we, as a society, can't afford to lose.

After a year of struggling with this situation and trying one solution after another, we decided to be proactive. Just talking with kids on a case-by-case basis does not yield long-term systemic changes. We have begun the process of going back to the drawing board seeking out the "experts," such as the staff of the alternative high school and the professionals at the local high school. We have started the process of designing a program that can facilitate a transition for these kids who think that a short stay at an adult education program can earn them a GED and start them on their way to a new life. They need much more than that. They need a program that will enable them to honestly examine where they are coming from and where they want to go, while at the same time providing them with appropriate academic instruction to enable them to reach their goals. They need to learn that they are not "throwaways" that no one cares about. They need to come to terms with their possibilities, their values, and their hopes.

At this point, as we continue to search for solutions to this problem, we are most interested in any suggestions and experiences that others might be willing to share.

Pat Nelson is Director of Adult Education Services at Second Start in Concord, NH.

Where is the Will?

by Wendy Quiñones

Every morning, two teenagers leave my house to go to schools for "children." Three of those mornings, I leave my house to teach at a school for "adults," the great majority of whom are about the same age as my "children." While this may seem like nothing more than an amusing semantic confusion, many if not most adult education teachers, myself included, feel it's a symptom of something deeply wrong with both systems of education. And it immediately raises two questions: First, why are so many teenagers in classes designed for adults? Second, where are the adults the classes were designed for?

Obviously, teenagers are coming to GED programs because they have dropped out of high school. But why have they done that? In my class, at least, these are the kids who, for the most part, didn't do well academically in standard classrooms, although most of them are plenty bright. Many were absent so much (maybe because the standard classrooms didn't suit them) that they can't graduate because of their school's attendance policy. Some are forced by the courts to be in some kind of education program. These are kids who can't — or who believe they can't — pass the standardized tests now required in all Massachusetts high schools to graduate. Some, for good reason, are barred from their high school campuses. Others don't fit with the rest of their classmates and can't wait to get out of the often-cruel adolescent high school scene. Some kids' families urge them to get out of school, get a GED quickly, and get a "good" job. Others for one reason or another have left their families and have to work to survive while they try to get a high school diploma.

In other words, these are the kids for whom regular high school has failed, and for whom no alternative high school setting is available. Adult GED programs have become *de facto* the alternative high school of last resort. And yet, exasperated teachers who are in adult education, often because they don't want to deal with adolescent issues, are hardly likely to be the best resource.

And where are the adults? Let's begin with the fact that our adult students are mostly adults with low incomes. For the lowest of low-income people, the possibility of furthering their education has all but vanished. In Massachusetts, at least, the single mothers on welfare who were a high proportion of our students are now, at best, discouraged from going to school or, at worst, forced to drop school in order to work. Other low-income, working parents with preschool children are faced with finding child care — something the state often promises to subsidize if they work, but not if they go to school. (The fact that subsidized daycare seldom actually materializes for low-income working parents, either, is another story). While much of the country prospers, the economic situation for low-income workers has steadily worsened, so the time and energy adults might have formerly been able to devote to education now have to be funneled into more hours of work. Low-income folks often have more than their share of crises and emergencies — health, transportation, family, and housing issues — and less than their share of resources to deal with them.

What we have, it seems to me, are two education systems that are both failing precisely those students who need them most. The standard education system for "children" too often tosses out those adolescents who are the most difficult to serve, while still requiring them to be in an educational setting somewhere. They end up in adult classes whose teachers may be neither trained nor (and here I speak for myself) temperamentally suited to teach them. At the same time, the system for adults fails to address the barriers that they predictably encounter in trying to return to education.

So what's going on? In adult education, at least, what I see is a lot of energy and money going into patching up an unsatisfactory system and underwriting a great deal of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo. There are curriculum frameworks, certification plans, technology roundtables, Equipped For the Future programs, so-called SMARTT computer systems — all of which provide lots of jobs for teachers and administrators. But are these the things we should be spending money on to recruit adult students and educate them? I don't think so — at least, not while the systems we have are failing so many people.

Adults need programs that deal with their issues and serve their needs, many of which could be resolved with a simple redirection of funds and priorities. Let me give two examples from my own experience. Right now I teach in two programs. One is a day program in a literacy center, housed at a community college

Continued on page 16

Youth in ABE: Going Beyond the Stereotypes

by Margaret Anderson and Anna Megyesi

We are disturbed by the complaints we've been hearing about youth in adult education programs. While it is true that more teens are turning up in adult education and GED programs, and that this may lead to challenges for instructors and adult students, it seems important to go deeper than the stereotypes to understand both the young people and how they may change the nature of the classes.

Listen to the following statements: I don't want to work with *youth*. *Youth* are ruining the program. *Youth* are unmotivated to learn. *Youth* have no interest in what is happening in the community. *Youth* are disrespectful.

These are pretty familiar comments, right? Now try inserting one of the following groups every time you read "youth": the elderly, disabled people, immigrants, African Americans, women. Imagine the responses you'd get. The same statements about any other group would never be tolerated. So why is it okay to put down teens?

Many of the issues that teachers are attributing to teens — poor attendance, coming in late, acting inappropriately, not paying attention — are not unique to teens. Poor attendance is rampant in adult basic education, whether it's due to unreliable transportation or childcare, changing work schedules, health issues, family issues, low self-esteem, or lack of confidence. And, in our experience, it isn't age that determines whether someone comes in on time. We've had a young student regularly come in an hour early and stay till we lock up, while an older student is always at least half an hour late. Neither do adults have a monopoly on "appropriate behavior." We recently worked with a 44-year-old man who repeatedly checked out the *Playboy* web site and made inappropriate comments to women in the class, despite the boundaries we had set. Meanwhile, an 18-year-old woman sat in the next room concentrating intently on an essay about the root causes of school violence.

Some people claim that youth lower the standards of behavior in their classes and force them to establish rules that they haven't needed previously. Working with a variety of ages, in ABE and in other contexts, we've found that it's always useful, and often necessary, to establish guidelines for working together, because most of us aren't used to cooperative learning. The guidelines work best when they are set by the group and self-enforced. When the guidelines aren't working, we have a responsibility as teachers to address the behavior, for the sake of the whole group. Someone who acts in outrageous, disrespectful or destructive ways can be asked to leave, no matter what their age.

Are teens less interested in class work than learners of other ages? We haven't found that to be the case, as a general rule. When students aren't engaged, it's easy to blame them, especially if we don't connect with them or like them as individuals. But in some cases, it's the teachers who can take responsibility for the "behavior problems." We recently worked with a 17-year-old teen mother who had come to us after going to a number of high schools, both traditional and alternative. A series of failures had left her feeling bitter towards teachers and schools, and she brought this attitude, as well as a genuine desire to learn, to our program. At first we really struggled with her. She would appear to be barely awake during class, take extended cigarette breaks, and show little interest in the class work. It was by getting to know her better and helping her find a project that truly interested her that we broke through to the part of her that really wanted to learn. She came alive when she started an internet research project on Kurt Cobain, the (now deceased) lead singer of Nirvana. She was fully engaged and eager to learn a whole new set of research and computer skills. The "behavior problems" faded. We didn't need to create a whole new set of activities for her or other youth, or become more rigid and traditional in our teaching. Instead, we were successful when we followed the learner-centered model more faithfully. It's examples like this one that make us wonder what we can learn about our teaching from the "behavior problems" of learners.

Are teens less interested in class work than learners of other ages? We haven't found that to be the case, as a general rule.

We understand the complaints that teachers are making. Many people choose adult education because they want to work with highly motivated, goal-oriented, calm and respectful adults. They don't want to deal with discipline. But we have to, whether we have teens in our classes or not. The image of the ideal adult student who comes to class ready to learn, regularly and on time, may be more myth than reality. Even the most motivated student has bad days.

We also see a bigger issue at the heart of these complaints: an increasing number of learners are *mandated* to attend our *voluntary* programs. These referrals from courts and probation officers, rehab programs, and welfare offices are significantly changing the tone and atmosphere of ABE and GED programs. This is an issue we have to face as a field; it isn't fair to blame the changing classroom dynamics on teens.

At a meeting of peace activists that we recently attended, an adult commented to a youth participant, "It's good to see that young people have been thinking about Kosovo, because we never see youth at rallies and meetings. They just don't seem to care." This young woman, a junior in high school, responded, "We have a lot to say, but no one asks us." What are we missing by thinking of teens as trouble makers, as raging balls of hormones? It's up to all adults, not just high school teachers, parents and "youth specialists," to listen to youth and take them seriously, as learners, as individuals, and as members of the community.

Margaret Anderson and Anna Megyesi teach an adult basic education class at The Literacy Project in Northampton, MA.

Stereotypes Activity

Purpose: To examine the sterotypes participants have of others and identify the effects of stereotypes on themselves and others.

Time: 30 minutes

What you need: Newsprint and markers

How it's done: Ask participants to find a partner. Explain that this activity is like a word association exercise. Ask one person in each pair to say, "Adults are…" Ask the other to quickly finish the sentence, saying whatever comes into his/her head. Have them repeat this process with the sentence, "Teens are..." Reverse roles, and allow the other person to complete the sentence. Bring the group back in a circle. Record on newsprint the words that came to their minds during the exercise — one page for adults, one for youth.

Define "stereotypes" as a group, or offer a definition: an oversimplified generalization about a particular group which usually conveys a negative image. Review the list of responses and identify which of them are stereotypes. Ask the participants if they can think of a real person who does not fit the stereotype.

To debrief, ask the group:

- How do these stereotypes make you feel?
- Does it matter if we stereotype? Why or why not?
- Do stereotypes affect people's lives? How?
- Can stereotypes ever be positive?
- Can people benefit from some stereotypes?
- How are stereotypes connected to violence?

Differentiate among stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

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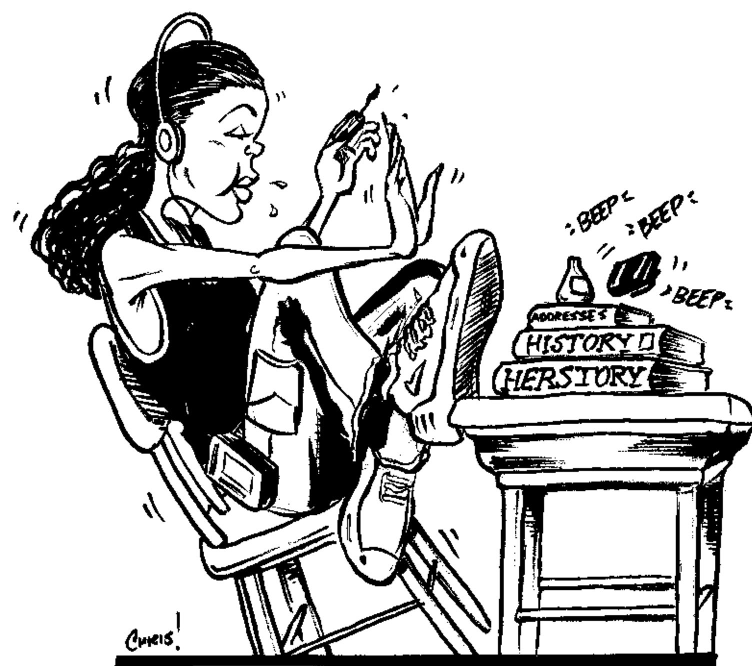

What stereotypes are shown in this cartoon?

Putting the P Back in Participatory

by Elsa Auerbach

The fact that participatory approaches to adult ESL are becoming increasingly popular is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is heartening to see that participatory approaches are coming to be accepted as cutting edge rather than fringe views and that the field may even be on the verge of a paradigm shift. On the other hand, I am uncomfortable when the term *participatory* is used loosely to describe any approach that claims to involve learners in the shaping of curriculum goals or classroom processes. Often, the terms *participatory* and *learner-centered* are equated despite the fact that they have potentially different ideological implications, the former focusing on social transformation and the latter on self-realization. Although participatory pedagogy is rooted in a social change perspective, its inherently political nature is often obscured. As Edelsky (1991) says, "Buzzwords and movements not only can promote change; they can prevent it" (p. 161); my fear is that this may be the fate of participatory ESL.

Whereas the learner-centered orientation puts primary emphasis on participants' involvement with curriculum development processes (i.e., on students setting their own goals, exploring their own experiences, shaping the curriculum, and evaluating their own learning), the participatory approach emphasizes drawing curriculum *content* from the social context of learners' lives, as well as involving them in curriculum development processes. Whereas putting learners at the center of pedagogy is common to both views, they differ as to how and why this is done. The main tenet of the learner-centered approach is that adults learn best when they direct their own learning and their education is tailored to needs they have determined themselves. Further, the learner-centered approach posits a shift in the teacher's role from transmitter of information to facilitator of classroom dynamics and negotiator of the curriculum. As such, this approach is clearly a step forward from earlier ones in which experts determined curriculum content for learners and specified objectives based on the needs of the dominant social or economic order (see Auerbach & Burgess, 1985).

> ***It is the P that stands for politics — critical analysis of the social context of learners' lives — that is the guiding principle of participatory education.***

The key tenet of participatory education, based on the work of Freire (1970), is that marginalized people (such as immigrants and refugees in adult ESL classes, who often have the worst jobs, if any, and the poorest housing conditions) will only be able to affect change in their lives through critical reflection and collective action. Freire contends that powerless people will remain powerless if they act only as individuals. As such, the goal of participatory education (first developed in Latin America) is not to promise people that through education they can be assimilated into the very system which required their marginalization, but rather to create the basis for transforming that system into a more equitable one.

The teacher's role in this process is to identify problematic aspects of learners' lives, re-present them to learners as content for dialogue and literacy work, and guide reflection on individual experience to more critical social reflection that eventually could lead to collective action. Thus, changes in teacher-student roles are not an end in themselves, but a rehearsal for changing power relations outside of class.

Adult educators concerned with social change criticize the learner-centered approach for a number of reasons. As Mead (1991) argues, adult learners' marginalization itself may inhibit self-directed learning and relying on it may actually disempower learners: either they may opt only for goals and choices with which they are already familiar (thus, reinforcing the status quo), or worse, they may be at a total loss without the resources to make choices. Mead goes on to argue that the emphasis on individual choice and goal-setting, while claiming to promote a value-free education, may in fact support the values of the dominant culture. The effect of leaving all curricular choices to the students is not likely to result in questioning of the social order. "Dominant culture values are so pervasive and implicit that it is a major task to surface them and be critical of them. That essentially, is the role of the teacher" (Mead, p. 46).

Further, emphasizing individual goal setting without any accompanying social analysis reinforces the specific Western mainstream value of individualism — that through hard work and individual effort, learners can change the basic conditions of their lives. This vision of individual self-betterment may be a false promise in a society where race, ethnicity, gender, and the general vicissitudes of the economy play such a prominent role in the distribution of jobs, social status, and income. Working with students on job-finding goals without also incorporating analyses of factors such as employment discrimination and the recession can only reinforce self-blame and demoralization.

Likewise, the learner-centered approach has been criticized for celebrating and validating learners' individual experiences, cultures, and histories without also situating them in a broader social context, thus unwittingly reinforcing the status quo. As Simon, Dippo, and Schenke (1991) argue, "We must avoid the conservatism inherent in only confirming what people already know. Experience should never be celebrated uncritically. School is a place within which to explore the problematic character of experience" (p. 9). Again, this suggests that the role of the teacher must go beyond that of facilitator or negotiator. It is the teacher's responsibility to guide learners through a process of comparing experiences, analyzing their commonality and root causes, and most important, imagining alternatives.

Thus, as we potentially move toward a paradigm shift, it is important to keep in mind that participatory education means more than just changing classroom dynamics and curriculum development processes. It is the *P* that stands for politics — critical analysis of the social context of learners' lives — that is the guiding principle of participatory education.

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Elsa Auerbach teaches in the Bilingual/ESL Graduate Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. She has taught ESL to adults in community and union programs, as well as coordinated several university-community collaborations, including family literacy and bilingual community literacy training projects. She is the author of *Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL/Literacy* (Center for Applied Linguistics/Delta, 1992).

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Do We Need a Broader Definition of Adult Education?

by Carol Chandler

In adult education circles, we emphasize the importance of a curriculum that is relevant to students' cultural contexts and that has a direct impact on students' lives or level of civic participation. This is just the kind of education happening at many small grassroots community organizations that operate outside the "adult education system."

In my work at the Office for Refugees and Immigrants, I work with grassroots community-based organizations that are very active in providing community education on many levels related to cultural orientation, housing, employment, immigration, legal and school systems, language, domestic violence, health, etc. This community education occurs through community forums, ethnic media, individual counseling, and cultural events. Many of these organizations do not have formal adult education programs or even ESOL classes, and most operate with very minimal resources.

For me, this raises the question of how we actually define "adult education." We often think of it as building specific skills or, in the case of ESOL education, specific language skills. Even though we recognize team-building, cultural orientation, advocacy, community organizing as important, most of the time when we think of adult education, we focus on classes, student-teacher ratios, hours per week, etc. Is it possible that we might look more closely at what these immigrant and refugee organizations are doing in their communities to help us define adult education in broader terms? Then we might respond by linking existing adult education resources with the community education and development efforts already taking place in local communities.

Carol Chandler is Director of Community Building at the Office of Refugees and Immigrants in Boston, MA.

Bringing Community Into the Curriculum

by Carolyn Bronz and Lou Dorwaldt

This is a story about how a learning project, originally conceived as a way to fulfill the objectives of a workplace readiness class, can draw students into fuller participation in their communities as well as develop valuable personal skills.

Here in Vermont, our adult education centers have had shaky funding for years. In the last few years, we've invited local legislators to one of our student support group meetings each fall. This event is a learning opportunity for students as they prepare and practice what they want to tell their representatives, and it is an excellent way to present our organization and its needs. We have gradually built a good relationship with our local representatives, and some of our students have become quite active politically.

Last year, our representatives were so impressed with what they heard that they suggested that a group of students go to Montpelier, our state capital, and testify before a committee about their issues of concern. The students were excited by the idea, and preparations for the visit became a focus for classroom activities. Students did background readings, research on welfare, welfare reform, corporate welfare, etc., wrote their personal stories, practiced their speaking skills, studied how government works, prepared their budgets, and more over a period of months.

Finally the big day came and we went to the state capitol. The students were well prepared but nervous, of course. They read their stories to the committee, who listened attentively and asked many questions. They kept us long after our scheduled hour. This made a huge impression on the students. As one said, "The committee really seemed interested in what we had to say about our situation. I thought we were going to go down there and just be blown off. But I was wrong." Every one of the students came out of there feeling empowered.

Afterwards, I asked students to articulate and assess what they had learned from the project using categories from the Equipped For the Future standards. For example, for Listening Actively they wrote:

- So we can understand what people tell us.
- I had to listen carefully to questions so that I could answer.
- So we can hear both sides of an issue.

And for Learn through Research:

- We had to know the information about what we talked about.
- I learned how to look up things.
- I got information from the Internet; I have learned these computer skills.
- I use personal knowledge, information from others, libraries, books, etc.

Students from the Getting Ready to Work class receive check from the Vermont Women's Fund for a grant they wrote.

These skills and many others were necessary in order to prepare for and succeed in our project.

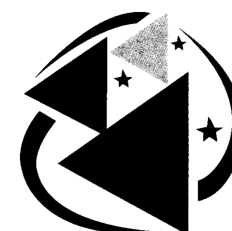
One outcome of the testimony was that legislators contacted Reach Up, the office that administers welfare-to-work, to suggest a meeting between staff and the women who are affected by their decisions. This meeting was the first time caseworkers and the women they monitor sat around a table to discuss and resolve problems as equals.

As teachers, we have certainly observed that projects that involve reaching out to the community have been very powerful learning experiences for our students. The preparation involved in speaking, writing, presenting their points of view and interacting with people that they ordinarily see as impossibly out of reach requires them to get their act together, and they do!

A year later, this observation was corroborated by our experience with a whole new class in a different town. The Getting Ready To Work class is a group of low-income women, mostly single mothers, all welfare recipients. Again we invited legislators to come in the fall, and this time one of the legislators handed me an application for a grant from the Vermont Women's Fund to benefit women and girls. The class decided to use grantwriting as a learning activity and we spent a few hours of class time brainstorming and writing our proposal. Out of their own experience, the students identified the need for emergency child care and transportation funds. We brought in people to guide us in developing our budget and timeline, and one of the students typed it all up. And we got the grant! Now we have formed a committee of four of the women in the class who will be administering this grant. These women have a date to speak to the local Rotary Club to tell them about it and to ask for matching funds. They will be interacting with all kinds of community agencies and people, they will be making and implementing decisions. I'm sure we can't even foresee all the learning experiences that this grant will provide them.

My point with this story is that sometimes the best learning opportunities come in unexpected ways. Students sometimes have goals that they don't know how to make explicit. None of the women in our classes would have had "going to Montpelier to speak to legislators" as a goal. All of them want to improve their lives and those of their children. Of course, how a person takes part in a project is different for each participant: some students are much more active than others, some are not ready to speak in public, some just want to observe and do behind-the-scenes support. But at whatever level they choose to participate, they all learn something, and they really have the sense that they are doing good, important work. The students are becoming more firmly woven into the fabric of their community. It is exciting to be along for the ride!

Carolyn Bronz and Lou Dorwaldt are teachers at Vermont Adult Learning in St. Albans, VT.



Equipped For the Future Skills

Communication Skills
- Read With Understanding
- Convey Ideas in Writing
- Speak So Others Can Understand
- Listen Actively
- Observe Critically

Decision-Making Skills
- Use Math to Solve Problems & Communicate
- Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Plan

Interpersonal Skills
- Cooperate with Others
- Advocate and Influence
- Resolve Conflict and Negotiate
- Guide Others

Lifelong Learning Skills
- Take Responsibility for Learning
- Reflect and Evaluate
- Learn Through Research
- Use Information & Communications Technology

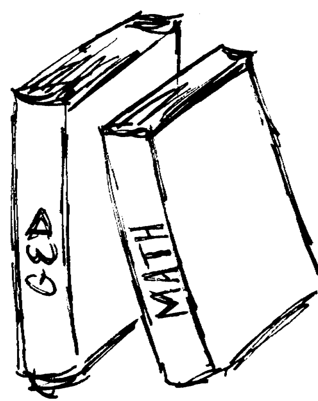
When Students Want Workbooks

by Meg Costanzo

Whenever I hear teachers debate the use of traditional versus nontraditional materials with adult learners, I recall an evening when two new students joined my GED/Adult High School Diploma class. Both young women had previously been enrolled in our center's program, but this was the first time I had had the opportunity to work with them. As they enthusiastically chatted about returning to their studies, the two headed toward the main bookshelf where we stored the GED preparation books and various other texts. They were anxious to find the books they had used when they had last attended class.

After paging through the books, they listened intently as I described the various types of activities we would be doing in class — assignments that included project work and hands-on problem solving using manipulatives. One of the young women asked which math workbook they would be issued. I told them that I would not be handing out workbooks, but instead would occasionally assign them some of the traditional drill found in texts and workbooks, but only when it related to the other assignments we were doing in class. In my teacher journal for that evening, I expressed my concern regarding their reaction to hearing this news. "Both seemed very 'workbook-centered.'...I wonder how they'll respond to our project-based approach."

Before the beginning of the next class, one of the women pulled me aside and, seeing as I was not going to give her a workbook, asked if she could buy a copy on her own. I could tell from her request that I had not done a sufficiently effective job convincing her of the value of a nontraditional, project-based approach to learning in contrast to a more traditional one that emphasizes drill, rote memorization, and lecture.



As it turned out, these two students eventually became strong advocates of project-based learning. They began to acknowledge that the work I was providing for them was indeed going to help them achieve their educational goals, even if it did not necessarily look like the work they were used to doing in class. Nevertheless, I learned a valuable lesson from this experience. I was unfairly projecting my negative attitudes about workbook drill on my students. One of my earliest memories of elementary school was my hatred of the seemingly endless pages I had to complete in my phonics workbook. I had never stopped to consider that perhaps some of my students found this type of assignment worthwhile, perhaps even enjoyable. I also had not considered the feeling of accomplishment my students might experience upon completing this type of work.

This realization came at a time when I was also questioning my role as a teacher of adults. I was struggling to find a balance between a student-centered versus a teacher-centered classroom. Through my work on the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Project sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, I had been examining how much control my students had over their own learning. I was slowly realizing that I could relinquish many more of the decisions concerning what the students learned, and how they learned it, to the students themselves. But what if my students chose so-called traditional materials and methods, including assignments from workbooks, texts, contrived reading passages, and lectures, the types of instruction to which they were accustomed, over the activities and projects that I felt could be more beneficial in helping students learn to learn?

I recognized that, to establish a genuinely student-centered classroom where students had the option of choosing among a variety of different teaching materials and ways of learning, I would have to concentrate on refining the way I interact with my students. First of all, I would have to make a concerted effort to convince my students that there was more than one way to learn the material they needed to master. Many had the preconceived impression that the only way they could demonstrate that they knew something was by doing work that looked exactly like a page of questions from the GED preparation book. I had to remind them that life isn't like a multiple-choice test, with only one right answer and choices laid out neatly in front of you from the start. In some cases, this attitude about learning was not something that my students were quick to embrace. I had to provide repeated experiences in order for them to feel comfortable with this teaching/learning style, explaining my rationale as I went along and pointing out how this would help them achieve their educational goals more quickly and easily in the long run.

Secondly, I realized that I had to establish a channel of communication whereby my students could give me feedback regarding the types of activities and assignments they were finding most helpful. I achieved this through the use of dialogue journals. Every evening, ten to fifteen minutes before class ended, I would ask my students to reflect upon the evening's lesson. I often would give them open-ended prompts to help them focus on a particular aspect of their learning. For example, I might ask, "How did you find tonight's math lesson?" or "What type of activities did you find most helpful tonight?" Soon my students were able to open up with their feelings and collaborate with me in planning our lessons. Other teachers in the AMI Project used learning log forms to gather this same kind of information. Like me, many of the teachers in our study also recognized that their students needed practice to develop the necessary skills in reflection before they could participate in these metacognitive experiences.

When my students asked for more traditional assignments, I had to be sensitive to their needs and respect their role in this decision-making process by providing the materials and type of instruction they requested. This was particularly true for students who were almost ready to take the GED or Adult Diploma diagnostic tests. Very often all they wanted to do was practice work for the test. Even though I felt uncomfortable "teaching" this way, I had to understand and appreciate my student's wishes when it came to this matter. My concept of learning as a discovery process, filled with exploration and enjoyment, was perhaps a luxury that did not correspond with their needs at this point in their lives.

I believe, depending on the context of the adult classroom, that traditional educational materials and practices do serve a specific purpose. I found a blend of the traditional and nontraditional to be most successful in my particular situation as my students became more active participants in the lesson planning and decision making processes. Despite my encouragement to try nontraditional approaches, my students would sometimes choose materials and methods less favored by me personally. I came to recognize that having the students serve as active participants in the design of their own learning programs was an equally desirable outcome.

Meg Costanzo was a teacher-researcher for the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Project, a project of the New England Literacy Resource Center sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

To find out more about the AMI project contact Mark Holmes at World Education for copies of the March 1999 Issue of *Focus on Basics*. He can be reached at (617) 482-9485 or email [mholmes@worlded.org].

Where is the Will? *Continued from page 12*

which has an on-site child care center. This center, however, is not available for the children of our students. Nor is there funding available to pay for child care elsewhere. The college also lacks convenient access to public transportation. Students must get there any way they can, and they must shoulder whatever it costs. So who comes? Mostly teenagers who have no parental responsibilities.

My second teaching job is at a community-based organization on the southern border of Boston, in a neighborhood many people think of as dangerous. We get inquiries about my nighttime class, but potential students often rule it out when they find out where it is. The required subway and bus combinations at night are daunting and costly, and predictably discourage attendance on a winter night. Yet we have no transportation funding. In addition, most of my students there are older women who have worked all day. They are tired when they arrive in class and often struggle against exhaustion to assimilate complex information — but they can hardly reduce their hours of work if they want to keep eating. So it is no wonder that attendance is sparse.

Young people, too, need a system that deals with their issues and serves their needs. I can't really speak to what is needed in such programs, but clearly, whatever is available now isn't working for the young students I get.

As far as adult programs are concerned, the problems and barriers students encounter are completely predictable. Adults usually have to earn a living, and often they have families to support. Children need to be cared for. Cars break down. Overtime gets demanded. Bills accumulate and second (or third) jobs have to be found. All of these things can prevent adults from coming to class or, if they come, from being fully present. If our goal is to actually educate adults, why aren't we addressing these issues? Why aren't we providing child care or child care funding? Why aren't we providing transportation or transportation funding? Why aren't we — heaven forbid — even paying a small stipend so that adults might actually be able to take the time to acquire the education we say we value? Where is the political will to make adult education a real possibility?

Wendy Quiñones teaches GED in the Boston area.

A Closer Look at Student Advisory Committees in ABE Programs

by Andrea Parrella

There has been quite a bit of talk in the last few years about the level of student involvement in ABE program practice. The Massachusetts Department of Education mandates that the programs they fund have a Student Advisory Committee. Many staff developers encourage teachers and program coordinators to elicit student input on programming decisions as well as part of internal program evaluations. On both a state and national level, students and program graduates have formed student-run organizations as a way of attempting to integrate student voices into ABE policy and practice. So how are programs implementing student advisory councils? What do teachers and students think about them? What have been the effects of having these committees on program practice? I spoke with members of various ABE programs to explore these questions further.

The Jamaica Plain Community Center (JPCC) in Boston has had a student advisory committee for a number of years. One or two students (or as many who are interested) from each class meet with a staff member who helps facilitate. These meetings take place once or twice a month. Present director Shelly Ruocco and past staff member Vicky Nunez say that the group functions particularly well when there is a purpose with an end date. For example, a number of years ago at JPCC, students wanted cold water to be available for students. The advisory committee meeting provided a forum for students to discuss their concerns and to brainstorm solutions. As a result of their discussions, the program provided students with access to a water cooler. More recently, students developed a classroom and program evaluation survey for their peers as part of an internal program evaluation. To help strengthen the group, the program invited Michele Sacerdote, the former Student Leadership Coordinator at World Education, to conduct two trainings at JPCC with students on meeting facilitation skills.

Read Write Now in Western Massachusetts has funding from a private foundation to hire students in paid positions. Students assist staff in running focus groups with their peers on the topic, "Where do we as a program want to be in the next several years?" These student consultants, along with an outside research consultant and program staff synthesize the data gathered and strategize work plans. When the project finishes, the group disbands. Janet Kelly, the program's director, struggles with the challenge of bringing student voices to the decision-making table. She comments, "As staff, we need to let go of some control and trust that good things will happen."

These committees seem to be more effective when there is clarity around how they fit into the program's process of decision-making.

Janet has some advice for programs interested in creating these committees. First, she stresses the need to be clear with students about what the impact of their work will be. She comments that, "In our case, learners had voices, but they weren't the only voices. In our meetings with them, we explained how decisions at the program level are made, including explaining the role of funders, community members, and other staff members in decision-making." Second, she states the significance of ensuring that all materials used in the meetings are accessible to everyone regardless of their skill level.

At Archdale Community Center in Boston, a group of GED students and their teacher set aside one hour per week during class time for what is called a *community meeting*. In this group, they talk about ways that the program can improve the quality of their services. They also use the meeting time to share experiences and resources, and to encourage each other to persist in their studies. Deborah Schwartz, a former teacher at Archdale, explains that the teacher and the students take turns facilitating the group. One of the former students, Sandra Ramgeet, feels that for the students, "It is important to keep the meetings simple. Nothing formal. So people don't feel uncomfortable." She also comments that when people bring snacks to the meetings, the atmosphere is "nicer, and more open." Deb prefers a more formal meeting structure in order to make sure that the group accomplishes the agenda they set for themselves. In instances where Deb and the students have different perspectives of how they prefer to conduct the meetings, they operate by negotiating power on the basis of each individual situation. Deb and Sandra both admit that this process is never easy, but that it has increased the level of trust within the group. Deb believes that "my definition of how the meetings are functioning isn't the only appropriate way to have them function. It's important to be aware of communication styles in the context of class, race, and culture." Both Deb and Sandra attest that this continual attention paid to group process issues is of core significance to building trust and unity within the group.

Deb and Sandra find that involving the whole class in the group meetings is beneficial because projects focused on improving the program can then be more easily integrated into the curriculum. They described a time when their program decided to hire a childhood educator. Based on discussions at their community meetings, the class decided to take matters into their own hands because the process wasn't happening fast enough. First, they wrote a letter to the hiring council explaining that without childcare, they could no longer continue attending the GED class. Then, when the hiring council did not act on the letter, they wrote a job description themselves, created flyers, advertised for the position, and then opened and read resumes. Sandra comments that it was crucial having her teacher be part of the group. She says that the teacher "was our guide throughout the activities. We needed her help to improve our reading and writing skills so we could write the letters, the flyers, and the job description."

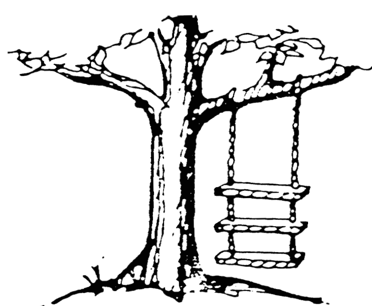
Although the class at Archdale was able to effect many changes at the classroom level, both Deb and Sandra talk about the importance of having support and involvement of the program administration. Deb and Sandra advise programs to invite the program director into a few of their meetings in order to foster collaboration around improving the quality of program services.

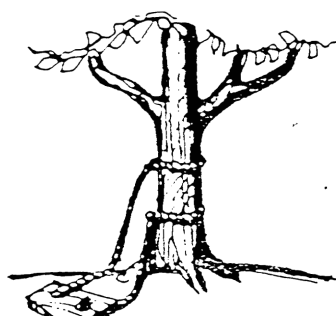
Based on their rich experiences, program members have many insights to share on the impact of student advisory groups. These committees seem to be more effective when there is clarity around how they fit into the program's process of decision-making. This clarity seems to come over time if students and staff members have an on-going dialogue around issues of power and if the program director supports this dialogue. Also, the groups seem to have become stronger over time as they work to develop strategies and policies to ensure that all students both within the program and within each meeting are heard equally, and that people are not being left out on the basis of language level, basic skill level, class, race, or culture.

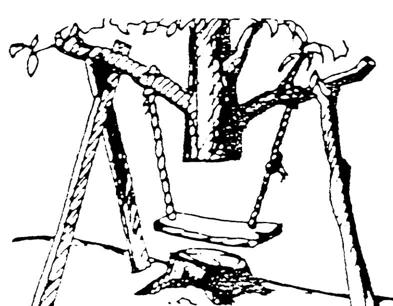
My conversations with program members and reflections on my own past experiences have raised more questions than answers. Staff often feel uncomfortable asking for too much of students' time outside of their studies. Should students be paid to take on this responsibility? If the committees are set up as extracurricular, are we privileging the involvement of some students over others? What level of decision-making is realistic for students? How often do staff members take on the responsibility for planning, facilitating, and following up on issues addressed at the meetings? Are staff members supported by local and state administration to take on this work? What resources are available to program staff and students to develop the group facilitation and leadership skills necessary to have an effective group? Are they enough?

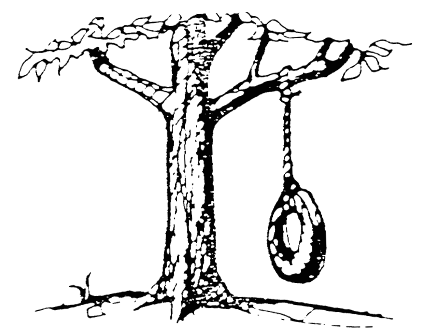
We need to continue to explore these questions and develop stronger systems to implement effective student advisory committees. We need to work together to find ways of providing the adequate training and resources necessary for staff and student pioneers in this area to do this work and to develop "how to" manuals for starting and maintaining these groups. When those are in place, we should determine whether implementing student advisory committees leads to improved services and increased student learning gains.

Andrea Parrella taught in ABE programs in the Boston area for four years before joining NCSALL at the Harvard Graduate School of Education as a Research Assistant. Andrea thanks the following people for taking the time to talk to her about their experiences with student advisory committees: Sandra Ramgeet and Deborah Schwartz, formerly of Archdale Community Center; Janet Kelly, Read Write Now; Shelly Ruocco, Jamaica Plain Community Center; Vicky Nunez, Massachusetts Department of Education; Michele Sacerdote, Vermont Adult Learning.









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Listening Between the Lines

by Janet Isserlis

1984
I've been an ESL facilitator for four years now and proudly invite my older brother to sit in on the ESOL class I'm teaching at a refugee assistance program in Providence, Rhode Island. I'd thought I'd been entertaining and energetic, using gesture, drawings, and humor, and that the class had been inspirational. He asks me why I treat the students like children.

1990
Rany Suon, a young Cambodian mother of two comes to visit me at home. I've just bought a new computer and I invite her and her children to write something, to try it out. The kids lose interest; we play in another room. A little later, Rany hands me something she's written about her husband, his gambling and the worry it causes her. Thinking of my colleagues who publish student writing and the strength of the piece, I ask her if I could share it with them. She asks me not to.

1993
Anita, a learner in a literacy program outside Vancouver, with assistance from a teacher, writes a letter to her mother, expressing her hurt and rage at events that transpired during her childhood. My colleague stresses how important this writing is for the student. I listen, blank as milk, saying nothing.

Five years later I'm going through files, looking for a transcript, and find Anita's letter. I think about the power in her writing. I think of how, for many years, I've taught with my eyes closed, how I've relegated problems to the way things are, to someone else's business. I wonder if I can ever understand anything well enough to actually help a learner in the way s/he best needs to be helped. I wonder if I can do more than say I validate someone's experience; if I can get beyond my own way of seeing into understanding all the joys and difficulties that shape the lives of people.

Educators in general, and ESOL teachers in particular, are in privileged positions as people who use their abilities to read and use language to assist others who want to develop those abilities themselves. But what are the pitfalls of this privilege? Reading Lisa Delpit's book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, has helped me to identify some of them and to understand the clashes of learning and teaching across race. Delpit emphasizes the importance of listening in order to learn about how people live and make sense of their world before trying to actually 'teach' anything. How clear and yet utterly not simple.

As a result of reading that and other books, I have felt the need to reflect on the power I have in the classroom. In the past, I've silenced colleagues and learners by making assumptions, by minimizing difference for the sake of "equality" and have ultimately done learners a great disservice by assuming that I know who they are and what they need without asking. Or by asking the wrong question in the wrong way at the wrong time.

How do I change my practice in the classroom, and my work now as an administrator? I begin with the knowledge that my own understanding of how people learn is inevitably incomplete, and that there are questions I must pose. Who are the individuals in this classroom or meeting? What do they know and how have they come to know it? What can I learn about them before presuming to be heard or to teach them? How can I do the simple but incredibly complex work of listening respectfully, considering, agreeing, and disagreeing in ways that enable us to move our work along?

I need to be mindful of the fact that in some communities a medicine wheel is a framework for learning and knowing the world; in others, the media might influence how meaning is made. I need to realize that both 'exotic' and ordinary understandings underlie and influence the way people learn and live their lives. I need to listen closely to what it is learners are telling me, to be mindful of the fact that my world view and way of learning are likely not necessarily the same as those of someone else.

I continue to build habits of mind that compel me to consider the barriers and strengths I bring to my work (as a learner, practitioner, administrator), and to be conscious of the wide range of abilities each person may possess. How can I use what I know about how people learn to speak, read and write — and listen — and use that knowledge towards assisting learners in lowering barriers that I may unwittingly create? I need to find more ways to draw on the strengths we all possess both individually and collectively. Who can drive a car, program a VCR, find the best deal in town on groceries, read aloud, cook rice, work out fractions? How did each come to know what they know?

Ultimately, the question for teachers becomes: How can I help others learn what they want to know? I find open-ended materials helpful in this regard, because they lead to problem-posing as an approach and to using language experience as a means of building a bridge from learners' own words to writings by other people with other perspectives.

Working with and from learners' strengths and addressing areas of need by embedding skills into meaningful content is not a new idea. Let's get on with it, more carefully, more intentionally, listening between the lines of our students' words.

Janet Isserlis is the Director of Literacy Resources/ Rhode Island in Providence, RI and has worked with refugee, immigrant and other adult learners in the US and Canada since 1980. This article is adapted from an article online at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Swearer_Center/Literacy_Resources/atlanta.html

Reference: Delpit, Lisa. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom.* New York: The New Press.

Listen

by Edward L. Castor

You see the forest
You cannot see the tree

You see the crowd
You do not see me

You hear the noises
You do not hear my voice

You say I can do what I want
But I have no choice

You say I do not care,
I will not try
I have been hurt so much,
that is the reason why

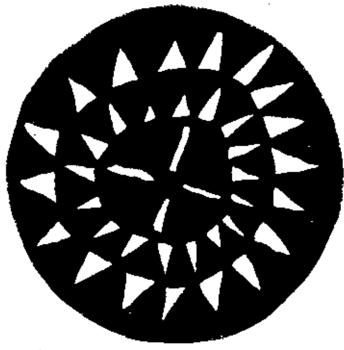
I feel like a man in a cage
My mind and heart in rage

Please listen to what I have to say
I cannot learn in the traditional way

Questions and Activity:

- What do you think the author of this poem is trying to say?
- What feelings are expressed in this poem?
- Have you ever felt some of these feelings?
- What does "You see the forest, You cannot see the tree" mean? How would you illustrate this concept?
- Write a poem, draw an illustration, or make a collage that describes your experience in high school or adult education.

Poem and illustration reprinted with permission from *Learning and Leading in Michigan*, a report from the Michigan Adult Learner Leadership Academy II, 1993. Published by the Michigan Department of Education.



Literacy Volunteers:

Where Do They Fit Into Progressive ABE?

by Cathy Stanton and Margaret Anderson

For ABE programs working toward social change, classroom volunteers illustrate both the promises of activist education and many of its problems and struggles. On the one hand, volunteers can be valuable allies. They can connect community and classroom, underscoring the idea that education involves students' whole lives and the lives of their communities. Their voices can broaden group discussions, adding diversity and experience. Many bring an amateur enthusiasm — about teaching, learning, and community development — that can rekindle the spirits of overworked staff.

The volunteer role is wonderfully fluid, and it can help erase some of the distinctions between teachers and learners. When they share their knowledge as well as model the search for answers, they serve as mentors to students. And when students master new skills, they can move into the volunteer role, becoming mentors themselves. Their contributions are so valuable that at a recent staff meeting, our instructors agreed that even if we had plenty of funding, we wouldn't replace the volunteers with paid staff.

However, volunteers may also buttress many things that activist ABE educators work to overcome. While volunteers can provide much-needed one-on-one time, that model (what one adult educator has called "Millie-and-John-in-the-library") can also isolate learners who may have few enough opportunities for community. Many volunteer tutors bring with them ideas about education that reinforce social and educational barriers. At worst, they may see themselves as missionaries, dispensing knowledge to the needy, rather than as learners themselves, working toward empowerment for all.

In our discussions of what it means for ABE programs to be "accountable" – to our students, our communities, and our funders – the question of how volunteers fit in is a crucial one.

Volunteer tutors help stretch meager budgets, but depending on them may work against our efforts to increase funding for the field. Voluntarism is a frequent route into paid teaching (both of us began as volunteers), but the open access to the field may reinforce the notion that "anyone can do this." The common notion that, when it comes to literacy training, willingness and energy compensate for skills and training, works against our efforts to be paid in relation to the complex demands of our jobs.

Many ABE programs are struggling to meet the standards of performance set by funders. Programs are also striving to incorporate all that we are learning as a field about how adults learn. Volunteers, by their very nature, are somewhat outside of this "accountability" discussion. They may be inconsistent in their attendance, unreliable in their record keeping, and steeped in outdated methods of teaching. Because they are unpaid, program staff may be reluctant to hold them to the same high standards we set for professional staff. How much can we ask, we wonder, from people who are generously donating their time and energies? And yet, volunteers may be the people with the most direct contact with students. Their efforts can affect students' learning experiences tremendously, for better or worse.

In our discussions of what it means for ABE programs to be "accountable" — to our students, our communities, and our funders — the question of how volunteers fit in is a crucial one. What role do unpaid community volunteers play in a field that is seeking to "professionalize?" Through our work with volunteers, we've developed some strategies that we think can help address some of the difficulties of working with volunteers while preserving the many benefits they bring.

Think of volunteers as unpaid staff

Since volunteers offer the "gift" of their time, many teachers don't feel that they have the right to ask anything of them. We thank them for what they offer, even when it falls far short of what we need. Some agencies resolve this awkwardness by thinking of volunteers not as gift-givers but as unpaid staff who are responsible for carrying out the program's mission, together with the paid staff. This shift in thinking is crucial to creating a volunteer program that works for everyone and upholds the standards of the agency.

Set up structures to screen volunteers

Many agencies are accustomed to begging for volunteers and taking anyone they get. But when we start to think of volunteers as part of the staff, it's clear that we need a screening process. Our agency's application process includes a written application form, a formal job description, a screening interview, and reference checks. To our knowledge, we have not turned off potential volunteers with this more rigorous application. In fact, we have more volunteers than ever, and many of them thank us for taking them so seriously.

Offer a thorough training which includes popular education

We offer an 18-hour training, covering the basics: who we are and what we do, the reading process, the writing process, math, the GED, lesson planning, and popular education.

We include popular education in our training, even though the message that "education *is* political" turns some volunteers away. Those who stay are more committed to our progressive mission. We've noticed that the way we approach popular education in the training makes a difference. When we present it as an add-on to academics, prospective volunteers raise more objections: "Doesn't this political stuff take time away from the *real* work of the agency — the academics?" However, when we demonstrate how community issues are *integrated* into skill-building, new volunteers are more often intrigued and excited about getting involved.

Provide on-going supervision

Regularly communicating with volunteers — in person or over the phone or email — allows us to bring up both what is going well and what can be improved. We can address problems when they arise and provide support for volunteers to change their behavior. We can also help volunteers try out new ideas and grow as teachers and leaders in the classroom.

Many volunteers, especially those who are interested in teaching as a career, see support and feedback as one of the primary benefits to volunteering. Others, however, may resist the idea that they should be supervised. Some may be offended by honest feedback and choose to discontinue their service. While we may lose a few volunteers this way, those who are not open to feedback probably aren't the most appropriate volunteers for our "community of learners."

Some of the resistance may come from the staff themselves. Even though we have high standards for volunteers, it can feel disrespectful to be critical. But failing to treat volunteers honestly is perhaps more disrespectful, because it shows that we don't take them seriously as colleagues. When we ignore problems, we give volunteers less respect than we give learners who always have the chance to learn from their mistakes.

Provide opportunities for professional development

Opportunities for professional development reinforce the idea that teachers (paid or volunteer) are continually learning, and that we take the volunteers' work seriously. As volunteers are introduced to new skills and perspectives, both they and the programs benefit. There may be an added benefit that when volunteers understand some of the tensions in the field, they may have a greater understanding of their own role within our progressive mission.

In addition to workshops and conferences, we can include volunteers in teacher inquiry projects or book discussion groups, and introduce them to the on-line world of literacy education.

Integrate volunteers into group classes

Unlike some agencies, we don't set up one-on-one matches with tutors and learners; all of our volunteers are placed in classes. We find this structure valuable because it fosters a sense of community within the classroom and integrates volunteers into the life of the agency. During individual study classes, volunteers move from one learner to another, as needed. Learners get individual attention, but they also have the chance to try things on their own or turn to peers for help.

Volunteers also participate in group classes, adding their perspectives to discussions. As volunteers grow in their confidence and skills, they can design lessons and lead discussions themselves.

Volunteers also participate in community projects, developing other kinds of leadership skills. Volunteers can enhance a project through their connections to the community, and some may come to lead projects themselves. By creating roles for volunteers in these projects, we attract and retain the people who are committed to progressive education.

Don't overlook good work

Volunteers make a significant contribution to our classes, and we naturally want them to share our progressive philosophy. Sometimes, however, volunteers who appear to be conservative or apolitical may, in fact, reflect some of the basic tenets of progressive education through their classroom practice: active and responsive listening, respect for learners, self-knowledge and humility, and a deep sense of caring for the community. It isn't always necessary, or even desirable, for volunteers to share our political agendas. If we think that "education for empowerment" only happens when we follow the spiral model of popular education, we may overlook some great volunteers who don't speak the language of the field.

Volunteers have the potential to be both teachers and learners — and in this sense, they are no different from anyone else in the participatory ABE classroom. When we take volunteers seriously as full members of our learning community, we show more respect for ourselves and our students. And we move one step closer to being truly accountable to the communities we work within.

Margaret Anderson and Cathy Stanton work at The Literacy Project in Western Massachusetts.

La Tertulia Literaria:

An Inspiring Visit to a Barcelona Book Club

by Silja Kallenbach

More adults kept coming in; by 8:30 pm there were 31 mostly middle-aged or older men and women. They arrived carrying Goethe's *Fausto*. Not everyone had read up to the mutually agreed upon point in the book, but they came anyway to hear what others had to say and maybe put in their two cents. It was like every other Monday evening in the past 18 years at La Vernera School for Adults: time for "la tertulia literaria" or what we might call a book club. Only this book club was started by adult basic education learners, some of whom have been coming ever since.

I happened to take a seat next to Ana who told me she started out in the school's literacy classes 18 years ago and has been coming to the book club since she learned to read. In the course of the evening, as the adults read aloud the passages that stood out for them, I could tell that some people were still struggling with reading. I was impressed to learn that it was the group's decision to read classic, full-length books by authors such as Garcia Lorca, Proust, Baudelaire, and Cervantes. Later I learned that for many "tertulia" participants these were the very first books they ever read. These works and this book club was their entrée — on their terms — to the world of "high culture" from which they were excluded by virtue of their class and level of education.

These works and this book club was their entrée — in their terms — to the world of "high culture" from which they were excluded by virtue of their class and level of education.

A specific methodology and philosophy underlie "la tertulia." The philosophy reflects the school's overall participatory, Freirean pedegogy that emphasizes dialogue, social equality and respect for the experiences, opinions and literary interpretations of the participants in spite of their limited formal schooling. The methodology consists of a facilitated discussion based on the passages that the participants find interesting or significant. The participants' opinions and decisions guide the process. At the beginning of each semester, the group selects the books they will read. And at the end of the evening, the group decides how many pages they will read for the following week's session.

The conversation I observed was deep and free-flowing, often turning to past and contemporary politics, religion, and relationships between men and women. People did not always agree with one another, but they seemed to respect each other's perspectives. "Each time a new person joins the group the same questions come up: Is there one correct interpretation of each text, or is it possible to have multiple ways to interpret it? People feel initially constrained by the narrow limits of established knowledge, unable to break down the barrier of the sacrosanct knowledge they attribute to those who have university level education," writes Ramon Flecha (1997, p. 71, translated from Spanish).

This book club is one of many offerings of La Vernera School for Adults that takes its name from the working class neighborhood in Barcelona, Spain where it is located. There are four levels of classes starting with basic literacy to high school equivalency, including math, social studies, and science. Each level is offered four times a day in two-hour classes to accommodate adults with different work schedules. In addition, adults from the neighborhood participate in all kinds of other courses ranging from astrology and word processing to sevillana dance and various crafts. 1,400 adults attend one or more of them, and they are all free.

You might think there is generous funding for adult education to make all these classes possible. Not so. La Vernera has only eight paid staff, all full-time. Its functioning depends on a corps of over 100 volunteers — "collaborators" as they are called — who are former or current students, other community members, or university students or professors. Amazingly, people who are interested in teaching a class have to observe classes and team teach for a whole year before they can teach one alone. Not only that, the volunteers are expected to attend monthly meetings, biannual retreats, and student orientations. These are rather high demands on volunteers by U.S. standards. Yet there is no dearth of collaborators. Every person I spoke with was beaming with enthusiasm and commitment.

The key to such dedication, I believe, comes from La Vernera's clear and unifying philosophy and goal of social justice. The participatory pedagogy extends to the school's elaborate democratic management structure. The school is run by a general council which is composed of representatives elected by each class and volunteers, the eight staff members, and representatives of the founding women's and neighborhood associations. There is no director. In addition, there are monthly coordination-reflection meetings that all volunteers must attend, and weekly staff meetings. Each monthly meeting has a reflection-discussion component on a specific theme ranging from evaluation to the situation in Kosovo or racism. One teacher told me, "It takes a while to understand this structure, but it's worth it. . . We are empowered. The outlook is very global. . . There is constant self-evaluation."

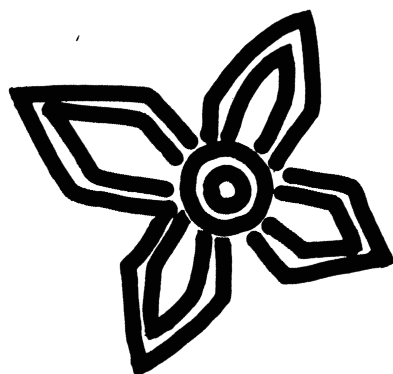
The roots of La Vernera's philosophy and goals go back to its founding in the late 70's after the end of the Franco dictatorship. A neighborhood association and the women's association of La Vernera successfully fought to obtain the building from the city in order to establish a civic center where adult education figures prominently. Each floor of the building now houses a different set of activities: day care, teen center, senior citizen center, social services, a public library as well as meeting rooms.

The School for Adults also takes credit for the formation of the neighborhood coordinating committee in which all education, social service and civic groups of La Vernera participate and discuss issues that affect the community, and plan actions to address them. The committee, for example, was successful in getting the city to build a subway station in the neighborhood.

In spite of its scarce financial resources La Vernera School for Adults has transformed its neighborhood and the lives of many of its residents. And it continues to do so thanks to its clear vision of social equality and transformation, and focus on continuous improvement of the small and big ways for reaching this vision. I came away inspired by my visit. I also was left wondering whether a "tertulia literaria" could work in the U.S. context. Would our students be interested; would they keep coming?

Silja Kallenbach is Coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.

References: Flecha, R., 1997. *Compartiendo Palabras. El aprendizaje de las persona adultas a traves del dialogo.* Paidos: Barcelona, Spain.

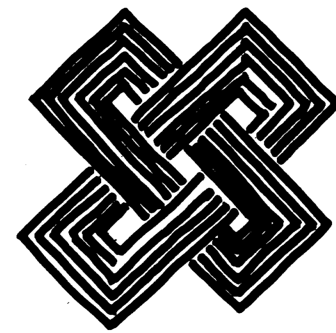


Que con la educación se escuche mi voz
Voz de lucha
Voz de esfuerzo
Voz desde mi corazón
Con la educatión se alza mi voz
para que se escuche el rugido.

With education my voice will be heard
voice of struggle
voice of power
voice from within my heart.
With education my voice will rise
so that you can hear me roaring.

Student poem reprinted with permission from *Voices Making Change*, March 1999, a publication of The Changes Project. For more information contact Alex Risley Schroeder at SABES, Holyoke Community College, 303 Homestead Avenue, Holyoke, MA 01040 or email at [arisleysch@hcc.mass.edu].

Community Building: One Tutor at a Time



by Carol Chandler

The UMass/Boston Community University Project for Literacy: A Model for Student Participation and Community-Building

BACKGROUND

During the early 1980's, I worked at a Boston area community-based organization to set up a Bilingual Teacher Training Program which was successful in recruiting and training bilingual/bicultural teachers for ESOL and native language literacy classes. Many of the teachers who started in the early days of that program continue to teach in adult education today. At that time, I was also teaching ESOL at UMass/Boston and many of my students often wrote in their journals about their desire to work with their communities. This inspired me, along with colleague Tom Macdonald, to approach the UMass Bilingual Graduate Studies Program about the idea of setting up a program to recruit and train ESOL students as ESOL and native language literacy tutors. Eventually we secured funding and the Community-University Project for Literacy (CUPL) was established.

CUPL, now approaching a decade of service, provides a unique model for community leadership and diversity in community service. Over the last nine years, CUPL has recruited, trained and placed approximately 270 students from over 28 countries and has worked with more than 25 community education programs in the Greater Boston area. The most innovative aspect of CUPL is that it specifically recruits, trains, and places bilingual/bicultural students to work as tutors for adult learners from their own or other linguistic backgrounds and provides opportunities for them to assume leadership roles in their communities.

Students who enroll in the project, commit to tutoring four hours per week at a local literacy program while attending a weekly credit-bearing academic seminar at UMass. The training model is designed to encourage students to reflect on their own language and literacy acquisition processes and apply this reflection to theoretical investigation and practical experience. The weekly seminar provides a forum for tutors to discuss their tutoring experiences, to problem-solve together, and to examine second language and literacy acquisition theories, methods, and materials.

CUPL Tutor Jean Charles Adrien (far right) is helping this group of students learn English and prepare for Citizenship at the Haitian American Public Health Initiative (HAPHI) in Mattapan.

WHO ARE THE TUTORS?

CUPL's most valuable resources are the college students themselves as they share their experiences, bring new ideas and perspectives to the learning and teaching process and become an inspiration for other adult learners. Here, in their own words, are some of the reasons UMass students give for participating in CUPL:

"I'm interested in working in a community-based adult literacy program because it would be a great chance for me to take action in my neighborhood and help other members of my community in acquiring skills as essential as basic education, literacy, and English acquisition."

"Since my arrival to this country, I always wanted to give something back to my community. In participating in this program, I hope I can fulfill that dream."

"I think that it's the best opportunity to meet people and share with them the knowledge and experiences that I have had as an ESL student."

Initially, students have a good deal of anxiety about participating in the program. They question their level of English and their ability to "help others." Some are concerned that they are "too young" to teach adults, or that they won't live up to the expectations students often have of the "teacher."

By the end of the semester, tutors develop an increased sense of confidence and self-esteem through their experiences. It's interesting to note that this usually parallels their growing understanding of the importance of confidence-building in the learning process and, in particular, language learning. Both coursework and fieldwork provide opportunities for tutors to develop reading, writing, and critical thinking skills essential to their success in college. One student explains what participation in the project meant in terms of her own personal growth:

"When I first began the program, not being a native speaker of English, my reading, writing and conversation abilities were very limited. The program really helped me find my own voice. One thing that helped a lot was that the material used in the class was all relevant to my own life and the lives of my students. I overcame the fear of presenting myself. I have built a lot of self-confidence, and it was because of the program. If it wasn't for the program, I don't know what I would have done. You find yourself. I know what I'm about, what I can do, what I can't do. You learn your strengths and limitations."

Finally, CUPL has enabled bilingual undergraduates to explore new academic and career options. Many ESOL students regard the language barrier as too much of an obstacle for them to consider a major in English or to pursue a career in teaching. Even tutors who had been teachers in their native countries often feel that linguistic and systemic barriers do not allow them to continue their careers in the United States. For these students, participation in the project provides an opportunity for practicing their profession in a U.S. context.

IN THE COMMUNITY

CUPL has strengthened the capacity of many Boston area programs to provide ESOL and literacy instruction by enabling centers not only to serve additional students but to provide more small group and individualized instruction. Teachers consistently report that tutors bring new ideas, materials, and fresh perspectives to the centers and classrooms where they work.

Another way that the project has had a positive impact in the community is that the tutors become role models for many adult students who might have considered college out of reach. Sharing their own experiences, they become an inspiration for others. One literacy program teacher wrote:

"I believe [the tutor's] greatest value to our class was that she was a Chinese student who is just a few steps ahead of where my students hope to be next year or two. I could not have asked for a better tutor. She understood the students, spoke their language and knew about their problems in learning English and integrating themselves into the American society in general and American colleges in particular. She was a great role model for everyone in the English Transitional Program."

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, many UMass tutors continue their community work as volunteers or as paid professional staff long after their participation in the project. In this way, the project contributes to promoting diversity in the field of adult education and human services and to strengthening local community development efforts.

CONCLUSION

CUPL is creating new generations of tutors who become teachers who become mentors for new tutors and so on. You can't imagine how rewarding it is for me to be able to say to an ESOL student who wants to work with her community, "I have the perfect program for you," or when I visit a community program and a former tutor, now hired as a teacher says, "Do you have any tutors for me this year?" I'm excited when I see a former tutor representing his agency in his new role as Program Counselor at a human service provider meeting, or when Polly Welsh, who is now teaching ESOL and Writing at UMass College of Management and coordinating the recruitment and placement of CUPL tutors, comes into the classroom to meet a new group of tutors and I can say, "Polly was once a CUPL tutor, too." This, for me, is community building — one tutor at a time.

Carol Chandler is Director of Community Building at the Office of Refugees and Immigrants in Boston, MA.

Educación de Adultos:

La Perspectiva de una Latina

Yolanda Robles is one of those few teachers in our field who has had the opportunity to experience adult education on both sides of the desk. She is a former adult learner who now works at the Community Education Project in Holyoke, Massachusetts as a Native Language Literacy and GED/Family Literacy teacher. Paul Hyry, a contributor for this issue of The Change Agent*, recently had the opportunity to interview her.*

Tell me a little bit about where you came from and your education as a child.

I was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and grew up in Caguas. I left school very early on, in 6th grade. Later on, as a teenager, I went to night school and was passed to an 8th grade level.

I got married when I was 19 years old and had my daughter. We moved from Caguas to Springfield (Massachusetts) when I was 21, and I had two sons over the next few years. I was on welfare and mostly stayed at home until my younger son was in first grade. I was in my early 30s at the time.

How did you start studying in an adult education program?

I couldn't speak English and I felt the need to start learning because I didn't like the way I was treated when I went places. Also, my welfare worker was giving me the message that I had to start doing something if I didn't want to lose my check, and she told me about an ESL class at the welfare office. So I took that class. Then I moved to Holyoke, and I heard about a GED class in Spanish at the New England Farm Workers' Council. I decided I wanted to study there, so I spoke to the teacher. She had doubts because my education level was very low compared to the other students in the class. I begged her to let me in, and finally she said I could give it a try.

What were your goals at that time, and how did your family feel about your educating yourself?

My family was not very supportive. The message was mostly that my role was to stay home and take care of the kids, and nobody really believed that I could do much else.

How long did you study in the GED class, and what was it like?

It was really hard for me. There were 12 students at the beginning, and I always felt like I was coming from behind. I had to ask a lot of questions and felt stupid sometimes. We had 20 hours of class a week, but I also stayed after class and worked with a tutor. I did homework for hours every night. In a lot of ways I feel more proud of my GED than of my other degree, because I had to work so hard to pass the GED test. The class lasted four or five months, and I ended up passing on my first try.

So how did you end up making the transition to college?

My teacher talked to us about it, encouraged us to consider it, and helped us with the paperwork, etc. Six of us decided to go to the local community college. Of those, only two ended up finishing the Associate degree; the others ended up leaving, I think because they didn't really believe they could do it, and also because they ran into problems in their families; one or two ended up really depressed.

I started almost right away in the ESL program. I wasn't thinking about a degree, just wanting to learn more English and see if I could do it. I tested into ESL Level III (out of five levels), and also found out about a sociology class in Spanish. I thought, "What the hell, why not?" and enrolled in that class. To my surprise, I ended up on the Dean's List at the end of the semester, so I figured "What the hell?" again and enrolled the next semester in ESL IV and psychology in Spanish. Then I took ESL V and was finished with ESL, so I decided to go full-time.

What was it like to be an adult Latina student at the community college?

It was really hard, at the beginning and then especially when I got out of the ESL program. Some of the teachers were really nice, but there were a couple of teachers who treated us more like we were special education students — they didn't take me seriously or push me to do good work, but rather just "gave" me grades.

I remember one class where I was the only Latina — we were supposed to be working in a small group, and the other people in my group put their chairs in a circle that left me on the outside. After that I always hated it if I found out there was going to be small group work in a class.

So how did you end up becoming a teacher?

During my last semester [Spring 1996], I had my work study through the Mentoring Project, and at the end of the semester I tutored some GED students at the Community Education Project (CEP). It wasn't really a class, just a small group of Head Start parents who were trying to get ready to take the test. I did this for about a month. Then in the summer, an announcement about a part-time job teaching a bilingual GED class at CEP came to the Mentoring Project. I didn't apply because I was afraid. Then another announcement came saying the search had been re-opened, and the director of the Mentoring Project was really on my back to apply; I sent in a resume mostly to make her happy.

I went to the interview and was really nervous, and then was surprised and terrified by the job offer. It was a fifteen-hour-a-week job in a family literacy program for Head Start mothers. At that time, the whole staff was part-time and because the search had been re-opened, they were already matriculating students and I started teaching in two weeks.

I was terrified every day at the beginning that I couldn't do the job. I studied and prepared for hours every night, working with my sister and my daughter, then I would go to class the next morning and teach.

How has your work changed since you started?

I got a lot more confident about my teaching in the second semester. The next fall I started teaching Native Language Literacy (basic reading and writing in Spanish for adults) along with the GED class. Then in the fall of 1998 my job changed and I started teaching GED and family learning as part of the local Even Start collaborative; that has been another challenge.

Who do you think has power with regard to adult education?

I think the welfare department has a lot of power, because they put tremendous pressure on people to get to work, and this creates severe barriers for parents who want to study. I also think that the people who give the money for the classes set the tone for our work, and in my current job I have to wait for people to tell me what to prioritize during my class hours. For example, I agree that focusing on parenting skills is really important, but my students are also really interested in being able to pass the GED, and sometimes they say things to me like "I know how to play with my kids," and "It's good to think about educating them, but why spend so much time on this when I don't know if I can pay the rent?" I also feel that our coordinator at the Community Education Project has the power to tell us what she needs from us and to make decisions, but that's more like the captain of a boat who moves things in a certain direction.

Don't you think that teachers have some power, especially with regard to the students' experience?

I have never felt like I've had power, but I guess I do in that way, because I have used my power as teacher to directly control situations like arguments between students that have gotten difficult. My work involves a lot of emotional support for my students, who are struggling with a lot of different issues. But I never enter the classroom with the idea that I run the show. Also, I don't bring up my educational background around the students, because I don't want to give them the message that I think I'm better than them.

Are there challenges?

Yes. I feel like I constantly have to demonstrate to people that I can do my job. When I started teaching, I don't think that the people in the agency where the classrooms were located believed that I could, and I felt like an unwelcome presence. So I was afraid of losing my job and always had to be thinking about what I said and how I dressed. I have always felt like I've had to guard my tongue; there's a lot of pressure to not say what I really think, but rather what people above me want to hear from me.

So I feel responsible to do my best for my students, but being careful around the people above me. People around me have paid big prices for speaking their opinions about things, so sometimes I only say what's necessary, not because I don't have opinions, but because I struggle with fear of the consequences of fully expressing myself.

Do you think students have power?

Yes, definitely. If I don't teach well, they can go over my head and push for change. But even more than that, as adults they have power — what they say matters, and if I can't listen to them, then I'm not ready to teach.

Yolanda Robles is an adult educator and Paul Hyry is a former teacher and administrator at the Community Education Project in Holyoke, MA.

Some Civic Participation Web Sites

A list of web sites and resource materials available on-line for teachers interested in incorporating civic participation into their lessons.

American Social History Project
http://www.ashp.cuny.edu/
ASHP seeks to revitalize interest in history by challenging the traditional ways that people learn about the past.

AskERIC Lesson Plans
http://www.askeric.org/Virtual/Lessons/
The AskERIC Lesson Plan Collection contains more than 1,000 unique lesson plans which have been written and submitted to AskERIC by teachers from all over the United States. You can find lesson plans in civics, current events, government, U.S. history and more.

Café Progressive
http://come.to/cafeprogressive
"Our goal is to provide you a with a onestop interactive resource for progressive Political and Educational Community and Resources!"

Center for the Study of Civic Values
http://www.libertynet.org/edcivic/civiclit.html
Many links to civic and political education online resources.

Civic Practices Network
http://www.cpn.org/
CPN is a collaborative and nonpartisan project dedicated to bringing practical tools for public problem solving into community and institutional settings across America. Our common mission is to tell the stories of civic innovation, share the practical wisdom, and exchange the most effective tools available.

Close Up Foundation Online
http://www.closeup.org/home.htm
Take a virtual tour of Washington, D.C. , read current news and statistics on student civic interests and awareness, view some online civic resources.

CONGRESS.ORG
http://congress.nw.dc.us/congressorg2/main.html
Find your representatives, email or print a letter to Congress, see how your reps are scored by various associations and advocacy groups.

Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF)
http://www.crf-usa.org/
Foundation seeks to instill in our nation's youth a deeper understanding of citizenship through values expressed in our Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and educate them to become active and responsible participants in our society. Make sure to look at the CRF online lesson plans.

Key to Community Voter Involvement
http://www.otan.dni.us/cdlp/vip/home.html
How to Vote: An Election Tutorial, The Easy Reader Voter Guide, How to be Heard and Make a Difference, and much more.

Pick Your Candidate - LESSON PLAN
http://easternlincs.worlded.org/TEACHERS/PICK/index.htm
A wonderful multi-faceted lesson plan that helps students to understand campaign advertising and candidate's positions so they can make educated decisions at the polls.

Project Vote Smart
http://www.vote-smart.org
Non-partisan voter education and information site. You can find results of governors, congressional and state legislative races, as well as voting records of congressmen and women on selected key issues, such as campaign finance reform. Vote Smart Classroom has resources for students and teachers including lesson plans on U.S. history and government.

Thomas
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.html
Provides an easy way to keep track of legislation.

United for a Fair Economy
http://www.stw.org
United for a Fair Economy is a national, independent, nonpartisan organization that puts a spotlight on the dangers of growing income, wage and wealth inequality in the United States and coordinates action to reduce the gap. Visit their website to read the latest press releases and find out more about the resources available.

National Literacy Advocacy Listserv

Many of the topics covered in this issue have been discussed on-line on the National Literacy Advocacy (NLA) listserv. To read archived messages or to subscribe to the listserv go to [http://literacy.nifl.gov/forums.html]. The archives are grouped by year and can be sorted by name, date, subject, and thread.

V A L U E

Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education

In June 1999, nearly 100 adult learners from 32 states attended VALUE's Adult Learner Leadership Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Institute was designed to help adult learners learn how to:

- build and strengthen adult learner leadership at the state, community and program levels. (In particular, they would learn how to create state-level adult learner organizations.)
- participate in VALUE as a national organization.

To learn more about VALUE and find out how you can become a member, visit the web site at [http://literacynet.org/value] or contact the administrative office at Learning Partnerships, 14 Griffin Street, East Brunswick, NJ 08816-4806, tel. 732-254-2237.

WANTED:
Student-generated writing for new citizenship web site

Seeking 50-200 word essays by ESOL/ABE learners who are in the process of becoming citizens or who have recently become citizens, on the following topics:

- deciding to become a citizen
- the application process
- preparing for the interview
- the oath ceremony
- next steps for new citizens
- citizenship stories from earlier days

Who will read my writing?
Other learners from around the country.

Where will it be posted?
On an Internet web site for people who want to know about becoming a citizen. (We will let you know what the web site address is as soon as it is decided.)

What should I send with my writing?
A photo of yourself and a way for us to contact you if necessary.

How do I submit it?
Send it to: ESL Center
Jones Library
Amherst, MA 01002

More Questions? Call Lynne Weintraub at (413) 256-8037 or send email to [lynnew@crocker.com].

Do Not Forward
Address Correction Requested
Return Postage Guaranteed

World Education
44 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

THE CHANGE AGENT

Published by New England Literacy Resource Center

THE CHANGE AGENT

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

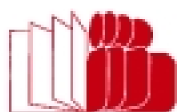
Theme: The Environment/Environmental Health

Educators and Adult Learners: We are looking for lessons, materials, student projects about an environmental issue.

Some questions to think about:
What role should corporations play in protecting the environment?
Can one person make a difference?
What environmental issues exist in your community?
What is the most important environmental issue in your mind?
In what ways does the environment affect your health or wellbeing?
Is recycling good for the environment?
How are our buying decisions affected by environmental issues?

All articles must be received by November 1, 1999.
All articles will be considered. Final decisions are made by *The Change Agent* Editorial Board.

Please send material (on PC disk, if possible) to:
Marie Horchler, NELRC/World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210 phone: (617) 482-9485 fax: (617) 482-0617
email: mhorchler@worlded.org



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The mission of The Change Agent *is to provide, in the form of a low cost newspaper, news, issues, ideas and other teaching resources that inspire and enable adult educators and learners to make civic participation and social justice related concerns part of their teaching and learning.*

In New England, *The Change Agent* will continue to be available free of charge in limited quantities through the New England Literacy Resource Center's affiliated State Literacy Resource Centers (SABES, ATDN, CALL, Vermont Adult Education Board, Literacy Resources/Rhode Island, New Hampshire Department of Education). Contact these centers for more information.

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