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ABSTRACT

This special topic issues focuses on workplace literacy. "Literacy Practices in Today's Workplace" (Larry Mikulecky) provides a picture of demands and practices in workplace literacy. "Workplace Literacy Skills: Making Reading Work for Work" (Esther Minskoff) advocates use of contextual instruction and offers guidelines for providing workplace literacy instruction for adults with reading disabilities. "Joint Efforts in Training" (Janie Carter, Patti Maher) addresses working with learning disabilities in workplace literacy programs. "The Connection between Learning Culture and Learning Disabilities" (Nancie Payne) focuses on identifying an individual's learning style and aligning it with the workplace learning culture. "Moving toward Better Skills Development in Entry-Level Positions" (Robin J. Koch, Nancie Payne) looks at developing critical skills other than the fundamental ones--reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics--in entry-level workers. "The Missing LINK: Multisensory/Multimotor Training for Workforce Literacy" (Chris McFadden) discusses the key elements that contribute to the success of work force literacy programs. "You Can't 'Fake It' in the Real World" (Chris Lee) describes how an individual deals with his learning disability during day-to-day activities. "Brenda's TIPs on Workplace Literacy" is the story of Brenda Sweigart-Guist's success in improving her reading and math skills through Tyson's Improvement Program (TIP). Other contents include a list of 11 selected readings and a list of 6 organizational resources. (YLB)

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Workplace Literacy:
Employment Issues for the Adult Learner with Learning Disabilities

From the Director . . .

An estimated 30% to 50% of individuals attending basic skills training, job, and workplace literacy programs may have an undiagnosed learning disability. "Learning disability" is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of disorders, including disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Learning disabilities may be displayed in an inability to effectively listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations – skills that are used every day in the workplace. Moreover, learning disabilities occur across the lifespan; as a result, adult with learning disabilities are present in the workplace and in workplace literacy programs.

This issue of LINKAGES focuses on workplace literacy. As professionals working with adults with learning disabilities, we will not be able to draw realistic conclusions about the success or failure of job training programs unless we thoroughly understand the individuals who seek those services. By better understanding individuals with learning disabilities, we will be able to provide more effective workplace literacy and job training programs – programs that increase the individual's job success, reduce frustrations, improve self-esteem, and lessen the need for retraining as technology and job demands change.

With a better understanding of job, career, and workplace literacy issues as they relate to adults with learning disabilities, it is our hope that adult education can better meet the needs of adult learners.

Neil A. Sturomski
Director

Literacy Practices in Today's Workplace

By Larry Mikulecky

Research conducted since the mid 1970's provides us with the following picture of literacy demands and practices in today's workplace. First, in terms of the level of difficulty of the common forms of materials with which workers deal (memos, manuals, troubleshooting, directions, new product information), it has been consistently found that the vast majority is at the high school to college level. This level of difficulty is comparable to that of most newspapers and magazines. Second, as workplaces make technological and organizational changes, more and more workers are expected to work with print materials. Third,

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workers are, more often than previously, expected to be more flexible and able to do each other's jobs; on occasion, they are expected to be able to independently manage unfamiliar information. As workplaces are restructured to become more productive, workers in many manufacturing and service jobs are being called upon to monitor quality performance by gathering information from charts, graphs, and computer screens, to take measurements, to calculate averages, to graph information, to enter information onto various forms, and to write brief reports indicating problems and attempted solutions. Some workers in these same occupations are also expected to be able to gather information from print in order to participate in quality assurance groups and to play active roles in improving productivity. In short, workers are much more likely than before to face new print demands as part of ongoing workplace retraining. The U.S. Department of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills confirms changes in many industries that reflect increased workplace skill requirements.

A recent survey of 26,000 adults, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), asked employed participants to report the frequency with which they read work-related materials and wrote on the job. Results indicate that, during a given week, literacy is required of the vast majority of workers in every job category, including labor. In all occupational areas, most workers report reading often or at least on a weekly basis. On the surface, it appears that if one wants to avoid literacy use, there are few occupational areas in which one might find work; reading is "rarely" reported by 25 to 30 percent of service workers, laborers, and farm-forestry workers. This same survey data also provides a clear picture of the extent to which Americans must write on the job. Surprisingly high percentages of workers report that they frequently write on the job: 54 percent report frequently writing reports, 45 percent frequently write on forms, and 40 percent frequently write memos. Thus, if we wish to match education with current writing demands in the workplace, greater emphasis on the skills that will prepare workers to be able to write and read memos and reports seems necessary.

Due to the documented phenomenon of learning loss resulting from little literacy practice, the very workers who may need to improve in basic skills are likely to grow less able as time passes. These workers may very well be ill-prepared for the ongoing education they are likely to find necessary to keep their jobs.

In addition to surveying workers about job-related reading and writing, the NALS asked about literacy practices for personal use. While percentages of those who reported rarely reading for any purpose (home or work) were rather low for workers in the professional, sales, and crafts occupations, the percentages ranged from 25 to 30 percent for those in the other occupation areas. Due to the documented phenomenon of learning loss resulting from little literacy practice, the very workers who may need to improve in basic skills are likely to grow less able as time passes. These workers may very well be ill-prepared for the ongoing education they are likely to find necessary to keep their jobs.

To ensure that workers are equipped with marketable skills, our education system must keep abreast of these changes in demands and practices in workplace literacy.◆

Larry Mikulecky is Professor of Education and Chair of the Language Education Department at Indiana University-Bloomington. His most recent research has examined assessment issues in adult literacy programs, workplace literacy programs, and family literacy programs.

Workplace Literacy Skills: Making Reading Work for Work

By Esther Minskoff

Adults with reading disabilities need different types of reading instruction for different purposes. They need the traditional type of reading instruction that is designed to develop skills in areas such as phonics, word identification, and comprehension. However, many adults with reading disabilities have deficits in generalizing such reading skills to specific tasks, especially in the workplace. Therefore, they need instruction in workplace literacy or occupational literacy: the ability to read work-related materials. The use of contextual instruction, where instruction is delivered at the job and/or uses the actual materials of the job, helps to compensate for deficits in generalization. In addition, individuals with learning disabilities are frequently more motivated to read work-related materials because they see immediate benefits.

Most jobs require increasingly higher reading skills; therefore, many individuals with reading disabilities must be trained to master such skills if they are to get jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency and personal satisfaction. More and more jobs also require computer literacy skills. In addition to mastering the use of the computer and various software programs, individuals with reading disabilities must be helped to master the high-level reading tasks of such programs.

The reading materials and processes in the work setting are different from those in the school setting. School emphasizes ***reading to learn*** skills which involve retention of information. Work primarily requires ***reading to do*** skills to accomplish tasks. Instructing individuals on ***reading to do*** tasks should emphasize the individual's prior fund of knowledge concerning the performance of the tasks. For example, if nurses are reading directions concerning the use of a new thermometer, they must draw on their prior knowledge of the use of the thermometer. In addition, new terminology related to ***reading to do*** tasks must be explicitly taught. For example, if an individual in a vocational training program in the health field does not understand the meaning of the word "supine," the meaning must be taught first and then reading of this word should follow.

I have been associated with the TRAC Project at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in Fisherville, Virginia

When providing workplace literacy instruction for adults with reading disabilities, the following guidelines may be effective:

✓Identify the literacy tasks required for the specific job the individual is being trained for or currently holds.

✓Involve the student in the process of identifying his/her needs in meeting the reading demands of the vocational training program and/or job.

✓Use the individual's prior knowledge concerning performance of job tasks as the basis of instruction.

✓Identify vocabulary pertinent to ***reading to do*** tasks, and assess the individual's knowledge of the meaning of the vocabulary. If the word is not understood, teach its meaning first and then teach how to read the word.

✓Use the actual reading materials that are used in the vocational training program or on the job.

✓Have the individual apply all reading skills already mastered (e.g., phonics, contextual clues) to the workplace reading task.

for a number of years. This project was designed to develop occupational literacy skills in 26 vocational education programs in which high school students with learning disabilities are frequently enrolled. The reading requirements of the vocational education textbook, class assignments, and the workplace reading tasks were analyzed to create assessment and instructional materials for each area. The TRAC Program was designed for use by special education teachers who provide support to high school students with learning disabilities; the students are enrolled in mainstream vocational education programs so as to facilitate their transition to the world of work. The approach should be used to develop assessment and instructional programs for workplace literacy skills for adults with learning disabilities.

School emphasizes ***reading to learn*** skills, which involve retention of information. Work primarily requires ***reading to do*** skills to accomplish tasks.

Workplace literacy must be developed in both post-secondary vocational training and work site literacy programs. The reading demands in most vocational programs are more difficult than the reading demands of the corresponding jobs. Training programs require textbook reading and tests as well as ***reading to do*** tasks for job performance; on-the-job literacy programs require ***reading to do*** tasks.

Workplace literacy programs can be developed in vocational training, Adult Basic Education (ABE), community literacy, and on-site business/industry literacy programs. Workplace literacy skills are certainly not the only skills adults with reading disabilities need to develop, but they are the most important for survival. Increasing an individual's workplace literacy skills results in the individual not only being able to meet the ever-increasing literacy demands of jobs that he or she already has, but also to climb the job ladder to higher level positions that require more advanced reading skills.◆

Esther H. Minskoff, Ph.D., is Professor of Special Education at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and is currently president-elect of the Division of Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Joint Efforts in Training

By Janie Carter and Patti Maher

What do you do when intelligent, skilled workers encounter learning difficulties in a workplace education program? I was confronted with this situation as an ABE/GED instructor for Forest Echoes Technical Institute's Joint Efforts in Training (JET), an on-site workplace education program at the Georgia-Pacific Operations in Crossett, Arkansas. As we prepared new-hire and transfer workers for Georgia-Pacific's academic evaluations, skilled workers who were encountering learning difficulties began to surface. In some instances, lives and careers were being impacted. We dealt with these workers as best we could, but many kept hitting brick walls with their learning experiences. We felt helpless.

Rather than give up on these workers who had valuable skills that were integral to the company's operations, we thought a staff training project for dealing with learning disabilities in workplace education programs

should be pursued. A steering committee met, and a few months later we developed a pilot project entitled "Learning Disabilities in the Workplace." The identified goals of the program were to assist instructors involved in workplace education programs to recognize learning disabilities, attentional disorders, and other special learning needs, and to identify accommodations so that learners could reach proficiency requirements within a company.

Initially, 15 adult educators from Arkansas attended the training session where they were introduced to an informal assessment instrument developed by Nancie Payne called the "Learning Inventory" and the Jordan Oral Screening Test (JOST), developed by Dr. Dale Jordan. Additionally, a number of adult education administrators, vocational education school directors, and rehabilitation counselors received an introduction to the issue of learning disabilities in adults and to the pilot project. After 12 months of operation, the pilot project was evaluated, and the committee recommended the expansion of staff training to a full three-year project. During 1995, additional workplace educators will be trained in the implementation of the "Learning Inventory." Also, during 1995, sustaining sessions for the pilot project participants will be conducted for continued consultation and training in an instrument designed for ABE literacy students. Concurrently, state trainers will be trained by participants of the pilot projects so that, at the end of 1996, training will be self-supporting.

A Plan for Working with Learning Disabilities in Workplace Literacy Programs

Step 1: Identify the individual as possibly having a learning disabilities.

Step 2: Approach the individual in a private setting and say something like, "You know, I've noticed that you are having difficulty in the area of ___. I think it might help if I knew more about the way you learned best. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions some time so I can determine the best way to work with you?"

Step 3: Administer the "Learning Inventory."

Step 4: Administer the JOST. Also have the individual write his or her name, the alphabet, the days of the week, and the months of the year.

Step 5: Evaluate all the information gathered up to this point. This is where you nail down the individual's learning strengths.

Step 6: Discuss the results with the student. Go over possible accommodation strategies, need for further evaluation of vision/hearing, and counseling. Refer the individual to services he or she needs, and encourage the individual to follow through.

Step 7: Follow through. Arrange for the individual's formal evaluation, begin implementing accommodations in class, and make adjustments as needed.

Patti Maher was a participant in the pilot program. Currently, she is in training to be a state trainer. When asked to reflect on her experiences in the program, she provided the following comments:

The actual training stressed that the pilot participants must be trained to be learning disabilities (LD) observers, not diagnosticians. Considering that there are more than 30 million employees with LD in workplaces across the nation, we need to ensure that the most effective forms of instruction are available for all students of an education center, even those with learning disabilities. Therefore, instructors need to be trained to informally evaluate a student with LD so that the instructor can identify and implement accommodations for that student's instruction. The accommodations should not only increase the rate of learning, but also the ability to use, retain, and access the information that is learned.

In this project, the informal evaluation of a student with LD is begun by administering the "Learning Inventory." This is a series of questions discussed in

a private interview format. The questions cover four broad areas: personal background, educational history, behaviors and manifestations, and mandatory or preferred modalities. The secondary information addressed by the questions includes: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, oral communications, reading, writing, spelling, calculations, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity. Many times the "Learning Inventory" is followed up with other tools such as the JOST.

In my opinion, this inventory is one of my most valuable teaching tools. In just about an hour, I gain a wealth of information regarding the learning styles and personal/ educational background of the student. In one case, I gave the inventory to an ABE student who had been coming to class off and on for three years. During the course of the interview, I learned that I had to use a mulitsensory auditory/visual teaching approach for this student. Unlike most of my other students, I learned that this student did not respond well to tactile teaching approaches. In addition to adjusting my teaching style to meet this student's auditory and visual learning strengths, I also learned that I had to make accommodations for his physical disabilities. As a result of the inventory, I learned that this student was deaf in one ear. Now, I always teach from the student's "good ear" side. I also learned that after five minutes of reading his vision blurred and he could not make out the letters on a page. I recommended that the student have a thorough eye exam, which he did; he now sports a new pair of glasses. For the first time, this student is making significant progress in class. He is now able to function more effectively on his job. Needless to say, his self-esteem is skyrocketing.

Without reasonable accommodations, the person with learning disabilities is often presented with innumerable barriers. The inability to adequately demonstrate skills results in poor performance evaluations, stress-related health problems, and job instability, not to mention the unrealized productivity standards for the employer. Without appropriate education and training, there are few opportunities that allow advancement.

The JET project is unique, because it originated in workplace education. The impact of this project is significant. It developed objective and logical methods to train educators in assisting workers with special learning needs who are involved in workplace education programs. These methods can be replicated in any industry-based program within any state. By addressing special learning needs from a proactive approach, industries could expect to expend fewer training dollars, better utilize education and training staff, and create a more productive workforce.

The secondary benefits include stronger communities as employees understand their learning differences and are able to share those differences with their families and their children's schools. This impact will be even more significant if vocational, technical, and adult education/literacy programs embrace a unified effort designed to meet each delivery system's needs. I've learned so much about how differently each individual learns and how important it is to enlighten us and our students so that we all can create our own learning power. Through this project I have witnessed lives blossoming and changing direction where once frustration and despair with learning had otherwise stymied good, capable people.◆

Janie Carter is the Coordinator of the Arkansas Adult Education/Literacy Resource Center. Patti Maher is a GED and workplace literacy instructor. She works at the Northwest Technical Institute in Springdale, Arkansas and at the Fayetteville Adult Education Program in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

The Connection Between Learning Culture and Learning Disabilities

By Nancie Payne

Inherent within every work environment is a unique learning culture. Learning culture can be described as those ways in which the job-site generally communicates and expects employees to receive, interact, and respond to specific job expectations. Since each particular workplace environment is unique, encompassing everything from a small independent office setting, a manufacturing setting, to a division within a larger company, the learning culture which each reflects is unique. In fact, learning cultures are as diverse as the people who function within them.

The uniqueness of any given work environment and learning culture can significantly affect an employee's performance, especially if that employee has a learning disability.

Assuming employees with learning disabilities are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the particular job for which they have been hired, it follows that success within the work environment will in large part be directly related to the similarities between the employees' processing styles and the learning culture. However, without accommodations individuals with learning disabilities are often unable to adapt their processing style to fit the learning culture. Thus, it is important for individuals with learning disabilities to seek work environments that closely align with their particular style.

Before this can be done, individuals with learning disabilities need to know their processing or learning style. Through evaluation methods the individual's learning style can be determined, as well as different types of working environments to which that style can be matched. The key is to ensure that employees (1) understand how they process and respond most effectively to information and (2) can associate that unique style with the learning culture of various workplace environments.

To evaluate an individual's processing style, personal cognitive, conceptual, and affective characteristics should be identified. *Cognitive characteristics* describe the methods by which a person perceives, finds out, or gets information (defined in terms of abstract/concrete; dependent/ independent; sensing/intuition; visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic). *Conceptual characteristics* include ways in which the person thinks, forms ideas, processes and puts information into memory (methods include introversion/ extroversion; reflective/active; random/ sequential). *Affective characteristics* involve feelings, emotional responses, motivations, values, and judgements. The way an individual feels or thinks and, thus, the effects the environment has on that individual should be carefully assessed.

Once the individual's processing style has been identified, the next step is to identify workplace cultures that best match this style. A good strategy is for the individual to pursue information interviews and on-site visits. In order to get exposure to various learning cultures, information interviews should be conducted with prospective supervisors. This approach should result in a strong match between one's personal processing style and the workplace learning culture. The more these two elements are aligned, the fewer accommodations are necessary and the greater the opportunity for success.◆

Nancie Payne is President of Payne & Associates, a firm that specializes in consultation, development, and implementation of comprehensive services for youth and adults with special learning needs.

Tips for Workplace Success for the Adult Learner

✓Know your learning style and how that style matches up with different jobs.

✓Apply for job positions for which you have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform at the level required by the employer.

✓Know your strengths and be able to describe them; present yourself as a capable individual who can competently perform the job.

✓Pursue informational interviews and on-site visits in order to get a feel for different workplace environments and job tasks.

✓Request and review job descriptions before applying for positions.

✓Disclose learning disabilities to the personnel/human resources staff person after the job has been offered; do so in person (never over the phone) after you have accepted the job. Then make arrangements to speak with the job-site supervisor if and when necessary.

✓At the time of disclosure, describe the strategies you have developed that assist you in performing job requirements and state workplace accommodations that can help you.

✓Ask the supervisor for written job performance expectations – what you will be required to learn and apply within the job setting.

✓Ask for specific time lines for performance evaluations; be sure you understand when and how your performance will be evaluated.

✓Know when and how to request appropriate accommodations.

✓If accommodations are provided, establish an evaluation process through which you and your supervisor can review the effectiveness of the accommodations and the possibility of adjustments.

✓Do not use your learning disability as an excuse for not doing your best.

The above suggestions are from Nancie Payne, *consultant to employers and employees for workplace accommodations.*

Moving Toward Better Skills Development in Entry-Level Positions

By Robin J. Koch and Nancie Payne

Literacy and adult basic education programs are often challenged with assisting individuals with learning disabilities to acquire basic skills sufficient to enter the workplace. A quick look at the curriculum in many programs suggests that the skills of reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics are perceived as critical to enter the workplace. While these fundamental skills are most definitely essential, research continues to present other, equally relevant critical skills.

In a study addressing training challenges in the workplace, employers from fast food and variety retail industries were interviewed to identify essential skills and problem areas in entry-level positions. The information gathered in this study will, in part, lay the groundwork for the development of additional curricula in literacy and adult basic education programs as well as effective workplace accommodations for employees with learning disabilities who choose to enter these or similar positions.

The essential skills for entry-level crew members, as identified by the fast food employers, included:

- good communication skills
- good manners
- friendliness
- patience
- speed and efficiency
- basic math skills
- accurate handling of money
- knowledge of menu items
- good team work
- flexibility

Employers in the fast food industry uniformly identified the primary entry level position in their companies as crew member. These employees are generally responsible for working the front counter areas, cashiering, helping customers, taking orders, filling drinks, packaging food, basic food preparation, cleaning dining areas and dishes, and taking orders at the drive-through window.

The major problem areas in training and performance in the entry-level positions in this industry included: difficulty understanding exactly what customers want; forgetting to do all or parts of their job when helping customers; difficulty dealing with the public and angry customers; inability to take more than one order at a time; lack of speed; cash shortages; using the wrong food condiment on sandwiches; and lack of accuracy and common sense.

The primary entry-level position described by employers from the variety retail industry was that of a cashier. A cashier's responsibilities might include various duties: ringing up merchandise, providing pleasant and thorough customer service, helping stock merchandise, returning unpurchased and returned merchandise to appropriate locations in the store, following procedures when handling refunds/charges/voids, and creating merchandise displays.

The major problem areas in training and performance in these entry-level positions involved: lack of speed and accuracy when serving customers; inability to do things on their own without being told; lack of confidence; completing forms improperly (e.g., waste control forms); improper cash handling which caused overages and shortages; inability to count money correctly and balance tills; inappropriate merchandising; and failing to remember new programs being sponsored.

The essential skills for cashiers, as identified by variety retail employers, included:

- good interpersonal skills
- positive attitude
- willingness to work
- dependability
- good writing skills
- good basic math skills
- speed in using a ten-key machine
- common sense
- good memory
- sense of urgency in completing work
- the ability to do multiple tasks and follow directions

While some of the essential skills and problem areas relate more to job training, there is much to glean from this study and others like it. If we believe people with learning disabilities and literacy needs have difficulty learning and transferring skills to the workplace, then certainly we would agree that those skills cited in this study are among those that should be taught as part of literacy and adult basic education curricula. In addition to addressing, reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, curricula need to include interpersonal skills, group/team work skills, organization and self-management skills, problem solving and critical thinking skills, and, most of all, conversation skills, social skills, and listening skills.◆

Robin Koch is Human Resource Manager for a private employer. She has an MA in Social Sciences with an emphasis in organizational systems, both from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington.
Nancie Payne is President of Payne & Associates.

The Missing LINK: Multisensory/Multimotor Training for Workforce Literacy

By Chris McFadden

READ/San Diego is a library-based, volunteer, literacy program sponsored by the City of San Diego, California and the San Diego Public Library. Many of the project's 700 volunteers are enrolled in workforce literacy programs sponsored by the joint efforts of READ/San Diego and partner companies. Key elements that contribute to the success of these workforce literacy programs include the following: (1) employees are tutored by other employees within the workplace setting; (2) all tutors complete a preservice program, as well as participate in **ongoing** inservice training; and (3) the learning needs of adults with learning disabilities are firmly in focus.

In response to the need for helping the large numbers of adults with learning disabilities that enroll in READ/San Diego, a training program was implemented in 1992 to train volunteer tutors in specialized teaching methods. An intensive training course in multisensory/multimotor instructional techniques was designed specifically for use by volunteer tutors. The goal of the training program was to provide tutors with a variety of techniques to help adult learners process and retain information. An important component of this training program is the **ongoing** inservice training requirement expected of the volunteers.

While workplace literacy programs are not the ideal setting for teaching adults with learning disabilities, such programs can be effective if employees are taught by tutors who are trained in multisensory/multimotor techniques and if basic skills training is the major focus. Examples of highly successful workplace literacy programs include those established at Sea World and Solar Turbines. But beyond the strong commitment that these companies have made to setting up and maintaining a workforce literacy program, what else was necessary to ensure the success of the partnership program?

The ultimate success of such programs is based on the participants' reaching their goals. When this happens both the employee and the employer get what they want. This can occur only if learners stay in the program long enough to benefit (reaching long-term goals), at the same time getting what they need immediately – a "quick fix" in order to survive in the workplace (satisfying short-terms goals).

Employees who are marginally literate, displaying rudimentary writing and spelling skills, need systematic, cumulative training because they do not understand language structure. They need to strive for long-term goals. But learners tend not to stay in a course long enough to reach such goals unless their immediate needs are satisfied. They usually expect immediate help with what is most critical to them **at the moment**. And almost always, the most immediate need is writing skills. These learners need to be given highly structured, multisensory, guided writing instruction in sentence structure so they can communicate at work.

What else is a crucial need? Often it is job-specific vocabulary for both reading and writing. This, again, entails accomplishing short-term/immediate goals.

Key elements that contribute to the success of these workforce literacy programs include:

1. employees are tutored by other employees within the workplace setting;
2. all tutors complete a preservice program, as well as participate in **ongoing** inservice training; and
3. the learning needs of adults with learning disabilities are firmly in focus.

Meeting these immediate needs provides learners with immediate satisfaction, but because the underlying problem has not been addressed, they have only a fragmented knowledge of language. Nevertheless, when learners are successful with short-term goals and have been taught in a way that suits their needs, they realize that in the long run their problem is not amenable to a "quick fix." This is the point at which they become motivated to stay in the program to acquire more lasting skills that will help them become independent. Everyone benefits – the employee, the employer, and society as a whole. Indeed, the 1994 California Adult Literacy Survey indicated that 60% of Californians support the view that employers have an obligation to provide literacy education to employees.◆

Chris McFadden is the founding director of READ/San Diego. He is past chair of the San Diego County Literacy Network and has been a board member of the San Diego Council on Literacy since 1989.

You Can't "Fake It" in the Real World

By Chris Lee

In elementary school, when most kids were learning to read and write, I was learning to fake it. I faked it to hide the fact that, because of a learning disability, I could not read or write. I lied to my friends and teachers and skipped classes where I might be publicly embarrassed. Although I managed to get through school, it wasn't long before I was hit with the reality that faking it wouldn't work in the "real world." I couldn't fake it when I needed to write checks. I couldn't fake it when I took the test to get a driver's licence. I couldn't fake it when I wanted to apply for jobs and the potential employer demanded that I fill out the application on the spot. As much as I tried to hide (from) my learning disabilities, it became apparent that I was going to have to deal with having learning disabilities in every aspect of my life – academically, socially, and in the workplace.

Fortunately, while in college, I learned more about my learning disability. I learned the importance of self-advocacy, and I confided in my teachers about my learning disability. I began speaking on panels to area high school kids in special education classes about my experiences. This began my career as an activist for individuals with learning disabilities.

The more comfortable I became with my learning disabilities, the more I wanted to help others. During my senior year in college, I wrote a book entitled *Faking It,* with Rosemary Jackson, about my frustrations growing up with a learning disability. I hoped *Faking It* would help people – parents and teachers, as well as creative learners – understand what it is truly like to be a student with learning disabilities.

After I graduated from college, I had a rough transition period into the real world. I had a lot of restless energy, and it was really difficult for me to stay focused. Once I got out of the academic setting, I thought everything would be great and I wouldn't have to deal with my learning disabilities anymore. The real world introduced me to a different aspect of my learning disabilities. I now had additional responsibilities like writing checks, filling out tax forms, and writing shopping lists. Without the support system that I had when I was in college, I had to develop my own accommodations to enhance these life skills.

My first job after college was with an insurance software company. I was immediately confronted with difficulties on the job because of my learning disabilities. Without a support system, I tried to develop my own accommodations and modifications for the workplace.

In my next job, I told my employer that I had a learning disability and she was helpful with accommodations and modifications. But even with this assistance, I was not successful in this job. It required a lot of accuracy with the computer and excellent organizational skills. It was an awful experience.

My book was about to be published, and I began putting energy into publishing and promoting *Faking It.* Around this time, I began thinking about a career in education. I had some reservations about becoming a teacher, but I knew I wanted to do something relating to learning disabilities and education. When I learned about an opening with the Learning Disability Research and Training Center, I knew that this was the type of career move that I was looking for.

Currently, I am the Director of Training for the Learning Disability Research and Training Center, a national grant funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. In this position, I oversee all training activities. We have inservice training dealing with adults with LD. The Center focuses on assessment, intervention, interagency collaboration, and employment issues.

While I enjoy my job as Director of Training, I am often frustrated by some of the office tasks that are a part of my position. For example, because I am in a supervisory position; it is my responsibility to disseminate information to employees. But how can I get the information out to employees when I am not understanding it myself? Even though I am in the perfect work environment to disclose such concerns to my boss, I am hesitant to do so. I always feel like I'm complaining and asking for too much – playing like a victim. However, I have learned that, when I do not ask for appropriate accommodations and modifications, I am acting like a victim.

> Once I got out of the academic setting, I thought everything would be great and I wouldn't have to deal with my learning disabilities anymore. The real world introduced me to a different aspect of my learning disabilities.

Day-to-Day Activities

Some of the day-to-day activities that cause an individual with learning disabilities difficulty in the workplace also create problems in social settings. For example, in the workplace, one difficulty I have is writing down information such as names, addresses, and phone numbers given to me over the phone. This type of information always gets jumbled on the page. In social situations, a major difficulty I have is reading simple day-to-day things such as people's names. It is almost impossible for me to take down and then read phone messages. I find myself calling and pretending that I can't read the writing on the message, because the handwriting is so bad or just reading the first name and hopefully not being asked for the last name.

I also deal with administrative issues. This is an area in which I have been especially frustrated during the last year. I have been affected in several areas: anywhere from trying to keep up with reading various memos and articles that are routed to my desk, to having to develop office policies and procedures which are critiqued over and over again. I can't tell you the number of times I have had to rewrite our office policies and procedures. I find that a sense of humor helps me deal with these frustrations.

On the issue of being able to keep up with office reading, I have come to the conclusion that this is an impossible task. Trust me; I do not like to use these words. Even though I am able to have a volunteer read some of the articles for me on tape, it still takes me too long to read and process all this information. I find myself not picking up important office meeting dates and training opportunities.

Due to the fact that my job involves ongoing training activities that place me in front of the public, I am constantly having to create new ways of getting around embarrassing situations. For instance, reading my own overheads out loud to the audience has always been very stressful. Even though I am usually the one who develops my own overheads, whether it is finding a simple quotation or putting down a phrase that explains an idea, it is always difficult for me to read the overhead. I am never sure whether I am leaving a word out of, or putting one into, the sentence. I'm thankful that I am able to pick up on nonverbal cues from the audience. Usually all it takes is a puzzled or confused look from an audience member to get the hint that I need to read the overhead again, hoping to get it right the second time around.

Creative Techniques in the Workplace

The following is a list of some of the techniques that I use in the workplace:

✓A tape recorder plugged into the phone that records information so I don't have to write it down.

✓Colored highlighters to distinguish words that look alike when reading.

✓Colored transparencies that can be placed over the text.

✓Assistive technology designed for reading.

✓Character Recognition Software like *Open Book* and *Xerox Bookwise*.

✓A voice organizer that I use to record important facts, figures, memos, phone numbers, and reminders.

✓When having to read a passage out loud, I use the technique of VERTICAL READING. This process entails taking the paragraph and rewriting it from the top to the bottom of the page and not from left to right. This forces me to read the text in a vertical manner, not a horizontal one. For some reason, switching my reading from vertical to horizontal makes the passage more fluid when I read it in front of the audience.

For example, this is my name in vertical reading:

C L
H E
R E
I
S

This is where I am today. I have grown stronger and more confident. I have more ambition. Yet, I am still scared – scared of the situations that lie ahead of me. I guess I won't ever stop being scared. As long as I face things head-on, there will always be a chance I might fail. I realize now that everyone, in every walk of life, faces the chance of failing. But being in the race is better than being on the sidelines. I could fall, but if I do, I'll make sure to get up and finish.◆

Chris Lee is Director of Training for the Learning Disabilities Research and Training Center. He is also an author, a public speaker, and a graduate of the University of Georgia.

Brenda's TIPs on Workplace Literacy

By Brenda Sweigart-Guist, as told to Charles W. Washington

Brenda Sweigart-Guist says, "I never really had a chance to smile when I was young, but now I do, and I got a lot of smiling to catch up on." One thing Brenda has to smile about is her success in improving her reading and math skills through the Tyson's Improvement Program (TIP). TIP is the workplace literacy program at Tyson's Mexican Original East Plant in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Begun three years ago as a pilot program in 12 plants, TIP has expanded to most of Tyson's plants. Workers are given the option of enrolling in ABE classes, GED classes, or computer literacy classes. Tyson's commitment to its program is evident in the $100 bonuses offered to students who complete 48 hours or six months of classes and improve their math and reading skills by two grade levels. Tyson's offers an additional bonus for earning the GED.

Brenda has perfect attendance in the GED program. She said, "I really like going to class, because I really like to learn. In school, I had regular classes and two special education classes. I didn't like school too much then because I didn't learn anything." Brenda dropped out of school when she was in the eighth grade. She describes herself as one of those "unfortunate people who had to take care of the family, because both

parents had to work." As the only girl in a family of six kids, Brenda thought her time would be better spent helping out at home rather than in a classroom where she wasn't learning anything.

Brenda found out that she had learning disabilities when she was six or seven. "I had a head injury, and when they did a brain scan it was discovered that I have a slight brain damage problem," she said. More testing resulted in Brenda being diagnosed as having learning disabilities.

Although Brenda dropped out of school in the eighth grade, she kept her mind on learning. "I always wanted to get my GED. When I saw the memo about TIP, I knew that this program would help me reach my goal." TIP is ideal for Brenda because the small classes (5-8 students) allow her to have individual attention from the instructor. Brenda credits her TIP instructor with helping her with some of her personal issues as well as improving her math and reading skills.

In addition, TIP has helped Brenda with workplace issues. She has learned to fill out forms and applications, and she has improved her social skills and ability to relate to her coworkers. Brenda has also learned the importance of self-advocacy. She says, "If I am having a problem with something, I know I have to tell somebody and ask for accommodations. Normally, I don't have too many problems, but I do know who to get help from if I need it."

Brenda's enthusiasm about the program is contagious. She entered the program knowing how to add and subtract. She was determined to learn to multiply. She practiced her multiplication tables on the line and annoyed some of her coworkers with her chatter. Soon, her enthusiasm spread, and her co-workers began to help her practice her multiplication drills. Two weeks after she enrolled in the program, Brenda knew all of her multiplication tables.

Brenda said she is learning more now, through TIP, than she ever has. "I'm getting up there in age (she's 34 years old) and I want to better myself. Hopefully I can go to college one day," she said. Every success gets Brenda closer to her goals.◆

Brenda Sweigart-Guist works in the packing department at Tyson's Mexican Original East Plant in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Charles W. Washington is a Research Associate at the National ALLD Center in Washington, DC.

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Workplace Highlights

Contributors to this workplace literacy issue of LINKAGES included: a professor examining issues in adult and workplace literacy; a professor in special education focusing on learning disabilities; a coordinator of a state literacy resource center; several local program directors; a private consultant on issues relating to learning disabilities; a human resource manager; and several adults with learning disabilities; one of whom is a student in a workplace literacy program. The following issues were highlighted:

- Literacy skills are now required of the vast majority of workers in every job category.
- Workers with learning disabilities may be ill prepared for the ongoing education necessary to get and keep jobs.
- Most jobs are requiring higher literacy skills.
- Individuals with learning disabilities need to be better trained if they are to get and keep jobs that will allow economic self sufficiency.
- Adults with learning disabilities need to learn how to generalize classroom skills, such as reading, to specific tasks in the workplace.
- An essential element of successful workplace literacy programs includes a focus on the learning needs of adults with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities.
- A firm knowledge of one's strength's and weaknesses increases the likelihood that the worker will be able to develop skills, be well matched to a job, and require fewer accommodations.
- Adults with learning disabilities in the workplace who are aware of the accommodations and modifications they need and are able to disclose this information, increase their opportunities for success in the workplace.

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Organizations

Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy
204 Calder Way
Suite 209
University Park, PA 16801-4756
814/863-3777

The Institute provides work in literacy research, development, and dissemination. The Institute projects have addressed the following issues in adult literacy: 1) computer-based instruction, 2) workplace literacy, 3) special needs populations, and 4) customized materials development.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
West Virginia University
809 Allen Hall
P.O. Box 6123
Morgantown, WV 26506
800/526-7234

JAN, established by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, is an information and consulting service providing individualized accommodation solutions to inquiries about enabling people with disabilities to work. JAN's purpose is to make it possible for employers and others to share information about job accommodations

National Alliance of Business (NAB)
1201 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005-3917
202/289-2888

The NAB is a nonprofit, business-led organization dedicated to building an internationally competitive American workforce. The Alliance establishes partnerships between the corporate world, government, local community leaders and educators to address employment, training, and work force quality issues. Services of the Alliance include technical assistance, training, advocacy and information services.

National Workforce Assistance Collaborative
National Alliance for Business
1201 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005-3917
202/289-2915

The Collaborative's mission is to help small and mid-sized businesses adopt high performance work practices, become more competitive, and to create and retain high-skill, high-wage jobs for workers. It is also set up to strengthen service and information providers so they can better meet the needs of these businesses in four areas: employee training, labor-management relations, workplace literacy, and work restructuring. The Collaborative has a listserv forum on Internet. To subscribe to NWAC-L send an e-mail message to: LISTSERV@PSUVM.PSU.EDU, leave the subject line blank, and the body of the message must contain subscribe NWCA-L your first name your last name.

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
1331 F Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004
202/376-6200; 202/376-6205 (TT)

This Committee is an independent federal agency. The Committee's mission is to facilitate the communication, coordination, and promotion of public and private efforts to empower Americans with disabilities through employment. The Committee provides information, training, and technical assistance to business leaders, organized labor, rehabilitation and service providers, advocacy organizations, families and individuals with disabilities.

United Way of America
701 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-2045
703/683-7100

United Way implemented an Education and Literacy Initiative in 1989. Supported activities range from basic adult education, student tutoring, and job training, to organizing a literacy coalition for case management and support services, family programming involving parents and their children, and establishing workplace literacy programs.

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The National ALLD Center

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The Academy for Educational Development

The Academy for Educational Development, founded in 1961, is an independent, nonprofit service organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. Under contracts and grants, the Academy operates programs in collaboration with policy leaders; nongovernmental and community-based organizations; governmental agencies; international multilateral and bilateral funders; and schools, colleges, and universities. In partnership with its clients, the Academy seeks to meet today's social, economic, and environmental challenges through education and human resource development; to apply state-of-the art education, training, research, technology, management, behavioral analysis, and social marketing techniques to solve problems; and to improve knowledge and skills throughout the world as the most effective means for stimulating growth, reducing poverty, and promoting democratic and humanitarian ideals.

The National ALLD Center

The National ALLD Center is funded by the National Institute for Literacy under a cooperative agreement with the Academy for Educational Development in collaboration with the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities. The Center promotes awareness about the relationship between adult literacy and learning disabilities. Through its national information exchange network and technical assistance training, the National ALLD Center helps literacy practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

The National Institute for Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal agency jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The Institute's primary goals are to provide leadership and coordination for literacy activities across federal agencies and among states, the knowledge base for literacy, and create a national communications system that links the literacy field nationwide.

AED

Academy for Educational Development

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