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ABSTRACT
        This volume consists of four issues that present best
practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research
is used. Issue 1(A) on adult multiple intelligences has seven articles: "MI
(Multiple Intelligences), the GED (General Educational Development), and Me
(Martha Jean); "Understanding Multiple Intelligences: The Theory behind the
Practice" (Juile Viens); "'I Can't Learn This!' An MI Route around
Resistance" (Wendy Quinones, Betsy Cornwell); "Adding a Dimension to Career
Counseling" (Jean Mantzaris); "Emerging Themes in Adult Multiple
Intelligences Research" (Silja Kallenbach); "Putting Theory into Practice"
(Terri Coustan, Lezlie Rocka); and "Multiple Assessments for MI" (Meg
Costanzo, Diane Paxton). Seven articles in Issue 2(B) on accountability are
as follows: "Learners First" (Shirley Wright); "Performance Accountability:
For What? To Whom? And How?" (Juliet Merrifield); "Nationwide Accountability:
The National Reporting System" (Barbara Garner); "Guiding Improvement:
Pennsylvania's Odyssey" (Cheryl Keenan); "Accountability in a Multi-Faceted
Program" (Jan Goethel, Carol Gabler); "Translating Vision into Reality"
(Agnes Precure); and "Voices of Learners: Learner-Identified Impacts Study"
(Barbara Garner). Issue 3(C) has seven articles on standards-based education:
"A User's Guide to Standards-Based Educational Reform: From Theory to
Practice" (Regie Stites); "Articulating Learning with Equipped for the Future
(EFF) Standards" (Jane J. Meyer); "Equipped for the Future: The Evolution of
a Standards-Based Approach to System Reform" (Sondra Stein); "Confessions of
a Reluctant Standard-Bearer" (Jim Carabell); "Teaching to the Math Standards
with Adult Learners" (Esther D. Leonelli); "Standards at the State Level"
(Barbara Garner); and "Documenting Outcomes." Eight articles in Issue 4(D) on
writing instruction include the following: "The Power of Writing, the Writing
of Power" (Elsa Auerbach); "How I Wish I Was Taught to Write" (Thanh Bui);
"Using Research on Writing" (Marilyn K. Gillespie); "What's Right Rather than
Wrong" (Rebecca Garland); "Why I Like Writing in My Journal" (Chhoeup
Chhoeun); "The Assumptions We Make: How Learners and Teachers Understand
Writing" (Mary Russell); "Seven Easy Pieces: Writing Activities for Beginning

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Learners" (Shirley Brod); and "Home Literacy Practices." (YLB)

Focus on Basics
Volume 3
1999

Focus on Basics

ADULT MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

MI, the GED, and Me

by Martha Jean

*P*erhaps you've been in the same place I was in 1996. I was a teacher, preparing students to take the tests of General Educational Development (GED). We spent much of class time using GED workbooks. Many of my students, most of whom were homeless, had great difficulty giving long-term attention to academic subjects and retaining the information being taught. Many students with these problems did not stay in the program long enough to reach their GED goals, yet I could see that these learners had abilities that made the world a better place. Then, I heard about the NCSALL's Adult Multiple Intelligences (MI) Project. I wanted to join the project because I had read a little bit about MI and was anxious to give some time and thought to how it could serve my learners.

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory fit my observations of the students in my classrooms. MI theory proposes that there are eight — and maybe more — identifiable intelligences. The learners in my classrooms were

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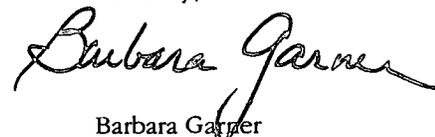
Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

One of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's (NCSALL) biggest challenges is applying research findings — ours and those of other researchers — to practice, testing them in practice, and disseminating encouraging approaches that arise from this process. We have established a number of mechanisms to do this. In *Focus on Basics*, we publish research findings in a way that we hope is accessible to teachers, and seek out teachers to write about their experiences applying research to practice. The NCSALL Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network supports representative teachers from 13 states. The teachers choose NCSALL research studies, design teacher research projects to test the implications of the study findings in their own classrooms, and carry out the projects. We hope to publish their findings in *Focus on Basics* in the coming years.

The NCSALL Adult Multiple Intelligences Study connected research to practice from its inception. A teacher research study, the purpose was to explore the application of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory to the adult basic education classroom. Multiple intelligence (MI) theory, described in an article by Julie Viens that starts on page 6, posits that people have eight, or perhaps nine, kinds of intelligence. Over the past decade, hundreds of K-12 teachers have applied this theory with great success in their classrooms, but little application has been made in adult basic education.

After learning about the theory, 10 teachers designed research projects they carried out in their classrooms over the course of two years. While the analysis of the work of the entire group is not yet finished, researcher Silja Kallenbach feels it is not premature to share six themes that have been emerging from this work in a story that begins on page 16. Many of the teachers' findings are presented in this issue, too. In the cover story, Martha Jean is candid about the false steps she took turning a theory into practice; her end result, however, convinced her the effort was worth it. On page 13, Jean Mantzaris explains how she changed her view of career counseling as a result of her experience with MI. On page 10, Wendy Quiñones and Betsy Cornwell provide evidence of MI as a promising tool to use when working with capable yet resistant students. Diane Paxton's and Meg Costanzo's story, on page 24, explores their experiences with all kinds of assessment and MI. MI theory meant enhancing rather than abandoning familiar practices, write Lezlie Rocka and Terri Coustan in their article, which begins on page 21.   * * *

NCSALL is also experimenting with an electronic discussion list to see how effective it is as a dissemination tool. The *Focus on Basics* list is a virtual study circle: a place where list members can discuss the ideas and articles published in *Focus on Basics*, ask questions of the authors, and relate them to their experience in classrooms and programs. If you have access to e-mail, please sign on. For information on how to subscribe, turn to page 10, or visit the NCSALL web site, http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner
Editor

smart in many different ways. Gardner defined intelligence as an ability to solve problems or fashion products that are valued in one or more cultures. He acknowledges the two traditionally accepted intelligences, which he calls mathematical/logical and linguistic, but he also theorizes the existence of the interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, and naturalistic intelligences as well. Drawing, fixing cars, singing, resolving conflicts, or composing a poem — skills my students possessed — all fit this model. I wanted to figure out a way for students to use their multiple intelligences to connect productively with GED material.

First Year

In the first year of the AMI project, my teacher research question was whether GED-based, MI-informed activities would help students use their intelligences as learners and GED test-takers. I taught two classes of four to seven students; each class met twice a week for a total of six hours a week. I would use MI activities with one of my two classes, and my usual approaches with the other as a comparison group.

In that first year, I stumbled around a bit trying to figure out how to make an MI-informed lesson that would help GED test takers. I read David Lazear's *Seven Ways of Teaching* and *Seven Ways of Knowing* (1991), Thomas Armstrong's *Seven Kinds of Smart* (1993), and Bruce Campbell's *The Multiple Intelligences Handbook* (1994) to get ideas for my first MI lessons. After initial attempts that had every student trying activities in every intelligence, I realized that requiring work in each domain was not in the spirit of MI. I had to let my

students choose activities. Their choices would probably mirror the intelligences in which they were strongest. I decided to use an MI-informed approach at least one day a week. I started to design "Choose 3" lessons on broad topics, such as math, for example. Each Choose 3 consists of choices based on the eight intelligences: at least one choice for each intelligence. Students picked the three activities they would do alone, with a teammate, or in a group.

I created lessons about home, travel, plants, math review, writing, and angles. I was trying to find topics that could reflect some of the GED subjects in each lesson or a lot of choices from one GED subject. For example, the math review had choices about angles, word problems, and perimeter, area, and volume. Students did do these lessons enthusiastically, but a couple of problems arose. The content of the lessons was too broadly defined: I could not connect the activities to a specific area of the GED for review. Also, the students did not always choose activities that centered on the content that they needed most. I began to address those shortcomings by creating lessons that were more narrowly defined by content. For example, angles from the GED math became the topic of one Choose 3 lesson, and all the activities related to angles. Brainstorming

— a pre-writing skill — became the topic of another Choose 3 lesson. This way, after students completed a Choose 3 lesson, I knew the content had been covered and everyone could move into the workbook for review. I also found that the Choose 3 lessons could be used to review material already taught or to introduce a new topic.

Tracking Progress

I kept track of learners' progress with student daily logs that asked what materials they had completed and how they had scored on GED

CHOOSE 3 LESSON
Angles

1. In 2-5 minutes list as many angles as you see (inside or outside).
   Make a graph showing each type you found.
   Which angle is most common? Why?

2. Using your arm and elbow, make five angles.
   Draw those angles and write approximate measures for each.
   Are there any kinds of angles that cannot be made with an elbow?

3. Discuss with someone and write a response:
   A. What does someone mean when they say, "What's your angle?"
   B. If you were on an icy road and did a 360, what happened to you?
   C. Why do you think this ⊥ is called a right angle?

4. Using Play-Doh and/or paper show the angles 180, 135, 90, and 45 degrees.

5. Find or make five triangles. Measure and total the angles in each.

6. Draw, make with Play-Doh, or paint a place you know and mark and measure the angles.

7. Write a poem, song, chant, or rap using some of the following words about angles:
   - figure formed by two lines, intersection, elbow, notch, cusp, fork, flare, obtuse, acute
   - point of view, perspective, viewpoint, outlook, slant, standpoint, position
   - purpose, intention, plan, aim, objective, approach, method. ❖

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workbook material. Students also recorded their views on what was or wasn't working in MI lesson in multiple intelligence logs. I kept a teacher's daily log of my observations. The data show that, from the start, having choices increased students' involvement in class. Fewer students were going home early, taking lots of breaks, or just not doing anything. After I fine-tuned the Choose 3 activities, I observed that, although learners' choices differed, individuals thought they had chosen the easiest activities. Students who said they liked math often chose the logical/mathematical activities and students who said they liked discussions often chose the interpersonal activities, and so on. My conclusion was that learners were using their strongest intelligences to help them understand each GED topic.

By the end of that class year I was seeing something else that I thought was significant. Not only did I observe students using their strongest intelligences to learn GED materials, but I also noticed that students who traditionally drop out — those with learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD) — appeared to be involved in learning in ways that I had never seen before. These students were coming to class and starting the Choose 3s immediately. They were more willing to go into the workbook material that was related to a Choose 3 activities they had done. Compared to the non-MI-informed class, and to the period before I started the MI project, there was less complaining, less protesting: "I don't understand!" and less avoidance of any classroom or workbook activity.

When I looked back at my classroom observations and attendance records, I noticed that, although usually students with ADD attended no more than a few weeks, one of my students with ADD had stayed on from enrollment in December to the end of class in May. Another LD student had attended regularly and gotten her GED, unlike past students with LD who never came to class long enough to be test-ready. A third student had excellent attendance compared to other LD students in a class where I was not trying MI-informed lessons.

Second Year

In the second year of the project, my research question was: How do MI-informed lessons affect the attendance and progress of adult learners with LD or ADD? I also liked the idea that I could develop and refine the Choose 3 lessons to help students pass the GED tests. I planned to add some math activities and also design Choose 3s for science, social studies, grammar, and writing. Examples of the lessons are given on pages 3-5. I was so pleased by the results of MI-informed instruction the first year that I could not deny it to either group of students, so both classes subsequently received MI-informed instruction.

The students had struggled with doing daily and MI logs in year one. In the second year, they talked and I recorded their MI activities, which included their views on the MI lessons. I also kept my teacher's log. I also kept my MI activities log. At intake and during the year, I recorded students' self-disclosures about LD or ADD diagnoses through school or agency testing, and I compiled attendance data.

The second year of the project was especially exciting. I had the whole year to incorporate MI theory

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CHOOSE 3 LESSON
Brainstorming

Take 15-20 minutes to do each of the three you choose.

1. Trace your hand. On the fingers write two or more sentences that express the main ideas you would use for an essay about one of the following:
   A. Why I like hands-on activities.
   B. I am handy at...
   C. I like the way I handled this situation...

2. Pick a graphic from the "GRAPHICS" folder. Color it. Write three things you see in the graphic. Write six sentences about what you think the graphic is about or what it makes you think about.

3. Using one of these — keyboard, magnet words, numbers, shapes, clay, Play-Doh, paint, markers, crayons, or paper pieces — show how you would design a five paragraph essay about "My Favorite Classroom Activity."

4. Draw three rooms from a house you lived in as a child. In each room write two or more sentences about what you remember in that room.

5. Pick three life symbol graphics (see folder) that represent your life right now. On another sheet of paper trace the picture and write two or more sentences in each picture about why you chose that graphic.

6. Choose an animal picture that most reminds you of yourself. Trace the picture, or draw your own image, or make the animal out of clay or Play-Doh. List everything you can think of that describes that animal: how it looks, where it lives, family, food, movement, sounds it makes, how it acts, etc. Put a check next to the things that are like you and explain how they are similar. ❖

into my GED lessons and could be more attentive to how learners with LD and ADD were responding to an MI-informed class.

This is what a class looked like: Students came in and started reading the Choose 3 for that day. Play-Doh, markers, a keyboard, rulers, Legos, pen or pencil, paper, and maybe a partner or a group would be collected to do the chosen activities. Lots of discussion, movement, concentration, debate, questions, and answers filled the room. Learners who finished before the others did related workbook activities. When everyone completed their three activities, the whole group gathered. Everyone identified their choices. Anyone who wanted to, which was usually everyone, shared what they did. I distributed a GED worksheet on the subject, which students read and answered silently. Then they shared, debated, and checked their answers. The remainder of the class and the next class included some writing exercises and lots of workbook practice.

My records showed that students with LD and ADD had excellent attendance. They not only attended more regularly than in other years, but they also were actively participating in the activities while in class. Because they attended more regularly and were doing the workbook reviews more willingly, they made progress toward individual GED tests. This, of course, was also true of all the GED students that year.

Positive Outcomes

By the year's end I had learned much about how MI-informed lessons affect the attendance and progress of adult learners with LD or ADD. In interviews with these students, one student said, "To know something is one thing. To know something and do it is another." He

continued, "I prefer hands-on because it clarifies everything. If it was all workbook, I wouldn't do well 'cause I'd lose interest. I wouldn't stay long 'cause I'd lose interest. If you make work fun, it wouldn't be work."

Another student who had just passed her GED math said about working only in the workbook: "I'd probably still be on the math in the beginning. I concentrate more on those [points to Choose 3 lessons]. My mind drifts if I just do the workbook." She said of the Choose 3, "These give you a different way of looking at problems. You go through the problems more this way. In the workbook you just do the problems, that's it, and with this you can work together."

The words and reactions of students in my MI-informed classes have stayed with me. I believe that choices should always be a part of the learning experience. I know that allowing students to learn through their strengths is successful. I'm beginning to think about how MI will help learners with the GED 2001. It's a never-ending quest.

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About the Author

Martha Jean was born almost 50 years ago. During the second half of those years, as a substitute teacher in the public schools and as an adult education teacher for Community Action, Inc., in Salisbury, MA, she discovered that her best teaching happened when she was trying to figure out the many ways that her students could learn.❖

CHOOSE 3 LESSON
The Planets

Choose 3 of the activities below.
Do any by yourself, with a partner, or in a group.
Read handouts: size, geography, distance of the planets.
Look at mobile and press on pictures. Look at books about planets.

1. List the distance of each planet to the sun in scientific notation.

2. Describe the planets musically - use keyboard, song, song titles, etc.

3. Using the paper roll, compare the distance from the planets to each other and the sun.

4. Compare the size and look of each planet using Play-Doh, paper, or balloons.

5. Using mime, dance, or a play, show what would happen to you if you were standing on each planet.

6. Write a description or create a poem that compares yourself to the planets you think you are most like and most different from.

7. Design two different aliens: One who looks like s/he could live on a planet closest to the sun and another who looks like s/he could live on a planet the farthest away from the sun. Use any materials to make each alien.

8. Make a list comparing the size, colors, distance from the sun, moons, and temperature of each planet.❖

Understanding Multiple Intelligences: The Theory Behind the Practice

by Julie Viens

t's early evening in Salisbury, MA, and the GED preparation class is in full swing. Working in pairs or independently, the students use rulers, Play-Doh, drawing materials, measuring spoons, and even a xylophone to complete three measuring tasks from the 10 options Martha, their teacher, has provided. One student measures and cuts strips of paper, one student measures another's height, another pair giggle as they measure and compare differing amounts of Play-Doh. Lively discussions about inches, gallons, and musical notes create a welcomed din to Martha's ears.

Two hundred miles to the north, in rural Vermont, four students in an adult diploma class make entries in their dialogue journals. One student is describing how he used his carpentry-honed spatial skills to solve a math problem. A new student sits with headphones on, completing an informal self-assessment. The voice on the tape asks about her avocations, what types of things she's good at and likes to do. Meg, her teacher, described this as the first step in a process of "discovering her own areas of strengths."

The next morning, in Gloucester, MA, Wendy is leading one of the last sessions of her adult basic education (ABE) history course. She and her students set up the classroom for final project presentations. These projects, some in preparation for

weeks, will demonstrate students' understanding of some aspect of the course. One group prepares to do a skit, one student will read an original poem and present related artwork, another pair pin up charts and graphs to accompany their oral presentation. As everyone sits to watch the skit, the nervous energy is palpable and upbeat.

Which one of these teachers is using multiple intelligences (MI) theory to inform her practice? All three, as the reader likely guessed. "Multiple intelligences" is a theory, not an approach or set of strategies. Indeed, when Howard Gardner introduced the theory in 1983, educational implications were only briefly mentioned. As a theory of intelligence, multiple intelligences describes the "smarts" students bring to the task of learning. It frames and suggests, but does not prescribe any specific classroom practices. There is indeed no single "right way" to apply MI theory. However, using an MI lens or framework can and has helped inform excellent, and often quite distinct, teaching and learning practices.

Moving from a theory of intelligence to actual classroom practices is an act of interpretation. Applying MI theory in the classroom provokes a critical process of practice and reflection on the part of the educator. Simply put, because MI theory is not prescriptive, teachers decide for themselves how to apply it, reflecting and making revisions and additions along the way.

Understanding MI theory and its major components is essential to applying it appropriately and well. The teacher researchers on the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Project described in this edition of *Focus on Basics* adopted MI theory with subjective but critical lenses. They designed MI-based applications that worked for them, taking into account their contexts, goals, and beliefs about what good, appropriate, and feasible teaching practices entail. Like hundreds of other teachers, they too started with the basics, "What exactly is the theory of multiple intelligences?"

In Theory

What is multiple intelligences theory and what major tenets guide its use? First and foremost, MI theory challenges the widely held belief that intelligence is a unitary trait that can be adequately measured by an IQ test (Gardner, 1993). MI theory claims that there are many ways to be smart and that those abilities are expressed in our performances, products, and ideas. Intelligence is defined as the ability to create or solve a problem or fashion a product that is valued in one or more community or cultural settings (Gardner, 1993a).

Thus MI theory makes proverbial "apples and oranges" out of intelligence: putting everyone on a single line is impossible and comparison — or competition— among people is pointless. With MI theory the question moves from "How smart are you?" to "How are you smart?" Therefore, MI applications are directed toward identifying, nurturing, and using students' unique combinations of intelligence in the business of learning.

Gardner and his colleagues looked at the many abilities individuals demonstrate and the diverse roles they are able to assume and asked, "What are the basic

biological faculties — the 'intelligences' — responsible for these abilities that we observe around us every day?" They developed a list of eight criteria necessary for an ability to be designated an intelligence (see page 8). These criteria represent evidence from brain research, human development, evolution, and cross-cultural comparisons that each of these abilities has a universal, biological basis and operates relatively independently. Using the criteria, Gardner initially identified seven intelligences (see page 9). An eighth intelligence, naturalist, has since been added, and a ninth, existential intelligence, is under consideration (Gardner, 1999). Abilities that satisfied a majority of the criteria were selected as intelligences. Not one of the eight intelligences fulfilled all of the criteria perfectly; each of the eight satisfied most of them. (For a detailed description of the criteria and how each intelligence was assayed, see Gardner, 1993a, Chapter 4; for naturalist intelligence, see Gardner, 1999.)

The criteria have served well as the principal means to identify a set of intelligences that captures a reasonably complete range of the types of abilities valued by human cultures. By keeping the criteria in active use, MI theory can be and has been modified to reflect our increasingly better understanding of people's intellectual capabilities. MI theory offers the most accurate description to date of intelligence in the real world, and it continues to be a helpful articulation and organization of human abilities.

Another important aspect of MI theory is the idea that both nature and nurture have a role in each individual's intelligence. It is not simply a matter of "what you're born with." MI theory holds that

intelligence originates biologically; that is, all human beings are at promise for each of the intelligences. However if, how, and to what extent intelligences develop is intrinsically tied to an individual's life experiences. The more time an individual spends using an intelligence, and the better the instruction and resources, the smarter one becomes within that area of intelligence.
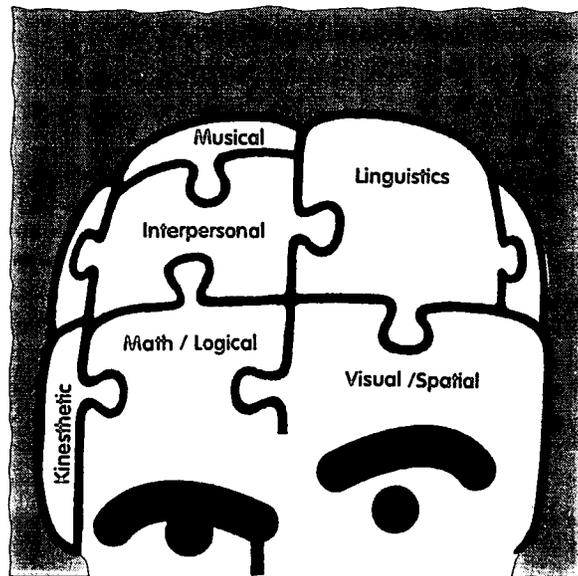
Each of the intelligences is universal, but how and to what extent intelligences manifest themselves depend to a significant degree on the cultural and individual context. For example, in the case of linguistic intelligence, writing might dominate in one context and storytelling in another. A child in the first context whose mother is a reporter and whose home is filled with books, a computer, and writing implements might have more developed writing abilities than a child without those environmental supports.

This view of the nature of intelligence suggests providing a range of activities in the classroom to ensure students the opportunity to develop abilities in a range of

intelligence areas. It also suggests that if intelligence is demonstrated in the things we make and the problems we solve, then assessment of students' abilities should demonstrate this too. In other words, students should be assessed using real "tools" and solving real problems. Why choose among multiple answers or answer essay questions about, say, political action, when students can get involved politically in some way and teachers can assess that participation?

A Closer Look

Each intelligence has its own unique characteristics, tools, and processes: each represents a different way of thinking, solving problems, and learning; and each emphasizes a particular type of product. Although each intelligence operates relatively independently — the brain has distinct mechanisms and operations for each intelligence — in reality they work in combination. So people's intellectual strengths are demonstrated through their unique combination of intelligences. For example, a violinist needs musical intelligence to be successful, but only in combination with interpersonal abilities, such as communication with other musicians in the orchestra; intrapersonal, such as translating the emotion of the piece; and bodily kinesthetic, such as the physical act of playing the instrument.

Intelligences also include sub-abilities: one is not simply "musically" or "linguistically" intelligent. One's musical intelligence might be demonstrated through the ability to compose clever tunes or to distinguish instrument parts in a song. In the case of linguistic intelligence, ability might emerge through creative expression, as in a story, or in the descriptive language of a presentation.

Musical
Linguistics
Interpersonal
Math / Logical
Visual /Spatial
Kinesthetic

These distinctions within intelligences are important to keep in mind when developing experiences and assessments in the classroom. Students may vary in terms of how they are musically or spatially intelligent (Hatch, 1997). Acknowledging the detail of each intelligence provides only more promise for rich, engaging activities in the classroom. Each intelligence is briefly summarized in the box on the next page.

MI in the Classroom

MI theory is not about introducing another way to do things, but rather is a framework for thinking about the types of experiences to have in the classroom that tap a range of intelligences generally and build on students' unique combinations specifically. Good teaching practices should fit under an MI-based umbrella.

Most MI-based programs have been initiated to address three goals: create opportunities for students across a range of intelligences (exploration); give students intensive opportunities in areas of strength (talent development); and

The Eight "Signs" of an Intelligence

○ Potential isolation by brain damage
○ Existence of savants, prodigies, and other individuals distinguished by the presence or absence of specific abilities
○ Recognizable end-state and distinctive developmental trajectory
○ An identifiable set of core operation(s)
○ Evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility
○ Support from experimental psychological tasks
○ Support from psychometric findings
○ Susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system
— Gardner, 1993

create more individualized or personalized education by more directly addressing students' intellectual strengths in their curriculum (using strengths). The following approaches and activities were developed to address these goals.

○ **Providing a variety of curricular options.** This approach is related to providing students with exposure to and experience across intelligences. Students can hone skills and experience success in the classroom (strength areas), and teachers and students have the opportunity to uncover their own strengths and interests.

○ **Providing choice among activities or "entry points" to develop understanding or learn skills.** Many teachers use MI theory as a framework to develop options for students to work on particular material or skills. Allowing students to learn in ways in which they are most comfortable increases the chances for substantive learning as well as increasing student self-esteem.

○ **Expanding instructional strategies and media based on the intelligences.** We teach in a manner that makes most sense to us. Upon closer inspection, teachers are not surprised to see that they tend to teach from their own strengths. MI theory has been a useful way to analyze and expand instructional practices and the media used.

○ **Informally assessing student intelligences toward developing educational activities.** A definitive assessment of a student's intelligences is not only difficult, but also not necessary (Gardner, 1996). Informal assessments based on observations, student checklists and questionnaires, and other classroom activities such as dialogue journals and intake interviews provide a context to collect valuable information about students' areas of

ability. This information can be shared explicitly with students, getting them involved in conversations around how they learn best. It can also be fed back into the curriculum.

○ **Expanding assessment options to allow for students' use of areas of strength in demonstrating their learning.** Analogous to providing curricular options, giving students options for showing their learning allows them to use ways that are comfortable and through which they can experience success.

These approaches are rooted in an understanding of MI theory, its implications for teaching and learning, and a desire to build on students' intelligences. Looking back at the opening vignettes, we see that Martha's application emphasizes providing students with a range of MI-informed entry points into their GED topics. Meg uses ongoing and informal assessment of each student's intelligences to develop instructional strategies. Wendy uses MI theory to give students an opportunity to use their unique profiles of intelligences to demonstrate their understanding.

MI theory did not direct these teachers to these practices, but served as a catalyst. MI theory offers both a framework and a language to use to develop practices that best fit one's context while acknowledging, celebrating, and building on the abilities adult students bring to their learning. In the other articles in this publication, you will see some of the many interpretations of MI that are possible in creating successful learning experiences.

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The Eight Intelligences

Linguistic Intelligence
- involves perceiving or generating spoken or written language
- allows communication and sense-making through language
- includes sensitivity to subtle meanings in language
- encompasses descriptive, expressive, and poetic language abilities

A great deal of linguistic intelligence is required if you are a novelist, stand-up comedian, journalist, lawyer, poet, news correspondent. Linguistic intelligence is not about being bilingual, but does include facility with learning languages; nor is it being talkative or liking to talk.

Logical/Mathematical Intelligence
- enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations
- includes facility in the use of numbers and logical thinking

A great deal of logical-mathematical intelligence is required if you are a mathematician, scientist, engineer, or architect. This intelligence is not only about numerical reasoning but, as the name implies, includes logical reasoning abilities that might not involve numbers at all.

Spatial Intelligence
- involves perceiving and using visual or spatial information
- transforming this information into visual images
- recreating visual images from memory

You need a lot of spatial intelligence if you are a sculptor, architect surgeon, cab driver, dancer. Spatial intelligence is not necessarily visual. Blind individuals develop excellent spatial ability.

Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence
- allows an individual to use all or part of your body to "create"
- refers to the ability to control all or isolated parts of one's body
- includes athletic, creative, fine, and gross motor movement

You require a great deal of bodily kinesthetic intelligence if you are a dancer, surgeon, athlete, sculptor. Bodily kinesthetic intelligence is not merely moving, or "working off energy." A student who cannot sit still in the classroom does not necessarily possess a strength in this intelligence.

Musical Intelligence
- involves creating, communicating, and understanding meanings made out of sound (music composition, production, and perception)
- includes ability in dealing with patterns of sound

A great deal of musical intelligence is required if you are a musician, conductor, sound engineer, or choreographer. Musical intelligence is not engaged by playing music "in the background." In fact, background music often interferes with the work of those who excel in this area because they tend to focus actively on the music.

Naturalist Intelligence
- involves the ability to understand the natural world
- includes the ability to work effectively in the natural world
- allows people to distinguish among, classify, and use features of the environment
- is also applied to general classifying and patterning abilities
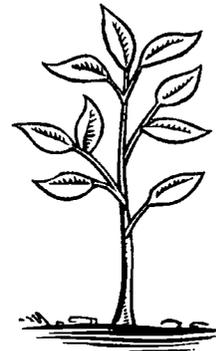
A great deal of naturalist intelligence is required if you are a botanist, biologist, gardener, farmer, chef. The naturalist intelligence is also brought to bear in other non-natural classification and patterning activities.

Interpersonal Intelligence
- involves the capacity to recognize and make distinctions among the feelings, beliefs, and intentions of other people
- allows the use of this knowledge to work effectively in the world

A great deal of interpersonal intelligence is required if you are a teacher, mediator, salesperson. Interpersonal intelligence is not simply working, or preferring to work, in a group, being well liked, or having manners. Rather it emphasizes an individual's ability to understand social situations and the actions of others within that context.

Intrapersonal Intelligence
- enables individuals to understand themselves and to draw on that understanding to make decisions about viable courses of action
- includes the ability to distinguish one's feelings and to anticipate reactions to future courses of action

A great deal of intrapersonal intelligence is required if you are a therapist, poet, minister. Intrapersonal intelligence is not related to comfort with or preference for working alone. Consider the individual who knows that he is or she is the type of person who likes to work in groups.

Existential ability remains under consideration for designation as an intelligence. It refers to the human inclination to ask very basic questions about existence, such as: Who are we? Where do we come from? At this time this ability does not sufficiently meet the criteria discussed earlier (see box on page 8) to be considered an intelligence (Gardner, 1999, p. 9). The question remains as to whether existential abilities are not an amalgam of logical and linguistic intelligences. ❖

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About the Author

Julie Viens is a senior researcher with Harvard Project Zero, a research group co-directed by Dr. Howard Gardner and located at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. For the past 10 years, she has worked with educators, from pre-K on, in the research and development of MI-based strategies. The AMI Project represents Julie's first foray into adult education, and she hopes to continue working in this diverse and challenging field. ❖

Focus on Basics Electronic Discussion List

Focus on Basics electronic discussion list serves as an electronic forum for discussion about the articles published in *Focus on Basics.* It is intended as a place to converse with colleagues about the themes examined in the publication; to get questions answered and to pose them; to critique issues raised in the publication; and to share relevant experiences and resources.

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"I Can't Learn This!" An MI Route Around Resistance

When students have trouble learning skills that seem within their reach, academics is probably not the problem. MI may be a useful tool with these students.

by Wendy Quiñones and Betsy Cornwell

I n a language arts class, Sue has just spent a half-hour or so working on homophones, modeling the letters for there, their, and they're in Play-Doh and arranging them according to their different usages. Sue seemed to enjoy the exercise, and to gain a clear understanding of which word to use where. But later, making corrections to a letter she's writing to the housing authority in her town, she struggles. "There," the teacher says. "You know this; we just finished working on it. Is this the right word here?" Sue throws down her pencil and refuses to think further about the problem. She says angrily, "I can't do this. I never can do things like this. I'm just too stupid."

Diane is determined to earn her adult diploma this year and has only the geography unit to complete. Punctual, enthusiastic, and diligent in most things, she is late for appointments to work on geography at the library, is sullen and unresponsive during the lessons at her home, and procrastinates in doing the work. The deadline for graduation passes with the unit still incomplete. Diane grouses in her learning log, "I asked why I would ever need geography for my life. She [the teacher] won't answer me about geography. She is up to spring something on me that I don't know about yet."

Most adult basic education teachers have stories like these: students refusing to attempt or to master tasks well within their reach, or students unwilling to learn subjects required for achieving their stated learning goals. These students say they want to learn, but our methods, which work well with others, don't seem to work for them. What's the problem? In our research, we found that combining a new understanding of the source of this resistance with the use of multiple intelligence (MI) inspired lessons provided a wealth of exciting avenues for skirting this resistance so that students can approach their goals.

Refusal to Learn

Let us be clear about the phenomenon we are discussing here. The student who fails to learn — whose intellectual abilities are not up to her ambitions — is not our topic. Rather, we are seeking to understand the student who, while cooperative in many other ways, is in at least one area actively, willfully, consciously refusing to learn. These are students who, according to Herbert Kohl (1994), are actively engaged in "not-learning." Such not-learning is no easy feat, says Kohl: "It can require actively refusing to pay attention, acting dumb, scrambling one's thoughts, and overriding curiosity" (p. 4). It is a

result of conflicting goals: the resistance generated by conflicts between students' desire to learn and "the larger context of the choices they make as they create lives and identities for themselves" (p. 10). The attempt to get an education may raise for an adult many "unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity" (p. 6). The student who is unready to resolve those challenges and conflicts may well find not-learning the most available defense.

Sue, for example, is the single mom of a toddler. Her son's father does not support the family economically, but he is actively involved with both Sue and the child. Sue is nearly illiterate despite her diploma from a vocational high school. Through Wendy's 20-hour-a-week program and additional work with a tutor, her reading ability is improving markedly. The child's father, however, insists that the teachers are lying when they say this, and that Sue can't be a good mother unless she's home full-time with her child. Will Sue's refusal to give up education and her increasing skills drive her child's father away? Sue grew up as the child of a single mom, and she is determined to maintain her son's ties with his father. She also wants very much to improve her reading and go to college. These goals are in conflict. She honors her learning goal by attending an education program; perhaps her not-learning is an attempt to placate her son's father and thus honor her family goal.

Diane, sharing her cluttered house trailer with her husband and four children in rural Maine, is working toward her alternative diploma. Diane has indicated her suspicion and contempt for "smart people" who know everything, especially how to find things in books. Going to the library, looking in atlases, even acknowledging that

she owns a complete and current encyclopedia, may simply place her too close to that category of "smart people" she scorns.

Identities Threatened

In other words, what to us seem like simple learning activities in pursuit of stated goals are, for Sue and Diane, threats to other, perhaps unstated, goals and to familiar identities. It is critical for teachers to realize that the not-learning student is, as Richard Everhart (1983) writes, acting as an agent "with the ability to interpret the meaning of social situations and to take action based on those meanings" (p. 20). Our not-learning student is interpreting what we are asking her to do from a system of goals, beliefs, and values not only different from ours but also perhaps even in conflict with others she has stated. She is not failing to learn; she is actively not-learning as a way of avoiding this conflict among goals. The more we insist on her learning, the more she is likely to feel that her goals — and her unspoken, perhaps unacknowledged conflicts — are being dismissed, and that we are simply another of those impersonal forces that attempt to control her life.

Not-learning in such circumstances allows the student to be loyal to whatever goal she is unready to alter or relinquish. This positive action of not-learning provides her a satisfaction far different from the feelings produced by failure to learn. According to Kohl, failure can produce "a loss of self-confidence accompanied by a sense of inferiority and inadequacy" (p.6). Not-learning, by contrast, "tends to strengthen the will, clarify one's definition of self, reinforce self-discipline" (p. 6). A teacher's insistence over a student's resistance can indeed be perceived as an oppressive condition, one that must be resisted. As Kohl indicates, that

resistance — that act of loyalty to her own goals — can provide the student with intense satisfaction. As novelist Alice Walker writes, "Resistance is the secret of joy" (1993, p. 279).

What's a teacher to do? We are, after all, not therapists. Many of the factors that influence our students' decisions about learning are simply beyond the scope of schools and teachers. It's not for us to insist that Sue get rid of her son's verbally abusive father, or to force Diane to accept an identity she despises. Directly confronting students with these conflicts before they are ready to acknowledge and resolve them is likely to produce only more and more passionate not-learning. Pressing on toward the goal as we try to ignore the resisting behavior can have the same result. We must acknowledge and respect the fact that Sue and Diane do have reasons for not-learning. These reasons may or may not appear valid to us, but they are valid to the not-learning student even when neither she nor we can precisely identify them. Identification isn't important. Respect is. We can acknowledge and move around the conflict to concentrate instead on the learning goals we share with the student, harnessing her interests and strengths to move toward her goal.

MI Connection

This is where MI comes in. As teachers, we know that students learn in different ways. The theory of multiple intelligences allows us to systematically provide and validate ways both of learning and of demonstrating learning that are not commonly used in the classroom. Traditional education uses primarily linguistic and mathematical intelligences; MI adds to these musical, bodily/kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and spatial. Giving students opportunities to learn and to

express their knowledge through these additional intelligences may provide a way to learn without threatening whatever the not-learning student is trying to protect. Once we are able to temporarily leave the realm of traditional school activities, some not-learning students feel more free to explore. Give Sue, for example, lessons that allow her to learn through Play-Doh, markers, and craft materials (spatial and bodily/kinesthetic intelligences), or by producing a skit (interpersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, perhaps musical intelligences), and she can participate in and even design successful learning activities. Translate the same material to paper-and-pencil tasks, and all of her energy goes into not-learning. Sue's interpretation of learning seems to dictate that competency with paper and pencil — linguistic intelligence — threatens her goal of retaining a relationship with her son's father while competency with Play-Doh, markers, crafts, and skits — spatial, interpersonal, bodily/kinesthetic — does not.

Similarly, while Diane refused to go to the library to "find things in books," she happily, and on her own, cut items out of newspapers and magazines, eventually organizing them into folders labeled with the subjects that interested her: Princess Diana, the Unabomber, JonBenet Ramsey, and Terry Nichols, among others. With this clue to Diane's strong interpersonal intelligence, Betsy organized geography lessons around people and current events. Diane's extensive learning logs reveal a turning point with an assignment that involved using colored dots to mark the travels of Princess Diana on a map. In her log, Diane noted, "Today I learned how to find places on the world map…On places that current events happened that was of interest to me…Learning to use a map can be fun and interesting to do.

Being able to travel to different places without having to get on the plane myself. Because I can do it from my kitchen table in my home." After completing that assignment, Diane began to create elaborate collages using magazine pictures to illustrate the customs, costumes, topography and animal life of several different countries. After beginning the collages, Diane also insisted on completing the worksheets she had refused to do the year before.

Those worksheets involved using atlases and encyclopedias to find facts and figures about seven different countries. This assignment relied almost totally on linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences: the two "school intelligences." Diane initially responded to the worksheets by insisting that the assignment was beyond her capabilities. Several months later, when the focus was shifted to the people who lived in and traveled through those countries, and she was allowed to express her knowledge using pictures and newspaper clippings, Diane met and then exceeded the expectations of the course. Charting the travels of Princess Diana was actually a more complex task than what was asked for in the worksheets. In addition to using a world map and atlas, Diane had to consult a biography and newspaper clippings to determine which places the Princess had visited. To complete her collages and collections, Diane had to master all the research techniques demanded in the original worksheets. Once she mastered those techniques, she insisted on completing the worksheets even after Betsy informed her that she'd already done enough to satisfy her course requirements. We believe that the opportunity to view the subject through interpersonal (studying people instead of countries) and spatial (pictures and collages) intelligences created a safety zone in

which Diane could express her knowledge without the need to confront her complex feelings surrounding school and "smart people."

Lesson Learned

The lesson we can learn from both of these women is that the actual task, understanding homophones or researching information about different countries, was by no means beyond their abilities. What they needed was a way to demonstrate their knowledge without threatening their sense of personal integrity.

Sue and Diane were both working in intensive learning environments where students and teachers have a great deal more personal contact than is possible in many adult learning centers. Our knowledge of our students' personal lives certainly helped us understand them better, but we don't believe that level of understanding was necessary to help them find ways to learn. We believe, however, that two things are crucial for teachers facing not-learning students. First, we must acknowledge that not-learning serves a vital function in the lives and identities of our students. By honoring our students' stated and unstated goals, even when they conflict with our own, we are expressing confidence in our adult learners' abilities to incorporate education into their own world views. Second, we must be willing and flexible enough to expand the number and variety of learning strategies we offer to our students so they may find their own paths to growth.

While our experience with MI makes us extremely hopeful that we can duplicate Diane's success with other students, we don't expect unalloyed success. What teacher can expect that? We do hope that MI can become one more tool available to

teachers who wish to expand the options by which adult students can become successful learners.

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About the Authors

Wendy Quiñones was teaching in a year-long transitional education program for low-income women in Gloucester, MA, when she conducted this research. A former journalist, she has worked in adult basic education for about 10 years. She is now teaching GED, and doing teacher training and mentoring teachers who pilot the use of the *Adult Multiple Intelligences Sourcebook.*

Betsy Cornwell is a teaching coordinator for the Northern Oxford County EvenStart family literacy project in western Maine. She travels to students' homes in this rural area to work with them on high school diploma, GED, or ESOL needs. She also manages the program of 20 families and six traveling teachers who provide early childhood, adult education, and parenting instruction. ❖

Adding a Dimension to Career Counseling

Introducing MI theory and MI-enhanced activities to a career counseling course opened everyone's eyes to new possibilities

by Jean Mantzaris

At Wallingford Adult Education Learning Center, Wallingford, CT, we serve the needs of our adult learners with classes in basic education, general educational development (GED), and external and credit diploma programs. We also provide classes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) for a growing population of students, a significant number of whom are Mexican immigrants. Many of our students are employed at minimum wage jobs, or receive welfare, disability, or unemployment benefits. An essential element of their education at our Learning Center revolves around making career choices and seeking related higher education and training. As guidance counselor responsible for career development, I struggled with how to serve these students. They are under considerable pressure to make the "right" career choice, while constrained by limited time, limited finances, significant family obligations, and a limited view beyond standard careers.

In searching for new ideas and a more focused approach, I joined the Multiple Intelligences (MI) project. While traditional concepts of human intelligence measure linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities, multiple intelligences theory suggests that the range of intelligences be broadened to include spatial-visual, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. All humans possess these intelligences in varying degrees and apply them in various combinations, given their proclivities, activities, and environment. This concept seemed a promising premise for guiding students through their career choice process. I therefore agreed to learn about MI theory and carry out a practitioner inquiry project in which I applied MI theory to my work with adult learners involved in career development. I decided to focus on how students' awareness of their own intelligences and participation in activities informed by MI theory affect their career-decision making process.

The class in which I did my research was a 12-week career development module that met each Wednesday morning for an hour and a half. I had 11 students, five of whom were male. Of the 11, eight participated in almost all the activities. Our Learning Center uses individualized instruction, so these modules were the only place where students were in groups. To gather data, I had students write in their journals after each MI-inspired activity; I also kept observation notes and held individualized interviews with the students before and after the course.

Immediate Changes

Before the module started, I held individual interviews with students. In the past, when interviewing students, I began with a short conversation about why they came to adult education, then quickly had them filling out forms and taking assessment tests. With MI in mind, I asked students about their career choices, their strengths, what they felt they were good at, and a "wish" career. I also had all students assess their intelligences using an instrument developed by Meg Costanzo, another AMI project member. I wanted to see if their dream occupations matched their strengths.

During the first class session, using lecture and visuals, I introduced Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, and then had the students work in pairs, interviewing each other about their intelligences. Each student reported to the group on the strengths of his or her partner. Journal entries from that day included: "This stuff is fun, but more than that it shows you how many people around you are smart in many ways and so am I" and "Like it woke me up. I though it was enlightening. I came in with a poor mood but this picked up my spirits." One student expressed negative

views of the activity, describing it as "a waste of time. I'm here to study for my GED. I don't have time for this."

Another week, I asked students to "go back in time" and reflect on what they loved to do as children and bring representations — photos, favorite stories, etc. — of these activities into class. Two students shared childhood photos. John shared a picture of his first Halloween, commenting on how much he did and still does enjoy pretending. Kimberly talked about taking things apart and putting them together, something she still enjoys today. Students also had time to "play" with materials I had assembled that were familiar to them from childhood, such as kazoos, blocks, and Legos. They reflected on whether their favorite activities were connected to present favorite activities or strengths, and if they wished to resume or strengthen any neglected activities. They looked for links between their adult and childhood intelligences and explored why childhood intelligences withered or flourished. Eric, for example, talked about a childhood among adults and how being a clown in school got him in trouble. The students each made key chain ornaments depicting a strength they wanted to nurture.

During another meeting, the students completed the Harrington-O'Shea Career Decision Making System. This career inventory has several reading levels and is available in Spanish. The students received an interpretive folder with their personal summary profile and I reviewed this material with them. Some of the students exhibited a flat profile on the

Harrington-O'Shea, which may have resulted from a lack of familiarity with the scale used in the instrument: like and dislike. The students felt that these inventories were not as reflective of their strengths as the MI profiles they had developed. I believe the MI assessment seemed more personal to students.

When the students moved to a study of Connecticut career clusters — eight areas that drive Connecticut's economy — they looked at the careers in light of multiple intelligences. One student saw how a natural resource manager needs math/logical strength to study chemistry, physics, and math; linguistic strength to express concerns verbally and in writing; kinesthetic strength for field work; visual/spatial strength to look for clues in the environment; interpersonal strength to accept recommendations; and interpersonal strength to reflect on findings and to make ethical considerations. Another student for whom business and finance may not have previously had any appeal viewed his strengths as math/logical and musical and began to think about a business career in the recording industry. Yet another student with linguistic strength and no known career objectives described how his quick tongue — a source of trouble for him in school and with the law — might be an asset in the broadcasting industry.

New Possibilities

Once students became aware of their strengths, career possibilities abounded. While four students were fairly certain about possible careers during the interviews I held before the module began, only one remained certain of his choice at the completion of our work. A decision of "no choice," however, now seemed positive rather than directionless. The students were beginning to dream, and to explore.
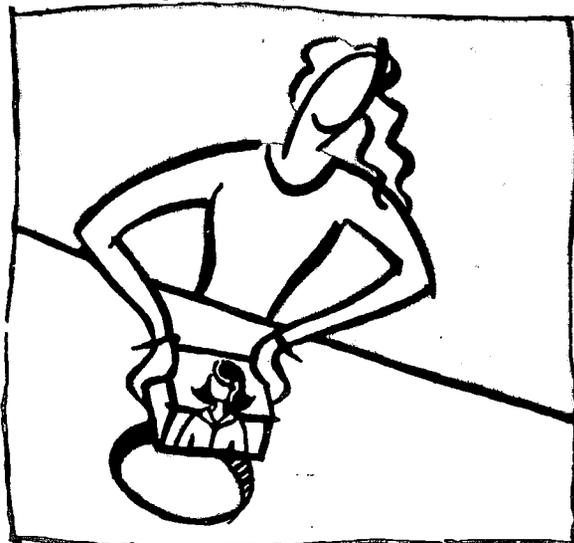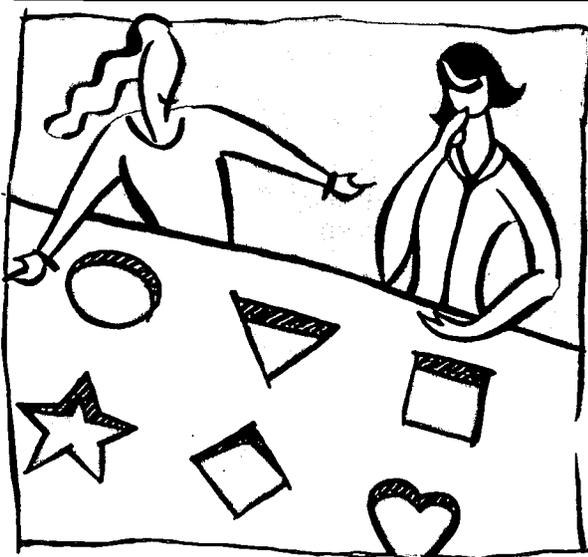
Three students decided to enter community college to explore different areas of study. The two who worried about having served jail time now made plans: one to attend a community college and the other to attend the state university. For the three public assistance recipients, the changes were significant. All three filed college applications and Free Application for Federal Finance Aid (FAFSA). For one, that took particular courage, since her benefits were ending and she faced opposition from family members.

Conclusion

The entire project was an extraordinarily enlightening experience for all of us involved, counselor and students alike. Rather than beginning the endeavor with a hypothesis — a statement of expected outcome — I began with a question: Can MI theory provide a valid approach for guiding students through the process of identifying their strengths and skills in order to make appropriate and ultimately gratifying career decisions? I was no longer operating within the parameters of proven research; rather, I was assuming the role of the researcher, and it would be I who formulated the outcome.

As a counselor, I had previously been so focused on the "right fit" in the career decision-making of adult education students that I missed the discovery process. Yet, as the students and I became more and more absorbed in this project, we found that the discovery process is a vital and multidimensional element of career choice-making. It was fascinating to watch the students reaching back into their childhoods for recollections of their strengths, skills, and favorite activities and drawing correlations to those extant. From there, they were able to extrapolate their career choices. Using what they learned about themselves through MI, they will now be able to capitalize on their strengths and talents in the future.

I was at first uncomfortable that this approach so widely expanded the students' range of choices; I had always viewed the career counseling process as one of narrowing, not broadening, possibilities. My own ambivalence became a discovery process in itself as I learned that the MI approach could be a valid and viable tool in career development.

Perhaps the words of John, one of my most eloquent student journal writers, best exemplifies our MI journey into self-discovery and career decision-making: "...our past experiences shade our view on life..my glasses were somber and obscure, tainting everything that filtered throughout...Then expectedly the world around me changed. The air gave birth to new sounds and smells. The land filled with colors I had never seen...I had unconsciously changed my glasses. New dreams and desires danced through my mind. Words like college, career, and future introduced themselves into my vocabulary...."

About the Author

Jean Mantzaris is a full-time guidance counselor of adult high school preparation and ESOL students at the Wallingford Adult Learning Center, Wallingford, CT. She lives in the community with her husband and three children.◆

Emerging Themes in Adult Multiple Intelligences Research

A team of teachers researched the effects of using multiple intelligence-influenced instruction in their adult education classes. Their experience suggests that MI theory has much to offer adult basic education.

by Silja Kallenbach

A group of Latino elders is gathered in the kitchen of Centro Hispano in Chelsea, MA, for their English lesson. One woman is scraping the gelatin from an aloe vera plant while an elderly man is blending chopped onions and water. Another "senora" is chopping limes; several others are assisting and observing. They are talking animatedly in halting English peppered with Spanish about different ways to heal various ailments with natural remedies. Their teacher, Diane Paxton, is busy taking photos she will ask them to sequence later. The photos will also serve as a memory prompt when the learners write down their recipes. When the class does its customary assessment of what the students liked and disliked about the preceding month's activities, several students agree with a classmate's sentiment when she says,"Very good, we learned a lot of words. I'd heard the word blender, but didn't know what it meant." Another student holds up the book "Natural Medicines," which the group has written as a class project, saying: "This is our literature."

Several hours' drive north, in Manchester, VT, another group of adults is hunched over multicolored flash cards spread on a table along with math manipulatives.

Converting measurements is the topic of this evening's class. Written on the cards are measurements expressed in fractions, percents, or decimals. The students' task is to puzzle out which figures are equal. There is a lot of laughter and negotiation of correct answers. Meanwhile, Meg Costanzo, the teacher, is watching silently.

Both of these vignettes took place in the course of the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) study. Both learning activities could be described as being "in the spirit of" multiple intelligences theory. They illustrate what we have learned in the AMI study: There is no one way to apply MI theory in instruction, but some common approaches have emerged.

The AMI study explores the application of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (MI) to adult learning and teaching. The theory defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultures or communities. It counters views that intelligence can be measured solely through IQ tests. It contends that all humans possess at least eight forms of intelligence: linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial/visual, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

MI theory has been widely applied at the pre-K - 12 level. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy AMI study is the first extensive and systematic investigation of the use of MI theory in adult literacy education. It is a qualitative, naturalistic study with teacher research at its center. Between December, 1996, and June, 1998, 10 teachers, working with about 140 students, grappled with and applied MI theory in their classrooms. While the analysis of commonalities and differences in the teachers' experiences continues through 1999, the themes emerging from the research are instructive.

Six Themes

Using an MI framework leads teachers to offer a greater variety of learning activities.

MI theory supports and validates creative, multimodality teaching. Given that MI is not a technique but a theory, it lends itself to varied interpretations, all of which have in common their student-centeredness. While it is just one entry to such teaching, it tends to propel teachers to "push the envelope."

The AMI experience suggests that when teachers begin to consider students' strengths beyond the linguistic and math/logical they gain, more often than not, an increased appreciation of their students and new insights into how to reach and teach them. Furthermore, it appears that the consideration of MI theory leads teachers to offer a greater variety of learning activities, whether or not they try to identify their students' particular strengths.

AMI teacher Martha Jean developed lessons that gave students choices that corresponded roughly to combinations of the eight intelligences. These lessons became especially popular among the AMI

teachers. They could provide options for students to learn through different types of experiences and media.

Choice-based lessons were by no means the only way the AMI teachers carried out MI-based instruction. As a whole, MI-based approaches can be characterized as constructivist. They invite students to construct their own meaning through problem-solving and the media of their intelligence strengths, building on what they already know and feel competent in. Thematic and project-based lessons are common ways in which teachers put constructivism into practice. Meg Costanzo's students' favorite project — without exception — was to devise ways to increase enrollment in their learning center. They redesigned the center's recruitment flyer and sign, wrote a public service announcement, interviewed graduates, and calculated attendance rates. The number of hours of student attendance, mostly their own, increased 220% since the beginning of Meg's involvement in the AMI study.

Sometimes an MI-based activity functioned as a "hook" that got students engaged and willing to grapple with more abstract, rote, or decontextualized material. Martha had her students choose and complete three learning activities out of a possible six to 10 across GED content areas. For example, she invited the students to "compare the size and look of each planet using Play-Doh, paper, or balloons" or to "show what would happen to you if you were standing on each planet using mime, dance, or play." These choice-based activities were typically followed by work in GED workbooks. Lezlie Rocka followed readings in her basic literacy class with choice-based activities.

All but one of the 10 AMI teachers concluded that MI theory pushed them to take more risks and broaden their teaching beyond what

they had been doing. The level of creativity in their lessons increased discernably. Lezlie, for example, went from believing that MI theory had little to offer to her already multi-sensory teaching approach to asserting that MI theory informed and broadened her approach to teaching reading and writing. Throughout her AMI experience, Diane Paxton described her use of MI theory as "only one aspect that I draw on under the umbrella of my teaching" (Paxton,1998, p. 26). Nevertheless, she "used MI theory to develop thematic units and creative group projects...MI also helped to overcome the problem of various levels in the class, helping to ensure language acquisition opportunities for all students" (p. 16).

Observing students' learning preferences generates valuable information about students' strengths that can inform the development of future lessons.

An alternative or complementary approach to having students assess their own intelligences is for the teacher to observe and analyze their learning preferences, interactions, and writings over time. Terri Coustan found that she could generate rich information about her beginning ESOL students' intelligences by paying close attention to the choices and comments they made. For example, when a student expressed preference for math, Terri suggested she choose a paragraph-sequencing activity that draws on logical/math intelligence. Meg reports that she gained new insights into her GED and diploma program students' intelligences through weekly dialogue journals with her students. She then used this information to guide the students in choosing learning strategies. For example, she found that MI theory provided a

compelling rationale for using webbing as a pre-writing activity to collect one's ideas and thoughts, particularly with students who are spatially intelligent.

Wendy Quiñones developed an original method for observing students' intelligences. Before showing the movie *Educating Rita,* Wendy asked her students to choose one or two things to observe from among several possibilities that were calibrated to the eight intelligences. She explained the value of this experience: "One of the questions I developed clarified for me the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic approaches to problems: I asked [students] for the floor plan of Rita's house. Now, to ultralinguistic me, this seems almost silly: I don't care what the floor plan is, nor would I normally think to ask about it. For someone strongly spatial, however, this might be an extremely interesting project — and the point is that the floor plan would have to be deduced from the events in the movie. For the spatial person, this activity would involve her quite literally in putting these events into a perspective that makes deep sense to her" (Quiñones, 1998, p. 11).

The diversity of viewing preferences expressed by the students was illuminating to Wendy and to her students: "For example, one normally quiet woman demonstrated a stunning spatial intelligence by citing detail after detail of color, clothing, jewelry — each one a significant commentary on the movie and on Rita's character. Among many other observations, she noted that Rita at times had red in her hair and clothes 'so we could really see fire in her.' She pointed out that Rita's shirts literally had blue or white collars, depending on whether she was doing manual or intellectual work, and that for the last half of the movie, Rita wore a dragonfly pin so that we would get the message that she was 'really

starting to fly.' In one of those rare but glorious moments, a different student picked up the conversation. 'That's just a whole different way of thinking,' she said. 'I would never see all that. I wish I could do that.' But a third student couldn't let things rest there. Turning to the second student, who is extremely musical, she said, 'Yes, but you thought of all the music, how the beginning music added to the scene'" (Quiñones, p. 18).

Teachers often begin applying MI by having students assess their own intelligences, but a range of factors affects whether students find the assessment useful or meaningful.

Self-knowledge is one of the defining features of intrapersonal intelligence. One dimension of this knowledge is knowing one's intelligence strengths. The development of this form of intrapersonal intelligence is important to many endeavors, such as career planning. That was the hunch Jean Mantzaris had when she set out to investigate what MI theory might have to offer to her career-planning course with ABE and GED students. She began this process by teaching her students about the theory and by having them assess their own intelligences. Like several of her peers, Jean used a survey instrument developed by Meg Costanzo. Jean reports that the eight of 11 students who stayed with the course gained positive insights about themselves partly as a result of doing MI self-assessments. Both Jean and her students found the intelligence self-assessments to be easier to relate to and therefore more meaningful than traditional career aptitude tests.

One of Jean's students writes, "This stuff is fun, but more than that it shows you how many people around you are smart in many ways and so am I," (Mantzaris, 1998, p. 5). In addition to speaking to a heightened sense of his own capabilities, the comment also highlights the appreciation many students gained for each other's intelligences when the surveys were discussed in class. Wendy focused on this aspect in her teacher research. She concludes that, for her students, "Adding the MI framework, which validates many ways of learning, knowing, and demonstrating knowledge, makes it impossible to ignore the evidence that others have strengths which we ourselves lack, and makes the conclusion almost inescapable that working with others is at least sometimes advantageous" (Quiñones, 1998, p. 17).

Meg found that "Students appreciate having their intelligences acknowledged and valued. Many have never had the opportunity to claim their intelligences before this experience" (Costanzo, 1998, p. 9). A comment by one of her students explains Meg's assertion, "I haven't really had time to think about where my strengths are. I just know my weaknesses and that sometimes worries me. I always knew everyone had strengths and weaknesses, but I always worried about the things I couldn't do, not the things I could" (p. 32). A month later, the same student wrote, "You have inspired me in more ways than one and I never thought I could feel this good about my education and my self-esteem."

Jean and Meg are two of the five AMI teachers who found it useful to have their students assess their own intelligences. Three teachers did not find this approach useful, and one never tried it. A more thorough analysis will, it is hoped, reveal what underlies this diversity of opinion.

Meg's and Jean's students were secondary, rather than basic literacy, students, which may be why they were more readily able or willing to find value in MI self-assessments than their less literate counterparts. A divergent case is presented by Betsy Cornwell's ABE and high school diploma program students, most of whom did not respond positively to the idea of assessing their own intelligences. Betsy writes, "While I expected that the creation of individual intelligence profiles would yield a wealth of information about my students' intelligences and preferred ways of learning, I found that the exercise had limited usefulness and relevance for my particular group of students" (Cornwell, 1998, p. 7).

Neither of the two ESOL teachers who participated in the AMI study found it particularly useful to have students assess or talk about their own intelligences. One reason they did not use Meg's survey was that its vocabulary is inaccessible for beginning ESOL learners. They tried to have their beginning ESOL students identify their intelligences through pictures that depicted people using particular intelligences. Diane felt that trying to identify the exact combinations of intelligences that underlie her ESOL students' strengths was confusing both to her and her students, even when the students' native language was used to clarify concepts, and of questionable educational value: "I would venture to say that every adult student has stories of the development or estrangement of their intelligences... For me this is really beginning to call into question the part of MI that stresses that individuals investigate and become familiar with their own intelligence profiles."

Students' regular reflection on their learning shifted and broadened their paradigms of effective and acceptable teaching and learning practices.

According to the AMI teachers, a typical ABE, GED, or ESOL student expects traditional lessons with

workbooks or other text-oriented methods. At this stage of our data analysis it is not clear, but we wonder whether the students' level of previous education is a factor in how fast and willingly they will expand these expectations once they experience other ways to learn. Our data does suggest that when MI-based lessons are coupled with regular reflection and self-assessment of what is helping adults to learn, students begin to shift their paradigm of effective teaching and learning. More specifically, they begin to see value in more diverse ways of learning. Diane's findings are instructive in this regard: "Ongoing assessments, both formal and informal, of the students' ideas and feelings of what helps them to learn, understand and practice English, were what showed the students and me that the changes towards a more diverse curriculum resulted in an effective way to learn English. Therefore these assessments were essential in students coming to accept MI-inspired curriculum" (Paxton, 1998, p.27). Diane used multiple types of assessments such as student-teacher conferences, surveys, and group discussions.

The AMI teachers concurred that developing students' metacognitive skills can be arduous. Reflecting on one's learning does not come easily for most adult literacy students. It is both a skill and a habit that needs to develop over time. Students may resist reflection and fail to see its relevance. A few of Diane's students apparently thought that she did not know how to teach because she was asking for their opinions on the subject all the time!

Diane and several of her colleagues found that building trust and community in the classroom is necessary for MI-based instruction. Trust and mutual respect enable people to take risks into the unfamiliar together, to perform a skit, to tell a story, or to build something.

Terri expresses this: "Although trust was not directly germane to MI-based learning, it supported MI-based learning. A trusting community allowed students to take chances in their learning and to try new things" (Coustan, 1998, p. 28).

Teachers perceive a shift in the balance of power in the classroom when they offer students intelligences-informed choices in how they learn and express their understanding.

When teachers gave students choices in how they learn and demonstrate what they have learned, they were effectively giving some control to students. As a group, the AMI teachers' perception of the effect of their AMI work was a noticeable shift in the teacher-to-student power relations. It is possible that the act of validating students' strengths, interests, and preferences is an important first step that helps build the students' self-confidence and enables them to take control over their own learning and the curriculum. Furthermore, when students examine their strengths, they are likely to deepen their self-knowledge, which gives them a firmer foundation from which to direct their learning.

Several AMI teachers found themselves relinquishing some control by giving students choices and respecting their individual ways of learning and knowing. Terri found that, as students began to express preferences through choice-based .activities, they also became more assertive in other ways, shifting the balance of power in the classroom somewhat. She writes, "My experience over the past few years had shown me that these students were reluctant to share their preferences with me. I had almost

given up hope of ever being able to learn their preferences and had decided that this behavior was related to learners with limited English. Now the students appeared to have reached a benchmark or milestone…More students made choices. And those choices reflected both what the students liked and did not like about the activities I suggested" (Coustan, 1998, p. 21).

Likewise, Lezlie comments, "My class became more interactive and student-directed as I experimented with MI theory. Before this research project, I did most of the leading and dictated the order of the activities" (Rocka, 1998, p. 15). Sharing power with students was an unanticipated outcome of the changes Terri and Lezlie made in their teaching. Exploring how MI theory might serve to empower students was the focus of Wendy's research project. Her answer was "yes" in terms of the classroom-based power relations: "A change in the teacher-student relationship in the classroom rapidly became apparent. The combination of assignments based on multiple intelligences with the strategy of allowing students to choose their own assignments was the best I have yet found for sharing power while giving students a firm structure within which to work" (Quiñones, 1998, p. 13).

MI-informed education encourages teachers to learn more about their students, and may cause them to increase their expectations of students.

A well-known principle of adult education is that adults come to us with plenty of life experience, and that good adult education should acknowledge and draw on that experience. Teachers commonly try to get to know their students' goals and interests. MI theory offers

another lens through which to view students. This lens can be perplexing or illuminating.

The majority of the AMI teachers did find value in viewing their students through an MI lens. They felt that they gained a richer perspective on the student as a whole person. It provided not just interesting but also substantive information they could use to prepare lessons to help their students find new, perhaps more effective pathways to learning. Terri, for example, uncovered talents she did not know her Hmong students had and created opportunities for them to use those talents to learn English. When she saw that Choua, who is not literate in his native language, was good at building, she made sure his learning options included modeling new vocabulary words from clay or other material. This is not to say that her teaching approach is not validated by, or consistent with, other theories and approaches, such as participatory education. Nevertheless, Terri comments that MI theory led her to see more dimensions of her students.

As students were better able to demonstrate their strengths and use those strengths to learn new skills and information, their achievements sometimes exceeded their teachers' expectations. Wendy writes of her secondary level students, "My students' enthusiasm for being allowed to make their own choices, and their resulting willingness to spend time doing things they previously didn't think they could enjoy or learn, would have been enough reward for using this structure in my classroom. But there was much more! Students very often surprised me with their choices in these activities, taking on tasks one would never have suspected them capable of" (Quiñones, 1998).

Lezlie writes, "I do not know that I am seeing changes in students'

abilities. What I am seeing is perhaps other sides of the students that I would not see if we were only doing paper and pencil work. I was continually moved by the students' depth of understanding, sensitivity to the subject, and interest once they were allowed to choose their form of expression" (Rocka, 1998, p. 15).

It would stand to reason that as students exceed teachers' expectations, teachers would begin to raise their expectations of students. It is too early in our data analysis to make a strong case for this. We can, however, say that the teachers' expectations of themselves and their teaching has changed. Perhaps Meg sums it up best: "I come away from my research with a revised model for an effective ABE classroom, one that is less teacher-centered and which gives the students a greater voice in what they study. It is a classroom that emphasizes personal growth as well as academic development. It is a model that encourages students to solve real life problems and develop a variety of skills they will find useful in the future" (Costanzo, 1998, p. 28).

Conclusion

The AMI experience suggests that the 10 teachers involved tended to go through stages in their efforts to apply MI theory. They typically began by assessing students' intelligences under the assumption that intelligence profiles are the most important feature of MI theory. Later, they came to realize that what matters is not achieving perfect accuracy in assessing students' intelligences as much as their awareness that any given group of students possesses a diversity of intelligence strengths, and that their learning will be facilitated if they draw on those strengths. MI theory became another lens through which they could view, understand, and appreciate students and with which they could design engaging lessons.

The AMI teachers' efforts to engage students and facilitate their learning in light of MI theory led most of them to offer choices and multiple ways to engage with topics and materials. Having choices, in turn, gave their students more control over their learning and developed student voice. Teachers and students shifted their paradigm not only of what is desirable but also of what is possible. As one of the AMI teachers said about MI theory in education: "In the end, it's about looking at everyone from a strengths perspective. We all have strengths."

The work of the AMI teachers lay the groundwork for our understanding of what happens when "MI grows up." As befits an initial investigation, we expect the AMI study to generate at least as many new questions as it will answer. It will surely point to new and promising areas of inquiry related to MI in adult education.

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Putting Theory into Practice

Applying MI in the classroom meant enhancing, rather than replacing, techniques we value

By Terri Coustan and Lezlie Rocka

I n 1997, we were teaching adult basic education. Terri taught low-level learners, mostly Hmong from Laos, who had little or no schooling in their own language and limited use of English. Lezlie taught adult basic education to low-level learners, women, most of them single mothers with dependent children receiving public assistance. We became participants in a teacher research project that focused on applying multiple intelligences (MI) theory to our adult education practices.

Multiple intelligences theory is just that, a theory. It is a psychological theory that addresses what the brain does with information. After learning about MI, we were both excited to try it in our classrooms. It made so much sense. It validated what we witnessed with our students everyday: people seem to have different strengths, or intelligences, and they seem to process information and express what they know in different ways.

We wanted to use the theory, but we found ourselves asking just what that meant. How does one apply a theory? MI theory has no specific application method, instructional approach, or curriculum, yet teachers in many K-12 schools are applying it today. What this means to us is that they are using the theory to guide how they teach. We decided to begin by using MI theory as a way to think about our students as we did the day-to-day, on-going, on-your-feet assessment we always do. Then, we

let the theory influence instructional choices. We will talk about these processes separately, although often they happened simultaneously

Viewing Students

At first, our application of MI theory involved only how we, as teachers, viewed our students. When we were "wearing MI glasses," we could view students' choices and preferences. We could see ways in which students learned most easily, enjoyably, and efficiently and assumed that they corresponded with students' strongest intelligences. Equipped with this information, we tried to develop or encourage students to participate in activities that would aid their learning by drawing upon their strengths.

For example, decorating at Christmas last year was not necessarily an MI-based activity. But when Terri wore her MI glasses, the activity provided her with information about her students. She offered the learners, mostly Hmong, the opportunity to decorate the class door. She brought in a variety of materials and framed the top of the door with jagged paper resembling mountains. After a discussion about Christmas in Laos, the students went to work.

Blia cut out a tree using a paper folding and cutting technique that differed from the technique used by everyone else in the class. He made another tree with a star on top. Choukha cut out a bird within the body of the tree and then he cut out a dinosaur.

Mai See and Seng, two women, traced and pasted trees directly on the door. Choua chose not to make a tree but made an airplane with a slit in the side in which he inserted a wing. Other students did not use the paper or the scissors but told Terri about Christmas in Laos, where it never snows.

Without MI glasses, Terri would have seen that her students cut, pasted, drew, traced trees and airplanes, and that some people talked. She would have made a mental note that some students were "good" or "gifted," as demonstrated by their art work. She might have focused on how their individual efforts blended into a spectacular seasonal display with interesting shapes, colors, and textures. The decorated door would have held her attention. She was looking at the forest and not the trees.

With her MI lenses on, she was able to see beyond the end product, to how individual students uniquely communicated their knowledge and their strengths. For example, the students demonstrated differing spatial strengths. Blia's tree, complete with star on top, demonstrated his unique two-dimensional spatial intelligence; Choua's airplane was an example of three-dimensional spatial intelligence. Some experimented with familiar animals and objects, others chose more unfamiliar animals such as dinosaurs, demonstrating both with their spatial and linguistic strengths. Mai See and Seng demonstrated differing linguistic and intrapersonal strengths in talking about their memories of Laos.

These observations helped Terri to assess the strengths of the students. She noted her observations in her teacher's log and thought about them later. She was not only able to learn more about the ways that her students used and expressed information, but she also used the information in planning activities more mindful of their strengths. In

the past, she would have assessed her students using more traditional ways, through reading and writing activities. She learned that she can assess students by paying attention to all the things they do in the classroom, even decorating a door for Christmas.

Understanding Strengths

All the intelligences are operating at all times in people. When we perform an action, such as playing the piano, for example, we don't use only one intelligence. We usually have our whole array of intelligences involved in everything we do. Individual strengths and weaknesses differ, but we use all our intelligences to make sense of the world.

Intelligences by themselves cannot be observed, but can be inferred by analyzing individual strengths. In our classrooms, we were able to view areas in which we thought our students had strengths, but it was not possible for us — or necessary — to define anyone's intelligence profile. Instead of guiding students' towards what we saw as activities that suited their intelligences, we decided it was best to supply, within lessons, an array of choices and opportunities through which students could express their different intelligence strengths. We thought that this would allow students to explore receiving and communicating information in ways that suited them best.

We saw students' strengths and preferences reflected through the activities they selected, the length of time they devoted to the activities, their body language during the activities, and what they said about the activities both during and after doing them. These strengths and preferences emerged as we observed students choosing the same activities or types of activities over and over.

Terri had this example in her classroom observation journal: The

students really liked looking through the magazines for the new vocabulary. Yang Lee found four pictures for the word "problem." She said the word "problem" each time she found a picture. I could see her mind working as she scanned the picture bringing new and old information together. Over the year, whenever Terri offered choices of activities to illustrate understanding of new vocabulary, Yang Lee regularly chose to look for pictures in *National Geographic* magazine. She noticed details and questioned the background of pictures. In viewing a photo of a girl in a village, she alone commented on the mountains and their shape and compared them to those in Laos. For Yang Lee, pictures provided informational input as well as an opportunity to communicate her knowledge. Her keen interest in pictures seemed to reveal her strengths in spatial intelligence, which she used to reinforce or expand vocabulary and gain information from pictures. Yang Lee also seemed to link her spatial intelligence to her linguistic and intrapersonal strengths by labeling or questioning the spatial forms and describing them to Terri and to the class. Spatial intelligences seemed to be the force driving Yang Lee's comprehension and expression.

Influencing Instruction

Our MI-related instructional goal was to allow students to succeed by providing them with opportunities to work from their strengths. Each day we offered them choices. They were able to select how they wished to learn and how they wished to demonstrate that they mastered information. The choices we offered reflected the different intelligences identified by Howard Gardner.

Some students chose to read about a topic, some chose to look for pictures, or to hear a story on tape. Some chose to write, others chose to

draw, or to construct. On other occasions we used whole-group instruction, asking our classes to draw, act out a play, or pantomime a word.

Lezlie's Experience

A reading lesson Lezlie modified after learning about MI is a good example of the choices we offered. The class read *Meet Addy* by Connie Porter, a book classified as historical fiction. It illustrates some of the experiences slaves had on the Underground Railroad. Addy, the main character, is a young teen born into slavery who escapes with her mother to freedom.

Before she learned about MI theory, Lezlie began the group reading lesson with a pre-reading question based on what the class had already or were about to read. She asked the students whether they thought that Addy and her Mama would make it to freedom. They discussed and wrote about this.

Then, while the students read aloud, Lezlie encouraged them to apply all the skills they already

Post-Reading Choices

To add an MI perspective to a reading lesson using the book Meet Addy, Lezlie added these post-reading activities. Students could do them alone, with a partner, or in a group.

- Draw a picture or show in Play-Doh any part of what we read.
- Pick a song or a chant that would give you inspiration if you were doing something very scary. Write the words to the song or sing it.
- Make your own map of Addy and journey either on paper or with Play-Doh
- Write or discuss with someone a part of what we just read that you think is interesting.
- Act out a part of what we just read.
- List the places Addy and Mama hid on their escape to freedom.
- Design your own project for this chapter. ❖

learned, reminding them to use their finger, a pencil, or a book mark to help guide their eyes. She made sure to allow them ample time to use decoding strategies before giving a prompt, and coached students on beginning or ending sounds of words. They discussed what they read after every paragraph, reviewed the meaning of difficult words, and reread the paragraph if necessary. After reading, she led a post-reading activity in which she asked students what they liked or did not like about what had been read. Students wrote about this. Some shared their writing with the class.

When Lezlie looked at this lesson from an MI perspective, she did not change it, she added to it. The projects and activities she added allowed students to choose how they wanted to express what they understood about the reading. She presented the students with options. They did these activities after doing the reading for the day. After they finished, she had them share what they worked on with the class.

Lezlie explains: My assumption in offering choices was that students would choose projects which corresponded with their strongest intelligences. Those who felt most comfortable role playing the stories possibly had greater bodily/kinesthetic and interpersonal skills; those who chose drawing possibly had stronger visual/spatial skills. I am not positive which expressions correlated with which intelligences, yet this knowledge did not seem necessary. Once we began doing the projects along with the reading, students' interest in the story increased. They came into class excited to read and were lively and animated while working on their projects. They worked together organizing themselves and their projects until they were finished. Their new-found ability to perform a task well in school seemed to elevate their egos, as did

their newly-gained understanding of the reading material.

Value

Lezlie felt that instruction based on applying MI theory did seem to facilitate learning for her students. For example, reading comprehension did not seem to happen as easily when students only read and wrote. There seemed to be a synergy between expression and comprehension. Students seemed to gain greater understanding of a story after they expressed what they read in a way that was comfortable for them. Renee, for example, remembered little of what she read until she started to role-play the story after she finished reading. This alternative form of expression seemed to make meaning of the text and embed it in her memory. The more Lezlie encouraged students to express and explore meaning in their own ways, the more she was surprised and moved by the depth of their responses.

Instruction based on MI theory also seemed to cause improvements in specific reading strategies for students. This was not a planned goal but an unexpected and powerful result. It seemed that when students were given the freedom to choose how they wanted to express what they understood, they became invested in the final result of their efforts and wanted their information to be presented as accurately and as well as possible.

While students were doing their projects, Lezlie saw them combing through the reading to get information and details. They wanted to be sure their projects were accurate. She had not seen this desire for accuracy and details when they had to write a book report; then they just wanted to get the report done. Reading became a tool to do the projects, whereas a book report makes the reading the focus.

Terri also found compelling

reasons to use MI theory-based instruction with low-level ESOL learners who experienced failure in traditional classrooms. Reading and speaking are very limited channels of expression for these learners. MI-based instruction offers a greater range of activities through which they can learn. For example, since Ka and Pia's English is so limited, they are not able to communicate much through writing and speaking. Ka prefers to draw. Although her drawings do not have much detail, they are important because they allow her an additional pathway via which she can communicate. Since she was unable to say many words in English, by drawing she was able to demonstrate to Terri her knowledge of a word or an idea. Terri was then able to respond verbally and help her with the words that were slow in coming. Her drawings became a bridge to learning English and a way for Terri to check on her level of understanding.

Once her low-level learners became more familiar with having choices, Terri observed changes in their choices. Students started with easier activities or those chosen by a friend. After four weeks, they were trying new activities and working efficiently on the ones that they have previously tried. They were no longer doing just the easier activities, such as writing their new spelling words in glitter. They were doing the harder activities, such as sequential story strips, and they were taking more control of their learning. They were seeking out their own ways to learn and developing confidence in their choices. Terri believes that these new skills will make it easier for them to learn English and will transfer to problem solving outside the classroom.

In Conclusion

Teachers are bombarded with new curricula and instructional

approaches. Each new approach seems to suggest that we replace the old with something new. Applying MI theory was different: it did not mean that we abandon activities that are important to us and to our students. It meant that we enhance them, and think about our students differently.

None of this came easy to us. We found that after each class, we needed to reflect on what had happened and what to do next. However, from the beginning, we saw validity in the theory, and after applying it we saw that it helped our students learn. How did MI theory affect us and our students? Our students broadened the ways in which they expressed themselves and benefitted from this learning process. They liked being able to express themselves in ways other than speaking and writing. When given the opportunity to choose, they tapped into their own strengths, finding a picture to illustrate a vocabulary word, or building objects with clay.

We as teachers discovered fuller and richer ways to assess our students, and we used the information in planning our lessons. We are still reading about the theory and talking to other teachers who are using it. As we continue to teach, we know that our application of MI theory will take us in new directions. We wish you good luck on your own MI journey.

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Terri Coustan has a master's degree in elementary education and elementary administration. She holds certification in ESOL and has taught a family literacy class at the International Institute in Rhode Island for the past eight years.

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Multiple Assessments for Multiple Intelligences

by Meg Costanzo and Diane Paxton

*T*eachers use many kinds of assessment for many different purposes. They often use formal tests — commercial or "home grown" — for placement: to decide in which class to enroll students, and to determine where to start instruction. They informally assess students as they teach, to gauge whether the students have grasped the material. They may use tests or assignments to do this, too, and to mark the completion of a section of curriculum. For guidance in choosing instructional methods, many teachers observe students' enthusiasm or ask their students which instructional activities they prefer.

Multiple intelligences (MI) theory, which identifies eight ways in which students can be "smart," provides educators with an expanded framework to use when assessing their students' strengths and potential. Schools have traditionally emphasized only two of these intelligences, linguistic and logical/mathematical. Multiple intelligences theory encourages teachers also to recognize their students' bodily/kinesthetic, spatial, musical, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. It stimulates teachers to plan assessments that allow students to draw upon these intelligences when trying to demonstrate their mastery of content material.

As teachers interested in finding ways to engage adult basic education students in nontraditional approaches to learning, MI theory

was appealing. We were curious about the efficacy of formally assessing students' intelligences. We also wanted to see if we could use MI-influenced assessment and instruction as a springboard to break our students away from their attachment to traditional modes of learning. Over the course of our teacher research project, we found that our view of the value of developing intelligence profiles for our students differed. One of us concluded that developing individual intelligence profiles was not meaningful; the other found the process beneficial and empowering to students. We both found that MI-enhanced, nontraditional classroom practices were accepted by our students, more by some than others, but accepted nonetheless. In the ongoing classroom process, we used diverse assessment formats to invite students to think about their own learning as well as the effectiveness of activities.

Diane's ESOL Classes

I taught two different English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, beginning literacy and intermediate. At the start of the project, I had the impression that individual profiles were essential in bringing MI theory to the classroom. And, at the 1997 TESOL convention, Thomas Armstrong, a well-known speaker on multiple intelligences, emphasized that individual profiling was one of the most valuable aspects of the theory for students. Many of my AMI colleagues also felt this way. With my beginning ESOL students, I

introduced the intelligences explicitly and worked with them to help them identify their areas of strength and weakness. My hope was that if they realized they had many areas of strength besides the linguistic intelligence, they might begin to value nontraditional learning activities designed to emphasize other intelligence areas.

My students' limited ability to communicate in English encouraged me to find ways that were not dependent upon language to help them to assess their intelligences. I used photos of people engaged in tasks that represented each of the intelligences. The students guessed the underlying intelligence categories. Next, they identified areas of their lives that indicated skill, interest, and experience in those areas. For example, students who liked to dance, take walks, and exercise identified bodily/kinesthetic intelligence, and those who enjoyed reading and studying English identified linguistic intelligence as an area of strength. I created a self-assessment chart using drawings of people learning in different ways: working alone, in pairs and groups, singing, writing, laughing, reading. The students circled the ways they like to learn.

My elderly Latino students did not see the identification of their intelligence profiles as relevant to our class. They followed the class process I have described, but did not understand how the idea of their intelligence strengths could help them learn. In my view, the thinking about intelligence or "being smart" in eight different ways was not part of their cultural backgrounds, perhaps as a result of their limited experience with literacy. They appeared to be going through the motions to please the teacher, which is part of their educational background. Neither during this part of the class nor later did they take ownership of or show

additional interest in the idea of intelligences. I overheard Juanita very softly say something like, "All this is not related to English class."

Jesus replied, "Sssshhh, the teacher is giving us a gift of what she knows, she is trying to help us learn, and we should be thankful." They seemed to feel that I was taking class time to focus on a topic in which they were not interested. I, too, was coming to doubt the usefulness of MI self assessment. I began to realize that, at least the way I taught, individual profiles were not relevant to my beginning students' potential to benefit from the application of MI theory, nor could thorough MI profiles be done in the context of our class. The most I could do is to look for domains of a student's experience in which the intelligences manifest themselves.

While our class did not see intelligence profiles as useful, they did benefit from MI theory in other areas. The students came to accept more hands-on, non-traditional activities which were extensions of topics in which they were interested, and I used MI as a framework to inform the development of their learning projects.

Meg's Classes

I taught an adult basic education (ABE), preparation for tests of general educational development (GED) and adult diploma class. My ABE and GED students arrived in class expecting to hear lectures and be assigned workbook pages. I needed a way to redirect these expectations and encourage the students to approach learning from a different perspective. If I could alter my students' expectations about what they would experience as learners in my class, perhaps I could reach them in a more effective way.

When I introduced MI to my students, they were interested in learning about the theory, but they

could not transfer the abstract ideas to their own experiences in the classroom. To help them do this, I wanted them to begin reflecting on their strongest intelligences. Developing individual profiles seemed to be a concrete way to begin this process. Also, we operated under an open enrollment, open exit policy at our center. This meant that new students were constantly rotating in and out of our program. I needed a standard introduction to orient students to the types of MI-inspired activities and projects they would be experiencing in our class. Creating individual profiles became a way of making new students more comfortable with the style of work they would be encountering in our program.

At first, I had the students complete a learning preference questionnaire that I found in *The Multiple Intelligences Handbook* by Bruce Campbell (1994). As I reviewed these questionnaires with my students at individual conferences, I realized that they had little experience with this type of self-assessment. I decided to create an AMI assessment survey that the students would find easier to complete. I wrote eight scenarios, each containing statements specific to a certain intelligence, and recorded the script on a cassette. As the students listened to the tape, they responded to each scenario by stating whether the statements described them 'very much,' 'a lot,' 'somewhat,' 'a little' or 'hardly at all.' The students then graphed their responses on a grid. In subsequent class discussions we talked about the intelligences associated with the scenarios. The students began to reflect upon the ways they learn best. The on-going discussions about the students' strengths that stemmed from the development of the profiles were far more valuable than the actual profiles themselves.

Most students reported enjoying this type of individual MI assessment, often using words like 'fun' and 'interesting' to describe the experience. One student said she was now aware that there were more ways than one a person is smart; another student thought this was a good exercise to make you think. Whenever someone new enrolled in the program, the other students were often the first to remind me that the new student needed to complete the survey. In addition, the students frequently referred back to information found on their individual profiles. At the conclusion of our class, one student suggested that they take the survey again to see if there were any changes in their profiles.

Perhaps the reason my students reacted so differently to this type of assessment than Diane's students did has something to do with their vastly different cultural and educational backgrounds. My students did not find it inappropriate or impolite to discuss their strengths and talents. Through their children, many were already familiar with educational contexts that emphasize individual projects and nontraditional teaching methods. Most of my students had already completed a couple of years of high school and many had held jobs where they had experienced continual success. Maybe they felt less threatened about discussing their strengths and weaknesses because of these experiences.

Variety of Approaches: Diane

In an effort to help students develop metacognition — an awareness of their thinking and learning processes — about the effect of the diverse approaches to ESOL we were experiencing as a class, I incorporated assessments into the routines of the class. These assessments were designed so that the students could reflect individually and as a group on the value of the activities and thematic units we did. The assessments raised their awareness and ability to articulate how they learn effectively, as well as encouraging them to express their needs and begin to take control over the class and their own learning.

I used a variety of assessment tools, some created spontaneously and others prepared ahead of time. Usually once a week I asked them to reflect as a group on an activity, writing their responses on newsprint or the board in categories, 'good' and 'not so good' or 'it helped me learn because/it didn't help me learn because.' At mid-semester, I asked each student to complete a form that was part chart, part short-answer questions. The evaluation chart listed all the activities done in class. Each student indicated with a check if they wanted more, the same, or less of each activity. I tallied the responses, brought them back to the class on newsprint, and we discussed them. This helped all the students see the diversity of activities that were helpful and also created a community of learners who were expressing their needs in English, which in itself represented a developmental step.

Hearing each others' opinions about teaching and learning helped the students in both classes recognize and value their own voices as well as the many different ways there are to learn. Twice a semester I held individual conferences. Several of the students pointed out their appreciation of the varied methods we used in a videotaped assessment at the end of the semester. Samaria noted, "All three points of what you write on the board help [their journals; their notebooks for all the grammar, readings, and textual activities we had done; and the creative wall projects]. Because you have to try many different way how you can learn more fast. For me I like to try a different ways. I like this."

Randolfo said, "Everything in this class helps us. Believe me, because you know everything is interesting. And for myself, I can say that writing I learned so much because when before I came here, I write just a little, but now I can write a lot. Because I speak more than writing. Everything in this class is good, myself I can say."

Concepcion reported, "I like the cassette, because at home we can listen the story and read it at the same time. When we don't know how to pronounce a word, we can practice. The stories are interesting, and later you give a song or a poem or a photo that has the same idea. It makes me think a lot about how to say my ideas in English. Later when I write in my journal, I know more how to write my paragraphs to say ideas."

I also believe that listening to and building on what classmates said and thought helped their bonding process, building community and trust in me and each other. And, seeing that their opinions were solicited and respected by peers and the teacher helped them to become empowered as individuals and as members of the learning community and to take ownership of their learning processes.

Many Methods: Meg

I used many assessment methods when I evaluated my students' learning preferences. The notes from the teacher journal, as well as the anecdotal musings I wrote after each class, provided useful information. I also examined samples of class work when looking for evidence of student strengths. I assigned writing topics that gave me insight into the students' intelligences. We worked on team-building activities that allowed the students to display their strengths through project work. I gave open-ended assignments such as: What can we do as a group to make our center a more comfortable place in which to work and learn? How can we, as a

group, encourage more adults to attend classes at our center?

The students expressed interest in working on these real-life challenges, often saying that this was their favorite part of our program. One student told me, "The project is very important to me because I'm learning more with every step we take. It's exciting to find out what's next and begin the project. The most exciting part is the finished project because we all worked together to complete it." As the students worked on their projects, I had time to observe them in authentic settings as they solved problems and created products.

Perhaps the most effective assessment tool I used was dialogue journals. During the last 10 to 15 minutes of each class, I asked the students to reflect upon the evening's lessons. The students could write about anything they chose, but I often set the direction for their reflections by posing such open-ended questions as, What do you think of the math activity we did in class tonight? or What kinds of lessons work best for you? Based on their responses, I pursued further discussions to encourage them to think about the ways that they learn best. As time went on, student comments became lengthier and more introspective. When I asked the students what they thought of the dialogue journals, they emphatically endorsed their use. One student made the following comment regarding our journals: "I like [the journals] very much. We can talk about something we liked or didn't like, what we might want more work in, some things we couldn't say in class or didn't have a chance to say."

As this project progressed, I realized that a few of the assessment tools I had developed to gather data for my research were becoming a end in themselves: a model for ways

to draw upon students' interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences to help create a positive classroom environment, a community of learners. The interactions in the classroom stemming from data collection activities, both one-on-one and as a group, helped to establish closer bonds between my students and myself. I noticed a new dynamic emerging in the class and a shift in the balance of power. The students began to assume a greater role in determining how the class was organized and what they studied. Their work during our team-building activities made them aware of the wide range of their abilities, and they started to view themselves in a different light. One student's reflections in her dialogue journal underscore this change. "I haven't really had time to think about where my strengths are. I just know my weaknesses and that sometimes worries me. I always knew everyone had strengths and weaknesses but I always worried about the things I couldn't do and not the things I could."

A month later, after we had completed our first team-building exercise, the same student wrote this: "First of all, I really believe that our project was a success for two reasons. 1) We all worked together and worked for something that we thought was important. 2) That you have inspired us to open our minds and have [the] belief that we are capable of almost anything if we really want to do it... I never thought I could feel this good about my education and my self-esteem."

As a result of my work on this project, I have an entirely new view of the meaning of assessment. Besides relying solely on my observations of student strengths and weaknesses, I now encourage my students to assume a greater role in this process. I include their input more than ever when designing our

lessons and units. More and more, I found myself saying, "Why am I doing this, when the students could do it instead?" I believe that my work on the AMI Research Project tipped the scales of the balance of power in our classroom, making it more student-centered now than it had ever been before our involvement in this research.

Conclusion

Our experience with the MI project affirmed the value of designing assessment tools that are meaningful and empowering to students, not just sources of information to be used exclusively by the teacher. The information we gathered from the assessment tools also informed our classes' work with project-based activities, which in turn contributed to the students' taking control over their learning processes. As a result of their growing self awareness as members of a community of learners, the students in our respective classes bonded, determined how they acquired skills, appreciated each others' strengths, and learned to value nontraditional approaches to teaching and learning. ✏️

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About the Authors
Meg Costanzo carried out teacher research as part of the AMI study while teaching a GED/external diploma class at the Tutorial Center in Manchester Center, VT, and training tutors for the local affiliate of Literacy Volunteers of America. Meg has almost 30 years of teaching experience, mostly at the elementary level.

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BLACKBOARD

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Multiple Intelligences Web Sites

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• http://literacynet.org/diversity/homenew.html

• http://pzweb.harvard.edu

NCSALL Web Site

Visit our web site for all issues of *Focus on Basics*.
http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall

Focus ● on
Basics

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

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which is the federal legislation that governs the bulk of adult basic education in the United States, requires the establishment of "a comprehensive performance accountability system to assess the effectiveness of eligible agencies in achieving continuous improvement of adult education and literacy activities" (WIA, Section 212.a). States' accountability systems are being implemented as of July of this year. All members of the field adult basic education are curious — and anxious — to see what impact the new regulations will have.

Accountability touches everyone differently, depending on their position in the system. In assembling this issue, we therefore sought out learners, program staff, staff development providers, state ABE directors, researchers, and public policy advocates. We didn't restrict their stories to how they were implementing the Workforce Investment Act. We wanted to know how they defined accountability, what being accountable involved, what the challenges were in implementing useful and viable accountability systems, and what lessons they had learned. The result, we hope, is a snapshot of diverse approaches to and opinions about accountability and its role in adult basic education in 1999.

Learners are represented by Sherri Ames and Lisa White, who share their views on what they feel accountable for as program participants in a box on page 3. Sensing that their rural Maine program was not having much impact on its learners' lives, Shirley Wright and her colleagues were motivated to change their accountability priorities. Jan Goethal and Carol Gabler write about the challenges their Eau Claire, WI, volunteer program faced as it grew, added partners, and diversified the programs it offers. Agnes Precure describes how Oregon's adult basic education accountability system is part of the state's comprehensive approach to providing a clear message about the success of state agencies in reaching commonly agreed upon goals. The State Adult Basic Education Director in Pennsylvania, Cheryl Keenan, looks back a number of years to the beginning of a continuing process to institute an accountability system that fosters program improvement.

Excerpting from her NCSALL report *Contested Ground*, Juliet Merrifield presents a vision of an accountability system for Adult Basic Education in which all partners are mutually responsible and provides us with the steps to get there. Literacy advocate David Rosen describes some strategies for awakening legislators to their role in championing adult literacy policy and appropriate resources. And finally, we provide an update on accountability-related NCSALL research being conducted by Beth Bingman and her colleagues at The University of Tennessee.

To discuss these articles and the questions they raise with your colleagues across the nation, please join the *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list. Learn how to subscribe to the list by turning to the Blackboard on page 24.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner
Editor

school diploma, and we would never issue a diploma to someone who had not met this requirement. The system said that an "A" meant achievement. We gave out lots of A's. So why were our adult learners still unable to find employment? Why were they still on welfare? Why couldn't they remember anything that we had taught them? In our small town, we saw students often and asked them about the impact that attending our program had made in their lives. Participation had, in many cases, not made a difference and had not improved their quality of life.

Our program team, which consisted of the director (me) and four teachers, began to scrutinize what we were doing and why. We asked ourselves: Who are we really accountable to? Our answer was that we were accountable to our learners first and to the system second. With that in mind, we began to build a new program, one that focused on the learner while satisfying the state and federal government as well as our local school district. We are still in the process of making this change, and it is working extremely well.

The Whole Person

We resolved to build a comprehensive learning program that taught the whole person, not a program like the one we had before, which put people into disjointed classes. Before, if a student came to me and said that he or she needed an algebra class to enter nursing school, I put that student into algebra class. Nine times out of ten, the student did not succeed in a nursing program. Now, before talking about classes, we do a comprehensive intake with the student, discuss his or her goals and needs, and create a plan with a timeline for that student. Then, we put him or her into class.

Early in the process of planning a program that taught the whole

student, we surveyed our learners. They said that their attendance would be better if they could attend classes during the day, while their children were in school. We had been offering classes four nights a week and a few hours during the day. We knew that to offer more day classes we would need space, especially because, with new welfare-to-work legislation, more learners were participating every year: 200 in 1998 compared to 50 in 1995. A local director was retiring, so the district offered to share my directorship between two districts: we combined two programs into one, thus leveraging financial resources. The neighboring district also offered a building that was not in use – and they offered to pay building expenses. Thanks to a superintendent with vision, we were given an out-of-use elementary school that handily happened to be between the two districts. We opened

the Atkinson Learning Center in 1996. Our school has three large classrooms, a small library, and a kitchen. It also has a huge outdoor area that can be used for learning. At this point, we had a little more funding, and we had space. Two critical problems had been resolved.

Our staff asked, "How do we design our delivery system so that it is learner-centered and active?" At the time, we provided classes in English, math, social studies, and science, much like regular K-12 education. Many of our students had already failed in this system; we could not set them up for failure a second time. We were ready to try something new.

We decided to drop the myth that all subjects exist independent of each other. English class cannot focus on just reading and writing. Math cannot focus solely on calculations, and so on. Learning is an integrated process; many things

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The Learner's Viewpoint

Staff at the Atkinson Learning Center surveyed program participants to learn about their views of accountability and adult basic education. The approximately 75 participants who responded said that that they were accountable for their actions and their learning; 95 percent felt responsible for their learning and attendance. They also felt that by going to school, they were modeling good behavior for their children. In response to the question, "How do you know that you have learned?" more than half the learners said that they know where to look and how to find the answer [to questions].

"It seems to me when I was young, I couldn't wait to get out of high school and just be done with learning," said program participant Sherri Ames. "Though I really wanted to go to college, I was a little relieved

when it didn't work out. Now here I am, 32 years old. The world has changed a lot in 13 years. I now understand that in order to get ahead in life, I must continue my education and soak up all the information I can get."

Another learner, Lisa White, talked about accountability and responsibility. "Accountability is being responsible for my own actions. It is up to me to get places on time, do what I agree to do, and to use tact and manners. I understand that I need to learn more in all three roles of parent, worker, and community member. This year, I have learned lots of new computer skills. I have also learned to solve problems on my own. I know that I'm learning because I can do things without asking for help all of the time. It's nice to feel more confident."

occur at once. We realized that we needed an integrated curriculum.

EFF

We still needed funds for this. In Maine, adult education teachers are usually hourly employees who are expected to teach during all paid hours. I guess that teachers are expected to write curriculum because they want to - on their own time. I do not expect my teachers to do this. About this time, in 1995, we happened upon and received a grant to participate in the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) project. Via a survey, EFF identified four reasons why adult learners attend literacy classes: for access, to develop a voice, to support action, and to provide a bridge to the future. EFF applies these purposes to three roles adults play: worker, family member, and community member, and has identified a set of common activities that cross all roles. Managing resources is one common activity, for example; work together is another. EFF has also developed a subset of skills — which they call generative

Community Member Role

Focus on local community, town government, state government, and federal government
Underlying study is U.S. history

Essential Common Activities
• Develop and express sense of self
• Manage resources
• Work together

Generative Skills to be Evaluated
• Plan
• Listen actively
• View critically
• Use mathematical concepts and techniques
• Solve problems
• Reflect and evaluate

skills — that adults must have in order to be able to perform the common activities. Generative skills fall into four broad categories: communication, interpersonal, decision-making, and lifelong learning. Within each skill is a means for measurement, with standards. With $6000 provided by EFF, we had money for planning. We spent five full days working on our curriculum and started to hold one- to two-hour weekly staff meetings.

Our new classes would be focused around the three roles outlined in EFF: worker, family member, and community member. Within each of these three roles, the content areas are very important. Each class would address standards from each content area while addressing certain generative skills, such as problem-solving or speaking clearly. We had established the framework for our adult learning environment. By the fall of 1997, we had made many changes, but much work still remained.

Once the framework was established, we had to specify the content and skills that would be addressed and evaluated, keeping in mind that we are accountable to teach content specified by the state of Maine. Teachers worked together to do this, organizing them by adult role. The list we developed of the common activities, generative skills, and content area for the role of community member is in the box to the left. The common activities form the basis for classroom activities. Learners begin by looking at the personal histories and then at the history of the towns around us. It is an inside-out approach that helps learners connect to the subject matter more easily than if they started with abstract historical dates and places. All testing, portfolio documentation, presentations, and other assessment activities are done so that a particular generative skill, such as solving

"We took time to articulate and develop a consensus around our program's teaching principles..."

problems, is evaluated in relation to the EFF standard for that skill. Learners build portfolios that are set up according to the generative skills so that they can see and be responsible for their progress toward meeting each standard.

We taught using this framework and curriculum for a year, and then evaluated what we were doing. We realized that we were not all working from the same underlying assumptions about teaching and learning. So, we took time to articulate and develop a consensus around our program's teaching principles. Here is the list we developed: learning is active, not passive; teachers are facilitators of learning; every student can learn; each student learns differently; assessment must be done in a variety of ways if it is to be valid; all learning gains must be documented.

Not Done Yet

Teachers and facilitators agreed to be held accountable for and provide to our learners an educational program based on these principles and built around the EFF framework. But we were not done yet. Changing our schedule to make our program more accessible to learners, we now run three 10-week sessions from September to May and a fourth summer session. New students enter

programs only at the beginning of a session. We split students into three levels based on their reading skills, as tested by the Wilson Reading Test and an informal reading inventory.

Teachers developed more specific curriculum documents, listing requirements students would have to meet. The documents were in draft form because the staff agreed that students would discuss and refine all classroom expectations and then reach agreement with each teacher about individual expectations. Learners need to know how they will be evaluated, on what, and why. This needs to be very clear to them or trust can be broken early on in the learning experience. This sounds simple but it was sometimes difficult for staff to be clear enough so that learners were not intimidated.

Right now, we measure student progress by testing reading level and evaluating generative skills. We document learning in portfolios based on achievement within each generative skill. For example, the learners in the community class have been studying government all year and have decided they would like to see it in action. They are planning a trip to Augusta, our state capital. They outlined a plan to raise money for the bus, developed a schedule of events for the trip, and designed a means to evaluate their success. It is very important that they talk about evaluation often throughout the process, so that they know where their grades will come from. After they complete the trip, they will evaluate it against their performance standards and then document their gains in learning in the generative skill areas of planning, using math, problem-solving, and reflection. They will document their gains within their portfolios. At the end of the year, our program will be able to count how many students improved their reading levels and how many

increased their skills in each generative skill area.

We award Maine high school credit to students who meet the expectations that they and their teachers agree upon at the beginning of each session. Expectations must align with the curriculum. In addition, all classes have a mandatory attendance requirement. We explain this to students and they usually all agree that their presence is extremely important to learning. In Maine, 45 class hours are necessary for one credit and 16 credits are needed for a high school diploma. If all expectations are met, learners in our community class will receive half a credit in government, half a credit in US history, and half a credit in math. Classes built upon the other roles offer similar credit. Other classes are available for students who want to progress more quickly in math, art, and lab sciences. Some of these still use the old approach to teaching and learning, but it is our program goal to have all courses using the EFF framework by June, 2000.

Conclusion

Our program is now in the fourth year of building an accountability system that meets the needs of learners first. We are not done with this process. Equipped for the Future has provided us with an appropriate framework and standards for measurement. It is now my job as program director to support teachers and help them build a program that maximizes their potential to create an excellent delivery system. Accountability is a tough issue for everyone in education. Our program is determined to pursue true accountability to our learners. We owe it to them.

About the Author

Shirley Wright is the Adult Education Director for two rural programs in

Maine. She has spent several years developing welfare-to-work and employment skills programs for displaced workers. MSAD #41 and MSAD #68 Adult Education, programs in Dover-Foxcroft and Milo, are both partners in the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future Project.❖

Performance Accountability: For What? To Whom? And How?

by Juliet Merrifield

In everyday life, accountability means responsibility; it means being answerable to someone else for one's actions. We cannot, however, use the term without specifying accountability to whom and for what. In adult basic education (ABE), how we answer the question "to whom" depends a lot on our position in the system. Teachers may answer that they feel accountable to their students. Program directors may answer that they are accountable to their funders and staff as well as to students. State adult education offices may feel accountable to the governor, the legislature, to other state agencies, to workforce development boards, as well as to taxpayers. In addition, no clear consensus exists about "for what" adult education is accountable. Where does the balance lie between providing services and delivering results? Is the main purpose increased literacy proficiency, or are more diffuse social outcomes the emphasis? Until recently, the focus has been on providing services, with little emphasis on the results or the impact of those services. In the last few years, a number of policy initiatives at state and federal levels have begun to shift the emphasis to delivering results, with services seen as the means to an end. But what the "end" should be is by no means clear.

I would like to suggest that developing performance accountability is not just technically challenging but also challenges our values. The key issues do not have purely technical solutions. They require agreement on what is important to us, on what we want out of adult education. If they are to be resolved, they require involvement by the ABE field as a whole.

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?

Good Performance

Accountability systems work best if stakeholders — those who have an interest in the outcomes of the system — agree on what success looks like. For adult basic educators, the heart of the matter is our concept of literacy. That concept has shifted over time from reading and writing text to functioning in society, from a simple dichotomy of illiterate/literate to multi-literacies. Brian Street characterizes two broad conceptual notions of literacy. The autonomous model conceives of literacy as a discrete and fixed set of skills, transferable from one context to another. The ideological model conceives of literacy as practices that are sensitive to social context and inherently associated with issues of power and access (Street, 1984).

Much recent research on multi-literacies suggests that there are multiple purposes for literacy and multiple goals and expectations for literacy education (Heath, 1983; Barton, 1994; Street, 1984,1995; Lankshear, 1997; New London Group, 1996). In such an understanding, notions of success must also be multiple. A single definition of success — gaining the GED, for example, or getting a job — excludes learners who have different purposes.

Definitions of success should be negotiated among all the stakeholders, learners, and practitioners as well as policymakers and funders. Although the legislative goals of the Workforce Investment Act reflect a majority among lawmakers, other stakeholders — including policy makers, program managers, teachers and students — may focus on other purposes for adult education and look to other measures of good performance.

Next Steps: Agree on Performance

Practitioners can play a role in defining performance within their own states. The WIA requires that each state develop a plan of the performance measures it will use to track results, including but not limited

to those required by the Act. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these measures will define what counts for the field. The challenge is to come to an agreement on performance that includes the full diversity of learner and societal purposes. Lessons from the literature and experience in education and other fields suggest states should:

- Invest time and energy in agreeing on what performance means;
- Involve stakeholders and seek consensus;
- Reflect newer understandings of literacy and connect performance with real life; and
- Acknowledge a variety of outcomes as acceptable performance, as a way of including the full diversity of learners and programs.

Capacity to be Accountable

Adult education is trying to develop a national accountability system without having developed the capacity of the service delivery system to document and report results (Moore & Stavrianos, 1995). Plenty of evidence documents the lack of valid, reliable, and useful data about performance (Young et al., 1995; GAO, 1995; Condelli, 1994). These studies suggest some of the most basic data are absent, incomplete, or of low quality.

When asked to report numbers, programs will indeed report numbers. But as the GAO report on adult education says, "the data the Department receives are of questionable value" (GAO, 1995, p. 33). This is not surprising, since staff in programs usually do not use the data, rarely see reports based on them, and see no one else placing any real value on them.

Performance accountability requires investment in the ability of local programs to collect, interpret, and use data to monitor how well they are doing. A number of states

such as Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Arkansas have already begun to develop their capacity for accountability. (For an overview of Pennsylvania's program, see page 13.) They consistently learned from their experiences that the key is to get buy-in from programs and practitioners from the beginning (Merrifield, 1998). They are also acutely aware of the problems of deciding what is counted, as well as how it is counted.

What is counted becomes what counts. Many examples of the hazards of counting the wrong things exist. A healthcare delivery system emphasizes cutting the numbers of people on a waiting list for surgery, thus ensuring that people with minor needs get served quickest because more operations for varicose veins than for heart bypasses can be performed in one day. The original performance standards of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), an education and training program, emphasized the numbers of people placed in jobs within a specific time frame. This ensured that programs recruit clients who were most qualified and therefore easiest to move into jobs quickly and cheaply (GAO, 1989).

Next Steps: Build Capacity

Two kinds of capacity — to perform and to be accountable — are linked (Merrifield, 1998). By instituting a learning organization approach with feedback loops, performance data can help programs improve performance and increase accountability. Building the capacity to perform involves:

- Increasing resources and focusing

"The challenge is to come to an agreement on performance that includes the full diversity of learner and societal purposes."

them on quality rather than quantity;
- Providing staff development and training and technical support;
- Using performance data for continuous improvement.

Building the capacity to be accountable involves ensuring that:
- Accountability demands are commensurate with resources and capacity;
- Users of measurement tools are engaged in their development;
- Staff training and support are provided;
- Information is timely;
- Improved performance is rewarded.

A variety of efforts are already underway to build capacity to perform and to be accountable. Teacher inquiry projects have involved individual teachers in examining their practice and identifying ways to change and develop (Smith & Lytle, 1993). Some programs, such as those described elsewhere in this issue, have been working on their capacity to use data for continuous improvement. Some states have begun efforts to build local program capacity for both performance and accountability. The National Accounting and Reporting System (Condelli, 1998), will be providing training and support on how to use newly revised WIA-related performance measures. (See page 11 for more on the NRS.)

> *"...it is crucial that we collect data that are relevant, adequate, and important."*

Accountability Tools

For accountability purposes, it is crucial that we collect data that are relevant, adequate, and important. To do so, we need tools — indicators and measures — that we believe in and use well. Indicators and measures are approximations of reality, not reality itself. They can be good, bad, and indifferent. An indicator that measures something unrelated to literacy learning – the number of brown-eyed learners, for example — is irrelevant. An indicator that measures something relevant — the prior learning that students bring, for example — but in an inadequate way, is dangerous. An inability to measure something important — affective changes in learners, for example — can be disastrous.

Some of our current accountability tools are inadequate: what we use to measure literacy gains is one example. Standardized tests are widely used. While such tests have their uses for placement purposes, their validity as measures of performance is questionable (Venezky, 1992). "The research literature raises questions about the validity of standardized tests ... and local program staff have questioned the appropriateness of using these assessment to measure program results" (GAO, 1995, p. 24). As yet, however, few alternatives to standardized tests exist. Some

programs are using various tools, such as portfolios, that allow learners to demonstrate their learning authentically (Literacy South, 1997), but so far these cannot compare learning between learners and across programs. Without external criteria or standards, authentic assessment will not meet the needs of accountability systems.

How we collect data for accountability is also important. Different approaches to data collection and analysis meet different purposes. A complete performance accountability system would include several approaches: monitoring, evaluation, and research would all have a place.

Monitoring can answer ongoing questions about day-to-day program operations. What kinds of students are being recruited? How long are they staying? What do they say they want from their learning experiences? How satisfied are they with the program? Monitoring is part of everyday management, providing a routine way for program staff to see how well the program is working.

Evaluation can answer particular questions about program operations at particular points of time. How are learners being served? Are they making progress on their learning goals? Is the program meeting quality standards? Evaluation may include a look at program-monitoring data. It may also involve gathering new data to answer specific questions. Surveys or focus groups are useful evaluation techniques.

Research can answer questions about associations, correlations, and meaning, and often takes a broader focus than one program. Research questions might examine: What are the benefits to individuals and society of participation in adult education? Which program designs are associated with different results? What kinds of resources are needed to support specific program designs?

Research may be conducted by outside researchers or by practitioners themselves (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997).

Each of these accountability technologies illuminates different aspects of reality. They have different strengths and need to be used appropriately. Carrying them out involves scarce resources, so they should be applied carefully and economically to ensure that the data collected are both useful and used.

Next Steps: Develop New Measurement Tools

New approaches and tools for measurement are needed that are linked to performance. Performance assessment tools enable us to assess literacy practices. For accountability purposes, this more authentic assessment of literacy practices demands that we develop external standards or criteria against which individual student learning can be measured, and through which program performance can be assessed. Initiatives in performance assessment in countries such as Britain and Australia may provide useful models for measuring and assessing learning. We should use the full potential of research, evaluation, and monitoring technologies to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

Mutual Accountability

Underlying all the other issues in performance accountability for ABE is the question of accountability relationships. Traditional approaches to accountability echo Taylorist manufacturing systems, in which quality control checks at the end of the production line ensure that widgets meet product specifications and accountability runs only one way. Assessing outcomes at the end of the production process has its place in quality control systems, but increasingly businesses are turning to more participatory approaches to

managing work processes and using production data for continuous improvement (Stagg, 1992).

High performance workplaces build in processes at each stage of production to monitor and improve performance. They involve workers in this monitoring. The business world is now utilizing concepts such as the learning organization: one that facilitates the learning of its members to transform itself continuously (Pedler et al, 1991). This approach is seen as a way of responding to changing environments and multiple demands. This kind of learning and transformation has to be shared and internalized: it cannot be imposed from the top (Stein, 1993). Accountability is shared or mutual.

In ABE, mutual accountability would engage members of the organization in creating a common vision, determining goals and customer expectations, and designing effective means of monitoring processes and results. Every member would be both accountable to others and held accountable by them. Learners would hold teachers, for example, accountable for providing learning opportunities that meet their needs. Teachers, in turn, would hold program directors and funders accountable for providing the resources they need to meet learner needs. These might include materials, space, training, pay for lesson planning and assessment.

Spelling out relationships of mutual accountability reveals some that are overlooked in conventional accountability systems. Congress, for example, holds adult education programs accountable for providing effective and efficient services. But Congress should also be held accountable by programs, by learners, and by voters for

identifying a social need, passing appropriate guiding legislation, and providing the resources needed to create a strong adult education system.

Learners should hold their teachers accountable. But programs should also hold learners accountable for taking learning seriously and for making an effort to participate fully. ·
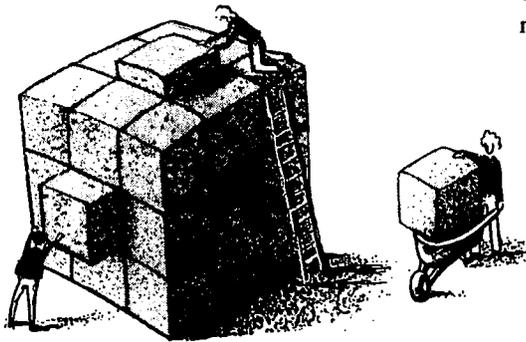
Businesses who expect adult education to provide them with workers equipped with basic skills might be expected in turn to provide jobs for those workers, or to continue a workplace basic skills program when the grant runs out. Mutual accountability would require all the partners to honor their contracts.

An accountability system based in the concept of mutuality has several characteristics:

• It is negotiated between the stakeholders in a process that engages all the players in clarifying expectations, designing indicators of success, negotiating information flows, and building capacity.
○ Each responsibility is matched with an equal, enabling right: the right to a program that meets one's learning needs with the

responsibility to take learning seriously, for example.
• Every player knows clearly and agrees to what is expected of them.
• Every player has the capacity to be held and to hold others accountable.
• Efficient and effective information flows enable all players to hold others accountable.

Inequalities of power and uneven access to information prevent the development of mutual accountability. Learners, for example, cannot become real stakeholders in mutual accountability until they have other ways to effect change beyond dropping out. They will only become part of the structure of accountability when they have real power to make choices. Some community-based programs encourage learner participation in management, with learner representatives sitting on boards, and being involved in management decisions about the program. Many state-level adult learner organizations are working to address the inequalities in power and in access to information, and to strengthen the voice of adult learners in the system.

How information flows is also a central issue in mutual accountability. Without adequate access to information, stakeholders cannot hold others accountable. In traditional information flow designs, information is collected at the base and increasingly summarized for the purposes of different levels on the way up: from program to community, state, and national levels. In this simplistic model, information flows only one way: up the system to the state and national levels. Few people have either access to or the ability to use the data.

This model will not fit the needs of an accountability system that takes into account different performances

and purposes and has mutuality as an underlying assumption. A more complex information model should allow information to be generated at all levels and to flow around the system, up, down and across it, among and between different players who use it for specific purposes at specific times.

Next steps: Develop Mutual Accountability

Reforming accountability requires moving from one-way, top-down lines of accountability to a mutual web of accountability relationships. To make this switch, we must:

- Bring the full range of stakeholder groups into the process — including teachers and learners;
- Provide support for stakeholders who have least access to information and power;
- Increase information flows among and between all stakeholders and make the information transparent (accessible to all);
- Develop learning organizations at the program and state levels that would emphasize learning and continuous improvement, shared responsibility, and engagement in monitoring results.

What Next?

To implement performance accountability well requires agreement on good performance, capacity both to perform and be accountable, new tools to measure performance, and a strong system of mutual accountability relationships. In the business world, high performance is associated with extensive changes in organizational practices, including a broadly understood vision and mission, flatter hierarchies with decision-making pushed as close to the shop floor as feasible, and participation at all levels of the organization in monitoring and improving performance. If ABE is to

meet society's need for high performance, it too needs to change. But these changes cannot be implemented from the top alone. They will require federal and state government departments to consult with the field and with stakeholders. They need willingness to learn lessons from the past and from other countries. They demand a commitment of resources to building the capacity of the field. Above all, they call for the contributions of all players, practitioners and learners as well as policymakers and researchers. ✍

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Full Report Available

The research report upon which this article is based is available from NCSALL *Reports* for $10. For information on how to order this report, please turn to page 23. ❖

Nationwide Accountability: the National Reporting System

The data reporting system for Adult Basic Education has been redesigned. A pilot test of the new system finds both success and stumbling blocks ahead

by Barbara Garner

In the mid-1990s, federal and state administrators of the US adult basic education system felt growing pressure to document that participation in literacy programs leads to positive results. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), working with state Directors of Adult Basic Education, embarked on an effort to improve the National Reporting System (NRS) and link it more closely to program accountability and improvement. With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the redesigned NRS becomes even more important.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) legislation replaces the former Adult Education Act, which was in place for 33 years. Title II of WIA, called the "Adult Education and Family Literacy Act," addresses adult education. Title II reflects a priority towards more intensive, higher-quality services rather than rewarding number of students served. It also puts a much greater emphasis on learner outcomes, and therefore on accurate measurement and reporting (Balliro & Bickerton, 1999).

Mike Dean, of OVAE, is responsible for overseeing the NRS redesign project, which is being implemented by the Pelavin Research Center of the American Institutes for Research, in Washington, D.C. The new system is not dramatically different from what was in place before, Dean explains. "In reality, the system has been tracking many post program outcomes, as well as outcomes within the program. The difference is that there is a new value on collecting and reporting performance data. Before, from the federal level, if someone couldn't track people, there were no real consequences."

He continues, "Now they have to [track people]. As a result, we have to train people on the methodologies they are going to need to collect, report, and analyze this information. We're trying to demonstrate the value that this information can have, at the local level for program improvement, for teachers, for staff development, for information about instruction. One of the challenges is to educate practitioners as to how important it [reliable outcome data] is, why it's important, and how it can improve programs."

Finer Gradations

The NRS project revised the educational functioning levels that programs report for students, as well as the written descriptions of those levels. The new system has a finer gradation of measurement. For example, in the old system, Level One was grade levels zero to 2.9 on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Level Two was 3.0 to 5.9. The new levels are zero to 1.9, then

2.0 to 3.9 (Condelli & Kutner, 1997). The Knox County Adult Basic Education Department, Knoxville, TN, participated in a pilot test of the new levels. Knoxville staff member Bill Walker reports that the finer gradation "allows us to show progression within some lower levels. The pilot allowed us to claim more successes. It used to be, if a student began at 0 and went to 2.1 in a one-year period, it wasn't successful because he didn't progress to the next level. Under the new groupings, that student will be seen as a successful completer of beginning literacy."

Robbie Thomas, director of the Queen City Vocational Center, Cincinnati, OH, another program that piloted the NRS, concurs: "I felt like the [new] breakdown made sense. The written descriptions and the testing matched. Instructors felt pretty comfortable with them. Having the greater gradation is a positive thing."

Follow Up Difficult

WIA also requires programs to track and report outcomes such as placement, retention, and completion of post-secondary education or training, and unsubsidized employment or career advancement. These outcomes occur after learners leave program and are notoriously hard to track. The programs participating in the pilot tested a system for gathering this information that involved calling former students.

Knoxville's Walker explains, "Our charge [in the pilot] was to select 200 learners who had dropped out of our programs six months prior and to contact them to administer a survey of why they dropped out and what benefits they got from adult ed. We did this to determine the effectiveness of telephone polling to gather information for learner outcomes that are mandated in the Workforce Investment Act." Programs participating in the pilot were

successful in reaching, on average, 23% of the people they called. The response rate varied from program to program, ranging from a high of 35% to a low of 11%.

"I believe that some of the core indicators of performance [literacy gain] in the Workforce Investment Act will be very easy for adult educators to evaluate. I have misgivings about the core indicators of performance in regards to retention or completion of post-secondary education or training and unsubsidized employment, and I have misgivings about our ability to collect these and other reliable and numerous data by telephone," says Walker.

The difficulty the participating programs had in contacting learners was not surprising. Adult basic education programs have trouble following up on learners after they have left their programs, because of the transience of and reticence on the part of the learner population and a lack of program resources. The same phenomena make research on adult literacy learner outcomes extremely difficult (Beder, 1999). It's a tricky challenge: to show evidence of the impact of participation in adult basic education requires substantial resources, which may not be forthcoming until the evidence is produced.

Thomas corroborated the difficulty of obtaining follow-up data: "We serve about 3,500 students a year. The pilot — a telephone survey — was looking for information on 200 students who had withdrawn. Going into it, I thought that 400 calls would produce the results.

We called 536 people. Of the people we called, 28% completed the survey, 5% refused, 37% had invalid phone numbers, 30% had no answer, line busy, or we left messages."

Thomas thinks that if students were told upon entry into the program that this was part of the process, the response rate would improve, yet she admits that this is just conjecture. She also feels that using the instructors to make the calls, rather than the instructional aides she did use, might have given more successful response rate. "I feel that follow up is something we need to do. It was a new experience for us. It will be time consuming — it took 51 hours to make the phone calls — an added dimension in terms of work load and information. But, how can you show that you're making a difference unless you follow up on students?"

The performance measures just tested will go into effect for the program year beginning July 1, 2000. Training and technical assistance to states on reporting requirements will begin in the summer, 1999. For more information, contact Larry Condelli of Pelavin Research Associates at (202) 944-5331, Mike Dean at (202) 205-9294, or visit the web site http://www.air-dc.org/nrs.

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Educating Lawmakers

by David Rosen

What can practitioner and adult learner leaders do when policymakers do not understand that adult literacy education must be a legislative priority? How can we help them to take more responsibility for this? Legislators have become supporters, even activists, after they learn directly from students or program graduates how much they have gained from adult literacy education programs. Learners and practitioners can visit legislators. Legislators learn how students have gained confidence, and how they and their families have improved their economic situation, literacy skills, and health. A particularly effective strategy that has been used in Massachusetts involves having adults who are waiting for basic skills classes send postcards to their legislators. Large numbers of people who must wait months or years for these critical services is a measure of constituent dissatisfaction that captures lawmakers' attention, and helps them to become accountable.

In Pennsylvania, practitioners who learned about the Massachusetts postcards have planned a different strategy, asking students to send cards to legislators when they have earned their GED or other adult diploma, thanking them for the public investment in them which has paid off. Another effective strategy is a coordinated campaign in which legislators are invited to visit programs and talk with students. In Massachusetts a few years ago, after a legislator who was skeptical about the value of adult literacy had visited two programs in one week, he turned around: he's now an ardent adult literacy advocate. With all these efforts practitioners can be more effective if they work together, meet regularly, set an annual agenda, communicate frequently with others in the field, and dig in for the long haul.

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Guiding Improvement: Pennsylvania's Odyssey

Pennsylvania has used a combination of direction from the top and innovation at the grassroots level to devise and institute an accountability system that is intimately linked with program improvement

by Cheryl Keenan

our years ago, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education asked 10 agencies to volunteer to pilot a program improvement process for adult education called Educational Quality for Adult Literacy. "EQUAL" seemed to be an appropriate acronym for a project that sought to provide quality for all adult learners in the Commonwealth, rather than in isolated pockets of programs around the state. We provided the pilot sites with a systematic way to look at their programs and learners and to select problems they wanted to solve. After each program selected a problem, they used a form we developed to guide them through a process of asking a question, gathering information, analyzing that information, and drawing conclusions that would lead to action. These days, participants from the original pilot sites still laugh when they recall that first meeting. They had left the meeting saying, "Yeah, but what does the state really want?"

Thinking Back

In December, 1993, I became a new State Director of Adult Education. I struggled to get a handle on the critical issues within adult education, reading General Accounting Office (GAO) reports that disputed the value of the federal investment in adult education and reviewing national evaluations that could not demonstrate positive outcomes for adult learners. My impression was that within Pennsylvania, adult educators felt generally that they did made a difference in people's lives. I heard practitioners express frustration about the reputation of adult education being an unaccountable and unproved program. I saw program quality vary from place to place and recognized differences in the way the professional development system supported teachers. And I saw the pending cloud of new federal legislation and the implications of the re-engineered federal accountability system.

Reflecting back on "what the state really wanted," I can say that we — the state Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) — wanted a way to approach accountability that was connected to improving quality of services to learners. To me, this meant making significant changes in Pennsylvania, triggering reform of both local and state practices. Goals at the state level included being more responsive to local program needs by improving timelines and ease of funding, conducting meaningful evaluation and monitoring of programs, and investing our federal funds targeted to teacher training and experimental programs (Section 353 funds), in activities that supported program improvement. At the local level, it meant engaging teachers, tutors, program coordinators, and administrators in a team approach to solving problems identified through the systematic use of data. The assumption we made was that building an accountability system in isolation from quality improvement would demonstrate poor program results.

Early Years

In the very first years of EQUAL, we in ABLE struggled to keep a balance between identifying problems at the grassroots level and directing areas of focus from the state level. For example, to make informed decisions about accountability at the state level, we needed some sites to focus on assessment. In addition, we learned early on that many of the pilot sites were concerned about the same issues. Program improvement teams were recreating the wheel time and time again. We at the state level had some needs, and we wanted to create some "efficiencies" as future EQUAL sites came on board. However, we did not want to be viewed as directing local programs in the process. The 1992 revisions to the National Adult Education Act created a mandate for states to adopt Indicators of Program Quality and to use those Indicators to evaluate and monitor program effectiveness. As the middle ground in the top-down versus bottom-up debate, we developed a guide that used the Indicators of Program Quality as a framework for local program self-assessment. We eventually asked pilots to direct attention toward specific indicator areas, including assessment, to determine what practice issues sites would identify.

With the help of a national consultant, we developed forms that

allowed the pilot sites to record any assessment activity used with a sample of learners. The consultant analyzed these records to determine what local assessment practices were being used. We began to see trends that led us to develop specific professional development opportunities concerning assessment. The data collected on these forms became the basis for our current program performance standards. These steps were the beginning of aligning state policy with practice and identifying program improvement needs.

By focusing the pilot sites on assessment, the EQUAL program improvement process helped us approach issues related to program accountability. We discovered that the pilot sites used a variety of assessment tools. Many forms being practiced, while valuable to teachers and students, were not standardized and could not be used for statewide performance measures. We learned that where formal assessments were used, they were not being administered and scored properly, rendering the subsequent scores invalid. By providing training and technical assistance to the pilot sites on the proper use of standardized tests, we were able to collect valid and reliable data on student learning. We used the data to set performance standards on student learning, which is the heart of our accountability system. Without a program improvement process that focused programs on measuring student learning and supporting them in collecting that information, the program performance standards may have been based on data that was not valid and reliable, giving an erroneous measure of expected student performance.

Local Ownership

The three-year pilot experience exceeded all of my expectations. The pilot grew to include more than 20 sites. Besides the goals we had set for the project, one of the most beneficial outcomes was the extent to which the pilot sites embraced the project. Once staff at the pilot sites understood that the state had no hidden agenda, they began to use the program-improvement process to solve other problems. By using data to answer questions rather than making assumptions about their programs, they began to see gaps between what they believed and what was real. By attacking small problems first, they began to experience success and began to solve more challenging issues. These factors helped them feel as if EQUAL belonged to them.

We developed a core of leadership that embraced the project and has served to carry the initiative into its second year of a scheduled three-year phase-in of all adult education agencies in Pennsylvania. At the close of the pilot, in June, 1997, I sat through the "celebration" and reflected on how the level of conversation about practice had changed dramatically in the three-year period. Pilot sites that had broached "retention" as a student issue in their first data-for-decision-making logs were now looking within their programs for the solution. They talked about why students were leaving based on real data gathered from learners and shared how they used that information to change their program operations. One team had surveyed learners about why they left the program and found that many students felt as if they were not making progress. When the team looked at data about student learning, they were able to demonstrate to learners that learning has natural peaks and plateaus. The team realized that they did not share information about learners' progress with individual learners as much as they thought they did. They changed

their program operations to increase individual student counseling that emphasized the review of progress. They were excited to see retention numbers rise.

Pilot site participants, in turn, became the "opinion leaders" in the state by telling others how EQUAL helped their programs and learners. During the pilot, we brought staff from the sites together several times a year to share their experiences. At first, many participants were nervous because they were not sure if what they were doing was "right." Once they overcame this fear, they spoke easily about their successes and the value of the EQUAL process. When the state began statewide implementation in September, 1997, the training included presentations by representatives from the EQUAL pilot sites. They presented at conferences and spoke at other professional development opportunities. In many cases, they went on to become statewide leaders in the next phase of EQUAL and provided support to new sites by drawing on their own successful experiences.

Going to Scale

It is one thing to run a successful pilot program of 20 quality adult education programs. It is quite another to spread the practice consistently to all 230 adult education programs in Pennsylvania. The next phase of EQUAL attempted to bring it to scale using the expertise and leadership of our pilot participants. Our goal was to bring on one-third of our agencies each year for a three-year period.

To prepare for the effort we again took steps to align state policy with program improvement by strategically investing Section 353 funds into a structured training and technical assistance network using pilot personnel and expertise. We began to integrate our existing professional development centers into the EQUAL

network. By so doing, we developed a training infrastructure capable of supporting a large-scale reform effort.

What remained a major challenge was how to create an incentive for new agencies to sign on to program improvement without mandating it from the state level. Although I understood that eventually the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education would need to develop a mandatory participation policy, I did not feel the time was right. We needed more people behind EQUAL to convince others of the intrinsic value of program improvement. The solution came with passage of the federal budget, which contained a 36 percent increase in the adult education appropriation. Our Bureau Management Team began to strategize about how we could use the increase to realize our EQUAL participation goals. We created a new application procedure that tied funding for program expansion to participation in EQUAL program improvement activities. Through that process, we realized our first year participation goal.

We are now in the second year of "going to scale" and no longer have the financial incentive available to the extent of the first year. However, the success of the first 81 agencies has influenced others to sign on. EQUAL is being viewed by program staff as something that can help them meet the newly implemented program performance standards. Program year 1999-2000 will bring on the last set of programs: we have mandated participation by this final year. The timing appears right. Resistance to new requirements for program improvement and corresponding mandates for data

collection and assessment training is minimal. Program staff realize that Pennsylvania is now well positioned to perform in the new federal environment imposed by the Workforce Investment Act.

Lessons Learned

We have learned much about implementing program improvement as a means to increase quality and subsequent accountability. First, high-quality training and technical

> *"When local programs are using data regularly to inform program operations, they place a higher value on that data."*

assistance that match actual program improvement needs are critical in assisting local program in implementing change. Willingness to make the financial investment necessary to support that is critical. Second, building a core of leadership and expertise has been one of the greatest keys to reaching our goals. In addition, maintaining the balance between what is directed at the top and what is driven by ground-level practice is a constant struggle. And last, but of course not least, grounding the program improvement team in issues related to teaching and learning is only accomplished by involvement of instructors and tutors in the team process.

We have also learned that given adequate support, the program-improvement process is effecting significant changes in how adult educators do business. We have

observed programs improving retention by actively seeking input from learners about why they leave and why they stay; improving decision-making about how to use assessment in their programs; aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and improving the quality of data collection and analysis. Most importantly, it appears that agencies that have embraced EQUAL as a means of continuous improvement are capable of using program information in meaningful ways and are able to respond to state program performance standards.

If someone asked me if continuous program improvement really makes a difference in implementing statewide program accountability systems, I would answer a definitive "Yes." But the more important question may be "Why?" What we are trying to measure in Pennsylvania's Performance System is relatively straightforward. Do learners enroll in programs, persist in learning, accomplish learning, and achieve goals as a result of that learning? We are beginning to answer these questions. As teams of program staff systematically explore their program operations and student learning, they develop a deeper understanding of their program and their learners. Equally important is that teams become more comfortable collecting and using data. They have looked at numbers, recognized where they are low, and can formulate a plan to improve areas of weakness. When local programs are using data regularly to inform program operations, they place a higher value on that data. They devote more time and attention to working with teachers and volunteers to collect better-quality information. Local

programs and state staff are better able to communicate about performance based on real program information. So, at the state level, we can determine if standards need adjustment or alternative standards are needed for certain target populations.

The Future

It is too soon to have the answers from all the work we have done, but we now have the structure necessary to be accountable and to concentrate on quality. We have the capacity, at the state and local levels, to run the system.

We are continuing to invest in keeping a set of programs engaged in "leading edge" activities. Some sites are assisting us in learning about student articulation, for example, so that we can continue to forge new directions for program improvement activities. Continuous improvement never ends. It just prepares us for the next set of changes. ✍

About the Author

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Accountability in a Multi-Faceted Program

Increasing partnerships means satisfying more partners. To do so, this volunteer literacy program has been clarifying goals and improving accountability systems

By Jan Goethel and Carol Gabler

Twelve years ago, a small group of concerned educators formed a volunteer organization to meet the literacy needs of adults in three counties surrounding Eau Claire, WI. Affiliation with Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., (LVA) provided training, materials, and structure. Through partnership with Chippewa Valley Technical College, a reading specialist was hired as executive director. What LVA-Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) lacked in size, it made up for in enthusiasm. Accountability at that stage meant filing the annual report to assure the national organization that our tutors were trained and our numbers were rising. It seemed straightforward: we could see improvement in the basic skills of our students and that was enough.

The tutoring program grew rapidly in the first two years, and we soon felt the need to expand our services. The first step was to provide story time for preschool children while their parents were working on literacy skills. Then we began to form partnerships with the school district, the county human services department, and the YMCA to provide early childhood education for three- to five-year olds, parenting classes, child care for siblings, and transportation. Collaboration occurred piece by piece, but within

six years from its inception, the simple partnership had evolved into a comprehensive family literacy program. In each partnership, we became accountable to other local agencies to provide the services that we promised, services that are diversified as the types of partners. The partnerships work only because we are satisfying needs on all sides. For example, the YMCA provides space for our preschool and reserves slots in its child care program for younger siblings. In return, we help the YMCA accomplish its mission of reaching out to all families in the Eau Claire area by recruiting from a population that otherwise might not become familiar with the facility. Everyone benefits from the partnerships, but the mutual responsibility — and the ensuing accountability — grows with each new partner.

The Challenge

LVA-CV now offers comprehensive services to more than 200 learners on an annual budget of $230,000. We have four full-time professional staff members, 20 part-time professionals, and an average of 100 volunteers at any given time. We offer adult basic education (ABE) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), work experience, computer classes, certified preschools, licensed child care, transportation, and social services. We

have 14 funders, and we are accountable to each of them. A highly charged organization like ours is not unlike a hyperactive octopus. The complexity of the program forces us to be vigilant about what our many arms are doing.

We are accountable, first of all, to our students and tutors. With students, we seek to ensure that they are satisfied both with the program and with the skills they are gaining. As students' needs change, we change our approach and what we offer. When welfare reform in Wisconsin moved recipients quickly to work, our learners needed more flexible programming, so we initiated evening classes and literacy services in the workplace. They needed computer skills to be employable, so we added computer labs. We responded to their desire for citizenship by adding classes that help them prepare for the examination.

We are accountable to our tutors, promising them adequate training and ongoing support. Frequently evaluating the tutor training format, evaluating the competencies in which we train tutors, and surveying tutor satisfaction are all ways in which we ensure that we are doing what we set out to do. Tutors are vital to our program; we use such means as periodic tutor refresher sessions, conversation groups, and follow-up phone calls to help them feel part of the team.

We are accountable to our staff to ensure that they are not totally overwhelmed. With so many funders, all of them requiring data in different formats, paperwork is unending and unavoidably time-consuming.
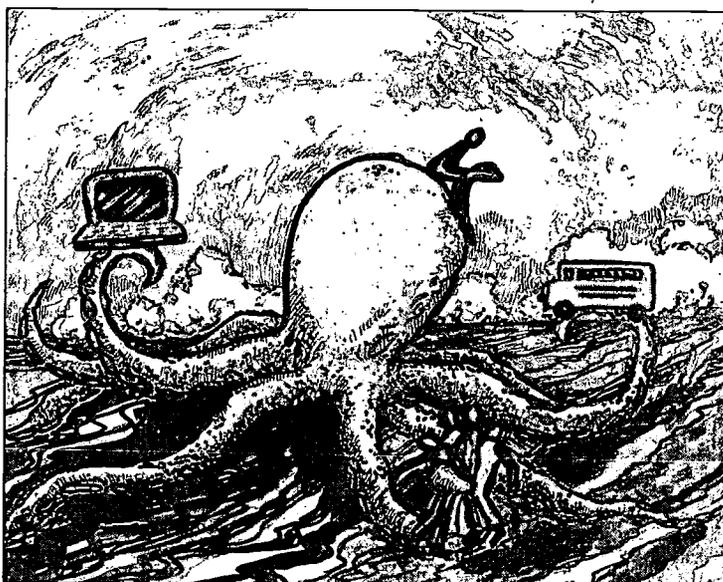
Standardization of the reporting process would certainly be welcome. We are starting to use Literacy Pro, a nationally recognized data base software. As our staff becomes accustomed to using this system, we will be able to document our outcomes in a more systematic fashion. At any given time, for instance, we will be able to know immediately how many student and tutor pairs are active, without going through all the files. In the meantime, we look for ways to share the responsibilities and simplify whenever possible. Recognizing the benefit of stepping out of our

— Cyndee Kaiser

environment occasionally to see how others are meeting the challenge of accountability, we also support time for staff and board to participate in development opportunities at the local, state, and national levels.

We are, of course, accountable for the wide range of public funding we receive, from supplemental funding through United Way of America to program sustaining-contributions through Even Start. As a United Way recipient, for example, we have to measure program and client outcomes to satisfy their growing focus on accountability. We

are accountable to our collaborative partners, to the business community that supports us, and to the private citizens who donate money. Whether funding is public or private, we must demonstrate effective and efficient use of it. We do this via annual budget reviews and external audits.

Ensuring Continued Improvement

Even in our earliest stages of expansion, the Board of Directors recognized the hazards of unplanned growth and, over a two-year time span, formulated a strategic plan. This lengthy document defined our mission and provided a framework for growth and improvement. The strategic plan was a clear statement of what we wanted to accomplish. Less clear, however, were the issues of how we would do that, and how we would measure our success. Evaluation was a somewhat neglected area, since money was more likely to be spent on implementing and maintaining programs. Realizing that we lacked the expertise and capacity to measure our impact satisfactorily, we hired an outside evaluator to help us untangle our goals and objectives and overhaul our evaluation methods. The evaluator worked with staff members and Board committees to specify goals and outcomes so that the data we gathered would be relevant to those outcomes. At times we wished he would just leave us alone and let us do our jobs, because initially this just seemed like more work.

Gradually, the benefits of revising our accountability process became apparent. We began to see

how much time we could save by streamlining the competencies we hope to deliver, and how we could lessen confusion by clarifying our roles. The evaluator had each committee work through its own outcomes, determine who was responsible for each task or area, and list what kind of data were needed to show evidence of those outcomes. This process has helped in the recruitment of students. Once we recognized that responsibility for recruitment was shared by several entities — the teaching staff, the program and planning committee, and the public relations committee, which oversees all media promotions — we could prevent duplication. Coordinating efforts across committees also resulted in the creation of a program-wide calendar that indicates deadlines, who is responsible for what, and what evidence is required to indicate success.

With the help of the evaluator we reviewed and revised our original strategic plan, resulting in a more practical working document. Although our first evaluator has moved on, his advice remains: "To be accountable, you have to define what you are trying to do, then provide evidence to show that you have done it. You can't show improvement in something unless you have defined exactly what you were trying to improve."

Application of the strategic plan has of necessity involved the whole organization. Over the past two years, our volunteer Board of Directors and the staff have again revised the plan. Under the guidance of a new evaluator, committees are studying all the programs to see if they comply with the current strategic goals. The program and planning committee compiled a set of criteria to be applied to each program. By using this questionnaire, the committee responsible for planning and

implementing Reading is Fundamental (RIF) events evaluated their efforts in relationship to the strategic goals. They determined that the entertainment format was a lot of fun but did little to promote reading in families, as was intended. The action plan led to changes in format that put the emphasis back on reading.

When applying the strategic plan to their academic programs, instructors define their own personal goals and devise personal action plans. One preschool teacher, for example, had as her goal to help the children understand the world of work. Her action plans included reviewing and selecting appropriate computer software and taking the children to visit a site where many of their parents worked. She set her own time line and determined how she would measure success.

National Emphasis, National Support

In LVA-CV, as in all programs that receive public funds to deliver literacy services to adults, the challenge of accountability has truly come to a head with the 1998 Workforce Investment Act. Title II of this mandate calls practitioners to accountability and continuous improvement. LVA-Chippewa Valley has found some guidance at the national level as we've strengthened our accountability efforts. Literacy Volunteers of American has an accreditation initiative currently under way that establishes quality and accountability standards for volunteer literacy providers. Meeting all the criteria for accreditation will reinforce the evaluation process already happening within our affiliate. One of our Board members attended the national training and will guide us as we prepare for accreditation later this year.

Another important national connection has been our

participation in What Works Literacy Partners (WWLP), an assessment project sponsored by the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Foundation. Representatives from LVA-CV meet twice yearly as members of a network of researchers and practitioners to formulate better ways to measure actual student outcomes and student satisfaction and link them to instructional practices and program design. LVA-CV and all the WWLP partners benefit by learning improved methods of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data that measure learner progress.

Participation in this effort has given us the tools and also the energy to further our own efforts at accountability. It has also boosted our energy and motivation. In one instance, the LVA-CV participant learned the hard way that if you don't ask the right questions, you won't get the results you need. In other words, you can feed myriad statistics into a computer and churn out results, but they won't be relevant unless you first determine what factors are most pertinent to the organization's needs. One example would be the correlation of outcomes to students' individual goals, rather than just test results. Students preparing to take the written driver's exam will not necessarily show improvement in overall reading ability yet may still accomplish their goals. Ours is a diverse population, with varying needs and goals. Lumping diverse cases together too narrowly for the sake of numbers is neither relevant nor effective.

Conclusion

Accountability is nothing new. Nor is it something that can be done once and forgotten. As a nonprofit organization constantly in search of funding, the accountability challenge is with us every day. We've come a long way at LVA-CV in our accountability efforts. Strategic

planning has helped us establish a healthy cycle of planning, doing, and reviewing, and in the process a few memorable facts have emerged:

We are accountable to all with whom we have exchanged promises or expectations. Every transaction, whether personal or business, implies making good on that promise or meeting that expectation. Clearly demonstrating effective delivery of literacy services helps us recruit students, obtain grants, secure partnerships, persuade businesses to offer literacy services, even influence legislation.

There are only so many hours available in a day. We can't add to the clock, so we must find other ways to make time for strategic planning, make time for staff to meet and resolve issues, make time for the person responsible for the finances to focus on that challenge, away from the constantly ringing telephone.

Careful planning now saves time and money later. We must force ourselves to sit down and plan, and then after we've carried out the plan, to sit down again and measure our progress. We at LVA-CV are a nurturing group by nature. We must not feel guilty if we are not providing direct service at every moment. It is also important to evaluate where we've been and where we want to go. 📖

About the Authors

Jan Goethel is a freelance writer who has produced numerous literacy-related publications, including *The Path to Family Literacy* (Steck Vaughn, 1996), co-authored with Carol Gabler. An active volunteer, Ms. Goethel serves as writing consultant and publications manager for LVA-Chippewa Valley.

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Translating Vision into Reality

Oregon's accountability system is based on quality-of-life goals. But how does one measure "quality of life" and how does that translate into classroom practice?

By Agnes Precure

*I*n Oregon, accountability is led by a common vision known as Oregon Shines. Developed with input from a broad array of stakeholders, this blueprint for the state's future lays out three quality of life goals: (1) High-Quality Jobs for All Oregonians; (2) Safe, Caring and Engaged Communities; (3) Healthy Sustainable Surroundings. What sets Oregon Shines apart from other states' strategic plans is that it is supported by 92 benchmarks: measures of our progress toward the three quality of life goals. Each state agency is responsible for one or more benchmark. Data collected from the systems managed by the state agencies are fed to the Oregon Progress Board, a body created by the state legislature in 1989 to track benchmarks. The Progress Board then reports the results to the Governor, the legislature, and the citizens in a "report card." These benchmarks enable the government to provide a clear message to the people of Oregon about how state agencies and the systems they represent are doing in their efforts to reach the goals described in Oregon Shines.

The challenge has not been one of agreeing on the vision but on how to measure it. For benchmarks to become meaningful indicators of progress, they have to be measurable. So Oregon's benchmarks for adult basic education

(ABE) are not framed in terms of quality of life; instead, they are the percentage of adults with a high school diploma or equivalent, and the percentage of adults reaching "intermediate" levels of literacy. This means that our system outcomes come down to the types of things that ABE programs have been reporting to the federal government for more than 20 years: how many certificates of General Educational Development (GED) or Adult High School Diplomas earned, and how many students made skills gains.

Although this sounds simple enough, it's not. Decisions flowing from these benchmarks affect every aspect of our system. For example, to measure "intermediate literacy" Oregon's Office of Community College Services/Job Training Partnership Act Administration (OCCS/JTPA), the agency that administers ABE programs, had to define it better. We at OCCS/JTPA asked questions such as: Which skills define intermediate literacy? Reading? Writing? Math? All three? Do we want to know whether people have these skills or whether they know how to apply them? Apply them to what types of tasks? With the help of the Progress Board, we chose the 1990 Oregon Survey of Adult Literacy Survey (a derivative of the National Adult Literacy Survey) as our model. We defined intermediate literacy in terms of the ability to apply literacy skills to prose,

document, and quantitative tasks. We set our baseline for those areas, then added two more categories: writing and oral communication (speaking and listening). We are still working with the Progress Board to determine how we will establish a baseline and measure progress for these additional measures.

So far, I have only described the policy around accountability. The answers to these policy questions, however, have a significant impact on our ABE programs. How we define the benchmarks determines how many people fall into the intermediate category, what has to be done to increase the number of adults at this level, and how we'll measure our progress. In other words, decisions about how to define and meet the Benchmarks translate directly into classroom issues such as recruitment, curriculum development, retention, assessment and reporting. Finally, in collaboration with Oregon's ABE program directors, we at OCCS/GTPA had to set targets for improvement, targets for which the programs in our system are responsible. This is the center of Oregon's ABE accountability system and serves as the focus for the ABE professional development system provided by the state.

For the remainder of this article, I will illustrate how accountability policy affects Oregon's teachers and professional development system by discussing two specific examples: the implementation of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and the implementation of the Tracking of Programs and Students (TOPS) data management system. Finally, I'd like to address some of the challenges raised by these choices.

Influencing Instruction

To keep the broader vision of Oregon Shines in focus, Oregon's

ABE programs adopted an instructional methodology that emphasizes teaching the basic skills of reading, writing, computing, listening, and speaking within the context of personal and career development and emphasizes the use of real life situations. In the late 1980s, we realized the need for an assessment system linked to this

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> ## "The challenge has not been one of agreeing on the vision but on how to measure it."

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philosophy, to allow us to assess learner progress in the ability to apply basic skills in life or employability contexts. We chose CASAS, which also provided us with a core competency list that forms the basis for curriculum and instruction. For example, the life skills reading competency might require a learner to use reading skills to answer questions related to instructions for a telephone answering machine. For the employment skills competency, learners might answer questions related to an office supply catalogue. These competencies drive curriculum, instruction and assessment. They help learners see the link between the basic skills they are learning and the real life tasks to which they will apply these skills outside of the classroom. CASAS implementation totally changed the way Oregon's ABE programs delivered basic skills instruction.

Prior to CASAS implementation, instruction was almost entirely

workbook based, focused on the remediation of discrete skills. Each program measured progress differently, and we had little sense of whether we were showing results as a system. Now Oregon's ABE programs use realia — real-life artifacts brought into the classroom —, conduct small group instruction, and talk about the types of things that our learners can do, rather than their grade levels. Teachers can clearly demonstrate to themselves and their learners when skills gains have been made. The result is that Oregon's ABE classrooms have become more vital and exciting as learners collaborate on meaningful projects, using workbooks for practice rather than as the core of instruction. Needless to say this, shift required a lot of training. The implementation of CASAS virtually defined our professional development efforts throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Training modules, ABE conferences, and curriculum development projects all centered around the implementation of competency-based instruction, group instruction, cooperative learning, and the application of life skills to real-life situations.

Measuring Learner Progress

The need to take accountability to the next step – that of looking at systems results and how they support our progress toward the Oregon Shines benchmarks — led to the implementation of the Tracking of Programs and Students (TOPS). TOPS is a computerized information management system we use to document individual learner progress. TOPS has replaced past approaches to accountability that relied entirely on program self-reports and a fair amount of guesswork at the end of each year. Using TOPS, we collect demographic information and learner gains for

state and federal ABE reporting. Although TOPS is used primarily by the ABE and state and local Corrections systems, it has the capability to provide data matches with other agencies. These matches allow us to show how basic skills education relates to other learner outcomes related to employment, further education, and increased self-sufficiency. The TOPS system also includes a supplemental form that can be used to identify workforce readiness and workforce maturity skills.

Implementation of TOPS has not only helped us to better track skills gains, it has also allowed Oregon's ABE programs to gather the quality-of-life data that mirror the family work and community goals described in Oregon Shines. This is because instructors insisted that TOPS reflect those "other outcomes" that are typical of ABE classrooms. Progress in these family, work, community, and educational outcomes is linked directly to learner goals at program entry. This has meant a number of changes in the way that programs manage their intake processes. For TOPS to track progress effectively, programs have to collect more specific information about learner goals at intake. This information is causing some teacher to rethink what they are teaching and how their curriculum and instruction connects with learner goals.

As we become more able to collect reliable data using TOPS, we will be better able to plan for program improvement and new approaches to professional development. Professional development efforts focused initially on making sure that teachers knew how to put information into TOPS and how to get reports back. We've modified our assessment and instructional training modules to include TOPS information. The next

step is to work with program directors and instructors to develop training on how to use the data for program improvement purposes.

Challenges

Oregon's approach to ABE poses some special challenges. One is the challenge of using a contextualized approach to teaching those with rudimentary literacy skills. Teaching literacy skills in context is often confusing for emergent readers, who still need to master the basics. On the other hand, it is difficult to make beginning reading instruction meaningful and engaging. The trick lies in developing the right mix of discrete skill instruction and the application of skills. Oregon's programs are participating in a national study to examine these issues and develop approaches that will more effectively serve these emergent readers. This may lead Oregon programs to develop more specialized approaches to serving adults at lower literacy levels.

Another challenge is how to allocate time and resources. Better data collection is a time-intensive process. The implementation of TOPS has required increased time and resources for orientation and intake that have traditionally gone to instruction. This is likely to result in the restructuring of many Oregon programs. In addition, early results from TOPS data have pointed out some weaknesses in our current assessment practices, especially for limited English speakers. This means we will have to help programs to rethink how and when they currently assess students for placement and progress. Because TOPS collects detailed information about learner goals, questions about how better to meet those goals and show student progress are already being voiced by instructors. This too will

lead to new professional development offerings as teachers work to become more skilled at meeting learners' needs.

The need to show outcomes is important not only for accountability to the Governor, legislature, and other stakeholders, but also for learners, instructors, and program administrators. All of Oregon's state and federally funded ABE programs are implementing TOPS. Everyone is rethinking how to allocate resources for intake and assessment. TOPS implementation has raised philosophical questions that challenge the very mission of ABE. We are examining whether it is more important to provide access to the greatest number of learners or to make sure that we are providing the best services possible for those we serve.

For me the greatest challenge lies in making sure that the vision of Oregon Shines that led to the benchmarks and increased accountability doesn't get lost in the implementation. How do we avoid losing the learner in the messages about accountability and systems reforms? This challenge and the ones above will be worth addressing. The answer to these questions will help reinforce the connection between "real life" outcomes and the work of Oregon's adult basic skills providers and their partner agencies.

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About the Author
Agnes Precure is the Professional Development and Curriculum Specialist for the Office of Community College Services/Job Training Partnership Act Administration (OCCS/JTPA) in Salem, OR. Prior to her work for the state of Oregon, Ms. Precure was the National Literacy Project Director for Wider Opportunities for Women in Washington, DC. ❖

Voices of Learners: Learner-Identified Impacts Study

N CSALL is doing a variety of studies around the impact of participation in literacy programs. NCSALL researchers Mary Beth Bingman and Olga Ebert recently finished a pilot, the precursor to a larger qualitative study on how students describe the impact that participating in adult literacy programs has had on their lives. The pilot produced some interesting findings and also some good information about how to improve their research methodology.

How do former students describe the impact that participating in adult literacy programs has had on their lives? This question was addressed in a pilot study of 10 former learners conducted by NCSALL researchers Mary Beth Bingman and Olga Ebert, both of The University of Tennessee. The participants spoke of changes in literacy practices and in their sense of themselves. The learners also talked about their everyday lives and their work, paid and unpaid, providing a rich picture of the lives of adult learners.

The researchers started their interviews by asking the learners to describe their lives. The everyday life experiences described by participants were a mix of hard times and ordinary life issues, reports Bingman. "Adult literacy students are

often described as people incapable of helping themselves. This description is not borne out by our data. People describe lives that are in most ways quite ordinary. They have jobs, raise children, go shopping, have hobbies, are concerned about their neighbors and communities. Their literacy skills may be limited, but they are not people who are "other" than most Tennesseeans.

"They do say that their lives have been hard," she continues. "The younger participants' financial problems are compounded by costs borne disproportionately by the poor: higher rent-to-own prices because they have no credit, paying money order fees when they don't have a checking account, being unable to pay the "up front" lawyer's fees that might enable them to address financial wrongs. These lives may be ordinary, but they are not easy."

According to Bingman, all reported being involved in their children's educations. The initial group of 10 had 20 children of high school age or older, nine of whom attended at least some college and only one who dropped out of high school. They also have younger children. "Passing on illiteracy doesn't seem to bear out." This quote is representative of the comments of many of the participants: "I provided, made sure that [my child] wasn't gonna wind up in the same situation that I did. So, I tried to get them all to go to school."

The researchers didn't find big changes in employment. In no case did people report getting a better job.

"This was partly because our sample was older, with three retirees. There was a generational divide. In a lot of ways, the older participants have done very well. They had jobs, raised families, were involved in their communities. However, lack of credentials affects younger people." An older participant explained that he couldn't get his job now: he learned by watching, but now, he wouldn't be able to, because everything is computerized. "Nowadays," he said, "you can't even get a job unless you got a college education, hardly. At least, every job here in town almost you got to have a GED or high school education."

The participants had been enrolled in what Tennessee calls Level 1, or literacy class. When asked about their classes, they all reported learning a variety of skills, such as breaking words into syllables, using standard writing conventions, and working with math. Seven reported using new literacy practices, including opening a checking account, programming a remote control, using measurement at work, being better able to fill out job reports. "I know how to write a check out now...They learned me how to do it in school...And making a money order out, I know how to do all this stuff. I won't forget how to do this stuff." While in no instance, reports Bingman, were their changes in literacy reported as life-changing outcomes, people did talk about their changed skills and practices and new knowledge as improvements in their lives.

Although most of the participants described themselves as having had a positive sense of self before participating in literacy programs, they also discussed changes in their sense of themselves as a result of their participation, says Bingman. They spoke of pride in their accomplishments. One student described passing the GED test: "It

built my ego, and I've had a lot of praises and [they] even made a write-up of me in the paper." Others noted a new sense of efficacy: "I feel better about myself since I learned to read better." According to Bingman, the participants reported an overall sense of change in what they felt able to do.

As noted earlier, this was a pilot study. In the fall, 1999, the study will be expanded to five more sites around the country, providing a larger sample, and more diversity in life histories. "The pilot provided us with some technical information," Bingman acknowledges. "We traveled across the state rather than using local interviewers, so we didn't understand the local context as we should. We were also limited in how often we could meet with the participants. So in the next phase, we will recruit and train local interviewers. Our pilot also ran into the same kinds of issues you deal with in any research in adult basic education: it's hard to keep track of people. We planned to do two long interviews with each participant. Of 10, we lost two participants. One disappeared and one declined to do the second interview."

The findings from the study will prove useful to practitioners and policy makers. Teachers can gain insight into the lives of their learners by reading the narratives. Learners use literacy in many ways in their lives; the findings support the idea that it is appropriate to have a similar diversity of materials in the classroom. Mathematics instruction might also include a wide range of real-life uses. And the life stories themselves would make a good text for other learners to read.

This study could also be useful in measuring program performance. The narratives of the 10 people in the study, says Bingman, "suggest that the impact of participating in adult education programs is complex and varied, as are the people who

participate. But that these changes will lead to post secondary education, secondary school diplomas, or career advanced for those who begin at the literacy level, is not evident in our study. States developing additional performance indicators besides the core indicators included in the Workforce Investment Act might look to the up-

coming, expanded study, for guidance in what those indicators might be. They should probably include expanded literacy practices, a stronger voice, and the excitement of learning and sharing new knowledge. As one student noted, 'Things come natural to me now. I've come a long way.'"

— **Barbara Garner**

NCSALL REPORTS AVAILABLE

Reports are NCSALL articles and research findings. The following *Reports* are available:

Reports #1: Merrifield. J. (1998). *Contested Ground: Performance and Accountability in Adult Education.* $10

Reports #2: Purcell-Gates. V., Degener, S.. & Jacobson, E. (1998). *Adult Literacy Program Practice: A Typology Across Dimensions of Life-Contextualized/Decontextualized and Dialogic/Monologic.* $5

Reports #3: Tyler. J.. Murnane, R.. & Willett. J. (in press). *Estimating the Impact of the GED on the Earnings of Young Dropouts Using a Series of Natural Experiments.* $5

Reports #4: Bingman. M.. Smith. C.. & Stewart. K. (1998). *Practitioners Speak: Contributing to a Research Agenda for Adult Basic Education.* $5

Reports #5: Rudd. R.. Zacharia. C.. & Daube. K. (1998). *Integrating Health and Literacy: Adult Educator's Experiences.* $5

Reports #6: Beder. H. (1999). *The Outcomes and Impacts of Adult Literacy Education in the United States.* $10

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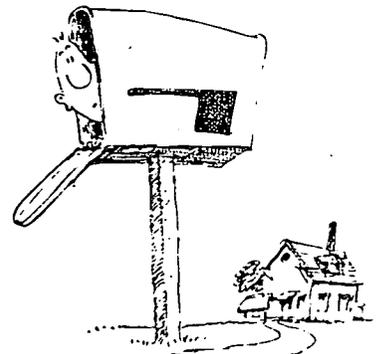
BLACKBOARD

Workforce Investment Act

For a copy of the act, contact the House Document Room at (202) 226-5200. The Workforce Investment Act is Public Law 105-220.For an overview of the act, go to http://usworkforce.org/ For federal legislation and summaries of the act, go to http://nifl.gov

Assessment Systems

Comprehensive Adult Skills Assessment System (CASAS), 8910 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard San Diego, CA 92123-1104 phone: 1-800-255-1036, fax: 619-292-2910 web site: http://www.casas.org/

National Reporting System

For information on the National Reporting System, contact Larry Condelli of Pelavin Research Associates at (202) 944-5311 or visit the web site at http://www.air-dc.org/nrs.

Accountability

An interesting discussion on accountability started on the National Literacy Advocacy electronic discussion list in May. To read the archived messages, go to http://literacy.nifl.gov/forums.html. The archives are grouped by year and can be sorted by name, date, topic, and thread. You can specify the NLA list, and sort by thread: accountability.

Focus on Basics Electronic Discussion List

FoBasics electronic discussion list serves as an electronic forum for discussion about the articles published in *Focus on Basics*. It is intended as a place to converse with colleagues about the themes examined in the publication, to get questions answered and to pose them, to critique issues raised in the articles, and to share relevant experiences and resources.

To participate, go to the LINCS homepage at http://nifl.gov. Choose "Literacy Forums and Listservs" and follow the instructions. Or, send an e-mail to LISTPROC@LITERACY.NIFL.GOV with the following request in the body of the message: SUBSCRIBE NIFL-FOBASICS firstname lastname Spell your first and last names exactly as you would like them to appear. For example, Sue Smith would type: subscribe NIFL-FOBASICS Sue Smith

Put no other text in the message. Give it a couple of minutes to respond. You should receive a return mail message welcoming you to NIFL-FOBasics.

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Visit our web site for all issues of *Focus on Basics*.
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And Finally, a Poem about Accountability

Truth and Perfection

I can see it off in the distance,
Shimmering in the brilliant red sunset.
"Outcome measurement
leading to accountability and
continuous improvement."
Its models of logic impressive, complex,
Almost beyond human comprehension.
But as I approach, I see behind the
mask
A teetering house of cards,
Held together with airplane glue,
The odd rubber band,
And the too-bright paint,
Festive and self-congratulatory.
As I stare, awestruck and
overwhelmed, I wonder:
Is this thing as unattainable and
tauntingly out of reach
As is true love, true happiness,
or anything else
Perfect and true?
— Alan Brickman, 1999

Focus ● on

Basics

A User's Guide to Standards-Based Educational Reform: From Theory to Practice

by Regie Stites

S *tandards have been one of the hottest topics in education reform for more than a decade. The drumbeat has been fed by fears that American kids — the future American workforce — are not keeping up with their peers in Western Europe and Japan. Such worries were given wide currency with the publication of the book* A Nation At Risk *in 1983. A* Nation At Risk *struck a responsive chord with the public. In the late 1980s, then-Governor Bill Clinton and his colleagues in the National Governor's Association began to see national goals and standards as the mechanism they needed to speed educational reform, a priority with voters. At a meeting with President Bush in 1989, the governors announced National Education Goals as the centerpiece of the America 2000 educational*

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

WORLD EDUCATION

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

Standards-based education, as Regie Stites writes, has been "one of the hottest topics in education reform for more than a decade." Driven by general interest and by the Workforce Investment Act, more and more states and programs are moving towards standards-based education. But, as I discovered when the articles for this issue started arriving, what they mean by standards-based education, and how they implement it, differs widely.

Stites comes to our rescue, providing definitions that make sense, and an overview that clarifies many questions I had. I propose that we — the field of adult education— adopt the definitions he provides us with in his article. This will enable us to talk to each other as we puzzle out the role of standards-based education in adult basic education.

Other writers in this issue share their experiences in implementing standards-based education at the teacher, program, state, and national levels. Jim Carabell, who drives the back roads of Vermont to tutor students in their homes, describes his coming to terms with a standards-based approach. Jane Meyer, whose Canton, Ohio, Even Start program is implementing Equipped for the Future, finds that while standards-based education has proved fruitful for learners, changing over to this approach demands much of her staff. Esther Leonelli writes about the evolution of math standards, and about how she implements those standards in her mathematics classroom in Cambridge, MA. Brian Kane, of Washington State's Department of Education, explains why his state chose a standards-based approach when designing their new state plan, and gives us a peek at how they are implementing this approach. On the national level, Sondra Stein, architect of the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) Initiative, provides us with a history of the development of EFF. And if you flip to the Blackboard on page 28, you'll see mention of standards-based activities in Massachusetts, California, and at the organization TESOL.

In addition to providing us with workable definitions, Stites also reminds us that adult basic education has a variety of major national initiatives underway: the National Reporting System, Equipped for the Future, and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. I hope that these initiatives, as well as the TESOL standards efforts and a variety of local activities, coordinate with each other. And I join Stites in championing opportunity-to-learn standards, providing, of course, that the resources needed to meet the standards are made available as well.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner
Editor

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reform agenda. The US Department of Education adopted the America 2000 goals as policy when Clinton took office as President. Adult literacy and lifelong learning are addressed in Goal 6: "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) in its 1994 Goals Report appended an "indicator" for the adult literacy goal as follows: "Increase the percentage of adults age 16 and over who score at or above or above Level 3 in prose literacy on the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS)."

The ideal model of standards-based reform described in this article will provide some context for understanding why an indicator such as this one is needed — in theory— to make Goal 6 and the standards connected to it work. It will also provide some perspective on why — in practice — this particular indicator is problematic.

In Theory

In American educational policy discussions, three general types of educational standards are usually defined: content standards, performance standards, and opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards (NCEST, 1992; National Academy of Education, 1993; Husen & Tuijnman, 1994). Each type has an indispensable part to play in the ideal model of standards-based reform.

According to the 1992 report by the National Council on Educational Standards and Testing (NCEST, 1992, p. 9), **content standards** define "everything a student should know and be able to do." In other words, content standards describe the range

of desirable knowledge and skills within a subject area. Content standards for history, for example, specify the people, events, and ideas that should be included in the history curriculum (and texts) at each grade level. The content standards for adult literacy being developed through the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Initiative (see page 11) define a set of knowledge and skills needed for competent adult performance in the roles of worker, community member, and parent or family member.

The NCEST report (1992) defined **performance standards** as specifications of "how much" students should know and be able to do. Thus, while content standards shape what goes into a curriculum, performance standards set benchmarks — specified levels of achievement — that shape expectations for educational outcomes, provide a basis for measuring learning outcomes, and provide the criteria for imposing rewards and sanctions. Performance standards for mathematics, for example, specify the mathematical operations and concepts that should be mastered at each grade level as well as the types of assessments that should be used to measure that mastery. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) took an interesting detour from the ideal model for standards development to develop a set of Assessment Standards for School Mathematics (NCTM, 1995). These standards provide guidance for teachers in the selection or design of tests to measure student progress in the knowledge and skills defined in NCTM's curriculum (content) standards.

Examples of performance standards for adult literacy are hard to find. The skills and competencies defined by the US Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (US DOL,

1991) might fit the bill for some, but SCANS definitions of skills and competencies are not detailed and specific enough to perform the function of performance standards in an accountability system. The descriptions of student performance levels being developed by the US Department of Education's National Reporting System (NRS – see box on page 4) as well as by individual states to meet the requirements of 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA – see box) might eventually function as adult literacy performance standards. In a way, this is "setting performance standards by the back door." In other words, provisions of the NRS and of the WIA may serve the purpose of performance standards without being explicitly labeled as such.

Opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards specify the nature of educational inputs and resources that are needed to realize expectations for student — and school — performance (NCEST, 1992). The NCEST report also suggested that OTL standards are needed to respond to concerns over the potential inequity of raising expectations for all students without ensuring that all had an equal opportunity to meet higher expectations. For example, OTL standards might specify the number of hours and quality of instruction that students should receive before they are tested on desired levels of skills and knowledge specified in content and performance standards.

Although explicit mention of OTL standards was dropped from the American standards-based educational reform movement early on, they remain important in the theoretical model. This is clearly stated in the following description of the connections among the three types of standards from the 1993 report by the National Academy of Education: ". . . for meaningful and fair performance standards to be set, it is necessary to define the exact

Workforce Investment Act

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaces the Adult Education Act, which was in place for 33 years. Title II of WIA, the "Adult Education and Family Literacy Act," addresses adult education. It reflects a tendency towards more intensive, higher quality services rather than number of students served. It also puts a much greater emphasis on learner outcomes, and therefore on accurate measurement and reporting (Balliro & Bickerton, 1999). States will now award adult education funding to programs that provide adult education services based on 12 criteria. These include the degree to which the program establishes performance measures for learner outcomes, past effectiveness in meeting these measures, and the maintenance of a high-quality information management system (WIA, Section 231.e.). For federal legislation and summaries of the WIA, visit the web site http://nifl.gov.

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Balliro, L., & Bickerton, B. (1999). "The Workforce Investment Act and New Multi-Year RFP." *Bright Ideas*, Vol. 8, No. 4.

National Reporting System

The National Reporting System is a national project sponsored by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) of the US Department of Education. It will establish a uniform national data base of adult education student outcome measures. Development of the data base requires standardizing measures, assessment, and data collection procedures, technological tools and training and technical assistance. Much of the development work was done between 1997 and 1999; training and technical assistance to states on reporting requirements began in the summer, 1999. For more information contact Larry Condelli, Pelavin Research Associates, (202) 944–5331, or visit the web site http://www.air–dc.org/nrs.

content areas to which these standards shall apply. Before performance can be fairly assessed, it is moreover necessary to determine whether all students have had adequate opportunities to learn the prescribed content" (quoted in Husen & Tuijnman, 1994, p. 2).

It should be clear by this point that performance standards carry most of the load in the theoretical model. They specify "how much" students should know and be able to do. They may also specify the tests used to measure whether students have learned enough. For these reasons, performance standards supply the leverage needed to hold learners and educational programs "accountable" for learning. While content standards may be the result of broadly inclusive efforts to achieve consensus on "what" students should know, in the end, they simply describe what "ought to be," not what "must be." Content standards alone do not drive a system of accountability for educational outcomes. Performance standards, with accompanying indicators to specify where to look to see how much is there and benchmarks to determine the level of performance that is enough, do.

In the ideal model of standards-based educational reform, content, performance, and OTL standards each have clear and distinct roles to play. In practice, however, the line between content and performance standards often becomes blurred and OTL standards have been mostly neglected. Still, it is helpful to consider the three types of standards — in practice — separately.

In Practice

According to the ideal model, defining national content standards would seem the logical next step to take after adopting national educational goals. In some K-12 subject areas, such work was

underway when the national goals were developed. This work on national content standards was seen as a way to define the broad outlines of subject matter that should be studied at various levels in schools across the country (see NCEST, 1992; Ravitch, 1992). One of the most commonly heard arguments against the development of national K-12 content standards is that such standards might create a "standardized" national curriculum that lacks the diversity and flexibility that many see as among the main strengths of the decentralized American educational system (Apple, 1993; Eisner, 1993). Proponents counter by pointing out that content standards are meant to serve as general guides for curriculum and should ideally be "general, visionary, and not at all prescriptive" (Porter, 1993, p. 25). Pie in the sky or procrustean bed — you choose.

In theory, with content standards you should have a choice. In practice, choice may be lacking. Content standards may influence commercial textbook publishers to such a degree that the only available — or allowable — texts and materials are aligned with them. For example, content standards and curriculum frameworks developed by large states such as California and Texas have a direct impact on the content of textbooks for K-12 subject areas. Choice in content may also be lacking when federal, state, or locally mandated testing and reporting requirements encourage schools to "teach to the test." Based on the recommendations of the National Reporting System and some states' plans to use specified levels of performance on the CASAS or TABE tests as core indicators of learner outcomes, this may soon be the situation for many adult literacy programs. In such a scenario, results on these tests may become de facto performance standards and adult literacy programs may feel compelled

to choose content and materials that are aligned with the skills and knowledge measured by these tests.

Whither OTL?

Opportunity to learn (OTL) standards — also known as delivery standards — were among the first victims of the encounter between the ideal model of standards and the realities of American educational politics. Delivery standards were included in the original House version of the Goals 2000 bill, but were dropped before the bill became law (Lewis, 1992). The original rationale for OTL standards went something like this: for performance standards to be fair, students and others who will be held accountable for outcomes must have the opportunity to meet those standards, therefore there should be standards for the quality of schools and schooling. Arguments about the dimensions of school quality and who would pay for it led OTL standards to an early demise.

Within the K-12 arena, the politics of educational standards has created some strange bedfellows. Opposition to standards in general — and to OTL standards in particular — has come from both the liberal and conservative ends of the political spectrum. Religious conservatives and radical leftists have sometimes found common ground in their shared support of "local" control of education. On the other side, supporters of OTL standards see them as guarantors of equity in educational opportunities and outcomes.

Political alignments on issues of adult literacy can also unite otherwise habitual adversaries. The provisions of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) relating to adult literacy program accountability are a good example of this intersection of political interests. Title II, the Adult Education and Family

Literacy Act, ties receipt of federal funding by states to the development and implementation of five-year plans for improving instructional and professional development outcomes. This requirement appeals to fiscal conservatives in that it can be seen as an accountability mechanism that compels each state to explain what it will do and how it will show results from federal funding. It also appeals to liberals in that it encourages states to engage in strategic planning to expand access and increase equity in adult literacy learning opportunities, especially in poor and minority communities where the need is especially acute. Will this two-pronged support last? The ultimate irony and very real danger is that in satisfying the program accountability requirements of the WIA, states may be seen to be defining something akin to OTL standards for adult literacy. They may well encounter the same sorts of bipartisan opposition to "unfunded mandates" and loss of local control that sank OTL standard setting for the K-12 system.

Driven by Assessment

If content standards leave us a choice and OTL standards foster resistance, where does that leave performance standards? They are right where they always were: at the center of standards-based reform. Both critics and advocates characterize the educational standards movement as an "assessment-driven" reform effort. The basic idea here is that since teachers often teach to the test, one way to improve teaching and learning is to create a better test.

The ultimate success or failure of standards-based reform rests heavily on the creation of new forms of assessment, specifically, new performance-based assessments.

> *"The ultimate success or failure of standards-based reform rests heavily on the creation of new forms of assessment..."*

Performance-based assessments may take a variety of forms including complex tasks, investigations, portfolios of student work, or any other assessments that require learners to make use of prior knowledge, recent learning, and relevant skills in actively solving significant and realistic problems (Herman et al., 1992). The emphasis on performance standards and performance-based assessment has directed the attention of psychometricians away from issues of reliability, which is how consistently a test measures skills or knowledge, towards issues of validity: how well a test measures the skills or knowledge it was designed to measure (Messick, 1994).

Tasks in performance-based assessments are typically longer, fewer in number, and scored in a more subjective manner than tasks in more traditional standardized tests. This has raised concerns about the potential for bias and inequity in the use of such assessments (see Darling-Hammond, 1994; Linn et al., 1991). These concerns are heightened in situations where the outcomes of a test have significant consequences either for the learner or for the educational program. In such high-stakes environments, the tendency is to fall back on tests that have a track record of previous use and that produce consistent results. Standardized tests with multiple-choice, fill-in-the-bubble formats

have the advantage of producing scores that only experts can effectively challenge. Performance-based tests have the advantage of measuring skills and knowledge in ways that make the content and levels of expected performance clear to everyone, including learners and teachers.

Salvation?

Will standards solve our educational problems and make American students world-class academic performers? This question has generated fierce debate among K-12 educators. Opposition to particular standard-setting efforts has been intense and often effective. In 1994, the US Senate in a nearly unanimous vote (99–1) rejected a draft version of standards for US history. More recently, the Clinton administration has faced an uphill battle in trying to institute a system of national tests in key subject areas. Nonetheless, despite setbacks at the national level, the standards movement marches on and seems to be gaining ground at the state and local levels.

Adult educators joined the standards fray rather late. In some ways, this is an advantage. As late-adopters we can benefit from the successes and failures of the K-12 efforts. In other ways, a late start is a significant disadvantage. One of the most important lessons of the K-12 efforts is that standards-setting works best when everyone is part of the process. This takes time. NCTM, for example, has been at work on standards for more than a decade.

Accountability is why the adult literacy field can't take its time with standards. While it is possible to have accountability without explicit content and performance standards, defining standards through a broad-based consensual process provides an opportunity for many voices to inform key decisions about who needs to be held accountable, how

they should held accountable, and for what. At a minimum, we need to have performance standards and test results to show how many learners are making enough progress to be counted as success stories. Of course, the usual success stories that adult literacy programs tell about their learners include more than test scores. That's fine as far as it goes, but in policy and funding circles these days, it doesn't go far enough.

"Have states increased the percentage of adults who score at or above level 3 in prose literacy [in the National Adult Literacy Survey]?" (NEGP, 1998, p. 43) is the indicator for adult literacy defined by the National Education Goals Panel. Consider how this indicator might work within the accountability model of standards-based educational reform. First, we might ask what connection this indicator has to the content of adult literacy education. Are the skills measured by the prose scale of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) (Kirsch et al., 1993) a reflection of broad consensus on what adults "should know and be able to do?" In the absence of content standards — or at least the absence of content standards aligned with skills measured in the prose scale of the NALS — our national indicator for measuring performance is not directly connected with the content (or goals) of the adult literacy education system. Should adult learners measure up to level 3 on the NALS scale? Level 3 seems to match pretty well to the literacy proficiencies of successful GED examinees, which gives some legitimacy to the benchmark (Baldwin et al., 1995). Without explicit performance standards, however, this benchmark is not directly linked to expectations held by the adult literacy field and communicated to students in adult literacy programs. And, since no one is talking much about opportunity-to-learn standards these days, no real

discussion occurs of what resources and learning opportunities adult learners should have access to before we hold them — and the programs that assist them — accountable for reaching level 3 on the NALS scale.

Clarify Expectations

Adult literacy programs have always been accountable to their funding sources in one way or another. As competition for public money has increased, however, pressure to show results from investments in adult basic education has also increased. A coherent system of content, performance, and, I would argue, opportunity-to-learn standards for adult basic education could help to ease the pressure and clarify expectations on all sides.

At the national level, the EFF initiative has made much progress in defining content standards that would serve to guide development of curricular content for adult literacy education. At the same time, with encouragement from accountability provisions of the WIA, the US Department of Education and states have moved closer to consensus on a national reporting system. In addition, planning is now underway for a second National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), scheduled for 2002. These three initiatives seem to be moving in rather different directions. Each is setting its own content and performance standards for the field of adult literacy. EFF is building broad consensus around standards for what adults should know and be able to do to fulfill adult roles as "workers, citizens/community members, and parents/family members." EFF is expanding the range of "desirable" skills and knowledge in ways that seem to be a closer fit to the goals and outcomes to which adult literacy programs and adult learners aspire. The National Reporting System is attempting to make use of the best available measures to gather

information on program outcomes. The NAAL is aiming to profile the range and distribution of literacy (document, prose, and numeracy) skills in the adult population of the United States.

Alongside these national developments, these days the real action in standards setting seems to have shifted to the state and local levels. California has already published and distributed Model Program Standards for Adult Basic Education (1996) and Model Standards for Adult English as a Second Language Programs (1991). A number of other states, including Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, among others, have been actively developing program and learner outcome standards. It is too soon to tell how state-level standards for adult literacy will turn out or the extent to which they will adhere to the ideal model or to national standards emerging from EFF, NRS, and NAAL.

Closer to the Ideal

This is the current state of practice in adult literacy standards. According to the ideal model of standards-based reform, all forms of standards — content, performance, and opportunity-to-learn — should be aligned. To bring the practice closer to the ideal, we must somehow connect EFF, NRS, and NAAL as well as state-level standards. This will not be easy, but will offer many benefits. First, coherent content standards can provide a clear vision of what every adult should know and be able to do. Performance standards and related assessment matched to this vision will provide the tools for individual learners, literacy programs, and everyone else to monitor progress toward goals.

Opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards may be especially critical for a system of education (adult

literacy) that is chronically under-funded. As I have argued elsewhere (Stites, Foley, & Wagner, 1996), the stakes in standards setting are high. Adult educators and adult learners have a special stake in standards and need to be actively involved in all areas of standards setting for adult literacy. Finally, the particular characteristics of the field of adult literacy may call for the development of standards to meet such needs as assuring equity, improving coordination of services, and meeting the learning needs of an increasingly diverse population. A serious consideration of OTL standards for adult literacy would be a good place to start to address these needs.

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About the Author

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Articulating Learning with EFF Standards

by Jane J. Meyer

"*I finally understand what I am doing in this class!" said Rosa, after her teachers explained the Equipped for the Future framework. She had been attending family literacy classes for four years, improving her reading, writing, and math skills, and becoming more involved in her children's education. But, because the GED had remained elusive, she felt she was not successful, even though she was volunteering daily at her children's school, taking a leadership role in her community, and participating actively in local politics. In the fall, 1997, when Rosa's Canton, Ohio, Even Start program adopted a standards–based approach to education using Equipped for the Future (EFF), learning began to make sense for Rosa and her fellow students.*

EFF identifies three adult roles — worker, family member, and citizen — and 16 skills that are essential to be effective in these adult roles. EFF calls the skills, which are divided into four groups, generative skills. The description of each skill defines the standard against which student performance can be measured. The 16 skills are listed in the box on page 9.

Immediate Connection

The first time I saw EFF I knew it would be perfect for our program

and for our students. I had been struggling to articulate what Canton Even Start was about. It was so much more than parenting skills integrated with academics, which was the description I usually used. I was also searching for ways to measure and document skills beyond reading, writing, and math. An hour-long presentation at a conference introduced me to EFF and began to answer my questions.

Our Even Start students also connected to the EFF framework after only a brief introduction. They could see themselves and their daily lives in the framework. Because EFF standards are based on using skills in context of the adult's roles, Rosa and her classmates were finally able to measure and document their progress in a meaningful way. Although Rosa never did pass the essay portion of the tests of General Educational Development (GED), she wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper expressing her concerns about an off track betting issue in an upcoming election. She also was able to demonstrate writing proficiency by writing notes to her children's teachers, a personal mission statement, and a monthly parenting column for her housing project's newsletter.

Prior to adopting EFF, our program used a competency-based approach to instruction and assessment, focusing on building the

specific competencies needed to pass the GED. As a family literacy program, we taught GED competencies in the context of parenting. This approach seemed to make a lot of sense, since competencies break down learning into manageable chunks. Learners saw success. What they didn't see was the big picture: how these individual successes "fit" in terms of broader roles.

The switch to standards-based education meant focusing on the skills, rather than the specific context in which they are learned. We redesigned our Even Start program to target the development of the 16 EFF skills. Our curriculum spirals around the skills, revisiting them within new contexts in each of the three roles. We now measure student achievement in the ability to transfer skills learned in one role to another: to apply the skill across contexts.

Identify Goals

After an introduction to EFF, we ask our students to identify personal goals in one or more of the skill groups and record these goals in their portfolios. The teachers design project based learning activities that help the students develop the skills they have identified as goals. Teachers plan by identifying possible learning opportunities for each skill within the project. They record these ideas on a planning sheet that lists the 16 skills. At the end of the project, students use this form to document their skill development.

For example, a recent project entailed setting up a family math night for the elementary school in which the Even Start class is housed. Some of the learning opportunities the teachers identified were: developing writing skills by writing a formal proposal to the principal, developing math skills by preparing a budget for the project, and developing planning skills by

organizing the project and carrying it out within the allotted time. Others included developing technology skills by creating a flier on the computer to advertise the program, developing research skills by searching out age-appropriate hands-on math ideas, and developing speaking skills by greeting guests at the program and giving the directions for the math activities.

As a group, the students planned the project, then they divided into committees to do the work, choosing their committees based on their learning goals. Octavia had set a math goal so she volunteered to work on the budget committee. Rosa had a writing goal so she served on the committee that wrote the proposal requesting permission to do the project and financial support from the principal. Lou wanted to improve her computer skills so she worked on the publicity committee.

At the end of the project, students assessed their development using the standards and documented this progress in their portfolios. Canton Even Start portfolios are three-ring binders with the EFF skill wheel on the front. Tabs divide the notebook into 16 sections, one for each skill. The students keep their goal sheets in the front and place evidence of skill development behind the tab for each skill. Before doing this, they reflect on their accomplishments by completing and attaching a form on which they explain what they can now do with the skill that they could not do before. Students reflect on four relevant dimensions as they relate to development of the particular skill: increased knowledge base, increased independence in using the skill, increased range of situation in which they can use the skill, and the fluency and ease with which they can use the skill.

For this project, Octavia inserted the budget her committee prepared
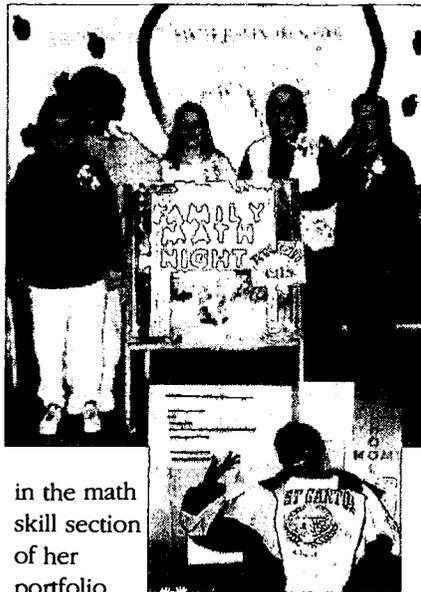
in the math skill section of her portfolio. She noted that although she had already known how to add, subtract, and multiply decimals, she had not known how to line up a formal budget and set up a system to record expenses. She included a budget sheet she had developed to help her keep track of her personal finances.

Rosa placed her committee's written proposal along with a response from the principal in the writing section of her portfolio. She recorded that she had learned to organize her thoughts into paragraphs with topic sentences, but still needed help with subject and verb agreement. She had never written anything that would be read by someone as important as the principal before, but realized now she has good ideas that she can and should express in writing, with proofreading assistance.

Lou placed a copy of the flier her committee created on the computer in the technology section of her portfolio; she had already known how to change fonts and type size, but now knew how to center, bold, underline, and use clip art. She also indicated that she now feels more comfortable getting in and out of word processing, saving, and printing without assistance.

Challenges

The switch to standards-based education has not been without challenges. Staff and students understand the concept of learning the set of competencies that build to the GED credential. It's more difficult for students to set their own goals and for teachers to guide them in identifying and developing the skills necessary to reach their goals. And, although students easily understand Equipped for the Future and see relevancy in the roles and skills, many still look to the GED as the ultimate measure of success.

Staff need additional training in goal setting, in using student-centered learning strategies, and in facilitating student reflection and evaluation. Increased preparation time is necessary to plan the learning projects and gather the materials that lead to skill development and transfer across the roles. Grant applications and state reporting systems often are not easily compatible with EFF standards.

Communication Skills
•Read with understanding
•Convey ideas in writing
•Speak so others can understand
•Listen actively
•Observe critically

Interpersonal Skills
•Cooperate with others
•Advocate and influence
•Resolve conflict and negotiate
•Guide others

Decision-making Skills
•Use mathematics in problem solving and communication
•Plan
•Solve problems and make decisions

Lifelong Learning Skills
•Reflect and evaluate
•Take responsibility for learning
•Use information and communications technology
•Learn through research

Benefits

As funding sources demand increased accountability, our use of standards-based education will be helpful. EFF standards allow all students to articulate their achievements in terms of what they can do in their daily lives, in addition to how they meet, or fall short of meeting, the GED competencies. Using EFF standards our program had the same percentage of earned GEDs as when we focused on GED competencies. However, our graduates — GED recipients or not — develop a broader set of skills that help them daily to be effective in their roles as workers, family members, and citizens.

The greatest benefit that focusing on standards has brought to Canton Even Start has been the clear articulation of both program and student goals. From initial recruitment through graduation, the standards permeate all activities. Staff and students can easily explain the thrust of the program and can communicate it to collaborating partners and stake holders.

Student goals are clear because they express what the students want to be able to do in their daily lives.

Progress is assessed in terms that are meaningful and obvious to the students: new things they can do, things they can do with greater independence, ways they can use skills within a broader range of circumstances, and things they can do with greater ease.

Under the competency-based system, Rosa considered herself a failure because she did not attain her GED. With the EFF standards-based system, she can be counted as a success. Although Rosa may never earn her GED, she can articulate her accomplishments and her next goals on the path of lifelong learning. She knows she is a success.

About the Author

Jane J. Meyer began working in adult education 10 years ago as a volunteer tutor. Since then she has been a family literacy teacher, facilitator of Canton's Even Start program, and is currently Coordinator of Adult Basic Literacy Education for Canton City Schools. ◊

Career Passport

One of the goals of Canton Even Start is to help participants become employed. We assist all graduates in creating a career passport containing formal documents that identify and describe their marketable skills. It is designed to help students in identifying and marketing their skills to potential employers. For the employer, the career passport provides a detailed and reliable source of information about the graduate's abilities, so, in turn, they can better match applicants to job openings.

The passport consists of five components: a cover letter from the school administrator that describes the program and endorses the student's competency list, a resume, a list of competencies achieved by the student, two or three references, and certificates earned by the graduate. Certificates might include the GED, attendance

certificates, and awards.

The centerpiece of the passport is the list of competencies achieved by the student. Our program focuses on the development of the 16 EFF skills, so we have developed a list of possible competency statements for each skill standard. Teachers document skills at the basic, intermediate, or advanced levels of competency. For example, under the skill "writing," competencies include "writes messages to communicate with others," "writes using standard conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar," and "conveys ideas in writing to ask for information, provide direction, influence others, and deepen understanding." Teachers review students' portfolios and select the competency statements appropriate for the level of development documented for each skill.

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Equipped for the Future: The Evolution of a Standards-Based Approach to System Reform

by Sondra Stein

“   *he National Institute for Literacy believes that the vision shaped in these adult perspectives constitutes a customer-driven mandate for change. We propose this vision be adopted as a mission statement for our field and that we begin — as a field — to explore what we would need to do differently, as teachers, administrators, counselors, support staff, providers of technical assistance and staff development, funders and policymakers, to assure that every aspect of our delivery system is dedicated to achieving Goal 6 as defined by these adult students.”*

“Executive Summary”
Equipped for the Future: A
Customer-Driven Vision for
Adult Literacy and Lifelong
Learning
(Stein, 1995)

The Beginnings

The 90s marked the beginning of a heightened interest in accountability at both the state and federal levels of government. Members of Congress wanted evidence that public dollars were being used well. While they continued to be moved by first–person testimonials of individuals whose lives were transformed through participation in adult literacy

programs, they were looking for aggregate data to support these anecdotes. They were concerned that adult educators could not document the overall effectiveness of the programs supported by the Adult Education Act (AEA). As a result of these concerns, the National Literacy Act of 1991, which amended the AEA, included stronger provisions for accountability for adult education programs.

The National Literacy Act also established the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). As part of this focus on accountability, the Act included, as one of NIFL's duties, monitoring the progress of the states and nation toward achievement of the National Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning Goal. This Congressional mandate was the impetus for Equipped for the Future (EFF).

Acting in partnership with the National Education Goals Panel, the national agency charged with reporting states' progress toward achievement of all eight National Education Goals, NIFL initiated a broad-based effort to define and set standards for the existing national adult learning goal. The goal reads: "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate, and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsi-bilities of citizenship." NIFL's hope was to engage the various

stakeholders in the adult literacy and basic skills field — including practitioners, researchers policymakers, adult learners, and all the other "customers" of our system — in developing a clear, specific, and measurable picture of what attainment of this goal would look like. We began our effort by sending an open letter to adult learners around the country. More than 1,500 adults, studying in 151 programs in 34 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, wrote to tell us what achieving the goal meant to them. They spoke with astonishing unanimity, identifying four fundamental ways in which literacy prepared them for their roles as workers, citizens, and parents. These four purposes are:

• ACCESS: To gain access to information and orient one's self in the world.

• VOICE: To give voice to one's ideas and opinions and to have the confidence that one's voice will be heard and taken into account.

• INDEPENDENT ACTION: To solve problems and make decisions on one's own, without having to depend on someone else to mediate the world.

• BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: To keep on learning in order to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

The team at NIFL involved in analyzing the data was excited about the potential significance of these responses. In July, 1995, NIFL released the report that summarized them at a national meeting of adult learners. We called the report *Equipped for the Future: A Customer-Driven Vision for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning* to emphasize that it was based on the voices of our customers. We invited the field to listen to the voices in the report, and to consider whether these four purposes (combined with the three roles focused on by learners) might serve as a starting point for rethinking

what we teach and how we define and measure success.

Explicit Consensus

In 1995, NIFL announced a program of planning grants intended to encourage this process of thinking about and discussing the implications of the framework of purposes and roles expressed in Equipped for the Future. The parameters we defined for the planning grants put EFF, along with national efforts to achieve the other goals, on the path of standards-based reform.

Standards-based education reform is part of the total quality management movement. This movement assumes that once you know what your customer wants, you continuously adjust all your systems to assure that you get there as effectively and efficiently as possible. The eight national education goals represented the first step in articulating what the customers of our national education system wanted. The next steps in defining desired educational results involved building an explicit national consensus for each goal on content standards, which articulate what students need to know and be able to do to achieve the goal, and performance standards, which identify the level of achievement to which students should aspire ("how good is good enough" in standards lingo). This consensus on results serves as the starting point for system reform. Standards are adopted and teachers begin the task of figuring out what new curricula and teaching approaches are necessary to achieve these standards. System results are assessed regularly: are more students leaving the system with the knowledge and skills defined by the standards? If not, system workers and managers try to identify what changes can be made in programs and policy to support the teaching learning process.

The need for such a process related to the adult literacy and lifelong learning goal was brought home, in 1995, as the Adult Education Act came up for reauthorization by Congress.[1] Congress had asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) to tell them how the program was doing, and the GAO responded with a troubling report (1995). "The broad goals and flexibility of the AEA and its State Grant Program have resulted in a federal program that is serving many different populations, yet has difficulty determining its target populations, objectives, or a means to measure program results.

"Although the broad goals and corresponding flexibility give state and local officials the latitude to design programs and quality indicators tailored to their particular needs and priorities, some state officials and experts have voiced concerns that the federal government has not provided sufficient vision and guidance. The program lacks a coherent vision of the skills and knowledge adults need to be considered literate. This poses a challenge for developing accountability measures" (p. 23).

The report concluded, "the [federal] program has had difficulty ensuring accountability for results— that is, being able to clearly or accurately say what program funds have accomplished" (p. 33). NIFL hoped that the customer-defined vision articulated in Equipped for the Future could serve as the starting point for a standards-based reform effort in our own field that would enable us to meet the GAO's challenge and be more accountable for results.

A Journey

The process of moving from broad national goals to standards is complex, and the NIFL was lucky to have the example of a range of standards efforts on which to build.

Once the National Education Goals were in place in 1991, the Federal Government supported the development of standards for all of the academic disciplines in K-12 education: math, science, geography, history, social studies, and English language arts. In most cases, the actual standards development work was carried out by professional teachers' organizations: for mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM); for English, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA). The government also supported the identification, by unions and industry associations, of skill standards for workers in 22 industries.

As NIFL studied the public reception given these standards, we saw that involving key constituencies throughout the process was critical to success. The broader the customer involvement, the more likely it was that the standards would be an accurate reflection of what students, or workers, in the case of skill standards, needed to succeed in the real world. The broader the involvement of teachers and other stakeholders in the education system, the more likely it was that the standards would actually be used to drive teaching and learning.

We felt we had a good customer base for our standards-based system reform effort. Since the EFF framework of four purposes and three adult roles (parent, citizen, and worker) had come from adult learners, we felt confident that it accurately reflected these customers' perception of their needs. The planning grant process would give us an opportunity to see how other customers and constituencies responded to the framework. We would also see whether teachers and other adult education professionals who were invested in the existing
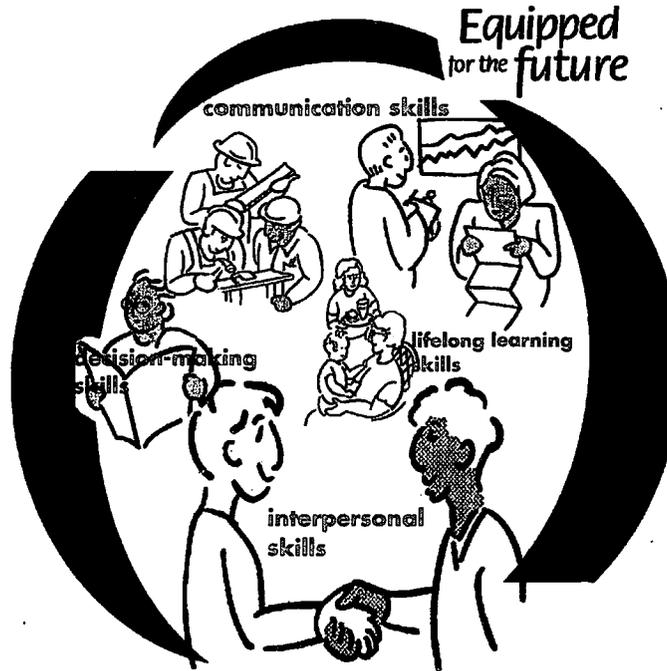
system responded to this new approach to defining the results of the system.

The eight organizations awarded planning grants in October, 1995, became our partners in figuring out how to build broad investment in a common set of results for adult literacy and basic skills and how to undertake a nationwide process of system reform to achieve those results. They engaged adult learners, practitioners, and representatives of key stakeholder groups in focus groups, discussions, and inquiry projects. All eight grantees reported that participants were — for the most part — excited about the way the EFF purposes defined the goal of adult literacy and basic skills education. It fit their experience of the real needs of adults. The data collected through these activities also showed there was no consensus among all these participants on what adults had to do in their roles as parents, citizens, and workers. We couldn't begin to develop content standards that defined the skills and knowledge needed to carry out these roles until we took a closer look at exactly what adults do in these roles.

Thinking about Results

To get a clearer picture of what adults do, the next round of Equipped for the Future grants was organized by role. A technical assistance team with expertise in developing occupational skill standards worked with teams coordinated by the three grantees: the National Center for Family Literacy (family role), the Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee-Knoxville (citizen role),

and the University of Maine–Orono (worker role). Together they developed a uniform structured feedback process we used to build consensus on the major responsibilities of adults in each role.

Equipped for the future

communication skills

decision-making skills

lifelong learning skills

interpersonal skills

Each team worked with an advisory group and state partners to make sure participants in these feedback sessions represented a broad array of effective role performers. Frontline workers as well as supervisors and managers participated in the worker sessions; they were from unionized and nonunionized workplaces, in five different industries, in five states. Participants for the citizen role included a similarly broad range of activists, from "good neighbors," to leaders in community organizations, to public officials. For the parent/family member role, sessions were held in family literacy programs, schools, churches, and on Indian reservations, with parents and family members representing a broad cross-section of cultures, races, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. Altogether, 1,100 adults participated in sessions to debate, refine and

eventually reach consensus on "role maps" that identified a purpose of each and the broad areas of responsibility and key activities essential to carrying out that purpose. Agreement required finding a language that respected differences across culture, race, and religious background, and finding a level of specificity in descriptions that left room for local variation.

These role maps provided a picture of role competence that was our starting point for defining the knowledge and skills that adults need to draw on to carry out their responsibilities as workers, and as members of families and communities. In response to feedback from participants urging us to develop only one set of standards for adult learning, we combined the data collected for all three roles to identify the Equipped for the Future list of necessary skills: the basis for our content standards.

Since the picture of adult role competence with which we start is so inclusive, the Equipped for the Future list of necessary skills — the basis for our content standards — is also inclusive. It starts with the skills adults need for access to information: reading and writing, listening and speaking, and viewing. It also includes the skills adults need to use the information they access to carry out their responsibilities: to speak and to act effectively in their roles as parents, citizens, and workers. This includes both the interpersonal skills that are sometimes talked about as teamwork skills, and the decision-making and learning skills that are often described as "higher order" or critical thinking skills.

The EFF team worked closely with our technical assistance team to

develop the first draft of EFF content standards. Then we invited states that were interested in helping us refine the standards to identify programs within their states that could serve as field development sites. Through a competitive process we identified 25 programs in 12 states that have worked with us since October, 1997, to help answer a set of questions about the standards and standards framework:

• Are the EFF Draft Standards and other components of the EFF Content Framework reasonable, useful, and appropriate tools for guiding teaching and learning in adult literacy and basic skills education? Are they appropriate for framing assessment of learning and reporting learner success and program results (to the state and national levels)?

• What other tools and resources are necessary for teachers and administrators to most effectively use the Standards and Content Framework to guide teaching and learning? What else is necessary to frame assessment of learning and reporting of learner success and program results?

• Do the EFF Standards and Content Framework help you move toward your goals of more effectively addressing the learning needs of adults who come to your program? How?

• To use the EFF Framework, what characteristics and attributes do teachers need? What strengths do programs need?

• What are the barriers to using the EFF Framework in your classroom? In your program? In your state?

The data provided by these field development partners — and by experts in assessment and standards who participated in a separate round of review — have helped us refine the content standards so that they focus sharply on the aspects of skill

use that are most important for effective role performance. Field reports also have helped us understand how the standards can be used with adults at every level of skill. Feedback from teachers and administrators in these sites has also helped us understand that, to really use the EFF standards to guide instruction and assessment, broader system reform must occur.

Counting What Matters

The EFF Content Standards are a first step toward focusing the adult learning system on helping adults achieve their goals and be successful in their roles. However, standards-based system reform also requires that programs be able to assess and report progress toward those achievements. That depends on the development of good criterion-referenced assessment tools that enable teachers and programs to assess adults' abilities to use the whole circle of EFF skills to achieve their goals. It also requires that state and federal agencies responsible for governance of adult learning adopt the standards and establish policies and provide resources and incentives that support the alignment of instruction, assessment, and reporting with important goals. Such alignment is the hallmark of standards-based reform and it requires substantial investment and commitment at every level.

This is what EFF is aiming toward. Over nearly six years, our field-based research has expanded from adult learners to involve representatives of all the customers and stakeholders in the adult basic education system. We have put many of the elements of the EFF framework into place. Through the field development process, we have developed a number of goal-setting and instructional tools that enable learners to take increasing control over their own learning. We have

developed content standards for each of the skills that teachers find useful in diagnosing specific strengths and weaknesses. We know a lot about what kinds of tools and approaches need to be included in an assessment system if it is to be useful for the whole range of assessment, credentialing, and accountability purposes defined by learners, programs and other system customers.

More investment, more field-based research, and more consensus building must be done, this time to determine the levels and benchmarks associated with performance standards. But what the EFF team and our partners have learned through our work so far makes us feel that the journey ahead will bring us closer to our goal of a system that really does help adults equip themselves for the future.

Notes
[1] In 1998, Congress replaced the Adult Education Act with Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, entitled Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, underlining the connection between adult education and broader national goals for a skilled workforce and for children's educational development.

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Sondra Stein, senior research associate at the National Institute for Literacy, directs the Equipped for the Future Initiative. Prior to joining NIFL, she worked in Massachusetts, where she taught, directed education for a community-based organization for women, was chief education planner for the state employment and training agency, and was deputy director and director of Governor Michael Dukakis's Commonwealth Literacy Campaign.❖

Confessions of a Reluctant Standard-Bearer

by Jim Carabell

I've always been wary of the term standards. The origin of the word itself connotes a dormancy or inertia: a standing still. As an adult educator, I've been told that standards are our friends, that we need them to ensure program quality, to indicate our goals, and to promote systems change. But it wasn't my fellow teachers who were voicing that mantra. I remained unconvinced. I felt my work with adult students needed no stronger imprimatur than our own, as we engaged in the learning process. To my mind, each teacher and student relationship developed its own measures of quality. The imposition of guidelines set by anyone beyond us seemed superfluous and a bit intrusive. I viewed standards as a bureaucratic construct devised to restrain creative teaching, foisted upon teachers in the field in the name of greater program accountability. Standards implied a uniformity and universality borne out of the K–12 educational mainstream (the model that failed learners in the first place). Adults in our programs told us they were succeeding in their learning precisely because we offered an alternative to that model.

I understood a community's desire to set dictates for educating its children that, in its collective judgment, will prepare them to successfully take part in the world beyond school. But adults are independent agents, in no need of societal in loco parentis. They are already immersed in the demands and responsibilities of the world and should be left free to determine what they need, educationally, to meet those demands.

Well, that's what I thought 16 years ago. Over the course of those years, in the process of looking more closely at my teaching practice, my discordant tone regarding standards-based education has found a new key.

In the beginning, I worked as an itinerant adult educator in rural Vermont, traveling to homes along roads of variable pavement, in seven towns, in a region covering about 600 square miles. When I was hired for this work, the reliability of my car probably outweighed my minimal teaching background. I began teaching with one overriding principle: do the least harm possible. I was convinced that one false curricular step would send my students reeling back to relive the traumatic failure that brought them to our program in the first place.

With the support of many creative and talented co-workers, I set out to make the teaching and learning environment as different as I could from the system as I knew it and as my students described it. I tried to make learning an enjoyable, communal enterprise. I customized everything, eschewing workbooks and keying in on the goals, language, culture, experience, and the style and pace of the learners. Since I travel to homes, teaching primarily one to one, I observed, listened, and utilized what was at hand. If a student had a bowling trophy on the mantle, we'd use that when it came to figuring averages. I'd have a mechanically inclined student explain gear ratios to me before I tried to show how the concept worked on paper. The pack of Marlboros wrapped up in a sleeve would serve up our M for initial consonant sounds.

These methods actually worked. My students seemed to be learning and making positive life changes. Even though a majority of learners, no matter what their skills, came to our program with the initial goal of obtaining a certificate of General Educational Development (GED), much more than GED preparation happened. Students were gaining the independence literacy offers, reading on their own, working for the first time, handling checkbooks and household finances by themselves, reading and writing notes to teachers, helping their children with homework, becoming involved in community issues, developing new concepts of self.

So, why were the federal and state accounting mechanisms not asking our programs about these outcomes? Every year-end, I filled out the innumerable forms that asked about the numbers of students served; the grade-level progress they'd achieved in reading, writing, and math; the number who passed the GED tests; and the number who left the welfare rolls. As my notions of literacy broadened, the qualitative impact of my work with students became more important to me. The quantitative analysis of end-of-year reporting seemed to neglect the true nature and value of my work. I wanted to find a way to showcase all the achievements of my learners. I wanted to alter the agenda in favor of

a larger perspective. I wanted to stop looking at the GED as a culmination and begin looking at successful outcomes in terms of real-world changes taking place as adults aligned lessons to life.

New Approach

About eight years ago, prompted by impending changes in state and national policy, I joined with other staff in our program in forming a study circle to rethink our approach to assessment. We chose several books and articles to read and discuss in focused seminars, operating under the assumption that literacy is broader than reading skills and involves more than a standardized test can indicate. We reasoned that, since reading, writing, and math are not only complex processes but are used across a range of purposes, we should assess them multidimensionally. We wanted assessment to be a collaborative activity, done with rather than to the learner. We also wanted to ensure that assessment itself was a useful learning activity — for teachers and students — not an addition resulting in more paperwork and fewer direct teaching hours.

The more we examined our long-standing practices, the harder they were to justify. Why did our reading diagnostics use decontextualized language? Why did our math diagnostics value computation skills over conceptual understanding? Why did our assessment processes focus on deficiencies rather than strengths? If we viewed literacy as more than the attainment of discrete skills, then why weren't our materials and instruments for teaching and assessing reflecting something more holistic?

With this in mind, we read Schneider and Clark (1993) on authentic assessment, Fingeret (1993) on portfolio assessment, Lytle and

> *"A standards-based approach might just recast our program in the eyes of funders... by allowing us to show, more authentically, what we do."*

Wolfe (1989) on program evaluation, and McGrail (1994) on alternative assessment. Deeper questions emerged. In the course of assessment, what implicit assumptions do we convey regarding the teaching and learning process? Does all assessment employ a set of underlying standards? Are standards and assessment merely opposite sides of the same coin? Isn't the very definition of literacy, narrow or broad, a social proposition of what we'd like our neighbors to know and be able to do?

We gathered, critiqued, and revised hundreds of instruments. We completely revamped the goal-setting and diagnostic materials we'd been working with and added a number of ongoing evaluative tools to our grab bag. We supplemented our reading, writing, and math diagnostics with student questionnaires aimed at discovering how learners used these skills in their lives; we added goals checklists and learning style inventories to our initial interview materials; we devised an ongoing, quarterly evaluation process based upon performance measures that students defined for themselves; and we kept portfolios of student work and accomplishments to help demonstrate progress. We were articulating standards without knowing it: those insidious

standards. I was embracing my own contradictions or, as I like to say now, appreciating the paradox. Standards could be both well defined and idiosyncratic. Curricular standards for teachers could co-exist with performance-based outcomes for students. I was now viewing standards as guideposts that marked significant points on an educational journey. The destination, mode, and pace of travel were left to learners and teachers, while checkpoints for gauging progress and reevaluating direction were built in. Standards, as tools for orienting teaching and learning, and as models for usage and comparison, could stand together with the underlying values I held about literacy and learning.

A standard didn't require subservience to just one curriculum or instructional method, but could inform and improve them. A standard involved an internal awareness more than it implied an external encroachment. A standards-based approach might just recast our program in the eyes of funders and policymakers by allowing us to show, more authentically, what we do.

Basking in the radiant optimism of pedagogical righteousness, our staff spoke of the need to influence the state to revise our end of year reporting. To no avail. Soon afterward, the state decided to align the outcomes for adult education with a newly developed K-12 standards framework. It includes a huge checklist of 500 standards, across 163 skill areas, in 39 academic categories, that is tied to attainment levels, which address the essential knowledge and skills that Vermont felt was important for its children to know and be able to do. I saw this as an endless list of factoids that would turn teachers into bean counters. Its convoluted language was also a concern. Under the heading "expression" is written: "Orally

communicates in ways that enhance relationships, minimize conflict, and encourage collaboration." This standard is not especially aligned with the language of my adult students. In comparison, the relevant Equipped for the Future Framework standard is: "Speak so others can understand."

I concluded that if Vermont's Department of Education continued to view adult students through the lens of a sequential, developmental, competency-based, K–12 model, then nothing we did in the field by way of alternative assessment would matter. More significantly, since those factors would continue as the tail that wags the grant-dollar dog, our program managers would have no choice but to accede to them in seeking and accounting for those monies.

EFF

Just as my spiral toward depression began, along came Equipped for the Future (EFF). This standards-based reform initiative finally spoke to adults, literally and figuratively. I had never encountered such an inclusive, bottom-up approach to the development of standards. More than 1,500 adult students in 149 programs across 34 states were asked why they sought our services. They responded that to fulfill their roles as parents, citizens, and workers, they needed to gain access to information so they can orient themselves in the world; give voice to their ideas; act independently; and build a bridge to the future, by learning how to learn. Their responses led to pilot projects that helped design a framework to incorporate those multiple goals. Learners, practitioners, industry

representatives, community members, and others participated to test the suitability of those four purposes across the three adult roles as a foundation for system reform. EFF described a concise set of content standards that dovetailed with performance indicators. More than a disjointed list of skills, the framework focuses on the applied use of knowledge and skills, by embedding them in the context of adult roles and responsibilities.

In 1997, I participated in an EFF pilot study to try out and critique the framework. Tammy was one of the first students I saw after attending a four- day EFF training. She was a GED student. I had given her some percentage problems the week before to try for homework. While explaining one to me, she looked up from across the kitchen table and said, "Don't be surprised if a state trooper interrupts our lesson today." Tammy had just bought a $500 car from her brother, who didn't have a title, who'd acquired the car from his ex-girlfriend, who also didn't have a title, who got the car from her brother, who may or may not have had a title, but who had since left the state for parts unknown. Tammy was driving the car, was stopped for having a defective tail light, and now

was worried. She had gathered all kinds of forms from the Department of Motor Vehicles, but none seemed to solve her dilemma. We put away the percentage problems and brainstormed various courses of action. We decided to call the DMV for direction, so Tammy wrote down and rehearsed her story as well as specific questions to ask. Tammy looked up the number, made the call, wrote down the name of the person she spoke to, and the information she gathered. She then read and filled out the proper forms, formulated and wrote an explanatory letter, as the DMV worker had asked, figured the math (tax as a percentage of the car's value), went to the general store to make copies of everything, and mailed the package. The trooper never showed. Tammy soon obtained a clear title.

What Tammy and I did that day was a waste of time, according to our end-of-year reporting. Even if the reading, writing, math, brainstorming, speaking, and problem-solving we engaged in somehow aided Tammy in gaining skills that would help her pass the GED, all the other accomplishments would go unnoticed and unconsidered.

We found a place for Tammy's activities in the EFF framework. Tammy's purposes of access to information and independent action to solve problems were evident. She was acting in her roles as a worker and family member. Tammy covered at least 18 of the common activities, generative skills, and knowledge domains within the framework. And this was a found lesson, ad hoc and unplanned. When I showed Tammy the framework and we discussed

how her project that day fit so many of the activities and skills that her fellow students, teachers, and community members around the nation identified as essential, she was genuinely proud. I was pleased to find validation for a learning activity I had considered part of my work all along.

In viewing knowledge and skills in the context of students' lives, EFF is broad enough to fit with much of what I already do. By offering a multitude of paths to explore the framework, as different roles and purposes for learning manifest themselves, it also encourages my students and me to consider our lessons from a number of different perspectives, without being prescriptive. This fits with the idea of a literacy spiral, where one activity or inquiry might send students and teachers off in many directions and involve a range of complexities. Just like real life.

Standards work when they · codify our internal values and respect our individuality. There will always be tension between the specific student and the general rule; the grant requirement and the program mission; the present and the future; the is and the ought. Standards work when they encourage a dialogue between those realms.

How's It Going?

How's it going? The application of standards is an activity of correlation and contrast. How is it going, compared to what? When I ask students if they've noted improvements in their reading, writing, and math abilities, they often look to the past and compare. My learners and I often look to their initial goals and compare. We often look toward an ideal and compare. Good teaching and successful learning not only involve but require these comparisons.

Sixteen years ago, I was far from willing to take up the flag of standards-based education; I would more likely burn it in effigy. I now realize that it was not the imposition of standards per se, just those that did not reflect my teaching experience and failed to consider the needs and goals of my learners. My initial cognitive dissonance has resolved into a new understanding. Goals, standards, curriculum, and assessment are intricately tied together like members of a musical quartet. The players may produce different tones, but a harmony arises through active listening, proper timing, and practice. This analogy also speaks to the social aspect of our enterprise; we work in concert as a community of learners. The application of bow to string means a certain amount of friction will accompany every melody. Measure by measure, I've come to appreciate the process as well as the results.

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Teaching to the Math Standards with Adult Learners

by Esther D. Leonelli

For the last 10 years, I have been an advocate for standards-based teaching of mathematics and numeracy to adult basic education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED), and adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. It has been quite a journey, a learning experience, and the most fulfilling part of my adult education career since I returned to teaching adults in 1985. By "standards-based," I mean a set of values and important ideas used to judge methods of instruction and assessment. With respect to math instruction, I mean both content and methodology based upon the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics (1989), which was adapted for ABE instruction by Massachusetts teachers.

My Conversion

I was trained as a secondary math education major in the late 1960s. When I first taught adults, from 1971 to 1973, I tried to incorporate the methods I learned in college. These methods were based upon the "new math movement" and Piaget's work with children, used manipulatives, and included a deductive, but very directed, approach. These did not translate well into my adult education work at that time. I found that my students,

who were in an individualized math lab in a Boston program that prepared them for medical training and professions, did not want to be led through these "discovery" lessons. They wanted to be shown the "rule" so they could apply it to the problems in the book and to the math tasks needed for the particular job they were planning to pursue.

I could do this very well. And so I taught math skills one on one, in a linear way, using pencil and paper and remedial arithmetic skills textbooks. I taught basic computation by rote, using decontexualized situations. Once the students mastered computation skill using only numbers, then I showed them how the skills were applied to word problems, which were chosen for the particular skill to be practiced and mastered.

I continued to teach this way when I returned to the adult education classroom in 1985, teaching ABE and GED level students. I was reluctant to use the manipulatives — the Cuisenaire rods, the base-10 blocks — that were a part of my math education training. I gave up trying to have my students discover the math concepts they were trying to master, although I wished that my students could rely on their own reasoning powers to reconstruct the theory or rule if forgotten. I reverted to teaching math the way I was taught.

My methods worked okay. I relied on textbooks with many

practice exercises and the answers in the back of the back. I could get my students to pass the competency-based math tests my center used for the alternative adult diploma credential we granted, one test at a time. That made my students feel confident and good. But I felt something was lacking when they couldn't remember how to divide fractions once we moved on to another math topic. I was disconcerted when they had to return to my class to prepare for the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) test or the college entry test. Something wasn't sticking. The math was "learned" for the test and then forgotten. Students depended on me and on the textbook for answers and rules. And, my methods did not work well for the students who were non-native English speakers. Needless to say, I felt that the approach I was taking needed changing.

By 1989, the GED test had changed to include more emphasis on problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills. It allowed more use of estimation skills and required that fewer complicated calculations be done without the use of calculator. A team of GED teachers in Massachusetts took a good look at the test and came to the conclusion that how we were teaching math should change. I joined that team. Around the same time, I attended a multisession workshop on teaching basic mathematics at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston. This was a mathematical re-awakening for me and an invitation to reconsider my own practice. The workshop introduced me to new national developments in the area of curriculum, methodology, evaluation, and teacher training in school mathematics that moved math teaching beyond the "back to basics" movement of the last two decades. These ideas, along with research and practice in classrooms and

constructivist theory, were incorporated into NCTM Standards, the seminal document for the math-standards movement. I read the Standards, became a "believer," and in the process, also became a lifelong math learner.

Through attendance at NCTM conferences I got to see first-hand the exciting changes in pedagogy and assessment advocated by proponents of the NCTM standards. I saw less direct instruction and more modeling of mathematical behavior by teachers. I saw less "drill and kill" practice and more interesting problems for investigation by students. I saw less individual seatwork and more cooperative lessons and conversation in the classroom around math, and fewer answers from the teacher and more sharing by and among students of individual strategies for solving problems. The workshops were intended to engage me in learning more math, which they did. And they showed me how the activities could be engaging for my learners.

In one workshop I was introduced to international developments in math education, the "realistic maths" curriculum from the

Here are two views of a building:
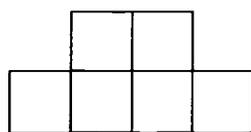
Front View
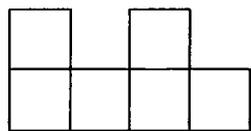
Side View

What is the least number of blocks you can use to build the building? What is the maximum number of blocks you can use to build the building?

Freudenthal Institute, the Netherlands. Their approach asks students to make mathematical sense from graphical images of the real world. One of the "geometry" problems that I like to pose to my students came from that workshop (see below). It requires not only visualization, but also the physical handling of concrete materials and group discussion to come up with an optimal solution.

This activity let me view students at work alone and together, solving a concrete problem. When they build their structures I see what they saw. What I learned is that many of my students have never had the opportunity to build and play and visualize. I also realized that I was making a lot of assumptions when I "lectured" or "demonstrated." I had assumed that my students could "read" a picture and could learn to interpret word problems by my teaching of "key" words and formulas.

Standards and Frameworks

The NCTM Standards were based upon the assumption that, in the late twentieth century, American society has four new social goals for school education: (1) mathematically literate workers, (2) lifelong learning, (3) opportunity for all, and (4) an informed electorate. To meet these (1989) societal goals, the Standards state further, that: Educational goals for students must reflect the importance of mathematical literacy. Toward this end, the K-12 standards articulate five general goals for all students: (1) that they learn to value mathematics, (2) that they become confident in their ability to do mathematics, (3) that they become mathematical problem solvers, (4) that they learn to communicate mathematically, and (5) that they learn to reason mathematically. Points 2 through 3 appear in the first

three "process standards" of the document: Math as communications, math as problem solving, and math as reasoning. The fourth process standard —mathematical connections — relates to the inter-relatedness of math topics and the connection of math to other disciplines.

Several instructional themes permeate the NCTM Standards: Concrete and problem-centered approaches to teaching math concepts; emphasis on estimation and visualization in realistic contexts; and using cooperative learning techniques. The Massachusetts ABE Math team found that these practices coupled with the four process standards are completely in harmony with notions of good adult education practice and so they included these in Massachusetts ABE Math Standards.

The "how" of teaching math is followed by the "what to teach." The NCTM Standards content strands are described for three groups of K-12 learners: K-5; middle grades 6-8; high school level 9-12. The ABE math team found that the content of much of ABE and GED mathematics fell within the middle-grade math range and so focussed their content standards on those standards. My own view is that today's GED test covers school mathematics content up to 8th grade. The Massachusetts Numeracy Framework roughly parallels these content stands with seven Numeracy strands.

I find that a standards-based approach to teaching adult basic math fits well with good adult education practice. The approach is learner-centered, involves a solid theory of learning for understanding, and addresses the wide diversity of cultural background, learning styles, and abilities of the learners whom I teach. And, it addresses math content and skills that are relevant for the new millenium.

What I take personally from the NCTM Standards is this:

– Learning (and doing) mathematics empowers adult learners;
– Math (and number sense) comes from real life;
– Mathematics is more than arithmetic competency and a set of rules to be memorized;
– Mathematics is investigation, communication, and a way of thinking about the world.

In terms of content, how and what math I teach, the math must be meaningful and connected to adults but also must stretch them beyond where they are. It must be more than teaching computation. And, since algebra is a "gatekeeper" to entry into and success in further education, my commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity compels me to ensure that adult math instruction includes some algebra (Moses, 1997).

In My Classroom

The learning of math as well as the doing of math includes moving along a continuum from — and among — the concrete to the representational to the abstract. "Digits" were born to represent fingers and toes; to "calculate" originally meant to use stones to count. In actual practice, mathematicians, scientists, technicians, draftsmen, engineers — people who use math everyday — often use graphic and concrete models to do math work. So I try to incorporate the use of a "hands-on" curriculum. It starts, as in real life, with concrete models, incorporates graphics and representational activities, includes, as well, games, writing, and the use of mathematical language and symbolism, and finally, integrates technology.

For example, I use a range of visual models to help learners conceptualize fractions, decimals, and percents. They construct number lines using folded paper, to demonstrate halves, quarters, eighths. Pie graphs of a day's activities are

drawn with colored pencils or developed on computer from spread sheets. I try to teach decimals and percentages at the same time, so that the students can relate these two concepts. Thus, students use the folded paper — which represent fractions — to analyze a candy sale's bar graphs, which are calibrated in percentages. They describe the pie graphs in fractions as well as in percentages. Building on students' experiences with percents in everyday life, we construct the meaning of percents in more complex situations.

But I try to do more with manipulatives than just use them to develop and demonstrate concepts. The blocks or tiles or other concrete things are often themselves part of the problem. I recently conducted a bean-bag race in the hallway of the learning center where I work. Two students walked along a track, dropping bean-bags every two seconds, while a third student kept time. The rest of the class, who hadn't viewed it directly, had to look at the bean-bag drops and tell which student walked faster and how they knew. One student spent a number of minutes animatedly explaining to me how the walks differed and how he had analyzed the situation. In explaining his reasoning, he pointed out the differences in the "proportional" distances between the two sets of bean-bags and how that translated into different speeds. As he talked, he got very excited with his own understanding and explanation, and exclaimed at the end of his analysis "and that's math!"

From Real Life

Students from other countries use different procedures than found in many adult education texts, particularly for several of the common computation operations such as subtraction and long division (Schmitt, 1991). Despite this, and

although the operations did not make sense as taught to many American-born students the first time around, adult education texts teach only the US algorithm (a rule or recipe for a mathematical procedure or operation). Standards-based math teaching respects students' thinking, background knowledge, and development of their own algorithms for computation. I try to teach my students by listening to their explanations of their own thinking and ways of doing math.

One of my GED students, Leo, was a "street smart" learner. He could apply his own experience in playing the numbers to solving the combinatorial problems I posed in class. (For example, "how many different outfits can you make with three shirts and four pairs of pants?") But he couldn't do a two-digit division problem the "long way," and he felt that would hamper his passing the GED. We spend about 15 minutes after class one day, talking through a long-division problem. In drawing out his thinking, I found he understood the concept of division as repeated subtraction and urged him to use that strategy. In the process, he came up with a method of division

"Close to 100"

• Using only single-digit cards, deal players hands of six cards.

• Players choose, from their hands, four cards, forming two two-digit numbers that add up to a number as close to 100 as possible.

• Players keep their own score. Points are the difference between the sum of the two two-digit numbers and 100.

• Deal seven hands. The player with the lowest total score wins.

(Russell, et al.,1998)

> *"It is challenging to change one's practice to the values and practices of the NCTM and ABE Math Standards, particularly when the ideal is not readily shared by other teachers and is not in the experience of our learners."*

that made sense to him and which he could articulate and repeat successfully. Although he claims that he now used a method I "showed" him, it was his own algorithm that he was able to apply confidently in his work, not one that you could find in any GED book.

With my more basic students, those still working on addition and subtraction, I use an investigation of the concepts of carrying and borrowing. Several useful card games, such as Close to 100 and Close to 0, build on the learner's sense and experience with numbers using 100 and 1000 as benchmarks (see box on page 21). The games gives learners a chance to use numbers in the context of a real-life social situation: a card game. Results can be discussed, strategies shared, and which simulates mental math activities that adults need for daily life, such as calculating change from a dollar, adding or subtracting percents, making purchases. Besides being fun, it is learning in a social context.

One of my formerly homeless students graciously shared with me many of his strategies for estimation. He often practiced his multiplication skills by estimating the bricks in a building wall, then counting one-by-one or multiplying row by height to check his number reasoning. Today I give "Elliot's Walk" — a true story — as a problem to my students to assess their proportional reasoning and communication skills in using math. Here it is: Elliot took a walk from his apartment to Harvard Square one day and counted his paces as he walked. He figures that his pace is approximately 2 feet long. He counted as high as 3,000 paces and then stopped counting just as he got to the Square. Approximately how far did he walk?

Investigation, Communication

I try to teach for understanding, using a problem-posing, questioning approach that connects the areas in which learners have strengths. For example, instead of directly teaching my learners to do these problems:

1. $3\times5 + 6$
2. $102 + 10\times5$
3. $25/5 + 35/7$

using the PEMDAS or "Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally," (parenthesis, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction) rule for order of operations, I ask them to generate their own expressions in my Number of the Day activity. This also gives me a daily assessment of the depth and breadth of my students' grasp of computation, order of operations, and use of symbolic notation. I write "Number of the Day" on the board, and a box with a number next to it. I ask the students to write as many numerical expressions as they can

that equal the number of the day. Student responses the day the number was 350 included: $300 + 50$; $200 + 100 + 25 + 25$; 70×5; $50 \times 6 + 50$; $182 + 26$; $150\times2 + 50$.

Technology

My adult learners have access in the classroom to appropriate technology: calculators and computers. Rather than being a crutch, calculators are an invaluable aid in teaching basic mathematics because of their speed, accuracy, decimal display, and memory. Many of my learners already rely on calculators in every day situations as workers and consumers. I use them as instructional tools to assist in the development of concepts, to help reinforce skills, to promote higher level thinking, and to enhance problem-solving instruction. By freeing them from the routine, long, or complex calculations, more time can be spent on conjecturing and reasoning.

In Conclusion

It is challenging to change one's practice to the values and practices of the NCTM and ABE Math Standards, particularly when the ideal is not readily shared by other teachers and is not in the experience of our learners. I find many learners look to me for answers when I'm trying to have them develop that capacity themselves. One of my students complained to his counselor that "at the end of the day, we're tired from working, and she expects us to think." It is easy to fall back into old methods of direct instruction and worksheets and workbook pages. Also, teaching using the math standards means covering less material while taking time for discovery. That's hard when students need their GEDs by June. So sometimes this way of teaching brings its own discomforts, to me and to my students.

The only evidence I have for the success of my approach that "less is more" is that I rarely cover all the material in the GED textbooks in the 14 to 15 weeks of my course. Yet most of my students seem to have the confidence to take and pass the test. My experience with teaching a range of learners, from literacy students to GED, has convinced me that teaching for learning in the vision of the math standards is good adult education practice.

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Standards at the State Level

Washington grapples with implementing a standards-based approach to ABE

by Barbara Garner

What happens when a state decides to implement a standards-based educational system? *Focus on Basics* talked to Brian Kanes, staff member at Washington State's Department of Education and former state director of adult basic education in Minnesota, to find out.

For many years, Kanes explains, adult basic education (ABE) programs in Washington State were using a system based on Washington State Basic Skills Competencies and Competency Indicators. As with many competency-based systems, however, standards and criteria were not clearly defined. And, although representatives from welfare, job training, corrections, business, industry, and labor had participated in developing the competencies, these same folks did not understand what it meant when a student completed, for example, Intermediate ABE or Beginning English as a Second Language (ESL). Because of the variation from class to class and program to program, students and teachers and the general public didn't either. Some employers and job trainers voiced dissatisfaction with former basic skills students who had passed math tests but weren't adept at applying those skills, for instance, using a tape measure to accurately record sizes of production materials. Other employers explained they were trying to hire people who were responsible and reliable, who could team up with their co-workers to

solve problems, and who could communicate effectively on the job. They were interested in work-related, rather than academic, skills.

Kanes continues, "Welfare reform, encouraging public assistance recipients to find and keep jobs, was also pushing us toward standards. Our state's version of the federal Personal Responsibility Act now allows adults with low basic skill levels to participate in an ABE or ESL or GED preparation program instead of immediately seeking a job, if the basic skills provider can demonstrate that learners are making progress toward basic skill standards needed to find and keep a job and needed for wage and skill progression." They needed a system that would measure that movement.

And, for the past few years, a majority of Washington State's adult learners with employability related goals have been staying in basic skills programs only for about 10 weeks. As has been documented throughout the country, many other students, especially single parents and racial and ethnic minorities, also persisted for short periods of time. Are they "project learners," pursuing short-term learning projects to address a short-term need that is very context-specific, who left when they determined they got what they needed? Or are programs not helping them address their real-life issues? The Department of Education wanted a data-based system that would provide them with the information to answer these questions.

The State Adult Education Advisory Council developed, Kanes explains, and the State Workforce Board and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges approved, a long-range plan for a statewide assessment system. That plan describes initial screening and placement tools and the procedures for developing and implementing diagnostic, on-going progress, completion, and impact assessments. It calls for developing basic skill standards within the Equipped for the Future framework.

Why EFF?

Kanes explains, "The state department of corrections, the state workforce board, the state Department of Employment Security, the representatives of business and industry, all the state agencies and most of the private people who have something to do with adult literacy, all worked together. They said they wanted to define the federal functional levels in educational terms and in student real life terms." State Director Israel Mendoza, who is on the national board for EFF, brought EFF to the attention of the advisory council, which recognized it as an approach that met their needs. In addition, he says, "there are certain things that many adult educators think that we know about effective adult basic skills learning and teaching. We, in Washington State, were looking for an approach to standards and accountability that reflected those beliefs. We believe EFF does the job."

Adult basic education programs in Washington State that receive any state or federal Adult Education and Family Literacy funds come under the administrative purview of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). Community and technical colleges, under the same State Board, are leading the skill standards development efforts in

Washington State. Skills standards specify the knowledge and competence required to successfully perform in a given occupation or field. Unlike most competency-based programs, skill standards also define the levels of performance that are required. Since the Washington Office of Adult Literacy has "in-house" experts – their colleagues at community and technical colleges – to help with the process, coupling a skill standards approach with EFF to make sense. The State's track record with skills standards is well-regarded by policymakers and business, industry, and labor, so any standards system developed in partnership with the skills standards efforts will receive recognition by employers around the state.

Putting It All Together

Although Washington State adult educators have been reading about and discussing authentic assessment and EFF and Skills Standards for several years, in the spring of 1999 the state held its first hands-on, what-might-this-mean-for-ABE-ESL-GED "practicum." About 300 Washington adult educators experienced preparing and using rubrics at six regional workshops. Rubrics are standard protocols for scoring a learner's demonstration of or performance on a task. The participants prepared and tested rubrics, and tried out the draft ABE and ESL writing assessment rubrics that a smaller group of their peers had developed earlier in the year. Participants graded actual student work samples, determining whether the sample qualified as a "level completion." They then worked in groups to grade the rubrics themselves, both for their adherence to competency standards and criteria, and for their usefulness with a diverse population of learners.

Workshop participants took the rubrics back to their programs to

share with their colleagues and to collect better student work samples to use as "anchors" for each achievement level within each competency level. A State Board for Community and Technical Colleges staff person collected the comments and work samples to further refine the draft writing rubrics.

In the summer of 1999, another team of Washington adult educators began a year-long process of rewriting the Washington State Competencies to reflect the newly announced federal competency (functional) levels, and to develop rubrics for the other academic and functional skill areas. They will involve basic skills staff from local programs in reviewing the competency statements and rubrics as they are developed, and to help create "authentic" procedures through which to put the rubrics into use. At the same time, family literacy programs throughout the state will be piloting methodologies for integrating EFF more fully into the standards development and assessment process.

Challenges

Washington state is determined to keep the needs of the learners in the forefront of any performance assessment system it develops. "If you set up an assessment system and it limits how you can perform, behave, act by its very structure," Kane explains, "that's sending the wrong message. If we define the outcomes in such a way that it focuses all attention on something that is easy to measure rather than than something important to the learners, then we've structured it all wrong." But Kane is not aware of many concrete examples of how to measure, observe, rate performance. That challenge lies ahead. They hope to draw on the work EFF is doing in that arena.

The structure of the ABE system

in the state presents another challenge. Most adult educators in Washington, as in most other states, work part-time. "Many part-time instructors do not get paid unless they are teaching students," says Kane, "For our system to change, the part-time instructors need to be involved. How do we get them to participate? How do we get them into a feedback loop so they not only talk to their co-workers, but report back to us so we can send the information to our workgroups and use it to improve the process?"

"We face other challenges as well. For example, some rubrics workshop participants thought that having a 'toolbox' of approved assessment procedures and activities, tied to rubric standards and criteria they could share with learners, would enable them to plan learning options and assess performance in ways that would encourage, not discourage, the 'most-in-need' students. Some of the participants, however, worried that performance standards would discourage participation in basic skills programs because 'effort expended' would not be valued as much as 'reaching the bar.' And some adult educators viewed developing standards and standard rubrics for assessing them as lack of confidence in them as teachers or tutors. We know most practitioners think a lot about how to make sure teaching and learning focus on meaningful learner goals, and we at the state need to do a better job of recognizing that fact publicly."

Despite the challenges, Kanes says, "Many basic skills teachers and tutors are warming to EFF and Skills Standards, because its mapping of generative skills across adult life roles and activities will enable them to do what learners want and what funders require, often at the same time."

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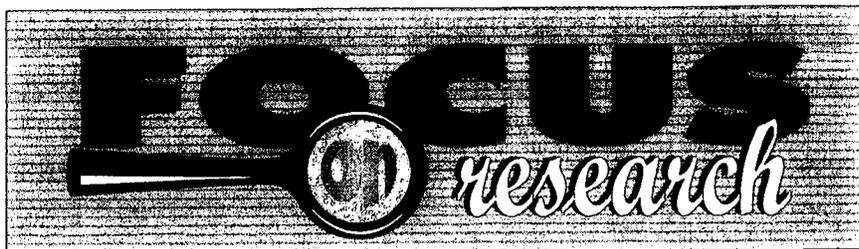
Documenting Outcomes

An action research project led by Beth Bingman at The University of Tennessee is one of NCSALL's research activities that focuses on learner outcomes. Bingman and her colleagues are working with three adult literacy programs to develop methods for documenting the outcomes that occur in learners' lives as a result of participating in adult literacy programs.

"I originally thought we'd be doing something like collecting outcomes and come up with processes to do that," explains Bingman, "but it's more complicated than that." First they had to develop agreement, within and across the three participating programs, on what constitutes an outcome. They decided upon this definition: outcomes are changes in learners' lives as a result of participating in adult basic education (ABE). To establish a common language for outcomes assessment across the sites, the research team and program participants then developed what they call the "Inputs to Impacts Grid." This grid, shown on page 27 is used by the teams to analyze their programs' components.

Each program team also compiled a list of what their program had been documenting before the project began. They examined who does the documentation, for whom it is done, how often, how is it used, and how is it reported. "This was a useful process for everybody," comments Bingman. "We discovered that there were very few places where outcomes were being documented." The teams uncovered duplication in the overall documentation that could be eliminated and came up with ways to streamline processes.

The project has three sites, one in Tennessee, one in Virginia, and the third in Kentucky. The Tennessee site is the literacy division of an urban ABE program. They offer day and night classes for literacy level students and have a family literacy program. The Virginia team is from one county in a seven-county rural program. The three teachers involved teach multilevel classes in a housing project, a jail, the local library, a vocational school, and a night class at a high school. The Kentucky team is the staff of a county adult learning center. They offer General Educational Development (GED) and literacy instruction in the center and at a family resource center in their rural mountain county.

Different States, Different Approaches

Federal policies allow states to design their own accountability systems. Each program in this research project is therefore taking a different approach to documenting outcomes, reflecting the different approaches their states take to performance accountability. While the procedures they are testing are different, many of the issues they face are the same. Tennessee provides one example: "In

Tennessee," says Bingman, "we are working with four teachers, each of whom started by trying different ways to document outcomes. For instance, someone tried monthly taped interviews with two students about what had happened in their lives. Another teacher used a teacher checklist and a reflection log. Someone else kept portfolios of evidence. It was incredibly time intensive to get what they wanted. They were paid for the extra time they spent to do this. No one felt it was going to work program-wide." One big challenge across the country is developing processes to gather information on outcomes that can be used in a system where the majority of teachers are employed part-time or are volunteers.

Then there's the question of who gets to say that something is an outcome. If a learner says "Yes, I'm doing this," does it count as an outcome? Is it substantial or rigorous enough? Can the information be believed if it is reported by the learner? As Bingman points out, "one of the concerns is a tendency to report what people want to hear. But we believe that learners are the ultimate authority on changes in their lives."

On the other hand, if students are asked to report outcomes, the question becomes, Why should they bother? For example, the teachers in the Virginia program tried collecting outcomes by using in-class activities such as stem sentences, in which they provided the beginning of a sentence, "Now I can…" and learners completed them, and story circles, in which learners talked about changes in their lives. The teachers weren't satisfied and the learners felt their time was being wasted. So, after some discussion, the teachers developed a checklist of possible outcomes. After learners tried the list and suggested changes, the list was revised. The team now plans to use the form,

which they call "Do, Set, Met," for initial goal setting as well as for documenting outcomes. They hope that having a variety of outcomes to choose from will help learners name specific goals that they can accomplish. The "Do, Set, Met" goals will tie into the state reporting system.

Outcomes

The outcomes of this research project, a set of processes teachers can use to document outcomes of student participation, will have to meet criteria that address all these challenges. And it will also have to fit with existing policies and requirements, such as the reporting requirement of the Workforce Investment Act (see box on page 4) or state-level requirements.

"People will have to feel like they can do it in a reasonable amount of time," says Bingman, " and that it's real evidence, collected systematically".

The project is slated for completion by the end of the year. A final report will include suggestions of how local programs can use the processes developed by the action research teams. The teams also plan to meet with state ABE staff to share what they have developed.

For more information, contact Beth Bingman at The University of Tennessee, 600 Henley Street, Suite 312, Knoxville, TN 37996-2135; telephone (423) 974-4109, or e-mail her at ncsall@utk.edu.

Documenting Outcomes for Learners and Their Communities: Inputs to Impacts Grid

	Student	Program
Inputs – factors available for performance	Previous educational experiences Life experiences Goals Abilities Commitment Needs Temperament (e.g., shyness) Challenges, e.g., L.D., child care, transportation	Building, equipment Staff Curriculum Materials Goals Volunteers Technology
Process – the educational and organizational processes contributing to performance	Intake interview Orientation Reading, writing, math activities Social interactions School governance activities Testing & assessments Discussion/analysis Cultural expressions Computer use	Planning Record-keeping Assessment Scheduling Instruction Staff development Advice, guidance, support Connecting to human services, etc.
Outputs – the immediate results of services provided	Test scores Journals More comfort in class GED Resume Certificates Documentation of improved performances	# of classes offered # of hours of instruction # of students Staff development activities
Outcomes – the longer-term results of education for individuals and programs	New reading, writing, math practices Changed self-concept Checking/savings account Computer skills New goals Changed/new skills Driver's license/CDL license Workforce skills. Citizenship A job Job promotion	Aggregation of student outcomes test scores GED student goals met Teacher changes Records kept Improvement in program (PQI) Changes in administration philosophy
Impacts – changes in community brought about by changes in learner's lives	Children more involved in school; increased use of public resources; more activity in civic life; pressure to improve neighborhoods; better educated/developed workforce	

BLACKBOARD

California Model Program Standards

°   California adopted Model Program Standards in 1992. Publications available: *Model Program Standards for Adult Basic Education*, 1996, $11.50. Item No 1213; and English as a Second Language: Model *Standards for Adult Education Programs*, 1992. $7.50. Item No. 1046. These publications are printed and sold by the California Department of Education, Publications Division, (916) 445-7608. For examples of how agencies have devised course outlines and lesson plans to address the standards, see the OTAN Web site, www.otan.dni.us

TESOL Adult Education Program Standards

°   The membership organization TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is developing a set of adult education program standards. The standards will identify key criteria of a quality adult ESOL program, sample measurements that can be used to determine if the standard is met, and sample performance standards that indicate levels of acceptable performance. For more information, visit the TESOL web site, www.TESOL.edu, or call John Segota at TESOL, (703) 518-2513, or Gretchen Bitterlin (619) 527-5339; e-mail: Gbitterl@sdccd.cc.ca.us

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks

°   In 1995, the Massachusetts State literacy resource center (SABES) and the State Department of Education began convening tasks forces to develop a set of curriculum frameworks for adult education. The goal of the process is to develop learning or content standards that are based on learner needs and aspirations. These standards will be linked to assessment and validated. For more information, visit their web site www.doe.mass.edu/doedocs/ frameworks/ or contact Robert Foreman, (781) 388-3300, extension 315; e-mail rforeman@doe.mass.edu

GED Testing Service

°   The GED Testing Service has identified common elements in national and state standards in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, creating a synthesis of the standards in each discipline. They have compiled their findings into a book, *The Alignment of National and State Standards*. An executive summary of the book is available; the full book is $22.99 per copy plus $5.00 shipping and handling. Contact the GED Testing Service, One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 939-9475, or consult their web site, at www.gedtest.org

Related Web Sites

°   The National Education Goals can be found at the National Education Goals Panel's web sites, negp.gov. This site has not been modified since December, 1998.

°   Information about Equipped for the Future can be found at the National Institute for Literacy's web site, www.nifl.gov. Click on NIFL Programs & Activities, or call (202) 233-2025.

°   K-12 efforts can be found at the web site run by Achieve, Inc., a non-profit that provides advice and assistance to states on education reform: www.achieve.org

°   The web site of the Education Commission of the States has many documents on educational standards that can be downloaded. The web address is www.ecs.org. Enter the word "standards" into the search function; this will connect you to a publications list. Or write or call them, ECS, 707 17th Street, #2700, Denver, CO 80202, (303) 299-3600.

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Focus ● on Basics

The Power of Writing, the Writing of Power

Approaches to adult ESOL writing instruction

by Elsa Auerbach

If you had walked into an adult English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class 20 years ago, you might have seen students doing little writing other than completing short exercises designed to reinforce particular grammar points or language functions. The teacher may have evaluated this writing on the basis of formal correctness; students may have had little opportunity to write extended pieces in which they expressed their own ideas. Today, you may see exactly the same kind of writing in some adult ESOL classes; in many others, however, you're likely to see students filling out job applications, writing notes to their children's teachers, or practicing taking phone messages. They may be writing journal entries, doing free writing, composing stories about their lives, or writing down folktales from their homelands. Some may be

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Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

Working on this issue, I couldn't help but think back to the last adult basic education (ABE) class I taught. It was an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) literacy class that met for six hours a week. I taught reading, writing, and math to ESOL speakers who had pretty good command of oral English and varying levels of literacy in their first languages. After reading these articles, I long for a chance to do it all over again, differently.

In our cover article, Elsa Auerbach describes five current approaches to teaching ESOL writing and the different messages each approach sends to students. She urges teachers to be thoughtful about the instructional choices they make, and to keep in mind the signals their choices send. While her article is geared towards ESOL, the approaches she outlines are equally applicable to native English speakers. Bui Thi Nguyet Thanh, an ESOL teacher and former ESOL student, was devastated by the methodology used by one of her ESOL teachers. With this in mind, she carefully crafted her ESOL writing classes to meet her new immigrant students' psychosocial as well as academic needs. This story, which includes a variety of teaching tips, starts on page 7.

What does research on writing instruction offer to adult basic education? Much, we learn, as Marilyn Gillespie takes us through the evolution of the process writing model, into research on spelling, and finally to studies of the social role of writing. Turn to page 10 for her article.

ABE teacher Rebecca Garland discovered the social role writing can play: the instructional approach she used, which involved a particular kind of journal writing, had an impact on the social setting in her classroom. As her students shared their stories, they developed a sense of community and self confidence. Learner Chhoeup Chhoeun describes her experiences in this class on page 17. Rebecca's article starts on page 15. Mary Russell wondered about the mismatch between learners' interest in the mechanics of writing and teachers' focus on self expression. Her questions led to a research project that provides us with some very telling insights. Her report, which starts on page 20, reminds us that what we understand about writing is not necessarily the same as what our students understand.

Many readers of *Focus on Basics* have asked us to include some specific teaching activities. I am happy to announce a new column, "Focus on Teaching," which appears on page 24. Thanks to Shirley Brod, ESOL teacher from Colorado, for sharing her techniques with us.

❖❖❖

NCSALL is proud to announce the publication of its first edition of the *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy.* Available from Jossey-Bass, this scholarly book includes eight articles on topics of importance to the field. Archie Willard, founding member of the learner organization VALUE and a leader in the field of adult basic education, wrote the introduction. For information on how to order the *Review*, please turn to page 25.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner
Editor

revising their work for publication. Others may be working together to draft letters to the editor of a newspaper about a community problem or to craft a petition to the local school board. The teacher may be writing alongside students, responding to their writing by asking questions and sharing experiences, or giving mini-lessons about a particular grammar point.

At first glance, the changes over the past 20 years can been construed as representing a new eclecticism in writing pedagogy: a "let a hundred flowers bloom" philosophy. However, underneath this proliferation of practices are several distinct tendencies that reflect theoretical developments in the fields of second language acquisition, composition theory, and literacy studies. Although most of the research in ESOL writing has been done in higher education contexts (see Cumming, 1998; Raimes, 1998) and there has been minimal writing research in adult ESOL contexts, pedagogical practices in both contexts are informed by similar approaches. Understanding the differences and similarities between the approaches is important because writing instruction is so powerful. The way that writing is taught sends learners messages about who they are as writers, what is entailed in the act of writing, what they can do with writing, and what writing can do for them. In fact, writing instruction often goes further than shaping conceptions about writing itself: it can also contribute to constructing learners' sense of their own identities and possibilities (Ullman, 1997). In this article, I present five current approaches to teaching second language writing, the theoretical perspectives on which they are based, their implications for practice, and the messages they send learners.

Behavioral and Functional Approaches: Writing for Assimilation

One of the first departures from grammar-oriented writing instruction for adult ESOL students in nonacademic contexts was the functional or competency-based approach (Savage, 1993). This approach, which evolved in the late 1970s, is based on the view that, for immigrants or refugees, the priority is survival; according to this view, their needs for writing focus primarily on very functionally-oriented, context-specific writing tasks. Thus, where grammar-based approaches value what students know about language, this view emphasizes what students can do with language. It is concerned with the behaviors and performance demanded in particular domains or roles rather than with grammar per se. For example, workplace educators may develop an inventory of writing tasks required for a specific job and base writing instruction on that inventory. As such, this approach is parallel to the English for special purposes (ESP) approach used in academic contexts. Often writing tasks are integrated into thematic life skills modules along with reading and oral language skills: reading want ads, filling out job applications, and preparing for interviews may go hand in hand as tasks associated with finding a job. Assessment is based on the ability to demonstrate competence; this approach is congruent with outcomes-based models currently being mandated through federal policy initiatives.

Proponents of this approach argue that it will enable learners to

> "*The way that writing is taught sends learners messages about who they are as writers, what is entailed in the act of writing, what they can do with writing, and what writing can do for them.*"

participate in the contexts of their daily lives competently and meet the practical demands of work, family, and community life. It will, they say, prepare new immigrants and refugees to succeed according to the expectations of American society. The message here is that being able to perform the writing tasks associated with specific contexts, norms, and societally defined roles will results in assimilation into the American mainstream.

Cognitive Approaches: Writing for Self-Expression and Meaning-Making

As second language acquisition and composition theories have developed, an emphasis on writing as a cognitive, meaning-making process has become increasingly popular. Critiquing behavioral and functional approaches, believers in this approach argue that writing should be much more than filling out forms or responding to externally defined norms. All too often, they claim, the functional approach limits both the kinds of writing students can do and the roles for which it prepares them. It trains students to fit into the social order as it exists, which, for refugees

> ## "The message this approach sends is that learners' lives and voices have value..."

and immigrants, often means filling menial roles or dead-end jobs that require little thinking or extended writing (Tollefson, 1989).

In the cognitive view, often called the "process" approach to writing, the focus on meaningful communication for learner-defined purposes derives from second language acquisition theory. The focus on the process of writing as a vehicle for reflection and exploration of ideas comes from composition theory. The content, practices, and purposes of ESOL writing inspired by this approach differ from those in functional classes: writing becomes a way of making sense of experience or discovering what one thinks rather than performing functionally useful tasks. Thus, writing often starts with personal narratives, as titles such as *Writing Our Lives* (Peyton & Staton, 1996) suggest. Literary forms such as poetry are also often incorporated (Kazemek & Rigg, 1995). While instruction focuses primarily on writing to create meaning, form is addressed both implicitly and explicitly: advocates of this approach argue that increasing accuracy evolves through drafting, revision, and editing; in addition, teachers often incorporate mini-lessons about relevant linguistic points.

Common practices in the process approach include free writing in journals, writing extended narratives through a cyclical process, and publishing student writing. In dialogue journals, students write about thoughts, experiences,

reactions to texts, or issues of importance to them, and teachers respond to the content of students' entries by sharing experiences, ideas, and reactions as well as modeling correct usage (see Peyton & Staton, 1993). The cyclical process of composing extended narratives involves generating ideas through free writing and brainstorming, drafting, conferencing with peers and teachers, revising organization and content, editing for form, and, in some cases, publishing writing for a broader audience. These publications give writers real audiences and purposes for their writing, as well as becoming the impetus for building curriculum around learner writing and serving as models for student writers (Peyton, 1993). The message this approach sends is that learners' lives and voices have value and can become the vehicle for language acquisition as well as self-discovery.

The Socio-Cultural Practices Approach: Writing for Affirmation

A third perspective coming from the field of literacy studies focuses on socio-cultural practices rather than functional behaviors or cognitive processes. Literacy ethnographers argue that cognitive views of literacy and process approaches assume a universality to writing that is not borne out by research into actual literacy uses (Street, 1984). Their research shows that ways of acquiring and using writing vary from culture to culture, from context to context, and always depend on who is using it, under what conditions, and for what purposes (Barton & Ivanic, 1991). According to this view, people are informally socialized into the local, culture-specific literacy practices of the communities in which they are immersed. Because the out-of-school literacy practices of people from "mainstream"

backgrounds are most congruent with school literacy practices, they are at an advantage when they encounter literacy instruction in school.

To value the range of practices that students bring and utilize them as resources, advocates of this view propose starting with what people know and do, by investigating how people actually use and acquire writing within specific families and communities (see, for example, Klassen, 1991). The point is to build on what people know, and to incorporate their local cultural knowledge into schooling, drawing on what Luis Moll (1992) calls their funds of knowledge. Thus, pedagogical practices may encourage the use of culture-specific genres, purposes, and content. Examples include a book about the many uses of aloe vera and other natural remedies produced by a class of Latino elders (Costanzo & Paxton, 1999) and a literacy text based on Creole proverbs developed in a Creole literacy project (Auerbach et al., 1996). Along with this goal of cultural affirmation, promoting the first language as a vehicle for cultural maintenance is often emphasized. Students in a Hmong project in California decided to learn to read and write in Hmong to preserve their first language and pass along oral histories to their children (Kang et al., 1996). The message in this approach is that learners' cultural knowledge and ways of using literacy are valuable and can become a bridge to new learning. Writing is a vehicle of social and cultural affirmation.

The Genre Approach: Writing for Access to Powerful Discourses

A fourth approach argues that both the cognitive and socio-cultural approaches to writing instruction, despite claiming to empower learners, assure their continued exclusion.

They argue that because certain literacies yield more power than others, it's not enough for learners to share their stories, find their voices, and celebrate their cultures. Process writing and immersion in meaningful usage may be fine for people who come from the dominant culture, but they obscure the rules of the game for everyone else. Delpit (1995), for example, argues that what's important is not voice in itself but teaching the discourses of power. She favors explicit instruction in the rules and standards that are valued in the dominant culture. The genre approach, popular in England and Australia, proposes deconstructing dominant genres, analyzing them from a linguistic point of view, and reproducing them (Hasan & Williams, 1996). Through overt instruction students learn to identify specific text types (narrative, factual, procedural, and persuasive), analyze their structural and linguistic features, and generate their own texts that conform to the conventions of each genre (see Spiegal & Sunderland, 1999). For example, students might be given two different texts, such as a news report about the housing crisis and a letter to the editor about housing discrimination. They would be invited to compare what the texts are about, why they were written, when one would read each, where they would be published, and how the language and structure of the texts differ (USWE, 1997). The students might then use this information to produce their own parallel texts. The message sent by this approach is that mastery of the genres of power will yield access to power.

The Critical Approach: Writing for Social Change

A fifth view argues that neither the socio-cultural practices view nor

the genre view actually delivers what it promises: where the socio-cultural practices folks focus on writing practices, and the genre folks focus on text structures, the social change folks focus on social issues and action for change. They argue that it's not enough to affirm learners' cultures and celebrate their voices; they say that it is crucial to look at literacy within the context of larger institutional forces. As Giroux says, "Student experience has to be understood as part of an interlocking web of power relations" (1987, p.177). Social change advocates say that the genre approach makes the mistake of claiming that acquiring the discourse of power will actually lead to gaining power (Luke, 1996). In fact, they say, experience, history, and research show that other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and race are equally important in determining access. This approach argues that all writing pedagogy has an implicit political stance, whether or not it is acknowledged (Severino, 1998).

So within the critical approach, writing pedagogy is tied to analyzing student experience in relation to broader economic and political relations. Writing focuses on content drawn from the social context of learners' lives (connecting the word and the world, as Paulo Freire would say) and is used in the service of action for change (Freire & Macedo, 1987). For example, a parents' group in Los Angeles that began meeting the week after the L.A. riots used their classes to explore their fears and concerns about what was happening in their communities. They then wrote a book not only describing their experiences but also analyzing what was happening and why, and distributed the book in their community to prompt further dialogue (Orellana, 1996). In a

> *"The message this approach sends is that writing can become a context for exploring critical social issues and a tool for taking action..."*

Boston ESOL class, students compared and analyzed incidents of police harassment after one received an unjust traffic ticket. They then wrote a letter to the editor of a local paper about police discrimination (Nash et al., 1992). The message this approach sends is that writing can become a context for exploring critical social issues and a tool for taking action to improve the conditions of one's life.

In Conclusion

Certain debates in the field of ESOL writing transcend or cut across approaches. They include questions such as: What is possible with new writers? Where should one start? What is the role of the first language in ESOL writing? Should learners with minimal schooling first learn to write in their first language? What should one teach more proficient second language learners? Should they be encouraged to utilize first language resources in second language writing or be forbidden to do so? How do the social contexts in which writing is taught shape the pedagogy? How can writing instruction become a tool for empowerment? It is not possible to explore these issues here, but examples of ways to address these questions can be found in work by Atkinson (1987), Auerbach (1993), Barahona (1996), Shamash (1990), and Smoke (1998).

My hope is that this article has shown how the practices described in

the opening paragraph reflect different approaches to ESOL writing. I hope it is also clear that certain common elements underlie current approaches and that, in practice, writing instruction often draws elements from each of them. There is widespread consensus within the field of ESOL writing about several points: 1) that a focus on meaning rather than form (grammatical correctness) encourages writing development; 2) that instruction should stress writing for real reasons, to real audiences in order to promote authentic communication; 3) that writing should be contextualized and that content should be meaningful and relevant to learners; 4) that learners need some degree of overt instruction, which includes talk about writing, substantive, specific feedback, and multiple opportunities for revision; 5) that social and cultural variation in writing practices and genres needs to be taken into account; and 6) that all writing pedagogy reflects a stance about the learner in relation to the social order. The most important point is that teachers need to be conscious of implications of their practices and of the power of the messages that their pedagogical practices convey.

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How I Wish I Was Taught to Write

*A teacher draws on her experiences as an ESOL learner
to craft a writing curriculum for beginning ESOL students
that meets their academic and social needs*

by Thanh Bui

You ask me how I learned to write when I first came to this country. I didn't learn very well. After one year of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in Shreveport, LA, I had to take English 101. My first composition came back red from all the corrections the teacher had marked. The second one came back unmarked, with just one word on it: "Awkward." I didn't know what awkward meant, so I decided to become a plant in my class so as not to attract too much attention. I also gave up my confidence in writing, something I thought I had done very well before coming to this country as a refugee of war.

During my years of teaching beginning ESOL, I incessantly asked myself how I learned to write. Please don't think that I'm boasting here. The truth is I still don't think I can write. As a teacher, I stay focused on the basics. I divide my school year into roughly ten thematic writing projects. Here are some examples from my writing curriculum.

September

September is the time for "My name is," "I am from," or "I was born in." During this month, we do drills on everything from the colors (of hair, skin, eyes, clothes) to the American measurement system, using pounds and ounces to reveal sometimes not so desirable information like our weight. The second week, we start our first journal writing assignment using the parallel writing approach. I write and say aloud each word on the board; the students follow the movement of my hand. Many of my students haven't had much formal education in their own languages, so I try to write only when they can see the actual action of writing, be it on the board or on paper. This gets them accustomed to what writing looks like.

We start with a topic such as "The most special person in my family is my mother." The following day, the topic changes to "The most special special person in my family is... because he/she is very good to me." The students replace my words with their own. They learn to write a few words of their own every day, and feel a great sense of achievement. I've learned that it's easier for students to write about matters of the heart than about the economy of a country. Also, when my students write about a subject they know, it gives them a sense of worthiness, a balance to the sense of having no family, no money, and no future. I also make sure that the language I use is simple enough so that most of them can understand it without having to translate, and that is a boost to their confidence. I have them continue to write about the same person, and they begin to anticipate: at school every day they will write more about that special person so dear to their hearts. On Friday, we look back at our week's writing, compile the sentences, and add "I like/love him because... ." Unbeknownst to them, my students have just written an essay.

October

October is the time of changes: in personal development, in the surroundings. For most of the students, it's an exciting month. Leaves change their colors. The temperature drops. They find themselves wearing big, thick jackets, and are tickled with the idea that they are new people, "Americanized." Our topics this month are differences, descriptive language, and simile. We study about different shades of colors, different weathers, and different feelings. We learn comparative words. I bring in various leaves, give each student one, have them examine their leaves, and write on the board "My leaf is... ." The students describe their leaves in the simplest way, using shapes, colors, and textures. Over the course of the week, we expand our leaf activity into simile with, for example, "My leaf is round like a ..., and it's green like a ... ." Towards the end of the month, we make a trip to the Old Dutch Church, just two blocks away, to learn about Washington Irving's *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. After the trip, we brainstorm about what we've learned, using the mind
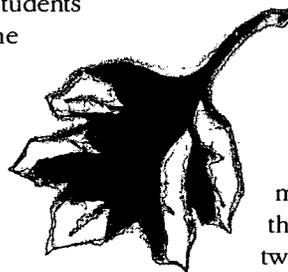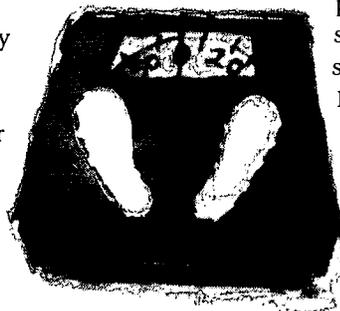
webbing technique. I draw on the board a circle with the title in it, and a few rays around it. I ask some students to volunteer to come up to write their words about the story. I make sure not to draw too many rays so as not to intimidate them, because this is often the first time they are writing on the board, and it can be either a chance to get greatly humiliated in public, or a chance to be proud. Most times, the rest of the class volunteers to add more rays and words to the circle. Then we sequence the words, and the students dictate the story to me to write on the board, using their vocabulary words. At the end, the more advanced students copy this and type it up. We put all the students' names at the bottom of our story, and I show them how to initial their names. To some students, initialing is a godly action, similar to signing their names. I explain that in this country, once established, they will encounter initialing as a way to identify themselves.

For a Halloween activity, I bring in a small pumpkin for each student to carve. Year after year, they never fail to show amazement as well as excitement at taking part in this American custom. I have had a few cases where the students do not want to cut up the pumpkins for fear of wasting such good food. For a writing activity, I ask the students to describe their pumpkins, then to state what or who they think their pumpkins look like. This leads us into the simple form of metaphor that we learn along with simile. I help the students type up their work, paste it on their pumpkins, and display them in the hallway. To prevent apprehension, I make sure that the students know that their work is perfect because

they are exposing themselves to the larger public this time.

November

November is the month of self-examination. We learn about thankfulness. Our topics are about the things and people for which we are grateful. I provide the beginning of a sentence: "The thing I appreciate most in life is....," and ask the students to include in their writing the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) and the H (how). Starting the second week, I introduce them to the story of Thanksgiving. We discuss the vocabulary, the history, the culture, and the people. Then I give them a thought-provoking question to write about each day. For example, "How would you feel if you were a mother with sick children on the Mayflower?" Or "What would you do if you were a Native American gathering wood and found white men setting up camp near your home?" We talk about our reactions to different circumstances. The following week, I put all the topics on the board and we categorize them according to time sequences. As you can see, I insert writing techniques such as categorizing or sequencing without making it into a separate lesson, which could reduce a learning experience to the most confusing time for beginning ESOL students.

I ask the students to volunteer to act out a scene for each topic, and I record what they say and type it into a script. Again, unknowingly, my students are writing their first play,

which they will act in. We take turns acting every day until everyone feels comfortable and natural. Then I propose that we use this as our class presentation for the school's Thanksgiving celebration. Their first reaction is often negative, but their pride has always won. And by the last Thursday of November, I'm the proudest teacher on earth.

December

December is the make it or break it month for most students. Either their enthusiasm, or their allocated budgets, or their visas, or everything is running out. Then there is also the sense of bewilderment. They feel cold, sad, and without futures. To build self-confidence, we teach each other. Topics are invariably about how to do something they know well, for instance, cook a family recipe. We learn about conversion from metric to US measuring systems, about kitchen verbs, and American kitchen appliances. Then we collectively write a recipe book, grouping together students of the same country as much as possible. The students, through this activity, always realize that they are much alike.
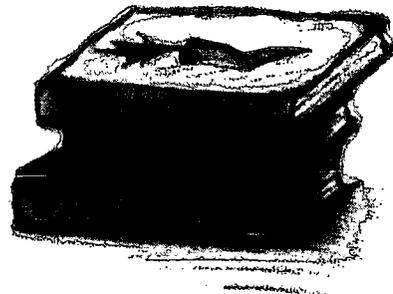
Other Activities

We continue to write in this fashion, through thought- and feeling-provoking questions, throughout the year. Here are some other activities I do with my beginning ESOL class.

At the beginning of the year, to introduce the students to the alphabet and also to break the ice, I group students in fours or fives. I give each

group an adjective that they've learned that week, and ask them to use body language to write it. The words should be short enough so not to discourage them from getting up and forming them with their bodies.

After the lesson on past tense, I bring in animal-shaped Beanie Babies. Each student picks a Beanie, and writes about that animal "In my former life I was a... and I lived in... ."

To practice the conditional, "If I am..., I will...," each student retells a folktale from his or her country. Then they convert it into a modern version. They end their writing with advice to their characters, again using the conditional tense "If I meet him, I will tell him... ."

On a snowy day, I bring in a bucketful of snow, have the students touch it, feel it, and then we write a cinquain about it. Cinquain, a five-line stanza, is a form of poetry that I find easily applicable to beginning ESOL writing. Step by step, I ask them to give one noun to name the object, two adjectives to describe it, three progressive verbs to state what it does, four words in a sentence to say what they think about it, and one new word to name the subject again.

On Earth Day in April, we listen to Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World." I provide the lyrics with blanks for them to fill in. Blanked out words are colors, present tense verbs, or nouns, depending upon what I want to emphasize. Then we sing along with Louis.

To develop a vocabulary of feelings, I play the silent French film *The Red Balloon,* and have the students write down five feelings the main character must have felt, and five feelings they felt for the character. The assignment is "Have you ever felt that way and why?" I consciously slip in more advanced use of grammar and vocabulary without much fanfare so that the students don't get worried.

To do creative writing, I draw a red dot on the board and ask the students to write about it. I repeat this exercise a few times a year to measure their language growth. A beginning writer writes something like "I see a red dot." Later she might write, "I see a red sunset." A more skilled writer might write "It's a sunset over the horizon." I sometimes use meditative writing with my students. I have the students sit with their eyes closed and ask them to count their breaths while I read them a short story. Then I ask them to write one part that touched them most and to state what sensation they experienced. Lots of times, the students feel very funny in the beginning of the activity, but after a few minutes, they are really drawn into the meditation mood with its relaxing sensation.
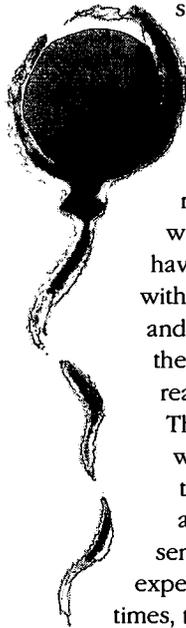
Final Thoughts

The sole wish I have is to see my students pick up a piece of paper and a pencil to write unafraid. I forbid myself to let the three "y's" — philosophy, accuracy, and policy — interfere with my teaching. I ignore the philosophy that writing means the students will produce an acceptable essay-like composition. I leave that to my advanced ESOL colleagues. I also ignore the rules of accuracy. I try not to correct their work; rather, I show them my interest in their writing and in what they have to say. For I know that if I focus on mechanics, I will reduce them to just the capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and the period at the end. Lastly (and discreetly), I pretend

to forget the curriculum policy. How can I apply the Department of Labor's Scan Skills with my students where they don't even have enough basic skills to survive? All I want is to help them develop a sense of self worth and pride about being in this country. All I want is for writing to become an enjoyment that they can do while struggling against sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and, at times, despair.

Toward the end of the year, I recognize lots of change in my students. They tackle critical or analytical topics, in their own limited English. I can see that they have grown, and that this growth has taken root in their unconscious.

I think that if my students learn with me, it's not because I can teach any better than other teachers, but because they feel that I can relate to them and understand their difficulties. I understand the fear of revealing one's ignorance. In June, my students have gained enough confidence to go out and get a job. They may be dishwashers, seamstresses, housekeepers, or gardeners. The jobs don't require Scans Skills as much as they demand a lot of understanding about oneself and the work environment. And I imagine that from time to time, during break, my students pick up paper and pencil to write cinquains about...their bosses. ✍

About the Author

Thanh Bui is short for Bui Thi Nguyet Thanh. Born in Vietnam, she came to the United States in 1975 as a refugee at the age of 19. Her first job in ESOL was as an after-school big sister, helping Southeast Asian high school kids with homework. She was one of the first ESOL teachers for the Caddo Parish School Board in Shreveport, LA, and helped developed the program's curriculum. She has taught English for the Berlitz School in Lausanne, Switzerland, and started the Berlitz for Kids Program in Europe. She has been teaching mainly lower ESOL levels with Southern Westchester BOCES, New York, since 1990. ❖

Using Research on Writing

Marilyn Gillespie highlights some research on writing instruction and discusses what it offers to adult basic education

by Marilyn K. Gillespie

I was introduced to research on writing in the mid-1980s while starting up Read Write Now, a small library literacy program in Springfield, MA. Janet Kelly, who co-directed the program, had just finished a graduate course on the teaching of writing in elementary schools. She described the latest writing process research and speculated that it might be uniquely suited to our desire for a learner-centered classroom. We were looking for ways to move beyond simply teaching skills. We wanted literacy acquisition to be part of a process whereby adults developed personal goals for change, found their own voices, and acquired the ability to speak out and give an opinion on things that mattered in their lives. Janet introduced me to the work of researchers Donald Graves (1975), Lucy Calkins (1975), and others who had begun to make authors of even very young children through the implementation of writing workshops. Could our adult beginning readers, many of whom were just beginning to read words and make sentences, do the same? We decided to give it a try.

We introduced the writing process to our first group of students and suggested they write autobiographies. Soon they were teaching us. "My name is Lidia," a student began. "I was born in Italy in 1939, in the middle of the depression and in the middle of the war." Lidia had completed only second grade in Italy. She had never written so much as a short letter before, yet the urge to tell her story gave her the courage to spell words as she heard them and to suspend her need to have everything perfect the first time. Soon other students began reading Lidia's story and started their own. Over time we came to recognize that writing was not only a way for adults to improve their literacy skills. Writing about their lives also gave them a chance to reflect on what school had been like for them in the past, to set goals for the future, and to offer their experience up for others with similar backgrounds (Gillespie, 1990, 1991).

During the years that followed, I learned of other programs that were incorporating different kinds of writing into their classrooms. Some advocated journal writing (Kerka, 1996) or dialogue journals (Peyton & Staton, 1991). Other involved adult basic education (ABE) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) literacy learners in writing newsletters, anthologies, and individual books (see Gillespie, 1991; Peyton, 1993). More recently, writing has been woven into collective research efforts (Auerbach, 1992; Gardner, 1985; Mace, 1995) and project based instruction (Wrigley, 1998).

For the most part, however, programs that include the writing process as an integral part of instruction appear to be in the minority. Most programs, if they involve students in composition at all, do so only with more advanced students. They use the traditional approach of assigning topics and "grading" the results. Even the advent of the General Educational Development (GED) essay test does not appear to have fostered writing proficiency in the way creators hoped it would. After reading hundreds of GED essays, Art Halbrook, the writing specialist for the GED Testing Service, concluded that writing instruction is frequently a "blueprint for mediocrity" (1999, p. 8). Too often, he notes, teachers simply drill students in a five-paragraph formula. Student are taught to restate the topic in their opening paragraph, to write three paragraphs of supporting statements, and to link them with transition words such as first, second, third or next, then, or finally. The last paragraph begins with the inevitable "in conclusion" and involves restating the first paragraph. Students are shown how they can adapt this formula to any topic to pass the GED test. Halbrook notes that "the resulting essay is an amorphous piece of writing, a hybrid product loosely defined as an essay only because it has sentences, paragraph divisions, and a beginning, middle, and end" (p. 9). This drill and practice approach, he points out, does a great disservice to students. Formulaic writing leaves the learner "shackled to a form that denies the individual the ability to grow and communicate as a writer..." (p. 9). Moreover, it has limited value in preparing adults for the writing demands of higher education.

Researchers have made considerable progress in understanding what people do when they write and how they learn to write. This research has made its way to public schools and universities. Yet, for the most part, it appears that only a few adult literacy educators

have had the time or opportunity to learn about it. This may be due in part to the fact that little of this research has been conducted with adult literacy learners. Adult literacy educators must read between the lines to see how the research can apply to our populations. The aim of this paper is to show that such an effort is worthwhile. I will highlight a few strands of writing research that are of interest to those of us in the field of adult literacy and suggest the implications they have for adult literacy education.

The Writing Process: A Working Model

Many teachers who learned the basics of the writing process model in the early 1980s may be unaware of how it has evolved over the past two decades. A "working model for the writing process" was first proposed by cognitive psychologists Hayes and Flower (1980). In collecting together the growing body of research up to that point, they suggested that writing could be seen, above all, as a "goal-directed, problem-solving process" (Hayes & Flower, 1980 p. 4). The writing process had essentially three sub-processes. Writers plan. They decide what to say and how to say it. Writers generate text. They turn their plans into written text, getting the words down on the page and observing the conventions of writing such as spelling and grammar. Writers also revise. They use a variety of ways to improve on the existing text. These three sub-processes do not occur in any fixed or linear order. At one moment writers might be writing, moving their ideas and their discourse forward; at the next they were backtracking, rereading, and digesting what had been written. The fact that these sub-processes are recursive, with one often interrupting the other, represented a shift in the understanding of the writing process.

An important aspect of understanding the writing process has been the study of the differences between "novice" writers and "expert" writers such as professional authors. Novice writers include young children as well as older children and adults who never learned to write or who experience difficulty writing. Some of this research came about with the advent of open admissions policies at many colleges in the 1970s. Shaughnessy (1977) examined the errors of college learners in what were then labeled "remedial" programs. Her research showed that novice writing reflects oral speech. Perl (1979) noticed that novice writers may lose their train of thought because they have to attend to more mechanical concerns such as letter formation, handwriting, and spelling (aspects of writing that are automatic and unconscious with more experienced writers). Sommers (1980) showed that novice writers typically solved problems simply by fixing grammar errors and spelling and copying the text over. Over time it became clear that there are large differences between experts and novices. Experts spend considerably more time revising. They pay much more attention to global problems (for example, re-sequencing, re-studying, and re-writing large units of text) than do novices. Experts are also better than novices at both detecting problems in their own text and diagnosing the cause of those problems (Hayes & Flower, 1986).

As the writing process model developed by Hayes and Flower has evolved, it has become considerably more complex. For example, new detailed research on memory has led Hayes to extend and expand the role of working memory in his most recent revision of the writing process

"Adult literacy educators must read between the lines to see how the research can apply to our populations. ...such an effort is worthwhile."

model (1996). We now understand that any cognitive process that is not automated must be retrieved from our long-term memory by our working memory before it can be used to solve problems or make decisions. Our short-term storage capacity is limited (Torrance & Jeffery, 1999). This research helps us to understand why adult novice writers, for whom spelling and handwriting may not yet be automated, need to focus more attention on these aspects of writing. and why they may have less working memory available to focus on other aspects of the writing process.

Alternative Models

In the writing process model associated with Flower and Hayes, experts and novices are seen as using essentially the same writing process, only with experts doing it much better. An alternative theory developed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987, 1993) explores the notion that mature, expert composing is based on a process that may be different than the process used by less skilled writers. Less skilled writers, they suggest, use a "retrieve-and-tell" approach to writing tasks. They call this the *knowledge-telling model* (in contrast to a knowledge-transforming model used by more skilled writers). Novice writers produce much less elaborate or abstract sets of prewriting notes. They concern themselves with

> *"Research on learning to spell has shown that spelling is not just a memorization process but a process of noticing (as in reading) recurring patterns in the sound, structure, and meaning features of words..."*

generating content *during* composing and spend much less time considering goals, plans, and problems posed by the writing. They think about the topic or assignment and ask themselves what they know. Then they write down everything they can think of. They make less frequent use of main ideas in their writing as guides for planning and integrating information. When it comes to revision, they are less able to make global revisions that would involve reorganizing the content. As they write, they read over what they have written and use this to come up with additional information to add. In short, the knowledge-telling model uses a streamlined procedure that allows less-skilled writers to bypass the complex problem-solving activities often seen in the composing practices of more skilled writers. These strategies work especially well for writing about personal experiences. Not only is it relatively easy to find something to say, but abstract, logical organization is not usually a major concern. Students can create coherence by following a basic chronology.

In the *knowledge-transforming model*, on the other hand, the writing task leads directly into problem analysis and goal setting. The resulting goals, and the problems anticipated, lead to plans for how to resolve them, whether they are problems of content or problems related to how to organize the information best in light of previously presented information and the audience to be addressed (rhetorical problems). As one problem is solved, others are created and in this way new content is generated or new ideas about how to organize the composition are developed. Becoming a proficient writer is a deliberate process in which writers learn to distance themselves from their writing and use the output — the written text — as input: food for thought, for revision, rethinking, rewriting, and writing.

Other Recent Research

Several new developments related to applying research to the classroom may have special relevance for adult education. Graham (1997) and Graham et al. (1995), for example, have conducted research aimed at diagnosing specific problems faced by learning-disabled children. They are testing specific strategies for teaching learning-disabled students the kinds of self-regulatory procedures used by skilled writers. They set up a teachable routine that externalizes the writing process and allows students gradually to internalize the goal setting and revision strategies used by their more proficient peers.

Other researchers have looked more closely at the role of spelling and handwriting. Within the writing process model, the processes such as creating letter representations in memory, accessing and retrieving these representations in memory, motor planning, and motor production are now referred to as low-level processes. Processes for planning, generating language at the sentence and text levels, and reviewing and revising written text are considered high-level processes (Berninger & Swanson, 1994). Many researchers believe that for beginning writers, "the goal is to automatize the low level processes so that working memory resources are freed for the higher level constructive aspects of composing" (Berninger et al., 1998, p. 652). Strategies are now being tested with school-aged children that seek to improve students' low-level and high-level skills during the same composition process (Berninger & Swanson, 1994; Berninger et al., 1998).

Research on learning to spell has shown that spelling is not just a memorization process but a process of noticing (as in reading) recurring patterns in the sound, structure, and meaning features of words and then trying out and revising hypotheses about these patterns in other writing situations. This is one of the few areas where research *has* been conducted with adult literacy learners (see Worthy & Viise, 1996; Viise, 1996).

Research on how to teach handwriting has also focused on automaticity. Berninger and her colleagues (1997) found that offering a series of ten-minute handwriting sessions while children were engaged in the writing process was the most effective strategy. The children responded best to visual cues such as numbered arrows indicating the nature, order, and direction of component strokes required to produce the letter correctly. They found combining visual cues with memory retrieval intervention (in which children look at each letter, then cover it up and write it from memory) was more effective than other treatments.

The Social Aspects

Writing researchers have also come to recognize the central role of the social, affective, and motivational dimensions of the writing process. A growing body of research has explored the social aspects of writing in varied contexts, from homes to workplaces to cross cultural classrooms in public schools (Freedman, 1994). Although few studies have yet looked directly at the social and affective dimensions of writing in adult literacy contexts, this area holds great promise for future research. Many recent case studies of adult learners allude indirectly to the value of this line of research. In *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (1995), for example, Purcell-Gates found that even after seven years of public school, four years of adult school and 31 years of life, her student Jenny had never read or written her *own* words. All she had ever done was copy *other people's words* — language that had little meaning for her. Jenny's words, Purcell-Gates noted, "were never acknowledged and affirmed, never allowed. Since people think, conceptualize, and learn with their language— with their words — Jenny was effectively shut out from the literate world" (1995, p. 218). Jenny's breakthrough began in part when she started to keep her own journal.

Other studies point to the powerful images of reading and writing adults carry within themselves, often derived from their school experience. Forrester's case study of "Laura" (1988) showed how strongly she had internalized the belief that she was unable to write because she could not spell every word correctly. Only by associating learning to write with the "trial and error" process of learning to figure skate (Laura's favorite hobby) was she finally able to give herself permission to move forward after

years of limited progress. In another recent case study of adult beginning readers, Fingeret and Drennon (1997) have suggested that the decision to come to an adult literacy class is part of a wider process of personal transformation. Although the process of learning to write was not a primary focus of their study, their profiles of learners demonstrate the important role writing can play in the personal transformation process.

In my own research (Gillespie, 1991), I also found that many of the adult beginning readers I studied used writing as a way to examine their previous beliefs and experiences with respect to themselves as learners and to develop alternative images and possibilities. Writing possessed many qualities that made it a particularly important tool in the personal transformation process. The permanence of written text allowed adults to step back, re-think, revise, and sometimes publicly affirm their new identities as they entered the literate world. We need further research with adult literacy populations to help illuminate the role writing can play in the affective and motivational dimensions of becoming literate. Such research, writing experts suggest, may be valuable not just to adult literacy educators but also to the field of writing research as a whole (Freedman, 1987).

Implications

What are the implications of this research for adult literacy education? The research shows that writing is not best taught as a linear, sequential set

> "...many of the adult beginning readers I studied used writing as a way to examine their previous beliefs and experiences with respect to themselves as learners and to develop alternative images and possibilities."

of skills but as a process of gradual approximation of what skilled writers do: a cycling and recycling of learning processes. Composition is not something that should wait until all the basic, prerequisite skills are learned, but can be introduced even to relative beginners. Adult learners should be given ample opportunity to write not only in GED classes, but also in ABE and even beginning ESOL classrooms. Moreover, we cannot treat writing as a neat, linear process: on Monday we plan, on Tuesday we draft, and on Wednesday we respond to drafts (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). If our writing curricula are to foster the growth of goal-oriented problem-solving skills, we need to acknowledge that students will learn at different rates and in different styles. We need to find ways to encourage them to decide on their own topics and purposes for writing and to see one another as resources. Since many adults bring with them powerful images of writing associated primarily with spelling, grammar, and handwriting, adult literacy educators should discover ways to help students learn put this aspect of writing into perspective. Low-level writing processes such as spelling,

handwriting, and grammar need to be taught not in isolation but along with the higher-level processes of learning so that these tools are applied to the construction of meaning. Those of us who work with students who aspire to pass the GED also need to understand the role of knowledge-telling and narrative writing as a precursor to the kinds of knowledge-transforming writing required of essay tests.

Adult literacy learners have the ability, the need, and the right to be more than simply consumers of other people's words. Our challenge as teachers of writing is to move beyond seeing writing as simply another skill. The application of recent research on writing can give us valuable tools to help adult literacy learners to become creators of language: to make words their own. 📖

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What's Right Rather Than Wrong

Using journals to teach writing and to build self confidence

by Rebecca Garland

I teach adult literacy at Dorcas Place, a community-based organization in Providence, RI. My class runs 20 hours per week and is comprised of approximately 15 women, ranging in age from 18 to 60 and including both native and non-native speakers of English. To be eligible for my class, a student must be on welfare, must be a parent, and must be reading and writing at around the fifth grade level. Many students bring to class a history of failure in the public school system and a resulting sense of inadequacy regarding their academic skills. They have difficulty recognizing their academic, and even personal, strengths.

I was concerned by this lack of confidence because I suspected that it might have a negative impact on my students' ability to learn. When working on goal-setting activities, many were unable to articulate what they were good at or even what they enjoyed doing. They looked at me blankly when I told them that the classroom was a place where we could all learn from each other. They assumed that since I was the teacher, my job was to tell them the answers, and their job was to listen. They accepted almost everything they read as truth, even articles that made sweeping negative generalizations about welfare mothers. Since learning occurs best when the students are actively engaged, I was concerned that their lack of

confidence would result in passive attitudes that would hinder their progress.

How could I help my students recognize and celebrate the wealth of experience and knowledge they already possessed? How could I help them to use this knowledge base to become more actively engaged in their own learning? I thought that one entry point might be through the telling of their life stories. If I could help students to write about the details of their lives and to develop an appreciation for their own personal histories, perhaps they would begin to place a higher value on their own experiences. Most formal writing assignments brought on anxiety in my students. For this reason, I wanted to avoid essays or autobiographies. I was looking for a medium that would allow students to relax and let their stories flow naturally. I decided their journals would be an ideal place to begin this process.

For years, journal writing has been a daily ritual in my classroom, followed by a time of optional sharing. I usually write a guiding question on the board to elicit students' reactions to texts we have read or topics we have studied, or to help them relate what they are learning to their own lives. They write their responses in special books, knowing that no one will read them without their permission. Sometimes they choose to share with the class. Sometimes they give them to me to read and respond to. Other

times they choose to keep private what they have written. The fact that students were already comfortable with this medium was one reason I decided to use the journals. Another reason was the personal nature of journal writing. By definition, I felt journals would be conducive to personal storytelling.

New Focus

I began by changing the focus of the guiding questions from what students were thinking presently to their past experiences. Before, questions had been geared toward eliciting writing about students' preferences, values, and goals. Now, I made them a place for students to explore their personal stories and the stories of their families. Every morning as the students came in I wrote a question on the board about some aspect of their lives. I asked for stories about their births and about their children's births. I asked them to write about how they got their names and how they chose names for their children. I asked them to write about a happy childhood memory, and a sad one. I asked them to write about family traditions and stories. I had them write 15 things that they remembered from their lives, short little details that came to them only when they were writing fast without thinking too much about it. I was hoping that by exploring their personal histories, students would begin to appreciate the richness of their lives and develop the confidence they needed to approach their studies in a more proactive way.

Three indicators would tell me that this new journal focus was indeed helping my students to

become more self confident. First, I was hoping to see an increase in students' willingness to express their opinions about class content and structure. Second, I was looking for an increase in their ability to offer alternatives. Third, I was hoping to see an increase in students' willingness to lead the class, even teach each other. I wanted concrete evidence that students were beginning to take a leadership role in how the class was run and in the

content of their learning. This would tell me that their confidence was indeed increasing.

Spelling

The first hurdle to arise from these assignments was one I had expected and encountered many times previously: students' anxiety over spelling. When students first come to my class, I ask them to tell me the characteristics of a good piece of writing. They invariably respond by saying it must have everything correctly spelled, periods in the right place, and use proper grammar. They never mention content, the most important part of any good writing and the part where they could immediately excel. This class was no

different. They told me they couldn't write because they couldn't spell. They were very anxious about writing and reluctant to put even one sentence on paper until they could spell it perfectly.

Years ago as a new teacher, I spent a lot of time trying to convince my students that spelling was relatively unimportant. I repeatedly told them not to worry about spelling or punctuation; they could go back later and fix that. Their ideas were precious and could not be retrieved once lost, so I emphasized the importance of getting their thoughts down first and to correct spelling and grammar later. I soon learned that I was wasting my breath. Even as I was telling them this, the erasers and the White-Out were appearing on their tables. They surreptitiously looked words up in the dictionary and tried to get the correct spelling from classmates and other staff members. They stopped in the middle of sentences and completely lost their trains of thought to get a word spelled right. They were obsessed with writing perfectly the first time, even though they knew that their journals could be private.

With this class, too, I realized that I needed to find creative ways to combine direct instruction in the mechanics of writing with an emphasis on the importance of content. I decided to try integrating lessons on spelling and grammar into the journal assignments. I first obtained permission from the students to share selected writings from their journals with the class. Then, I chose examples from these entries to teach spelling and

decoding sequentially, using the phonics-based Orton-Gillingham approach. For teaching other aspects of writing mechanics, such as punctuation, I used a combination of teacher-made worksheets, prepared materials from commercial textbooks, and journal entries. I retyped some of their entries, leaving out all the punctuation, and they had to fill in the missing parts. Finally, I experimented with teaching

paragraph structure using a hand as a model and a metaphor. The thumb represented the main idea, the three middle fingers the supporting details, and the pinky the concluding sentence. After they became comfortable with this model, I required them to use it when they wrote in their journals. Teaching writing skills directly, while constantly referring back to the content in their journals, allowed students to practice their new skills within a context that was meaningful to them. They were happy because they were getting spelling and grammar instruction; I was happy because the materials used were their own.

Painful Topics

A second difficulty that arose from these personal journal

assignments surprised me, although in retrospect it was completely understandable. Some students found the topics painful. They told me that nothing good had happened in their lives. They said that writing about their lives made them remember hurtful things that they wanted to forget, and they didn't want to write about their pasts anymore.

Their negative comments disconcerted me. I thought the

Chhoeup Chhoeun and classmates

personal histories they were creating in their journals were wonderful. How could they not like them? Then I began to see their comments as a sign that they were beginning to take control of their learning. For the first time, they were openly critical of an assignment, one of the behaviors I was looking for. I reminded myself that, hard as it might be, the students were doing what I wanted them to do. And I needed to encourage them. So I responded by asking them what they would like to write about in their journals instead. This was hard for me because I liked what we were doing and I didn't want to stop the autobiographical journal writing. But I had wanted them to suggest alternatives and, uncomfortable as it was, I was prepared to accommodate them when they did.

A class discussion arose: people

Why I Like Writing in My Journal
by
Chhoeup Chhoeun

I never wrote in a journal before. At first I didn't like it because I don't feel like writing about my life in a journal. It is not a good life that I have. But when I started to write I felt comfortable. I wrote about my life the good and the bad. When I wrote in a journal I got a lot of things that I thought in my mind out of my head.

My teacher had me write about where my name came from. I came to the US from Cambodia when I was six. My sponsor to this country gave me the name. The name that I have is the same sound as my father's name. Before my sponsor named me when I was six, I don't know what they called me.

The teacher also asked us to write about my kids. I have three beautiful daughters. Also a memory from when I was young. It was when I met my first boyfriend and we went to the carnival and we walked around in a park. Also something funny that happened to me when I was young. When I threw a snowball at my brother and it hit him in the butt. Then I took him inside and tried to put him in the shower.

We wrote about 15 things we remember. I wrote I remember when I said goodbye to my dad in Philadelphia when I moved to Providence. When I wrote in my journal it helped me a lot because it was sad.

Also I wrote about my culture Cambodia. The way we dance and the way we dress. The way we go to the temple and then put powder on our faces on Cambodian New Years. I danced for the class at the Christmas party. I wish I could visit my country now to see what it looks like.

I like to write about my life because I can get some things out of my mind. It helped a lot because I could get some problems out. When I wrote in the journal, that's when I started to realize I need to make some changes in my life. Move on in my life. Now I'm living upstairs so I don't have trouble with my sister and brothers. I'm still having trouble with my boyfriend, but I have hope that things will change.

Now I write a lot in my journal when I have something in my mind. I write a lot of poetry. I never wrote poetry before, but now I do.

argued for and against continuing this type of journal writing. Many acknowledged that writing about the past could be painful. But they added that it could also help people come to terms with painful experiences. The result was that people agreed that we should continue, but they stipulated that nobody had to write if they didn't want to. There would always be the alternative journal suggestion: "Write me a letter. Tell me what's on your mind. I will write you back."

As time went by, the students became more comfortable with writing about their lives. When people voluntarily shared out loud, others found the courage to do so, too. They began to get ideas from each other. They seemed to enjoy most the stories about day to day

events because the details were so much fun to listen to. What emerged were intimate snapshots of daily life, rich with detail. The results were so much better than I had expected. Some examples from different students are in the box on this page. These are the writings of people who told me they had nothing to say.

I kept telling them that their writing proved they had much to share, and I began to notice changes. First, their obsession with mechanics started to diminish. If they couldn't figure out how to spell a word, they did the best they could and kept going with a minimum of fuss. They began writing longer entries. And they shared what they had written much more willingly. As their confidence increased, the students started acting differently in the

classroom. People were getting to know each other through the journal sharing. The class was beginning to develop a real sense of community. And they began to take more of a leadership role in the classroom. They began to tell me the things they wanted to study and to insist that we take the time to study them.

One result that I had not foreseen was that they became fascinated with each others' cultures. They started by asking each other questions about their countries of origin. This curiosity led to the idea of holding "Culture Days" each Friday. On these days, each ethnic group in the class took turns sharing food, clothing, music, and other customs from their culture. Among other things, the class ate pastelles and other delicacies on Puerto Rican

Samples from Students' Journals

Write about when you were born. Where was your mother? What happened?

I was born on December 28, 1974. There was a Christmas party at one of my aunt house. Everybody was drinking. A fight broke out with two of my uncles. My mother try to get between them and one of them push her by mistake and she fell down the stairs and three days later she had me.

I was born in Cambodia in the forest when the war start. When my mom was in labor a lion follow my mom. The lion watch my mom in labor. When I came out my mom want to throw me to the lion. That time she was carrying clothes and something else. She throw the clothes instead of me, but I have a feeling that the lion is close to me. Everywhere I go is like it watch me from somewhere. The lion look after my mom and me.

Write about a funny thing that happened when you were a child.

One day I ask my sister for a needle. So when I got finished with the needle I put it in the arm of the chair so I forgot about it. When my sister came over she sat on the needle and jump up. I laugh so hard because the way she sat on it. She was so mad and I thought it was so funny. She took the needle and threw it out on Chad Brown Street.

Write a story that people in your family tell over and over again.

When we came to this country [from Poland] in 1965, we took a big ship. My mom and my sisters and brother were seasick, so my mom told me to go to the dining room to eat because they were getting chicken soup. I went to get something to eat so I sat down to eat. So the man asked

me where my family was, so I told him. He started laughing. Then the man brought my dinner. I started to eat and then I looked up. There was a window and I saw a big wave. Then I got sick too. So I went to join my family.

Make a list of 10 wonderful things your mother, partner, teacher, or kids would say about you.

1. My baby that's 3 year old says mom I love.
2. My oldest daughter says I'm the best mother that she ever had.
3. My teacher say keep up the good work
4. Mother she miss me, and loves me
5. People would tell me how nice I am, the way I like to help people
6. Me I say I'm a strong-minded person love to help people.
— **Published with the authors' permisson**

Day, watched a video of an African-American family reunion on Black Culture Day, modeled German clothes, and saw the wedding of one of my Cambodian students on video.

I also began to notice changes in students' behavior in their personal lives as well. One student got a restraining order against an aggressive partner. Another had herself and her children tested for learning disabilities. Two got their drivers' permits. Four applied for and got employment. Obviously, these changes cannot be attributed solely to the writing the students were doing. But I am certain that the writing was one important factor in a series of things that contributed to their beginning to appreciate themselves more fully and to have the confidence to make positive changes in their lives.

A Success

I consider the personalized journal writing experiment a success. The stories the students wrote provided a motivating context to teach writing mechanics as well as to increase student confidence. Students no longer argued when I asked them to take more of a leadership role in the class. There was a sense of increased pride in themselves and their cultural identities as they shared with each other aspects of their heritage. And the journals were valuable for their own sakes as well. The stories of the students' lives were wonderful pieces of their personal histories: treasures for them to share with their children. I gave them the assignment to write their autobiographies using the journal entries.

Did the use of the journals as a medium for personal exploration help students to make measurable academic gains? On standardized tests, students made the same grade level gains as students did in classes where I had focused journal writing

"Students no longer argued when I asked them to take more of a leadership role in the class. There was a sense of increased pride in themselves and their cultural identities..."

on more generic topics and taught spelling and punctuation using commercial materials. So the journals were effective in helping students learn the mechanics of writing. In addition, the journals taught them something that my other journal approaches had not. They taught students to value their own history, and to communicate this history to others. My students grew in self confidence and self awareness, as demonstrated by their increased willingness to be more proactive in the classroom and in their lives. They learned to listen to and care for each other in a classroom community as the sharing led to increased understanding and empathy. I would encourage teachers to try some of these assignments as a way to shift students' attention away from what's wrong with them and to emphasize what's right.

About the Author
Rebecca Garland has been teaching ABE and pre-GED classes at Dorcas Place for eight years. She has just begun a doctoral program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she plans to study the effects of trauma on adults' ability to learn. She lives in Providence, RI, with her two cats.❖

The Assumptions We Make: How Learners and Teachers Understand Writing

by Mary Russell

As a teacher of basic writing, I was often puzzled by my students' beliefs about how writers write. Many, for example, believed that "good" writers never misspelled words, understood punctuation, and were able to produce text in finished form, with everything right the first time. My interest in these beliefs and their effects on learners — often characterized by teachers as writing anxiety — was the impetus for my doctoral dissertation project. My project focused on the hypothesis that teaching writing to adults requires that teachers do more than encourage learners to take risks and lose their fears, and that a first step to effective instruction was to examine the assumptions both teachers and learners brought to this task. To test that hypothesis, I interviewed teachers on teaching writing and learners on the relative importance of mechanics, process, and ideas about form and structure. The study was designed as a collaborative effort, with myself as researcher, three teachers of adults, and 18 learners who were native speakers of English. The teachers used systematic inquiry — a form of teacher research that provides an ordered way of analyzing classroom events — to examine their own practice. I met with the teachers regularly both inside and outside their

classrooms throughout one school year. I was a participant observer in the classrooms, and the facilitator of the inquiry during our meetings. This article focuses on what I learned from the teacher and learner interviews, classroom observations, and group discussions held at the beginning of the project.

Many adult basic literacy learners believe that their writing skills are not adequate (Fagan, 1988; Gambrell & Heatherington, 1981; Smith-Burke, 1987). They come to the task of learning to write with a mental model of writing that emphasizes form rather than content, produces anxiety about making mistakes, and assumes that writers use their personal experience as data. In contrast, teachers who understand that writing is a complex process often focus on content over form. They urge learners not to worry about making mistakes and to view confusion and mistakes as signs of growth, the place where learning to write begins. It is difficult, however, to convince students of the validity of this view. For learners whose understanding of the writing process is limited, the injunction not to worry about form and to ignore mistakes often serves to raise anxiety rather than to dispel it. Adult learners want to know how to get the form "right," and how to recognize and *avoid* mistakes, not make them: they often fear that the error will became confused with the right usage, and dislike risking

humiliation or embarrassment. From the point of view of these students, making mistakes of any kind is a source of anxiety and confusion, and often marks the place where learning to write stops. In effect, teachers and learners appear to be speaking two different languages, perhaps different dialects of the language of writing instruction.

This kind of instructional disconnect around issues of correctness, process, and strategy has been called "conceptual difficulty" (Johnston, 1985). Conceptual difficulty can interfere with instruction. Once an inappropriate concept is learned or an appropriate one not learned, further instruction that presupposes an understanding of that concept may be not only wasteful but also destructive because of the resultant experience of failure and its emotional consequences (p. 158). It is therefore important not to presuppose that we (as teachers) know what learners think, but to use questioning, observation, and discussion to determine what the students' concepts actually are.

The following example of a conceptual difficulty observed by one of the teachers in the project may help to illustrate what I mean. (All the examples are taken from my research data.) The teacher was helping students to practice for the test of General Educational Development (GED) and was using used topical readings as a basis for writing practice. What she asked learners to do is a common instructional strategy. Learners were to read a brief article containing information about common ailments, such as arthritis or diabetes, discuss it in their small groups, and then write about it. When she looked at the papers, she realized that one learner appeared to have a limited understanding of what she had read. However, when the teacher suggested that the learner re-read the original information, the

learner said: "I don't know anything about diabetes. I don't have diabetes. I can't do it. I can't explain it. I can't learn by reading. I can't write about anything I don't have personal experience of" (Transcript, 1/24/95).

This comment startled the teacher. It was not that the learner did not understand the piece, but that she believed she *could not* learn by reading. The teacher said that this response "shocked" her. When the student said "I can't write about anything I don't have personal experience of," the teacher realized that one of the student's basic concepts directly contradicted what the teacher thought was common knowledge. Intrigued, she asked other students about this, and three different learners told her the same thing. Does this mean, she wondered, that she needed to explain that you can learn things by reading? She had never thought about saying that out loud (Transcript, 95).

It would be quite reasonable for a teacher who sees a poor first draft based on a reading to assume, as this teacher initially did, that the learner was not attending to her reading, or simply had poor reading skills. But because this teacher was engaged in inquiry, she uncovered a deeper problem: the learner could read, she just didn't believe reading had anything to do with writing. This incident revealed to the group that some ideas are not always "givens" for adult learners.

To address issues of conceptual difficulty requires teaching strategies that unearth and acknowledge these often unarticulated ideas about how people write. Other strategies must help to address inappropriate concepts. To teach writing to this learner, the teacher must find a way to help her analyze and reflect not only on the belief that she cannot learn by reading, but also on other beliefs that may be impeding her

progress. As learner interviews revealed, these include false assumptions about the importance of correctness, incomplete or truncated models of process, and limited notions of writing strategies such as revision.

Correctness

In interviews with all three teachers, they indicated that they used a minimum of grammar and skills instruction, both because they wanted to de-emphasize the importance of correctness, and also because they felt that teaching decontexualized skills was not effective. They therefore employed teaching methods such as individual writing conferences that focussed primarily on content (Interview, 11/94). The teachers also encouraged students to self-correct by, for example, reading their work aloud and listening for punctuation, and then reformulating a part that didn't "sound right" (Interview, 12/94). One teacher said that he liked to edit as a group exercise because he believed that this process reduced the risk of embarrassing learners. He remarked, however, that this process did not seem to improve learner writing. He noted, too, that students often asked for correction and seemed puzzled about what he meant when he suggested that they revise (Interview, 11/94).

In interviews, I asked learners to estimate their own skills and what they thought their writing "needs" were. I adapted an interview protocol from an instrument called "Self Estimates of Writing Skills," which was developed by the Ontario Institute for Study of

Learner Opinion Poll
What Do You Think About Writing?

"Answer definitely" or "sometimes": I think that good writers:

1. Are good spellers
2. Don't feel anxious about or intimidated by writing
3. Understand punctuation
4. Always use the right words
5. Needed help with their writing
6. May have problems getting started
7. Have very large vocabularies
8. Are well educated
9. Got good grades in writing when

What do you think would help you most with improving your writing?

1. Improving my vocabulary
2. Learning how to write a paragraph
3. Having my teacher mark all my mistakes
4. Improving my handwriting
5. Learning to use word processing on the computer
6. Learning to type
7. Having more time to write
8. Having more chances to practice writing
9. Improving my spelling
10. Understanding punctuation
11. Understanding grammar

What do you think is most important to someone who reads your writing?

1. What I have to say
2. My handwriting
3. The words I use
4. Neatness
5. Spelling

SAMPLES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE USED WITH STUDENTS

> *"Learners' spelling and punctuation anxieties might not only be about correctness, but also about their inability to conceive of a strategy that places them in the role of corrector."*

Education (OISE), based on a model first proposed by Bryson, Bereiter, and Scardamalia. The questions were designed to elicit narrative answers on mechanics, process, and structure, and what students thought were the characteristics of good writers. The interviews provided samples of student thinking that showed the influence of partially digested elementary and secondary instruction, and a conviction that their mechanical skills such as spelling and punctuation were inadequate. The teachers and I then used this information as background knowledge when doing observations of learner writing behavior. We observed that while 90 percent of the students said in their interviews that the dictionary was the poor speller's best friend, no one consulted a dictionary during writing. And while some learners said they "edited for mechanics, like punctuation," teacher observations revealed that few learners were even re-reading their texts.

In general, learners behaved as though the correction of mechanics

was a process beyond their ability, the province of the teacher or some other "they": a process that occurred outside of themselves. A student said, for example, that she would correct her punctuation by "looking to see how they would punctuate it in a sentence and then see if I did the same" (Transcript, 12/95). One of the teachers noticed the mysterious "they" and said: "It interests me that people think that writing that is printed in a book seems to be so different from their own. Learners often seem to think that [the writing] comes from some different place. They don't see the person behind it. If I ever type something on a computer, like a writing exercise, or homonyms, I'll hand it out, and people will say, 'What do they want us to do here?' Like it comes from somewhere else" (Transcript, 3/95).

This may occur because the instruction is not getting to the root of the problem: in this case the learner's belief that she cannot *be* the corrector. Learners' spelling and punctuation anxieties might not only be about correctness, but also about their inability to conceive of a strategy that places them in the role of corrector. These strategies must be made explicit for learners to be able to use them.

Process

In my initial interviews with teachers, their answers indicated that they were assuming that certain techniques associated with writing process theory were effective for helping learners improve their writing. All three of the participating teachers used self-selected topics based on reading, brainstorming techniques for prewriting, and peer revision. But after talking about learner responses to questions about process, one of the teachers decided to observe more closely how learners were using these techniques. She found, for example, that while her

students made detailed lists of the ideas that came to them during brainstorming activities, when the time came to write, the lists — specifically created as a support for writing — were never used. When another teacher wondered why this might happen, the teacher replied, "I don't know. All sorts of little things that I am finding out that I never would have suspected [before we started the project]. Like it never would have occurred to me that they would separate brainstorming from writing the essay. And so I never made the connection explicit" (Transcript, 95).

Why would a learner not make the connection between brainstorming and writing? Why go to the trouble of making such a list, if she did not intend to use it? One possible answer is that the learner may think of writing as producing a product by taking series of discrete steps forward, of which brainstorming is one. The list, now completed, is a step finished. The next step, the draft, is viewed as a separate process. The influence of this kind of belief is subtle. While these beliefs have substantial control over a learner's behavior, without questioning and observation, a teacher might attribute the behavior to something else, or simply think that the behavior is inexplicable. What the teacher saw was the effect of the belief, not the belief itself and, for her, the behavior was puzzling.

The following example also raises questions about the learners' concepts of process. In answer to the question "What would make someone a good writer ?" one adult learner said: "Knowing how to punctuate things. And not having to have so many mistakes on a paper and everything being just right the first time. Nothing else" (Interview, 1/95). Her assumption that punctuation and avoiding mistakes are of primary importance is not only

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in direct contradiction to what her teachers think is important, but also raises questions about the implications of this belief for her writing development. Her comment should make it clear that, in spite of the intensive work over the last 20 years on writing as a social process, this learner still views it as a product that springs wholly formed from the mind of the "good" writer. There is no slot for revision in her mental model.

Strategies

To learn to write is to understand what revise means quite literally. With adult basic learners, it is their inability to re-vision their writing that is most puzzling and frustrating for teachers. Often, learners repeat the same mistakes, and no amount of instruction appears to make an impression. One teacher remarked that his students exhibited "a real resistance to doing anything twice" (Transcript, 3/24). Student responses indicated that they equated revision with rewriting: the physical act of re-writing, or recopying for neatness. One learner described his process: "Rewrite and revise too. ... I do all three. I edit first. Rewrite means re-copy. Should do it three times. Three times for me" (Interview, 1/95).

One teacher was very interested in revision, and observed it closely. She discovered that her students interpreted peer revision to be an entirely different activity than their teacher assumed it to be. She said: "They take each other's papers and [physically] rewrite them. I (learner Y) take X's paper, and read it. But I don't talk to X. I don't talk to the person. I just sit down and re-copy his paper" (Transcript, 95).

For the learner who believes that being a good writer means "having everything right the first time," the concept of a first draft is unclear, and therefore revisioning is an empty concept. If one cannot get it right on

the first try, then what is the point of going back?

Conclusion: Making Connections

While the findings I have summarized here might help teachers understand some of the problems adults have when learning to write, they are only a small piece of what we need to know about teaching writing to adults. One of the major characteristics of the mental model exhibited by the learners in this project was their failure to make conceptual connections between reading and writing, brainstorming and drafting, the writer and the product. How can teachers help learners who have unproductive mental models for writing? How can we help them to make the necessary connections?

It may be that we need a different model of teaching writing specifically for adults: one that allows learners and teachers to co-construct representations of their assumptions about writing processes, and that makes explicit the connections that may be unclear. There may be, for example, a number of things besides "You can learn from reading" that we need to say "out loud." It might also be useful to bring samples of professional authors' manuscripts both to illustrate that professionals do not "get it right the first time," and at the same time help learners to see the person behind the text. Engaging learners and teachers in self-conscious and self-directed inquiry about the processes, mechanics, and strategies involved in writing can not only help learners to visualize themselves as the person who creates the text, but can also illustrate the complex nature of literacy and give

> "... we need a different model of teaching writing specifically for adults: one that allows learners and teachers to co-construct representations of their assumptions about writing processes, and that makes explicit the connections that may be unclear."

weight and respect to the experience and knowledge both teachers and adult learners bring to writing.

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About the Author

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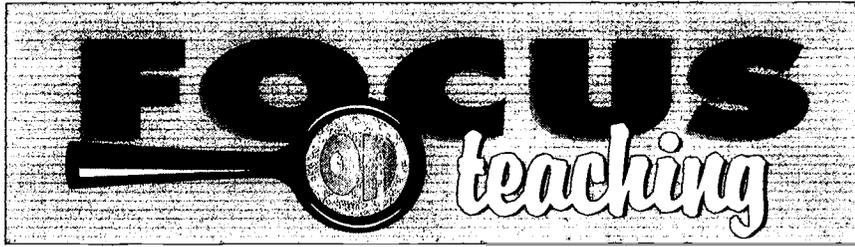
Seven Easy Pieces
Writing Activities for Beginning ESOL Learners

by Shirley Brod

*I*t is often difficult to develop writing activities that beginning learners can handle. The suggestions below are very simple, but give students increasing confidence that they can, after all, write on their own. I hope the activities will trigger ideas that you and your learners will enjoy.

Since beginning-level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students run the gamut, you will want to pick the activities appropriate for your students. The easiest, which focus on pencil holding and letter formation, come first.

1. Vanishing Letters: Using words that learners will face frequently, write the complete word. Then write the word with one letter missing, replaced by a blank that learners fill in. Keep adding blanks until learners are writing (and spelling) the entire word on their own.

```
NAME
_AME
_A_E
_A_ _
_ _ _ _
```

2. Document Literacy (Form Language): All our learners have to fill out forms, whether they are ready to or not. Instead of subtracting letters, add items, one at a time, beginning with NAME (first, middle initial, last), which learners always want to learn first. In another lesson, when you have taught the meaning of *address*, give them a new form that repeats NAME and adds ADDRESS. Continue this simple spiraling until they can complete a simple form with their own personal identification items.

3. Labeling Pictures: This activity works well with a picture dictionary, such as the *Oxford Picture Dictionary* from Oxford University Press. After your learners have worked with new vocabulary, such as parts of the body, have them transfer what they've learned. Give them a new and different picture, with blanks beside targeted body parts, and have them copy the appropriate words from the picture dictionary, or from a labeled work sheet you have provided. This is a good starting place for learning how to use a dictionary, and the completed page provides each learner with a vocabulary list to keep for review.

4. Dictation Pairs: Give your learners practice in speaking and listening, reading and writing, and asking for/giving clarification through paired dictation. Make a worksheet that can be folded in half vertically, so each student sees only one side of the page. One side is for Student A; the other, for Student B. The top of A's sheet has the items that A is to dictate to B. The bottom of A's sheet has blank lines for words B will dictate to A. B's page is the reverse. When you model the exercise, be sure to model ways to ask for clarification: *Please speak slowly. Please repeat.* When both students have dictated and written, they spread the page out and check their work. Learners can be introduced to this activity very early on, using such simple items as numbers, letters of the alphabet, times, dates, or simple words they spell to each other.

Student A	/	Student B
SAY.	/	WRITE.
1. 3:00	/	1._____
2. 5:45	/	2._____

5. Lists: Take learners a step forward by providing an opportunity for them to choose their own items. The simplest way to do this is with lists.

a. **Shopping lists** — Learners write a list of things they want to buy. Then the class can take a field trip to a store where they locate the items and their prices, or learners can do this as an outside activity. If food items are used, they can locate them on an aisle directory.

b. **Family lists** — After studying family vocabulary, learners make a list with the names of members of their families, including their ages and relationship to the writer. If they add telephone numbers, this can be their emergency contact information.

c. **'Who am I?' lists** — Learners list all the naming words they know that refer to their identity: *wife, student, mother, refugee, female, daughter, Mexican,* etc. A reader can read the lists while the class tries to guess the identity of the writers.

6. Scaffolded Writing: A satisfying first prose writing assignment can be an extended fill-in-the-blanks activity. Perhaps learners want to write notes for their children when they have been absent from school. Learners

copy a basic note, filling in blanks for the date, child's name, and the reason for the absence, and sign their names. They select items from a word bank, or ask you for additional items if needed. The final product is a complete handwritten letter. Thank you notes are another good choice, and are especially motivational if they are actually mailed.

7. **Tiny Books: Individual Composition:** This activity is an outgrowth of a show-and-tell class. Students bring a favorite object to class and tell the other learners about it. My learners used photographs, hand-crafted items, ethnic costumes, musical instruments, and even special foods. You take notes as learners talk, and provide a simple story that each learner copies into a tiny book (3"x 5") with construction paper covers and several lined pages, adding a signature. Here is an actual example: "Nyoua's Picture."

> *My husband took the picture at my home. This picture is from 1984. I went to a party for Hmong people's New Year. My dress was White Hmong. I wore a black dress and a green sash. I wore a Hmong "sao" or necklace. My hat was red, white, and black. This was a happy day.*

Type the stories, one to a page, and have each learner sign his or her story. If they wish, they can draw the item on their page. Combine the stories in a booklet and give each learner a copy. These booklets can form the basis for individual reading practice.

About the Author

Shirley Brod, an ESOL teacher for more than 20 years, has written and edited materials for ESOL students and their teachers for Oxford University Press, Steck-Vaughn Company, and Spring Institute for International Studies. She was director for Spring's English Language Training/Technical Assistance Project, which provided consultation and training for refugee ESOL providers throughout the country.❖

Focus on research

Home Literacy Practices

Victoria Purcell-Gates and her research team are finishing the data collection for a NCSALL study that examines whether learners' literacy practices — the way learners use reading and writing — change as a result of participation in literacy programs. In the research, a change is considered the adoption of a new practice, such as reading the newspaper or writing letters, or engaging more often in a practice they already had done.

"We are looking at the relationship between change in practice and two dimensions of instruction that theoretically might affect literacy practices," Purcell-Gates explains. "The first dimension is the degree to which the activities and materials that the students use in their literacy programs are reflective of the kinds of materials people use outside of the classroom." The research team is now calling that dimension "authentic" vs. "school only." For example, using

the newspaper [as reading material in class] would be more authentic if it was a real newspaper, one that was brought in so learners could read about an event that just happened and get their questions answered. Less authentic would be bringing in a newspaper that is a month old and reading about a certain issue. The other end of the continuum is if a teacher brought in a newspaper and had people underline all the verbs.

The second dimension is the degree to which the teachers and the students collaborated as equals in creating the program. "In other words," says Purcell-Gates, "how much influence the student actually had on the program." At one end of that spectrum is "dialogic," with the student greatly involved in decisions regarding curriculum, assessment, and policy; at the other end is "teacher-directed." [For more on these dimensions, see *Focus on Basics*, Vol 2 B, p. 11.]

Data Collection

Working with 230 learners and about 75 teachers or tutees, Purcell-Gates says, "we had to collect two kinds of data. The first was a description of the class (or tutor/tutee pair) in terms of where it sits on the two dimensions. We triangulated on three sources of data: a questionnaire that the teacher filled out; class observation by the data collector, who used a protocol to get at those dimensions; and interviews with students in the class." This gave them information that let them assign each class in their study a position along

the "authentic" vs. "school-only" and "dialogic" vs. "teacher-directed" axis.

They also collected information about the learners' home literacy practices. "We just finished the home questionnaires: going into the homes of the participating students every three months for as long as they are in their programs." Using an extensive questionnaire, they examined the kinds of literacy practices the learners engaged in that week, whether they had engaged in them before, whether they began the practice since starting their literacy class, or if they were doing that type of reading or writing more often since beginning the class. Administering the questionnaire took at least an hour, sometimes two.

The questionnaire depended on reports from the learners on their own activities, or self report. The problem with self report is that people often answer what they think the researcher wants to hear, or they provide erroneous answers because of faults of memory. To alleviate some of these problems, the research team insisted on interviewing people in their homes, so the learners wouldn't directly connect their answers with their literacy programs. The team also hopes that because they are asking about life literacy practices rather than academic practices, the participants don't feel that their answers are a judge of their programs. And, when someone mentioned engaging in a literacy practice, the data collectors asked for specific examples.

Difficulties

The research team learned a lot about the difficulties of doing quantitative research with adult basic education populations. "Just to 'hold what you've got still' while you're doing the research is almost impossible..." says Purcell-Gates. "Data collectors, programs, people disappeared..." And analysis is

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difficult, too. "There is such variation in terms of program, program stability, program quality, students, needs, backgrounds, purposes for going, for leaving, and all the different things that can happen to students' lives that affects what they do. I think it would be helpful to come up with a different paradigm for research, where you combined as hard data as you can get with really good qualitative research."

Statistical analysis will start soon. "Theorists might say that the more authentic the class and the more participatory the program, the more you'll see transfer to the home," remarks Purcell-Gates. "We're not sure what the data will tell. Based on our findings, we will create portraits of instructional activities and materials, as well as of teacher and student relationships, that appear related to change in home and community literacy practices. We make these giant curricular pronouncements about what the best way to do things is, but we base that on no evidence. In academia and in workshops, people talk about the best way to teach adults to read and write, and there's only theoretical defense. This is an attempt to try to look at some of these issues empirically."

For more information on the home literacy practices study, please contact Victoria Purcell-Gates at vpgates@pilot.msu.edu.

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Focus on Basics

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• The National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education (NCLE) has a number of ERIC Digests on writing instruction. These are available free from NCLE, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC, 20016-1859; (202) 362-0700, ext. 200; e-mail: ncle@cal.org, or can be downloaded from their website: www.cal.org/ncle.

D. Rabideau, "Integrating Reading and Writing into Adult ESL Instruction." March 1993 EDO-LE-93-01.

J. Kreeft Peyton, "Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy." April 1993 EDO-LE-93-02.

T. Bello, "Improving ESL Learners' Writing Skills." June 1997 EDO-LE-97-03.

Writing Resources
• E. Auerbach, *Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy.* Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: CAL and Delta Systems, Inc., 1992.

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● J. Peyton, "Listening to student voices; Publishing student writing for other students to read." In J. Crandall & J. Peyton (eds.), *Approaches to ESL Literacy Instruction*, Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: CAL and Delta Systems, Inc., 1993.

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● C. Severino, "The political implications of responses to second language writing." In T. Smoke, (ed.) *Adult ESL: Politics, Pedagogy, and Participation in Classroom and Community Programs.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998.

○ M. Spiegal & H. Sunderland, *Writing Works: Using a Genre Approach for Teaching Writing to Adults and Young People in ESOL and Basics Education*

Classes. London: Language and Literacy Unit, 1999.

Web Sites
• www.about.com has ideas and information useful to writing teachers. It's also linked to a lot of useful sites. Click on Arts/Literature and then on journals or (really) creative writing for kids.

● www.avko.org has information about spelling and dyslexia.

● www.noahsays.com/write/8.htm has a useful article on journal writing.

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