The Year 1999 in Review

Volume 2: Chapter One
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From the perspective of the field of adult literacy, the year 1999 is best seen not as the penultimate year of the millennium but as the year bookended by the reauthorization of the National Literacy Act in late 1998 and the National Literacy Summit of early 2000. Both of those events represent a huge milestone, and 1999 may be regarded as the time when people in the field were preoccupied by reacting to the former and preparing for the latter.

The new Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which was technically Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, mandated controversial new student performance measures for all federally funded programs and required all states to rewrite their adult education plans. The performance measures focused on job readiness rather than more holistic concerns, a fact that continues to outrage many people in the field.

Given this context, the National Literacy Summit, planned for years as a means to develop a consensus about how best to move the field forward, also came to be regarded as an opportunity for adult educators to respond to Washington and tell the politicians and bureaucrats how to get it right. It remains to be seen if the powers that be will heed the manifesto.

There were also a number of relatively routine but nevertheless significant developments in 1999, and that is where this overview begins. Federal funding for adult literacyñrelated programs is covered first, then developments in policy, then research activities, and, finally, events such as the National Literacy Summit and the Summit on Twenty-First Century Skills for Twenty-First Century Jobs hosted by Vice President Al Gore.

FEDERAL FUNDING

After six years in office, the Clinton administration embraced the adult literacy cause in early 1999 with a level of public commitment not seen since Barbara Bush was first lady. In his State of the Union speech on January 19, President Clinton called for "a dramatic increase in federal support for adult literacy." Separately, he said his budget proposal for fiscal 2000 would "significantly" expand federal efforts to help immigrants learn English and learn about democracy.

Clinton's Budget

As promised, Clinton's budget proposal for fiscal year 2000 called for massive funding increases for adult literacy programs. He wanted to increase adult education state grants by 28 percent and the overall adult education budget by 49.4 percent. "The income gap...is largely a skills gap," Clinton said on January 28, as he announced his new literacy and job training initiatives. "We've closed the budget deficit, now we've got to close the skills deficit. We cannot have the earnings gap in America-the income gap-get bigger because we didn't make the skills gap smaller. Now is the time to do it. We will never have a better time."

The first item on his list of specific proposals was "a national campaign to dramatically increase our efforts at adult basic education and family literacy, to help the millions and millions of adults who struggle with basic reading or math." The budget President Clinton submitted to Congress included the following programs:

- Reading Excellence Act (America Reads). This initiative was approved by Congress in October 1998 and had an appropriation of $260 million for fiscal year (FY) 1999. It provides states with competitive three-year grants for reading partnerships; states will then make subgrants to local partnerships that must include family literacy programs. Clinton's $286 million request for FY2000 would allow twenty-two to twenty-four additional state grants and would more than double the number of children served to almost 1.1 million.

- Adult education state grants. Clinton requested $468 million, an increase of $103 million over the FY1999. The administration said part of the requested increase would be used for "a strengthened emphasis on program accountability," as called for in the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998. The administration also considered this proposed increase as part of a so-called Hispanic initiative, which included several Kñ12 programs, such as bilingual education and emergency immigrant education. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) said the spending increase in adult education would be "aimed primarily at expanding state efforts to help immigrant and other limited-English-proficient

adults, including Hispanics, to learn English and make a successful entry into the workforce and the mainstream of society."

- National leadership activities. These are evaluation, technical assistance, and demonstration programs run by the DOE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy. The administration wanted to increase funding more than seven-fold, from $14 million to $101 million, to finance several new initiatives. Common Ground Partnership grants to states and localities significantly affected by immigration were to receive $70 million. The grants (another part of the Hispanic initiative) would support demonstration programs providing young adult immigrants and other participants with English literacy and life skills instruction and information about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. An allocation of $23 million was proposed for discretionary grants to help states and private sector partners increase access to technology for adult education instruction. There would be forty pilot projects. The amount of $2 million was proposed for a High Skills Communities Campaign that would help selected states and local communities promote adult literacy and lifelong learning and measure progress in both areas. According to the DOE, these assessments would allow schools and employers "to determine if individuals have the literacy skills needed for available jobs."

- Community-based technology centers. President Clinton requested an increase from $10 million in FY1999 to $65 million in FY2000. This program, one of a dozen technology programs run by the DOE, makes grants to public housing facilities, community centers, libraries, and other community-based programs to make technology available to poor people in urban and rural areas. Grantees provide access to programs for preschool, family literacy, after school, adult education, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) as well as to on-line databases with job listings. The additional $55 million requested would increase the number of such grants from forty to three hundred.

- Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers. President Clinton proposed to triple funding for this school-based program, from $200 million to $600 million, enough to provide school districts with about two thousand new grants. These centers are primarily intended to provide after-school, weekend, and summer academic and recreational services for Kñ12 students, but in many cases they also provide parents with educational, job training, and job placement services.

National Coalition Lobbying Efforts

By March, all twenty-eight sustaining (voting) members of the National Coalition for Literacy (NCL) agreed to ask Congress to provide more funds than the Clinton administration requested. They agreed to lobby for the following amounts: $286 million for the Reading Excellence Act (America Reads); $568 million for state grants, "a critical first step toward a five-year goal of $1 billion"; $116 million for "national leadership" activities sponsored by the DOE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy; $7 million for the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL); and $145 million for the Even Start Family Literacy program (the same amount Clinton proposed).

Campaign for Even Start

In May, Congressman William Goodling (R-Pennsylvania), legislative father of Even Start, said he would ask his colleagues to increase the program's annual appropriation from the FY1999 level of $135 million to $500 million for FY2000. Goodling made the announcement at an oversight hearing on Even Start before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which he chaired. The friendly witnesses included Sharon Darling, president of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), and Andy Hartman, director of the National Institute for Literacy.

A $500 million appropriation would have been larger than the entire FY1999 appropriation for adult literacy programs ($385 million), but it would still have been dwarfed by the $4.7 billion appropriation for Head Start, which, like Even Start, is an intergenerational program. Even Start served about 31,000 families in 1999 (up from 2,500 in 1989), whereas Head Start served 800,000.

Although Goodling's committee had a direct role in the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which authorizes Even Start, the committee had no direct control over appropriations. Few observers expected the House and Senate appropriations committees to grant Goodling's request, and they did not.

Capacity-Building Grants

Volunteer and community-based organizations within the NCL lobbied Congress to include a new $15 million set-aside for themselves within the adult education budget. The money was to be earmarked for "institutional support," or capacity building. It would have allowed groups such as Literacy Volunteers of America, Laubach Literacy, and the National Alliance of Urban Literacy Coalitions to do such things as mount professional development efforts and gather data on the performance of their local affiliates. The money would not have provided grants for local affiliates, but it had the potential to help them claim a larger share of federal grant money in the future.

Since the passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991, volunteer and other community-based literacy groups have been guaranteed "direct and equitable access" to federal adult education funds, but by 1999 they were still receiving only a fraction of the federal pass-through funds doled out by state education officials. Those officials often said that local volunteer organizations did not receive funding because they could not demonstrate their professionalism or prove their effectiveness. But neither the local organizations nor their national umbrella organizations had the resources to upgrade tutor training significantly or conduct the kind of data gathering needed to demonstrate success. They argued that that was why they needed the $15 million set-aside. In the end, congressional appropriators would not be swayed by such arguments. The Republicans, who controlled Congress, had made it common practice to abolish existing set-asides and earmarks, and most of them were disinclined to create a new one.

By October, the NCL had given up on its drive for funding levels higher than Clinton's requested amounts, as well as its request for $15 million in new capacity-building funds.

By mid-November, President Clinton and Congress agreed to a 23 percent increase for adult education state grants over the FY1999 level, from $365 million to $450 million. Nevertheless, total spending on adult education would remain $105 million below the level Clinton originally requested. He had wanted a total of $575 million, with most of the $190 million year-to-year increase earmarked for a Common Ground Partnership initiative: new ESOL and civics programs run by the states and the DOE. As part of the compromise with Congress, the administration was allowed to earmark $25.5 million of the $85 million increase for adult education state grants for the ESOL/civics program. The final allocations were as follows:

Reading Excellence. Level funding of $260 million.

Even Start. An increase from $135 million to $150 million.

Adult education state grants. An increase from $365 million to $450 million.

National leadership activities. Level funding of $14 million, with nothing for capacity-building grants.

National Institute for Literacy. Level funding of $6 million.

Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers. In another compromise, Congress and the White House agreed

on $450 million for Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers in FY2000. This represents an increase of $250 million over the FY1999 amount, but it was still $150 million less than the president had originally requested.

Community-based technology centers. An increase from $10 million to $32.5 million. The administration said the new funding level would allow the program to reach at least 120 communities.

Star Schools. An increase from $45 million to $51 million. (This program funds distance-learning projects, including the PBS LiteracyLink project targeting adult learners.)

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

As usual, Congress and the administration paid little attention to adult education and literacy in 1999. Meanwhile, state and local adult education officials continued to struggle with the mandates laid down by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998 and with the Education Department's National Reporting System.

The Administration's Elementary and Secondary Education Bill

In May, the Clinton administration unveiled its proposal for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The proposal put several literacy-related programs in line for changes, including Even Start, Reading Excellence, educational technology, and bilingual education. The ESEA dates back to 1965 and President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty initiatives. Fully $8 billion of the ESEA's annual funding is for Title I, the federal government's effort to improve education for the disadvantaged. Even Start is part of Title I, as are various migrant education programs. The "Educational Excellence for All Children Act," as the administration called it, would have made the following changes:

Even Start

- Require local programs to hire teachers with relevant certifications or endorsements by July 1, 2002. Aides providing instructional support, such as follow-up educational activities in home visits, would have at least two years of college and be under the direct supervision of a teacher.
- Increase compatibility with welfare reform initiatives and list career counseling and job placement services as allowable project expenses.
- Require states to submit plans describing their efforts to develop

and use quality indicators when evaluating local projects, their efforts to ensure that projects fully implement all of the Even Start program elements (early childhood education, parenting education, and adult literacy), their competition procedures for subgrants to local projects, and their procedures for coordinating resources.

- Increase the quality of services by encouraging the use of research-based instructional methods, encouraging state-level collaborations and coordinated services, and requiring state officials to review independent evaluations of local projects.
- Increase the intensity of programs by encouraging instruction through the summer months, encouraging the use of distance-learning technology, and requiring states to assess the retention efforts of local programs.
- Allow states to fund up to two model projects to serve as mentors for others.

Reading Excellence Act

- Limit funding to programs serving students in the third grade and below and their families.
- Require states to submit descriptions of the processes and criteria they use to evaluate applications from school districts.
- Allow states to receive new grants after their first ones run out. (The original authorizing legislation allowed only one grant during the multiyear authorization period.)
- Allow the DOE to use 1 percent of each year's funding for technical assistance and for replicating model projects.

Educational Technology

- Consolidate Technology Innovation Challenge Grants and Star Schools into a Next Generation Grants program for public and private consortia.
- Target grants to the neediest schools and communities, including grants for community technology centers for poor children and adults.

Bilingual Education

- Emphasize the importance of English proficiency by requiring schools to conduct annual assessments and report the results to parents and by providing incentive grants to successful schools.
- Require schools to provide clear program descriptions to parents and notices of their right to withdraw their children at any time.

- Authorize a "Training for All Teachers" program to provide ongoing professional development.
- Authorize a career ladder program for aides who want to become teachers.
- Authorize bilingual education teachers and personnel grants to improve the capacity and curricula of teachers' colleges.

Although much of this activity is directly relevant to children, not adult learners, the adult education community has an interest in Kñ12 reforms for the effect they will have on the adult learners of the future. Many adult learners still seethe about the poor education they received as children and are quite militant about Kñ12 reform, caring deeply about Kñ12 programs even though their funding streams generally do not intersect with adult education funding streams. Moreover, trends in Kñ12 legislation, such as accountability, usually show up later in adult education programs, and adult education is sometimes supported by Kñ12 programs.

GOP Introduces "Straight A's Act"

The Republican Congress rejected the administration's ESEA bill out of hand. In June, House Republicans introduced the Academic Achievement for All Act (Straight A's), which would allow states to take most of their federal Kñ12 education funding in a lump sum, including funds for Even Start. The proposed legislation would have allowed states to combine all of the federal Kñ12 programs they administer, including Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged (Title I of the ESEA, which includes Even Start), the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, immigrant education, homeless education, and vocational education. The act would not have affected state adult education grants or the federally administered Even Start grants earmarked for programs serving migrant families, Native American tribes, and outlying areas.

The Clinton administration denounced the bill as an assault on categorical programs targeted to the disadvantaged. These categorical programs are federal aid targeted to specific disadvantaged groups. Democrats believe Republicans want to fold these programs into block grants so state and local officials can steer the money to affluent constituent groups that do not need it. More than half of all schools get Title I aid, including many that have below-average poverty rates. Yet some truly poor schools get none.

Congress took no final action on Straight A's during 1999. As of mid-2000, it remained bogged down in a partisan stalemate. It appeared that it would be left up to the next president and the next Congress to resolve this issue.

House and Senate Title I Bills

By late October, the House and Senate had each taken up bills that would reauthorize Title I. (Straight A's would have changed some of the rules governing Title I, but separate legislation was required to reauthorize, or renew, the program. Typically reauthorization bills also involve rule changes.) Each reauthorization bill included several provisions that, if enacted, would have had a significant impact on literacy programs for children and families. For example, the House approved a reauthorization bill (H.R. 2) on October 21 that would have required schools receiving Title I funds to use reading curricula based on the most current, scientifically based research.

As for bilingual education, H.R. 2 would have required parental approval before students could be placed in traditional bilingual education programs, as opposed to English-immersion programs. It would also have required testing of all students who had attended school in the United States for at least three consecutive years in reading and language arts in English.

In the section dealing with Indian education, H.R. 2 would have added family literacy services as an allowable use of federal funds earmarked for Indian schools. Also, schools funded by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs would have been required to see to it that various providers of family literacy services coordinated their activities. The sections dealing with Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native education programs also included language adding family literacy services as an allowable use of federal funds.

The Clinton administration was muted in its response to H.R. 2. It wanted to see some changes, but it did not issue a veto threat. With regard to literacy-related provisions, the administration backed Hispanic House members who opposed the parental notification provision for bilingual education and wanted students with limited English proficiency to be tested in their native languages in all subjects other than English. Hispanic House members argued that H.R. 2 would penalize students who needed an extended time to become fluent in English. They and the administration lobbied against the House provisions, waiting to see what the Senate might do and hoping to eliminate them from the final bill.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions released a draft summary of its Title I reauthorization bill on October 15. At the behest of the chairman, James Jeffords (R-Vermont), and committee member Patty Murray (D-Washington), the draft included an increase in the authorization level for Even Start to $500 million-the same amount sought by fellow literacy advocate Bill Goodling in the House.

The Senate bill would have maintained the then-current authorization level for the Reading Excellence program at $260 million. It also included a new five-year early learning initiative with a total authorization of $7 billion. The initiative was targeted to children, but local projects could include education for parents and family literacy programs. The bill would also have increased the authorization level for Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers to $800 million per year. The FY1999 appropriation was $200 million. Finally, the bill would have renewed the stand-alone authorization for the Star Schools program. That contradicted the administration's proposal to combine Star Schools with Technology Innovation Challenge Grants. The bill would have increased the Star Schools' authorization level slightly. Star Schools' funds also support the development of adult education media projects.

As with the Straight A's Act, Congress took no action on Title I reauthorization in 1999. It too would seem to be left for the next president and Congress to consider.

The House bill, H.R. 2, did not address the authorization levels for Even Start, Reading Excellence, Twenty-First Century Centers, or Star Schools. The House planned to deal with those programs in separate legislation.

Goodling Presses for Even Start Bill

Congressman Goodling hoped to cap off his twenty-six-year career in Congress by introducing a bill to reauthorize and expand his Even Start program. Goodling hoped the bill would pass in 2000, coinciding with his retirement. As introduced, the Literacy Involves Families Together (LIFT) Act (H.R. 3222) would have increased the annual authorization for Even Start to $500 million, just as the Senate's S. 2 would have done. Congress approved funding of $150 million, well short of the $500 million Goodling and fellow senator James Jeffords had requested. The bill has the following major provisions:

> Accountability. States would be required to review the progress of local Even Start programs to make sure they were doing a good job. States would use these findings when making decisions about continuation grants.
>
> Training and technical assistance. States would be allowed to use some of their Even Start funds to provide training and technical assistance to Even Start instructors, so long as they did not cut back on service to families. States would pay an experienced organization, such as the NCFL, to provide the

training and technical assistance.

Extended funding. Programs that had received federal funds for eight years (the limit) would be allowed to keep receiving them at a reduced rate, with the federal government matching 35 percent of expenses.

Research standards. Just like other federally funded reading programs, Even Start programs would be required to base their instruction on scientific research findings.

Adult reading research. Because relatively little research has been done on how adults learn to read, the bill would have provided the National Institute for Literacy with $2 million per year for a new research project.

Migrant programs. The bill would have amended Title I and the migrant education program to allow states to use those funds to establish more family literacy projects. It would have also increased the existing Even Start set-asides for migrants and Indians from 5 percent to 6 percent whenever annual appropriations exceeded $250 million.

Older children. Children older than age eight would receive Even Start services, provided their schools used funds from their basic Title I grants to cover part of the cost.

Indian programs. The bill would have encouraged coordination among Even Start and other family literacy programs operated by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, as would the corresponding Senate legislation.

Goodling was also sponsoring the Straight A's bill that would allow states to fold their Even Start funding into a block grant along with their federal funding originally earmarked for other Kñ12 programs. As he introduced the LIFT bill, he said he was confident that block grant states would keep funding Even Start "because it's a successful program." H.R. 3222 had the enthusiastic support of the National Even Start Association and the NCFL, although NCFL president Sharon Darling said she did not want the program block granted.

Congress decided not to wait until 2000 before extending federal funding for Even Start projects beyond the soon-to-be-expired maximum of eight years. To prevent any delay while his LIFT bill was pending, Congressman Goodling persuaded the House to include the extension in its version of the appropriations bill that would fund the DOE for

FY2000. He then persuaded the Senate to accept the provision during final negotiations on the appropriations measure. The extension provision also imposed accountability measures. States were required to assess the progress made by all local projects using "indicators of program quality" approved by Washington. This requirement applies to all decisions about continuations of funding beyond the first year, not just continuations beyond eight years.

Congress took no final action on Even Start reauthorization in 1999. As with the Straight A's Act and Title I reauthorization, it seems this will be left for the next president and Congress.

Policy Developments at the State Level

With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), the Adult Education Act and its 1991 update, the National Literacy Act, passed into history on June 30, 1999. The WIA included a new Adult Education and Family Literacy Act as its Title II. The new act required state directors of adult education programs and their staff to submit new state plans by April 1999, with the plans to go into effect July 1.

First, program staff and administrators had to choose one of three options: (1) join with job training, unemployment, welfare, and other state officials to submit a unified workforce plan immediately, (2) prepare a discrete five-year plan for adult education, or (3) prepare a one-year transitional plan that would serve as a placeholder while the other state-level departments hashed out a workforce plan by themselves. (The WIA did not require workforce plans to be submitted until July 1, 2000.) The act also required the states to focus on a number of critical new issues. One key issue in the development of adult education plans was the establishment of student performance standards based on each state's history of service in the following three areas: educational gains; success in postsecondary programs, job attainment and retention, and advanced training programs; and completion of secondary education.

Ironically, although the WIA's accountability and continuous-improvement provisions required states to undertake extensive reforms, the act also reduced the states' ancillary and support funds. States could spend no more than 12.5 percent of their federal grant funds on teacher training, curriculum development, and other support services. The old set-aside had been 15 percent; in addition, states had also been allowed to use a portion of the federal funds earmarked for local services on such things as technical assistance.

Once the adult education plans were approved by Washington and the funding adjustments made, state officials turned their attention to meeting other WIA requirements, including the establishment of adult

education representation on state-level workforce boards and the integration of adult education services into the new One-Stop Career Centers. Much of this work would continue into 2000.

Problems with the National Reporting System

As state and local officials continued to wrestle with the new WIA requirements, pilot testing revealed that adult education and literacy programs faced real difficulties in their efforts to track learners who had left local programs. This development had the potential to make Congress reluctant to increase funding. The problems came to light as the DOE and the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education worked on redesigning the National Reporting System (NRS), which measures learner outcomes. The redesign project was launched in the mid-1990s, partly in response to the Republican takeover of Congress following the 1994 elections. The GOP looked askance at programs that could not show measurable results, and the results produced by adult education programs had long been hard to measure or simply poor. The head of the project was Mike Dean of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. The actual implementation was carried out by the Pelavin Research Center, part of the American Institutes for Research in Washington.

Congress provided a new impetus for NRS improvement in 1998 when it passed the WIA with its new accountability requirements. As Barbara Garner (1999) of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) summed it up, the act "reflects a priority toward more intensive, higher-quality services rather than rewarding [programs for the] number of students served. It also puts a much greater emphasis on learner outcomes, and therefore on accurate measurement and reporting" (p. 11). Under the old NRS, data collection and reporting had been hit-or-miss. As Dean told Garner, "There were no real consequences" if programs were unable to track students.

Programs that field-tested the NRS reported mixed results. On the one hand, the system allowed programs to report student progress (as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education) on a new scale that gave students credit for small advances that would have been ignored under the old system. "The pilot allowed us to claim more successes," said Bill Walker of the Knox County Adult Basic Education Department in Knoxville, Tennessee. But when it came to tracking the results students achieved in life after leaving adult education programs—exactly the sort of data required by the new act—pilot testers had mixed results. "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," Garner concluded. In fact, the programs not only had difficulty tracking learners because this is hard

to do but also because the NRS design required them to track each and every student served rather than a representative sampling of students. Sampling would have put much less of a burden on programs and probably produced better-quality information (C. Smith, personal communication, July 30, 2000).

The new performance measures required by the act were nonetheless due to go into effect July 1, 2000.

Funding Applications Decline

Program applications for federal adult education pass-through funds were down by about half in California in 1998, and they were somewhat lower in Connecticut, according to Ronald Pugsley, director of the DOE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy. Officials speculated that the accountability and quality requirements imposed by the WIA, and new state policies issued in response to the act, could be discouraging programs from applying.

California, for example, had adopted a "pay for performance" system for all local adult education programs receiving federal pass-through funds. Rather than fund local programs on the basis of hours attended by students, the state distributed funds on the basis of student outcomes. The state also noted on its application form for local programs the WIA requirement that all funded programs have access to computerized management information systems. Similar standards were in place in Connecticut, where local programs were also forced to work against an unusually tight deadline for the submission of funding proposals.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

There were no landmark research findings on the order of the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey reported in 1999, but many researchers continued to toil in more modest vineyards. Three of the most notable were Hal Beder of Rutgers University, Susan Imel of Ohio State University, and Tom Sticht, head of Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences in El Cajon, California.

Evidence of Program Success Is Elusive

Beder (1998) reviewed a host of research studies and found insufficient data to show that participants in adult basic education programs actually made gains in basic skills. After reviewing the twenty-nine most credible studies on the outcomes and impacts of adult education programs conducted since the late 1960s, he reported that "the evidence was insufficient" to determine whether adult learners actually learn. "In contradiction, however, learners in 10 studies were asked if they gained in reading, writing, and mathematics, and they overwhelmingly reported large gains," Beder reported. "What led to this contradiction, and what is

the answer to the gain question?" he asked rhetorically. As to the former question, he suggested "that self-reported perceptions of basic skills gain [from students] are inflated by the normal human tendency to answer with socially acceptable responses and a reluctance to say unfavorable things in a program evaluation." As for the question of "real" or measurable gain, Beder said it "remains to be answered."

Researcher Says Adult Educators Should Rethink, Redesign Programs

If adult educators want to attract more people to their programs and keep them enrolled longer, "they must change how they think about their programs," argued Ohio State University researcher Susan Imel in a report funded by the DOE (1999). Citing 1997 research by B. A. Quigley, Imel reported that only 8 percent of all people eligible to participate in government-funded adult basic education and literacy programs actually did so. Of those who did participate, 74 percent left their programs within the first year. Although there are several explanations for these statistics, including "the complicated nature of the lives of many adults," Imel said that "the way adult basic and literacy education [ABLE] programs are structured may also be a factor. . . . The fact that most ABLE programs still resemble school may mean that many adults may not choose to participate, or, once enrolled, do not find a compelling reason for persisting until their educational needs are met." Indeed, many adult learners have said they were loathe to return to a setting just like the one where they were unable to learn as children.

One way to address this problem, Imel suggested, would be to redesign programs using adult education principles rather than K–12 principles, and she devoted the bulk of her paper to describing that new model, drawing on her own research and the work of several others. Her recommendations include the following:

- Involve learners in planning and implementing learning activities. Imel said that learners can begin with input on the intake or "needs-assessment" process and then help set program goals and help out all the way through to the evaluation phase.
- Draw on learners' experiences as a resource. Adults' own "life tasks and problems" are often what lead them to programs, Imel said, so they provide a "reservoir for learning."
- Cultivate self-direction in learners. Although many adults who have had difficulty following directions from teachers and other authority figures are not self-starters, Imel, quoting S. D. Brookfield, said that once adults are encouraged to become self-directed, they begin to see themselves as continuously recreating their circumstances rather than reacting to them.

- Create a climate that encourages and supports learning. This means a climate marked by trust and mutual respect that fosters self-esteem. Imel said conflicts should be handled in a way "that challenges learners to acquire new perspectives and supports them in their efforts to do so."
- Foster a spirit of collaboration. This often means that the teacher and student roles are interchangeable, with each learning from the other.
- Use small groups. Small groups promote teamwork, encourage the involvement of all participants, and can "emphasize the importance of learning from peers."

Teachers "frequently give lip service" to learner involvement, according to Imel, but fail to follow through. She said they must really listen to learners and use their input in program development. She suggested letting students orient newcomers and serve on advisory boards. She also suggested that teachers use instructional materials that link academic subjects to students' real lives, often referred to as "contextualized learning." It is thought to make lessons more compelling to students, and it may be based on common work experiences, gender, race, ethnic culture, or class.

Practitioners See Their Work as Therapy, Not Revolution

Adult educators in North America prefer to view themselves as psychotherapists rather than as revolutionaries, soldiers, or parents, according to a 1999 survey by Tom Sticht (1999). During workshops he led in the United States and Canada, Sticht asked eighty-one practitioners to consider eight sets of "dominant metaphors and analogies," each an attempt to summarize the roles of teachers and their adult students. The practitioners were asked to rate the appropriateness of each set. In descending order of popularity, they were

- Psychotherapy (education as a self-esteem booster)
- Business (teacher as purveyor of a service)
- Economics (education as an investment in human capital)
- Public schools (education as a way to produce productive citizens)
- Revolution (education as a means to liberation)
- Medicine (education as a cure)
- The military (education as a battle against illiteracy)
- Parenting (teacher as parent)

Canadian teachers said the most appropriate metaphors were psychotherapy, economics, and business. American teachers working in correctional education chose business, economics, and public schools. American teachers from community-based organizations chose

psychotherapy, public schools, and business.

"Interestingly, the revolutionary metaphor, which might be associated with social justice and the critical literacy movement, especially the work of Paulo Freire, did not emerge in the top three metaphors or analogies thought appropriate for adult literacy education by the 81 participants," Sticht noted. "In contrast, the business and/or economic metaphors were always in the top three....The predominance of the psychotherapy metaphor...while the revolutionary metaphor was ranked [lower] may indicate that adult literacy workers...view depression rather than oppression as a more serious problem to be overcome."

National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2002

By January 1999 the DOE had set up a Web site (http://nces.ed.gov/nadlits) to provide information on what it has decided to call the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), scheduled for 2002. It will be the ten-year follow-up to the landmark National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) conducted in 1992.

Like the NALS, the NAAL will be a household survey of people age sixteen and up. Also like the NALS, the NAAL will collect data and analyze the prose, document, and quantitative literacy skills of American adults, but this time the data are to be fully broken down by states and major subpopulations. The NAAL is also expected to provide trend data reaching back beyond the NALS to the 1985 assessment of young adult literacy conducted by the Educational Testing Service. Finally, the NAAL is expected to compare adult American literacy rates with those of other countries. A previous study found the United States about average among industrial nations.

In March, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the DOE's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, formally invited proposals from potential contractors capable of conducting the survey. The NALS was conducted by the Educational Testing Service under an NCES contract.

EVENTS

The year included two high-profile events that were important prerequisites to a third that would not happen until 2000, the National Literacy Summit. Organizers of this long-planned summit had repeatedly postponed it throughout 1998 and into 1999 while waiting for Vice President Al Gore and former Senator Paul Simon (D-Illinois) to hold their own separate literacy-related events. The delay tactics were a political strategy; the organizers did not want to get out in front of such influential friends. They reasoned that it would be better to follow the leads of Gore and Simon rather than try to lead them in policy directions

they may or may not want to go.

Gore Summit

One week before President Clinton's State of the Union speech, at Vice President Al Gore's January 12 Summit on Twenty-First Century Skills for Twenty-First Century Jobs, Gore proposed a new federal tax credit for employer-provided workplace literacy programs. He said the credit would apply to expenditures on literacy, ESOL, and other basic skills programs. It would cover 10 percent of such expenditures, with an annual maximum of $525 per participating employee. (Tax credits directly reduce an employer's tax owed, as opposed to tax deductions, which reduce taxable income.)

Gore also proposed several other initiatives. One of these would provide up to ten "High Skills Communities" with awards from the president and vice president each year "for achieving concrete results in improving the skills of their adult workforce," including adult literacy skills. Another was a $60 million plan to help train workers for high-skill jobs in industries facing skill shortages. This program would be run by regional workforce development boards. A third initiative was the proposed expansion of the existing tax credit for employer-paid training and education at the collegiate and postgraduate levels. Gore also called for an advisory panel that would analyze incentives for postsecondary education and training, such as low-income loans, grants, and tax incentives. Options might include individual "lifetime learning accounts" that would combine personal savings, employer contributions, and federal aid.

Congress had not given Gore's tax proposals any serious consideration by the end of 1999. The Clinton administration, not waiting for congressional authorization or an appropriation, began to designate High Skills Communities on its own authority. These were essentially symbolic declarations by local officials and business and labor leaders to cooperate on programs to upgrade workers' skills. Gore also took action by creating a thirty-one-member "leadership group" and directed it to come up with new ways to help train workers for high-skill jobs. The group included representatives of the National Institute for Literacy and the American Council on Education (ACE), the parent organization of the GED Testing Service. In a Blueprint for Lifelong Learning released in November 1999, members of the group made several rather platitudinous recommendations for national action and pledged themselves to various activities to further those recommendations. For example, NIFL pledged to conduct pilot testing on a training course for retail workers that is based on NIFL's Equipped for the Future curriculum standards. The ACE pledged to work with the AFL-CIO to increase the number of adults who take the General Educational

Development (GED) test each year.

Simon Forum and National Summit
Meeting in Carbondale, Illinois, in late March, the nation's leading literacy advocates called for summit meetings to be convened in every county in the nation as the first step in a new mobilization effort. The advocates had gathered at the invitation of former Senator Paul Simon for a forum to answer the question, "Literacy: Where Do We Go from Here?" Simon headed the new Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University. "This is the moment," said Alice Johnson, a former Simon staff member who had gone on to work at the National Institute for Literacy. She was referring to the momentum created by Vice President Gore's January Summit on Twenty-First Century Skills and President Clinton's subsequent call for new literacy initiatives and fiscal 2000 spending increases. "I want this conference to stretch our thinking," Simon said. "You know, you can get in ruts in any field, and that includes the literacy field. I want to see us start dreaming some big dreams and then fighting for those dreams."

At the end of the two-day forum, participants adopted an action plan with the following components:

- The library director in the biggest town in every county to convene a meeting of educators, religious leaders, welfare officials, businesspeople, labor leaders, and others to assess local literacy needs and mobilize new efforts to address them
- Mandatory literacy programs in every prison, with screening for learning disabilities and incentives for prisoners to improve their skills to at least the level of attainment of the GED credential
- A one-year campaign, in cooperation with broadcasters and advertisers, to encourage people with skill deficiencies to seek help
- "Significant" tax incentives for employers to offer workplace literacy programs (greater than the 10 percent proposed by the Clinton administration)
- An expanded effort to identify learning disabilities in young children
- Automatic tie-ins between literacy programs and all human service agencies, including welfare and employment offices
- Expanded family literacy efforts
- Greater cooperation among existing literacy programs and agencies
- More training for volunteers and better training for professionals
- Improved learner recruitment and retention efforts, based on interviews with dropouts, and including such services as day care and transportation

- Program assessment standards by 2005 that link learner outcomes to effective practice, followed by a National Literacy Report Card published every two or three years

"Since the enactment of the National Literacy Act in 1991, we have inched forward toward the goal of eliminating illiteracy in the United States," Simon said. "I believe these concrete, specific recommendations would help us move forward much more aggressively.... The question is not one of resources [but] of will. Are we really going to pay attention to this problem?"

Those attending the forum included Congressman Tom Sawyer (D-Ohio), coauthor with Simon of the National Literacy Act of 1991, former first lady Barbara Bush, and the leaders of the NIFL, the DOE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, the National Center for Family Literacy, Laubach Literacy, the Literacy Volunteers of America, and Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education. Other organizations represented at the forum included the National Center for Adult Literacy, the Newspaper Association of America, the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund, the American Library Association, and the State Literacy Resource Centers Association. The no-shows included Senators James Jeffords and Patty Murray, Congressmen Bill Goodling and Tim Roemer (D-Indiana), the mayors of Baltimore and Philadelphia, columnist William Raspberry, and the leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Council of La Raza.

National Literacy Summit

Once Gore and Simon had held their literacy-related events, leaders in the field began making plans for a summit in Washington to set a national literacy agenda.1 It was conceived as a ten-year follow-up to the landmark report Jump Start: The Federal Role in Adult Literacy. Planners included the National Institute for Literacy, the DOE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. In the Jump Start report, Forrest Chisman of the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis had laid out an agenda including the call for a national center for adult literacy (which would become the National Institute), a federal mandate requiring comprehensive state plans for adult education and literacy, state literacy resource centers, and access to federal funds for nonprofit and volunteer organizations. Most of these proposals were realized with the passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991. The new summit was intended to produce a new manifesto. Regional literacy summits would follow the national event, and a final manifesto would emerge later.

After many delays and postponements, the summit was slated for

February 2000, when 150 to 175 invited attendees would hammer out a tentative new agenda for the adult literacy field. In addition to the organizers, other participants would include the National Coalition for Literacy, the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, other federal agencies with an interest in literacy, and representatives of labor, business, community colleges, and other key constituencies. The Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Foundation agreed to provide $72,500 to sponsor the summit and the follow-up meetings.

Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education

Archie Willard, chairman of the new adult learners' group Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE), attended the February 10 meeting of the National Coalition for Literacy (NCL) with a request for funding. (The NCL includes virtually all of the nation's leading literacy organizations, including VALUE, which was created in 1998 by a group of about fifty adult learners and adult education professionals.) In a short and moving appeal, he said VALUE deserved support because adult learners were the best possible advocates for increased government support. "Congress needs to see the finished product," Willard said, referring to the NCL's underwhelming Capitol Hill lobbying effort of the previous day. Only fifteen people had shown up, and only a handful of those had confirmed appointments with members of Congress or their staff. Willard said VALUE needed funding for lobbying efforts and other activities. One objective was to get Congress to earmark federal funds for student leadership activities. Willard came away from the meeting with a commitment of $1,000 from the NCL treasury and an even greater amount in checks and pledges from individual representatives of NCL member organizations.

CONCLUSION

The year 1999 may best be regarded as the beginning of a new reality for the adult education and literacy field. It was the year when state officials and local program personnel began to rethink and redefine their jobs under terms dictated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. It was also the year when members of the field finalized plans for their National Literacy Summit, which would give them a solid, visible platform from which to voice their opinion of the WIA. It would be facile to describe 1999 as a year of fundamental change leading to some bright new future. The real fundamentals did not change. Too many adults continued to struggle with inadequate skills. Too many adult education and literacy practitioners continued to struggle with inadequate resources. Too many children continued to be neglected by schools that lacked the resources and perhaps the will to make them literate.

Things may change for the better in the new millennium. As 1999 drew to a close, the need for change remained glaringly clear.

Note

1. The literacy summit had first been proposed in 1996 by Jean Lowe, then director of the GED Testing Service. She said the field lacked an infrastructure for sharing proven instructional ideas, and she hoped a summit would help create one. She also hoped the summit could define the nature and extent of the nation's literacy problems, produce standards for measuring progress toward solutions, and calculate the amounts of government funding needed to make such progress. Officials at the NIFL and NCSALL had been talking about a summit almost since Lowe first suggested it, but their tentative plans were repeatedly postponed—first by plans for Gore's conference and then by those for Simon's forum in Illinois.

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Chapter 2