

# FIELD NOTES

Volume 17

Number 3

by and for the Massachusetts  
Adult Education Community

funded by the Massachusetts  
Department of Education

summer 2008

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Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education

## Opening Doors to Community Building

BY ERIN McNALLY

One of our program's greatest challenges at the Higher Education Resource Center (HERC) is also one of its greatest strengths—an all volunteer teaching team. Teachers rarely get to meet together, and it is challenging to maintain a team dynamic. Knowing this, we devote a two-hour workshop at the beginning of each cycle of classes to foster community among teachers. The workshop also serves to equip teachers with practical activities for community building in their own classrooms.

On several occasions we have had a consultant facilitate these workshops. I was particularly impressed by the results of one creative writing session. Placing an intriguing set of antique keys on the table before us, she asked us to pick one and bring it back to our seat. We then had some time to study the key and consider what it might hold the power to open. The facilitator told us to close our eyes and imagine what we were opening with the key. Asking us a series of questions, she guided us through an exercise of the imagination. We experienced the process of using the key to open something and explore what lie inside using all of our senses and emotions.

When we opened our eyes again, we wrote a descriptive piece about the key and what we had experienced with our eyes closed. Although it was optional, all participants chose to read their pieces to the group. At the time, I remember being impressed by this process as I watched our team open up to



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# FOREWORD

I like it when we offer open issues of *Field Notes*. We get submissions that might never fit into any of our themes. In this issue, Linda Werbner returns with a satisfying article on bringing relevant health issues into the classroom. Erin McNally, coordinator and teacher at a volunteer ESOL program in Boston's South End, shares a lesson plan for writing using imaginative portals. Several staff members at the Haitian Multi Service Center worked collaboratively to write about a center wide project for Black History Month involving the creation of a paper quilt and dramatic presentations. Margaret McPartland shares a brave narrative about the ways teachers and students affect each other's lives.

I am always pleased when teachers submit student writing. Christiane Wallaston-Joury at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge submitted a memoir written by her student Yonghyun Lee called "My Yellow Wooden Gate House." This delightful account, written as an assignment after the class read an abridged version of Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, is rich in visual and other sensory details. Carolyn Sadeh also submitted some student writing as part of her article about using teachable moments in her classroom.

In addition, we have an in-depth review written by Marie Cora of an important new assessment resource for ABE programs called *Measures of Success*. An article on moving from oral to silent reading from Maria Mazzaferro, and a look at a prison reentry project from Katy Upton, round out the issue.

We always welcome feedback from readers in the form of suggestions, letters to the editor, or ideas for future issues. Be sure to look on the last page of each issue for upcoming themes and submission deadlines.

Happy reading!

—Lenore Balliro, Editor

## Mission Statement and Editorial Policy

*Field Notes* is an adult basic education (ABE) quarterly, theme-based newsletter. It is designed to share innovative and reliable practices, resources, and information relating to ABE. We attempt to publish a range of voices about important educational issues, and we are especially interested in publishing new writers, writers of color, and writers who represent the full range of diversity of learners and practitioners in the field.

*Field Notes* is also a place to provide support and encouragement to new and experienced practitioners (ABE, ESOL, GED, ADP, Family Literacy, Correction, Workplace Education, and others) in the process of writing about their ideas and practice. Editorial support is always provided to any writer who requests it. Teachers, administrators, counselors, volunteers, and support staff are welcome to write for *Field Notes*.

## Our Funder

*Field Notes* is published by the System for Adult Basic Educational Support (SABES) and funded by Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), Massachusetts Department of Education. The Central Resource Center (CRC) of SABES is located at 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210.

## Our Editorial Policy

Unsolicited manuscripts to *Field Notes* are welcome. If you have an idea for an article or wish to submit a letter to the editor, contact Lenore Balliro, editor, by phone at 617-482-9485, by email at <lballiro@worlded.org>, or by mail at 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. Submission deadlines for upcoming issues are published in each issue of *Field Notes*.

Opinions expressed in *Field Notes* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor, SABES, or its funders. We do reserve the right to decline publication. We will not publish material that is sexist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory.

## Our Reprint Policy

Articles published in *Field Notes* may be reprinted in any publication as long as they are credited to the author and *Field Notes*.

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## Opening Doors...

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one another through writing. We were getting to know each other in an entirely different way than by talking or using typical ice-breaker activities. At the same time, everyone had the option of writing at an emotional level that felt safe to them. Some pieces were humorous, others were reflective, and a few were mournful. We all left knowing and remembering more about each other than our names and our favorite activities or countries of origin. We left with a foundation as a team to build upon.

## Modifying the Activity

Although I wanted to do this activity with my intermediate ESOL class, I didn't have any interesting or inspiring keys on hand, and I wasn't sure that photocopies of keys would have the same inspirational value. Instead, I decided to try the activity using photographs and images of a variety of doors. All found within minutes on "Google images," some of the doors looked old and worn, others like garden gates. Some resembled entrances to grand mansions, others like entries to jail cells. Some floated in air; others could have been doors to students' apartment buildings. To start, I taped all the images onto the class white board and explained that we were going to start a unit on descriptive writing using these pictures. After brainstorming what makes descriptive writing worth reading, I provided the students with a graphic organizer: a five-sectioned chart with the headings Smell, Touch, Sounds, Feelings,

and Sight. We examined the images more closely, and I gave the students a few minutes to pick a door that made an impression on them in some way and a few more minutes to study the door closely.

Next, I told the students to close their eyes so we could use our imaginations to visualize and write more effectively. A few people were hesitant, but once they saw that everyone else was participating, they relaxed and joined in. I then gave them the following instructions, pausing often to give them time to fully imagine:

- Walk towards the door. . . once you reach it, begin to open it up.
- What is it like to open the door? Is it heavy? Does it make any noises?
- Do you need a key?
- What does it look like?
- Now, go through the door. Take time to observe everything beyond the door. What do you see?
- Where are you going?
- What do you hear?
- What do you smell?
- Touch what's around you. What does it feel like?
- What do you do there?
- How do you feel in that place?

After some time, I instructed them to open their eyes and start writing what they had experienced. Without worrying about grammar or spelling, they were asked to write with as much detail as possible, so that their readers would feel as if they themselves were present in the scene with the door. Twenty minutes later, the class was still working away, and I asked them to finish the thought they were working on.

## Sharing Our Work

When we began to share our writing with each other, I was amazed to see both the descriptive quality of what students had written as well as the depth of thought and feeling in their work. Some students wrote about dream houses or scenes from their home countries, while others wrote about more abstract places like dreams where God spoke to them. Others wrote about opening doors to different points in their lives, and one student wrote about opening a door to a rushing river that had just killed her family members in a hurricane a few weeks before.

During this time, students had the opportunity to respond to each other's writings, emotions, and experiences. I watched as they encouraged each other, empathized with one another, and discussed things important to them. And I, the teacher, was able to take the role of a participant. Through this creative activity, the students were able to reach a higher level of writing, uninhibited by rules of grammar and spelling, as well as communicate with one another and relate with one another on a different level.

In both of these instances, with teacher and student teams, I witnessed the power of creativity and imagination to open doors to community building and sharing.

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# Reading, Writing, and Blood Glucose Meters: Health Conversations in ESOL/Literacy Class

By LINDA WEBNER

One evening, during the 15-minute break in my evening ESL/literacy class in Boston's International Institute, I watched with fascination as my student, Fatima, a cheerful middle-aged widow from Morocco, matter-of-factly checked her blood sugar. Fresh from her evening prayers in the hall with the other Muslim students, Fatima fished out the compact electronic blood glucose meter from her purse and briskly pricked her finger to test her glucose levels.

Up until then, I was not aware that Fatima had even been living with diabetes, but it certainly put her frequent absences and complaints about dizziness and feeling weary into context. "It is 85," she reported after a few moments. "That is good."

Hawa, a young Ghanaian woman, peered over her shoulder and nodded her head. "For me, that would be very high." The two women began an animated conversation about what high and low blood sugar numbers are for each other. Other students chimed in with stories about relatives and friends living with diabetes and their strategies for managing this chronic disease, which like other health problems, such as asthma, hypertension, and obesity, are no strangers to the immigrant community.

I watched their faces and the way their voices rose in excitement as they traded stories

about long anguished waits in the emergency room with a feverish child; the frustration of not understanding doctors, who spoke to them for five minutes at lightning speed before rushing off to the next patient; outrage over high copays and \$50 bills for two aspirin, headaches, high blood pressure, flu, strokes; and

2000 Census reported that 18.6 percent of the immigrant population speaks a language other than English at home.

In Massachusetts, the agency responsible for monitoring and supporting immigrant and refugee health is the Refugee and Immigrant Health Program, which is part of the Department of Public Health (DPH). Accord-

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*Other students chimed in with stories about relatives and friends living with diabetes and their strategies for managing this chronic disease, which like other health problems, such as asthma, hypertension, and obesity, are no strangers to the immigrant community.*

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problems that made them miss work at their low-paying jobs. As the volume increased around me and I watched the spirited exchange taking place in room 6B, I had a eureka! moment. Here was a teachable moment if ever there was one. Health. That's a topic that is relevant and meaningful to my learners.

## **An Underserved Population**

According to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau and FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform), the foreign-born population of Massachusetts was about 630,895 residents in 2007 or 11.2 percent of the state population. The

ing to its Website <[www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/rhip/wwwrihp.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/rhip/wwwrihp.htm)>, this agency offers initial and follow-up screening for all newly arriving refugees and ensures that DPH-contracted health care facilities provide linguistically and culturally appropriate services and work toward removing barriers to accessing primary care services.

## **Emergency Room as Health Care Provider**

Despite these high numbers and the sincere efforts of the Refugee and Immigrant Health Program, many newcomers still fall through the cracks in our

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## Reading, Writing, and Blood Glucose...

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vast and bewildering health care system. For a long time, documented and undocumented immigrants without health insurance or steady access to a primary care physician relied on the emergency room for their acute care. The concept of preventive care can seem like a luxury to a stressed newcomer juggling several low-paying jobs and a family and trying to adjust to multiple systems in her newly adopted country.

With the passage of the 2006 health reform law requiring all uninsured residents to sign up for low or no-cost subsidized health insurance through the Commonwealth Care program <[www.macommonwealthcare.com/](http://www.macommonwealthcare.com/)>, the free care system has been dismantled. Yet my learners admit that they still use the emergency room as their health care access point because they don't know or understand what the alternatives are.

## Hunting for Health Literacy Materials

After my epiphany watching Fatima with her blood glucose meter that evening, I set about looking for good health literacy materials—in particular a code or set of images that would resonate with my learners. Any ESOL/literacy teacher worth her salt can tell you that finding the right materials, is more than half the battle. There are countless resources for high-level ESL learners on the topic of health, but few for adult second language learners who are pre-literate. This is truly an underserved and little-understood population

in the ESOL solar system.

I scoured the library and the binders we keep at my agency for health-related stories and activities. I didn't have time to create an entire curriculum from scratch as I would have in years past. You see, for a long time, like some *Field Notes* readers possibly, I was a rein-

and through this simple group of codes demonstrates how issues of culture and language intersect in urgent health situations.

When I introduced Singleton's health-themed codes to my learners, the discussions that followed were spirited and personalized. "That's me!" I

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*"That's me!" I heard again and again. "This has happened to me."*

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vent-the-wheel sort of teacher. This mindset arose partly out of necessity, owing to the dearth of quality materials for adult ESOL literacy.

## SABES to the Rescue!

This time, however, I immediately checked the SABES Web site and found a wealth of information and materials on the theme of health and literacy education <[sabes.org/curriculum/health/](http://sabes.org/curriculum/health/)>. This page has eight different links and while quite a bit of it was geared toward higher levels of literacy, I found plenty of gems that would fit seamlessly with my multilevel class.

Of the eight, my favorite and the one that fits my students' level the best is the Health & Literacy Special Collection, which has a link called *Picture Stories for Adult ESL Health Literacy* <[www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/health/](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/health/)>. This collection of eight comic-style picture stories is the work of Kate Singleton, of Fairfax County, Virginia's Public Schools and REEP. Singleton, now a health care social worker, taught adult ESL for many years

heard again and again. "This has happened to me."

After we discussed the situations and I had pretaught any relevant vocabulary that might be new to my learners, I elicited an language experience approach (LEA) story, allowing them to dictate the action of the story while I copied their exact words onto the board. This is the essence of the whole language approach that I was schooled in many years ago and still hold fast to, despite the siren call of phonics and a more traditional, textbook approach to teaching English. This is not to say that phonemic awareness has no place in my classroom. In fact, the first half hour of class is devoted to phonemic awareness activities and using Wilson boards to spell words.

The story my learners created was recycled countless times over the next few weeks into strip stories, cloze exercises, and other reading and writing activities. I also supplemented the learner-generated LEAs with garden-variety parts of the body diagrams and lists from the binders.

## A Culturally Appropriate

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## Reading, Writing, and Blood Glucose...

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### Message

Perhaps the centerpiece of the unit on health literacy, however, was a visit from Dr. Anne Medinus, a health outreach worker from Boston's African Community Health Initiative (ACHI). Founded eight years ago, ACHI is a nonprofit organization whose mission, according to its Web site <[www.african-communityhealthinitiatives.org/](http://www.african-communityhealthinitiatives.org/)> is to improve the health and access to health and social services of Massachusetts' burgeoning African and immigrant diaspora.

During her 45-minute presentation to the learners at the IIB, Dr. Medinus took the audience on a journey from the very general to the specific and personal. A number of students spoke to Dr. Medinus about the problem of chronic headaches. Headaches, Dr. Medinus explained, are often a response to stress; being an immigrant is very stressful. Dr. Medinus herself emigrated from Nigeria and shared her own struggle with debilitating headaches, stress, and hypertension, which she never experienced until she came to the United States.

"When I go back to Nigeria to visit, my blood pressure goes right down," she said, and many in the audience nodded and smiled. Dr. Medinus acknowledged that immigrants are often juggling a variety of stressors from cultural and linguistic adjustment, to working one or more low-paying job, attending school, and caring for one's family. When this stress is unchecked, she explained, it

can manifest itself in mental and physical illnesses like depression, hypertension, ulcers, and even diabetes.

### Preventive Care

The key to maintaining one's health is to practice preventive care, as Dr. Medinus urged. This led to a discussion about the importance of finding a good primary care physician—as well as the challenge in finding such a practitioner these days—and utilizing community-based clinics rather than hospital emergency rooms for care.

Another important piece that Dr. Medinus touched on is the importance of signing up for health insurance now that the

free care system, long a standby for the poor and immigrant population, is being dismantled. Dr. Medinus explained that the ACHI will walk students through the health insurance enrollment process. Upon hearing this, many students brightened and nodded. After the talk, Dr. Medinus was happily deluged with questions about clinics and screenings; she handed out nearly all the pamphlets on diet, nutrition, and health she brought with her.

*Linda Werbner is a social worker who also teaches literacy/ESL at the International Institute of Boston. She can be reached at <[werbner@simmons.edu](mailto:werbner@simmons.edu)>.*

## Web Resources for Health and Health Literacy

### [www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/health/index.html](http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/health/index.html)

This site provides a general orientation to the U.S. health care system, including the need and options for health insurance. Also includes information on how to receive health care, first aid procedures, personal hygiene practices in the U.S., and mental health services.

### [esl-lab.com/health/healrd1.htm](http://esl-lab.com/health/healrd1.htm)

A healthy lifestyle – reading and listening practice

### [ipl.org/kidspage/browse/hea0000](http://ipl.org/kidspage/browse/hea0000)

Health and nutrition topics – reading practice

### [mcdservices.com/medex/medex.htm](http://mcdservices.com/medex/medex.htm)

Reading medicine labels (note: This site includes translations into Arabic, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.)

### [mcdservices.com/medex2/medex2.htm](http://mcdservices.com/medex2/medex2.htm)

Nutrition – provides guided and detailed listening practice

### [esl-lab.com/office/offrd1.htm](http://esl-lab.com/office/offrd1.htm)

Doctor's appointments – listening practice

### [www.literacynet.org/vtd/index.html](http://www.literacynet.org/vtd/index.html)

Visiting the doctor – reading practice



# Uncountable Outcomes

By MARGARET MCPARTLAND

I started teaching adults in 1993 and am still working in ABE today. Over the years my life has become entwined with students and their families in unexpected and recurring ways. Some of the most memorable “outcomes” in my teaching can’t be entered into any database or measured numerically. Even though these outcomes are not countable, I remember them most vividly and hope they illustrate some of the things many of us value in our teaching.

## Linnie

In 1993 I was a 28-year-old rookie and the sole GED teacher at a Dorchester agency that served adults recovering from substance abuse. One of the students, Linnie, walked through the door with a scowl on her face. Her left hand was deformed and limp for reasons I never found out; her right hand held a notebook, pen, and all of the baggage of her previous educational experiences.

Linnie made sure from the start that I knew how she felt about everything we did in class: “I hate math. I hate writing. I hate history.” And her favorite, “This is stupid.”

At first, she never did homework and came late to class almost every day. One day, I asked her to stay after class for a few minutes. I explained, “This is a class for adults, not high school. No one has to come here. People

come here because they want to learn. Do you want to learn?” She nodded up and down. I explained why I give homework and why punctuality and a positive attitude would make things easier for her.

She answered, “When I was in school, my teachers told me I was slow.”

I responded, “You’re not slow!” Now I was angry, but not at her. She picked up her notebook and left, expressionless. I



wasn’t sure if I did or said the right thing. The next day, she came to school on time. Over the next few months, her attitude changed. First, the negative comments stopped. She started doing her homework. Sometimes she would even come in early for extra help. After a while, I heard words come out of her mouth like, “I like this one” and “This isn’t so bad.”

Linnie started to open up little by little about her personal life through her essays and ca-

sual conversation. She was born in a mental hospital 28 years earlier, “seduced” by her stepfather at age 12, experimented with drugs, worked as a prostitute to support her habit, traveled to Baltimore for a stint as a peep show model, and somewhere along the line contracted the HIV virus.

I told Linnie that she should write her autobiography and get it published. She laughed, but I wasn’t kidding. Linnie remained in my class for about 10 months. Unfortunately, the agency where I worked faced financial difficulties and chose to eliminate the ABE classes. On the last day of class, the students and I held a goodbye party. Linnie brought in an aluminum tray full of homemade spaghetti casserole.

I moved on to a different school and I referred Linnie to another GED program in the neighborhood. About two months after the school closed, Linnie called and said she was in (the former) Boston City Hospital. She had pneumonia and a blood clot in her neck. I asked her if she wanted any visitors.

She said, “Yes, I do. I’m going to be here for a few weeks, so bring me some magazines. I like *Cosmopolitan* and *Ebony*. I trekked to the hospital in scorching heat for my visit with Linnie. She had lost a lot of weight and tubes traversed her body. I gave her the magazines and my Walkman, and she put on the

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## Uncountable Outcomes...

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headphones and played with the knobs of the Walkman until she found a radio station she liked. She bopped her head up and down in rhythm. "Thanks a lot," she said.

She told me that she cursed out all the doctors and nurses who she felt were disrespecting her. We debated the shenanigans of certain characters on our favorite soap opera. Then I left.

About a week later, I called the hospital; the operator said that Linnie had been discharged. I called her and she explained that the doctors said she was well enough to go home. I knew she lived alone and I was worried, especially when a few weeks later a recorded message told me her phone was disconnected. I never saw Linnie again, but I was to be reminded of her in unexpected ways later in my teaching.

## Maria

In 1998 I was teaching GED classes at a family shelter for women in Dorchester. One of these women, Maria, had a learning disability coupled with bouts of depression. She had three children at the time including two chunky, adolescent boys: Ricardo and Pedro, and a baby daughter, Marianna.

Maria's two sons were much bigger than she was and verbally abusive to her. Maria's frequent bouts with depression and anxiety manifested themselves during class. Though she was an excellent writer and a good reader, she had tremendous anxiety with timed tests and with math. No matter how many different methods we tried (music,

patterns, pictures, etc.) she could not completely learn her times tables or division procedures. (At that time, the GED test did not allow use of the calculator.) However, she did have a good conceptual understanding of math, better than some of her peers. I thought that the requirements of an External Diploma Program (EDP) would be more easily attainable and a better match to Maria's skills than the GED, so I referred her to another program. She was excited about making the change.

I met Maria twice at her home to help her prepare for the EDP entrance exams. We sat at her kitchen table, and it wasn't easy to concentrate; her young daughter was playing on the floor and her big boys were bouncing around the apartment. I had confidence that she could squeak by the EDP math test and pass it, and her reading and writing skills were fine. We arranged for her to start the class a few weeks later. She appeared very enthusiastic. However, when I tried to reach her, the phone was disconnected with no forwarding number. She never enrolled in the EDP class.

## Frank and Nina

In 2003 I was working at the Harriet Tubman House in the South End, responsible for the intake of new students. One day Frank and his daughter, Nina, came to enroll. I noticed that Frank had the same last name as Linnie, and he resembled her. At the end of the intake, I asked him if he was related to a young woman named Linnie. He said he wasn't, so I let it go. Frank and Nina took my math class for about six months.

One week Frank missed a few classes and came in early to catch up on his work. After we caught up, I asked again, "I had a student once a long time ago named Linnie. Deformed arm. Looks like you. Same last name." He paused. "Linnie. Linnie ... Oh yeah. We called her Winnie. She was your student? She was going to school for her GED?"

"Yes, she was one of my best students," I said.

"I never knew she did anything like that; she was always running the streets." Frank replied. Then he told me Linnie passed on a few years before. "The streets got her," he told me.

I told him that I still had the writing anthologies that the class produced back then, which included several of Linnie's essays. He said that he would like to see them. Then he asked me how to find "percent increase."

A few days later, I showed him a wonderful essay Linnie wrote about her great-grandfather. Frank smiled. "I didn't know that she tried to get her education like that."

## Ricky

These days I teach at a program that serves at-risk youth. All of the students in my small GED class have learning disabilities, anxiety, and probably some level of attention deficit disorder I love this group. One of the students, Ricky, 23, has a documented learning disability and anxiety diagnosis which allows him to take the GED test untimed. Ricky is a thoughtful writer. Though he has trouble with math computation, he displays a good conceptual under-

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## Uncountable Outcomes...

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standing, better than some of his peers.

In one essay, Ricky wrote that he got into a lot of trouble as a teenager. Since then, Ricky has become a deeply religious young man and carries a bible with him at all times.

One day, Ricky needed help filling out a form, asking what a beneficiary was and who he

remember you sitting at the kitchen table with my mom." He shouted and pointed. We were both spooked. Later we talked about his mother some more.

He said, "She still gets depressed sometimes. She told us that she made a lot of sacrifices for us."

I said, "She sure did. She never had reliable child care so it was hard for her to finish school. Ricky gave me his mother's phone number and I

carefully and said, "Wow, she is a real good writer."

"I know," I said.

## Reflecting on What Counts

Over the years, I have served my students as best as I could. While some students earned high school equivalencies and went on to better jobs or college, I don't know what happened to many of the others. I was devastated to find out what happened to Linnie, but I did feel solace in knowing that for a period of time in her life, she had the clarity to work toward her dream of a diploma and to renew a thirst for knowledge. I am glad I could enlighten her cousin Frank about another side of her so he could see her in a new light. I am still working with Ricky, and with each passing day I see him gain the confidence needed to reach his goals. I look forward to seeing Maria at his graduation.

A few years ago, a former colleague gave me a few simple words of advice when I wondered aloud if the students and my efforts made a difference. She said, "You will never really see the effects most of the time, but you just have to have faith."

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*These days I teach at a program that serves "at-risk" youth. All of the students in my small GED class have learning disabilities, anxiety, and probably some level of attention deficit disorder. I love this group.*

should name. I suggested his mother. When he wrote his mother's name on the paper, my jaw dropped. Her last name was different from his, but I recognized the name of my former student, Maria.

I asked Ricky if his mother had a sister named Pilar who used to attend class with her. and he said yes.

"Do you know her?" he asked. I told him I did, and he asked me if I had ever come to their house.

When I said yes, he responded, "It was you. It was you! I

called her.

"I am so glad you are his teacher," she said. "Ricky used to hate me. Since you told Ricky that I made a lot of sacrifices for him, now every time he sees me, he hugs me and says 'thank you.' I guess he just needed to hear it from someone else besides me."

I said, "Whenever you are ready, even if it is several years from now, let me know and I'll hook you up with GED or EDP resources."

With her blessing, I showed her essay to Ricky. He read it

## This is your newsletter.

We welcome letters to the editor, suggestions, and ideas for future issues.

Write to Lenore Balliro, editor, at <lballiro@worlded.org>. Thanks.

## New & Noteworthy

### New Newsletter from NIFL

*Catalyst*, the National Institute for Literacy's first newsletter in more than a decade, is here! The inaugural issue is packed with news and information about the Institute's programs, people, and publications. To access this issue go to <[www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications/Catalyst5-08.pdf](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications/Catalyst5-08.pdf)>.

### New DVD About Immigrants for Classroom Use

Developed by the The Immigrant Theater Group of The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. in Malden, MA, the DVD *Immigrants: The Real Story* contains a series of selected dramas from its most successful plays. The DVD runs 45 minutes and can be ordered by emailing <[ilcpublied@yahoo.com](mailto:ilcpublied@yahoo.com)> or by calling Ewa Goodman 781-322-9777. There is a nominal charge to cover duplication and mailing costs.

### New Numeracy Issue of *Focus on Basics*

The new issue of *Focus on Basics* (Volume 9, Issue A) is now available at [www.worlded.org](http://www.worlded.org). Published by World Education, the theme is Numeracy and includes articles on math instruction, professional learning models, using whole-part thinking in math, and more.

### SABES/ACLS Lesson Plan Resource Guide

[sabes.org/curriculum/lesson-planning-guide-2008.pdf](http://sabes.org/curriculum/lesson-planning-guide-2008.pdf)

This 42-page document contains valuable information for teachers, including templates, rubrics, and a substantial list of "action verbs" to describe learning objectives.

## Mark Your Calendar

### September 25-26, 2008

Adult Learning Resource Center (IL)

National Immigrant and Refugee Conference: Issues and Innovations

Location: Chicago, IL

Website: [www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/refugee.html](http://www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/refugee.html)

### October 1-4, 2008

ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2008 Annual Conference

Location: Little Rock, AR

Website: [www.proliteracy.org/conference/conf2008.asp](http://www.proliteracy.org/conference/conf2008.asp)

### October 18-21, 2008

National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE), Fall 2008 Conference

Green Community Colleges: Sustainable Campuses and Programs

Location: Austin, TX

Website: <http://ncwe.org/conference/>

### October 22-23, 2008

Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE), Annual Conference: Network 2008

Location: Marlborough, MA

Website: [www.mcae.net/](http://www.mcae.net/)

### November 11-14, 2008

American Association for Adult and

Continuing Education (AAACE) 2008 Conference: Creating Your Future Within Our Future

Location: Denver, CO

Website: [www.aaace.org/](http://www.aaace.org/)

### November 12-14, 2008

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), 2008 International Conference: Lifelong Learning: Building Pathways to Independence

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Website: [www.cael.org/cael\\_conference.htm](http://www.cael.org/cael_conference.htm)

### November 17-18, 2008

National College Transition Network (NCTN), National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education

Location: Providence, RI

Website: [www.collegetransition.org/index.html](http://www.collegetransition.org/index.html)

# Review of *Measures of Success: Assessment and Accountability in Adult Basic Education*

By MARIE CORA

The topic of assessment in adult basic education remains one of the most difficult areas to unpack. *Measures of Success*, a collection of writings by experts in the field, is a valuable resource that expands and deepens our knowledge base and presents us with practical strategies for decision making about assessment and accountability in our own programs. The book comes with two useful DVDs that illustrate diagnostic and performance assessments.

The book, edited by Canadian educator Pat Campbell, covers assessment theory and practice. Practitioners and researchers from the U.S., U.K., Scotland, Australia, and Canada weigh in with their experiences, analyses, and interpretations of the complexities of building and maintaining accountability systems. At the forefront of the debate is the question of audience and purpose. The authors explore and demonstrate the inherent difficulty in finding or developing assessments that can serve the needs of the funder as well as the needs of the teacher and student.

## Part 1: Types of Assessment Tools

In "Developing Practice-based Performance Assessments," Christine Pinsent-Johnson discusses the development and definition of performance assessment. She notes that "the key to developing performance assessments that reflect learning

beyond the program is to examine the specific contexts in which developing literacy skills will be put to use" (p 18). A discussion of literacy as a set of practices as opposed to a discrete set of skills ensues, and the chapter contains many excellent examples of what performance assessments are, how to use them, and what they can be used for.

In "What Does Competence Mean? Who Decides? Competency-based Assessment in Adult Education," Karen Geraci discusses definitions, including what is meant by competency-based education as well as who defines the particular com-

informal reading inventories (IRIs), miscue analysis, fluency, comprehension, writing, and spelling. The chapter provides excellent examples and explanations of the above diagnostic assessment approaches. However, I found her analysis of the term "standardized" oversimplified and debatable at times.

Programs who use standardized tests such as the TABE will find the fourth chapter, "Standardized Referenced Tests," particularly interesting. The author notes that there is not a single definition of a standardized test, although they do have a number of elements in common. In addi-

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*The authors explore and demonstrate the inherent difficulty in finding or developing assessments that can serve the needs of the funder as well as the needs of the teacher and student.*

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petencies. The author spends some time clarifying the terms "competence" and "competency-based education," and notes a number of factors that have contributed to confusion over these terms. The chapter concludes with a description of several commonly used competency-based assessments: CASAS (U.S.), and CABS and TOWES (CAN).

Robin Millar explores diagnostic assessment in the third chapter, including interviews,

tion to detailing the differences between norm and criterion referenced tests, Fagan offers educators some commonsense guidelines for choosing tests to best suit their needs.

## Part 2: International Perspectives

Four of the five chapters in this section of the text focus on descriptions and discussion of the assessment and accountabil-

*Continued on page 12*



## ***Measure of Success ...***

*Continued from page 11*

ity systems in the U.S., Scotland, Canada, Australia, and the U.K. (England and Wales).

In the first chapter, “Assessment for Whom and for What? Stepping Back to Ask Important Questions about Assessment,” Katrina Grieve sets the stage for these international case studies by examining “what gets counted, what does not get counted, and how this shapes “what counts” as learning in adult literacy” (p. 123). Grieve begins by highlighting areas that are not counted, including literacy practices that adults use in their daily lives, and nonacademic outcomes such as growth in confidence and positive social interactions. The author briefly reviews how the context has shifted in adult basic education over the past 40 years, from a focus on access, participation, and social justice to a focus on the measurement of skills and outcomes of programs. Assessment for policymakers, for practitioners, and for learners is reviewed in terms of how they are at odds and the tensions and conflicts that this causes.

Grieve notes that in government accountability systems, policymakers get to say what counts, generally favoring employment outcomes and short-term skill gains rather than a change in literacy practices over time. He then reflects on the impacts of such systems; for example, ABE programs are tempted to “cream,” selecting students who can show more immediate outcomes. The author concludes by offering several suggestions for moving forward in a more inclusive way

that attempts to address the various stakeholders’ needs.

In “The Challenges of Consistency: National Systems for Assessment and Accountability in Adult Literacy Education,” authors Ralf St. Clair and Alisa Belzer note that the most crucial part of building a national system is the development process; initial choices at this stage will impact all aspects of the system. To this end, they examine four critical choices, offered in the form of questions, as guides to assist development of a national system (pp. 164-166). The authors ask:

1. What is seen as the primary purpose for literacy and numeracy education for adults?
2. What specific mechanisms are included in a national system?
3. What contextual factors influence the development, implementation, and use of these mechanisms, and who is held responsible for system change?
4. What are the aims of the initiative and what will show they have been attained?

In “Student Assessment in Canada’s Adult Basic Education Programs,” Pat Campbell suggests that practitioners want reliable information on how to select appropriate assessment tools; they prefer to have a mix of nationally provided processes and tools that are flexible enough to be tailored to the diversity of needs in their local areas.

Jan Hagston and Dave Tout revisit the introduction of competency-based education in the 1990s in their chapter “Assessment in Australia: A Balancing Act.” According to the authors,

competency-based education led to the development of accredited curriculum standards frameworks. The Australian system has structured its standards and reporting system on a broad concept of skill development that represents a wide range of learning needs.

The Skills for Life (SfL) policy is described in “A Balancing Act? The English and Welsh Model of Assessment in Adult Basic Education,” by Jay Derrick, Kathryn Ecclestone, and Juliet Merrifield. SfL produced national products including standards, core curricula, teaching materials, and assessment materials. The authors evaluate the effectiveness of various aspects of the policy, and then discuss the merits of both formative and summative assessment in terms of how well they each support learning.

## ***Part 3: A Conversation among the International Authors***

The final chapter presents a one-day conversation among some of the authors, culminating in the emergence of a common set of key principles instrumental in guiding the development of accountability and assessment systems. The seven principles suggest the following guidelines:

1. Accountability focuses on the quality of programs and services that support learning, rather than on narrow performance measures.
2. Capacity-building is a feature of every element and level of the system.

*Continued on page 13*

## Measure of Success

*Continued from page 12*

3. The system is based on an explicit theory, with corresponding pedagogies and procedures that recognize the multidimensional and changing nature of literacies.
4. A quality system is informed by and responds to communities of practice.
5. The system supports innovation and manages risk in a developmental way.
6. The system achieves a balance between developing a common set of standards and meeting the diversity of communities and learners.
7. Ongoing research data is used to inform and improve the system.

## DVDs

While the book is a “must-have” addition to any ABE program, the accompanying DVDs are equally important. The DVDs are an excellent staff development tool for ABE programs. They actually show what some assessment strategies look like, including imperfections. It is easy to picture teachers and other ABE staff watching the DVDs and using them to guide their own reflections about assessments suitable for their students.

## Diagnostic Assessment DVD—25 minutes

In the introduction to this DVD, editor Pat Campbell is interviewed about assessment, echoing an important point throughout the book: the need for a variety of tools to properly assess a person’s educational needs.

Two types of diagnostic assessment are described: interviews and informal reading inventories (IRIs). Each of these types is described in the interview segment followed by a vignette that illustrates each technique. The final portion of the DVD is entitled “Linking Assessment to Instruction” and includes descriptions of specific assessment activities. In addition, suggestions are provided for addressing readers with different needs. Closing remarks remind us that “instruction needs to be tailored to students’ strengths and weaknesses.”

## Performance Assessment DVD—27.50 minutes

This DVD illustrates interviews, portfolios, and demonstrations. The interview section offers interaction between a teacher and student, demonstrating a variety of ways to

learn as much as possible from the student without sparking nervousness. The vignette on portfolios focuses on the development and use of a scoring rubric, which is an indispensable part of any performance assessment. The vignette on demonstrations also focuses in part on the use of a rubric, with an emphasis on using the rubric than developing it. Both sections discussing rubrics strongly suggest the importance of student participation in rubric development.

## Conclusion

*Measures of Success* is a highly valuable resource that provides a global and up-to-date look at assessment and accountability in ABE. The chapters range from practical and pragmatic to theoretical and research based, making it an appropriate resource for ABE workers in a variety of roles. The book presents a broad analysis of ABE systems viewed through a cross-country lens of national efforts. The DVD shows us what assessment techniques can look like, helping to remove the mystery and vagueness surrounding discussions of approaches like portfolio assessments.

The book and DVDs will be extremely useful for practitioners looking to understand and master some cornerstones in diagnostic and performance assessment.

*Marie Cora is a specialist in professional development and online educational programming. She can be reached at <marie.corta@hotspurs.com>.*

## *Measures of Success: Assessment and Accountability in Adult Basic Education*

Pat Campbell (ed.). Edmonton, ON: Grass Roots Press, 2007.

This resource is available in the SABES library. Go to [www.sabes.org/resources/library.htm](http://www.sabes.org/resources/library.htm)

# My Yellow Wooden Gate House

By YONGHYUN LEE

*Editor's note: This memoir, written by an ESOL student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, was written after the class read an abridged version of The Story of My Life by Helen Keller.*

I was born in June 1970 in Seoul. As the fourth girl baby of my parents, I guess they might be very disappointed to have another girl. However, I didn't get any complaints from my parents about my "being a girl." After me, my parents had another girl, so there were five girls in my family. I was very happy with my four sisters. I lived in a single house for 30 years since I was born. It had a yellow, wooden gate so my house used to be called "Yellow, wooden gate house."

I liked my house a lot. It had five rooms and a front yard, a basement for storage, a garage, and a rooftop made of a slab. I was not allowed to go down or go up to play in those places. However, I knew it was a big pleasure sneakily to go there with my sisters. When Mom was not at home, we went down to the basement with our dolls like Barbie. Another secret pleasure was to play on the big flat rooftop. My parents always warned us not to go up there, but we knew that it was a good hiding place when we played hide-and-seek, especially with our friends.

Once when we had gone up there, we found a dead bird. Then we buried it in our yard. I don't remember who moved that bird to our yard, but I guess it was my third sister, who always acted like a tomboy. We found baseballs more often than dead birds on the rooftop. Then we played with the ownerless balls in the yard.

We mostly played in our front yard. My father liked gardening. In my yard, there were several different trees. Watching the flowers of each tree one by one, I could feel a flow of the seasons. The first flowers were always from the magnolia tree. With the buds of a white magnolia I knew spring was coming. The full bloom was so beautiful, like a bride with a white dress, but it was very sad that their glory could last only for a few days.

Shortly after feeling that sadness, I would be fascinated by the purple lilacs in my yard. I thought magnolia was like a shy bride, on the other hand, lilac was like a perky girl.

After the lilac was gone, roses began to bloom. The roses were beautiful, but the rose worms that also liked them were disgusting. I was frightened by worms sometimes when I passed my house gate. To this day I still don't like roses.

During hot days, my sisters and I liked playing in a big water tub in the yard. We forgot the sweltering heat while splashing each other. Another pleasure during summer was to lie down on the grass to read books or to figure out the shapes of clouds. One cloud could look like a sheep and another like an umbrella.

Strangely, whenever a season changed, the rain came. With the spring rain, I knew the land was awakened from the long winter



sleep. After the rainy season in June, the hot weather started. With a typhoon, autumn came. Long lasting dry leaves hanging on the trees fell down with the winter rain.

In the middle of autumn we had a small harvest from the jujube tree. I liked the hard green jujubes, really sweet and crunchy. My Daddy picked persimmons from the tree in my yard. It was a little more delicate job than getting jujubes. If we shook the persimmon tree like the jujube tree, we would not get flawless persimmons. We always left one or two persimmons on top of the tree and they were small gifts for birds.

On snowy days in winter it was a real pleasure to make a snow man or snow balls. Usually we spent time in our rooms talking or reading. We would talk to each other lying with our tummies down on the hot floors.

Sometimes I still miss the hot floor in Korea. Like my dreams, time passed very fast. Sometimes I feel I have grown up suddenly, like a sudden change of seasons. Still, I like to remember my childhood like a happy dream.

*Yonghyun Lee is a student at the Cambridge Community Learning Center. She can be reached through her teacher Christiane Wallaston-Joury at <chriswj@cambridgeMA.GOV>.*



# Black History Month at the Haitian Multi-Service Center

*Editor's Note: The following article describes a collaborative effort at the Haitian Multi-Service Center's ESOL program in Dorchester and was written by four staff members. Their bios follow the article.*

## Getting Started

*By Heidi Herrick*

The concept for a Black History Month event at the Haitian Center, as well as the idea for a Black History paper quilt, began with photos on a hallway bulletin board. A few pictures of Black leaders sparked the staff's memories of figures we had studied as children, and others we had seen, heard about, or revered. People brought up the names of politicians, world leaders, artists, literary figures, musicians, and athletes. We began to research, and discovered a variety of "firsts" among Black educators, inventors, and other professions throughout history.

Soon our one bulletin board of photos expanded to three, and we decided to enlarge our concept into a hands-on project where teachers and students could share ideas, creativity, and support. We began to plan a Black History Month event for which the entire school could participate and enjoy.

When students returned from their winter break, they saw approximately 75 photos of Black leaders arranged on the bulletin boards in the hallway outside their classrooms. Staff began to notice students stand-

ing around the boards and whispering to one another about the photos. Some even asked for additional information and spent time engaging in independent research! Because the staff had

each class would choose one Black history leader as a hero to research and present in a "quilt square" format to be included in a schoolwide Black History Month paper quilt. In addition, all classes would present something about their hero to the entire school using multimedia or other arts on February 28, Black History EXPO Day.



**Leomene Jean Louis, as Defilee La Folle, in the HMSC Black History Expo.**

recently participated in a staff paper quilt activity as an idea for a student literacy project, we decided to use the quilt idea as a model for creating a student-developed paper quilt commemorating Black leaders; this activity would tie in well with the larger event.

Near the end of January, students were informed that

## A Teacher's Perspective

*By Christine Doret*

It all started after the students saw the colorful pictures of Black heroes hanging in the hallway. The sparkling images captured their attention and they started asking questions. Since the class was planning to make a presentation on one of the historical figures, we decided to take a tour together to look up at the pictures. I explained to them how each of these people had contributed to history. As a result, they all agreed to present on Rosa

Parks.

First, I gathered information on Rosa. I wrote a lesson plan focusing mainly on reading. The students read a short version of Rosa's biography. For activities I made a list of questions where they had to extract the answers from the reading as a group. For lower-level students,

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## Black History Month...

*Continued from page 15*

I used cloze exercises. Another activity we did was tracing cities and states on the map; we chose places of importance to the life of Rosa Parks.

Making a quilt square out of the chosen heroes was another part of the project. When it was time to make the quilt, I brought in scissors, papers, glue, rulers, and a picture of Rosa. The class had about 16 students and our task was to create one 18" x 11" piece of a quilt. In order to get everyone involved, I grouped

was time to expose themselves to these kinds of activities. I explained that later on in life they might face circumstances where they would have to talk in front of a large audience. After this, everyone was willing to participate. One of my colleagues suggested that I do a play on Rosa's arrest. We created a scene where Rosa refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. I figured the best way for them to be confident was to use PowerPoint presentation. On the day of the event, a few of them presented slides with pictures and accom-

My pre-GED class first thought of Langston Hughes. They started to read poems and short fiction by this famous Harlem renaissance writer. But suddenly, one student mentioned Jean Michaelle, the governor general of Canada, and asked, "Why don't we do it on her instead?" Since we were working already on Langston Hughes, I didn't see how they were going to switch to someone else. But the student went on to explain how interesting this lady was and how she went from being born in Haiti to becoming the governor general of this giant country, Canada. I asked them how they felt about doing the project on Jean Michaelle. They did not mind switching, especially since they couldn't understand some of the poems by Langston Hughes. "Well, it's your project," I told them. So we switched. They started doing research and writing paragraphs about her as assignments.

The pre-GED class had a big responsibility; they had to put the quilt together. They had to gather materials and "quilt squares" from all the classes to put the big paper quilt together. A pattern from a real "drunkard's path" quilt was scanned and printed onto paper to use as a border. They collected the materials from the classes and on a Thursday they put it together. It was interesting to see the students joking and laughing while putting the quilt together.

## Engaging Literacy Students in the EXPO

*By Sara Jorgenson*

I introduced my literacy level class to Black History

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*I grouped students in pairs. It created a warm, friendly, and learner-centered atmosphere.*

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students in pairs. It created a warm, friendly, and learner-centered atmosphere. They had to measure the length and the width of the paper to come up with the right size. I modeled one for the whole class. They divided the chores among themselves. One measured and cut the paper, another one glued the picture accordingly and so forth. Finally, each pair created a quilt square. Afterward the class chose two judges who picked the best one based on the boldness, size, and color.

For days students rehearsed for the big day. At first, they were nervous about a school-wide presentation. They thought they were doing their presentation in class. When I announced the EXPO, they panicked. None of them wanted to be part of the presentation. I told them I felt it

panying writing in their own words about the event.

## Well, It's Your Project!

*Saul Augustin*

I first started by making my students aware of what the teachers were working on in preparation for Black History Month, simply to inspire them. I told them that the teachers were making a staff paper quilt that contained a picture of each teacher with a little something about the teacher. This quilt was hanging on the bulletin board in the hallway so each student could locate the teachers in the Center and read about them. I let them know that the students were going to make something like that also, but it was going to be a combination of each class's own project, and it was going to be about Black leaders.



## Black History Month...

*Continued from page 16*

Month by reading children's book entitled, *The Show Way*, by Jacqueline Woodson. The book invoked discussion about quilts, symbolism, and The Underground Railroad and set the tone for the project while building students' background knowledge about Black history in America. Dialogue about quilts ensued and the images of Black people of distinction displayed in our halls sparked interest about Black History Month. The entire class

took a good long look at the photos on the bulletin boards in our hallways. Students took notes on the Black leaders they wanted to learn more about. As a class we came up with a long list of those we might study for the six weeks before the Black History Month EXPO.

After examining the bulletin boards, my class had an initial secret ballot vote to decide on the Black hero we would study; Barack Obama was the winner. Just about everyone in the class was excited to learn about this talented, educated, grand orator, someone with a winning shot at the presidency.

First I purchased multiple copies of an easy biography of Barack Obama intended for children but suitable for adults.

The biography gave students an overview of Obama's life and the background knowledge they needed to participate with confidence. We reviewed the information with handouts I created, including vocabulary puzzles, matching activities,

sition on immigration, which remained a focus for the class. In addition to connecting to Black History Month, the experience exposed students in some depth to a relevant current event: our next president. As a result of our discussions, students agreed to

watch at least one debate.

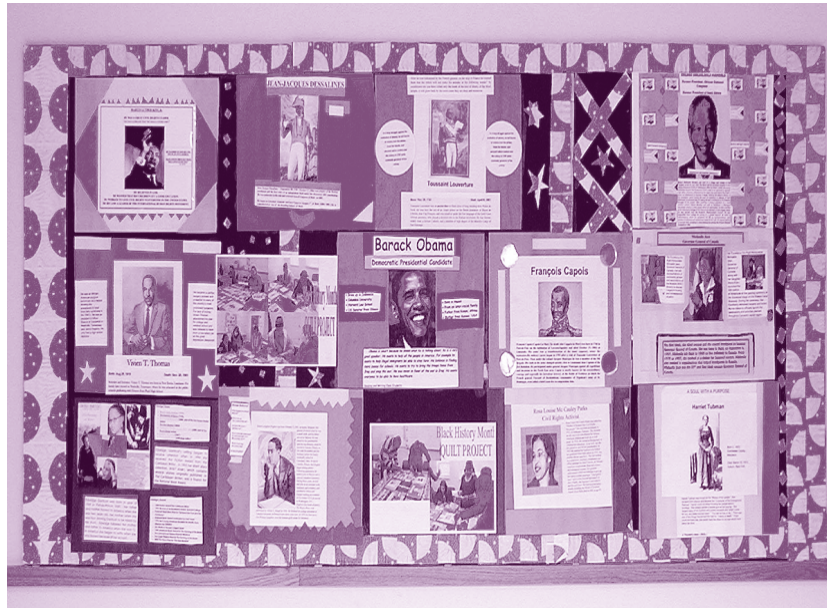
Over the weeks we also spent time on map skills, locating important places in Obama's life. Students learned about map directions and were able to tell one another where Obama was born in relation-ship to Boston. Continents, countries,

states, and cities were discussed as well.

The deadline for our class quilt-square was rapidly approaching. I asked if anyone was interested and directed them to the teachers' staff "quilt" to get ideas. One student volunteered to put our "Obama" quilt square together with me after class.

She chose to use a copy of the cover of the book we read about Obama with his smiling face for the center and used several important facts about his life that we had discussed and read repeatedly in class. She typed them and cut them out to arrange on the 11"x 18" paper. This made it easy for the rest of the class to read our quilt square

*Continued on page 18*



**Black History Month Quilt at the HMSC**

and other exercises based on the book, designed to elicit written responses. Those who read the book independently were able to complete book reports.

I also handed out Obama fact sheets in different levels of reading difficulty. After the fact sheets we read short paragraphs about Obama's position on issues. Students chose an issue of interest to them such as health care, immigration, racism, education, and so on. They read and summarized with a partner, then presented their discoveries back to the entire group. This took multiple sessions to complete because students were not familiar with much of the news about Obama. The students were most interested in his po-



## Black History Month...

*Continued from page 17*

and feel a sense of ownership of it because the words were familiar.

Finally, we had to get ready for the EXPO. My class was worried about how we would present our part and had a hard time coming up with ideas. I suggested an interview with Obama. That got a lot of laughs and students joked, "Sure, let's invite him to the Center and Hilary Clinton too!" We went through about five different students playing the part of "Obama" while the rest of the class developed interesting questions to ask. This took a week of revisions, and you could not hear the shy students as they read their questions. We needed to rehearse. I got our microphone set up in the classroom with the chairs aligned just how it would be at the EXPO. I prepared the questions in the order each student would ask them to "Obama." To help students develop ease and confidence, we practiced the interview at least three times in class before the EXPO.

The EXPO itself was hilarious—at least when "Obama," a Dominican student, showed up. Dressed in a suit and tie, "Obama" displayed a political flair for moving the crowds. He waved and smiled and hugged in between all the questions—planned and unplanned—that were asked, until the "secret service person" whisked him out while the entire school erupted in laughter. I said to myself,

"This is how learning should be more often: fun, hysterical, challenging, and imparting hope."

*Heidi Herrick is the communication and data coordinator at the HMSC. She can be reached at <heidi\_herrick@ccab.org>.*

*Christine Doret is an ESOL level I teacher, counselor, and program manager at the HMSC. She can be reached at <christine\_doret@ccab.org>.*

*Saul Augustin is an ESOL II and pre-GED teacher at the HMSC. He can be reached at <saul\_augustin@ccab.org>.*

*Sara Jorgenson is a literacy teacher and program director at the HMSC. She can be reached at <sara\_jorgenson@ccab.org>.*

## Resources

*Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*  
Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard  
New York: Random House, 2000

*Escaping Slavery: Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*  
[www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=127](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=127)

*The Quilts of Gees Bend*  
[www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/](http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/)

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## Massachusetts Adult Literacy Hotline

Free information on GED, ESOL, literacy, and citizenship classes for adults offered throughout Massachusetts. Information online at

**[www.sabes.org/hotline](http://www.sabes.org/hotline)**

Call 1-800-447-8844, seven days a week, 6 a.m. to midnight.



# We All SCORE: Employment Education at the Dukes County House of Corrections

BY KATY UPSON

The Reentry Initiative Project at the Dukes County House of Corrections located on Martha's Vineyard helps inmates return to productive citizenship after they complete their sentences. The goals of the project are to lower sentence time, to increase probation time, and to increase public safety.

Helping inmates find life supporting work is also a major tool for reducing recidivism. One extremely important piece to our work has been with local community partnerships, such as our collaboration with the Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE).

SCORE is a nationwide organization of volunteer professionals dedicated to providing free, confidential job counseling to clients. We contacted the island counselor, Bob Iadicicco, and his fellow counselors, Robert Fokos and Art Flathers, to see if they could work within the jail as an employment resource for our inmates.

Originally I had little idea of what might happen by inviting SCORE into the jail; neither did they. We have since learned that every personal connection to the outside world offers another network opportunity for the inmate, and this support can go a long way toward making a productive reentry a reality.

Approximately 90 days before release, we introduce an inmate to a team of two SCORE counselors. They examine the inmate's job experience, assess his skills, review his expectations

upon his release, and coach his presentation skills. Sometimes it is obvious that an inmate will not return to his past profession. Highly educated professionals can lose credentials or licenses, making this transition very challenging. For these individuals, a lot of retooling must occur before they are ready for release. Those in vocational trades can more easily transition back into a system that is familiar.

As the education coordinator, I step back and let the experts from SCORE work with inmates to make things happen. The re-education can be intense; the SCORE focus is to recognize potentials and skills and to blend them with past experience. Volunteers tutor inmates through mock job interviews, resume writing, and achievement analysis. They assist with job research plans and the difficult cold calls. As the program has evolved, two learning strands have evolved: one for the inmate, the other for the community and SCORE volunteers.

Following one session, Bob Iadicicco said, "Usually we don't get this close to clients, it's not this intense . . . We've tried to personalize each client and to gain trust. It's been a different experience from our usual business counseling."

Robert Fokos added, "We think of ourselves as a support service to the general public, we don't generally think of the people in jail. The jail population has been excluded from our work because nobody has ever

brought it up—not until you called us." Art Flathers sees the inmate as lacking the self-confidence to make good decisions. After working with Art, an inmate reported, "He asked me to list my accomplishments; I did not think I had any. But when I thought about it, I realized that I did, and I began to think I could do something good with my life."

"I learned to say 'I need a job,' another inmate reported. "When I held up the mirror to my face and said my name and asked for a job, it felt strange. When I saw myself, it was not me; then I realized that it was. I learned to smile while I spoke, to hold my shoulders back, and to make eye contact. Other inmates have a hard time in the mock interviews when asked about their incarceration, or gaps within their resume. It can be very difficult for inmates to explain what has happened to them. But through the Reentry Initiative, they have learned skills to address this difficult area.

Robert Fokos confided to me, "People ask me why I do this and how I handle the experience. It's simple: I come in and meet people . . . I try to separate what they have done from the person in front of me. I concentrate on the positive and do the best I can to help them improve their lives."

*Katy Upson is the education coordinator at the Dukes County House of Corrections. She can be reached at <kupson\_600@comcast.net>.*

# What's New about the New Citizenship Test?

By LYNNE WEINTRAUB

Students who send applications to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) after October 1, 2008, will face a redesigned citizenship test. (Those who apply before October 1st, but have interviews after October 1st can choose either the current test or the new one.) As is currently the case, the test will be administered at the time of the interview, and students will be told immediately whether they pass or fail. Here is a brief description of what students can expect to see in the new test.

## What Does the New Test Look Like?

The current test has been revised and standardized—but it's not a radical transformation. Students will still have a list of 100 study questions. They'll be asked 10 oral questions and will be required to answer 6 of them correctly to pass. One new wrinkle is that for many of the questions, there are multiple possible correct answers. USCIS study materials will offer several "right" answers, but students need to produce only one (in some cases, several) of the possible options to get the question right. Much of the civics content that we currently teach remains unchanged. Some topics have been refocused, and a few new topics are being introduced. For example, the new question list has fewer questions about the flag, but new questions on U.S. geography have been added.

The literacy test has also undergone minor revisions. For the reading component,

students will be given a civics related question on paper, such as "Who was the first president?" and asked to read the question aloud. For writing, the examiner will dictate a full-sentence answer to the initial question. The student is expected to write what he or she hears: for example, "Washington was the first president." (Note: Students do not need to know the answer to the question—they simply have to write the dictated sentence correctly.) USCIS study materials will not provide the actual literacy test questions and answers, but instead is offering a word list that students need to master in order to read the questions and perform the dictation task. As with the current literacy test, students who are unable to write the first dictated sentence will have a chance to try again with a second and third sentence before they would receive a failing score. Examiners will evaluate students' responses using a rubric supplied by USCIS (and designed by a panel of language educators selected by TESOL).

Examiners will continue to assess students' oral proficiency based on responses to questions about their applications. Examiners will be given some suggestions on how to word these questions in plain English (and some guidelines for determining whether an applicant's performance meets the "high beginning" standard). Unfortunately, USCIS has declined to share these suggested rewordings with practitioners, but a study guide will offer key vocabulary words to help students prepare

for the interview.

## Is It a Better Test?

The rationale for revising the test was to make it fairer (meaning that every applicant in every location would face the same level of difficulty) and more meaningful (i.e., not just an exercise in reciting trivia). It has also been emphasized repeatedly that USCIS is not aiming to make the new test more difficult than the current one. To what extent has the test redesign project succeeded with these objectives? The revised civics and literacy tests have been standardized to a greater degree than the current test is. However, since the speaking (interview) test will not change significantly, it is unclear whether future applicants will experience a genuinely more uniform and fair administration of this particular test component. The new literacy test items (developed by the TESOL committee) do appear more meaningful and fair (in terms of levels of difficulty) than the current test. Are the newly released civics questions more "meaningful" than the current ones? Will the new test be more difficult than the current one? Opinions about this vary. Take a look at the pilot test questions at <[www.uscis.gov/newtest](http://www.uscis.gov/newtest)> and you can decide for yourself.

*Lynne Weintraub coordinates a library literacy program for immigrants in Amherst, MA. She can be reached at her citizenship educator blog at <<http://citizenshipnews.us>>.*



# From Oral to Silent Reading

By MARIA MAZZAFERRO

For the beginning level reader, transitioning from reading aloud to reading silently is a giant leap beset with dangers without a safety net: the dangers of possible miscues, mispronunciations, misinterpretations, and unfamiliar words.

As teachers we want every reading experience to reenforce the new reader's confidence in the ability to make good sense of text, not to diminish it. In stating a preference for reading aloud over reading silently, new adult readers frequently ask, and it's a valid question: "But how will I know I'm saying it right?" My reply is, "Well, maybe you won't know, but you have to start to trust yourself and I have to show you how."

I knew from trying that confronting new readers with a long page of text and expecting them to plunge in and read to themselves was frustrating for them and unsatisfactory for me. I had to find a way to ease them into silent reading.

## Creating Suspense

I now provide short reading selections with easy, basic vocabulary and an interesting story line that continues from one day (or one reading period) to the next. Continuing the same story line provides continuity and context for what students are reading and also creates anticipation about what will happen next. This kind of approach also shows students what more experienced readers do when they read a whole book.

To accomplish this method, I begin by taking a story and breaking it down into passages of only five sentences each, typed in large font (16 point), numbered, and triple spaced between lines. This creates a lot of "white space" on the page and does not appear too daunting. The silent reading assignment fills about a half sheet of paper. I introduce the reading by identifying any words that might present stumbling blocks

can also mark any words they want because we will be revisiting the passage more than once!

I give students about five minutes to read the sentences; we then discuss the answer to the guiding question as well as any details they recall. To conclude, we read all the lines aloud as a group and individually. This reading aloud gives them the opportunity to hear the words pronounced and to internalize the correct pronunciation.

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*I encourage students not to let one word stand in the way of finishing the passage. As we know, this is a difficult thing for new readers to do.*

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and putting them on the board in advance, eliciting a definition that fits the context. I also give them a "reading for a purpose" task, suggesting that as they read, they look for specific information.

## Guiding Questions

For example, I might ask them to think about why a main character in the reading is angry. Giving students a purpose for reading helps them to focus on getting meaning from the text as a whole. I encourage students not to let one word stand in the way of finishing the passage. As we know, this is a difficult thing for new readers to do. Students

As students get more comfortable with this process, I increase the number of sentences to about ten or more for a selection. I still use a large font but I double space instead of triple space so the reading fills a whole page. To keep things manageable I fold the paper in half so they don't have too many sentences to overwhelm them. Of course, students can look ahead to see what happens next if they want to, but we still concentrate on five to eight lines per reading. Later, I reduce the font to 14 point, eliminate the numbers, and type in paragraph form.

*Continued on page 22*

## From Oral to Silent...

*Continued from page 21*

The story I have been using is a spin-off of *Two for the Road* by Roseanne Keller (New Readers Press, 1979). I write one installment at a time; each installment features Annie, an independent woman in her work and in her love life! My class meets three times a week; the silent reading occurs twice a week.

We are still in the early stages of silent reading practice, but we are progressing. Because they have become familiar with the format, students are comfortable with my request that they read something to themselves. For the beginning reader, comprehending what is read silently is a test of confidence, and developing that confidence requires instruction, guidance, practice, and patience.

*Maria Mazzaferro teaches at Read/Write/Now in Springfield, MA. She can be reached at <lovechio@surfglobal.net>.*

## Teachable Moments

By CAROLYN SADEH

At the Community Education Project in Holyoke I teach a level II ESOL class. As my background is in theater improvisation, I often work with what comes up in class spontaneously, and welcome “teachable moments” as opportunities to address students’ concerns. Below are two examples of unplanned, but valuable, lessons we shared.

### Gory English

One day we were working with —Wh questions. Students were beginning to understand the change in sentence structure from statement to question and the verb–subject relationship.

As students were practicing questions with one another, one student was getting frustrated. The other students began teasing her by continuing to ask her questions. Someone asked, “What are you thinking?” She replied, “I want to kill the teacher.” I knew she was really

frustrated with the lesson, so I decided to try and diminish her anxiety by improvising and using her response. I said, “Great, let’s write a story about that.” I got them to dictate a story spontaneously while I wrote it down.

Illeana, the student who made the statement said, “I don’t want to be the one (in the story) to kill the teacher. I think Spiri should do it.” Spiri, a cook from Mexico, became the main character. After we completed the story, I asked the class how they felt about publishing it in *Field Notes*. They said it was OK. I felt it was OK as well, since the story allowed Illeana to address her frustration creatively and to be supported by other students.

The story “The Perfect Crime,” printed on the next page, is a bit gory, but it’s a brilliant little tale of “getting knowledge.” Digest the teacher and the language and you’ve got the power.

### Diomedes’ Story

As I continued with the —Wh lesson, I had students interview each other. As one of the students, Diomedes, started to answer the model interview questions, the students got interested in his story and started asking more and more questions. I wrote his story on newsprint as it was unfolding. Then I asked Diomedes if he would take what we had written from these questions and use it to write a brief autobiography and publish it in *Field Notes*. He agreed. His story, “In the Hands of the Lord,” is printed on the next page.

*Carolyn Sadeh teaches at the Community Education Project in Holyoke. She can be reached at <foolplaysadeh@verizon.net>.*

## Resources for Teaching Silent Reading

*A conversation with FOB: Modified sustained silent reading*  
[www.ncsall.net/?id=990](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=990)

Krashen, S. (1993). *The power of reading. Insights from the research.* Englewood, Co.: Libraries Unlimited.

*Implementing an extensive reading program and library for adult literacy learners*  
[www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/RFL/October2007/rodrigo/rodrigo.pdf](http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/RFL/October2007/rodrigo/rodrigo.pdf)

## Student Writing

Please see Caorlyn Sadeh's article, *Teachable Moments*, on the previous page for an introduction to these pieces of student writing from her ESOL class.

### In the Hands of the Lord

My name is Diomedes Calle Cruz. I am from Chiclayo, Peru. My father's name is Gerardo Calle and my mother is Matilde Cruz. I have three brothers. My mother died when I was four years old. Then my family was divided because my father could not stand by their economic situation. I went to live with my uncle, where I was educated. There I learned to love God and appreciate my life.

I was fifteen years old when I felt the desire to become a priest. In 1978 two priest missionaries of Bridgeport, Ct. came to work with the poorest people of my city. Their testimony gave me courage to become a Catholic priest, to serve my people.

When I finished high school I went to the University to study philosophy and theology for eight years to become a priest. I was ordained on June 29, 1994 and my first mission was in a village of the jungle Bellivista. I worked there for three years. Then I went to work for the people of Pucara where I was appointed pastor for four years. I then spent one year in a parish in Lima.

After that I came to the United States. Actually I am working for the Springfield Diocese as a Catholic priest in the parish

of Blessed Sacrament and All Souls Church with the Hispanic community. I also study English at Community Education Project in Holyoke. Chiclayo is now an important city because the oldest temple of the Americas was discovered there. I thank God for having me come to this country to give my services to a community full of faith.

I enjoy sharing and working with different nationalities and to learn the American customs.

### The Perfect Crime

Created by Illeana, Spiry, Jerry, Yomi, Iris, Jose, Ivalise, Margaritta, and Gisella

Spiri will wait for the teacher outside of the building. He will kill her with a knife. (Note: At this point everyone in the class was aghast saying, "No we can't kill you," and I said, "Why not?" so they went on.) Then he cut up her body into little pieces and mixed them in bread dough. That night he bakes it in the oven. The next day he brings the bread to class. He gave everybody a piece and after we ate it all the students speak perfect English.



## Summer Cleaning!

We hate to waste postage and paper, so we try to reduce the number of returned *Field Notes* copies by keeping our mailing list updated. Can you help us? Take a minute to delete names of staff who no longer work with you. Also add the names of staff who want to get *Field Notes*. You can respond through email or snail mail. Use additional paper if necessary. Email Leah Peterson at <lpeterson@worlded.org>. Gracias.

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## Upcoming Themes for *Field Notes*

### Fall/winter 2008

Transitions from ABE to college, training, or work.

**Call by: August 1**

**Submit by: August 15**

### Spring 2009

The revised ABE English Language Arts Curriculum Framework

**Call by: December 1**

**Submit by: December 15**

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