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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Let Them Choose
Derek Kalchbrenner
cover

Hip Mama
Lenore Balliro
4

Diploma Plus
Alex Hoffinger
5

Mass AAL Unites Students
Ernest Best
8

YouthBuild Boston Builds Skills
Wesley Robertson
9

Help! Managing Behavior in the
ABE Classroom
Wendy Mongeau
10

In Their Own Words
Elizabeth Zachry
11

State of the State
Lenore Balliro
16



SABES
System for Adult Basic Education Support

Massachusetts Department of Education

Let Them Choose

BY DEREK KALCHBRENNER

I read my first Danielle Steele novel recently. It came recommended by a young woman in my largely youth GED program at Jobs ForYouth in Boston. Since it is rare for my students to read, let alone enjoy reading, I eagerly accepted the offer to borrow her copy of *The Long Road Home*. Though I wasn't even moderately impressed with the book, I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations I had with my student about it. That, of course, is the main reason teachers read books that their students are reading.

"You've only read that far?" was a typical response from her when I told her how much I'd read the previous night. It was clear that she was riveted by the story of an abused girl who struggles to find acceptance and love as an adult.

Jobs for Youth (JFY) is a workforce development agency that offers ABE/GED and job skill training for youths and adults in the Greater Boston area. Since coming to JFY in 1993, I have worked to turn my bored or reluctant youth readers into avid ones. To call my students reluctant readers is something of a stretch, because it implies that they read on their own once in awhile, which often isn't the case. This situation is consistent nationwide. In his book *How to Make Your Child a Reader for Life*, Paul Knopp reports that only 20 per cent of teenagers read for pleasure. Of course, many never read for pleasure because reading is a chore for them. They seldom get to choose the books they read, and even when they do their choices are limited to titles on "Best Books for Young Adults" lists compiled by adults. Many students tell me they have no favorite author or have never read a book they enjoyed.

Continued on page 3

FOREWORD

The fastest growing population in Massachusetts adult basic education is the 16-to-18-year-old student group. Over the last year, enrollment in this age range increased from 3.2 per cent to 6.7 per cent of total enrollment, according to data from Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) at the Massachusetts Department of Education. Many people in the field speculate that the implementation of MCAS tests in the public schools has contributed to the rise in youth participation in ABE classes. Whatever the reasons for this increase, it is clear that young students returning to school in an adult basic education arena have their own interests, needs, and goals. Some of these goals overlap and intersect with a more mature population, some do not.

The articles submitted for this issue of *Field Notes* reflect some practices and approaches that resonate with youth. For example, Derek Kalchbrenner at Jobs for Youth in Boston encourages teachers to let their students select their own books, even if the titles do not represent "good literature." Allowing students to start with reading material that is compelling to them, Kalchbrenner claims, better ensures that they will go on to become avid readers. He supports his claim with his own experience and research from the field.

Alex Hoffinger describes how teachers at the Diploma Plus Program, developed and managed by the Center for Youth Development at the Commonwealth Corporation, engage students through their performance-based approach. Student-initiated projects—from running a college fair to researching the events of September 11 and after—illustrate how teachers who are sensitive to youth concerns can successfully reach program and student goals. At YouthBuild Boston, students not only participate in academics and life skills, they also actively learn construction skills by rehabbing abandoned property around Greater Boston. Youth benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to their education; the community benefits with new sources of low-income housing.

Elizabeth Zachry summarizes a research project focusing on why students return to adult basic education after dropping out of school. Though not all of her research participants are young students, her report shares insights on the many reasons people want a second chance at their high school education.

Wendy Mongeau's article on managing behavior in the ABE classroom also applies to a larger audience than youth. She shares concrete classroom-tested guidelines for dealing with problematic behavior in class.

Finally, Ernest Best gives us an overview of the Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (Mass AAL) and highlights some of their recent outstanding projects.

As always, we welcome feedback of any kind. Call Lenore Balliro, editor, at 617-482-9485 or email <lballiro2000@yahoo.com>.

Field Notes Mission Statement and Editorial Policy



Mission

Field Notes is a quarterly, theme-based newsletter designed to share innovative and reliable practices, resources, and information relating to adult basic education. 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 adult basic education practitioners (ABE, ESOL, GED, ADP, Family Literacy, Corrections, 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, and support staff are welcome to write for *Field Notes*.

Our Funder

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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 <lballiro2000@yahoo.com>, 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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Let them Choose

Continued from page 1

This situation is daunting, but working with youths gives you the opportunity to be the first to put a good book in the hands of a teenager that he or she actually enjoys. Mary Leonhardt, who has taught high school English for over 25 years, writes, "I've watched teenagers have their first experience with an enthralling book, and it was literally an earth-shattering experience for them . . . And after they read that first wonderful book, they are really open to finding another one." (Leonhardt, 1997).

Choose Carefully

I have seen this as well and that is why I am a firm believer that student-chosen, independent reading should be a part of every school, and I have been fortunate to work with professionals who agree. In my classes at JFY, we make time in class for free reading and make regular trips to the library. We know reading and discussing books they enjoy helps engage youths in school and also helps them achieve their goals. My Danielle Steele fan, for example, has won many attendance awards and is one of our best English students.

The goal with reluctant or inexperienced readers, once they've developed necessary reading skills, is to get them interested in reading. Youths need to be so absorbed in books that they forget everything else except what they are reading. Leonhardt also suggests that helping students form a reading habit is the first step toward turning reluctant readers into avid ones (Leonhardt, 1997).

This has academic benefits as well. Reading popular fiction is an excellent way to increase reading speed, to learn vocabulary, and to improve comprehension skills.

Leonhardt points out that youth must love reading to become excellent readers and this will only happen if they do lots of reading.

Practical Suggestions

In what follows, I offer some suggestions to help you engage youth (and adult) students in reading. But be forewarned: I am going to suggest authors that make some English teachers shudder.

1. Choose the first book carefully: Many youths are already jaded toward reading. The wrong book can exacerbate those feelings. If you've encouraged your students

take your students to the library and help them find something they would enjoy reading.

Popular Authors for Youth

Below are some authors and titles that have come recommended by other youths.

STEPHEN KING (*The Shining*): Leonhardt says simply, "King should get a gold medal for helping so many young people love reading" (Leonhardt, 1997). King is a horror writer who also has several short story collections (*Night Shift*, *Skeleton Crew*) that may be better

*Choose the first book carefully:
Many youths are already jaded
toward reading.*

to choose a book for something like a free reading period and a student doesn't readily choose one, give that particular student's interests a lot of thought before helping her choose a book.

2. Don't denigrate students' choices—if you do, you'll make them feel bad about their choices, themselves, and reading. If you have a student who reads nothing but Dean Koontz horror novels, you can certainly suggest other authors, but don't put down his favorite writer. Avid readers eventually move on to more mature works.

3. Don't force them to read—schools do this enough. If you have a free-reading period in your school, don't insist that a student read a book during it. Have magazines and newspapers available as well.

4. Allow for a wide choice in reading material. If you don't have a large collection of books,

for youths who struggle to finish a whole book. Young Adult sections of libraries usually have prominent displays of his books. Also recommended: Dean Koontz (*Midnight*), Robin Cook (*Coma*), and Patricia Cornwall (*Black Notice*).

V. C. ANDREWS: Andrews is a young adult best-selling author with many series to her name. The first and most popular is *Flowers in the Attic*. Andrews' books portray young people in horrible family situations and deal with child abuse, incest, murder, and other atrocities. Also recommended: Lois Duncan (*Killing Mr. Griffin*), and Laurie Halse Anderson (*Speak*).

DANIELLE STEEL: I can't count the number of students who have told me they've stayed up late and gotten up early to read one of Steele's

Continued on page 4

Let Them Choose

Continued from page 3

stormy romance novels. Steele has some short novels such as *The Promise*, which might be better for a reader who hasn't read many complete books. Also recommended: Sidney Sheldon (*Master of the Game*).

TERRY MCMILLAN (*Waiting to Exhale*): Books with strong, independent African-American women as protagonists. Also recommended, Bebe Moore Campbell (*Brothers & Sisters*), Walter Dean Myers (*Monster*) and Eric Jerome Dickey (*Cheaters*). Dickey is a relatively new author who is enormously popular with my students.

TOM CLANCY: *His Debt of Honor* concludes with a disaster frighteningly similar to the September 11 tragedy. For students interested in espionage, war, and battling terror-

ism. Also recommended: Clive Cussler (*Dragon*).

THOMAS HARRIS (*The Silence of the Lambs*): Very absorbing books for youths interested in criminal investigations. Also recommended: Robert Parker (the Spenser series).

Derek Kalchbrenner is program manager at Jobs For Youth in Boston, where he has worked as a teacher, coordinator, and manager since 1995. He can be reached at <dkalchbrenner@jfy.net.org>.



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Leonhardt, M. (1997). *99 Ways To Get Kids To Love Reading*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Leonhardt, M. (1993). *Parents Who Love Reading, Kids Who Don't*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Carter, B. (2000). *Best Books for Young Adults*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions.

Also Recommended

Lipson, E. R. (2000). *The New York Times Parents' Guide to the Best Books for Children*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Web site <www.ala.org/yalsa>.

Hip Mama: A 'Zine for Young Moms

BY LENORE BALLIRO

Hip Mama was developed and is still edited by a former welfare Mom. Ariel Gore, a single mother, wanted to reach an audience of readers who "don't have to do the whole yuppie thing just because they have kids." Her magazine explicitly integrates politics and parenting.

The magazine includes personal narratives, book and music reviews, sex and parenting pieces, commentaries, news, and "Girl-Mom" (resources and discussion for young parents). Recent articles include "Protest Primer" and "Just Say No to Genetically Altered Foods."

The *Hip Mama* Web site has lots of features that expand the magazine's offerings. "Hip Talk," a forum on parenting and related issues,



offers topics like Education and Ideology, From Here to Maternity, Nourishment, Organizing, and Children Growing Older, among others.

Hip Mama would make thought-provoking reading material for family literacy programs and programs for teen Moms. It's also good reading for those of us continually trying to balance our roles as we work, play, grow, and parent. You can check out the *Hip Mama* Web site for ordering information at <www.hipmama.com>.

Lenore Balliro is the editor of Field Notes. She can be reached by email at <lbaliro2000@yahoo.com>

Diploma Plus Engages Students

BY ALEX HOFFINGER

How can a program reengage youth who have given up on the traditional education system, either as dropouts or underachievers, in their learning and career pathway? What strategies can work with such young people who, after falling behind in high school, are now in their late teens or early twenties? These questions go to the heart of Diploma Plus, a program developed and managed by the Center for Youth Development and Education (CYDE) at the quasi-public Commonwealth Corporation. The program currently serves close to 700 youth at seven sites across Massachusetts and one in Maryland. Diploma Plus sites are a mix of small schools and alternative education programs that serve at-risk or previously out-of-school youth, including community-based high schools and redesigned GED programs that can now offer high school diplomas through agreement with local school districts.

Performance-Based Program

For several reasons, Diploma Plus has helped at-risk young people—particularly older youth—recommit to school, achieve academically, and transition to college or the workplace. First, the program is performance-based. Students can accelerate their progress toward a high school diploma by meeting explicit academic competencies and an array of challenging program requirements. This is opposed to a

“time-in-seat” or traditional course credit approach, which may take more time than the young person can or is willing to invest. Second, Diploma Plus emphasizes work on projects and other active learning approaches, which make academics more engaging and relevant. Third, the final stage of the model—called the “Plus Phase”—incorporates post-high



Diploma Plus students in Sarah Johnson's class at ABCD

school experiences that genuinely look and feel different from “regular” school. Among other things, students in the Plus Phase take college courses, participate in internships, and undertake major projects, all of which involve “adult-like” experiences and require students to assume greater responsibility for their learning.

Community Action Projects

Nowhere is the combination of active learning, relevance, and adult responsibility more evident than in the Community Action Project (CAP), one of three required projects in the Plus Phase of Diploma Plus. The CAP has several intended learning goals, among them:

- ◆ To encourage in students a sense of responsibility for the larger community and an understanding of the value of being proactive.
- ◆ To enable students to develop a sense of empowerment and have the satisfaction of doing something that is meaningful to others.
- ◆ To provide an opportunity for students to apply research and problem-solving skills in a real-world context and to gain experience working as part of a team.
- ◆ To help students learn about how the government and/or community organizations work, and ways to influence decision-makers whose decisions impact their community.

The CAP is well illustrated by examples from the fall of 2001 at two Diploma Plus sites, Action for Boston Community Development's (ABCD)University High School, and City Roots—South Boston.

At ABCD, teacher Sarah Johnson thinks it is essential for Plus Phase students to select their CAP topic. She gives students examples of different kinds of projects to choose from, often using current affairs as the jumping-off point. This fall, her students decided to focus on September 11th — what led up to the attack, its impact on young people directly affected by the tragedy, and how the nation and its citizens are responding.

As with previous CAPs, students made many decisions about particular activities and as such, the project was, in Sarah's words, a “moving target.” But she

Continued on page 6

Diploma Plus . . .

Continued from page 5

saw to it that the project had structure and academic depth. Among the project's assignments were these—a reflection piece and chronology about the events of September 11, a narrative from each student on "what is war," research into the historical roots of the "war on terrorism," study of federal and state government and their responses to the attacks, discussion of daily news briefings, a PowerPoint presentation about international support for the US-led coalition, letters to the editor, interviews with family members, and a daily journal.

As a group, the students decided their main goal was to educate the school community about the terrorist attacks and their aftermath. For culminating activities, students developed informational leaflets, designed and placed posters around the school, presented at meetings of the student body, and organized a debate addressing how the Septem-

ber 11 attacks impacted the ABCD school community.

College Fair

Meanwhile, at City-Roots—South Boston, Diploma Plus teachers Paul Markis and Mariel Beal guided students as they designed, planned, and hosted a college fair. Students generated this idea themselves, as they had been dissatisfied with college fairs they had previously attended. Here, as at ABCD, students had significant input into the project's direction, assignments, and activities, but the teachers provided structure and set overall expectations.

The students decided early on that the college fair should serve not just their fellow students, but also any interested youth from South Boston and other Diploma Plus sites. Students then brainstormed tasks and responsibilities, with Paul and Mariel providing feedback to fill in gaps. In the course of the project, students prepared a work plan and budget,

and then divided up into subteams to contact colleges and confirm their participation, conduct outreach to numerous youth-serving programs and centers, and publicize the college fair through posters, flyers, emails and press releases. After successfully hosting the event, students individually prepared a final report and presentation, which summarized the project as a whole, described their own contribution, and reflected on what they had learned.

As these examples show, the CAP works well for Diploma Plus students. They take on ambitious tasks, and in doing so, learn and accomplish a great deal. The CAP draws the best out of students because it is their project. Teachers guide it and set parameters, but students decide what issue they want to address and how they will serve their community.

The CAP is therefore like the other key Plus Phase activities, which ask students to apply their skills in adult settings. By doing so, the program meets students where they are— young adulthood. And in successfully completing Diploma Plus requirements, students demonstrate to themselves that they are indeed ready for the next step.

For more information about Diploma Plus, see the program's Web site at www.commcorp.org/cyde/dp.

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Summer 2002

*How I Got Into the Field of ABE
and Why I Stay There*

Call by: March 15

Submit by: April 1

Fall 2002

ABE Licensure

Call by: May 15

Submit by: June 15



State of the State

continued from page 16

44 percent cut. How did that happen? Last year, the line item appropriation for ABE was \$30.2 million. The legislature voted to increase that amount to \$34 million. That's the number that was officially recorded in the legislature's budget documents. When then-Governor Paul Cellucci vetoed the proposed increase, the line item was back to \$30 million. The legislature never took up the override and never updated the (\$34 million) on their books! When the legislature left only \$17 million in the ABE budget, they thought they were cutting 50 percent of the budget allocation of \$34 million. However, they actually cut \$13 million (30-17=13), so it was a cut of 44 percent. Whew.

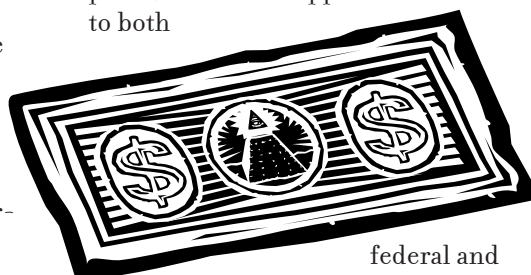
Successful Strategy

The ABE community staged an impressive, thorough campaign to restore funding. Continual pressure—in the form of rallies, calls, visits, letters, and emails—convinced legislators of the importance of ABE funding. This campaign illustrated that rallies alone—while vibrant in their collective appeal—are not enough to get the most effective political results. Students illustrated the importance of adult education services with life stories, putting a human face on ABE. "You are talking about all my dreams," one student implored to his representative. From November 29 through mid-December when the budget was amended, public outcry continued. A volunteer public policy committee organized an effective feedback mechanism, using email and Web sites. People were updated daily. As a result of this massive effort, where everybody across

the state did his or her part, Governor Swift, to her credit, laid the groundwork for restoring \$12.5 million to ABE through a supplemental budget she filed: First the legislature considered restoring \$10.1 million (90 percent of what we had to start the year) but was rapidly convinced to restore the full \$12.5 million (a 97.7 percent restoration!).

How the Cut Was Taken

The total cut—2.3 percent or \$700,000—has been applied by DOE/ACLS across all services: instructional, administrative, and SABES support. For equity purposes, the cut was applied to both



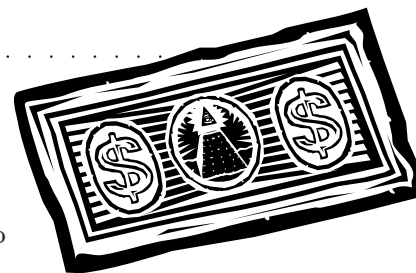
federal and state funded ACLS programs. This approach reduced cuts to 2 percent across the board including all instructional programs, SABES, the DOE/ACLS administration budget, etc. ACLS left it up to individual programs how to apply their cuts.

What's Ahead

The work is not over. This year's budget process is likely to proceed more quickly, since it is an election year. The Governor has filed her budget (House 1), which begins the FY 2003 budget process. In it she proposes that DOE/ABE receive \$32 million—a \$2.5 million increase. She also proposes a \$2.5 million appropriation for ABE services at Community College developmental education programs. Once the House and Senate craft their budgets, they will go to the conference committee for a vote, then to Governor Swift for approval and/or vetoes.

The ABE community must

continue its vigilance on budget issues. It's important to continue to educate elected officials about the value and integrity of the services we provide. Proactively, that means using media coverage whenever we can to highlight our students and their successes. Without strong and continual advocacy, the visibility of ABE and the needs of our students will inevitably be diminished.



Implications

The necessity for strong educational outreach and advocacy for our students has never been clearer. It's a good time to reflect on what it means to work within an educational arena whose students are marginalized from public discourse. Our students are immigrants, the working poor, single mothers on public assistance, refugees, high school dropouts. Part of our job responsibilities must, therefore, involve political action—that is, making sure that the work in ABE is visible, valued, and sufficiently funded so we can continue to do our work and students can continue to get the services they deserve. We need to prepare ourselves to again roll up our sleeves and work in solidarity for continued success.

Lenore Balliro, the editor of Field Notes, has worked in ABE for over 18 years.



Mass AAL Unites Students Across State

BY ERNEST BEST

During the recent state budget crisis, ABE services in Massachusetts were severely threatened. The power and importance of the adult learner in restoring budget cuts became more evident than ever. Literally thousands of students worked with their programs in making phone calls and even going to the State House to let their voices be heard about the importance of adult literacy in their lives. In addition to working with their programs directors and teachers, adult learners took it upon themselves, in an organized fashion, to play a major role in advocating for funds. This subsequently led to the successful restoration of nearly all of the funds that were cut.

The Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (Mass AAL) is an organization formed by current and former students of adult literacy programs, including Adult Basic Education, ESOL, and GED. Mass AAL is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services. The leadership of Bob Bickerton must be acknowledged in terms of his progressive thinking of the field of adult education and of the significant role that adult learners should play in the advancement of our field. His support helped to get Mass AAL off and running.

One of Mass AAL's purposes is to build student leadership by creating and implementing activities for adult learners statewide. These activities are intended to empower students and help them become more active citizens who can have a positive effect on their communities.

Outstanding Projects

In a recent project, Mass AAL

sponsored, in collaboration with Dr. Marcia Hohn of Northeast SABES, the Health-Focused Student Leadership Project. Grants were given out to a number of programs statewide. These grants are sponsored through a collaboration of SABES and the Mass AAL. The grants enabled students to carry out health projects. One of the

given the right conditions, adult learners will rise to the occasion and exceed anyone's expectations. It is Mass AAL's belief in the adult learner that compels us to continue our work.

Mass AAL Goals

Mass AAL is focusing on a number of goals:

They got doctors and nurses to volunteer on the van, and they themselves were trained to become intake workers.

most outstanding of these projects was based in the southeast SABES region.

Mobile Health Services

At the ACCCESS Program of Cape Cod Community College, adult learners obtained a mobile van supplied with medical equipment. They got doctors and nurses to volunteer on the van, and they themselves were trained to become intake workers. Residents bringing babies to the van received inoculations that would protect them from life-threatening diseases—some for the very first time! After the patients were seen they were led from the van into a health clinic. The learners got the van to park right out front. Residents, many for the first time, were now enrolled in the health care system. This project literally saved lives!

The Health-Focused Student Leadership Project has proven that

- ◆ To foster student leadership by helping to create student advisory councils in programs throughout the state.
- ◆ To help strengthen student advisory councils that already exist.
- ◆ To encourage adult learners to play a major role in informing the public and policymakers about the power and importance of adult literacy to our society.
- ◆ To assist adult learners in becoming active and effective citizens, making a positive impact on their communities.

Regional Meetings

In order to move our goals forward, Mass AAL is planning to hold regional meetings in each of the five SABES regions. After the regional meetings, a statewide adult learner conference is also planned. The reason for these

Continued on page 14

YouthBuild Boston

BY WESLEY ROBERTSON

Launched in 1990 with 28 young people in a church basement, YouthBuild Boston was the first replication of the YouthBuild model outside of New York. YouthBuild Boston is a private, nonprofit community-based program that teaches Boston's unemployed and unskilled young people to renovate abandoned buildings into affordable housing for low-income families. YouthBuild Boston offers these young people a chance to obtain the educational, occupational, social, and leadership skills they need to become economically self-sufficient.

YouthBuild Boston offers participants a multi-disciplinary academic, vocational, and job training program that addresses the needs and interests of participants through a core curriculum. The curriculum has an array of academic and vocational electives coupled with an extensive support network.

Academics and Job Training

YouthBuild Boston's program has two main components—the Academic Program and the Vocational Education and Job Training Program—through which students rotate in biweekly cycles, spending two weeks at the school site followed by two weeks at the work site. Both components focus heavily on applied learning and critical thinking and combining group learning with an individualized education plan tailored for each student.

The curriculum integrates academics, on-the-job training, vocational education and life skills.

Great efforts have been made to develop a math curriculum that uses relevant examples such as construction, budgeting, and finance problems to reinforce math skills. The reading and writing curriculum focuses on personal growth, cultural history, and community issues; the vocational electives encourage students to push themselves and broaden their skills base.



Students at YouthBuild Construction site. Photo by WesleyRobertson

YouthBuild Boston has two educational programs to help students. The first is our GED attainment program. This program teaches 18-to-24 year-old students the skills needed to pass the GED test. Classes are held to prep in the five subjects covered by the test as well as test-taking skills. Our high school diploma program is new. In conjunction with the Boston Public School's Boston Evening Academy, we are a part of the External Diploma Program (EDP) administered by the City of Boston. Through this program, we are able to offer diplomas to students over the age of 19.

Students start every day reading the newspaper. According to Instructor Brad Howard, "They always open right to the editorial page." Brad likes to use real life situations as examples for the classwork since he feels that this is

the key to keeping students interested and engaged. Students submit questions to create math quizzes and also keep journals of their work. These journals are divided into five sections so that when test time arrives, students can have quick access to their notes. YouthBuild Boston also uses computer software specifically designed to aid students in GED preparation.

Life Skills

All students also attend life skills classes during their school site cycle. Students who already have a diploma or GED are required to leave the work site to attend life skills classes. The curriculum for these classes is a rough outline to allow the counselors and instructors the ability to quickly address issues the students are having as they arise. Classes cover topics like substance abuse, leadership development, test-taking skills, stress management, conflict resolution, and positive motivation.

Vocational education classes, taught in our new Vocational Education Center, are closely linked to the type of work done on the work site. The vocational education class is used to give students the theory behind what they will be doing in the field. This instruction gives a greater depth and meaning to the practical work the students will find themselves doing on the job. According to Deputy Director Greg Mumford "Voc-Ed is to fine-tune what they get in the field."

Continued on page 10

Youthbuild. . .

Continued from page 9

Job Site

The heart of Youthbuild's program is the job site training. The job site offers students a practical experience of construction work. Students are actually working on rehab projects of buildings liened by the City of Boston. After completing Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and first aid training and certification, all trainees begin on the work site where they learn all phases of gut rehabilitation. Individual Education Plans (IEP) for each student detail competencies for the hands-on training program. Trainees meet with instructors every two months to evaluate their performance and measure competencies learned. Major sections of the IEP include orientation to carpentry, operation of power tools, operation of machinery, demolition, constructing foundations, floor framing, framing exterior walls, framing interior walls, framing ceilings and roofs, exterior finishing, interior finishing, and erecting staging. This work is done under the supervision of highly experienced professionals from the field.

In addition to creating housing that goes to low-income families, students also participate in monthly community service days. Past projects include building handicap access ramps, weatherizing homes for the elderly, and landscaping playgrounds at local schools. Past students are also responsible for the creation of the After School Drop-In Program, which serves children ages 7-14, that is also part of YouthBuild Boston.

Wesley Robertson is the administrative coordinator at YouthBuild Boston. He can be reached by email at <wrobertson@ybboston.org>.

Help! Managing Behavior in the ABE Classroom

BY WENDY MONGEAU

When I left elementary teaching to pursue ABE full-time, I figured that I had left behavior management problems behind me. Gone were the days of incessant chatting during lessons, breaking up arguments, mediating cliques, dealing with hostile behavior, etc. Or so I thought.

A classroom of adults can present a new range of behavioral problems, some of which echo my elementary teaching days. Looking around in my small morning group in September, for instance, I saw several issues immediately. One student whom I'll call "Lena" liked to tell me how to structure and teach lessons to cater more to her individual learning style. Another student I'll call "Antonio" was in a continuous mental fog, with selective listening habits which kept him about three steps behind everyone else as we transitioned to each new segment of class. "Mia" and "Giorgio" were often chatting while I taught the class, and "Marianne" wasted no time in sharing her general cynicism and bitterness about life, sometimes culminating in a hostile exchange with another student. At the very least, her tough-edged attitude could make her classmates uncomfortable.

Basic Social Rules

There are some basic social rules which, I believe, should govern all interactions between people—little people in elementary classrooms, big people in ABE classrooms, people on the street, and people in families. Since I can't

make the world conform to this behavioral "vision," I always try to establish some basic rules to regulate behavior in my own little corner of it—the classroom.

For instance: Don't interrupt someone who's speaking. Try to understand the other person's point of view. Be willing to share the teacher with other students who need help. Refrain from negative comments about other people and their socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. These guidelines for classroom behavior cannot be assumed on the part of the teacher. While some students may demonstrate such behaviors naturally, others will need teaching and reminders along these lines.

Some of these guidelines will inevitably arise on an ongoing basis, but you can address them at the beginning of the year and build a foundation for a respectful atmosphere. Try initiating a discussion in which you ask students which behavioral and social rules they consider important within the classroom. Then brainstorm together, adding a couple of your own, and compose a list. The list need not be exhaustive. You can post the rules in a noticeable, decorative format on a prominent wall of your classroom and refer to them as necessary.

The students will likely be more invested in following rules that they helped to create as opposed to rules that you impose on them.

These rules will not prevent every sticky situation. In some instances you will need to have a

Continued on page 13

In Their Own Words: Why Adults Return to School

BY ELIZABETH ZACHRY

Why do adults return to the classroom after being so discouraged in high school? What is their experience once they enroll in an ABE program? Have their perceptions of themselves and the classroom changed since they were adolescents? These questions, among others, formed the foundation of my inquiry into how adult students perceive and interpret their lives in the context of their schooling.

To accomplish this goal, I interviewed 12 adults participating in GED and pre-GED classes at ABCD LearningWorks, an adult learning center in downtown Boston. The participants were divided equally among men and women as well as by immigrant and native-born status. They were asked to answer 10 open-ended questions in which they were invited to compare their childhood educational experience with their experience now as an adult in school.¹

Their descriptions of high school reveal a complex picture of how their struggles with learning disabilities, unsupportive familial and peer pressures, and their own lack of interest in learning created a negative interaction with the school system. Students such as Roger and Phoebe reported stories detailing an inability to learn in the classroom and a desire to leave school rather than to waste their time. As Roger stated, "I wasn't learning, and the attention (from teachers) wasn't there. They were just passing us through."

For other students such as Rianna and Daniel, defiant behavior led to their absence from school. As Rianna explains, "I left school in the ninth grade. I was

expelled because I was always in trouble."

These students explained that their rebellious behavior in school was often a reaction to the restrictions that classroom instruction placed on their lives as well as a general lack of interest in learning what school had to teach.

Reasons for Returning

With these negative experiences, why would these students choose to return to school? Topping their list of reasons was a desire to improve themselves or their work opportunities. Nine of the 12 students I interviewed reported that they returned to school to advance their employment prospects or because they wanted to go to college. Rachel's

highlights, "When you go to jobs...if you have to read a lot of things—to be able to understand what I'm reading and be able to read it, you know, without feeling embarrassed because you don't know how to read things—and people judging you because you don't have strengths that they have from the things they might have learned when they was in school."

For many students, feelings of insecurity in job interviews or in job searching pushed them to complete their education. Rather than viewing themselves and their career prospects negatively, they sought to improve their academic skills by returning to school.

Additionally, six out of the 12 students argued that building their confidence was one of their pri-

As Donald put it, he came back to school to "not to be a fool—or let anyone call me a fool."

response reveals the situation of many students: "I didn't finish and get my school diploma at home—so I wanted to come and see if I could...make a change now. Some people ask you if you got your GED... You know, when you go to work, people ask if you finished high school." Roger emphasized this same issue, "I'm very limited as far as jobs. I did everything I can do ... I need a high school diploma or a GED to be able to tell people who I am." Other students emphasized the embarrassment involved in going in for work interviews without having a diploma. As Jill

many reasons for returning to school. For Phoebe and Jill, this took the form of feeling more comfortable in the society where they lived. Phoebe stated that she wanted to be "a smart member of society" while Jill stated, "I want to feel normal—not to feel like an outsider." Rianna mentioned that she "felt dumb" because she didn't know how to read and write and wanted the chance to "get [her] life back on track." As Donald put it, he came back to school to "not to be a fool—or let anyone call me a fool."

Continued on page 12

In Their Own Words . . .

Continued from page 11

Thus, for many students, not having completed their education made them feel less comfortable about their abilities. By returning to school, they hoped to feel more confident about their intelligence, develop a more positive self-image, and feel more comfortable interacting with their social world.

In tandem with their argument that school was strengthening their abilities, 11 of the 12 students interviewed argued that returning to school was already having a tangible effect on their lives. Despite the high concentration of students with academic difficulties in the classroom (7 of the 12 students I interviewed reported difficulties with reading and/or math when they were children), 10 of the 12 students interviewed discussed how their academic abilities had improved after attending classes at ABCD.

Many students named actual academic skills that they had gained, such as mastery of fractions or decimals. Phoebe stated, "I never made it as far as decimals. This is all new. They're teaching me work I've never done before." Other students relayed personal stories of how their improved academic abilities had helped them to function in their everyday lives. For Jill, this took the form of feeling more comfortable filling out job applications. She states, "They [employers] would need me to read and I knew wouldn't be able to do it without being here [at ABCD]." Jill also explained that her increased academic skills helped her feel more comfortable working with her son who is in advanced classes at school.

Other students such as Donald and Randy emphasized how their increased ability to understand difficult words had made them feel more comfortable

reading a book. Both students mentioned the fear that they used to have over an inability to pronounce and understand unfamiliar words. Now, Randy urges, "I can pick up a book and read. There were a lot of times when I couldn't do that... Now I feel better about myself."

Social Skills

Eight of the 12 students also explained how attending classes at ABCD has made them feel more confident in their social skills and ability to understand people. Several students emphasized a change in their ability to converse and relate with others. For Randy, this change was manifested in his own comfort talking with people. "I'm not as shy, not the way I was before with people. I was always to myself, by myself... here you're learning, gaining a lot of knowledge. ... You can deal with different people on different levels, different terms."

For Robert, a change took place in his ability to understand others. "It's [school] made me more compassionate—because of the knowledge I'm getting. I'm understanding people and why they come to the US, why my classmates are here." Thinking more broadly, Donald emphasized an increase in his comfort and desire to join social groups. "I wanted to join groups before but never did because of my reading. Now I would do it.... I like working with kids, I would like to volunteer or tutor ..."

In addition to discussing how school had affected their academic and social skills, many students discussed how school had changed their view of the future. As Robert put it, "I had all these things I dreamed about as a child. I realize now I can accomplish these things if I finish my GED." Other students such as Donald, Nan, and Tara mentioned the ability to get a better job

and more developed focus for their careers. Donald explains that he has "gotten more in the mindset of working with computers or doing a trade" whereas before he states he "never knew what to do." For each of these students, attending school played an important part in their vision for their future lives. For many, it was the primary reason they were attending school.

As can be seen through these students' reports, adult education has a much broader impact on students' lives than the academic work that is at its focus. While helping students to accomplish their academic goals, adult literacy programs also appear to help students feel more comfortable engaging in their social world as well as imbue a sense of confidence and self-satisfaction as their participants begin to master previously undeveloped skills. This increase in confidence and ability also appears to affect students' views of their future goals and spurs them to seek higher achievements than they would have had they not returned to the classroom. As they return to an environment that they once rejected as unattainable or unworthy, adult students are taking a bold step towards proving that a negative classroom experience does not have to define one's future and that all abilities can be strengthened when given a second chance.

¹For a profile of Elizabeth's students and for a listing of the questions Elizabeth asked, please go to the SABES Web site at <www.SABES.org> and click on *Field Notes*.

Elizabeth Zachry is a pre-GED teacher at ABCD LearningWorks and a graduate student at Harvard. She can be reached by email at <EMZachry@aol.com>

field notes

Help!...

Continued from page 10

repertoire of management strategies to call upon. Of course, each class is unique, so behavioral problems must be handled in a flexible manner. As teachers, we create our own individually tailored behavioral remedies all the time, often without even realizing it. Below is a quick-reference list of suggestions for handling some common ABE classroom behavior issues.

In general, teachers can use preventative maintenance to head off behavioral problems at the pass. For instance, building positive

relationships with students is a very effective way to foster a safe, comfortable learning environment. Students who have a positive rapport with their teacher are more at ease in the classroom, and thus more likely to learn. It's also important to build group activities into the curriculum. Get students to work together in pairs, in groups, or as a class, and see how the comfort level rises and tension dissipates. Don't forget to use humor, a wonderful unity builder and tension reliever!

I have seen these principles and methods at work in my own class. In the past four months I have seen a transformation from

individual learners, somewhat awkward around each other, to a group of students who listen to one another and share ideas, even laugh together. Remember to be patient with this process. In doing so, you will build a classroom community where behavioral problems are minimized, spirits are high, and learning may proceed unhindered.

Wendy Mongeau is a certified elementary school teacher who recently made the full-time switch to adult basic educator. She teaches beginning level ABE, advanced ESOL, and computer classes at the Adult Learning Center in New Bedford. She can be reached at <wmongeau@msn.com>.

If the problem is...	First, ask/say...	Then try...
Chatting as you conduct a lesson	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Can you hear me all right? 2) Do you need help with something? 3) Was there something you wanted to add? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Taking the student aside and discussing the disruption caused by the chatting 2) Changing the seating arrangements, if it is an ongoing problem
Failure to follow directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Did you hear the directions? 2) Is everything OK? Is there something on your mind? (privately) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Positive reinforcement for following directions 2) Utilizing a volunteer to monitor the student and help them stay on task 3) Suggesting/Making a referral for hearing screening. If necessary 4) Referring student for a counselor for assistance with personal matters that may be interfering with concentration and learning
A student who bosses you around	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Could you tell me about which parts of this class are meeting your needs, and which aren't? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Checking in frequently with student, soliciting feedback 2) Gentle reminders about the teacher's role vs. the student's role in the classroom 3) Modifying the student's individual program to better suit his/her needs (if it makes sense to do so)
A student who wants the teacher's full attention at all times	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) You can do it! 2) I believe in you! 3) Keep trying! 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Modeling/Teaching strategies to organize time and materials to help students accomplish tasks 2) Breaking down tasks into individual steps and checking with student after each step has been independently accomplished 3) Continuing to communicate confidence-inspiring messages
Heavy absenteeism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) I'm concerned that you've missed so much of what we've done in school lately. Could you tell me what's going on? 2) Have your educational goals changed? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Notifying the administration of your concerns, if it is a chronic problem
Lack of classroom participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) You are doing great work, but I'm concerned that you don't seem comfortable with participating openly in class 2) I know you'd get more out of your educational experience if you're actively involved, so is there anything I could do to help you? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Keeping an eye on the student; don't let them slip through the cracks. They may be perpetuating patterns of low self-confidence that were formed during their early school years 2) Calling on the student during class, and valuing the ideas he/she contributes

Resources for Youth in ABE

ERIC Publications

The following resources can be ordered through ERIC via the Web: www.eric.gov/

ERIC NO: EJ540644

Carter, Betty. (1997). "Adult Books for Young Adults." (article)

ERIC NO: ED360638

Christenbury, Leila. (1993). "Things That Go Bump in the Night: Recent Developments in Horror Fiction for Young Adults." (article)

ERIC NO: EJ603231

Chance, Rosemary (1999) "A Portrait of Popularity: An Analysis of Characteristics of Novels from Young Adults' Choices for 1997." (article)

Web sites

www.cal.org/ncle/ResLD.htm

The National Center for ESL Literacy (NCLE) is unveiling a new feature: a resource collection. The title of this first collection is *Learning Disabilities and Adult ESL* and is posted at the address above. The Resource Collection contains articles, reports, books, Web sites, organizations, electronic discussions, policy materials, ERIC documents, and other resources that address the featured topic.

www.mtsu.edu/~itconf/proceed97/kinnersley.html

Children and Young Adult Literature on the Internet: An Introduction

www.ala.org/yalsa

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Web site.

Books

Smith, Karen Patricia, Ed. (1994). *African-American Voices in Young Adult Literature: Tradition, Transition, Transformation*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Available from Scarecrow Press, 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706; Tel: 800-462-6420. email: orders@scarecrowpress.com Web site: www.scarecrowpress.com.

Nilsen, Alleen Pace Donelson, Kenneth L. (1993). *Literature for Today's Young Adults. Fourth Edition*. New York: Harper Collins. Available from Harper Collins, P.O. Box 588, Dunmore, PA 18512.

Monseau, Virginia R., Salvner, Gary M., Eds. (2000). *Reading Their World: The Young Adult Novel in the Classroom, Second Edition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Available from: Heinemann, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912. Tel: 603-431-7894; Web site: www.heinemann.com. Includes a companion CD-ROM with almost 2,000 reviews of young adult literature.



Mass AAL . . .

Continued from page 8

meetings will be to learn more about starting student councils. Students will also talk about advancing the cause of adult literacy, as well as explore issues particular to programs in their regions.

Mass AAL has great interest in working closely with teachers and practitioners at programs. The conditions are ripe for such a collaboration: at a recent meeting of ABE program directors, a focus group was held, placing "student leadership" as number two on its list of priorities of issues important to programs.

When meeting with adult learners statewide, Mass AAL found that students overall considered improving the salaries and working conditions for teachers as the number one issue. Adult learners feel that teachers do important work and should be compensated commensurate to their worth to society. Mass AAL would like to ask teachers and other program staff for their help in getting the word out about the organization and with help in getting student councils started. We've put together an adult learner leadership training guide that includes, "How to Start Student Councils." We'll be glad to come out to programs to talk about it.

Ernest Best, a former adult learner, is the executive director of Mass AAL. He can be reached at 617-782-8956 ext.13, or by email at <ernest@alri.org>.

Mark Your Calendar

April 9-13

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 36th Annual Convention: *Language and the Human Spirit*
Location: Salt Lake City, UT
Contact: TESOL, 703-836-0774 Web: www.tesol.org/conv

April 27

Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts, 16th Annual Conference
Location: Waltham, MA
Contact: LitVolMA@aol.com

April 28-May 2

International Reading Association (IRA), 47th Annual Convention: *Gateway to Global Understanding*
Location: San Francisco, CA
Contact: 302-731-1600 Web: www.reading.org/2002

May 8-11

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), Annual Conference: *Doin' the Charleston!*
Location: Charleston, SC
Contact: SCLRC, 803-929-2571
Web: www.sclrc.org/COABE2002

May 16-18

University of South Florida, Cancer, Culture and Literacy Conference, 3rd Biennial: *Developing Effective Communication Strategies to Reduce Health Disparities*
Location: Clearwater Beach, FL Contact: Ann Gordon, USF, 813-903-4975 Web: www.moffitt.usf.edu/Promotions/ccl

May 24-26

Adult Education Research Conference, AERC 2002: *Investigating the World of Adult Education*
Location: Raleigh, NC
Contact: Barbara Copeland, NCSU, 919-515-6297
Web: www.ncsu.edu/cpe/aerc02

May 30-June 1

Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE), 21st Annual Conference
Adult Education and the Contested Terrain of Public Policy
Location: Toronto, Ontario
Contact: Leona English, lenglish@stfx.ca
Web: www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/



Write for Field Notes!

Share your experience with other teachers. Do you know about a great video, Web site, novel, or other resource for the classroom? Have you completed a project with your students that you'd like to write about?

We are recruiting writers who have not yet contributed to *Field Notes*. If you'd like to write for a future issue, take a look on page 6 for upcoming themes. Or call anytime with an idea for an article or review—it does not have to fit into a theme. I am happy to work on drafts with writers.

Interested? Email me at [<lballiro2000@yahoo.com>](mailto:lballiro2000@yahoo.com) or call me at 617-482-9485 with your ideas.

Lenore Balliro
Field Notes editor

State of the State

BY LENORE BALLIRO

WITH INPUT FROM ABE PRACTITIONERS AND ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICES (ACLS)

The recent crisis in adult basic education funding was resolved favorably due to exceptional advocacy efforts by the ABE community across the state. These recent events have a great deal to teach us about our roles and responsibilities as practitioners in a deeply important, yet usually invisible educational arena.

Recap

Just before Thanksgiving, back in November 2001, the state budget process, long overdue, had reached its final stage in the legislative conference committee. Dan Bosely, a state representative from North Adams and a long-time supporter of ABE, became alarmed when he was informed that the committee had voted to cut ABE

funding in half. Bosely immediately alerted the Department of Education, and word went out to the field through the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education. Within hours, hundreds of calls from practitioners around the state went out to state representatives, senators, and other important public figures in an attempt to keep funding for ABE intact. These calls initiated a massive, concerted, and highly effective advocacy effort resulting in an unusually successful restoration of 97.7 percent of proposed cuts.

Clarifications

Before reflecting on the advocacy strategy and why it was successful, it is important to clarify

some of the confusions that arose along the way. These confusions clouded peoples' understanding of the budget process. (Note: If technical fiscal details feel too overwhelming, please skip this section and go right to the next subhead. No one will fault you.)

First, the legislature was five months late in finalizing a state budget for FY 2002. That means that ACLS had already spent almost 50 percent of its anticipated appropriation. Therefore, a 50 percent cut would mean that all services would end by January 31, 2002.

Second, the figure of a 50% cut wasn't even correct. The proposed cut really represented a

Continued on page 7



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