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FIELD NOTES

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Ten Years After

In Retrospect <i>Lenore Balliro</i>	1
Dancing the Meringue <i>Peggy Rambach</i>	3
A Student's Perspective of a College Success Class <i>Katie Shaw</i>	5
Behind Bars: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Training <i>Kristin Sherman</i>	6
What Makes a Good Supervisor? <i>Comments From the Field</i>	9
Workplace Needs Assessment <i>Jenny Lee Utecht</i>	11
A Little Too Much From the Heart <i>Cathy Coleman</i>	13
Inspiring Writers Using Objects and Images <i>A. O'Brien, J. Schwerdtfeger, & J. Fischer</i>	15
Oh, Ernesto! I Have Something Wonderful to Tell You! <i>Richard Golberg and Janet Fischer</i>	18
Teachers Observing Teachers <i>Susan Chernillo</i>	21
Steps to Peer Observation <i>Lee Haller</i>	22
I Wish I Knew How Heavy My School Bag Would Be <i>Ruth Clark</i>	23
Helping the LD Learner Helps All Students <i>Janet Isserlis</i>	25
Let them Choose <i>Derek Kalchbrenner</i>	27
Things We Can Do: Addressing Issues of Sexual Orientation in the ABE Classroom <i>Stefanie Mattfeld and Deborah Schwartz</i>	29
What Is Your Program's Philosophy? <i>Richard Goldberg</i>	31
Teaching Social Justice in the ABE Classroom <i>Nancy Goodman</i>	33
Supervisor Self Assessment <i>Alex Risely Schroeder</i>	35

Funded by the Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

In Retrospect

Field Notes began as *Bright Ideas* in 1991, when the newly-formed SABES and ACLS identified the need for a practitioner-based publication in the Massachusetts ABE community.

I was lucky to come aboard in 1997 to build on the talents of the previous editors, Laura Purdom and Elizabeth Santiago. Over the years, *Field Notes* evolved from 12 pages to an average of 24 (and sometimes up to 32) pages. Based on the interests expressed by practitioners, we covered themes ranging from the basics: reading, math, curriculum frameworks—to the more whimsical—"How I Entered the Field of ABE and Why I Stay There."

This retrospective is not a "Best Of." Rather, it is a small sample of the creativity and collected wisdom of practitioners who have contributed to the publication over the years. The editorial board and I chose pieces of writing unique to *Field Notes*—articles that would not be easy to find in other venues.

We had to leave out many great pieces, but we hope the selection here will encourage you to peek at the archives of *Field Notes* (and even some *Bright Ideas*) at www.sabes.org/publications.

When I planned this issue of *Field Notes*, I was unaware that it would serve as the penultimate edition. After the next (summer) issue, *Field Notes* will cease publication. Thank you to all the writers who put their voices out there, worked through all those revisions and drafts, and shared their reflections with the rest of us.

FOREWORD

This retrospective issue has allowed me the time to revisit many years of *Field Notes*. The process reminded me of our extensive range of services, settings, and staff experiences.

I reread writing from prisons and job training programs, from island settings and inner city neighborhoods. From community based organizations and community colleges. Writing on policy, fiscal issues, working conditions, 9/11. Lesson plans, tips for teachers, resource lists, book reviews. I also felt a rhythm in each volume: 32-page issues packed with “serious” information balanced lighter issues like summer reading and “teaching from the heart.”

And that rhythm is representative of who we are collectively. We do serious things and we do fun things. We balance quantitative analysis with qualitative narratives. We eat cake, we write reports. In the words of my dear colleague Janet Isserlis, “It’s all good.”

And even though *Field Notes* won’t be around after the summer issue, we still have our voices. Let’s find ways to continue sharing our ideas, our challenges, our frustrations, our experiences with one another. Let’s Blog and Facebook. Instead of My Space, let’s Our Space. Let’s keep the dialogue going.

—Lenore Balliro, *Field Notes* editor

Please note: We are not including authors’ contact information in the bios, because they may not be accurate anymore; some of these articles are reprinted from years ago. However, we include the volume and number for the original articles, which includes bio notes. They might still work.

Field Notes Mission Statement and Editorial Policy

Field Notes is an adult basic education (ABE) quarterly, theme-based newsletter published online at <www.SABES.org>. 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

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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 <lbaliro@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*.

Editor: Lenore Balliro
Editorial Board for this issue: Christine Doret, Richard Goldberg, Deborah Schwartz, Michele Sedor.

Dancing the Meringue: Partying to Promote Conversation in the ESOL Class

BY PEGGY RAMBACH

It's hard enough to make conversation in someone else's living room, let alone in someone else's language. I mean, invite any number of adults into a small, enclosed area and the first thing one of them might say will be, "Anybody got a beer?" After all, what makes for lively conversation, but loud music and a free bar?

Which was something I began to consider after about the fourth week of attempting to get my ESL 2 class to talk. Instead, I sweated it out (literally), placing them in my "innovative" circle configuration and hoping against hope that at some point, one of my brilliant topics would hit like a slot machine. But no. It was more like:

Me: So, what holiday do you like most in Vietnam and Cambodia?

Most of Class: [Shrug.]

Me: New Year's? Do you like New Year's?

Most of Class: [Nod.]

Me: When is New Year's in your country?

All of Class: [Silence.]

Until, of course I'd long for it to be my New Year's so I could pop a cork and put myself out of my misery.

But not one to rely on such means to solve a crisis, I had to finally face the fact that cultural holidays, what you do on the weekends (sleep, buy groceries), what you do in the summer (sleep, work, and buy groceries)

and how you like your supervisor (very nice, fine) were not going to evoke the kind of conversation I was after.

Good Conversation

So I had to ask: What exactly was I after? Indeed, what was a good conversation? Answer: A free-flowing, spontaneous, exchange of



ideas. And why, I thought, is making good conversation often referred to as an art? Answer: Because it's really hard. It takes imagination and skill. We even identify those who have the skill as "good conversationalists" and invite them to our dinner parties. So I asked: What makes a conversationalist good? Answer: Confidence, lack of self-consciousness, and the ability to ask questions and convey genuine interest in the answers.

So, I concluded, the key to making good conversation was not in the choice of the perfect topic, as the textbooks would have you believe, but in creating a classroom atmosphere that resembled a really great cocktail party (minus the cocktails, of course). That is, I had to design activities that did what cocktails do, that would make my students relax, shed their inhibitions, make them want to ask questions and want to hear the answers. Most important, I had to create an atmosphere that made them have fun. Because if they were having fun, everything else would follow.

And, yes, I agree, cultural exchange is important in an ESL class, but there are ways to do it that are a lot more lively than asking someone, "What do you do on New Year's in your country?" Instead, I asked the Dominicans in my class to teach the Asians the meringue dance. I asked the

Asians to teach the Dominicans their traditional dance - all in English of course and so the classroom was in fact filled with music and laughter and a lot of talking and dancing. In fact, it sounded, not like a class, but suspiciously like a party.

And rather than force my students to dredge up their past continually by demanding that they tell an autobiographical story, we played make-believe. My students assumed fictional

Continued on page 4

Engaging Adults...

continued from page 3

roles, but always in pairs and sometimes in response to a fictional situation. For instance, they witnessed a crime ("This is a crime," I said and stole a student's purse.) Then, one student played "witness," one the "interrogator."

I gave the witness a 3 by 5 card with the "criminal's" name written on it, which was the name of another student in the class. The witness, in response to the interrogator's questions, had to describe the student whose name was written on their card, and describe that student well enough for the interrogator to eventually be able look around the classroom and identify who it was.

This gave the student/witness a reason to talk, and the student/interrogator a reason to ask questions. I realized that if students had a purpose for speaking, other than, because-the-teacher-asked-me-to,

students will actually want to speak.

More common to ESL classes, I also had my students play real-life situation roles like interviewer/job applicant, grocery store checkout clerk/ patron, eye doctor/patient, always in pairs and always preceded by a demonstration and list of necessary vocabulary.

And then one day, when I was introducing a unit on car buying, I thought, I've never

ing, and everyone having fun, including the salesman, who, of course, left me with a stack of business cards.

Next came a friend who taught my class CPR. And now I'm thinking of asking one of those friendly, techie guys who work at my local Radio Shack to come in and sell my students a DVD player. There are any number of possibilities.

And how has my role changed? Well, as you can see,

Instead, I asked the Dominicans in my class to teach the Asians the meringue dance. I asked the Asians to teach the Dominicans their traditional dance - all in English of course. . .

bought a car without agreeing to a deal I regret for the full seven-year term of the loan, so how can I, in good conscience, teach this subject to my students? I thought then, why not just import the real thing? So I asked a car salesman to visit my class and sell my students assorted models of new and used Matchbox cars.

Sure enough, I found an affable car salesman (most of them are) willing to donate his time, and the whole exercise produced that same party atmosphere. In this case much of the class playing the spectators who called out suggestions to the pretend buyers, everyone laugh-

I just play the host, wandering around the noisy classroom like I'm carrying a tray of hors d'oeuvres offering a canapé of a vocabulary word here, a Swedish meatball of encouragement there. And I always lead the celebratory toast.

Peggy Rambach, the author of Fighting Gravity, a novel published by Steerforth Press, has compiled and edited three anthologies of writing from the Asian community in Lawrence.

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A Student's Perspective of a College Success Class

BY KATIE SHAW

There is a class at Greenfield Community College designed to help students be successful in college. It is called HUD114, but it is more commonly known as College Success. When I took this class, we were introduced to different departments in the school. For example, one day we took a visit to the library and met the librarians, who then introduced us to all the resources available there. The next week one of the counselors came in and we spent the class in a quiet meditation period. We were then informed about the various confidential counseling services that are available.

A visit from the Learning Center staff was great; most of us did not even realize that tutoring was an option! As part of the class we were able to take a stroll over to the Fitness Center,

and most of us were shocked to learn that the college gym is open nearly every day. And the best part—for free!

During this class we participated in many group activities. This allowed the students to develop some great friendships at school. One of our assignments was to create a “code of conduct” that we thought would be reasonable to follow. This activity allowed us to fully understand the behaviors that are acceptable in a school environment while also helping us to understand how to do a research project. All the while the project allowed us to work with the students that are now such great friendship atmosphere was created by the wonderful teacher we were privileged to have. Her classroom was always a safe environment, and she became a good friend as well! For the

three days a week we spent in College Success class, every idea, problem, and concern was somehow addressed and used as a learning experience.

The College Success class is a great tool. It helps all new students learn the ropes of the school and lets them ask all of the questions they may have as they occur. The class is also great for students who are returning to college after a period of time off; it helps them reacclimate to school. After surveying several of the students who have taken part in the College Success class, I learned that the most important aspect of the class is the environment. Students are able to meet people who are in their shoes—people who have the same questions and concerns about successfully completing their college education. This class is necessary for those who normally may not feel comfortable speaking up to ask questions that they need answered to be successful students.

Katie Shaw was a student at Greenfield Community College's Next Step Up program.

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Just Out—2009

Moving Research About Addressing the Impact of Violence and Learning Into Practice

This ground-breaking book brings together research studies and stories about the impact of violence on learning in adult basic education. Written by Jenny Horsman and a group of practitioner researchers, this book is available from

www.windsoundlearning.ca

Behind Bars: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Training

BY KRISTIN SHERMAN

Buenos tardes, me llamo Francisco Martinez, y yo soy de Mexico. Good afternoon, my name is Francisco Martinez, and I am from Mexico.

Like many of my students in the jail, this student had an alias. All the jail records listed him as Manuel Rodriguez. With these words of introduction, he claimed his true name, and began his part of the presentation. We were giving a workshop on Latino culture to new detention officers who would, within

had been experiencing conflict with other inmates and with officers, and felt that much of this conflict had arisen because officers knew nothing about Latino culture. The students submitted a petition asking for such training. At the time, I was working on a project in collaboration with Literacy South, in which I was trying to develop lesson ideas that would help ESL students learn to navigate systems. The officer training seemed like an ideal project to meet both the

opened a description of Latino culture that they felt was authentic. They also translated phrases that were specific to the jail environment into Spanish. Finally, they came up with concrete suggestions. Meanwhile, I began lengthy negotiations to persuade the command structure and training officers to allow the training. I was able to get the training approved, but I had to deliver it. There were too many obstacles, including security issues, to permit the students to give the training themselves. So, I presented their material to several different classes of new officers.

Over the following year, both officers and inmates “turned over.” I had a whole new cast of characters in my class, and all of the officers in command positions were new. The trainings were discontinued when a new training officer took over. What hadn’t changed was the conflict between Latinos and the other ethnic groups. Another incident propelled a student into approaching me about the lack of training the officers received in dealing with Latino inmates. One pod supervisor continually called the Latino inmates “Pancho,” while other, non-Latino inmates were addressed respectfully by Mister and their last names. I told the student that we had such a presentation, developed by students, but it hadn’t been done in a long time. After that class, I approached one of

Students in my ESL class had been experiencing conflict with other inmates and with officers, and felt that much of this conflict had arisen because officers knew nothing about Latino culture.

a couple of weeks, begin their jobs supervising these very same Latino inmates.

I teach ESOL to an intermediate class at Mecklenburg County Jail in Charlotte, North Carolina. My students are all Hispanic. About two-thirds are facing serious time on federal charges. They represent different countries, levels of education, and degrees of acculturation.

The idea for the training on Latino culture for detention officers at the Mecklenburg County Jail was born a couple of years ago. Students in my ESL class

students’ needs and my own. I suggested the students “put their money where their mouths were” — that they develop a workshop/presentation that could be used to train officers.

Preparing for the Training

As a class, we read books and downloaded articles from the Internet to learn about differences between Latino and Anglo cultures. We watched the movie *Fools Rush In*, which was surprisingly useful in its depiction of the contrast between the two cultures. The students devel-

Continued on page 7

An Experiment...

Continued from page 6

the captains and the new training officer. Both agreed not only that the training could be done, but also that students could do it.

At the next class, I recruited volunteers for this project from among the more proficient English speakers. This would be an opportunity to be something other than inmates in the eyes of the officers, they could be professionals. I had five students agree to participate. They were not the original students who had developed the earlier training, so we were basically back to the beginning. These students met for four additional classes, which allowed them to do the background research and review the work of the earlier students. We revised the content and divided the responsibilities. Each student had a part of the presentation: Francisco would address the demographics of the jail population, Abad would briefly describe the history and culture of Latinos in America, I would talk about language issues, Jaime would give a glimpse into the Spanish language, and Eutimio and John would both cover the concrete suggestions for the officers.

Rehearsal

I put the information on Power Point transparencies in

bullet form, so the presentation would be as professional as possible. In our final meeting before the training, we rehearsed with the transparencies. The students made additions and changes and worked on their transitions, and discourse connectors practiced putting transparencies on the overhead projector correctly and using pointers to indicate place. The students rehearsed their introductions, and gave



each other feedback. They tried to minimize those gestures and dialectical features that marked them as inmates: hitching up their jumpsuits, posturing with their hands, using double negatives. They tried to identify things “inmate-y” or “cholo.” Abad took some books home, back to the pod, to review the major events in Latin American history.

On Monday, the day of the training, we also had our regular ESL class. The five presenters conducted a dress rehearsal with their classmates. Each student was applauded, and the class was focused and attentive.

It was obvious that they had practiced over the weekend. They were comfortable with their transparencies, and as the information was projected onto the whiteboard at the front of the room, the presenters used the board to elaborate on the bulleted points of the slides. The other students were dismissed, and the new officers arrived at the classroom.

To our disappointment, there were only three. John made a face and held up three fingers. I whispered that a small group would allow us to practice, and perfect the presentation. We put our game faces on. The students were beautiful, they were funny, engaging, natural teachers.

Francisco, aka Manuel, was first. “63% of the Hispanics in this facility are from Mexico. Next we have the United States at 10%, which includes Puerto Rico and people who are citizens, and then Colombia that has 5%, and Republic Dominican 5%, and other countries 10%. So, you can see, not everyone is Mexican. And I want to tell you that sometimes the officers say, ‘You Mexicans.’ And we think that is racial, and we are not all Mexican.”

Abad presented next on history and culture. “When Christopher Columbus—have you heard of him?—discovered the new world, which is what

Continued on page 8

An Experiment...

Continued from page 7

we know now as the Bahamas in 1492, he met the Arawak people, and called them Indians. There were many peoples in this new world, the Toltec, the Olmec, the Aztec in Mexico, and the great

Mexico. Use our names, please. Don't disrespect our religion. We have religious figures, and also the Bible is very important to us. Officers when they shake us down, they just throw the Bible on the bed or the floor. We're in here, but we're human beings, too." Eutimio suggested the of-

to me, and to themselves just what they could do.

This kind of project is effective for language learners on a variety of levels. First, they are identifying issues of importance in their lives and participating in addressing these issues. Second, the learners are learning how to navigate a system in their new country; in this case, the inmates were learning how to effect change in the correctional environment. Third, learners are using language in purposeful ways: to acquire and present information, to educate, and to persuade. A project that engages learners in creating change in their everyday lives can also create power. I will always remember the image of a Latino teacher in an orange jumpsuit and flip-flops, in front of uniformed students with black boots and badges, saying, "Me llamo Francisco Martinez, y yo soy de Mexico."

Kristin Sherman taught ESL at the Mecklenburg County Jail for five years.

Originally published in *Field Notes*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (winter 2003)

"Don't call us the Mexican mafia. That's racist, and I'm not even from Mexico. Use our names, please."

Incan civilization in Peru."

He touched on the high points in Latin American history, including the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico lost half its national territory to the United States. He went on to describe Latino culture, addressing machismo, family, and religion, among other things. "And, you know, people who came here recently from another country, their attitude toward authority is, well, that authority is corrupt. If you are drunk and driving and the police stop you, well, you give them money and they let you go. We call that the bite." He talked about variations in the Spanish language: "In Mexico, if you say 'soy un cabrón,' you are saying you are 'the man.' In Cuba, that means like someone is trippin' with your wife." The officers laughed.

Use Our Names, Please

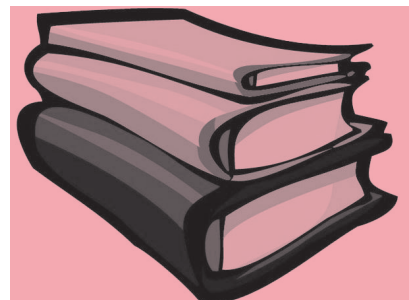
The presentation concluded with Eutimio and John suggesting "do's" and "don'ts." "Don't call us the Mexican mafia. That's racist, and I'm not even from

ficers ask the inmates about their culture or language. "These are some suggestions so maybe you can do your job more easy, and we can get along better."

Officers' Reactions, Students' Reactions

The officers said that the training was useful, and left for their next session. After they left the students were pleased with how things went. John said: "You know, Miss Kristy, I thought with only three of them, it was a joke, but they listened to us and showed respect. It was good."

The audience was small, but the effect on the students was great. It was important enough that Francisco wanted to use his real name, Jaime practiced over and over in his pod, and Abad read additional history. Eutimio said to me afterwards: "You didn't think we could do so good, did you?" I believed they could do it all along, but maybe they weren't so sure. For a short time, they were in control and they showed to the few officers,



What Makes a Good Supervisor?

COMMENTS FROM THE FIELD COMPILED BY LENORE BALLIRO

What do you respect most about your supervisor? What does your supervisor do that you find especially helpful? I took an informal survey of practitioners around the state. Here are the responses, in their own words.

"A hands-off approach, meaning that I'm trusted to act autonomously, with limited direct supervision. I'm... held accountable for my performance, but it gives me great satisfaction to not have someone looking over my shoulder, scrutinizing my every task."

"I... find that the freedom to explore and initiate new projects with the knowledge that I can look to her for support is invaluable. I value her confidence in me so that I may work independently while knowing I have support when I need it."

"...my current supervisors... grant me intellectual freedom in the classroom and... encourage, but not try to micromanage, my professional growth."

"...working with a supervisor who shares a similar vision of the mission of adult education is key to my job satisfaction."

"(My supervisor) is culturally competent. Not only has he acquired an impressive array of Vietnamese vocabulary, he is aware of the factors that influence the Vietnamese-American adult ESL learner."

"The supervisor I have now knows what's going on in the classroom and she brings in articles and resources that pertain to our lessons."

"He (supervisor) is a cookie jar of ESL/Classroom ideas (yummy!). His experiences both as a teacher and administrator are rich and readily tapped."

"Assistance with goal setting."

"I find specific feedback to be the most useful from my supervisor."

"Willingness to process issues, change, and innovation in-depth... or a long enough time that collective ownership had a decent chance of emerging."

"Sharing frustrations, challenges, and triumphs and encouraging others to do the same..."

"We are not bogged down with unnecessary paperwork, and if we have a meeting it's important. If we have done something noteworthy she shares our successes with anyone who will listen."

"A good supervisor makes sure everyone gets paid in full in a timely manner."

"I... value a supervisor who will stand up for workers when necessary."

What's missing, or what doesn't work well?

"Not modeling reasonable work/life boundaries."

"Trying to maintain lines of communication when working part time and when my supervisor is gone to so many other meetings."

"Things I would have respected: matching words with actions more often."

"(In one class) (the supervisor)... exploded and berated me in front of the students."

As a supervisor what are you most proud of?

"Reflecting over time on how people have grown in their jobs developed new skills... new ways of solving problems... seeing staff develop a sense of teamwork."

"I am most proud of being able to foster a professional environment where there is a lot of genuine sharing and support."

"Of engaging folks in a way that is deeply respectful of their own goals and needs."

Continued on page 10

What Makes a Good...

Continued from page 9

As a supervisor, what is most challenging?
“Being transparent enough in my own thought processes (hopes and fears and needs) in a way that begins to diffuse some of the inherent power dynamics.”

“Unclear roles, unclear expectations, unacknowledged tensions get in the way of managing well.”

“The most frustrating part of an (ABE) supervisor’s job is the constantly changing grant reporting requirements and the lateness of approval for funding. Right now we’re still hiring for courses that have already begun, a typical fall situation.

Teachers hired on the fly cannot plan their courses rationally. Our students suffer.”

“Managing a staff that is part-time, off site, and has little time to spend on program development and maintenance.”

“Conflict resolution that sometimes occurs between staff members. Remembering the importance of feedback to staff -- both positive and negative -- and... making time each day to let staff know that you’re available and appreciate their efforts.”

Other comments from supervisors

“It would make a world of difference to have the DOE and/or SABES get more involved with training/mentoring managers. Also, these (management) positions, no matter how small the program, should be full-time, for what’s expected.”

“It’s very important for directors to develop a vision for their program with their staff and to maintain that vision afterwards-to be the management/peers, and I like it.”

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Women’s Perspectives

A Journal of Writing by Adult Learners

Issue Four
2009

Transition / Transformation



Women’s

Perspectives, Issue Four, is published by We Learn (Women Expanding /Literacy Education Action Resource Network) and is available online at:

www.litwomen.org/we-learn.html

Workplace Needs Analysis

BY JENNY LEE UTECHT

A workplace needs analysis is a systematic way of identifying a workforce's basic skill needs. A needs analysis gathers information and input from all key stakeholders at the workplace through interviews, focus groups, surveys, work site observations, review of workplace documents and other activities. It is a vital step toward developing an effective workplace education program and a curriculum that addresses workers' basic skill needs.

A needs analysis does not involve assessing workers' specific skill levels in English, math, or reading. It's used to identify general areas of need and ideas for curriculum content. A needs analysis can tell you how many workers are native English speakers or not, whether native speakers need to focus on reading or math, or the range of speaking abilities among non-native speakers. But assessing specific skill levels, through standardized testing (BEST, TABE) or alternative assessments, happens after the needs analysis has helped you to determine basic areas of need.

Why Do a Needs Analysis?

A workplace needs analysis will give you important information about what general class types and schedules to offer, and where to start developing curriculum. A needs analysis can build a strong case and provide direction for an education program. You can also build

support across the work site for a program by involving as broad a cross-section of the entire workforce and union (when the workplace is unionized) as you can.

But a needs analysis should not only identify workplace issues and problems that might be addressed by improving workers' language and literacy skills. When you are conducting a needs analysis, you should also examine workers' basic skills needs in the larger context of the workplace, and identify other workplace factors that affect workers and their jobs, and that may indicate whether or not the workplace is ready to support an education program. For example, you should ask about communication channels, on-the-job training offered, staffing levels, level of support for a program among front-line supervisors, and potential barriers to setting up a program.

How Do You Do a Needs Analysis?

Typically, the education provider and group of key stakeholders at the workplace (workplace and union leadership, managers, front-line supervisors and workers, union shop stewards, human resources) form a committee to plan, implement, and evaluate the needs analysis. The committee decides how information will be collected: through individual interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and/or examination of workplace documents. Com-

mittee members also identify work site departments or areas that will participate in the needs analysis. They help to spread the word about the needs analysis (through department and union meetings, newsletters or flyers). The committee also helps to give you access to workers and the work site, and to evaluate needs analysis results.

As the education provider, your role is often to orient the group to the needs analysis; develop focus group or interview questions tailored to the work site and present them to the committee for feedback; conduct the interviews or focus groups; and summarize the information collected so that the committee can analyze the findings.

Your needs analysis plan and activities should take potential language and literacy barriers into account. For example, will you need to translate flyers into workers' native languages? Will you need to hire bilingual interviewers? You should keep all information collected during the needs analysis confidential and anonymous. Make sure that people know ahead of time that you will keep their input confidential; otherwise, some people may be reluctant to participate. Also, interview workers and their supervisors separately — both groups may hesitate to speak their minds if the other is present.

Participation in needs analysis activities should be voluntary. Needs analysis activities

Continued on page 12

Workplace Needs Analysis

continued from page 10

should happen during work time if possible, with workers, supervisors, and others receiving paid release time to participate.

Whom Should You Talk To?

The needs analysis should reach each at least ten percent of the workforce (except when the workforce is very large). It should include a representative cross section of the workforce, including workers (both those who might take classes and those who won't), frontline supervisors, upper level managers, union shop stewards, and union leadership (when the work site is unionized). Needs analysis participants should represent the range of ages, ethnicities, job types, shifts, and levels of seniority at the work site.

What Should You Ask?

The specific questions you ask will depend on the work site, but your questions should

address worker's job duties and responsibilities; recent changes in technology or work processes; communication and how it could improve linguistic cultural diversity and its impact; reading, writing, communication, math, and computer skills workers use on the job and how they could improve; current on-the-job training and education opportunities; types of training and education workers might want; promotions or career ladders and skills needed to move up; potential barriers and supports for an education program; goals for the program; when, where, and how to hold classes (class space, release time possibilities).

When the work site is unionized, needs analysis questions should also address: reading, writing, math, communication, or computer skills needed to participate in union activities; how the union communicates with members; how well members understand their union contract, and possible literacy and language barriers among the membership to communicating

with the union or understanding the contract. Ask the union leadership about the union's history at the work site. And be sure to ask both management and union leadership what the contract says about education, training, and upgrading for workers, and how an education program would fit into that.

What Should You Keep in Mind?

Improving workers' skills is not the only answer to making workplaces and jobs better. Many factors beyond workers' individual control affect their ability to perform their jobs better, for example work load or work design, poor management, lack of opportunity to use new skills, or health and safety issues. While a workplace education program can address some of the issues uncovered during a needs analysis, it's important to help the committee look realistically at what a program can and can't address. A basic skills program is not a "quick fix" for low worker morale, short staffing, poor management, ineffective workplace policies, or labor-management tensions. But it can be an effective step toward helping workers to improve their job-related and general basic skills, and access higher-skilled jobs.

Jenny Lee Utech worked for the Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable where she developed workshops and training for workplace educators and administrators.

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Workplace Education Resources

The Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable has two useful resources for ABE and ESOL practitioners:

Workplace Health and Safety ESOL Curriculum
by Jenny Utech

Workplace Educator Training Manual
by Jenny Utech

Please go to <www.umass.edu/roundtable> for more information.

A Little Too Much from the Heart? Working Conditions and ABE

By CATHY COLEMAN

How many of you reading this article planned to go into adult education? My guess is not many of you are raising your hands, but many of us do find our way here through various routes, then we find our niche, and this is where the trouble begins.

A Real Job

"When are you going to get a real job?" A friend of mine asked me in 1991. A "real job," in her estimation, was like the one she had—a job in accounts payable, a perfectly respectable, "normal" job with a desk and a computer, and a larger than average cubicle, a job she went to each day at 9 and left at 5, a job which provided her health benefits, paid vacations, and a retirement plan.

In 1991, I was a long way from that kind of job. I was teaching five classes (one pre-GED, four workplace math) in three different places, coordinating the regional student writing publication for SABES, and participating in various other staff development projects. I had a schedule no one could figure out. "No it's Monday and Wednesday 9–11 and 1–3 and Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 6–9." I essentially ran an ABE program out of my car, carting GED books, graph paper, various pieces of student homework, and a big bucket of Base Ten Cubes all over central Mass.

In 1991, I taught for part of the time in a basement room where it was so cold we wore our coats a good deal of the winter. Our classroom was actually the break room for school department staff, and it doubled as a meeting space. On a regular basis, my class and I would



show up to find that we had been bumped for some type of meeting or I would be in the awkward position of having to explain to tired school department personnel carrying large cups of coffee—"Umm . . . yeah, I'm the GED teacher and this isn't actually being used as a break room now. I'm really sorry. We'll be done by noon, I promise."

In 1991, I had been in the field only a few years. For the most part, it was all good. I was young and learning my craft. I was happy to have a room to teach in at all and was grateful for times when the heat worked. No big deal. I was taking it all in, and making an OK living for

a young woman.

Many years later, I'm still in adult education. As I look back on my 19 years in the field, I realize that I've had the great privilege of working from the heart. I sometimes wonder, though, if my decision to remain in this field is a little too much from my heart and not at all from my head . . . or my wallet.

I'm not as young as I used to be. After spending many years with no health insurance, I pay \$539 a month for an individual plan, have little saved for retirement, and ask myself every year, "Can I afford to stay in ABE another year?" I am actually considering a career change, and I have watched many, many smart, talented, dedicated people leave this field in search of better opportunities, more stable jobs, better money, a more secure future—in short, better working conditions.

Saying Yes

I love my teaching. I love my students. I work with a great group of colleagues and a director who is doing what she can to promote positive working conditions in our field. I've been lucky in many regards. I've spent a career saying yes to every growth opportunity that came my way. I said yes, for example, when asked to join the ABE

Continued on page 14

A Little Too Much...

Continued from page 12

Math Team in the early 90s. This experience changed the way I viewed teaching and learning; it also gave me the invaluable opportunity to see how the rest of the ABE world lived. Prior to joining a state-

I sometimes wonder. . . if my decision to remain in this field is a little too much from the heart and not enough from my head...or my wallet.

wide team, I didn't have much opportunity to meet many other adult educators. I was too busy running from one part-time job to another. The Math Team allowed me, over an extended period, to get to know teachers from all parts of the state. This experience also showed me that the world in my one program was not the world everyone experienced in this field. I saw that there were progressive directors and programs out there working hard to try to get good teachers to stay in ABE, offering full-time work in some cases, providing teachers with truly collaborative work environments and a real role in decision making. It was wonderful to see, and I felt a real sense of hopefulness about our field.

Feeling Hopeful

I still feel hopeful about ABE, largely because of the recently reincarnated Working Conditions Committee of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE). This committee, made up of teachers, directors, and staff

developers, is working hard to promote working conditions that will attract and retain quality professionals in ABE. Recently, the committee has finalized a set of standards for working conditions. These standards are intended as a guideline for programs and as a catalyst for discussion about how we can work toward meeting these standards. You can check out the standards at www.mcae.net/ and click on "Updated Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs."

The Working Conditions Committee is not just a group of people who get together once a month to kvetch. It is a group made up mainly of folks who, like me, have been in this business a long while and who might be called optimistic realists or realistic optimists. We rec-

ognize that the changes we envision cannot happen overnight. We also acknowledge that some learning centers are in better positions to make these changes than others. Some directors and program staff have found ways to make their centers places where smart, talented people want to work and want to stay working there.

The Working Conditions Committee wants to recognize these programs and share their ideas with others. The ABE field, like any other, has visitors, passers-by, and residents. All of these have contributions to make. If we can create the conditions that will convince smart, talented, and committed visitors to become residents, maybe someday Paula Poundstone will hear someone in the audience say, speaking from her heart and her head, "Yeah, I want to be an adult educator."

Cathy Coleman has been a teacher, staff developer, curriculum developer, and filmographer in ABE programs and resource centers across Massachusetts.

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Inspiring ABE Writers Using Objects and Images

BY ANDREA O'BRIEN, JANE SCHWERDTFEGER AND JANET FISCHER

As ABE teachers, we are excited by the possibilities that art-images, objects, photographs hold to inspire learners to write. Art is a wonderful prompt for writing, because we all have unique experiences that come to mind when we write, and each of them is valid, valued, and personal.

The Power of Personal Photos

For Andrea, the power of a personal photograph for evoking writing cannot be stressed enough. At our Network 2004 workshop on inspiring ABE writers, Andrea illustrated a powerful technique. She began by sharing a video clip of a mid western town taken after a tornado had passed through and destroyed many homes and buildings. We saw an auditorium filled with tables, covered with hundreds of photographs, scattered remains of the tempest. As the townspeople walk up and down the aisles trying to recover their memories, viewers were left wondering, what would happen if our own personal photographs were lost or de-stroyed? Andrea stopped the clip; she then

shared photographs of her parents and grandparents.

Using an intriguing photograph taken before her parents married, Andrea led the group into an exercise of observation, asking:

- Where are these two people?
- What are they doing in the photo?
- Who took this picture?

As she shared the story behind the photos, Andrea modeled a guided writing exercise she has used with her

having to come up with something completely “out of the air” to write about. Andrea then models a first draft of her favorite photograph, sharing with us the writing she shares with her learners.

By taking the responses to the question in the first chart, the information can be turned into complete sentences that form the foundation for the writer’s ideas, while providing lots of opportunity to add extra detail and information in the writing revision stage.

For our learners, personal photos invite them to “tell their story” and start from something familiar. Students can choose to include information that they feel is relevant and “safe” to share.

Every Object Is Full of Story

Jane’s background as a museum educator is the inspiration for using objects (both familiar and unfamiliar)

to inspire writers. At the Network conference, she began by asking participants in our workshop to think of a special memory—one that evokes our senses—and asked What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What does it feel like? Does it have a special taste?

These questions framed our curiosity for the object she brought out to the audience. We began by examining the object closely. As we passed the object



ESOL learners. Using their own personal photos, learners begin by answering questions in a graphic organizer. The chart helps students focus on specific information to questions that can then be expanded upon for more detailed writing.

Pre-Writing: Gathering the Details

The questions above provide a framework that allows even the shyest writer to respond, and reduces students’ fear of

Continued on page 16

Inspiring ABE Writers...

Continued from page 15

through the audience, we had a chance to feel it, play with it, try to open it, look inside, see if it made a sound. Through reflection and responding to a series of questions about the object, we learned that the object Jane passed through the audience is a barn lantern that was used in the early 1800s, and we came to understand the design and functionality of the lantern for its original users.

For Jane, questioning strategies are a great way to engage students actively in the learning process. The teacher facilitates a dialogue between the student and the object. The questions posed to students can help build skills in critical thinking, writing, and reflection.

Different questions have different purposes, depending on the response you intend to elicit. For example, asking questions that use one's senses elicits descriptive information about the object. Asking students questions that build on the descriptive, as well as prior knowledge), and applying that information for other purposes, encourages student to process information, make inferences, summarize, and organize what they know. Finally, asking questions that have students using higher-order thinking skills encourages students to develop new ideas, make predictions, formulate hypotheses, or support an opinion about the object.

These questioning strategies represent a hierarchy of questioning roughly based on Bloom's Taxonomy, but there are other levels of thinking skills that can be drawn upon, too.

The Truth of a Photograph

To illustrate her use of photographs in teaching writing at



the Network conference, Janet hung a variety of pictures from magazines and newspapers around the room. She began by asking participants what they noticed as they entered the workshop room; what caught their eye? Everyone noticed the collection of pictures on the wall, aware that the room looked physically different from most of the conference rooms. She then

asked them to stand by a nearby photograph on the wall, and to begin by simply describing what they saw in the picture. She reminded participants that simple observation must prevail at that initial observation point, and to beware of the temptation to leap into judgments and speculations about who the people are, what they are doing, why they are doing it, or how they are feeling.

As participants began to share information about their pictures, Janet asked them to reflect on what struck them, and asked: Did the picture remind you of anything in particular? In what ways does it relate to your own experience? As participants shared this information with a partner, the room became abuzz with conversation. A spark had been lit, interest increased, and excitement flowed as people eagerly engaged in discussion and reflected on their observations and experiences.

Using Pictures

In the ABE/ESOL classroom, photographs can serve the same powerful purpose as they did with teachers at the Network conference. They provide a starting point for rich discussion and many activities. The rich imagery of a picture evokes not only students' interest but also provides a stimulus for writing in response to it. A picture can catch us in the moment and still allow us to transcend it. Using pictures also encourages students

Continued on page 17

Inspiring ABE Writers...

Continued from page 16

to think creatively and critically.

Using pictures students can

- tell the story behind the picture;
- give the picture a title and explain it;
- write from the perspective of a person portrayed in the picture;
- prepare a debate on a theme evident in the picture.

Using pictures, teachers can also

- teach compare and contrast strategies using more than one picture;
- teach simple vocabulary and descriptive words;

- teach letter writing skills by encouraging students to write a letter to one of the characters in the picture or write a letter to the editor about an issue depicted in the picture.

In addition, pictures can be adapted for many activities, including pair work, small group and whole class cooperative learning, making them particularly suitable for multi-level classes.

Objects and pictures can provide a common or shared experience for adults to explore together. They are easy to collect and transport, they can reflect the individual interests of teachers and students. They are free or low cost, and they can be used over and over again!

Andrea O'Brien worked as the staff developer at the Lawrence Public Schools Adult Learning Center.

Jane Schwerdtfeger is curriculum and assessment development specialist at the Adult and Community Learning Services Massachusetts Department of Education.

Janet Fischer has worked in ESOL for many years.

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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

800-447-8844.

www.sabes.org/hotline

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

Oh, Ernesto, I Have Something Wonderful to Tell You: Making Higher Level Readers Out of Lower Level Learners

By RICHARD GOLDBERG AND JANET FISCHER

As teachers in Boston's Asian American Civic Association, we work with immigrant adult learners at a reading level of 3–4, the grade level equivalents used by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Richard's level I class is slightly lower than Janet's level II class. In this article, we will provide some practical, classroom-based ideas for teaching higher-order reading skills to lower level readers who are nonnative speakers of English. Richard shows how to get students to read and respond to a whole book on work and family issues. Janet shows how to take a student-generated text and provide reading and writing activities to build background knowledge in order to increase comprehension.

Joining the Literacy Club

Our common goals are to help lower-level learners, in Frank Smith's words, to "join the literacy club," that is, to make reading more enjoyable, to engage with texts, to go beyond the wall of print barrier of "too many new words," and to acquire the kinds of reading strategies necessary for success at higher levels of education and employment.

We don't see these goals as mutually exclusive, and we believe teachers shouldn't focus on one at the expense of the other.

Linking Theory to Practice: Richard

In my level I ABE class, students read *Woman's Work, Man's Work* by Roseanne Keller (New Readers Press), a small "chapter book" focusing on the difficulties faced by an immigrant family. The husband, laid off and unable to find work, is forced to stay home and take care of the couple's three children, while his wife works full-time to support the family.

First Steps: Content and Formal Schemata

Since none of the students had ever read an entire book in English, we thought it useful to bring some reading theory into the classroom to support our view that meaning is not found in individual words or texts but as part of an interactive process between a reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). First we examined content schemata (what readers already know about the subject they're reading). Students easily wrote examples of "woman's work" and "man's work," both in their native countries and in the United States, and they were asked if they ever knew of a woman who did "man's work" or a man who did "woman's work." We also discussed how different societies would view men and women in these situations. These activities

provided much useful information for a future lesson on changing gender roles.

Next, we used formal schemata (knowledge of the organizational structures of different kinds of texts—for example, how a book is different from a poem). Students were asked to skim the entire book by looking at the front cover (a picture of an exasperated house husband), table of contents, names of chapters, pictures, and reading small sections, such as any chapter's first and last paragraphs.

Each student then shared her/his findings with the class. Finally, we tried to predict the content of each of the seven chapters by writing one sentence summaries based on the titles ("The Broken Dream," "Anger," "Change of Heart," etc.) and to predict the ending from the last line of the book, "Oh, Ernesto, I have something wonderful to tell you."

Students read the book in different ways: through sustained silent reading in class, by reading a few paragraphs aloud "round-robin style," by listening to the teacher read aloud, and by reading assigned chapters at home. All in-class reading followed a strict "no dictionaries" policy. If students encountered difficult new words or idioms, they would underline them and try to guess meanings from con-

Continued on page 19

Oh, Ernesto. . .

Continued from page 18

text with the rest of the class, or they would try a “list it and skip it” approach of writing the word in their reading journal and looking up the meaning later. (For an excellent list of strategies that can be used before, during, and after reading, see Auerbach and Paxton (1997).

Reading and Writing as Interactive Skills

In all our classroom work, we use reading and writing together, not as discrete skills. Among the writing assignments was a letter to either Carmen or Ernesto, the two main characters, in which students would give their reactions to the husband’s or wife’s plight and offer suggestions to improve their respective situations. After reading the book, students were asked to write their own ending to the story and predict what might happen to Carmen, Ernesto and their children in the next few years. Finally, they did a longer piece of writing to explain how they would deal with the problem of job loss and shifting child care obligations if those situations surfaced in their own families.

Narrow Reading

These activities were not done in a vacuum but were part of longer units on the changing family and working in the United States. Through this kind of “narrow reading,” investigating a topic in depth by reading multiple genres—a short book, a newspaper article, a poem—students are able to increase their background knowledge and transfer both content and formal

schemata to more challenging readings. Although we do only one chapter of the book in class every day, each time we read this book I have always noticed that many students are reading it at a faster pace on their own, proving that if the material connects with their realities, students often do more independent reading.

Using Student-Generated Writing as Class Texts (Janet)

At the beginning of each new class cycle, I try to establish a strong foundation for reading. For example, we begin the first class day with a reading assignment integrated with a writing assignment. Although

on the board. The following class, students are given a photocopy of the list they generated from the previous class. This list enables students to read their classmates’ responses and validate their own ideas in print. We then discuss similarities and differences among the group. Students respond very positively to this activity because they receive immediate feedback from their peers. It also encourages them to relate their experiences to their peers’ and prepares them to respond to subsequent class readings at more challenging levels.

We continue the theme with a published reading assignment using two excerpts from *I Was Dreaming to Come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island*

After reading the book, students were asked to write their own ending to the story and predict what might happen to Carmen, Ernesto and their children in the next few years.

most students are Chinese, we often have non-Asian students in our classes. The challenge is to find themes that all students can relate to. For my students, immigrating to the United States is a universal experience; therefore, I choose readings related to this theme. What follows reflects a combination of in-class and at-home reading activities.

Students begin by writing about the thoughts they had about the United States before they immigrated here. We next list all of the students’ responses

Oral History Project (New York: Puffin Books, 1995). Students read about the expectations and thoughts of two immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island in 1920. They also read a short biography of each of the immigrants. After referring to their earlier responses in the opening activity, they write a short letter to one of these immigrants. In their letter, they explain how they can identify with the writer’s feelings or experiences and

Continued on page 20

Oh, Ernesto. . .

Continued from page 19

how they themselves reacted in their own situations. Using letter writing provides students with a clear audience for their writing, making it easier to determine tone, level of formality, and other choices any writer has to make.

The following day, students do a variation on a role-play using writing instead of talking. Each student exchanges her letter with a partner and takes on the role of the immigrant her partner wrote to. Students write responses to their partner's letter addressing specific issues, concerns, or challenges their partners have faced. These student-generated texts give students opportunities to read more authentic texts with a controlled level of diction. Depending on the class, we will do up to two "letter exchanges" to reinforce their reading and writing skills from multiple perspectives.

The follow-up reading is a longer student-generated text from a former ABE student. We discuss students' reactions to this student's experiences, again drawing comparisons and contrasts. As a final activity, we create a chart comparing the three writers to the class members, examining country; age when immigrated; thoughts before coming to the U.S.; hopes for the future; and advice/suggestions for each person. Through the use of this graphic, we look for commonalities. The use of a chart also provides students with a different reading skill: locating information from a graphic, which is organized differently from a narrative.

Recycling Vocabulary

By following one relevant theme for a period of time, we created a context that helped students increase their comprehension of the reading matter. Vocabulary is naturally recycled when you use a theme, so students have the chance to see new words repeated in different readings. Using student-generated texts is a natural way to keep the level of diction low enough for students to read with ease. By introducing published material on the same theme, they have the opportunity for exposure to language somewhat beyond their reach. By combining reading and writing as interactive activities, students see the connection between the two. All of these strategies with low-level students help set the stage for higher order reading skills.

Sample Reading Strategies

(based on Auerbach and Paxton, 1997)

Pre-Reading Strategies

- Accessing prior knowledge
- Writing your way into reading (Writing about your experiences related to the topic)
- Asking questions based on the title
- Making predictions based on previewing
- Identifying text structure
- Skimming for the general idea
- Reading the introduction and conclusion first

During Reading Strategies

- Skipping unknown words; guessing from context
- Predicting the main idea of each paragraph
- Drawing pictures to show what you see in your mind's eye

After Reading Strategies

- Revising prereading expectations
- Making an outline, chart, map, or diagram of the organization of the text
- Retelling what you think the author is saying
- Relating the text to your own experience

Janet Fischer and Richard Goldberg worked together at the Asian American Civic Association in Boston.

Notes

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"Life-transforming ideas have always come to me through books."

—Bell Hooks

Teachers Observing Teachers

BY SUSAN CHERNILO

Teaching can be a lonely occupation. I know that sounds strange because of course students provide wonderful interaction. But no one else, unless we are lucky enough to have a classroom assistant, is playing the same role that we are in the classroom. For some teachers, working solo is a plus. Some of us might feel that “too many cooks spoil the broth,” and as with any creative endeavor, teaching is something better done alone. As a fiction writer, even though I write alone, I depend a lot on feedback from other writers. I have come to appreciate that the same is true of teaching: I appreciate the feedback my colleagues have to offer.

Feedback Through Peer Observation

I participated in a peer teaching observation process twice. Both times the feedback I got from the other teacher was invaluable. I was all geared up for criticism, and happily surprised when what I got were helpful suggestions. Usually, the teacher focused on what I had pointed out as my “issues” in our pre-teacher meeting, in some cases giving me pointers on how to do what I was doing a little more effectively. In some cases the teacher told me I was fine and to keep on keeping on without worry. One of the most stunning pieces of feedback was when my observer gave suggestions to something I hadn’t even been thinking of as an issue, my reading lesson. I learned that

sometimes the thing you’re most self-conscious about is the least of your problems because you’re giving it attention.

Observing Others

Equally instructive to me were the times when I was the person doing the observing. When the staff first started talking about the peer observation process, teachers were excited, but there were a lot of concerns. How would teachers who have



completely different styles, or teach entirely different levels, understand what each other is doing? Both times when I was the observer, these issues came up. I came to see how they could be dealt with, and indeed, actually enhance the process.

The first year, for example, I observed a teacher whose approach was more “meat and

potatoes” than mine. I gave her suggestions about doing more interactive and expressive activities; she was a bit defensive (and rightfully so) as she was a much more experienced teacher than I. But over the next year, she’d try out different things, get excited about it, and tell me about it. Meanwhile, in my own class, I was realizing the importance of the nuts and bolts of ESOL and had the luxury to incorporate methods that I had seen her use. Over time, we moved towards each other, not to some bland middle ground, but to a multi-dimensional place that incorporated a diversity of approaches. The next year, I observed the literacy class, knowing little about teaching that level. I found that by just listening to the teacher during the pre-observation meeting, I could help her unearth her concerns and come up with some of her own conclusions. And after sitting in on the class I was able to come up with some helpful suggestions. She described her class as the same every day, always starting over, with no apparent memory of yesterday, a bit like the movie “Groundhog Day.” So for me to get a slice of one day’s worth was really out of context. It was like entering a way slow downed world, and I found it fascinating; I was honored to have the chance to enter it for a day.

Susan Chernilo has been an ESOL teacher and volunteer coordinator.

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Steps to Peer Observation at the Adult Learning Program

BY LEE HALLER

The Adult Learning Program of Jamaica Plain Community Centers uses an annual peer observation and feedback process for teachers' professional development. We developed our process for this, including our document, Elements of Quality Teaching, and all the forms, over a series of staff retreats:

- Each teacher fills out a Teacher Self-Reflection Form where they describe their areas of relative strength and weakness, using our Elements of Quality Teaching document.
- Each teacher fills out a Peer Matching Form where they describe their areas of expertise someone observing them might learn from, what they would like to learn by observing, and whether they prefer to observe someone in a level close to theirs or something different.
- The director matches pairs. Some teachers observe and are observed by the same person

(A-B), others are part of two different pairs (A-B, C-A, B-D). It gets complicated!

- Staff meeting time or a non-instructional night is used for pairs to meet, pre-observation, to discuss the self-reflection of the observee and what they each hope to gain. They use a Classroom Observation Form to decide what aspects the observer will pay specific attention to. The observer takes notes of that meeting.
- The director schedules observation sessions. Each observer sits in for a whole three-hour class, and takes notes. The observer's class has a sub.
- Pairs meet again after the observation. The observer writes up the Classroom Observation Form to share feedback with observee.

Lee Haller has worked in the ABE field since 1992.

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This resource is now available at www.litwomen.org/welearn.html

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I Wish I Knew How Heavy My Schoolbag Would Be

By RUTH CLARK

The Links Program at Middlesex Community College is offered to adults who hold a GED or high school diploma and want to start a college education. We are always looking for ways to better prepare students for our program, so we designed a simple survey asking students two questions: "What do you wish you knew before you joined the Links Program?" And "What would you recommend to the new students entering the Links Program?"

Identifying and Sharing Barriers

We used the survey as a classroom writing exercise. First we had students brainstorm about barriers to their education. The teacher recorded responses on the board as talking points. This part of the exercise was a big help in promoting the free

flow of ideas and in establishing commonalities: everyone had fears about their education.

The activity also illustrated that many students shared similar barriers, as illustrated in the following partial list:

- lack of money
- family hardships (deaths, illnesses)
- needed to work
- learning disabilities
- lack of academic skills
- getting used to homework again
- lack ability to retain information
- single parent, working
- lack of confidence/self-esteem
- overtired from employment/lack of energy
- medical problems (self and family)
- lack of support from families, teachers, etc.

For teachers who want to replicate this activity in their own transitions class, a few of the barriers from the list above can serve as a catalyst for students to begin brainstorming their own ideas.

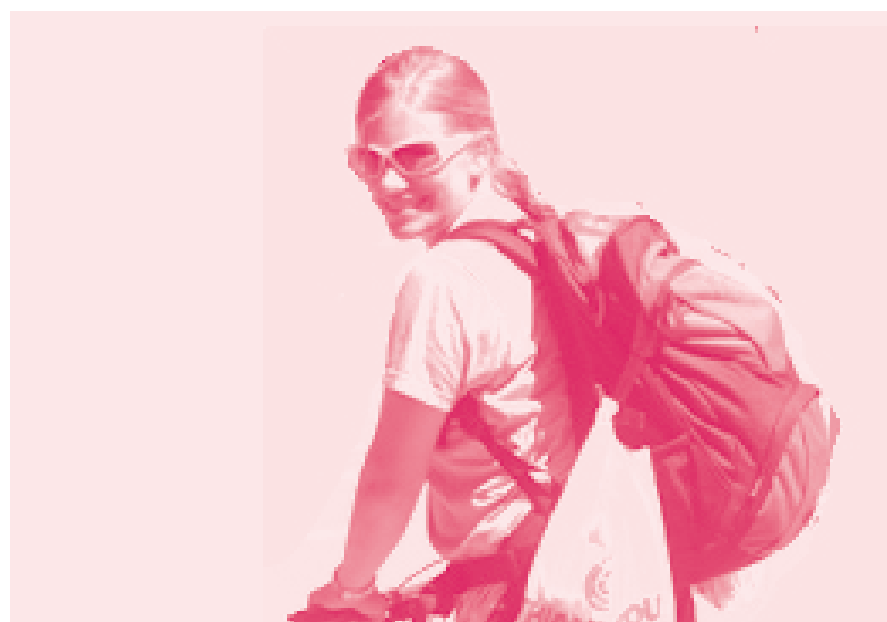
Overcoming Barriers

The next step, discussing solutions to the barriers, shows students how many strategies they already have for overcoming obstacles. Here, students can be validated for what they have already accomplished. For example, the class could describe time management systems they are already using to plan for class hours that may be different from an ABE schedule. They could share strategies for planning homework time and locating homework places. They could also share backup plans for transportation and child care needs so they don't miss class. In many cases, the encouragement the students gain from each other, the teachers, and staff in the adult learning centers can help them reevaluate barriers and serve as an introduction to a transition program or mainstream college.

I Wish I Knew How Heavy My School Bag Would Be

After brainstorming the barriers/solutions activity, we asked students to tell us what they wished they knew prior to entering the Links Program.

Continued on page 24



I Wish. . .

Continued from page 23

Their answers, partially represented in the list on the next page, provide insight into how to prepare students for transitions programs.

By using these exercises with your own students, and by considering the feedback from former students, you can plan to incorporate classroom material that will “plant the seed” and build on your students’ success with ABE. As with the in-class exercise, the process of forming their answers to the survey questions helped the Links students realize that they’d made positive gains in overcoming the barriers they most feared. In addition, they let us know what steps would help us better prepare our students for the Links Program

- I knew my homework was going to take as long as it does.
- I knew how fast paced the classes are.
- I knew what to expect in college.
- I knew there would be so much help available.
- I knew how helpful the teachers really are.
- I knew how the staff of the school is really trying to help you succeed.
- I knew more about attendance policies and being on time.
- I knew that college would be as easy as it seems to be, as well as fun.
- I knew about the transitions program sooner.
- I knew about the tutoring help.
- I knew that college would be less stressful than I thought it would be. I had started a while ago.
- I knew about the Harrington-O’Shea evaluation that will help me find academic direction toward a major.
- I had better time management skills.
- I had prepared better in high school.
-

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Students’ Recommendations

By drawing from their responses, students were able to come up with a list of recommendations for incoming students.

- Do homework first. Don’t procrastinate.
- Seek out tutoring and learning centers and school counseling to help overcome obstacles.
- It’s not that hard. There is a lot of help.
- Study hard and you can do it.
- This program gives you hope and makes you feel, “yes, I can do it.”
- There are many educational opportunities to explore out there in the world for people to pursue.
- Talk to other people who are going to college to hear their opinions and how much they love school.
- Work at (someplace like) UPS because they will pay for school and insurance.
- Listen to your teachers and there will be no surprises on tests.
- Check baggage at the door.



Helping the LD Learner Helps All Students

BY JANET ISSERLIS

Understanding how adults process language and literacy is a key piece of our work in supporting adult learning. Scientists' and educators' growing awareness of learning differences and difficulties has led to an increase in research on addressing these difficulties through multi-sensory approaches and other means of instruction. This increased awareness can benefit learners of all abilities.

In-depth analysis of their particular learning disabilities has enabled some adults to learn more about how they process spoken and written language. It has also enabled their teachers to adapt instruction best suited to help them learn. However, professional diagnoses are not widely available or easily affordable to most adults. And for many ESOL learners, the process of undergoing official screening for and diagnosis of learning disabilities is impractical, if not impossible, as these diagnostic processes are seldom available in languages other than English. In addition, academic preparation is usually not an immediate goal for basic level readers, yet accommodations usually focus on academic preparation. So even if an 'official' diagnosis of a learning disability is made, accommodations (such as extra time for a GED test, or special equipment for writing or calculating) are not necessary to those learners who are not yet poised to prepare for these high stakes tests.

Because screening for learning disabilities is a complicated and expensive process, it seems far more useful for us, as teachers and programs, to understand multiple ways of assisting learners regardless of their official status in terms of LD. In doing so we strengthen every learner's ability to acquire spoken and written language.

Ideas for the Classroom: Rituals and Repetition

Predictability, consistency, and recursiveness are keys to moving forward for anyone learning anything, but they are particularly important elements for students with learning difficulties. Building incremental challenges and offering opportunities to use what's been learned in new ways are also cornerstones of good teaching.

I have used many of the ideas presented here in ESOL classes, but they have applicability to basic literacy learning as well. It is fairly easy to plan predictable activities for sections of each class so learners come to know what to expect on a daily or weekly basis. These predictable chunks may take the form of rituals or recurrent events.

For example, in a beginning level ESOL class, a teacher can set up the blackboard in advance so at the beginning of every class someone will write the day and date in the top right-hand corner. Or the teacher can give a student a Post-it Note to mark the day on a wall calendar. Another predictable

activity is to write a question every day on the blackboard as a warm-up to the day's lesson, such as: Who woke up before 6 o'clock? Who took the bus to school? Where's the best place to buy rice?

These activities give learners opportunities to use knowledge and strategies (e.g., looking at the wall calendar to write the day and date, to review basic vocabulary, to build an awareness of sentence structure, and to gain automaticity in using high-frequency words). Questions can also tap into learners' existing knowledge and start to build schema for the tasks ahead.

Weekly Rituals

I've worked with several basic level ESOL literacy classes by beginning each week with a language experience story. We spend the class encoding the students' activities over the weekend. At first, learners tell me what they did over the weekend, and I write it down on newsprint. Increasingly, learners do the writing; other students and I help the scribe as needed. I then take the newsprint with me after class and type the stories up into a one-page newspaper format. I take the newsletter to the next class and we use this as reading material.

Using Language Experience

Because we do this language experience story each week, it

Continued on page 26

Helping the LD Learner...

Continued from page 1

becomes a predictable and consistent activity. Because we use the language over again (from oral to written to reading what we wrote), the activity is recursive. In addition, on the newsletter itself, I always include a small calendar for the month in the upper right corner, a word search, or a circling/underlining task at the bottom.

I also include a masthead with the name of the classroom and the date (week of ...) at the top of the page. For students who finish quickly, I add a few questions for them to answer on a separate paper. (This helps keep a multi-level class running smoothly.) As you can see, I replay the literacy activities from my daily blackboard rituals onto the weekly newsletter.

Over time, the familiarity of the task, the new bits and pieces of language from weekend stories, and the predictable format and content all work towards helping learners expand their abilities to read and write. These events also generate new topics of discussion as people begin to ask and answer questions about their lives beyond the classroom.

Dialogue Journals

Another weekly activity I have used for literacy acquisition is dialogue journals. One day a week students enter some writing into a notebook and

pass it to me. I then take the notebooks home and respond to them with roughly the same amount of language. Seeing learners' gradual progress, as well as noting errors, also helped shape subsequent classroom activities. For example,

It's just all good.

I could create mini lessons on grammar points and vocabulary based on the needs I saw from the journals. When one journal was completed, I photocopied it and returned the original to its owner. From this he or she could see how the writing developed over the 4–6 weeks of using the journal.

In many classes, some learners make strides more quickly than others. These students can be asked to do meaningful expansion exercises that become predictable over time.

For example, one student can write five questions about another student's weekend, and that student can write answers to the questions. For example, Anna could ask Juana: What was the food like at your party? Who went to the party? Having predictable formats for learning literacy helps learners develop skills by keeping the kinds of tasks constant while presenting new challenges in content.

Framing classroom activity in ways that benefit all learn-

ers—those facing learning challenges as well as those making more noticeable progress—is like the thinking behind universal design that led to having indentations in curbstones at street corners. While initially designed for people in wheel chairs, the smooth bits also work remarkably well for baby carriages, shopping carts, and skateboards. It's just all good.

References

For more information on language experience approach, see *The Language Experience Approach and Adult Learners* <www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LEA.html>.

For more information on dialogue journals, see *Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy* <www.cal.org/resources/digest/peyton01.html>.

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"The ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive."

— Autobiography of Malcolm X, 1964

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 For Youth 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.

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 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 choice-

Continued on page 28

Let Them Choose. . .

Continued from page 27

es, 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, 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 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 STEELE: 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 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 terrorism. 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).

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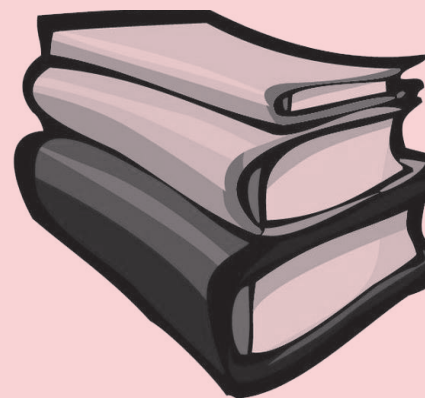
Carter, B. (2000). *Best Books for Young Adults*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions.

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

Derek Kalchbrenner has worked as a teacher, coordinator, and manager with youth since 1995.

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Things We Can Do: Addressing Issues of Sexual Orientation in the ABE Classroom

BY STEFANIE MATTFELD AND DEBORAH SCHWARTZ

There is a range of possible actions in dealing with issues of sexual orientation in the classroom and in combating homophobia. We all make different decisions depending on what we are comfortable with. You may decide that one of these actions is right for you, or you may want to take on more. This list was adapted from several sources. See footnotes for references.



1. Do not assume all of your students are straight (heterosexual). Remember that in a classroom of ten students, the odds are that at least one is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered and more may have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered friends and relatives.
2. Don't force students to disclose anything they are not comfortable with. For example, if you plan lessons that demand disclosure of personal or family information, you can always give an optional lesson that does not require students to reveal OR disclose their sexual orientation.
3. Use inclusive language. (Especially for administrators/coordinators.) When speaking, writing policies, or when distributing memos, use language that is inclusive and gender-neutral about behavior and relationships. For instance, invite people to bring their "spouses or partners" to a meeting or event. This shows that all families belong.
4. Openly use the words gay, lesbian, and bisexual in any context that you are teaching, not just when you are teaching specifically to these issues.
5. Provide classroom speakers who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered in order to share their experiences, respond to students' questions, and to celebrate diversity. (See Resource section for SpeakOut!)
6. Institute an "anti-slur" policy from the first day of class that includes a ban on homophobic remarks. Don't allow offensive humor directed at gays and lesbians or homophobic remarks in class.
7. Challenge all homophobic remarks. Ask what they are based on. Don't shut students or colleagues down for having "politically incorrect" opinions, but don't ignore that hate hurts the people targeted by it. You can ask other students to respond to the comments, express your own discomfort with the comments, or begin a discussion and supply the class with information that helps dispel stereotypes and inaccurate information. Remember that silence=collusion; being silent means you are, in a way, agreeing with the comment and sending a message to the rest of the class.
8. Display a gay-positive symbol such as a pink or black triangle pin or sticker or a rainbow flag in the classroom.
9. Expose learners to positive historical and current role models for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered communities. For example, when discussing literature, history, social studies in class, point out that certain figures were/are gay or lesbian the same way you would mention their ethnic or racial background. You could note that Alice Walker is a lesbian, or that Walt Whitman was bisexual. Further, you could proactively introduce curriculum that affirms gay leaders, activists, athletes, musicians, writers, and artists. Don't leave out gays who were persecuted during the holocaust.

Continued on page 30

Things We Can Do

Continued from page 29

10. Push for teacher in-services around gay, lesbian, or bisexual issues. For example, set up a staff training about homophobia: how and why we should confront it as educators.
11. Post resources for all students about social services and include numbers for gay/lesbian hotlines.
12. Include discussions of gay, lesbian, or bisexual issues in the class, as with any other issues pertaining to oppressed groups. Teach about the history of American Movements: civil rights movement, labor movement, women's movement, and gay movement. Use documentary films such as *Eyes on the Prize* and *After Stonewall*.
13. Join GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network. (See Resource page for information.)
14. Examine images of gays and lesbians in the media -- especially in feature films and television. Look at stereotypes as well as positive images of gays and lesbians. Some films with gay-positive characters include *The Wedding Banquet* and *Bent*.

Notes

1. "Dealing With Sexual Orientation in the Classroom," Karen Snelbecker and Tom Meyer. Originally published in *TESOL Matters*, August/Sept 1996; reprinted in full in *The Change Agent*, February 1999, Issue 8. Available from Marie Horschler at World Education, 617-482-9485.
2. "Supporting the Invisible Minority," John D. Anderson. *Educational Leadership*, April 1997 (p. 70)
3. The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Speakers Bureau (now called *SpeakOut!*), handout.
4. *The TA's Guide for Overcoming Homophobia in the Classroom* (Web resource): youth.org/loco/PERSON-Project/Resources/organizing_Tactics/TA.html

Stefanie Mattfeld and Deborah Schwartz have taught ESOL and ABE in adult basic education programs for several years.

Originally published in *Bright Ideas*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (winter 2000)

Resources

Please see *Bright Ideas* at www.sabes.org/ for more complete resources and bibliographies.

GALE (Gay and Lesbian Educators): Support and networking. Write to: PO Box 930, Amherst, MA 01004.

SpeakOut! (formerly the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Speakers Bureau), 29 Stanhope Street, Boston, MA 02116. 617-450-9776. Offers speaking engagements on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues to encourage dialogue and understanding. Sliding scale for honorarium. Also train people as speakers.

PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays): 978-562-4176

Call for regional PFLAG offices around the state.

Web: www.ultranet.com/~gbpflag

What Is Your Program's Philosophy?

By RICHARD GOLDBERG

If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea.

—David Belasco, American playwright and producer (1853-1931)

If a student walks into your agency and says, “I need to improve my English,” then asks about the specific program that you coordinate or in which you teach, are you able to succinctly explain what your program does and how you do it?

Can you clearly articulate whom you serve, and why, in one or two sentences? If not, you may be setting yourself up for frustrations in the classroom, misunderstandings among staff, and unfulfilled expectations for students. This article will offer some suggestions on how to establish a clear program philosophy that you can communicate to students and other stakeholders in your agency and community. It is important to have a clear program philosophy not only for your students but also as your community partnerships emerge so community stakeholders know who you are and how you do what you do.

Learning From Experience

In late 1993, almost one year after the two major educational providers in Boston's Chinatown launched an ABE transition program as a bridge to college, skills training, and alternative high school diploma courses, our program was evaluated by a team of researchers from the University of Massachusetts Boston. Among other things, the research team conducted one-on-one and focus group inter-

views with students. One particular student response made a powerful impression. “This program was to help us in getting ready for our futures; however, the course seems like it's lacking a theme—they talked a little bit about everything.” (Kiang, et al, 1994). From this comment, it was clear that the program could have done a much better job in communicating its goals, methods, expectations, and anticipated results. As a result of the evaluation feedback we then set out to clarify and redefine what kind of a program we were supposed to be.

Beginning with the next round of testing sessions, we gave all prospective students a two-page fact sheet with program goals presented visually. We used the image of a staircase with steps ending in reaching the program's anticipated outcomes. These outcomes include college, job training, an alternative high school diploma program, or employment. The sheet has since undergone several revisions as our ABE program has grown to four levels. We now answer the questions, “How will we teach you?” and “What will you learn?” We also clarify our expectations about homework, attendance, and students' commitment to program goals.

Use of Native Language

We read all of this aloud with each group of prospective students, then the program

counselor summarizes the fact sheet in Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, the native languages of most of the people we serve. The result is that by making our program more tangible and explicit at the point of first contact, there is a good deal of buy-in from our most important stakeholders.

What You Can Do

At your next meeting with your staff, you might want to brainstorm some answers to these questions. You may discover that you are right on track with where you want to be. You may also discover, however, that you are having trouble, as a group, articulating or agreeing on a set of goals, or that your goals are not congruent with your practices. Whatever arises from such a discussion, it's always useful to reflect critically on the basic questions: what are we doing, why, how well are we doing it, and how well are we explaining all of this to our most important stakeholders, our students?

- What does your educational program stand for?
- Are you really doing what you are funded to be doing?
- Does your philosophy come across clearly in what all of your teachers do with their students?

Continued on page 32

- Can you explain it in one sentence?
- Are you successful, and how do your students know that you are successful?
- Is your educational culture consistent across all levels of your program?
- Is one teacher doing content-based or theme-based instruction while another puts more emphasis on grammar worksheets or is teaching to a test?
- What are your expectations of students?
- Do you set reasonable goals with students? Is this negotiated or dictated? Are these expectations consistent throughout your program?
- How do you communicate them among staff and to students?
- Is your program sensitive to your students' short term and long-term needs?

Notes:

- Kiang, Peter, et al, 1994. Research and Reflections on the English Transitional Program. University of Massachusetts/Boston.

Richard Goldberg has taught in and directed ESOL programs for many years.

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Try This!

Every program should be able to accommodate different teaching styles, but it is important to maintain the same underlying philosophy and to continually reinforce it with teachers and students. After nine years of trying fine tuning, I believe our program has finally come up with something that even David Belasco would be proud of:

We are an intermediate-level English program that prepares adult learners for college, job training, alternative high school diploma programs, or employment through integrated, theme-based instruction.

Now try writing your program philosophy in the space below.

Special thanks to Debbie Liehs, faithful Field Notes proofreader for for ten years.

Teaching Social Justice in ABE Classes: It's for the Students and the Teachers

BY NANCY GOODMAN

What can adult basic education teachers do when students bring stories to school about their struggles to provide for themselves and their children? How do teachers cope with their feelings of anger at how unfair "the system" is?

By teaching students how "the system" works, by exploring the power of electoral politics, and by examining how students' struggles are connected to people like themselves throughout history and around the world, teachers can begin to address the complexities of students' issues and concerns and help them plan for social change.

Many of us who work with people who are not yet economically stable come to care deeply about them. So it's hard when they come to school and tell the class, "I went in for a review of food stamps, but when they found out that I pay \$400/month in a car payment, they reduced the amount for my teenage daughter and me to \$12/month! If I don't have a car, there's no way I'm going to be able to get my degree and really earn enough to support us." Or we have heard, "The good news is, I just got a raise! The bad news is, my rent's going up, and now I earn \$10/month too much to

qualify for Mass Health." These, and many other related situations, are all too familiar to our students and for our staff. We feel sad, scared, angry, and overwhelmed.

Women in Leadership

Wellspring House is a 22-year-old organization that began as a shelter for homeless families and has expanded to offer access to permanent affordable housing, education and training, and



support for families. In the education program called Foundations (17 weeks of college transition classes), we give direction to all those feelings in a course called Women in Leadership.

Half the sessions focus on women's history, particularly the fight by women to earn the right to vote. In learning about Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, students come to appreciate that voting is an opportunity not to miss. In the other half of the class, imagining our future, students learn how to use the power we have to influence the government and other bureaucracies to respond to people's real needs.

Starting Out

On the first day of class I show students a drawing of a woman standing in a kitchen holding an empty wallet. There is a toddler tugging at her shirt. Behind her are nearly empty cupboards and cracked plaster walls. I ask the women, "What do you see here? Why is the woman doing what she is doing? Does this happen in real life? Can you describe a real-life situation?" After linking it to their lives, I bring it out to a larger context. "What are causes of poverty? Why don't people earn enough money?"

Once I have stimulated students' thinking regarding the what and why of poverty, I ask them, "what do you know about poverty in America? What do you want to know?" Because I use the model of popular education, I use the answers

Continued on page 34

Teaching Social Justice

Continued from page 33

to these questions to shape the course to each class's particular interests, providing information that the students tell me will be useful to them.

The course is approved for three credits at North Shore Community College, so we consistently cover some basic concepts: self-interest as a motivator to action; vision of the world as it could be including other groups whose visions have already led to action plans (such as the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project); the role of citizens in a democracy; the opportunity to register to vote including a discussion of the values of the four political parties listed on the voter registration form; the role and structure of American government. But we are also flexible. One class may ask for a session on taxes. Another group may want to know about the federal budget.

Meeting with Legislators

Often there are opportunities to meet with our legislators at the statehouse. For example, three students and I attended a Home and Harvest Rally in the fall of 2002. The rally was an education and advocacy event put on by a number of the Boston coalitions who are working to increase access to housing and jobs. One of the Foundations students spontaneously agreed to take the podium and describe how she had become homeless and what it had been like to live in a motel for several months with her young son. She also told us that she is in

school now and plans to earn a degree in criminal justice. Then the students and I visited our state senator. After hearing that another of the students had been forced by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to quit a full-time job before they would help her, our senator filed Senate 812, a bill to allow DTA to offer benefits on a sliding scale. In the fiscal climate of FY 03, the bill did not pass, but you can be sure that the student whose story generated the bill learned a huge lesson about influencing the legislature.

Wellspring complements social justice teaching with a community-based public policy committee. This group "invites Cape Ann community members to examine economic and social policies that make it difficult for many residents to attain economic stability.... The committee also encourages people who are directly affected by these policies to offer testimony at legislative hearings." The public policy committee is a safe place for students who have a high level of interest in social justice to learn to work with others to make it easier for families to thrive in Massachusetts.

Students Reflect

On the final exam I asked: why do the Foundations program and Wellspring House want you to know about voting and how the government works? One student wrote, "to get involved ... to make a difference in our community and make informed decisions—to understand that each vote counts, we can be heard at all levels of our government and work together to improve our

own life and the lives of many." Another woman wrote, "...We will know what is happening in our government and [decide] whether we agree or disagree with what is going on." And one more: "So we can advocate (vocabulary word!) for what is important to us, which in turn empowers us. We should not leave our future in the hands of others."

In the title to this article, I claim that teaching about social justice is beneficial both to the students and to us, the teachers. The students' words above have given you their reasons why it's beneficial to them. For teachers it helps relieve the anger and helplessness we feel in the face of our students' obstacles. It helps to know that we are sending them out into the community with tools to organize and advocate for change that will lead to greater justice for all.

Resources

www.weiu.org The Women's Educational and Industrial Union has information on the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project.

www.civicyouth.org United for a Fair Economy has materials available online.

Hope, A., and Timmel, S. (2001). *Training for Transformation*. London: ITDG Publishing.

Nancy Goodman has worked as an administrator in Gloucester, MA.

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Supervisor Self-Assessment

CONTRIBUTED BY ALEX RISLEY SCHROEDER

The quiz below is adapted from "Effective Supervision Survey" in *Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership: A Guide for Organizations in Changing Times*, by Berit M. Lakey, George Lakey, Rod Napier, and Janice M. Robinson (New Society Publishers, 1995), page 136. It is designed to be answered by employees about their supervisor.

Instructions:

As supervisors we are used to wearing a variety of different hats. In this exercise put on the hat of a staff member of your organization and look at your behavior through the eyes of your staff. Use this instrument to assess yourself as a supervisor. With each question, rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 (10 = excellent). Be honest!

1. Clearly defines her or his own limit of authority. _____
2. Provides me with clear organizational goals and priorities. _____
3. Provides me with a clear understanding of my own authority as it relates to my role. _____
4. Helps me to establish my own goals and objectives in an atmosphere of openness and collaboration, where my ideas and concerns are seriously considered. _____
5. Determines with me the criteria of success upon which my own performance will be measured. _____
6. Believes that my career development is a crucial part of the supervisory process and actively focuses with me on career opportunities and my own long-term goals. _____
7. Meets with me regularly to keep in touch with my progress. _____
8. Establishes with me a climate of help and accessibility that makes it easy to approach him or her. _____
9. Provides me with organizational information I feel is important to my own work and maintains my interest and involvement in the organization. _____
10. Provides me with the opportunity to develop specific skills or experience necessary for my present job or future development within this organization or elsewhere. _____
11. Helps me develop a clear and easily followed plan that outlines my progress and how well I am meeting my own goals and objectives, both in terms of the job itself and my personal and professional development. _____

Continued on page 36

Supervisor Needs Assessment...

continued from page 35

12. Helps me evaluate my own performance in areas of strengths and limitations. _____
13. Takes time periodically to observe me on the job, doing those things that are most important for my success. _____
14. Solicits my own views of my performance based on the criteria to which we previously agreed. _____
15. Solicits, along with me, information from individuals I impact in my job and compares this with his or her conceptions of my performance, as well as with my own. _____
16. Works with me to improve my performance in areas that appear to need strengthening, based on the information I have gathered. _____
17. Gives problems I have within the organization appropriate attention, shortly after I've stated them. _____
18. Shapes my supervision according to my unique and changing needs. _____
19. Involves me in problem solving where I have the expertise or where I feel the eventual decision will directly influence my own life. _____
20. Uses observation/evaluation tools that I am both familiar and comfortable with. _____

Alex Risley Schroeder works in western Massachusetts.

Originally published in: *Field Notes*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (winter 2002)

The Change Agent Special Issue on Health Now Available

The Change Agent's special issue on health offers 56 pages of short articles, illustrations, cartoons, math lessons, and quizzes that explore students' experiences dealing with health challenges and their individual- and community-based responses to those challenges.

Learn about the U.S. health insurance industry, students' experiences of health disparities, tips and tricks for being healthy, the connection between mental, physical, and environmental health and much more. Featuring ready-to-use lesson plans, personal stories, and lots of graphics, *The Change Agent* is perfect for a multi-level ABE and/or ESOL classroom.

SUBSCRIBE NOW by visiting our web site (www.nelrc.org/changeagent) or calling 617-482-9485.

Black History Month at the Haitian Multi-Service Center

HEIDIE HERRICK, CHRISTINE DORET, SAUL AUGUSTINE, & SARA JORGENSEN

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 standing 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 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 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 school wide 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.

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, 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.

Continued on page 38

Black History Month...

Continued from page 37

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 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 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 Power Point presentation. On the day of the event, a few of them

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.

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



presented slides with pictures and accompanying writing in their own words about the event.

Well, It's Your Project!

By 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

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.

Continued on page 39

Black History Month...

Continued from page 38

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

Fact Sheets, Map Skills, Quilt Squares

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

The Expo

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 devel-

Continued on page 40

Black History Month...

Continued from page 39

opened 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, Christine Doret, Saul Augustin, and Sara Jorgenson have worked together at the Haitian Multi Service Center.

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

The Quilts of Gees Bend
www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/

Originally published in *Field Notes* Vol. 17, No. 3 (summer 2008)

Did you know?

The SABES Web site <sabes.org> offers an online library catalogue, a calendar of ESOL and ABE trainings and workshops across the state, regularly updated resource listings, and other relevant information on adult basic education.

Did you know?

A great resource for our field is the bulletin published through Literacy Resources Rhode Island, written and edited by Janet Isserlis. You can find more information at <http://swearercenter.brown.edu/Literacy_Resources/>. To request the bulletin via email, send a message to lrri@brown.edu

Did you know?

MassAAL is the voice for the adult learner in Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and GED programs in Massachusetts. MassAAL assists the adult learner in developing lifelong leadership skills, creates public awareness about the need for adult literacy, and strengthens the adult learner’s voice in shaping public policy for adult literacy services in Massachusetts. MassAAL empowers adult learners by helping them to have a collective voice in how their ABE programs are run. Find out how to get your students involved at <sabes.org/student/massaal.htm>

Did you know?

SABES publishes its *Math Bulletin* quarterly at <sabes.org/resources/publications/mathbulletin/>. This resource is chock full of research reports, lesson ideas, and resources.

Mark Your Calendar

Check the SABES Web site, <www.sabes.org>, for local and regional activities. This list was prepared by Lou Wollrab.

April 18-22, 2009

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) 2009 Conference

Location: Louisville, KY

Contact: info@coabeconference.org

Website: www.coabeconference.org/

April 22-25, 2009

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)

Annual Conference and Exhibition

Location: Washington, DC

Contact: NCTM, 703-620-984

Website: [www.nctm.org/meetings/May 28-30, 2009](http://www.nctm.org/meetings/May%2028-30,%202009)

May 28-30, 2009

Adult Education Research Conference, 50th Annual Conference

Location: Chicago, IL

Contact: info@adulterc.org

Website: www.adulterc.org/

June 10-12, 2009

Thomas Edison State College/CAEL,

National Institute on the Assessment of Adult Learning

Location: Princeton, NJ

Contact: Joyce Archer, 609-984-1130 x3205

Website: www.tesc.edu/4398.php

June 25-27, 2009

The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Summer Institute 2009

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills

Location: Montreal, QC

Contact: The Centre, 514-931-8731x1415

Website: www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/

June 28-July 1, 2009

National Educational Computing Conference, NECC 2009

Location: Washington, DC

Website: <http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/NECC2009/>

August 4-7, 2009

University of Wisconsin–Madison

25th Annual Conference on Distance Learning & Teaching

Location: Madison, WI

Website: www.uwex.edu/disted/conference/

Reflections From *Field Notes* Readers

From Janet Isslerlis,
RI Adult Education
Professional Development
Center

Field Notes has offered opportunities to practitioners to share their knowledge in ways that work best for them. For some of us, it's a short article; for others it's writing in tandem with someone else—a colleague, a student—to develop ideas that intersect, run parallel and sometimes meander, but always help us move our thinking in new ways. Or move our thinking about old ideas to some other place.

Field Notes has been readable without being patronizing; has provided access to resources—material and human—and has provided critical information to people who are often too busy to sit down and actually speak to one another. Conferences and meetings are part of our professional development and growth; communication—in whatever form(s) it takes—is a huge piece of that work, too.

It feels bleak to contemplate the loss of this resource. Listservs enable us to communicate and serve a particular purpose. They don't, however, really support sustained thinking about a topic with a beginning, middle and end. As much as these three elements are important to good writing, the "end" piece (as in the end of *Field Notes*) here seems terribly sad.

Thank you for all you've given us and helped us, sometimes, to give ourselves.

From Deborah Schwartz
Adult Literacy Resource Institute/Greater Boston SABES

Field Notes is an incredible asset to the adult basic education field and a one-of-a-kind resource to those of us who help train and build capacity for the field through the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES). In my varying roles at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute/Greater Boston SABES Center—Curriculum Development Specialist, Home-buying Readiness Project Manager, and now Assistant Director—I am struck with how often adult literacy teachers, counselors and administrators comment on the value of the resource.

Whether I am training new teachers or working with veteran counselors, *Field Notes* is a resource that I return to over and over again for its clarity, concreteness and depth of reflection. *Field Notes* is the only journal that compiles writings from the field and that offers specific examples and resources for the classroom and program. Most recently, I have incorporated the entire staff development issue into our New Staff Orientation. Because the articles are timely and field-authored, I always look forward to incorporating the latest issue into a new training or workshop.

From John Strucker, Ed.D.

I was surprised and saddened to learn that *Field Notes* may not be refunded. I've been an avid reader of *Field Notes* since its beginnings as *Bright Ideas* back in the 1990's, dating back to when I was an adult ed. practitioner in Cambridge and down through ensuing years when I worked as a teacher and researcher at Harvard and NCSALL.

Field Notes is not only a unique space where practitioners can share their ideas and insights. Its very existence provides concrete evidence that SABES and ACLS recognize the professional wisdom and dedication of Massachusetts ABE, ASE, and ESL teachers.

I hope that a way can be found to continue *Field Notes* under your outstanding editorship. Please let me know what I can do to help keep this valuable resource alive for our field.

Richard Goldberg

Asian American Civic Association

Field Notes (and *Bright Ideas* before that) provided me with so much useful information, beginning as a new teacher 17 years ago and later as a program director. Since the material came from people like me in our field, and was always presented in an easy-to-use and very readable format, I took away many great ideas that I put into practice in my classroom and in my work in running an adult basic education program. I hope that there will be a future for *Field Notes* so that other ABE/ESOL practitioners and program managers will be able to benefit as I did.

More Reflections

Michele Forlizzi, PhD

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

For me, the many articles (in *Field Notes*) kept reinforcing how many disciplines overlap to bring about the betterment of our educational system, teaching of adults and change within our communities. Collaboration is a word you often heard but at times can be difficult to achieve.

Field Notes highlighted many ways to collaborate. I often read about human service provisions put in place to help with adult student retention, the many teachers, ABE counselors and community partners helping others on how to respond, offering steps and ideas on how to think about the issues and give some directions as to where to lead the individuals involved.

Field Notes not only provided a resource to educators but also to those professionals on the periphery of education.

Alexis Johnson

International Language Institute

It was so easy to publish with *Field Notes*. If an upcoming topic moved you, you could write something for inclusion and see it in print. It was like a writing prompt and much appreciated. I will be so sorry not to have this opportunity to write about topics that matter to me.

I would read every issue and mark articles that would be appropriate for different staff. I wouldn't always read it when I got it but it was always one of the publications that I saved to read at another time. It was a great source for keeping up with what's going on in Massachusetts and for new ideas. I will sorely miss it.



Alphabet Soup: A Partial Glossary of Acronyms in Our Field

ABE: Adult basic education

ASE: Adult secondary education

CBO: Community based organization

DESE: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (formerly DOE)

ESOL: English for speakers of other languages

GED: General Education Development

MAPT: Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Tests

OVAE: Office of Vocational and Adult Education (US DOE)

SABES: System for Adult Basic Education Support (MA)

SMARTT: System for Managing Accountability and Results Through Technology (MA)

WIA: Workforce Investment Act of 1998

Upcoming Theme for the Final *Field Notes*

The summer 2009 issue is the *last issue of Field Notes*.

So let's make it really good.

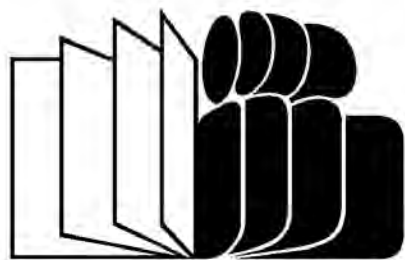
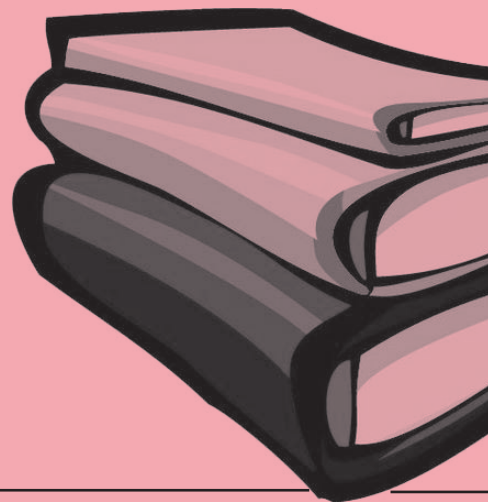
Please submit a short review (400 words or so) of a book, article, or Web site that has made you pause, rethink something, cry, shudder, laugh out loud, or has enlarged your understanding of the world.

Your selection should somehow connect to the work we do in ABE, but we know that means just about anything: history, fiction, politics, languages, anthropology, pedagogy, poetry, economics, labor history, legends, sagas, picture books, print making, theory, research, memoirs, semiotics, schematics, photovoltaic engineering, yoga, gardening, and anything at all by Tommie DePaola or Arnold Lobel.

Deadline: April 30, 2009

Submit to: lballiro@worlded.org

PS: Feel free to write a letter to the editor, too.



WORLD EDUCATION



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