NCSALL Seminar Guide:

Goals and Self-efficacy in Persistence

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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Goals and Self-efficacy in Persistence

This seminar guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to introduce adult education practitioners to the research on adult student persistence and its implications for practice. Programs or professional developers may want to use this seminar in place of a regularly scheduled meeting, such as a statewide training or a local program staff meeting.

Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

- List the four supports to persistence that were identified in the Adult Student Persistence Study
- Recommend some instructional and programmatic strategies for improving student persistence

Participants: 8 to 12 practitioners who work in adult education—teachers, tutors, counselors, program administrators, and others

Time: 3 1/2 hours

Agenda:

15 minutes	1. Welcome and Introductions
5 minutes	2. Objectives and Agenda
50 minutes	3. Adult Student Persistence
15 minutes	***Break***
50 minutes	4. Working Groups Jigsaw
45 minutes	5. Reporting on the Jigsaw
20 minutes	6. Reflections and Planning Next Steps
10 minutes	7. Evaluation of the Seminar

Session Preparation:

This guide includes the information and materials needed to conduct the seminar—step-by-step instructions for the activities, approximate time for each activity, and notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. The handouts and readings, ready for photocopying, are at the end of the guide.

Participants should receive the following readings at least 10 days before the seminar. Ask participants to read the articles, take notes, and write down their questions for sharing at the seminar.

- 🕮 **Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports** by John Comings, Andrea Parrella, and Lisa Soricone (*Focus on Basics,* Volume 4, Issue A, March 2000)
- 🕮 **A Learner's Story** by Marvin Lewis (*Focus on Basics*, Volume 2, Issue A, March 1998)
- 🕮 **Supports and Hindrances: A Force-Field Analysis** by Andrea Parrella (*Focus on Basics*, Volume 4, Issue A, March 2000)

Also **ask participants to conduct a force-field analysis (**as described in Parrella's article) with a student, on what helps and hinders the student's ability to persist in the program. Participants should bring the results of the analysis to the session.

The facilitator should read the articles, study the seminar steps, and prepare the materials on the following list.

☐ **Newsprints** (Prepare ahead of time.)

___ Objectives and Agenda (p. 4)
___ Definition of Persistence (p. 5)
___ Four Supports to Persistence (p. 5)
___ Negative and Positive Forces (p. 5)
___ Self-efficacy (p. 6)
___ Discussion Questions (p. 7)
___ Next Steps (p. 11)
___ Useful/How to Improve (p. 12)

Handouts (Make copies for working group participants, p. 7.)

___ *The Effects of Continuing Goal-Setting on Persistence in a Math Classroom*

___ *Look Before You Leap: Helping Prospective Learners Make Informed Educational Choices*

___ *Reflections on the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project*

___ *A Conversation with FOB…Counseling in ESOL Programs*

___ *Where Attendance Is Not a Problem*

___ *A Comprehensive Professional Development Process Produces Radical Results*

___ *Implementation Isn't Easy*

___ *Separate Yet Happy*

___ *Sudan to South Dakota: Helping Youth Make the Transition*

___ *Beyond the Scope of the Teachers: Deciding to Employ a Social Worker*

___ *A Mind/Body/Learning Approach to Counseling: Helping Students Handle Stress*

___ *Build Motivation by Building Learner Participation*

___ *Getting into Groups*

___ *Power, Literacy, and Motivation*

Readings (Have two or three extra copies available for participants who forget to bring them.)

___ **Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports**

___ **A Learner's Story**

___ **Supports and Hindrances: A Force-Field Analysis**

Materials

___ Newsprint easel and blank sheets of newsprint

___ Markers, pens, tape

___ Sticky dots

Steps:

1. Welcome and Introductions (15 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** to the seminar. **Introduce yourself** and state your role as facilitator. Explain how you came to facilitate this seminar and who is sponsoring it.

- **Ask participants to introduce themselves** (name, program, and role). Then poll the participants on their reactions to conducting the force-field analysis that was assigned as preparation for the seminar by asking who found it enlightening, difficult, useful, impossible, and so on. Explain that they will share their results more in depth later.

- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other housekeeping information.

Note to Facilitator
Since time is very tight, it's important to move participants along gently but firmly if they are exceeding their time limit for introductions.

2. Objectives and Agenda (5 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Objectives and Agenda</u>** and review the objectives and steps with the participants.

Objectives

By the end of the seminar, you will be able to:

- List the four supports to persistence that were identified in the Adult Student Persistence Study
- Recommend some instructional and programmatic strategies for improving student persistence

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions (Done!)
2. Objectives and Agenda (Doing)
3. Adult Student Persistence
4. Working Groups Jigsaw
5. Reporting on the Jigsaw
6. Reflections and Planning Next Steps
7. Evaluation of the Seminar

3. Adult Student Persistence (50 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Definition of Persistence.</u>** This definition was discussed in the reading assigned for the seminar, **Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports**.

> **Definition of Persistence**
>
> Adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow.

- **Review the definition of persistence. Ask participants to comment on the ways this definition is similar to or different** than the ones they use. Also, ask them if they feel the research the definition was based on was valid and whether or not they find the definition useful and why.

- **Post the newsprint <u>Four Supports to Persistence.</u>** These supports were identified in the Adult Student Persistence Study.

> **Four Supports to Persistence**
>
> - Awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence
> - Self-efficacy
> - Establishment of a goal by the student
> - Progress toward reaching a goal

- **Post the newsprint <u>Negative and Positive Forces.</u>** Explain to participants that the force-field analysis they conducted was the first support: awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence.

> **Negative and Positive Forces**

- **Ask participants to share their findings** from the force-field analyses they conducted in preparation for this seminar. Write the findings on the newsprint as the participants share them.

- Ask the participants which of the negative and positive forces they find surprising or challenging, and why.

- **Post the newsprint <u>Self-efficacy.</u>** This is the second support suggested by the researchers. The participants read about these experiences in the reading, **Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports.**

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is focused on a specific task and represents the feeling of being able to accomplish that task, which in this context is successful learning in ABE, ESOL, or ASE programs. To build self-efficacy programs should provide the following experiences:

- Mastery experiences
- Vicarious experiences
- Social persuasion
- Addressing physiological and emotional states

- Ask participants whether they agree with the self-efficacy concept and ask them to explain why or why not. Then ask them to share strategies they have used successfully to promote *mastery experiences* (successful learning with authentic evidence of success) and *vicarious experiences* (role models), and how they address *physiological and emotional states* (support) and provide *social persuasion* (support).

- **Explain that** for the rest of the seminar, **the group will be focusing on the last three supports:** self-efficacy, goal-setting, and making progress toward goals in their specific contexts.

Break (15 minutes)

4. Working Groups Jigsaw (50 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Discussion Questions.</u>** Explain to participants that in this activity they will be discussing how to increase student persistence through self-efficacy, goal-setting, and making progress toward goals.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think the author in each article did to increase learner persistence? How valid was the evidence the author presented to support the impact?
- What did you see as the impact this strategy had on learner persistence? What were the possible reasons for this impact?
- Have you tried a similar strategy? What was the impact on persistence?

- **Ask the participants to form up to five small groups** according to their primary contexts—adult basic education (ABE)/adult secondary education (ASE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Youth, Counselor, or Program Administrator.

- **Ask the groups to discuss the assigned articles.** The small group should conduct a modified jigsaw in which each member reads one of the articles and then explains the key ideas and findings to the other members. Give the participants 45 minutes for reading and discussion. Remind the small groups that they will be sharing one new idea that they developed from reading and discussing the articles with the large group.

- **Distribute the articles as follows:**
  - ABE/ASE Working Group
    - ***The Effects of Continuing Goal-Setting on Persistence in a Math Classroom*—**[Note to facilitator: Through practitioner research the author considered the effect of continual goal-setting on learner persistence in a math class. Study results revealed that students are able to identify their specific goals and some psychological and academic barriers to reaching those goals. The author finds that goal-setting is important for

some students and determines that, to be effective, goal-setting must be continual.]

- ***Look Before You Leap: Helping Prospective Learners Make Informed Educational Choices*—**[Note to facilitator: The author argues that students need to be more active in making decisions as to which high-school-completion option (GED, Adult Diploma, External Diploma) is best suited to their needs and goals. The article describes how, by working together in small groups to gather information and make comparisons about their options, adult learners become motivated to take responsibility for their learning. The author determines that the sense of community that develops during this orientation process contributes to learner motivation and retention.]
- ***Reflections on the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project*—**[Note to facilitator: The author describes the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project, a program designed to help practitioners explore issues of violence in society and to incorporate their understanding of the effects of violence on learning into their teaching. In this project, personal experiences with violence were not necessarily disclosed nor directly addressed in the curriculum; however, participation and attendance improved as students gained confidence by assuming leadership roles in their programs.]

- ESOL Working Group
  - ***A Conversation with FOB…Counseling in ESOL Programs*—**[Note to facilitator: This article addresses how English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructors often take on counseling roles in the course of their teaching. It argues that teachers perform mental health work with ESOL learners as they assume advocacy roles and provide learner referrals.]
  - ***Where Attendance Is Not a Problem*—**[Note to facilitator: The author considers why retention rates in ESOL are higher than ABE and adult secondary education (ASE) and examines the sources of motivation for adults to attend ESOL classes, including attainment of language and literacy skills and cultural information.]
  - ***Reflections on the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project*—**[Note to facilitator: The author describes the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project, a program designed to help practitioners explore issues of violence in society and to incorporate their understanding of the effects of violence on learning into their teaching. In this project, personal

experiences with violence were not necessarily disclosed nor directly addressed in the curriculum; however, participation and attendance improved as students gained confidence by assuming leadership roles in their programs.]

- Youth Working Group
  - ***A Comprehensive Professional Development Process Produces Radical Results*—**[Note to facilitator: This article documents the systematic professional development of teachers who learned how to implement the Youth Cultural Competence (YCC) model into General Educational Development (GED) classes that have large percentages of young adult learners. The authors note that by adopting the YCC model, programs achieved positive outcomes in retention and increased GED graduation rates.]
  - ***Implementation Isn't Easy*—**[Note to facilitator: The director of a GED program with a large percentage of students under 25 years of age describes her program's efforts to improve retention and the challenges encountered. Through group instruction, individual instruction, project-based learning, and a Youth Cultural Competence model, the author observes how the program evolved into a learning community with improved retention.]
  - ***Separate Yet Happy*—**[Note to facilitator: This account describes how a community-college-based GED program designed a separate class for learners 16–21 years of age. The class integrates activities based on Adult Multiple Intelligences theory with positive results.]
  - ***Sudan to South Dakota: Helping Youth Make the Transition***—[Note to facilitator: The author describes how one program integrates immigrant learners of all ages into English classes. The program also offers an additional Young Adult Orientation class to meet the acculturation needs of their younger adult students, many of whom are refugees who fled the war-torn Sudan.]

- Counselor Working Group
  - ***Beyond the Scope of the Teachers: Deciding to Employ a Social Worker*—**[Note to facilitator: In response to the complexity and seriousness of issues facing their students, this program hired a full-time social worker to help individuals, families, groups, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength through an

empowerment approach. As individual learners and small groups worked with the social worker to set educational, career, and personal goals, improved attendance was noted.]

- ***A Mind/Body/Learning Approach to Counseling: Helping Students Handle Stress*—**[Note to facilitator: This article describes how one program addresses student counseling and academic needs in an ongoing classroom setting. The instructor describes how she incorporates reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, study skills, and health science content, as well as aerobic exercise, stretching, yoga, meditation, and cognitive restructuring into a "health education class." The author observes improved retention and motivation among learners.]

- Program Administrator Working Group
  - ***Build Motivation by Building Learner Participation*—**[Note to facilitator: This article describes the many ways in which student participation is promoted in one ABE program. Students have leadership opportunities, including making classroom and administrative decisions (such as identifying courses that should be offered and students to teach these classes), engage in peer tutoring, participate in a student council, produce a program newsletter, and discuss issues (while sharing facilitation duties) at all-school meetings. Students and practitioners in the program assert that this model has a positive effect on learner motivation and persistence.]
  - ***Getting into Groups*—**[Note to facilitator: The author describes how a shift from individualized instruction to organized classes and small-group discussions increased student retention and participation in his program. Although many factors that influence retention and motivation cannot be controlled, the author suggests that programs focus on those issues that can be addressed and advises that programs must be willing to try new approaches to address the specific needs of the student group.]
  - ***Power, Literacy, and Motivation*—**[Note to facilitator: The author argues that linking literacy education with civic participation transforms the motivation of educators and learners. The author describes his program's efforts to achieve this goal.]

5. Reporting on the Jigsaw (45 minutes)

- **Reconvene the whole group.** Ask the groups to share one new idea that they developed from reading and discussing the articles.

- **Lead a general discussion on how intake, orientation, instruction, and/or program activities might be designed to foster persistence and retention.**

6. Reflections and Planning Next Steps (20 minutes)

- **Ask participants to take 10 minutes to review the ideas** for increasing learner persistence generated during the session. Then ask the participants to choose one or two ideas to try out in their programs or classrooms and briefly write down a plan for making those changes and what evidence or data they will collect to determine if the idea works.

- **Post the newsprint <u>Next Steps.</u>** Explain that now that the individual participants have an idea to try out in their programs and/or classrooms, the group should make a plan about its next steps**.**

Next Steps

- How might you share with each other how your plans worked, or how might you ask each other questions?

- **Write up the next steps** on the newsprint as the participants mention them. After five minutes of brainstorming, ask participants to silently look at the options and decide on two that they think are priorities.

- **Hand out a sticky dot to each participant** and ask the group to put their dots next to the idea that they would most like the group to do. If they don't want to do any of the activities, they should not put their dots on the newsprint.

- **Lead the group in organizing its choice. For example:**

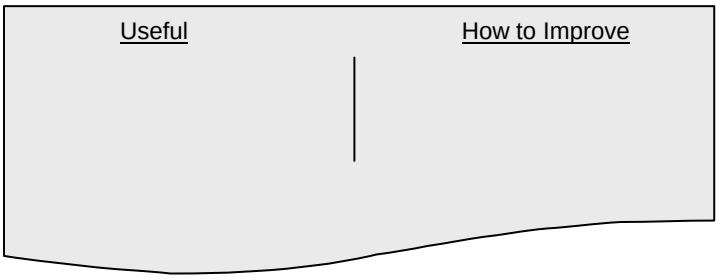
  - If they choose to schedule a follow-up meeting, set the date, time, and place for the meeting, and brainstorm an agenda for the meeting. Determine who will definitely be coming, and who will take the responsibility to cancel the meeting in case of bad weather.

  - If they choose to organize an e-mail list, pass around a sheet for everyone to list their e-mail addresses. Decide who is going to start the first posting, and discuss what types of discussion or postings people would like to see (e.g., asking questions about how to try out their ideas, describing what happened after they tried it, sharing other resources about adult student persistence, etc.).

7. Evaluation of the Seminar (10 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in the time left, you would like to get feedback from them about this seminar.** You will use this feedback in shaping future seminars.

- **Post the newsprint <u>Useful/How to Improve.</u>**



  Ask participants first to tell you what was useful or helpful to them about the design and content of this seminar. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "Useful."

- **Then ask participants for suggestions on how to improve this design and content**. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "How to Improve." If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask the person to rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion on the newsprint.

- **Do not make any response to participants' comments during this evaluation.** It is very important for you not to defend or justify anything you have done in the seminar or anything about the design or content, as this will discourage further suggestions. If anyone makes a suggestion you don't agree with, just nod your head. If you feel some response is needed, rephrase their concern: "So you feel that what we should do instead of the small-group discussion is . . . ? Is that right?"

- **Refer participants to the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy Web site (www.ncsall.net) for further information**. Point out that most NSCALL publications may be downloaded for free from the Web site. Print versions can by ordered by contacting NSCALL at World Education: ncsall@worlded.org.

- **Thank everyone** for coming and participating in the seminar.

Reading

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports

by John Comings, Andrea Parrella, and Lisa Soricone
Focus on Basics, Vol. 4, Issue A, March 2000, pp. 1, 3-7

NCSALL's Adult Persistence Study suggests that managing positive and negative forces, self-efficacy, setting goals, and making measurable progress help learners stay in programs

Adults choose to participate in educational programs while children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper "work" of childhood. In fact, most school-aged students probably never seriously consider dropping out. An adult, on the other hand, must make an active decision to participate in each class session and often must overcome significant barriers to attend classes. Most adults come to adult basic education (ABE), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), or adult secondary education (ASE) programs with goals that require hundreds if not thousands of hours of learning to achieve. Every adult education program should help adult students persist in their learning until they reach their educational goals.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is conducting a study on learner persistence. The first phase of NCSALL's study used research as a tool to develop advice for practitioners on how to help adults persist in their studies. In addition, the study developed advice for policymakers on how to structure funding and accountability systems in ways that will support persistence. The next phase of the study will test and refine this advice in programs. In the first phase of this research, the study team read previous studies and related literature, and talked with practitioners about how they have tried to help adult students persist longer in their studies. The team also interviewed 150 pre-general educational development (GED) students in New England to gain their insights into the supports and barriers to persistence. Most of the students were native speakers of English, but a few were immigrants whose English was sufficient or them to be in a pre-GED class.

Defining Persistence

The staff of the Persistence Study spent time working on their definition of persistence so as to be clear about what they were trying to measure. They

found persistence to be a complicated concept. Most of the literature on adult education defines persistence as the length of time an adult attends a class or tutoring sessions (Beder, 1991; Comings, 1995; Quigley, 1997; Tracy-Mumford, 1994; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992; Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994), but learning may extend beyond attendance in a specific program. The definition of persistence used in this study is: *adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow*. The study team interviewed learners near the beginning of their participation in a program and again four months later. A persistent learner was one who, at the second interview, was still in class, was no longer in class but was involved in organized self-study, or who had transferred to another class.

Advice

We classify adult students in many ways: by gender, ethnicity, age, employment status, number and age of children, previous school experience, and educational background of other adults in their lives. The first phase of the Persistence Study revealed that these categories do not tell us much about how to help adults persist in their education. The only significant findings were that immigrants, those over the age of 30, and parents of teenage or grown children were more likely to persist than others in the study. The greater likelihood of persistence by immigrant students in ESOL classes is well documented (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994). The findings of this study suggest that this effect continues as immigrants learn English and move on to ABE and GED programs. Grown children might encourage their parents to join and persist in a program. On the other hand, adults who are over 30 are more likely to have teenage or grown children than those under 30. These findings might point to older students persisting longer because they benefit from the maturity that comes with age and they no longer have the responsibilities of caring for small children.

Two aspects of educational experience were also associated with persistence. Adults who had been involved in previous efforts at basic skills education, self-study, or vocational skill training were more likely to persist than those who had not. The strongest relationship was with those who had undertaken self-study. Adults who mentioned a specific goal, such as “help my children” or “get a better job” when asked why they had entered a program, were more likely to persist than those who either mentioned no goal or said they were doing it for themselves. These findings suggest that experience with education may increase an adult’s self-confidence about learning. These relationships also suggest that motivation, especially as demonstrated by undertaking self-study or by being clear about the goal for attendance, supports persistence.

The pre-GED students identified a range of supports and barriers to their persistence; clear trends were evident when the study team analyzed their responses. The team recorded these trends, reviewed the research literature and the data from interviews with practitioners, and developed the following advice, which describes four supports to persistence.

The first support is awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence.

In searching for a framework for analyzing data, the study team sought a theoretical model that would both place the adult learner in a central position and be useful to program managers seeking practical advice on how to increase persistence. The study team chose to employ a force-field analysis as developed by the sociologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin's theory places an individual in a field of forces that support or inhibit action along a particular path (Gilbert, Fisk, & Lindzey, 1998; Lewin, 1999). Understanding the forces, identifying which are strongest, and deciding which are most amenable to manipulation provide an indication of how to help someone move in a desired direction, such as reaching an educational goal.

In the case of adult students, positive forces, such as the desire for a higher income, help support persistence in an adult education program. Negative forces, such as lack of free time to study, push adults to drop out. From the time adults enter programs to the time when they either achieve their goals or drop out, both positive and negative forces are acting upon them. Any intervention by an ABE program meant to increase persistence must help adults to strengthen the positive forces and lessen the negative forces.

The force-field analysis looks at barriers and supports as existing at many levels of importance, from those that have no real effect on persistence to those that have a very strong influence on persistence. The force-field analysis also suggests that strengthening or weakening a force that can be influenced might offset the effects of another force that cannot be influenced. Thus, an adult with a very strong need for education to gain better employment might put aside his or her embarrassment, while very strong embarrassment might keep a less strongly motivated student from coming to class.

Programs must help students to develop an understanding of the negative and positive forces that affect their persistence. Building on that understanding, each student must make plans to manage these forces so that persistence is more likely. The plans that come out of such an exercise should include strategies for persistence when the forces that affect a person's life cause them to drop out, and these plans must be revised as adults persist in their studies and these forces change.

Adult students in this study emphasized positive forces. The strongest positive force mentioned by adult students was the support of people, particularly their families, friends, teacher, and fellow students, followed by self-efficacy and personal goals. Most learners mentioned at least three positive forces, while some mentioned many more. At the same time, many learners mentioned no negative forces or just one. Of the negative forces mentioned, no single force was common.

The force-field theory itself offers a tool for understanding and planning to manage these forces. Students can be encouraged to discuss their persistence in terms of the force-field and to build their plan from that discussion. A classroom force-field activity can begin with students identifying all of the supports and barriers to their persistence. They can then categorize them into those that are most likely to help or hinder their persistence.

Once the crucial forces are identified, students can plan to build their supports and reduce their barriers. As happens in some programs, staff must be open to having the outcome of this activity be early dropout for students who, for any reason, are not ready to persist in their studies. If this is the outcome, adults should be helped to make a plan to prepare to return and be successful later. The management of these forces may be an individual responsibility, one that a group of students takes on together, or one that engages a whole community. For example, students might have transportation needs. A group activity might lead to ride sharing or a request to a public agency for transportation support.

The second support is self-efficacy.

The educational program must help adult students build self-efficacy about reaching their goals. The term *self-confidence* is used more often in adult education literature, but self-efficacy is a more useful term to describe this support. Self-confidence is a global feeling of being able to accomplish most tasks. Self-efficacy is focused on a specific task and represents the feeling of being able to accomplish that task, which in this context is successful learning in ABE, ESOL, or ASE programs. The study drew from the theory of a social scientist, Albert Bandura, for advice on building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Adult education programs should provide the following experiences to their participants as a means to build self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences allow an adult to be successful in learning and to have authentic evidence of that success. This does not mean that instruction should be designed to produce only easy and constant success. Adults must also experience overcoming failure and eventually achieving success through a sustained effort. Instruction should help them develop this insight. Some programs take care to provide regular recognition of progress and celebrations

of achievement. Others make sure that instruction provides opportunities for success early in program participation. These efforts provide learners with opportunities to experience success.

Vicarious experiences are those provided by social models. Adult learners should come in contact with adults who are just like them and have succeeded in an ABE, ESOL, or GED class. These role models, both through the knowledge they share directly and the indirect teaching of their behavior, help adult students to acquire the skills to manage the many demands of learning. Some programs employ successful present or former students as speakers during intake and orientation activities, while others recruit past learners as counselors, teachers, and directors. These past students provide models of success.

Social persuasion is support from teachers, staff, counselors, fellow students, family, and friends that reinforces self-efficacy. These verbal assurances are needed, in part, to overcome the negative self-efficacy about learning built up during previous schooling. Most practitioners provide verbal assurances, but some programs encourage family members to provide this positive reinforcement as well. Some teachers take great care to develop a culture of support among students in their classes. These efforts ensure positive support for students.

Addressing physiological and emotional states is the acknowledgement that negative feelings can result from poor self-efficacy and can also lead to low self-efficacy. Examples of these states are tension and stress, among other negative emotional states. Adult learners must be helped to perceive and interpret these conditions so that they do not affect their self-efficacy. Some practitioners feel uncomfortable addressing the personal problems of their students, and all practitioners must acknowledge that they are not trained mental health professionals. Even so, many teachers use life histories and dialogue journals to help students identify the physical and mental states that can affect their learning. For example, adults with limited English skills may feel anxiety when they have to speak in class. A teacher might ask her class to write about these feelings and practice speaking even with anxiety. Just the acknowledgement that feelings can affect learning can help diminish their negative effect.

Many of the orientation and instructional activities identified by practitioners in this study provide the experiences that Bandura has outlined. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy can act as a powerful framework within which programs can improve on the activities they have already undertaken.

The third support to persistence is the establishment of a goal by the student.

This process begins before an adult enters a program. An adult who could be classified as a potential ABE, ESOL, or ASE student experiences an event in his or her life that causes him or her to enter an educational program. The event might be something dramatic: a person might enter the United States as a refugee and find that she does not have the language skills needed to qualify for a job. The event might be less dramatic: a parent may decide he needs more education when his first child begins school. The event might be subtle: a school dropout might have always felt the desire to study for the GED and when her children are older and need less attention, she finally has some free time available for education. This event provides potential adult students with goals they hope to accomplish by entering an ABE, ESOL, or ASE program. The staff of the educational program must help the potential adult student define his or her goals and understand the many instructional objectives that must be met on the road to meeting that goal. Teachers must then use these student goals as the context for instruction and intermittently review them, since they may change.

The fourth support is progress toward reaching a goal.

Since goals are important supports to persistence, adult students must make progress toward reaching their goals. They must also be able to measure that progress. Programs must provide services of sufficient quality that students make progress, and programs must have assessment procedures that allow students to measure their own progress. Much of the recent interest in measuring progress has come from the need to build systems of program accountability. Helping students measure their own progress may require tools and methods that are not appropriate for accountability purposes. Accountability systems need measures that are easy to collect and quantify. These may not be useful to students and difficult to integrate into instruction. Portfolio and authentic assessment approaches may have weaknesses in an accountability system but might be very useful for adults who want to measure their own progress. These kinds of assessments can be an integral part of an instructional approach.

Further research into assessment might produce a hybrid system that serves both needs and could lead to certification of progress that occurs more frequently than at present in most programs. At this time, most adults who enter ABE, ESOL, or ASE programs will gain certification only if they pass the GED test or acquire an adult high school diploma. Program-level certification may be helpful to student morale, but state-level or even national certification of achievement might make smaller increments of learner achievement more meaningful and provide a range of goal steps.

In Conclusion

Aspects of these four supports already exist in some programs, but a combination of the four may provide a more supportive environment to persistence. These supports are more likely to be built if the policymakers who provide funding value them. This means that persistence must become a more important measure in program accountability. Funding agencies must provide the technical assistance and training needed for programs to put these supports in place. Policymakers could then hold programs accountable for the quality of their intake, orientation, instruction, and program approaches that support persistence. Using the expanded definition presented here, persistence itself should be an outcome measured as part of an accountability system.

Persistence and Accountability

From the point of view of an accountability system, student persistence ends when an adult drops out of a program. When an adult returns to a program after a lapse in attendance, the program may view that student as a dropout who has returned. From the point of view of the student, persistence may continue after drop out through self-study or distance learning. The adult may view him- or herself as a persistent learner who could not attend for a while. Using only attendance in class or in tutoring sessions as a measure of persistence undervalues effective learning activities that should be encouraged. A wider definition of persistence would allow practitioners to focus on helping to become persistent learners; adults who use episodes of program participation as critical parts of a comprehensive learning strategy that involves other forms of learning.

The definition developed by the study team in the Persistence Study values self-study, transfer, and reentry into a program as part of a pattern of persistence. For this expanded definition of persistence to become part of an accountability system, it must be measurable. This would require procedures for collecting evidence of “time-on-task” that could be credited to a program. Some of this “time-on-task” might be spent in classes, some in tutoring sessions, and some in self-study through technology, media, or instructional materials. Other “time-on-task” measures might include increased time reading or reading of new, more challenging materials and engagement in community improvement efforts that require the use of English, literacy, and math skills. Methods of measuring and validating these efforts and linking them to a plan of learning developed within a program context would transform some dropouts into persistent learners who are not presently attending formal classes or tutoring sessions.

This expanded definition would require programs to relate to their students differently. Programs would need added resources to stay connected and serve adults who are not attending formal classes or tutoring sessions. With these added resources, programs could treat their students as long-term clients who use a wide range of services, some provided by the program and some by other agencies, to achieve significant improvement in their skills. Since a single adult student might participate in the services of several different programs, a way to document progress would have to be shared among them.

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About the Authors

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Reading 📖

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

A Learner's Story

by Marvin Lewis
Focus on Basics, Vol. 2, Issue A, March 1998, p. 12

Looking back, my first memories as a learner come from home. There were always books around. Momma and 'Deddy' had the biggest; they were the Bible. My older brother and sisters introduced school books to me. I had good models for early childhood reading and writing. I was read to a lot by all family members. I was well-rooted in reading and writing before I hit kindergarten.

On the first day of school, Dick and Jane was read to the whole class by yours truly. That's only because I learned from my sister. As for forces working against me, well, when you are the only Black person in your class from grades three through six: well, use your imagination. Kids can be mean at times; sometimes it was me. Once you get called a slur you're not really concentrating on the classroom, you're concentrating on retaliating.

I was working at Goodwill Industries when I decided to take classes at Goodwill Community Learning Center. It had been 18 years since I graduated from high school. While working, it hit me that unless I improved my education I would continue to be in dead end jobs since all I had were labor skills. So I started taking classes.

My family and friends were very supportive. They thought it was wonderful. The atmosphere was good. The Learning Center let me work at my own pace. What I liked the most about it was how the students were given the opportunity to have a major say in things.

Then I became a peer teacher. I helped with sharing information, getting information from everyone in the class. I really can't remember how they figured I had an interest in doing this. I think they asked me.

Of course, I got discouraged because it was new to me. But fortunately, a staff person shared with me that discouragement along with frustration is a learning process. As for quitting, it entered my mind, but I was immediately snapped back into reality by looking into my children's eyes.

The advice that I would share with staff and program directors would be this: don't fake the funk. That means don't pretend with the students. We can see right through it.

About the Author

Marvin Lewis is the seventh son of 16 children. His parents moved from Louisiana to Washington in 1952. He is the father of three children and an American Red Cross volunteer in disaster relief. As an Americorps volunteer, he is in his second year as a student organizer at the Goodwill.

Reading

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Supports and Hindrances: A Force-Field Analysis

by Andrea Parrella
Focus on Basics, Vol. 4, Issue A, March 2000, p. 19

The following activity guides a group of learners in thinking about the forces that hinder and help them to achieve their goals. For beginning English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students, you might need to explain or demonstrate vocabulary.

Step 1: Ask the learners to think about what it takes for them to continue to pursue their educational goals.

Step 2: Write "Pursuing Educational Goals" at the top of a large sheet of paper on the wall. Then, draw a vertical line down the middle of the paper, and write "+" (plus sign) over the left-hand column and "-" (minus sign) over the right-hand column.

Step 3: Ask the learners to brainstorm all of the things that make it hard for them to stay in the program and continue to pursue their educational goals. As they brainstorm forces, write them, one by one, on the right side of the paper, under the minus sign. Use the question: Who or what gets in the way of (hinders you from) continuing to come to this program?

Step 4: Ask the learners to brainstorm the things that help them to attend class or to continue to pursue their education goals. Write these on the left side of the paper, under the plus sign. Use the question: Who or what helps you (supports you) to continue to stay in this program?

Step 5: Ask the learners to look at the lists and talk about what they see. Are there more negative than positive forces? Where do the forces come from (the class, family, work, etc.)?

Step 6: Give each learner an index card or a blank piece of paper and ask each to write down the answer to this question: What two forces from the list do you most want us to work on in class? Point out that they can take their forces either from the positive "+" force list (forces they would want to work on strengthening), from the negative "-" force list (forces they would want to work on weakening), or from a combination of the two.

Step 7: Have the learners get into pairs and discuss the forces they have written down. They must reduce the number of forces from four (two each) to

the two they feel are most important to work on in class. One person in each pair should write the new list of two forces on a piece of paper.

Step 8: Have sets of pairs join to form small groups of four. Each pair shares its list of two items with the other pair. The group of four now has several minutes to come up with a new list of two forces on which all four agree. They write their new list of two forces, which represents their "consensus," on a large piece of paper.

Step 9: Ask a member from each group to post the paper with their two forces written on it, reading the forces aloud as they do so. Then ask the whole class to look at the papers for similarities: Are there any forces that appear on all the lists? If so, write them on a fresh sheet of paper. These represent the consensus of the class.

Step 10: Continue looking for forces that appear on more than one list until all the forces listed on more than one sheet are on the "consensus" list. Ask the class to consider which items still remaining on the original lists are important enough to include on the fresh list. The fresh list represents the forces that the class wants to work on in the coming term.

Step 11: If only two forces are listed on the "consensus" sheet, skip to step 12. If there are more than two forces, have the learners vote for the two forces they see as the highest priority.

Step 12: The class has now determined the two forces that they most want to work on. The next step is to brainstorm the various ways in which you can work together as a class to address these forces by strengthening the positive and weakening the negative.

Continuing the Process: This is just one way you can help learners understand what is helping them achieve their goals and what is hindering them from doing so. You, of course, will be learning at the same time. Try to set aside some time each week to work, as a class, on strengthening the supporting forces and weakening the hindering forces. You and the learners can assess what effect these activities are having. The forces that the learners want to work on may change over time. To capture these changes, repeat the force-field activity with the class or with individuals throughout the semester.

About the Author

Andrea Parrella worked for two years on the NCSALL Adult Student Persistence Study.

Handout

(To be distributed to ABE/ASE Working Group.)

The Effects of Continuing Goal-Setting on Persistence in a Math Classroom

by Pamela Meader
Focus on Basics, Vol. 4, Issue A, March 2000, pp. 7-10

I have been a math teacher for Portland Adult Education (PAE) in Portland, ME, for more than 15 years. For the last three years, I have been Maine's practitioner research and dissemination leader for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). One of my responsibilities as leader was to conduct a practitioner research project that relates to one of the ten research projects being sponsored by NCSALL. I was interested in John Comings' research on learner motivation and retention. In this research, Comings and his research team surveyed students who were successful in completing their objectives. They found that these students felt that setting goals helped them in their persistence. I decided to observe what effect continuing goal-setting in a math class would have on learner persistence.

We at PAE have worked hard to make our program accessible, and particularly to make our math courses interesting and inviting as they have evolved over time. Ten years ago, we offered math in a lab setting: students worked individually. We provided no group work or teacher-led lectures. As our program grew and we began to learn of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' standards, we decided to offer math classes that covered a range of math disciplines. We incorporated teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, the use of manipulatives, and journal writing and reflection. We also gave math inventories before we placed students into math courses to ensure that students would feel prepared. The inventory we used was the Math Pre-GED form CC test, with teacher-made inventories for more basic math students.

All of our courses, including math, were free for General Educational Development (GED) and high school diploma candidates; all others paid a fee of $40 to $50 per course plus book purchase or were provided with a fee waiver of $50 if they met income guidelines. We provided transportation for those who lived on the school bus route, and the city bus had a stop at our school. Our program had childcare for eligible students in daytime classes. The only mandatory attendance was for the high school diploma students: to

receive high school credit for a course, they could not miss more than three classes. Attendance was not mandated for the other students, but was necessary if they wanted to receive a grade. Despite the services PAE provided and the efforts we made to make the class atmosphere less intimidating, our dropout rates were more than 50 percent in our math classes.

I teach four math classes, each of which meets twice a week for two-and-a-half hours each session. In this article, I will share the findings from my two Math Concepts classes. Math Concepts is a course designed to help GED students pass the GED math test; it also serves as a pre-algebra course for learners who need a stronger foundation before entering into an algebra class. We had found earlier that combining pre-algebra and GED-bound students in the same class has had a positive effect on persistence. The GED students witness the college aspirations of the pre-algebra students while the pre-algebra students support the GED students as they prepare to take the test. Most of our pre-algebra learners have their high school diplomas, but sometimes some are taking the class for high school credit. My morning Math Concepts class consisted of 21 students and my evening Math Concepts class consisted of ten students. Of the 31 students total, 13 were pursuing their GEDs, eight of whom were English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students; four were taking the class for high school credit; and the remaining 14 were college preparatory students.

Gathering Data

During the first class, I explained that NCSALL's learner motivation research found that students who persisted in an adult basic education course attributed this persistence, in some measure, to goal-setting. I had the learners fill out a goal-setting questionnaire based on a survey *Conquering Math Anxiety* (Arem, 1993). It included questions about the barriers and positive forces that might exist for them as they pursued their stated goals. They then listed the action steps they considered important to pursuing their math goals. I gave students a week to work on this and then collected the questionnaires. I responded individually to each person's work.

In the past I had observed that the initial loss of students occurred within the first four to six classes, so I decided to have the learners revisit their goals during the fourth class, reviewing what they listed as barriers and positive forces. As a group, we discussed whether any positive forces had been working for them and if any new barriers had occurred that they had not listed. I also asked them to consider which action steps they were doing consistently and which they thought they needed to work on. In about four weeks (eight classes later) I asked them to revisit their goals once more. I also asked if they thought, with only 11 classes remaining, that they would

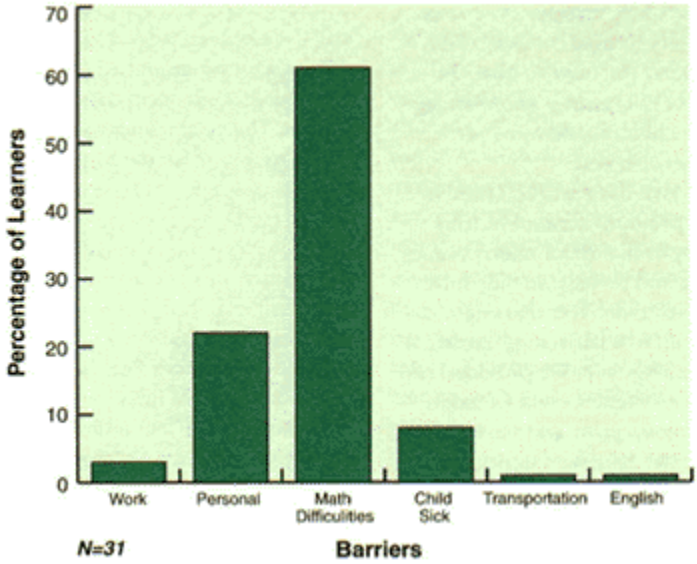
persevere to the very end. Many responses were more like affirmations: "I feel I will. I didn't say at times it may be a struggle, but I am sure that I can manage through, it's only 11 more!!!" "Most definitely, if I was going to quit, it would have been earlier in the class."

At the end of the course, I asked the students who remained to fill out one more questionnaire rating the factors that kept them attending, the factors that kept them connected, and the factors that made it difficult to continue in the course. I also asked them to rate the effect goal-setting had on them completing the course.

The Findings

When I started this project, I assumed that my GED students would have difficulty articulating their goals. I could not have been more wrong. The Math Concepts (GED) learners gave heartfelt testimony to what they perceived as their goals, barriers, and positive forces. "My mom sent me up here to finish my schooling and to better myself in many different things so I am going to achieve my goals and make my mom and the rest of my family proud of me and to be proud of myself," one learner said. My second surprise was the list of barriers and positive forces. NCSALL's learner motivation project was not specifically focused on math. Those researchers found work, childcare issues, and transportation to be some of the barriers to persistence. The primary barrier that inhibited learners completing my math class, however, was dealing with various math difficulties and phobias.

Barriers to Persistence in Math Class



The "fear of failure" appeared in many responses; frustration with mathematics and embarrassment at not knowing a particular concept also were evident. As seen in the bar graph on page 29 math difficulties were the barrier that students perceived as keeping them from finishing a class. Study strategies was the positive force most emphasized. Strategies such as asking questions of the teacher and classmates, listening, studying, attendance, and completing homework were some of the more numerous responses listed by the participants at both levels. Psychological and academic barriers were at work here, not situational barriers such as transportation.

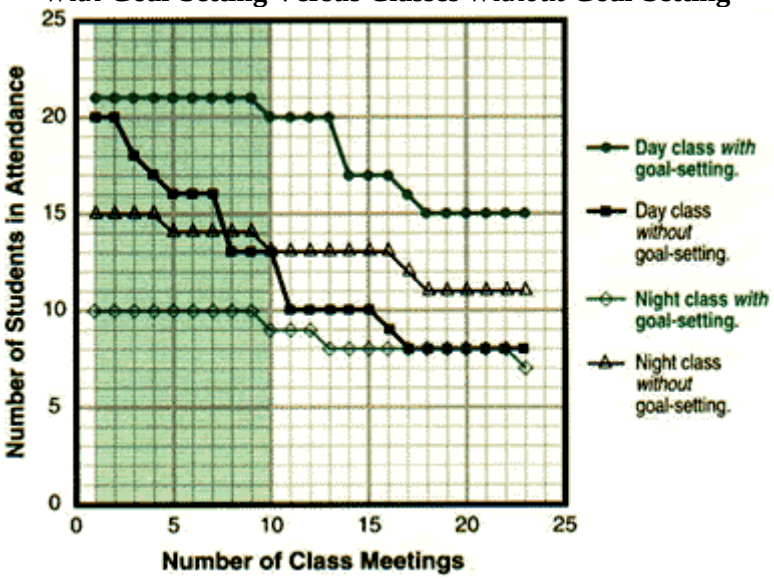
The exit survey yielded additional interesting data. I asked the learners to indicate if they were male or female so I could compare the responses by gender. In answering the question, *What factors kept you coming to class*?, the top four responses to that question for men, in order of importance, were 1) the need to understand the math, 2) goals, 3) the teacher, and 4) friends. Women had as their top choices: 1) the need to understand the math, 2) the teacher, 3) goals, and 4) to get a GED. I also asked the exiting students to assess what factors made them feel connected to the class. Again the responses were different for men and women. I was surprised that the men rated reviewing goals as the most important factor in helping them feel connected while the women had the teacher as first. This might be because I am a woman math teacher and women tend to focus on connectedness. I also recognize that I was biased. I thought that men were probably not comfortable talking about goals or might feel that the goal-setting exercise was not necessary. I learned that goal-setting was very important to this group of men.

I asked the learners to rate the factors that made it difficult for them to attend class, even though this group did complete the course. Again the responses were different for the men and women in my classes. The men placed work as their barrier and the women placed being ill as their number one barrier. Each of these pieces of data provided me with information about persistence and attendance, but my initial question was directed at seeing if retention was affected by placing emphasis on goals. The graph on page 31 displays persistence in four Math Concepts classes, two held during the day and two held in the evening. In the classes of similar makeup and size where we engaged in goal-setting more students stayed longer before dropping out.

In the day class that utilized goal-setting, the retention rate was 71 percent compared to 45 percent for the group that did not set goals. In the evening class the rates were relatively the same: 70 percent for the goal setters compared to 73 percent without goal-setting. And notice that learners in the goal-setting group dropped out later in the course: there was 100 percent retention in the goal-setting class for nine classes compared to 93 percent in the non-goal-setting group. By the 18th class, the retention rate for the goal-

setting group was 80 percent while the non-goal-setting group had dropped to 73 percent. In fact, the retention rate for the goal-setting group remained at 80 percent until the last class. This merits attention because the longer we can keep GED students attending class, the better their chances are of success on the GED math test.

Comparing Persistence of Learners in Classes
***With* Goal-Setting Versus Classes *Without* Goal-Setting**



Conclusions and Implications

My primary reason for conducting this research was to see how effective goal-setting was to student retention in a math class. I learned about much more than that. I found that for some of my Math Concepts students, goal-setting was an important part of their commitment to succeed while others were less enthusiastic. One GED student stated, “I think these goal sheets are really good and they help you.” Another said, “Almost every night I reaffirm it [goal] in my journal that I will get to class and complete my assignments.” However, another learner commented, “They haven’t really had any effect on my commitment to this class.”

For goal-setting to be effective, it must be continuing. For me, this meant incorporating this practice into my lesson plans so that my students and I were consciously aware of the process. In addition, I learned that retention is affected by many factors, not just goal-setting. I discovered the importance of dealing with math anxiety. Before my research project, our math staff had made a conscious effort to address fear of math through journal writing, lab activities, group work, and tutoring. We also tried to establish a community of

concerned students who looked out for each other. It is clear we should continue to do even more. In fact, this past semester we asked all our math students to think about the barriers that would keep them from completing a math course. At all levels, from basic math through algebra, math anxiety was the compelling negative force.

We are now collecting data from our students who have persisted through a course to see if their attitudes about math have changed and what contributed to this change. Of 40 students polled in December, 12.5 percent said they hated math and 32.5 percent were afraid of math when they began the math course in September. When leaving the math course, this improved to 0 percent hating math and only 2.5 percent fearing math. Also, at the beginning of the courses 0 percent loved math; exiting, 25 percent indicated a "love of math." Our next project will be to try to locate students who did not persist to see if their math attitudes changed.

This was the first time that I participated in a practitioner research project. Although I was hesitant at first, practitioner research has transformed me. I found it a valuable tool to "quantify" a "gut feeling" that I had. It also raised more questions. I am now using the practitioner research model with students by requiring my algebra students to research a question they have and use their graphing skills to analyze their data.

My research has convinced me that emphasis on goal-setting is worthwhile. I also realize that goal-setting must be a continuing process, not just an introductory activity at the beginning of a course. And, as one research question is answered, others surface. What effect would an orientation for all students have at which goal-setting issues are discussed? Would weekly discussions of goals be more effective than monthly? How can we better address the problem of math anxiety? This research raised many questions and concerns and certainly merits our attention.

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About the Author

Pam Meader, a former high school math teacher, has taught math in adult basic education settings for more than 15 years. She is the New England representative for the Adult Numeracy Network, NCSALL's Practitioner Research and Dissemination Network (PDRN) leader for Maine, and recently was awarded Maine's Adult Education Teacher of the Year award. She is passionate about mathematics and seeks to instill this passion in each of her students.

Handout

(To be distributed to ABE/ASE Working Group.)

Look Before You Leap: Helping Prospective Learners Make Informed Educational Choices

by Marti Giese
Focus on Basics, Vol. 4, Issue A, March 2000, pp. 11-14

I work in a high school completion program in Fairfax County, VA, a densely populated county adjacent to Washington, D.C. Our program offers three different options for adults interested in finishing their secondary education. One option is our adult high school, where learners can finish the courses required for a diploma or can choose from several options of independent study to complete their coursework. A second option is our General Educational Development (GED) program, which offers monthly testing and free preparation through our network of learning centers throughout the county. These open-entry learning centers offer assessment and self-paced study to adults who wish to improve their skills in reading, writing, math, social studies, and language arts. A third option is our external diploma program, which allows adults over 21 to earn a diploma through demonstration of competencies based on life skills. In this program adult learners meet first with advisors who identify the competencies needed and then with assessors who evaluate the competencies learned. The meetings continue as long as necessary. Each of the three options is designed to meet different learning preferences, time lines, and lifestyles. Understanding the differences between options and determining which will best suit one's needs requires careful analysis.

Over the past few years I have noticed that many learners enroll in an option without making a thorough comparison of the programs to understand which would be best for them. Mismatches often occur between adult learners and the programs in which they choose to enroll. As a result, learners lose motivation and sometimes drop out. For example, many adult learners choose the well-known GED program without taking a closer look at the other two options. Some of these enrollees have only a couple of courses to take and could more quickly and easily attain their goal by enrolling in our adult high school. Some do not like to take tests. They tend to put off taking the GED test and lose the motivation to complete the program. Others lose motivation because they are unable to focus for the eight-hour GED exam, as it is most commonly offered in our county. These learners find themselves taking the test several times with disappointing results. Others choose to join one of our

learning centers to prepare for the GED test, and eventually lose interest because their work schedules and childcare issues do not allow them to attend with enough regularity to make progress. Over time, they too, stop coming.

I believed that these adult learners needed to become more active in their decision-making about how to complete their high school education. If they asked more personal questions about each of the options, they could gather enough information to make a program choice based on their specific needs. I wondered how I could motivate prospective students to do this.
A workshop on discovery learning led by Ed Vitale, a consultant and curriculum specialist for Virginia's Workforce Improvement Network, interested me in the motivating power of group research. I did some background reading, including Ira Shor's *Empowering Education—Critical Teaching for Social Change (*1992) and Michael Pritza's "Getting Into Groups" (1998). This strengthened my belief that working together in small groups to gather information and make comparisons would help motivate prospective students to ask more questions to get the information they needed for their individual circumstances. I also hoped it would encourage them to discuss and evaluate what might and might not work for them.

A few months later I joined The Virginia Adult Education Research Network, which is coordinated by Ronna Spacone. In this program, groups of teachers, tutors, and administrators from around the state learn about qualitative inquiry methods so they can explore issues from their practice. After doing some reading about qualitative research and participating in some discussions, I formulated the following research question: What happens when adult students engage in group learning to research high school completion options?

Project Design

I knew an orientation to our programs would have to accommodate an extremely diverse group of people, from those who could read and write little English to those near readiness to qualify for an American high school diploma. Since our orientations are given in a variety of locations, the procedure would have to appeal to learners in a jail, in a community development program, and in our community learning centers as well. These orientation activities would have to be nonthreatening enough to engage the timid and the confident alike.

Colleague Donna Chambers and I designed and developed a three-session, six-hour orientation workshop that led small groups of adult learners through a series of research activities intended to promote the skills involved in asking questions. Our workshop provided a process: a progression of group activities intended to enable the group to do research and discover the

information about each option for itself. We ran the three-session orientation workshop six times in all, totaling 60 participants. Four of the orientations were held in our community learning centers, some during the day and some during the evening, where a mix of new and continuing enrollees attends. Almost all of these students were preparing initially to take the GED test. We ran a fifth orientation at the Pre-Release Center, a program of Fairfax County Detention Center. These participants were also preparing for the GED test. We offered the sixth orientation at a community development program where mostly non-native speakers of English, who are not involved in our high school completion program, come to learn about resources available to them in our community.

In session one of each of the orientation workshops, ten adults got to know each other, talked about their reasons for pursuing an education, and came up with a list of questions against which to compare the three high school completion options. At the end of the session, we organized them randomly into three research teams, gave each team a research topic—one of the program options—and offered the teams an array of printed materials about the programs. The participants were free to select and read any or all of the materials we offered.

During the second session we met in a computer lab to explore the Internet as a tool for researching each of the three high school completion program options. We gave the participants the Fairfax County Public Schools web site as a point of origin. We then explained the use of sidebars and tool bar buttons so they could locate information about each of the high school completion programs. Participants were encouraged to use the telephone in the computer lab to call the program offices for information they were unable to locate on the Internet or in the pamphlets and brochures they had chosen.

In the third session each research team reported on what it had learned about its assigned high school completion option to the other two teams and the facilitators. Each presentation was followed by questions from the audience about how the program option described would suit specific personal needs.

During the weeks of the orientation workshops, my colleague and I kept journals in which we made a simple division between observations and reflections. We gave forms with these headings to teachers, tutors, and administrators who watched the process as well. After each session we collected the forms. We consulted the adult learners in the workshop by asking a series of questions at the end of each session that focused on what they had learned and how they felt about the activities in which they had participated. At the end of the orientation, we asked the learners to fill out forms evaluating the effect of the entire workshop.

Findings

Because our approach focused on process and relied on the learners to discover the information they needed, each of the six orientation workshops produced slightly different results. All of the groups, however, came away with an understanding of the differences between program options. During the orientation for students from the jail, for example, participants focused on which program would best support them in the future, when they were no longer incarcerated. The mothers in the community development project discussed how they could juggle family responsibilities with pursuing an education. In the orientations at the community learning centers, participants talked about the content from the perspective of future employment and possible entry into a community college. The participants explored and discussed the information of personal interest and concern; each prospective student was able to learn what he or she needed. The facilitators did not take responsibility for figuring out who needed what.

The workshop activities provided an avenue for participants to engage in their research with enthusiasm. One observing administrator was surprised that a mother recently arrived in this country was willing to leave her two preschoolers with a woman she scarcely knew so that she could continue to attend our sessions. An inmate from the jail volunteered that he regretted having missed the first session. Several people from the community learning centers asked why they had not been given this workshop before. By the second session, learners took ownership of their research. By making phone calls and going to the local library to use the Internet, some students voluntarily continued their research outside of class. One man remarked, “I feel responsible because you are making me do the work.”

In all the locations where we held the orientation workshops, a sense of commitment to the research groups developed. A teacher at the jail said, “There was a sense of responsibility and ‘connectedness’ in the group...In fact, one of the members had a terrible migraine headache, yet he stayed for the session because he didn’t want to let his group down.” At the community development program office an observing administrator remarked that it was wonderful to see a second-year learner take responsibility for a newcomer. At one of the community learning centers, participants left the room after the third session with reluctance. Each stopped outside the door to wait for the rest of the group to emerge. The whole group stayed together, talking and laughing all the way down the hall.

When we provided the orientation at our existing learning centers, participants began to interact more and different pattern of classroom relationships began

to emerge. One observer of the process summed it up: "One of the more boisterous students became more subdued ...he was not the center of attention that he normally likes to be. The circle arrangement and group participation took away his power ...and there was participation by those who usually feel shy, withdrawn or intimidated by the more vocal students." Instead of looking to the facilitator for help, group members looked to each other for support. In this way, everybody became a teacher, and everybody learned.

Other patterns of thinking and acting changed as well. One very shy and withdrawn learner who came from a social center surprised us all by participating enthusiastically. Another quiet young man beamed about his accomplishment of making a phone call to gather information. He said people usually hang up on him when he uses the phone because they become impatient with his stuttering. One inmate remarked, "Since last week I learned that being a full time college student isn't such a bad idea...until this, I figured that it just wasn't for me."

From this new-found sense of community support came surprising statements of self-awareness, thoughts that could change attitudes, and quite possibly, change lives. Here are some examples: "I am learning a little bit about myself like I need to further my education because if I don't, I will not have a good job to support my family." "What I am learning about myself is that I'm not as dumb as I thought I was and if I put my mind to it, I can accomplish just about anything." "What I am learning from this session is that distractions keep me from focusing fully on my objective...[I] need to grow up and realize what's real important. That's what I've learned."

Inspired

As a facilitator of growth, I was excited and inspired by results such as these. As a teacher, I wanted to know that I helped the participants develop some of the learning skills they need for the future. I asked each of them at the end of the six-hour workshop, "What have you learned through our work together?" They told me, "I learned that to work in groups is very important, rather than try to get all the information by myself." "It made me realize that the telephone, the computer, and printed information is there to help me learn." "The most important things I learned was how to make a list of questions, how to look for information, and these will help me make my decisions."

At the end of the orientation workshops, several prospective learners chose to enroll in the External Diploma Program and others entered the adult high school. One participant left the orientation excitedly midsession to go straight to the adult high school office to register when he realized how easy it was

going to be to finish. Most of the participants voiced the wish that they had learned the information sooner.

This project lasted six months and offers encouragement that adult learners can be taught and motivated to ask more personalized questions about each of the program options during orientations. Furthermore, we are encouraged to find that when learners formulate and answer their own questions, they use this knowledge to make appropriate choices.

Conclusions

We saw that the research methods we used during the orientation workshop allowed adult learners to get involved and encouraged them to take responsibility for their own learning. Their many individual questions suggested that they were personalizing the information they received. The sense of community also helped adults feel comfortable enough to guide each other. Those who were able to explain, guide, or support, did. Those who needed to learn these skills could do so by watching others in their group. Those who were able to organize a plan of action demonstrated the skills for those who needed to learn it. Everybody supported the group goal in some way.

In this atmosphere it seemed that everybody was a teacher as well as a student. Participants learned about more than the three high school completion options available to them in Fairfax County. They learned to rely on themselves and others to gather information. They also learned to extend their reach for more information through the use of technology.

Based on results from this research project, Ronna and I recommended a full-scale program change. It includes a single point of entry for adult learners in the Adult High School Completion Program combined with a multisession orientation program that encourages personalized questions through working in small groups to research our three program options. The full-scale program change is now being designed.

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Handout

(To be distributed to ABE/ASE and ESOL Working Groups.)

Reflections on the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project

by Elizabeth Morrish

Focus on Basics, Vol. 5, Issue C, February 2002, pp. 15-20

Quantitative research has established conclusively that domestic violence is a factor in approximately six percent of all US households, and that 20 percent to 30 percent of women receiving welfare are current victims of domestic violence (Raphael, 2000). Fifty-five percent to 65 percent of women receiving welfare have experienced violence sometime in their lives (GAO, 1998). According to statistics reported in the Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report "Violence against Women," violence occurs more frequently in families with low incomes. Average annual rate of violent victimizations per 1,000 females was 57 for families with incomes below $10,000 and 31 for families with incomes between $30,000 and $50,000. Level of education was also found to correlate with the rate of violence. For victims with less than a high school diploma the average annual rate of violent victimizations per 1,000 females was 48, compared to 28 for female victims who were high school graduates (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995).

Concerned with violence as a barrier to learning in adult basic education, World Education sought funding through the US Department of Education Women's Educational Equity Act that would enable six programs to enhance educational services for women who have or are experiencing violence by exploring changes in practice and policy. Drawing on the work of researcher Jenny Horsman, who participated in the project, we named as violence many forms of oppression and trauma, including domestic violence, violence by institutions of the state, childhood abuse, workplace violence, and rape. Two years later, we articulate these assumptions about violence:

- violence is pervasive and takes many forms;
- different forms of violence are intertwined;
- violence is supported by institutions;
- violence affects all of us; and
- by participating in institutions that perpetrate violence, we all perpetuate the violence our society supports.

We wanted a project that would support adult education practitioners because we saw that teachers know how widespread violence is and yet hesitate to weave their understanding into their practice. The project gave participants the legitimacy and the support needed to explore the complexities of these issues. One teacher described her inability to connect the implications of violence to her teaching before participating in the project:

> I already knew about violence. And I already knew that oppression is a form of violence. I am politically conscious. But before the project, I never put my politics together with my teaching.... The project made me more sensitive in my teaching position. Before, when someone had an attitude or went to sleep in class it would aggravate me. Now it's a red flag for me. Before it was, "Look, if you're not coming here to learn, don't come." Now, I say, "Are you OK?"
>
> Now I have a different mindset. I've seen that there's a connection between counseling and teaching. I wasn't aware of this before.... I will forever be more conscious of the issue as it affects women in the classroom.

The initial Women, Violence, and Adult Education project event was an introductory institute held in April, 2000. Adult education practitioners gathered from across New England to explore issues of violence and oppression. Programs then applied to become part of the three-year project that would explore ways to address the implications of violence on learning. Six programs were chosen; teachers from these programs participated in a series of four two-day training workshops to share ideas, discuss research, and create a supportive community of educators. Wherever possible, at least two teachers participated from each program. This group of teachers has developed strategies and materials that now, in the final phase of the project, are being compiled in a *Sourcebook* that will be published in the fall, 2002. (Look for information about it in future issues of *Focus on Basics*.)

In selecting participants, World Education was looking for geographic diversity, a variety of program structures, and a variety of student populations. We chose the York School, described in the Ridgway & Griffth article; Vermont Adult Learning, a welfare-to-work program in a small town; Even Start Learning, Innovation, Nurturing, Knowledge, Success (LINKS), a program in rural Maine that works with families in their homes; Project Hope, located in a shelter for homeless women in Boston; the Community Education Project, based in a community organization in a small town in Massachusetts; and the Genesis Center in Rhode Island, which provides classes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). What happened in each of these programs is profound. Working on the project shifted people's thinking: it changed teachers' practices and influenced students to make new

decisions about education and work. While all programs will be featured in the *Sourcebook*, in this article, space restricts me to highlighting the work from three programs. I will outline the activities of the programs and share the views of teachers and students. The examples are taken from personal observation, project reports, and interviews.

Vermont Adult Learning

The White River Junction "Getting Ready to Work" is a regional program funded to serve welfare clients, primarily women who are single parents with work mandates. Teacher Katy Chaffee wrote, "Their lives are compromised by very little income. As a result of recent changes in welfare legislation there are enormous pressures and stresses on our participants." She talked more about this when interviewed about why the program joined the project:

> We're in this whole structure of violence at the same time we are trying to acknowledge it in other women's lives. It is sitting here even in how we are being asked to work. I don't want to go there—it hurts. I was living it. I saw the life raft out there, I went "Yeah! Grab it!" And so [one of the teachers] participated in the institute and she talked about there being one violence…. So then you have to look at how you participate in that [violence], too.

The program, housed in a storefront on Main Street, draws people from a wide geographical area. They offer classes and individual help. Both participating teachers saw institutional violence as a reason to join the project. Teacher Tammy Stockman explained:

> I have been aware for years that violence in every possible form is a huge part of the women's lives. Poverty itself is an act of violence. Often the women had to leave early to go to court. Our site was right around the corner from the court house, and the women were in and out of there all the time, dealing with custody and child support issues, addiction issues, abuse issues. The violence is systemic, not just episodic. The system is set up to hurt and to continue to hurt poor women.

When asked what she was hoping to gain from joining the project, Tammy replied:

> Lately, it seems like the violence has been getting worse, and we needed more support than we were getting. One woman came to class with a loaded pistol because of an abusive partner. There was no place for us to get trained in how to deal with things like this because the people above us didn't want to hear about it. They'd say, "Don't tell us that there are so

> many women affected. We don't believe you." What can you say to something like that?
> Participating in this project enabled us to openly discuss violence as a reality and to ideally come back with a language to describe it and statistics to say, "You're wrong. This is a huge problem." I am hoping that once this project is over, we will be well informed and have strength in numbers. The people above us won't be able to sweep it under the rug so easily.

Inspired by the model of self care provided by the introductory institute, the participating teachers in Vermont decided to begin their project with a staff retreat and invited a therapist to join as a mentor-advisor. Katy said:

> We needed no further evidence or proof that our participants had multiple experiences of trauma and violence. Did they also have ideas and experiences of wellness: what it is, what moments of wellness feel like, what it would be like to live well; what words that describe it?

The staff emerged from their retreat determined to focus on wellness and to see if this would change the outcomes in their welfare to work program. They were being pushed to become more focused on getting students out of the education program and into work. Nevertheless, they started a well-being support group that met once a week as a regular part of the program. They hired outside consultants—"experts"—to teach and joined the courses as participants.

They piloted three consecutive courses consisting of eight to 10 two-and-a-half hour sessions each. The first was on mindfulness, the second on creative writing, and the third on collage, facilitated in turn by a therapist, a high school student, and an artist. A turning point occurred in the mindfulness course when they decided to lock the door. Tammy wrote:

> How had we been so blind to the signals of stress that our participants had been giving? We realized at this time that [what] we had come to see as trust and comfort was actually at a rather shallow level and that much of our participants' behavior was a direct result of their fear. When the door was locked and the phones turned off and the fear of being interrupted was eliminated, when the collective act of self-care was given top priority and the rest of the world was sent a clear message that this was our time and space, that was when we felt a sense of well being. And that was when trust was built.

Students' reactions included:

> I appreciated the safety of this group, that I could try things. In other groups I have felt that I am not as good as everybody else in the room. Here I am not worried about not being able to do what other people can do.

This laid the groundwork for the writing and collage groups. Again the teachers hired consultants and participated as part of the group. Again they unplugged the phones and locked the door. The collage artist they hired was convinced of the power of healing arts in her own life and others. She says:

> The creating of one's own artwork is inherently healing and revealing. It allows access to the deeper parts of the self, and as a consequence, draws on and shares in the humanity of all of us.

Following is Katy's report about the collage process. Her reflections and her interviews with students show what a difference this made in the lives of the students and their ability to imagine themselves changing.

> There is a cultural expectation that welfare-to-work training should provide goal-oriented, rational, job related programming. This well-being support group provided a weekly personal space for valuing each other, and ourselves for asking questions, and for exploring who we are and what we are meant to do in this world. The format facilitated clarity about career directions for some or an appreciation of personal strengths.

A student commented:

> We also imagined a place of well being, and another time, a challenge in our life and then changed places with someone of our choosing.

The students agreed it was valuable to include collage in the welfare to work program. One in particular articulated what developing a collage meant to her:

> ...It taught me to be in a classroom situation again. I did get a job. It gave me the confidence that I can focus.... I know that the collage I did about change is very important to me. Because I'm very angry at the world that we live in and the conditions that there are. It [the collage] gave me a place to put it just the way it is now. ...It got it out of me. Because I couldn't put it into words—all these things—but I could put it all on the collage. It worked.

Katy and Tammy were pleased with the outcomes.

> **Participation grew and attendance improved.** In our program, which is not mandatory, participants often vote with their feet. Participants' enthusiasm developed quickly. Although initially scheduled for four to six weeks, participants wanted to continue longer. We extended the class to 10 weeks.
> **Participants gained self-confidence and pride in their work.** Collage required a unique process of listening to your inner self through right brain work. One of our satisfied artists commented, "There is nothing quite like discovering that inside of you is an interesting person worth getting to know."
>
> **The exploration of interior personal space informed participants' ideas about work, relationships, and values.** Career ideas and job direction were never part of the agenda of the collage group. However, greater personal clarity about future directions was an outcome.

Even Start LINKS, Maine

This rural family literacy program sends tutors to work with women in their homes, where it can be hard to focus on literacy skills. Life intervenes, often in the form of violence. A jealous boyfriend lingered at the door with a gun when the tutor was there. Child sexual abuse was hidden by the community, including the local doctors; even the literacy coordinator had felt powerless to address it. The teachers and the students needed support. Participation in this project enabled them to hire a social worker to meet with the staff every month for discussion, counseling, and clinical advice. The coordinator, Janice Armstrong, says the inclusion of a therapist at the introductory institute inspired her to hire the counselor. Otherwise, she says, "It absolutely would not have occurred to me." She described the role of the social worker:

> …She gave us an opportunity to process our roles with the families, helped me process my role as supervisor of the teachers, and [gave the] teachers an opportunity to save up problems and situations that they were uncomfortable with and needed feedback on. They prioritized the problems and we processed them one by one. She gave very objective feedback... one family had a death in the family. She had very specific suggestions like contacting the death and dying support group at the hospital for support and counseling. She knew specifics and could give the teachers that information. Not only that, she was willing to go on home visits. She did visit this family [and] we were able to get all the children into counseling, and arrange for counseling at school.

> There were just so many ways she helped the program. The teachers were sometimes very stressed. She had such a calming way. That is very, very necessary for staff in the type of program we work in. To be able to feel that calm, know that there is hope, [that] everyone will be able to carry on in some way.

As part of the project, one of the teachers was trained by a staff person from a collaborating family service agency to facilitate a support group. Once students were able to address issues in this group, and staff could do the same in their monthly meetings, literacy work could be the focus during tutoring sessions. Janice wrote:

> ... having a women's support group for learners has opened up time for literacy instruction during home visits because the women have less of a need to talk about their problems to the teachers.

After participating in the project, Janice realized that the teachers and the students had to feel supported for changes to happen. She says this about the student group:

> We tried so many different ways to bring these women together and it just didn't work but this clicked. They got together and planned an end of the year trip to Bangor for all their nine families. [It clicked] because of this women's empowerment group. They were meeting together every Wednesday for an hour and then afterwards would stick around and they started talking about what they could do together.

The project resulted in better attendance than usual, and, for the first time, student ownership and participation in the program planning process. Janice now feels that a counselor is an essential part of her program that she will work to find funding to continue.

Project Hope, Massachusetts

Project Hope is a homeless shelter that recognizes the role of supports in addressing homelessness. They run adult basic education classes in addition to other programming for women. The ABE teachers knew violence was a part of the women's lives at home, on the streets, and in the institutions governing their lives. What convinced them to join the project was the murder of one of the students.

> In February, 2000, one of my [Anna Yangco] students was killed by her son. As a writing teacher, I get to look at people's innermost thoughts. I thought I knew this woman. But she used religion to mask her problem.

> She would say "it is in the hands of God." Still, I felt I should have known. In the fall she used to write a lot, but after Christmas break she would hardly write at all. I would ask her "Why aren't you writing anymore?" And she would say "Oh, I don't know. I just can't do it anymore." And then she died, I was so upset. I kept thinking. "What could I have done?" I started wondering what I could do to prevent this from happening again. Then, in March, my boss got a flier about the Women and Violence project and told me I should get involved in it. It was perfect timing. So I went to the first institute and I have been involved ever since.

One of the participating teachers was also coordinator of the Paul and Phyllis Firemen Scholarship, which gave women full scholarships for further education after passing their GED. It seemed that because of the generosity of the scholarship, many of the usual barriers to education would be addressed. For the women at Project Hope, this was not so. Something else held them back. Taking on the work around violence enabled the participating teachers to see if creating the conditions for learning was that something. Anna describes how they began:

> When we got back from the first institute, we were thinking, "How do we create positive conditions for learning?" My partner teacher looked around and said, "Why don't we change the room?" So she held a "visioning day" in her class. She asked her students to draw pictures of what they would like the room to look like. She asked, "If you could have anything you wanted in this room, what would it be? No restrictions!" So the students drew these incredible pictures, and we worked on the room all summer based on what they told us they wanted. We painted the walls, added plants, put a little fountain in, got halogen lights instead of the fluorescent ones, bought new, more comfortable chairs. We hung a stained glass panel in the window.... By the end of the summer, the room looked totally different. And when the year began, we noticed a complete change in people's attitudes. They were much more relaxed, much calmer.

Teacher Char Carver describes what was different about the work they were doing as part of the project:

> We changed "self-improvement" activities to "self-empowerment activities"—so we took them to the library [for] a poetry and writing session. Two women got up and read their poems and they had never written before, so it was wonderful! We went out for dinner with the women and they all got dressed up for the occasion. We used music and writing as healing getting them to think outside of the box.... We had an activity period where every week they had to do an act of self-care.

> We put money in the budget into childcare, which we didn't have before…the frivolous thing is difficult. We need to put our resources into the women, if we value their endeavor. It's critical that we don't repeat the oppression of poverty. We need to learn how to budget in a different way. How do you explain to other people what you're doing when you buy flowers? But when the women talked about the flowers, they talked about hope.

Anna says this about what she and the students learned from the project:

> I've seen lots of changes. By the end of the year, the women can say, "I'm important." They tell me that they don't worry so much about what everyone else thinks. They think more positively about themselves. Last year, five people went on to college. There are always changes, and it's hard to isolate it to just this project. But I have seen their willingness to take risks increase. At the end of the year, we had a yoga class. This was a big risk. We moved the tables back so that everyone was sort of exposed. We were on the floor doing stretches. If this had been at the beginning of the year, I'm sure no one would have come. But at the end of the year, everyone went. And they came back for all four sessions.

Conclusion

This project has taught us that addressing violence does not mean inviting everyone to disclose. It does not mean that we need to address violence directly in curriculum and materials. It means creating the conditions for learning that name and recognize the presence of violence in our lives.

The staff of the programs changed their practices to allow time for activities and elements that are usually considered luxuries in adult education. These included creating safe and beautiful space, doing art, and giving teachers and students time to talk and find ways to reflect. The shift in thinking and programming could not have happened without modeling and encouraging three levels of support: care of self, support from within the program, and support from community counseling and referral resources. The teachers report changes in their students: better attendance, improved writing skills, the willingness to take risks which led to the ability to make changes in their career and educational choices. As Katy Chaffee said, "greater personal clarity about future directions was an outcome." Surely that is what much teaching in adult basic education is all about.

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About the Author

Elizabeth Morrish, World Education, Boston, brings 20 years of teaching experience and interest in trauma and learning from work with Cambodian women refugees and young parents to her position as director of the Women, Violence, and Adult Education Project.

Handout

(To be distributed to ESOL Working Group.)

A Conversation with FOB…Counseling in ESOL Programs

Focus on Basics, Vol. 6, Issue A, October 2002, pp. 22-23

Focus on Basics *spoke with two English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) professionals, Myrna Atkins, CEO and president of the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning in Denver, Colorado, and Nazneen Rahman, Education Director at the International Institute of Providence, Rhode Island, about the role counseling plays in ESOL programs. Both the Spring Institute and the International Institute serve large numbers of learners in a variety of ESOL programs. Neither ESOL program has specialized counseling staff, but both recognize the role of advocacy and referrals as important in lowering students' stress levels. The teachers in both programs take on the counseling role.*

The Spring Institute's Atkins explains, "The ESOL teacher is in a key role. The contents of ESOL lessons take on the role that a counselor might play. If the teachers see themselves in that role [of counselor], although they might be teaching survival skills, housing, shopping, parenting, they think and teach and listen to students differently." Dialogue journals, in which the learner and teacher write back and forth to each other, are one example of an ESOL activity that can be slanted to deal with issues traditionally considered counseling. "You look at what you get from your students [via journals] differently if you're thinking of it as a mental health activity," she points out.

Teachers as Counselors, Advocates

Atkins finds that most of the mental health work with refugees and immigrants is being done by ESOL teachers. "They have more face time, are seeing students longer than mental health teachers; the teachers have relationships and trust and use methods that involve talking about issues that are key factors which need to be handled when promoting mental health. The goal is not to turn teachers into mental health workers." She is careful to differentiate between mental health and mental illness, and what the teacher's role is and is not. In mental health, she explains, you are "looking at behavior and psychological factors that lead to someone being healthy." Coping, being in positive employment, and having good physical health are all elements of positive mental health. These are issues that can be addressed in ESOL curricula. For example, the Spring Institute's pre-employment ESOL program includes an activity called Steps to Success, which helps learners see that,

while they are currently ESOL students, they are on the road to other things. It's an ESOL activity and also a mental health activity.

The teachers—indeed, all the staff—at the International Institute of Rhode Island, explains Rahman, are counselors. But they define their role as being advocates for the students. "It works in several ways. For example, a student wanted to attend our morning class. Her child was in Head Start and needed to be able to attend [Head Start] an extra hour if the mother was to attend ESOL class. It took 10 telephone calls, but we finally got that approved. Other learners might ask for help with writing letters, or making phone calls. I've gone to children's schools with parents, because the parent's don't understand what the teacher said." This approach, being advocates for learners, is not a formalized aspect of the program, yet all the teachers adopt it.

Both programs find referrals important. "As teachers," explains Rahman, "we don't handle domestic violence." They had a workshop on it, and have a relationship with a domestic violence program in their community, so they can make referrals when they are needed. "We are not equipped to do a lot of mental health or other counseling. We do as much as possible and then do referrals. We have an informal list; most teachers have their own contact people."

Rahman emphasizes building relationships with the other services offered by her organization, as well as with outside service providers. "Many refugees and immigrants have immigration and naturalization problems. We have immigration and naturalization services here. We have a lawyer and caseworker; they give workshops and handle cases for our students. We also have interpreting and translating, helping with documents. We have a refugee resettlement division. We work very closely with them. When we start our school year, we give an orientation, and then departments are invited to give an orientation to students. Minority health is giving information and referrals. Whenever they hold something, all the students are invited."

Spring Institute's Atkins stresses the need to form relationships with outside agencies before referrals are needed. "In our program," she says, "we have close relationships with the Rocky Mountain Center for the survivors of torture. I changed what I was doing to partner with one of those staff so the students would get to know them. The referrals go both ways. That's an important partnership. There are not enough of those partnerships. The time to form those relationships are not when you need them, but before."

Target Needs

To improve the counseling available at the International Institute of Rhode Island's ESOL program, Rahman would like to see more training for teachers on specific counseling issues. A separate counselor, too, is a possibility. ESOL programs considering counseling "should look at their student body first to see what the needs are. Is it mental health? Is it job search and employment? Then get counselors in those areas. Our population has huge needs in immigration and naturalization and our institution has that. You have to start with who is coming in and what their needs are," she reminds us.

Atkins counsels ESOL programs to focus on staff needs: "Teachers have to be aware of how stressful working with people who have so many needs can be. We have to make sure of our own mental health. Some teachers get overwhelmed with the enormity of the tasks both timewise and stresswise. They start taking on a lot of their students' concerns. They have a responsibility to take care of their own mental health. Who takes care of the care givers?"

Handout

(To be distributed to ESOL Working Group.)

Where Attendance Is Not a Problem

by Moira Lucey
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Some thoughts on why ESOL students often persist despite considerable obstacles

According to a U.S. Department of Education national evaluation of federally-supported adult education programs completed in 1994, enrollment numbers and class sizes tend to be larger in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programs than in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) (Fitzgerald, 1995). In addition, students enrolled in ESOL classes receive an average of 113 hours of instruction before leaving a program, which is three to four times more hours of instruction than students leaving ABE or ASE get. As a result of the high level of participation in ESOL classes, the study found improved basic skills, literacy skill, and employability in learners.

Why are participation and retention rates higher in ESOL than in ABE or ASE classes? What motivates an adult to attend ESOL classes? I can only respond to these questions by first reflecting on our ESOL program at the International Institute of Boston and on my experience with ESOL learners.

As is typical in many adult education programs, at the International Institute of Boston we end each term with a ceremony. It is always the same. Students, teachers, and other staff fill a room. Brief speeches are made. Those students finishing our highest level class are handed diplomas. Those who got full time jobs but still come to class every day are applauded. Attendance certificates are handed out. As names are read, those who had perfect attendance rise. Then those who missed only one day stand. Those who will be returning next term sit in the audience looking pleased that they are able to come back. They come from many countries and backgrounds. They are all ages and sizes.

Each semester, year after year, I continue to be amazed as I address the group. I see students busily snapping pictures of the graduates, groups of friends, and teachers. I hear those students who are completing our highest level class approach their teachers, begging for permission to enroll in class for just one more term. I look into the eyes of those who have full-time jobs but still manage to attend class 15 hours a week. I observe the groups of newly formed friends sitting together, laughing and sharing stories and food. I think of what it

really takes for adults to embark on the process of learning a new language and literacy and what is at stake if they do not learn to function in English at some level. I marvel at the fact that the vast majority of these students have studied well beyond the national average of 113 hours of instruction before leaving our program. The main reason why students from our ESOL classes do not complete a term is most often job related; it's rarely related to motivation.

For ESOL students, improved English language and literacy skills are not the only reason for participating in a program. ESOL classes provide the key to understanding more about how to operate in American culture. They give students the opportunity not only to practice language but to learn why something is said or how language changes in a given cultural context. Students learn what to say or not say on a job interview or how to make a doctor's appointment for a sick child. Students share experiences with each other. As they gain language skills and a better understanding of America, their ability to function more effectively in their communities, workplaces, and neighborhoods increases.

Having the freedom to attend school is a privilege for some learners, one that may not have been offered them in their native countries. Whether it is a young man denied entrance to college because of the political affiliations of his family or a woman who was never permitted to go to school because women in her country did not attend school, these students are determined to learn. This is their opportunity.

ESOL programs provide learners with a chance to interact with other adults who may have similar life experiences, come from the same country, or are facing the same challenges. Students, especially those who have recently come to the U.S., are often separated from friends and family. Class is a place to make new friends. The social isolation many ESOL learners feel because of their inability to communicate with neighbors or co-workers in English lessens as friendships form and networks develop.

Of the ESOL students surveyed in the U.S. Department of Education's national evaluation, 92 percent said that they read well or very well in their native languages. Half of the ESOL students had completed at least high school. Unlike many of the students enrolled in ABE or General Educational Development (GED) classes, ESOL students have not necessarily had failure experiences prior to enrolling in a program. They may be well educated and speak more than one language. They enter programs with excitement. That, in turn, contributes to their ability to learn English. For most, studying ESOL carries no stigma: it is not looked at as remedial education. Even if ESOL students have little or no formal education in their native countries, we often see a high level of motivation to learn English and basic English literacy. In

fact, these learners often stay in our ESOL classes for a year or more, attending regularly.

External factors can also influence students' participation in a program. Whether it is an employer who is recommending class attendance or a worker from the welfare department, expectations and requirements may, if met, result in a reward. For students on public assistance, it is cash and food stamps, medical assistance and child care. For students whose bosses have requested that they enroll in ESOL classes, it can be better positions or maintaining current jobs. Many students acknowledge the need to improve their English language and literacy skills for their jobs. That is why they come to class.

Certainly the quality of a program influences attendance and retention rates. Support services, especially bilingual support, allow programs to more effectively and comprehensively reach out to adult populations with needs that may go beyond education. Flexibility and options in scheduling allow students unable to continue in a daytime class, for example, to attend an evening class. The quality of the teaching staff is also critical. Massachusetts now has a number of masters-level ESOL teacher training programs producing well-trained teachers. This, combined with resources from the state allocated to training and professional development, helps us recruit and support talented teachers.

While many of our students show impressive attendance and retention rates, I do not want to ignore the fact that some students do not complete a semester. As with all adult learners, our students have other roles and responsibilities. Some situations necessitate dropping out: lack of child care, health problems, a move to another area, and employer demands are the most common. Factors that relate to the program also cause learners to disappear. If the class schedule is inconvenient or the goal of the learner and the program differ, students may leave. But even if a learner drops out, the motivation to learn often remains in the form of an intent to continue studying when the time is right. It is this motivation and determination to learn that characterizes the adult ESOL learner, and it is also what keeps so many of us working in the field from "dropping out."

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About the Author

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Handout

(To be distributed to Youth Working Group.)

A Comprehensive Professional Development Process Produces Radical Results

by Betsy Topper & Mary Beth Gordon
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In metropolitan Kansas City, practitioners get a chance to learn, test, and refine new teaching strategies that really work with youth

Young adult learners in General Educational Development (GED) programs in metropolitan Kansas City were dropping out: typically more than half left within weeks of enrolling. The practitioners who served them were sometimes more relieved than alarmed. The young people in their programs were, as a group, unmotivated and disruptive in the learning environment. And they seemed to be immune to every teaching strategy practitioners tried.

The Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning is an organization committed to strengthening the adult basic education (ABE) system in the five-county metropolitan Kansas City area—was not willing to abandon an entire population segment, especially one that accounted for more than half of all participants in 70 area GED programs. So Alliance staff researched, funded, and implemented an 18-month-long professional development process designed to give practitioners the skills and intensive support they needed to work effectively with young adult learners in GED programs. This effort has proven to be successful on several levels. It has revolutionized the way metropolitan Kansas's GED practitioners work with young adult learners, turned frustrated practitioners into highly motivated educators eager to work with youth, and substantially improved outcomes for young adult learners in our GED programs.

Identifying the Problem

A January, 1999, survey of the adult literacy programs with which the Alliance works produced, among other things, one statistic that startled us: 52 percent, or more than 10,000, of the participants in local GED programs, were young adults ages 16-24. This seemed to contradict conventional wisdom that more mature adults—who after years in dead-end jobs understood the value of a GED—dominated GED and other adult literacy programs. We confirmed our findings with area GED practitioners, including the eight members of our

advisory group, the Professional Development Planning Work Group (PDPWP), which guides our professional development efforts. PDPWP members and other GED practitioners quickly oriented us to the realities of youth in the GED programs in our region.

According to local GED practitioners, the vast majority of young adults in Kansas City area GED programs are required to enroll in order to receive public assistance, qualify for job training, or meet a condition of probation.

Practitioners also told us that because young adult learners are not in GED programs by choice, they rarely seriously pursue studies that lead to a GED. Those who do try usually falter in the GED system of independent study. Most drop out within a few weeks after enrolling, according to attendance records.

Many practitioners confided that they had no idea how to motivate these reluctant learners.

The Search for Models

The next step was to assist GED educators in securing training that would enable them to better meet the needs of young adult learners. PDPWP members warned us that GED practitioners did not want to be inundated with educational theories. What they really needed was hands-on, practical experiences that would show them how to involve alienated young people in the learning process.

Finding a viable youth education model was much harder than we had anticipated. The adult education and literacy literature provided no suggestions. When we turned our attention to the youth development field, we found the resources we needed. The most valuable of these was the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), which carries out extensive research into best practices related to youth development.

We asked AYPF to help us put together a one-day workshop that would present an overview of some of the best practices for working with teens. About 40 area GED practitioners attended this event. In fact, when we ran out of seating, many practitioners were willing to stand for hours just so that they could hear what the presenters had to say.

A demonstration of a teaching strategy known as Youth Cultural Competence (YCC) by a representative of the Youth Development and Research Fund Inc., in Gaithersburg, MD, captured everyone's attention. The YCC strategy integrates elements of youth culture such as rap music, media images, and pop icons into the academic curriculum. What may sound superficial in theory

turns out to be a powerful youth-oriented teaching tool in practice. As web Alliance staff and practitioners alike—could see from the simple exercises demonstrated with youth volunteers during the workshop, YCC captured the attention of youth and engaged them in learning.

We were overwhelmed by the positive feedback from the practitioners who attended the workshop. Their consistent message: YCC training is exactly what we need to engage the young adults in our classroom.

We knew that practitioners were ready for something new. But we wanted to check with youth in GED programs to make sure we were moving in the right direction. We hired a consultant to conduct in-depth interviews with young people in area GED programs. The findings: traditional GED programming was not working for them. We decided to raise money and devote considerable staff time to see if YCC training for GED practitioners would result in significantly better outcomes for young adult learners. Critical to our eventual success was an early decision to give the effort our full support. If YCC failed, it would do so based on the limitations of the model and not because of haphazard professional development or because we lacked the patience and resources to see it through.

Initial Planning

We spent the next few months designing an intensive, long-term professional development experience around YCC that would stimulate permanent behavior change among GED practitioners. We negotiated with officials at the Youth Development and Research Fund (YDRF), the organization responsible for creating the YCC concept. We provided them with information so they could restructure their basic YCC training program, which focused on youth job development concerns, to emphasize issues related to adult learning.

Our initial training plan, which was devised in consultation with our funders and the professional development work group mentioned earlier, started with a three-day workshop covering all aspects of YCC. We limited the workshop to 16 people so that participants could get the attention they needed to digest and practice teaching strategies that would be a huge departure from those they commonly used. To maximize the impact of this training, we also required that two practitioners from each participating GED program attend the training. The intent was that practitioners who worked in the same program could support one another in implementing YCC strategies. And, we favored participants from GED programs with large numbers of young adult learners. As a result, the 16 participants in our initial training came from eight area GED programs that served 75 percent of the young adults in GED in our area.

During the planning process, our funders, who by this time had embraced the notion of YCC, wanted to make sure that training participants would have an opportunity to test YCC principles in their classrooms. They talked about how easy it is to get excited about new ideas presented in training only to become frustrated—and eventually give up—when faced with the difficulties of implementing those ideas. They requested that we put aside enough money to award a $5,000 mini-grant to each of the eight GED programs participating in YCC training. The mini-grants could be used, for example, to purchase boom boxes or other equipment needed to create lessons around rap or hip-hop music. They could pay for gift certificates for youth as incentives for regular attendance or academic achievement. They were to be awarded on the basis of a simple letter of intent from participants in YCC training.

The Process Begins

Our three-day YCC training was conducted by Josh Weber of YDRF in July, 2000. Participants were immersed in YCC principles and practices. They learned the theory behind YCC, including why conventional approaches to education are not relevant to young people in GED today. More compelling than the theory was the hands-on, down-to-earth instruction in YCC strategies. Participants learned, for example, how to use an ad in a youth magazine to capture the attention of their young adult students. They learned how to use the lyrics of a rap song to initiate a meaningful discussion about poetry and literature. Josh explained and demonstrated strategies and then the participants practiced these strategies under his supportive guidance.

The GED practitioners left this three-day workshop re-energized and committed to the principles of YCC. They talked about how eager they were to try out the new strategies they had learned. Their enthusiastic comments demonstrated that they believed that they had found a way to get through to young people in their classrooms.

Continued Support

The original YCC training plan called for an intensive workshop plus the mini-grants. However, before the July YCC workshop ended, everybody involved agreed that continuing formal support would be beneficial. As Josh explained, participants would likely encounter a host of external and internal barriers in trying to implement key YCC strategies. For example, YCC suggests conducting small group classes for young adult learners, but the eight programs participating were built around independent study.

The Alliance sponsored support sessions, which we called breakthrough sessions. The sessions—convened at six-week intervals—gave training

participants an opportunity to talk with one another about how YCC strategies were working in the classroom. We hired a professional facilitator to conduct the two-hour luncheon sessions. We felt that someone skilled in stimulating honest, nonjudgmental discussion of YCC successes and failures could help bring participants' skills to the next level. The breakthrough sessions were well attended and always elicited lively, useful discussions of YCC issues. Over time, participants became a cohesive support team, encouraging each other with advice and powerful personal support.

Eventually, breakthrough session participants asked questions about certain YCC practices that they could not answer through collective wisdom. Several participants were overwhelmed by the response of students to their YCC efforts. For example, some young people were so pleased by the changing attitudes and behaviors of their instructors that they began sharing everything with them, including the intimate details of their sexual experiences. We agreed we needed more information about YCC implementation.

Six months after the YCC workshop, we arranged a video conference with Josh, our YCC trainer. Participants discussed their YCC concerns and problems with him, and he offered thoughtful answers and suggestions. Participants left the video conference upbeat and fully committed to making YCC work in their GED classrooms. Two additional video conferences, which featured groups that were successfully using YCC principles, proved to be very helpful in boosting the confidence and upgrading the YCC skills of our training participants.

Evaluation

We evaluated our YCC efforts in several different ways. We held two focus groups consisting of young adult learners in programs served by YCC-trained instructors, facilitated by a professional consultant who had no stake in the outcome. Focus group participants were unanimous in their praise of the positive changes taking place in GED programs. Said one youth, reflecting the attitudes of his peers: "It's like I'm not invisible anymore. My teachers accept me for who I am. I can tell they really want to help me learn."

About nine months after the initial training, Josh returned to Kansas City for several days to observe YCC trainees in their classrooms and to provide one-to-one coaching. He also led a workshop in which he identified specific ways in which GED practitioners could make YCC even more effective. By late summer 2001—after YCC had been implemented in Kansas City area GED programs for more than a year—Weber distributed in-depth surveys to YCC training participants as well as to the young adults they served. He returned to Kansas City in September to provide an overview of results and to explain

how GED programs must change if they are going to be successful in attracting and keeping young adult learners. Based on the growing positive buzz about YCC, some 50 GED practitioners and program directors attended this event. A new round of YCC training for the uninitiated has since begun. Seven GED programs are participating.

Outcomes

Here are a few specific examples of positive outcomes experienced between July 2000 and December 2001:

- North Kansas City Adult Education and Literacy: GED graduation rates among young adults seeking GEDs more than doubled from barely 10 percent to about 25 percent.
- Kansas City, Kansas, Community College ABE: Retention rates among young adults grew from 40 percent to 75 percent.
- Family Literacy Center: Attendance among teens and young adults increased 30 percent.
- Genesis School: GED pass rates reached an unprecedented 90 percent among young adult learners in the school's GED prep classes.
- Kansas City ABE: Enrollment among young adult learners has climbed 68 percent due to a peer-to-peer recruitment effort implemented by enthusiastic young adult learners.

A Sea Change

YCC training participants have changed in ways we would have never predicted. Seemingly staid practitioners who appeared to be mired in traditional GED teaching methods eagerly embraced YCC. They were willing to try "guerilla teaching tactics," as some described them, to get through to youth who had given up on education.

GED programs utilizing YCC principles have been transformed. That is what GED practitioners tell us and what we have observed during site visits. Before YCC, young people in Kansas City area GED programs were too often sullen figures, sitting silently at a table or desk, hunched half-asleep over an open book. Today, young people in GED classrooms led by practitioners trained in YCC are excited and energized. They are sitting together at tables—perhaps enjoying snacks or beverages—engaged in the experience of learning. They are talking about math, literature, history, and more—all in the context of issues relevant to youth.

Although the collection of data has been spotty until recently, the information available documents a substantial improvement in outcomes among young adult learners served by YCC-trained practitioners. In general, GED graduation rates have increased and dropout rates have fallen.

Successes, Challenges, Missteps

Our original, 18-month, intensive YCC training and support effort (July, 2000, through December, 2001) is now complete. Many things worked; some things did not. The basic YCC training, as well as the support systems that evolved, worked very well. We now know that the continuing breakthrough sessions were critical. YCC training would never have transferred so comprehensively to the GED classroom without them.

An essential element of YCC is the establishment of small group sessions or classes designed specifically for young adult learners. YCC will not work unless young people are given an opportunity to express themselves in a youth-friendly setting. Therefore, administrators must be brought on board, because policies and procedures have to change at the GED program level to make YCC viable. This ranges from the organization of space for young adult learners, to the scheduling of classes, to the attitudes of the people who oversee GED programming.

Site visits and one-to-one coaching by YCC trainers led to some extremely valuable adjustments in YCC practices. For example, the YCC trainer noticed that some practitioners using YCC principles failed to connect the learning occurring in the GED classroom—a math lesson tied to the cost of a two-pack-a-day smoking habit—to the math concepts covered on the GED. Once this was pointed out, practitioners routinely related lessons to the GED.
We could never have sustained this effort without the support of 10 local funders who gradually came to embrace what initially seemed like an extreme, unproven approach to education. The reason they supported YCC: nothing else had worked well with Kansas City area youth.

In retrospect, we would make three changes. Some GED program directors who voiced support for YCC training balked when YCC-trained practitioners under their supervision tried to introduce new ideas. For example, a few were reluctant to separate young adult learners from more mature learners or to permit rap or hip-hop music to be played in GED facilities. A potential solution to this: Secure, prior to training, a written commitment from program administrators to support key YCC components and strategies.

The Alliance charged a modest $125 for the intensive, three-day YCC training, which did not begin to cover our costs. (See below for information on funding a YCC training.) We no longer charge even nominal fees for YCC training. Our rationale is that we are asking people to participate in a long-term professional development effort that will lead to programmatic and instructional change. We do not want to give them any reason to refuse.

Although we have an enormous amount of anecdotal information, we lack a large body of consistent statistical data documenting the success of our YCC efforts. We should have been (as we are now) more intentional in setting up a data-tracking component. This is especially difficult because we work with myriad independent GED programs that maintain statistics in different ways.

Funding a Professional Development Program

Our Costs

The Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning spent nearly $44,000 on its Youth Cultural Competence (YCC) professional development program, or $2,750 per participant for 18 months of intensive training and support services. This relatively small investment led to a sea change in youth-oriented teaching strategies among ABE practitioners and substantially improved outcomes for their young adult learners.

Close to a quarter of the YCC budget involved training fees ($7,000) and travel costs ($3,000) to bring a trainer to Kansas City for three training or coaching sessions. Another $10,000+ was for professional consultation services, which included facilitating the breakthrough sessions and conducting focus groups and one-to-one interviews with young adults in ABE.

Other costs included more than $2,600 for meals and refreshments served during training and breakthrough sessions (about $10 per person per meal); $20,000 for the mini-implementation grants to ABE programs; and $400 for brochures about the training.

The $44,000 YCC professional development budget does not include Alliance staff time (about 25 percent of the director's time over an 18-month period) or the space and technical equipment required for the training presentations, breakthrough sessions, and video conferences. One of our funders—Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation—provided free space and state-of-the-art equipment for most YCC-related activities.

Duplicating this Training

The Youth Development and Research Fund, Inc., in Gaithersburg, MD, developed the YCC training model that we used. However, groups with more limited financial resources can probably find a local organization especially skilled in working with youth to put together a viable, YCC-like professional development program for ABE practitioners. The Alliance can advise you on this. (See contact information below.)

Securing Funding

Here's a suggestion for ABE programs in communities where there is no Alliance-type organization that supports system-wide ABE efforts: Join forces with several ABE programs in your area. Identify local funders who fund, or might be open to funding, education or youth development programs. Send a few of your most articulate and persuasive representatives to meet with each potential funder.

You can make this argument: Every year, thousands of kids in our community drop out of high school. Most will face a host of problems, ranging from very limited job opportunities, to chronic poverty, to a higher-than-average risk for involvement in crime and substance abuse. The best way to change their bleak future prospects is to help them earn a GED through local ABE programs. Unfortunately, ABE programs nationwide have failed dismally with young adult learners. But now there's a practitioner training model, tested and proven in Kansas City, which dramatically improves the success rate among young people in ABE. Will you help us to fund this effort in our community?

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In Conclusion

The Alliance was able to implement a long-term, intensive professional development effort that fosters and supports radical behavior change over time among GED practitioners. It was not easy. To duplicate a professional development program like this, which gives practitioners a chance to learn, practice, and eventually fully integrate new teaching strategies, requires a lot of planning, resources, commitment, and creative thinking.

- First, typical short-term training programs, no matter how good, will not permanently change the behavior of practitioners. The only way to do this is through long-term support.
- Such support must be provided on many levels, including follow-up workshops, site visits and other technical assistance, and continuing support sessions.
- Continuous information gathering is important. We used structured interviews and focus groups with our target population (young adults). This information helps bring to the surface the kind of additional training and support services that may still be needed.
- Practitioners need the tools to implement the strategies they are learning. One example is the $5,000 mini-grants our funders provided to make GED programs more youth-friendly.
- Tracking, evaluating, and adjusting training and support services are critical to meet the evolving needs of practitioners.

- Long-term, comprehensive professional development efforts require funding and ways to keep funders engaged.
- Commitment and patience are necessary to see such a major professional development program through to its conclusion. This includes securing the commitment of participating practitioners to become part of a continuing learning experience.

About the Authors

Betsy Topper is the director of the Metro Alliance for Adult Learning. She spearheaded the Alliance's effort to bring Youth Cultural Competence training to area GED programs.

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Handout

(To be distributed to Youth Working Group.)

Implementation Isn't Easy

by Janet Geary
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Staff turnover and staff resistance impair implementation of the Youth Cultural Competence model. This Missouri program comes up with a hybrid that works.

The North Kansas City School District Adult Education and Literacy program had a problem. About 600 students were enrolling throughout the year, of whom about 60 percent, or 360, were younger than 25 years old. Overall, only about 10 percent of the youth who listed completion of the GED as a primary or secondary goal were actually completing it within the year. As the administrator of the program, I was searching for a way to improve retention and GED completion rates, particularly among the youth in our program. I decided to start by focusing on the group of under-25-year-old day students, which includes about 20 people on any given day.

At the same time, the Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning (MAAL), a consortium of adult educators from the metropolitan Kansas City area, observed that adult education programs throughout the area were having trouble serving youth well. In July, 2000, the MAAL invited our program to participate with a cadre of adult education teachers from other area programs to explore the Youth Development and Research Fund's model of youth workforce preparation, Youth Cultural Competence (YCC). Our lead teacher, Karen, and I participated in this training and decided to apply the YCC techniques for engaging youth in workforce readiness training to our GED preparation program.

Our program model had been open-entry, open-exit, with individualized instruction. Students could come into the center at any time—we were open 43 hours a week, over five days and four evenings—and work on their own, receiving periodic input from a teacher. To implement the model we learned about in the YCC training would involve significant programmatic changes. We wanted to shift to twice-a-week group sessions, in addition to individualized instruction. Karen would have to teach group lessons using different instructional methods than those to which she was accustomed, and she would need to draw on radically different instructional materials.

Introducing Change

As administrator, I am free to institute change as I see fit, but change won't happen unless those who implement it are also invested in it. To prepare for changes in instruction methods and materials, Karen and I decided to start small. We invited several of our young students to participate in a focus group to see what kinds of music they listened to, what movies they went to see, and who their "heroes" were. We provided snacks and held a drawing for a $10 gift certificate as an incentive. We emphasized that we wanted to make the group sessions critically relevant to their lives and tried to let them do most of the talking and record their ideas. The focus group helped us to get acquainted with the students and observe how they might interact in a classroom setting.

We advertised the change to all the 16- to 25-year-olds enrolled in the program at the time by sending them postcards, putting up fliers, and putting notes in their individual folders. We wanted participants to come to both group sessions a week, but did not require it. We have the luxury of having a separate room adjoining our learning center in which to hold our group sessions, and we had a part-time teacher available to help those who wanted to continue to work on their own.

I worked with Karen to design lessons and activities that integrated elements of popular culture with critical reading, math, or language arts activities. Our students were interested in hip-hop music. We developed a lesson around music following the YCC model. Students are given sheets with the typed out lyrics to a song that has a positive message. The song is played for all to listen to as the students follow the lyrics. Students highlight passages that have meaning to them, then share what they highlighted and why. This activity encourages students to examine the content of the song critically, gives them an opportunity to express themselves, and pushes them to take a look at their music and the message it conveys. The teacher is able to observe students interacting and note how they verbalize their thoughts. This is an engaging way to build critical thinking and reading skills needed for the GED.

Another lesson we developed involves cell phones. Many of our students use cell phones and were discussing issues regarding usage, bills, and service restrictions. We developed a math activity using the actual cell phone bills of our students. We discussed the parameters of various plans, how costs were figured, and how plans differ. The students all became better consumers and developed math and critical thinking skills in the process.

Implementation Grant

A $5,000 implementation grant from MAAL helped us get the program started. With those funds, we added two items to our program that appeal to nearly every young person regardless of educational level: food and money. We always had snacks and drinks available during class. The students developed a reward system based on attendance, with one student assuming responsibility for tracking attendance. Students earned a $20 gift certificate to a store of their choice after attending class for a specified number of hours. After a few months, we found out that people were more interested in socializing and being together than in the academic progress. So, since the focus of our program is academic progress, we shifted to rewards for progress on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and GED practice tests rather than on attendance.

The fund also allowed us to purchase current magazines for the learning center for students to read. We selected magazines based upon students' interests based on conversations with them. We have used *The Source, Teen People, NASCAR Illustrated, Tiger Beat, Twist, Basketball News, Road Racer,* and *Pro Wrestling Illustrated.* We also base reading and language activities on the magazines.

We discovered that most of our students are not accustomed to spending any time at all thinking about their thinking and making connections between education and life. At the end of an activity, we asked, "How does this apply to GED?" At first, they couldn't answer. We had to "feed" them the answers, pointing out, for example, that hip hop music was a form of poetry. To promote an understanding of this connection, an essential component of each activity is reflection. Each lesson ends with a discussion of the role of the activity in preparing for the GED test.

Staff Turnover

As of July, 2002, our primary teacher, Karen, was not able to continue working with the two teen-focused group sessions and grant funds were no longer available. The next year was spent struggling to find a teacher who could take our work with youth to the next level. We suspended group instruction for five months. I was looking for a teacher who was able to relate well to young people, had strong teaching skills, and who was willing to experiment with new concepts. I trained the teacher we hired on YCC; MAAL provided some training as well. We restarted the teen-focused group sessions. Our new teacher was able to develop the relationships with the students but not to integrate the material with youth popular culture or relate the lessons to GED prep as effectively as we had hoped. The students were not always

encouraged to analyze why they engaged in certain activities and lessons. They were not actively involved in planning the classes; and youth popular culture was seldom used as a vehicle to teach the required academic skills.

That year we added a Learning Support Specialist (case manager) to our team. Even though our program is located in a suburban area and most of our students are not dealing with the severe poverty and crime associated with an urban area, complicated issues frequently hinder their academic success. Our students deal with mental and physical illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, family responsibilities, unstable housing, and legal proceedings. The Learning Support Specialist counsels students, refers them to appropriate agencies, and assists them when disruptions occur. She facilitates group sessions focusing on communication skills, employability skills, and interview techniques. The supportive relationship she develops with the students as they journey through the GED preparation process is different from the kinds of relationships their teachers have with them.

The Learning Support Specialist is employed half-time in our program and half-time by Synergy Services, Inc., a local service agency. The development of this partnership was without a doubt the highlight of the year. The agencies cooperate to aid participants in both programs. For example, Synergy had already developed a workplace readiness component that the facilitator was able to personalize and offer to our students. We receive donations of children's books and school supplies that we give to Synergy to use in their teen parent program.

At the same time, several of our students in their late 20s and early 30s told us that they felt left out and wanted to participate in group sessions as well. They were welcomed into the class along with the teens. Each session now has from 10 to 15 students, half of whom are younger than 25; half are 25 to 35. The classes were effective: retention rates were up to about 80 percent, but, in May of 2003, we were once again looking for a teacher.

One More Change

The final major change to our program design resulted from this change in teaching staff and the introduction of project-based learning via another staff development offering from the MAAL. Project-based learning involves having students participate in a relevant project in order to develop academic skills. The project selected by the students is a bimonthly newsletter to share with present and potential students that illustrates what is available in the GED program. Students determine the content of the newsletter, write the articles, take the photos, and edit the work.

Now, four days a week we have at least one group session and on some days we have more than one. Topics include reading, language, math, and (at least once a month) employability skills. The groups are open not just to the younger students but to all students. The majority of the students are under 25, but the groups are definitely of mixed ages. For example, recently in one class of 11 students, six were under 25 and the oldest was 58.

"The various groups we offer have grown naturally. We started by offering a math group. The students then began to request that we offer other groups focusing on other subject areas. Each time we offer any group, the Learning Support Specialist and I go around the classroom and personally invite every student to join us in class. We try to keep our approach quite low key and non-threatening. Our students are now our primary recruitment tool," reports Lorie, our primary instructor.

One group session a week focuses on the newsletter, which integrates material from multiple subject areas. Students still have the option of participating in group instruction or continuing to work independently. About 80 percent of all students who attend on any given day choose to participate in the groups. Students offer various reasons for this. "I'm a visual person, so I can grasp the material better in groups than when I work on my own. We make the work fun. When you enjoy something while you're learning, you remember it longer," explains Novena.

Tammy, a returning student, comments, "I've been in GED classes off and on for several years, and I never completed. I lost interest when I was working all by myself. Now I look forward to coming each day."

Our students have a great time laughing and learning together. Mixing the ages doesn't seem to be an issue. The life experience of the older students is well received by the younger students, while the younger students often introduce freshness and energy to the class. The mixed ages also helps keep the group time focused on academics rather than socializing.

Students encourage and support each other when needed and challenge each other when it is appropriate. Debbie, the Learning Support Specialist, comments, "I personally enjoy relating to the student as a whole person not just on an academic level. It's really heartening to observe the students interacting and connecting with each other as well as with the staff."

The relationships formed in the groups continue during the individual study time and students often work together outside of group time. "You can get ideas from other students as well as the teacher. We help each other a lot too. It helps me learn when I help someone else," says Loi, a current student.

We have discovered that students involved in the group instruction stay in class longer, are more likely to reach their academic goals, continue to have contact with the Learning Center teachers once they leave class, and keep us apprised of their progress toward achieving their life goals. The students who attend our group classes averaged 93 hours in class as opposed to 36 hours per student in the overall program. The GED pass rate program wide is about 10 percent. The students in our group classes have a pass rate of about 22 percent.

A Learning Community

Our day program has evolved into a learning community that blends direct group instruction, project-based learning, Youth Cultural Competence, and fun. Even though the blend of direct group instruction and individualized instruction is working well in the day program, the evening teachers are convinced that their population is significantly different and would feel hampered by direct group instruction. Change is always uncomfortable, and not all of our teachers are willing to abandon their comfort zone and try new and different methods. As we hire new teachers, they are expected to use more directed group instruction rather than individualized instruction.

YCC helped us understand the value of student involvement in planning activities and the importance of a positive peer culture. We discovered that lessons that revolved around popular culture were engaging, but students struggled to make the connection between those lessons and the GED preparation process. Students enrolled in our program are interested in GED preparation regardless of their ages; therefore, their commonality becomes GED preparation rather than age. It seems to us that making positive personal connections with each other as well as with staff, being involved in planning, and having the common goal of passing the GED help the students persist. The real shift was in getting students into groups. The connections they make with each other and our staff often continue after they leave the program, whether they actually complete the program or just drift away. Sometimes they return to our learning center as students and sometimes they just come back to chat. They feel we are all in this together.

Our program is not perfect and neither are our processes, but our learning community is meeting students' needs better than it was four years ago. We continue to strive to provide experiences for our students that will lead them to make academic progress, solve problems, learn the value of lifelong learning, and nurture relationships.

About the Author

Janet Geary is the Director of Community Education Services for the North Kansas City School District in Kansas City, MO, and has been involved in adult education and literacy since 1986. During her tenure in adult education, she has helped initiate and carry out several projects to fine tune processes and services for adult education students.

Handout

(To be distributed to Youth Working Group.)

Separate Yet Happy

by Barbara Garner
Focus on Basics, Vol. 7, Issue A, June 2004, pp. 29-30

Youth have always been a big presence at Dona Ana Branch Community College (DABCC) in southern New Mexico. In fact, the college solicits lists of dropouts from neighboring school districts. They send letters encouraging these former high schoolers to go back to high school, but remind them that if they do not, they should consider adult basic education. Over the past few years, instructors of General Educational Development (GED) preparation courses were reporting that the adult/youth mix in their classes was difficult to navigate. The younger students were interested in technology, wanted activity-based and hands on learning, and were moving at a faster pace than the more mature students; the older students were more traditional. Last summer, the adult basic education instructional (ABE) team discussed ways to enhance the program. They decided to separate the younger and older students by creating an additional GED class specifically for 16- to 21-year-olds who had stopped out of school no more than three years before. Focus on Basics talked with the instructors who are teaching the new class and the original class, which now has only older students.

In the fall, 2003, DABCC started a GED preparation class for younger students with 26 students enrolled. The first accommodation they made to meet the needs of this age group was scheduling. The class started at 10 a.m. rather than 8 a.m. because most of the students arrived late when the class started at 8. It was held twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, for four hours a day, 10 to 12 and 12:30 to 2:30.

Lilia-Rosa Salmon taught the class. The age range of students was 16 to 22. She has only good things to say about it. “I had heard that most of the instructors were complaining about the younger students because of discipline issues,” she explained. “When we decided to form a youth-only class, people asked, ‘Who would teach it?’ I said I would.

“I don’t know why, but I never had a discipline problem at all. Since they’re surrounded by [students] their own age, they didn’t act up. They were more comfortable joking around and saying silly things and we would all laugh. I told them to watch their language and respect others, and not laugh at others asking questions. And that was it.

"Most of them were very fast learners. They did homework. Every one of the [13] students who completed the semester moved up a level [one went on to college]. I wouldn't be scared to send these students to college. I know they would be ok."

Using AMI and Internet

Having recently participated in a study circle on adult multiple intelligences (AMI), Lilia-Rosa decided to integrate a lot of AMI techniques into her class. The activity-based instruction gave the students more time to move around the class and suited their energy level. She also split class time into group activities and individual time. This was especially necessary because despite the narrowed age grouping, the students' academic levels were diverse. This semester, she is using similar techniques with the class. She has also arranged to have the class spend part of each week in the computer lab. Lilia-Rosa was surprised to learn that although her students could do anything on the Internet, their word processing skills were very weak. The students work on their GED essay-writing skills and computer skills in the lab. "We did the IQ test that is available for free on the Internet," she remembers. "I was amazed that only one of my students was average: the rest were above. I even had two in the genius category. Of course, this is the Internet. But I was surprised. This is a group of young adults who are not very informed about the world, and who were not successful in schooling. The IQ information was very encouraging for them."

Lilia-Rosa is 22 years old, and admits that her youth is probably a contributor to her success with this age group. "I need instructors to keep me active and focused. I try to give the same to them," she explains. "I do think it [her age] has an impact. I can probably relate more to their stories, to what they have to say [than older teachers]. They are comfortable telling me things. It's a huge responsibility to me because they see me as a young person like them, but yet I can work and be in college, so I'm a role model. They see that perhaps they can do it."

She feels that the students feel themselves to be part of adult basic education now. In the mixed age-group class, she says, she thinks they felt out of place: neither part of the public system or the ABE system. And they felt that as dropouts they couldn't do the same work as others. This semester, Lilia-Rosa took them on a field trip to New Mexico State University; they have been doing a lot of talking about how they can get into college with GEDs.

When other teachers ask her if she is having any problems, she responds that she's sorry they had such a hard time, but "I haven't had any problems at all. I can't even say I'm such a good instructor. I didn't even have to work to make

a community in the classroom: they all started talking to each other and found their common interests. During the break, they all sit together and have lunch. Now they are all friends."

The "Elders"

How did the "elders" do without the younger students? Anastasia Cotton is teaching the older students. She feels that separating the age groups has been working out well for both groups. Her students know they need their diplomas, she explains, and "they know they don't want to be stuck at $5.50 an hour. They want to work. They're focused. This year, I have had a lot fewer complaints from students about other students. We could focus in on certain area, for example in reproductive health, AIDS, and homosexuality. Before, the older students didn't want to talk about potentially taboo topics. The younger students made some [older students] very self-conscious. Now, the older students are a lot more open. But, again, I don't have really older people in there; probably the oldest is 38.

"Nevertheless, the interests of a parent with two or three kids is very different from the interests of a 16-year-old who is still trying to date. For example, their music is different, so if you want to use music in the class, it's easier to do with the students separated by age.

"I've never seen a class participate more than this semester. I don't know whether that's because the "kids"—under 18—are not in there, or what."

About the Author

Barbara Garner is the editor of *Focus on Basics*.

Resources

Please visit the NCSALL website at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu (see Teaching and Training Materials section) for the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study Circle Guide. Intended for professional developers and practitioners who want to organize and conduct study circles that help practitioners read, discuss, and use research to improve their practice, this nine-hour, three-session study circle introduces teachers to Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) and its application in adult basic education. The study circle incorporates findings from NCSALL's Adult Multiple Intelligences Study, the first systematic effort to examine how multiple intelligences theory can support adult literacy education.

Handout

(To be distributed to Youth Working Group.)

Sudan to South Dakota: Helping Youth Make the Transition

by Lara Ann Frey & Yvonne Lerew
Focus on Basics, Vol. 7, Issue A, June 2004, pp. 26-28

What can you do to assist young adults who are newcomers to the United States? Is it best to serve them alongside older adults in English as a second language classes? When might a specialized program best meet the needs of younger adults? Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, Refugee and Immigration Programs (LSS/SD) struggled with these questions and undertook a mixed approach: immigrant adults of all ages learn English together and an additional Young Adult Orientation class is offered to meet the specific needs of younger adult students.

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes at LSS/SD Refugee and Immigration Programs include adults from many countries and from ages 18 to 80. Students are placed in classes based on their English proficiency level and the times of day that they are available to attend school. The variety of lessons included in the life-skills-based classes meet most students' needs regardless of their countries of origin or their age. However, some young adults need more attention.

Special Needs

A few years ago, LSS/SD realized that a group of young adults from Sudan needed specific information and training beyond what was offered in the general ESOL classes. These young men had been displaced from their families and eventually found shelter at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Called by some the "Lost Boys of Sudan," they had survived from childhood in displaced communities made up of children and youth. Beginning in 1999, some 4,300 were accepted for resettlement in the United States; about 250 came to South Dakota.

The young men (very few young women were resettled with this group) from Sudan arrived in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, eager to begin their lives anew. They knew some English and entered ESOL classes for adults at the high beginning to intermediate levels. In addition, LSS/SD offered them the help of refugee resettlement case workers, general orientation classes, and pre-employment training. Nevertheless, this group of young men continued to struggle to adjust.

"Lost Boys" of Sudan

The story of the "Lost Boys" began in 1987, when thousands of young boys were separated from their families as a casualty of the long-running and deadly civil war in Sudan. In many cases, boys as young as seven years old were away from their villages tending the cattle and were separated from their families during the fighting. In other cases, young men and boys were targeted for kidnapping by various factions to become combatants in the war and therefore escaped to refugee camps to escape that fate.

Over the years, the Sudanese youth fled to refugee camps in Ethiopia, then fled again back to camps in Sudan, and finally to Kakuma, in Kenya. Along the way they were stalked by lions, attacked by militias, crossed crocodile-infested rivers, and suffered from hunger and thirst. Finally, in 1999, the US Department of State designated 4,300 of the "Lost Boys" to be permanently resettled in the United States. The majority of these young men arrived in 1999-2001. Some 200 to 300 now live in South Dakota; some were initially resettled there and some decided to move to join friends and to obtain employment.

Sources

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Crawley, M. (2000). "'Lost boys' of Sudan find new life in America," ***Christian Science Monitor***, Nov. 7.
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Case workers at LSS/SD, as well as community members such as landlords and employment supervisors, reported that these young men behaved inappropriately in social settings. We worried that these young men, who had arrived with such high hopes, were engaging in behaviors that endangered their health and might cause conflicts with law enforcement. Many were impatient and impulsive, behaving more like teenagers than adults. They were faced with adult responsibilities to support themselves, manage money, follow the local laws, and interact with others in the community; however they did not have the skills or experience to do so successfully. Some of them indicated that they wished for parents or other adults to direct and guide them, and in some instances volunteers stepped forward to fill that role. In general, however, they were legally of age and needed to learn to function as adults in American society.

Special Class

In response to the need for a specific, direct instruction to help this group of young adults to make a successful adjustment to life in the United States, LSS/SD created a Young Adult Orientation class. The class content was prepared by an adult ESOL instructor in consultation with refugee

resettlement case workers, some of whom were themselves from Sudan; nurses and other health professionals; and a professional public school refugee family liaison. The class was offered for two weeks, for three hours each day: a total of 30 instructional hours. Afterwards, the curriculum was adjusted and compiled into a written instructor's manual to allow others to replicate the program with subsequent groups.

To supplement the instructor-led lessons in the Young Adult Orientation class, guest speakers with specific expertise were invited to present information from their particular perspective. The local police department's community education officer spoke about law enforcement concerns; a counselor who had himself crossed cultures spoke about culture shock and cultural adjustment; nurses or advanced nursing students presented information about safe sexual practices and about good nutrition; and consumer credit counselors spoke about money management. Since some of the potential instructors at LSS/SD were case workers, who are not trained as teachers, we wrote the instructor's manual in a detailed, scripted manner.

Lesson Format

This excerpt from a Social Skills lesson demonstrates the level of detail presented in the instructor's manual:

Say, *We have talked about culture and cultural adjustment. We want to talk about and demonstrate some important social skills. These skills are important if you want to be successful in your job. These skills will also be important as you spend more and more time with American people.*

Say, We are going to role-play. A role-play practices what you are learning. For example, we are going to show you how to start a conversation. First we will tell you how to start a conversation. Then we are going to demonstrate how to do it. And then you are going to practice it.

Say, The first activity we will practice is greeting people. How do you greet people in Africa? Allow time for student response. How do you greet people in America? Allow time for student response. Say, *In each country it is important to greet people but each country has a different way to greet people. It can be confusing to remember what to do. Today we are going to practice American greetings.*

Curriculum Topics

- Goal setting: short-term and long-term
- Budgeting
- Time management
- Options for education: GED and postsecondary
- Using the public library
- Cultural adjustment
- Sexual harassment

- Discrimination issues
- Law enforcement issues: driving laws, curfew and underage issues, family law and abuse, sexual conduct
- Social skills
- Basic nutrition
- Sexually transmitted diseases and sexual health
- Employment skills
- Bicycle and car safety and insurance

While the Young Adult Orientation curriculum was created to meet the specific concerns of young adults from Sudan, LSS/SD has adapted it for use with other populations. We are planning to offer the class for young adults who have recently arrived from Liberia. The class is best suited to the needs of young adults who are new to the United States and without the guidance of elder members of their families or communities.

Impact

We did not conduct quantitative research to evaluate the results of the Young Adult Orientation class. However, qualitative evidence demonstrates its positive result. As in any adult education program, attendance and participation are indications that the class is meeting participants' needs. Overall, attendance was high at the Young Adult Orientation classes and 61 percent of the students who started the class completed it successfully. Anecdotal responses from case workers, law enforcement personnel, and other community members confirmed the value of the class.

At the end of each two-week class session, participants filled out class evaluation forms. The comments were instructive and validated the purpose of the class. Comments from student evaluations include:

- "The orientation is nice and I learnt a lot of things that I was not expecting to learn: How to communicate with the people in the city; going well with girlfriends, boyfriends and be friend to people openly, not keeping away from people."
- "What I have learned is to pay attention to American's cultures and adapt [to] it. Follow the laws of America and respect them so that I can not fall into problems with the government and to make me be successful in my studies and work."
- "It can let me understand how I will live with my new community and how I will survive in my new country."

Many of the topics of cultural adjustment are faced by immigrants of all ages, older as well as younger adults. Many topics, from managing money to being successful on the job, are covered in the life-skills-oriented classes at LSS/SD as well as in many adult ESOL programs across the country. The Young Adult Orientation class provides a special educational opportunity, however. Some topics, such as underage drinking and social interactions between unmarried young adults of the opposite gender, are of specific interest to young adults. Other topics may be of general interest, but young adults may feel constrained by the elder members of a mixed class or older adults may become impatient with the questions and concerns of the younger adults in the group. At LSS/SD, we have found that the specific concerns of young adults can be addressed most effectively with groups comprised of young people, and especially single-gender groups from the same culture.

For further information or to obtain a copy of the Young Adult Orientation Curriculum created by Lutheran Social Service of SD, please contact: Yvonne Lerew, Education Program Coordinator, Lutheran Social Services of SD, Refugee and Immigration Programs, 218 W. 13th Street, Suite 110, Sioux Falls, SD 57104. ylerew@lsssd.org.

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Handout

(To be distributed to Counselor Working Group.)

Beyond the Scope of the Teachers: Deciding to Employ a Social Worker

by Nikki Merritt, Miriam Spencer and Lori Withers
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"Let's Write About You" was an exercise in writing developed by Independence, Missouri, adult literacy instructor Tammy Sturm in the summer of 2001. Tammy found that students complained regularly about not having anything to write about. She therefore began lessons based on students telling their personal stories where they were "the expert."

In "My Bad Day," a student we will call Cindy shared her story of violence, abuse, and her search for answers. She wrote the following:

> "I didn't like dealing with him when he was drunk because you couldn't control him and you never knew what he would do. He would get real violent when he was drinking... I got real scared because he was threatening me...I decided to hide in between two mattresses...I could hear him screaming..."
>
> "Even though he had hit me a number of times, I felt I would deserve whatever he gave me."
>
> "It made me realize that I couldn't continue to live like that...I was living dangerously...I had to think about what this was doing for my children...I didn't need this kind of relationship in my life."

Cindy cited keeping her job as the reason for enrolling in the Family Literacy Center Adult Education and Literacy (FLC AEL) program. Upon entry, she said she needed a GED—General Educational Development certificate—quickly; however, her entry scores on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) indicated she would need intensive instruction and time to build her skills. As Cindy participated in the classroom, began to trust staff, and participated in "Let's Write About You," it became evident that she faced the threat of losing her job, financial worries, parenting concerns, and unresolved domestic issues. These problems all accompanied her to class, affecting her initial progress as she attempted to concentrate on learning.

Like Cindy, most adult literacy students bring myriad social challenges and barriers into their programs with them. At the Family Literacy Center, staff documentation revealed that students in adult education and literacy classes were continuously facing a wide range of issues that interfered with their ability to attend class regularly, study, and focus on their personal goals and learning. Parent educators, adult education teachers, and the director spent inordinate amounts of time—teachers estimated it at upwards of 25 percent—listening to students' personal problems and assisting them in finding resources, which, in some cases, involved sources of personal protection. We realized that as professionals we were not educated to meet the social service needs of these students adequately and asked ourselves: Do we need to offer social services as a formal part of our AEL program? In this article, we share the challenges we were facing, what we decided to do, and how our program has changed as a result.

Our Program

Established in 1990, the mission of Family Literacy Center, Inc. (FLC), is to provide comprehensive services that respond to the educational and special needs of children, adults, and their families to Eastern Jackson County families in need of basic education and workplace skills. Of the adults living within a five-mile radius of our location, 77 percent do not have a high school diploma or GED. In 2000-2001, FLC provided 251 children with early childhood education, served 564 adult literacy students (of whom 98 percent were female), and 130 teen parents. The collaborative intergenerational services we offer include adult literacy, early childhood education, parent and child time together, parents as teachers, and teen parenting classes.

Challenges

Cindy and her classmates come to study to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED exam. In most cases, the issues that caused these adults to drop out of school have not been resolved when they enter our program. Nearly all the problems involve difficult circumstances that may include long-term unemployment, abusive relationships, homelessness, lack of resources to meet basic needs, and children or elderly parents with chronic health problems. As a result, many students are in crisis, causing chronic disruptions to their education. The disequilibrium associated with crisis serves as a powerful motivational force that can heighten the client's susceptibility to intervention (Bergin & Garfield, 1993). On the other hand, people in crisis—our students among them—experience strong feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, powerlessness, and hopelessness. After a crisis period (typically lasting four to six weeks), students will either return to their previous coping

skills or develop a new set of responses that may leave them functioning better or worse than prior to the crisis (Parad & Parad, 1990).

Concerned that our educational mission was being undermined by the wide range of stress-producing issues learners brought to class, we requested and received a planning grant from Metropolitan Alliance for Adult Learning (MAAL). MAAL is a metro-wide initiative operating under the umbrella of the Heart of America United Way in partnership with individuals and organizations from virtually every sector of the Independence, MO, community, including major philanthropists in the Kansas City area. The grant would allow us to document these issues in greater depth and develop a design and grant proposal that would, we hoped, enable us to address these problems so that FLC AEL students could focus on learning.

We contracted with a social worker who conducted classroom observations, 33 student interviews, and eight staff interviews. Students described feeling high levels of stress from many different sources including finances, health problems, interpersonal relationships, and lack of community resources. We learned that many students come from families that had not demonstrated positive parenting skills or positive interpersonal relationships. One student described being locked out of the house all night as a disciplinary measure. The social worker noticed, during conversations with individual students, with groups, and during support groups, that many students had difficulties concentrating due to a preoccupation with personal issues. This often resulted in what we felt to be excessive time and energy being used to discuss these concerns, leaving diminished time for study in the AEL classroom. The breadth and depth of problems faced are apparent in the following student responses:

- met biological father after having no contact for 18 years;
- has cancer but was not receiving treatment due to demands of parenting and lack of support network;
- kicked out of home at age 15 for smoking;
- moves around between homes of other relatives.

In addition, 44 percent of students reported physical, sexual, or emotional abuse during childhood, 55 percent of students indicated current involvement in abusive relationships, and 92 percent of students experienced insufficient financial resources to meet daily needs.

What to Do?

The planning grant enabled us to document and validate our concerns: stressful events in learners' lives were accompanying them into the classroom

and distracting them from learning. As we were then structured, FLC AEL offered minimal intervention and assistance: the three part-time teachers, trained in education, lacked the time, knowledge, and strategies necessary to deal with case management.

A committee that worked on the planning project decided that the complexity and seriousness of the issues facing our students warranted pursuing funding for a full-time social worker to work with the adult literacy program students. A similar model had been used with the teen parent program at the FLC.

A program grant, also from MAAL, allowed the FLC to contract with Heart of America Family Services (HASF), a counseling and family support agency serving the bistate Kansas City area, for the employment of a master's-level social worker (MSW). This grant was written to provide small group and individual counseling to assist students in removing barriers to their educational goals. Individual intervention was chosen to complement the instructional strategies used in the program. The proposal outlined a seamless system of support in meeting the social service needs of adult learners. By hiring a social worker, we hoped that AEL student attendance and GED attainment would increase, and that students would gain knowledge of community resources and problem-solving skills.

Nikki, the full-time MSW we hired through HAFS, serves students in three separate sites in the Independence community. Nikki uses an empowerment approach, which, in social work practice, is the process of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities to increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and to develop influence toward improving their circumstances (Barker, 1995). The techniques Nikki uses include accepting the client's definition of a problem; identifying and building upon existing strengths; teaching specific empowering skills; and providing mediation and advocacy to mobilize community resources needed in a state of crisis. Nikki believes that the empowerment perspective has become an influential tool for students in the program she serves. Via individual counseling and small group instruction, she assists students in setting educational, career, and personal goals. In the first six months since she joined us, she has assisted 35 GED students in goal-setting. She has also provided short-term counseling, interpersonal relationship-building, academic instruction, and crisis intervention to 37 other students. Visiting individually with 73 students, Nikki has developed rapport with them. This has made the students more likely to depend on Nikki, rather than their classroom teachers, for assistance, thus allowing the teachers to focus on instruction.

Nikki has implemented Survival Skills for Women (http://www.flinthills.com/~ssed), a 10-week course that expands participants' growth and

economic potential with sessions focusing on money management, child management, and re-entry to employment. Cindy was one of 10 graduates of the program and provided the inspirational speech at their graduation. Nikki also implemented a Young Men's Support Group for 10 males under the age of 25. This group met for six weeks, building positive relations between the members and strengthening the members' skills in areas chosen by them: making positive choices, job readiness, personal health, parenting, and assertiveness. Nikki has facilitated students' use of outside resources, referring 34 participants to support services such as treatment programs, housing, and vocational/technical services. She has built and maintained relationships with 23 community agencies.

Integration into FLC

As adult education and literacy, early education, and parenting staff interact with adult students, they refer them to Nikki and ask the learners' for permission to give Nikki their names. Nikki participates in weekly staff meetings to provide insight into family dynamics, confidentiality, and ways to address stressful situations. She is also available to staff for personal consultations, which facilitate their ability to be effective in the classroom setting.

Impact

It is an FLC AEL practice to compare attendance data to previous years. Since Nikki joined us, the average contact hours per day has risen from a three year average of 56 to 65.4 hours. The average students per day has risen from a three-year average of 14.2 to 17.7 students. Since July 1, 2001, 14 students have obtained their GED, including Cindy, with seven others scheduled to take the tests over the next two months. The number of GED recipients is slightly higher than in previous years.

The shock felt by the FLC staff when they realized how many students had serious barriers was probably the most unexpected outcome of the project. The initial planning grant enabled us to identify more precisely the barriers faced by our learners; however, the implementation of the project has revealed the magnitude of the issues in their lives:

43%	Youth (ages 16-18) smoking cigarettes
21%	Single-parent households
15%	Youth living on their own without parental/guardian support
12%	Inability to access reliable transportation to AEL site
7%	Criminal behavior and involvement with probation and parole
4%	Homeless 16 to 18 year olds

3%	Suspected use/sale of illegal drugs

Adding a social worker to the AEL sites has been a successful endeavor that FLC's Board of Directors is committed to continuing. A reduced grant amount will be requested through the Alliance for an additional year of implementation. The program will be committing a portion of funding to the project in the upcoming year, along with United Way. During a recent dialogue, four students shared with Nikki their great appreciation for her assistance. They commented that her guidance, words of wisdom, and knowledge kept them coming to class even though they faced many challenges. Cindy and several other students wrote a poem for Nikki and gave her a candle, because she "was their light."

The multitude of services offered is a giant step toward meeting the personal and social needs of AEL students, allowing them to focus more energy on continuing their education. The addition of the student liaison social worker has demonstrated the center's proactive approach to best serve its participants like Cindy, once fearful and lacking hope, now enrolled in college and becoming equipped to achieve her goals and capture a promising future.

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Nikki Merritt, MSW, has worked in community-based, school link, social services for the past seven years.

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Handout

(To be distributed to Counselor Working Group.)

A Mind/Body/Learning Approach to Counseling: Helping Students Handle Stress

by Marjorie Jacobs
Focus on Basics, Vol. 6, Issue A, October 2003, pp. 14-17

Going back to school while working as an adult education teacher and counselor at the Community Learning Center (CLC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, brought me face-to-face with my old test and school anxieties. They were heightened by limited time, raising teenagers of my own at home, caring for my spouse and an aging parent, and having responsibility for housekeeping chores. To ease my own tension, I started practicing Tai Chi, Qi Gong, yoga, and meditation on a regular basis.

In discussions with my students, I learned that they had no outlets for their stress, usually considerably more tension-provoking than mine. Despite a mandatory, study skills workshop designed to empower them, many students were still missing classes because of health and motivational problems, weakening of commitment, poor time management skills, interference from job schedules, and family conflicts. I started to think that the best way to address the students' counseling and academic needs would be in an ongoing classroom setting.

At the same time, the CLC started to use the Massachusetts Department of Education's new student registration form. The form listed personal health goals dealing with stress reduction, nutrition, and improved self-confidence and self-esteem. Students could now potentially meet academic and health goals in one class. I realized that the opportunity had arrived for me to apply the knowledge, skills, and convictions I had acquired over the past 10 years in studying mind/body medicine and psychology.

Initial Skepticism

At first my colleagues at the CLC were skeptical about the idea of my teaching a counseling class instead of one of our traditional adult basic education (ABE) or General Educational Development (GED) preparation classes. It represented a big change in both what and how we were teaching. I was suggesting teaching basic academic skills and providing group counseling through a health content format. Eventually, my co-workers supported my initial idea to offer a

weekly, 1.5-hour, mixed-level, health education and counseling class for morning ABE and adult secondary education (ASE) students.

We began offering this class in September, 1999. It was so popular with the students that in September, 2000, a second counseling class, also meeting once a week for 1.5 hours, was added at the CLC for morning English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) advanced students. I call both the classes "health education" to remove any stigma associated with counseling and therefore attract more students. I incorporate reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and study skills with health science content in both. We do not only vocabulary building, highlighting main ideas of paragraphs, and writing activities together but also aerobic exercise, stretching, yoga, meditation, and cognitive restructuring: learning to view things more optimistically and with a sense of humor. In the supportive atmosphere of the group, we openly discuss problems that students are having.

Stress Management and Creative Arts

Teaching health education has given me the freedom and flexibility to respond to students' interests and needs. At the beginning of each semester, students tell me what they want to explore and learn. To facilitate this process, I have them complete a questionnaire to find out which health-related topics and activities interest them.

This past school year, my students and I have worked on some stress management and expressive arts techniques. We practiced focusing the mind in the present moment to facilitate learning and counter the negative cognitive effects of stress (forgetfulness, distractibility, negativity, pessimism, anger, anxiety). I taught them how to do the simple exercises I do, as well as yoga stretches, sitting, walking, and standing meditation.

Based on the research of psychologist James Pennebaker (1997), who studied the power of writing in emotional and physical healing, I have promoted at-home journal writing in both health classes. My students experience the healing process and I get regular feedback on their interests, needs, likes, dislikes, and progress. In class, my students and I have taken writing a step further by experimenting with guided imagery and drawing to stimulate creative writing. I have used these expressive arts, which I was learning in a course at Lesley University, as a way for students to understand themselves better and gain self-confidence. Tapping into the creative process has improved students' writing and captivated their interest.

I first taught my students how to turn off the stress response and bring about the relaxation response, a state in which the mind/body is brought back to

balance (relaxed state) and is no longer fighting or running away to protect itself from a perceived danger. During relaxation, our blood pressure decreases, heart beats slower, metabolism slows down, breathing deepens, and muscles loosen. We become more open and receptive to new ideas and ways of being in the world around us. Electroencephalographs, which record brain waves, provide evidence that our brains also slow down.

Mindfulness Exercise: "I am a Cranberry"

When I put the small cranberry on my palm, closing my eyes and softly breathing, I felt the cranberry was not only a piece of fruit but also a natural and living thing combining the rain, the soil, the seed and the season. I slowly put the acid cranberry into my mouth. When it melted in my mouth, I felt it integrate into my body, my soul, and even my mind. When I absorbed this cranberry, I also absorbed the essence of nature. I felt that I was also a member of our natural world, just like the cranberry absorbing the nutrition of the world and contributing to the world in return.

Finally, I felt I was becoming a cranberry, although only a small part of our organic world which, however, is important. This whole inner experience is somehow magical and significant to my mind. I think this special process of thinking is also a helpful psychological meditation for my mind's health.

Jun He

Brain Waves

Researchers Elmer and Alyce Green (1984) of the Menninger Foundation have described four types of brain waves or electrical rhythms that correspond to the stages of our mind or consciousness: beta, alpha, theta, and delta. Beta waves are rapid (13 to 26 cycles per second) and occur during stressful, everyday life situations when we are dealing with the outside world or are involved in "active thinking." Our negative, fearful, or angry thoughts and detail-oriented thinking are associated with beta rhythms. The slower alpha brain waves (eight to 13 cycles per second) characterize the relaxed mind, where our focus is more inward, such as when we daydream or meditate. During this state, we are wide awake, but creative ideas or images arise from the unconscious mind. In other words, when we are relaxed, creative ideas just come to us. Instead of the mind going blank when we feel stressed about writing, ideas and images flow. Theta rhythms (four to eight cycles per second) bring us almost to the point of sleep. They produce a dream-like state filled with unconscious images, and we feel drowsy. Delta waves, the slowest brain waves (zero to four cycles per minute), occur during deep sleep.

Walking Meditation Exercise: "I am The Tree of Knowledge"

I can see people walking around me. They feel good being next to me. They are looking for a place to rest. It seems to me that they know how easy it is to find peace under a tree. I feel the wind that brings the birds; they fly around and come to me. I spread my arms for them. I feel strong.

While the birds are singing, I'm laughing. I'm happy. I see men, women, and children playing in the playground. They are happy too. Happiness is in the air. I feel strong. It touches my soul.

Ewerton Borba

The Greens conducted many studies on the relationship among the mind, creativity, health, and healing. They found that as participants' brain waves slowed down in alpha and theta states, they experience healing of physical disorders (i.e., high blood pressure) and the expression of creativity. These results happened naturally as soon as the body and mind calmed down and were free of stress and active or worried thinking. The students participating in their studies were taught how to slow down their own brain waves to bring about body/mind relaxation. Once relaxed in alpha or theta consciousness, participants reported having more images, increased energy, improved concentration, and creative thinking, all of which helped them in writing papers and taking tests. They even noted an increase in positive thoughts, a sense of empowerment, and openness to the possibility for change and growth.

Preparing for Creative Expression

Expressing our creativity, therefore, not only is beneficial for our health and learning but also makes us feel happy. We get a rush of energy and produce something that makes us feel good about ourselves. By setting favorable conditions in the classroom, we adult educators can help our students to reduce stress and express their creativity, leading to broader and more optimistic thinking.

First, however, we need to prepare the mind of the learner. I use movement and mindfulness meditation, starting with a five to 10 minute exercise to calm the body and stimulate creativity. When the blood is circulating, oxygen is feeding all the cells of the body, particularly those of the brain. With increased oxygen, the brain has more energy, and we feel alert. In the classroom, we dance, sing, chant, do some simple sitting/standing stretches or yoga postures, march in place, or even walk around the classroom.

Mindfulness Activities

After exercising, we turn the focus inward with a 10-minute mindfulness activity that slows down brain waves and stimulates creative expression. I remind students not to worry about how they look or whether they we are doing an activity correctly or not. We concentrate on doing only one thing very slowly, gently, and silently. Breathing can be a mindfulness activity if we observe the rhythm and sensations of each in-breath and out-breath. Or, we practice progressive muscle relaxation, starting with the face and working down to the feet, tightening and then relaxing different muscles. Sometimes we do a guided imagery activity, free writing, or draw pictures to practice mindfulness.

Almost any activity can be performed mindfully. One of my favorites is to eat a dried cranberry mindfully. I have students select one berry and hold it in their left hand. They examine its texture and shape, notice how it feels in their hand, and then smell it. I ask them to think about how that piece of fruit grew and became what it is and how it got to them. Then, I tell them to put it in their mouth and let it rest on their tongue, noticing any changes in their mouth. Next, they bite into it so that they have two pieces of fruit in their mouth. Lastly, I instruct them to eat the fruit as slowly as they can with the thought that it could be the only food they will eat all day.

After eating a dried cranberry mindfully, I ask the students to write as much as they can, in the present tense, beginning with "I am a cranberry." At the end of the class, students share their writings, thoughts, and feelings about the creative process. They report feeling happy, proud of themselves, energized, and relaxed. The boxed text provides some examples of ABE and ESOL students' writings from such a class on mindfully eating a cranberry.

Mindfulness Exercise: "I am a Cranberry"

I am a cranberry, and I enjoy that I grew up under sun light with a nice view. I remember the people taking care of me and how proud I was. I felt like a VIP. I'm used to enjoying myself, and I never think about the future even though one day I heard people talking that my time was coming up to be taken away.

But what has happened here? Hey! It's so hot! I can't breathe. I am suffocating. Why am I drying up? Oh, I'm getting smaller and smaller, and that's not right. What is this box, and it's so dark here! It changed everything for me!

Now I'm another thing. I'm a dried cranberry, and I'm trying to enjoy my challenges. Now I like to be eaten from a nice person, to feel his soft tongue on my body, to feel his pleasure eating me. It will be a new feeling, and like every new experience, it's so exciting for me.

Isak Spahiu

Student Feedback

The student feedback from the health education classes has been overwhelmingly positive. In classroom discussions, specific writing assignments, and journal entries, students share their joy, energy, feelings of peacefulness, self-explorations, and heightened self-esteem. They report a decrease in negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and frustration. Their enthusiasm has spread to other classmates who have not yet enrolled in health education, and we now have a growing waiting list for September classes.

Conclusion

In the three years that the CLC has been offering health education/counseling classes for morning students, all the GED students who have taken it have passed their GED exams and received their high school equivalency certificate. They even continued attending their other classes until the last week of school, unlike most of their classmates, whose attendance trailed off after registering for their tests. The GED graduates, almost all of them young adults, said they would not have stuck with the program if it had not been for their health class. It kept them motivated despite stress outside of the class and learning difficulties in the areas of writing and math. During the school year, none of the ABE students who attended the health class for at least three months dropped out of school.

I hope this approach to counseling will become part of the core program at the CLC and be seriously considered by other learning centers whose students could benefit from health education classes. As Derren Lewis-Peters, a 17-year-old student who completed his GED in June, 2002, writes,

Attending this class [ABE/ASE Health Education] has been an eye-opening journey filled with positivity and excitement. As I write this, on the eve of my last class, I can feel a sliver of sadness come over me, but I can rejoice in the fact that I've come away from this a smarter, wiser young man with a better understanding of myself and the people around me, all because of this one, fantastic class.

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About the Author

Marjorie Jacobs has been an adult educator at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the past 30 years. She is also a stress management consultant and health educator. She gives workshops on the mind/body/learning connection, stress reduction, meditation, and the External Elixir of Kung Fu. She can be contacted at mlmljacobs@yahoo.com.

Handout

(To be distributed to Program Administrator Working Group.)

Build Motivation by Building Learner Participation

by Barbara Garner
Focus on Basics, Vol. 2, Issue A, March 1998, pp. 11-12

The Goodwill Learning Center in Seattle is in an enviable position: supported by Goodwill Industries and private grants, it is not dependent upon government funds. The staff are free to experiment. Students suggest courses, and those with special skills teach them to others. The current roster of classes includes traditional topics such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), math, reading, writing, and preparation for the tests of General Educational Development (GED). At the students' suggestion, the roster also includes public speaking, passing the written driving exam, small business, and cash English. In cash English, students learn the standard spoken English they need to succeed in the formal economy.

Director Pat Russell-Sims feels that participation motivates students, builds their confidence, and opens them to new vistas. At the Goodwill Learning Center, participation comes in two forms. It can mean being involved with the general running of the school; it can also mean being involved with other students. Learners, who include those studying ESOL and all levels of adult basic education (ABE), participate in hiring staff and in setting organizational policy. The students in each class determine their own rules; for example, students decide whether snacks can be eaten during class, whether children can be brought to class, and whether homework should be given. There's a peer tutoring program, and four of the Center's staff of seven are former students, which indicates that student involvement works.

Despite the Center's commitment to the concept, building student participation isn't easy. A student council started a number of years ago by a small group of active students provided the Center with a way to get student input. The group didn't grow, however, and when the core members graduated, it faltered.

To complement the work of the student council, another group of students started a newsletter. They write, lay out, and circulate the two-page publication. Students get copies in their mailboxes every week or so. It is entitled the *Goodwill Community Learning Center Student Newsletter, News By, For, and About Students.*

To further increase student participation in the overall running of the school, the Learning Center has instituted quarterly all-school meetings for the students. "We thought about calling them 'assemblies,'" explains Marvin Lewis, a former student and now an Americorps volunteer responsible for student involvement, "but assemblies means high school, and lots of people don't like that." To prevent classes from being interrupted, the first two meetings did not coincide with class time. Of approximately 175 students enrolled at the time, about 55 attended each of the first two meetings. They broke up into small groups to generate suggestions about how to improve the Center. Their lists included a request for child care and more computer classes; the administration is looking into the feasibility of both. Another request, for more ESOL classes, was fulfilled almost immediately.

Not happy with the attendance at all-school meetings, the Learning Center is experimenting with ways to increase it. They're particularly concerned with attracting night students. Now, all school meetings are held during regular class time. The Center will hold two meetings a quarter, one during the day and one in the evening, so students who go to class in the evening can attend. They serve food: donuts, croissants, bagels, fruit, and juice.

To broaden ownership of the meetings, responsibility for facilitation rotates. "A lot of students bring a lot of experience with them—from church or other places," Lewis points out, and the Center runs a public speaking class, so finding students to facilitate isn't hard. Lewis works with the facilitators, helping them prepare for the meeting.

Lewis is an example of a student whose motivation was enhanced by being given the opportunity to participate in the running of his school. He shares his story with us here. He would be the first to admit that, while building learner participation is not easy, it can be effective.

A Learner's Story

by Marvin Lewis

Looking back, my first memories as a learner come from home. There were always books around. Momma and Deddy' had the biggest; they were the Bible. My older brother and sisters introduced school books to me. I had good models for early childhood reading and writing. I was read to a lot by all family members. I was well-rooted in reading and writing before I hit kindergarten.

On the first day of school, Dick and Jane was read to the whole class by yours truly. That's only because I learned from my sister. As for forces working

against me, well, when you are the only Black person in your class from grades three through six: well, use your imagination. Kids can be mean at times; sometimes it was me. Once you get called a slur you're not really concentrating on the classroom, you're concentrating on retaliating.

I was working at Goodwill Industries when I decided to take classes at Goodwill Community Learning Center. It had been 18 years since I graduated from high school. While working, it hit me that unless I improved my education I would continue to be in dead end jobs since all I had were labor skills. So I started taking classes.

My family and friends were very supportive. They thought it was wonderful. The atmosphere was good. The Learning Center let me work at my own pace. What I liked the most about it was how the students were given the opportunity to have a major say in things.

Then I became a peer teacher. I helped with sharing information, getting information from everyone in the class. I really can't remember how they figured I had an interest in doing this. I think they asked me.

Of course, I got discouraged because it was new to me. But fortunately, a staff person shared with me that discouragement along with frustration is a learning process. As for quitting, it entered my mind, but I was immediately snapped back into reality by looking into my children's eyes.

The advice that I would share with staff and program directors would be this: don't fake the funk. That means don't pretend with the students. We can see right through it.

About the Author

Marvin Lewis is the seventh son of 16 children. His parents moved from Louisiana to Washington in 1952. He is the father of three children and an American Red Cross volunteer in disaster relief. As an Americorps volunteer, he is in his second year as a student organizer at the Goodwill.

Handout

(To be distributed to Program Administrator Working Group.)

Getting into Groups

by Michael Pritza
Focus on Basics, Vol. 2, Issue A, March 1998, pp. 20-22

In Gilmer County, Georgia, a shift from individualized instruction to classes and group discussion increased student retention and participation

I am an instructor at the Gilmer County Adult Learning Center in Ellijay, Georgia. Gilmer County lies at the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains in the extreme north and central part of the state. Like many rural counties, Gilmer, once relatively isolated, is rapidly becoming a satellite community of a major urban area, in this case, Atlanta. Our students are a diverse group in terms of age and academic development; the youngest is 16, the oldest is 92. They range from non-readers to those who have completed the tests of General Educational Development (GED) and are studying for entrance to technical school or community college. With the exception of a dozen or so currently enrolled Hispanic students, all are Caucasians in the middle- to low-income brackets. Women outnumber men by about five to one.

Like many others in the field of adult basic education, my colleague, Art LaChance, and I were concerned with student retention. Our drop out rate was consistently about 34 percent. About ten percent of these would enthusiastically enroll, but never return. A larger number began well but their attendance gradually tapered off until they finally disappeared without notice or explanation. A surprising number, perhaps another ten to 15 percent, were within easy reach of their goals when they suddenly and inexplicably left the program. Follow-up calls to these students did not yield results. We both felt personally and professionally frustrated by our apparent inability to keep these students engaged for the full course of the program. We knew that they were falling short of their goals, and we felt a lack of effectiveness as an organization. We wondered if we could do anything to change this pattern, or whether it was an unalterable fact of adult education. We had never looked at the problem critically, however, until we participated in a practitioner inquiry project sponsored by the University of Georgia's Department of Adult and Continuing Education in Athens. It was with this project that we really began to consider the possible causes for such high numbers of dropouts.

We began by brainstorming ideas about what we could do to increase retention. Would different methods of intake or the creation of a weekly

student orientation affect retention rates? Would awards and certificates of level completion have an impact? What about asking our students about the kinds of study and activity they preferred? We wondered about creating regularly scheduled classes in reading, writing, or math, which we didn't have at the time, or starting discussion groups based on current events. We had success with some team building and discussion-prompting activities in the past, so this idea seemed to have merit.

We then considered our students. All of them were influenced by variables over which we had no control: problems with family, money, illness, transportation, child care, and the like. Many of them told us that they had never seen education as a necessity. Even in the face of recent industry lay offs or the inability to find work, many still saw education as irrelevant. "Why," they asked, "do we have to know this stuff?"

As I mentioned, we had been offering individualized, self-paced study with instructor assistance and self-directed computer-based programs. We began to wonder whether these methods were contributing to our high attrition rate. Students had liked the few group activities we had led. Perhaps a more successful method would include greater participation from both students and instructors alike. This hunch began to take precedence over other ideas. We eliminated most of our other questions and focused on the issue of participation. Our research question became: Will group participation in structured classes and discussion groups increase student motivation and retention?

The first step in our investigation was straightforward. We asked our students to respond to a simple questionnaire about the possible instructional approaches we could use at the Center. Choices included individual study with either text materials or interactive computer programs such as PLATO (which we were already doing), study in pairs, or group study in a classroom environment. The groups would focus on language, math, and writing skills. More than 85 percent of about 50 students answered that they would prefer studying together as a group.

Student Input

We then interviewed students in more depth to determine at what point and in which subjects they felt they most needed help. We began to hold loosely organized classes two or three times a week based on the needs of the greatest number of students. We included students at all levels and left attendance to their discretion, rather than making it mandatory. Since we have two instructors, one of us was always available to those students who preferred to work individually.

Classes were at first informal and unscheduled. We would simply move around the Center and ask "Who wants to do class?" and get together for an hour or so, creating a lesson from whatever students were working on at the time. As we progressed, the classes became more structured and scheduled, though during the span of the project we were careful not to make these sessions seem unnecessarily academic or authoritarian. We did not want to re-stimulate negative past experiences, and we considered student feedback and participation to be two of the most important elements. We also began discussion groups based on topics selected by the students and on exercises from "Beyond Basic Skills," a newsletter of classroom ideas published by the University of Georgia. These groups provided a place in which the students could talk about issues they felt were relevant to their lives, like work and personal finance. In these forums, they questioned the relevance of education, asking "How is education going to improve the quality of my life?" and "How can my life improve by learning percents and geometry?"

Hard Questions

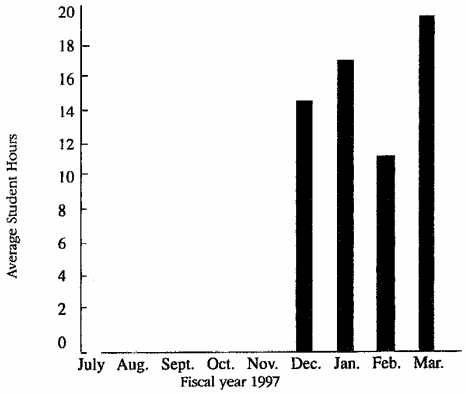
Sometimes answering these questions was hard. During our project, I kept a log of my observations and reflections. The log entries seem to be most useful in shedding light on recurrent themes about student needs and observations. In reviewing the log entries, I discovered the importance of making material relevant to students' lives. "Today," I wrote in my log, "Linda and Troy [names have been changed] asked why they have to learn this stuff. Can we make more money?' If I say No, but your quality of life will improve,' they ask really hard questions: How would my life improve without more money?' There seem to be very few students who will buy the academic reasoning." As part of our inquiry project, we turned to attendance records for data, extracting the cumulative monthly hours of all students who were not mandated to attend and comparing them to hours of attendance in the months before the project began. The data are displayed in Figures 1 and 2. We were struck by the fact that the average number of attendance hours for non-mandated students had increased about 50 percent during the project. At first we were skeptical about such a large increase, but a review of attendance records showed the data to be correct.

Figure 1: The Numbers of Students and Total Hours of Student Attendance for Fiscal Year 1997. Our project was in effect from December through March. During February, no groups were held. The hours are for non-mandatory ABE students only.

Fiscal Year 1997	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.
Total Number of Students	46	55	71	71	41	21	43	39	39
Total Student Hours	423.5	632.75	572.25	604.25	394.75	299.25	726.0	448.25	770.0

Art and I interpret this data to be an indication of the success of our project, and because of this we have incorporated group classes and discussion into our present methods of instruction and curriculum presentation with some real success. Classes are full and students actually make time to include them in their daily schedules. Both the classes and the discussion groups generate energy and enthusiasm in the students, which leads to greater participation and time spent in the program. Participation, especially in the discussion groups, is open to all students, making the classes multi-level. This exposes many of the learners to ideas and subject matter that they would not otherwise encounter and fosters student interaction. It seems to spark in some of our beginning ABE students a desire to participate further: they say they feel good about "going to class." We have noticed that class participation seems to foster study groups, with more advanced students often helping those who are less far along. Because of this, students actually seem to be spending more time involved in their studies.

Figure 2: The Average Student Hours for Fiscal Year 1997. Project was in effect from December through March. During February, no groups were held. The hours are for non-mandated ABE students only.



Of course, this study also created some new problems and challenges. We need to recognize that many factors which influence motivation and retention are probably beyond our influence, and so concentrate on those that we feel we can help to change. As instructors, we realize that we should constantly remain open to change and to restructuring our methods of approach according to the needs of the students, both as a group and as individuals. What works one time, with one group, may not necessarily work the next. Certain constants, such as the need for relevant content, may be extrapolated from our daily work, but the solutions to the problems we encounter may vary from time to time and group to group. This has led us to believe that there is no single solution to the problems of retention and motivation, but many solutions must be applied according to the demands of the time and the needs of the students.

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About the Author

Michael Pritza began work in adult literacy as a volunteer with the Gilmer County Reading Program in 1992. In 1993, he accepted a position with the program, where he now serves as an ABE/GED instructor. Pritza has been involved in practitioner inquiry research since 1995, and is currently working on a degree in Alternatives in Education from Skidmore College in New York.

Handout

(To be distributed to Program Administrator Working Group.)

Power, Literacy, and Motivation

by Greg Hart
Focus on Basics, Vol. 2, Issue A, March 1998, pp. 1, 3-5

"Will you support the construction of an adult education center on the south side of Tucson? Please answer YES or NO." Lina Prieto, working on her GED, the single mother of two sons, put the question to each city council member and each county supervisor as they stepped up to the microphone. It was September, 1996, and 2,000 people in the auditorium waited for each to answer. An occasional "grito" (shout) rose up out of the crowd. Even the children waited intently beside their parents, aware that something unusual was happening. Signs demanding support for adult education lined the huge room at the Tucson Convention Center and bobbed above the crowd. The politicians stepped up to the microphone one at a time to answer her. "Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" Eleven times "Yes!", eleven times a huge eruption of shouting from the crowd, and on the last "Yes!" we rose to our feet and raucously celebrated victory. We—immigrants, drop outs, single mothers on welfare, minimum-wage workers, under-paid part-time adult educators—hugged one another, waved our signs, and gave "high fives" all around. The politicians looked out with wonder over the scene until they, too, were engulfed by the thrill loose in the room. A building for adult education was going to be built, for sure, but this jubilation was about more than that. It was about power.

At Pima County Adult Education (PCAE), we have come to believe that literacy is a means to greater power and personal freedom, not an end in itself. It is the prospect of achieving power and not the concept of literacy that truly motivates both students and teachers. Lina Prieto, the other adult education students who had spoken before her, and the audience itself were acting with intent to influence their own destinies and their community. Literacy had helped them to act, but the excitement and satisfaction they felt arose from the knowledge that they were, in those moments, powerful.

My colleagues and I at PCAE have grown weary of working with people desperate to change their lives, only to contend with the fact that from one year to the next about 50 percent of PCAE's 10,000 students drop out before achieving their learning goals. We know that the reasons for that are numerous and complex, and that many are associated with what it means to be poor. We also know that some students leave because what we are able to offer as a program simply doesn't appeal to them. We believe that many students sense

what some adult educators already know: that our own status as adult educators relative to other public educational institutions is a mirror image of their own powerlessness. We think that far too many conclude that getting a GED or learning to read at a higher level probably won't change their lives, and, painful as it is to admit, at PCAE we believe they may be right.

An Investment

We held a series of formal and informal meetings and discussions throughout 1992 and 1993, some in the context of a series of day-long staff retreats. As a result, we decided to invest time, energy, and money to introduce the potential for power and civic engagement in an integrated way into our curriculum. We did this to motivate students to use and respect literacy as a tool of action rather than to regard it as a concept unrelated to the reality of their lives and their powerlessness. We also did it to motivate ourselves through deepening our commitment to the meaning and potential of our work as adult educators. The philosophies and practices of Myles Horton, the great plain-speaking American adult educator, and, to a lesser degree, his friend, the great and courageous Paulo Freire, provided fodder for our discussions and models for our actions.

An experience in 1988, when PCAE students and staff staged a large public demonstration that led to a 200 percent increase in funding, had taught us something important: students and adult educators changed when they felt they had some say in their lives. Students involved in planning and organizing the demonstration stayed involved with the program for years, some as paid teaching aides. Teachers involved in and inspired by the powerful impact on themselves and their students grew increasingly discontent with the standard academic, skills-based curriculum that, despite endless tinkering, never seemed to have an impact on attrition levels.

Despite that previous experience, however, we still didn't know how to introduce and sustain ongoing discussions with our students about power. We weren't entirely sure how to identify issues of common concern or how to organize broad-based civic actions and interventions designed to address them, or how we would connect all of that to the adult education classroom. We needed help to proceed. We got it, from the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC), an organization associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), founded in the 1940s by the late organizer and radical Saul Alinsky. The PCIC worked originally with faith-based constituencies and a few secular institutions to research issues of importance to the Tucson community, especially those affecting the poor. Some of the issues coming to light based on PCIC's work included lack of child care and transportation, inadequate job training for living-wage jobs, low wages, latch-key children, and the disintegration of

families, neighborhoods, and schools. PCIC's lead organizer and I began to meet and form the basis for a working partnership that recognized mutual interests. With PCIC's help and guidance and PCAE's commitment of training, staff time, and leadership—including the creation of the position of Coordinator for Civics and Citizenship—we began to convene forums and one-to-one meetings for students and staff to identify issues affecting their lives.

During these forums and one-to-one meetings, student and staff leaders began to emerge. Issues such as low wages, gang and crime-burdened neighborhoods, and parents' sense of disconnection from their children's schools came to the fore. At times with and at times without teacher guidance, small groups of students began to research issues. Their research included the analysis of public policy documents, the development of effective questions and agendas for meetings with public officials, the preparation of speeches and position papers, and learning how to reach consensus on strategy and conclusions through dialogue. The use of high level literacy skills was, of necessity, essential to all of these tasks. Training for staff and students also included public speaking skills, the mechanics of presenting at large public meetings, and conducting smaller group meetings with public officials and others. In fact, most of these activities were pointed towards meetings with public officials, of which there were eventually many. Student and staff skills were tested and refined during those encounters.

Under the guidance of the Civics and Citizenship Coordinator, six student leaders took paid positions with PCAE as student advocates and student mentors. Their responsibility included, among other things, assisting student councils and identifying other students with leadership potential. Eventually, a core group of about 40 students and staff formed a group called the "Friends and Students of Adult Education." They continue to meet regularly and to take an active and public role in issues of concern to adult education students and adult education in general.

Staff and student participation in this civic process was and remains a matter of self selection at PCAE. Individuals determine whether or not they want to be involved and their level of involvement. They demonstrate their interest through attendance at meetings and their willingness to volunteer for assignments such as research, meetings with public officials, or disseminating and explaining information to other students and staff. At any given time at PCAE, we may have 25 or so student leaders who are actively involved and a few of hundred who stay informed by attending student council meetings and meetings of the "Friends and Students."

In the beginning of our relationship with PCIC, some of our approximately 170 staff were immediately interested, and others were skeptical. Some of

those who were most cautious have since become ardent proponents of civic involvement. Others were ambivalent at the inception, and remain that way to this day. Everyone had questions and concerns: Is this type of civic involvement appropriate for an educational program? Might we lose our funding if we antagonize the powers that be or get caught up in partisan politics? Does PCIC have a hidden religious agenda? Will my job be threatened if I choose not to participate? Today, most teachers appear to be comfortable or are becoming more comfortable with PCAE's efforts to link adult literacy education with the notion of power. Clark Atkinson, a teacher with more than 25 years of varied experience as an adult educator and a strong advocate for teachers' rights, was one of the most dubious at the outset of our involvement. He said recently that he believes that our work with civic engagement has been the most important thing PCAE has ever done.

We have had a number of outward successes based on the issues identified and addressed by students and staff. They include hosting the candidates for Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction in our classrooms, where they were challenged to publicly commit and demonstrate support for adult education. This later materialized into a statewide family literacy initiative. Adult education students played pivotal roles in the development of a city-wide program that nearly doubled the number of after-school programs for elementary-age children. In partnership with teachers, they have formed a non-profit corporation called Adults for Community Transformation (ACT). They confronted powerful local bureaucrats over the placement of a swimming pool at a local neighborhood center instead of a long promised adult education center. Ultimately, they got not one facility, but two. They worked with staff and parents at a troubled high school to create a jobs program for students that is now being lauded and duplicated throughout the city. Hundreds of students studied interviewing skills and participated in a walking canvass of some of the city's more troubled neighborhoods and later helped to present the results to the City Council and the County Board of Supervisors. Working with some of the city's most influential political and business leaders, they have been instrumental in the creation of a new job training strategy that guarantees employer-pledged, living-wage jobs with a career path. In the spring of 1997, students worked with the Board of Supervisors to get $2.25 million included for adult education buildings in a county bond issue. After the bonds passed in a very tight election, 500 attended a County Board of Supervisors meeting in July of 1997 to successfully request that the money be allocated ahead of schedule.

These successes speak for themselves. But what about the impact on students, their learning, and their willingness to stay involved? Skills of involved individuals have certainly grown. Right now, our attrition rate remains about the same, and we report about the same number of student goals achieved as

in the past. And, there has been a price to pay: power generates opposition. Former allies, both individuals and institutions, have grown distant and, in some cases, inimical, as they perceive that their interests and their access to resources may be threatened by an active adult education constituency competing for those same resources. The risk is real that in questing for power we might lose some, or, in the worst case, all of our ability to even offer educational programs. We might lose our jobs, too. We also clearly recognize another risk: that we as teachers, i.e., the literate, might exploit students. That possibility requires constant vigilance and introspection. The buildings we have won, for example, cannot just end up being nicer places to work for adult educators; they must serve and strengthen the adult learner community. We must be vigilant also that PCAE itself is not similarly exploited by the IAF or PCIC for their own purposes.

We will not understand the full impact of our work for many years to come. We have shown ourselves that linking literacy education with the notion of power transforms the perspectives and motivations of educators and students alike. We have seen people's lives and the lives of their families change. When GED student Lina Prieto, who questioned city and county officials, speaks powerfully to a room of 2,000 people, she knows she has the ability to influence the direction of her community: she has power. Her seven-year-old son sitting in the audience sees it, too. When teachers see students involved in the civic process, they recognize that they themselves are engaged in meaningful work: they have power. When government officials see that the community they serve has a voice, they see that power belongs rightfully to the people. For the people at PCAE involved in this process, adult literacy education, and power will never rightfully be separate from one another again.

About the Author

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Information About NCSALL

NCSALL's Mission

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort among the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

NCSALL's Research Projects

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) student motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge, and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners*; Focus on Policy,* a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy,* an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports* and *Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. In addition, NCSALL sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

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