



Demystifying Program Report Cards

by THOMAS SUH

In 2007-2008, the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL) issued the first-ever program performance report cards to local, regional, and community-based adult education providers. The purpose was to provide a snapshot of adult education program performance with regard to specific state and federal expectations. Since we had never developed such an instrument, staff first conducted preliminary research ranging from reviewing what other states had developed to compiling an inventory of state and federal expectations to reviewing the types of data collected by OAEL.

Once the research had been completed, it became apparent that the primary objective was to develop a practical instrument that was reliable, fair, and expandable. In looking at what some of the other states had adopted, we were

struck by the complexity of some of the scoring processes and weighting systems. If the goal was to provide an accurate snapshot of program performance, elaborate scoring and weighting systems appeared to obscure the picture rather than crystallize it.

Although we wanted to avoid having to rely on similarly complicated processes and systems, it was not evident (at least initially) whether this complexity could be avoided. To determine whether this would be possible, we set out to find the answers to the following questions:

1. How feasible would it be to rely only on the data and information submitted by the programs?
2. What kinds of measures would be fair?
3. Could we develop a system that would incorporate measures that may be important in the future?

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A Few Words on *Progress*

Program improvement efforts involve everyone. Adult education programs that have demonstrated success involve all of their stakeholders in the process, regularly communicating with them and seeking feedback that can point the way to needed change. "Everyone in our school from the office staff to the custodians shares the vision of what we are about," says Bonnie Mizenko, program manager with Virginia Beach Adult Education, identified by the OAEL as a Tier 1 program. In addition, through committees, surveys, meetings, and various communications vehicles, Bonnie obtains vital information and data that help her to target areas for improvement.

Over the past few years OAEL has focused on program improvement, including implementing a report card system, desk audits, and formal site visits. This major change in the way programs are monitored has been challenging for adult educators, many of whom began to work in adult education when the emphasis was on the number of students enrolled each year with less concern for how much they might have learned.

As Thomas Suh, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with OAEL, discusses in his article, the guiding principles in the development and implementation of the report cards have been: Is the data reliable? Is the report card fair to all programs, regardless of location or size? Can it be expanded to accommodate other measures as needed? It is clear from Tom's article that the monitoring procedures themselves will continue to be improved to make them more useful as tools that both OAEL and programs can use to identify areas for improvement as well as measure success.

The program improvement process is continuous. As programs achieve new levels of performance, they will continue to set new goals that will take them even higher. While continuous improvement is relatively new in the adult education arena, it has the potential to help our students achieve better learning outcomes by helping us to strengthen the quality of our instructional offerings and the administrative effectiveness of our programs.



Calendar

April

1-30

National Poetry Month
<http://www.poets.org>

4-10

National Library Week
<http://www.ala.org>

11-13

National Conference on Family Literacy
San Antonio, TX
<http://www.familit.org>

12

National Drop Everything and Read Day
<http://www.dropeverythingandread.com>

21-24

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Annual Meeting
San Diego, CA
<http://www.nctm.org>

25-28

International Reading Association Annual Convention
Chicago, IL
<http://www.reading.org>

May

20

Literacy Fair of Virginia
Keyville, VA

July

28-30

VAILL: Virginia Institute of Lifelong Learning
Richmond, VA



A Letter from OAEL Director **Elizabeth Hawa**

As I prepare to retire as your director in the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL), I will have the comfort of knowing that adult education in Virginia has moved on to another stage in the program improvement chain of development. At OAEL, we have set forth high expectations, as articulated in the *Operational Guidance Manual for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs* and the new monitoring and evaluation system consisting of desk audits, program performance report cards, and a standardized on-site monitoring process. Tom Suh has made an excellent contribution to this issue of *Progress* by providing a comprehensive description and rationale for the report cards and future plans for this measurement of program strengths and weaknesses. The development of GED® and ESOL standards and the Virginia Adult Educator Certification Program as well as our strong goal-setting and assessment policies have added significantly to the expectations set forth by staff at the state level. And, the bottom line *is* program improvement!

What are some of the program improvement strategies being implemented locally? A sampling of those strategies are highlighted in this issue of *Progress*. Annette Loschert with Literacy Volunteers of the Roanoke Valley describes her approach in the Roanoke area—increase instructional intensity and create an environment to foster active learning. She has the results to prove her success, with an increase of 157 percent in the number of adult learners making gains. Bonnie Mizenko's recognition of the importance of hiring and then nurturing a strong staff is indicative of her wisdom as the program leader in Virginia Beach. She talks about "inspiring your staff" and keeping them connected to the larger goal and mission, reminding us that, like our learners, teachers must also be motivated. Finally, Amy O'Shell tells us that in Page County they have "paid more attention to our data," and it has reaped benefits for the program.

As we approach reauthorization and the increasing emphasis on workforce development, I believe Virginia will be able to step forward ready to meet the challenges because of the work these practitioners and others of you have accomplished in this journey called "program improvement." I leave you knowing that the resources are there and the structure is in place to develop an even stronger adult education and literacy program in Virginia. You know where you need to go, and you are learning more about what it takes to get there. Thank you for the privilege of traveling with you on the journey!

Godspeed and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Hawa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

New Models of Learning at Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley

by ANNETTE LOSCHERT

CBLOs have the unique challenge of finding innovative ways to intensify instruction, because the old model of “2 hours of tutoring per week” simply won’t cut it. At Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley, we view intensity of instruction as a way to increase learner interest and improve learner gains by identifying creative ways to increase instructional hours while reducing the length of time it takes to get the learner to an acceptable hour threshold for post-testing.

Determining how our program can involve volunteers in new ways in order to increase intensity of learning and improve learner outcomes has been our program improvement challenge this year. Our goals are to (1) increase the number of hours a student spends in instruction-related activity in a given time period (one fiscal year) and (2) create an environment that promotes active learning.

Our staff seeks ways to create new roles for our volunteers that draw on their experience while increasing their satisfaction levels, hours of instruction, and learner gains, as well as improving program management practices by creating a team approach to program planning.

We kicked off this initiative in July by adding an 8-week summer ESL class meeting four hours per week to supplement our fall and spring offerings. This class gave 22 learners the opportunity to gain intensified instruction during a time that has traditionally been a slow instructional period. In addition, one of our tutors focused on working with ten of our lowest level ESL learners in a group setting for four hours



per week, building community and trust and resulting in excellent attendance.

As a result of adding these two initiatives, by the end of December, 126 learners had reached the 12+ instructional hour threshold compared to 94 learners last year (a 34% increase), and 18 learners made an educational functioning level gain compared to 7 learners at the same time last year (a 157% increase).

We capitalize on opportunities to match volunteers with unique backgrounds and areas of interest with learner needs. Our strategy is to supplement instruction through topical instructional mini-clusters to attract learners who are already working with a literacy tutor, enabling us to provide two additional instructional hours each week.

Our focus has centered on citizenship and employment pilots based on learner requests and volunteer expertise.

- Our citizenship cluster serving six learners meets three hours per week and is taught by a veteran tutor who has shepherded a number of learners through the citizenship process within the last two years.

- Many of our learners have been interested in pursuing the CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) exam. Our ESL Coordinator and two tutors with medical backgrounds are partnering with the staff of a local retirement community that administers the test to develop a pre-test curriculum to ensure passage of the exam. Referrals from Refugee and Immigration Services supplement our learner base to make up our first class of 19 learners.
- We have a “roaming” tutor who addresses employment issues from resumé writing and interviewing skills to navigating Virginia Workforce Center resources.

We view communication between staff, tutors, and learners and tutor training and support to be the keys to learner success. By identifying and matching tutor expertise and interest to learner needs, other opportunities for topic-specific mini-clusters are beginning to emerge. We are currently looking into developing clusters in landscaping, construction, and food service.

All of this, of course, leads to transition in one way or another:

- transition from the traditional way of serving learners to a new intensified instruction model;
- transition from immigrant status to U.S. citizenship;
- transition from unemployment to employment; and,
- transition from underemployment to new careers in new areas of interest.

Our team approach has resulted in new roles for volunteers. Most volunteers are content with general tutoring based on their learners’ goals with support from our program staff, but giving volunteers new opportunities to work in their areas of interest or expertise increases their commitment and makes them part of program planning. The process also allows them to feel that

Our focus has centered on citizenship and employment pilots based on learner requests and volunteer expertise.

their talents and skills are being put to good use.

Our focus on increasing the range of instructional activities based on learner need and tutor expertise, implementing a team approach for planning and decision making, emphasizing topic-specific mini-clusters to supplement traditional one-to-one and small group tutoring, and expanding ESL class offerings, particularly during the summer months when options are slim, has yielded exciting improvements to our program practices.

Innovative planning and sound partnerships combined with a team approach to program planning have opened up a wealth of opportunities that will make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Annette Loschert is Executive Director of Literacy Volunteers of Roanoke Valley.

Demistifying Program Report Cards (continued from front page)

Reliable, Fair, and Expandable

Our concern with the first question was really about data reliability. If we required information from our programs in addition to what they were already submitting via the National Reporting System (NRS) database, wouldn't this decrease data reliability since requiring additional information tends to increase the chance for error? Yes. While minimizing data error would be a good thing, we were not sure whether the types of data currently being collected would be sufficient for evaluating programs fairly.

Given the diversity among the programs across the state as well as the variance in social and economic conditions facing each program, determining what was fair was by far the most challenging of the three questions. A large community-based literacy organization in northern Virginia is vastly different from a regional program in southwest Virginia, both of which are quite different from a local program in Tidewater. To classify rural programs under one heading, for example, does not take into consideration the nuances that distinguish one rural community from another in terms of job opportunities, geography, community support, or the educational make-up of the population. While such nuances reflect the unique challenges each program faces, we knew that whatever we developed had to exclude any situational differences between programs and focus on expectations that could reasonably be expected of all programs.

We knew that whatever we developed had to exclude any situational differences between programs and focus on expectations that could reasonably be expected of all.

Our preliminary review of state and federal program expectations revealed that there were four broad areas that ought to be included in a Virginia-based performance evaluation: management of grant funding, meeting state and federal performance targets, OAEL policy compliance, and program participation in staff development. OAEL collected or had access to the appropriate data to develop measures for three of the four, specifically financial management, target performance, and policy compliance. While OAEL still plans to develop a fourth set of measures to evaluate professional development, the initial development of the performance evaluation was limited to the three areas for which OAEL currently collects data.

What about the measures? The target performance and policy compliance indicators were based on measures already calculated on

the NRS tables. The financial management indicators were developed to measure the most fundamental aspects of grants funding management. In order to allow the calculations built into the NRS tables to be consistent not only with each other, but also with the financial measures, each indicator would be based on measuring performance that could be reduced to a standard scale of zero to one. These calculations would then be weighted according to a five- or ten-point scale, depending on importance. By adopting these measures and scoring system, OAEL could rely on data that programs were already reporting via the NRS system and, therefore, measure performance reasonably expected of all programs without

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the burden of relying on a complex scoring process.

The instrument was simple enough that measures could be added or removed to address future priorities. Since performance is rated according to tiers based on overall percentage, program performance can be rated consistently from year to year even though the total number of points may change during the same period. A drawback, however, is that if the report card reflects any changes to the set of measures during a three-year period, programs would be unable to establish overall trend data and compare performance during that period. Programs would nevertheless be able to establish trend data for those indicators that do not change during this same period.

Design of the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 Report Cards

The first report card evaluated performance in three areas: management of grant funding, target performance, and OAEL policy compliance. Management of grant funding (financial management) was worth a total of 20 points and consisted of three measures: a program's annual rate of expenditure, the number of problematic reimbursement requests, and annual spending per eligible student. The second area, target performance, was also worth 20 points, but only consisted of two measures: a program's rate of educational functioning level (EFL) completion and enrollment target performance. The third area, OAEL policy compliance, was worth 10 points and consisted of two measures: the intensity of services (attendance hours) for ABE students and for ESOL students.

Based on their results, programs were recognized as being in one of five tiers. Programs that received an overall score of 45 to 50 points or more were placed in the highest tier, Tier 1. Programs that achieved a score of 40 to 44.99 points were placed in Tier 2 and so on until Tier 5, which was designated for programs that received a score below 30 points.

Design of the 2009-2010 Report Card

In 2009-2010, the report card will retain the three broad performance categories: financial management, target performance, and OAEL policy compliance. However, this version will

feature additional measures and an increase in the total number of points from 50 to 100.

The financial management section will continue to measure the same three items as the 2007-2008 report card. However, the total number of points for this section will decrease from 20 to 15 points.

The target performance section will continue to measure a program's EFL completion rate and target enrollment rate but will also include three additional measures: follow-up goal completion, rate of retention, and the target post-test rate. The total number of points for target performance will be 60 points.

The OAEL policy compliance section will continue to measure the intensity of services for ABE students and ESOL students. However, the section will also be expanded to include four additional measures: policy training completion, rate of monthly data entry, waiver reliance, and waiver effectiveness, for a total of 25 points. The measurement of the last item will not be calculated as part of the report card, but will be used by OAEL to evaluate the effectiveness of its waiver policy.

On the Horizon

Although a number of changes have been introduced for the 2009-2010 program performance report card, we are continually seeking ways to improve the report card. We would like to expand the report card to include staff development participation and effectiveness as report card measures. We are also interested in enhancing other aspects of the report card. For example, we hope to develop tier rankings for specific program subsets such as those defined by enrollment size, grant income, and geographic location. Another plan is to transfer the report card to the NRS system to remove OAEL as the "middleman" and allow programs to download their report cards as often as they would like. Farther down the road, we believe that we can develop a program improvement handbook specifically linked to the report card that could offer best practices in response to particular patterns of report card results. Until then, we at OAEL will continue making improvements that will reinforce the report card's reliability and fairness.

Thomas Suh is Program Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy.

Reaching Higher **at Virginia Beach's Adult Learning Center**

***An Interview with Program Manager
Bonnie C. Mizenko***



What does “program improvement” mean to you?

Well, I think it means always striving to improve your service delivery and the organization. It means inspiring your staff to become better at their jobs and to produce greater academic achievement for the students.

Congratulations on your top program performance in 2008-2009. How do you account for that success?

I would say that I've surrounded myself with top performers; our staff is absolutely wonderful. They are not only excellent instructors and assistants, but everyone in our school from the office staff to the custodians shares the vision of what we are about. We're here for our adult learners. All of our staff embrace that idea; they're enthusiastic, passionate, and really committed to working with the population that we serve.

And our students: they come expecting good things. They've heard about the Adult Learning Center, and when they come, we try not to disappoint them. We want our students to succeed and we try to communicate that to them.

How do you target areas to focus on for improvement?

Well, we're guided by the data. We listen to input from our staff. If we hear conversations that people are having in the halls that deal with

student retention or professional development or staffing, we pay attention. We try to analyze the data, too: we look at attendance rates in different classes; we look at NRS data.

We have a Director's Advisory Committee, made up of people who represent the various employee groups, who all bring things to the table. We survey the staff annually to find out about any issues or requests, as far as PD goes. In addition, we have regular ABE and ESOL departmental meetings. I try to sit in on, if not entire meetings, then portions of them, to listen to the discussions. And sometimes the priorities come from the state or the school division.

So, we're always seeking input.

Do you have any current target areas that you're willing to share?

Yes. Our school division requires us to have a plan for continuous improvement, which we refine every year. For this year, we're working on increasing retention, increasing attendance hours and the percentage of students completing each level. We also want to maintain Tier 1 status and increase the percentage of students receiving GED credentials.

Our measurable objectives are:

- 100% of instructors will complete the Understanding by Design program to improve learning plan design and delivery.
- 100% of ABE, GED, and ESOL instructors will complete training on effective reading instruction.

These are ultimately aimed at improving student outcomes.

What do you do specifically to encourage meeting NRS targets?

After staff have post-tested, they're required to counsel students and share their achievements. We print out the test scores for the staff so that they know exactly how their class has done, and we try to make that information available on a regular basis so that staff knows exactly how their students are progressing.

Our Academic Coordinators also monitor student progress on a regular basis. We've emphasized the importance of post-testing and the accrual of the required number of hours to staff. If a student tells us they have to leave for a significant amount of time (they will be out of the country, caring for a sick relative, etc.), we try to capture the gains by post-testing.

We're always looking to differentiate instruction. If teachers see a student is struggling in a classroom, we try to intervene as quickly as possible, first to retain the student,



then to meet his or her learning needs. It's not one size fits all. Maybe a student could have an undiagnosed learning disability, and we need to refer that person for testing; maybe this student would work better on a computer while others are doing group work. We try to find the best learning style for the student before they reach frustration level.

We make computer-assisted instruction available. We have a corps of volunteers and

teaching assistants. We have interns from Southern Illinois State University, practicum students from Old Dominion University, and counseling students from Norfolk State University, all of whom help to enhance our service delivery.

In your opinion, what role do instructors play in program improvement?

They're essential. The instructors are the front line with the students, and they're the ones who establish a relationship. That is critical. You have to establish a relationship with students first, to entice them to stay and then to be successful. So instructors are absolutely critical to what we do. That's why we try to hire the best, hold them to a high standard, and provide them with all the tools they need to be successful in the classroom.

Do you have any advice that you'd like to share with other programs?

I'd just like to underscore what we've talked about concerning staffing. Staffing is critical. We don't recommend teachers for hire unless they're certified or eligible for certification. And then, you do have to be visible and inspire top performance. We have evening Principals who oversee programs, but the Academic Coordinators and I visit, too. You have to monitor, visit satellite sites, show the staff that you're committed. Communication is important, especially with day, evening, and satellite staff. If they don't feel connected, results suffer: all staff have to be a part of the dialogue; get regular communications; and know that, yes, we care about your students, we're checking in, and we'll visit you and encourage both students and staff.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with *Progress* readers?

I know that Virginia Beach is often looked at as a large, well-funded program, but I would say that, no matter the size of your program, you could achieve great results by always reaching higher.

OAEL Recognizes Local Programs

At the Fall 2009 Program Managers' Meeting, the Office of Adult Education and Literacy honored adult education and literacy programs for outstanding performance based on program audits and report cards:

Top CBLO 2007-2008

Tidewater Literacy Council

Top-performing Adult Education Programs 2007-2008

Henrico County Adult Education Program
Virginia Beach City Adult Education Program
Prince William Regional Adult Education Program
Carroll County Adult Education Program

Top CBLO 2008-2009

BEACON Adult Literacy

Top-performing Adult Education Programs 2008-2009

Virginia Beach City Adult Education Program
Henrico County Adult Education Program
Chesterfield County Adult Education Program

Honorable Mention 2008-2009

Prince George Regional Adult Education Program
Rockingham Regional Adult Education Program
Charlottesville City Adult Education Program

Most Improved Program 2008-2009

Page County Adult Education Program

Honorable Mention,

Most Improved Program 2008-2009

Fauquier County Adult Education Program

An Interview with Page County's Amy O'Shell

Congratulations on being most improved adult education program in 2008-2009.

That was really exciting for me.

How do you account for this change?

Well, a number of things. We focused a little more on ESL classes, and I was fortunate enough to find a teacher who was really ready to roll, very enthusiastic. A large increase in our numbers was in the ESL field.

It was my first year, and I came in with a fresh perspective, which I think helps. I was also able to focus on adult education more perhaps than the previous director (because the school system saw the need and allocated the additional time).

We paid more attention to our data; we looked at it every day. I think aside from the increased ESL numbers, our other biggest gain was from keeping up with data and really showing what we were doing. I think we've always been a pretty strong program, and now we're just better representing that.

What advice do you have for programs embarking on program improvement efforts?

Don't be afraid to look at the numbers and let them instruct you. I have a different perspective from most people: I come from a background in statistics and reporting, financial reporting, so I look at the numbers constantly.

We have great teachers here, a strong group of educators. My job is more to look at the numbers and say, for example, maybe we lost a number of this type of student last year, what can we do this year to hold on to those folks?

Read your community. Let them tell you what they want and need. A lot of people were surprised by our ESL numbers — I didn't even know we had that many ESL folks up here in the mountains — and they ended up being a really dedicated group of students who made gains.

Amy O'Shell is Adult Education Program Manager for Page County.

Policy to Performance

Policy to Performance: Transitioning Adults to Opportunities is a new federal Vocational and Adult Education initiative. Virginia will be one of eight states advancing their efforts to transition low-skilled adults and adult learners towards post-secondary and employment opportunities.

The purpose and objectives of Policy to Performance include:

- Enhancing college and career readiness for low-skilled adults through increased and quality access to training and learning opportunities.
- Providing comprehensive technical assistance to participating states on crafting strategic policies that support college and career readiness for low-skilled adults.
- Helping adult education state directors to connect adult transition policies to larger

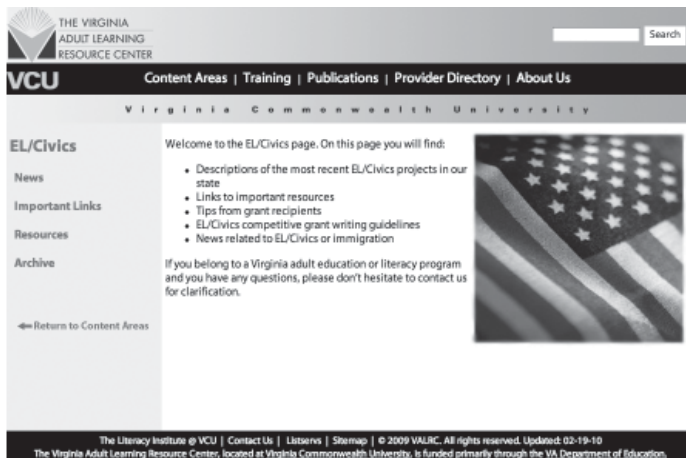
policy initiatives in their states.

- Providing policy tools, dissemination strategies, and resources to assist all states in transitioning adults through the post-secondary education, training, and employment continuum.

Over the next 25 months, Virginia will receive targeted technical assistance and customized coaching to examine, analyze, and develop policy that is unique to Virginia's context and meets the needs of the state's adult low-skilled learner population.

For more information about the national Policy to Performance initiative, visit the website: <http://www.policy2performance.org>. Browse the Resources section to find publications, information on transitioning efforts around the country, and links to organizations that support post-secondary transitions.

VALRC Adds EL/Civics Resources

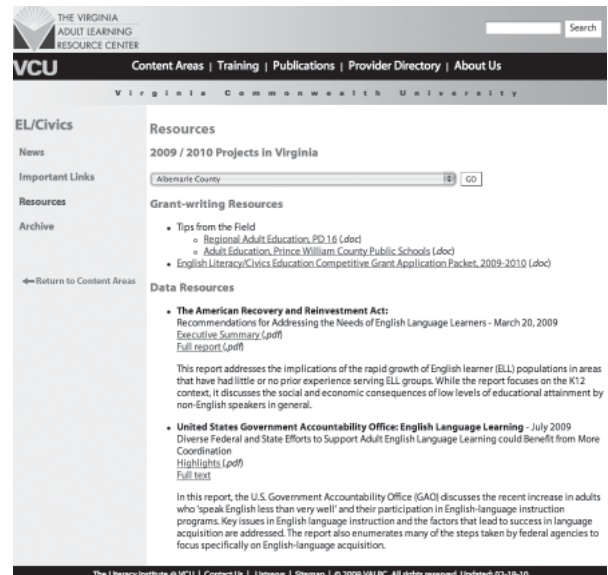


The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center recently dedicated a section of its website to EL/Civics. EL/Civics now joins ESOL, GED, Reading, Numeracy, Learning Disabilities, and other hot topics as one of eleven **Content Areas** featured on www.valrc.org.

In the EL/Civics content area, you'll find *News* about the latest EL/Civics resources, reports, and grant announcements. *Important Links* will connect you with key immigration, government, and instructional websites.

Look under *Resources* for Virginia EL/Civics

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grant guidelines. You'll also find tips on writing the EL/Civics grant from successful applicants, data resources, and summaries of grant-funded projects currently underway throughout the state.

If you teach in or manage an EL/Civics program, be sure to bookmark:

<http://www.valrc.org/content/elc>

Learning POWERED BY Technology

On March 5th, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology released *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*, the draft of the National Educational Technology Plan (NETP) 2010. The plan calls for "revolutionary transformation rather than evolutionary tinkering"* to meet the Obama administration's priorities of raising the percentage of Americans with two-year or four-year college degrees to 60% by 2020 and closing achievement gaps based on race and income.

The plan notes that digital exclusion, or the disparities in technology access and use, "must be overcome because job applications, health information, and many other crucial information resources appear only in the digital realm (<http://www.fcc.gov/recovery/broadband/>)." One of the underserved populations mentioned explicitly in the plan, along with low income and minority learners and English language learners, is adult learners.

The plan also describes a new federal program, the Online Skills Laboratory, which will build a library of openly available, web-based resources for learning. These courses will be designed with input from experts in content, pedagogy, and technology and offered free of charge through community colleges. The flexibility provided by online access can help meet the needs of adults who are working or raising a family.

The NETP embraces 21st century learning, describing five essential focus areas, each with a goal and related action recommendations for local, state, and national educators (as well as public and private sector stakeholders).

Serving the Underserved

"Many adults in the workforce are underproductive, have no postsecondary credential, and face limited opportunities because they lack fluency in basic skills. Unfortunately, they have little time or opportunity for the sustained learning and development that becoming fluent would require. For these learners, technology expands the opportunities for where and when they can learn. Working adults can take online courses at any time and anywhere. While individual adults benefit with more opportunities for advancement, companies and agencies benefit from the increased productivity of a fully literate workforce, one continuously preparing for the future."

Learning

The model of 21st century learning described in this plan calls for engaging and empowering learning experiences for all learners. The model asks that we focus what and how we teach to match what people need to know, how they learn, where and when they will learn, and who needs to learn. It brings state-of-the-art technology into learning to enable, motivate, and inspire all students, regardless of background, languages, or disabilities, to achieve. It leverages the power of technology to provide personalized learning instead of one-size-fits-all curriculum, pace of teaching, and instructional practices.

Goal: All learners will have engaging and empowering learning experiences both in and outside of school that prepare them to be active, creative, knowledgeable, and ethical participants in our globally networked society.

Assessment

The model of 21st century learning requires new and better ways to measure what matters, diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the course of learning when there is still time to improve student performance, and involve mul-

tiple stakeholders in the process of designing, conducting, and using assessment. In all these activities, technology-based assessments can provide data to drive decisions on the basis of what is best for each and every student and that in aggregate will lead to continuous improvement across our entire education system.

Goal: Our education system at all levels will leverage the power of technology to measure what matters and use assessment data for continuous improvement.

Teaching

Just as leveraging technology can help us improve learning and assessment, the model of 21st century learning calls for using technology to help build the capacity of educators by enabling a shift to a model of connected teaching. In such a teaching model, teams of connected educators replace solo practitioners and classrooms are fully connected to provide educators with 24/7 access to data and analytic tools as well as to resources that help them act on the insights the data provide.

Goal: Professional educators will be supported individually and in teams by technology that connects them to data, content, resources, expertise, and learning experiences that enable and inspire more effective teaching for all learners.

Infrastructure

An essential component of the 21st century learning model is a comprehensive infrastructure for learning that provides every student, educator, and level of our education system with the resources they need when and where they are needed. The underlying principle is that infrastructure includes people, processes, learning resources, policies, and sustainable models for continuous improvement in addition to broadband connectivity, servers, software, management systems, and administration tools. Building this infrastructure is a far-reaching project that will demand concerted and coordinated effort.

Goal: All students and educators will have access to a comprehensive infrastructure for learning when and where they need it.

Productivity

To achieve our goal of transforming American education, we must rethink basic assumptions and redesign our education system. We must

The National Education Technology Plan is still in draft form. The U.S. Department of Education welcomes comments and suggestions at its website:

<http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010>

apply technology to implement personalized learning and ensure that students are making appropriate progress through our K-16 system so they graduate. These and other initiatives require investment, but tight economic times and basic fiscal responsibility demand that we get more out of each dollar we spend. We must leverage technology to plan, manage, monitor, and report spending to provide decisionmakers with a reliable, accurate, and complete view of the financial performance of our education system at all levels. Such visibility is essential to meeting our goals for educational attainment within the budgets we can afford.

Goal: Our education system at all levels will redesign processes and structures to take advantage of the power of technology to improve learning outcomes while making more efficient use of time, money, and staff.

Grand Challenge Problems

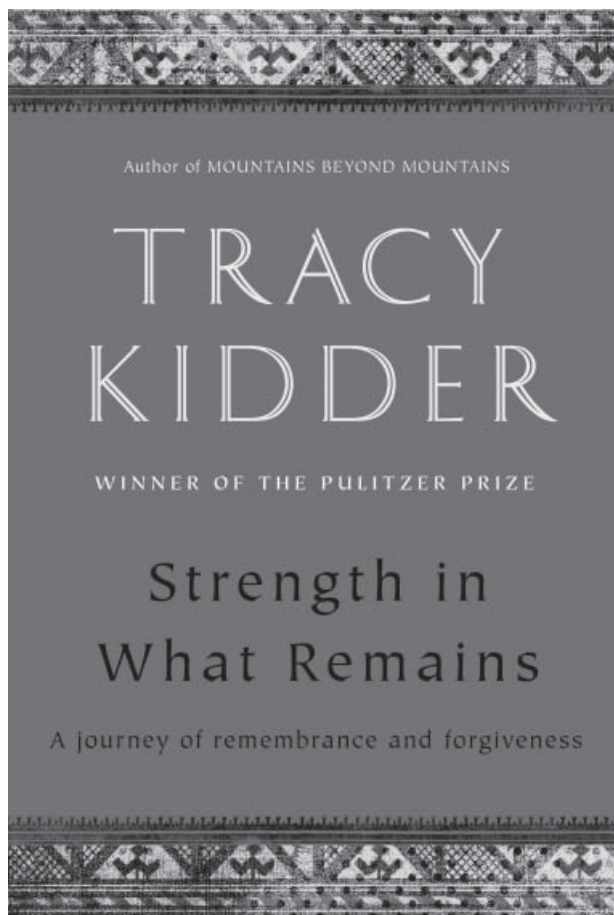
To help fulfill its vision of the future, the NETP calls for the funding and support of the Digital Promise, an organization “with the mission of serving the public good through research and development at the intersection of learning sciences, technology, and education.” This center would “identify key emerging trends and priorities and recruit and bring together the best minds and organizations to collaborate on high-risk/high-gain R&D projects.” It would also tackle what the NETP refers to as “grand challenge problems,” ambitious research and development efforts that would benefit from national leadership.

**Quotations, along with goals and descriptions of the five focus areas, are taken directly from Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology, National Educational Technology Plan 2010, draft released March 5, 2010, by the Office of Educational Technology, U.S. Department of Education.*

Book Review: **Strength in What Remains**

Written by TRACY KIDDER

Reviewed by HILLARY MAJOR



In *Strength in What Remains*, Tracy Kidder tells the story of Deogratias, a Burundian medical student who in 1994 fled ethnic violence in his home country to arrive in New York with a single suitcase, no English, and no idea of what to do next. The first section of the book combines background on Deo's youth and young adulthood in Africa, including his harrowing experiences of genocide and civil war, with an account of his struggles in New York City. Many adult educators will find the details of Deo's new life heart-achingly familiar. Plagued by nightmares and post-traumatic stress, working at a grocery for scant pay under an abusive boss, and debating the merits of sleeping in Central Park or in a tenement with no working plumbing, Deo's existence is bleak. Kidder describes Deo's laborious

attempts to learn English with the aid of pocket dictionaries and his perseverance despite basic errors such as pronouncing "Hi" as "Hee." At one point, Deo realizes that his grocer co-workers treat their brooms better than they treat him.

With help, Deo is able to find a place to live and to attend Columbia University. The second half of the book describes Deo's personal mission to found a medical clinic in rural Burundi. After the formidable challenges Deo faced essentially starting over in a new country, his return journey and success in harnessing donations and community resources to construct a clinic that bridges local ethnic divisions seem all the more remarkable.

Deo's tale of triumph against the odds inspires a mix of admiration and awe. At the same time, the reader begins to play the what-if game: What if Deo hadn't achieved the test scores that gained him admittance to prestigious Burundian preparatory schools and, ultimately, medical school? What if any of a number of close calls during Deo's months on the run in the wilds of Burundi and Rwanda had transpired just a little bit differently? What if Deo hadn't befriended the wealthy medical student who was eventually able to arrange his flight to the U.S.? What if he hadn't encountered a French-speaking baggage clerk who was willing to show him the ropes of tenement life? What if a couple of New Yorkers hadn't taken Deo into their apartment and supported his stateside college education? As the narrative delves into the obstacles arrayed against this young, intelligent African refugee, the reader comes to suspect that, despite Deo's hard work, suffering, commitment, and ingenuity, his success is in many ways the product of lucky coincidence — and to wonder about the workings of the systems that thrust so many additional hurdles in Deo's path.

Tracy Kidder has a gift for penning eminently readable nonfiction with a social conscience. His previous works include *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, a chronicle of the medical activism of Paul Farmer (who has been in the news lately as United Nations Deputy Special Envoy to Haiti); *Home Town*, a portrait of a small New England city; and *Among Schoolchildren*, a profile of one inner-city classroom. Like these, *Strength in What Remains* combines the rich details of a personal narrative and eyewitness reporting with background research (including a cogent historical

analysis of the ethnic conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda) into a book that will fascinate, shock, and provoke thought. Education as a means of personal fulfillment and of overcoming challenges is a recurrent theme in Deo's story. Adult educators, particularly those who work with immigrants, will find in this book confirmation of both the dramatic difference their efforts can make and the tough reality that faces their learners.

Hillary Major is Specialist for Publications and Communications at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

CLICK: **LINCS** **Program Improvement**

The National Institute for Literacy (NifL) hosts resource collections focused on basic skills, program management, and workforce competitiveness. Resources have undergone rigorous review and been vetted by experts from the field, whose comments are included along with the links to the online resources: http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/resourcecollections/RC_planning.html

Program Improvement falls under the Program Management collection, and features fifteen web-based resources, including:

- **Guide for Managers of Adult Education Programs**
This New York resource, intended for new program managers, includes information on the need for adult education, working with adult learners, staffing, program design, and collaboration.
- **Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models**

In compiling this resource, the New England Learning Resource Center reviewed more than 40 postsecondary institutions and 25

ABE-to-college transition programs. NifL's reviewer described this paper, with its comparison of transition models and program and research recommendations, as a "must read."

- **An Evidence-Based Adult Education Program Model Appropriate for Research**

This lengthy resource by NCSALL, Harvard, and San Francisco researchers suggests a framework for adult education that addresses specific aspects of program quality supports as well as learners' entrance and participation in a program and subsequent re-engagement in learning. The report gives a set of principles for each area, discussing their basis in learning theory and professional wisdom while noting that the research to evaluate their effectiveness has yet to be done.

Funding for the National Institute for Literacy is slated to end in September 2010, so be sure to visit www.nifl.gov and bookmark your favorite resources. Visit www.edpubs.gov to order free copies of NifL's print publications.

The Resource Center Welcomes Jeffrey Elmore



As ABE Specialist, Jeffrey Elmore manages one of the newest programs at the Resource Center, the Virginia Adult Education Certification Program. His responsibilities include developing and coordinating the program's curriculum and organizing training sessions. Please feel free to contact Jeffrey with any questions about the Certification Program.

Jeffrey began his career in Adult Education in 1995 when he traveled to South Korea to teach adult ESL classes. He returned to the U.S. permanently in 2004 to teach GED® classes for the Virginia Department of Correctional Education at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women. In the midst of his Korean experience, Jeffrey earned a M.Ed in Adult Education from VCU. When he needs to get away from the Adult Ed environment, Jeffrey can be found either in the woods on his bicycle or at the racetrack with his car.