



Student/Tutor Pair of the Year Dallas Jackson and Barbara Pearce enjoy the applause from the audience.

## READ Center Accolades

At the ProLiteracy Worldwide 2006 Annual Conference in Atlanta in October, READ Center student Dallas Jackson and his tutor Barbara Pearce received the Student/Tutor Pair of the Year Award. Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Pearce each received a \$1000 stipend to attend the conference with their families. The READ Center, an adult literacy center in Richmond, received \$1500 from Dollar General, a leading supporter of adult literacy in the United States.

According to Robert Wedgeworth, CEO and President of ProLiteracy Worldwide, "Since 2001, nearly 42,000 adults have been referred to literacy programs through the Dollar General Referral Project. In addition, Dollar General funds research projects and professional development for literacy professionals." The Richmond pair is the most recent winner.

When he was in his early 60s, Dallas Jackson decided to take a step to improve an area in his life that he felt was lacking. He had completed school through the eighth grade, and he wanted to improve his reading skills. He recounts that,

while he was working as a baker, "I used to have to rely on my memory a lot as a baker. When I had to buy ingredients from the store, I had to try to remember everything I needed," which often meant several trips back and forth. Now, he recounts, "I carry a pad and write down what I need."

While he has retired from his job as a baker, his new reading skills are affording him great pride, as he was "blessed to be promoted to Bible Class Teacher. This happened because of the time I spent at the READ Center learning to read my Bible." As a teacher, Dallas now models what he learned from his tutor Barbara Pearce by studying and finding interesting things to incorporate into his lessons.

Mrs. Pearce retired from teaching and joined the READ Center as a tutor in 1996. The former high school history and government teacher harbored a passion for adult literacy and a desire to help her students meet their literacy goals. As Dallas Jackson says, "Barbara knows exactly how to approach me to help me to learn. She asks me, most of the time, what I would like to read and do."

She says, "Dallas is very easy to teach because he's motivated to learn; he's very

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interested in learning, and he works at it." She focuses on his accomplishments rather than how she has helped him attain them. "Dallas came primed for success. Being retired, he had the time and the determination."

Matching student to tutor in adult literacy is an art that requires an understanding of each of the pair partners. In this case, the two people were well matched, each bringing interest and determination into the process. Dallas's success and new leadership role in his Sunday school class, and Barbara's dynamism in working with him, show what tutors and students can accomplish and how rewarding those accomplishments can be.

According to Debra Hill, lead education resource coordinator at The READ Center, "I think the award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of tutors and students working together every day to increase adult literacy across the nation." ■

# PROGRESS

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## A Few Words on *Progress*

Does my student have a learning disability?" Almost every teacher and tutor in adult learning programs has asked this question at a point when a student fails to progress or experiences great difficulty with certain learning tasks. Rarely does an adult educator have the resources to schedule psychological testing, nor does she often have a learning disabilities specialist with whom to consult about interventions. Most often teachers and tutors are left to their own devices when it comes to providing appropriate instruction for such a student.

About six years ago, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), having acknowledged that anywhere from 30 to 80 percent of adult learners exhibit some kind of learning difficulty, launched "Bridges to Practice," a nationwide training program on learning disabilities and learning differences for adult educators and partner agency professionals. This training, which has been provided across Virginia by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC), was updated by NIFL last spring. In addition to the Bridges training program, the Resource Center provides Learning Disabilities Tool Kits for check out by practitioners. Further, VALRC publishes Update on LD, a quarterly e-newsletter.

To provide current information about learning disabilities, difficulties, and differences, we have assembled a group of informative articles on an array of topics from GED accommodations to multiple intelligences. Other articles address integrating assistive technology, understanding issues in ESOL and LD, and using technology to support instruction. Two articles highlight Spotsylvania County's very successful Bridges to the Future Program, operating since 2001 to provide psychological testing along with appropriate instruction for adults with learning difficulties.

While adult educators now have more resources at their disposal than in years past, they continue to face numerous problems associated with instructing students who learn differently. The approaches discussed in this issue of *Progress* will not provide all of the answers or meet all of the needs, but they will help. We will continue to identify new strategies, research results, and methodologies to take to the field through training programs and publications, and we welcome practitioners to share approaches that they have found to be particularly effective in working with students with learning difficulties.

Sincerely,



## Calendar

### March

9

MoneyWiSe Financial Literacy Workshop  
Falls Church, VA  
[vjsanbor@vcu.edu](mailto:vjsanbor@vcu.edu)

23

MoneyWiSe Financial Literacy Workshop  
Radford, VA  
[vjsanbor@vcu.edu](mailto:vjsanbor@vcu.edu)

26-28

COABE National Conference  
Philadelphia, PA  
[www.coabe.org](http://www.coabe.org)

### May

2-3

Reading Workshop for Community-Based Orgs  
Fredericksburg, VA  
[vjsanbor@vcu.edu](mailto:vjsanbor@vcu.edu)

3

MoneyWiSe Financial Literacy Workshop  
Richmond, VA  
[vjsanbor@vcu.edu](mailto:vjsanbor@vcu.edu)

17

MoneyWiSe Financial Literacy Workshop  
Keysville, VA  
[vjsanbor@vcu.edu](mailto:vjsanbor@vcu.edu)

17

Literacy Fair  
Keysville, VA  
[www.literacyfairofvirginia.org](http://www.literacyfairofvirginia.org)

### July

18-20

VAILL  
Radford, VA  
More info in spring issue of *Progress*

# Speaking of Intelligence

by SILJA KALLENBACH

Whether we talk about it explicitly or not, intelligence is a concept always in the background in any educational setting. It is reflected in the self-talk and sense of self-efficacy of adult learners, many of whom come to adult education feeling they are not smart enough, having internalized that message from their former teachers, caregivers, and maybe even peers. Teacher talk as well often conveys our notions of what constitutes intelligence. Our definition of intelligence matters because it influences how we perceive students and how we approach instruction and assessment, and even counseling.

The long-standing common view of intelligence describes it as unitary, fundamentally inherited, and largely static and unchangeable: you either got it or you don't. It views intelligence as a cognitive ability that is applied in pretty much the same way to all the tasks we undertake, whether programming a computer, reading a book, or creating a work of art. This traditional view also claims that intelligence is measurable by paper and pencil or computerized tests. The best known, of course, is the IQ test. In educational settings, this unitary view of intelligence is reflected in standardized tests such as the GED, SAT, and the GRE.

In the early 1980s, Dr. Howard Gardner, a Harvard cognitive psychologist, made a radical departure from the "IQ view" of intelligence when he introduced the multiple intelligences (MI) theory. Gardner defined intelligence as the biological potential to process information in certain ways that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or make products that are valued in a culture or community. In other words, intelligence is about solving problems and making things others in the community value at a given time. If we took this definition of intelligence to heart in adult education, we would develop curriculum around making things and

solving real problems our students and our communities find meaningful. MI theory offers some guidance for how we might do that.

In addition to the definition of intelligence, MI theory holds that intelligence is pluralistic, meaning there are many different types of intelligences and different types of memory associated with them. In education we tend to refer to memory as the ability to recall words, facts and events. We forget that there is also musical, bodily-kinesthetic memory and visual memory. While the IQ view asks, "How smart are you?", MI theory asks, "How are you smart?"

MI theory claims each of us has at least eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

Each one of us, and our children, has a unique profile of intelligences that manifest themselves in our daily lives. Most human activities draw on more than one intelligence. For example, if you like gardening and are pretty good at it, you probably have a good amount of naturalist intelligence. But you also need some amount of spatial intelligence to design a nice flowerbed and logical-mathematical intelligence to estimate how many plants you need.

To most parents and teachers it's self-evident that we all have different strengths or intelligences. But what are we to make of that in literacy or family literacy classes where the primary objective is reading and writing or numeracy?

Our intelligences shape our level of interest in the material and how we prefer to process and demonstrate our understanding of it. Typically, we give students one choice, one way to show that they have learned something, and we expect them to learn pretty much the same way. In so doing, we miss the opportunity to help students draw on their multiple intelligences and their associated memory.

Providing a greater variety of entry points, or ways into the topic or skill area, is perhaps the most common MI-based lesson format. It gives students choices that roughly correspond to the eight intelligences and uses them in different combinations and across different content areas. When teachers give students choices in how they learn and how they demonstrate what they have learned, they are effectively giving them more control and responsibility over the learning process.

As teachers implement MI-based practices, they tend to develop a keener understanding and appreciation of their students' strengths. ABE Teacher Lezlie Rocka's comment about her reading class illustrates this point:

*Originally, I thought that I saw my students' strengths no matter what kinds of lessons I did. But after reviewing all my [action research] data, especially comparing that of last year to this year, I see that through choice of expression and projects, I am able to see a wider variety of strengths. And the students are able to see their own strengths and the strengths of each other. . . . My class became more interactive and student-directed as I experimented with MI theory (Rocka, 1997)*

Viewing her teaching through the lens of MI prompted Lezlie to expand the repertoire of choices she gave her students, all of whom were struggling with becoming fluent readers. For example, after reading a chapter in *Meet Addy* about a teen-age girl born into slavery who escapes with her mother to freedom, students could draw a picture representing a scene, act out a scene, or make a map of Addy's journey. They could extend or pick a song that would give inspiration on such a journey, among other choices. Lezlie did not, by any means, abandon

*Continued on page 4 . . .*





Mind-map depiction of multiple intelligences is available at <http://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/curriculum/MISmart/MImapDef.HTM> and is used by permission.

her other teaching strategies that focused on multi-sensory decoding. Rather, she added a new dimension that allowed students to express their understanding using their imagination and non-linguistic intelligences, which engaged them in the reading in a way that she had not previously observed.

Using content and authentic materials from adults' lives is a hallmark of student-centered adult education, and it is also consistent with MI theory. One way that ESOL teacher Terri Coustan increased the authenticity of her beginning-level classes was through a gardening project. Knowing that most of her students had been farmers in their native country, Laos, Terri developed a project that built on her students' naturalist abilities. The students constructed an indoor greenhouse and prepared seed trays. They maintained outdoor garden plots. Terri integrated a number of related activities

into her ESOL class such as planning gardens, choosing seeds, and discussing topics such as dividing and sharing the gardening space.

A common misconception about MI theory is that it is the same as learning styles. Auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic styles reflect different ways in which we take in information through the senses. They may or may not overlap with intelligences. We process or make sense of the information with our intelligences. I could be an auditory learner who needs to hear information said out loud in order to move it to memory. That doesn't mean I'm musically talented.

Perhaps the most common misconception about MI theory is that it is a teaching strategy. MI theory is a theory of intelligence that suggests ways of teaching that are consistent with its tenets. Teaching approaches that honor different ways of processing and demon-

strating understanding and that build on students' strengths are in the spirit of MI theory. That doesn't mean that everything has to be taught in eight different ways. Nor does it mean that teachers need to measure their students' intelligences with some scientific level of accuracy. Testing multiple intelligences is antithetical to MI theory, whereas helping people deepen their understanding of their multiple intelligences through activities and self-assessments and teacher observation is not. A good place to begin is to become more aware of our own teaching and learning preferences and intelligences and how those are affected by our intelligence profile.

Ultimately, MI theory poses a challenge to us adult educators to diversify our approaches to instruction and assessment based on a more holistic understanding of our students' interests, lives, and talents. ■

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*Silja Kallenbach co-directed the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy with Julie Viens for Project Zero at Harvard from 1996 to 2001. Silja is co-author of Multiple Intelligences in Adult Education, A Sourcebook for Practitioners (Teachers College Press, 2004) and co-editor of Multiple Intelligences in Practice (NCSALL, 2001). Silja is the Director of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education, a six-state collaborative focused on staff development for adult educators.*

# Should We Refer Culturally and Linguistically Different Learners for Diagnosis for LD?

by ROBIN SCHWARZ

**W**e have had LD training, and now we know that all our struggling ESOL learners have LD. What can we do to teach them?" "What are the best tests to use to identify LD in our ESOL learners?"

As the above quotes from teachers illustrate, increased emphasis on LD training for adult education personnel and on referring struggling native English-speaking learners for LD testing has quite naturally led many to think the same path should be followed for ESOL learners who struggle to learn. In fact, there are several compelling reasons why this is an erroneous conclusion. Let's examine those reasons and consider other ways to find out what may be holding up ESOL learners who seem to exhibit learning difficulties.

First, testing culturally and linguistically different (CLD) persons for LD is impossible if the law is interpreted carefully. Two specific requirements are given in Section 504 for an adult to be identified as LD: The diagnosis must be done a) with validated, standardized tools and b) by qualified diagnosticians. However, since no tests exist that have been validated on the adult English Language Learner populations present in our programs, and few, if any, diagnosticians are fully qualified to test adults from other language and cultural backgrounds for LD, these requirements cannot be met.\*\*

Second, the diagnostic testing tools and procedures are inherently biased linguistically and culturally. Though learners may understand words, they will not perform in the same way as a native speaker on language tasks. Just as challenging as the language tasks themselves are the cultural ideas or values in test items. In addition, many diagnostic tools assume abilities, such as interpreting abstract figures, or values, such as the importance of doing one's best, that are

actually culturally specific and add to the cultural challenges of the test.

Furthermore, because they lack understanding of LD and the intent of the testing process, CLD learners may be misled by the effort to identify LD in them. The term LD usually translates to something negative, usually mental retardation, and in many other cultures, learners who are slow or different are ostracized or even physically punished. So even though teachers want to help their learners by referring them for testing, in fact the learners may interpret their efforts very differently.

Still, we cannot ignore the fact that many of our CLD learners do struggle in our programs. If we cannot have them tested, how can we know what is holding them up? For CLD learners, we need to look at six major factors that contribute to learning struggles but are rarely addressed in currently used intake procedures testing tools. Ask these questions:

**1** Does the learner have adequate pre-literacy phonological skills critical to literacy and language acquisition? Phonological awareness (PA) is the understanding that sound chunks (words, syllables) as well as stress, intonation, rhythm and rhyme carry meaning. Learners must have strong PA to begin phonics and understand phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle. Many CLD learners have weak PA in English because they have low literacy or the sound system of their language is significantly different from that of English. A few may have a fundamental weakness in this skill.

Phonological memory, the skill needed to retain and process speech sounds for long-term memory or repetition, is the prerequisite for oral/aural language skills. For adult learners, this skill may be weak if the sounds of the new language are not well perceived, resulting in poor listening and speaking skills.

**2** Are adult language learners' needs being met and their normal language acquisition patterns recognized? Adults learn language differently from children. Their brains no longer process speech sounds as effectively, and they also want to know how the language works. Therefore, adults need more explicit instruction in the sound system and structure of the target language. Simply exposing them to oral language is not sufficient.

Furthermore, in normal language acquisition, listening/speaking language normally develops in about 1.5 to 3 years, while reading and writing the language of books, tests, and text intended for native English speakers takes at least 5 to 10 years to become develop adequately. When this normal discrepancy is ignored and learners are evaluated only by their oral skills, learners who have topped out of ESOL classes may be misplaced into classes where they exhibit reading problems or cannot manage the materials in basic ABE. Also, language is acquired in predictable stages. If learners are presented with grammar complexities beyond their current language acquisition stage, they will be confused and unable to manage tasks. Finally, adult learners are more likely than children to have significant interference from differences in phonology, syntax, and grammar between their native languages and English.

**3** Has the educational background been adequately taken into account? The profound effects on learning of having had no exposure to literacy or of speaking an unwritten language are not well understood by teachers. If instruction for pre-literate learners starts with phonics or basic writing without building their pre-literacy skills, the move to literacy can be difficult. Or, learners who are highly literate but treated as pure beginners because of low

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# Integrating Assistive Technology into the Adult Education Classroom

by DON FINN, PH.D.

Regardless of learning setting, adult educators frequently encounter students with learning challenges or blocks. Think of yourself as a learner; do you hate math or are you challenged when applying grammar rules to your written work? In the same way, we encounter adults with learning challenges. We all take in and process information differently and sometimes need to find tools to help increase our comprehension. This article will explore different types of assistive technology that can be used to benefit all students.

## What is Assistive Technology?

PLUK (Parents, Let's Unite for Kids) is a private, nonprofit organization based in Montana that provides information and services for children with disabilities and their parents and guardians. Their web-based Family Guide to Assistive Technology offers a practical definition:

Assistive technology devices are mechanical aids, which substitute for or enhance the function of some physical or mental ability that is impaired... [and are] used to help an individual perform some task of daily living ([www.pluk.org/AT1.html#2](http://www.pluk.org/AT1.html#2)).

These technologies are classified as either "high tech" or "low tech," and although they provide aid for users with mobility and non-mobility issues, this article will focus on non-mobility technologies.

## Computer-based technologies and their applications

The integration of computers and computer technologies into adult education classes has become more common in recent years. One factor contributing to this is the increase in programs and Internet sites that are appropriate for adult learners; however, some learn-

ers may encounter fears and difficulties with computers. The most common of these include computer phobia, limited keyboarding skills, and trouble comprehending information that is presented in a text-heavy environment. Computer phobia and limited keyboarding skills can be addressed through hands-on introductory computer courses or activities involving basic computing functions; these activities can be especially effective in lowering learners' anxiety levels. A number of tutorial programs designed to help with keyboard familiarity and to increase keyboarding speed are available. These multimedia programs involve drill and practice activities that integrate voice and visual features.

Students with keyboarding challenges may also use speech-to-text software packages. These products enable users to speak into a microphone connected to the computer; the software converts the spoken words into text that appears on the screen. Using voice commands, the user can distinguish where to begin paragraphs, end sentences, and apply other grammatical and stylistic elements to the document. The document can then be sent to a word processing program like Microsoft Word or printing and further revision. Originally designed for users with low vision, blindness, or mobility issues, (such as arthritis or paralysis,) these software packages are also used by those with learning disabilities; most commonly, dyslexia.

Text-to-speech software, commonly called screen reading programs, were originally intended to assist individuals with blindness or low vision to understand electronic text presented via computer. These programs highlight words on the screen as the computer reads them. In addition to helping the intended users, screen readers have been effectively used by students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

by helping them to focus on the text using their senses of sight and hearing. English language learners are another group benefiting from screen readers because reading and speaking skills are reinforced as the program highlights and pronounces words. Occasionally, programs may still encounter problems pronouncing words, but over the years, pronunciation and voice quality have improved tremendously.

Computer operating systems and programs have a variety of customizable accessibility options. These features include adjustable text sizes, color options for links and backgrounds, and volume and video controls. Another important feature is the ability to install optional mouse and keyboard input devices. More information about accessibility features for Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office programs can be found online at: [www.microsoft.com/enable/](http://www.microsoft.com/enable/). Information about accessibility features on Apple computers and Apple OS and other programs is located at: [www.apple.com/accessibility/](http://www.apple.com/accessibility/).

## Electronic Devices

Many electronic devices are available to help learners better understand and apply the written word. One such device is the Quictionary Reading Pen (QRP), a hand held device that was featured in the Spring 2002 edition of *Progress*. The Pen allows the user to highlight or roll over printed text one word at a time. The word is displayed on the built-in led screen and a computerized voice speaks the word through a small built-in speaker or a headphone. In addition to helping students pronounce words, the pen offers other useful features including displaying a word's syllables, spelling the word aloud, and providing definitions from its built-in dictionary.

Electronic dictionaries and language devices are available for a variety of pur-



poses and can be used effectively in adult education settings. The Franklin Corporation offers a line of these devices including dictionaries containing more than 300,000 definitions and 500,000 synonyms and antonyms. Other devices allow users to hear pronunciations in English and other languages, including Spanish, French, and German. Information about these devices, ranging in price from \$29.00 to nearly \$200.00, can be located online at: [www.franklin.com](http://www.franklin.com).

Portable digital recorders allow learners to record voice messages, such as reminders of tasks or due dates, or longer messages like lectures or discussions. The recording is stored digitally and may be saved or transferred to a computer for later retrieval or conversion to text using voice recognition software. These devices can be purchased from department or office supply stores at prices ranging from \$20.00 to more than \$400.00, depending on features and the amount of hours of recorded material that they can store.

## Low Tech Devices

Low tech assistive devices are usually inexpensive, general in function, widely available, and often overlooked as being assistive. Highlighters and colored pencils are useful for identifying parts of speech, clarifying instructions, or distinguishing different ideas or concepts in educational materials. Dry highlighters or highlighting tape offers an attractive alternative for use in textbooks because the highlighting can be removed using a standard eraser. Colored self-sticking tabs or flags are useful in allowing learners to distinguish among items in an assignment.

Often, learners experience fatigue, moving text, reversing letters, or other problems while reading. These issues are commonly associated with dyslexia or other perceptual vision problems. Although research on the effectiveness of colored overlays varies, the use of overlays, generally colored light blue, pink, or gray, may be helpful for students who experience difficulty reading printed text

because the overlays cut down on glare and the effects of bright backgrounds. A low cost alternative to overlays is to print handouts on white paper having a brightness rating of 90% or less, or on light gray or pale blue paper. It is not advisable to print classroom materials on fluorescent or brightly colored paper because this often enhances the dancing letter effect.

Regardless of the types of technology available to the instructor or program, the most important principle to keep in mind is that each student should be counseled individually to determine how to best overcome any challenges he or she may be facing. ■

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*Don Finn, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor of Adult Education and Professional Development at Regent University in Virginia Beach. His research interests include the integration of technology into education and instructional practices for reaching diverse learners.*

## Should We Refer Culturally and Linguistically Different Learners for Diagnosis for LD?

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oral skills may be bored or unwilling to engage in learning.

**4** Has the cultural background been considered? Culture impacts virtually every aspect of teaching and learning. Adults, unlike children, come with fully formed cultural values and beliefs. Often, if CLD learners' expectations of education do not match their experience, they will be very unhappy. Learners from authoritarian educational systems where everything is memorized, for example, may be very uncomfortable or uncomprehending when the teacher asks for reflection and discussion.

**5** Have health, physical functioning and mental health been checked? CLD learners may not have had regular vision and hearing check ups or even regular health care. Moreover,

cultural attitudes towards talking about health or physical challenges may prevent learners from telling a teacher about problems such as illness or severe hearing loss that actually interfere with learning. Because many of our learners have suffered trauma, a wide range of mental health problems may be making life and learning hard for them.

**6** Are the problems "pedagogically-induced"? Many learning difficulties are known to develop when factors 1-5 are ignored, or when teachers do not employ the best teaching practices. Unclear directions, failure to use multisensory teaching, or not assuring that learners really master skills can confuse and frustrate learners, who then give up or just get stuck.

Careful attention to these factors will

guarantee better learning for nearly every student. Wise programs and teachers will find ways to address them in intake and instructional procedures. ■

\*\* These requirements CAN be met for Spanish-speaking adults, though Spanish-speaking diagnosticians experienced in testing adults, especially those who are very low literate, are rare.

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*Robin Schwarz is a nationally known lecturer, author and consultant on ESOL and Learning Disabilities. She is a partner with TLP Group in Columbus, Ohio.*

# Accessing Technology, Literacy

by HEIDI SILVER-PACUILLA

**H**ow are you using technology to meet the needs of your students with learning disabilities and other academic challenges? In this article, we will see how students at one adult education program learned to make the most of what was available and seek out free and low-cost technologies that supported their learning, persistence, and goal determination.

Students with learning disabilities (LD) often struggle with literacy fundamentals such as decoding, fluency, spelling, comprehension, and composition. While they work to remediate those skills, they have little time or energy left to help them access literacy content or activities that are of personal interest to them. Technology can help.

A participatory study (more fully described in Silver-Pacuilla, 2006) involving students with LD sought to determine how students could supplement their adult education studies with supported access to accessible technologies, such as text-to-speech (computer readers), speech recognition (dictation programs), and applications on the Internet. Over the course of the project, students learned to use text-to-speech and speech recognition, became daily email users, improved their basic literacy skills, participated more fully in their regular classes, and found a greater sense of directedness and goal determination. Some finished their GED, some went on to community college, and others found personal fulfillment in journal writing, reading digital books, or introducing their family to the power of technology.

Supported access means that the students were given small group time on well-equipped computers with a literacy

coach at hand to guide their growing use of technology to achieve their personal literacy goals. The support and study space proved to be key to the success of their efforts. Students with LD need additional time with learning material and often require additional explanations and demonstrations. This study time is rarely available in the regular classroom and, while they know they should study, students are generally not effective when studying alone. Providing a dedicated study time and place with a literacy coach who can prompt students to use learning strategies and promote the transfer of skills, as well as teach them the functions of the technology, can meet this need for students.

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*The support and study space proved to be the key to the success of their efforts.*

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These findings reinforce other research recently conducted in adult education, particularly the work on persistence undertaken by NCSALL and self-study by Reder (2001). Persistence among adult students is defined as: “staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their program, and returning to programs as soon as the demands of their lives allow” (Comings, Parella, & Soricone, 1999, p. 3). Turning students on to the power of technology to make self-study an effective alternative has the potential to boost their persistence and

provide a means to study during times of stopping out.

You may have a computer lab already available to your students. Are they using it fully? What programs are you suggesting and demonstrating to students with LD? How can technology help your students meet the classroom assignments and projects? Here are some suggestions based on our research, along with resources to get you started:

- Use text-to-speech. Do not worry that students will not learn to read if the computer reads to them. Show students the importance of reading along with the computer (silently or aloud), and they will benefit from hearing and seeing the words simultaneously. Programs that highlight the word or phrase as it is being read add additional support, helping students stay with the text.
- Use scan and read programs to teach studying strategies. Have students bring their class materials or forms and letters from home to scan into a computer reader program. Show students how to make the most of any features available in the software such as dictionaries, thesauruses, note taking, or highlighting. Continue to prompt students to be active in their studying to help build good habits.
- Use text-to-speech programs to make interesting content on the Internet accessible to students. Find out what students are really interested in; you won't know until you ask and listen. Search out and bookmark high quality sites that students can read with text-to-speech. Interesting material is



motivating.

- Use email as a learning opportunity. Many good sites will send a daily or weekly email on a selected topic; find one that is of personal interest to your students. Help students build the habit of learning daily.
- Use electronic dictionaries. Stop wasting time with paper dictionaries! E-dictionaries with text-to-speech can help students acquire the pronunciation of the word, focus on the correct definition for the context, and note the nuances in how words can be used.
- Read e-books. Readers and e-books are available at no cost on the Internet. Show students how to find and navigate e-books. Start a book discussion group.

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*Turning students on to the power of technology to make self-study an effective alternative (can) boost their persistence and provide a means to study...*

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- Try speech recognition. Dictation programs are especially appropriate for students who are not comfortable with the keyboard, or who are limited by their poor spelling abilities. Training the program to recognize a voice and training the users to make corrections takes time, but the process is a rich literacy learning activity.
- Customize students' e-desktops. Many students who struggle with reading fatigue find relief in en-

larged font size, different fonts, or varied background and font color options. Try different options with students and show them how to customize their view.

Students in our project spoke of being "hungry" and "thirsty" to learn computer literacy. They knew that it was a portal for them to engage in literacy as the serious and motivated students they want to be. As we shared our learning and made presentations to others in our program, students shared how access to these accessible technologies had boosted their persistence, determination, and personal goal setting. Above all, they constantly encouraged and challenged tutors and instructors to "Try it!" and to engage with them as co-learners to see how technology can benefit adult education students. ■■

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- Silver-Pacuilla, H. (2006). Access and benefits: Assistive technology in adult literacy. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 50(2), 114 – 125.
- 
- Heidi Silver-Pacuilla is a Senior Research Analyst at the American Institutes for Research.*
- For those interested in reading the larger description of her study cited in the article, found in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, contact VALRC.

## Resources:

### Text to Speech, Scan and Read, E-Dictionaries

Search the reviews and product details of free and commercial products in the Reading Matrix [www.techmatrix.org](http://www.techmatrix.org). Both the Microsoft Windows XP and Vista and Apple's Mac Tiger operating systems have text-to-speech software built in and available to read text in applications.

### E-books

University of Virginia's e-library at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/> and Project Gutenberg at <http://promo.net/pg/> both have many classic books available to download for free. E-books are increasingly available from online booksellers and open source publishers; search for e-book+topic on the Internet.

### E-mail

Encyclopedia Britannica offers This Day in History and Biography of the Day emails: <http://www.britannica.com/>. Dictionary.com offers a Word of the Day email: <http://dictionary.reference.com/>. Chicken Soup for the Soul offers inspirational messages in daily emails: <http://www.chickensoup.com/Email.html>. Search for the topic of student interest plus "daily emails" to see what else is available.

### Speech Recognition

Dragon Naturally Speaking and Via Voice are both commercially available from <http://www.nuance.com/>. Both the Microsoft Windows Vista and Apple's Mac Tiger operating systems have speech recognition software built in and available to take dictation.

### Customize Your Desktop

For help with customization options, see "Accessibility" and "Options" in the program or operating system.

# Spotsylvania Offers Psychological Services in Bridges Program

by ROGER PASTERNAK, PH.D.

*For the last eight years my practice, Mental Health Resources, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, has been providing psychological support to the Spotsylvania County branch of the Bridges to the Future Program. This collaboration has been an opportunity for me, as a private practitioner, to provide psychological services to an underserved population and a very interesting learning experience. The collaboration has also been very successful in clients obtaining GED accommodations, earning their GEDs and achieving their goals.*

When we began providing services in 2000, I expected to be dealing with a client population that was mostly learning disabled. My previous experience with adult learning disabilities was mainly in college students seeking classroom or testing accommodations or occasional adults seeking accommodations for particular examinations. My staff and I had learned to look for the requirements of particular programs and test publishers so that we could provide the client with a useful report.

We followed the same practice in dealing with the GED requirements. We acquired the Woodcock-Johnson-III Tests of Achievement, which had recently been published and was, at the time, the only comprehensive achievement test with adult norms that met the requirements established for the GED. We also acquired the scoring and interpretive software for the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, third edition, allowing for faster turn around times for the reports. The efficiency and cost effectiveness of the program were also increased by the use of practicum students from the doctoral program in Clinical Psychology at Argosy University for most of the test administration.

When we first began doing Bridges cases, we followed the procedures that I had developed in my practice over the years. We did a test results informing session for each case presenting the results to

the client and to the Bridges and Social Services staff. Often these became planning sessions, which had a beneficial effect on client morale, and, in turn, led to better follow-up with recommendations. The active collaboration with the Bridges staff and staff from other agencies, such as the Department of Rehabilitative Services

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*Often these became planning sessions, which had a beneficial effect on client morale, and...led to better follow-up with recommendations.*

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and the Rappahannock Area Community Services Board, also helped us to refine our reports and recommendations to make them more useful to the end users.

When we set up the original protocol for evaluating Bridges cases, I created a short form so that the teaching staff could indicate areas of concern. We also constructed an intake interview to further refine our test selection. We created a standard test battery around the W-J-

III ACH and WAIS-III, which we could vary depending on the presenting issues. To meet the GED publisher's requirement for the diagnosis of ADHD, we included the Conner's Continuous Performance Test-II, a computerized test. We also included the Conner's Adult ADHD Rating Scale (CAARS) to obtain standardized self-report information concerning ADHD symptoms. To supplement the clinical interview as a screening for emotional problems, we used several self-report instruments. We have made extensive use of the Emotional Problems Scale (EPS), a specialized instrument designed for use with persons of borderline or mildly mentally handicapped range cognitive functioning.

In the beginning, we used the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) as a part of the battery, but found this 566 item instrument too long and tedious for clients and required too high a reading level. We next tried the Personality Assessment Screener (PAS), which is admirably brief but not specific enough for our purposes. We finally settled on the Symptom Checklist 90 Revised (SCL-90-R), a good, relatively brief supplement to the clinical interview. At times, we have included other instruments in the battery including the Rorschach, Neo Personality Inventory Revised (NEO-PI-R), the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory-3 (SASSI-3), and the Beck Depression In-

ventory-II (BDI-II), depending on the assessment need.

Recently, we have been looking at the five years of data we have accumulated. Brittany Cornell, a student intern from the Paraprofessional Counseling Program at Germana Community College,

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*The population on whom we have data is not a random sample.*

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recently tabulated the last three years of data, which provides some insight into the population of people served by the Bridges Program. It may be of some use to those working with similar programs or thinking of starting one. Some caution should be used in generalizing from this data, however. The population on whom we have data is not a random sample. They represent about 40% of the population whom the program staff selected for assessment because of suspected learning or emotional problems. A small number were high school graduates or clients with GEDs receiving services who were screened for accommodations in educational programs or for emotional problems. Further refinement of the data analysis could produce a sample more representative of persons from social services populations seeking a GED.

Data from the past three years indicates that our clients had a mean age of 29 years; 86% were female. The average highest grade completed was 10th grade. The mean Full Scale IQ score of the WAIS-III was 84. The modal range of IQ was Borderline, with 35% of clients scoring in this range. Only 27.5% were within the Average range, while 7.5% were within the Mildly Mentally Handicapped range and 29.5% were scored in the Low Average range. Woodcock-Johnson-III ACH scores indicate a Broad Reading mean grade equivalent score of

7.6. The mean Broad Math score was 7.0 and the mean Broad Written Expression Score was 7.4. These scores should be viewed with some caution, however, as many were obtained from students who had been taking GED classes for several weeks prior to the evaluation. In terms of learning disabilities, 8% of the population was found to have a reading disability. Another 10% were found to have a math learning disability, and 5% had a disability in written expression.

Fully 39% of the population was found to have ADHD. This is consistent with the well-known association between this disorder and early school drop out. Further analysis of the data could produce figures on how many of the clients with this disorder were diagnosed in childhood. Another possible analysis of the data might shed some light on the association between ADHD and school drop out due to early pregnancy.

Other mental health issues included a 10% frequency of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), most often related to

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*...it is clear that the problems with education and employment experienced by our clients go beyond academic problems and learning disabilities.*

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a history of spousal or childhood abuse. The single most common mental health problem reported was depression, with 41% of the population reporting some form of depressive disorder. Bipolar Disorder was found in 6% of the population. Active substance abuse was report-

ed by 6% of the population, but this is probably under-reported to a significant degree.

Information from the clinical interview indicated that 15% of the population was being treated for a medical problem, and 29% had a history of head injury.

Based on this preliminary analysis of our data, it is clear that the problems with education and employment experienced by our clients go beyond academic problems and learning disabilities. The population appears to have a very high number of persons with psychiatric problems. We have been very fortunate to have excellent support from the Rappahannock Area Community Services Board, which has allowed our clients to access counseling and psychiatric services quickly. Programs may also need to consider other barriers to employment, which we have observed in the client population but do not currently have statistics for, including lack of a driver's license and felony convictions.

My experience with the Bridges program has given me a sense that well designed and targeted psychological assessment services can provide a useful component in helping clients obtain their GEDs and access other services. ■

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*Dr. Roger Pasternak has been working with the Bridges to the Future program, a collaboration between the Spotsylvania Department of Social Services and Spotsylvania County Public Schools. Susan Hahn with the Department of Social Services is the Project Manager; Betsy Mathias is the Program Manager.*

# Accommodations Available without Prior Approval

by GEORGE BAILEY

A central topic of discussion in last year's Race to GED Fast Track II training was GED testing accommodations that do not require prior approval. The importance of these accommodations is emphasized by a core belief that whenever we take a test we are really being tested in two areas: how much we know about the subject matter, and how much we know about taking a test. An understanding of test-taking strategies and an increase in "test wise" thinking may be all we need to turn a failing score into a passing score. Being aware of available testing accommodations that do not require approval by GEDTS-trained personnel and implementing appropriate instructional accommodations in the classroom are two important and effective test-taking strategies.

The following adaptations or devices (accommodations) may be permitted during GED testing:\*

- Colored transparent overlays
- Clear transparent overlays with a highlighter
- Temporary adhesive notes (For security reasons, these must be supplied by the testing center and not brought in by the candidate.)
- Earplugs
- Large-print test edition
- Magnifying device
- Priority seating
- Hats or caps to limit the effects of fluorescent lighting (The GED examiner must document that a request was made by the candidate.)
- One test per day
- Straightedge (plain and unmarked)

\* Section 11.5 of the GED Examiner's Manual, GEDTS, 2005. Please refer to this section of the manual for a more detailed explanation of the suggested uses of these accommodations.

Additionally, Section 11.16 of the GED Examiner's Manual, "Other Devices as Deemed Appropriate," states, in part, that:

"The GED Testing Service allows all

other devices without permission as long as they compensate for the disability, do not provide an unfair advantage, and do not compromise the validity or reliability of the GED Tests.

GED candidates are allowed to use other adaptive devices such as pencil holders, wrist braces, and graph paper, so long as the device does not provide an unfair advantage to the test-taker.

Because the Official GED Testing Center may not have the GED candidate's preferred device on hand, the candidate may be permitted to bring his or her own magnifier, overlays, or the like, to the testing session. It is the prerogative of the GED Chief Examiner or GED Examiner to examine these materials to ensure that the materials do not contain any unauthorized testing aids."

The availability of accommodations that do not require prior approval is certainly important knowledge for the GED candidate to have and to understand. The most effective use of this knowledge, however, requires that a line of communication that includes the GED examiner, classroom instructor, and student/GED candidate must be maintained. This communication is the only real way to assure that the proper adaptive devices are used by students who are actually able to benefit from their use, both in the instructional environment and the testing environment.

It might be helpful to look at this process in reverse time order—from GED examiner to instructor to student. The GED examiner should be informed before the day of the test about a GED candidate's intended use of one or more of the adaptive devices, the need for priority seating, or a one test per day request. This knowledge allows the examiner to plan for and help assure a comfortable testing environment with the needed adaptive devices and security measures in place.

Prior to the test, of course, the instructor should determine which, if any,

of the adaptive devices are needed by and recommended for individual learners. Learning is likely to occur more quickly if the appropriate adaptive devices are used. It probably should be noted that not all students need or are benefited, either in the classroom or in the testing environment, by the use of any one or any combination of these accommodations.

The first stage in the process of using the appropriate adaptive device with a learner is knowing which one or ones to recommend. How the instructor makes the proper recommendation to the struggling student is where the process is at its most critical point. In some cases, clues may manifest as physical classroom behaviors that can tell the instructor which device to recommend—for example, squinting while reading may indicate the need for a magnifying device, or complaining of words moving on the page may indicate the need for using a colored overlay. In other cases, instructional performance behaviors may suggest that a learner would benefit from the use of an adaptive device. For example, a student may seem to grasp clearly concepts presented in the classroom but be consistently unable to demonstrate this knowledge on a test. Performance behaviors do not indicate which accommodation or accommodations may be helpful; instead, they can function as a signal to the instructor that closer observation is needed to watch for and identify any physical behaviors that indicate the need for specific adaptive devices. The attached chart is a more complete list of indicators that a student may benefit from accommodations not requiring prior approval. ■■

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*George Bailey is the Assistant Manager, Programs for VALRC.*



# GED Test Accommodations

If you observe ...	then your student may benefit from...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• squinting eyes while reading</li> <li>• eyes watering while reading</li> <li>• complaining of letters moving on the page</li> <li>• inability to read for long periods of time</li> <li>• eyes becoming bloodshot while reading</li> <li>• complaining of headaches while reading</li> <li>• holding text close to face to read</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• colored transparent overlays</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making notes while reading</li> <li>• forgetting directions while completing assignments/tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear transparent overlays with a highlighter</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making notes while reading</li> <li>• appearing to be lost on the page</li> <li>• having trouble with multi-step problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• temporary adhesive notes (Post-Its®) for spatial notes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leaning on hand while reading</li> <li>• plugging ears with fingers while reading</li> <li>• easily distracted by environmental noise while reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• earplugs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• squinting eyes while reading</li> <li>• complaining of headaches while reading</li> <li>• holding text close to face to read</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• large print text</li> <li>• magnifying glass</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having trouble concentrating for extended periods of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one test per day</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tracking text with finger</li> <li>• having difficulty keeping the place on the page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• straightedge</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• squinting eyes while reading</li> <li>• complaining of headaches while reading</li> <li>• shading eyes while reading or listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visor</li> </ul>

# eLearnVA: Distance Learning Takes Another Step

by RICHARD SEBASTIAN

In the past decade, distance learning has dramatically changed higher education and, to a lesser extent, K-12 education, and is now poised to change adult education as well. In Virginia, there are several notable adult education programs that have been offering some form of distance learning for years.

Typically, these programs have been offered by individual localities, with little coordination between programs and no centralized organization at a statewide level. Until now. In early 2007, the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center plans to pilot a new distance-learning program, tentatively called eLearnVA, that will provide comprehensive, web-based pre-GED, GED, and Workplace skills lessons to adults who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to benefit from traditional education classes, and who have access to a computer and a broadband Internet connection.

“We believe that distance learning will play an important part in the future of adult education,” says George Bailey, assistant manager of the VALRC and manager of the eLearnVA program. “As teens move out of high school and into adult education classes, they are going to have different expectations about how they learn. One of these is a desire to use technology to support their learning, in-

cluding learning online.”

Here is how eLearnVA will work. Before formally enrolling in eLearnVA, all potential adult students will complete the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment at their local adult education facility as well as a short, online learning orientation developed by VALRC and found on the eLearnVA homepage. Using the learner’s TABE scores, goals, and educational information, online mentors will design an individualized educational program for each student using four web-based programs: *GED Connection*, *Workplace Essential Skills*, *KeyTrain*, an online program designed to improve workplace skills necessary for the Workkeys Assessment, and *GED Pathway*.

“Our online mentors really make this program stand out,” says George Bailey. “While learners still need to be motivated and able to learn independently, they won’t be totally on their own. Their mentors are there to answer questions, give them encouragement, and help guide them toward their educational goals.”

The eLearnVA program isn’t VALRC’s first experience with distance learning. Since 2001, when the Department of Education Office of Adult Education and Literacy and the Virginia Department of Social Services purchased a statewide license for PBS LiteracyLink’s *Workplace Essential Skills*, VALRC has offered an open enrollment class in a LiteracyLink virtual classroom. Any Virginia adult interested in GED study or developing workplace skills in communication, reading, and math could obtain a free LiteracyLink account, work on their lessons at their own pace, and receive feedback from online mentor and GED Specialist Jason Guard.

Jason, along with George Bailey, Dr. Roberta McKnight and Noreen Lopez from PBS LiteracyLink, was also involved in drafting the report *Recommendations: Improving Virginia’s Distance Learning Opportunities* in 2004. Among other rec-

ommendations, this research-based plan called for a centralized, web-based learning program for Virginia’s adults. These recommendations were used to guide the implementation of VALRC’s most recent distance learning initiative, the Electronic Food Stamp Employment & Training (eFSET) project, a web-based education program for adults receiving food stamps. The Resource Center created and managed eFSET from October 2005 to September 2006 and used the design of the program as a model for the eLearnVA.

George Bailey says, “While VALRC has extensive experience with distance education, we also don’t assume we know everything. We want to start small, partnering with a handful of adult education programs, while also establishing collaborative relationships with other programs that have been offering these kinds of services for years.”

eLearnVA is targeting not only pure distance learners—those adults who receive all of their learning online—but also those adults who need to interrupt their face-to-face classes temporarily, as well as those adults simply looking to supplement their classroom learning with further study. eLearnVA also hopes to help serve Virginia’s population of 16- and 17-year-olds who have been released from compulsory high school attendance. Young students who have trouble fitting in to regular adult education classes may benefit from working independently online.

eLearnVA will begin its pilot phase in early 2007. ■

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*Richard Sebastian is a specialist at VALRC. In addition, he is a doctoral candidate at the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education, where his research focuses on the pedagogical potential of digital videogames, virtual environments, and pervasive participatory alternate reality games (ARG).*



From left to right: Jason Guard, Richard Sebastian, and George Bailey

# VALRC: New Directions in the New Year

by HILLARY MAJOR

The beginning of the year is a time to reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of the previous year and to make plans for the year ahead. We'd like to share some of what VALRC has been working on in 2006 and our plans for new projects that we hope will continue to meet the changing needs of the field in 2007.

Debbie Bergtholdt has been coordinating the Resource Center response to Virginia's pilot GED content standards. Program managers are being surveyed about how the Resource Center can best assist in implementation. In 2007, study circles will be formed, allowing GED instructors to take a deeper look at specific standards and how they can be tied into curricula already in use. Steck-Vaughn and Contemporary have developed correlations between their publications and the Standards; these are available online at the Race to GED Polilogue forum. KET is currently working on developing correlations for *GED Connection*.

The statewide GED Helpline (877-37-MY-GED), managed by Jason Guard, continues to receive about 500 calls a month. Orders are still being filled for DVD sets of the *GED Connection* and *Workplace Essential Skills* television series. In addition, Jason acts as an online mentor for distance learners, working to support the increasing demand for web-based adult education services.

In addition to an increased focus on online learning for students, VALRC continues to offer online professional development opportunities for instructors, including ongoing TABE certification training, Adults as Learners, ESOL Basics, and Using Technology to Enhance GED Instruction. In addition to these offerings, VALRC plans to premiere two new online courses in 2007. Lauren Ellington will bring her two areas of expertise together to offer Learning Disabilities/Difficulties and the Adult Learner. Vicky Sanborn will offer a new, research-based

Online Tutor Training.

VALRC continues to offer a variety of face-to-face trainings. New in 2006 were Art of the Classroom, a training in the art of professional judgment designed by Debbie Bergtholdt and Marcia Phillips, and the Numeracy trainings in math instruction, which have already reached more than 300 participants (with some duplication as teachers attend multiple workshops). Susan Holt continues to organize trainings in the four strands of Number Sense, Algebra, Measurement & Geometry, and Data & Statistics. She is also working with the Numeracy trainers to refine training content and begin study circles for trainers' local programs. In addition, Susan is developing a new training for 2007: the Virginia Reading Project II, based on NIFL's new book *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers* by Susan McShane.

As part of our new partnership with the Virginia Department of Correctional Education, VALRC is offering workshops tailored to the needs of instructors who serve incarcerated learners. For community-based organizations, the Resource Center is currently conducting the QuAL-D Project, which gives participating programs assistance in developing database records and using the gathered information for program improvement.

To help address the needs of the ESOL population, the Resource Center has developed Building Basics: ESOL Toolkit for General Construction, Landscaping, Painting and Plumbing, a curriculum designed to teach English skills and workplace vocabulary to students with English language proficiency levels corresponding to the three lowest National Reporting System levels. The curriculum, which provides a Facilitator Guide, Facilitator Materials, and Student Handouts for 18 multi-level lessons, is available on the VALRC website. During winter and spring 2007, VALRC will be



Carla Dannouf (left) and Hillary Major (right)

rolling out three new trainings around the state, to be followed by study circles on the same topics: Teaching Reading to Adult English Language Learners, Teaching Writing to Adult English Language Learners, and Teaching Oral Skills to Adult English Language Learners.

In addition to announcing new trainings, new curricula and new online offerings, the Resource Center is pleased to welcome two new staff members. Hillary Major joins VALRC as Publications Coordinator and will work with editing print and online resources, in addition to serving as Technical Facilitator for many of the online courses. She takes the position of Randy Stamper, now at DOE's Office of Adult Education and Literacy. Carla Dannouf has moved into Donna Grieco's office manager position, providing the program support that keeps the Resource Center running smoothly. Donna, longtime mainstay of the VALRC support staff, retired last November. And this just in, Debbie Bergtholdt moved to DOE February 1, to be State GED Administrator. ■■

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*Hillary Major is the Publications Coordinator at VALRC.*

# PROGRESS

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## Observing Bridges to the Future

by LAUREN ELLINGTON

My friend and colleague Susan Hahn has coordinated the Bridges to the Future Project, a collaboration between the Spotsylvania Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Spotsylvania Regional Adult Education Program, since it began in 2001, and I was glad to have the opportunity recently to observe several classes. The project takes a different perspective on serving the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) population. The first step is to use the Washington State Screening Tool to indicate the possibility of a learning disability. If it is determined that a learning disability is likely, Dr. Roger Pasternak does further evaluations. (See his article on pages 10-11.) This enables the program to help the learners develop learning strategies designed to compensate for their disabilities. It also allows them to request accommodations for taking the GED. Additionally, the pro-

gram strongly emphasizes work readiness skills. In the class I observed, instructor Carolyn Haghghi had her students develop and refine their resumés, which they would then take to job interviews in the area.

As well as observing some classes, I also wanted to get a feel for how the students viewed the program. I spoke with Lucille (name changed for privacy purposes) about her experiences with the project. She had only good things to say and was happy to share how she has already been helped. Lucille has been diagnosed as having Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She talked to me about how this disorder has caused her to make many, often disastrous, impulsive decisions in her life. Because of these impulsive behaviors, she has been convicted of felonies. She said also that her ADHD had lost her jobs in the past. She told me that by having her disorder diagnosed and receiving support

through the program, she has been able to curb her impulsivity. She talked about how her modified behavior has helped in her relationship with her roommate, who also happens to be her child-care provider. She credits her newly developed impulse control to her involvement in the Bridges to the Future Project. Lucille also told me that she didn't know where she would be without this program. Since our conversation, she has gotten a job.

The Bridges to the Future Project is a wonderful program. It highlights how successful interagency collaborations really can be. It also highlights that the "hard-to-serve" can be served with amazing results! ■■

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*Lauren Ellington is the specialist for LD and for online training at VALRC. She is the author of Update and Update on LD, online newsletters published by VALRC.*