

PROGRESS

A publication of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

Bridging the Vision

with Joanne Huebner



What Has Been Seen Cannot Be Unseen

“What has been seen cannot be unseen, what has been learned cannot be unknown. You cannot change the past, but you can learn from it. You can grow from it. You can be made stronger. You can use that strength to change your life, to change your future.”—C.A. Woolf

Early in the 20th century, a social psychologist and pioneer of organizational psychology named Kurt Lewin proposed a [three-stage model of change](#) now known as the “unfreeze-change-refreeze” theory. For program managers who participated in the fall, 2016 Leading Through Change meeting, this may be familiar. When we first solicited articles for this issue of **PROGRESS**, focused on leadership in adult education programs, we had no idea how relevant leading

through change would become. There is no playbook for leading through a change like COVID-19, but we are definitely creating one for the next crisis. Adult education in Virginia is responding to this event as an opportunity because we already had a vision for our future that allows us to assimilate change more readily.

The articles in this issue demonstrate the leadership response to the tasks of change. You will read about students emerging as leaders,

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teachers emerging as leaders, a reflection on becoming a leader, and program managers and partners focused on leading change. Five teacher leaders talk about “unfreezing” in their article *What Does it Mean to be a Teacher Leader* (p.4). Unfreezing is the process of reducing the fear of trying by mobilizing the fear of not trying. Bettie Nickerson states, “This pandemic pushes us into distance learning with our students.” Mary Palmer adds, “In my foray into setting up remote classes and communication systems for my students during this time of pandemic shutdowns, I have found that there is tremendous flexibility in how students make use of the resources I set up.” Three articles by Janet Sodell (p.17), Katherine Hansen (p.15), and Jeffrey Elmore (p.13) highlight students as leaders. Unfreezing takes place as students begin taking risks, finding their voice, and developing a sense of community. The student and teacher leadership mindset already in place makes “unfreezing” less difficult.

The tasks of “change” after unfreezing include making the change meaningful, moving from old competence to new by learning new skills that alter behaviors and ways of thinking, bravely realigning structures and roles, and generating the support for that change. The urgent na-

ture of this event provides a platform to speed the tasks of change already in motion for adult education. In *Becoming an Effective Online Learning Mentor* (p.21), Katie Bratisax outlines skills for quality online instruction beginning with comfort with the technology. She also provides tips in adjusting to asynchronous schedules, time management, and communication with students including electronic non-verbal cues and developing social presence. Region 7’s work, shared in the article *Leading the Charge of Distance and Blended Learning* by Sharon Hetland (p.19), provided a head start prior to the outbreak in realigning structures with a blended learning ESL class at a workplace site. Hetland states, “We are learning now what we must do in the future with all students: determine technology access and ability when enrolling students; get every student in on-line programs and give them time to practice in class; integrate distance learning into every classroom; and investigate loaning laptops.” Cyndi Finley and Ahoo Salem comment on generating support for change through partnerships, in this case, The Virginia Higher Education for Incarcerated Students Consortium and Community Based Literacy Organizations (p.24 and 27 respectively). Finley notes that “Incarcerated individuals will also feel the impact

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and upon release, return to a world with new challenges, obstacles, technology and a new way of surviving.” and “Now more than ever, partners have come together to strengthen our communities, provide service to those in need and reach out to one another to make sure people are safe and thriving during this time of crisis.”

I am encouraged that “unfreezing” has taken place so readily. I imagine we will not “refreeze” again for a while as the tasks of change continue. I marvel at all that has been accomplished in such a short period. Marjorie Lampkin, new regional program manager for Region 17, in A Career Pathway for Adult Educators (p.29), provides a directive for leading through this time

of change: “Focusing on the positive impact we have on the students we serve gives us the courage to step forward into a change that will undoubtedly impact the way we conduct adult education programs in the future. It is said that leadership is forged in times of adversity; accept this current situation as an opportunity to forge your leadership skills!” 📌

Joanne Huebner is the manager of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). She leads the team of educational specialists in carrying out the VALRC mission of equipping the field of adult education and literacy with essential skills and resources.

From VALRC

“Equipping the field of adult education and literacy with essential skills and resources”

VALRC Welcomes New Staff Member

The Resource Center is pleased to welcome our newest hire who joins us in our mission to help support adult educators.



Hali Dayberry

English as a Second Language (ESOL) Specialist

Hali Dayberry is the English as a Second Language (ESOL) Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). In this role, she coordinates teacher professional development that aligns with state and federal initiatives, as well as local interests and needs. This work includes the design and delivery of online courses, face-to-face workshops, and virtual meetings, all with a focus on the practice of teaching English to adult learners. Hali has a career of working in international education in both the adult education and university settings. In addition to teaching English as a

Second Language, Hali has also worked as an international student advisor, which gives her tremendous insight into the options that exist for creating career pathways for adult students. She is also knowledgeable in current immigration requirements and student placement testing. Hali holds a bachelor’s degree from George Mason University in global affairs/middle eastern studies and a master’s degree in teaching English as a second language from the University of Southern California.



Voices from the Field: What does it Mean to be a Teacher Leader?



by Diana Helwig, Bettie Nickerson, Dr. Mary Palmer Legare, Tamara Reynolds, and Vicky Routson

Introduction

The term “teacher leader” carries with it a wide range of meanings, responsibilities, and roles that can change from situation to situation, or even moment to moment. The professional learning association [Learning Forward](#) widely defines the term as “a set of practices that enhances the teaching profession” but adds that this definition is still too limiting. In this section, adult education teachers across the state share their experiences in teacher leadership and what the term means to them (Killion, et. al., 2016). The teachers are members of a virtual learning community, facilitated by Hillary Major and Dr. Kate Daly Rolander at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, who share their practices to build on each other’s knowledge and experiences and to work to move the field of adult education forward through collaboration and innovation. In writing this article, we hope to expand our sharing beyond our virtual group and extend discussions around what it means to be a teacher leader to other instructors around the state.

We Are All Students

**Betty Nickerson,
GED® Instructor,
Region 19,
Southside Programs for Adult
Continuing Education (SPACE)
Surry County Resource and
Employment Center**

While researching teacher leadership, I kept coming across the repeating themes of collaboration and mentorship. As I thought about these, it occurred to me that the teacher leader needs to be a student as well. In this ever-changing landscape, teachers need to be reeducating themselves on a continual basis. After taking a 15-year detour from adult education, I was overwhelmed by what I needed to know and be able to do as I reentered the classroom in 2018. It wasn’t the content areas as much as it was technology. Almost every aspect of adult education is touched by technology, even more so as our classes are affected by the closings resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic pushes us into distance learning with our students. Many teacher leaders at the local and state levels have provided us with a multitude of resources. So here is our chance to try some of the resources that we may not be adept at using. Some may work better for others and are not one-size-fits-all. This does, however, give us the opportunity to motivate and inspire our students as they witness us in the role of a student. It certainly reinforces learning as a lifelong process.

Leadership & Learning

Diana Helwig,
Adult ESL Instructor,
Region 19,
Southside Programs for Adult
Continuing Education (SPACE)
Prince George County

“Our efforts to grow as teacher leaders will help us empower ourselves, other teachers, and our students!”

Foundations of Support & Sharing

Vicky Routson,
Adult English Language Learner
Teacher,
Region 8,
Loudon County

For me, teacher leadership starts with creating a foundation of support and sharing within my cohort of teachers. In my experience, many adult ELL teachers have busy lives, full-time day jobs, and just don't have the time to seek out opportunities to connect and share, even with other teachers at their sites. My initial response to this has been to try to coordinate group events at the end of each thirteen-week session. Group potlucks where the teachers from all classrooms participate along with their students is a great way to get communication going between staff members. It seems that the more the teachers connect even via email, the more comfortable they are in reaching out for help, sharing out resources, and communicating with the group at large.

President John F. Kennedy said, “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” This combination of leadership and learning is what we need in teacher leaders—teachers who continually strive to discover and apply new research-based knowledge. Every person has the potential to show leadership, and teachers have a unique opportunity to lead students, other teachers, and anyone who is watching. So, how do we become the best possible teacher leaders? We follow the same guidance that we give our students: set small goals and work daily to achieve them so that our educational community can continue to improve for the sake of our students.

- Take **risks** to find and use new educational technology sources.
- Ask for **advice** from other teachers.
- **Read** educational journals (like **PROGRESS**).
- Recognize the accomplishments of other teachers to **encourage** them and learn from them.
- Seek **feedback** from our students about what's working, what's not, and what they are missing.
- Focus on and embrace our **vision** of why we teach.
- **Collaborate** with others to build a team and inspire each other.

Our efforts to grow as teacher leaders will help us empower ourselves, other teachers, and our students!

Use this chart to guide your reflections on your role as a teacher leader:

	How am I already doing this?	How could I embrace this more?
Finding new websites and apps for my students		
Asking for advice from other teachers		
Reading educational journals		
Recognizing accomplishments in other teachers		
Seeking feedback from students		
Embracing my vision for teaching		
Collaborating with others		

See some examples of Diana’s work to:

- [survey students](#) about distance education options;
- organize English Language PLCs through detailed agendas (see [Agenda 1](#) and [Agenda 2](#)); and
- make the English Language Proficiency Standards easily accessible for [instructional planning](#) and for [scoring](#).

Teacher Leadership in Cyberspace

Mary Palmer, Ph.D,
Adult Education Instructor,
Region 17,
Rappahannock Community College

I know from my years of experience in public and private schools that professional development with no plans for follow-up amongst teachers may give us an idea or two, but it is unlikely to effect the kind of change in practices and grounding theory that promotes real professional growth. These ideas may spice up the soup, but rarely is the recipe upgraded.

We are lucky to have a team of fantastic and dedicated part-time teachers. Our team is made up of people who work at full-time time or other part-time jobs, as well as people who have retired. We have some teachers who have many years of experience and some with less experience. We have some ‘lifelong learners’ who maintain a constant state of professional self-study through their own

How does one exercise teacher leadership when we as teachers so rarely see each other? We are spread out over several different campuses across five counties. All of our professional development sessions are led by teachers; however, we have only three each year, which last three hours each and give us a total of only nine hours of time spent together learning.

**Tamara Reynolds,
ABE and GED® Adult Education
Instructor,
Region 5,
Campbell County**

reading and research. We have some bright and capable instructors whose degrees are in areas other than education and who are learning on their feet. We have some teachers who have never been in the classroom before. Many teachers fall into one or more of these categories, but what is clear to me is that their professional development needs vary widely. How can we as teacher leaders provide more flexibility in our professional development offerings? I believe that remote learning holds some answers.

In my foray into setting up remote classes and communication systems for my students during this time of pandemic shutdowns, I have found that there is tremendous flexibility in how students make use of the resources I have set up. Some prefer just chatting through messaging; some want video chats, group or individual; some need the common visual of screen-sharing. Some crave community, but some want strictly one-on-one. Remote learning provides all of these options.

The richest and most productive parts of my own professional learning experience have always involved teacher-to-teacher support. Remote learning tools can make this option possible as well. I envision a system being put in place for the next school year that creates teacher pairs, or small groups of teachers who teach the same subject, who can set their own agendas and times to meet online for brief sessions to share ideas and find solutions to problems. Such a set-up would allow teachers to connect in a convenient way and would certainly foster community and camaraderie.

What we as teachers know is that what we do is not easy. We need each other's support and guidance. The in-person time together as a whole group at our professional development sessions is necessary and valuable. However, that time can be greatly enhanced with a few follow-up online sessions for mentor-mentees or content area teachers. We can make that happen with the tools of remote learning.

Every day the opportunity for leadership stands before you. Each day brings you opportunities to think outside the box, create solutions for problems, and raise important questions. Every day you have to decide whether to put your ideas and contributions out there or keep them to yourself. To lead is to live on the edge a little, especially when you lead people through change because you challenge things they hold dear and their ways of thinking when all you can offer them is a possibility. Our communities, organizations, and schools need people from wherever they work and live to take up the challenges at hand rather than complain or wait for a call to action. This has always been true but may be especially so now in a world of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Some of the strongest leaders I know are teachers. Teacher leadership means dreaming big, yet helping students achieve small dreams one step at a time. It means planting a seed that will one day produce a full harvest and taking someone by the hand for a short distance but paving the way for a long future. Great leaders are the world's loudest cheerleaders. Teachers who lead not only motivate their students, but also their colleagues as well. They are always willing to jump in to lend a helping hand whether by working on new ideas, coaching, observing and offering feedback, or serving as a mentor. Teachers who are leaders set high expectations and they prioritize what matters. If a student fails, they don't blame the student. They look for new ways and resources and ask themselves,

Defining Teacher Leadership

by Dr. Tamara Sober

Teacher leadership is rarely tightly defined (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) and often used as an umbrella term (Neumerski, 2012). Most commonly, teacher leadership refers to teachers who maintain classroom-based teaching responsibilities while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom, with an understanding that a practitioner has a unique lens for informing decisions about the work. This definition implies that teacher leaders go above-and-beyond their typical duties, such as department chair or lead or mentor teacher, but it may also include hybrid teacher leadership roles or titles such as instructional coaching, coordinator, specialist, and more. Essentially, teachers lead by supporting the professional learning of their peers or by influencing policy and decision-making at the school, district, state, or even national level, ultimately with a goal of improving student learning.

[The academic study of] teacher leadership (i.e., scholarship) has been labeled partially-theoretical or even atheoretical (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), albeit with the most frequent theoretical lens being distributed leadership (about 20%, according to a literature review by Wenner & Campbell, 2017) meaning teacher leaders begin with the positive assumption that leadership is shared by more than just the person formally holding the leadership title. While a strong theoretical foundation may not be critical to field practitioners, the need for empirical research on the *impact of teacher leadership* should garner more attention in today's context that recognizes teacher leadership as a key component of school reform. Educational institutions are being faced with high teacher turnover linked to a lack of teacher autonomy amidst the 21st century private business sector's move towards a distributed leadership model.

Formal recognition of the value of teacher leadership is a positive sign for the profession, and teachers credit leadership opportunities with providing them a sense of empowerment, as well as a path for improving their practice and growing as a professional. However, for schools to fully access the student-learning and school-improvement benefits of teacher leadership, the following supports must be considered:

Professional development focused on leadership skills and the study of power. Teacher leadership professional development is often focused on strategies, pedagogy, and content knowledge; with very little attention given to the study of power dynamics, such as those that arise when teachers are placed in positional authority over their peers, upsetting the egalitarian norms of the profession. A focus on developing critical consciousness of historical and institutional oppression is essential for equipping teacher leaders with the skills and understanding necessary to cultivate more diverse and equitable school cultures.

Administrative and structural support that cultivates a school culture of trust. Trust is the scaffolding necessary to support non-hierarchical decision-making; without trust, faculty will resist leadership coming from anyone other than the administration. Leaders in positions of authority should lead by example by continually modeling efforts to encourage leadership of others and by institutionalizing opportunities for teacher input, voice, and leadership. Other structural factors that create the conditions for successful teacher leadership include clear-cut job responsibilities and recognition for those teacher leaders

who step up to take on and meet those additional responsibilities.

Time to complete the work. Teachers who take on leadership roles cite the lack of time to fulfill the work, as they are pulled in competing directions (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Their desire to take on more in order to bring about change can often lead to burnout, and despite the theoretical foundation of distributed leadership, those who show leadership promise are often given heavy loads that may far outweigh their peers' workload. School leaders tapping teachers for leadership roles set them up to experience success when they relieve those teachers from some duties and responsibilities in order to free up time for the added responsibilities.

As recent as 2017, scholars cautioned that the lack of empirical research on teacher leadership may present an overly optimistic picture of the expectations and implementation of teacher leadership and they posed a number of questions (Wenner & Campbell, 2017) that if answered could inform the work and roles of teacher leaders.

- Recognizing that schools are nested and constituted in unique contexts, in what ways do the school-level factors shape the enactment of teacher leadership?
- To what extent can the roles of teacher leaders be connected to improved teacher practice and increased student learning?
- Are there models of teacher leadership that are more effective than others in terms of student learning and/or teacher learning?
- What role do teacher leaders play in shaping issues of equity and diversity in classrooms, schools, and communities?
- How might we encourage more teacher leadership among underrepresented groups?
- In what ways might teacher leadership mitigate teacher attrition?

From a practical standpoint, practitioners who currently serve in teacher leadership roles may find it useful to answer one or more of these questions for their specific context. As the recognition of the added value and need for teacher leadership becomes more prominent, and as more teacher leaders provide context-specific answers to these questions, perhaps we will come closer to defining teacher leadership. 📌

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Learn More about Teacher Leadership

[Teacher Leader Model Standards](#)

[Teacher Leadership: Exploring the Concept and Setting a Standard](#)

[Mentor Teacher and Instructional Coach Training](#)

Empowering Teachers and Learners by Teaching Skills that Matter

by *Hillary Major*

9-5-3. Those numbers speak to the heart of Teaching the Skills that Matter in Adult Education ([TSTM](#)), a federally funded project that focuses on improving adult education and literacy instruction as a means of helping adult learners acquire the skills they need for meeting the demands of their lives. Most of the nine (9) “skills that matter” will be familiar to teachers, who might have seen them in lists of 21st century skills or, more recently, in descriptions of [workplace readiness skills](#) or WIOA-approved workplace preparation activities. They are:

1. Adaptability and Willingness to Learn
2. Critical Thinking
3. Communication
4. Interpersonal Skills
5. Navigating Systems
6. Problem-solving
7. Processing and Analyzing Information
8. Respecting Difference and Diversity
9. Self-awareness

Importantly, these skills are not taught or learned in isolation. TSTM focuses on developing the nine (9) skills, along with basic and academic skills, in five (5) main subject areas that are relevant to adults’ daily lives: civics education, digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and workforce preparation. To do that meaningfully, with lessons that engage adults and give ample practice opportunities with the “skills that matter,” TSTM also focuses on three (3) instructional approaches: integrated and contextualized instruction, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. This may seem like a lot, but with TSTM, integration is the name of the game. Becky Payton, pilot

instructor and regional specialist with Thomas Jefferson Adult and Continuing Education at Piedmont Virginia Community College says: “TSTM ties CCR standards and workplace readiness skills together so neatly. It is a package worth opening.”

Developed by [American Institutes for Research \(AIR\)](#) in partnership with [Jobs for the Future](#), TSTM includes an extensive toolkit for teachers, as well as training and coaching for instructors. As one of five pilot states, Virginia has assembled a dynamic team of instructors who have been attending training, teaching lessons from the TSTM toolkit, and applying TSTM to their instructional approaches since September 2019. Together, the pilot instructors represent a wide range of Virginia adult education, from English language instruction to GED® preparation to PluggedInVA and job skills training. After several months of teaching with the TSTM toolkit and training in mind, all participating teachers found their students better able to identify and apply skills such as communication, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills.

Integrating the TSTM skills and approaches can mean turning over some of the classroom responsibility from teacher to students, which can be challenging but rewarding as students become empowered as learners and leaders. The Virginia pilot team benefited from working with adult education leader and instructional coach Susan Finn Miller, who participated in planning and problem-solving discussions by phone, visited from her home state of Pennsylvania to observe classes, and supported Virginia’s teachers in their instructional journeys.

At the AE&L Conference, pilot teacher Mary Cherry of Southside Virginia Community College spoke about making project-based learning work in her rural program to support and challenge learners in very multilevel classrooms. Lyle Ring of the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) found the TSTM materials worked well with his program's curriculum and the topic areas selected by his students. He said, "TSTM gave me an arsenal of resources as a teacher and provides our program with a roadmap to integrate employability skills with ELPS."

ESL teacher and pilot team member Sarah Lupton of Roanoke Valley-Allegheny Region 5 Adult Education shared the power of her TSTM experience:

You know that high you have after attending a professional teaching conference? You head home enthusiastic and motivated and confident, ready to try out a bunch of new things in your classroom . . . then life happens and a lot of those ideals go by the wayside. Well, TSTM is like conference motivation that never ends. Its trifecta of access to professional resources, teaching coaches, and research-based methods keeps you going all school year long. You won't be able to help yourself—you'll want your colleagues to know how they, too, can craft lessons in such a way that both they and their students leave each class able to articulate how each day's lesson grew their academic, social, and civic abilities. Whereas many students may typically say "I'm enrolled in this class so I can get my GED® [credential]," after TSTM, students will say, "I enrolled so I could get my diploma, but along the way I gained skills that will serve me so much longer and much more broadly. Even my family has benefited."

In my class, I experienced a true career high point while teaching a TSTM lesson—students proudly and confidently presented to their peers the results of research and surveys they had completed in order to compare and contrast two possible career options. For the presenting students, the level of personalization—and therefore investment—was high, but it was also evident that the audience was motivated to benefit from their peers' presentations. Students asked question after question of the presenters, and what could have been just another dry Venn Diagram project was instead a dynamic time of higher level thinking skills and meaningful communication on display!

The TSTM pilot team continues to advise and work with the VALRC on ways to roll out TSTM to a wider audience, and we all look forward to sharing more with fellow Virginia educators. Expect to see further information, including professional development opportunities and the public launch of the TSTM Toolkit (with lessons), announced over [VAELN](#) this year. You can also learn more about Teaching the Skills that Matter at the [TSTM Virtual Conference, June 16-17](#). 



Hillary Major is the Instructional Standards and Communications Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. She works to assist Virginia adult educators as they incorporate the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education into their programs and instruction. She is a coordinator for Virginia's Teaching Skills that Matter pilot team.



What is VAELN?

VAELN (Virginia Adult Education & Literacy Network Listserv) is an electronic mailing list maintained by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. Subscribers may send messages to everyone on the list and will receive all messages sent to the list. Adult educators are encouraged to subscribe to VAELN to keep abreast of policy changes, Resource Center acquisitions, and staff development information.

Cultivating Adult Learner Leaders: Putting Research Into Practice

by Jeffrey Elmore

Here in Virginia, we're fortunate to have a strong adult education environment with a wide range of great things going on. One particularly effective element is the organization [Research Allies for Lifelong Learning](#), led by researchers Margaret Patterson, Ph.D. and Wei Song, Ph.D. Their mission is to support adult educators and learners by applying high-quality, rigorous research to adult education practice (Research Allies, 2020).

For two years, from 2014 through 2016, Dr. Patterson worked on the ALLIES project, collecting student voice and leadership data from both experimental and control groups in a range of adult education programs. In May, 2019, Turonne Hunt and Amy Rasor, doctoral candidates at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, joined Dr. Patterson to analyze the data and publish their findings. The team examined how adult education programs and practitioners facilitate the growth and development of adult learners' voices through leadership training. They published their findings as *We Are The Voice To Speak Up: Cultivating Adult Learner Voice Through Leadership*. Their paper appears in the fall [2019 leadership edition of the COABE Journal](#). After reading the paper, I wanted to learn more about their work and their ideas about how programs can put their research into practice, so we set up a Zoom meeting and chatted candidly for about an hour.

Dr. Patterson, Ms. Hunt, and Ms. Rasor observed a few key overlapping themes in programs where learner voice and leadership were actively part of the curricular goals. They found that in successful programs linguistic risk-taking was valued and supported by both the teachers and students. For those learning English as a new language, these programs created an environment where it was OK to have errors in vocabulary, grammar, and

speaking, and that these errors were seen as opportunities for growth. Getting the English right was not the goal; taking the chance and learning from mistakes was the goal. In this environment, the teachers fostered a sense of comfort and safety that extended throughout the class.

Building on open communication among students and teachers, the researchers also found that successful programs all held an atmosphere of respect and dignity for the adult students. A number of things stood out to the researchers. While the teachers in less successful programs at times treated their adult students like children, in the successful programs, the adult students were always treated as adults. The adult students were given 'voice' to be involved in decisions about instructional planning and curricular design. Every student was treated with the belief that they had both the right and the ability to be a leader. Self-direction was supported, fostered, and scaffolded, as opposed to being simply expected without any assistance from the teacher.

Third, the researchers found that laughter and humor were essential elements to creating environments where the adult learners could become comfortable finding their voices and developing as leaders. In successful programs, the researchers observed teachers and students laughing with one another as peers. Their laughter was more than simply a way to diffuse a tense situation. Instead, their laughter came from a genuine sense of comfort and humor among everyone in the class. As well, the researchers saw that effective instructors didn't need to take themselves too seriously. These instructors were able to weave humor into content and curriculum, making learning into a fun, enjoyable activity for the whole class.

Finally, the researchers observed that successful programs developed a sense of community that extended beyond the class itself. They saw that within classes, relationships were important and everyone knew one another at a personal level. Within the class, both the teacher and the students shared common goals, and everyone in the class was valued for their contributions to those goals. The sense of community didn't happen overnight, but was purposely fostered by the teacher through respect and encouragement for all of the students to participate and contribute to the class activities. Over the course of time, the researchers identified that as the learners became more confident in their voices and comfortable as leaders in the class, the teachers took increasingly indirect roles in class leadership. By the end of the project, Ms. Hunt noted that for an outside observer of one class, it might not be immediately evident who the teacher was because all of the students had assumed leadership roles.

As adult educators, we strive to make our classes places that our students want to be. We want our students to feel safe, valued, and respected as adults. We also want our students to be successful in their learning, life, and career goals. For us, instruction has to be so much more than content and teaching. By fostering voice and leadership among our students, we can build the kind of learning communities our students need. If you have questions about developing these practices in your class or program, I encourage you to be in touch with Dr. Margaret Patterson at margaret@researchallies.org. 



As the VALRC Adult Academic Programming Specialist, Jeffrey Elmore works with regional program managers and other leadership staff to implement regional professional development in accordance with local program needs and goals. Jeffrey also works with programs that have implemented the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), to train new staff and to keep existing staff current with the demands of the NEDP. Under the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) initiative, Jeffrey creates and delivers CCRS-aligned professional development for classroom instructors around the content and practices necessary for completing high school equivalency. Within this scope, his primary focus is mathematics instruction.

Learn more about Dr. Patterson's CAPE study from her June 2019 PROGRESS article: [Moving the Needle in Virginia Adult Education: Reaching One Adult at a Time](#)

Hear directly from Dr. Patterson in an [in-depth interview with Barbara Gibson at the Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Conference](#).

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<http://researchallies.org/>

Program Improvement through Adult Leadership Training

by Katherine Hansen

Are you looking for a way to cultivate adult learner leaders in your program while at the same time improving upon your program offerings? Virginia has been instrumental in piloting VALUEUSA's Leadership Training for Adult Learners based on [Margaret Patterson's award winning research](#) on student involvement in program improvement. By all accounts, this training initiative is bringing a new level of excitement and innovation to our state.

During two half-day training sessions, adult learners practice workforce readiness skills with support from program staff. Together, they outline a program's organizational structure, evaluate program strengths and needs from their perspective, identify a priority improvement need, and create a viable project plan using critical thinking and organizational skills. The plan is then implemented over the following months. This training initiative benefits learners with proven evidence of workforce skills that they can use on résumés and in job interviews. Additionally, it helps programs foster a student-centered program design, as well as offer a roadmap for long-term application that can improve recruitment and retention.

According to Marty Finsterbusch, Executive Director of [VALUEUSA](#), training creator, and adult learner himself:

Programs that have implemented what they learned through our Leadership Training report that there is a level of energy in the program not present beforehand. They also report that by working in partnership with learners for a more consumer-driven operation, learner involvement has enhanced recruitment, retention, resources, and reform.”
– VALUEUSA Leadership Training Overview

This is underscored by our Virginia adult education program staff who have participated in pilots across the state. Debbie Hamrick, Region 12 Franklin County Adult & Career Education Coordinator, shared, “What we loved about the training is that the students were empowered. The students share that they learned so much about our local program and that they feel much more confident about their educational journey!”

Their adult leader group identified outreach as their overarching program need. They named their group COACH (Coalition to Open Adult Career Horizons), with a mission of spreading the word about their adult education program. The attendees of this particular training were comprised of adult learner and community leaders. Together, they came up with ways Franklin County Adult & Career Education could partner with stakeholders to let people know about the programs they offer. They have since created flyers that were paired with takeout orders from a local restaurant and are in the process of making tabletop displays for doctor's offices, with a next step of making banners. The adult learners are not only demonstrating leadership within their program, but also becoming visible as leaders in their community.

Dr. Fontaine Ferebee-Johns of Region 20 Chesapeake Public Schools Adult & Continuing Education was enthusiastic about the experience in which her adult learners participated. “I feel that the training was very beneficial in that our students now know that they have a voice and we will act on their concerns.” The project that her adult learners identified as most pressing was to get their poorly-maintained and dangerous

parking lot repaired—aka, Project Parking Lot. Alice Graham, Region 20 Program Manager thinks, “This training is great!” She has already planned to offer the sessions to her Portsmouth adult learners and is excited to see what they come up with.

The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center is also very committed to seeing this opportunity develop and grow. Our staff has been working with VALUEUSA to design and test a train-the-trainer curriculum that we hope to roll out to all interested service providers. Moreover, VALRC manager Joanne Huebner hopes that “at some point we can even connect our Virginia adult learner leaders with one another in order to form an ever-growing and ongoing statewide coalition”.

What is VALUEUSA?

VALUEUSA is an alumni association for adult education and English literacy in the U.S. Through a grant from the [Dollar General Literacy Foundation](#), they have put together this Leadership Training for Adult Learners, which they hope to offer nationwide.

How can you be involved in this free training?

It’s simple. Just create a cohort of adult learners and teachers/administrators from your program, with a 3:1 adult learner to program personnel ratio (for about 12–20 total participants). Then, schedule, two, four-hour blocks for the training which can be consecutive days or a week apart and allow time for project implementation. This makes for a great capstone project for any PIVA or IET program. We encourage you to give it a try! 🟢



Katherine Hansen, M.Ed., serves as the Communications & Community Support Specialist for the VALRC. She is a certified TESOL instructor and Project Management Professional (PMP). Katherine’s career experience bridges the academic, nonprofit, and corporate worlds in global intercultural communications, teaching/training, and program/organization development.

Learn more about VALUEUSA and hear from adult learner leaders by watching these videos on VALRC’s YouTube channel [VALRC Richmond](#):

[What is VALUEUSA?](#) (2 min)

An excerpt from Marty Finsterbusch presenting at the Virginia Adult Education & Literacy Conference

[Hear the Voices of Adult Learners Who Have Gone Beyond: Part 1](#) (33 min)

[Hear the Voices of Adult Learners Who Have Gone Beyond: Part 2](#) (32 min)

At the Virginia AE&L Conference, adult learner leaders share their years of experience within the context of the current national adult education perspective. Through discussion, panelists and the audience explore the ways adult learners, themselves, think, as well as the long-term impact practitioners and programs have on them. This session challenges you to rethink how adult learners are engaged by the programs in which they participate with you.

[Interview with Adult Learner Leaders](#) (22 min)

Barbara Gibson follows up with the adult learner leaders at the AE&L conference with an in-depth interview.



In-class Games Help Build Students' Confidence to be Leaders

by Janet C. Sodell

Anyone who has worked with low literacy adult basic education (ABE) students for a length of time knows that we build self-esteem more than we teach reading. How do we increase students' self-confidence to start seeing themselves as the leaders we know they are? I inadvertently stumbled upon a solution as I was trying to find yet another way to review a familiar topic . . . again. I didn't realize how much impact it would have on my students' leadership skills.

Over the last year and a half, I have introduced different games in classes I teach for the [READ Center](#) in Richmond, VA. READ serves ABE students reading primarily below the sixth-grade equivalent. As I tried different types of games, I observed how the students reacted, how the games changed the class dynamics, and how the students changed themselves.

This article references several of the games I use in class. READ has added two PDFs to their website with [instructions for various games](#) and my presentation "[Games and Activities to Elevate Students to Teachers](#)." This PowerPoint, from the February 2020 Virginia Adult Education & Literacy conference, includes my students' assessments of the pros and cons of each game, my lessons learned, and suggestions of different subjects that can benefit from the game. You can find these presentations on [our website](#).

The three games that have had the biggest impact on improving my students' leadership skills are *Hot Seat*, *It Takes Two*, and *Walk This Way*. *Hot Seat* and *It Takes Two* require student interaction. *Walk This Way* can either be played individually or as a whole-class game.

The game *Hot Seat* tends to get quite boisterous as the team shouts out clues to their teammate in the "hot seat". It's a fantastic way to learn soft skills such as listening, not talking over each other, and expressing yourself succinctly. I've noticed that whole-class discussions have become calmer, with everyone more likely to wait their turn to share their opinion, and more balanced, with quieter students actively contributing to the discussion. As every student gets a turn on the "hot seat", the shyer students become more comfortable being in front of a group and projecting their voices.

It Takes Two has empowered students to politely identify when a mistake has been made and they are learning how to ask clarifying questions to help their classmates reach the correct answer. Students are now more likely to independently reach out to a classmate they see struggling and help them reach the answer on their own, rather than just give the struggling student the answer.

When done as a group activity, *Walk This Way* allows students to step into a leadership role as they organize themselves according to the goal of the game. To prevent more confident students from taking over, I'll sometimes appoint a quieter student to be the leader. This has given them the opportunity to take a chance they normally wouldn't have taken on their own—and succeed!

Each time we play one of these games, my students' self-confidence grows. They are more likely to volunteer to step up to the board, explain their position in a class discussion, and voice their opinion (with logic to support it!) about the types of things we do in class. Next step: getting students to acknowledge that they are leaders!



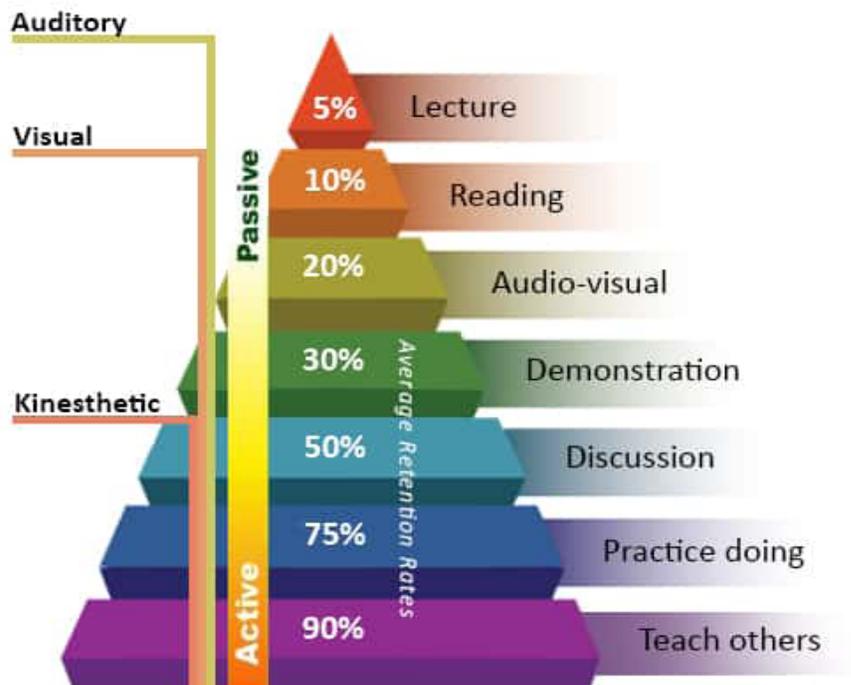
Janet Sodell, M. Ed., has been teaching low-literacy adult basic education students to read better for more than 19 years. She is a tutor trainer with The READ Center in Richmond where she also teaches three different multi-level classes. In 2019, Janet was awarded the Joan E.D. Kushnir Teacher-of-the-Year award by the Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education (VAACE).

The Learning Pyramid

In Janet Sodell's presentation, she demonstrates how the National Training Laboratory Institute of Applied Behavioral Science Learning Pyramid can be considered when utilizing games and activities in the classroom.

The Learning Pyramid or "cone of learning" illustrates the effectiveness of different types of teaching methods. It suggests that students are least likely to retain information from passive approaches like lectures and reading. On the other hand, when active learning techniques are used, such as kinesthetic practice and teaching others, students retain as much as 90% of the newly-introduced material.

Learn more about the Learning Pyramid by visiting the [Education Corner website](#).



Adapted from the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science Learning Pyramid

Leading the Charge of Distance & Blended Learning

by Sharon Hetland

In 2019, Amy Judd, program manager of Region 7, wrote an Innovation and Opportunity Grant applying for funds to develop a site plan to implement distance education. The awarded funds were used to engage in a professional learning circle with the [IDEAL Consortium](#), offer an on-site workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) class with blended learning, and implement a stand-alone distance education program for students seeking the GED® credential.

[Dr. Jen Vanek](#) of the IDEAL Consortium facilitated the course for five instructors and the regional specialist. Jen led the group through a series of webinars and online modules over the course of eight weeks. The work was intentional and delineated the essential components for an effective distance education program. Program needs were assessed, and specific strategies were defined for **recruitment, screening and learner readiness, orientation, curriculum, and assessment.**

A main factor of **recruitment** for us was to more fully utilize all social media and inform all our instructors and partner agencies. We developed a link on our website with an [online survey](#) for interested students to complete. The form goes directly to the distance education coordinator and begins the screening process as a potential student completes various digital literacy tasks.

Screening and learner readiness is key to successful distance education. Students must have access to technology on a reliable basis, have technology skills, have time to dedicate to studying on their own, be able to work independently, and be academically prepared to handle the rigor. That's a tall order!

The **orientation** process is, in many ways, a continuation of the screening process. Since there must be 12 in-person contact hours, orientation allows the instructor to meet the student, discuss goals, and start assessments.

Using [TABE Online](#) helps us see students' comfort level with technology, as well as their academic skills. In the blended learning pilot, students took a technology skills assessment in addition to [CASAS](#). During orientation, students are introduced to the software and online curriculum they will be using and get some practice with those programs.

The advice from IDEAL is to use one primary **curriculum**. This simplifies things for students, and it allows teachers to be fully versed in all the program content. Our program uses [GED® Academy](#) and [USALearns](#), and we supplement with [Kahn Academy](#) and [Stand Out](#).

Of course, we follow the state **assessment** requirements for pre- and post-testing. This sometimes means arranging to travel to the student or having another instructor closer to the student meet to do the assessment. Formative assessments are critical along the way to gauge student progress. The blended class used [Kahoot](#), [Quizlet](#), and [Google Forms](#) to aid in assessment. With distance learners, there is frequent contact between them and staff about assignments, results, and progress.

Implementation: ESL Blended Learning

The blended learning ESL class was piloted at a workplace site, Sysco. The class met for 16 weeks with employees who came to class prior to their shift. There were two instructors, and learners were divided into an lower and higher academic group. The learners used Chromebooks and the [station rotation method of blended learning](#). Lower level learners primarily used USALearns and more advanced learners used Khan Academy. The class had excellent attendance and all students made learning gains or improvements. [Student surveys](#) showed great satisfaction and the desire to continue learning. Some distance learning was completed at home, but many students expressed that they did not have time to work outside of class.

Workplace classes present unique obstacles as production needs can interfere with attendance. Technology needs can also be problematic with corporate internal firewalls and restrictions. It is critical to work through this in advance and do several “trial runs.”

Distance Education

Initial response shows that we were correct to anticipate a desire for distance education. As of March 6, we have had 112 adults submit the online survey with 67 of those starting the process and 38 following through to be assessed and start the program. The students range in age from 16 (released from compulsory education) to 67. Learners have primarily entered at EFL levels of 3 or 4, but a few learners with EFL 2 have been successful in the program. We established a requirement of five hours of work per week. The average seems to be around three hours, but those completing tests quickly are sometimes putting in six to eight hours. Twenty-six GED® test sections have been successfully completed with five GED® completers. The Distance Education Coordinator logs approximately eight hour per week in assessing, communicating, providing instruction, and documenting student contact hours and progress.

Conclusion

Jen Vanek prefaced the course with these remarks,

This is really more of a program development plan than a course. Know that this is very real, and it will feel like work, but when you are done, you will know how to implement distance learning and have the materials you need to do so.

Jen’s words could not be more accurate. We did indeed develop concrete site plans and useful materials for ESL and high school equivalency (HSE) education, but we also experienced the exhilaration of creating something new that we believed would be useful to our students and to our program. All the participants valued the process and are major stakeholders in the success of the program. ✓

Resource

[IDEAL Distance Education and Blended Learning Handbook](#)



Sharon Hetland has been in adult education for more than 20 years. She has taught GED® prep, ESL Bridge, and Workplace Readiness classes. In her role as regional specialist, she provides professional development, support, and guidance to more than 30 instructors. She served as the Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education (VAACE) President from 2013-15 and continues to advocate for adult education providers and learners.

UPDATE

Now that distance learning is the “new normal,” all programs are working hard to get students involved in online platforms. It might be helpful to use one main curriculum with which students are already familiar. This also allows instructors to help one another. This is the time to rely on the “experts” in your program. Those instructors who regularly use [Zoom](#) or [Google Classroom](#) can take the lead. One ESL class just conducted in Zoom was a joyful experience for students and teacher. They were delighted to “see” one another, and it was a comfortable and safe oasis in the midst of the COVID-19 chaos. The human connection helped those students who were feeling isolated.

We are learning now what we must do in the future with all students: determine technology access and ability when enrolling students; get **every** student in online programs and give them time to practice in class; integrate distance learning into every classroom; and investigate loaning laptops. We are all lifelong learners.



Becoming an Effective Online Learning Mentor

by Katie Bratisax

With social distancing measures in place due to COVID-19, adult education programs face many obstacles in providing remote opportunities for learners. While equitable access to technology will continue to be a challenge for programs, the skillset used to support student learning and engagement online is similar to that which is used in a traditional classroom learning environment. The main difference is the method of communication.

Being an instructor can be both challenging and rewarding. Instructors use their knowledge and experience to help learners identify short-term and long-term educational goals, set learning expectations, and establish realistic timelines. An instructor also provides guidance, lends support, and encourages their learners. These are the same skills required for online instruction.

In order to effectively teach and mentor learners in an online environment, an instructor should get comfortable with technology and ensure that they have the prerequisite technology skills (Educational Technology Cooperative, 2006). These include:

- staying up-to-date on new adult education resources and [online mentoring practices](#);
- being knowledgeable about online educational resources for their learners;

- being flexible and willing to embrace change;
- managing and monitoring students' academic progress to ensure success;
- using [effective motivational techniques](#) to keep learners active and progressing toward their stated educational goals;
- assisting learners' self-directedness and self-sufficiency through the communication of clear and challenging expectations, clear and concise instructions based on these expectations, and support for learners in meeting those expectations;
- incorporating instructional strategies to encourage active learning and participation in an online environment; and,
- understanding and responding to students with special needs in the online environment.

Another often overlooked but important issue for online teachers is that the delivery of courses is not restricted to a specific time or schedule (asynchronous). Because instruction does not start and stop at the same time for all students, time management skills are extremely important—not only for the online teacher, but also for students. Research shows that good time management skills are a major factor in learner success and that poor time management skills are given as a reason for dropping distance education courses

(Miertschin, Goodson, Stewart, 2015). Online instructors can help develop these skills by providing learners with some tips for success. For instance, they should avoid distractions, set milestones towards goals, make lists, prioritize assignments, and reward themselves for accomplishments.

Communication is another vital component to the success of online learning. It is a way to bond with learners, share information, and provide support. In a traditional classroom, instructors can not only use words and body language to help convey the material, but they can also pick up on nonverbal cues from learners on how well they understand the material. Effective online instructors can learn how to identify electronic non-verbal cues (eNVC) such as:

- how learners perceive and value time, structure their time, and/or react to time (**chronemics**) through the timing, frequency, and pace of their postings;
- a lack of communication, which is a cue for showing discontent;
- two-dimensional visuals that learners use such as emoticons, illustrations, or profile pictures, which can demonstrate feeling or depth of engagement;
- electronic style, effort, expression, and tone of the learner, which can include things like punctuation, caps, shortened/quick answers, etc., to express thoughts and/or feelings.

Successful online instructors are also able to foster virtual communication by facilitating activities that allow learners to become socially connected with their peers and instructor(s) as well as establishing group “social presence” whereby participants feel comfortable projecting their personal characteristics into the group and presenting themselves as “real” (Al Tawil, 2019).

Effective online instructors must also possess the ability to prepare quality written communications. Appropriate and effective writing not only conveys information, it

also encourages and supports learners. Additionally, to better help students, it is important that online instructors communicate in a timely and professional manner with each of their assigned online students.

A few communication examples include:

- Demonstrate responsiveness to learners by responding to emails and phone calls within a reasonable amount of time.
- Encourage and support learners becoming comfortable using electronic communications.
- Establish and observe specific times when learners may reach their online instructor via text, phone, email, or a preferred mobile app.
- Regularly monitor each learner’s completion of assignments and use of online programs, responding in a timely way with suggestions.
- Contact learners who have been inactive for a week or more via text, phone, email, or a preferred mobile app.

Learning remotely can be challenging for both the instructor and the learner. One way to manage these challenges is to define roles and responsibilities, for example, by creating an online learning contract (see example). This contract will help learners understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from their instructor with each party’s commitments being clear and concise. Another way to motivate learners is by creating certificates of achievement, which can acknowledge both short- and long-term accomplishments or even acknowledge a personal triumph.

Teaching remotely may be overwhelming and a struggle for some adult educators, especially those who enjoy the traditional classroom environment—the social interaction, the laughter, and the joy in a learner’s eye as they “get it.” It is important to remember that even though the delivery method might have changed, the connection and the bond between instructor and learner

is still there and needs to continue. One way in which instructors can share the responsibility, motivate each other, and help overcome feelings of isolation is through a professional learning community (PLC). A PLC can help online instructors work collaboratively to share expertise, improve teaching skills and knowledge, and achieve goals. I leave you with this piece of advice: "trust in yourself, trust in your co-workers, trust in your learners, and trust that you are not alone." 📌

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Learning Contracts

Self-Directed Learning: Learning Contracts

Create Contracts to Improve Communication and Reduce Anxiety

Example: Online Learning Contract

Learner Commitments

- I agree to devote a minimum of ___ hours each week to following my learning plan and complete my assigned lessons.
- I agree to make achieving my educational goals a priority in my life.
- I agree to establish regular, weekly communication with my mentor by responding promptly to my mentor's communications, contacting my mentor when I have questions or need help, and notifying my mentor if any circumstances affect my participation in the program.
- I agree to form my own educational support system by sharing my educational goals and enrollment in a distance education program with supportive family members, coworkers, teachers and/or friends.

Our Commitments

As an enrolled student in a distance education program, we agree to support you in accomplishing your educational goals by:

- > helping you make a timeline for achieving your goals,
- > creating a learning plan based on you goals and educational needs,
- > providing you with feedback every ____ (weeks/days) about your academic progress,
- > challenging and encouraging you to do you best and achieve your goals,
- > responding to all of your emails within ____ (weeks/days), and
- > helping you identify and access appropriate study materials and online resources.

The Virginia Higher Education for Incarcerated Students Consortium

by *Cyndi Finley*

How do you equitably teach students in isolation with limited resources? That question could reflect the current status of the public school systems dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic; however, this question represents the very struggle faced by educators and Department of Corrections staff across the state every day.

Background

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) reported that 70% of those who were formerly incarcerated will commit a new crime and half will return to prison within three years. "Given that about 95% of every 100 incarcerated people eventually rejoin society, it is crucial that we develop programs and tools to effectively reduce recidivism." This equates to fewer crimes, cost savings, and improved communities. IHEP reported that recidivism rates for students who participated in prison education programs were on average 45% lower than those who had not participated (Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011).

The benefits extend beyond just reductions in recidivism. The earning potential of a student with a degree is exponential. A bachelor's degree is worth more than \$1 million in lifetime earnings (Correctional Association of New York, 2009). The implications of obtaining a degree, or engaging in education and training, extend into economic development and improved communities as well.

It is widely documented that education has a positive impact on incarcerated individuals. If an individual participated in any type of correctional education program—whether it be adult basic education, GED®

preparation, college education, or vocational training—they had a 13 percentage point reduction in their risk of being re-incarcerated. And for those who participated in postsecondary education programs, college programs, their reduction in risk of reincarceration was 16 percentage points, a substantial reduction (Davis, et. al., 2013).

These reductions are estimated to amount to millions of dollars saved annually. The failure of education attainment prior to incarceration is a contributing factor to incarceration itself; higher education in prison is a chance to address those deficits.

Once released from prison, obtaining gainful employment is a top priority for educational participants. Incarcerated students increased their odds of finding employment upon release by 13 percent. The Virginia Higher Education for Incarcerated Students Consortium aims to expand efforts across the state so that incarcerated students can complete and pursue further education upon reentry.

The Consortium

Public service agencies are all too familiar with working in our respective "silos," often leading to duplication of efforts or lack of robust outcomes compared to collaborative efforts made towards the same goal. A select few working towards implementing higher education into Virginia's prison system made this fragmentation realization. Higher education exists in some prisons across Virginia and works well, but what about all prisons in Virginia?

The current landscape shows a heavy concentration of higher education programs in facilities in central Virginia but does not readily span to other parts of the state. Via a grant award from the [Laughing Gull Foundation](#) and facilitated by the [Virginia Foundation for Community College Education](#), leaders from both the Department of Corrections (VADOC) and Virginia's Community Colleges (VCCS) came together, to explore the expansion of higher education in prisons in Virginia.

The mission of the consortium is to provide equitable access to education for all Virginians, with a focus on expanding access and programs for underserved populations. The consortium has brought together key leaders and contributors from corrections and education; assessed the current landscape; and gathered interest from colleges, prisons, and partners

There are multiple barriers impacting both the implementation of higher education in prison and the students' pursuits after release. The Consortium broke down these efforts into six targeted areas on which to focus in order to develop and implement a comprehensive integrated action plan.

- **Policy and Advocacy** will address internal and external barriers, provide guidance on current policy and the development of new policy, and determine how to navigate existing measures in order to maximize benefits to VADOC, VCCS, and the students.
- **Education Pathways** will address program accessibility, student supports, credit transfers, and reentry. The pathways at each individual prison and college will differ, but gaining access to those pathways, the variety of supports the students will need to maintain equitable access to education, and the seamless transfer of students upon release are the primary focuses of the subcommittee.

- **Resources** will address funding, technology, course materials, faculty, staff, and educational resources such as libraries. Funding will continue to be a challenge, but the subcommittee will flesh out contacts and strategies to maximize efforts. Designing coursework around limited technology hiring the right staff to instruct this diverse demographic, and obtaining access to materials are crucial for successful implementation. The Consortium plans to develop guidance that will outline steps to navigate those issues.
- **Communication** will address how to communicate the Consortium message, especially the positive messaging around higher education in prisons, as well as communicating between partners.
- **Partnerships** will address how to develop and maintain partnerships within the correctional facilities and between VCCS and external partners, as well as play a critical role in the implementation of a new program.
- **Outcomes and Data** will address how to navigate assessment outcomes between two agencies, evaluate programs, and track processes.

Outlook

The recent COVID-19 epidemic has drastically changed the way we live. Its impact is not halted by four prison walls. Incarcerated individuals will also feel the impact and upon release, returning to a world with new challenges, obstacles, technology, and a new way of surviving. During this time of crisis, partners have come together to strengthen our communities, provide service to those in need, and reach out to one another to make sure people are safe and thriving. It is the work, collaboration, and dedication of these same partners that will help to expand educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals, preparing them for a whole

new world. The Consortium will lead this effort by developing and implementing a comprehensive integrated action plan, executed by partners, in order to enhance the reentry process for incarcerated students.

The Role of Adult Education

Adult education plays a huge role in this leadership effort, not only as a provider, but also as a partner. Adult educators across the state are already participating in prison education and their experience and contribution is valuable and crucial in creating a holistic approach to the Consortium efforts. By sharing both the nuances of adult education and the delivery of adult basic skills with the Consortium, adult education programs can play an integral part in this important initiative. 📍

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Cyndi Finley holds a master's degree in criminal justice from Virginia Commonwealth University and a B.S. in psychology from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. She brings more than 20 years of professional experience with local law enforcement agencies, the Richmond Family Court, and local government. Cyndi currently works as the project manager for a variety of programs within the division of Academic and Workforce Programs at Virginia's Community Colleges (VCCS) where she serves targeted demographics striving to overcome multiple barriers.

Thank you to everyone who made the 2020 AE&L Conference such a great success!



Collaboration & Partnerships: Moving Towards Maximizing Impact for CBLO & Adult Education Programs

by *Ahoo Salem*

In the fall of 2019 and as the newly appointed Executive Director of Blue Ridge Literacy (BRL), a small community-based literacy organization (CBLO) in Roanoke, Virginia, I was privileged to find myself in a position of possible collaboration with our region's adult education provider. To learn more about best practices and other partnership success stories, I reached out to several CBLOs in Virginia.

This led me to identify several important areas of collaboration based on differences in both services and resources. The most common area was referral partnerships, in which each entity makes a formal or informal referral to the other organization based on the needs of the learners. This was followed by partnerships based on sharing resources such as space, supplies, and areas of expertise. Examples of the latter include the provision of classroom volunteers, trained instructors, and teacher training workshops.

I was, however, much more interested in partnerships based on similarities of services and activities. This type of partnership can be best defined as a working relationship in which involved entities collaborate to recruit and provide services to adults to improve their literacy skills. For this type of collaboration, two pre-conditions need to be met. First is to make sure the time and location of the provided services do not result in duplication of efforts, followed by guaranteeing that the CBLO is able to meet the reporting requirements of their regional adult education provider. Among other factors, this includes CLBOs ensuring that they have the time and staff resources needed to collect and deliver intake and assessment data, as well as costs associated with CASAS and TABE tests and answer sheets.

A good starting point for initiating collaboration is to open a dialogue about the mutual benefits for both the CBLOs and adult education programs, as well as their learner-base populations. This can be followed by discussing how collaboration can create synergy, achieve reporting goals, increase access to funding opportunities, and ultimately enhance community awareness for both parties. Based on the nature of their work, each organization brings valuable characteristics to this working relationship. Over time, collaboration can help improve outcomes and accomplishments beyond what would be possible with each organization working independently. CBLOs, for example, can bring in an additional personal element from the type of relationship and trust they are able to build with learners. This sense of familiarity, in turn, creates accountability that can be used to foster higher retention rates. It also allows for the possibility of reaching out to learners through more informal channels when needed.

The current COVID-19 situation, which has put a hold on all in-person classes and programs, is a good example of the importance of these informal ties. For example, to re-establish contact with our learners after the sudden cancelation of classes, BRL staff used a wide range of communication tools, such as sending Facebook messages, calling learners' relatives, and utilizing word-of-mouth communications within communities served. This developed into chat groups for the different levels of classes that are now employed to keep in touch with learners, share community-related news and information, and plan and organize remote classes.

To complement CBLOs efforts, regional adult education providers offer a wide range of professional resources including professional development opportunities for CBLO staff, as well as assistance with data collection and reporting elements of the partnership. Most importantly, adult education programs often have access to seats for distance education tutorial services. This access is of critical importance at this moment during the pandemic when there is increased demand for moving towards remote and hybrid forms of instruction. Both sides of the partnership bring valuable opportunities for cross advertisements on different platforms, as well as among different target populations which aim to increase the reach and impact to literacy learners. Such partnerships can also be leveraged for joint grants and proposals—where a history of collaboration serves as a strong advantage point in securing funding.

Based on BRL’s relatively new experience of collaborating with our regional adult education provider, open communication, clarity, and flexibility have been key factors in maintaining a successful relationship. Having a clear understanding of the reporting requirements and the extent of each party’s responsibilities—in terms of collecting and tracking data and ensuring an adequate budget for staffing—requires open dialogue. As the two organizations move into their working relationship, shifting conditions and requirements may arise. Establishing clear communications and being adaptive to change help facilitate a smooth and successful partnership.

As literacy providers navigate the new conditions of remote teaching, social distancing, and limited in-person contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly important to work towards collaboration based on similarities of services to achieve the greatest impact in local communities. 📍



Ahoo Salem is the Executive Director of Blue Ridge Literacy (BRL), a CBLO that offers adult literacy services to foreign and native-born residents of Roanoke Valley. As a sociologist with a passion for integration initiatives, Ahoo is especially interested in the ways in which differential access to resources shapes and impacts experiences of everyday life for immigrants in different host settings. She utilizes her experiences to create cross sectional partnerships and collaborations with community partners to address the functional literacy needs of BRL’s learners. Originally from Iran, Ahoo holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Universita Degli Studi di Milano, in Milan, Italy. She has been living in the U.S. and working with Blue Ridge

Join the conversation!

[Virginia Community-Based Literacy Organization \(CBLO\) Forum](#)

A platform for CBLOs in Virginia and neighboring areas to share information about available resources and ongoing activities.

A Career Pathway for Adult Educators

by Marjorie Lampkin

We all talk about and emphasize career pathways for our adult learners, but what about for ourselves? Do you aspire to move toward leadership in your adult ed program? Have you ever considered what that pathway might look like?

In 2000, I entered the world of adult education as a part-time instructor for the Northern Neck Adult Education Program. Career pathways was not a buzzword at the time, but unbeknownst to me, I was stepping onto my adult education career pathway. Twenty years later, I find myself in the position of leading the adult education/workforce development initiative in the Northern Neck at Rappahannock Community College, where I serve as the coordinator for the Office of Career and Transition Services. And, yes, that includes serving as the program manager for adult education. Taking advantage of training and growth opportunities that presented along the way allowed for progression along a career pathway in adult education and leadership.

If you are looking to advance on your adult education career pathway and enhance your leadership opportunities, you may want to focus on the following.

Seek out formal education opportunities.

Explore the many certification and degree programs in the field of adult education. The Adult Education Certification program through Virginia Commonwealth University was instrumental for me in gaining knowledge of the theories and principles that drive adult education programming. This certification allowed the addition of an adult education endorsement to my teaching license.

Take advantage of informal education and training opportunities.

Join professional organizations and take advantage of the many trainings that they offer. Some suggestions are [LINCS](#), [VAACE](#), [COABE](#), [NAWDP](#), and [Workforce GPS](#). Attend the conferences made available through VDOE, VALRC, and VCCS. Stay up-to-date on the most current resources available through the VALRC website. (As an added bonus, these trainings can be used to renew your teaching license.)



Participate in as many local organizations and boards as possible.

Staying connected to your community is essential to being a successful leader. Staying connected allows you to gather resources for your adult ed students, as well as share the benefits of your programs throughout the community. Several suggested organizations and boards include the local Workforce Development Board, resource councils, re-entry councils, Career & Technical Education (CTE) advisory councils, Boys & Girls Clubs, chambers of commerce, the Workforce Development Board (WDB) Business Services team, and Community Services Boards.

Develop strong partnerships.

Partnerships allow for leveraging of resources and expertise and collectively providing the most comprehensive services to the citizens of our communities. A few suggested partnerships include WIOA Title I providers, Department of Social Services (DSS), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funded programs, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), local planning district commissions, and economic development boards.

As you progress along your career pathway, intentionally develop characteristics of a good leader. Always have a *vision* for yourself, your students, your teachers, and your program. Articulate your vision clearly and often; let your vision be the primary motivator that keeps you focused on future outcomes. Develop *relationships* with your team and assure that they have the tools and resources needed to be successful. Create an *environment* that allows for your team members to be heard, contribute in decision-making, and share accountability. *Value* each team member and make it a priority to assist them as they grow professionally and become successful; successful team members make for a successful team. Keep the lines of *communication* open and lead with *integrity* to establish your

credibility. Lastly, but certainly not least, be a “*change agent*.”

Our 2020 adult ed programs are overshadowed by COVID-19, which has imposed on us a change that brings with it a tremendous sense of urgency. We have been thrust into a “new normal” that we did not expect and certainly do not understand. We must be innovative and take this opportunity to focus on how we will have better and stronger programs as a result. The necessity to develop different avenues of teaching and connecting with our students has left us with no other choice but to be flexible and creative as we adapt to change. As change agent leaders, we know that change is continual and inevitable and therefore we must develop a strategic agility that embraces change. Focusing on the positive impact we have on the students we serve gives us the courage to step forward into a change that will undoubtedly impact the way we conduct adult education programs in the future. It is said that leadership is forged in times of adversity; accept this current situation as an opportunity to forge your leadership skills! 📌



Marjorie Lampkin serves as the Coordinator for Career and Transition Services at Rappahannock Community College where she administers the LWDA XIII WIOA Title I Adult & Dislocated Worker and Youth programs, POWER-UP-a cohort based career readiness program, and serves as the Adult Education Program Manager for Region 17. She has dedicated her career to educating and improving the lives of residents of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula through working locally in various areas in education and workforce development, including K-12, adult education, higher education, and WIOA Title I.

From the VDOE



The Importance of Staying in Touch

Thank you to everyone who has risen to the challenges that the COVID-19 outbreak has presented. We are so impressed with how adult education programs and instructors are working to provide continuity of learning for students. Your efforts support students and families in Virginia who are also grappling with new and often frightening realities. We are so grateful for all the outreach and support you have provided and the creativity and energy that you have demonstrated to find new ways to reach and teach your students. And even though the “new normal” arrived suddenly, the adult education community responded quickly and is offering a lifeline for students to prepare for what’s next in their careers.

Take care of yourselves and your families, and stay in touch with your colleagues!

Stay in touch with the Virginia Department of Learning:

- [Sign up](#) for newsletters and bulletins
- Check the VDOE COVID-19 [web page](#)

Stay in touch with the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center:

- [Teaching & Learning Online](#)

This online forum is a space for sharing resources, asking questions, and discussing how we work with adult learners at a distance. VALRC invites all instructors and adult education practitioners to share their experiences and strategies for working with their learners on the forum. Visit often and join in on the discussion! (You may need to sign up for a free account to post.)

Led by Kate Daly Rolander & Hillary Major using Padlet.

- [Virginia Community-Based Literacy Organization \(CBLO\) Forum](#)

A platform for CBLOs in VA and neighboring areas to share information about available resources and ongoing activities. Led by Elizabeth Severson-Irby using Schoology.

- [PLC on Improving Reading Instruction in Print Skills](#)

This professional learning community (PLC) has the same information as Foundations of Reading: Print Skills course; it is just presented in a slightly different manner. It is also a companion to the Foundations of Reading: Meaning Skills online course. Participants will attend a virtual meeting each week where the group will discuss the weekly content and assignments.

Led by Elizabeth Severson-Irby & Nancy Coggeshall. 

2020 PROGRESS CALENDAR

APR

27 Registration begins for [Professional Learning Community \(PLC\) on Improving Reading Instruction in Print Skills](#) Facilitated Online Course



MAY

13 [AAACE 2020 Annual Conference - Call for Proposals Deadline](#)

14–24 JUN [Professional Learning Community \(PLC\) on Improving Reading Instruction in Print Skills](#) Facilitated Online Course

JUN

16–17 [Teaching Skills that Matter Project](#)



AUG

16–19 [COABE](#), Baltimore, MD



OCT

15–17 [SETESOL](#), (Will go virtually if necessary) Richmond, VA

19–21 [NCFL](#), Dallas, TX

27–30 [AAACE 2020 Conference](#), Reno, NV

**All activities are still scheduled as of the date of publication.*