

# PROGRESS

A publication of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center



## Bridging the Vision

by Joanne Huebner

### The Path Forward

Get out your note-taking device of choice—this issue is packed with resources and information to help you innovate and your adult learners excel! As I read through these articles, I was overcome with a strong sense of pride and admiration for the many individuals who demonstrate that adult education is leading the way on the path forward from the pandemic's long road. While no one expects adult educators to shoulder the entire responsibility for shaping the future of workforce development, you play a vital role

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April 2021 Bonus Issue  
Volume #31, No. 3

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# PROGRESS



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# VCU

>>>Continued from p.1

in helping adult learners of every socioeconomic and literacy level work through these difficult circumstances and bring out their best. The contents of this issue can support you in doing just that.

At the heart of this issue are three central themes—civics education, financial literacy, and health literacy—that align with three of the five main focus areas of Teaching the Skills that Matter (TSTM). The Skills That Matter are the foundational skills needed for an adult learner to function effectively within the workforce and civic and community life. Teachers and program managers will find instructional ideas, digital resources, websites with free materials, lesson planning and learning activities, and partnership exemplars that highlight how teaching these skills enables adults to function effectively, locate and obtain information, and make informed and critical decisions about one's self-sufficiency, stability and well-being, and one's family and community.

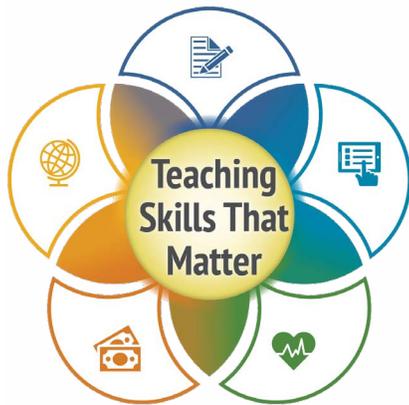
Learner insights and stories while implementing TSTM Toolkit lessons—*Eating Healthy on a Budget* (p. 34), *Finding Health Information on the Internet* (p.17), *Social Change* (p. 41), and *Cash Flow* (p. 32)—inspire ideas about creating contextualized, project-based, and problem-based instruction. Leslie Bradner, an adult education instructor from Region 13/14, created a ten-week online personal finance class open to adult students **and** the community incorporating free resources from the *Economic Empowerment Curriculum* by Cheryl Ayers (p. 25). The HEAL Program®, through Literacy for Life, offers classes to adults with low health literacy, provides training for medical staff that raises awareness of low health literacy along with practical tools and strategies for working with patients, and offers a path to become a licensed HEAL Complete provider (p. 11). Anne Dugger and Mari Hunt Wassink created a citizenship course that “can and will (and is designed to!) challenge us to rethink our history and to understand better the issues facing us today.” (p.43). These are but a few of the examples found within these pages.

Organizational change in education is often preceded by an action-forcing event (think Sputnik). A year ago we were scrambling, but we quickly began designing and implementing programs and services differently. And we are doing this with an equity lens. Adult educators are risk takers—we have to be! Thank you to this issue's contributors who clearly demonstrate how to surround others with support and enable success. 

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*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.*

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For the past two years, several educators across the state have worked on learning about [Teaching the Skills that Matter \(TSTM\)](#) and incorporating lessons from the toolkit into their classrooms. TSTM focuses on using three instructional approaches to teach nine essential skills in five critical content areas. In this issue of **PROGRESS**, a few instructors share how they integrated lessons from the TSTM toolkit into their classrooms including learner highlights and lesson adaptations, modifications, and extensions. [The toolkit](#) is available online and is ready to use. We, at VAL-RC, plan to provide more training on the toolkit during 2021-2022, so stay tuned for more information. For now, [explore the toolkit](#) and contact Hillary Major ([hmajor@vcu.edu](mailto:hmajor@vcu.edu)) or Elizabeth Severson-Irby ([seversonirea@vcu.edu](mailto:seversonirea@vcu.edu)) with any questions. To read a more in-depth article about TSTM, please see the [April 2020 issue of PROGRESS](#) (pp.11-12).

# 2021 AE&L CONFERENCE REMIX

Come experience and share in the achievements of ten teams providing actionable solutions for Virginia adult educators.



2021 Adult Education & Literacy Conference  
ReMix

## Team Challenge Showcase

April 14 & 15

### Keynote Speaker DJ Enferno



DJ Enferno has been a music professional since 1991 & has performed for over 3 million people in 36 countries including touring with Madonna in the 2008-2009 Sticky & Sweet World Tour. Bring your creativity, collaboration, & communication skills to DJ Enferno's interactive session as he leads us in an online state-wide team building experience—*Connecting to Create Emotion & Inspire Action*.

It's not too late to [register for the showcase!](#)



Visit the [AE&L conference website](#) to view recordings of any plenary sessions you may have missed.



# Gaining Health Literacy Through Adult Education

by Dr. Dana L. Ladd



**H**ealthy People 2030 (n.d.) defines health literacy as, “the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others” (unpaged). Health literacy skills help people navigate all aspects of the healthcare system—making an appointment, wayfinding in a hospital, taking medications safely, reading and filling out consent forms, understanding nutrition labels, prevention and screening, and managing chronic health conditions. The underlying skills people need to perform these healthcare demands include reading, writing, listening, speaking, numeracy, and the ability to critically analyze information.

Though having health literacy skills is important, only 12 percent of adults in the United States have health literacy proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Anyone can be at risk for having low health literacy, but risk factors for having low health literacy include: age (over 65), race (other than White), education level (below high school), income level (at or below pover-

ty), language/cultural background (first language other than English), and health status (those reporting low health status).

Adult educators can play an integral role in addressing the health disparities of adult learners by integrating curriculum that improves adult learners’ health literacy skills.

Working with students in adult education classes represents an important opportunity to reach out directly to people who face health disparities. Helping students to develop skills that can be applied to a health context is an important step toward improving outcomes for our students and families. (Soricone et al.)

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Adult educators already focus on teaching literacy and numeracy skills to adult learners. Adult educators can incorporate lessons on completing health forms, making appointments, and navigating a health appointment. Numeracy education can incorporate training to help adults understand how to read food labels and understand portion sizes, understand medication dosages and instructions, and understand health risks.

Communication and information literacy are both important health literacy skills for patients to possess. The skills below focus on improving adult learners' communication and information literacy skills which can benefit adult learners and improve their ability to make informed decisions about their health.

**Adult learners should develop communication skills so they can communicate clearly with their health care providers.** Adult learners should be encouraged to ask healthcare providers questions about all aspects of their health. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (2021) encourages patients to ask their healthcare providers three important questions:

1. What is my main problem?;
2. What do I need to do?; and
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Tools and documents designed by health literacy experts can be found at [Ask Me 3: Good Questions for Your Good Health | IHI - Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#). Similarly, the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#) (n.d.) encourages patients to ask questions about their health and provides example questions patients can ask, and contains a free

[question builder toolkit](#) on its website. Adult learning instructors can also access free materials and videos on the website to use during healthcare communication instructional sessions.

Nothing has highlighted the need for critical evaluation skills more than the infodemic

brought on by the massive amount of information being circulated about COVID-19 and vaccines. **Adult learners need the ability to evaluate health information in order to learn how to identify misinformation.** Adult educators can teach learners how to assess health information for credibility using the following evaluation criteria: authorship, accuracy, bias, and currency. Educators can use [Evaluating Internet Health Information: A Tutorial from the National Library of](#)

[Medicine \(medlineplus.gov\)](#), a free evaluating health information tutorial, to teach learners to evaluate health information before using it to make health decisions. Adult learners may also improve adult learners' evaluation skills by having learners practice their evaluation skills to critically evaluate health websites for reliability.

In addition to evaluating consumer health information, **adult learners should also know where they can access reliable consumer health information.** Patients need access to reliable health information written at a level they can read and understand so they can make decisions about their health. [Medline-Plus.gov](#) provides consumer-level health information written in easy-to-read language and provides audiovisual material. The site is also beneficial for those whose first language is a language other than English. MedlinePlus

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**Adult Educators can teach learners how to assess health information for credibility using the following evaluation criteria: authorship, accuracy, bias, and currency.**

provides [health information in many languages on a variety of topics](#). Adult learners can access MedlinePlus to find health information on a variety of topics. Educators can provide adult learners with a demonstration of the MedlinePlus website and emphasize it as a place for free, reliable health information.

Having health literacy skills is important for everyone so they can navigate the healthcare system and make informed decisions about their health. The communication and information skills outlined above, along with enhancing literacy and numeracy training to focus on health-related tasks, can help adult learners improve their health literacy skills. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (Sorcione et al., 2007) provides a guidebook, [Health Literacy in Adult Basic Education](#) that contains a more comprehensive list of skills and suggestions for integrating health literacy into the adult learning curriculum. This guidebook provides additional skills that are important for adult learners and includes lesson plans to teach many of these skills. By integrating these health literacy skills into the adult learning curriculum, adult educators can effectively work to decrease health disparities by improving the health and well-being of adult learners. 🟢



**Dana L. Ladd M.S., Ph.D., AHIP** is the Health and Wellness Librarian at the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Medical Center Health and Wellness Library and is an associate professor on the faculty of VCU Libraries. Dr. Ladd has worked in libraries for more than twenty years and has extensive consumer health information, health literacy, and plain language communication experience. She manages the daily operations of the Health and Wellness Library; supervises and trains staff; provides consumer health information services for patients, their family members, and the public; and teaches health information classes.

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WIN NETWORK

## VITAL CONDITIONS FOR WELL-BEING

Vital conditions are properties of places and institutions that all people need to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. We encounter them on day one and depend on them every day of our lives. They also persist over generations.



# Lifelong Learning: A Key to Creating Healthier Communities

by Aaron Boush

Most of us have a pretty good idea of what good health looks like—and what it doesn't. But the picture of health is made up of more than just what you eat, how much exercise you get, and whether or not you visit the doctor. Did you know that income, housing, stress, transportation—even what zip code you live in—all play a part in your health and well-being?

The conditions in which you are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age affect a wide range of health outcomes and risks. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) breaks these down into four groups:

- **Health Behaviors:** Alcohol and Drug Use, Diet and Exercise, Sexual Activity, Tobacco Use, Others
- **Clinical Care:** Access to Care, Quality of Care

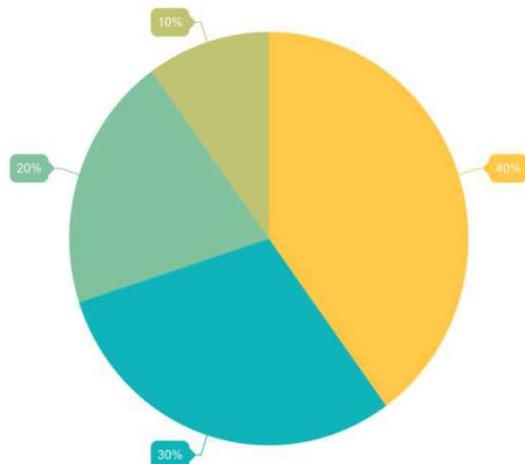
- **Social and Economic Factors:** Community Safety, Education, Employment and Social Support, Income

- **Physical Environment:** Air and Water Quality, Housing, Transit

While all of these components influence your health, they are not all weighted equally. It may surprise you to learn that the services doctors and hospitals provide have a much smaller impact than personal, social, economic, and environmental factors! Known as social determinants of health, these are what really matter most to your health. According to RWJF, social determinants account for 80 percent of what it takes to stay healthy, while clinical care only accounts for about 20 percent.

Taking a closer look, social and economic factors account for 40% of your overall

# WHAT INFLUENCES HEALTH?



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

- Social & Economic (40%)
- Health Behaviors (30%)
- Clinical Care (20%)
- Physical Environment (10%)



health. Education and income are the two most important pieces here, such as whether or not you graduated high school and whether you live in poverty. Your personal health behaviors matter too, at 30%—whether you smoke, eat healthy, exercise, or use risky substances or alcohol. Finally, your physical environment accounts for 10%, such as the quality of air in your home, lead poisoning, mold, secondhand smoke, or the safety of your home.

The picture becomes more complex when you consider each of these layers. How do you make sense of it all? If we really want to create healthier communities, we have to think more broadly and extend our reach outside of the four walls of our clinics and hospitals.

At Carilion Clinic Community Health and Outreach, we provide opportunities for better health in a variety of ways—including health education. Our programs share information, tools, and resources to empower those in our region to take steps to improve their health. This encourages lifelong learning: a vital condition of well-being. According to the [Well-Being in the Nation \(WIN\) Network](#), vital conditions of well-being are properties of places and institutions that we all need all the time to reach our full potential, such as food, humane housing, and access to meaningful work. Education is key to ensuring everyone—regardless of background or ability—can con-

tinue learning, growing, and thriving through life. Understanding all of the different factors that impact our health can help us make good decisions for ourselves, our families, and our communities. To learn more about our health education programs, [visit our website](#) and [join our Facebook Group!](#) We also offer *Easy Health*, a guide for community health resources that includes many listings for adult education opportunities. The digital [Spring 2021 issue](#) is available online now. 📄



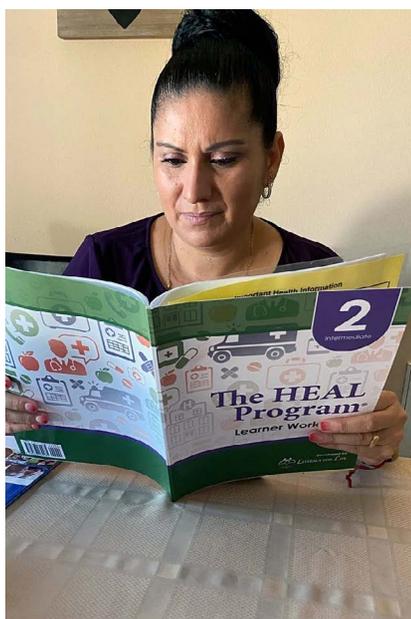
**Aaron Boush** is Director for Carilion Clinic Community Health and Outreach, overseeing Carilion's systems-wide community health assessment projects, community benefit, grants, peer support, community health workforce, and health education programs. He graduated from James Madison University with a bachelor of science in health service administration and received his master of healthcare administration from Jefferson College of Health Sciences. Aaron is a member of the Board of Directors at the Presbyterian Community Center in Southeast Roanoke City and at Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. He also serves in leadership roles and on various committees for Healthy Roanoke Valley, the Central Virginia Healthcare Executives Group, and the Radford University Carilion Healthcare Management Advisory Board.

# The HEAL Program<sup>®</sup>: Addressing Health Literacy through Classes for Adults

by Fiona Van Gheem

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**Low health literacy affects more adults than obesity, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer combined!**



The stories are many, and often harrowing. A mother could not read the instructions on her baby’s formula and diluted it improperly. The baby nearly died of malnutrition. A young woman did not understand her doctor’s explanation of a hysterectomy but signed the consent form anyway. After the surgery, she was shocked when she realized that she would be unable to have children. A man seemed disoriented during his GED<sup>®</sup> class. He told his teacher that he had just started a new medication, but he did not know the name of the medicine, why he was taking it, or what its side effects might be.

An estimated thirty-five percent of all adults in the U.S. do not have the ability to understand basic health information and services. People with low health literacy are more likely to skip preventative care—because they do not understand its importance, or they dread being presented with forms they cannot complete or information they do not understand. They enter the health care system when they are sicker and utilize emergency services at a disproportionate rate. They are more likely to have chronic conditions and less likely to manage them effectively. They are unable to make appropriate healthcare decisions and are significantly more likely to report their health as poor.

Understanding medical terms, instructions, and procedures is critical not only for these adults, but also for the children and other family members in their care.

[Literacy for Life](#), a literacy organization serving adults in Greater Williamsburg, designed the [HEAL Program<sup>®</sup>](#) to address this issue of low health literacy. HEAL classes provide instruction at three levels for English language learners: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. The Advanced level can also be delivered to native English speakers. A class consists of eight ninety-minute lessons, usually offered once a week for eight weeks. Learners receive student workbooks

at their appropriate level and trained instructors follow detailed lesson plans. In response to COVID-19, lessons have been adapted for remote, online delivery.

Participants learn to:

- Read and understand medication labels
- Ask questions of medical staff
- Read and interpret food labels
- Identify healthy lifestyle changes
- Understand and complete medical forms
- Know when to access primary care, urgent care, or the emergency room
- Understand advance medical directives
- Advocate for themselves and their families

The HEAL Program®, which received ProLiteracy's Award for Innovation and Collaboration, has been proven to increase learners' confidence and knowledge related to health and healthcare.



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Participants rave about the program:



***I have lost 11 pounds and I am thrilled! My cardiologist was very happy with my weight loss.***

**—Geraldine**

***When I feel sick, I don't panic and call 9-1-1. I take a deep breath, check my sugar, calm down, and then call the doctor.***

**—Linda**

***I am able to ask questions to doctors and nurses to make sure I understand.***

**—Monde**

***My medicine was making me dizzy. HEAL class taught me to read the label, and [I] learned that I should always take it with food.***

**—Silvia**





Literacy for Life initially piloted The HEAL Program® internally and in the local Williamsburg area. Since then, 17 licensed providers have implemented the program in six states. We are pleased to announce that obtaining a HEAL license is now an approved expense for Adult Education and Literacy Programs in Virginia! Literacy for Life is currently offering the license and training at a discounted rate for any state-funded programs who have an interest. We are excited that even more adults across Virginia will have the opportunity to benefit from this important, potentially life-saving program. To find out more, contact Fiona at [fvangheem@wm.edu](mailto:fvangheem@wm.edu). 📍

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*Fiona Van Gheem's teaching and management experience in education includes Pre-K, elementary schools, adult education, and most recently—Literacy for Life, a community-based literacy organization (CBLO) in Williamsburg, Virginia. She has been part of the team developing The HEAL Program® for the past nine years where she oversees local HEAL classes as well as the development of new content, training, and support for HEAL licensees.*

## Blue Ridge Literacy Taking Action!



Learn about how this Roanoke community-based literacy organization is collaborating with Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine students to provide health literacy classes using The HEAL Program®! [Read their program brochure.](#)

# RE-INVENTING HEALTH LITERACY

by Phil Cackley

*“Health Literacy is a crucial need for adult ESOL learners—during the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever.”*

When teachers at the [Arlington Education and Employment Program \(REEP\)](#)

moved English as a Second Language (ESL) classes online last spring, they re-invented health literacy lessons to reach learners connecting via video conference. The COVID-19 lockdown arrived in March 2020 with little warning, sending students and teachers home. Within weeks, the program moved instruction to Zoom and staff set about adapting instruction to a virtual environment.

The basics of what REEP teachers do for health literacy remains relatively unchanged from in-person classes. But the new online delivery mode for instruction has meant web tools are being adapted for use in class—with great success.

REEP’s ESL Curriculum for Adults is the cornerstone of how teachers help learners improve their English that is needed when they or family members navigate the U.S. health care system. Health is one of 12 possible units that can be taught in a 12-week intensive class term. Teachers conduct a needs assessment with each new group of learners so that it is possible to concentrate on four or five subject areas—health almost always makes the cut.

“We start with a foundation of vocabulary,” explained intermediate-level teacher Ellen Clore-Patron. “Students have previous knowledge and we build on that.” Over top of that foundation, learners work with grammar structures and extended dialogues to practice the oral language needed in situations where they are health consumers, she said. Reading and writing practice are integrated, as well.

At beginning levels, the vocabulary is very basic—learning to recognize terms for body parts, basic illnesses and inju-

ries, and key verbs to create short sentences. Beginning-level teacher Stacy Clark collected numerous images from the Internet that she shares with students in a Zoom class via PowerPoint slide decks. Getting learners to use pantomime to express health problems and then moving to short pair practices keeps the learning interactive and engaging.

“We have labeled flash cards and unlabeled flash cards. We spend a lot of time with have and has,” Clark said.

In addition to covering objectives focused on explaining health problems to a medical provider, teachers cover material related to nutritious food and healthy lifestyle choices; completing medical history forms; understanding medication labels; and identifying healthcare resources in the community.

While Zoom classes make it harder to cover some objectives—Clark said it has been tough understanding medicine labels without actual pill bottles (realia)—in other cases, the virtual environment has offered opportunities to use digital tools.

[Quizlet](#) vocabulary reviews can be shared with students via communication apps (such as WhatsApp or Telegram) for out-of-class homework. Google forms can give Angie Greene’s beginning-level learners practice filling out medical history forms.

“The students practice radio buttons, check boxes, and drop-down menus as a way to target the health objective *and* digital literacy,” Greene said. She gives her learners invented patient profiles to work with so that students are not being asked to share their private health history.

[Flipgrid](#), a video sharing web tool, has been a favorite digital choice for Clore-Patron with her intermediate-level classes. She guides her learners to create and post short videos on several different topics, including nutrition, home remedies, and end-of-unit reflections. She sets up user accounts

for each student on her class account (“It doesn’t take nearly as long as you’d think.”) and the final products can be viewed by classmates, not by the public. (Several students gave permission, however, to share their work with the public and [REEP has posted these to social media.](#))

“It usually takes a good four days to get through it,” Clore-Patron said. Students write to a prompt one night, to use as a script; do revisions from teacher feedback (on [Screencastify](#), the video screen recorder on Chrome) the next night; followed by instruction and practice sessions on Flipgrid on an easily accessible topic (such as what’s your favorite food); with the final night devoted to producing the video. She tries to have one of her classroom volunteers available to do troubleshooting, one-on-one, with students who may be struggling with the technology.

Some of the learners need more time to complete the assignment, meaning it gets pushed into the weekend and done as homework. The final product helps both the student and teacher—Clore-Patron can assess the writing ability of the students and their level of oral production while learners boost their confidence and get a sense of accomplishment at creating a video in their second language.



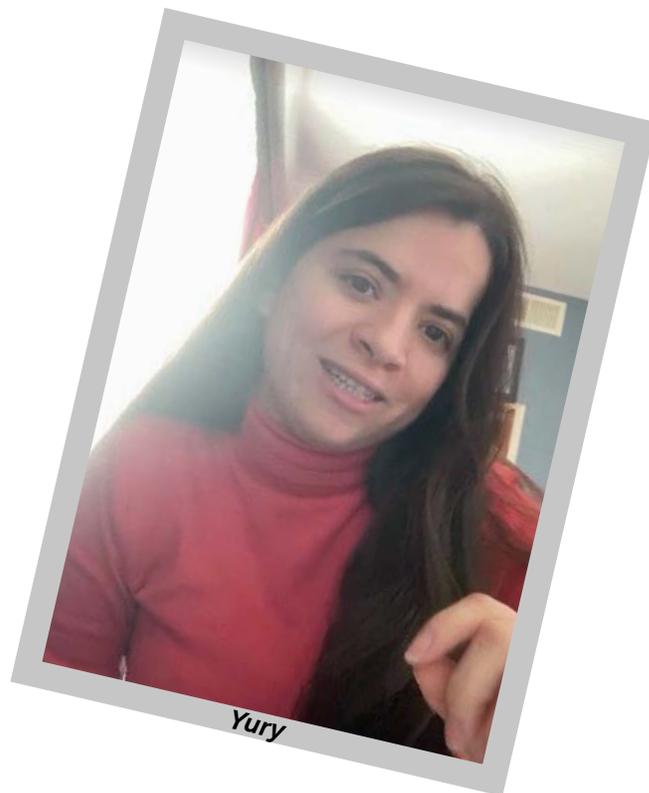
"There's this sense of independence—'Teacher, I did it!'" Clore-Patron said.

The most recent iteration of the Flip-grid project required students to reflect on what they had learned in the Health unit and how they expected to use the new language. You can view some of the results [from REEP student Yury](#) and from [Alejandro](#) who was a doctor in his home country.

Health literacy is a crucial need for adult ESL learners—during the COVID-19 pandemic, "now more than ever," as Yury said—and REEP teachers continue to develop effective ways of delivering instruction to help their students be successful. 🟢



*Phil Cackley has taught at REEP, the Arlington Education and Employment Program, part of Arlington Public Schools, since 1991. During this time, he has taught every level from low-beginning to advanced. For the past 15 years, he has also been one of the program's instructional coordinators, supporting teachers and overseeing one of REEP's two main sites.*

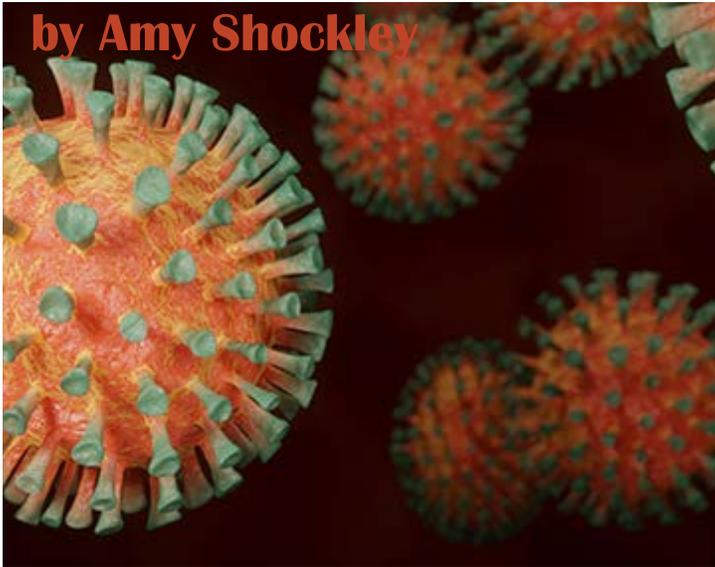


[Access the REEPworld Health Pages](#), a free English practice website for adult ESL students and teachers.



# Our Role as COVID-19 Increases Health Literacy Problems

by Amy Shockley



Health literacy has become a buzzword phrase among everyone from physicians to teachers because our collective health illiteracy has become so appalling. Professionals say this problem has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as panic and half-truths proliferate throughout the country. As it turns out, some among us don't understand the poor health decisions they make and experts say it has become a national public health problem. That's because there's a clear link between poor health literacy and poor health.

For many, it is hard to imagine being in the dark about one's health condition or not understanding the basics of nutrition or exercise. But the examples proliferate. Maybe someone doesn't have the ability, curiosity, or interest to seek the knowledge to make good health decisions. Maybe they are intimidated in front of doctors and nurses, and hesitate to ask questions. Perhaps they don't understand food labels or prescription instructions. Some likely feel items like sunscreen are an inconvenience. Others could be modest, and unlikely to tell a doctor about pain or discomfort. And everybody can probably agree that navigating a healthcare system or health insurance can sometimes be difficult and maddening.

But shining a light on health literacy and facilitating a greater understanding of health-related actions and decisions could be the difference between life and death. That's why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created a "[National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy](#)," with a goal of equipping society to better handle its healthcare issues. It aims to accomplish this feat by ensuring access to good health information, providing "person-centered" explanations, and supporting lifelong learning about personal health.

The issue of health literacy is blind to race, nationality, gender, or educational levels, but according to the action plan, it "disproportionately affects lower socioeconomic and minority groups" (p. 1). Some facts and examples of health illiteracy are especially startling. The action plan cites U.S. Department of Education data showing that only 12 percent of the country's English-speaking adults have "proficient health literacy skills" (p. 4). In fact, last year the Centers for Disease Control had to reaffirm warnings against rinsing food in bleach to guard against COVID-19 (Glicksman, 2020). In another example, a library asked its patrons to stop heating books in microwave ovens to kill coronavirus germs after too many burned, blackened pages, according to a report from a Chicago television station (Nextstar Media Wire, 2020).

What are some ways adult educators can develop health literacy in the people we serve? The action plan suggests these strategies:

- Support community-based programs that empower people to be more involved and active in health and teaching skills, such as computer use, to assist people in acquiring credible health information.
- Infuse health literacy skills into curricula for adult literacy, ESOL, and family literacy programs.

- Facilitate collaborations among the adult literacy and ESOL communities; health care partners; and community-, faith-, and academic-based organizations.
- Include high school, college, and professional school students in health literacy programs to bridge cultural and generational divides.
- Collaborate with medical librarians to create health information centers in public libraries.
- Train more librarians and reference staff in health literacy skills and health information technologies so they can help to build the health literacy skills of patrons.
- Create opportunities for health education and learning in communities through creative uses of technology and multimedia.
- Provide professional development in health education topics and skills for those teaching adult literacy, ESOL, and family literacy programs.

In addition to these strategies, it is important to contextualize health literacy subject matter when opportunities present themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic offers unique ways for contextualization to take place. Region 22's adult education program consists of Accomack and Northampton counties on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and is a rural area with Internet challenges. Being located on the campus of Eastern Shore Community College has been an asset during the COVID-19 pandemic because in-person classes have been permitted to meet. All students coming on campus have to sign in and complete a daily health assessment. This process has made health literacy very relevant for students and instructors, since health is addressed daily. The daily health assessment has prompted conversations with learners about when to get tested for COVID-19 and when to see a doctor. Instructors have used news articles about COVID-19, the vaccines, and other related stories in both in-person and online classes. Using news stories is a way to engage learners in relevant information that can benefit them and their families.

"Improving health literacy—that is, the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions—is key to the success of our national health agenda" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. iii). Adult education programs are instrumental in meeting this objective. 📍

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Health literacy has always been important for our adult learners, but with the COVID-19 pandemic it has become essential. The [Teaching the Skills that Matter toolkit](#) (TSTM) highlights health literacy as one of its content areas, providing lessons such as finding health information on the Internet, understanding the meaning of good health, and recognizing the cost of smoking (For more information about TSTM, see the [April 2020 issue of PROGRESS](#) (pp.11-12)).

Building on the TSTM lesson, [finding health information on the internet](#) and utilizing project-based learning, my students and I created a health-related [project-based learning experience](#). The goal of the project was to gather information on a health related topic, organize it onto a poster, and present the information during a showcase. I did this project with intermediate English language learners (ELLs), but this project could also work with advanced ELL students or in an ABE or GED® classroom.

I began the project by breaking my learners into groups of about five to six and giving them a survey of the different roles within the group; such as group leader, researcher, and graphic designer. The survey allowed me to help them choose roles in which they felt comfortable and created a teachable moment for me to touch upon self-awareness, one of the nine (9) skills that matter. Once the groups were formed and roles were established, the groups chose a topic from a provided list or proposed one of their own.

For two weeks, the learners spent about 30 minutes each class gathering information, deciding on images and text for the poster, and putting the posters together. As has often been the case when I do project-based learning, my students took over the reins and showed great initiative. For example, I did not assign any specific homework for this project, but many learners chose to gather information outside of class. While I provided some basic supplies, the learners took ownership of their final poster and many brought in supplies from home. One learner even reused a tri-fold poster board from a project their child completed for school.

## Teaching Skills that Matter through Health-related Project-based Learning Experience

*by Lyle Ring*

*“Doing the project made me feel like I could do hard things in English.”*

*“I am more confident.”*

*“I learned from my classmates, not only the teacher.”*

*“I had to communicate with people in English.”*

Their final poster needed to include: an explanation of the topic and why it is important; some graphics or visual images; a Frequently Asked Questions section; websites with more information; and local resources with phone numbers or addresses. Each group presented their poster during a showcase and we invited other adult ELL classes to come explore each poster. Even though the presentations were given in English, one learner suggested using their home language to help explain more complex vocabulary to those with lower English proficiency. Using multiple languages, all the attendees were able to understand the useful health information presented.

Throughout, I observed skills from the TSTM project being practiced and solidified through the hard work of my students. As with any group project, learners had to collaborate, compromise, and problem-solve when working on the different portions of the poster. At times, learners disagreed about which information was important and had to use interpersonal skills and conflict resolution skills in order to come to a consensus. The learners also gained confidence through this project because they became more knowledgeable in a topic that was important to them and were able to explain the information to others. Finally, the learners developed important critical thinking skills when assessing information and sources on the Internet.

Through this project, the learners not only gained important health knowledge, but they also improved their confidence in speaking, particularly on challenging topics. At the conclusion of the project, the students did an exit survey of their experience and responded with quotes like, “Doing the project made me feel like I could do hard things in English;” “I am more confident;” “I learned from my classmates, not only the teacher;” “I had to communicate with people in English.”

The following guide can help you conduct this TSTM health-related PBL experience in your program or classroom. 



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# Public Health Information Posters Assignment

Public health relates to health issues that affect the community. This project will take place over 2-3 weeks but not every day. You will be in a group of 5-6 people. You will have a specific job but you also must help your group-mates with their jobs.

**Project Goal:** As a group, you will create a poster about a public health issue. Your poster will be informally presented to other students in our class and other classes. It must include the following:

1. A brief explanation of your topic. (Why is it important?)
2. Graphics (At least 1 photo, drawing, or graph)
3. Frequently Asked Questions
4. Websites with more information
5. Local resources with address or phone number

## Step-One

**Topic:** As a group choose a public health topic (see below for suggestions). Check with your teacher to make sure it is not already being done by another group.

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AIDS prevention and treatment</li><li>• Alcohol or drug addiction</li><li>• Allergies (Food or medicine)</li><li>• Asthma</li><li>• Child safety</li><li>• Dental care</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diabetes</li><li>• Domestic violence</li><li>• Flu vaccines</li><li>• Healthy diet</li><li>• Mental health</li><li>• Open enrollment for health insurance</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open enrollment for health insurance</li><li>• Pregnancy and family planning</li><li>• Quitting smoking</li><li>• School immunizations</li><li>• WIC (Women &amp; infant care)</li></ul> |
|--|---|--|

## Step-Two

**Make a plan:** What do you need to do to make sure your project is done on-time? Who will do it? Consider the following general steps:

- Gather information
- Put together a rough draft
- Check your work
- Design the final poster
- Create the final poster.

## Step-Three

Find information: The following are some websites you can use to find information about your topic.

[Medline Plus](#)

[Arlington Public Health](#)

[World Health Organization](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)

[National Institutes of Health](#)

[Family Doctor.org](#)

## Step-Four

Work: Work with your team to put together this project. IT IS HARD! But by working together and helping one another you can do it! We will have volunteers available to help teams with English, computers, etc.

## Step-Five

Present: When our project is complete, we will have poster presentations. Students and teachers will come by and ask you about your topic. It is fine to speak with lower-level students in another language if helpful to them.

[Access & download this Public Health Information Posters Assignment.](#)



# Financial Literacy and Adult Learners

by Rebecca Scott

Are topics like payday loans, the gig economy, and comparing banking services part of your instruction? Do you use resources to help students understand and improve their credit scores? Financial literacy can play an important role in stabilizing a family and reducing the money-based trauma that stands between your adult learner and their success. For these reasons, financial literacy or personal finance needs a more central role in our instruction.

Adult education programs have expanded their offerings from the short list of GED® topics to an ever-growing collection of skills needed in the current workforce. Adult education instruction is now much more than high school equivalency completion; it also involves digital literacy, career coaching, soft skills, and vocational training. If your students are like ours, they struggle financially and this affects their focus and retention. Students in poverty or living below the ALICE threshold ([See PROGRESS 31 \(1\), p. 7](#)), who can't afford childcare, don't have a reliable car, who are paying off high-interest loans, and are living check-to-check, are hard to retain in classes.

Three years ago, in response to an Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL) Innovation grant application, we joined with a local Head Start program and a regional community action agency to create a learning community of parents in rural Lee County. Financial literacy became one of our critical components when we realized that the county had one

of the highest percentages of household accounts in debt collection in the state. Fortunately, our partner, [Appalachian Community Action \(AppCAA\)](#), had unique funding to offer personal finance counseling and assistance to the group. They helped the parents improve their credit scores, become banked, and even paid off credit card debt that was in collection.

Building upon that experience, a core group of our staff participated in two impactful economics and personal finance trainings offered by Dr. Cheryl Ayers, who is the co-director of the Center for Economic Education at Virginia Tech and the founder/director of the U.S. Economic Empowerment Project. You may know Dr. Ayers as an avid supporter of the adult education field who has created student materials and instructor resources for using basic economics, personal finance, and entrepreneurship as a real-world lens for teaching core GED® subjects and skills-based workforce preparation. ([See her free \*Economic Empowerment Curriculum\*](#).) Dr. Ayers also contributed to making Virginia one in 25 states to require an Economics & Personal Finance course for high school graduation and Individual Student Alternative Plan (ISAP) completion, including writing and recently revising the course learning standards as well as creating teacher institutes for related content and pedagogy professional development. Her guidance has given our program confidence to address personal finance solutions with our students. This content is now part of our integrated education and

***“There is much work to be done—encouraging programs to include personal finance in their instruction, training instructors, identifying online and print-based materials for classroom and approved distance learning.”***

training (IET) offerings with the Mountain Empire Community College Road to Success in Virginia (RSVP) program, our job readiness classes for local social services participants, and our re-entry efforts at the local regional jail facility.

Fast forward to where we are now—in pandemic or, hopefully, soon-to-be-beyond pandemic days. According to several recent studies by the Pew Research Center (Horowitz et al., 2021; Kochhar, 2020; Parker et al., 2020) the groups hardest hit for job or wage loss in the last year have been low-income women, immigrants, young adults, and those without a high school diploma. Many have borrowed money from friends and family, have unpaid rent, and encounter trouble paying their bills. Some doubt they will ever recover financially.

As a program, we have started to address personal finance with a few small populations within our region. We know that we are not doing what we need to do to help all of our learners. In the last twelve months of COVID with closed classrooms and no online or physical access inside our regional jail, we have struggled to find approved distance education instructional materials for personal finance that are print based for adults without Internet access and those who are incarcerated. There is much work to

be done—encouraging programs to include personal finance in their instruction, training Instructors, identifying online and print-based materials for classroom and approved distance learning. If you are considering adding resources to help your students with everyday money decisions, check out the following helpful information.

### [Money Smart for Adults](#)

The newly updated *Money Smart for Adults* instructor-led curriculum from FDIC provides participants with practical knowledge, skills-building opportunities, and resources they can use to manage their finances with confidence. Instructors can use it to deliver unbiased, relevant, and accurate financial education whether they are new to training or experienced trainers. Downloadable materials include Instructor Guides, PowerPoints, Participant Guides, and Train-the-Trainer videos. Content also addresses adults with disabilities.

The curriculum consists of 14 modules that cover basic financial topics. Each module guides you on what to say and do. The materials are available for immediate download at [Money Smart – Teach – For Adults](#).

### [EVERFI: Financial Literacy for High School](#)

*EVERFI: Financial Literacy for High School* is a digital education program that teaches students how to make wise financial decisions to promote financial well-being over their lifetime. The interactive lessons in this financial literacy course translate complex financial concepts and help students develop actionable strategies for managing their finances.

Immersive digital environments and diverse characters bring modern, relevant financial education objectives to life. Students accelerate their financial understanding through problem solving, self-reflection, and games that provide real-life scenarios for practice. 

Languages: English and Spanish

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# Helping Adult Learners Reach the Goal of Financial Stability

by Leslie Bradner

Unexpected car repairs. Bloated cell phone bills. A big grocery haul for visiting family. These are the kinds of topics that my in-person GED® class discussed pre-COVID during breaks and after class. Even now, the stressors of working extra shifts or losing work or quitting a job to care for kids leach into my online classes and correspondence.

This is not surprising. Most students enrolled in GED® courses are there to improve their job prospects. More specifically, they want to make more money. People who do not have a GED® credential or high school diploma make less and have significantly higher rates of unemployment than those who do (Learn more, earn more, 2020).

When I attended [Dr. Cheryl Ayers'](#) "Economic Empowerment Citizen Seminar" original curriculum training program at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, my focus was on the economic concerns of my students.

When I left, I brought with me a valuable set of resources that I have been able to integrate throughout our GED® content areas and soft skills training for real-world contexts.

The highly flexible and multidisciplinary *Economic Empowerment Curriculum* is divided into three parts: economics, personal finance, and entrepreneurship. It is already organized into a PowerPoint that you can edit as needed. The section on economics covers the economics topics needed for the GED® Social Studies exam. Everything. It teaches concepts such as scarcity, opportunity cost, and goods versus services. We learn about types of resources and how money flows through our economy. The curriculum also integrates basic economic reasoning skills (e.g., cost-benefit analysis) throughout personal finance and intra/entrepreneurship topics for more informed and empowered decision-making. There never seems to be enough time to plan, so I have copied that section into its own PowerPoint document and included GED®-

style questions at the end for practice.

Personal finance is a large section and it can be easily subdivided into multiple lessons. It readily lends itself to the incorporation of math skills. Budgeting tasks teach not just budgeting, but integers and estimation. Decision-making exercises also demonstrate complex percentage concepts. Financial goal setting teaches rates to determine how much money must be set aside to accomplish a goal by a certain date. Simple interest is part of the lessons, so I was able to teach that without needing to develop new material. There are multiple worksheets already formatted for printing included with the curriculum which is also a time-saver.

The final section on entrepreneurship is where I could really see my students begin to imagine a way to financial stability. This inspired them to utilize many skills buoyed by a personal connection to the material because *they* were creating the material. This is where they showed proficiency with inference and causation to identify needs in their community. They used PowerPoint, most for the first time, to create flyers for imagined businesses. Even my most computer-phobic students had fun with fonts and graphics as they explored this new tool while developing computer literacy skills. These students were excited to not only learn, but also to look toward the future with opti-

mism. As a teacher, I live for those moments.

Since first attending Dr. Ayers' curriculum training program, I have used the *Economic Empowerment Curriculum* in part and in whole, in person and online. I will soon begin teaching a 10-week, online Personal Finance class open to our region 13 and 14 adult students and our community. And yes, I am incorporating resources from the *Economic Empowerment Curriculum*. Most of students' goals for themselves include financial stability. That means that teaching them how to get there is a goal for me. If I can include material for multiple GED® subjects at the same time, they are going to reach that brighter future even faster.

The in-person [Economic Empowerment Curriculum](#) and training program is currently being recreated into an online mini-course with self-paced modules, Google Docs worksheets, and live Zoom classes to facilitate peer learning and WIOA collaboration. Details to be announced soon. 

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**Leslie Bradner** has worked for the region 13 adult education program since 2017 and has learned much from the experienced, long-serving teachers. In 2019, she began a full-time instructor position with Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) teaching both adult education and psychology classes for the college. A career highlight for her was being a small part of the team who began teaching online adult education classes for regions 13/14 a mere eight days after the COVID-19 shutdown.

Economics and Personal Finance resource recommendations from [Dr. Cheryl Ayers](#), founder of the Economic Empowerment Citizen Seminar.

[Next Gen Personal Finance Resources](#)

[MRU Teaching Resources](#)

[Virginia Council on Economic Education Economics & Personal Finance Curriculum](#)

[Economic Empowerment Activity Sheets](#)

# 5 Considerations for Equitable Financial Literacy Instruction During COVID-19

by Katharine S. Wise

As if the world of financial literacy in adult education was not already multifaceted, COVID-19 has intensified these complexities by compelling the need to prepare for an array of circumstances. As educators, there is no option but to rise to the occasion and continue serving all learners who seek to increase their knowledge, even in a time where their personal and social resources may be more limited than before. With that in mind, I have identified five key considerations for how to effectively implement equitable financial literacy instruction during this pandemic that stays true to adult education principles and addresses new or amplified issues from the pandemic.



**Get rid of any preconceived notions of who the typical learner is or should be.**

Adult learners come from innumerable walks of life and enroll in financial literacy courses with various intentions and goals. In the United States, most contemporary financial literacy programs target their efforts towards either immigrants, college students, low-income individuals, or senior citizens (English, 2014). However, **anyone** can benefit from furthering their comprehension in finance-related topics and learning how to best utilize the resources available to them.

Additionally, we are currently in a time of widespread economic uncertainty, especially as related to this ongoing pandemic. As of December 2021, the U.S. unemployment rate hovered around 6.7% , and 4.9% in Virginia specifically (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). As such, many individuals and families alike have found themselves in financial situations that they never planned for or dreamed of being in. As educators, make sure to refrain from taking on a “placing blame” mentality (English, 2014) or attitudes that suggest that being in adverse financial situations is the fault of the learner, per negligence or illiteracy. Rather, be open to educating all interested parties and not assuming their background, circumstances, or reasoning behind taking a class.



**Be diligent in the application of critical theory.**

Well, “what exactly is Critical Theory”, you may ask.

English (2014) defines Critical Theory (CT) as a framework that “addresses major structural inequities [as raised by] issues of power, ideology, hegemony, and perspective” (p. 50). For adult financial literacy, this model speaks to how different social and systemic forces (such as class, ideology, power systems, race, and gender) contribute to the dispari-

ties between the levels of access to financial education and financial opportunities for different communities (and the subpopulations within) (English, 2014). Along with being open to serving a diverse student population, it is important to be meticulous when incorporating critical theory into financial literacy lessons. An effective application of the framework can deepen the learner's understanding of financial literacy within a larger societal and political context (macro perspective), as opposed to viewing finance solely on an individual level (micro perspective).

For more information on critical theory, [this article from ThoughtCo.](#) provides a very useful and digestible explanation.



### Create a comprehensive curriculum.

This is a call to provide instruction on fruitful financial behaviors, instead of merely offering vocabulary lessons. It is great for learners to be able to regurgitate the meaning of various financial concepts, however, would it not be better to help them devise action plans for translating their newly acquired knowledge into behaviors that will make reaching their financial goals more realizable? In this way, setting specific action-oriented learning objectives will serve learners well.

Way (2014) takes it a step further in suggesting that "approaches to financial education, which account for influences on financial behavior, in addition to financial knowledge, are likely to yield much more productive results" (p. 26). This relates to the aforementioned notion of teaching from both macro-level and micro-level perspectives. Learners want information that can be used, and thus lessons should be pertinent to their financial situations. However, demonstrating a connection between individual/family finances and various societal factors can help learners conceptualize how financial systems work and

affect them both within their respective communities and on larger scales, such as the U.S. banking systems.



### Incorporate Technology.

Now this is going to be a long one, but bear with me.

COVID-19 has necessitated the capacity to use various forms of technology, but even before the pandemic, the world was becoming increasingly digitized. As such, technology can be integrated into financial literacy lessons in a multitude of ways:

- **Modality:** Perhaps consider offering hybrid courses with options for either face-to-face or virtual instruction and allowing learners to choose whichever mode best suits their learning preferences and life circumstances. This can alleviate learners' anxieties about attending class in-person as the pandemic persists whilst ensuring their ability to nurture any changes within their domestic environment (such as alterations in work schedules, childcare, or transportation offerings).
- **Class activities:** Incorporating digital activities and virtual simulations into course curriculum can make the class environment both interactive and applicable to real world situations.
- **Homework & outside research:** Assigning post-session tasks that encourage learners to do some online research on their own can reinforce course teachings outside of regular meeting times, allow learners to tie homework to their individual interests/goals, and help them gain the confidence to take control of their learning. These concepts coincide with those outlined in self-determination theory (Way, 2014). (For more information on self-determination theory as it applies to education,

[the Center for Self-Determination Theory site](#) can help.)

- **Useful financial apps & online resources:** Introducing adult learners to digital options such as banking and investment mobile applications/websites can be useful in everyday life and in their personal finance proficiencies.

There are two inherent 'sub-considerations' that come with incorporating technology into financial literacy education. The first is that educators must invest time in increasing their own digital competencies so that they are able to fully articulate the utility of the various technologies being used in curriculum. The second is that educators must be cognizant of what barriers are present that may limit a learner's ability to access necessary course materials, especially in the event that learners cannot make it into the classroom (Collins & Holden, 2014). With that said, it may be useful to also provide learners with a list of local places they can go if they have limited access to a computer or a stable [and secure] Internet connection.



## Make it attainable.

Outside of concepts and behaviors, financial literacy also includes mindset management. Many learners may hold negative connotations of money, especially if they come from a low-income household or if they are presently in an adverse financial situation (Way, 2014). This may be linked to having a scarcity mindset (Morris, 2020) or low self-efficacy (Way, 2014). In either case, educators should work to change this mentality in their students. Situations may be daunting, but that does not denote permanence. Acknowledge that their desire to acquire greater financial literacy is a critical step towards changing present circumstances and for achieving financial goals.

The world may have forever been rattled and altered by this pandemic, but there is still the opportunity (and definitely the need) to cultivate a space for equitable and applicable financial education. 

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# Financial Navigators Help to Steady Waters During a Pandemic

by Jonathan Gedeon



In today's world, there aren't many of us whose lives haven't been altered due to the pandemic. Whether impacted by the virus medically, socioeconomically, or both, none of us are unscathed. Many have experienced changes to employment, changes in income, a sudden job loss, unanticipated expenses, a health crisis, and even the loss of a loved one. The ability to process even small tasks, let alone prioritize complex issues, can easily fall by the wayside. Many shut down; others might reach out to a friend, family member or loved one to ask for help. When combined with the stressors of the pandemic, frequent changes in resource availability, and a less than complete understanding of personal financial concepts, it can quickly become a recipe for an even greater disaster.

The [Financial Navigators program](#) was created to address many of these challenges. Our sessions take a person-centered approach in which the navigator works to connect with the client and carefully listens, asking questions to help determine the client's needs and work toward removing some of the stress of uncertainty from the situation. Navigators are under no time constraints when working with clients. Instead, they are encouraged to help community members as individuals, recognizing that each faces their own unique set of challenges. Navigators work toward helping the client establish priorities based on what

the client values. Once the client's individual needs have been established and prioritized, the Navigators provide support in connecting clients to both local and national resource partners. Additionally, the referrals made are specific to each client's distinct financial needs. Our highest amount of referrals are made to resource partners providing services in the areas of rent and mortgage assistance, utility assistance, food, employment services, and unemployment benefits. However, the goal of the Navigators is not to provide a sea of resource referrals. Instead, Navigators work with each client to create a tailored, individualized action plan containing resources for each of the client's personal finance needs. For each program, clients learn what to expect, when to apply, expected timelines, when and where to access the resource, as well as what documents or information the resource provider may need. Recognizing that this can be a lot to take in all at once, our action plans also include a customized summary for each referral.

In addition to providing for basic needs and assistance programs, Navigators focus on offering access to additional education and personal financial resources. These resources offer opportunities for our community members to grow their financial knowledge or understanding. For example, some simply want to learn how to best avoid becoming a

victim of identity theft, learn how to budget better, learn how to do their own taxes, learn about savings strategies, discover what debts they owe, or learn how to improve their credit. The Navigators are empowered to provide basic financial information on these topics and also provide local and national resources that best fit the clients' need. The work doesn't just address the immediate needs in times of crisis, providing short term fixes. It builds upon that experience, navigating clients from crisis to stability to resilience.

Even outside the context of a global pandemic, the financial stability of an individual depends largely on how they react to sudden or unexpected events that directly or indirectly impact their household's finances. In short, financial resilience plays the most critical role in determining future success and stability. "My belief is that financial resilience is built on the financial capacity of an individual and their personal support system of friends and family," says Jonathan Gedeon; Capital Region Program Manager of [Human Kind](#). "This knowledge, when coupled with access to resources, can often be the difference between moving forward or falling into a downward spiral of debt and instability."

HumanKind is the partner agency working directly with the [City of Richmond's Treasurer's Office of Financial Empowerment](#), led by City Treasurer Nichole R. Armstead. "It has been a vision to help connect residents to the resources available within the community, but not many residents know where those resources reside," said the City Treasurer. This program facilitates "Financial Navigation," creating a connection between residents and resources they need now more than ever before.

*"My belief is that financial resilience is built on the financial capacity of an individual and their personal support system of friends and family."*

Both HumanKind and the Richmond City Treasurer's Office of Financial Empowerment are not new to the challenge of providing financial literacy to adults. HumanKind currently offers both the [Ways to Work](#) program and the [Financial Opportunity Center](#) program. Both programs teach financial literacy as a core component of success. For more than 20 years, HumanKind's Ways to Work program has coupled financial literacy, credit knowledge, and case management with character-based vehicle lending. Helping individuals gain access to financial knowledge, transportation, community resources, new career opportunities, and a more secure financial future. HumanKind offers its Financial Opportunity Center program in partnership with the [Local Initiatives Support Corporation \(LISC\)](#). This program offers no cost, coaching services focused on income and asset building. HumanKind's Financial Opportunity Center takes a big picture approach in helping individuals where they are now, and helping them progress toward long term goals. Participants in this

program are assisted through an integrated service model with one coach providing services in the areas of employment and career advancement, financial education, access to community resources, and assistance in locating supports needed to help individuals attain big picture goals over a 3-5 year period.

Since 2018, the Richmond City Treasurer's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) under the leadership of City Treasurer, Nichole R. Armstead has worked to create services to promote awareness around the importance of Financial Literacy. Financial Wellness only recently became a required high school elective; however, we have a current population

working to navigate their finances that were never afforded that basic instruction. This creates a disproportionate gap in the understanding of maximizing income, leveraging resources, and building wealth. The need for Financial Literacy is tremendous for an entire population; however, through these efforts it is our hope that we are minimizing the gap.

Among those efforts, the City Treasurer's OFE launched an Elder Awareness campaign to alert seniors of common financial scams where their demographic is a target audience. In addition, they launched the City of Richmond's first Financial Literacy Fair, where adults learned more about opportunities to manage their resources more effectively, attended free workshops, and met with a financial counselor. The Financial Literacy Fair was such a success that it will be held virtually this year during [Financial Literacy Month](#). Most recently, they have launched the Financial Navigators programs in partnership with HumanKind and are continuing to look for additional resources to help equip residents toward financial stability and ultimately financial independence.

Since our start in January, Financial Navigation has continued to evolve, both in the resources provided and methods used by the Financial Navigators. Most importantly, utilizing our time in each of the 245 sessions conducted has allowed us to not just provide resources, but also to connect to the community, and take time to learn from our community members. Valuing their existing knowledge of resources and focusing on expanding their understanding of personal finance resources, we hope that they may take that information and use it not only to help themselves, but also to spread the word to their community that the navigation program is here to help. While we are just beginning, our navigators have already made 1,570 referrals, each representing an opportunity to fill a critical need for one of our community members. We can share with certainty that the Navigator Program is working based the overwhelming response of our clients. In fact,

many participants have completed an interest form, just to request a call back so that they can thank the navigator who helped them. But the strongest indicator of success is the volume of incoming referrals. Even individuals who reported that the Financial Navigation services did not have the specific resource they needed responded that they have shared the service with a friend or family member.

Financial Navigation is available in the Greater Richmond area. To request a session with a Richmond Financial Navigator, you can visit:

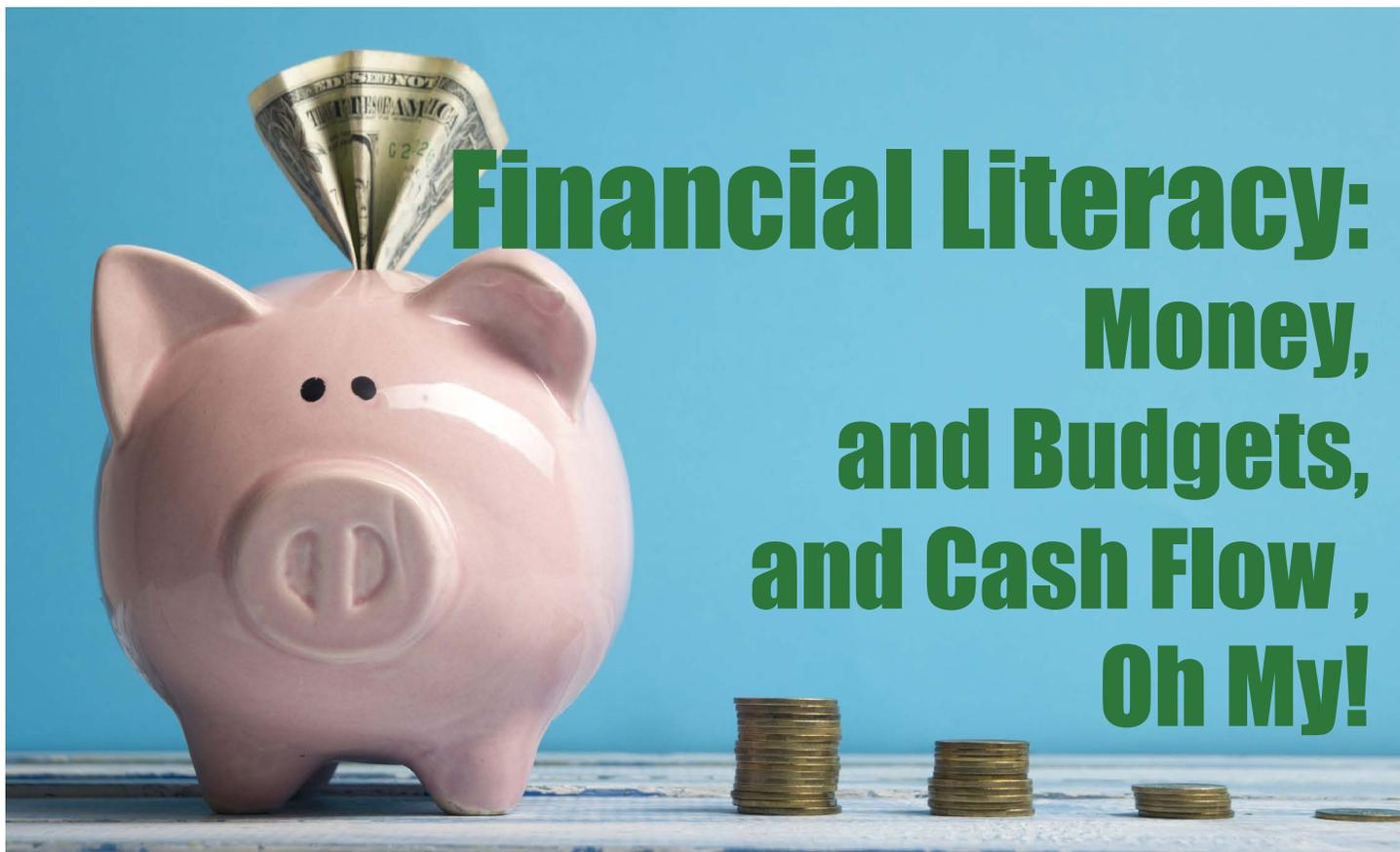
Online: [Financial Navigators City of Richmond](#)

Phone: 804-646-MORE (6673)

If you are interested in bringing Financial Navigators to your region, learn more from our national partner [Financial Navigators](#). 



*As the Capital Region Program Manager for HumanKind, **Jonathan Gedeon** leads the operations of the Financial Navigation, Employment Navigation, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, Ways to Work, and Financial Opportunity Center programs. His work focuses on creating economic opportunity and eliminating poverty within the Greater Richmond area. Prior to accepting his position at HumanKind, Jonathan worked for more than nine years performing and supporting financial and housing education services at one of the nation's largest providers of non-profit financial education and counselling services. Jonathan holds a B.S. in business administration and management from Virginia Commonwealth University and an A.S. science from Piedmont Virginia Community College.*



# Financial Literacy: Money, and Budgets, and Cash Flow, Oh My!

*by Jackie Corkins and Elizabeth Severson-Irby*

**F**inancial literacy is an important skill that all learners use on a daily basis for: creating budgets; going grocery shopping; paying bills; making rent, mortgage, or car payments; and paying for health insurance, medical bills, or prescriptions. The list goes on. Preparing learners to manage these situations should be an essential part of any adult education program, whether the program's focus is literacy, high school equivalency, English language learners, workforce preparation, re-entry, or any combination of these. This article describes how one instructor adapted a Teaching the Skills that Matter (TSTM) financial literacy lesson to meet the needs of her learners. For those unfamiliar with TSTM, it is a way of teaching that uses three different approaches to teaching nine skills in five different content areas. For more information about TSTM, see the [April 2020 issue of PROGRESS](#) (pp.11-12).

Over a four-day period for an hour each day, Jackie's beginning literacy English lan-

guage class worked via Zoom on the integrated and contextualized [Cash Flow](#) lesson from the [TSTM toolkit](#). This lesson goes into calculating percent increase, but can be easily modified, adapted, or extended to meet learners' needs. For example, Jackie chose to just focus on more foundational skills like creating a budget and checking bills and receipts. [The entire lesson can be found by accessing this Google Drive](#).

The first two days, Jackie spent time going over some of the financial literacy skills they would be using, such as determining income, identifying expenses, and interpreting bills. The class discussed the meaning, use, and importance of each topic. They also brainstormed the importance of financial literacy. Learners were split into breakout groups to come up with a dialogue for a financial situation to share and discuss. Some examples were distinguishing between needs and wants and saving for the unexpected or future expenses. These scenarios generated good whole group

***“At the end of this lesson, I think the students walked away with a better understanding of how to manage their finances.”***

discussion with learners posing questions such as, “Should I have a monthly budget?” and making comments such as, “I let my spouse handle the finances, but now I think it is important for me to know.”

After the two days of pre-work, Jackie’s class was able to move into contextualized learning, where learners created a budget outline. After going over the different aspects of the budget outline in class, learners were asked to complete a budget outline for homework. While only a few completed the activity at home, this did not deter the lesson’s progress or class discussion. In anticipation of needing a whole class activity, Jackie had prepared a shorter version of a budget for an emergency plumbing situation. In class, all learners completed the activity and discussed how they would budget for and handle the emergency situation.

Learners went into breakout groups to discuss the plumbing emergency and why they chose to handle the situation in a particular way. For instance, one learner initially wanted to cut money designated for more essential needs, but after the small group discussion, decided that she could use money earmarked for something less essential. The in-class activity and discussion allowed learners who completed the homework assignment to build on their budgeting skills. For those who were unable to complete the homework assignment, the in-class work allowed them to use the skills they learned in the previous class and apply them to a novel situation.

Lastly, Jackie used some actual bills and receipts for learners to look at, question, and discuss. As an example, learners checked to make sure items on a bill were correct and also practiced questioning particular items

on a bill or receipt. Overall, the learners were engaged throughout the various components of the lesson and learned some valuable financial literacy skills.

Jackie stated, “At the end of this lesson, I think the students walked away with a better understanding of how to manage their finances. For example, after reviewing and reading receipts and bills, one student stated that she never thought about looking at her receipts or bills and just paid whatever was owed. But after hearing how one of her classmates found double charges on receipts and questionable charges on bills, the entire class agreed that it is important to know what they are paying for and how much it costs.” 



**Jackie Corkins** ([corkinsj@gmail.com](mailto:corkinsj@gmail.com)) is an English language learner (ELL) instructor at the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (LCNV) where she teaches adult basic English and integrated education and training classes. For eight years, Jackie has taught the essential skills that ELLs must have to participate more fully and confidently in their workplace and community. To help her students apply their emerging English skills, Jackie focuses on establishing a learner-friendly environment that incorporates real-life situations, day-to-day activities, and personal experiences. Jackie enjoys traveling around the world and often shares her travel experiences with her students.



**Elizabeth Severson-Irby** is the Literacy Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). In her role, she provides leadership for instruction and program management in Virginia’s adult education and literacy programs, working with both public and private agencies and educational programs to ensure that adults have access to the educational resources they need.

# Eating Healthy on a Budget: A Project-based Learning Approach



*by Mary Cherry*

Project-based learning (PBL) has proven to be an effective method for developing soft skills and preparing adult learners for postsecondary and career transitions. PBL is one of the three teaching approaches utilized in Teaching the Skills That Matter (TSTM). Each of the five content areas presented in the [TSTM Toolkit](#) contains a project-based learning lesson. I chose the lesson, "[Eating Healthy on a Budget](#)," from the Financial Literacy section to teach a class of ABE/GED® students in January, 2020.

I quickly discovered that the lesson assumed some prerequisite skills (i.e., various ideas regarding "healthy" eating) that needed to be addressed. The lesson was introduced with a discussion about grocery budgets and healthy eating habits, and students brainstormed and shared ideas for saving money when grocery shopping. Following the discussion, the toolkit suggested playing an NPR video to present the topic, "food deserts." However, I found a [video prepared by the College of Agriculture at Virginia State University](#) that was more relevant to our geographical area and student population.

After the initial discussion and watching the video, the students determined the focus of our project would be locating community resources available to supplement monthly grocery deficits. To present their final project, the students secured a neighborhood meeting space to host a presentation for members of the public and local leaders.

To begin the project, the class brainstormed a list of possible resources and volunteered for specific roles necessary to complete the project. They utilized Internet searches to find local organizations, government agencies, and offices. Then, the students created questionnaires and role-played interviews in preparation for meetings with the town manager and Chamber of Commerce leader. They also made telephone calls to surrounding towns inquiring about community gardens and food banks and created a survey on SurveyMonkey to learn about how people in the com-





***“I never knew there was a community garden in the town next to us. It was good to learn about other places to find healthy food in our area.”***

munity and in their families spend and save money on food. A paper copy of the survey was made available for those without Internet access. In order to conduct interviews, students were provided the option to travel with a partner. One student researched loyalty programs active in local grocery and drug stores. She also drafted a list of websites where students could obtain grocery coupons. All learners prepared a brochure to highlight their research. To help organize all of the information, we created a class notebook and a shared Google Drive to store notes and documents.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic struck suddenly and we were not able to

host our final presentation. We were about to create and distribute invitations and begin the process of drafting forms for feedback from audience members. Even though they were unable to present their final project, the students developed many valuable skills during the process. They learned to plan deadlines and be accountable to each other. When one student did not return to class, her peers quickly learned the impact an individual can have on the group and its progress. They also developed research and interview skills and were able to conduct interviews before we moved to remote learning. Students also learned how to analyze and graph the data collected from the survey.

“Eating Healthy on a Budget,” was a perfect lesson for my students! Although listed under “Financial Literacy,” it touched on all five of the TSTM content areas and addressed all nine foundational skills. One student stated that “working on the project was an amazing experience [that allowed me] to interview different people and get their opinions and perspectives.” Another student “enjoyed learning about saving money on my grocery bill.” The students also learned about resources in their community, with one student commenting, “I never knew there was a community garden in the town next to us. It was good to learn about other places to find healthy food in our area.” This project-based learning lesson is a great way to help adult learners develop skills they can use in the workforce as well as their community and family life. 



**Mary Cherry** ([mary.cherry@southside.edu](mailto:mary.cherry@southside.edu)) has a background in special education and more than 35 years of teaching experience. Since 2014, she has taught for Southside Virginia Community College Transitional Programs, where she has been active in professional development and program improvement efforts. She is a member of Virginia's Teaching Skills that Matter pilot team.

# BELIEVE IT OR NOT! INFORMATION LITERACY & ADULT LEARNERS

by John Trerotola



"Don't believe everything you read."

This reminder is truer today than ever! One of the outcomes of social studies and civics instruction is a more informed citizenry. However, this goal is becoming a major challenge with the prevalence of fake news, deliberate misinformation, and the 24/7 flow of data from both print and digital media sources. With this in mind, Adult Basic Education (ABE) can take the lead by promoting instructional strategies to make ABE students, at all levels, more critical readers, listeners, and thinkers in this age of mass information.

Luckily, there are a variety of adaptable information literacy curriculum materials that will inform students on how to confidently evaluate print and digital resources from a variety of sources. In the end, being able to evaluate and distinguish between misinformation, opinion, and fact are skills that not only affect adult students, but also have an impact on their families and communities.

The prevalence of fake news is not new but incorporating information/media literacy into curriculum planning is a critically important current trend. While this type of literacy may be a bit unfamiliar, think of it as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and act using all forms of communication. It is a necessary skill for academic and workplace success and is essential for informed participation in society.

If students cannot evaluate the quality of a source, how can they make good decisions on those matters that affect their everyday lives? A very relatable example for us all is the ability to differentiate between the daily information and misinformation related to COVID-19. In fact, the National Association for Media Literacy Education has a [classroom-ready resource](#) on this very topic.

Unfortunately, there are barriers to evaluating the data that is being generated at a rapid pace, ranging from deliberate misinformation to "facts" that cannot be substantiated. How information is currently consumed can add to the challenge of adequate evaluation. Gone are the days of news from three networks as we now live in an age where social media is a major vehicle for information sharing and consumption.

As already noted, ABE practitioners can draw from a repository of standards' aligned information/media literacy resources and, based on the current reality, can be incorporated into digital, hybrid, and/or in-person classrooms of varying sizes. These resources correlate with multiple College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) anchors and connect to outcomes from Academic, Career and Employability Skills, Transitions Integration Framework (ACES/TIF) and the [Northstar Digital Literacy Standards](#). Moreover, you don't have to be a social studies teacher as these resources

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***“More than any other time, information and media literacy needs to be a necessary part of any ABE curriculum.”***

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and strategies can be used by all instructors and adapted to a variety of classrooms ranging from ELL to GED®.

When planning, consider a scaffolded approach to teaching information literacy. Perhaps start with “big picture” lessons to get students comfortable with the topic. What is information literacy and why is it important? Then, incorporate more detailed lessons that challenge students to begin approaching all types of data with a critical eye. It is also equally important to remind students that misinformation can appear in both written and visual forms. Try using the New York Times’ “[What’s Going On in this Picture or Graph](#)” as a quick and easy way for students to evaluate visual information.

Fortunately, there are many other classroom-ready resources that are mostly free and can be used in print or digital form. For example, to introduce the topic of information/media literacy, have students read an article from the [Strategic Education Research Partnership \(SERP\) Institute](#) on “[Today’s News: Information or Entertainment](#)” or use a leveled article from [NEWSELA](#) where students learn that fake news is not a new phenomenon. It may also be beneficial to engage emerging readers in a [Nearpod](#) lesson about the difference between pretend and real, or you can incorporate listening and multiple grammar skills into your instruction by using a “Deepfake” article from [Breaking News English](#). Although you need a nominal paid subscription, [ESL Library](#) offers comprehensive lessons on fake news, fact vs. opinion, and other related topics.

For more in-depth lessons, consider flipping your classroom by sending students a video clip on “[Identifying Fake News Sources](#)” from [C-SPAN Classroom](#) and then use in-person class time to discuss. In addition, [iCivics](#) has excellent stand-alone media literacy lessons and

even offers an [engaging game](#) where students have to “fight” viral deception and false reporting. However, when considering instructional resources related to information literacy, look no further than [Stanford University’s Civic Online Curriculum](#). This free resource has timely leveled lessons and assessments on critically evaluating evidence and sources.

These are just a few of the resources available and while the general website links have been noted, once you are in the sites, additional materials and activities can be acquired by simply using search terms such as “fake news,” “information literacy,” and “media literacy.” Recently, I gave a virtual presentation on the topic of incorporating information literacy curriculum into the ABE classroom and invite you to [view the replay](#).

More than at any other time, information and media literacy needs to be a necessary part of any ABE curriculum. Whether you are teaching remotely or in-person, English Language Learners or students needing a high school equivalency credential, those in the ABE community are in a perfect position to guide students along the information highway while giving them the awareness and skills to critically approach the constant flow of data coming their way. The well-being of our society depends on it!



*John Trerotola is a social studies/ ELA teacher in the Robbinsdale (Minnesota) Adult Academic Program. He teaches GED®, Adult Diploma, and college preparatory students. He also has had work experiences in the advanced ELL classroom. In addition to teaching, John participates in Minnesota Department of Education sponsored ABE working groups and has presented/co-presented on various topics regarding social studies curriculum/lesson planning, CCRS development and integration for the ELA classroom, and implementation of the Minnesota Standard Adult Diploma. John holds a Minnesota Secondary Social Studies Teaching License and has a B.A. and M.A. in history. Thanks to his love of history, John is currently splitting his time between Minnesota and Virginia. He is eager to engage with Virginia’s adult educators and can be contacted at [john\\_trerotola@rdale.org](mailto:john_trerotola@rdale.org) or # (612) 280-9789.*

by Keira Zirkle

# CIVICS INSTRUCTION THROUGH DIVING DEEP

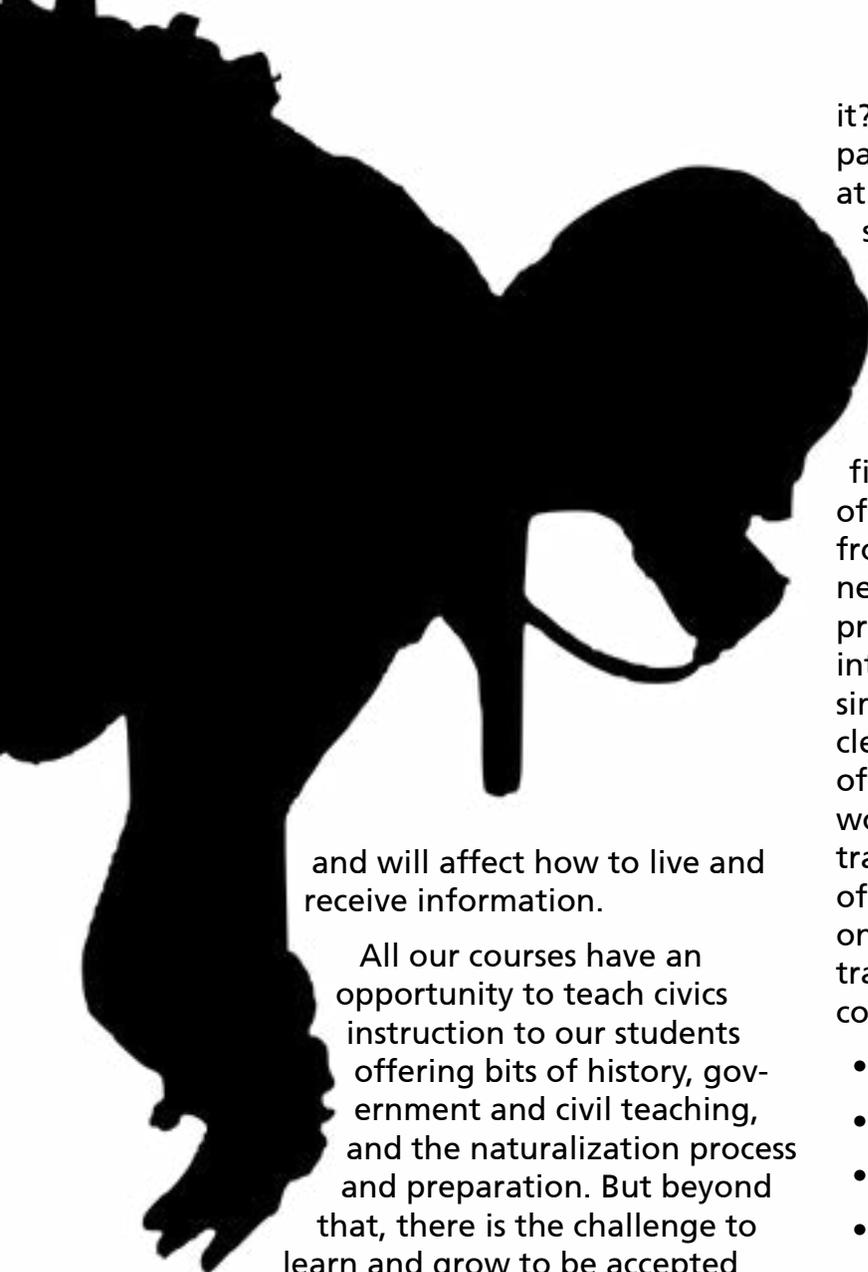
One of the most exciting aspects to teaching ESOL adult learners is the multiple facets of learning that occur in a classroom. There is the challenge of teaching both naturalization preparation and workforce development to ESOL adult learners. In addition, COVID-19 and online distance learning has reduced student numbers to less than half, but the population served still retains a robust diversity of languages, ethnicities, and nationalities.

The Education and Workforce Development (EWD) program within Catholic Charities, Diocese of Arlington has risen to the

present challenge, rapidly producing online trainings to our volunteers and students for what is currently completely online learning.

There are facets of:

- Teaching languages, from Oromo, Amharic, Spanish, Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, French etc. to English.
- Students and teachers learning from each other the differences of English vocabulary and grammar, and how that translates to perception of gender and social status.
- Teaching cultural and societal norms of the United States.
- Teaching cultural and societal norms of Northern Virginia, DC Metro area.
- Learning cultural and societal norms of El Salvador, Honduras, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and more.
- Learning, understanding, and teaching of how gender, socio-economic status, race, and government and media influences can



and will affect how to live and receive information.

All our courses have an opportunity to teach civics instruction to our students offering bits of history, government and civics teaching, and the naturalization process and preparation. But beyond that, there is the challenge to learn and grow to be accepted and safe within the United States.

This extends beyond the teaching of, for example, what a police officer looks like versus a firefighter. It expands to including questions of, "What were police and firefighters like in your native country?" It then unfolds into, "Have you seen or heard the firetrucks or police cars around your home? Do you understand the difference between the two?"

This deeper line of inquiry for asking students questions, even at a Basic English proficiency level, engages students and teachers together in a civics discussion that can evolve into addressing equity and how individual context is different for each student. At the beginning of quarantine, I included more discussions such as, "Have you seen the news today or yesterday? What did you think about

it?" I consider this practice to be an integral part of teaching that I urge all volunteers at EWD to employ at least a few times per semester, if not to the extent that I employ it.

### **Teaching Strategy of Diving Deep and Showing No Fear of "Bad Dinner Topics"**

No matter what level of English proficiency students are, I start the beginning of one class a week with a current article from the news (using a midline political news source). With Basic and Low Beginner proficiency levels, we break down an article into parts, along with plenty of pictures and simplified language to help make the article clear to the students. The students get a copy of the article with the pictures and a list of words that they should use dictionaries and translator apps to help them fill out the list of words. Sometimes an entire hour is spent on this exercise because once the students translate the article and have worked through comprehension questions, a discussion occurs.

- *"What do you think?"*
- *"Is this good?"*
- *"Is this bad?"*
- *"What do you think it means for your family?"*
- *"What do you think it means for your community?"*

This exercise integrates not only the students' own experiences and previous knowledge, but also includes questions that involve civic instruction and topics of equity too.

In our EWD program, we started integrating this dive into inquiry method due to how politically charged our environment was getting (especially in Northern Virginia) and how the students were cooped up in their houses for long periods of time due to COVID-19. The ability to talk, use hand motions, and pictures to try and explain what the students were feeling elevated the activity to be an intense learning experience that carried over to the class environment.

The strategy takes time, preparation, honesty, and patience. From an administrative viewpoint, the strategy (depending on the article) requires volunteers to receive training on tolerance and how to contain student emotions when they rise. Most of the teachers in our own program do this only once to several times a semester depending on the English class level and time available to prepare. From a teacher standpoint, despite the work, the payoff is immense. The strategy promotes civil engagement, reading comprehension, research skills, vocabulary development, writing and spelling practice, practice conversing in English, and much more. The development of students' connection of their own language to English plus the building of relationships through the discussions with the other students and the teacher lets the rest of class run more as a familial cohort.

There is always so much teachers can offer to students, but in this case, it truly is a marvel to see what the students can offer the teacher through this strategy. 

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### Basis for the Teaching Strategy:

Bunning, L. (2014). *The development of intercultural communicative competence: Community-based communication investigations in a beginning-level adult ESOL course*. (Order No. 3631348). [Doctoral dissertation, Lesley University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Crump, A. (2014). *Introducing LangCrit: Critical language and race theory*. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 11(3), 207-224. DOI: 10.1080/15427587.2014.936243.

Howard, L. (2020/2021). California EL civics: Seizing the opportunity to integrate performance-based assessment. *COABE Journal: The Resource for Adult Education*, 9(2), 32-37.



**Keira Zirkle** is the Off-Site ESOL Coordinator for Education and Workforce Development at the Catholic Charities, Diocese of Arlington. She has worked in migration and refugee services and as an instructor and curriculum writer for education and workforce development. Keira has taught Basics and Low Beginner ESOL classes, Basic Computer Literacy to ESOL students, Child Care Certification for VA for ESOL, and GED® Science Prep for ESOL students. She now focuses on coordinating classes, students, tutors, and teachers for ESOL classes and naturalization courses.



At Education and Workforce Development (EWD), within Catholic Charities, Diocese of Arlington, our program offers several different classes to adults. These adults are often first- or second-generation immigrants. We offer ESOL courses, Naturalization Preparation courses, and Workforce Development courses like: GED®-preparation, Child Care certification, Basic Computer Literacy, and CompTIA IT Fundamentals and A+ certifications.

Our program focuses on offering these courses to adults from various ethnicities, nationalities, languages, and countries. Our program has changed dramatically since its beginning, from being small and servicing and teaching only Spanish-speaking immigrants, to serving 1,497 students last fiscal year, and again to COVID-19 and online-distance learning reducing our student numbers to less than half; but still retaining robust diversity of languages, ethnicities, and nationalities.

Education and Workforce Development rose to the challenge, rapidly producing online trainings to our volunteers and students for what was to be completely online learning. Currently, EWD is still only offering online courses.

# PROMPTING LOCAL CHANGE THROUGH CIVICS LESSONS

*“Civics Education should be a part of all adult education programming so all learners develop the skills for understanding and thinking critically about the world around them.”*

*by Sarah Lupton*



How do we teach our learners to become more involved in their communities? How can we show the importance of being an effective worker, community or family member, or citizen? Civics education is one way to help learners develop agency and involves more than teaching learners how to pass the citizenship test. In fact, civics education should be a part of all adult education programming so all learners develop the skills for understanding and thinking critically about the world around them. One of the content areas in the Teaching the Skills that Matter (TSTM) toolkit focuses on civics education and below is a brief description of a lesson I taught. For more information about TSTM, see the [April 2020 issue of PROGRESS](#) (pp.11-12).

This past fall, I taught the [Social Change](#) lesson from the [TSTM toolkit](#) via Zoom to a class of advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Early in the lesson, we used Zoom’s basic features like “chat” and “annotate” in order to interact with the pie chart provided in the lesson as well as share our own participation and intent for future

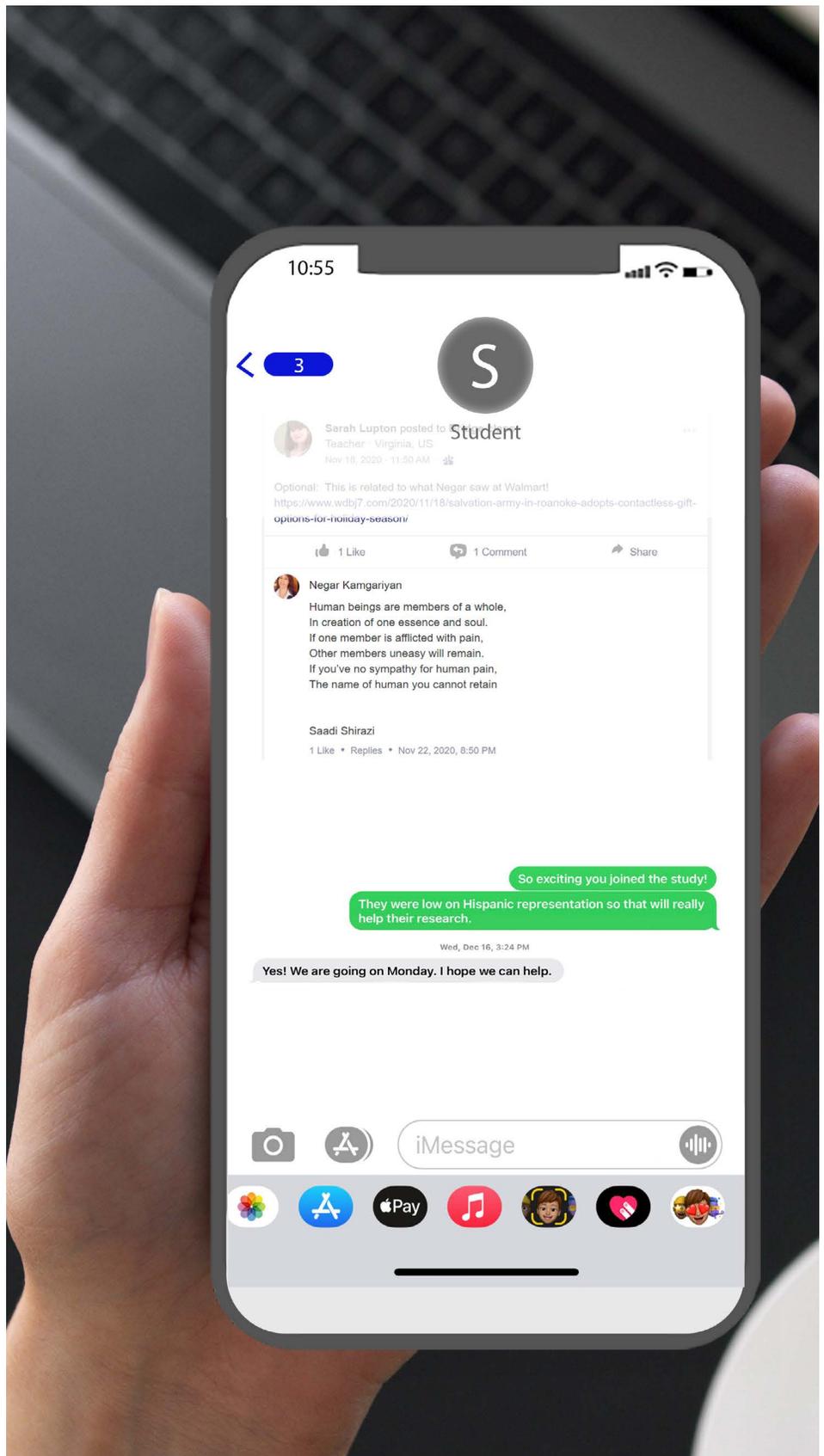
involvement through marking/voting. We watched the included [Dairy Queen video](#) together, as well, during which students listened out for words they did not quite understand. The video features an immigrant Dairy Queen owner who consistently gives back to his community and explains his reasoning for and satisfaction derived from doing so.

When going over the student generated words, some found the timestamp for those words and indicated their questions to me that way; others simply asked “I heard X. What does that mean?” Those unknown words were defined through class discussion and then I put them into a [Quizlet](#) vocabulary set so that students could study a contextualized list asynchronously. The next time class met, we watched the short video again and were able to interact with it even more because students had spent time studying their contextualized community involvement vocabulary words. This led to improved ability for students to share about their own community involvement. Some shared that they donated to food pantries or clothing drives. Others explained their involvement in

their faith communities or children’s schools’ PTAs. One student even complimented another for providing transportation for a local senior citizen.

An extension of this lesson took place through our class [Edmodo](#) page, a learning management system which allows me to post content and students can leave responses, submit assignments, and access other resources. Other sites such as [Canvas](#), [Google Classroom](#), or [Schoology](#) provide a similar platform. It was here on Edmodo that students encountered many local opportunities for social change, including: local Angel Tree opportunities—after one student asked about seeing one at the local WalMart; “Adopt-A-Senior” opportunities; a Google map of the many local food banks; and even links to a local COVID antibodies study, for which one student signed up. (This study had had a dearth of a certain ethnic group it had sought, and her participation helped them improve those numbers!)

My students found this lesson to be personal, practical, and motivating toward future actions. During a time when community involvement opportunities can seem so limited by COVID-19, this lesson truly proved to all of us that there was still plenty each of us could do to effect social change. 🟢



**Sarah Lupton** ([slupton@rcps.info](mailto:slupton@rcps.info)) is the English as a Second Language (ESL) Lead Teacher for Region 5 in Roanoke, Virginia. She also enjoys coaching other teachers through the Teaching the Skills That Matter initiative at both the state and national level.



# Re-imagining the Citizenship Class

*by Anne Dugger & Mari Hunt Wassink*

Citizenship, as many of us know, is a right and a responsibility—and it requires work. Being engaged in our communities can be difficult as we navigate adult life—kids, career, school—any number of day-to-day activities can keep us away from the solemnity of advocacy, voting, and engagement. Adult learners of English face the added burden of engaging in their new lives in a new country and in a new language. At the [Catherine McAuley Center \(CMC\)](#) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, we decided to reinvent what our U.S citizenship preparation classes could be. Despite spending many years teaching our students the 100 questions, the reading and writing vocabulary, and test-taking skills, we felt “citizenship” encompassed so much more!

In a typical year, our center serves about 500 adult basic education students who come from over 50 different countries. Over 450 one-on-one volunteer tutors teach English, literacy, math, computer skills, citizenship preparation, and conversation skills. Students pursuing U.S. naturalization have the option to take a 6-week citizenship course taught by staff. Originally, this course was, essentially, a course that “taught to the test.” While many

students gained their U.S. citizenship through this course, we knew we could do better—our students deserved as much information and understanding as we were able to provide. In particular, we began to envision a more holistic approach—one that prepared students not only to become U.S. citizens, but also to live as informed and engaged U.S. citizens after their naturalization ceremonies.

In recent times, our national conversation has been centered on racism, xenophobia, and White supremacy on a scale we haven’t seen in many years. The majority of students at CMC are considered “people of color” in the racial caste system of the United States, and hence have been particularly targeted on a national and local scale. As staff, we started to ask students questions about their experiences in the United States as any or all of these. What we found, (and truly, what we expected) was that, in immigrating to this country, many students had walked into a historical situation they neither had a part in maintaining nor completely comprehended. Because of this, many students could not make sense of incidents in which police profiled them or neighbors commented on their accents or

hijabs. These stories and anecdotes shaped our thinking as we went about reimagining just what a citizenship class could be. In particular, they highlighted how important it would be to teach students to contextualize current events within the long, complex history of the U.S., as well as to create safe spaces where students could process racist incidents on the news and in their daily lives.

Our new course, U.S. Citizenship and Civic Engagement, took two years to build. We began with a needs assessment—doing surveys, asking questions, and taking a deep dive into what was needed—and from there developed a scope and sequence for the course. Because of the breadth of material we sought to cover, we decided on a 28-week course that met once per week for 90 minutes. Although 28 weeks initially seemed prohibitively long, we found that most students spend at least this long awaiting their naturalization interviews. Hence, a longer class has allowed students to capitalize on this wait time and thoroughly explore the course material.

The course is open to students with a diversity of English proficiencies, ranging from low beginning to high advanced English proficiency. As a result, we extensively utilize differentiated instruction to effectively teach at all levels simultaneously. For example, every class reading is available in at least two difficulty levels, and volunteer teacher's aides (when available) provide support to students during independent and small group work. Eventually, we hope to expand the course to include adult learners at the emerging literacy level, as well. Structurally, the curriculum is organized into three overarching units: history, civics/government, and community engagement. Instead of teaching all of the 100 civic questions together, followed by the reading and writing vocabulary, the test material is folded organically into each unit by topic. For example, students learn how to read and write "Congress" and "senator" as well as memorize who their U.S. senators and representatives are during the week on the Legislative Branch.

The history unit centers on teaching the essential themes, events, and people of U.S. history with an emphasis on understanding how our past influences and shapes our present. Particular attention is paid to how White colonizers' enslavement of Africans and genocide against Native Americans form the foundation of White supremacy in our society today. Class projects and discussions are designed to engage students with primary source materials. Visual primary sources are particularly useful, because they do not require high English proficiency to understand (although depending on the source, the teacher may need to provide cultural context), and thus are perfectly suited for a classroom with a wide range of English levels. For example, students work in pairs with the [1787 diagram of the Brookes slave ship](#) to make observations, develop hypotheses, and ask questions. Afterward, they connect their analyses as a class to the history of the [Transatlantic Slave Trade and slavery in the United States](#). Students then discuss how and why White Americans excused the brutal institution of slavery, and how these justifications birthed today's racist policies and ideas.

Throughout the history unit, we have found two elements crucial to fruitful class discussions: [trauma-informed teaching](#) and [translanguaging](#). Many of the students we teach fled their home countries as refugees and asylum-seekers because of political or ethnic violence. While it would be detrimental to their success as new U.S. citizens to deny them the honest truth about our country's history, we also do not wish to re-traumatize students through our insensitivity to students' personal histories. Therefore, we built trauma-informed teaching techniques into the class to foster psychological safety for all the students. When studying potentially triggering topics such as genocide, we give trigger-warnings beforehand and use simple techniques, such as requesting a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, to check in with students throughout the class period. Students also establish discussion ground-rules together and review them each

week. Since we set high expectations for the depth at which students will engage with each topic, we provide scaffolding to help students of many levels of literacy and English succeed. In particular, allowing students to use their first languages in pair work and individual investigation helps students to encounter the subject matter in a more familiar linguistic context before discussing their reflections or creating a project to share with the class in English (or another lingua franca).

The unit on civics and government covers the Constitution and the structure of the federal government, as well as the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens. We use role playing extensively to help students internalize the knowledge and skills they will need to advocate for their rights. For example, in the lesson on the First Amendment, groups of students write and perform skits demonstrating how someone could exercise each of the five rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. During the week on voting rights, students line up and pretend to check in at the polls, present an accepted ID (under Iowa law), fill out a demo ballot, and deposit it into the voting machine. Art projects and memory games are also employed to help students express and internalize course content, such as motivations for voting and names of elected officials.

Finally, the unit on community engagement exposes students to local social service agencies and centers of art and culture, and encourages them to become more active in participating and shaping community life. In our particular context, we have developed partnerships with the African American Museum of Iowa, the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library, the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission, the League of Women Voters, and Justice for Our Neighbors. We envisioned a class that would allow our students to interact with area organizations, create space for them to begin the “work” of citizenship, and to understand the history that shapes many of their encounters in their new country.

Before taking students on field trips or inviting guest speakers, we prepared the organizations to receive the students. For example, we went to both museums and first did a tour with just our staff, which includes people from multiple countries. We were looking for triggers or places where we could help our students understand the exhibits. We asked to see the docent’s scripts for tours and simplified the language or inserted trigger warnings so our students could be free to learn and soak in the history provided without fear. Before having guests present to our classes, we talked with them about interacting with immigrants and refugees, and how to best communicate with people who may need a slower pace for speaking or simplified English. We wanted to honor the learners’ capacities to understand the information presented, both by setting high expectations for how much they could understand and by coaching docents and presenters to improve the accessibility of their materials. Engaging local organizations in the curriculum has also created a reciprocal learning opportunity for these institutions. They are able to understand how to best serve a new demographic that they have not previously reached, often through misunderstanding on both sides. Through the field trips and guest presentations, students gain familiarity with the services and arts available in the community; simultaneously, participating agencies develop new strategies to engage a more diverse clientele. Taken together, we now offer an introduction to the major hubs of civic engagement in the community that connects students and institutions in a mutual learning experience.

We kept an eye on our own assumptions as we collected the information needed to begin building this class. This particular course can be a true learning experience for the teacher! As we taught the class, it became important for us to situate our own biases. The course can and will (and is designed to!) challenge us to rethink our history and to understand better the issues facing us today. Being cognizant of *who* teaches this course is imperative—and

understanding that each person will be challenged to think about their own biases and assumptions.

Although our U.S. Citizenship and Civic Engagement curriculum is complete, we continuously update the curriculum. Our course recognizes the need to make our history relevant to our students today. With this in mind, we discuss stories that are happening in our news cycles at the moment. We also bring relevant news stories from past years to show the cyclical nature of some of this nation's issues. For example, when we talk about the Great Depression, the teacher talks about how many people in the United States today have or had grandparents who lived through those years. We talk about the stories we've heard from people who lived through that time and the issues they faced for years after—food hoarding, increased insecurity, and lack of trust in banks. This can easily lead to (and has!) conversations about food insecurity today, or even generational trauma, which leads us into every day, real-world issues facing many of our nation's population today. We always point out that these issues are continuing to happen, even today, and they impact how our students vote or for whom they advocate.

Prior to beginning our newly revised citizenship course, we had been averaging about 10 new citizens per year. The first year we began this course, we averaged 14. As the course grew into the second year, (even with a pandemic!), our new citizens numbered in the 30s last year! We found that some of our students dropped into particular classes they wanted to review or learn more about. We also found that only a few students stayed for the entire course, but often "picked back up" to fill in knowledge they needed or wanted.

We firmly believe adult English learners have something to offer their new home country and to that end, have created a class that prepares them for actively engaging in their citizenship. We encourage them to run for office, to dream big, and to really think about their choices when it comes to

politics, voting, and community advocacy. Our newly re-imagined citizenship course is what our new citizens deserve as they move into unfamiliar political and social landscapes—a sense of purpose, pride in their citizenship, and the ability to steer their ship the way they see fit. 📍



**Anne Dugger** holds a master's degree in education in teacher leadership. She is the Director of Education Services for the Catherine McAuley Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Her educational interests include andragogy, educational social justice, and volunteerism as social reform. Anne is passionate about adult basic education and believes firmly that adult learners have needed skills, experience, and voices in our communities.



**Mari Hunt Wassink** served as the Education Program Coordinator at the Catherine McAuley Center from 2017 to 2020. She holds a B.A. in history and Spanish from Coe College. As an educator, she is passionate about helping people achieve their goals and become informed and engaged members of society who advocate for themselves and their communities.



## Civics Education as a Critical Component of Adult Education

**A** key outcome of participation in adult education is that students are empowered to be more engaged in and informed about their roles as parents, employees, and community members. Civics education is a critical component of all levels and types of adult education, preparing students to engage in respectful dialogue, become knowledgeable about American history and civic structures, and understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

Civics education should never be a cut-and-paste exercise from one year to another. The fast pace of change the past two years certainly reminds us of that! Civics education should draw on current events that impact the students' communities at the local, state, and national levels and help students identify and understand connections between current and past events and social and civic structures.

The [Civics Education Issue Brief](#) of the TSTM Toolkit provides a vision for this type of instruction:

*“Civics education equips adult learners to deal with issues of critical importance in their lives and communities, with advocacy and agency as central tenets... Whether preparation for passing the United States citizenship examination or the social studies sub-test on HSE exams, civics education provides learners with an understanding of the fundamentals of government and U.S. history, ideally through a critical lens that draws on learners' own experiences, beliefs, and world views. More important, a well-designed civics education program supports the individual's full integration into society with opportunities to accept leadership roles and participate in community organizations... Quality civics education provides a means for all learners to become not only personally responsible but, potentially, participatory and justice-oriented citizens as well.”*

Using the resources of the Toolkit, adult educators can facilitate respectful conversations about current events and lead students to deeper learning about American government, history, and civic participation. Additionally, such civics education lessons can engage students in timely conversations around equity issues, which can help illuminate the history and social structures underpinning many current social tensions. Productive conversations and project-based learning activities could explore issues of housing policies, voting rights, environmental justice, disability rights, digital inclusion, climate action, health disparities, and so many more.

Setting the stage by emphasizing the standards-based instructional strategies of grounding evidence in text and using evidence to build on each other's observations or insights, civics lessons can emphasize the value of the diversity of experiences adults bring with them, apply critical thinking to those experiences, and explore each other's perspectives. Through such learning experiences, our students can build the confidence and language skills to be more engaged in their communities. 

# 2021

## PROGRESS CALENDAR

### APR

**14-15** [Adult Education and Literacy Conference ReMix Plenary Session: Showcase](#)

Virtual

**15-May 1** [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics \(NCTM\) Annual Meeting](#)

Virtual

**22** [Teaching Complex Texts: A Workshop from VALRC](#) (12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.)

### SEP

**20-22** [ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education](#)  
San Antonio, TX

**24-25** [VATESOL Conference: The Next Steps for Multilingual Learners](#)

[Call for Proposal Deadline June 1, 2021](#)

Virtual

VALRC Online Courses begin

### POSTPONED

SETESOL  
Richmond, VA  
Moved to fall 2022

GED® Annual Conference  
Atlanta, GA  
Moved to July 2022 (awaiting date)

Correction Education Association (CEA) Conference  
Austin, TX  
Moved to August 2021

[National College Transition Network Conference](#)  
Paused until further notice

[National Career Pathways Network Conference](#)  
No information

### MAY

**12** [Distance Ed Open Discussion](#)  
(1:30-3:00 p.m.)

**17** [Program Managers Webinar](#)  
(1:30-3:00 p.m.)

### OCT

**5-8** [American Association for Adult and Continuing Education \(AAACE\)](#)  
Mirimar Beach, FL

**6-7** [National Council for Workforce Education Conference](#)  
Tucson, AZ

**21** [Virginia Association of Teachers of English \(VATE\) Virtual Mini-Conference](#)

**22** [Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium \(MERC\) Conference](#)  
Richmond, VA

**25-27** [National Center for Families Learning \(NCFL\) Conference](#)  
Dallas, TX

### JUN

**15-16** [Teaching the Skills that Matter National Conference](#)

### AUG

**11-13** [Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults \(LESLLA\) Annual Symposia](#)  
Malmö, Sweden

### NOV

**15** [National Council of Teachers of English \(NCTE\) Annual Convention](#)  
Louisville, KY

