

One major change to the NRS table splits Beginning ESL into two levels, Low Beginning ESL and High Beginning ESL, so that learners will be able to show regular gains.

Showing Gains: Adjustments Made to ESL Functioning Levels

by DEBRA CARGILL

If you are a state-administered, federally funded adult education ESOL program or have been awarded a publicly funded grant, chances are you are familiar with the National Reporting System (NRS) begun in the 1990s to ensure that programs have accountability in the delivery of services. The NRS is an outcome-based reporting system wherein programs report on learners' educational gains as they participate in adult education programs. The NRS Educational Functioning Level (EFL) Table includes student measures to describe adult education students and assessment of the impact of adult education instruction.

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) has recently made several changes to the NRS Educational Functioning Levels for ESL that will go into effect July 1, 2006. These changes reflect the NRS' support in improving the public accountability of adult education programs and will assist states in correlating practices and programs for successful educational outcomes, as well

as assessing progress in meeting their educational goals, a critical element of the new NRS ESL table.

What is different about the new NRS ESL Educational Functioning Level Table? The changes focus on the beginning and advanced levels. These modifications will have some positive effects on how data are reported. Although the changes require no alterations in data collection or testing procedures, programs need to make a careful examination of the new levels in order to determine that their program practices are aligned with the changes. The changes may guide the decision of how to determine the levels of instruction for the ESL classes offered in local programs and how to place ESL learners in those classes. The levels at which students are initially placed is based on their performance of literacy related tasks (ESL: listening, speaking, reading, writing) and are still critical elements of the EFL descriptors.

Historically, more than 40% of ESL learners function in the beginning

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levels, so let's take a look at the beginning levels first. The new table will add an additional beginning level to the two currently provided. ESL Literacy (SPL 0-1), Low Beginning (SPL 2), and High Beginning (SPL 3) replace what is currently Beginning ESL Literacy (SPL 0-1) and Beginning ESL (SPL 2-3). Splitting two beginning levels into three beginning levels provides us with a more narrowly defined parameter, which gives us several advantages. The score ranges for the approved assessment tools become narrower, giving the effect of moving beginning students from level to level at a more consistent pace. In the older system, students remained in the two beginning levels for a longer duration because the score gaps were so much greater. The new NRS table will help improve showing learner gains at the beginning levels, as students will move through three distinct beginning levels.

Another change is at the advanced level. The new NRS ESL Educational

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PROGRESS

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A Few Words on *Progress*

Last year over 13,000, or 45 percent, of the students in Virginia's adult education programs were enrolled in ESOL instruction. In addition, hundreds of ESOL learners were served in community and faith-based programs that do not receive funding through the Virginia Department of Education, and thus were not represented in the National Reporting System (NRS) data. While Northern Virginia continues to have the highest number of immigrants of any region in the commonwealth, virtually every area of the state has experienced some impact from increases in immigrant or migrant worker populations. No longer is ESOL instruction confined to a few urban or suburban programs. Adult educators in small towns and rural communities are also being challenged to develop or expand ESOL programming as well.

In this issue of *Progress*, we have assembled articles to help teachers, tutors, and program managers as they seek to improve existing ESOL programs or to develop new ones. Regardless of the level of experience with ESOL, adult educators will find good information in Larry Condelli's article based on "Effective Instruction for Adult ESL Literacy Students: Findings from the What Works Study," a project of the American Institute for Research. Other articles focus on instructing low level learners, changes in the NRS, print and web resources, and EL/Civics projects.

While we can highlight the elements of quality instruction, identify important resources, and provide data about trends, in the final analysis, adult education programs are really about the teachers or tutors and the students they serve. To bring that fact into sharp focus, a student and a teacher offer their views about the importance of ESOL instruction. "My recent evaluation for promotion included comments from my boss saying that I was very fluent in English. I was so proud," recalls Katerine Biernot from Virginia Beach. Fairfax teacher Wendy Kilpatrick ends her commentary about the perks of being in adult education by saying, "My favorite benefit? The satisfaction over the last twenty years of knowing that I had a part, no matter how tiny, in some people's success stories."

Establishing and maintaining an ESOL program that helps students achieve their dreams for better lives and gives teachers and tutors the satisfaction of having played important roles in those accomplishments is hard but rewarding work. The goal of this issue of *Progress* is to offer some support along the way.

Sincerely,

Barbara Gibson, Manager
Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center



Calendar

**May
18**

Literacy Fair of Virginia
Keysville, VA .org

**June
10**

Reading Rules in
Richmond
Ginter Park Library
1200 Westbrook Ave.
804 646-1236

**July
26-27**

Literacy Trainer Institute
Crown Plaza Hotel
Richmond, VA
Contact: Vicky Sanborn
800 237-0178

**August
3-4**

Adult English Literacy
Providers of Northern
Virginia Professional
Development
Conference
George Mason
University

**November
2-3**

LESLLA International
Forum
Research, Practice, and
Policy for Low-educated
Second Language and
Literacy Acquisition – for
Adults (LESLLA)
Virginia Commonwealth
University
Richmond, Virginia
Contact: Nancy Faux
800 237-0178

CLICK:

ON REEPWORLD.ORG

by SUZANNE GRANT

If you are an adult ESOL educator, you know your students need to develop speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to navigate U.S. systems such as employment, health care, banking, and community involvement. You may also have students who need English and academic skills for college or job training programs. You may want to give students a voice in the instruction they receive and help them find ways to practice English outside of class, even at the beginning levels. But as a busy teacher or administrator, where can you turn for help? Wouldn't it be great if there was a website that could offer resources to you in all those areas?

Well, there is. The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) has been developing and refining its website since its initial launch in 2003. Now <http://reepworld.org> not only has instructional resources for teachers and administrators, but it also has a student access section designed to give beginning-level learners and others an online place for additional practice in English. And it's all free of charge.

Educators

The primary resource on the site has long been the *REEP Adult ESOL Curriculum*, a comprehensive curriculum with nine to eleven life skills topic units for each of nine levels of instruction. In addition to fully articulated units, it also has resources that can help you supplement your current instruction – tested lesson plans and activities, needs assessment and classroom assessment ideas, web resources, and online activities that are student-friendly.

To explore the curriculum, the best place to begin is the site map. Go to <http://reepworld.org> and click on Educator. Click on the REEP's Online Curriculum link, read the introduction, and then click Enter. This brings you to the site map. From this page, you can easily navigate the various parts of the curricu-

lum including the following:

- Instructional Planning (understand what makes the curriculum tick)
- Level Descriptions (determine which REEP instructional level best matches the level of your students)
- Curriculum Content (learn what content units are available and how they are organized)
- Getting Started Unit (find ideas for getting to know your students and building a community of learners)
- Learner Assessment (learn about assessing students upon program entry and throughout their study)
- Resources (mine the wealth of teacher and student resources available)

Students

The relative newcomer to the site, the REEP ESL Student Website section, is an easy-to-use website developed specifically for beginning level ESOL adults, for whom the vast majority of websites demand a higher level of English and Internet skills.

To check it out, begin by clicking on Students, then English Practice. Start with Introduction to experience the activities that assist students in learning to use a mouse and how to use REEPWorld. Then, click on Health and you can choose from The Body, Healthy Life, Food, Health Problems, Emergencies, and Medicine. Click on Family to hear four families talk about life in a new place with new challenges and new possibilities.

The staff at REEP hope that you enjoy your exploration of our website and that it will prove as useful to you and your adult learners as it has to teachers and adult learners all over the country. ■■

Suzanne Grant is the Director of REEP (Arlington Education and Employment Program, Arlington Public Schools). The REEP program offers English classes to prepare adults to use the English language while functioning in their roles as parents, workers, and community members.



The *REEP Adult ESOL Curriculum* was originally developed with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 1994 and updated for web-accessibility through Virginia EL/Civics funding in 2003. Virginia EL/Civics funding also enabled the initial development of the REEP ESL Student Website. The site is still under development and will be expanded as additional funding becomes available.

REEPWorld resources are only available online, but you are welcome to download what you need. For inquiries about the curriculum or to schedule a training, contact reep@arlington.k12.va.us.

A Success Story Interview with ESOL Student Katerine Biernot

by IDALIA ROSA-MARTINEZ

“My future husband and I met in Caracas, Venezuela, and one year later I was in Virginia Beach, Virginia, walking down the aisle,” said Katerine Biernot.

She arrived in the U.S. in December 1999 to start her life in a foreign country with very little English. Katerine had studied English for several years in high school in her native Venezuela, yet never gave it much importance or put it into practice outside the classroom. But when she met her husband as he vacationed in Venezuela, and dealt with the subsequent communication difficulties during courtship and marriage, she recognized how important that second language would become in her life.

Having to travel and switch planes in the middle of an airport runway without knowing how to ask for directions was her first real life run-in with her English-language deficiency.

“I didn’t know where I was going in a little car in the middle of airplanes,” Katerine remembered. “I was so scared.”

She could only trust that she was being led to her correct destination, a plane to Norfolk, Virginia, to join her future husband. She arrived one week before her wedding day, December 11, 1999. Soon after, she began her study of English at the Adult Learning Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. She studied for six months in beginning literacy classes before acquiring her first job at Trader Publishing, a job she held for two-and-a-half years.

“My first week on the job without understanding English very well was the most embarrassing and difficult time I could ever remember.” Katerine recalls she passed her initial interview at Trader’s because she tuned in to two or three words in the conversation and grasped a general idea of the interview questions. She responded to the interviewer with the best English she could muster.

As a Trader employee, Katerine says

that the hiring of prospective employees lay on her shoulders. Her job included English reading, speaking, and researching information to report back to supervisors and department managers. She was determined to do a good job in spite of her fear of making mistakes.

“I emailed and called my husband constantly in my broken English so he could explain so many things I didn’t understand on the job,” Katerine recalls. “His English was the only one I understood for so long.”



Katerine Biernot with her teacher, Bettye Hussey, at the Adult Learning Center in Virginia Beach.

Katerine struggled on the job, but persisted in achieving an understanding of English. For some time, her demanding workload and hours forced her to stop attending formal classes for awhile, a situation that was detrimental to her language acquisition.

“I recommend that anyone learning English stay in classes until they are able to achieve good speaking, grammar, and writing skills even if it means sacrifice,” she said.

Katerine did sacrifice by rearranging her work schedule so she could return to the Adult Learning Center and continue

her study of English. She’s been back in the books for almost two years now and is currently in the ESOL High Intermediate class. Her progress is steady, report Katerine and her teacher. And her progress is necessary, because her job demands a full eight-hour shift in clientele communication that requires her knowledge and increased comprehension of English vocabulary in the health field.

Katerine recently received a promotion and salary raise at her current employer, AmeriGroup. She hopes to remain there and has dreams of stepping up to supervisor someday.

“My recent evaluation for promotion included comments from my boss saying that I was very fluent in English; I was so proud,” Katerine said.

Katerine became a United States citizen in September 2005.

“In the USA many things work, like the mail delivery, the streets are clean, and the opportunity for a better life is here for those who work for it,” she said.

Katerine feels she has accomplished much in the USA. “I had to leave my university education back in Venezuela and help my mother support us after my father died. But I am proud of who I am today.” Katerine said. “I am determined to do my best and the Adult Learning Center has helped me with my dreams.” ■

Idalia Rosa-Martinez is the evening ESOL coordinator for the Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center. She has been with the Center for four years.

GMU to Host Second ESOL Professional Development Conference

by PATRICIA DONNELLY

The Adult English Literacy Providers of Northern Virginia (AELPNV) are continuing their commitment to provide professional development opportunities to adult education practitioners in the region by hosting the Summer 2006 AELPNV Conference on Thursday, August 3rd and Friday, August 4th, at George Mason University's main campus in Fairfax.

Six Northern Virginia-based, adult literacy organizations collaborate on this conference to provide much-needed, high-quality adult English literacy training. This coalition includes Arlington Education and Employment Program, Fairfax County Public Schools, George Mason University, Hogar Hispano—Catholic Charities, the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, the Organization to Promote Adult Literacy, and Prince William Public Schools.

The goal is to offer professional development at an affordable cost for area resi-

dents to learn tips of the trade for working with adult ESOL and basic literacy students. Many participants are volunteers serving the community through small community-based organizations or faith-based institutions who have limited opportunity for professional development. This year's \$25.00 conference fee will include a presentation by keynote speaker Neil Anderson, Professor of Linguistics and English Language at Brigham Young University, as well as opportunities to meet with publishers and participate in over 50 different workshop sessions. Session titles include "Teaching Vocabulary: The Magic of Seven," "Thinking About Reading," "Fundamentals of Immigration Law," and "Ethical Decision Making in the Adult Education Classroom." All the presentations will appeal to both ESOL and ABE adult practitioners.

This year, the Virginia Regional Literacy Coordinating Committees have been very generous in their support. The

Northern Virginia Regional Literacy Coordinating Committee (RLCC) Region VI has made a contribution to the Summer 2006 AELPNV Conference. In addition, the Spotsylvania County, Frederick County, and Shenandoah Central Region IV RLCCs have all contributed to this summer's effort. The AELPNV Committee appreciates the support of our literacy colleagues across Virginia.

Conference registration forms will be available after May 10th. Forms will be sent over the VAELN listserv and also will be available online at <http://www.opaliteracy.org>. The space limits conference attendance to 250 participants, so plan to register early. The website also provides a list of near-by hotels. For further questions or information, please contact the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia at 703-237-0866. ■

Patricia Donnelly is Executive Director of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia.

ESOL Resources in Print and on the Web

Don't have the time to pick and choose from among the many ESOL resources available? Here are a few excellent options.

Print Resources

Bell, J. S. (2004). **Teaching multilevel classes in ESL (2nd ed)**. Ontario: Pippin. (Available from www.pippinpub.com/)

In the second edition of this classic, Bell describes features that make a class multilevel. These include differences in language proficiency, educational experience, and situational factors. This book discusses the challenges of teaching and planning curricula in multilevel classes and offers strategies for classroom management. It is filled with practical activities and resources.

Brown, H.D. (2001). **Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy (2nd ed.)**. White Plains: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

This book discusses teaching practices that are grounded in principles

of language learning. Written for new teachers, it covers topics such as the history of language teaching, principles of language learning, designing and implementing language lessons, and assessing language skills.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (1999). **How languages are learned**. (2nd ed) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This clearly written and simple introduction to the study of language acquisition is invaluable for those wishing to know more about how we learn languages. The main theories of first and second language acquisition are discussed along with their practical implications for language teaching.

McKay, H., Tom, A., & Ur, P., Eds. (1999). **A. Teaching adult second language learners**. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Focusing specifically on adults learning English, this book provides a summary of the principles of teaching adults, a lengthy section on building community

in the classroom, and a variety of activities organized by life-skill topics. Topics include personal identification, family, community, housing, and work. Within each of these sections, the authors provide several interactive activities including purpose, time, level, preparation, step-by-step procedures, and follow-up. The overview of teaching adult ESOL, as well as the structure and detail, make this book ideal for practitioners new to teaching adults learning English.

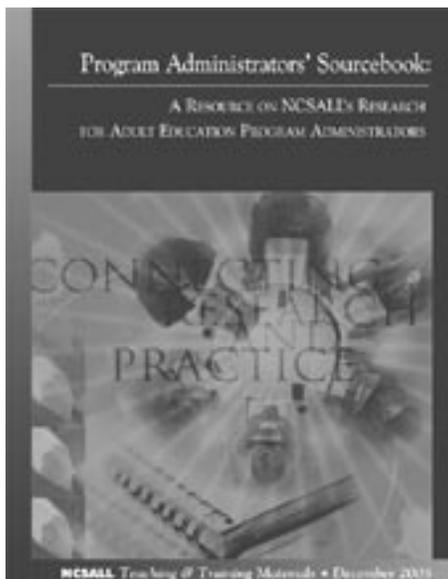
Parrish, B. (2004). **Teaching adult ESL: A practical introduction**. New York: McGraw-Hill.

This introduction to teaching adult ESL, presents the many complex facets involved in teaching adult ESOL in a thoughtful and interactive manner. Chapters include, "Working with Adult ESL Learners," "Approaches and Program Options in Adult ESL," "Managing ESL Classes," "Selecting Instructional Materials and Resources," "Assessing Learn-

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Hot off the Presses: NCSALL Announces Two New Publications

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy would like to announce the publication of two new research reports. *Submitted by* WORLD EDUCATION, NCSALL'S DISSEMINATION WING



NCSALL Program Administrators' Sourcebook: A Resource on NCSALL's Research for Adult Education Program Administrators

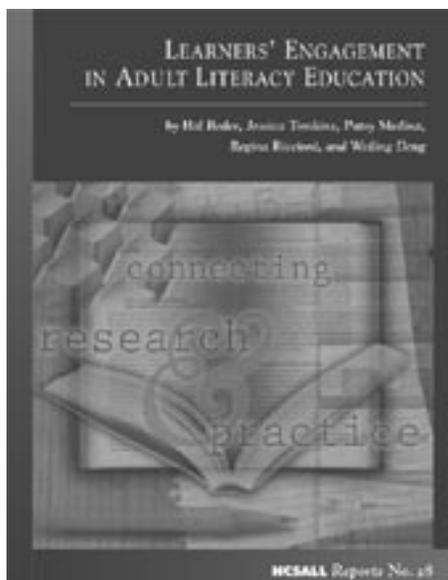
If you administer an adult education program, you face a wide variety of challenges:

- How can you help students make “level” gains?
- How can you help students gain the skills they need to reach their goals?
- How can you help students stay in programs long enough to meet their goals?
- How can you prepare and retain good teachers?
- How can you document the

successes of your program?

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) conducted research relevant to these questions. The *Program Administrators' Sourcebook* (December 2005) is designed to give you, as a program administrator, direct access to research that may help you address the challenges you face in your job.

For more information, go to:
www.ncsall.net/?id=1035.



NCSALL Research:

Learners' Engagement in Adult Literacy Education

This research was conducted by the NCSALL research team at Rutgers University, New Jersey, in partnership with the New Brunswick Public Schools' Adult Learning Center, NCSALL's partner in the National Labsite for Adult Literacy Education. The research team studied six classes: three basic level classes, a GED class, and two adult high school reading and writing classes.

Engagement is mental effort focused on learning and is a precondition to learning progress. This qualitative study looks at how learning context shapes engagement. Key findings include:

- Students participating in classes that use individualized group instruction (IGI) show a high level of engagement. The high level of engagement exists for three reasons: motivation, the encouragement given to students by teachers, and the voluntary nature of participation in adult literacy education.
- The engagement falls into three categories: learners engaging with materials, learners engaging with teachers, and learners engaging with other learners. Each engagement

pattern has a shaping factor. For learners engaging with materials, the shaping factor is the routines and procedures of IGI. For learners engaging with teachers, the shaping factor is the teacher's interpretation of his or her role and related behavior; and for learners engaging with other learners, the shaping factor is the social norms of the classroom.

IGI is a commonly used method of instruction in adult basic education. This study has revealed factors that shape engagement. Engagement, a precondition to learning, can generally be assessed through simple observation. It follows that learners' level of engagement can function as a day-to-day marker of instructional success. If the results of assessment prove negative, malfunctions of the instructional system, teachers' role behaviors, and/or classroom norms may be places to search for solutions.

For more information on the research on engagement, read *Learners' Engagement in Adult Literacy Education* (NCSALL Report #28) at:
www.ncsall.net/?id=29#28. ■

Teaching ESOL in Literacy Programs

by VICTOIRE GERKENS SANBORN

Is it effective to combine ESOL and ABE curricula into one tutor-training workshop? How are ESOL students unique in the world of adult education? This article examines two recent publications and the implications of their findings for literacy programs that serve ESOL students.

In *A Conversation With Focus On Basics...What Works with Adult ESOL Students*, part of the NCSALL website found online at www.ncsall.net/?id=189, Heide Spruck Wrigley discusses the teaching strategies tutors should use with ESOL literacy students. Adults who did not complete schooling in their native countries generally experience trouble in multi-level classes, where basic literacy is rarely taught, and where the more advanced students often drive the pace of instruction.

This observational study, involving about 500 students, found the following important results:

1. ESOL students learn more when tutors make the connection between the textbook and the student's life outside of instruction. Tutoring strategies should include the use of objects (real foods, household items), environmental print (flyers, labels, signs), mail (including notes from schools), and trips to neighborhood spots where literacy is needed. Other important tutoring strategies include language experience stories, personal writings, and songs.

2. ESOL students make higher gains when several students in a class share the language and the tutor is bilingual. If the tutor is able to explain an assignment in a student's native language, then the student can concentrate on the learning task instead of the instructions. If a tutor is not bilingual, then she must demonstrate or model tasks in order to make the instructions simple and clear. When

their frustration and anxiety are reduced, students can focus more on "meaning-making."

3. ESOL students respond to a balance of routine and variety. To hold their interest, they need to practice new learning tasks, as well as experience a variety of instructional materials and techniques.

4. For an ESOL student to make progress, frequent and regular attendance is more important than total hours of instruction.

The second article, "How Should Adult ESL Reading Instruction Differ from ABE Reading Instruction?" by Miriam Burt, Joy Kreeft Peyton, and Carol Van Duzer, (www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/readingdif.html) offers suggestions for instruction in the four components of reading instruction.

1. Vocabulary

Because of ESOL students' lack of familiarity with English, vocabulary instruction must be carefully planned and deliberate. Tutors should:

- pre-teach the vocabulary before introducing a reading passage;
- select reading passages that are only slightly above the learner's independent reading level;
- teach high-frequency words first; and
- provide multiple exposures to specific words in multiple contexts.

2. Alphabets and Word Analysis

Native students possess a larger vocabulary base than ESOL students. Tutoring strategies should include:

- using actual English words that follow patterns, not nonsense words;
- teaching word analysis skills, including prefix and suffix meanings; and
- identifying parts of speech and their roles.

3. Fluency

Fluency is of questionable value in the adult ESOL classroom. Tutors should:

- limit choral readings to select short segments that emphasize English stress and intonation and
- have a native-speaker model reading the passage before involving an ESOL learner in oral or choral reading.

4. Comprehension

Certain reading passages may be difficult for ESOL students because of cultural differences. Tutors need to:

- find out what students know, need to know, and want to know;
- build on ideas and concepts from learners' cultures and experiences whenever possible and select readings on topics they are most familiar with; and
- pre-teach vocabulary and preview unfamiliar ideas, actions, vocabulary, and settings as well as titles, pictures, graphics, text structure, and discourse markers (e.g., words such as "first" or "next").

In conclusion, both articles make a persuasive case for literacy programs to offer separate and distinct tutor-training workshops, no matter how tempting it might be to combine ABE and ESOL curricula into one hybrid. ■

Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is the Director of the Literacy Support Center.

What Works:

A Preview of AIR's Two-Year Study of ESL Literacy Students

by LARRY CONDELLI

Adult English-as-a-second-language (ESL) literacy students pose a special challenge to teachers because the students lack literacy skills in their native language and English communication skills. While their more literate peers can transfer their native language-literacy skills to help them learn English, ESL literacy students lack foundational skills such as decoding and comprehension strategies and cannot produce print. They face the dual task of learning literacy and English-language skills simultaneously. The *What Works* Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students is the first large research study conducted to identify ways to provide effective instruction to improve the English literacy and language skills of these students.

Over a two-year period, we studied 495 ESL literacy students from 13 programs in seven states. Although there were more than 30 languages spoken among our students, about two-thirds were Spanish speakers and a substantial portion of students came from recently non-literate cultures, including Somalia (ten percent), and Hmong-speakers from Laos (eight percent). The average student age was 40, and 72 percent of the students were female who had on the average of 3.1 years of schooling in their home countries. We followed these students for nine months from the time they entered their first class, observing each class an average of nine times to measure classroom instruction that we could relate to student learning.

Measuring Instruction: Classroom Observations

Teaching adult ESL students to become proficient speakers of English and to be skilled readers is a complex endeavor, and trying to develop a framework for

capturing this work was quite a challenge. This teaching requires a dual effort of instruction in (1) the language skills necessary to communicate in English and (2) the literacy or reading and writing skills necessary to process print and gain meaning from the written word. We developed a classroom observation guide as a formal way to code and quantify these activities.

We quantified the instructional activities measured through the observation guide, and we created two categories of measures: instructional emphasis measures, which describe the content of the instruction in terms of the language or literacy focus; and instructional strategies, which include the activities teachers used to organize and teach the lesson. The following instructional variables were used in the analyses.

Instructional Emphasis Variables

- **Literacy development emphasis**—main focus on reading and writing development
- **ESL acquisition emphasis**—main focus on speaking, listening, fundamentals of English
- **Functional skills emphasis**—main focus on functional literacy (e.g., interpreting forms, labels, using money, maps)
- **Basic literacy skills emphasis**—main focus on print awareness, fluency, and basic reading skills
- **Reading comprehension emphasis**—main focus on comprehension strategies
- **Writing emphasis**—main focus on writing fluency, writing practice
- **Oral communication emphasis**—main focus on speaking and listening practice

Instructional Strategies Variables

- **Varied practice and interaction**—Teachers provide students with opportunities to learn in a variety of ways and modalities (e.g., speaking, reading, writing,) and by having students interact with each other.
- **Open communication**—Teachers are flexible and respond to students' concerns as they arise. They ask for open-ended responses and support authentic communication.
- **Connection to the "outside"**—Teachers link what is being learned in class to life outside the class and bring the outside into the class through use of field trips, speakers, and real-life materials.
- **Native language in the class**—Teachers use the native language to explain concepts and give directions, and they allow students to ask questions and complete written assignments in the native language. These strategies were often used in conjunction with each other, either within a single class session or over several sessions.

Outcome Measures

We measured students' English language and literacy development using the following battery of standardized and non-standardized measured reading, writing, speaking, and listening tests.

- The Woodcock-Johnson Basic Reading Skills Cluster (WJBRSC) and Reading Comprehension Cluster (WJRCC) measure basic reading and comprehension abilities.
- The oral Basic English Skills Test (BEST) measures English speaking and listening.

- Adult Language Assessment Scales (A-LAS) Writing Assessment measures writing ability.
- Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Form Completion Test measures functional writing.

Each assessment was conducted individually at entry and at approximately three and nine months after enrollment, regardless of how long the student remained enrolled. We gave instructions for each test in the learner's native language.

Findings

The *What Works* study was successful in relating instructional strategies to student learning. We used a statistical technique, latent growth modeling, to examine the relationship of instructional content, instructional strategies, student characteristics, teacher characteristics, and class variables on student outcomes. We found that three instructional strategies: connection to the outside world; use of the student's native language for clarification in instruction; and varied practice and interaction; were related to growth in student literacy and language learning. Emphasis on oral communication, where the teacher explicitly emphasized oral English communication skills, also resulted in increased oral English proficiency. The tables summarize the main findings related to instruction and program practices.

Connection to the Outside: Using Materials from Everyday Life

One of the key findings of the study was that connecting literacy teaching to everyday life made a significant difference in basic-skills development in reading. To implement this strategy, teachers used materials from daily life containing information that students wanted to know about or with which they had some experience—such as grocery flyers, utility bills, letters from schools or immigration authorities, and other items that appear in students' mailboxes—to highlight literacy for adult contexts. Using authentic

materials in this way, teachers can help build vocabulary skills and background knowledge that helps students negotiate different types of document literacy and increase reading comprehension skills.

Activities of this sort might foster literacy development by linking new information to what learners already know and by engaging the learner in topics of interest. By starting with familiar materials that are of interest to learners and by creating situations for cognitive involvement, teachers can create interest, maintain high levels of motivation, and engage students' minds.

“We found that connection to the outside world, use of the student’s native language, and varied practice were related to growth in student literacy.”

Use of Students' Native Language for Clarification

Our study showed that when teachers used the native language as part of instruction to clarify and explain, students exhibited faster growth in both reading comprehension and oral communication skills. Students who received clarification in their native language were able to focus on the task at hand without worrying about whether or not they understood the directions correctly.

Many students are reluctant to use English outside of the classroom for fear of being misunderstood, fear of not understanding, or fear of ridicule. For these students, having a teacher who shares their language means being able to ask questions in a secure environment, having the opportunity to focus on learning, and taking in more information than otherwise possible.

Varied Practice and Interaction

Varied practice and student interaction is important to language learning, because learning how to communicate in English is a challenging process requiring different sets of knowledge: an understanding of sentence structure, grammar and syntax; a good sense of how written language reflects oral language (phonology); the ability to interpret and use word endings that change the meaning of an expression; and a rich vocabulary. In other words, students need a good sense of “how English works” to understand what is being said, and a good sense of what is appropriate in any given situation; that is, socio-linguistic competence.

While it is entirely possible to learn English on one's own and slowly sort out the intricacies of the language, the process is aided by a teacher who draws students' attention to certain patterns and rules when appropriate and gives students a chance to talk in class without having to worry about accuracy at every step. Setting time aside to demonstrate to students how English works and to practice language in meaningful ways appears to pay-off in terms of increasing oral proficiency.

Students

We found that the amount of formal education that students had was related to growth in their basic reading skills. It may be that students with more prior schooling in their native language gained some knowledge of basic reading that they were able to transfer to English, enabling them to learn faster. Students' English language and literacy skills when they started class also were related to their subsequent learning. Students with higher basic reading skills developed reading comprehension and oral communication skills faster than their peers. Similarly, students with higher initial English oral communication skills improved their basic reading skills faster. ■

Larry Condelli is the Managing Director of the American Institute for Research.

Do You Know About Virginia's EL/Civics Grant Opportunities?

by NANCY FAUX

What is the EL/Civics Education Program?

The English Literacy and Civics Education Demonstration Grants Program was designed to help states and communities provide expanded access to high-quality English literacy programs linked to civics education. Participants in these programs increase their English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in order to understand and navigate governmental, educational, and workplace systems and key American institutions, such as banking and health care.

Who provides the funding?

The U.S. Department of Education provides grants to states, which then may implement a competitive process for awarding sub-grants to local projects.

Who can apply to receive a sub-grant?

Local school divisions, post-secondary institutions, and private not-for-profit 501 (C)(3) community-based or-

ganizations are all eligible to receive the sub-grants.

When did this program begin?

The grants began being awarded in 1999 after the passage of Title II, section 243 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

Who is responsible for this funding and the program here in Virginia?

The Virginia Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and Literacy administers the program in Virginia.

How much money is usually given in the subgrants and for how long?

Each year it varies, but it can range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 per year. Grants can run from two to several years.

How are the recipients selected?

A review panel of expert adult educators from Virginia selects the awardees

from among the applications that meet all the requirements and were submitted within the deadline.

How often are these funds awarded?

Sub-grants are awarded once or twice a year.

Can you find an example of a recent project funded by an EL/Civics sub-grant.

Two such programs are highlighted in this issue of *Progress*. See page three to read about the REEP program. An article by Dr. David Red below describes a program he put together in Fairfax with EL/Civics monies.

Who can I contact for more information?

Ms. Judy Fine in the Office of Adult Education and Literacy at (804) 786-8367 or at judy.fine@doe.virginia.gov. ■

Nancy Faux is the ESOL Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

EL/Civics Funded Staff Development Program Now Available

by DAVID RED, PH.D.

A few years ago, Yvonne Thayer, then the director for adult education in the state, asked me to design a program for adult ESOL instructors to help them become better teachers of reading. The only requirement was to align the final product with the previously published *Introduction to Research-Based Adult Reading Instruction*, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in June 2005. I consulted with MaryAnn Florez, who at that time was an ESOL specialist in the Fairfax County Public Schools' adult ESOL program, and together we hammered out a model. I proposed this model to Dr. Thayer and she gave permission to move forward. When MaryAnn moved on to REEP, I approached the Center for Applied Linguistics, in Washington, D.C. to ask if they could help.

Miriam Burt, Carol van Duzer, and Lynda Terrill, from CAL's Center for English Language Acquisition, consulted on the project from the initial idea and created the product we now have – *Teaching Reading to Adult English Language Learners: A Reading Instruction Staff Development Program*. Trainers may implement this staff development program with small groups of ESOL practitioners. This product is not a guide for teachers; it is a training program.

The 15-hour, research-based workshop can be offered to instructors of low-level learners, advanced learners, and mixed levels of learners.

The workshop is broken into four presentation segments. The first six hours introduce participants to the basics of second language reading for adults. The next three segments are delivered in three-

hour time frames. During each of these segments, the participants prepare and demonstrate a particular facet of teaching reading and are encouraged to try it out in their classrooms before attending the next segment. The culminating activity is the creation of an entire reading lesson. An experienced trainer can give this workshop alone, but we found it is good to have a team (three is ideal) of presenters.

The program has been piloted twice, revised, and is now available online from the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center at www.valrc.org. ■

David L. Red, Ph.D., is the Adult ESOL Coordinator for Fairfax County Public Schools' Adult and Community Education Program

New Manual Will Guide Faith-Based Adult Ed Efforts

by CATHERINE NORRELL

The Virginia Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and Literacy and the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center are working together to develop a training manual for those faith-based organizations interested in contributing to adult education programs in their communities.

Many faith-based organizations wishing to make an impact on the literacy and work skills of their congregations and within neighboring communities attempt to design and conduct adult education programs. Although the organization's intent is good and the commitment level strong, these new programs often either do not succeed or succeed at very low levels. This lack of success in faith-based adult education programs is generally due to two factors: lack of information and lack of training.

Faith-based organizations are poised in a critical position in the adult education arena. Because of their community service objectives and focus, their natural position is on the front lines of the battle for social regeneration and uplift. This position helps them to see not only the need for increased literacy and work skills, but also some of the barriers that impede the attainment of those skills. Targeted training on various levels of adult education support will help the faith-based organization to more effectively meet the literacy needs of the community and to help adult students overcome those barriers.

The Adult Education Training Manual for Faith-Based Organizations is made up of two sections of three training modules. Section One introduces the course, conducts participants' introductions, and defines the various adult education programs available for faith-based organizations. It is designed to help participants become acclimated

to the training environment by providing an overview of the training, as well as acquainting them with the terms and language of adult education.

The third module of Section One is critical in that it provides an explanation of the ten levels of adult education support in which organizations may participate. The components of each level are explained beginning with simple awareness efforts and progressing through referral, mentoring, and partnering.

Section Two focuses on the logistics of developing, implementing, and evaluating the program designed in Section One. Topics covered in Section Two include de-

veloping a team, assigning roles, selecting materials, and recruiting learners.

When complete, this manual will provide faith-based organizations a step-by-step guide that will enable them to recognize how best to contribute to adult education efforts in their communities and to develop an effective plan to do so. ■

Catherine Norrell is a research assistant at the Resource Center and a Ph.D. candidate at VCU's School of Education.

Adult Education Organizational Interest Schema

Results of Data Interpretation	Level	Adult Education Program Type
Indicate >	1*	Awareness/Promotion Program
Indicate >	2*	Awareness and Information Dissemination Program
Indicate >	3*	Information Dissemination and Referral Program
Indicate >	4*	Mentoring Program
Indicate >	5*	Tutoring Program
Indicate >	6*	Mentoring and Tutoring Program
Indicate >	7*	Mentoring and Tutoring Program with Information Dissemination and Referral
Indicate >	8*	Satellite Adult Education Program
Indicate >	9*	Partnering
Indicate >	10	Community Based Literary Organization (CBLO)

*Levels 1-9 require partnership with local Community Based Literacy Organization (CBLO).

The chart above indicates ten possible levels of commitment available to faith-based organizations. The level chosen will be largely dependent on their size and resources.

Showing Gains: Continued from front page

Functioning Level Table removes the High Advanced ESL EFL descriptor and creates exit criteria for the advanced level from what was the High Advanced level. The previous Low Advanced level essentially becomes the Advanced Level; changes are in descriptors and cut scores for assessment. The advantages for this move are again to help ESL learners show learner gains at the Advanced level, as they will now be able to exit the level at a lower score range. The ceiling on the score range had previously been so high that it made showing learner gains at the advanced level very difficult.

As ESL programs review the new NRS Educational Functioning Level ESL Table to consider how they will incorporate the new table, they should:

1. become familiar with the new Educational Functioning Level descrip-

tors to understand how students function in all of the language skills at each of the new levels according to the NRS ESL Table;

2. examine current Beginning levels of ESL instruction and revise, expand, or plan for future classes of the levels as necessary to correlate to the new NRS ESL Table;

3. examine the Advanced level to determine initial assessment cut-off scores for placement in the advanced level and assess whether students at this level should be placed in a program other than ESL (i.e. transition to Adult Basic Education);

4. make sure they are using an initial placement/assessment tool that places students in their ESL programs accurately

5. review their assessment pro-

cess so that assessment instruments are aligned with instructional design, curricula, and levels of classes offered in the program; and

6. continue to follow appropriate test administration practices and use the approved VADOE standardized assessments for pre- and post testing, as it applies to their program. ■

Debra H. Cargill is the lead ESOL teacher and program developer for Prince William County Public Schools' Adult Education Program.

Illiteracy-Free Zone

by JASON GUARD

I went to Venezuela in March 2006 as part of an information-gathering delegation organized by Witness for Peace, a politically independent nationwide organization whose mission is to support, peace, justice, and sustainable economies in the Ameri-

cas. Considering the war of rhetoric that is currently taking place between the U.S. and the Latin American oil giant, we thought it would be valuable to try to gain a balanced perspective by meeting with a diverse line-up of Venezuelan community organizations, opposition

political parties, government spokespeople, church groups, unions, and maybe squeeze in a little shopping and sight-seeing to boot. Despite my curiosity about Latin American culture and politics, the most startling bit of news that I brought back concerned Venezuela's endeavors in adult education.

On October 28, 2005, the Venezuelan government announced that 1.5 million of their citizens had learned to read in less than two years' time. The United Nations' Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) certified the South American country as an "illiteracy-free zone," with less than one percent of Venezuelans unable to read. The literacy program credited with Venezuela's achievement is called Mission Robinson, named after South American independence hero, Simon "the Liberator" Bolivar's former tutor. The program's success was accomplished by mobilizing the armed forces to serve as reading tutors.



ESOL Resources: Continued from page 5

ing and Teaching,” “Standards and Accountability” as well as chapters focused on teaching language skills. Because of its collegial tone, accessible format, and activities for readers to apply what they are learning, this book may be a natural for use in a peer-mentoring or study circle format.

Web Resources

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA)

www.cal.org/caela

The CAELA website is an outstanding resource for adult ESOL practitioners. Over 70 briefs, digests, Q&As, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) about adult ESOL are included. Resource collections include “Assessment and Evaluation in Adult ESL,” “What Beginning Teachers and Tutors of Adult English

Language Learners Need to Know,” “Civics Education for Adult English Language Learners,” “Learning Disabilities and Adult ESL,” and “Second Language Acquisition.” Briefs from 2005 include topics such as “How Should Adult ESL Reading Instruction Differ from ABE Instruction” and “Using the ESL Program Standards to Evaluate and Improve Adult ESL Programs.” An extensive and popular new resource is the *Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners*. In addition, CAELA staff have developed a searchable adult ESOL resource database that will make searching for evidence-based documents easier and more efficient. Other pertinent resources on the CAELA website include teacher resources, statistics on adult English-language learners, reference materials, and links to other sites useful to those working

with adult English language learners.

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults

www.arlington.k12.va.us/instruct/ctael/adult_ed/REEP/reepcurriculum/

ESL Special Collection

www.literacynet.org/esl

This website is part of the National Institute for Literacy’s Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS). The collection includes sections for learners, teachers and tutors, and administrators. The teacher section provides links to research, techniques, and approaches to teaching adult ESOL learners.

And don’t forget the Resource Center’s website at www.valrc.org. We have a wealth of resources available for ESOL teachers, tutors, and administrators. ❖

The next step is Mission Robinson 2, which seeks to raise literacy levels to 6th grade or better. But this is just the beginning of what the Venezuelan government is calling “a system for social inclusion.” Mission Ribas, named after independence hero José Felix Ribas, provides high-school-level classes to the five million Venezuelan high school dropouts. The goals of the educational missions in Venezuela are not only workforce development, but also the inclusion of all people in political participation and the promotion of cooperation and compassion as part of the national identity. “The first power the people should have is knowledge,” is the motto for Mission Robinson.

The social missions of the Venezuelan government have been developed since 1998 under the controversial administration of current president, Hugo Chavez. The country’s economy is almost exclusively based on its enormous oil reserves. President Chavez’s move to redirect state-run petroleum profits toward social justice, social welfare, anti-poverty, and educational programs has

polarized the country. His critics claim that the social programs are inefficient and corrupt. Meanwhile, the 60 percent of Venezuelans who are living in poverty appear galvanized and see the Missions as a way to better their futures.

Involvement in Venezuela’s adult education programs is typically coupled with job-training programs under Mission Vuelvan Caras (Returning Faces). Many who graduate from these programs go on to participate in subsidized, cooperative-development projects. The programs are free to all. Not only is childcare offered, but wage reimbursement scholarships are available for time away from work.

During my week-long trip to Venezuela, I had the opportunity to visit a rural classroom where Mission Ribas classes were taking place. Several students were seated and studying toward high school diplomas. They had all left school years before to find work and support their families. I asked them what they planned to do after graduation and they all agreed that reliable income was their top priority. Sensing some simi-



Mission Ribas is the government-sponsored high school equivalency program in Venezuela.

larities between the plight of these students and our own population of adult learners, I asked if there was one subject that was more difficult than the rest of their studies. They looked at each other and nodded as they answered in unison, “Mathematics.”

For more information on these missions in Venezuela, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolivarian_Missions ❖

Jason Guard is the Assistant GED Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

RC Grad Assistant Attends Harvard Conference

by DEBORAH WESTIN

On February 24, 2006, I had the opportunity to present my research at the 11th annual Student Research Conference/International Forum at Harvard University. According to Kathleen McCartney, Acting Dean of the Harvard School of Education, there is no other student research conference of its kind in any other graduate school in the country.

Over 159 students presented at this conference, 39 percent of whom were from universities other than Harvard, and six percent from countries other than the U.S. Each session consisted of panels of four presenters. The subject area was entitled "Adult and Higher Education." The topic for the panel of which I was a part was "Support for Special Populations in Higher Education." The

presenters discussed "Orphans in Higher Education," "International Graduate Students as Teaching Assistants," "Social Support for International Graduate Students," and "First Generation College Students." The Dean of Curriculum and Instruction moderated our panel.

I have been curious to know how international graduate students develop social support networks and the effect of this on their academic studies. My relationships with friends who are international students have led me to this topic. I chose to present "An Overview of the Related and Relevant Literature of Social Support Programs of International Students." The research indicates that social support, particularly from students in the host culture, can reduce acculturative

stress and enhance international student satisfaction.

At the end of the day, I attended a forum entitled, "Rebuilding Lives: Education in Humanitarian Crisis." Featured panelists were from UNICEF, Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies, Harvard Medical School, Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, and Harvard Business School. The panel discussed the role of education and psychosocial programming in response to humanitarian crises. The overall message that I heard was that education is a right for everyone. ■■

Deborah Westin is a graduate research assistant at the Resource Center.

Resource Center Collaborates on Workplace Grant

by SUSAN HOLT

The Workplace Literacy Grant, awarded to Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, is a two-year project funded through the Virginia Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and Literacy. A diverse group of partners in this project, which continues through June 2007, are looking at workplace literacy issues for students requiring accommodations in their learning environment. The ultimate goal is to provide curriculum and instructional enhancements to help the targeted population pass the WorkKeys assessment and earn a Career Readiness Certificate.

Partners include:

- Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC)
- Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)
- Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN)
- Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)
- Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC)
- Dayton Learning Center

- Richmond Career Advancement Center
- Chesterfield County Transition Team

The grant recognizes that students with learning disabilities, learning style differences, or ESOL backgrounds often struggle to gain the basic workplace skills that lead to gainful employment. Therefore, the team is investing energy and expertise to:

- modify the existing WIN Career Solutions curriculum (an adult learning software program correlated to the WorkKeys assessment) to successfully address learning and accessibility needs;
- pilot and evaluate these adaptations with targeted adult-learning centers and One-Stop system partners;
- document the usefulness of the revised WIN Career Solutions curriculum in combination with enhanced instructional supports and measure the "pass rate" for persons taking the WorkKeys assessment, leading to the Career Readiness Certificate; and

- possibly identify screening tools for ESOL instruction that might identify the need for alternative formats and/or further testing to see if a disability exists.

Kathy Trossi of WWRC is the projects coordinator. In addition, Don Finn, faculty member with the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at VCU, advises them on Universal Design.

This collaborative initiative provides a unique opportunity for Adult Basic Education specialists and Special Education experts to work side-by-side to enhance workplace instruction and curriculum design for the targeted population.

For more information, contact: Kathy Trossi, Division Director, Vocational Services, WWRC (Kathy.Trossi@wwrc.virginia.gov or 1-800-345-9972, ext. 27230). ■■

Susan Holt is the Instructional Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Listening to the World *Cultural Issues in Academic Writing*

Written by HELEN FOX / Reviewed by CAROLYN HARDING

As an international education graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Helen Fox was asked to design and teach a course for graduate students from Asia, Latin America, and Africa whom professors had identified as having difficulty with analytical writing. It took Fox five years of close mentoring, tutoring, and researching to identify the heart of the challenge: Non-western students may understand the world and express that understanding in significantly different ways from westerners.

Though Fox writes about working with graduate international students, she provides plenty of insight for to any of us working with non-native English users. Fox challenges us, "Are we ready to imagine knowledge differently? Are we persistent enough to listen to the gaps and silences until we hear, in the distance, the voices of thousand-year-old intellectual traditions?" (136).

Although the international students with whom Fox worked struggled with academic writing assignments, she knew those students "were far from un-thinking or un-curious.... They were...talented, observant, and critical" (xv). Yet Fox found the students' writing ignored audience needs, had insufficient support, was vague, used broad generalizations, and often lacked an obvious main point and transitions. Fox identified two glaring differences between international students and American students: international students apparently refused to respond to their professors' meticulous and frequent instructions about how to improve their writing, and the professors seemed to overstate the problems. How bad, Fox wondered, could the students' writing be when these very students were accomplished in their home countries? Many had left prestigious jobs—as administrators, political scientists, political activists, and even teachers—to seek an American education. Indeed, some had published—in English—in their home

countries.

Fox began with the premise that critical analysis and analytical writing is challenging for anyone, particularly so for those writing in a language other than their native one. Still, despite her best efforts over three years of teaching the course she designed, Fox found that the initial issues remained: students were intractable when implored to "get to the point sooner" or to "reorganize this to make it more clear" (xv). However, when Fox worked with American students (native English users) who also had trouble with analytical writing, those students understood the concept undergirding her advice.

Fox finally realized that international students' understood the concepts of organization, coherence, clarity, depth and continuity in vastly dissimilar ways from western students. From this, Fox concluded the writing approaches were rooted in cultural differences. "I became convinced that it is the ways students have learned to see the world;" how they see social relations, how they negotiate social roles, "that affect the way they express themselves, both in speaking and in writing" (xix).

Fox found that countries such as Japan and China have particular, historically based writing styles, but those styles are not reflected in their academic writing. Fox also found that Japanese students are accustomed to respecting teachers to the extent that questioning is rude; a good student is one who takes verbatim notes and parrots the information (56). Former colonies (Fox cites Cote d'Ivoire) have adopted their colonizers' academic style while incorporating the language and approach of the indigenous culture. Other countries (Fox cites Somalia), which have enduring oral traditions, have "only recently formalized a written version of the national language" (xx), so students may not be familiar with written rules. Additionally, gender plays

a compelling role in students' writing. Because many cultures extend privilege to the male perspective at the expense of the female one, international female students may find the western, particularly American, direct approach intimidating. Social status influences how students write, as well. A Nepalese student, who in Nepal holds a government position, is his family's youngest male, making him subservient. As a result, "I don't have that loud voice, I don't have that strong vocabulary in my writing. I always try to be very polite, humble, keep very low. But here at the U.S. university, you have to find words that will voice your opinion very strongly.... You have to find words that will show that you are aggressive. So I had to learn this vocabulary, and you can imagine how frustrated I was with that." (23)

But can native English users imagine the frustration of our non-native English users? Moreover, are we willing to try? In 161 pages, complete with an extensive bibliography and an appendix of multicultural resources, Fox identifies and explores not only the hurdles international students face when tasked with using western, English writing conventions, but as well, the remarkable depth and breadth of their native cultural influences that enrich and influence their writing. Fox offers suggestions for working with international students, the most demanding being that we take the time to learn from our students as they learn from us. ■

Carolyn Harding, a retired Fairfax County ESOL Specialist, is now an ESOL consultant and trainer.

The Perks of Adult Education

by WENDY KILPATRICK

Don't you get perks? Benefits? I am asked all the time when I say that I teach adults for Fairfax County Adult Education.

Of course I do, I answer. My perks are the phone calls from students after they have their citizenship interview, telling me that they wouldn't have passed it if they hadn't taken my class. My benefits are meeting a young former student at the local Cinnabon, and he tells me proudly that he is the manager; when I see my two Thai students, a married couple, working at a clothing store, and they tell me that their job interview went the way we rehearsed in class. One of my students taking the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was relieved and thrilled to tell me that, on the real test, she had been given the same writing prompt that we had practiced in class.

At our credit union, my husband and I meet Salvador, surrounded by his children and grandchildren who are

helping him apply for a loan for his first house, and later find out that he got the loan. One student came to class and announced that she was the employee-of-the-month at her fast food job. I met another student working at MotoFoto two weeks after I suggested she apply as a lab tech there. My students are now maitre d's at two of the tonier Holiday Inn restaurants. Another supervises the local Balducci's deli.

My students are my neighbors who participate in our civic association and parents' night at our elementary school, and who I meet at our congressman's local office, ready with questions.

Those aren't benefits, I am told. I think so, I say. When my mother and I shop at the grocery store, my students make sure that my mother is attended to and pass only the freshest bakery items her way. At Krispy Kreme, the manager, a former student, greets me and then gives me a baker's dozen.

Hermes came into class and announced that he had passed the citizenship interview. It was less than a month until the presidential election, so I gave him the phone number of my voter rep, and he returned to class an hour later registered and able to cast a provisional vote.

My favorite perk, I tell my critics, is attending the citizenship swearing-in ceremony at my school. Even though seating is limited in the small auditorium, I am ushered to the front row. Afterwards, students insist that I stand in the middle of photos, with them and their families, all wearing elegant hand-made outfits from cultures that I probably will never experience.

My favorite benefit is the satisfaction over the last twenty years that I had a part, no matter how small, in some people's success stories. ■

Wendy Kilpatrick teaches ESOL at the Bryant Adult Center in Fairfax County. She has been teaching for 22 years.