

# Working with Under-resourced Adults

## An Interview with Ruby Payne

**Editor's Note:** Ruby Payne is an expert on poverty and mindsets of economic classes. Her many publications include *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and (with Philip E. DeVol) *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. She has been a high school teacher, principal, and school administrator and is the founder and CEO of the aha! Process, Inc., educational consulting firm. Ruby Payne holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy studies from Loyola



University and an M.A. in English literature from Western Michigan University. She was interviewed for *Progress* in May 2011.

**Hillary:** Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I'm Hillary Major with the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center in Richmond, Virginia. We work with adult educators all around the state who teach adults who are learning basic reading, writing, or math skills; studying to take the GED® Tests; or learning English. I think adult ed is similar to many other educational fields in that a large percentage of our teachers and staff are middle class, while many of our students come from poverty. Based on your work, what advice do you have for teachers in this situation?

**Ruby:** All learning is coded emotionally. Particularly for people from generations of poverty, the nature of the relationship is crucial. If the relationship is not there, or they don't like you, they are not going to learn from you. Often, it's considered a form of dishonesty to work for someone that you don't like. Education has to be a relationship of mutual respect. Mutual respect is not about being a student's friend. It is about holding high expectations and providing insistent support; in other words, telling students "I know you can do it, I'm going to help you, and here's what I insist on from you."

A huge issue in generational poverty is that people live in a survival environment, which is this very concrete, reactive world. To survive in school and *Continued on page 18 ...*

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# PROGRESS

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**Submissions and letters are welcome.**  
Contact Hillary Major, *Progress* Editor, at:  
(804) 828-7535  
(800) 237-0178  
[hmajor@vcu.edu](mailto:hmajor@vcu.edu)  
We reserve the right to decline publication.

*Director of Adult Education and Literacy*  
**Randall Stamper**

*VALRC Manager*  
**Barbara E. Gibson**

Editorial Team  
**Hillary Major**, *Editor*  
**Katie Bratisax**, *Webmaster*  
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## A Few Words on *Progress*

**"Knowledge is a huge form of power. Knowledge is a huge form of privilege.**

The piece that most people leave out is the education of the person themselves: it's not enough to teach the abstract informational content. You must also teach people how to make that content work for them," says Ruby Payne at the end of her interview with *Progress* editor Hillary Major.

Although Dr. Payne was speaking about teaching students in poverty, her comments could just as easily have been about gay and lesbian students, new immigrants, millennials, or *any* student who comes into our programs. This issue of *Progress* focuses on teaching diverse students, but all of our students have learning needs beyond pure academics. Learner-centered instruction is a major tenet of adult education theory and practice, yet, when we read the articles in this issue, the concept of learner-centeredness takes on new meaning. We are challenged to recognize the layers of diversity that characterize the typical adult education classroom. At the student level, someone who lives in poverty may also be an immigrant, may also be gay, may also be a millennial. Providing learner-centered instruction becomes an exercise in coordinating instructional content with diverse student needs and expectations.

The summer break is a good time to consider how to incorporate the ideas presented in this issue. Rethinking how we provide instruction, how we conduct intake and assessment, and how we communicate with our diverse students is important work. By reflecting on our own practice in light of these ideas, we can find new and better ways of helping all our students "make ... content work for them."



## Calendar

**July  
17-20**

Correctional Education  
Association Conference  
Charleston, WV  
[www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)

**27-29**

VAILL: Virginia Institute  
of Lifelong Learning  
Radford, VA

**August  
29**

Registration for VALRC  
Fall Online Courses  
Begins  
[www.valrc.org](http://www.valrc.org)

**September  
8**

International  
Literacy Day

**18-23**

Annual Fall for the Book  
Festival  
Fairfax, VA  
<http://fallforthebook.org>

**23**

VALRC Fall Online  
Courses Begin  
[www.valrc.org](http://www.valrc.org)

**29-October 1**

LESLLA Conference  
Minneapolis, MN  
[www.cehd.umn.edu/  
ci/LESLLA](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ci/LESLLA)

**18-23**

Southeast TESOL  
Annual Conference  
Richmond, VA  
[www.vatesol.cloverpad.org](http://www.vatesol.cloverpad.org)



# Coaching Life

by Rita Ricks

*My life assignment is to “coach life” into the underserved population and, in particular, underserved Moms.* They are, in most cases, the working poor, single parents of their households with low incomes and minimal education, receiving public assistance. They have no voice and are entrenched in a system that is not always customer friendly. They struggle with lack of adequate funds or the knowledge to manage what they have. Some have minimal parenting skills because they themselves were raised by an underserved Mom. In many instances, they have been molested sexually, physically, and mentally. They are survivors but lack the necessary social skills to survive in today’s society. They are unsure, frightened, angry, sad, insecure, unhappy, overwhelmed, and just plain tired. They have no real answers as to why they have so many children with few resources and few role models to help them raise responsible, self-sufficient adults. And yet many do.

These Moms’ footprints are on their children and the environment their children grow up in. These women, consciously or unconsciously, set the tone for how each day will play out for themselves and their children, and that tone directly impacts each and every person they come in contact with: bus drivers, school officials, social service personnel, retail clerks, and entire communities.

Mommas have huge influence in their homes and their community, and I want to help them channel that energy in a positive direction. Life coaching benefits them and others with whom they interact. I coach them one-on-one and in groups on how to:

- develop decision-making skills,
- improve interpersonal skills with their family and friends,
- have greater confidence and self awareness,

- learn how to identify and act on developmental needs,
- gain new perspectives and abilities,
- acquire coping mechanisms,
- develop greater adaptability to change,
- learn the value of nutrition and exercise,
- manage anger and depression,
- conquer fear, and
- gain balance in their mind, body, and spirit.

What’s fascinating is that many service providers could benefit from having a life coach. Some may even share some of the same life experiences as these women and have never healed. As educators, you must continuously check yourself and avoid transferring your opinions, judgments, biases, and fears onto your students. You are tasked with helping your students have the best life possible. It’s why they come to you. You are their role models ... good or bad.

Grow from the following:

- Be authentic. Students, no matter what age, see through phony.
- Have a vision for your life that keeps you moving forward and energized.
- Be focused and intentional. You create your reality with your thoughts and your words.
- Stay positive and always have a Plan B.
- Check on your goals every 3 months.
- Manage your time effectively and honor it.
- Be healthy in your mind, body, and spirit.

In Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*, he writes, “That’s what alchemists do. They show that, when we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too.”

We are educators; we must be alchemists. ■

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*Rita Ricks is a motivational speaker and life coach in Richmond. For more about Rita, see her website: [www.speaktoyourspirit.com](http://www.speaktoyourspirit.com)*

# An Interview with Janet Isserlis

by Betsy Wong

**Interviewer's Note:** Janet Isserlis, of the Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center and the Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University, works with adult literacy practitioners and learners to expand professional development opportunities and assist in improving delivery of services to adult learners. She has worked with adult immigrants and refugees in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Vancouver, BC, since 1980. A co-author of *Making Connections: A Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective*, she has written about trauma and learning, assessment, and practitioner research and was a 1999-2000 Literacy Leadership fellow of the National Institute for Literacy.

**Q: As you note in your excellent *Trauma and the Adult English Language Learner* article, while most of us are familiar with all of the obstacles and difficulties our learners have had to overcome in order to start a new life here, few of us are aware of domestic violence or personal trauma that our learners have faced or currently face.**

**Why is this an issue that is so seldom discussed?**

It's discussed a little bit more among practitioners who've been in the field for a while – but the chronic challenge of the field itself is that we turn over. People who are new to it, particularly, may not be intimately familiar with the impacts of those stressors on learning; they may think, "This learner just doesn't want to be here," when in fact there are far more complex issues that people are struggling with.

**Q: In the same article, you noted that abusers strive to isolate their victims. You write, "For immigrant or refugee women, this isolation is exacerbated by language and culture differences that make finding safe options all the more daunting." How is this so?**

For a lot of victims of violence, there is a stigma of shame and very real fear. "If I disturb the

**People may think, "This learner just doesn't want to be here," when in fact there are far more complex issues that person is struggling with.**

status quo, the ramifications are that I'll be in bigger trouble." Common wisdom is that you're at greater risk of violence after you leave your abuser.

If you're coming from a culture where violence is innately normalized, there's already an expectation of "this is how it is."

If you decide that this is not okay, do you have the cultural knowledge of what's available to help you?

In this country, there are resources in place. But if you speak Urdu, who is going to help you? If you go back to your community, word gets out. Perhaps it's a small community, and maybe nobody will believe that your abuser is your abuser.

It's all the more difficult if your abuser hides or destroys your papers.

Domestic violence is about power and control. If you don't have the financial resources, your abuser has more power and control; if you're undocumented, your abuser may threaten to report you to immigration.

**Q: You have advocated "making the classroom safer for all" – meaning, not only for victims of personal trauma or abuse but for all adult learners and practitioners. Can you outline for us some ways in which to do so?**

The approaches we try and take to accommodate learning have to work for everyone – and not just victims of domestic violence. There's the notion of building community, establishing ground rules over time, and finding a way to talk about something that might be upsetting to others.

Give learners lateral choices. If they're answering the question, "What did you do this

weekend?”, I let learners know that they can make something up as long as they can tell me in the past tense (“I washed the floor”).

There’s Jenny Horsman’s (see Moving Research about Violence and Learning into Practice in the resources listed on page 24) idea of having a comfortable chair or area in the classroom, where learners can take time out – maybe sit there and have a cup of tea for as long as it takes and then go back to learning with the rest of the group.

We can also find ways to make it clear that, “If you need to take a break, you can let me know that ‘I need 10 minutes, I’m going for a walk, I’ll be back.’”

We want learners to not worry about being present for learning if they can’t. We don’t want to tell someone to go resolve their issues and come back. It’s that notion of “what are the ways that you can be present now? and how can we support your learning?”

I always make myself say, “I’m glad you’re here,” if a person is late. We want to honor any decision they make ... It’s also building the notion that we have expectations for you as a member of this class: We need you here. We want people to feel that their presence is valued and necessary.

We can accom-odate ways for people to learn without being physically in the classroom – using computers, worksheets, or other forms of self-study materials. It requires more of practitioners and adds a degree of difficulty in terms of organization and planning but enables learners to stop out rather than drop out.

**Q: Some practitioners would argue that issues of domestic violence or personal trauma have no place in an adult ESL classroom. The focus of the classroom, they say, should remain purely on language acquisition. How would you respond to this viewpoint?**

Absolutely! I’m not suggesting that we stop and talk about domestic violence, that we talk about being a refugee or witnessing atrocities.

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We need to understand that those experiences have possibly occurred for our learners – and among our colleagues – and they may possibly have difficulties focusing on language or whatever we’re doing in class, at work.

But if the class raises that topic and wants to talk about it, we can ascertain what people know and what the focus of their interest is. Are we putting together a manual for the community, and we want to focus on what to do for victims of crime?

We don’t pose this as subject matter, but we need to know how it affects learning and teaching.

**Q: You’ve worked with immigrants and refugees in Massachussetts, Vancouver,**

**and Rhode Island. At what point did you begin to perceive issues of personal violence in the immigrant community – and what did you do in response?**

In the early ‘80s... I’d be teaching family terms with Cambodian and Hmong refugees using Cuisenaire rods, and

they’d line up the Cuisenaire rods representing family members – and then knock them over, because those family members had died during wartime. I started understanding intuitively that issues were there.

In the mid 90s, when I was working in Vancouver on a curriculum guide, I understood that it wasn’t only political violence that refugees experienced but domestic abuse and trauma.

*What is it that makes people able to learn or not?* I backed into that again and again. What is it that distracts us on a day-to-day level – and if you’re experiencing chronic violence, what does that mean?

It’s important for us to be aware of this. For some, that means having a startle reflex when they hear loud voices – so don’t clap your hands loudly to make a point. Put a book gently on the table.

Not everybody is a victim and not everybody is a survivor, but everybody is at risk.

*Continued on page 6 ...*

# An Interview with Janet Isserlis

(continued from page 5)

**Q: Returning to the context of an adult ESL classroom, let's say that you're an instructor and a student tells you after the class that her husband doesn't want her to come to English class anymore. What do you tell the student?**

I would ask how she feels about it; if I knew her well, I'd ask her if she feels safe and what she wants to do ... maybe see if self-study materials would be of use, see if she might be able to negotiate something once a week, or see if she's on e-mail.

I'd try and ascertain the level of risk and level of engagement that would still be possible – and I'd make it clear to her that she would always be welcome to come back to class.

One of the things in this line of work is to anticipate, "What can I ask?" as opposed to "What can I say?". Find out her level of safety and what she wants; for instance, is it okay if I call you, or is it a problem?

Without probing into her privacy, I'd try to ask her questions to help me learn how to connect her to learning – and learn how I can help her.

Saving people, as such, isn't the objective here. We are not working with learners – or with colleagues – as saviors. We're not there to save people or help them to change their lives – we're there to make them aware of the decisions that are possible, and, when appropriate, to support them in ways that respect boundaries, privacy, and safety concerns.

**Q: Some instructors are wary of broaching issues like domestic violence because they don't want to become involved in their learners' personal lives – or feel that they don't have the qualifications to deal with such complex issues. What advice would you give these instructors?**

They don't have to become involved; if they're aware, or if a student (or a colleague) discloses violence, the most important message is to let the person know it's not their fault. Let them know of resources – many programs

have posters with resource information and an 800-number [1-800-799-SAFE]. There should be information that is visible for everyone to see. [Editor's Note: See **Messages that Hurt and Help** under Trauma and Adult ESOL Learners: Resources on the back page.]

**Q: Ten years ago, you wrote that "Although strides have been made in raising public awareness about the prevalence of violence in all forms and its effects upon learning, work remains to be done in the areas of teacher education, policy, and increased awareness among learners and practitioners in ESL programs." Have such strides been made – and what remains to be accomplished?**

Yes and no. The Violence Against Women Act has made some strides and increased awareness. In teacher education, Jenny Horsman contributed in huge ways in raising our awareness and helping us make connections between understanding the impacts of

violence on learning and on how our approaches to teaching support or hinder learning for all.

Because the field turns over so often, there's a need to make people aware of the fact that we don't know who our learners are; we don't know what their stories are. But, there are really good chances that every person here has had some form of trauma.

Just knowing that people have histories that impact their ability to be present for learning at a given moment is really important.

Teacher education varies from state to state but needs to be as much about the process as about language approaches or verbs. ■

**Anticipate,  
"What can I ask?"  
as opposed to  
"What can I say?"**

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*Betsy Wong is an Adult ESOL instructor and trainer for Fairfax County Adult and Community Education. She is also a frequent facilitator for face-to-face and online trainings sponsored by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.*

# The Millennial Student in the Classroom: *My, How Things Have Changed!*

by Victoire Gerkens Sanborn

*Technology has always assisted teachers and students in instruction. The proliferation of Web 2.0 media and digital devices has made it harder for adult education teachers to keep up with an ever changing and expanding choice of technologies and equipment. For the older generation, mastering today's digital resources is akin to learning a foreign language, whereas younger learners view technology as a natural part of their environment. This article examines the digital divide between teachers, many of whom belong to Gen-X and Baby Boomer generations, and students who were born after 1982, and how adult education and literacy programs must strive to help these adult students acquire the digital literacy and critical thinking skills needed to meet the challenges of life in the 21st century.*

In the past decade, teachers and administrators of adult education and literacy programs have experienced the influx of millennials to their multicultural, multilevel classrooms. Considered to be digital natives, these students, born between 1982 and 2002, share unique characteristics that include a preference for: group activities and collaborative team assignments; lessons with simulations, games, and online resources; multi-tasking; experiential learning; a teaching environment that balances lectures with interactive hands-on activities; texts

that are rich in graphics; and communication with peers and teachers via IM (instant) and text messaging. With their experience in gaming, millennials do not consider losing as a failure but rather as an opportunity to learn. Gaming has taught them to persist in solving problems, expect immediate feedback, and try alternate routes towards achieving a goal. These expectations have been transferred to the classroom. Past performance provides an opportunity for reflection, growth, and a way to succeed. While they have shorter attention spans and are easily bored, millennials prefer to learn by doing and working in collaborative situations. They are also goal-oriented and prefer clear directions and schedules that will help them to stay on task.

Unfortunately, most research about millennials favors the well-educated upper middle class youth over young adult basic education and ESOL literacy learners, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Yet these disparate groups, including those from different generations, do share some characteristics. In "Boomers, Gen-exers & Millennials: Understanding the New Students," Diana Oblinger describes today's undergraduate students, 61% of whom are under age 25, as being multicultural and non-traditional. Eighty percent are employed, with many working 35 hours or more while enrolled. Many are single parents or lack a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>

While millennials share some characteristics with other age groups, they also possess qualities that are unique to their cohort. Many feel free to appropriate online information for personal use or school work without consideration of copyright laws. They expect a graphically rich visual environment and are easily bored with long lectures in class,

*Continued on page 14 ...*



# Empowering Adult Learners for Health Care

by Kate Singleton

***Delmy, 6 months pregnant with her first child, wonders if she should tell her obstetrician that she takes daily thyroid medicine prescribed by another doctor.***

***Fatima, a recent refugee from Iraq, is concerned about her teenage son, who is ordering "vitamins" online to build his muscles, working out a lot at the gym, and complaining of an irregular heart rhythm and insomnia.***

***Mohamed, a 75-year-old man with many health issues, empties onto his classroom desk a wallet full of follow-up medical appointment cards given to him upon discharge from a local hospital. He explains with frustration that he doesn't have Medicare and that no one will help him get it, so he can't afford the follow-up care appointments.***

***Maria, an ESOL literacy student from Morocco, reports that she feels very sad and alone since her child was stillborn in the hospital last year. She states that she is also very anxious because she can't find a job to pay her large hospital bill. She doesn't understand how she can be given a bill for thousands of dollars for losing her baby.***

***Oscar shares that he has struggled with back pain from a work injury for a year, but he doesn't have health insurance and says he can't afford to go to a doctor in the United States. His family used to have insurance, but they had never used it and discontinued it when the cost went up shortly before his injury.***

The stories above are a few examples of the many pressing health care concerns shared with me by adult ESOL students in the past year during a health literacy outreach project in Northern Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Since I wrote the *Virginia Adult Education Health Literacy Toolkit* in 2003, the health literacy challenges facing both adult ESOL and ABE learners have grown much more complex and will only continue to do so with pending changes to health care. Reactions from the vast majority of adult learners upon receiving information in the Northern Virginia project indicate that, in 2011, Virginia adult

learners are extremely baffled by U.S. health care. They are very aware that they want and need to understand and use it better.

Low health literacy is a widespread problem among U.S. adults, with an estimated 36% having *basic* or *below basic health literacy*.<sup>2</sup> Adult education programs are a very important resource in educating learners around health literacy needs. In some ways, it is a particularly hopeful time to do this. This article will briefly discuss what health literacy means for adult learners and will offer suggestions of what adult educators can do to help empower their learners for health care.

## Health Literacy: What's it all about?

Health literacy is most commonly defined in the United States as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."<sup>3</sup> Originally associated specifically with an individual's ability to read and understand written health information, health literacy is now understood to be a broader health communication problem, the solutions for which rest with both patients and providers. For patients, health literacy encompasses a complex array of skills, including:

- basic skills: reading, writing, English language, numeracy;
- cultural awareness skills (including understanding U.S. health care system culture);
- critical thinking and decision-making skills;
- self-advocacy skills (being able to assert oneself as needed in health care situations);
- access and navigation skills (knowing when, where, and how to seek information and affordable care); and,
- self-efficacy skills (pulling together and implementing all of the skills above effectively for one's own situation).

As the student stories at the beginning of this article show, health literacy challenges can and do impact adult learners in severe ways. The



# Empowering Adult Learners for Health Care

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the **Virginia Adult Education Health Literacy Toolkit** at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED482788.pdf>. The Toolkit also contains a detailed section to address teachers' concerns on teaching health topics – you don't have to be a health expert to teach about health and health care!

**Provide learners with a list of your community's affordable health care resources.** Many, especially LEP learners, may not have heard of local low-cost clinics. Free and low-cost clinics in Virginia can be located through these websites: <http://www.vafreeclinics.org> and <http://www.vacommunityhealth.org>. Some of these clinics provide dental care also. Local health departments can provide additional information on affordable dental care. Include affordable mental health care resources in the list as well. To locate additional resources, ask a local hospital case management department or a local government human/social services department to share information with you, as they usually keep their own community resource lists.

**Uninsured learners need to know that if they find themselves with a large, unmanageable hospital bill, they may not have to pay it all.** Teach them how to request a financial counselor at a hospital to see if they qualify for a discount, payment plan, or charity care. ("I'd like to speak with a financial counselor, please.") This is most effective when asked while the patient is still in the hospital.

**Many learners do not have a realistic expectation of health care costs.** Teaching them that an emergency room visit for an uninsured patient might start around \$1,000 can be very helpful in making a case for seeking treatment before health issues become emergencies. The cost of delayed care is greater financially *and physically*, as the delay can result in otherwise treatable conditions becoming chronic or fatal.

**Many LEP learners have no idea they have the right to a trained medical interpreter free of charge at hospitals, clinics, and doctor's offices which receive federal funding** (typically in the form of Medicare payments). Let learners know of this right, which is for all limited English speakers

*who request it*, regardless of immigration status. Teach learners how to request an interpreter in English. ("I need an interpreter, please. I speak\_\_\_\_\_.") Encourage interpreter use – medical settings are not appropriate places to be practicing English!!! Accurate comprehension of medical information is far too important.

**Invite health care speakers such as public health nurses, health educators, clinic staff, and medical librarians to your class.** However, make sure beforehand that they can communicate well for your learners' comprehension abilities, or arrange with the speaker that you will "translate" for the speaker into terms your learners can understand. Not

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**Teach learners how to request a financial counselor at a hospital to see if they qualify for a discount, payment plan, or charity care.**

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understanding a health care speaker will cause further frustration around using health care for your learners.

**Help learners understand that asking questions is very important for patients.** Emphasize that *many* adults in the U.S., from all levels of educational attainment, are anxious about talking with health care providers and asking them questions. The typical 10-minute duration of today's doctor-patient interaction increases that anxiety. Here are suggestions for questions in different medical scenarios: <http://www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer>.

**Help learners problem-solve on how to make the most out of their 10 minutes with the doctor.** Discuss strategies such as planning questions in advance of the appointment, looking up conditions or medications on *reputable* websites online before or after an appointment, bringing along a friend or family member to be an advocate and support at the appointment, and deciding when it's appropriate and how to be a "squeaky wheel" at the doctors' office to get one's needs met.

**Get to know the National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health website for consumers [www.MedlinePlus.gov](http://www.MedlinePlus.gov), which has easy-to-read English and translated information on health conditions,**

**medications, and treatments.** It's a wealth of information, including subtitled videos and "cool tools" (for calculating health risks, etc.). The website is well-designed and user-friendly, with no commercial content. Its lesson-planning potential is endless! For older students, there is also [www.NIHSeniorHealth.gov](http://www.NIHSeniorHealth.gov).

**Talk about mental health.** Adult learners are no strangers to stress, depression, and trauma. Help de-stigmatize it by making mental health an OK topic to discuss or learn about in class. Help learners compare differing cultural views on mental health. Invite a mental health professional (perhaps from a local Community Services Board) to speak with your class about what treatments/resources are available for common conditions such as depression and anxiety, or what learners can do if they know someone who is facing these issues.

Incorporating such health literacy instruction into your adult education classes may require some extra effort initially as you gather resources and plan lessons for the first time. However, the potential rewards to individual learners and to programs make these efforts worthwhile. As a

result of the health care information presented in the Northern Virginia project, learners reported registering at affordable care clinics, pursuing treatments for health issues they'd endured for quite a while (including surgery in at least one case), changing to healthier behaviors, considering getting annual check-ups for the first time, feeling more confident in asking health care providers questions, and sharing the health care resource list and information received in class with family and friends. Krista Bennett, a teacher in Fairfax County's Adult and Community Education ESOL program, quotes one of her students as saying in response to a class lesson on communicating effectively with health care providers, "This is exactly why I'm here." ■

*Kate Singleton, MSW, LCSW, taught adult ESOL, trained teachers, and developed curricula in Northern Virginia for fifteen years prior to becoming a health care social worker. She is the author of the Virginia Adult Education Health Literacy Toolkit and Picture Stories for Adult ESL Health Literacy. Kate currently works as a health literacy consultant to the adult education, health care, and social work fields. She can be contacted at [ksingletonlcsw@gmail.com](mailto:ksingletonlcsw@gmail.com).*

### Depressed



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Picture Story Five: Depressed is available from the Center for Applied Linguistics at [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/Health/healthindex.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/Health/healthindex.html)

### Endnotes

1. The Northern Virginia Health Literacy Initiative (2010-2011) was a project of the Inova Fairfax Hospital Health Sciences Library, funded by an award from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine. The project provided presentations on accessing, navigating, communicating, and understanding health care for more than 800 adult ESL students and 100 ESL teachers and tutors.
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# Creating a Safe Space for our LGBTQ Students

by Lauren Ellington

No matter what your religious or political affiliation, I believe that we would all agree that no one should have to try to receive an education in a state of fear. Unfortunately, this is all too often the case for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning/queer (LGBTQ) in our nation's schools. According to the American Psychological Association's **Facing the School Dropout Dilemma report** (2010), it is estimated that almost one-third of all LGBTQ students drop out of high school which is more than triple the national rate. The main cause of this high dropout rate is the hostile school climate that arises from harassment about their sexual orientation. According to the **2009 National School Climate Survey: School Climate in Virginia Research Brief** by GLSEN, most LGBTQ students had been victimized at school (4 out of 5 experienced verbal harassment and 3 in 10 experienced physical harassment and assault), and 63% of those incidents were not reported to any authorities. These students also experienced other forms of harassment: 66% were sexually harassed, 53% were cyberbullied, and 50% had property deliberately damaged or stolen. LGBTQ students scored lower on measures of academic achievement and school engagement (with lower GPAs, more class failures, and less positive feelings towards teachers and school) than their heterosexual peers according to the APA report. While a true percentage of the LGBTQ population of the United States is difficult to estimate due to hesitancy to accurately report, it is estimated that 1 in 10 Americans is part of the LGBTQ community. That means that you have, had, or will have a

student who is LGBTQ in your classroom. It also means that you most likely have a student who is LGBTQ in your classroom who already has faced a negative learning environment.

As educators, we are charged with providing an environment conducive to learning for all of our students. This includes making sure that our

students who are LGBTQ are provided with a safe space in which to learn. By providing this safe space, we become allies for our students who are LGBTQ. According to GLSEN's **Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students**, as educator allies we need to focus our efforts in four ways: know the issues, support, educate, and advocate.



SAFE  
SPACE

## Know the Issues

You may ask, "What is an ally?" The Safe Space Kit defines an ally as "an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting

and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly." The statistics above clearly demonstrate that the LGBTQ community is discriminated against.

Before making the decision to be an LGBTQ ally, you should first assess your own personal beliefs for anti-LGBTQ bias. The Safe Space Kit provides a set of questions for you to use to analyze your own potential biases on page 7.

One of the simplest yet most effective ways to be an LGBTQ ally is to use terminology accurately

and respectfully. There is a lot of terminology out there and what was once acceptable may not be so any longer. Also, individuals may prefer one term over another. The best way to know is to ask individuals which terms and pronouns they would prefer to be used in reference to themselves and their significant other(s). The GLSEN Safe Space Kit provides a glossary of terms for talking about and with members of the LGBTQ community.

## Support

In our programs, the most important part of being an ally is to be sure that we are visible as allies. You can do this by posting supportive materials such as symbols, quotes from prominent LGBTQ community members, or Safe Space Kit posters or stickers. You can also wear a visible marker on yourself such as a rainbow bracelet or button.

If a student makes the decision to come out to you, be sure to honor their confidence in you by not breaking it. Don't discuss their gender identity or sexual orientation with others unless you have received permission to do so. GLSEN's Safe Space Kit provides an excellent resource for how to respond when a student comes out to you on pages 14-15.

One of the hardest but most necessary ways to be an ally is to speak up when you witness anti-LGBTQ language or behavior. The negative school environment that the 2009 National School Climate Survey revealed often continues into adulthood. Many times, the anti-LGBTQ language is unintentional yet still harmful to our students. Show your support by taking a stand. You can get ideas of how to address these incidences at the **ThinkB4YouSpeak Campaign website: <http://www.thinkb4youspeak.com>**.

## Educate

In our role as educators, we can help our students learn about anti-LGBTQ bias and combat it. The easiest way to do this is to explicitly teach respect as a part of our curriculum. This can include writing assignments that deal with the topic of giving and showing respect. This topic doesn't have to be limited to addressing just LGBTQ issues; it can encompass all groups in the wider discussion.

As a way to help our students who are LGBTQ feel more accepted into your school community,

you can include positive representations of the LGBTQ community in your classroom materials and resources. This can be done by highlighting the struggles of the LGBTQ community when discussing the Holocaust or civil rights movements, including diverse families in your

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**1 in 10 Americans  
is part of the LGBTQ community.**

That means you have, had, or will have a student who is LGBTQ in your classroom.

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discussions of family, using or promoting LGBTQ-inclusive literature as choices for your students, and celebrating LGBTQ events such as Pride Month in June or LGBTQ History Month in October.

You can also engage your fellow teachers in discussions about how to make your program more LGBTQ friendly. You can distribute information for your fellow teachers from the resources that you find in this article, be a role model in your behavior towards your students, or even give a presentation at your next staff meeting on LGBTQ issues that you see in your program.

## Advocate

As we have seen with all social justice efforts, change happens most dramatically when individuals are vocal in advocating for that change. This is often a difficult process as it involves trying to change systems that may have been in place for a long time. The first step in trying to effect change is to assess your program. Identify what your program is doing right and where it could make changes to be more inclusive and welcoming to the LGBTQ community. GLSEN's Safe Space Kit provides a checklist on p. 28 for looking at different areas that may need changing.

Once you have determined how your program could improve, work to implement comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies to protect all students, not just those who are LGBTQ. Research has found that students in schools with generic anti-bullying policies experienced the same levels of harassment as those in schools without any policies. In contrast, students in schools with comprehensive policies that specifically mention sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression experienced *Continued on page 23 ...*

# The Millennial Student in the Classroom:

## *My, How Things Have Changed!* (continued from page 7)

losing interest and becoming impatient quickly. If they feel that their goals are not being met or their needs are not respected, they will drop a class or quit their job rather than try to address the problem.

It must be emphasized that, as with many generalizations, these characteristics are not shared by every millennial and that many older individuals exhibit similar preferences to their younger counterparts. Conversely, many millennials, especially those whose exposure to the new technologies is limited, will struggle to keep up with the digital age much like older students.

Be that as it may, millennials now make up 36% of the population. The implication for adult education and literacy providers is clear. Programs can no longer ignore the importance of digital devices, instant telecommunications, and online resources when teaching young adults the skills they will need to succeed in life and the workplace. Teachers and administrators, most of whom belong to the Baby Boom and X and Y Generations, will need to find ways to incorporate new teaching techniques to bridge the generational gap. In "Teaching and Reading the Millennial Generation Through Media Literacy," the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* summed up the situation best: "Hands on is not the same as heads on."<sup>2</sup> In other words, while millennials have immediate access to information on the Internet through an ever-changing array of electronic devices, most do not possess the critical thinking or comprehension skills needed to assess online content. Unless our educators acquire the necessary skills to teach this group of students, they will fail in helping them make informed decisions about web-based resources and digital media.

Yet instructors lack the tools and equipment in their classrooms to adequately teach their wired students. Teachers not only feel insecure about using technology in instruction, they lack professional development opportunities that

familiarize them with the new digital realities. Administrators will also need to reevaluate their practice when it comes to online accessibility. Most school systems and libraries restrict the use of the Internet and block personal blogs, websites, and MySpace and Facebook pages, even though millennials routinely use such sites to communicate with friends and teachers, for group discussions and file sharing, and to complete school assignments.<sup>3</sup>

Assumptions and misconceptions about millennial students abound. While it is true that most adult literacy students come from low income families, a large percentage own cell phones or have access to computers. A 2009 survey revealed that "just 27% of teens with mobile phones ever used them to access the Internet. This figure jumps to 41% when considering exclusively teens from households earning less than \$30,000 per year. Of these lower income teens, just 70% had computers in the home, compared to 92% from families earning more than \$30,000 per year."<sup>4</sup>

This is exciting information for educators, for low-income households increasingly favor cell phones over landlines.<sup>5</sup> One must ask,

"What percentage of those mobile phone users were born between 1982 and 2002?" If it is true that the majority of young individuals that come from low income and minority families use their mobile phones to go online, the opportunity for adult education and literacy providers to offer lessons that incorporate digital information increases dramatically. Educators can address the problems associated with the digital divide by asking students to use their mobile devices to access online information.

Another misconception is that those who text and chat online develop into poor readers and spellers. A recent study conducted by Dr. Clare Wood, a reader in developmental psychology at Coventry University, and published by the British

Academy, found that 8-12-year-olds who texted regularly were not among the problem spellers and readers in their classes.

Dr. Wood explains:

"We were surprised to learn that not only was the association strong but that textism use was actually driving the development of phonological awareness and reading skill in children."<sup>6</sup>

Young adult literacy learners between 18 and 29 years of age have access to more information than previous generations could have ever dreamed of. Even poor and struggling readers are frequently exposed to highly sophisticated online information, including podcasts and YouTube videos. "Websites recommended by so-called poor readers contained complicated vocabulary and syntactical structures. These 'poor readers' gravitated to them because of their interest in the content."<sup>7</sup> But there is a downside to these online riches. Technological know-how, online information sharing and communications, and the ability to create their own Internet content have created a false sense of competency in millennials. Many of them, even at the college level, are unable to evaluate online information for relevance or accuracy, and they possess poor search strategies as well. Thus, digital natives, while remarkably skilled at using a bewildering array of digital devices, still need guidance from their teachers to develop the critical thinking skills they will need to analyze and evaluate this information.

One of the biggest misconceptions about millennials is that they prefer distance learning classes over a traditional classroom setting. This may be the case with a working parent, who needs the flexibility and convenience that online classes provide, but most millennials prefer to work in groups with their peers. "[They] enjoy in person classes if the instruction is engaging, active, and not a 'boring lecture.'"<sup>8</sup> But this is often not the case. Many millennials feel that their teachers' expertise with technology is at best mediocre and their use of it uninspiring, and that schools do not prepare them for life outside of class.<sup>9</sup>

To successfully help millennials reach their literacy and lifelong learning goals, adult education and literacy programs will need to transform their programs and teaching

## **41% of teens from low-income households have used a cell phone to access the Internet.**

practices to address media literacy, digital literacy, and visual literacy in addition to more traditional print and online resources. Barriers to achieving these goals include a lack of digital-based lesson plans aligned to content standards, fully networked classrooms, technical support and information technology services, and professional development for teachers. School administrators will need to allow access to blocked websites and the use of mobile devices inside the classroom. The transformation will not be easy, but in the long run these changes will help adult education and literacy students keep pace with the rapidly changing technologies that will affect them throughout their professional and personal lives.

**For more information about millennials,** see the Pew Research Center's 2010 report *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next*, edited by Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, and available at: <http://www.joshuakennon.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf> .:

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*Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is Literacy Specialist at VALRC.*

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# Promoting Resilience of Adult Learners

by Susan Leone

**A** **adult educators frequently encounter learners who can be described as resilient. A common definition of resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity.**

It has been further suggested that resilience requires that individuals not only bounce back but thrive in the face or aftermath of adverse conditions.

Frequently, adult learners face stressful life situations in addition to the tasks associated with their education. Increased resilience can assist them to reach their personal and academic goals and to cope successfully with current classroom challenges.

Fortunately, resilience is no longer considered innate, and factors fostering resilience can be promoted and learned. Protective factors can be introduced and implemented in the classroom to increase resilience. Experts in resilience and positive psychology agree that four factors are helpful in promoting resilience. Supportive social structures, the ability to make meaning out of adversity, adequate management of emotional responses, and development of optimal coping strategies are the cornerstones for promoting and maintaining resilience. Adult educators can incorporate these elements into their classrooms in a number of ways, which this article will discuss briefly.

## Social Support

Early in life, a supportive relationship with a significant person is crucial for developing resilience in individuals. Later, caring mentors, teachers, counselors, coaches, and others can serve this essential function. Adult educators often are those significant persons in the lives of their students.

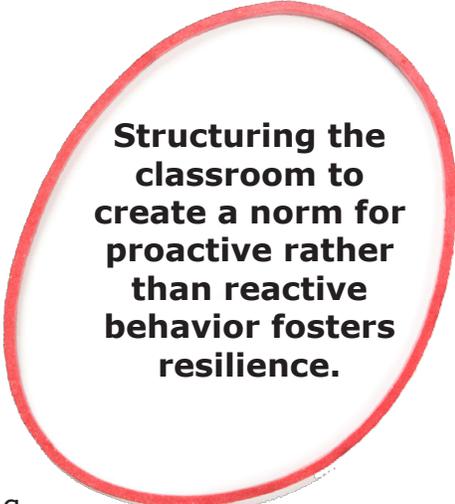
In addition to providing a significant relationship, adult educators can encourage social support for adult learners by structuring the classroom to create community and to promote a sense of belonging, a family group environment where individuals are recognized for accomplishments and actively engaged

in learning and mastery. Academic tasks can be accomplished utilizing study partner arrangements and the formation and implementation of study or review groups. Collaborative learning, which incorporates peer tutoring and review, provides encouragement and support for learning and for the related challenges associated with formal education. Informal support groups can evolve from the increased intimacy derived from regular classroom meetings and student advisory sessions.

These structured student support sessions are most beneficial when held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Topics covered may range from exploring issues related to balancing school and other life commitments and obligations to group problem solving related to academic and classroom management issues.

Formal or informal mentoring programs are helpful in providing supportive relationships. Retired educators and other volunteers can be enlisted to combine tutoring with encouragement and social support needed to persevere in school completion. Supportive advising by adult educators and other professionals can be naturally combined with exploration of career and future options and plans. It is equally helpful to assist adult students in accessing community resources that can help meet personal and academic needs.

Structuring the classroom to create a norm for proactive rather than reactive behavior provides a learning environment that fosters resilience. For example, the practice of developing a work plan results in increased strategies and better task completion. A work environment that encourages persistence in task



**Structuring the classroom to create a norm for proactive rather than reactive behavior fosters resilience.**

mastery and a mindset that views mistakes as learning opportunities promotes resilience. Such classroom norms and philosophies help adult learners to find meaning from their experiences and motivate them to become more engaged learners.

## **Making Meaning of Life's Challenges**

Adult educators can assist in making meaning out of life's adversities by listening to the personal narratives and stories that students have to share. These experiences can be incorporated into writing assignments and regular journaling that may or may not be assigned work. The sharing of stories can be one aspect of classroom discussions. In this situation, the goal is to convey that others understand the student's struggles and to validate the experiences.

Whether the narrative is informal or formal, in oral or written form, the goal is to make meaning out of the experiences. Ask "making meaning" questions in conversation or as a prompt for writing to stimulate thinking. For example, "As you try to make sense out of this, what have you learned?" or "What advice would you give somebody going through what you faced?" or "What strengths have you developed as a result of this situation?"

Equally important for individuals constructing a personal resilience narrative is answering the "getting through" questions. Prompts in this category include questions such as: "How did you get yourself to do that?", "What helped you make it through that?" or "Who inspired you to persevere?"

The sharing and/or writing of these personal narratives can further develop problem-solving skills and strategies. This exercise will also help individuals to assess resources and strengths rather than to focus on deficits or dwell on obstacles. Learning experiences that promote a sense of internal locus of control rather than externalizing and blaming outside circumstances further promote resilience. The ability to reframe behavior and ideas and to *re-story* life's experiences, focusing on positives rather than negatives, will emphasize a solution-focused viewpoint and increase resilience.

## **Managing Emotions**

Resilient individuals are not debilitated by the inability to manage strong emotions. An

essential aspect of managing emotions is the opportunity to communicate the situation with others without negative judgments and with the feeling of being understood. A classroom that creates this environment – combined with expectations for order and civility, so conducive to optimal learning – will promote this protective factor. Emotional management, in turn, allows adult learners to concentrate and to learn more efficiently and is an essential life skill for other future endeavors.

A key aspect of developing effective emotional management is the ability to reframe situations in order to consider other options. Reframing events, combined with the use of positive self-talk and affirmations, will enable students to move on from negative experiences in the classroom or elsewhere. Adult educators are in an excellent position to model these behaviors for students and to set the norm in the classroom for use of these positive thought strategies. Formal or informal discussion or writing assignments can further promote emotional management, so crucial to resilience.

## **Successful Coping**

Adult education classrooms that focus on solutions and developing positive strategies for individual and group problem solving promote resilience in learners. Successful coping strategies can be discussed in classroom meetings, explored in journal writing, and incorporated into rituals and routines of the classroom; they can become the norm for handling differences in the classroom social milieu. The result will be a more harmonious classroom, more student engagement and subsequent mastery, and long-range positive outcomes for adult learners.

## **Conclusion**

Promoting the resilience of adult learners through increasing protective factors in the classroom is more than a good idea. It has short-term and long-range benefits for the individual, the community of students, and adult educators participating in this shared venture. The resulting increased wellness, happiness, optimism, and successful outcomes will benefit all parties. ■

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*Susan Leone, Ed.D., was an Associate Professor of Counselor Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. She retired in 2011.*

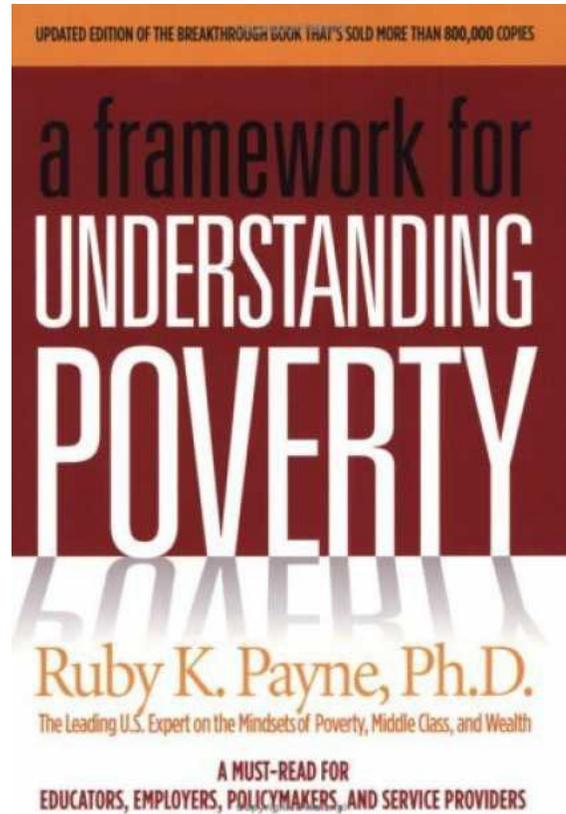
# An Interview with Ruby Payne (continued from front page)

work, however, you have to live in a reality that is very verbal. If you don't like someone at work, you can't hit them; if you want to insult them, you have to insult them in formal registry. In poverty, you react, but at school and work, you have to plan.

Most middle class teachers aren't aware that they live in an abstract, representational reality. I would have never understood that if I hadn't lived in Haiti for three months. While I was there, this adult man begged me for a Polaroid picture of himself. I gave him one; he held it upside down, backwards, sideways. He was looking at the backside, with nothing on it, and I said, "No, no, you are supposed to look at it this way." He just laughed at me and turned it back over. There was a missionary nearby and I asked him, "What is wrong with that man?" He said, "Ruby, you live in an abstract world. You have been taught since you've been in Kindergarten that a physical object like your body can be represented in two dimensions on a piece of paper. You have to learn that."

As human beings, we're limited because we cannot get inside each other's heads. When you say to me, "I really like that color red that that woman has on," did you see the same color I did? Or when you say, "I was really angry at somebody," when you were really angry, did you feel like I do when I'm really angry? We don't know. So what we do is we communicate in abstractions: words, drawings, numbers. That's why we study numbers and words and ideas: they represent things, but they are not the things themselves. Students from poverty don't understand that until they're taught.

I had a manager in my company who wouldn't follow the handbook because he didn't understand that the handbook represented behaviors. We had an employee who was having difficulty understanding the concept of clothing – she was opposed to it, right? – and I had had conversations with her about why clothes are important at work, but she kept coming in wearing short, short skirts. I told the manager, "Look, you have to write her up for this," and he said, "She didn't mean it." I said, "It doesn't matter; that handbook serves as a legal document for us because it represents behaviors we have to follow." The bottom line was, he didn't know that abstract words could represent behavior.



When you get into the world of ideas in adult education, middle class teachers can be just stunned when students don't get it. Teachers think it's an intelligence issue. It's not. It's an experience issue. There are tools teachers can use – mental models, drawings, stories, or analogies that can help translate.

**Hillary:** So, how would a teacher bring these mental models into the classroom?

**Ruby:** Let me give you this simple example of a mental model: I was working with an 8th grade social studies teacher, and her kids were having difficulty understanding the three branches of government. I told her to draw three tents on her blackboard; so she said, "The three branches of government are like a three-ring circus." Inside each tent – for the executive, the judicial, and the legislative branches – she wrote down their primary acts and responsibilities; then, she drew these little trapeze ropes between the tents and wrote down what happens between tents, checks and balances. 100% of her kids got it.

A teacher I know went from 58% failure to 8% failure in one year by using cell phone bills to teach algebra. That's a mental model. It translates.

**Hillary:** You talked about the importance of relationships. In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, you wrote about the “emotional memory bank” and having at times to sacrifice relationships for achievement in order to focus on an education. I think this idea is something that will really hit home with our teachers, because persistence is such a challenge in adult education. Our learners face so many barriers, both internal and external, that can keep them from the classroom.

**Ruby:** Oh, yes. I want to talk about an internal issue, which is positive self talk, but first I want to talk about the external issue of relationships. The first thing we do, and the first thing that I recommend your adult educators do, is to interview, with a video camera, people who successfully made it through the program. Make them talk about what happened to their relationships.

There’s a rule we teach right off the bat: when you choose to get educated, you have to give up relationships for achievement for a period of time. You don’t have time for them both. We ask students to draw a circle on a piece of paper and put their name in it. Then we make them draw circles around their name, and in each circle they put the names of people that are important to them in their lives. If that person is going to support them while they are getting their education, they put a solid line between that person’s name and their name; if that person is going to support them some of the time and not some of the time, it’s a dotted line; and, if that person is never going to support them, there’s no line. Then, what we say is: *Let’s just be honest from the get-go. Not everyone is going to be happy you are getting educated, so you have to make a plan for how you are going to handle the people who are not going to support you. What are you going to do about it?* And we have students write out a plan, and we show them the DVD of successful students, so they can listen to those students talk about how they dealt with the people who did not support them.

In generational poverty, getting educated is equated with loss. People who are trying to get an education may be insulted at a very basic personal level by others in their family or community. They may say to a woman: *You’re no kind of a woman, you don’t love me, you don’t love your children, all you care about is yourself.* To a male they’ll say: *You don’t have any (you know), you are letting her lead you around by (whatever) – you know, a lot of body parts.* The bottom line is that both men and women infer that they are less than because they are pursuing school, and they don’t know what to say. So, here are some phrases we give them to say:

**In generational poverty, getting educated is equated with loss. We say: Let’s just be honest from the get-go. Not everyone is going to be happy you are getting educated, so you have to make a plan for how to handle the people who are not going to support you.**

Number 1: If you get educated, you will be able to keep the people you love safe because you will have more choices and more power and more money.

Number 2: Getting educated and keeping educated will make you tougher and stronger. (You are respected in poverty for being tougher and stronger.)

Number 3: You will have respect. Respect is about power. You will have power and respect.

Number 4: You won’t get cheated – and you hate to get cheated because you get cheated so much in poverty.

Number 5: You can win more often. (The predominant style of conflict resolution in poverty is win/lose, so you are interested in anything that will help you win.)

When a student comes in and says to me, “Well, my old man said (this or that),” I’ll say, “You know what, I know you love your old man, so what can you say to him so that he will know that you are doing it for him as well?” And she can say things like, “If you get hurt, I can make sure that you are better protected. I can make sure that you have an opportunity to win more often. My education will help us keep our children safer.” When students give specific responses like this, their naysayers can’t really refute them.

A lot of time middle class teachers say this kind of stuff: *An education will help you make more money. It will help you get a job promotion.* I’m not saying that’s not true; I’m just saying it

*Continued on page 20 ...*

# An Interview with Ruby Payne (continued from page 19)

doesn't mean much to students from poverty. It would be like someone saying to you that you need to take some courses so that you can manage your trust fund. It doesn't compute. It doesn't even translate. And then teachers will wonder why students don't persist.

Motivation really requires three things. It requires autonomy, meaning, and relationships.

**The middle class loves those big, fat planners. You are not going to use those in poverty.**

So, first of all, if you want people to be motivated, they have to have some sort of significant attachment to a relationship. *I'm doing this for my children, I'm doing this for my Stacey.* It has to be something personal.

One of the things that I recommend to teachers, particularly when they are dealing with adults, is that the first thing they say to students is, "Alright, before we go any further, why do you want to learn this? Why do you need this?" And some students will say, "Because I have to take it if I want the certificate." So I'll back them up and say, "Okay, *why* do you think they want you to have this information giving you this certificate? Why would it make a difference for you to have this information?" I'll say, "When you get that certificate, they don't want you to fail. They want you to be able to win. So why do you need this information in order to win?" Keep bringing information back to meaning and to relationships.

Then, you have to give students choice and autonomy. For that, you have to teach them how to plan.

The middle class loves those big, fat planners. You are not going to use those in poverty. First of all, they are equated with being book smart; they're just not cool. What I recommend for adults is to give them 3x5 note cards as their primary planning tools. Each day they come to class, have them make 7 boxes on one side of the card to represent one week, name the days, and write down in the boxes what their deadlines are for the week. Then, on the other side of the card, have students number 1 through 7 – never more than 7 – and write down the 7 things they have to do that day if they are going to be ready

to get everything done this week.

Students don't know how to do that. They have never seen anyone do that; they keep track of time emotionally or based on what's on television. We need to teach them how to plan backwards: If a paper is due on Friday, what do you have to do on Thursday to make sure you are done by Friday? Are you going to start on Thursday? Hell, no! You don't have enough time. So, how are you going to back it up? Will you start on Wednesday? Tuesday? What is it that you have to do to get this paper done?

You have to teach your students about positive self talk. According to hard research, there is almost no positive talk in poverty: as a matter of fact, you get two negative comments in poverty for every positive one. In professional households, you get five positive comments for every negative.

I'll bet you you've been in a situation where you thought about quitting midway through. Have you ever been there?

**Hillary:** Sure.

**Ruby:** Okay. What did you say to yourself to keep yourself going?

**Hillary:** I guess I looked at the rewards of finishing. I was like, "Yeah, this is awful, but if I can just get it over with, then I can move on to something else."

**Ruby:** Then you said, "Yeah, and I can have a margarita when I'm done."

**Hillary:** I have bribed myself before. Yes, I have.

**Ruby:** Hahaha. We all do. You see, the bottom line is we all use that positive self talk. You don't have that in poverty. There's a phrase teachers can give to their students called an "If, then." Here's an example of how it works:

I was working with three 18-year-old boys in Texas who had failed the exit level state assessment repeatedly; they were seniors, and if they didn't pass it this last time, they could not have a diploma. So I gave them a skills test. Every one of them had the skills.

I said to the boys, "Did y'all quit during the middle of your test?"

They looked at me, and they went, "Well, yeah," – all of them.

I said, "What did you say to yourself when you quit?"

The first kid said, "This is stupid, this is dumb. I already missed too many."

I said, "How many did you miss?"

"5."

"How many can you miss?"

"I don't know."

I said, "Actually, you can miss 30."

The next boy said, "Well, I worked until 1a.m. at the fast food place. I was just exhausted, so I laid down and took a nap."

The third boy said, "Well, I was cold and I was hungry, so I just laid down and slept."

I said, "You know what? You guys don't have any positive self talk." I explained to them why your brain needs it. And then I said to them, "Do you boys have your driver's licenses?" All three of them did.

So I said, "Let me tell you something: if you got your driver's license, which is much harder than passing this test, then you can pass this test. When you are in this test, I want you to tell yourself that if you can get your driver's license, you can pass this test. I want you to practice this right now." And then I taught them some test-taking skills, and they all passed.

The bottom line is the "if, then." If you just tell someone "yes, you can do it," particularly an adult who has had a lot of negative experiences, their brain will automatically kick it out. If you find something that they can already do and then say "if you can do that, then you can do this," the brain believes it.

**Hillary:** Can you talk a little bit about how teachers can walk the fine line of having relationships with

**Motivation requires autonomy, meaning, and relationships.**

adult students that are supporting and demanding but not insulting or patronizing?

**Ruby:** Yes. That's when you use the adult voice. Here's the issue in a nutshell: Everyone has voices in their heads that talk to them all the time, and they take on personas. When you are in your adult voice, you are asking; when you are in the parent voice, you are telling; and when you are in the child voice, you are whining. When you don't have enough of an adult voice,

**When we ask students questions, we treat them like adults. It's not about letting students off the hook. You have to say to them: "I know you're tough. I know you can handle this. Now how are you going to make it work for you?"**

you don't have the ability to resolve an issue with questions or compromise.

I need to say, by the way, that teaching adults how to ask questions is one of the most valuable tools you can give them. When you have only the casual register, you don't know how to ask a question syntactically, and the fastest way for teachers to teach that is to have their students develop multiple choice questions as a way to study. Rather than answer questions, students create their own.

Too often, teachers don't ask questions: they take on the parent voice, telling their students what to do. When we ask students questions, we treat them like adults; we say, "Can you tell me about the kind of help that would help you get this done on time?"

You'll have some teachers who want to make excuses for the student. They'll say, "Well, I let him off the hook about that." I say, "No; you need to work with him and figure out how to make it work." It's not about letting students off the hook. If they need extra time, that's great. If they need a buddy to study with, that's good.

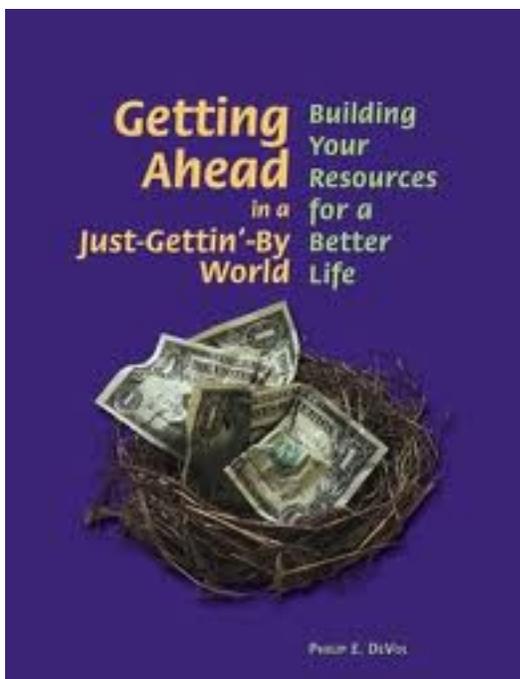
But you have to say to them, "I know you're tough, I know you can handle this. Now how do you make it work for you; how will you do this?"

At one of the community colleges that we work with, the teachers complained that the adult students had crises all the time: child care didn't show up, the car broke down, yada yada. This college had students use their cell phones and videotape with their phones what they did to solve a crisis in their lives. Then they put those video clips up on the college website and called it the crisis center. So those clips and videos from cell phone recordings became a resource for other students who could see real students solving real problems. They might be talking about how they are getting their planning done even though they have three children or how they are dealing with a difficult teacher.

*Continued on page 22 ...*

# An Interview with Ruby Payne (continued from page 21)

When we work with college kids and adults, we teach a one-credit class using the book *Investigations into Economic Class in America* by Philip E. DeVol and Karla M. Krodel. It teaches the hidden rules of school, the hidden rules of college, how college works. Students absolutely love it. They come out of that class empowered about how to handle college and the coursework. And the other version is *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World*, which we use to transition adults of poverty.



**Hillary:** What else do you think adult ed teachers should know about these ideas and about working with students who come from really different backgrounds?

**Ruby:** Abstract representational reality, planning, mental models, translation, personal meaning – all of that has to be brought to the table as a part of instruction. One of the questions I would ask every day before starting a lesson is: Why would it be important for you to know this? What will it do to help you with your certificate or your degree?

I was an English teacher, and when I taught writing to kids, I'd say, "Okay, you are Mr. or Mrs. God and you are always trying to manipulate the readers; you either want to inform them or persuade them or entertain them, but you are always, always, always trying to manipulate the reader." Then I'll say, "Why would you want to know how to do that?"

They'll go, "So you can get what you want."

And I'll say "BINGO! So, don't you think that if you can do this better than everyone else, then you can get what you need and what you want? That's what I'm going to show you how to do." When you put it that way for them, they get it.

In science, students may say, "I don't understand why I need to know about vertebrates and invertebrates." And I'll say, "It will teach you about how systems work and how your body works – and believe me, if you don't know

how your body works, you are going to have difficulty staying healthy." And I'll say, "All information has to be classified and organized in some fashion, and this is how they chose to do it in science. Now, you don't have to agree with it, but I want you to understand why they made these decisions the way they did. Because when you get in the workplace in order to process information faster, you are going to have to be able to do the same thing. So let's look at how they grouped information here; let's look at how they thought about it, because

that will help you understand dynamics that show up in a lot of other places besides science."

Another piece that I haven't talked about yet is that you have to make every student develop a future story. They are never going to finish a program, they are never going to finish college or a university, if it doesn't fit into a personal future story. I asked one 18-year-old boy, "What will your life be like when you are 25?"

He said, "I'll be dead."

"How do you know that?"

"Everybody like me is dead."

"Would there be any reason you wouldn't want to be dead?"

"Yes, my two-year-old brother."

"Is there anything you can do right now so that there will be a better chance that you will be alive when you are 25? Just pick one thing." He needed a future story.

We conducted some surveys and interviews with adult women. Women in wealth and the middle class talked constantly about plans and choices. With women of poverty, those two words never showed up. Planning and choice. They were not in the vocabulary ever in any interview.

So one of the things we do is we make sure that students have a future story. I'll say to students: *You are ten years older than you are right now and you are the star of a movie. Who is in the movie with you? What are you doing?*

What kinds of things do you see? What do you hear? Are you laughing or smiling, or are you frowning? What's in your future story, why do you need an education right now so that you can get that future story?

Money gets you past survival but it does not give you the capacity to develop your own resources. The only things that can do that are having relationships with people different from you, education, and employment. But relationships with people different than you and education are precursors to employment. One of the reasons I wanted to talk with you is that, with adult education, you are actually giving people the opportunity to have relationships with people different than they are. Knowledge is a huge form of power. Knowledge is a huge form of privilege. The piece that most people leave out is the education of the person themselves: it's not enough to teach the abstract informational content. You must also teach people how to make that content work for them. ■

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*Hillary Major is Progress editor and Publications and Communications Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.*

## Creating Safe Spaces for our LGBTQ Students

(continued from page 13)

lower instances of harassment. For guidance on how to speak with your administrator or other authorities on how to affect policy changes, see the Safe Space Kit's guidelines on page 31.

Throughout history, educators have worked to affect change in our society, to make it better through our efforts. We have seen the movement for women's rights and racial equality. We have made great strides in those areas, but we still have work to do in the area of equality for our students who are lesbian, gay, transgendered, or questioning/queer. Are you with me in working towards that change? ■

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*Lauren Ellington is Online Training and Learning Disabilities Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. She is currently enrolled in the Master of Education in Counselor Education program at Virginia Commonwealth University and is working toward a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) credential.*

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## LGBTQ Resources

### Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

### GLSEN's Safe Space Kit

<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1641.html>

### "Exposing Hidden Homophobia"

*in Teaching Tolerance* from the Southern Poverty Law Center  
<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-35-spring-2009/exposing-hidden-homophobia>

### Virginia Anti-Violence Project

<http://virginiaavp.org>

### Equality Virginia

<http://www.equalityvirginia.org>

### People of Faith for Equality in Virginia

<http://www.faith4equalityva.org>

### National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

<http://thetaskforce.org>

### Human Rights Campaign

<http://www.hrc.org>

### The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

<http://www.glaad.org>

### Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

<http://community.pflag.org>

### ThinkB4YouSpeak Campaign

<http://www.thinkb4youspeak.com>

# News from the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

**T**he Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center welcomes **Maurice Oliver**, our new Assistant Manager, who brings to the job many years of experience in adult education. After graduating from VCU in 1986, Maurice worked for the Adult Career Development Center in Richmond, teaching at Richmond City Jail, George Wythe High School, the Philip Morris Employee Development Center, and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. As an adjunct at J.



Sargeant Reynolds, Maurice taught classes for employees of the Department of Public Utilities. He has also given business writing workshops, worked for the Department of Juvenile Justice, and developed e-learning courses for Anthem employees.

**Iris Guillet** also joins the Resource Center, working with eLearn Virginia and the GED Helpline. Iris started working with adults at Wayne's Nursing Home in New York state as an Assistant Director of Recreation. Her career in adult education began at Bronx Community College where she worked as an evening part-time instructor and then as a full-time counselor. In 1990, she moved to Virginia, where she worked in adult and continuing education at Richmond Public Schools' Adult Career Development Center. She has worked as an assessor, counselor, and ESOL teacher.



Richard Sebastian has left VALRC to accept a position as Director of Teaching and Learning Technologies with the Virginia's Community College System. ■

## trauma and Adult ESOL Learners: Resources

see An Interview with Janet Isserlis, page 4)

### **Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective**

Nonesuch, K. (Ed.). (1996). Toronto, Canada: The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women. Available: [http://www.nald.ca/library/research/making\\_c/cover.pdf](http://www.nald.ca/library/research/making_c/cover.pdf)

### **Managing Stress to Improve Program Learning**

Balliro, L. (2011, January). In *Program Notes*. Available: <http://nelrc.org/expertise/program%20notes%20Feb%2024%20.pdf>

**Messages That Hurt and Help** (2006). Available: [http://swearercenter.brown.edu/Literacy\\_Resources/help.html](http://swearercenter.brown.edu/Literacy_Resources/help.html)

### **Moving Research about Violence and Learning into Practice**

Battell, E., Hornstein, S., Horsman, J., Jones, C., Murphy, J., et al. (2008). Edmonton, Canada: Windsound Learning. Available:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/change/ElevenResearchers/ElevenResearchers.htm>

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE**  
<http://www.thehotline.org>

**Power and Control Wheel**  
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP). Available: <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/PhyVio.pdf>

**Trauma and the Adult English Language Learner**  
Isserlis, J. (2000, July). Available: [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/digests/trauma2.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/trauma2.html)

**Violence and Learning: Taking Action**  
Norton, M. (Ed.). (2004). Available: <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/valta/cover.htm>