

NRS: Building Virginia's Future **One Learner at a Time**

by Patty Shortt and Randall Stamper

Two hundred twenty-five professionals from sixty-seven adult education programs have completed approximately 3,200 collective hours of training and 536 hours of pre-work assignment. That work has generated the dynamics now producing positive changes across the state. These education practitioners have embraced the challenge motivated by a federal directive for individual states and local programs to improve the quality of National Reporting System data.

An NRS training team, comprised of Carol Chafin, Anita Prince, and Patty Shortt, conducted 128 hours of NRS Level II and III training based on a Plan-Do-Study-Act program-improvement cycle in all eight Superintendent Regions. This training was rigorous, but adult education practitioners are using what they have learned to take a close look at how they operate and to deduce how they can improve operations. Undoubtedly, program improvement progress will be evident in the 2004 NRS reporting data.

By 2005, the NRS reporting data should reveal enormous accomplishments in program performance, which will definitely influence the next round of federal funding decisions for adult education.

Whereas Level I was simply an explanation of what the National Reporting System is, NRS Level II equips program managers and their teams with the skills

... our job is not only to help adult learners become literate, but also to support them in the practical application of their literacy levels.

needed to analyze program performance by interpreting data to define problems and propose solutions. NRS Level III is an intense workshop. Teams analyze and interpret their own program data compiled in the pre-work assignment, find the root cause(s) of program-specific problems(s), and design action plans to improve recruitment, retention, educa-

Program Improvement

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tional functioning level gain, and the establishment of follow-up goals.

Though it's a work-intensive process, the overwhelming response has been positive. "Our team had a sense of what we needed to do but lacked a clear focus," explained Tonya Creasy. She and her team at Northern Neck Adult Education finished Level III in October of last year. "This opportunity to participate in training provided us with the evidence we needed to clearly see what we needed to accomplish. We needed to get out of the box and be open to expanding our horizons and entertain a wide range of activities relating to our solution analysis." Other programs are

Continued on page 12 ...

"We Can Do This:"

An Adult Education Program Rises to the Challenge

by Virginia Leadbetter-Bolte

It is a frightening time to be in Adult Education these days. Talk of standards, funding, and program improvement have many of us worried. I even thought to myself recently that I wanted a nice, safe little job. But I've invested the last eleven years in Adult Education, and I've always liked a good challenge. So I decided to suck it up and keep going.

"Let's determine all of the obstacles," I told the staff this week in our mid-year meeting, "but let's concentrate more on finding solutions, making this work." I had asked the staff to read the Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act before

coming to the meeting so they would understand that change was imminent. "Ultimately, I think our program will be better for it," I said.

I believed what I had told them. We must change. I know that, in the long run, content standards will make our program stronger and better able to serve those who walk through our door. It's been a harried journey for me as a program leader. I've had times when I stood behind our state leadership, times when I was angry with all of the changes coming at me so fast, and times like right now when I believe that they're fighting

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PROGRESS

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Letter from the Director



Virginia (Jenny) Leadbetter-Bolte's commentary, beginning on page one, speaks to the fears and hopes I think we all have as we strive to build our programs in these uncertain times. Her message cuts to the core of the challenges we face and illustrates the balance between the need for change and the all-too-human fear of changing. The key is in the simple but powerful statement: "We can do this." Only through a committed, organized approach involving all of the stakeholders – including students – can our organizations achieve higher levels of performance.

This issue of Progress is largely devoted to program improvement. In "NRS: Building Virginia's Future One Learner at a Time," program managers describe how they and their colleagues have accepted the challenge to change through their participation in the NRS training series. "Content Standards: Who Wants Them? Who Needs Them?" summarizes a project that identifies and evaluates content standards other states have established for adult education. "The Teacher Observation Project" outlines a process developed and piloted last year by the VALRC and a panel of experienced adult educators to help teachers increase their professional expertise.

Progress is only one of many tools available to help teachers, tutors, and program managers gain the knowledge and skills they need. By using those tools and working together, we can create programs and systems that really work for our learners.

Barbara E. Gibson, Interim Director, VALRC

Calendar of Events

<http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/vaelc/events/calendar.asp>

March

- 1-3 National Center for Family Literacy Conference
Orlando, FL / <http://www.familit.org>
- 5-9 National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs Conference
Tampa, FL / <http://www.naasln.org>
- 14-16 Correctional Education Association National Conference
Baltimore, MD / ceaoffice@aol.com
- 17-20 Learning Disabilities Association of American 2004 Conference
Atlanta, GA / <http://www.laamerica.org>
- 24-28 Virginia Festival of the Book
Charlottesville, VA / <http://www.vabook.org>
- 29-April 3 2004 TESOL Conference
Long Beach, CA / <http://www.tesol.org>

April

- 12-16 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
San Diego, CA / <http://www.aera.net/meeting>
- 24-28 Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) National Conference
Columbus, OH / <http://www.coabe04.org>

May

- 5-7 VA Assn. for Adult and Continuing Education (VAACE) Annual Conference
Virginia Beach, VA / <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/vaace/>
- 20 The Literacy Fair - Keysville, VA

June

- 8-12 Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO)
Pittsburgh, PA / <http://calico1.modlang.swt.edu/index.html>

July

- 28-30 English Language Institute - Marymount
Arlington, VA

Introducing

CLICK: ON WE BLOGS

by Stephen Grainer

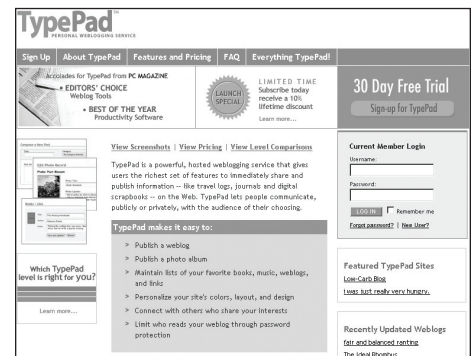
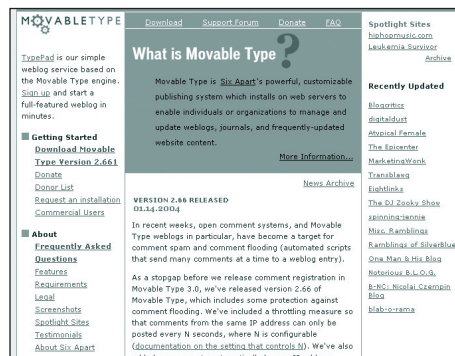
Hello and welcome to Click, the first edition of a regular technology column in Progress. As webmaster and general go-to technology guy at the Resource Center, I hope to share my passion for technology, featuring tools and tips relevant to the educational field.

How might your programs, courses, or learners improve if you could share research, hold discussions, and receive feedback easily and instantaneously? One of the newer trends on the Internet, the weblog, promises to help organizations communicate more efficiently with partners, learners, and the world at large. Many in other fields are starting to realize the potential of this new medium, from syndicated columnist, Dave Barry (<http://davebarry.blogspot.com>) to business magazine, Fast Company (<http://blog.fastcompany.com>).

a greater degree of control and configuration. For example, both discussion forums and listservs are open for anyone to post an entry, but weblogs usually have a specific author or group of authors. Unlike forums, only a weblog's authors can post entries – a useful way of moderating what is discussed on the weblog. If a discussion forum can be compared to a giant committee meeting where everyone has a voice and agenda, a weblog might then be compared to a seminar or panel where a teacher or group of teachers moderate the discussion to focus on a specific message.

There are a number of potential

tool to start with. For more advanced users, MovableType (www.movabletype.org) is a free CGI script that can be run on your website. Its customizable templating system is great for running multiple weblogs but also requires a much higher learning curve. If you are fairly experienced publishing content to the web, MovableType may be a good choice for its added versatility. Between the two is TypePad (www.typepad.com), where ad-free hosting is provided as part of a monthly fee. TypePad has most of the advanced features of MovableType, but it doesn't require you to install and set up the software on your own website.



Weblogging tools are as diverse as the weblogs they're used to create. Blogger (www.blogger.com, pictured left) is one of the easiest tools for creating a simple weblog, while MovableType (www.movabletype.org, middle) and Typepad (www.typepad.com, right) – both from Six Apart, Ltd. – are more versatile and consequently more complex.

Put simply, a weblog (or “blog” for short) is a website where an individual or group can share ideas, discussions, and links to other websites in succinct entries. Entries can be organized chronologically and categorically, and many weblogs allow readers to make comments on an entry. Entries can be as short as a single sentence with a link or up to several pages in length. Weblog topics are as varied as their writers, ranging from business and politics to personal and humorous.

Weblogs incorporate features of other electronic communication media such as discussion forums and listservs, but expand upon these media by offering

uses for weblogs within the educational environment. Programs can use them to share important research and publications with each other. Teachers can keep classes up to date with news, assignments, or additional comments on class material. Even students can benefit from the medium, participating in discussions on course weblogs or publishing their own assignments and thoughts in a weblog format.

Tools for publishing weblogs are almost as varied as the medium itself. Blogger (www.blogger.com) is the simplest and cheapest (the basic service is free with banner ads) tool to use. If you want to dive right into weblogging, it is the best

Whether or not you decide to try weblogging for yourself, here are some great examples to explore:

- <http://www.educationlibrarian.com/>
(A general weblog about educational and library topics)
- <http://www.literacytech.org/blog.html>
A weblog on literacy and technology
- <http://www.ebn.weblogger.com/>
A meta-weblog about weblogging in the educational field

Got a question or suggestion for a future topic? Email sdgrainer@vcu.edu with the subject “Click on this.”



Selected tips for: Presenting Useful Feedback

1. Give the floor to the instructor right from the beginning. Use such comments as:

- “Tell me how you felt about the lesson.”
- “Tell me some of the things you felt good about and that you did well.”
- “What were you observing during your lesson?”

Beginning the conference this way builds rapport, confidence, and trust and creates an atmosphere in which recommendations can be addressed later in the conference.

2. Listen to the instructor’s responses to the questions above. This is not the time to worry about what you will say once he/she is finished speaking. Instead, remain carefully focused on the instructor’s comments, as they may indicate a different perspective than you had originally considered.

5. Focus on behavior rather than the person, on helping rather than hurting, and on behavior that the instructor can do something about. Address growth and improvement in the most non-threatening manner possible by asking additional open-ended questions:

- “Was there anything that happened during the observation that you wished had gone better...that you would like to have done differently?”
- “Can you tell me about...”
- “Did you realize that...”
- Example: “Tell me about the incident when Jana and Denise were yelling at each other during the discussion.”

8. Conclude with the positive. It is still the responsibility of the observer to steer the conversation back toward the positive by restating the instructor’s strengths and expressing appreciation for their contributions, and when appropriate, their commitment to adults and the program. Ultimately, the observation process is an opportunity to learn, both for the instructor and the observer! ■■

the Teacher Observation project

by Debby Cargill

Before joining the adult education field, prospective teachers have had widely diverse professional experiences. Some have taught in the k-12 grades; others have taught in higher education settings. Some have been trainers in the private sector or in governmental organizations. Some have never taught anywhere. So how do they get the training they need to teach adults effectively? Having a checklist of indicators of good teaching would be a good start.

In October 2002, a group of experienced adult educators, recruited by the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, met in Richmond to create just such a list. The list, called The Indicators of Good Teaching, is one component of the Teacher Observation Project, a process and a set of tools for professional development. The observation process was designed to help observers better understand the teachers’ classroom practices and to give the teachers the objective feedback they need to examine and improve particular aspects of their practices.

The Indicators of Good Teaching is a categorized list of observable behaviors that provides a framework for objectively analyzing the notes taken during the observation. For instance, the curriculum category includes:

- Purposes and objectives derived from a curriculum framework, clearly articulated by the instructor and understood by learners, specific and relevant to learners’ needs
- Instructional content relevant to learners’ needs/interests, directly

related to learners’ goals, covers the scope of skills and knowledge required for program and learners, based on real-life problems, and appropriately sequenced for learners

- Instructional materials to include authentic items related to learners’ goals and life tasks

Other categories include Instruction (learning experiences, assessment, and transfer of learning) and Management (systems and resources, engaged learners, and the adult learning environment).

The indicators provide a framework that enables teachers to develop expertise. Reflection by the teacher on the observer’s feedback completes the process of providing assistance to a teacher who seeks to improve his or her practice. The observation process developed through the project begins with establishing positive rapport between the observer and the teacher. During the observation, the observer takes notes that are used when providing feedback to the teacher. Follow-up guidance and support is provided.

In the spring of 2003, three pilot observers – Christy Hicks, Eloise Rogers, and I – were trained in and piloted the process. We provided feedback to the project advisory group, which then revised the tools and training.

Janet Frye, Regional Specialist for Northern Shenandoah Valley, has conducted 14 observations in a variety of class settings from GED to ABE to ESOL classes. Frye states, “The best part of the observation procedure is that it gives specific feedback to a teacher

Foundations & Grants Online

and an unbiased picture of a class. The indicators validate good teaching practices, and are a clean way of expressing the program and state expectations.”

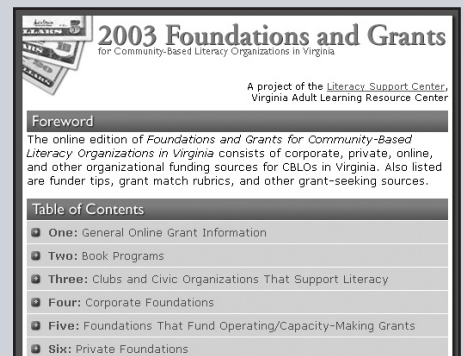
When asked if the process is any easier with teachers of particular backgrounds, Frye explained, “I believe that a person’s background doesn’t influence their response to the observations as much as their inherent personality. Some people resist feedback, but the observation process makes the feedback easier to accept.” The key, it seems, is to not be threatened by the process.

Susan Holt, a member of the development team, suggests that teachers, “...pair up with another teacher and conduct an informal ‘peer observation.’ Learn from each other. There’s nothing like having someone observe you in your classroom.” She also explained that the process is not only for new teachers. “We are always calling on our students

to reach beyond their comfort zone – to think and learn beyond what they knew they could do. Isn’t it only fair to ask the same of ourselves as teachers?”

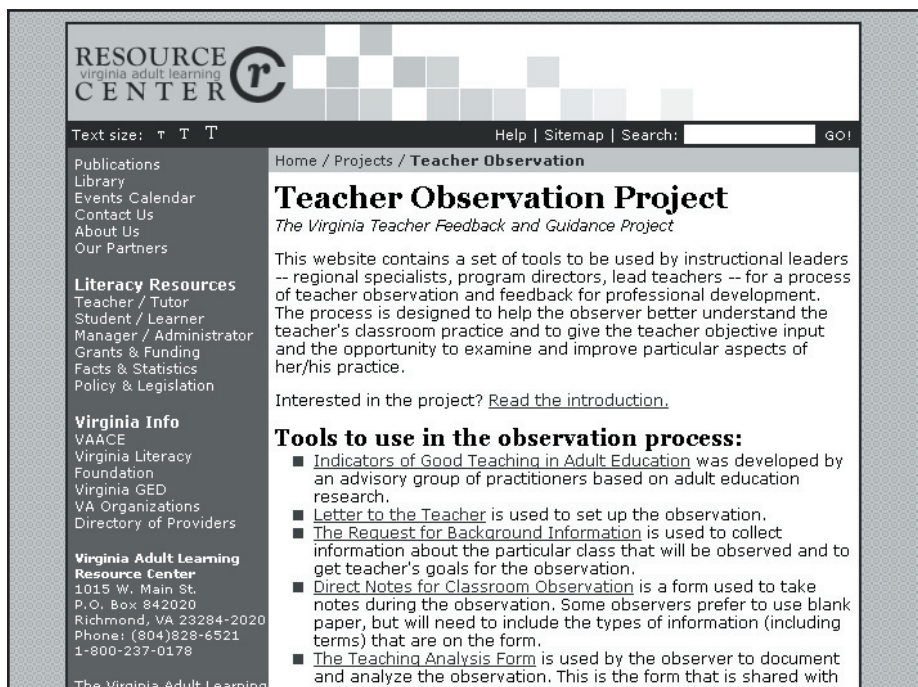
The Observation Project is central to reflective ways of teaching and will encourage good teaching practices. For complete information on the project, check out the website at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/projects/observation/. All of the tools and forms are included there. For the human touch, Holt suggests that teachers call on their Regional Specialists or the VALRC staff, who can direct you to someone in your area who can help you with the process. ■■


Debby Cargill is the Lead for ESOL and Program Developer for Prince William County Public Schools, Adult Education. Debby is earned an MEd. in Adult Education from George Mason University in 2000.



Grant seekers spend an enormous amount of effort searching for funders. While many grant-seeking resources already exist, especially on the Internet, few directories offer a comprehensive list of funders that have had a history of offering grants to literacy organizations and adult education programs in Virginia. Addressing the need for such a directory, the Literacy Support Center, a project of The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, The Virginia Literacy Foundation, and Virginia Commonwealth University, compiled the 2003-2004 edition of the *Foundations and Grants for Community-Based Literacy Organizations in Virginia*.

For convenience, this resource guide is divided into ten sections (see Table of Contents). The Grant Match Rubric and Prospect Worksheet from the Foundation Center can be photocopied as many times as needed, and additional grant seeking tips from important sources are also provided. If you find inaccuracies or information on additional resources, please contact: Victoire Gerkens Sanborn, Director of the Literacy Support Center, at 1-800-237-0178 or vjsanbor@vcu.edu. ■■



 **The Teacher Observation Project includes forms, sample letters, guides, and suggestions to make the process easier and less intimidating for both program managers and teachers. All of the resources are available on the project website at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/projects/observation/**

 **For More Info**
The Foundations & Grants booklet is available online at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/foundgrants/

Building Sustainable Funding: Part II

by Victoire Gerkens Sanborn



While searching for grants, directors and board presidents of community-based literacy organizations often wonder, “What are funders really looking for? Which information should I include?” Answers from a number of sources – including funders – follow a similar theme: program strength, a well-defined mission, a diversified funding base, evidence of collaborative partnerships, strategic direction, and a desire to improve. “We’re looking for an organization that is well run, has a strategic plan and a strong sense of where they want to be down the road, and is focused on how to deliver better services to their clients,” says Mark Emblidge, Executive Director of The Virginia Literacy Institute.

Susan Davis, Director of Programs at the Community Foundation Serving Richmond and Central Virginia, adds, “One thing I suggest and that we tell our grantees is to diversify your funding base as best you can and collaborate with as many partners as you can.” These part-

nerships should not just pay lip service to grant guidelines but should have real substance. “We expect there to be a relationship over time,” Ms. Davis emphasizes. “Tell us who your partners are, how long you have partnered, what your outcomes are, and what you hope to accomplish. We are looking for programs that consolidate community services, that share teachers, resources, space, and libraries.”

Steve Clementi, Public Affairs Director at Verizon, also spoke at length about the importance of establishing community partnerships and strengthening your nonprofit by seeking grants from a variety of sources. “One of the first questions we ask is if programs have successfully sought funds from other corporations ... we don’t want organizations to become dependent on us,” he explained. “Also, there are a lot of worthy projects out there, and we don’t have the budget to fund everyone. Our policy is not to fund grants for more than three consecutive years to one program.”

The Virginia Literacy Founda-

tion (VLF) is one of a small number of foundations that fund capacity building for literacy organizations. “We’re interested not just in the current number of students served, but in building greater capacity so that we can reach an even larger number,” Mark Emblidge said. Elsa Angell, head of the grants committee at the Virginia Literacy Foundation agreed, saying, “Wisely, Jeannie Baliles, {Virginia’s former first lady and Virginia Literacy Foundation founder}, saw that groups needed continuity. We have done this by funding their staff.”

Grants that support capacity building pay for board and staff development, marketing plans, strategic planning, survival during changing times, community building, and professional staff. These grants are often modest, but they do not need to be extravagant to achieve a desired result. Small amounts from a single source can add up over the years, contributing to an agency’s stability and long-term success. Since 1987, the Virginia Literacy Foundation has awarded an average of \$80,000 per organization to pay for program staff, purchase materials, or establish new services. Today, most of these organizations receive steady support from their communities and are ready to move to the next level of program development.

Capacity building is achieved in more ways than grant seeking. Through the Literacy Support Center, a public/private partnership between the Virginia Literacy Foundation, Virginia Commonwealth University, and the Virginia Department of Education’s Office of Adult Education and Literacy, community-based organizations can request free workshops for program and staff development, obtain free resources, and ask for technical advice. A national program, VISTA AmeriCorps, builds capacity through paid volunteers who provide critical expertise during a period of rapid growth or transition.

Organizations can also achieve sustainability through old-fashioned American enterprise or careful planning. “It is entirely legal ... for a charitable organization to charge a reasonable fee for goods

or services it provides. However, its activities must be conducted in a noncommercial manner..." (Herman, 75) More and more of Virginia's literacy programs are charging tutors for training and adult learners for supplies or "classes." Such fee-for-service, when affordable, is often accepted by these key clients as a fact of modern life, and it relieves cash-strapped organizations from the need to fundraise for books or supplies.

Strategic planning for fund development is vital, but some plans are too ambitious and difficult to implement. Board and staff are easily discouraged if they set too many tasks for themselves, like asking each board member to solicit 20 potential donors per year. Such an agenda would be daunting to even the most extroverted person! A sensible plan of action limits yearly goals to an attainable few, outlines action steps, as-

A sensible plan of action limits yearly goals to an attainable few, outlines action steps, assigns tasks to specific people, sets time limits, and leads to measurable results.

signs tasks to specific people, sets time limits, and leads to measurable results. To keep the plan viable, staff and board must meet at regular intervals to evaluate results, make modifications, plan next steps, and start the cycle all over again. (Wolf, 282-6)

Ultimately, finding sustainable funds for your organization depends on these conditions, which may be planned for:

1. Expansion of a broad individual and corporate donor base through the efforts of board and staff. These contributions are largely unrestricted, provide a dependable yearly income, and pay for staff and overhead.
2. Ongoing search for local and regional funders. Too many grant seekers wait until a funding crisis before researching grants. By continually investigating funding streams throughout the year, your agency

will be rewarded in the following ways: control over choosing which grants fit your mission, and a growing reputation as a stable, dependable organization.

In pursuing the two options described above, your fund development team should be made aware that grant seeking takes time, often a year or more, whereas individual donors can be solicited in a relatively short period.

No magic key will unlock the secrets to reliable funding. For the majority of nonprofit organizations, a fairy-tale godmother in the guise of one large, national grant will never materialize. By working diligently, your fund-development team, consisting of board, staff, and community members, can build a strong financial base for your organization. This base begins at the local level, moving from individual donors to community partnerships to regional sponsors.

Remember that results count. Keep track of grant and reporting deadlines. Maintain accurate records. Understand funder priorities. Work on recruitment and client satisfaction. Measure outcomes. And design sound, reproducible programs. "One thing we look at is 'What is unique about the program?'" says Steve Clementi. "If it is unique, we look at it a little closer. We don't discard an ordinary program, but if it can be implemented in other states, then we'll take an even closer look."

Finally, maintain regular contact with your funders. Send them a letter of thanks, even if your proposal was rejected, and find out what steps you will need to take to ensure success in the next grant cycle. Send special reports to current funders or put them on your mailing list. Hand them a special plaque or award, or name your student library after them. Court potential funders to set the stage for a future "ask." These steps take effort and patience, but over time your program should see a marked improvement in attracting sustainable funds.

Note: This is the second in a two-part series on Finding Sustainable Funding. Part I discussed Strategic Planning and Program Evaluation and was published in

the Spring 2003 issue of Progress. Virginia organizations may also order copies of the following free booklet: 2003 Foundations and Grants for Community-Based Literacy Organizations in Virginia at 800-237-0178 or vdesk@vcu.edu. Both documents can also be found online at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu. ❖

References:

Herman, Robert D. and Associates. *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 1994.

Wolf, Thomas. *Managing a Nonprofit Organization in the Twenty-First Century*. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, 1999.

Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is Director of the Literacy Support Center at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center at Virginia Commonwealth University.



Did you know...

- many small grants are awarded to organizations that have had no personal contact or prior relationship with a funder?
- grants account for less than 10% of the total income in many established nonprofit organizations?
- most nonprofit organizations with budgets of under \$1 million are funded by local and regional funders, as opposed to national funders?

(Herman, 10-14)

Content Standards: Who Wants Them? Who Needs Them?

by Roberta McKnight, PhD

It is important to know what you are trying to achieve before carrying out a plan to achieve it. Otherwise, there can be lost opportunities, confusion about purpose, and a failure to focus energy and resources on the goal. ... If we – students and educators – do not have an agreed-on vision of the goals and content of teaching and learning, it is hard to imagine that we can provide the most effective educational opportunities possible.”

Andrew Hartman,
Former Director, NIFL

In 1998, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), enacted legislation requiring states to develop performance standards and report progress through the National Reporting System (NRS) database of adult education assessment. While the WIA mandates development of five-year plans with progress reported in the form of performance standards, it does not address content standards. This contributes to the misconception that content and performance standards are the same. The

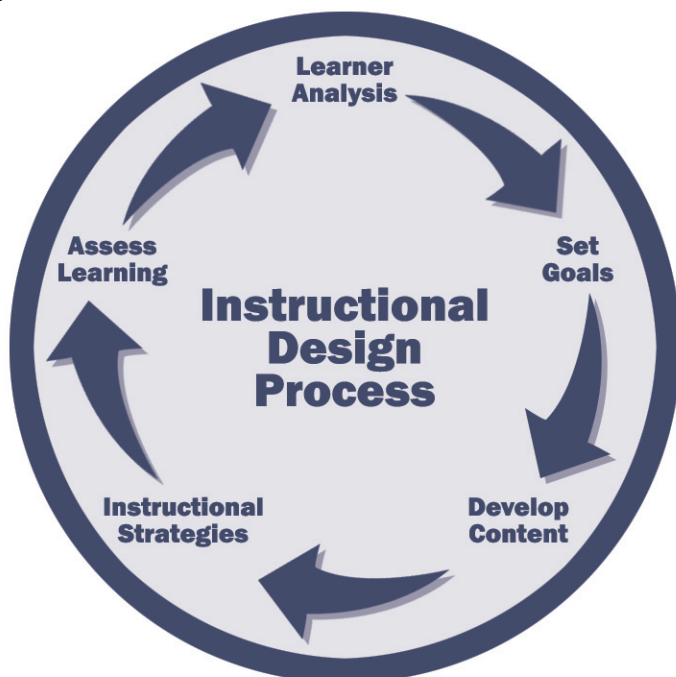
instructional design process, shown in Figure 1, may help to clarify the distinction between content and performance standards.

In the instructional design process, content is developed prior to or in conjunction with performance assessment to ensure that assessment targets specified goals to provide feedback for improving instructional strategies. In other words, curriculum development based upon specified content standards enables educators to assess the effectiveness of instruction. This is known as aligning content standards with performance standards.

The WIA requires adult education and literacy programs to report performance using standardized assessments but there is no consensus about goals and content (Merrifield, 1998; Stites, 1999). How is one able to assess performance without an identified set of goals (stated as content standards) in place on which performance is to be measured? If, to put it simply, content standards specify what to teach, while performance standards specify what level of achievement is required, how can the two exist independently? Together, they provide a

framework for continuous revision and improvement of instructional strategies (Stites, 1999). Without content standards, reporting achievement is limited to performance standards that focus on existing standardized assessments, which many adult educators feel do not accurately reflect the achievements of adult learners and are not based upon the continuous feedback loop illustrated in the figure below.

In a report to the Virginia Board of Education in 2001, a task force recommended appointment of an advisory council on adult education noting, “...it is time to help adults in Virginia who are challenged by the same basic skills of reading, writing, and using mathematics – especially those adults who can help their children learn.” (Davidson & Emblidge, 2001). Since the first standards for K-12 education were published in 1995, the standards reform movement in public education has become increasingly controversial with passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. According to an article in the Washington Post, “About 36 percent of Maryland schools failed to make adequate progress last year under the law. So did 45 percent of Virginia’s and 90 percent of Florida’s schools” (Helderman, 2003). As a result, larger numbers of students are falling into the adult education arena, needing to pass the GED. To address this problem, in 2003, Governor Mark Warner launched an initiative called Education for a Lifetime. This initiative focuses on three improvements to Virginia’s adult education system: 1) increasing the education levels of Virginia’s workforce by doubling the number of GEDs earned in Virginia; 2) creating a career readiness certificate that shows employers that job seekers have the required job skills, and 3) reorganizing Virginia’s 22 workforce development programs into a more streamlined and effective system (Warner, 2003).



The sequential and cyclical instructional design process illustrating the synergistic relationship between content and performance assessment.

State	Content Standards	Specificity	Format	Usability	Comments
Arizona	ESOL, Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies, Writing	High	PDF	Linear, sequential, requires flipping back & forth	Performance standards with interpretation, glossary, and sample activities are also available
California	ABE, ASE, ESOL, Parent Education, Older Adults	Medium	Word DOC	Linear, sequential, requires flipping back & forth	Currently under revision to follow same format as K-12 Content Standards
Florida	Math, Reading, Language, Workforce/Workplace	Medium	Web-based & PDF	Easy to use, lists	Concise lists with coded benchmarks
Iowa	Reading, Math	Low	PDF	Proprietary	Use CASAS Skill Level Descriptors
Maryland	ESOL	Medium	PDF	Linear, tabular, easy to use	Referenced to NRS level, CASAS, SCANS, Technology, Cultural, & Meta-cognitive Skills
Massachusetts	English Language Arts, History & Social Sciences, ESOL, Math & Numeracy, Science & Technology/ Engineering, Health	High	PDF	Easy to use, tables	Concise lists without coding; instructional design, descriptors, & structural schemas are variable
New York	English Language Arts, Math, ESOL, GED	Low	Web-based	Easy to use	Goal statements
Oregon	ASE/GED Math, ASE/GED Reading, ASE/GED Writing	Low	Word DOC	Easy to use, tables	Use CASAS Educational Functioning Level Descriptors
Pennsylvania	Foundation Skills in 20 categories	Low	PDF	Easy to use, tables	Adapted from EFF
Rhode Island	ABE, ESOL, Citizenship	Low	Web-based DRAFT	Easy to use, tables	Tables are arranged with NRS levels in left column with learning domains across columns
Tennessee	ESOL Curriculum Resource Book	High	PDF	Easy to use, book	Alignment between curriculum & assessment strategies
Texas	ABE Math, Reading, & Language Arts, Adult ESL, ASE/GED Science Math, Social Studies, Reading, & Writing	Medium	PDF	Easy to use, tables	Concise tables with indicators

The table above summarizes Dr. McKnight's findings on content standards developed in other states. The full report is available online at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/standardsreport/

In June 2003, I was contracted to conduct a study of currently existing content standards for adult education within the United States. My findings were reported to the Office of Adult Education and Literacy, Virginia Department of Education. This report can be reviewed at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/standardsreport/. The report notes that three content standards development efforts are available nationally – the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), Equipped for the Future (EFF), and the National Reporting System (NRS) – and are being used in various states. In addition,

twelve states have developed content standards, including Arizona, California, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Texas.

Three criteria are used to review and categorize existing state content standards – level of specificity, format, and usability or ease of use. Specificity refers to the detail found within the content standards presented. Format refers to how content standards are made available to the public. Usability or ease of use is based upon my own observation. A summary of the state standards and characteristics is summarized in the table above.

In Virginia, some local programs are already developing content standards. For example, an ad hoc committee in Henrico County has been working to create curriculum guides. In the City of Richmond, curriculum frameworks have been developed. Similarly, Chesapeake has adapted curriculum frameworks from Florida's adult education system. Since adult education, like K-12 education, is administered at the state level, a state service delivery system must provide leadership to develop content standards. Content standards would then be reported in a plan to the NRS.

Continued on page 13 ...

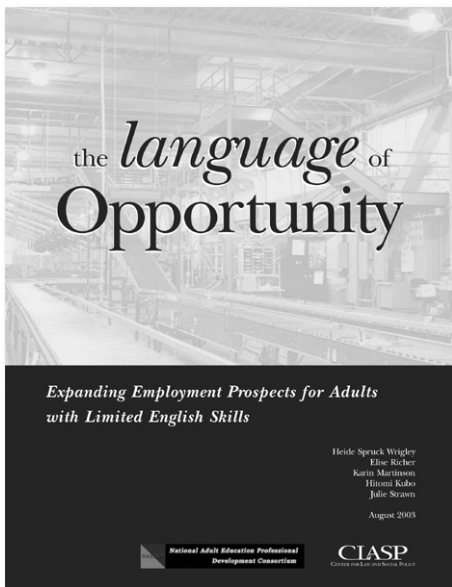


For More Info

Dr. Roberta McKnight's full report can be found online at: www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/standardsreport/

the *language* of OPPORTUNITY

*A New Study and
Recommendations For
Expanding Employment
Prospects for Adults with
Limited English Skills*
by Carolyn Harding



For More Info
The entire report is
available online at:
<http://tinyurl.com/3dr9w>

In the fall of 2003, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC) released a report, *The Language of Opportunity*. It focuses on solutions to a problem that has concerned policy makers and professionals in the ESOL community for several years. According to one of the authors of this study, Heide Spruck Wrigley, more and more immigrants are arriving in the United States with fewer skills and lower levels of education. People working with these immigrants have seen them getting stuck in jobs that don't offer pay sufficient to support a family. The recommendations in this report endorse policies that would forestall the growth of a permanent under class.

CLASP is funded by private foundations and works with other organizations to put policies forward as an impetus to make changes in legislation. In fact, the current Senate bill that addresses funding for adult education, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), includes language that would support research and demonstration projects to help immigrants with limited English and low-level job skills gain access to job training where they receive English language instruction as well.

Wrigley and the other authors, Elise Richer, Karin Martinson, Hitomi Kubo, and Julie Strawn, state in the report that if the changes they recommend are adopted at the federal and local levels, and are accompanied by increased funding,

many more adults with limited English proficiency (LEP) would improve their own and, consequently, the nation's economic well being.

In the next two decades, according to the report, the percentage of American workers whose English is limited will continue to increase. As native-born workers age and exit the workforce, more and more immigrants will enter it. Indeed, David Ellwood, in a 2002 report from The Aspen Institute, *Grow Faster Together. Or Grow Slowly Apart*, projects that immigrants will account for all the net growth in the 25- to 54-year-old group of workers in that time frame.

In the absence of scientific research on the most effective ways to deliver English language, literacy, and job training, the authors have drawn upon studies conducted on employment programs for groups of low-skilled individuals receiving cash assistance or welfare – a group that includes many immigrants and refugees. The research on this group “shows that the most effective programs for moving low-income individuals into work combine job training with basic skills training or provide a mix of services, including job search, education, and job training.” The other recommendations in the report come from non-experimental research in the fields of ESOL and training and from site visits and interviews with practitioners at promising programs.

The authors made the following recommendations for program design change.

- Create programs that combine language and literacy services with job skills training. Language instruction should be tied to train-

ing in particular occupations and should include general workplace communication skills, job specific language needed for training, certification and testing, and soft skills to help navigate U.S. workplace culture.

- Adapt existing education, employment, and training programs to the needs of individuals with limited English skills. The adaptations should include using assessments appropriate for measuring language proficiency, building on existing work experience and educational background, hiring bilingual staff, and using hands-on training to make job training more accessible.
- Offer short-term bridge programs that transition participants to job

of federal adult education and employment training programs under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

- Make WIA services more accessible to limited-English proficient (LEP) job seekers.
- Give states the flexibility under the welfare law (TANF) to provide low-income LEP parents with services designed to increase their skills and their earning potential.
- Allow states to provide TANF benefits and services to legal immigrants regardless of the dates of entry.
- Address the needs of low-income LEP adults in federal higher education policies.
- Fund scientifically based research

who the LEP adults are and how they are faring, a discussion on how English language and job training services can make a difference for labor market success, and an appendix where promising program models and practices are described.

Ms. Wrigley believes that students are best served when they are offered focused opportunities to learn English. For those needing a job, training in a particular job while learning English and job-search skills provides a faster way to become self sufficient. For those interested in helping their children, family literacy classes offer parents the skills they need to live successfully in their new culture. ESOL Civics classes are the best approach for those interested in learning more about their community. Accelerated classes can be offered to those most in need so that they can make the transition to job-training programs quickly. Saturday workshops, tailored to the needs of students in the community, can be offered. Classes that focus on particular student needs can help low-skilled immigrants succeed more quickly than if they have to attend several years of general language classes.

For some years now, Congress, through WIA, has focused on program accountability. What are the successes of adult learners? What are the returns on the money the government has invested in adult learners? Congress wants to see learners getting jobs, diplomas, and certificates that will give them better employment possibilities. This study, *The Language of Opportunity*, presents some ideas that will help programs and learners achieve those desired results. ■

Carolyn Harding is editor of Progress. She retired from the Adult ESOL program in Fairfax County a year ago.

In the absence of scientific research on the most effective ways to deliver English language, literacy, and job training, the authors have drawn upon studies conducted on employment programs for groups of low-skilled individuals receiving cash assistance or welfare – a group that includes many immigrants and refugees.

training and higher education more quickly.

- Create career pathways for adults with limited English skills. Encourage participants to plan for a career instead of just focus on getting a job now.
- Consider the merits of bilingual job training in areas where English is not necessary for job placement.
- Provide bilingual advising and job development responsive to the needs of foreign-born adults trying to adjust to the expectations of the U.S. society.

The authors also recommended specific actions for federal and state policy makers.

- Make combined language, literacy, and training services for adults with limited English a key focus

on “what works” in training and education for LEP adults.

- Link federally funded English language and job training efforts, and promote program improvement through common definitions for data collection and technical assistance across adult education, ESOL, and job training programs.
- Assist states and localities with new and growing immigrant populations to create an infrastructure of workplace development services for them.
- Support the development of “ESL workplace certificates” that establish English language competencies needed to participate in particular jobs.

In addition to the recommendations, the authors provide an overview of

Programs Report NRS Success *(continued from front page)*

reporting similar progress in targeting areas for improvement. Jim Andre and Heather Pike at Henrico County Adult Education explained that, “The amount of work involved for our three top priorities...is tremendous and will take time to carry out, but we are on our way. We have begun a process to increase participation in pre and post-testing and have completed a draft of the ABE content curriculum.” Henrico’s program has also contacted other area adult education programs in order to devise a plan that will increase the number of Richmond residents who pass the GED.

Future funding decisions will be tied to learner performance related to five core outcome measures: educational functioning level gain, attaining a GED or other secondary credential, attaining a job, retaining a job, and entering post-secondary education or training. The Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle is a targeted, deliberate, databased method for improving how a program assists its clients

in each of these. Understanding and using this process to improve performance outcomes is crucial if a program is to receive funding to continue serving its current and future clients.

Patty Shortt, program development

“Understanding and using this process to improve performance outcomes is crucial if a program is to receive funding to continue serving its current and future clients.”

specialist with the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center and NRS trainer, makes it clear what NRS is about. “Let there be no mistake about what we are doing,” Shortt explains. “We are discovering – through data analysis – how each program, specific to their demographic, geographic, and economic profiles, can

better serve adult learners – one adult learner at a time – as we build a competitive workforce to support Virginia’s economic future.”

How do we better serve our learners? The NRS focuses on four specific areas: Recruitment, Retention, Educational Functioning Level Advancement, and Setting Follow-up Goals. These areas are the heart of NRS accountability requirements.

First, we must recruit more adult learners into our programs. Next, we must retain those learners in class with the intensity and duration necessary to advance through literacy levels until they achieve desired educational and employment pursuits. A program’s root cause analysis may result in an action plan to examine how teachers are selected and trained, instructional methods are prescribed, curriculum is differentiated specific to each learner’s needs, and how the location, schedule, and environment for classes are conducive to educational achievement.

Finally, NRS standards require pro-

“We Can Do This” *(continued from front page)*

for us, fighting to keep our jobs. We must change. And like I told my staff this week, “You may not personally agree with the changes, so you, too, have to decide if Adult Education is a commitment you want to make. We must work toward transforming our program from the ‘revolving door,’ serving students whose skill levels are all over the place, into a closed-entry, structured program.”

“We’re not doing them any favors,” one staff member commented, “because life doesn’t work this way. If they get a job, they’re expected to go to that job everyday, not come and go as they please. By not expecting a commitment, we’re a part of the problem.” I agree. Accountability falls on all of us.

We can do this; we can transform our program. We can show that it is worthy of taxpayer money. It’s a challenge, but it’s possible. Right now, the state is in the process of developing content standards that will outline specifically what knowledge, skills, and abilities learners are expected to

master in each level. If we restructure our program with educational functioning levels in mind, students should theoretically be able to move from one level to the next until they complete our program. People will be more inclined to join our classes – and stay in them – if they know specifically what content will be covered in their classes and what they must do to succeed.

Amanda, a former GED graduate, made a good point: “You wouldn’t have these staff meetings without an agenda. Teachers ... don’t want to waste their time. Neither do students.” She’s exactly right. I wouldn’t take a class without a detailed description or a syllabus. Why would we expect less of our students?

Teachers were then asked to look at their Student Attendance Reports and see their attendance trends. “We’re getting them in, we’re just not keeping them.” That’s a hard reality to face. We must get our numbers up and work harder at keeping learners once they make that difficult decision to walk through the door. We

must keep our learners until they achieve their goals, and we have the evidence to show they’ve made those achievements.

This is the main challenge before me. I’m not convinced that the TABE test is necessarily the best instrument to evaluate the content of my GED preparation classes. Many GED teachers agree. Our ESL coordinator remarked that she didn’t think BestPlus measured the content of her classes. The performance assessment must measure how well the learners have mastered the content of our classes; the content and performance standards must agree with one another. This is an obstacle we’ll have to figure out.

Staff morale was up and down. But I believe they understood why we needed to change, and that, in the end, our program will grow stronger. “We can do this,” I ended. I really do believe that. ■

Virginia Leadbetter-Bolte is the Regional Planner/Specialist for the Office of Adult Education at New River Community College.

grams to provide support and encouragement to learners who set one or more of the four follow-up goals: attaining a GED, attaining a job, retaining a job, or entering postsecondary education. This means that our job is not only to help adult learners become literate, but also to support them in the practical application of their literacy levels. Collaborating and integrating adult education services with services available to our learners from Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Services, Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stops, and other appropriate local, state, and federal agencies, will sustain a successful transition to employment and post-secondary education or training. It's a tall order to enable and empower learners to achieve these goals.

"Be realistic in your expectations," Creasy advises. "Collect accurate data and don't be afraid to take a critical look at your programming, instructional processes and performance. Spend the time necessary to do the evaluation RIGHT. Don't take short cuts. Take the time that is necessary to get to the root of the prob-

lem. Your program will benefit from the time spent."

The training team is currently developing NRS LEVEL IV: Program Improvement Follow-up. The team anticipates that programs will want to use documentation of successful program improvement in future funding applications. Consequently, this phase will involve an ongoing, archived, web-based discussion board where program improvement teams will be able to communicate with other teams about interim checkpoint progress reports on implementing program improvement action plans. The training team also hopes to utilize a cutting-edge, web-based, asynchronous instructional delivery system that will allow program improvement teams statewide to share with each other the practices, policies, and strategies that they are employing to meet or exceed NRS accountability requirements by the end of each reporting year.

Virginia's General Assembly, the Governor, and numerous other state and local stakeholders have high expectations

that the number of Virginia workers earning GEDs by 2005 will double – raising the current average of 10,000 per year to 20,000 per year by that year. If we can meet that challenge, the result will be a stronger workforce in Virginia that will attract new industries with good jobs for Virginians. There is no doubt that Virginia's adult education practitioners are up to the challenge. Evidence already shows that programs are working enthusiastically to find a way to reach more undereducated adults who are in need of our services, deliver an educational experience that will lead to lifelong success for individuals, and secure Virginia's economic future. ■

Patty Shortt is a Program Development Specialist with the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Randall Stamper is the assistant editor of Progress and publications manager for the VALRC.

Content Standards *(continued from page 9)*

What is clear from the considerable efforts and scope of my research is that no one-size-fits-all approach to performance assessment will address the diverse nature of adult education (Stites, 2003). Input from adult educators and content experts is essential to the success of this project. Their participation and professional insights from experience in the field will enhance knowledge about adult learners in Virginia. Since content standards merely provide a framework for instruction, the involvement of educators at the program level will facilitate implementation. Once content standards are aligned with performance measures, a comprehensive training and dissemination process will foster data collection and evidence-based research. Content standards are a vital component of Virginia's adult education service delivery system and are essential to sound pedagogical practice. With support from Governor Warner's Education for a Lifetime initiative, adult educators are

uniquely poised to improve the provision of services to adult learners. ■

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Roberta McKnight, Ph.D., M.Ed., R.N. holds a Ph.D. in Education, M.Ed. in Instructional Technology, B.S. in Health Occupations Education, and is a Registered Nurse. She has worked in adult education and faculty support since 1991.

VALRC Online Courses

by Laura Boone

Whether you are already working in the adult education field or looking to make a career change, the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center can help you. The Resource Center offers many professional development opportunities in workshops throughout the year.

Taking an online course is a great way to begin or further your work in adult education. We offer three online classes twice a year, in the fall and in the spring. The eight-week courses are designed for adult education and ESOL practitioners and are situated in a Blackboard platform:

- **Adults as Learners: An Orientation**, formerly known as The Adult Learner, helps new practitioners learn the keys to success in working with adults by introducing instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and assessment approaches to measure learning gains.

"The course caused me to focus on my teaching and to consider how I can do it better, and provided a multitude of wonderful resources to use."

Catherine Krebs, Instructor

"I will apply the different theories to learning in my teaching. This helped me see better that all students do not learn the same way and thus I need to provide more variety in teaching methods."

Jennifer Chrisman, Instructor

- **ESOL Basics** identifies characteristics of adult ESOL learners, introduces effective methods in teaching languages, and addresses the four language skills and how adults learn another language.

"Since I have little or no experience in ESOL, I have acquired a lot of useful information to help me get started. I am using the steps to teaching oral and listening skills and will use the lesson planning syllabus plenty."

Kelly Robichaud, ESOL Instructor

"I am really benefiting from the course. I am in the middle of conducting training workshops for our ESOL program volunteers. The resources at the VALRC and this course have been a God-send to me."

Mary Hall, ESOL Program Director

- **Using Technology to Enhance Instruction** offers practitioners an opportunity to enhance lessons through technology. Students learn basic computer skills while learning adult basic skills or English as a second language. By using technology with your students, they gain confidence in their ability to access information and unlock employment opportunities through the Internet.

"This was a great online course for me. It gave me new ideas to use in the classroom and I learned a lot from my 'cohorts'."

Kathy Ortman, ABE/GED & ESOL Instructor

Experienced facilitators lead the classes, and you learn at your own pace in the comfort and convenience of your home or office. Participants are encouraged to take one course at a time and should be able to spend at least four hours per week for eight weeks. Other course requirements include access to an Internet-ready computer, basic computer skills, and periodic access to an adult education classroom.

There is no fee for the courses, and a certificate will be mailed to you upon course completion. For more information or to register, please contact Laura Boone at 804-827-2639, or go to the VALRC website, www.aelweb.vcu.edu. ■■

Laura Boone is a Training and Development Specialist at the VALRC. She earned her masters degree in adult education and human resource development at Virginia Commonwealth University and is currently earning her PhD in adult and organizational learning.

VROOOM!

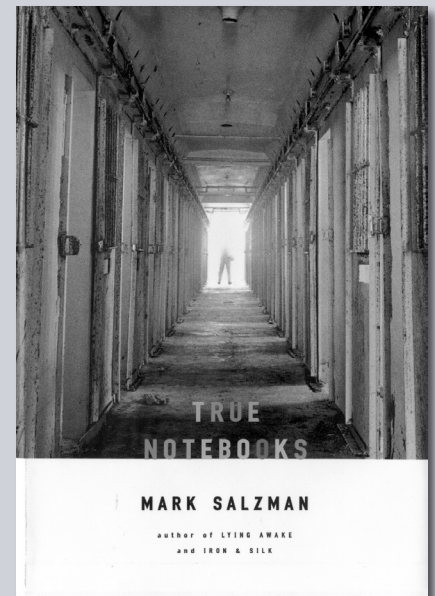
We're racing to GED
by Yvonne Thayer



Book Review

True Notebooks

by Mary Lynch



Race to GED is an initiative of Governor Mark Warner and is a vital part of his Education for a Lifetime program. The goal of the *Race to GED* is to contribute to the economic development of the commonwealth by doubling the number of Virginians passing the GED tests by December 31, 2005.

The Governor's program has two major components:

- Target marketing efforts across the state to educate adults about the financial and personal benefits of getting a GED, including a partnership with NASCAR and NASCAR racing teams to encourage workers to "accelerate" earnings with a GED credential
- Creation of Fast Track GED programs in five regions of the state to identify individuals most likely to benefit from a GED and to encourage their participation

in an intensive, short-term GED preparation program

Governor Warner has selected the following five adult education programs as pilot sites: Hampton, Prince William, Russell, Virginia Beach, and Danville-Martinsville (Region XI). The Fast Track program is designed for individuals 18-



64 years of age who are employed or able to be employed and who demonstrate academic readiness to prepare for and pass the English version of the GED tests. The classes and the instructional program are structured to achieve fast results for those learners who participate.

Race to GED is a very exciting opportunity for adult ed. Governor Warner has included this initiative in his budget

and believes we can deliver. Now it is up to us to demonstrate that we are up to the challenge of doubling the number of Virginians taking the first step toward a better life. Our time has come – we now are recognized as a partner in economic development.

The Office of Adult Education and Literacy held two statewide meetings to promote *Race to GED* in February. The team developing the marketing strategy includes program managers, VALRC staff, and DOE staff. Elizabeth Hawa is leading this group. The pilot site program managers meet regularly with DOE and VALRC staff under Bob MacGillivray's leadership. ■■

Dr. Yvonne Thayer is the Director of Adult Education and Literacy for the Virginia Department of Education.

In 1997, Mark Salzman visited a friend's Inside Out Writers class at Central Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles. He was researching a character for a novel; otherwise, he never would have exposed himself to two things he detested: writing classes and criminals. He recalls wishing "we could tilt L.A. County and shake it until everybody with a shaved head and tattoos falls into the ocean." Much to his surprise, he was so impressed by the class that he soon found himself teaching his own. In *True Notebooks*, he describes his experience, one that reminds writing teachers why we do what we do.

Salzman has excellent instincts as a facilitator. Early on, he types the students' essays, suspecting they'd like to see their own writing in print. One boy cannot contain himself: "Damn! I had no idea how talented I was! Check it out if you don't believe me! There's the title up there: COLLISION...just like in a book. Damn, I'ma send this home."

True Notebooks contains many excerpts from the boys' writing, in which they rant, express regrets, face fears, and

articulate goals. They venerate their mothers and lambaste their absent or abusive fathers. They define freedom, wonder about God, and debate the meaning of an incarcerated life. They create bonds among themselves that defy gang mores and perforate the masks that otherwise dominate and exhaust them.

Sister Janet Hall, volunteer coordinator at Central, describes the goal of the Inside Out Writers program as to give the students "a chance to express themselves, and feel that someone is listening." She also inspires them with a greater purpose: "Our world cannot be complete without you, and without hearing what you have to say. True justice cannot exist without compassion; compassion cannot exist without understanding. But no one will understand you unless you speak, and are able to speak clearly."

Salzman certainly develops compassion, understanding, and even love for his students. But these emotions are conflicted, as when he attends a favorite student's trial and becomes acutely aware of his victims. "I had to wrap my mind around the fact that someone I

had grown so fond of...had been foolish enough to go to a movie theater carrying a loaded gun, violent enough to shoot three people with it—two of them in the back—and then callous enough to want to go to a movie afterward."

These are no angels. They have made terrible mistakes, are angry and sociopathic, and deserve punishment for their crimes. But when you see them in Salzman's class, joking and posturing like the teenagers they are, you have to question their being tried as adults in a system that emphasizes incarceration over rehabilitation.

True Notebooks will both depress and inspire you with its descriptions of wasted lives and fleeting glimpses of hope. (One boy earns his GED and writes that his family's pride "made me feel like the man I was supposed to be.") Salzman's work also may inspire writing teachers with a renewed sense of purpose. But if you choose to read it, be careful: you might find yourself looking at your calendar, figuring out how to adjust your schedule so that you can volunteer at the nearest juvenile detention facility. ■■

PROGRESS

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Peak Performance

Virginia Adult Education Instructor Wins Award

by Susan Seymore

It is our intent to find the best teachers who are in the classrooms of our region, actually teaching today. We want to recognize their fine work, reward them for it, and by so doing inspire others to the high qualities they exemplify. Certainly, this award will recognize in a rather significant way what we consider one of the most important professions -- and one with so many unsung heroes."

Thomas D. McGlothlin

Ben Talley, a fourth grade teacher at Van Pelt Elementary School in Bristol, Virginia and an adult education teacher with the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program (MRRRAEP) was awarded one of two McGlothlin Awards presented each year. The McGlothlin Awards, established in March of 2000 by the McGlothlin Foundation, are among

the largest awards for the recognition of teaching excellence in the United States. Ben was among those teachers nominated from a five-state area (TN, VA, NC, WV, and KY). Ten finalists were selected based largely on community service outside the classroom. Videotaping of classroom instruction followed. Then a committee of college professors from across the area came and watched Ben teach for a day and interviewed fellow teachers and parents of his students.

Each winner received \$25,000. \$10,000 must be used for international travel to broaden the thinking and experience of the winning teachers, further enhancing their excellence as professional educators.

"One of my proudest moments of the whole McGlothlin Award process," Ben reflected, "came when a former MRRRAEP student came to Van Pelt Elementary School to be one of several

people interviewed by the McGlothlin Committee. Each committee member later commented about how they were deeply touched by his story of obtaining his GED, my helping him find work, and my eventually teaching his son in public schools. His personal story, I was told later, was the 'absolute clincher' in my receiving the award. All of us directly involved in adult education know what we do matters very much, but it was nice for me to see others in education get some first person evidence that we change lives for the better as equally well as ... public schools."

Ben and his family tentatively plan to travel to New Zealand in late July to film a science documentary. ■■

Susan Seymore is the Program Manager for the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program. This is her second year in this position.