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all write news

IMMIGRANTS GET LESSON IN POLITICS PROTESTING ABE BUDGET CUTS

by Adam Smith (Anita Chang also contributed to this article)

[This story first appeared in the January 4, 2002, issue of *The Sampan* newspaper, published by the Asian American Civic Association in Boston, and is being reprinted here with their permission. We would also be interested in publishing other stories in which students reflect on their experiences with advocacy during the recent budget crisis.—Ed.]

Adult immigrant students in Massachusetts got more than they bargained for when they fought against the proposed cut in Adult Basic Education. Not only did they help get most of the money restored (when the supplemental budget was signed on Dec. 19), they also got a crash course in local politics.

For those unfamiliar with what happened, the proposed state budget crammed through right before Thanksgiving contained a 44% cut for ABE (about \$13 million would be gone). ABE includes English-as-a-second-language for immigrants, GED programs, literacy classes, and other basic education courses for adults. The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education informed ABE program coordinators all over the state of the cut and sent them almost daily updates. MCAE also informed the ABE coordinators of how to fight the cut. Teachers of ABE and their students quickly followed MCAE's advice and organized to get the money back. Here in Chinatown, ABE teachers at the Asian American Civic Association and the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center helped their students write to legislators and call representatives and even march to the State House.

"There was a very well-organized response. People mobilized and went to the State House. It became apparent that it was very important that the money get restored," said Paul Wingle, a special assistant to Senate President Tom Birmingham, of the protest against the ABE cuts. He said that the

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STRIKING A BALANCE: MEETING THE NEEDS OF HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

by Wendy Mongeau

Student A is studying about relative pronouns, while Student B is practicing the pronunciation of the /th/ sound and Student C is struggling to decode a list of monosyllabic rhyming words. Teacher is divided between Students A, B, C, D, E, etc. in an attempt to give each and every individual in that room something new to take home in their brain. Welcome to my ABE classroom. I teach ABE and ESOL for men and women of various ages, personal backgrounds, native languages and cultures. Believe me, I treasure the differences and look forward to the variety of experiences that each day offers on the job. But as richly diverse as my students are, none of the differences I face have challenged me as much as the wide range of ability levels. Each day I run the risk of boring some while overwhelming others. Other teachers with whom I've spoken relate similar stories.

What's a teacher to do in such a situation? Reach for the candy jar on the desk when stress takes over? Go home and cry? Find a different job? I'm convinced that any configuration of students, no matter how varied in ability levels and goals, can create a dynamic, productive learning environment with

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**Please share this newsletter
with others at your program.
The deadline for submitting
material for the next issue is:**

April 15.

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receptionist at the Senate President's office estimated that about 1,000 calls concerning ABE came in a day. "We haven't even counted the number of letters yet," Wingle said. In this story, you will meet the Chinatown ABE teachers and students who helped in the statewide effort to get the money restored.

"Despite the horror of potentially losing our classes (from the budget cut), it was really inspirational seeing this population, which is usually seen as quiet and not active (politically), making an unquestionable difference (in helping to get the money restored)," said Maryana Huston, the ABE English-as-a-second-language program director at the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center. "The state made a big mistake waking up this group," said Stan Kaplan, an Adult Basic Education ESL teacher also at BCNC. The two said they had never participated in such a large campaign before. They said they first notified staff and kept them updated about the budget and told the students what was going on. "I went around

and talked to many of the classes. (I told them) we're going to fight this. The students were ready (to help)," Huston said. "I told my students to call and write their representatives," Kaplan said. "The students were more nervous about losing their ESL courses than calling their representatives."

Richard Goldberg, an ABE English-as-a-second-language teacher at the Asian American Civic Association, said he did the same. "It was pretty clear that we would need to write letters, make phone calls and visit the State House," Goldberg said. "I told my students very frankly and clearly what was going on. First we talked about some vocabulary, like 'budget' and 'restore,' and then we put it in the context of their life. We let students know that this fight is winnable. They knew what they were doing (when they started protesting the cut). We didn't make them. No one rejected it. This was a great civics lesson. It was something real."

Meet the Students

"I was sad, upset," said Lily Zhou, an ABE student taking English-as-a-second-language at the AACA. "My teacher told me that a lot of money was being cut from ABE and that it would be a big problem for us. At that time I wondered if protesting was worth it. I thought it would be

hopeless." Zhou came to the United States from China less than a year ago. She was planning to enter her final ESL course at the AACA in the spring, but wouldn't be able to do so if the cuts stood. Zhou said that though she had never participated in any sort of protest before, and that it is mostly illegal to do so in her home country, she wasn't nervous about writing her legislator or going to the State House because it was a group effort. "It worked," she said, adding that she's now more interested in U.S. local politics.

James Huang, who came to the U.S. from China two years ago, also takes English ABE courses at the AACA. "If the state cut the ABE money, then I wouldn't have a chance to study English anymore," Huang said. "It's not only for me, but also for my people. I know that if I want to live in the U.S., I need to improve my English. I thought, if I can do something to help get the money restored, then I wanted to do it. I wanted to take responsibility." Huang wrote a letter to his legislator and even talked about the budget cuts on a Malden public access show. "I learned not to only accept the government's decision. I will have my own voice. Here is open to my voice. In China, the government is the government and the people are the people. Here there is interaction. It is possible to be involved."



Bik Sim Lam was finishing her last ABE English course at the AACA and would not have been directly affected by the cuts. But she still participated in the protest by writing and going to the State House. She said she did it because she "wants all the immigrants to be able to study English." She came here from Hong Kong in 1986. She said that if the ABE classes didn't exist and she had to pay for expensive tuition-based ESL programs, she would have likely put off learning English. She said she had never protested before, but for this cause she did and would do it again.

Man-Chok Tin, who came here from Hong Kong 11 months ago and who is also studying ABE English at the AACA, even talked to Birmingham's aide, Colin Mahoney. He told him the importance of ABE. "I was very sad when I found out that ABE was (going to be) cut. I just came here from Hong Kong. I wanted to learn English. If I don't have good English, I can't survive. We had to have a voice. Like I said in my letter to Birmingham (he wrote to Birmingham asking for the ABE money to be restored): If you didn't have an education, how could you do what you do (Mr. Birmingham)?"

"I don't have any experience writing in English," said

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Lesson in Politics

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Alex Chow, who came here from Hong Kong 14 years ago and is in the AACCA's ABE English course. "So, I let my oldest son look at my letter (to Thomas Finneran) to check the grammar. I worked on my letter for four nights. I didn't feel so good when I found out the budget was being cut. Right now the economy is pretty tough. But we are the taxpayers. We work and pay taxes. If my English is not good, I can't find a good job to support my family."

Letters, Calls and Walks to the State House

Most of the calls to representatives were scripted. The ABE teachers helped the students, some of whom could hardly speak English, figure out what to say and then to write down whether or not that representative committed to restoring the money. "I was so impressed by the students. There were hundreds of people calling," Huston said. "They didn't seem nervous about doing it," Kaplan said. "I see the students (in general) have trouble making phone calls, and they did it. I sent the most willing students to make the calls first. Then they came back the next day and told the class. That inspired the rest to do it."

As for the letter writing, teachers at the AACCA and BCNC told the students to make basic points—that they wanted the money restored—but not to simply copy one format. Here are some excerpts from letters from students of both organizations:

"Dear Senator Birmingham: I'm an immigrant. English is very important for me. I need to study more English to help me live in the U.S.A. Now you cut the budget for Adult Education. I'm very angry. I hope you can give us a chance (to) learn English."

"Dear Mr. Finneran: Everybody says I am very smart. If you can restore the budget to (help me) continue my study(ing), I will do excellent work and volunteer in the community in the future."

"Dear Thomas Finneran: Every year I pay the school taxes for education. Now, the state government (is going to) cut the (adult basic) education budget. (They're going) to save the money for what? The Big Dig?"

"Dear Mr. Finneran: I came to the United States two years ago. I wanted to make a good life and have more opportunities to broaden my horizons in the future. Therefore I decided to come to the United States. My parents and I had many difficulties because of the different cultures and languages. I also had a hard time finding a job. At this moment ABE (is) close to me and is my only hope in the United States. I learn about the American culture and some basic computer and English skills in ABE every day."

How did the folks at the State House respond? "I think on some level it was gratifying to see such a response from new immigrants," said Wingle, special assistant to Birmingham. "It was a good demonstration (to them) on how American politics work."

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Welcome to the New SABES CRC Director

In a transition that was somewhat delayed by the ABE state budget crisis, Mina Reddy, the former director of the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, has taken over as the new Director of the SABES Central Resource Center at World Education, succeeding Sally Waldron, who has moved into a different position at World Ed. We want to welcome Mina to SABES and wish her the best in her new role at the CRC.

Who's Got Media Experience?

Do you or others at your program have experience working in the newspaper, TV, radio, or other media? Have any of your program graduates gone on to these sorts of jobs? The MCAE Public Policy Media sub-committee would like to learn from your experience. Call Sandy Goodman at the Jamaica Plain Adult Learning Program, 617-635-5201.

The Business of Education

Two recent articles focusing on the corporate agenda behind education reform in the public schools may also be of interest to folks in the adult education world. "Reading Between the Lines," by New York City writer Stephen Metcalf, published in the January 28 issue of *The Nation*, focuses on national education policies that mandate increased standardized testing and certain approaches to the teaching of reading. "Testing...Testing...One, Two, Three,"

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Heterogeneous Classes

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the help of a prepared and committed teacher. Following are a few suggestions for taking Students A through Z and concocting a delightful alphabet soup.

Bring the right attitude along with you. Underlying any repertoire of teaching techniques must be the proper collection of attitudes on the teacher's part. Be optimistic; don't view your teaching situation as an impossible one. Be patient, with yourself and with your students. Realize that not every day will be a banner day with all of your goals being met. Finally, have a sense of humor, which will lighten the burden of perfectionism that we, as teachers, often place on ourselves. Humor also fosters a comfortable, pleasant learning environment for the students.

Organize students into different groups for different tasks. Resist the temptation to categorize students as low, medium, high, "lost cause," etc., and make static, rigid groupings. If you're at all familiar with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, and if you have your eyes wide open in the classroom, you realize that Student H may be knowledgeable and articulate when it comes to math, but fearful of reading and writing tasks. Student J may be the other way around. There are artistic strengths, body-smarts, street-smarts, and many others. Your students are individuals with different strengths and needs, so group them accordingly.

For instance, if you know Student H is confident and relatively self-sufficient with helping verbs exercises, schedule him to work on his own or possibly help another student who is struggling. Then you can gather together any ESOL learners you have and work with them on an English grammar or pronunciation concept. If you're blessed to have a volunteer helping out in your classroom that day, this person could monitor another group. On another day, you might split your ESOL students to work with ABE students who are at similar points in the math curriculum. It takes some careful scheduling and forethought, but you'll find that once you get into a rhythm with this type of routine, it does feel easier and more natural.

Do at least one activity per day as a class. Working with my Basic Literacy group (0-3.9 grade level), I certainly know the meaning of "heterogeneous classroom." There are those with learning disabilities, those with native language differences, and those who are more advanced than the others in many areas. I have been honing my grouping strategies to help all of my students reap the maximum benefit from their time spent in school. But as valuable as this approach is, it doesn't go far toward building classroom unity. That's why I always arrange for something we can do together. It allows us a time to unite, share ideas, and share our experiences with one another.

One valuable vehicle for such a lesson is poetry. It sounds complex and advanced, but it's not. It's fun, and it

allows your students to think "outside of the box" for a little while. If you find books, web sites and other resources geared toward teaching poetry to children, you will find some activities that are quite adaptable to working with an adult population. Poetry is one area where I find even my most reluctant readers and writers excelling. It taps creativity in a way that many language arts tasks and texts don't, and students can surprise themselves with their success in this area. For example, I have a learning disabled student who has a marvelous grasp of poetic techniques, and she has gained a great deal of confidence in herself from realizing that she has something valuable to contribute to the class.

You can also read a fiction or high-interest-topic non-fiction selection, discuss it, do pre-reading and post-reading activities of your choosing, and keep things on the discussion/critical thinking levels. In this manner you are still teaching valuable skills according to the Curriculum Frameworks, but students with writing anxiety need not get stressed out, because any writing is done on the board by you. Exercises such as this effectively build class unity at any ability level.

Give all students the attention they require. Some students require more guidance and support than others. I used to feel that I had to spend an equal amount of time individually instructing and touching base with each student each day, in order to be fair. This is an unnecessary guilt trip and a trap. Instead, think of each student and what they need in order to get their learning accomplished for that day. One day Student X needs someone to sit with her for a half-hour to go over long division, which is a pretty major concept for someone who's never seen it before. The next day she is comfortably working and practicing on her own, with occasional teacher check-ins, which frees you up to circulate among several of the other students. Some students have learning styles which prohibit teacher hovering; they prefer to read about something, experiment with it and figure it out. They will "let you know" when they need something. This is fine, too. Different needs, different students, different days. Did anyone ever say that "teaching is like a box of chocolates"? Well, someone should. You wouldn't be in this profession if you didn't enjoy flying by the seat of your pants at times, right?

So, what am I really saying to you here? That there's a magic solution to this timeless issue of managing the heterogeneous classroom? If there is, I don't have it. Education at every level, from children to adults, is affected by this issue of ability variance. It certainly doesn't help to throw your hands up and say, "Why is this or that student in my class? It can't be done, I tell you!" Rather, see these challenges as opportunities to make something great happen. Getting constructive and looking for solutions is definitely the way to go.

* * * * *

Wendy Mongeau is an adult educator with the New Bedford Public Schools.

HOME-BUYING READINESS SOURCEBOOK IS PUBLISHED

by Deborah Schwartz

I enjoyed this class because I always say I want my own home one day, and I don't know the first thing about owning my own home. So I enjoy this class and I am going to get more what I need to know so when my money is right, I will know how to go about getting my home. --Gwendolyn Roberts, Project Hope, Dorchester

The Adult Literacy Resource Institute's National Home-buying Readiness Curriculum and Technical Assistance Project, through its partnership with the Fannie Mae Foundation, is pleased to announce the publication of a new resource for adult literacy teachers and program directors, *The Money Management and Home-buying Readiness Sourcebook*. The sourcebook's approach to teaching housing and money-management is rooted in the belief that students learn best from working with materials that spring from life experience and self-identified needs. From instructional activities about saving for a down payment to lessons on applying for a mortgage, signing the final papers, or maintaining the owned property, these materials are based in the actual process of buying a home and living in it. Most importantly though, these lessons are meant to support adult learners as they acquire and practice language, literacy and numeracy in the context of learning about a topic that is useful and meaningful to them.

The Tools for Teachers section, a collection of tried and true lessons, emphasizes classroom experimentation and learning through inquiry. Some of the literacy skills that are embedded in the lessons within the sourcebook include listening and speaking skills necessary for talking with housing professionals, math skills for effective budgeting, consumer knowledge essential for recognizing unsavory lending practices, reading comprehension skills for understanding documents, and the imaginative and interpretive skills critical to understanding poetry and prose about the themes of home and homeownership. In addition to these skills, home-buying readiness covers the content knowledge necessary for buying a home—from reading a credit report to overseeing house inspections.

In the words of Nancy Coffey, an ESOL teacher at Operation Bootstrap in Lynn: "I often use thematic, content-based units in my class, but never with such new and sophisticated content. Nor do I usually teach the unit over

such an extended period of time. If we truly learn vocabulary through contextual presentation and repeated use, the [home-buying] unit provided an excellent vehicle for vocabulary building. The classes included so much information that we were able to build vocabulary in many areas: housing and real estate, job history, general banking and credit, and home mortgages. Doing the math involved in figuring down payments and mortgages gave us an opportunity to work with reading big numbers in English. Overall, there were many chances to learn new words and new concepts and to practice using what was presented. The Navigating Home-Buying Readiness unit provided opportunities for reading comprehension using real-life materials, informal discussions, dramas, writing, and listening." And because Nancy, her colleague Dulany Alexander, and many other adult

literacy teachers across the country were able and willing to explore the topic of housing and home-buying with their ESOL and ABE classes and then document the results, we had the exciting task of compiling their work and now presenting it to others.

We also found that home-buying readiness works best when teachers have the support to rely on community-based housing experts, consumer counselors, and staff at social service agencies that know about available housing markets and asset-building resources for low-income families and immigrants.

So, in addition to providing discreet lessons and teaching approaches, the sourcebook also includes a section on fundraising for an adult literacy housing-related project, and a section on planning, implementing and evaluating such a project. The planning, implementing and evaluation section is rounded off with case studies of actual adult literacy home-buying readiness projects that existed through the support of Fannie Mae Foundation seed money.

The Money Management and Home-buying Readiness Sourcebook is a free resource. Just call 1-800-665-0012 or order it on-line from the Fannie Mae Foundation's Web site at <<http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org>>. You can also pick up a copy when you visit us at the A.L.R.I. Though as project coordinator I'm accountable for the sourcebook's flaws and gaps, the richness and breadth of the book is due to the writing, editing and conceptual work of Lenore Balliro, and the writing of hundreds of students, teachers, program directors and colleagues, all of whom are identified somewhere in the text of the *Sourcebook*.

The remainder of this article consists of examples of the kinds of lessons you will find in the *Sourcebook*.



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Homebuying Readiness Sourcebook

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Sample Lesson 1: Navigating the Banking System

Note to the teacher: The following activity (developed by Nancy Coffey, Operation Bootstrap in Lynn) is an example of how a seemingly unsuccessful homework assignment became a way for the

teacher to address her students' anxiety about banking and to help them feel more confident as banking consumers. Throughout your home-buying readiness project, you will want to take the lead from your students' actions, stated and unstated anxieties, and strengths in designing lessons. As in this case, when the teacher created lesson material based on her students' needs, you can explore how best to make a seemingly difficult situation into a "teachable" one.

Background: Independent of the home-buying readiness project, a center-wide Student Health Action Team program on stress was being held at Operation Bootstrap. During the course of the health team's project, it became clear that many ESOL students experienced great stress when negotiating with banks.

Original Teaching Goal: Because one of my teaching goals was to help students navigate financial systems more easily and because the ESOL students had revealed how stressful financial negotiations could be for them, I decided that for homework I would send everyone to a bank for practice. I also asked students to collect printed information about different checking and savings accounts at that bank. Those who were feeling really brave were encouraged to discuss accounts with the customer service representative. In preparation for the task, we had an in-class discussion about anxiety and how to cope with it. Students were encouraged to go in pairs to support one another, although surprisingly none did. In fact, the homework activity was not terribly successful, although it did lead to a wonderful discussion about why most people hadn't done the assignment and how the few who had successfully entered a bank had coped with the anxiety. One student got inside the bank and then left without getting anything. Another talked to the customer service representative and opened a checking account on the spot.

Revising the Lesson: I then printed up information from one bank's brochure so that students could compare that bank's offerings with those of their own banks. Several students proved to be very savvy consumers. Some had even discovered the no-cost banking offered by a very reputable local credit union. This discovery led to a sophisticated discussion about the difference between credit unions and banks. Several students changed their accounts as a result of this activity.



Sample Lesson 2: Student Writings: Dream Houses and Places That Feel Like Home

Note to the teacher: These nine short pieces of student writing [only two of the nine pieces are included here in this article] can be used in a variety of ways with your students:

to generate similar kinds of writings by your students, to stimulate discussion about language use and style differences in beginning writers, or to provide an authentic student text for reading comprehension. Following the readings are comprehension questions you can print out as worksheets. (For more student writings about the topic of Home, see <www.alri.org/fannie/fnma3/studentwriting.html>.)

A place that makes me feel at home would be like a very quiet neighborhood in the middle of the woods where I don't know anybody, but where everybody living there is very nice and helpful. A place where I could sit in my yard and fall asleep without anybody trying to kill or hurt me. I think Puerto Rico would be a good place for me to live. The weather is nice and there is a lot of woods and animals. Out at night, looking up at the clear sky, watching a shooting star, thinking what is the universe really like, and are we the only ones here? —Josue Morales, WAITT House, Roxbury

I always dream about a house in white color, with the red Japanese maple tree in the front yard. I love to have a big kitchen, so we can eat and cook at the same time. A family room is in my dream too; we need that for the kids playing anytime we have family coming over. I like to have a garden. It doesn't have to be fancy, just the place for me to plant something and cut some flowers or pick some tomatoes and peppers. Some of my dream already come true, some still far away, but I still love to dream about my house. —Ha Nguyen, Quincy College, Quincy

Remembering and Understanding What You've Read: After reading the student writings about dream houses, answer these questions: (Note that some questions will have more than one answer (e.g., more than one person mentioned ranch-style houses).)

1. Who would like to have a ranch-style house?
2. Who would like to have a yard?
3. Who wants a three-family house?
4. Who wants a yard where he can fall asleep and feel safe?
5. What style house does Jeannette Mealance wish for?
6. Who wants a balcony overlooking a yard?

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Homebuying Readiness Sourcebook

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Sample Lesson 3: Visits from Bankers, Brokers, and Housing Counselors

Note to the teacher: Invite realtors, bankers, and credit counselors into your classrooms to answer students' questions and to make contact with your students. Please note that

it is important to invite bankers and brokers who are certified and belong to the appropriate professional associations. Once teachers and program coordinators are certain of a realtor's or banker's credentials and motives, class visits by these professionals can be a very effective way to link students with services and to help students learn about the home-buying process. In the following stories, teachers explain how they incorporated housing professionals into their home-buying readiness projects.

Dwight Jarrat, ABCD's SouthSide HeadStart ESOL Program, Roslindale: For our final activity we invited a realtor to come talk to the class. He, in turn, brought a mortgage originator from one of the local cooperative banks. Both the realtor and the bank representative are immigrants themselves and have a good reputation in the community. It was a dynamic meeting that took the entire three-hour class period. Not only were students introduced to the complicated Offer to Purchase form and Purchase and Sales Agreement, but they were reminded of the excellent soft-second mortgage programs (refer to Glossary of Home Buying and Money Management, appendix 1) available to low-income city residents. The importance of hiring a real estate lawyer was emphasized, given that even nice realtors represent the seller. Students had a lot to say and had a lot of questions.

Deborah Marquardt, WAITT House, Roxbury: A community educator/liaison from a local bank and trust spoke to the class about finance and money management issues. He is a frequent presenter at W.A.I.T.T. House and a particular favorite with the students. In the past, he has been able to make banking seem accessible even to people who express suspicion about the motives of large financial institutions. Upon hearing of the students' interest in home buying, he offered to explain the loan process from the bank's point of view. He described what criteria the bank deems important when reviewing loan applications, and he offered advice about how to prepare for the loan application process. He also focused on fixing credit problems and how students can obtain their credit reports to begin to do that. As always, his information was clear and practical, and it added another important perspective to the home-buying process.

Sam Bernstein, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, Boston: In early March, a realtor based in Chinatown came

to the class to meet students, make a presentation, and answer the questions they had generated earlier in the semester. This particular realtor knows our student population well because he's been a substitute and part-time teacher at our school for many years. He speaks fluent Cantonese and some Mandarin. That day he spoke mostly in Cantonese. He had excellent bilingual materials. He compared the advantages and disadvantages of renting and owning, highlighting the tax advantages of owning a home. He showed pictures of different kinds of homes so students could compare them. He explained in detail how a broker functions. And he presented a monthly payment chart based on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage. The students were prepared for and welcomed this new information, and they asked even more questions.

Shelly Rieman, El Centro del Cardenal, Boston: We finished the home-buying unit by inviting a banker and a housing activist from a tenant rights group to come speak to the class about home-buying. These speakers, along with the Fannie Mae Foundation and Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI) materials that I distributed to the students (*Choosing the Mortgage That's Right for You/Abriendo La Puerta De Su Propio Hogar*, published by the Fannie Mae Foundation, and a list of home-buying resources and agencies from the ALRI's 1997 home-buying readiness project) provided students with a good jumping-off point to begin the home-buying process.

* * * * *

Deborah Schwartz is currently the Project Coordinator of the National Home-buying Readiness Curriculum and Technical Assistance Project and can be reached by phone at (617) 782-8956 x20 or via email at <deborah@alri.org>.

For Your Information

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by local author (and former adult basic education teacher) Amy Gluckman, appears in the January/February issue of *Dollars and Sense* and deals with "the commercial side of the standardized-testing boom." A snippet of each follows:

From Gluckman's article: "The current 'test-heavy' model of education reform represents the growth of corporate influence on the schools. In many states, business leaders have formed coalitions for the express purpose of reshaping public schools. As John H. Stevens, executive director of the Texas Business and Education Coalition, said at a July 2000 education reform conference, '[E]ducators do not dominate the dialogue on education in Texas. For more than a decade, the business community and a group of key legislative leaders... have been the major players in shaping state education policy.' ... [B]usiness leaders and management gurus have been very vocal about the need to apply business-based management techniques to the schools. And in the business model, the need for a lot of testing is obvious. After all, what

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business could function without 'quick and constant measurement of output,' as a 1999 *Forbes* article on "quality control" in the schools put it?"

And from Metcalf's: "Why is the same conservative constituency that loves testing even more moonstruck by phonics? For starters, phonics is traditional and rote—the pupil begins by sounding out letters, then works through vocabulary drills, then short passages using the learned vocabulary. Furthermore, to teach phonics you need a textbook and usually a series of items—worksheets, tests, teacher's editions—that constitute an elaborate purchase for a school district and a profitable product line for a publisher. In addition, heavily scripted phonics programs are routinely marketed as compensation for bad teachers. (What's not mentioned is that they often repel, and even drive out, good teachers.) Finally, as Gerald Coles, author of *Reading Lessons: The Debate Over Literacy*, points out, 'Phonics is a way of thinking about illiteracy that doesn't involve thinking about larger social injustices. To cure illiteracy, presumably all children need is a new set of textbooks.'" (It should also be noted that Gail Spangenberg of the Council for Advance-

ment of Adult Literacy in New York posted something of a rebuttal to this article on the NLA listserv in early February.)

—Steve Reuys

Looking at Youth in ABE

The Maine Fertilizer recently printed an article on "Teens in ABE," by Alisa Vlahakis Povenmire (who works for Northeast SABES), that originally appeared in *The Change Agent* in September, 1999, along with other articles on the same topic. With ABE programs seeing an increase in the number of young adults entering their programs and thinking about the effects of this on their classes, there might be some interest on the part of ABE staff in revisiting these articles. This issue of *The Change Agent* can be found on the web at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/pdf/issue9.pdf>.

Summer Conference on Math

In partnership with the U.S. National Institute for Literacy, the Centre for Literacy in Quebec, Canada, is sponsoring its 12th annual summer institute on the topic "Math for learning, math for life: Adult numeracy and basic skills," from June 27 to 29 in Montreal. For information visit their website at <www.nald.ca/litcent.htm> or call 514-931-8731 x1415.

Adult Literacy Resource Institute

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