

Adult
Literacy
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Greater
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Regional
Support
Center



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all write news

CREATING EDUCATIONAL GAMES ON THE INTERNET: A WEBSITE REVIEW

by Wendy Quiñones

If you've ever envied those fancy interactive computer games and quizzes, wished there were some directed specifically at your classes, and despaired of having the expertise to create them, weep no more! If you can type (even with two fingers), you can not only create quizzes and games your students will love, you can also effortlessly track how your students are progressing in learning the material you've presented.

All of this is courtesy of one of the best internet sites I've run across—a commercial site called Quia.com (to be found at www.Quia.com). Quia has taken all the computer-geekiness out of creating games by putting it firmly behind the scenes. You simply decide what kind of game or activity you want—say, a set of vocabulary flashcards—type your terms into the template provided, click on the button that says, "Submit!" and voilà! A set of computer flashcards appears, bearing your very own vocabulary words.

And if you don't want to make up your own games and quizzes, your students can still benefit from the many ready-made activities available at Quia. They can choose among games and quizzes made by other teachers in categories that range from English to math to science to foreign languages. My intermediate and GED-level students love this site! Math activities especially are favorites, with students able to practice endlessly in areas they feel weak in, including basic arithmetic, equivalent fractions, matching decimals and fractions, and algebra terms. Even students new to computers can use these activities, which require only minimal mouse movement—and so are good practice for beginning mouse users.

A math matching game, for example, looks like the first graphic shown on page 2. Students click once on the box with the problem, say $9+1$, and again on the box with the answer, 10. If the answer is right, the boxes do a virtual flip-over to display their reverse sides, and the board looks like the

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EXAMINING THE FUNDING PICTURE IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

by Thomas Sticht

Over the past several months, a lively discussion has been taking place on the NLA (National Literacy Advocates) listserv regarding recent changes in adult basic education policy and the federal ABE system. Thomas G. Sticht, a nationally-known researcher and consultant in adult literacy education, has contributed to this exchange a number of research and opinion notes which we feel would be of interest to practitioners. So, with his permission, we are reprinting some of these pieces here in the newsletter; the first installment appeared in the March, 2000, issue.

Unaware of Where's Awareness in Adult Education

The *Digest of Education Statistics for 1998*, available on the U. S. Department of Education's web page (www.ed.gov) presents a schematic diagram called "Figure 1. The Structure of Education in the United States." The figure reads from kindergarten at the bottom to post-graduate college studies at the top and includes vocational/technical and 2- and 4-year colleges as post-secondary education programs. Noticeably missing to me was the

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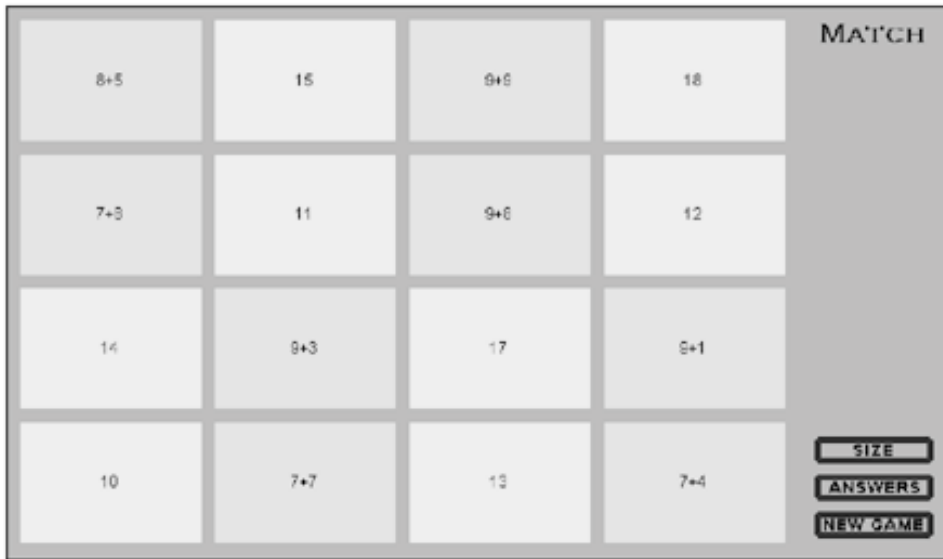
Please share this newsletter
with others at your program.
The deadline for submitting
material for the next issue is:
June 15.

Creating Educational Games on the Internet

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second graphic on this page. If the answer is wrong, the boxes do nothing at all. Students can play as many new games of this as they want, or, with the click of a button, they can return to the main page and pick another.

Directions: Find the matching squares



page, but inevitably a crowd gathers to argue actively over spelling. Imagine! Arguing over spelling, talking about spelling rules, reinforcing each other when they finally get the right answer.

And it's simple to do. For all of the Quia activities, the task for the teacher is equivalent to typing information into the cells of a table. On the page for creating a hangman game,

for instance, there's one box for a title and another for a description. Then there's a series of boxes for entering terms to be used in the game. For my spelling hangman games, for example, to use the word "advantage" with the definition "a head start," I typed those into the appropriate cells, as shown in the first graphic on page 3. Then I added the other words I wanted in that game. (I generally kept mine to between 25 and 50 words. I divided the list into many games arranged alphabetically). When I finished entering the words and definitions I wanted to use, I simply clicked on the "Submit!" button. My student ended up with a game that looks like the second graphic on page 3.

Creating virtually any of the

Quia offers a good variety of possible activities already made up: flashcards, matching and concentration games, hangman-type activities, multiple-choice and pop-up quizzes, jumbled words and word searches, and—the latest addition—a "challenge board" game that mimics "Jeopardy," with students choosing a category and the number of points they want to try for, and then answering a question of appropriate difficulty.

But for my money, the real fun (and benefit) is that you can make your own activities geared to your own subjects and your own classes. These then have their own URLs, and can be made available to your students alone or to others if you publish the URL. For instance, I put up the GED master spelling list in a series of hangman games; my students or anyone else can find them at www.quia.com/pages/gedstudy.html. Students with computers can then use these at home, but I think the best use is still in the classroom. A student may start out alone on this

Directions: Find the matching squares



Quia activities is as simple as this. Now, typing all that stuff in for the master spelling list was pretty tedious, I have to admit. How many words and definitions is that? I couldn't bear to count—but a few evenings with some good music

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Creating Educational Games on the Internet

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| | Hidden Word or Phrase | Hint (optional) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | advantage | a head start |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |

and a dictionary and I was done. And that's all I had to do.

The beauty of Quia is that they have made all this incredibly complicated stuff incredibly easy. Its directions are simple (some students have figured out how to make their own), navigation around the site is straightforward, and whatever you want to create simply happens automatically. I've made up some GED-type multiple-choice quizzes for materials my classes have worked with, for example; it's tedious typing, but then the quizzes are there.

Furthermore, if I choose to set these up as "quiz sessions"—and Quia has very easy-to-follow instructions about how to do this—not only can my students get instant feedback on which questions they are answering right and wrong, but I can get reports on how the students do and which questions they miss—all automatically! Imagine working on vocabulary, for instance, and being able to know with the click of a key or two not only which students were doing well and which were having trouble, but which specific words were giving the class trouble. Imagine doing the same with math or history or geography or...you get the picture.

Naturally, Quia has some limitations. It is subject of course to all the various internet ills—the net can be slow, servers can be down, and so on. Then I learned the hard way that if you're creating an activity and you accidentally hit

"enter" instead of "tab" when you're moving from one field to another, you'll lose whatever you haven't previously submitted. But that's like any creative activity on a computer—you just have to get used to saving (in this case, submitting) fairly frequently or working with hard copy. (To be fair, though, when I have had any problems, Quia's email technical support has been quick and responsive.) In addition, so far at least the Quia creators haven't come up with matching games that allow more than two matching cards, or that allow many items to match a single answer (parts of speech, for example). And it is a commercial site. When I first discovered it last year, I wondered how they could possibly make money; recently they've answered that question by posting banner ads. But they're fairly unobtrusive, and each one carries a warning that clicking on it will open a new browser window.

But these are small quibbles. In my experience, Quia is a terrific site that allows us as teachers an array of options that can help students be excited about learning. And that's what it's all about, isn't it?

* * * * *

Wendy Quinones has taught adult education in the Boston area for 10 years. A recovering English teacher, she has recently developed an increasing interest in technology as a classroom resource for both teachers and students.

**Please fill out our survey
on Staff and Program
Development Activities
on page 7. Thanks!**

The *All Write News* is published every two months. Please send all material for the newsletter to the editor, Steve Reuys, at the A.L.R.I. (see address on back). Our phone number is 617-782-8956; our fax number is 617-782-9011. All signed articles represent the opinions of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the A.L.R.I. or its staff. For permission to reprint articles, please contact the editor. Complete issues of this newsletter published since March, 1998, as well as individual articles published since May, 1996, can be found in the "Publications" section of our web page at: <http://www2.wgbh.org/mbcweis/lrc/alri>

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The Picture of Adult Ed.

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adult education program. Then I came across the footnote to the figure which read: "Adult Education programs, while not separately delineated above, may provide instruction at the elementary, secondary or higher education level."

Setting aside the quaint idea that adult education provides "elementary" education for adults, I wondered about just how aware the American public, including those who work for the U. S. Department of Education, are about the adult education system that is rapidly approaching service to some 5.0 million adults a year. *The Digest of Education Statistics* points out that in 1998 the K-12 system served some 46.8 million enrollees with expenditures of around \$350 billion, close to \$7500 per enrollee. The post-secondary, higher education (college) system enrolled about 14.6 million students with funding of some \$233 billion, or roughly \$16,000 per enrollee. But the adult education system, with enrollments reaching some ten percent of those of the K-12 system and almost a third the number of the higher education system, received combined federal and state funding in 1998 of \$1.3 billion for 4.2 million enrollees, only about \$310 per enrollee.

Could a failure to appreciate the magnitude of the adult population seeking adult education explain why the system was left out of the figure depicting the structure of education in the United States and instead was relegated to a footnote at the margin of the figure? Or was it just that the dollars spent per enrollee were too small for the adult education system to be included in anything but a footnote at the margins of education in the United States?

Maybe we need to include a really big awareness campaign to educate people about the adult education system as part of the vision making of the forthcoming literacy summit. Maybe this could start by getting the government to include adult education on the map of the education structure of the United States. If there is any appreciable awareness of the magnitude, nature and value of the adult education system among the media, the public, and even government education specialists today, I am unaware of where that awareness is. (*written January, 2000*)

Federal Adult Education Funds per Enrollee for 2000 Down 70% from 1970

In 1970 the federal adult education program received federal funds of some \$40,000,000 and enrolled 535,613 adults. By 1980 federal funds for state grants had increased to over \$99 million and enrollments rose to over 2 million. In 1990, federal funds stood above \$192 million with enrollments of over 3.5 million adults. Now Congress has

passed and the President has signed legislation providing for some \$450,000,000 for state grants to adult education. So in thirty years there has been a ten-fold increase in the federal funding of state grants for adult education.

While a ten-fold increase in funding may seem large, when expressed in constant 1997 dollars and calculated as dollars per enrollee, the picture changes dramatically. In 1970, the per enrollee funding was \$309 in constant 1997 dollars. In 1980 this dropped to \$95 and in 1990 it fell further to \$66.

Assuming an enrollment of some 4,500,000 adults in 2000 (extrapolated estimate from data for 1996, 1997, & 1998), the per enrollee dollars rise back to around \$92 in 1997 dollars, a figure very near that of 20 years ago in 1980, and 70 percent below the per enrollee funding of thirty years ago in 1970. If enrollments increase to 5 million, then federal per enrollee funds are closer to \$83 in constant 1997 dollars.

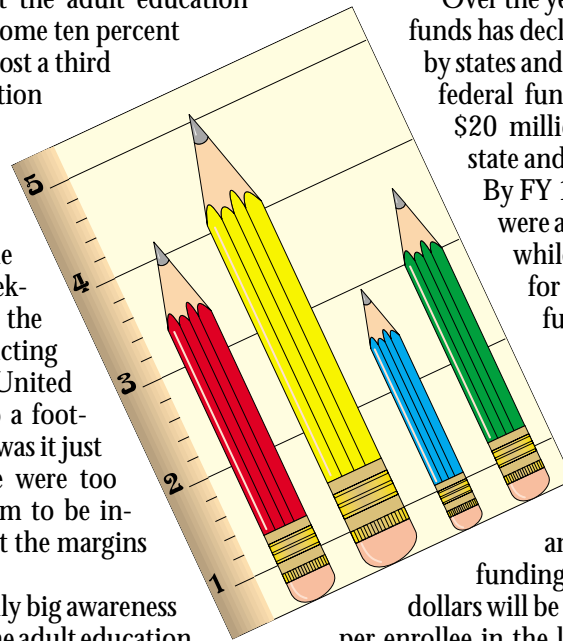
Over the years the federal share of adult education funds has declined while the share of matching funds by states and local education has increased. In 1966, federal funding for adult education was around \$20 million for some 377,660 enrollees while state and local funding was around \$10 million. By FY 1998, federal funds for adult education were about \$345 million for some 4.2 million while around \$958 million were available for adult education from state matching funds.

In constant 1997 dollars, funding per enrollee from combined federal and state sources for adult education was around \$394 in 1966. Assuming combined federal and state funds of \$1,500,000,000 in 2000 and enrollments of 4.5 million, then funding per enrollee in 2000 in constant 1997 dollars will be \$308, a 20 percent decrease in funding per enrollee in the last third of the 20th century! (*written December, 1999*)

Myth of the Early Years: All Is Not Lost By Age 3; Adults Can Learn and Their Brains Can Grow

On Sunday, October 13, 1991, the *San Diego Union* newspaper reprinted an article by Joan Beck, columnist for the *Chicago Tribune* that argued for early childhood education because, "Half of adult intellectual capacity is already present by age 4 and 80 percent by age 8, the great education researcher Dr. Benjamin Bloom reported in scholarly studies in the 1960s that helped establish the importance of early learning. No matter how good schools are, how capable and caring the teachers, they will not have as much effect on a child's permanent level of intelligence as has the environment in which he has lived before he started to attend first grade."

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The Picture of Adult Ed.

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Behind this widespread belief is another belief based on (faulty) understandings of neuroscience that the brain and its intellectual capacity is developed in early childhood and this has important implications for cognitive development over the lifespan. Even the First Lady of the United States has weighed in with the pronouncement that, "The first three years of life are crucial in establishing the brain cell connections.... By the end of three or four years, however, the pace of learning slows.... The process continues to slow as we mature, and as we age our brain cells and synapses begin to wither away.... With proper stimulation, brain synapses will form at a rapid pace, reaching adult levels by the age of two and far surpassing them in the next several years." (Clinton, 1996).

It has been argued that if children's early childhood development is not properly stimulated, then there is likely to be underdevelopment of the brain and that can lead to lower intellectual ability, poor school learning and to a life characterized by social problems such as unemployment, criminal activity, teenage pregnancy and welfare. It will be difficult if not impossible to overcome the disadvantages of deficiencies in early childhood stimulation later in adulthood. And so, some might argue, "Why should we invest in adult literacy education? Let's put our money into early childhood programs. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!"

But now trends in both brain science and cognitive science have converged to bring about revisions to these ideas from the conventional wisdom. For over a decade, the James S. McDonnell Foundation in St. Louis has supported extensive research in neuroscience. Recently, John Bruer, President of the Foundation, has written a new book entitled *The Myth of the First Three Years* (The Free Press, 1999) in which he explains that the findings of neuroscience do not support the claims made above by Mrs. Clinton or Joan Beck or other claims for early stimulation of infants and children under three years of age. He further argues that most neuroscience is irrelevant for early childhood and in-school education (1997, 1998). Following is a brief summary from earlier articles of what Bruer regards as major misconceptions that educators have of brain science (see my paper "Beyond 2000: Future Directions for Adult Education" in the Full Text Documents page at <www.nald.ca> for references to articles by Bruer):

1) Claim: Enriched early childhood environments cause synapses to multiply rapidly. Bruer states, "What little direct evidence we have—all based on studies of monkeys—indi-

cates these claims are inaccurate.... The rate of synaptic formation and synaptic density seems to be impervious to quantity of stimulation.... Early experience does not cause synapses to form rapidly. Early enriched environments will not put our children on synaptic fast tracks." (1998, pp. 13-14)

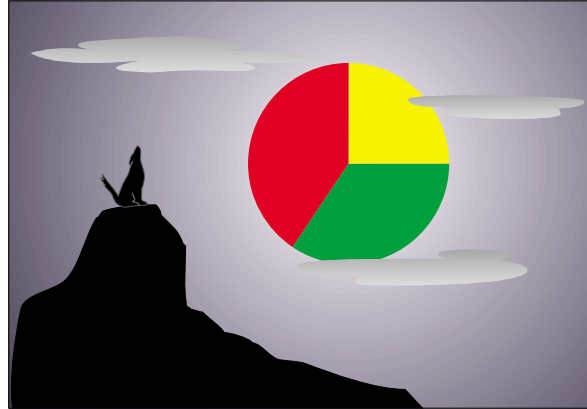
2) Claim: More synapses mean more brainpower. Bruer states, "The neuroscientific evidence does not support this claim, either.... Synaptic densities at birth and in early adulthood are approximately the same, yet by any measure adults are more intelligent, have more highly flexible behavior, and learn more rapidly than infants." (1998, pp. 14-15)

3) Claim: The plateau period of high synaptic density and high brain metabolism is the optimal period for learning. Bruer states, "The neuroscientific evidence for this claim is extremely weak. The neuroscientists who count synapses in humans and monkeys merely point out that during the plateau period, monkeys and humans develop a variety of skills and behaviors.... We do not know what relationship exists between high resting brain metabolism and learning, any more than we know what relation exists between high synaptic numbers and ability to learn." (1998, pp. 15-17)

relationship exists between high resting brain metabolism and learning, any more than we know what relation exists between high synaptic numbers and ability to learn." (1998, pp. 15-17)

Bruer goes on to say that, "Truly new results in neuroscience, rarely mentioned in the brain and education literature, point to the brain's lifelong capacity to reshape itself in response to experience." (1998, p.17) In his new book (1999) he references work in adult literacy to make the point that, "Adult literacy programs provide additional evidence that acquiring and improving literacy skills is not time-limited or subject to critical period limitations." (p. 112) He says, "The limiting factor in vocabulary growth, and presumably for some of the other things Verbal IQ measures, is exposure to new words, facts, and experiences. The brain can benefit from this exposure at almost anytime—early childhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and senescence." (p. 177)

For adult literacy educators, Bruer makes the important policy argument that with a better understanding of the limitations of present day neuroscience for understanding education, "We might question the prudence of decreasing expenditures for adult education or special education on the grounds that a person's intellectual and emotional course is firmly set during the early years." (p. 26) This is a myth he rejects and it is an important point in light of the current budget activities in Congress which place tens of billions of dollars in early childhood and in-school compensatory programs and less than \$400 million in programs for educating adults. (*written September, 1999*)



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Rules Change on Awarding of PDP's

If you're an adult basic education teacher in Massachusetts and you have some form of K-12 teacher certification, you know that you are required to renew this certification every five years. The major requirement for recertification is to participate in a variety of relevant staff development activities for which one can receive PDP's (Professional Development Points). SABES is a registered PDP Provider and for the past several years the various SABES centers have been awarding PDP's for most of the staff and professional development activities that they have sponsored.

On December 1, 1999, however, the state Board of Education and the Department of Education significantly changed the requirements for K-12 teacher recertification, including the rules under which PDP's can be awarded. (For information on this, please visit the DOE web site at <www.doe.mass.edu>.) Because of the changes in these rules, SABES is now evaluating its policies on the issuing of PDP's. What we can say at this point is that, based on the new DOE regulations, the SABES regional centers will probably not be awarding PDP's for most of the staff and program development activities we sponsor. Any activities for which participants will be eligible to receive PDP's will be clearly indicated in our publicity announcements. (Anyone seeking recertification should also be aware that any PDP's you received from SABES after December 1, 1999 (but before SABES became aware of these changes in policy) may not be accepted the next time you go for recertification.)

News on the GED

Recently the SABES regional centers have been offering workshops around the state providing an update on changes in GED testing policies, as well as upcoming changes in the test itself. People who weren't able to attend those workshops can find out what's going to be different about the GED in January, 2002, by visiting the American Council on Education's GED website at <www.acenet.edu/calec/ged/test2002-A.html>. Here's a very brief summary of the major changes that will be taking place in the test in 2002:

- The Writing Skills test will be called Language Arts: Writing. Questions will emphasize organization, as well as sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. They will not test spelling except for homonyms, possessives, and contractions and will only test commas when used to eliminate confusion. Materials used will include business communications (memos, reports, etc.) and "how to" texts. The length of the essay will expand to 250 words.

- The Social Studies test will include more history (U.S. and world), civics, and government and will de-emphasize some areas, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. There will be more graphics, and at least one "practical" document (voter's guide, tax form, etc.) and one excerpt from either the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Inde-

pendence, the Federalist Papers, or various landmark Supreme Court cases will be included.

- The Science test will have a greater emphasis on health and environmental topics and on science's relevance to everyday life.

- The Interpreting Literature and the Arts test will be called Language Arts: Reading.

- The Mathematics test will come in two parts, with calculators provided for use on the first section, and examinees must successfully complete both parts. About 20% of the questions will no longer be multiple choice but will instead be presented using the "fill in the bubble" format common to many standardized tests. There will be more emphasis on data analysis and statistics and fewer "not sufficient information"-type questions.

BALF 2000 Student Scholarships

The Boston Adult Literacy Fund is pleased to announce the 2000 BALF Student Scholarships, intended to encourage adults who have completed their basic education (GED or EDP) or ESOL studies and are now moving on to higher education or technical training. Adults must have completed their basic education or ESOL studies at an eligible Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, or Watertown program after July, 1999, and by June, 2000. Eligible programs include community-based programs, free preparatory programs offered by local higher education institutions, and volunteer-based programs. Programs are urged to identify and encourage candidates. The deadline for applications is Wednesday, May 31, 2000. For an application or more information, please call BALF at 617-720-0181.

NEWS FROM THE A.L.R.I.

New National Fannie Mae Project

After receiving funding from the FannieMae Foundation over the past several years to conduct a staff and program development project on Homebuying Readiness for staff at ESOL and ABE programs in the Boston region, the A.L.R.I. was asked this year by the Foundation to conduct its National Technical Assistance Project, providing curriculum and staff development assistance to FannieMae ESOL and ABE program grantees around the country. The project began in March, with Deborah Schwartz as its coordinator. Part of its mission is to provide on-line homebuying readiness lessons and teacher-sharing venues to both the Foundation's grantees and all other adult educators who might find the topic of homebuying and content-based instruction of interest. The project is also responsible for promoting the Foundation's ESOL and ABE curricula by presenting and exhibiting the materials at national and local adult education conferences. Deborah can be reached at the A.L.R.I., 617-782-8956, ext. 20, or by e-mail at <Deborah@alri.org>.

STAFF/PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES SURVEY

The A.L.R.I./Greater Boston Regional Support Center would like your feedback regarding the staff and program development activities we offer region-wide. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. You can use the back of this page to give us any further thoughts or suggestions you have regarding our staff and program development activities. Then tear off this page and send it back to: Steve Reuys, Adult Literacy Resource Institute, 989 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215. Thanks for your help!

- 1) On weekdays, I prefer to attend staff/program development activities: ___ in the morning ___ in the afternoon
- 2) I would definitely attend more activities if they were offered on weekday evenings. ___ yes ___ no
- 3) I would definitely attend more activities if they were offered on Saturdays. ___ yes ___ no
- 4) The A.L.R.I. offers both short-term activities (usually single-session workshops) and longer-term activities (usually multi-session mini-courses or on-going sharing groups). The former are often easier for people to attend, while the latter are often more valuable. With regard to short-term activities (especially one-session workshops), the number of these activities that we've offered over the past couple of years has been: ___ too few ___ too many ___ just about right
- 5) With regard to longer-term activities (especially multi-session mini-courses and sharing groups), the number of these activities that we've offered over the past couple of years has been: ___ too few ___ too many ___ just about right
- 6) Are there particular topics in any of the following areas on which you'd like to see us offer mini-courses or workshops?
 - Approaches to Teaching Adults:
 - Curriculum Development/Curriculum Frameworks:
 - Assessment:
 - Teaching Reading/Writing:
 - Teaching ESOL:
 - Teaching Math:
 - Teaching Other Areas (Science, Social Studies, etc.):
 - Teaching GED Preparation:
 - Teaching Native Language Literacy:
 - Learning Disabilities:
 - Counseling:
 - Technology:
 - Family Literacy:
 - Workplace Education:
 - Administering Programs:
 - Any Other Topics?

Staff and Program Development Activities Survey
continued from previous page

7) Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions for us regarding our staff and program development activities?

**Adult
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*Massachusetts
Readers: Please
Open Promptly—*

*Announcements
of Upcoming
Staff Development
Activities at the
A.L.R.I. Enclosed*