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EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: CONTRADICTIONS AND CORRELATIONS

by Debby D'Amico

[This article was posted to the NLA (National Literacy Advocacy) listserv in September and is being reprinted here with the author's permission.—Ed.]

The new outcome measures required of adult educators under WIA (the Workforce Investment Act) are a mix of education and employment indicators, some would say an uncomfortable mix. We are required to demonstrate progress in three education areas (completion of ABE or ESOL level; acquisition of a secondary credential or its equivalent; entrance into postsecondary education or training) as well as two employment ones (getting a job and retaining a job). Why this mix, and why now?

The debate over the WIA and the role of adult education and family literacy within it continues an ongoing discussion about the relationship between education and employment that is central to ideas about social equality in the United States. Adult educators often invoke this relationship when writing proposals and advocating for funding. We point out how important the efforts of adult educators and learners are to economic productivity and success in the new information-based global economy. However, we stop short of saying that it is our job as educators to find people jobs and to make sure they stay in them, and most of us recognize and address our teaching to the multiple needs and goals of adult learners, rather than to their employment objectives alone. Indeed, the very notion that education's primary purpose is to prepare adults for jobs runs counter to the belief of many adult educators that the right to education for its own sake is a basic human right. Are we educators, or job trainers/developers, or both? Why does this new role feel so uncomfortable, and why do the rules for documenting employment cause panic?

Could it be because the basis for the rules is rooted in contradiction, the contradiction that education is both related to work and not the only or
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SOCIAL ACTION THEATER IS COMING TO BOSTON!

by Katy Hartnett and Patricia Mew

Have you ever struggled to broach uncomfortable topics with your colleagues—topics around which there may be conflict? Are you searching for a new training tool? Can you imagine a group of reluctant ESOL learners resisting speaking English in front of others because of low self-esteem? Are you struggling with how to overcome barriers and introduce difficult topics in your classroom? Many times, a new method of presentation such as Social Action Theater can help.

Patricia Mew began the Western Massachusetts Social Action Theater Group in 1994 after a four-hour training with the Northern New England Adult Education Social Action Theater Group. She began with only five members. Today, in its seventh year and after performing for over 7000 people regionally, statewide and nationally, the group has fifteen members and an annual budget of close to \$10,000. They have recently incorporated and are in the process of attaining non-profit status.

Pat is the Curriculum Coordinator for Western Mass. SABES at Holyoke Community College. She began her career in Adult Education at

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Nov./Dec. 2000

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

Education and Employment

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always the main influence on employment? We know from our own experiences and those of our students, as well as from research and data on employment, that many other factors complicate the relationship between education and employment:

Although statistics such as census data clearly show that the higher the education level, the greater the earning power of an individual and the longer that person is likely to be employed, the correlation between education and employment is just that—an association that means an individual's chances of earning more money and having more job security tend to rise with his or her education. It does not prove that education, by itself, can predict stable income for every individual, or that education is the sole cause of success in the labor market.

For adult educators, the picture is complicated by the fact that there is no evidence that participation in literacy programs helps the employment prospects of individuals. This is probably because in an economy increasingly bifurcated into high and low wage jobs, it usually takes more than an increase in basic literacy to make a dent in earnings. In fact, research shows that postsecondary education may be necessary for most single heads of households to achieve job stability and an income that can support a family. This means that most of the students in our programs qualify for entry-level jobs, many with wages below poverty levels. Many educators feel uncomfortable with having a role in this kind of job placement, yet learners may want and need such a job given their current options or lack thereof.

The same individual with the same education credentials can have a very different experience depending on the state of the labor market. When there is a tight labor market and employers scramble for workers, there are opportunities for everyone and education requirements are relaxed. This is characteristic of the boom economy we are experiencing now. The reverse is also true, as we know from the late 80s and early 90s. Yet, in any economy, education positively affects the wages and job stability.

At every education level, earnings vary by race and gender. Job segregation by type, wage inequality, and glass ceilings are structured by race and gender. For single heads of households, labor market discrimination is compounded by the lack of affordable child and health care, putting enormous burdens on single mothers who must support households, find child care, and manage health problems with a minimum of social supports. However, women and people of color have fought for access to education of all kinds precisely because, in the absence of white and/or male privilege, it affords them greater access to better jobs and working conditions.

Government decisions, as well as the efforts of individuals, greatly determine wage levels, how education is rewarded in the workplace, and access to education and

training. We live in a society where it is legal and possible for employers to pay full-time workers wages below the poverty line. In countries where unions and workers have a strong political voice in decision-making, paychecks more adequately support a decent standard of living. In many of these countries, child care, health care and other social services support workers more fully as well, and education and training at no or low cost is more widely available. Paradoxically, education becomes more important as a means of advancement in the United States precisely because it is one of the few avenues available to workers and the poor.

Despite the hype about the greater skill requirements of work, researchers have found there is a mismatch between what individuals actually need to know to do a job and what employers look for in applicants. In other words, assumptions about the information economy and about the technical and literacy requirements of today's jobs may influence the skills or credentials required more than the actual demands of the work. For example, anyone seeking work in a New York City hospital now will find that a high school diploma or GED is required for any job. Yet, individuals without such credentials have been doing these jobs for many years, and doing them well. However, adult education students wanting to acquire or advance beyond entry-level jobs are going to need educational credentials, regardless of the daily relationship between what they study and what they do.

What does it mean to move forward in such contradictory circumstances? It means acknowledging any differences between the objectives of funding, our own, and those of adult learners, and doing our best to fulfill all of the above. It means recognizing the dissonance between believing that education is a socially acknowledged human right and operating programs within a political arena that sees employment as a matter of personal responsibility. For some, it means working to change the latter, by building a movement that supports a political climate more congenial to their views. For all of us, it means living with the contradictions that our students face when they try to combine education and work, when they try to achieve their educational and personal goals while supporting their families. Finally, it means strengthening the common ground we have with funders, and supporting our own claims for the power and achievements of adult education with data. Such data may provide the best argument that adult education is doing its job, that learners are struggling to do theirs, and that all of us deserve to have other factors that impact on employment addressed by policy makers.

(For a fuller discussion of the tension between education and employment for adult educators, see *NCSALL Report #10: The Impact of Welfare Reform on Adult Literacy Education*, available at <www.gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/reports.htm>.)

* * * * *

Debby D'Amico is a researcher and consultant in the field of adult basic education and literacy based in New Jersey.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

National Coalition Issues Report on Adult Literacy

The National Coalition for Literacy has issued its "call to action" for adult literacy entitled *From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy*. Quoting from the National Institute for Literacy's *Policy Update* announcing the report:

"The report recommends that the adult education, literacy, and language system work toward the following goal: By 2010, a system of high quality adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services will help adults in every community make measurable gains toward achieving their goals as family members, workers, citizens, and lifelong learners.

"According to the report, this goal can be achieved by focusing on three priority areas: resources, access, and quality. The report further describes the outcomes of achieving the overall goal through additional resources, enhanced access, and improved quality.

"The report makes a number of recommendations on how the field, policy makers, business leaders, and other partners can work together to achieve the goal. While some of the recommendations sound familiar, there is a new call to action in the areas of federal and state funding. Among the more provocative funding recommendations, the report calls on policy makers to: • appropriate \$1 billion annually of federal funds for the adult education, language, and literacy system; and • require every state legislature to appropriate for adult education a cash amount that equals at least 50 percent of the federal funds the state received for adult education.

"The report represents the culmination of a year-long process that began with the National Literacy Summit 2000, held in Washington, DC, in February. At that Summit, 150 participants began to craft an action agenda to move adult literacy forward in the 21st century. Since February, over 30 regional and local meetings were held to provide feedback and refine the recommendations contained in the draft agenda. In addition to these meetings, many individuals from across the country provided their feedback to the process."

For additional information and to view the report, visit the NIFL website at <<http://www.nifl.gov>>.

November is Family Literacy Month

November has again been named as Massachusetts Family Literacy Month, and in commemoration the state Department of Education has launched a new family literacy website: <www.doe.mass.edu/familylit>. Here you can find a guide to celebrating Massachusetts Family Literacy Month, instructions on ordering family literacy materials, and community profiles, resources, and links to other literacy and family literacy websites.

WRITE FOR THE NEWSLETTER!

The *All Write News* is published by the A.L.R.I., but it is meant to be **your** newsletter. Its purpose is to present news and information dealing with adult literacy/adult basic education and to provide an open forum for materials written **by** and **for** adult literacy/adult basic education practitioners in this area. We encourage people to send us: • articles that share practitioners' thoughts, experiences, and concerns; that reflect various approaches to adult basic education; that present ideas about teaching; or that explore important issues facing the field; • reviews of books, instructional materials, curricula, websites, software, audio-visual materials, etc.; • information on resources (financial or otherwise) available to programs; • responses to previously-published articles; • material in other, non-prose formats (such as poetry, cartoons, etc.). Articles should usually be not more than five or six double-spaced pages in length, though there have been exceptions to this.

Please send all material to me at the A.L.R.I., 989 Commonwealth Ave., Boston MA 02215, and, if possible, please include a computer disk (Mac or PC) with your material saved as a "text-only" document. Or you can e-mail it to me at: <steve@alri.org>. The deadline for submitting material for an upcoming issue is usually about one month after your receipt of the previous issue. Please call me at 782-8956 x14 to ask questions, discuss an idea, or get further encouragement. Thanks!

--Steve Reuys

The *All Write News* is published every two months by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute/SABES Greater Boston Regional Support Center, which is primarily funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Boston BRA/EDIC/Jobs and Community Services Department, and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. All signed articles represent the opinions of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the A.L.R.I. or its staff, nor does material included here necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Massachusetts Department of Education or the federal government.

Please send all material for the newsletter to the editor, Steve Reuys, at the A.L.R.I. (E-mail address: steve@alri.org; regular mail address: see last page of this issue. If sending by regular mail, please include, if possible, a computer disk (Mac or PC) with material saved as a "text only" document.) For more information or for permission to reprint articles, please call Steve at 617-782-8956 x14. Complete issues of this newsletter published since March, 1998, can be found in PDF format in the "Publications" section of our web page at: <<http://www.alri.org>>. Individual articles published since May, 1996, can also be found there in HTML format.

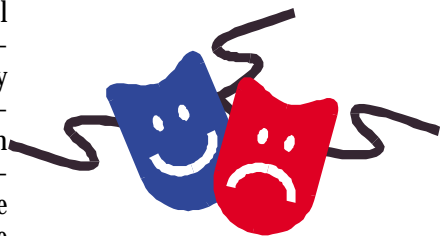
Social Action Theater is Coming to Boston

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the Hampshire County House of Correction in Northampton. There she taught inmates in ABE, GED and Creative Writing classes. Tapping into the creativity of her students has always been a high priority for Pat. While at Hampshire CHOC, she published her students' writing in three volumes with the help of arts lottery grants. While working with SABES, she has sought opportunities to combine adult learning with creativity and art. In a recent interview with Pat, Katy Hartnett learned about the possibilities that theater can offer as an educational tool.

KH: What is social action theater?

PM: Social action theater is a tool to address social and educational issues using theater. It's a way to encourage people, whether they are teachers, administrative staff, learners, community group members or parents, to think critically about the social problem being presented. It's also a way to create an interactive presentation about a theme or issue or to deepen the work being done around that issue. The theater group presents the scenario and interrupts it at a moment of conflict in order to get audience participation. This process encourages participants to examine the issue from a variety of perspectives. It puts the issue in the lap of the audience and is much more immediate in terms of getting people involved in the discussion.



KH: What are some of the issues you address?

PM: We address a variety of issues with this process. Some of the most often requested ones include domestic abuse, date rape, and gender issues such as sexual harassment and the like. When programs call us, we usually present issues that apply to the classroom or program, such as learning disabilities, attendance issues or discrimination. We have also done work with technology issues, housing discrimination, job related issues, transition to college and program staff issues. Our current mission seems to be to find ways to integrate this work into the ABE classroom, to connect it to classroom practice.

KH: So, what kind of impact have you had on ABE/ESOL students?

PM: For ESOL learners, we've had significant impact. We had the opportunity to work with a few different classroom groups, teaching them social action theater techniques. Last year, we helped a program incorporate theater into their curriculum frameworks project. Their theme was "What's Next? Navigating Our Futures: A Transitional Curriculum for ESOL Learners." Theater became a large

part of their classroom activities. Another program was interested in including theater in their health grant. In the latter case, theater really helped learners gain more confidence in speaking English in health-related contexts. Theater provides students a way to use role-playing in order to practice English speaking skills for their roles in real life.

KH: If we wanted to start a theater group in Boston, what would we have to do?

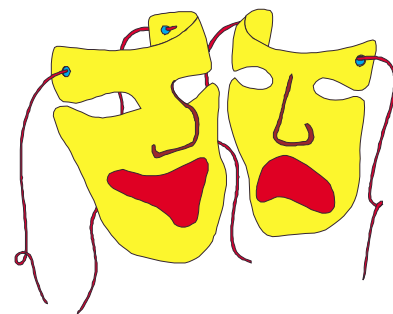
PM: First, you would need a group of enthusiastic participants. This anchor group of between five and eight people would need to learn the techniques, begin creating their own scenes and rehearse together several times. It's not necessary to have people with great acting skill. The enthusiasm is much more important. Besides, anyone can do this type of acting. You only need to be committed to the process. Having one person be in charge would work best. That person serves as a point person for the group, calling rehearsals, providing a guiding force and taking responsibility for the group.

KH: What kind of commitment would be involved?

PM: It would be good to meet occasionally to decide what issues you want to address and to develop and practice scenarios you create. When we first started, we had a number of organizational meetings at which we decided our purpose and who our audience should be. We started mostly with ABE classrooms. As time has gone by, we have enlarged that circle of potential audience members to include many other community groups. Keeping improvisational skills honed is a good idea. Meeting monthly, or more often if time permits, is a good idea as well.

KH: Is there anything else you want to add?

PM: Theater and theater techniques have great potential in the classroom as learning tools. I believe theater and art in general are underutilized as entry points into learning. Combining theater work with classroom practice is where I would like to go with this. I think there are many logical connections to Curriculum Frameworks and to developing theme-related teaching using theater. Not theater alone, but theater in conjunction with other forms of self-expression such as writing and movement, storytelling and scene development. It's incredibly powerful.



If you are interested in helping to start a social action theater group in Boston, please contact Katy Hartnett at the A.L.R.I. Call 617-782-8956 x16 or email her at <katy@alri.org>.

NEWS FROM THE A.L.R.I.

(Not so) Trivial Pursuit at the A.L.R.I. Library

Category: *Hands-on Science and Math.*

Question: *What doesn't fit neatly on the A.L.R.I. library shelves (but is ready to be loaned to ABE/ESOL/GED teachers)?*

Answer:

- Pocket compasses: Set of five for lessons on magnetism.

- Measurement pitchers: Four-piece set for metric measurement and area and volume studies.

- Geometry solids: Twelve-piece set includes sphere, cylinder, cone, and cube.

- Exploring Sounds: This kit includes a tuning fork, coiled spring, triangle, mallet, bells, clickers, tubes, straws and more. Teacher manuals include activities on hearing, timbre, pitch, and vibration.

- Scales and bar mass weights: For balance and weight demonstrations.

- Image reflectors: Translucent plastic reflectors to explain symmetry, reflection and congruence. Classroom set of eight and a text.

- Geoboards and elastics: For exploring shapes and numbers.

- Cuisenaire rods: Tools for teaching math concepts.

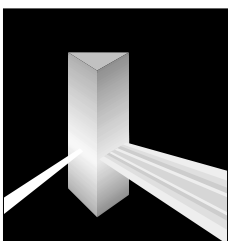
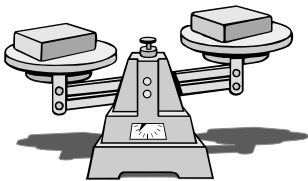
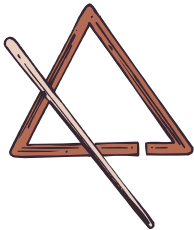
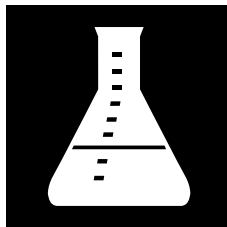
- Pattern blocks, foam quilting tiles, and unit cubes: For pattern matching, counting, sequencing, sorting, measuring and weighing.

- Calculators: Simple solar power calculators, four pocket-sized and two desk size with large numeral display, are loaned together for classroom use.

- Posters: On the circulatory, nervous, muscular, respiratory, skeletal, reproductive and urinary systems.

- Plus: Digital stopwatch, a snakeskin, adding machine tape rolls, bean seeds and a right angle prism.

—Sandra Darling

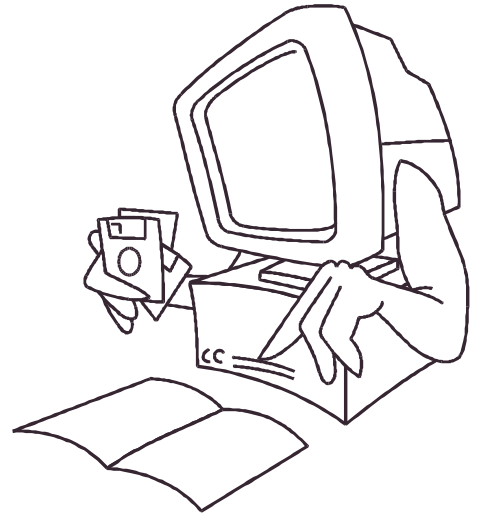


A New VISTA

As I adjust my internal time clock to a new schedule, I'm also adjusting the range of my vision. The past month seems like that experience you get after jumping into a deep pool. The bubbles and light swirl around your head and gradually clear to the new environment. I started my volunteer position with the Americorps VISTA program in September. My experience working at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge led me to find this path, to help out in the community and also expand on my own personal growth. The program I'm involved with is a pairing of VISTA and the UMass/Boston folks to "shrink the digital divide." My base now is the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, while reaching out to other educational sites in the Boston area. I am currently working with staff and students at three adult basic education programs. I maintain a connection with the CLC but am also working with Project Place and the International Institute of Boston, where my assistance hopefully aids people who for various reasons have so far been beyond the world of computers.

Speaking for myself, when those "bubbles" cleared it was great to be surrounded by helpful people at the A.L.R.I. who provide the training needed to go beyond my own skill level and make it possible to painlessly demystify the computer for others and watch them ignite new talents and interests that they had not developed. My work at these three different sites gives me experience with the many different schools and centers around the city, state, and country that work in the very large field of adult education. From my first day to now, I've had the chance to meet other new volunteers and teachers, and this could mean a network of wonderful people and minds that I would never have known otherwise. All these satellites of knowledge and good intent have proven the promise that the VISTA program offers, and I hope to expand along with students I meet along the way. I had never thought of myself as a teacher, but so many people of differing backgrounds and talents seem to make up the "adult ed. corps" I think the endless job of learning will go well due to all the people so dedicated to teaching in this field.

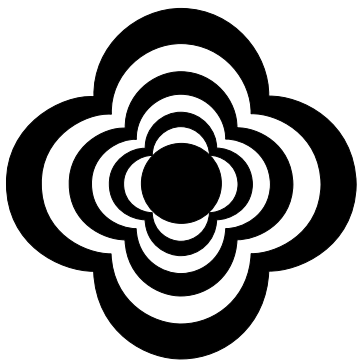
—Larry Syms



LOOKING BACK AT THE PAST TEN YEARS IN ABE

Earlier this fall I sent a letter to a large number of people who I knew had been working in the field of adult basic education in the Boston area for at least ten years, inviting them to write a couple of paragraphs about how they thought the field in general and/or their jobs in specific had (or hadn't) changed during this time. Here are the responses we received, from Richard Goldberg, Jo Hartel, Ellen Koretz, and Deborah Marquardt. My thanks to these contributors.

—Steve Reuys



In the fall of 1990, when I walked into the Learning Center at North Shore Community College's Beverly Campus to be a volunteer tutor, I had no idea where this path might take me. Ten years later I am coordinating an ABE program that will spend almost three quarters of a mil-

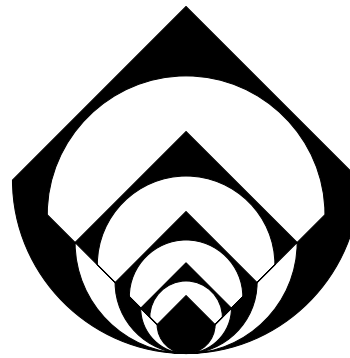
lion dollars from now until 2005. My first ten years in the field of adult education have been spent in the trenches, beginning with tutoring at NSCC and then at a workplace education program in Boston. That was followed by my first paid teaching job, a half-time ABE/ESOL position at a worker assistance center, and then a full-time, temporary ABE teaching job, which lasted only three months. In December, 1992, I was hired by the Asian American Civic Association, and I have been there ever since. I was fortunate to begin working in an ABE transitional program as it was being built to bridge the gap between ESOL and higher education, job training, and alternative high school diploma programs. For the next two years, in addition to teaching one of two levels of the program, I was coordinating our agency's segment of a community partnership, which basically meant coordinating myself. In 1996, due to increases in state funding, we added a third level along with a half-time teacher. A fourth level was added in 1998, along with another full-time teaching position, so our program has doubled in size. I now supervise a full-time teacher and a half-time counselor.

Along with the increase in program size has been an increase in my pay check. My salary has increased 34% since 1992, but 34% on top of something pitifully small doesn't amount to very much. Along with the monetary rewards have come many more responsibilities, including grant writing (curriculum frameworks proposals as well as the major narrative portion of the most recent DOE five-year ABE grant), staff development, program development, the

SMARTT system, and community planning. In spite of all this, I remain a full-time teacher, teaching two two-hour classes a day, four days a week, year round.

One of the most gratifying things about being in this field for the past ten years is seeing that so many of the same people whose brains I picked in informational interviews in 1990 are still around, at those required DOE meetings, or presenting at MATSOL and MCAE conferences, keeping all of us honest and fighting the good fights. Now, as then, there continues to be a reservoir of brain power in the adult education field in this state. But even with the growth of so many programs and the funding increases, one thing really hasn't changed—closing the door of your classroom, watching the occasional magic happen, and maybe being responsible for creating some of it.

—Richard Goldberg,
Asian American Civic Association



It's hard to separate out changes over the last ten years, or in my case over the last 20 years, but here are some of my colleague Betsy Lowry's and my thoughts. It seems to us that one characteristic of ABE practitioners has remained the same, and that is the dedication of the people who work in

this field. We do this work because we love it even if pay is low and working conditions are poor. Other things that have stayed the same might not have as much of a positive cast.

We're still complaining about red tape getting in the way as we try to do our jobs. The relationship between funders and providers continues to be adversarial. In order to get funding, we are told we have to conform to certain requirements even though we may not understand the rationale behind them. This has always been so. However, over the past 20 years, there has been a change for the positive. We now have many more opportunities to influence policies. MCAE comes to mind immediately as an example. The current push for accountability and standardization, for example, is an intensification of something funders have always asked for. The big difference is that now the service providers are being asked directly for their input in figuring out what works best.

When I started teaching there were very few ESOL and ABE teachers with training. Many of those that did have training were former Peace Corps volunteers. There has definitely been an emphasis on professionalization of ABE with more opportunities for teacher training and certification. We now think of ourselves as professionals. Unfortunately, salary increases and benefits have not followed along in the same way, so trained, experienced ABE teachers are

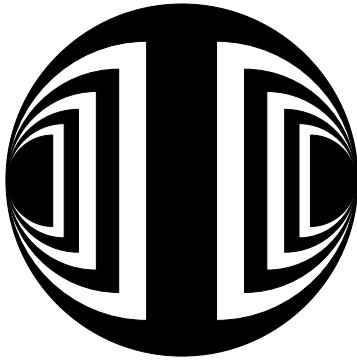
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The Last Ten Years in ABE

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becoming scarcer and scarcer. There have also been changes in the student population we serve. Although I don't have statistical proof, it seems to me that the number of students needing ESOL and ABE is still big, but there's a bigger spread now in skill levels. ESOL students, at least, come with either a low level of literacy or a fairly strong school background. There aren't so many in the middle.

—*Jo Anne Hartel,*
Community Learning Center

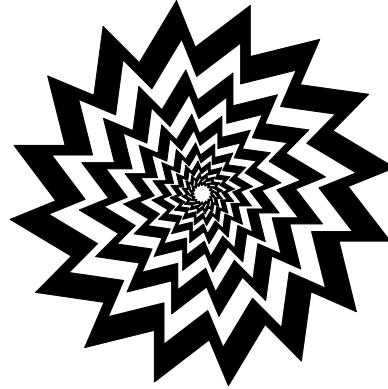


For seventeen years I have been an ABE teacher at the Charlestown Community Center. For the past five years I have also been one of the two mentor teachers for the Boston Region YALD Reading Theory and Practicum course given at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge.

In general I feel there has been a movement toward more direct instruction of academic subjects and a push toward greater accountability for academic gains. Some specific changes that I perceive are as follows:

- 1) Trained (maybe even certified) teachers are more often present in the classes. Ten years ago I believe there were programs that had their own GED graduates teaching classes.
- 2) Standardized academic skills assessments are more often administered in classes. It seems to me that in the past the idea of structured pre- and post-testing was often discouraged for being "too restrictive or intimidating."
- 3) Individual classes are more often designed by teachers with the students' academic goals in mind. Often the thought in the past seemed to have been that the content of individual classes should be determined only after students discussed and decided together the topics to be studied.
- 4) Basic skills, reading, writing, and math are more often the focus of classrooms. In the past, I believe that many classes concentrated on self-exploration, discussions of diversity, and artistic projects instead of the basics.
- 5) Technology offers new opportunities for students to gain information. Computers have become a very useful tool to reinforce teacher lessons.
- 6) As a reading teacher, it is of particular interest to me that there has finally been a recognition of the very important role of phonics especially (but not only) for learning disabled students. Ten years ago the direct teaching of phonics in isolation was often avoided for fear of being "boring"—even for learning disabled students.

—*Ellen Koretz,*
Charlestown Community Center



I have been working in the adult education field for twenty years, five of those years teaching various writing and ESL courses on the college level, and fifteen in a neighborhood-based adult program in Boston. I don't think I consciously chose to stay in the field, but it

just gave me a balance of challenge and flexibility that felt right to me.

In the mid 1980's it did not seem like a field that I could realistically stay in long-term because funding was so precarious and because so many positions were part-time, but I think that adult education has developed more respect in recent years. It now seems like a "real" career field—not just a series of jobs stuck together without much thought or planning. I was fortunate to find a full-time position at WAITT House in 1986 as the External Diploma assessor. When I tell people what I do, they say, "That must be so rewarding. Your students are there because they really want to learn." For the most part, that's all true.

Several times I have seriously considered looking for a new career—figuring that I've been doing this long enough. I haven't been able to come up with something I'd rather do, however. This is because I've had the opportunity to change my job responsibilities as opportunities presented themselves. Besides the EDP, I have also done career counseling, and currently I'm writing and editing grants and coordinating special projects. I think that the adult education field is more varied, more complex today.

—*Deborah Marquardt,*
WAITT House

We invite you to visit the A.L.R.I.'s web site, where you can find out about our staff, our services, our publications, and our special projects, along with all sorts of links to other useful sites. Our new, easy-to-remember web address is:
<http://www.alri.org>

REMEMBER THE A.L.R.I. JOB BANK!

People seeking jobs in the adult education field are urged to come in to look at our Job Listings Book to see what jobs are out there at programs in our region and to leave a copy of their resumé in our Resumé Book. And *adult basic education programs*, especially those in the Boston area, are reminded to send or fax us copies of job announcements for the Job Listings Book and to look through the Resumé Book anytime you have openings.

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*Massachusetts
Readers: Please
Open Promptly—
November
Announcements
of Upcoming
Staff Development
Activities at the
A.L.R.I. Enclosed*