



THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for
Social Justice: News,
Issues, and Ideas

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Women & Literacy

by Daphne Greenberg

According to the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey approximately 20% of women in the U.S. have difficulty completing applications, reading labels, or reading to their children. Twenty-three percent of all women aged 25 and over have not gone beyond 11th grade and 28% of women aged 65 and older have not gone beyond eighth grade. Women continue to be grouped in a few low-wage occupations, and lack of education is one of the reasons for this. Access to quality education is essential for women to progress socially, economically, and politically.

The field of education often does not take into account the consequences of gender differences in the classroom, and



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The Change Agent is the biannual publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center. Each issue of the paper helps teachers incorporate social justice content into their curriculum. The paper is designed for intermediate-level ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. Each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives.

In New England, *The Change Agent* is available free of charge in limited quantities through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers (SABES, ATDN, CALL, Vermont Adult Education Board, Literacy Resources/Rhode Island, New Hampshire Department of Education). Contact these centers to learn how to receive your free copies. PDF versions of *The Change Agent* can be downloaded for free from our Web site.

Submissions
Our next issue is about TRANSITIONS.

We welcome submissions from teachers and students in our field as well as activists and thinkers from outside the field. For submission guidelines visit www.nelrc.org/changeagent or call 617-482-9485.

Subscriptions

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From the Editors

What are the causes and consequences of women's low literacy levels? How are women learners bringing unique strengths to the challenges they face? What do women learners have to teach us about the best ways to reach out to other women, to nurture leadership, and to create the kind of change in society that will address systemic injustices? How have teachers created lessons that resonate with women's everyday experiences? With this issue on women and literacy, we address these questions (and more) by sharing the perspective and wisdom of adult learners and their teachers. In this issue, student voices are prominent as their writings highlight what they're going through and how they define issues for themselves. The teacher writings outline some of the transcending curriculum issues related to women and literacy.

"Being a woman is something to be proud of, but it includes many challenges," writes Agnes Nansubuga. The challenges are not unfamiliar. As many of our student contributors report, family responsibilities, abuse, inadequate income, and gender and race oppression make getting an education challenging. Punitive immigration and welfare laws put an extra burden on women learners from other countries and women with low or no income.

Perhaps less familiar are the enormous strengths that women bring to the process of learning and changing—not just themselves but the world we live in. The articles here reflect many of those qualities. Women learners with disabilities provide guidelines for ways to support women with disabilities in their learning. Intergenerational Asian-American women support each other inside and outside of class. A nursing home worker uses her union membership and improved literacy skills to protect her rights (and those of others) on the job. Immigrant women learners at VozMujer start with their own real-life dilemmas and their own problem-solving abilities, and engineer both private and public solutions as they gain literacy skills. Diverse women's voices come together in this issue to claim women's power to change, grow, support each other, and create a better world.

You will also notice that *The Change Agent* now has a new format. We hope teachers will be better able to reproduce pieces for use in the classroom. This collaborative effort between WE LEARN and NELRC gave us an opportunity to promote both the former's commitment to the creation of women-centered literacy materials and the latter's focus on the adult learner's role in social change. The experience and enthusiasm of our editorial board generated much of the vision and content for this issue. We thank them. We also received many more high quality student and teacher submissions than we had room for in the print issue. Thanks to the WE LEARN Web site (www.litwomen.org/tca/index.html), an addendum of these pieces is available online. WE LEARN, with the agreement and support of NELRC, will continue to use this issue to promote women's literacy issues and to build curriculum and community networks. We encourage you to contact WE LEARN and to participate in this important work.

After all, as community activist Klare Allen reminds us, education is not just about reading and writing, it's about "learning what you need to know to be the kind of person you need to be and to have the kind of community you want to have."

Mev Miller and Cynthia Peters
Guest Editors

Continued from page 1

adult literacy is no exception. There are issues unique to female learners. Educators and policymakers need to address them so that women can begin to take advantage of their educational strengths while overcoming their educational weaknesses.

Although men and women share many of the same obstacles when it comes to attending programs (shame, fear, conflicting work schedules, etc.), women often have additional barriers, such as lack of family support and multiple family responsibilities. Sometimes women are just plain too tired to attend classes. It is not uncommon to hear women complain that after child rearing, housekeeping, and work outside the house, they simply do not have time for studying. Many literacy programs do not have child care options and many women cannot leave their children with partners, family members, or friends. Transportation is another obstacle; often even if an attached woman has a car, the partner's transportation needs supercede the woman's needs. Not every area has adequate public transportation, nor is it safe for women in some communities to walk unescorted. Finally, husbands often do not allow wives to go to classes at night or to mixed

Women often have additional barriers [to attending programs], such as lack of family support and multiple family responsibilities.

gender classes. As researcher Janet Isserlis has pointed out, many women live with partners who do not want them to become more literate and/or independent, and this impacts their ability to participate in classes. Some women are not

allowed to leave home, and therefore cannot attend classes (either due to cultural restrictions on women and/or domestic abuse reasons).

Literacy training begins as an issue for females when they are young. While boys and girls

share many of the same reasons for why they drop out of school, girls have the added issues of marriage, pregnancy, family violence, and abuse. Another reason why girls may drop out of school is that they are systematically underrepresented in identification for learning disability services. Lack of a diagnosis means lack of needed services, which often leads to low self-esteem, frustration, and hopelessness—all factors that contribute to dropping out of school.

Many policymakers take an instrumental view of women's education, stressing that increased female literacy skills are correlated with improved child care, nutrition, and health. Higher educated women have been said to provide better prenatal care, produce more full-term babies, provide better postnatal care, and produce higher participation rates in their children's schooling. This type of reasoning has influenced many literacy instructional programs to focus on women only as homemakers, ignoring women who do not have children, de-emphasizing the personal literacy interests of women, and side-stepping the fact that the majority of women must earn a living and therefore need additional types of literacy instruction. Women deserve access to meaningful education because they have a right to it—not as a means toward some other end. To help women achieve this right, policymakers and educators should work to better understand gender differences in the classroom and meet the specific needs of women learners.

Women deserve access to meaningful education because they have a right to it—not as a means toward some other end.

Daphne Greenberg is the facilitator of the National Institute for Literacy Women and Literacy Listserv (http://novel.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/nifl-womenlit/women_literacy.html) and the associate director of the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy in Atlanta, Georgia. For references to this article, contact her at dgreenberg@gsu.edu.

Kaleidoscopic Image

by Kinnari Sutariya

My poem has no beginning, middle or end.
She contains pieces of broken colored glass
participating in abstract blurry patterns;
wants to make a kaleidoscopic image
and possibly some difference.
She speaks about
personal experience and observance
but not limited to self.

I wanted to study architecture.
My parents preferred me to
choose a college in the town we lived.
It would have been different, if I was a boy.
Good grooms look for educated girls.
To start college studies was encouraged
but pursuing a career was not.
When I was refusing to
marry a man, my marriage was arranged.
It was said that going to a good school
had gone to my head
and freedom was not given
to bring shame to the family.
This would not have been said
if I was a boy.

What defines illiteracy?
Is it only about the ability to read and write,
deprived opportunity?

I entered the U.S.A. as a newly married bride.
After a few days, I entered jail as a murderer:
first time away from a sheltered life,
interrogation by two white American men,
lack of fluent English and knowledge of law
made me feel illiterate
even though I had B.S. from India.

Amazing but true, in prison, I learned
more about women's issues and studies
by taking "Understanding Women" class.
Before that it was a mirage effect not in easy reach.
Women's studies are mostly offered as college courses.
They are real issues.
Shall it not start early at school level?

In India, for ages, Sarswati has been
worshipped as a goddess of knowledge.
Indira Gandhi became the first woman prime minister;
she took a high stand as a woman.
But the rate of illiterate women is still high today.
In Saudi Arabia, women are allowed to get an education
but, professional careers are limited to certain
care-giving areas only.

Afghanistan, Pakistan,
Bangladesh, South Africa...

Early-age marriages, children having children,
75-95% of household work and childcare
done by women, son preference over daughter
and much more affects women's education.
Problems are not limited to a few countries.
They are global.
They are women's.

For many women, literacy has influenced
their communication and standing voice,
and lead them towards better health and better life;
individually and collectively, it empowered them.
But gender oppression and inequality
causes women to be a major target of illiteracy —
scattering women as pieces of broken colored glass.
Women's depth is much more than separate pieces of
color.

Kinnari Sutariya was born and raised in India. Currently, she is incarcerated in Michigan, USA.

Women's Adult Education

A fundamental tool for empowerment

by Agnes Nansubuga

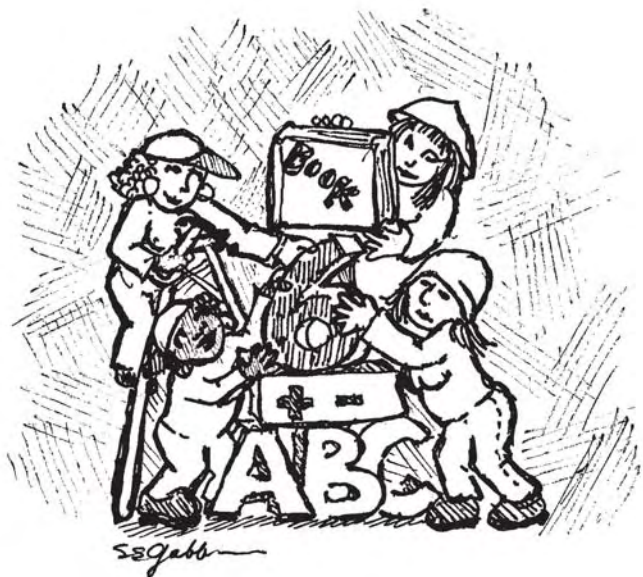
Being a woman is something to be proud of, but it includes many challenges, particularly when it comes to education. Social, economic, and cultural systems throughout almost the entire world often do not support women's literacy. However, adult educators can help women overcome barriers and empower themselves and their communities.

Often, it is women's responsibility to look after the children, their husbands, and at times the extended family. Because of the overwhelming workload at home, women do not have time to train for high-paying jobs. Employers are sometimes hesitant to hire women because they worry about having to provide maternity leave and they assume that women will have difficulties with childcare. Taking low-paying jobs means that women have to work extra hours to catch up with the bills. With all these pressures, it is hard for women to find the time to engage in educational programs and, anyway, they are often too tired to take on additional class work.

Traditionally, many cultures push women away from education. Some countries emphasize literacy and education for boys more than for girls. Consequently, there have not been many women to mentor other women in higher educational programs. Secondly, in some cultures, a female may be considered less marriageable if she is highly educated, so her family will pressure her not to go to school. Also, many cultures condone or do not do enough to prevent violence against women. Being the victim of violence can lead to shame and isolation, which has a profound impact on women's ability to learn and meaningfully participate in literacy programs.

Educators need to support women to overcome the barriers that hinder us from getting educated. It is important for educators to ask women what they need, to respect voices from all cultures, to make connections with diverse learners, and to link educational programs with what is happening in communities. Specific approaches should include: women's participation in curriculum development, using real life issues in lesson plans, and helping women increase their participation in politics. Women's literacy calls for a grassroots effort to combat the negative images about women through education and action. Through education, we shall move from self-empowerment as women to community empowerment.

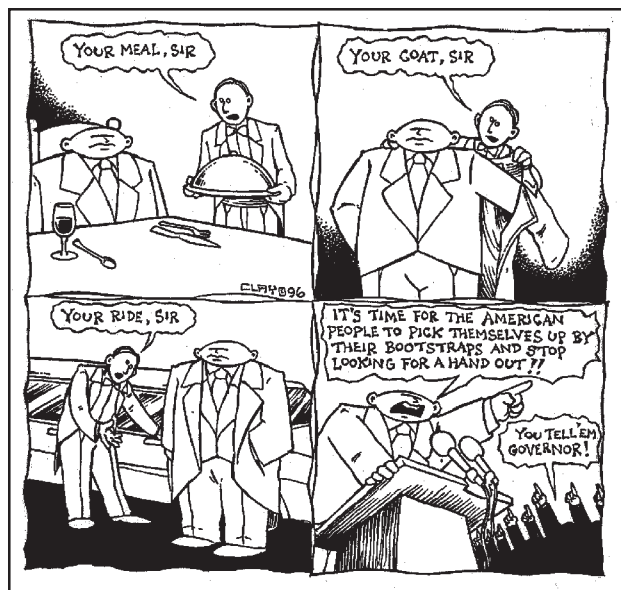
Agnes Nansubuga is an undergraduate student at the College of Public and Community Service at UMASS Boston.



Welfare Reform & Women's Education

by Lorna Rivera

I am always amazed when our political leaders create public policies that are based on stereotypes and misinformation. Welfare reform is an excellent example of this. Despite the fact that there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that the more education you have, the more likely you are to access decent paying jobs, many women on welfare have been forced to give up on their education and find "any job" as soon as possible. A significant number of my women adult learners at Project HOPE and at the College of Public and Community Service dropped out of school because of changes in welfare laws that began to be implemented in 1996. A 1997 study by Steve Reuys at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI) in Boston found that adult literacy programs throughout the state of Massachusetts experienced significant declines in their enrollments immediately after the welfare law passed. According to Reuys, "Education is no longer encouraged—and is in fact often ac-



tively discouraged—for recipients of public assistance in Massachusetts." As Congress continues to debate this issue (see "What You Can Do"), it is important for us to understand how and why low-income women's access to education is being restricted, and the effects of welfare "work-first" policies on women adult learners and adult literacy programs.

There is a widening gap in U.S. society between the very rich and the rest of us. According to United for a Fair Economy, the average

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT WELFARE REFORM

1. Speak or testify at a city or town meeting.
2. Organize a press conference.
3. Organize a media blitz—contact various media outlets to set up interviews, meet with editorial boards of newspapers.
4. Meet with your elected officials.
5. Write your representatives in Congress to let them know how you feel. (Find your representatives at www.firstgov.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml)
6. Participate in local activist groups by contacting:
 - The Welfare Made a Difference Campaign: www.wmadcampaign.org
 - Welfare Information Network: www.financeprojectinfo.org
 - The Welfare Reform Academy: www.welfareacademy.org
 - The National Welfare Rights Union: www.nationalwru.org

worker earned only \$517 per week in 2003, while the average Chief Executive Officer (CEO) earned \$155,769. The people who are in powerful positions to shape social policies typically come from very wealthy backgrounds and they have the most influence in shaping programs that are supposed to help low-income families. Unfortunately, many of our elected officials have little experience or insight about the everyday struggles of poor families.

Welfare reform passed in the United States as a result of politicians and the media promoting the idea that people are poor because there is something wrong with them as individuals. One of the great myths of U.S. culture is that people are poor because they made bad choices and bad decisions in their lives; they irresponsibly failed to answer the door when opportunity came knocking. Poverty is seen as an individual problem, not as a result of the unfair way our society distributes resources.

The media perpetuates these beliefs by focusing on the individual characteristics of the women who receive welfare, and they "color" these images to make it seem like more recipients belong to racial and ethnic minority groups and that they receive welfare for generations. By focusing on the mothers, the media also downplay the fact that the majority of welfare recipients are actually children. We are more likely to support lifetime limits on public assistance if we feel threatened by welfare recipients in some way—for example by thinking that excessive amounts of tax revenue are going to support these lazy women—even though this is simply not true. We have to buy into the myth that there is something fundamentally different between us and them.

One of the worst things about welfare reform is the effect it has on women's self-esteem. Many welfare recipients are prejudiced against themselves and each other. For example, I will never forget how one of my GED students said that welfare mothers should, "Get off their asses and try to find a man to support them." This particular student had a physical disability and was

a welfare recipient herself. Her remarks sparked a heated discussion in our class about stereotypes and so the women wrote essays about the "realities" of being welfare recipients. One

woman wrote: "I'm tired of people thinking I am less than everyone else just because I live off AFDC, cause I know I'm not. And the reason why I said this is because I have a friend that is always talking about mothers on AFDC and it gets me mad. She was

on it too and now, just because she has a job, she criticizes everyone else that lives off AFDC.

When I pass my GED test and accomplish my goal and find the job I want, I will never criticize no one that is going through the same situation I was in." This student identified with other women experiencing a similar "situation." It was an eye-opening lesson about the importance of challenging the self-hatred that weighs down the hearts and minds of poor women, and how internalizing oppressive messages prevents unity among women everywhere.

My own studies, as well as those of Barbara Sparks and Steve Reuys, have documented significant dropout rates and declining enrollments in adult education in the aftermath of welfare reform. Many of the adult education programs that had the greatest decline in enrollments were intensive (20 hours a week) community-based programs that offered classes during the morning hours to accommodate the schedules of mothers with school-aged children. Some of these were participatory learning and popular education programs that, in addition to providing literacy instruction, were also aimed at increasing political empowerment and social change. These programs offered a real possibility of change for

One of the great myths of U.S. culture is that people are poor because they made bad choices and bad decisions in their lives; they irresponsibly failed to answer the door when opportunity came knocking.

the women who attended them. But it seems that women who need education the most should just stay in low-paying jobs that will never help them escape from poverty.

I believe now is a critical time to confront stereotypes and misinformation about the causes of women's poverty. We could do more to increase awareness about the benefits of education and be more effective in lobbying for access to quality adult basic education. We live in the world's richest country that has the means to eliminate poverty and to provide access to education for all who desire it. We need to challenge bad public policies that perpetuate poverty.

Lorna Rivera works with adult learners in the College of Public & Community Services at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. Contact her at Lorna.Rivera@umb.edu for more information about the studies cited in this article.

Learn More About Welfare @

www.faireconomy.org/press/2004/CEOPayRatio_pr.html
United For a Fair Economy

<http://inequality.org>

Inequality.org is a nonprofit organization that provides information about US inequality with regard to healthcare, technology, economics, education, and other issues.

www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp

Institute for Research on Poverty at University of Wisconsin Madison, is an excellent source for statistics, links, news, research on issues such as health, education, welfare reform, low-wage workers, and child support.

www.cbpp.org

Center for Budget & Policy Priorities has information about Federal Budget expenditures and the congressional reauthorization of TANF.

It's Never Too Late *by Crecelia Jaurequi*

I am from Mexico where I received only eight years of education. On the one hand, it is difficult for a woman like me to go to school. I have to take care of two daughters and a husband. I have to organize my day from early in the morning, deciding what to cook and cooking early. Then I can have time to go to school and try to get the most that I can learn that day. After that I have to go pick up my daughters from their school. When we get home, I review their homework for that day and see how I can help my daughters. It is important for us that I learn English to help and encourage them. It is important for them to be in school and learn as much as they can.

On the other hand, it is fun to go to school because I have friends and I share time with them. We have little conversations as classmates and forget our problems and feel happy being in school. In conclusion, I want to be in school no matter how difficult it is or will be for me.

Crecelia Jaurequi is a student at the Marine Avenue Adult Learning Center and Family Literacy Program at the Harbor Community Adult School in Los Angeles.

My Life As a Teen Mom

by Darlene Paulino

I start my day by waking my four-month-old son, Aidan, and myself at 6:00 a.m. I bathe, feed, and dress my son, and then I pack his bag with diapers, wipes, clothes, and his bottles. After I am done with my son, I sit him in his walker and take him with me to the bathroom so that I can take a shower and get dressed.

After we're ready, we march out the door. Aidan goes to daycare while I am in school. I drop off my son at 7:30 a.m. so that I can be at the bus stop by 8:00 a.m.

In school, the teachers help me get prepared for my GED. I am in class from 9:00 to 2:00, studying math, social studies, reading, writing, and science. Also, case managers help me with my plans for college, housing, and a career.

I pick up my son at 3:15 and go home. I feed him and change him. Later, I put him to sleep and I start cooking a small meal for myself.

In the evening, I usually will watch T.V. with the baby or play with him for a little while. We then go to bed. What will tomorrow be like? The same as yesterday and today.

It makes me mad because there are so many young girls who want to have babies. Many friends that I know don't even use condoms to prevent disease and pregnancy. It is very difficult to take care of a baby, especially if don't have an education or a job.

I don't regret having my son Aidan. I love him 'til death do us part. He is my inspiration, devotion, and focus. He needs a mother that can stand up for him and say, "Present." Also he needs a warm home and a good example. I am his example; that is why I decided to make my life better. I am here to be somebody. I will get my GED and attend college. It does not matter how hard it gets.

Darlene Paulino is currently a GED student at the Crittenton Hastings House in Boston.



List some steps of your day:

1. I wake up at _____ .
2. After I wake up, I _____ .
3. _____ .
4. _____ .

How Much Education Do You Get?

by Cynthia Peters

Teacher's Note: One aspect of literacy is being able to read and interpret charts and graphs. In this lesson, the average years of schooling for males and females in selected countries is represented in two different graphics. Start by asking your students to simply look at the charts and identify what they see. Some might notice the layout and the shape and shading of the bars. Others might immediately react to the data. After they have had some time to absorb the information graphically, work with them on the math questions to help sharpen numeracy skills.

Chart 1: Average Years of Schooling for Males and Females in Selected Countries Compared to the U.S.

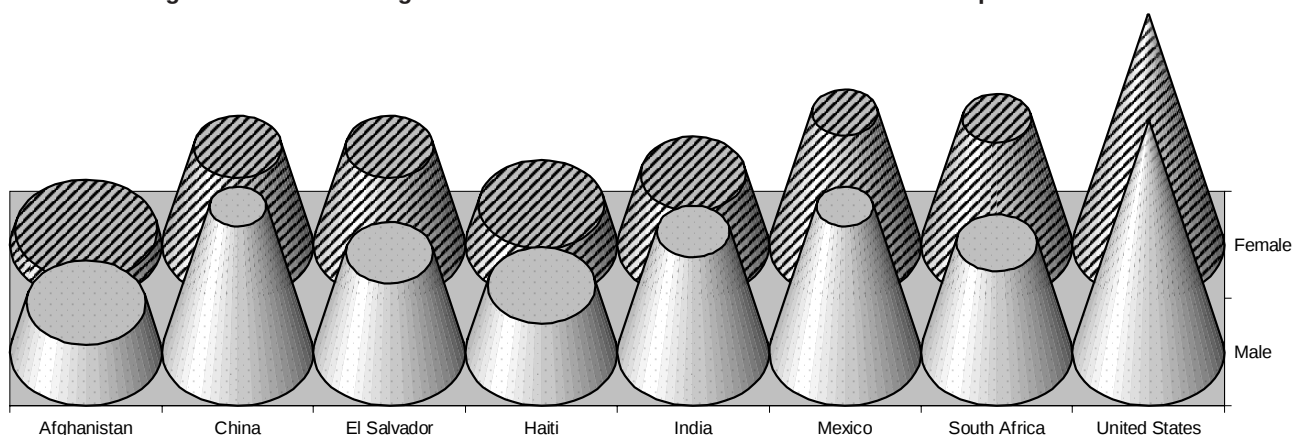
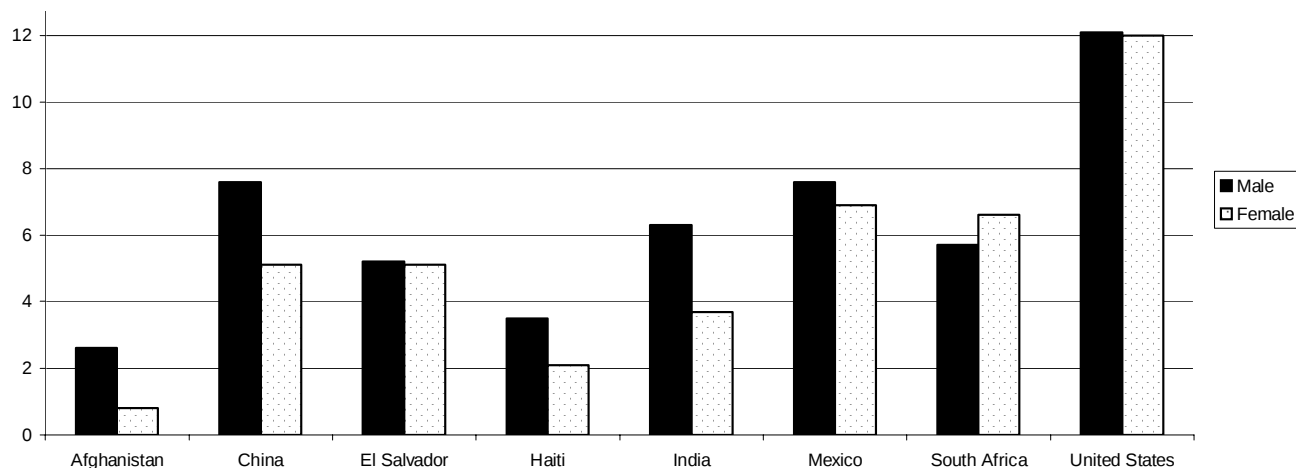


Chart 2: Average Years of Schooling for Males and Females in Selected Countries



Source: Table 2.13 (pp. 84-86) in the 2003 World Development Indicators, World Bank.

Student Worksheet: Average Years of Schooling

Look at Chart 1 and list three things you notice about it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now look at Chart 2 and list three things you notice about it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are three differences you notice in the two charts?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Look at Chart 2. The y axis is vertical and the x axis is horizontal. What information does the y axis give you?

What information does the x axis give you?

Where does this data come from?

Student Worksheet: Statistics and Averages

Statistics only tell part of the story and sometimes they do not even tell that well. What questions do these charts raise for you? What information is left out? What else would you like to know? Why do you think that in so many countries women get less education than men?

Questions to sharpen numeracy skills:

1. Which three countries show the least inequality between the sexes?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

2. Is there any country where females get on average more schooling than males?

Average years of schooling is found by adding all the years that males and females attended school and then dividing that number by the total number of males and the total number of females. Averages can mask certain facts. For example, averages tend to make us think that everyone's years of schooling are close to the average. But that might not be true. Averages often mask gross inequality.

Say you had a country with a very few well-educated people and a majority of people with very little education. Now, imagine another country where everyone had fairly equal access to a moderate level of education. The average years of schooling might look similar in both countries, but one country would have much more equal access to school. See below for how two very different countries (in terms of access to education) have similar averages. (Each country has 100 people.)

Country with Fairly Equal Access to Education:

30 people get 8 years of schooling = 240

40 people get 6 years of schooling = 240

30 people get 4 years of schooling = 120

TOTAL = 600 years

**Average years of
schooling per person = 6.0**

Country with a Big Educational Divide:

10 people get 16 years of schooling = 160 years

20 people get 12 years of schooling = 240 years

70 people get 3 years of schooling = 210 years

TOTAL = 610 years

**Average years of
schooling per person = 6.1**

Cynthia Peters, co-editor of this issue of The Change Agent, teaches in the Worker Education Program of SEIU Local 2020.

Fighting For My Rights

by Marie Stephanie Edma

I first heard about union classes at my job. My friend helped me. She pushed me to come to class. I have learned a lot from the Worker Education Program. My English improved and I got my high school diploma. WEP taught me to speak-up anytime and anywhere.

Last year—in January—I made a vacation-request for the month of August. The union contract states that vacation requests have to be made between January and March. I submitted

The union teaches us about workers' rights and that knowledge is POWER!

my request to the scheduler and it was approved by the Director of Nursing. Once I got my request approved, signed, and delivered back, I saved it along with my paychecks.

In July, when I looked at the schedule, I saw my name selected for the entire month of August. This was when I planned to go on vacation. I went to the scheduler and explained the situation to her. She told me, "You have to see the administrator."

A few hours later, after my lunch, I asked one of my co-workers to go with me to the administration office. I said, "Well, Mr. Kneland, I requested an August vacation at the beginning of the year, and it was approved by the Director of Nursing; however, I saw my name on the schedule for the entire month of August. Could you explain to me what happened? I have already made reservations to fly to Haiti and I cannot cancel the ticket." Mr. Kneland replied, "The request has to be approved by me and not the Director of Nursing." I countered, "Show me the paper saying that the Director of Nursing does not have the power to approve a vacation form." He started getting angry. He said that I could not go on vacation and threatened that if I went

to Haiti, I would be terminated. I banged my fist on the table and I said to him, "Don't play games with me because I am not a child; I am an adult! Since I requested my vacation, I shall take it and then come back to work."

"Mr. Kneland immediately backed down and assured me that everything would be OK and urged me to fill out a new request form, which he would approve on the spot.

I realized that by making myself heard, I became stronger. Sometimes managers try to put us down by being strict. However, the union makes the workers stronger because it teaches us how to defend our rights! The union teaches us about workers' rights and that knowledge is POWER!

After this incident, I realized that workers can have more power than managers if they communicate and organize together. I then decided to become an SEIU Local 2020 steward so I could learn more about workers' rights and defend them and myself.

In June of 2002, I graduated from the union's steward school. This accomplishment has made me feel stronger and more powerful. Workers are here to stay, but managers like Mr. Kneland—who was eventually fired—are temporary if they abuse and manipulate workers. Fellow workers, I hope you think about your goals and dignity because you can achieve whatever you want.



Marie Stephanie Edma is from Haiti. She works at East Village Nursing Home as a Certified Nursing Assistant, a member of SEIU Local 2020 and is a student at WEP.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears *by Ana Gonzalez*

Since I can remember, I have wanted to study and be an important person. Unfortunately, I did not have many opportunities growing up in Mexico. My parents were very poor and they didn't have any opportunity to study, either. They didn't know how to read, write, sign their names, or do basic mathematics. I studied first to sixth grade in my town, but for middle school, I had to walk almost twelve miles each day. Half of those were at noon when the sun was strongest and it toasted my skin while my knapsack hung heavy on my shoulder and my old shoes supported my tired feet. Sometimes I walked in rainy weather along a muddy way. When I walked home in the evening, the dark of night made me scared. I had almost no time to do my homework because I had to help my mother wash the dishes from a whole day and wash my two old uniforms. I also had to take care of my little sister. When we had food, I prepared my lunch because I didn't have money to buy it in the school. Sometimes when I had nothing to eat in the school it was difficult to learn. Sometimes I didn't do my homework because I didn't have money to buy the material to complete projects. However, I finished middle school and I graduated with good qualifications.

I talked with my mother and I said, "Mom, I want to study. Please let me go to more school," but she didn't want to let me go. She said, "We don't have money to pay for your school." I answered, "That's OK, Mom. I can work and study at the same time. I would like to be an independent woman, buy everything that I need

by myself, and let my money grow. I don't like when people take advantage of us because they know more." But she didn't believe in me and she told me, "You are a girl. You are going to get married and your husband is going to give you everything you'll need." I knew my mom was wrong, but I could not do anything at this time.

I still remember my father's eyes when I asked him about school. He said to me, "I wish I could afford it. If I had all the gold of all the world, I would give it to you because I love you and I know you are very talented and you want to do good things. Always remember it is most important in life to be an honest person. I'm very sad for you, and I love you with all my heart." I answered, "Yes, I know. And I love you, too." We hugged each other and I understood my father needed my help bringing some money to the house. So I dedicated my life to work. I worked with my father, cleaning houses or doing what was needed. I always did honest and decent work, following the wisdom of my father. I did this for five years, but the situation in my house was not tolerable for me and I couldn't bear how difficult life was for my family. The love that I felt for them pushed me to decide to travel to a big city where I studied for two more years without any support from my mother. I was living in my cousin's house. I was working as a cashier eight to ten hours a day, six or seven days a week. I was also studying at the same time from Monday to Friday, four hours a day and seven hours on Saturday. I was offered many promotions in my work, but I never took



them because my school schedule didn't permit me. I never had time to rest. Sometimes I didn't sleep so I could do homework. I took the reins of my own life and I never did anything bad. I was on the list of the ten best students in school so I

I still remember my father's eyes when I asked him about school. He said to me, "I wish I could afford it. . ."

had good grades when I quit my work. My boss didn't want to let me go. She said I was an excellent person and employee. I felt very proud of myself for everything I did in those two years.

I wanted to attend the university but was too late for the registration. I decided to work

one year, save my money, and continue studying the next year. But my plans changed. I got married and came to live in the United States.

I didn't know any people here—only my husband and his parents. I didn't have much support from them to study. I went to English classes with my father-in-law for about three weeks. Then I learned I was pregnant and I couldn't continue going to school.

Since my child was born, I have dedicated my life to him. Right now I have to drive for one-and-a-half or two hours each day to go to school at the Marine Avenue Adult Center where they have a Family Literacy Program. I also need to keep my house clean, prepare food, and give quality time to my son and husband. I feel I need a longer day to do everything, but the most difficult for me is to concentrate and learn. My father died in Mexico this month and I worry about my mom. Maybe I will have to work again so I can send money and help my family. It is difficult to be a woman with a dream of education. It is sad to think that maybe I won't continue coming to my current school.

Ana Gonzalez received 11 years of education in her native Mexico. She is now an adult student in Los Angeles, California.

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?

by Barbara Carreira

Who am I to take on the world
when I am unable to read?
Who am I to help others
when I am so much in need?

What effort would it take
for knowledge to be mine?
What cost would be involved
to learn to read one line?

When can my secret be shared
and shame be erased?
When can being illiterate be
something to be faced?

Where do I turn for help
with my desire to learn?
Where then, do I go
to improve the wages I earn?

Why in a world so advanced
must a woman struggle in vain?
Why when I reach out
does no one hear my pain?

AND

How am I to teach my child -
when I lack the skill?
How am I to change her path -
if not me, who will?

Barbara Carreira began writing poetry in junior high school, but this is one of the first times she has shared her writing with the public.

Surviving the Educational and Judicial Systems

by Monica Nowos

As a child, my first- and second-grade teacher isolated me. I recall asking her how to spell “carrot,” and she refused. In third grade, my teacher discovered I had no basic skills. I finally learned to read and write (barely). My fourth grade teacher was not just neglectful, but she humiliated me and degraded my progress. Fifth grade gave me inspiration from a dynamic teacher, but sixth grade was a year of doldrums once again.

I was grateful for my junior high learning experience, which was a dramatic change from the warehousing of elementary school. But there was always a gap in my basic skills that it seemed I could never close. When I could not keep up, I was plucked out of my English class and placed in a small room to *do nothing* with maybe five other students. This separation increased the gap in my learning. I had to demand to be placed in a real classroom. I had counselors, administrative staff, vice principals, and others with “Dr.” titles always trying to dissuade me from trying to receive an education.

I was able to complete high school and then college by purposely picking classes that did not require much writing. I did well on multiple choice or true/false tests and on labs because I had good comprehension.

In college, I sometimes experienced gender discrimination. One time, I was in an all-male (except for me) class on manufacturing. The students were supposed to work as a team and receive a communal grade. But I received a B- while my male counterparts all received As.

Another road block was in a women’s studies class taught by a woman. Though she brought to light gender inequality in our society,

she also practiced this bias herself. During her lecturing, she would only address male students’ questions and she purposely graded women students harshly.

She scrutinized our work, looking for things like typos, and then she graded us harshly. But she was lenient with the men and even gave extra points for discussion—which she only allowed males to participate in. It was a very bizarre experience. It almost seemed like she was conducting an experiment in how prejudiced behavior might affect a classroom.

After college, I got a job and was able to buy an SUV and a home, but my livelihood was soon dashed by a broken system—one that I had not even been aware of. This was the judicial system and my first experience with it was a baptism by fire. Though I had gone to school and worked in very male-oriented environments, I hadn’t seen *nothing* yet. I didn’t see a true witch hunt until I was introduced to the judicial system after defending myself and my family from an attacker.

During my trial, I had hoped to bring an expert witness, Dr. Saunders, to testify about abusive men and their propensity for violence. But the judge did not allow him to testify because Dr. Saunders had stated that he was a feminist. His definition of feminism was that he believed that women and men should be treated equally. In the courtroom, feminism was a dirty word. At



the end of the trial, the judge agreed with the reasoning of a juror that believed, "If a man hits a woman once, it is his fault. If a man hits a woman a second time, it is her fault."

I nearly fell over. To hear this from a judge was alarming and disgusting. I could not believe the ferocity of such a statement. I was sentenced to 7-17 years.

In prison, I found a sea of illiterate women. Not just a fissure of illiteracy, like the one I fell into as a child, but a Grand Canyon that thousands had fallen into. Literacy for women prisoners is so low that I find it hard to believe that most of them can understand the plea agreement they signed. The general feel of the women here is that there is nothing they can do about how they are treated. It is just the way it is and always will be. The continuous violence, abuse,

neglect, and unfair treatment that they have been subjected to has eroded their ability to stand up for themselves.

I do not believe there is nothing we can do. We should start by addressing the judicial system—the whole network from the police to the courts. The law books may have page upon page about equality and they may stress women's parity with men, but police officers and the courts do not enforce the rules.

Women's literacy would be best described as the ability to not only read, but to put what you read into *action*. Without action, equality can't exist. It is just a fairy tale.

Monica Nowos was raised in Rochester Hills, Michigan, the fifth of six daughters. She is currently in prison.

Education Helps Women by Idalina Barbosa

It is very difficult to believe that for many years, and even still in some countries today, the education of women is not perceived as important. Women are responsible for taking care of their families by cooking, washing, raising children, and caring for their husbands.

In the mid-twentieth century, women in the U.S. organized for access to education. Women realized education would help them to make significant contributions to their society as well to their families. Women entered colleges and pursued careers that were once exclusively held by men. Some of these professions are medicine, law, science, and even operation of high power equipment. Today it is very difficult to find a job that is still exclusively for men.

Education does three major things for women. It opens up opportunities in the work place, gives more freedoms, and instills a new sense of confidence to enable women to take risks.

Women no longer only see themselves as homemakers. Women who were unhappily married have found the confidence to be single parents. They are still able to take care of their children because they have become financially independent.

Women now have the freedom to express themselves. Women make choices about their bodies, their finances, and every other aspect of their lives. Education gives women the confidence to take risks because they know that if they fail they have the tools or could acquire the tools to help them succeed. Although women have accomplished a lot in the past century, there is still a lot more to do.

Women make choices about their bodies, their finances, and every other aspect of their lives.

Idalina Barbosa is a student at Mujeres Unidas en Acción in Boston.

Love for People and for Education

An Interview with Klare Allen

by Cynthia Peters

Klare Allen is a mother of four children and a long-time welfare and environmental justice activist in Boston. When welfare moved her and her family into a hotel after she became homeless, she started organizing the other mothers. Later she went through some education and training, and got a job as an organizer with Alternatives for Community and the Environment. She is dyslexic and employs her own strategies for reading when she has to. In a day when so many organizers depend on written communication, particularly email, she relies on her strength as a speaker, her creative thinking, and her love of people. Cynthia Peters spoke with Klare Allen at her home in Roxbury, Massachusetts on April 25, 2004.

Homeless in a Hotel

When I first started organizing, I didn't realize I was doing it. I was living in a hotel in Watertown [an upscale suburb of Boston], and I didn't know what to do or where to go. I started walking around the neighborhood. I found a service provider nearby. But they said they only provided services to people who lived in Watertown, and we didn't count since we were just staying in the hotel. They mentioned that some other people from the hotel had been by. So I started exploring the hotel and finding out that there were all these other mothers there — all of us from inner-city neighborhoods like Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. We started having meetings. We organized protests and rallies—just of ourselves. After a while, some organizations—like Mass. Coalition for the Homeless—started noticing us, and they came and asked me to speak about the conditions. So I did, and the media started to pay attention. They started to tell my story. I kept

talking with the mothers—not just in Watertown, but in Chelsea and all over the place. I helped them figure out how to get food stamps, where to catch the bus, how to find schools.

I was barely around for my own children. My old man raised them because every night I was off talking to these mothers.

When I visited with the mothers, I would just hug them. I made packets for them full of information about everything that they needed to know. I told them they had to be professional about their situations. They had to have a strategy. I said, "You get a notebook, and you write down the names and numbers of everyone you talk to. When you speak to someone, you've got to know who you're talking to. Never talk to the middle-man. Go straight to the Man. Start at the top."

The Man is the decision-maker. He (or she) can be anybody who makes decisions about your life and has control over what happens to you.

Taking a Class

Edna Bynoe, who was the supervisor of the homeless unit, took me aside once and told me I was smart. She said I should get some skills through welfare's education and training program. I noticed a class on environmental science. About 25-30 of us tried to take this class, but we couldn't understand the material. The class dwindled to about five. We were studying chemistry, biology, computers, and all sorts of environmental terminology. It's not that we didn't have the mentality for this work, it's just the way they were teaching us, we couldn't understand. There was many an evening we'd be sitting up

crying with frustration, trying to understand what we were studying. Just to read one sentence, we had to check the dictionary, get definitions to all these words, and then bring it back and try to make it all make sense. They said not to worry, that we would be graded on a sliding scale.

"Well, what does that mean? That even if we're all failing, some of us will still get As?"

This didn't make any sense. It seemed like they were just shuffling us through their system, as usual — another program that some funders came up with that really wasn't much use to us. I decided to find out who the funders were so that I could figure out what this was all about. Sure enough, it's the Man again. He wants to shuffle some folks—even better if they're Black folks—through the program so he can justify his spending and justify his job and get some more money.

Working as an Organizer

Eventually, the few of us that were left graduated. Someone from Alternatives for Community and the Environment (ACE), which was new at the time, came over and told me to apply for the community organizer job.

When I went for the job interview, I didn't even know what a community organizer was,

and I had no clue what environmental justice was. All I knew was that it probably wouldn't be a good idea to smoke.

Finally, they turned to me and asked me about environmental justice. And I said, "Environmental justice means my community doesn't have to look like garbage. The only reason it does look so bad is because of the way resources are distributed." I had lived in Roslindale, where they've got shrubs and fountains—not old tires and broken glass like they do in Roxbury. It's not like word was handed down from God, "Roslindale will get shrubs and fountains, and Roxbury will get old tires and broken glass." It's a choice that gets made about who gets what.

They asked me, "If you could do anything, what would you do?"

I said, "One: I'd clean up those vacant lots that are full of old tires and broken glass; and two: I'd tell people that our kids are not criminals."

I got the job. I couldn't type. Office skills were somewhat of an obstacle. When I was doing the homeless organizing, I was creating stuff out of my mind. I didn't have a calendar. I remembered what I needed to know. I didn't do none of this filing and paperwork.

But suddenly I was in this job and I was

Look at What You Already Know *by Klare Allen*

A lot of times, it's the people who are told they don't know anything who know the most. If people realized what they do all day, they would know how much they know: a lot. Don't listen to the voices that tell you that you can't.

Try this: Break down what you do in a month. When the bill collector comes and tells you he's cutting off your electricity, I bet you get a plan together pretty quick. I bet you're thinking; coming up with a strategy. When the welfare office tells you that you don't qualify for this or that because of this reason or that reason, you don't stop there. You get yourself through the hoop. That's called getting over. We know a lot about surviving and about getting over. We just don't use the words for it that educated people do, but we've got our own Master's degree in survival.

agreeing to do so many things, and I wasn't keeping up. One night, I was leaving the office. My co-workers got up and stood between me and the door. "Where are you going?" they asked.

"Home," I said.

"Well, don't you remember you said you'd do this thing and that thing, and that you promised to have such and such finished by now?"

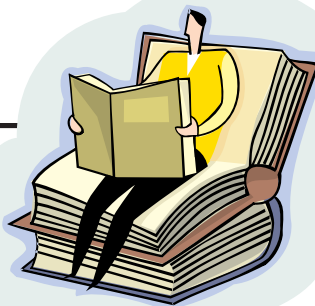
I said, "Sure, I remember. I'll get to that on Monday."

"Oh no you don't," they said. "You've got to do it now."

So I stayed at work until I was finished, and I didn't get home until really late that night, and that's how I learned to be accountable to other folks and to do what I said.

Cynthia Peters, co-editor of this issue of The Change Agent, teaches in the Worker Education Program of SEIU Local 2020. She works with Klare Allen in the fight to stop the construction of a biolevel 4 lab in the City of Boston.

Klare's Reading Tips



I think reading and writing are important skills to have, but they're not a necessity. I'm dyslexic and I really hate reading. As much as I try to avoid it, sometimes I have to do it. But if you're thirsty for it, you'll do it. I never read for pleasure. When I read, it's because I'm doing it for someone else—because I'm teaching about something going on in the neighborhood and I need some information in order to pass it on.

To people who are struggling with reading and writing, I would say that literacy is not

an obstacle. Where you lack, there is always a strength. Usually, people like me who have problems with reading are creative. I don't believe in "I can't do it." If you need to read, you can. You have to sit down and figure out what you need to do. My strengths are speaking and my love for people and for education. I don't mean reading and writing necessarily, but in learning what you need to know to be the kind of person you need to be and to have the kind of community you want to have.

When I read, I read with a highlighter in my hand. Here's what I do:

1. I read and highlight people's names in pink and facts in green.
2. Then I read it again, and now I have the colors there to help me see it more visually. I find I can remember it better and understand it better with the colors there.
3. I write down some of the information on a different piece of paper and then I try to think of how I would need the information to be presented to me so that I could understand it. I redesign it in my head to make it something I can really express to others.

Striving Women *by Nadine Lovemore*

Ever since I was a little girl I wanted to immigrate to America. I often heard stories of how money grows on trees in the United States. A few of my friends obtained temporary visas and never returned to Jamaica. However, I often wonder what it is like for women who reside in the U.S. illegally. I will discuss some of their experiences and how President Bush's immigration plan will hurt them.

First of all, women who are in the U.S. illegally often suffer physical abuse by their boyfriends or husbands, and because of their immigration status they are unable to seek legal help. I remember not too long ago there was a lady who was murdered. Her sister came forward and made an announcement that her deceased sister was an illegal immigrant. She also claimed that her sister was physically abused for years. Her sister was too scared to seek help because of fear of getting deported.

Secondly, some of the women that are undocumented and reside in the U.S. are often unemployed because of their inability to provide working permits or a Social Security card. In some cases, employers take advantage of immigrants, especially if they are undocumented. Employers will pay them less than minimum wage for their hard labor like house cleaning, factory work, and caring for the elderly. These employers know that if an illegal immigrant complains, she is more likely to suffer some repercussion and possible deportation.

Finally, when a woman lives illegally in the U.S., she lives in isolation because of fear of getting deported. Often, when a Jamaican woman has the opportunity to come to the U.S., she must leave her kids behind because it is too hard to support them before achieving financial stability. I remember when my cousin came to the U.S. on a temporary visa. She had to leave her children behind for a few years until she was able to send



for them. She often said to me, "If I had my kids with me and I got caught I wouldn't be able to escape." My cousin often expressed to me how sad it made her feel to leave her kids.

President Bush thought he could solve immigrants' problems with a new proposal entitled "Working Principles." His idea was to let immigrants come here to work for three years and then return to their native country. In my opinion, if a person works for three years she should be able to obtain permanent residency. Yet with Bush's new plan, there are no written guarantees. It is not fair that people should dedicate their time and effort to work for minimum wage and pay taxes, but not be able to partake of the American dream to become a permanent resident in the U.S. I recommend that the President support a legalization bill that would make it possible for immigrants who have been living in this country and supporting their families for many years to become legal residents. It would be a big help to women immigrants in particular who are often isolated, face domestic abuse, work at low-wage jobs, and have a hard time finding fair treatment or assistance in this country.

For more information see: www.immigrationforum.org

Nadine Lovemore is a student at Project Hope in Boston, MA.

Women with Disabilities

“Outing” Literacy and Expressing Themselves

by Heidi Silver-Pacuilla

For disabled women, literacy can be a sort of “coming out.” If educators would let go of their low expectations, bring the right assistive technologies to the classroom, stop sidestepping women’s problems, and not isolate disabled women, disabled women learners could have much to gain from literacy programs. In a participatory research project that I facilitated over the course of a year, sixteen women from a variety of backgrounds with various disabilities met to engage in dialogue, storytelling, and social action on the meanings of literacy, disability, and gender. As a result of their work, the women not only experienced personal changes, but also engaged with the issues on a public level. They developed recommendations for service improvements, wrote a brochure of advice to future women learners (see *Take Our Advice* sidebars), and they made group presentations of their findings at local and regional conferences.

One of the goals of our research was to understand the role of literacy in disabled women’s lives. Donna and Cindy, middle-aged white sisters living with their aging mother, both emphasized the empowering effect literacy learning has had on their lives. Donna, dealing with a chronic and barely-controlled seizure disorder, said of literacy, “[It’s about] coming out of my shell, being around people...Cause before I wouldn’t talk to anybody, I wouldn’t go anywhere, just stay home. Now that I’m getting out, [I’m] slowly losing that shell.”

Cindy credited her “coming out” to her engagement with literacy learning. “Before, I wouldn’t talk to people too much, and, you know, I wouldn’t tell people that I couldn’t read. So I had to take my mother and sister with me to

tell me what bus to get on. See, I was always afraid of getting lost. Now I feel comfortable with myself; I know how to get on the right bus; I can read the bus [schedule].”

Cindy is not only mastering skills, such as using the public transportation system, but she is learning about her relationship with others in society and feels less alone.

Sherry, a middle-aged white woman, shared how she had hidden her inability to read and write throughout her adult years. Speaking in the second person, she connected her experiences with others’ at the table, “You parked your life on hold and did for your kids and everybody else around you and put on what I call a false face because you never really looked at your problems head on. You just put it on the back burner.”

Once she enrolled in literacy classes and the support group, she not only admitted and confronted her challenges, she was energized to recruit other women and talk openly about her educational journey. “We’re coming out of the closet into the sunlight and now that we did that, I hope other people can join us and get out of the closet into the sunlight.”

Pam, a middle-aged white woman with learning disabilities, echoed her sentiment, saying that she felt she was “coming out of the dark and talking.” Her primary motivation for persistence in studying toward her GED was so that “I can be proud of *myself*, be happy with *myself*.”

Author Rod Michalko reminds us that what gets “outed” when someone with a disability comes out is not the impairment, which often cannot be fully hidden anyway, but our social assumptions of naturalness and normality. Com-

paring the phenomenon to that of lesbians and gays coming out, writer Simi Linton notes the “loss of community, the anxiety, and the self-doubt” embedded in the experiences of trying to overcome a disability or pass as normal. “Shame and fear are personal burdens... many disabled people live with...but if these tales are told, we can demonstrate how the personal is indeed political,” says Linton.

Participatory research gave these women a chance to reshape their identities as learners, as women, and as citizens through their practices of literacy. Through their dialogue with each other,

they saw themselves and others like them as learners, despite many years of personal and social messages to the contrary. They felt a new freedom to engage with the world—to “come out” and to stop hiding who they were. The action components of the research project—developing recommendations for service providers and other learning disabled women—gave them a chance to use their new-found voices in public.

Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, Ph.D., works at the American Institutes for Research, Washington, D.C.

Are you a Learner with a Disability? Take Our Advice . . .

Here are some strategies we recommend to help you reach your educational and work goals:

1. Join a support group; it's a place to learn about your rights and let out your frustrations.
2. Involve other family members in education; it helps make education more of a priority in the house.
3. Keep role models in mind for inspiration and encouragement.
4. Recognize and celebrate your own learning and personal growth.
5. Be patient. Building new habits, like studying seriously, takes time.
6. Recognize when you need help and ask for it.
7. Believe that learning builds self-esteem.
8. Get involved, one opportunity leads to another.

Written by women from the Speaking Up and Speaking Out Project, Pima College Adult Ed, Tucson, AZ.

Do You Teach Learners with Disabilities? Take Our Advice . . .

1. **We are a garden, waiting for your care and nurturing.** When we come to adult education, we are ready to learn and grow. Please help us feel comfortable and WANTED in your program. We need to speak to a counselor and a disability specialist, people who can encourage us and help us find available resources. There are more people with disabilities in our communities. Keep recruiting them and working to meet their needs. Reach out to the young students who might still be in denial of their educational needs and goals.
2. **We don't want sympathy, we want understanding.**
3. **Provide opportunities for us to learn about our rights and responsibilities.** We need to learn what there is to learn about our rights in this society, but we also want to meet our responsibilities. Help us continue to advocate for GED accommodations, like extra time to show what we know.
4. **We need assistive technology to be more independent.** We want to be as independent as possible. Keep trying to get more assistive technology and then provide training so we know how to use it. We need equipment in our homes and referrals to get this equipment. Things we've tried and liked so far are word processors with spell checkers, New Century software, computer readers, voice recognition, JAWS screen reader, email and TTYs.
5. **Don't rush us. Don't give up on students who are having a hard time.** One woman with LD said, "If it's going to take me a long time to reach my goal, well, let it. It's my time. Understand that I get very frustrated. When I need to ask a question or get some extra help, I can't wait."
6. **Teachers or trained tutors should lead small groups.** Small group settings address our need to work at a slower pace and get help when we need it. We need teachers and steady tutors who are trained to meet our unique needs. It is hard for us when we have to work with new tutors all the time. We also recommend the Wilson Reading Method for adults with learning disabilities.
7. **Teachers need to listen and be sensitive to our needs, but challenge us, too.** When we came to adult education, some of us knew we had a disability, others of us had never had the opportunity to talk about our learning problems before. We expect our teachers to know about meeting the needs of learners with disabilities. We aren't teachers, we need you to know how to teach us.
8. **Don't be afraid to ask about students' disabilities.** Provide an opportunity for all students to privately self-identify their disability to the teacher. Teachers need to get over any embarrassment or fear they have about disabilities because, if they don't, students can't get the help they need.
9. **Maintain/Start a support group.**

Written by women from the Speaking Up and Speaking Out Project, Pima College Adult Ed, Tucson, AZ.

Women Who Paved the Way

by Delores Jonella Martin



Susan B. Anthony

Where would we be without the strong, determined women, such as Emma Willard, who believed that women could study any academic subject we choose? Where would we be without Susan B. Anthony, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Anna Julia Cooper—just to name a few—who worked hard to secure equal rights



Mary McLeod Bethune

for women and African Americans? These strong-minded women, and many more, have paved the way for women today.

If it had not been for these women, many in our culture would still tell us that women should be seen and not heard, and should stay in the home—cooking, cleaning and producing babies. I am proud to applaud the women in history who made it possible for women of all nationalities to enhance their abilities and work toward their goals.

Delores Jonella Martin is studying to get her GED and learn building trades. She is incarcerated at the Western Wayne Correctional Facility in Michigan, where she participated in a women's group led by the AFSC.



Sojourner Truth

SOJOURNER by Barbara Bland

SOJOURNER
Here you are
Laid to rest
What I know
You were one
Of the Best

S is for the Soul she kept
O is for Others she helped
J is for the Journey she was on
O is for Optimistic character she had
U is the Ultimate strength she had
R is for Real—Real she was
N is for Never—she never gave up
E is for the Eternity her name will live on
R is for the Respect she had

T is for Traveler she was
R is for Roughness she went through
U is for Us the women she fought for to have rights
T is for Temperance she fought against alcohol abuse to protect women
H is for the Heart she had

Barbara Bland is a student at Project Hope in Boston, MA.

Women in History *Activism and Education*

Compiled by Mev Miller with assistance from issue editors

This timeline highlights a *few* events important in the history of women's rights and education since the 1800s. Use it in class during women's history month or for general lessons in social studies, history, math, EL/Civics, writing memoir, and Internet/computer projects. If teachers or students would like to add events or writings to the timeline on the WE LEARN Web site, please send suggestions and essays to Mev Miller at welearn@litwomen.org.

The interactive version of this timeline is located on the WE LEARN Web site at:
www.litwomen.org/tca/timeline.html



Historical Events	1848 Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, NY. - Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote, "all men and women are created equal." 	1851 Sojourner Truth gives "Ain't I a Woman" speech at Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.	1896 National Association of Colored Women founded to show achievements of African Americans and to help those in poverty	1903 National Women's Trade Union League is founded to improve wages and working conditions for women
	1853 Mary Douglass of Norfolk, Virginia is arrested for teaching reading and writing to black children	1861 Vassar College opens as one of the first women's colleges in the U.S.	1864 Congress makes it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native languages	1889 Jane Addams & Ellen Starr found Hull House—a place where women could bring their children for kindergarten and where women could sit, talk, and learn from each other 

Historical Events

1911

Triangle Shirt Factory Fire: This disaster killed 145 women and led to the founding of the International Ladies Garment Workers



The **First International Women's Day** calls for women's economic equality

1915

Jane Addams founds the **International Women's League for Peace and Freedom**

1916

Margaret Sanger sets up **first birth control clinic** in U.S.

1920

With the 19th amendment to the Constitution, **women gain the right to vote**

1935

Mary McLeod Bethune founds the **National Council of Negro Women** to fight discrimination, racism, and sexism

1955

Rosa Parks refuses to ride in the back of the bus



Daughters of Bilitis becomes the first lesbian organization in the U.S.

Educational Events

1917

Smith Hughes Act provides federal funds for vocational education

1951

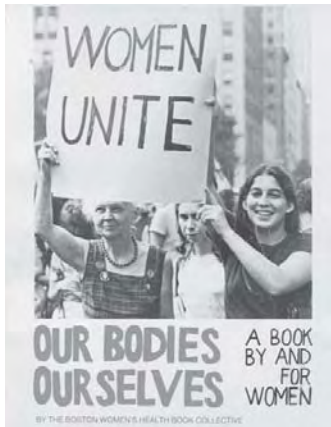
Welthy Honsinger Fisher founds **World Education**



1954

Through **Brown v. Board of Education**, the Supreme Court unanimously agrees segregated schools are "inherently unequal" and must be abolished

Women Making a Difference

Historical Events	1961 President Kennedy establishes the President's Commission on the Status of Women and appoints Eleanor Roosevelt as chairwoman.	1966 National Organization for Women (NOW) is founded in the U.S.	
	1963 Equal Pay Act promises equal wages for similar work regardless of race, sex, religion or nationality. 1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination and creates The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) 1965 Patsy Mink is the first woman of color to serve in Congress	1969 Stonewall Riots start the modern gay rights movement in the U.S. and worldwide	1972 Equal Rights Amendment seeks to add equal rights for women to the Constitution.  1973 Supreme Court decision, Roe v. Wade, legalizes abortion 1974 Coalition of Labor Union Women founded
Educational Events	1966 Adult Education Act helps adults to get their diplomas 1969 Boston Women's Health Book Collective writes <i>Our Bodies, Ourselves</i>, an important women's health book	1971 Ms. Magazine becomes a major publication for feminist voices	1972 Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all aspects of education programs that receive federal support 1974 Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) funds gender equity education and supports reentering women students 1977 National Women's Studies Association founded
			

Historical Events	1978 The Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans employment discrimination against pregnant women	1982 The first Hispanic Women's Conference is the largest gathering of Latina women in the nation	1983 The Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice created Peace Land for women	1985 Wilma Mankiller becomes the first woman chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma 	1992 National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women is founded 	1995 The UN Fourth World Conference on Women seeks equality and peace for all women in the world	1994 The Violence Against Women Act gives women a federal civil rights provision to combat gender-based violent crimes	2004 The March for Women's Lives seeks reproductive freedom and rights for women
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Educational Events	1991 National Literacy Act creates more adult literacy programs 	1991 Gender Equity in Education Act promotes math and science for girls, counsels pregnant teens, and prevents sexual harassment	1994 WE LEARN is formed to address women's literacy issues					
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Women in History

by Nadine Lovemore

Women in history
It is no mystery
It is philosophy
It is diversity

To show integrity
To fights for the rights
of humanity
To rise above poverty

It is intensified
Diversified
Solidified

They were the women of yesterday
Who paved the way for us each day
To help us to have a brighter day
And live our lives without delay.



Linda Chavez-Thompson



Eleanor Roosevelt

Nadine Lovemore is a student at Project Hope in Boston, MA.

Women in History Web Sites

Thomson/Gale Women in History Month
www.galegroup.com/free_resources/whm/index.htm

National Women's History Project
www.nwhp.org/whm/themes/themes.html

Women Who Left Their "Stamps" on History
www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0768442.html

Info Please Women's History Month Lists
www.infoplease.com/spot/womenshistory1.html

Women's History
<http://womenshistory.about.com>

National Register of Historic Places—Women's History
www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/wom

No Turning Back—Feminist Resources Site
<http://ntb.stanford.edu/resources3-5.html>

Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History
http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/women/html/wh_000106_entries.htm

Using the Web-based Version of the Timeline

by Diana Satin

Note: Preparation instructions for this lesson are included on the WE LEARN Web site at: www.litwomen.org/tca/compprep.html. These will be especially useful for teachers new to using computer-assisted lessons.

Preteaching:

Introduce the concept of a timeline: Put a line on the board, and ask students for important events in their lives, including the dates. Add them to the timeline, showing how the dates go in order along the line from left to right. Tell students that you'll now discuss important events for women in history. Write 'Important Events for Women in History' and ask what students know about this. Give some examples, such as voting rights, equal pay, access to education, etc. Add students' answers to the timeline on the board. Discuss these questions: How did they define an important event for women? Were students able to think of many examples?

The Activity:

- 1 Tell students they will now look at a timeline on the Internet, and read about women's historical events, which may include some the class discussed. Have students sit at the computers – sitting in pairs or groups of three encourages mutual assistance with technology and language skills, and discussion. Have students look over the whole timeline. Ask if they recognize any of the events and what they know about them. Then ask: What do you think needed to happen for the event to take place (changes in attitude, legal changes, etc.)? Which ones are most important to you, and why?
- 2 Choose a link for one event to show students how to use two or three reading strategies: prereading (previewing the title, looking at images and captions, asking questions about the topic you want answered in the reading), during-reading (taking notes, summarizing each paragraph or section, reading for the answers to questions), and post-reading (writing a summary or explaining it to someone else).
- 3 When they are ready, ask each pair or small group to choose one event to investigate. Tell students they will read a Web site to learn about the event, and then they will report back to the group to explain the event or discuss the answers to the questions they had.

Investigation / discussion questions:

- What was the event?
- Why did you choose this event to investigate?
- When did it happen?
- What was the historical context for the event?
- Why did it happen?
- Were there important changes in society after it happened?
- What is happening now in relation to that event?

Diana Satin has worked with adult immigrants for over ten years as a classroom teacher, staff development coordinator, curriculum developer, and published author.

Against All Odds *The Story of an Afghan Heroine*

by Melody Ermachild Chavis

Meena was a 20-year-old Kabul University student when she founded the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Ten years later, in 1987, she was assassinated. During those ten years, Meena inspired thousands of women (despite risk of imprisonment, torture, and death) to participate in clandestine schools, share literacy skills, and organize for change. The following excerpt of Meena, Heroine of Afghanistan (2003) begins with the story of how RAWA was started.

No one knows how [Meena] summoned up the courage to take these first steps. It is certain that she drew upon all that she had ever learned about freedom. Her husband encouraged her. Most of all, she relied on her closest women friends. Their organization was born among a very small circle of women who somehow believed, through the strength of Meena's conviction, that together, against all odds, they could do something.

At their first meetings, they decided on a name for their group. They knew they wanted it to include the word *zan*—women. Meena was adamant, and the others agreed, that they would open the group to women only.

"Who but women will work for women, and only women?" Meena asked . . .

The age-old women's culture of Afghanistan that oppressed them also sustained them.

"Afghan women are an oppressed group within an oppressed group," she said. "We have different goals than men, and much more ground to gain."

"All the men do is talk, talk, talk, and argue politics!" another woman complained. "I want to be in a group that actually helps people."

"Women," Meena told them, "are an untapped source of great strength. Look at what we accomplish every day, feeding our families, caring for children. If we can come together to

act in unison, we can make changes no one has dreamed of."

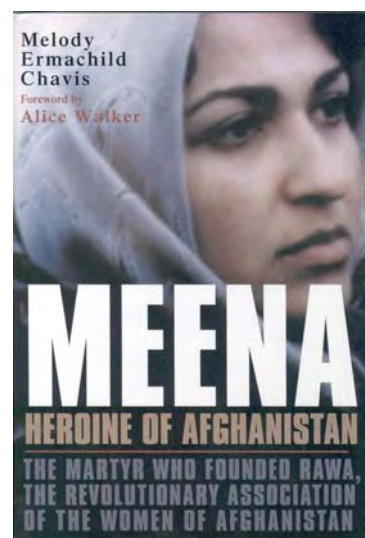
[So *zan* would be included in their name. Ultimately, the women decided on the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan—or RAWA.]

Next, the women discussed their founding principles. What did they believe in that they could agree on?

First of all, they agreed to work for democracy, by which they meant the restoration of elections in Afghanistan, and the right to vote for women and men . . .

Second they agreed their mission would be to struggle for equality and social justice for women. By that they meant the basic rights of women to education, legal rights, health care, and freedom from poverty and violence. . . .

They pooled their resources to help meet each other's needs. They shared food and gave each other outgrown clothes for their children. They learned how to help each other survive. They also talked about their personal affairs. If a woman was mistreated at home, the group



would talk about how she could avoid that in the future.

Nothing a woman needed to talk about was taboo. This was another way RAWA became stronger than the male political groups. The women forged intimate emotional bonds.

As educated women, [Meena and her friends] knew one way to reach out to their less fortunate sisters: They could teach them to read. Only eight percent of girls in the nation were enrolled in primary school. The constitution granted girls the right to education, but that meant nothing in places where there were no schools, no teachers, and girls were not allowed out of their homes. Meena suggested that they go to rural villages near Kabul where members of the group had relatives or friends and start free weekly literacy classes.

[But] their students faced huge obstacles to freedom. Fathers forbade them to study, and husbands punished them for reading. RAWA's literacy teachers soon learned what a long road lay ahead of them

As educated women, [Meena and her friends] knew one way to reach out to their less fortunate sisters: They could teach them to read.

on their journey to bring knowledge to the mass of Afghan women. . . .

[However], the age-old women's culture of Afghanistan that oppressed them also sustained them. Though the separation of the sexes stifled women who wanted to move into work and

learning, it also meant that women traditionally spent long hours together. A group of men meeting together might look suspicious, but women gathering to talk was as normal as *naan* [bread]. RAWA turned every common women's custom

into a tool of liberation. Every woman walked out at dawn or dusk to the *hamom*, the communal baths, carrying a change of clean clothes with her. The bath bundles of a few women concealed books and leaflets.

The *burqa*, which they as modern women had rejected, they adopted for its many uses in their clandestine work. Under their *burqas*, they were not only anonymous, but they appeared to be their own opposites: They looked like the most conservative

and obedient of women, not like the rebels they were. The *burqa* also covered whatever contraband they needed to carry. And when they could not hold back their tears, they picked up the hated but ample cloth of the *burqa* and used it to wipe their eyes.



Melody Ermachild Chavis is an author and peace and justice activist living in the San Francisco Bay area. She can be reached at melodychavis@comcast.net. The paperback edition of *Meena, Heroine of Afghanistan* is now available. Please see www.litwomen.org/WIP/stores.html for a store near you.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who did Meena rely on for strength? Who do you rely on for strength?
2. What did Meena mean when she said, "Women are an untapped source of great strength?"
3. How did the "age-old women's culture of Afghanistan" both oppress and sustain the women of RAWA?

My Life Story *by Emma Steele Brown*

I was born in Selma, Alabama in the late 40s. My parents are Ruth Bettie Steele and Columbus Steele, Jr. I'm the oldest of eight children. I lived in Alabama all of my childhood. As a kid growing up in the Deep South, I thought life was great. But I look back over my life now, and I know that we lived in hell right here on earth.

Being the oldest of eight siblings, I took on the role of being a mother at a very early age: cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the house. Both my parents worked in the cotton fields. A bench was made for me to stand on so I could reach the top of the stove to start a fire and cook the food before my parents got home from the cotton fields.

They did not make much money, but we always had food; if it was only beans and corn bread, we ate.

My parents worked the farmland. We grew everything we ate. The men on the farm fished on the Alabama River and we had fish. We had no electricity or gas, so we used kerosene lamps for light and wood for heat. Because we had no car, when my parents had to go into the town, they would use the horse and buggy to take them to the bridge that crosses over the Alabama River. There they would have to park it and walk across the bridge to get to town and buy whatever they needed and walk back to the horse and buggy.

My parents left the farm and moved to what we called the city when I was about six years old. We moved into a house that had electricity, but we still had to heat with wood or coal and cook with wood only. We never owned a clock because we lived in a house where you didn't need one to wake you. When the sun came up, it would shine on the house and the light would come right through the cracks. This was our alarm clock. One time, we got a lot of magazines and made some paste out of flour and wallpapered the inside of the house. We thought we were on top of the world, for it kept out the sunlight early in the morning. I remember four or five of my siblings sleeping in the same bed together. My mother used to take clothes "that we worn," put them on top of the bed, cover them with a sheet, and tuck it



under the mattress to keep us warm on cold nights. And we didn't have the mattress that you buy out of the store; ours was homemade.

Going to school was hard because we did not have what the other kids had. We would always sit alone when we ate lunch because we didn't want other kids to see what we had. We had the brown bag lunch, which would have grease all over it from the biscuit inside. We never had new books, always the old ones from the white school. In High School I remember feeling so ashamed of having to wear the same clothes two or three times a week, which you had to wash out by hand at night and dry by the fire. I would not go out for recess because I was afraid that the piece of cardboard paper that I had in the bottom of my shoe to cover the hole would fall out.

I can remember going to town and wanting something to eat. I had to go to a window labeled "colored" and wait to be served. There were benches, but I could not sit on them. They were for whites only, so I sat on the ground. If I needed to use the bathroom or wanted a drink of water, most of the time I was out of luck. When I think about this, it makes me sick: we had to say "yes sir" and "yes ma'am" to white kids our own age and we could not look them in the eyes. If they hit us, we could not hit them back. They could come to our house, go inside and eat our food, but we could not go inside their houses or eat their food unless they had leftovers and didn't want them. When we shopped for clothes, we could not try things on because we were considered nasty, diseased people. If we bought it and it was too small or large, or if it had any type of defect, we owned it.

We had to say "yes sir" and "yes ma'am" to white kids our own age and we could not look them in the eyes.

The message that day changed my life. I'm just as good as or better than anyone is, and I have rights too.

My God, what a turn around my life took in the early 60s when The Civil Rights Movement came to Selma. Everyone was talking about what was going on, how kids were skipping school to go down to Brown Chapel Church (BCC), and they were marching and boycotting the stores. One day, my mother watched us walk to the bus stop and get on the bus. She warned us not to skip school. But when the bus got to Water Street, it stopped and every one on the bus got off. We walked down to the BCC where they were having a meeting. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was there. I made my way down to the front of the church and sat on the floor where I could see and hear everything. The message that day changed my life. I'm just as good as or better than anyone is, and I have rights too. It gave me back my courage that I already had but had never used.

I was engaged at the age of 15, married at 16, dropped out of high school and then went to night adult school. I had my first child before I turned 17. Living in the South at that time I thought that I had it all together because I had finished night school, which was big thing for

me. I could read and write and do basic math. I came up North in the late 60s, got a job and went to work. At the age of 21 I had another child. I would read to my children and they looked up to me. This made me proud. However, I did not realize at that time that I needed to further my education in order to have a successful future.

In my life, I have found that as a black woman, I have had a harder struggle than most.

In my life, I have found that as a black woman, I have had a harder struggle than most.

In corporate America there have been many positions that I have been qualified for, but because I lacked a college education I was not able to advance. I have seen many other women “passed over” for a job because they didn’t have the education, although they already had the experience. I have also witnessed men receiving higher pay for doing the same jobs as women do. In order for a woman to rise up the corporate ladder, she must have twice the education and experience as a man. And if she happens to achieve that, she will still have to struggle to gain respect. The United States has yet to come out of the dark ages, for there are some who still believe a woman’s place is in the

home, barefoot, and pregnant.

I do not use “racism” as an excuse to conform to stereotypes in my life. But I have been discriminated against on many levels because I am a black woman. My experiences have taught me a lot. The most important lesson I’ve learned is that I need higher education in order to succeed in life. So, I’m back in school now, pursuing a degree in Business Management. I work at a company in Framingham, MA, where I have been for twenty-seven years, slowly making my way up from the assembly line to a position in the purchasing department. When I complete my degree, I hope to fulfill my dream of owning my own business.

I know I still have many obstacles to overcome, but with my life experiences, education, and God on my side, I will make it. Whenever I get tired of the struggle and the world tries to make me doubt myself by putting me down, I think back to Selma and to the message of Dr. Martin Luther King. I have a right to my dreams. And I intend to succeed.

Emma Steele Brown attends Cambridge College in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Take it further . . .

For more perspective on Emma’s life, see the timeline on pp. 26-29.

1. Name some of the laws that passed during her life that might have affected her.
2. What else happened during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s that might have affected her life?

My Literacy Story

by Ting Zhang

I have been interested in reading since I was a child growing up in China. I am hungry to read many books and curious about everything I read. One day my mom pointed to the bookcases in our living room and said to me, "These are all classic books that include *War and Peace*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*. When you go to middle school you will have to read them. These will be very helpful to you." I still remember her words now.

After I read, I always ask myself, "Why are they writing so well that they can touch my heart deeply? How can I write as they do?" As I found some sentences and paragraphs that I admired, I would mark them down. As time went by, I learned to write my journal. My father, a teacher of Chinese literature in a college, found me interested in writing. He said, "Every day you should write down something—even just a few words." I followed his suggestion and day after day, I progressed. Then he taught me how to be a good observer of everything that happened around

I looked at my journals in the flame and bitter tears were running down my cheeks . . .

me. My writing was vivid and my thinking ran so quickly that I wouldn't stop. I enjoyed writing and every semester I received awards in student writing contests. While I was

growing up, my dream was to be a journalist. However, while my writing was improving, unfortunate things occurred in my country—the Cultural Revolution was rising up. It was a very serious and frenzied period of time. Under these circumstances, I had an extremely difficult realization: I must burn all my journals by myself before the Red Guard trespassed in my home. I looked at my journals in the flame and bitter

tears were running down my cheeks. At that moment, I felt my dream would be broken and I couldn't clearly say a word! I nearly lost my balance. A few hours later, the Red Guard intruded into my home and burned all the other valuable books. I was shocked and stunned.

From that day, I stopped writing and reading for six years because I was among the hundreds of thousands exiled to the countryside for "reeducation." To the Red Guard, I was "guilty" because I was the daughter of a teacher and a doctor. I was sent to a remote village with no electricity, no traffic, no clean water, no newspaper, and no machines—not even a clock or a watch. I had no chance to read and write any more. I had no news of my family. I didn't know what happened outside the village.

Many years later, when I wanted to go to college, I remembered my lovely dream and started to write down all my ideas, plans, New Year resolutions, and feelings in my new journal. The journal was the only eyewitness of me, and a mirror to reflect myself in bygone years.

Two years ago, I came to America and lots of changes have taken place. I was frustrated like a blind and deaf person because I didn't read and write even simple words in English. Life was hard for me.

I was so lucky to find a wonderful English class in Boston at the Asian-American Civic Association. Here, the teachers were good in many ways and stimulated my study activity.

Now, even though my English is really very poor, I feel more comfortable and significant in my life because I can use my second language to read and write and communicate with others. I will have opportunities to serve other people with all I have learned.

The journal was the only eyewitness of me, and a mirror to reflect myself . . .

Ting Zhang is a student at the Asian-American Civic Association in Boston.

A Slave to No One

by Cassandra Grant

I am a woman. I am an African/Native American. My mother conceived me, carried me, and gave birth to me, and here I am. I am an individual with my own ideals, and my own conceptions of what the 21st century woman should be doing and not doing. For one thing, I am no slave for anyone. Not even the prison system can enslave my mind. I am a woman that is neither feminine nor masculine. I don't dominate nor am I dominated. I live in a white-male-centered world—which thinks up things that are supposed to be for a woman and things that are supposed to be for a man. I am aggressive, but I'm also caring and compassionate.

Being a feminist means knowing there is no limit to where females can go and what we can do. Women's self image and self-esteem have been affected by discrimination and inequality for years. The threat of being labeled unfeminine has long confined women to socially approved roles. We want the freedom to have jobs and to play different roles in society. Stereotypes and the negative valuation of women in the United States happen in day-to-day interactions.

Feminists make change by making our immediate communities more humane and more cooperative places to live and work. We advocate societies that are not characterized by relations of domination and subordination. As a feminist, I believe in the ideas of shared household work and economic responsibilities, financial independence, choices about

I believe in the ideas of shared household work and economic responsibilities, financial independence, choices about when and if you are going to have children, sexual freedom, and the right to enter into free and loving relationships with whomever you choose.

Womanism (black feminism) describes African-American women's struggle for self-determination and community, past and present. This term was created by Alice Walker, who said "womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender." It derives from the African American term "womanish," which means acting like a woman.

when and if you are going to have children, sexual freedom, and the right to enter into free and loving relationships with whomever you choose. Sexual liberation is 100% feminism. The freedom to love cannot be achieved until it is accompanied by freedom from fear. Some women have discovered the possibilities of lesbian love.

Feminism means women caring for each other. Women's sympathy for one another is a new source of strength. Women form close bonds with one another, whether they are professional, social, or domestic. These connections can mean independence and freedom. Feminism is for all women of whatever race, class, or religion. Despite the differences that separate women, feminism is a global phenomenon. It all comes together.

Cassandra Grant is incarcerated at Western Wayne Correctional Facility in Plymouth, Michigan. She loves writing, reading, playing tennis, coaching Little League baseball, and traveling. She will be released in January 2005.

Discussion Questions for *A Slave to No One*

1. What does Cassandra Grant think feminism means? List her ideas.

2. In the second paragraph, the author writes, “Women’s self image and self-esteem have been affected by discrimination and inequality for years. The threat of being labeled unfeminine has long confined women to socially approved roles.” Do you agree? Why?

3. To describe who she is (and who she isn’t), Cassandra Grant uses certain words and their opposites. For example, she says she is neither masculine or feminine. What other sets of opposites does she use? Have you ever needed opposites to describe yourself? Try filling in the blanks below.

I am neither _____ nor _____.

I am both _____ and _____.

4. What does feminism mean to you?

Loves Herself Regardless

by Silja Kallenbach

I'm growing in love.

I love and accept myself as I am.

If I don't take care of myself I can't take care of others.

These affirmations help emotionally motivate and sustain women who are studying in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program at Project Hope in Boston. Walking into their classroom I can tell right away this is no ordinary ABE class. At the center of the table around which the class is held is an elaborate centerpiece of candles, rocks, and flowers. Plants hang in windows, and on several side tables there are candles, more rocks, framed pictures, and inspirational quotes. The walls have been painted a cheerful peach color. It's a welcoming space. (See accompanying article, "Creating Sacred Space.")

The women who make up this class have made the often difficult decision to go back to school to get the GED. Some of them had positive experiences in school before dropping out. Lula Mae Johnson, for example, enjoyed learning

but left school some 40 years ago to raise her five children. Now, at the age of 65 she is pursuing the dream of her youth of becoming a lawyer. Other women, like Nadine Lovemore, had negative experiences in school: "I was always afraid because

when I was in high school the teachers never paid any attention if you weren't bright."

Regardless of how they felt about school in the past, all five women, who were interviewed for this article, started their studies at Project

Hope feeling worthless and lacking in self-confidence, at least when it comes to academic learning. "I used to feel ashamed of myself and stupid," says Stephanie Grell, who had to leave school at the age of 12 to take care of her siblings and "run the house." Lula Mae was taught always to put herself last. "I'd always find myself a corner to sit in because I was very embarrassed. I had very low self esteem," explains Lula. She and the other women were fortunate to find their way to Project Hope's ABE program where all students are automatically enrolled in a Loves Herself Regardless class, in addition to reading/writing, math, social studies, and health classes.

Loves Herself Regardless meets every Monday morning to help students get in a frame of mind that enables them to focus on their studies and to think positively. The purpose of this uncommon class is to help the learners, all of whom are women, to develop healthy self-esteem, to learn better ways of self-care, and to develop leadership skills. "Women of color or women who are marginalized have to go through a lot to get to the program. The Loves Herself class is an underpinning to help women continue to grow and transform while they are getting their education," explains Char Caver, the instructor extraordinaire of the class. It is Char who has turned the classroom into a kind of sanctuary. This is one of her many ways of communicating to the women that she cares about them, that they are deserving and beautiful. It has worked. Nadine exclaims, "It's so beautiful, it makes you feel you're somebody." The others nod their heads.

The Loves Herself Regardless class was

A typical class may start with a "brain dump" where each student symbolically dumps whatever is bothering or worrying her in order to open herself to learning.

originally developed by the Women's Theological Center in 1998, and it has evolved under Char's leadership over the past five years. A typical class may start with a "brain dump" where each student symbolically dumps whatever is bothering or worrying her in order to open herself to learning. Every class includes reflective journal writing, often in response to a prompt. "Free writing feels really good. It's relaxing. There's no right or wrong. I love writing now," says Shirley Fernandez. Later in the class they might make collages on themes like relationships, anger, or body image. Or, they might help each other identify self-defeating thoughts and behaviors, and how to replace them with positive ones. The class also helps students clarify their academic and life goals. Nadine comments, "It's a good class to break the ice. Students come with multiple problems. We learn to recognize each other as individuals, to give each other support and room for growth. This class has opened my mind to learning."

Sometimes students receive special gifts that become woven into the class goals. Rather than just handing out beautiful, new chenille blankets that someone had donated, Char had the women write about how they would use them for comfort and self-care. Char also runs the Loves Herself "store" where students can exchange weekly attendance awards for items related to self-care and growth. The enthusiasm that the five women express for the Loves Herself class stems from the positive effect the class has had on them. Sheena, who is new to the class, says it helps her focus throughout the day. Shirley says it helps her take care of herself, and to make time for school, in the midst of caring for her three children. Lula says she now allows herself to make her own education the number one priority. Nadine can't say enough about the class and its impact on her life: "When I started here I was on a path to self-destruction. When somebody said something (negative) to me I was ready to go off the deep end. Now I know better. I've learned not to take things so personally. I've

learned how to communicate. I know how to listen to people. I've learned how to just be with myself, how to evaluate myself and my strengths. I feel people always judge me, but I've learned that I can tell that person, 'You make me feel uncomfortable,' without getting into a fight about it. That's what I'm teaching my son to do.

"I've gotten a second chance to be the person I was supposed to be. I get to realize that deep down inside there is a good person. I used to say negative things about myself. I even thought about suicide at one point. I'm still in transition. I'm 33 years old, and I've never been so proud of myself in my life than I am now.

You have to develop strength. I've developed that strength. I know now that if I apply that strength to my life I'll be doing good."

A team of students from a doctoral counseling program at Boston College noted in 2002 that, "After observing the [Loves Herself Regardless] class for several months, there were pronounced changes in the women's classroom behaviors and interactions. Many of the women who started off the school year quiet, shy, and self-doubting were now taking on leadership roles and confidently participating in activities."

There is no formula or even curriculum to the Loves Herself Regardless class. It begins with love, the ability to express empathy, gain trust and to relate to the women, according to Char. It's based on relating to the whole person, respect and caring. Char's philosophy is that "the world will be changed one person at a time, by working on ourselves."

Silja Kallenbach is the director of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.

I've gotten a second chance to be the person I was supposed to be.

Creating Sacred Space

Supports for Low-Income Women in Adult Literacy Programs

by Roanna Yangco

At Project Hope, we believe that a clean, comfortable, and friendly atmosphere can foster learning. We want our students to feel the same qualities that the space represents: beauty, worthiness, abundance, and self-care. This promotes self-worth and self-esteem—a core goal of our program. If our students feel self-worth because we have provided an enriched learning environment and special classes that boost self-esteem, then it will carry over to the other areas like reading, writing, and math.

Is it such a radical idea that schools put effort and money into making learners feel welcome and comfortable? While the money could be spent on more books, learning tools, or new technology, if a learner does not feel comfortable and safe, then more supplies will not be much help. Giving her a dictionary or another writing textbook will not necessarily make essay writing any easier if the source of her inability to express herself lies elsewhere.

At the Adult Learners Program (ALP), we wish to create a “sacred space” for learning because we believe that *each woman in our program is sacred and has every right to take up space*. Our understanding of the word “sacred” is analogous to Webster’s definition, “worthy of respect.”

The agency, in which our Adult Learners Program resides, is in an old building that was formerly a convent. Our main classroom was the chapel for the sisters who once lived here. It is a beautiful room, but the walls, shelves, and altar-piece had collected dust and dirt over the years. The carpet and curtains were dark and dirty. The walls were a light mustard color. Electrical sockets were few and far between in the classroom,

so extension chords were stretched from wall to wall. The chairs were unstable and the seats of many had rips. We had tried our best to make the atmosphere comfortable given our budget, but there was still much more to do.

The Transformation Begins

In the spring of 2000, we began transforming our classroom. Prior to working on the physical space, we asked the students to imagine what their ideal classroom would look like. Through a guided “visioning exercise,” the women dreamed of water fountains, plants, comfortable chairs, coat racks, and new paint for the walls of our learning environment. When summer arrived,

a few teachers and students gathered to make the visioning dream come true.

We painted the walls, polished the wood, cleaned the carpet, and removed the curtains so that light could freely flow into the

room. Our former director brought us a stained glass picture she had made, so we placed that in the center of a large window in the main classroom. We added new halogen lights to counteract the harsh fluorescent overhead lights. We brought in new plants. During the school year, some women even took turns bringing in flowers to celebrate their sacred space. We took out the old bookcases and cabinets that cluttered the room and sorted through the years of accumulated books and papers. We only kept the essen-

Is it such a radical idea that schools put effort and money into making learners feel welcome and comfortable?

tial materials, which allowed for a more spacious and open learning environment. The *Art Connection* donated pictures so we had a gallery in our classroom.

We know that the transformation of our sacred learning environment is ongoing. We are continually adding new elements and taking away those that no longer meet our needs.

Although we have limited resources, we always keep the learning space in the forefront of our minds as a place that needs constant care and attention, just like our learners.

Roanna Yangco teaches at Project HOPE, which, in 2000, received a three-year grant to study the impact of violence on women in adult education programs.

Improve Your Classroom Space

ABE teacher and researcher Jenny Horsman believes that a good learning environment will cater to each of the senses, bringing “the whole person to learning”—mind, body, spirit, and emotions. For the eyes, light and color have been proven to have a powerful effect on our inner feelings. **Softer lighting** generally creates a feeling of safety and warmth, whereas intense fluorescent lighting can make a person feel exposed and uncomfortable. The bright rainbow of flames from a **candle** is beautiful and attractive. For some, fire also represents hope, strength, and healing.

Another way to add **color** in the classroom is to bring in plants and flowers. Not only are plants visually stimulating, but they are also helpful in creating an environment full of life and growth.

Aromatherapy, which affects the sense of smell, uses natural oils to stimulate physical and emotional well-being. Pleasing scents soothe the body so the brain can concentrate on learning.

Music can also become an integral part of the classroom. According to writer Marie Herbert, First Nations cultures believe that “sound vibration connects the mind, body, and spirit, and makes the physical body whole.” For some classes where students work individually, meditation music can play softly under the steady rippling of the water from a fountain. Also, music often supplies a meaningful backdrop during freewriting.

Last, but certainly not least, make **coffee or tea** and some basic **snacks** available during class. It is common knowledge that it is difficult to be fully attentive to a task on an empty stomach.

1. Slowly scan your classroom/ learning environment. How does the physical space appeal to each of the senses?
2. Does your classroom space allow learners to explore and reach their full potential?
3. How might you make your learning environment more “sacred”?

Intergenerational Women Students

Helping Each Other Inside and Outside the Classroom

by Melanie Ellsworth

As an ESL teacher with a class of women of all ages, I have found that both older and younger students have much to offer each other and frequently develop friendships and mentoring relationships inside and outside the classroom.

The relationship between older and younger women in the classroom is usually beneficial to both. Although one of my older students who is in her mid-fifties (I'll

call her Hong) has said that she sometimes feels shy to speak out in class because the younger students speak more quickly and confidently, she also explains that she feels qualified to speak about certain topics that younger students may not be able to discuss. As she put it, "I have experience, but young girl has no feeling to think about." Hong can teach her class-

mates much about "life experience, raising a family, and work." In a recent class, Hong felt confident to join in a discussion in which the teacher asked the students to talk about how parents influence children's future life decisions. Hong also speaks up in class when topics come up regarding work. She explains, "I know how to make conversation with co-worker. [It's] easy to meet co-

worker." With her many years of work experience, she is able to teach her classmates how to make small talk with co-workers and how to establish good relationships at work. "Sharon," Hong's 30-year-old classmate, agrees that she has learned a lot from older classmates about subjects "like taxes, government duties, voting." Hong also feels that as an older student, she is a role

model of how to work

hard. She often tells her classmates, "Never give up. Never give up!" Younger students find her dedication to learning English very motivational.

Hong and other older students also help their younger classmates outside the classroom. Hong and Sharon often shop

for vegetables together, and Hong offers suggestions about

best cooking methods to Sharon, who admits to needing a mentor in this area! Sharon says that Hong has taught her a lot of English vocabulary for different types of vegetables. Sometimes Hong and younger classmates go to Dunkin' Donuts where they "teach each other real life vocabulary words," says Sharon. Hong also goes to the library with younger classmates, and they en-



Image courtesy of *Picturing Change*, ProLiteracy Worldwide, NY.

courage each other to speak to the staff to find books that suit their reading levels. Sharon says these outings with Hong help her “improve life knowledge.”

Just as older students help younger students inside and outside the classroom, younger students can provide necessary support to older students. Sometimes in the classroom, I watch as younger students help explain the meaning of a new idiom to their older classmates. Some of my older students complain of forgetting vocabulary more quickly than their younger classmates, so their younger classmates can provide assistance with reviewing new vocabulary. Younger students also provide a model of speaking out and participating in class. In the Chinese school system in which most of my students were taught, class discussion was not encouraged. Several students have told me that classroom methods are becoming more participatory in Chinese classrooms these days, so perhaps the shock of entering a more learner-centered environment is not as difficult for some of the twenty-year-olds in my classes as it is for the older students. I have also noticed that my younger students tend to know more about American pop culture and are more enthusiastic about discussing topics such as dating differences between their native culture and American culture, so younger students can also teach their older classmates about these topics.

There is occasionally tension between older and younger students in our classroom. My younger student, Sharon, said she does not discuss political topics such as relations between China and Hong Kong because she feels her older friend Hong might have a very different outlook as part of a different generation. I have also discovered that the younger students do not know much about China’s Cultural Revolution, and often the older and younger students avoid discussing this topic because of the huge gap in their experiences and the very emotional nature of the topic. Hong also says that occasionally younger students in class will do something that

she doesn’t approve of, but she says “no problem” because “they are young.” Both Sharon and Hong emphasized that despite certain silences and disagreements between students of different generations, there is generally harmony in the class. Both of these students in separate interviews used the words “cooperation” and “respect” in referring to relationships between older and younger students in their classroom.

Talking with my students about the issue of age in the classroom has made me more aware of the importance of providing many different kinds of topics in the classroom. One of my younger students suggested that older students, as well as other ESL students who have spent more time in the U.S., may feel more qualified and interested in talking about subjects like taxes and civic responsibility. Other students may wish to talk about family relationships and school or dating. Eliciting from students a variety of topics seems to be a key to getting students of all ages to participate in class. This gives different students a chance to be authorities on a subject. As one of my students said so well, older and younger students can help fill in the gaps in each other’s knowledge and “give confidence to each other.”

Melanie Ellsworth teaches ABE at the Asian-American Civic Association in Boston.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think it’s beneficial for a classroom to have a variety of ages?
- Can you think of any conflicts or tension that might arise between students of different ages in a classroom?
- What can the teacher do to help the younger and older students interact with each other and participate together in class?

Women's Health in the Classroom

by Sabrina Kurtz-Rossi

Cancer touches everyone. One in four deaths in the U.S. is from cancer, and while lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in both men and women, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. You probably know someone with breast cancer, perhaps a mother, sister, friend or co-worker, or perhaps you have faced breast cancer yourself. These days it seems everyone has a cancer story.

The sooner most cancer is found the easier it is to treat. That is why mammograms (which look for lumps in the breast) and Pap tests (which look for abnormal cells on the cervix) are so important. But many women do not have access to screening and treatment. Women with low-income and women with limited education are less likely to have mammograms or Pap tests. Many new immigrants cannot access screening and treatment because of language and cultural barriers.

The *Health Education and Adult Literacy (HEAL): Breast and Cervical Cancer (BCC) Curriculum* combines literacy and health education to bring critical information about breast and cervical cancer screening and early detection to women in adult basic education (ABE) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. The following lesson, from the HEAL: BCC Curriculum, can be used to encourage discussion about early detection and screening as well as a wide variety of other women's health issues.

Sabrina Kurtz-Rossi directed World Education's Health Education and Adult Literacy: Breast and Cervical Cancer Project (HEAL:BCC). She is currently director of the LINCS Health & Literacy Special Collection www.worlded.org/us/health/lincs.

Using Stella's Story

Steps

- 1 Display the "Stella's Story" illustrations. Invite learners to tell the story that they see in the visuals.
- 2 To guide your class discussion, ask the following questions:
 - Why does Stella go to her health care provider?
 - What happens during the visit?
 - Do you think it is going to be easy for Stella to take care of herself? Why or why not?
 - What are the obstacles she may face? What or who might give her support?
 - Have you ever felt like Stella? If so, what did you do?
 - What can you do to make it easier to change your life in order to prevent or detect health problems? Who or what can support you in this?

Additional Resources

- *How to Feel Good: Learning to Relax and Exercise, An Invitation*, by the students of the Jamaica Plain Community Center Adult Learning Program in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection of writings by ESOL students describes the different activities they choose to stay healthy, especially as they confront the stresses of immigration. Available at: www.alri.org/feelgood/feelgood.html
- *The Health & Literacy Special Collection Web site* www.worlded.org/us/health/lincs is for teachers, students, health educators, and health care consumers. The site can direct you to free and low-cost materials, or you can download them directly.



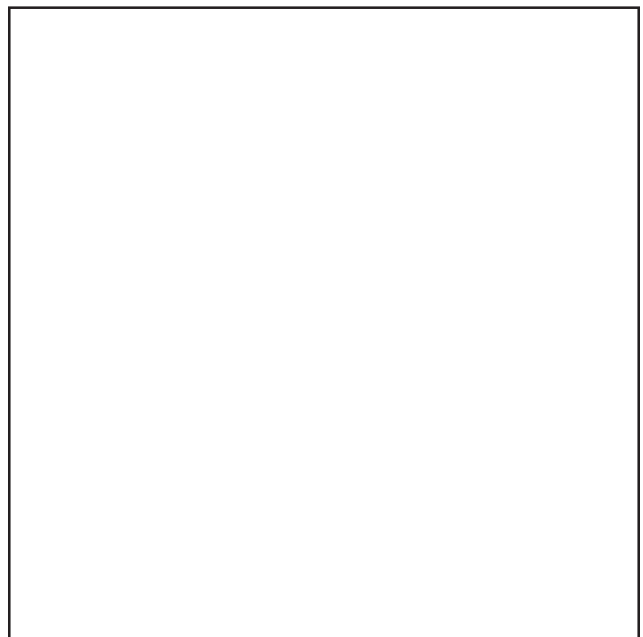
1



2



3



4 Draw what Stella should do next.

Stella's Story

Stella is generally a healthy person. She eats nutritious food and gets exercise by walking to work every day. She does not drink or smoke.

Stella has a very busy schedule. Every weekday, she wakes up at 5:30 a.m. and gets her children ready for school. Then she walks to the hospital where she works from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. In the afternoon Stella helps her children with homework, does the laundry, and cooks dinner. After that, she goes to school from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Most nights she has homework or housework and does not get to bed until midnight. On the weekends, Stella works overtime, if possible, and does the shopping.

This afternoon Stella is seeing her health care provider, Dr. Monteiro. She made the appointment because she is feeling ill. At the beginning of the appointment, Dr. Monteiro asks Stella how she has been feeling. "OK, but tired all the time," Stella answers. "Sometimes I am worried that I have some illness or disease." Dr. Monteiro asks if being tired is her only symptom or if something else is wrong. Then Dr. Monteiro checks Stella's blood pressure and asks if he can do a blood test. He explains that a blood test can detect chronic illnesses such as hepatitis and diabetes. Next, he asks Stella about her diet and if she is sleeping well. He also does a clinical breast exam (CBE). Dr. Monteiro asks if Stella has been remembering to do a monthly breast self-exam (BSE) and they talk about how CBE and BSE help detect breast lumps.

"Stella," Dr. Monteiro says, "Your blood pressure is too high. I know you don't smoke or drink alcohol. Your high blood pressure may be a symptom of stress. I know you have a very busy schedule. Do you ever do anything that helps you relax?" Stella says that sometimes she takes her children to the park in the afternoon, but lately she has no energy. She also says that she worries about her parents and wants to spend more time with them.

Dr. Monteiro tells Stella about how stress can affect a person's health. He recommends that Stella try to relax more and get more sleep. The doctor explains that high blood pressure can lead to a heart attack. Dr. Monteiro and Stella talk about ways Stella can take care of herself. The doctor asks Stella to come back to have her blood pressure checked in two weeks. He also reminds Stella to make an appointment for her annual checkup.

When Stella gets home, she calls a friend to tell her what happened. "What can I do?" she says. "I don't have time to change my life." Her friend says, "Let's meet and think about ways we can help each other. I am feeling stressed out, too."

Reprinted with permission from World Education's *Health Education and Adult Literacy: Breast and Cervical Cancer Project (HEAL: BCC) Curriculum*, Unit 1, Lesson 3.

My Father's Child

by Elizabeth Robles

I remember going with my mother looking for my father at the bar as the sun went down. I was only seven years old at the time. Carefully, I watched my mother peeking through the door of the bar. As soon as she saw he was there, she held my hand tightly, leaving the place without letting my father know she was present. I knew then that something was wrong. Once at home, she got all of us in bed. Silence hung over us like

Silence hung over us like darkness before a storm. A few hours later, my father came home drunk.

darkness before a storm. A few hours later, my father came home drunk. Today, I cannot remember what happened after he arrived. My memory of that moment is gone like a dense fog disappearing into the ocean.

One summer during school vacation, a man who owned a grocery store and had a farm of *cabulla* (a plant used to make sacks to store dried grains), offered a summer job to the kids in town. He wanted us to collect some beetles in jars to protect the plants the bugs were eating. The job was fun; the beetles were fat and brown with a hard texture. It was like a game, grabbing the little creatures while they tried to escape from my hands. Friday came and I went to collect my money. I planned to get lots of candy, but my father got there first. He had collected my money to spend it on alcohol. I was speechless at my father's action and my feelings were trapped like the beetles in the jars. I left the store without the sweet candy, tasting only a sour memory.

My mother always cooked good healthy meals. We had a vegetable garden in our backyard. Pulling the carrots out of the ground was my favorite thing to do. In addition, every day

we got fresh milk from my aunt's cows. There was no need for my father to break into a grocery store to steal a whole bologna to feed us. As I heard my mother whispering to my father, "Why did you do such a wrong thing? We have food." my little world trembled with fear for I expected the police to knock at the door to arrest my father.

The house in which we lived was government property. My father worked for the government, taking care of the coffee fields. Because of his alcohol addiction, he lost his job and we were evicted. We had to move into the house of my grandmother who lived close by. My father then moved to the city to look for a job, and promised he would return in three months. Instead, he came back a year later to take us to the city. One morning, just as the sun rose, we left town in a pickup truck. The back was full of our belongings, and on top of them were all of us—just like the Beverly Hillbillies when they moved to the city.

We settled down in the new house, which had electricity, more bedrooms, and indoor plumbing. However, my world was changing for the worse. Now I had no more vegetable or flower garden. I was not going to be able to listen to my mother singing while she hung the clothes outside on sunny mornings. And I had no place in nature to play.

In the country, I used to play hide-and-seek at nighttime with other children. The hiding place was on top of the trees near my house. After school, my recreation was taking off to the rainforest with kids from the neighborhood. There we spent hours catching frogs, climbing on trees, and searching for any living creatures. When it rained we would crawl under huge leaves waiting until the rain had stopped. In the meantime, we told ghost stories making our stay in the forest more exciting. After a playful after-

noon, and before the night arrived, I ran home where no one had noticed my absence. In the city, however, I would not have such contact with Mother Nature, the one who had protected and nourished me while I was growing up.

When I was eleven years old, we moved from one house to another several times during a year. The presence of the police with an eviction notice became more familiar as time passed. I discovered my father not only had an alcohol problem, but was an abuser as well. How could I not have noticed his behavior towards my

mother? Perhaps I did not want to know what was happening at home. On the other hand, I have some memories of my mother telling her friends of my father's drunken violence. As time passed, the abuse escalated and our house turned into a nightmare.

There were sleepless nights when he verbally and physically abused my mother. Holidays were like hell. On Christmas Eve, instead of waiting for Santa with excitement about the presents, I went to sleep hoping the night would vanish so I would not hear my father coming home.

My mother started working to give us some economic stability, and as a result, my sister and I needed to take full responsibility for the house chores. Now, I became a mom for my younger siblings. I took them to the hospital when they were sick, and made sure they had food and clean clothes. As a consequence of having many responsibilities, my outside social world was limited. My friends never knew what kind of life I led. I did not do well in school for I was exhausted by the time I got there.

Eventually, my mother divorced my father. For a while, he was in denial; he appeared at home just as if he had never moved. One night I was in bed when I heard a noise. Immediately I got up and opened the door, and there was my father choking my mother. I threatened my fa-

ther by telling him to let my mother go or I would call the police, then started running barefoot towards the police department. My heart was pounding with fear as I heard my father, his voice like the growling of a bear in the woods. Finally, I got to the police station and told them what happened. The police took me home and my father disappeared for a while.

There were other occasions when I sheltered my mother in the bedroom while my father was cursing and threatening to destroy the door. Above all, I remember vividly my mother and I waiting for the bus and my father suddenly appearing, begging her to take him back or he would get himself run over by a car. He then went into the middle of the road. I held my mom's hand and closed my eyes when I saw a truck approaching my father. I did not want to open my eyes and see him lying dead on the ground. After the truck passed, my mother's sweet voice comforted me saying that he had not died. When I opened my eyes, I saw him on the other side of the road laughing. My father was not killed on that day, but he had just killed a feeling inside of me. Time passed, and I became more detached from the feelings I had for my father.

In order to survive at home, I learned how to lie and to create a world of denial. I became a caretaker for everyone but me. School did not seem important because, as my father used to say, "A woman does not need to study—you will get married and have a family to take care of." Eventually, I married a much older man, who did not abuse me physically but knew how to control my life, absorbing my identity through emotional abuse as a sponge absorbs the water. I got di-

In order to survive at home, I learned how to lie and to create a world of denial.

I worked for ten years in a shelter for battered women and children . . . I saw my mother in each of them, and myself in each child who came to the shelter with fear in her eyes.

vorced years later, feeling as if I were divorcing my father.

After my divorce, I worked for ten years in a shelter for battered women and children, and my life experiences made it easier for me to understand their situation. I saw my mother in each of them, and myself in each child who came to the shelter with fear in her eyes. I was able to empower women to take control of their lives, leaving me with a rewarding feeling of making a difference in someone's life.

Three years ago, my father passed away. I cried when I heard the news, but not because I was going to miss him. I cried because I was angry that I did not have the feeling I had when my

mother died, the pain of losing a parent whom I admired and loved. Still, my father with his addiction taught me the hardest lessons of life. Many of my dreams were shattered. However, through courage, time, and determination, I am now taking the first steps towards becoming a psychologist. The person I am today I owe to Mother Nature, who taught me the value of beauty and balance, to my mother, who taught me the importance of love and honesty, and to my father, who taught me endurance.

Elizabeth Robles lives in Massachusetts. She works at Logan Airport for a major airline company, which makes it possible for her to fly and explore the world.



Image courtesy of *Picturing Change*, ProLiteracy Worldwide, NY.

Look at the picture above.

What is happening?

Why do you think it is happening?

What do you think can be done to prevent this from happening again?

Adult Education & Domestic Trauma

by Andres Muro

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (www.ndvh.org), an estimated one third of all women report domestic abuse by a spouse or boyfriend at some point in their lives. The American Institute on Domestic Violence (www.aidv-usa.com), reports that:

- ◆ every nine seconds a woman is beaten in the United States;
- ◆ between three and four million women are battered each year; and
- ◆ domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women.

These statistics raised the question for the staff at the El Paso Community College's Community Education Program, "What is the extent to which women attending adult education programs are victims of domestic trauma?"

We enlisted the support of Mexican immigrant women learners in our program, having

those who agreed to participate fill out a questionnaire in Spanish designed to discover experiences and attitudes toward domestic violence and how these affected their learning experience. While the study is small and focused on one program, it does provide a window into the ways that women learners experience abuse in relation to their pursuit of education.

The table on the next page summarizes the results of the questionnaires returned by the 113 participants who reported that they lived with someone. The percentage totals reflect women who had these experiences anywhere from "at least rarely" to "frequently."

Andres Muro is the manager of the Community Education Program at El Paso Community College. He has worked in the area of adult education, with women, for the past 15 years. For more information about the study, contact him at AndresM@cpcc.edu.

Additional Resources

Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education. Jenny Horsman. Available in Canada and the U.S. Check www.jennyhorsman.com for publishers and distributors who carry the book.

Take on the Challenge: A Sourcebook from the Women, Violence and Adult Education Project. Elizabeth Morrish, Jenny Horsman, and Judy Hofer, eds. Available from World Education or on the Internet in pdf format: www.worlded.org/docs/TakeOnTheChallenge.pdf.

Learning to Live without Violence: A Handbook for Men (Updated 1997), Daniel Jay Sonkin and Michael Durphy. Spanish version: ***Aprender a Vivir Sin Violencia: Manual Para Hombres***, Daniel Jay Sonkin, Michael Durphy and translated by Jorge Corsi. Both are available from Volcano Press.

Lack of support

If students don't feel supported, they will feel uncomfortable sharing school experiences with family or spending time preparing for school and doing homework.

Women who reported that they were not supported by their spouses/partners, or felt that their spouses/partners were critical of them for attending school while neglecting their chores.	28%
Women who felt guilty about neglecting chores, their children, or felt like dropping out of school.	36%
Women who reported lack of family support.	30%
Women who wished that their spouses/partners helped more at home so that they could focus more on school.	50%
Women who felt sad about going home from school or felt like leaving their spouses.	30%
Women who were told by their spouses/partners to attend to them or their children before focusing on school, or gave them reasons not to finish their homework or go to school.	30%

Direct interference

Sometimes, spouses/partners engage in behaviors that subvert the women's ability to focus on school, go to school, or do school work.

Women who reported that their spouses/partners hid their books or school materials.	4%
Women who reported that their spouses/partners destroyed their books or homework, or spied on them to see whom they sat with in school.	3%
Women who reported that their spouses/partners accused them of talking to other men or of being unfaithful, or followed them to school to see whom they talked to.	23%
Women who reported that their spouses/partners screamed, or insulted them, put them down, or made verbal threats.	24%
Women who reported that their spouses/partners get jealous.	33%

Physical abuse

In addition to being a criminal offense, physical abuse is a threat to a woman's survival, self-esteem, and ability to learn.

Women who reported that their spouses/partners grabbed their breasts, buttocks, genitals, or forced them to have sex.	11%
Women who reported that their spouses/partners had abused them either physically, emotionally, or both prior to their starting school.	4%

The need for additional support

Women who felt that counseling would help them to do better in school.	49%
Women who felt that their spouses should talk to a counselor.	39%
Women who felt that school should offer counseling.	43%

Daisy's Ambition

Anonymous

The day I met Daisy, she marched into the learning center, flipped back her long dark hair, and plopped a Pepsi and a big green paperback GED review book on the table.

"I want to get my GED," she said. "I've got this book."

I hated using the catalogue-sized GED review books because they seemed overwhelming and intimidating. But Daisy was determined and so intimidating herself that I didn't argue with

her. I tried to guide her patiently through the material, but most of what I said irritated her.

We suffered through three tense tutoring sessions before I discovered that I could make Daisy

laugh. Though her frustration went deep and she would often swear and look at me with disgust, there were times when just the hint of a sweet smile would shine through. I noticed that she would get crabby in exactly the way a close friend of mine would—all out of proportion to the immediate situation. One day, when this happened, I couldn't help laughing. Daisy looked up, surprised. In an instant I could see that she wasn't offended. She heard herself and laughed, too.

Daisy was short-tempered and tolerated no nonsense, which sometimes got her into trouble at her job as a server, but her determination served her well in her learning. She had learned some phonics in school and was good at using and building on this knowledge but, her vocabulary was limited and her school experience was

interrupted and insufficient. We began to use more accessible materials. She began to channel her irritation into breaking down the barriers of the words she didn't understand. She would often figure out a word or phrase after she got mad at it.

Writing aggravated her even more than reading. She would dutifully complete short writing exercises, but she didn't hide the fact that she hated them. Gradually, however, Daisy began to show an interest in writing what *she* wanted to write. As she talked about her life, I suggested that she write about her thoughts and feelings. She began writing regularly in a journal that she shared with me. I knew that she was beginning to appreciate expressing herself in writing, but I was surprised when she arrived one day with a five-page letter she had composed.

I didn't have to "introduce the writing process." Daisy wanted to know how her thoughts were coming across and exactly how to correct her sentences and paragraphs. In fact, she wanted to communicate as clearly as possible to the person she was writing to: a victim of the same perpetrator who had sexually abused her.

Daisy's older sister's husband had repeatedly sexually abused Daisy when she was a young teenager. She kept the secret until her best friend confided that she had been raped. Daisy told the friend her own story. She then told her sister, but not the married one. She found out that the same man had abused this sister. They told their mother and then had to tell their father because, Daisy said, "We were all crying. But my father didn't know what to do."

Writing aggravated her even more than reading. She would dutifully complete short writing exercises, but she didn't hide the fact that she hated them.

I was surprised when she arrived one day with a five-page letter she had composed.

Five years passed before the case went to court. The sisters testified, but the defense discredited their testimony. The brother-in-law went free. He and Daisy's sister moved to another state. The day Daisy brought me the letter, she had learned that the couple had moved back and were staying with her parents. She had also discovered that her brother-in-law was sexually abusing another female relative. Daisy had plenty to say to this woman, but could not meet her face to face.

For weeks, Daisy worked on the letter,

Daisy not only used her writing to express her emotions and clarify her thoughts, she began to see that she could *do* it: she could write.

wrestling with her feelings and revising her writing. She sometimes shouted and cried. I recommended counseling, but she refused. She said she had seen counselors four different times,

starting when she had "opened up," but she felt it hadn't helped her. She didn't want to go through the pain of building trust again.

We talked about what to write and how to write it. I asked her a lot of questions: What did she want and need from this communication? What was safe to write? What might happen if she sent the letter? How would she respond to whatever happened? We worked at clarifying, changing, restoring, and rearranging words and sentences.

Finally, Daisy decided that the letter was as perfect as she could make it. She sent it, hoping the woman would become an ally who would help her protect other people from the unpunished attacker. After the woman read the letter, she thanked Daisy. In the end, however, she did not accept what Daisy had come to accept: that the abuse was serious, that it was not her fault, and that she could help protect other people from abuse. Unlike Daisy, she wanted to maintain a relationship with the abuser, even at great

cost.

Daisy told her family how she felt about them harboring her sister and brother-in-law. She rearranged her son's care during her work and study hours so that he would not be in her mother's home when his uncle was present. She limited her participation in family events to those times when she could keep visits brief and free of contact with the abuser. Daisy's husband supported her decisions and actions.

Daisy not only used her writing to express her emotions and clarify her thoughts, she began to see that she could *do* it: she could write. She has since used letters to communicate with family members when other situations have become difficult.

Soon after this breakthrough, Daisy joined a small group of women working on math. Everyone in the group was agonizing over algebra. Daisy looked at a set of problems, quickly solved them, and put down her pencil. I was standing at a whiteboard, writing examples and attempting to explain them. Daisy moved next to a woman who was particularly frustrated and explained a problem. The woman instantly understood. Daisy discovered that she liked math calculations far better than reading and that she could teach someone else how to do them.

But her life took two significant detours. The first led her to another successful effort. The other delayed her studies for a year.

She had to change jobs, so I referred her to a career center. We started using materials from the center's workshops in our tutoring sessions. Independently, Daisy applied for a job as a personal care attendant and was hired. The agency manager who hired her helped her study for the certification test. After a few weeks of practice, Daisy passed it. "I passed the test," she told me, "on my own."

Several weeks later, on a snowy morning, I saw an accident. A wrecker was loading a smashed red car. When Daisy didn't come to her appointment, I learned that the car was hers. She called me at the learning center, repeating again

and again how relieved she was that her son wasn't with her. But her injuries were serious and painful. After she had recovered to some degree, she could return to work. But several months passed before she was able to add studying to her other responsibilities.

Daisy has returned to the learning center with energetic commitment. She is retrieving the emotional strength and ability to learn that she discovered through confronting the effects of abuse. On her way to a GED, she is boldly expressing herself on paper and exhibiting skills she did not know she possessed. By dismantling

some of the emotional barriers that had restricted her, she is acting to change the course of her own and her family's lives. Significantly, she *knows* she is succeeding in this. Her troubles are not over, but she smiles more often anyway.

One evening recently we were studying vocabulary and I asked her about the word "ambitious." "It's what I'm doing," she said. "Being ambitious."

To protect confidentiality, the author remains anonymous and the student's name has been changed, as well as some of the identifying factors in the story.

Taking Up the Impact of Violence in Literacy

Does **NOT** mean we have to focus the curriculum directly on violence, though you may choose to if

- students are interested in looking at issues of violence, and
- the supports for students and instructor are in place.

Does **NOT** mean we have to say this is the place for students to talk in detail about the violence they have experienced, though you may choose to invite these stories if

- it is appropriate for this particular group,
- it is a safe setting, and
- the supports for students and instructors are in place.

DOES mean we have to create appropriate conditions for learning. These include:

- acknowledging that many people experience violence and that violence can affect learning;
- working together to create safety and trust;
- creating a comfortable place to nurture the whole self—e.g., music, moments of silence, flowers, snacks, easy chair/s, beautiful pictures, inspirational quotes; and
- using curriculum that engages and nurtures the whole person—body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

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Homophobia in the Classroom

One Teacher's Response

by Cynthia Peters

"If one of my kids turned out to be gay, I would kill him," said one of my ESOL students.

"But you might not want to kill him," replied another, "because that would be murder, and they could put you in jail for that."

There was nodding all around.

I sat down, stunned. What had I prepared for class that day? A game for learning fractions? Reviewing the past tense? I couldn't remember. None of it seemed to matter. I didn't feel like a teacher at that moment. I felt angry, shocked, sad and personally vulnerable even though my own life partner is of the opposite sex and so for that reason, according to my students, I should be allowed to live.

I did not try to mask my feelings. I felt too much respect for the members of my class. We were friendly and affectionate with each other. I cared a great deal for each of them. They had consistently impressed me with their finely tuned sense of justice and fairness, and their understanding of how power reveals itself in U.S. institutions—in the workplace, in the school system, in the home, in how U.S. foreign policy impacts their countries of origin.

But here they were advocating killing their own children in the event they should be gay, and the only argument against doing so was a practical one ("you'll go to jail"), not a moral one.

"My sister is a lesbian," I told them. The classroom was silent. "It hurts me to hear what you are saying." I know I showed what I was feeling—my face had probably gone pale and my hands may have been shaking—and it affected them. Because of the trust and affection we had built up over many hours in the classroom, they had no desire to cause me pain. And their faces

showed what *they* were feeling—conflict between their hatred of homosexuality and their curiosity about what it could mean that someone they thought they knew and respected could be close to a gay person. I felt that the students were looking at me completely differently.

"My sister is a wonderful person. I love her. My parents love her. If they had rejected her because she is a lesbian, we all would have lost so much. Our family would have been divided. I am so thankful that they loved their daughter even though it was hard for them to understand her."

When issues arise in the classroom, most teachers respond as teachers. We look for what can be learned from the moment; we see it as an opportunity for critical thinking, debate, and English language practice. In a flexible classroom, such moments might lead to a writing project or some research. Maybe we mine the conversation for vocabulary and create a lesson plan around related themes for the next class. I have done that kind of thing many times. But in this case, I reacted not as a teacher, but as an individual who was clearly *affected* by what the students were saying. The students experienced an immediate consequence to their words and sentiments. I didn't absorb what they said in a neutral way. Instead, I let it bounce back to them, and thus they got a second look at it in a different light.

Not that they changed their minds. "It's against the Bible," they argued. "It's against nature, and a crime against God."

"The Bible also says not to have children out of wedlock," I replied. There was no need to point out that most of the people in the class had gone against the Bible on that score.

We all looked at each other, feeling un-

nerved, and I didn't rescue the situation from uneasiness—the way I usually might in difficult situations. We sat in this strange stillness. The charged feeling hung in the air. I had no particular strategy about where to take the class, but I had a strong sense that I didn't want to be less than honest about my reactions. This felt like the more respectful—if more potentially treacherous—path.

"Next class," I offered, "let's all bring in pictures of our family." We returned to the lesson plan of the day, but something had been opened up between us. It felt raw but honest.

For the next class, I brought in pictures of my sister. "She looks just like you," the students said, still seeming to study me with new eyes.

I showed them pictures of her sons. I showed them pictures of my parents and siblings and numerous cousins and nieces and nephews—my parents proudly in the center of it all. Ours is a mixed race family as well.

While we passed around everyone's photo albums, delighted over baby pictures, noted the family resemblances, and teased each other about the changes that are apparent over time, we talked about family. The students wrote about family being important because it offered unconditional love and because it was a source of comfort in a difficult world. We noted that this was something we had in common despite our di-

verse families. One student began to speak up about the importance of accepting people who are different from you. She talked about tolerance. She argued that people should mind their own business. "No one's asking *you* to be a homosexual," she said.

I did not attempt to steer the class toward any kind of resolution on the matter of homosexuality. But I hope I opened up a space for people to think about it differently, and for at least one student to voice her own argument against homophobia. As teachers, we often confront moments that challenge us to decide how to handle our own (sometimes very strongly held) political positions. There are various ways to take on these moments. In this particular experience, I learned that being personally honest but not didactic had some value. It was possible for me to pursue this course partly because, being straight, I did not have to take an enormous personal risk. It was also possible because I felt enough respect for my students to give them an honest reaction. This confluence of factors may not always be present in the classroom, but when it is, it presents a way forward. Teachers can draw off of it to find their way, respectfully and honestly, towards greater understanding.

Cynthia Peters, co-editor of this issue of *The Change Agent*, teaches at the Worker Education Program of SEIU Local 2020.

Coming Out to Students

by Deborah Schwartz

When I taught adult basic education at the Archdale Family Literacy Project in Roslindale, Massachusetts, I kept a journal. More precisely, we—the ten women students and myself—all kept journals. Our medium was stacks and stacks of green steno-pads. In them, we tried to tell the truth about our lives, though the students started noticing gaps in my story. They challenged me not to hide myself from them. Following are several edited entries from my own journal, which tell the story of coming out to my students. Most are from my experience with this class, but I also included two entries from two other classes I taught concurrently.

March 3

They are writing frantically in their journals. S writes about driving the rats out of her apartment. C writes about playing her music as loudly as she likes. L writes about her grandmother—about living with her in the mountains and drinking her coffee so black that it stings her eyes before she swallows.

When J reads, she interrupts herself to tell us that she's getting evicted because her oldest son Tom came home with some guy named Eddie who lit a joint in the hall then walked into her apartment with the lit joint and now the housing authority has the right to evict them.

C responds, "Even in this lousy project, you still have some rights." She is on her feet: "Do you know how often they've threatened to evict me? Just for playing my music after church on Sunday afternoon?"

C is smart and community-minded. She has set up this protocol of letting the neighbors know when she's going to be playing loud music. Half the time, they say it's fine and half of those times she invites them over because "it's no fun to dance alone," and the other half of the time, she shares chicken with them and then they change their minds, and half of the time they end up watching TV together.

"All those halves don't add up," B notices.

"They add up," responds C. "Believe me, they add up." Everyone laughs. The classroom is a world of words and stories and noise and quiet while we're writing.

We have authority over our lives for this brief time. The crocus doesn't just come up in the spring, but has the purple-colored chutzpah to bloom through the hard, cold earth. These women are like that. They give me bravery, but what do I give them? Room, that's all.

April 23

"Read what you wrote, Deborah. You always make us read what we wrote," J notices that I skip passages when it's my turn to read. I remind her that it's ok to skip passages, or to not

even read at all.

"But Deborah, you never tell us anything about your life, or at least anything good," which I know is a code word for anything interesting.

"Well nothing all that interesting happens in my life," I counter.

"Are you kidding?" replies C.

"You come in here some mornings and you look like a train hit you. You and your double latte!

Then some days you come in looking like

a shining star. You have a life too, just cause you're a teacher doesn't mean you can hide behind that. Jesus, you know what color each of our bedroom walls is painted. We don't know anything about you. Nothing that counts anyway. You take a risk, Missy, and read!" That's what C says.

So I read without censorship. I read about how hard it is pretending to my family that I am not who I am and that my partner is not my partner and that the commitment ring that I wear is just another ring. Then there is a silence. C and L and B and A and J are there listening to me so intently. The way I try to listen to them when they read their truths.

I say, "Oh God, I am so sorry. I have been lying to you about having a boyfriend, and..."

"It's ok, honey, sometimes you have to lie, but here you don't," C says to me. "Keep reading."

When I'm done, B says, "Girl, you're a lesbian." That makes us all laugh.

Then A says, "My sister's cousin GG is a fag and we love him. He does all our hair."

It goes on like this. They want to know about sex and I tell them I'm too uncomfortable to talk about that. But I can give them some resources. They want to know who sleeps on the couch, and I tell them we try not to go to bed

"Read what you wrote, Deborah. You always make us read what we wrote," J notices that I skip passages when it's my turn to read.

angry. They want to meet Nancy. They want to call her at work and invite her to our end of the year party, which I remind them isn't until May.

Later, they draw a huge invitation to Nancy. Here's what it says on the front cover: *YOU ARE INVITED TO OUR GRADUATION PARTY*. On the inside it: "Thank you for putting up with Deborah. We love her and now we love you."

May 26

Nancy came to the party last night. She played with the kids. J wanted to sit next to her and later came over to me and said she thought she was shy. C's teenage girls were staring at us at one point, but later they kissed us both goodbye. Nancy loved meeting the women and eating the heaps of food they piled on her plate. J's speech about being the first one in her family to ever get the GED made us all weepy, but when B put on "I'm coming out," saying that she knew we would like this "old people's music," and persuaded Nancy to dance with her, I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

[The same year I was teaching the ten women, I also taught two other classes in which the issue of sexual orientation surfaced. The following two entries are about experiences in those classes.]

May 10/Notes from the VideoFest

During the first half of the Spike Lee film, "Get On the Bus," I struggle with the gay jokes and name-calling circulating in the room.

I try, "Let's respect everyone, please." Then: "Abide by our ground rules, or I'll kick you out of here." And finally, "No gay jokes. It's mean and it's unacceptable."

"What are you a Dyke or something?" S calls out so that everyone can hear.

I remember how I have just promised myself to never lie again. I look at him. He is waiting for me to say something. The whole room is waiting. "Well," I pause, not at all sure what it is

I will say, "Well, yes, I am a Dyke."

Some of the students giggle. We watch the movie. Later, as I walk up to the front of the room, floating a bit above my body, ready to hand out their assignments and then dismiss them without discussion, I hear S's voice loud and clear from the back of the room as he gets up to leave. "Hey Deb, I'm sorry." That's what he says.

"What are you a Dyke or something?" S calls out so that everyone can hear. . . . He is waiting for me to say something. The whole room is waiting.

May 12

Before class, when I am usually alone doing some planning, a kid I have never seen before comes to visit.

"Listen," he tells me. "You can't tell anyone. I live up at the Beech Street Projects and I will be killed if they know." I tell him about BAGLY (Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth). I tell him about the gay men of color group at the Fenway. He gives me one of those hip, youth handshakes. I'm really klutzy and don't know the moves, so I just hug him. When he leaves, I cry.

Deborah Schwartz is the instructional specialist at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, in Boston, MA.



VozMujer: Querer es Poder

Uniting Language & Leadership Development for Latina Immigrants

by Dina Lopez and Adriana Valdez Young

Querer es Poder. Aspiration is power. To love is power. Angelina, a 42-year-old daycare provider from the Dominican Republic, recalls these as the most important things she learned through VozMujer, a women-centered ESOL and leadership development program for Latina immigrants in Providence, RI. For Angelina and other VozMujer participants, aspiration and love brought them to class each night to learn from and support one another; it inspired them to commit to changing their lives and communities.

Social, political, and economic systems in the U.S. place immigrant women at society's lowest rung. For Latin American women, this is compounded by the machismo, or the social subordination of women, that pervades their native cultures. This power dynamic may manifest itself in the ESOL classroom. It is common for men to dominate class discussions, while women listen attentively and take notes. It was to address these urgent issues that VozMujer was born: to create supportive, women-centered learning spaces where immigrant women can realize their power to pursue their personal and collective goals.

VozMujer is a new initiative of English for Action, a participatory educational organization that provides community-based ESOL and leadership programs to Latino immigrant families. VozMujer has two course components: a 14-week ESOL and women's studies program and a 10-week leadership and empowerment course in Spanish. The first component emphasizes learning English through classroom dialogue about women's health, women's economic challenges, and women's role in the family. The second

focuses on developing critical thinking and leadership skills by discussing power structures, gender, race, and women's roles in Latin America and the U.S.

During the ESOL class, twenty women from four Latin American countries gathered to learn, share, and build the language and leadership skills they needed to shape their new lives in the United States. The classroom became a transformative space. For many older women, it was the first time their own education took precedence over the needs of others. Many, like Aracely, had sacrificed their goals to provide opportunities for their children. After working in a factory for over 20 years, Aracely was now fulfilling her dream of returning to school. Sharing this experience with women like her allowed her to fully participate and feel comfortable in the classroom.

The facilitators, also Latina immigrants, designed the curriculum, lesson plans, and activities based on participatory, learner-centered practices. They implemented activities that encouraged women to express their opinions, engage in dialogue with each other and share their personal experiences. As a result of the emphasis on trust and relationship- and community-building, those with more advanced language skills became co-facilitators and learning-partners.

Socio-drama: A Powerful Tool

One of the most effective participatory tools that emerged from the classrooms was the "socio-drama." By working in small groups to enact solutions to difficult life situations, the group developed a socio-drama to rehearse, experiment with, and problem-solve using new language

skills. Through the socio-drama, they explored complex social problems that many women did not initially have the language skills to discuss. The method allowed women of different language levels to write and perform the drama according to their comfort and ability.

The process of creating, performing and reflecting on the socio-drama unearthed hidden acting talents, tricky language concepts, and unforeseen challenges and solutions. Not only is the socio-drama an effective way to practice and develop language skills, it is also an effective tool to promote critical thinking and community building, and a safe way for women to explore different opinions and approaches as “characters” rather than as themselves. Through the socio-drama, women can question and alter the behaviors of their husbands, bosses, and themselves. As a result, they build the confidence and support to make life changes outside of the classroom. They develop what Paulo Freire refers to as new ways of “reading the world” and “rehearsing for social change.”

Socio-dramas and methodologies based on the *Theater of the Oppressed* were also an integral part of the program’s leadership development workshops. Women developed gender analyses and skills in public speaking, community organizing and collective decision-making by creating body sculptures, animated images, and forum

theater (see definitions of these classroom activities below). After participating in these workshops, many women became involved in immigrant rights organizing through the Immigrant Freedom Rides and campaigns for immigrants’ access to driver’s licenses and higher education. They have also used their skills to organize fundraisers for the program as well as celebrations for their co-workers.

When reflecting on the course, women attributed their successful learning experiences to the fact that they could speak “sin verguenza” (without shame) and “con confianza” (with confidence). Betty, a participant, talked about the collective power of women, “Women have a lot of worth and we can achieve very important things if we try to reach them together.” Betty also realized through the course that she doesn’t have to put up with macho attitudes. “They can’t push us aside. As women and workers, we have the same rights. We have the same right to decide what is right, what is to be done, and what can’t. Now we are equal.”

At the core of this learning process is a strong love for life, for learning, for families, and community. A love that builds power, fuels aspirations, strengthens voices, and creates change. According to Rosario, another participant, our lives are sustained by this love and the “solidarity [that] exists between women as a way of surviving.”

For more information about VozMujer or to obtain copies of the curriculum or more lesson plans, please contact Dina Lopez at English for Action, 401-421-3181, dina@englishforaction.org.

Definitions

Body sculptures — In order to portray a feeling, situation, or idea for others to analyze, women work with one or more of their peers as human clay and mold their bodies into static images.

Animated images — As another tool for self expression, women collectively create a static image with their bodies and add a repetitive movement to accompany the image.

Forum theatre — Based on the work of Augusto Boal, this is a theatrical activity where a group acts out in an unsolved problem, and the audience is invited to suggest and enact solutions.

Dina Lopez has been working with English for Action for the past three years, first as board member and then as founding coordinator of VozMujer in 2003.

Adriana Valdez Young founded English for Action (EFA) in 1999 with her classmate Spring Miller. She served as EFA’s executive director for three years, and co-facilitated the VozMujer Leadership and ESOL programs.

Socio-drama: Rosa worries about her sexual health

This is a sample socio-drama activity that was implemented in the VozMujer multi-level ESOL class as part of the health unit of the curriculum.

Desired Outcomes

- Explore the causes and solutions for health problems that affect us.
- Share our experiences overcoming health problems.
- Ask questions and find solutions for health problems.

Setting the Stage

Rosa just found out that her husband Pablo has been unfaithful and she is worried about their relationship and her own sexual health. Rosa has never been to the gynecologist in the United States. Rosa asks her friend Sonia what to do. What should Rosa do?

Instructions

Work with the other members in your group to write a socio-drama about Rosa's situation. Every member must write and act out at least three lines. Everyone must participate.

Try to use the language topics we have reviewed in class:

- Asking questions with do/does and is/are
- Verbs: to be (am/is/are), to have (have/has), and to feel
- Health Vocabulary: problems, causes, and solutions

After you write your socio-drama, you will present it to the class. Have fun and be creative!

Notes to the Facilitator

After all groups have presented their socio-dramas, the class reflects on the situations and solutions that were presented.

Guiding Questions

1. How did it feel to be in the socio-drama?
2. Do you think the solutions to the problem are realistic? Why or why not?
3. What can we learn from the socio-dramas?
4. How can other women in our families and communities benefit from what we learned today?

Other Things to Keep in Mind

- The most effective socio-dramas are based on learners' own experiences and problems that they bring to class.
- Socio-dramas are great opportunities for learners to practice newly-acquired language skills. Make sure that learners are comfortable with the vocabulary and language skills needed to create the dramas so that they can focus on practicing their speaking and problem-solving skills.
- You can also help learners develop the socio-drama by brainstorming certain characters that should be represented (i.e. Pablo, Rosa, Sonia, a gynecologist, and a counselor).

Expressive Arts in Prison

Healing and Self-Discovery at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

by Steve Podry, with Bobby Blanchard

The Literacy, Education and Parenting program (LEAP) is a family literacy resource at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York state. As program coordinator, I have tried to utilize my background in the arts and as an expressive arts therapist to develop a learning environment that kindles the creative spirit of the women we serve.

The women we serve are mothers. Between 1977 and 2001 the number of women sentenced to prison in the U.S. increased 592%. Currently, there are over 97,000 women in jail, and 75% of those women are mothers. The ripple effect in terms of damaged families and children is an American disaster.

In response, the Children's Center at Beverly Hills emerged over 25 years ago to become a cluster of thirty inmate- and civilian-staffed programs and classes designed to nurture the relationship between children and their incarcerated mothers. One of the Children's Center core endeavors is the Nursery program, which provides an opportunity for incarcerated mothers to follow the love for their new babies as source and guide into new life. Women accepted to the Nursery keep their newborn children with them for up to 18 months. Most are released before this, or soon thereafter. LEAP is the family literacy and learning resource center for the Nursery community.

Prison amounts to a life-quake, a void, a troubling transitional space of chaos and vulnerability. LEAP offers the Nursery mothers an invitation to use this occasion to plunge into their own being. Each student begins by writing her autobiography, and proceeds to participate in

LEAP's Classes and Projects

- "Parenting Through Art & Play" and "Work World Preparation" classes for mothers
- "Art Education for Young Children" for the inmate caregivers who staff the Infant Development Center where the mothers leave their babies while attending class
- community art projects in the Children's Center Visiting Room as a way for older children and their mothers to celebrate their time together while also saying good-bye
- "The Musical Art of Making It Up" improvisational music-making classes
- a series of classes on using the expressive arts to work with dreams
- monthly visits from a retired poetry teacher and an authentic movement therapist
- volunteer instruction on the beautiful old art of quilt-making
- a six-week workshop in the art of telling stories
- open studios in the Nursery housing unit where moms with babies make art in a lively community atmosphere
- community murals, a variety show, and artistic and moral support for holidays and babies' birthdays

many creative activities. (See the box about LEAP's classes and projects.)

Everything we do in LEAP bears some connection to human creative potential. Trust, gratitude, a sense of wonder, and many other spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical qualities wait in the wings to emerge when a woman's creativity

comes alive. I often think of one Nursery mother marveling at her own art work: "How did I do that?" Writing and making art together, we begin to glimpse each other's strange beauty too. These awakenings and creative practices that support learning—journal writing, group sharing, and art for relaxation, healing, self-discovery—serve to disrupt the prisoners' feelings of victimization.

Prison is mad, less because of its reluctant guests, perhaps, than because of society's contradictory mandate that prisons should both punish and rehabilitate. An archaic part of our brain confuses "pain" and "gain." I have come to believe that punishing lawbreakers, children, or anybody else is counterproductive, since retribution is founded on feelings of vengeance and righteousness that only engender more of the same. It is an old habit to punish others and comfort ourselves by believing that the problem (e.g., the national drug epidemic) is being adequately addressed. One difficulty in supporting a non-punitive approach is that the alternatives to punishment appear far more bewildering, a challenge to our collective social imagination.

"Prison is the program; we try to create a sub-context," says one seasoned inmate, a parenting and prenatal teacher. Rehabilitative prison programs are simultaneously supported and undermined by the double-binding fallacy of rehabilitative punishment. Yet, prisoners themselves often construe a method in the madness of their predicament: "I'm lucky to be alive. Prison gave me a second chance." LEAP seeks to become a vehicle through which prison may reveal and give more than its destructive contradictions take away. Art-making supports imagining one's victimization in ways more conducive to living mindfully and creatively in the future, because an artistic attitude sees obstacles as opportunities to create something new. When an incarcerated woman re-imagines her prison time as an opportunity for reflection, for example, she shifts the potentially toxic consequences of imprisonment onto fertile ground. Still immersed in the literally creative act of giving birth, the

Nursery mothers may be especially keen to contemplate creativity and the remaking of their lives.

LEAP's guiding vision is that human beings are essentially creative. We imagine, shape, and make split-second decisions every moment, whether we realize it or not. We are *in* "Creation." We are in collaboration with a creation that is still in progress. No one has arrived. Nothing is a *fait accompli*. LEAP's vision says, "No wonder the world's such a mess! We aren't finished yet!" By using the arts to shape life and become aware of the ways in which life shapes us, we learn to navigate the tender middle ground of inner choice and imaginative action. Working in the expressive arts engages our identity as creator-participants in the world—making us all a little more free.

Bobby Blanchard was program coordinator of LEAP for a year before becoming the Nursery manager. Steve Podry has been LEAP coordinator since 2000.

Resources

Collective Voices in Expressive Arts

This excellent compendium put together by a variety of artists, educators, and therapists at Appalachian State University presents a range of specific frameworks and ideas for working with groups. Contact Professor Sally Atkins at atkinsss@appstate.edu to purchase a copy.

www.glasslakestudio.com

A great site to explore for more information on expressive arts therapy.

Women Reading Together

Women's Literacies, Women's Power

by Merv Miller

Do we narrow the possibilities of women's literacies when we primarily limit our view of literacy for women to decoding text (reading, writing, arithmetic) or to providing certain expected functions (getting a job, helping children with schoolwork, organizing families)? While reading, writing, and math are important tools in our societies, are they the most important? What are other crucial ways in which women communicate and organize their lives? Can the variety of ways in which women communicate broaden our understanding of women's literacies?

In *Women Speak*, Foss & Foss (1991) discuss the ways in which women's communication about their lives has been muted, misinterpreted,

and held as unimportant. They provide 30 examples of women's communication: architecture, baking, children's parties, comedy, costume design, dance, dress,

family stories, filmmaking, gardening, graffiti, herbology, holiday greetings, interior design, jewelry design, journal writing, language, letter writing, mother-child interaction, motherhood, needlework, newsletters, painting/printmaking, photography, poetry, public speaking, quilting, reading groups, rituals, and shopping. We might



Image courtesy of Picturing Change, ProLiteracy Worldwide, NY.

want to add other items to this list as well, such as using email or designing Web sites or participating in protests or community organizing. As you can see, many of the items in this list might not involve reading or writing but they do involve women interacting with each other, their families, and their communities.

By prioritizing schooled literacy, we have negated the many forms of literacy practices and expressive communications common to a wide range of women. To reclaim the breadth of women's literacies, we need to look to each other. Participating in women's book discussion groups is one of the ways that women combine communication and literacy. In my experience of participating with women learners in book groups, this alternative and communal learning environment provides much more than reading and writing. This experiential learning involves the mind, heart, and spirit in ways not always available in a classroom or individual tutoring setting.

“We want more women to join our group so we can learn more about different cultures and learn more from each other.”

—book group participant, Twin Cities, MN

In a relaxing and fun atmosphere, women not only improve their vocabulary and reading skills but they also gain the benefits of each others' experience and life knowledge. This helps diminish isolation and builds a sense of camaraderie sometimes creating long-term friendships or support networks. Women's book groups provide the opportunity to discuss topics women may not normally speak about or perhaps would not discuss in a mixed classroom with men, especially what one learner called "women-stuff." In such groups, some women have more opportunity to speak up in the first place, bolstering self-esteem. Book groups also encourage women to share their viewpoints and ideas or have their own thinking confirmed and expanded. Women who participate from a variety of cultures and backgrounds have the opportunity to challenge and learn from each other in ways not always available to them. Participants become encouraged to read materials they may not have realized they could read or to have access to materials they did not know existed.

"We learn to communicate with each other as women talking to each other . . . we help each other out. We talk not only about the books but also about life in general . . . that's what's different about it."

—book group participant, Twin Cities, MN

Overall, the book groups can provide a sense of confidence and leadership. In such settings, women have the opportunity to choose their own reading materials (leadership & decision-making), to consider their own opinions (critical thinking), to talk more openly than they might otherwise (communication skills), and to develop friendships (community-building). One book group I worked with demonstrated all of

these abilities when they developed and aired a special one-hour radio show for International Women's Day about the lives of single moms (see: www.litwomen.org/learnwrite/RadioBook.pdf).

Women not only want to read the world (as Paulo Freire said), they want to read themselves and each other. Women's literacy often depends on communication

and community and cannot only be viewed only as a solitary analytical act. The relationality women have with each other is one source of power and nurture.

Women's literacy involves emotion as well as intellect, and supports self-esteem, communication, self-knowl-

edge, and cooperation. Women's literacies not only involve text, but also picture and symbol, speech and conversation, creation and activity, emotion and understanding. Group reading and conversation encourages these literacies as it opens the content to wider analysis and deeper understanding. Women learn more about themselves and each other and their worlds. Book groups bear witness to this reality. By appreciating women's many forms of literacies and communication, women will come more easily to personal and social power.

"[My group] has helped me to go and stay in school, getting my life together and being with my daughter and making changes in my life. . . I've seen so many things happen because of the program and women coming out of their shell."

—book group participant, Twin Cities, MN

Mev Miller is the founder and director of WE LEARN and has facilitated book groups with women learners for many years. Mev also works for the System of Adult Basic Education and Support (SABES) in Fall River, MA.



Book Reviews

The Dirty Girls Social Club

by Ivette Rivera

The Dirty Girls Social Club, written by Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, is a story about six Latina women and their lives. "*Las Sucias*" became friends while studying at Boston University. After they graduated, they promised to meet at least twice a year to have a *Dirty Girls* reunion, usually a night of dinner, drinks, and girl talk. The book's characters are Lauren, Sara, Amber, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Usnavys. The main character is Lauren, a Cubana who works as a columnist for a local newspaper. Lauren is struggling with her identity as a Latina because her father is Cuban and her mother is white. Lauren also complains about her co-workers' stereotypes of Latina women. Lauren thinks she's not a good Latina because she doesn't speak Spanish, but at the same time criticizes people's notions about what they believe Latinas are like.

Another "Sucia" is Usnavys, a dark-skinned voluptuous Puerto Rican woman who grew up poor in Boston public housing, which has made her obsessed with the finer things in life as an adult. Usnavys is looking for a man who can support her financially, even though she is more than capable of supporting herself. Her father left her mother when she was very young and her

brother was murdered at a young age. So, she has abandonment issues that she masks by staying aloof with the men she dates.



Rebecca runs her own magazine called "Ella." This "Sucia" is a Mexican woman but refers to herself as Spanish. Even though Rebecca has olive skin and dark hair she views herself as Spaniard and totally denies her Indian side. Another "Sucia," Amber is Rebecca's polar opposite, she is a very proud Mexicana. In college she discovered the Mexica Movement and decided she no longer wanted to be called Hispanic, and wanted to be referred to as Native American. While Rebecca denies her Indian roots, Amber denies her Spanish roots. Amber is a starving artist who is trying to get a record deal singing angry

Spanish rock songs about what the white man did to her Indian people.

Meanwhile, Sarah is a white Jewish Cubana with blond hair who models herself after her idol Martha Stewart. She is a stay-at-home mom and comes from old Cuban money. She married her high school sweetheart Roberto, who turns out to be very abusive. Last but not least is Elizabeth, a beautiful Black Colombian, a successful news anchor who is hiding the fact that she is a lesbian.

As you read each chapter, you get a glimpse

into a day-in-the-life of each woman. I loved this book and from the very beginning I couldn't put it down. I thought the author did a wonderful job highlighting some of the issues Latina women face. And, she did a great job showing the reader how vast the differences can be in each Latino culture by explaining some cultural histories and incorporating some of the rich traditions each culture holds. The book makes references to some of the typical foods, music, and customs, and it uses just the right amount of Spanish words to give you a glimpse into the minds of Latina women and culture.

Even though this book is about Latina

women, this is a story about women in general. It is about their struggles and the bonds that keep them together. I think Alisa Valdes Rodriguez wrote this book to share her experience of friendships and to make the reader aware of some of the issues facing Latina women. You can tell the characters are dear to her by how human she makes them. She shows all their weaknesses and strengths in a way that makes you feel that both contribute to their empowerment. I would highly recommend this book to anyone.

Ivette Rivera is a student in the College of Public and Community Service at UMASS, Boston.

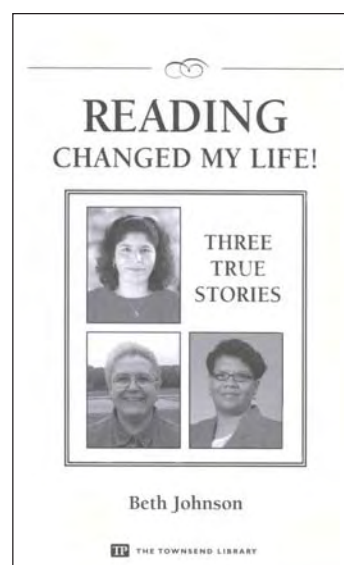


Review: Reading Changed My Life

by Hillary Gardner

I can remember clearly the day we sat around discussing Maria Cardenas' life. My summer class of adult students in the ESOL/Civics program at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training formed a semi-circle in front of me. We were talking about how in Maria's story, her father was an alcoholic and had been verbally abusive with her, telling her as a young girl that she was stupid and would never amount to anything. One student said: "My father was like that too." Another agreed. That day, a half dozen of my students came forward and admitted that alcohol and anger had been a part of their households when they were young.

That day changed how I thought about the cycle of learning. As a teacher, not a counselor, it wasn't my job to ask students to share their personal experiences, particularly experiences that were so difficult and personal. At the same time, because of the story we were reading, we gained a shared realization— maybe we all



ended up here for the same reason—we never got the support for education from our families that we needed when we were young. And maybe from the story in front of us, we could learn some ways to move beyond that fact.

As an ESOL/Civics teacher, one of my biggest challenges is finding reading materials for my class with an appropriate vocabulary level that will motivate my students to read but aren't oversimplified or childish. I like materials that show real people overcoming hardships, but

they can't be maudlin. In one text I considered using, the narrator explained the domestic violence she'd experienced in such detail that I couldn't imagine the text accomplishing its primary purpose—getting students excited about reading more. I want my students to be able to identify with the narrator of a story, but I have

students from many different backgrounds, educational levels, and ages. How can I accommodate all of them and keep within my very limited materials budget? If I buy my students a reader, I can't afford to also get them a dictionary or vice versa.

As an ESOL/Civics teacher, one of my biggest challenges is finding reading materials for my class with an appropriate vocabulary level that will motivate my students to read but aren't oversimplified or childish.

The Townsend Press has helped me resolve this dilemma. *Reading Changed My Life* by Beth Johnson (available for \$1 per copy) is a collection of stories of three women from different backgrounds who learn to read late in life. Maria Cardenas is a migrant worker from Mexico who never finishes school because at a young age she must work with her family in the fields. In Maria's story, we focused on the marigold she cared for as a symbol of what she hoped to improve in her future. We learned to label paragraphs with the main idea so we could find the details we wanted to look up later. We argued over whether it was a happy story or a sad story. We looked at some of the events that happened in Maria's life and compared them to our own. We talked about her slogan for success, to find beauty in the simplest thing, then studied more, sayings like one day at a time or don't put the cart before the horse.

In chapter two, we met Daisy Russell. Students read about how a U.S. citizen grew up

without ever learning to read at more than a second-grade level. We focused on the adjectives that described Daisy at different points in her life. Students looked for the adjectives in context and discussed why Daisy felt the way she did at different points in the story. We created a table of synonyms and antonyms with our adjective lists. Then students chose adjectives to describe themselves.

In the final chapter, we learned about Julia Burney, a police officer who started a reading center for underprivileged children in her community. Some students felt this achievement made her story "the best." We talked about the different ways all three women had gone about improving their lives: from visiting the library, to studying for the GED, to finding a Laubach literacy tutor. We looked at the turning point in each person's life and talked about "before and after" events, especially how they were different before, and what changed after, they learned to read.

The title *Reading Changed My Life* says it all; this book is about reading. It is also about immigration, poverty, alcoholism and abuse, but the smiling faces of the three women on the cover need no interpretation. At the end of the book there is a special offer: a coupon for five books for \$5. I will always remember the day my graduating student, Hilda, showed me the first of her five books, an abridged version of *The Call of the Wild* that she had ordered on her own. It will be hard to forget her look of determination and pride.

My thanks go out to the author, Beth Johnson, and the Townsend Press for producing materials that are sensitive, inexpensive, and inspiring. It is a rare and much needed resource.

Hillary Gardner is the program coordinator and instructor for the English and Civics Program at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training, LaGuardia Community College, Long Island City, New York.

WE LEARN

A Resource for Women's Literacy

WE LEARN promotes women's literacy as a tool for personal growth and social change through networking, education, action, and resource development. Like its name, WE LEARN is full of hope, promise, and expectation.

Women – WE LEARN focuses on the issues, needs, concerns, viewpoints, strengths, and wisdom of women. WE LEARN encourages the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of women. Though WE LEARN primarily focuses on adult women, we are also sensitive to the needs of girls and teenaged/young women. We also know that women live with children and men in a variety of ways and acknowledge women and their lives in families and communities. We encourage men to understand the importance of women's issues. Justice and respect for women helps the rights of all people.

Expanding – Women are always growing and changing in their bodies, minds, and hearts. Women expanding means that WE LEARN encourages women to increase their power and participation in all aspects of life. This expansion involves personal growth and acceptance of responsibilities. It also increases women's contributions to transform and change the quality of life in their families, communities, and the world.

Literacy – WE LEARN focuses on the basic literacy needs of adult women. An alarming number of women in the United States and the world cannot read or write very well. WE LEARN advocates for women's literacy. WE LEARN also knows there are different kinds of literacies and helps women to understand that there are many ways of knowing.

Education – WE LEARN supports education for women. It is not enough for women to have basic literacy. Women must also have access to a variety of educational experiences. Education includes reflection and action, research and discovery, knowing and doing. Education includes school and more than school. We are all learners. Many experiences in life can educate us.

Action – WE LEARN takes action to support and promote women's literacy and access to adult basic education. WE LEARN encourages women learners to take action in their lives and communities. WE LEARN assists women learners and teachers to develop leadership skills. Action involves advocacy. Action creates change and transformation in our world.

Resource – WE LEARN creates opportunities to publish and promote women-centered basic English literacy and reading materials and curriculum resources. WE LEARN also assists teachers and tutors to work together to create such materials to continue their own learning. We maintain a clearinghouse of these resources.

Network – The success of WE LEARN depends on the participation of students, teachers, tutors, administrators, researchers, librarians, writers, community activists and anyone interested in women's issues and adult basic literacy education. Network means we work together as friends and equals. Everyone's ideas and activity are important. We collaborate as colleagues.

WE LEARN is a non-profit membership organization based in Cranston, Rhode Island. It is the only national organization in the U.S. dedicated specifically to women and literacy. To learn more about our projects go to: www.litwomen.org/welearn.html, email welearn@litwomen.org or call 401-383-4374.

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ABOUT THE NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Based in Quincy, Massachusetts, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest philanthropy in New England that focuses exclusively on promoting access, quality, and effectiveness of education. Established in 1998, the Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs in New England that are designed to improve low-income and underserved students' academic achievement and access to higher education. Since 1998, the Foundation has awarded \$44 million in grants and support to education programs in the region.

For more information on the Foundation,
please visit www.nmefdn.org.



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