

A Survey of Best Practices in Adult Literacy

In order to determine the most effective adult literacy processes for a countywide Literacy Campaign, the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) conducted research with numerous literacy professionals and publications. This study includes literature on pre-literacy, Adult Basic Education (in English), GED/High School Equivalency, family, workplace, health, civic and financial literacy practices. To illustrate and supplement these concepts, websites and resources of programs are included.

This document is an evolving, participatory study intended to help all providers create the most effective programs. Please inform Jeff Bryant (jeff@cfmco.org) if you find errors in this document or wish to recommend edits or additional references and resources.

An efficient way for literacy providers to use this report is to read the general information on pages 1 to 5

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and then concentrate on the area(s) of adult literacy on pages 6 to 15 most relevant to their programs.

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Adult Learners

The concept of education often evokes childhood memories of a classroom full of desks and a chalkboard. But for many adults much time has passed since those days and the learning process requires a different approach. In order to increase the effectiveness of adult learning it is important to target who the adult learner is, why adults are involved in learning activities, how adults learn and how aging influences adults' learning capacity. Due to the responsibilities and circumstances of adulthood, ie: children, bills, employment, etc. learning must become a personal journey (Eisemon, 10). The context of learning becomes shaped by the context of the adult learner, and to a lesser extent, when and where the adult is learning (Sharan, 1). Learning occurs in direct proportion to society and the world affected by it.

Adult Literacy - Definition and Campaign Focus

The planners of the Literacy Campaign for Monterey County have adopted the definition of “adult” as people ages 18 to 35 years and the definition of “adult literacy” published in the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL):

Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.

Research comparing various learning environments for literacy, ranging from formal to non-formal methods, the most enabling environment tends to be found in programs offered by community-based organizations (Friedman, 5). The most effective adult literacy programs incorporate key elements described in the table on the next page and include a sequence of essential elements beginning with community outreach and concluding with the transfer of students to programs offering higher level or expanded services. True literacy success does not rely solely on one individual. The entire process not only engages students, but also involves agencies and the learners’ community (ie: employers, family, and friends). However within this continuum, agencies need to use their skills and resources to address the various needs of their learners. An enabling environment for learning establishes encouragement and relevance to a person’s daily life. Many of these stages run concurrent to one another, rather than independently. For instance, addressing barriers/special needs, ensuring that students feel empowered and engaging students in the learning process are concepts that need to occur simultaneously. All stages are necessary to ensure the success of a literacy program. The following diagram (below) depicts the various stages for both literacy learners and agencies:

12. Students transfer to another agency for continuation of studies



1. Student outreach and recruitment



2. Students are interested and motivated



3. Program addresses barriers/special needs: *Child Care*
Transportation
Class Hours
Learning Disabilities
Behavioral Issues



4. Students have goals:
Employment
Recovery Classes
Teaching Children



5. Classes incorporate skills training:
Vocational
Life
Parenting



6. Program and staff monitor effectiveness and adjust methods



7. Students have ownership of learning process



8. Agencies provide psychological support:
Encouragement
Positive Reinforcement
Incentives



9. Students' employers, family, and friends participate in the learning process



10. Agencies follow-up with dropouts



11. Agencies conduct an evaluation of their program



A Sequence of Essential Elements for Effective Adult Literacy Programs

Best Literacy Practices

Based on previous research accumulated assessing the needs of Monterey County, the CFMCO narrowed the literacy focus to address ‘below basic’ and ‘basic’ literacy needs. The following matrix is also provided by the NAAL:

Level of Definition	Key Abilities associated with Adults at this level	Sample tasks typical of level
<p>Below Basic indicates no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.</p> <p>Adults at the Below Basic level range from being nonliterate in English to having the abilities listed to the right:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locating easily identifiable information in short, commonplace prose texts • Locating easily identifiable information and following written instructions in simple documents (e.g., charts or forms) • Locating numbers and using them to perform simple quantitative operations (primarily addition) when the mathematical information is very concrete and familiar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching a short, simple text to find out what a patient is allowed to drink before a medical test • Signing a form • Adding the amounts on a bank deposit slip
<p>Basic indicates skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and understanding information in short, commonplace prose texts • Reading and understanding information in simple documents • Locating easily identifiable quantitative information and using it to solve simple, one-step problems when the arithmetic operation is specified or easily inferred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding in a pamphlet for prospective jurors an explanation of how people were selected for the jury pool • Using a television guide to find out what programs are on at a specific time • Comparing the ticket prices for two events
<p>Intermediate indicates skills necessary to perform moderately challenging literacy activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and understanding moderately dense, less commonplace prose texts as well as summarizing, making simple inferences, determining cause and effect, and recognizing the author’s purpose • Locating information in dense, complex documents and making simple inferences about the information • Locating less familiar quantitative information and using it to solve problems when the arithmetic operation is not specified or easily inferred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting reference materials to determine which foods contain a particular vitamin • Identifying a specific location on a map • Calculating the total cost of ordering specific office supplies from a catalog
<p>Proficient indicates skills necessary to perform more complex and challenging literacy activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading lengthy, complex, abstract prose texts as well as synthesizing information and making complex inferences • Integrating, synthesizing, and analyzing multiple pieces of information located in complex documents • Locating more abstract quantitative information and using it to solve multistep problems when the arithmetic operations are not easily inferred and the problems are more complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing viewpoints in two editorials • Interpreting a table about blood pressure, age, and physical activity • Computing and comparing the cost per ounce of food items

Best Learning Practices for Adults

The best literacy practices incorporate the best learning practices for adults. They take into account the differences between the child learner and the adult learner by respecting previous knowledge, integrating everyday circumstances and, in the case of second language learners, take into consideration the importance of the learner's native tongue. The following practices refer to overall best practices that an agency can encourage in a literacy learner.

- **Teach functional literacy skills.** Literacy programs are only useful when they facilitate learning and increase the learner's knowledge and understanding of the surrounding, natural world. Competent performance of most literacy tasks in daily life cannot be isolated from the knowledge that gives meaning to printed information (Eismon, 9). Therefore, literacy programs are better carried out in the context of where literacy is or can be used to improve daily life. For instance, driver's manuals are read in preparation for the actual driver's test or job applications are read in conjunction with real job searches. This concept implies linking literacy programs with an agricultural extension, community health education and other social services reaching the adult population.
- **Plan for learning across the lifespan.** Education does not stop once a student leaves the classroom. Adult learners realize the importance of education, especially literacy, when they begin studying again. Instructors must consistently point out the relevance of education in order to maintain a student's motivation. Also through planning for a person's lifespan, a student can continue on to higher education once they begin to feel more comfortable. Agencies can transfer their students to another agency in order to supplement the learner's knowledge.
- **Emphasize goals.** One of the most useful techniques for adult learners to maximize their retention of information includes setting goals. For instance, learning workplace relevant skills, studying for the GRE, taking parenting classes, etc. By setting a tangible target, adults can see the steps they are taking towards progress. This encourages self-esteem and increases motivation.
- **Incorporate basic knowledge.** By creating adult-situated contexts for learning, the learner commands respect, building self-confidence and further facilitating their education. The adult learner can also integrate their own experiences and understanding of the world to make the content of instruction more concrete.
- **Encourage collaboration in the classroom.** The most successful literacy programs engage learners by encouraging active participation in order to increase the rate of retention. This tactic gives adult learners a sense of ownership in their education. Promoting the participation of learners in designing the content of instruction makes lessons more concrete and builds personal efficacy.
- **Build upon native language.** Studies continuously point out that by mastering a person's native language, literacy in another language becomes easier. Instructors must find a way to incorporate learning in a student's native language in order to effectively accomplish English literacy.
- **Integrate use of multimedia.** Literacy programs need to stay at the cusp of technology in order to connect with today's adult learner. The use of computers, videos, tapes, etc., maximizes sight, sound and oral capacities in the learner, along with the resources available to instructors.

Pre-Literacy – Level 0 of the Monterey County Continuum of Literacy Services

Native Language Literacy (NLL) candidates are adults who speak a language other than English as their mother tongue and have attended 0-5 years of elementary school. Because of their level they are often unable to access services offering ESOL and GED classes. Most NLL classes incorporate both native language with English classes because adults rarely want to wait to begin learning English.

Based on the literature, in order to effectively accommodate to the adult learner, several patterns need to be employed:

- Teach native language literacy until the student can reach a certain level of literacy and can transfer to ESOL beginner class;
- Offer both native language and English;
- Translate the meaning of words and explain aspects of grammar;
- Coordinate primary oral English skills training with NLL instruction with two separate teachers.

Resources:

Gillespie, M. Native Language Literacy Instruction for Adults. Patterns, Issues & Promises. Center for Applied Linguistics, 118 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC. Tel. (202) 429-9292, 1994.

Adult Basic Education – Level 1

Adult Basic Education (ABE) encompasses a range of classes offered to adults. For the purpose of this study, the recommendations will apply to literacy classes taught in English. Adults potentially have difficulties with several aspects of literacy: phonetics, fluency, vocabulary or comprehension. Although many studies have been done researching literacy classes for adults, the latest studies reflect the changing trends for adult learners.

The following practices identify areas that instructors ought to incorporate into their classes:

- Identify what they already know and what they need to know beforehand;
- Assess *each* component of literacy (comprehension, fluency, etc.) to determine the student's abilities and potential;
- Translate the meaning of words and explain aspects of grammar;
- Specifically target phonemic awareness;
- Repeat reading texts to improve fluency;
- Teach specific comprehension strategies.

Resources:

<http://www.englishpage.com>

Offers weekly lessons on various topics especially for ESL students.

<http://a4esl.org>

Access quizzes, games, puzzles to use with your ESL student(s). This fun interactive Web site offers resources for students at every level.

<http://www.handsonenglish.com>

More assistance for ESL tutors and teachers.

<http://www.manythings.org>

This site features numerous games and other activities for ESL students.

<http://www.sabeswest.org/diversity/divbiblio4.pdf>

Annotated Bibliography of Diversity and Multicultural Materials for ABE: Materials for Use in the Classroom and Resources for Teachers and Administrators

Compiled by Dale Parker, member of the SABES West Diversity Advisory Group. Includes both print and video resources.

Kruidenier, John. Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction. National Institute for Literacy Contract. 15 May 2006.

http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/adult_ed/adult_ed_1.html

High School Equivalency/GED – Level 2

The GED places an emphasis on workplace skills and the ability to move on to higher education. Each section evaluates different aspects of knowledge applicable to life: organization, comprehension, world perception, everyday science and strategies for problem solving. In 2002 the GED testing changed, requiring instructors to reassess their teaching methods. The new test places a greater emphasis on content information and the progression of the test taker's thoughts.

The most valuable lessons for the adult learners:

- Translate the meaning of words and explain aspects of grammar;
- Address the psychological challenges that GED test takers face;
- Create lesson plans that require active participation from the learners (e.g. cooperative learning)
- Incorporate peer-reviewed GED instructional plans;
- Encourage personal reflection;
- Challenge the existing knowledge and experience of learners by further building upon expertise;
- Compare and contrast student's knowledge with literature on adult education.

Resources:

<http://www.LearningExpressLibrary.com>

The Mississippi Library Commission offers this site that gives unlimited access to practice tests. This includes the GED and Citizenship test in addition to tests for entry into specific careers such as paramedic, real estate broker and firefighter.

Family Literacy – Level 3

Family Literacy denotes a host of learning activities with an equal amount of educational implications for both adults and children. As a result, many family literacy programs revolve around how adult learning has a direct impact on a child's learning and literacy levels. In more comprehensive family literacy programs, both children and parents attend school together and play together in order to reinforce the important role that parents have as a child's first teacher.

Effective family-child literacy activities include:

- Translate the meaning of words and explain aspects of grammar;
- Provide demonstrations for parents about the pleasure of literacy and how literacy function as a tool to accomplish many purposes;
 - Read out loud to a group of parents in adult education classes ie: comics;
- Integrate adult education/job skills training for parents or caregivers;
- Focus on early childhood education;
- Involve peer support and resources for effective parenting;
- Provide intensive, frequent, long-term education and family support services to both parents and children;
- Conduct family reading time;
- Incorporate songs and rhyme.

Resources:

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/workforce/evenstart/parentinged/>

“Supporting Everyday Family Literacy Routines.”

http://www.readingfirstsupport.us/article.asp?article_id=133

Reading First Notebook. U.S. Department of Education. Winter 2006.

Cautilli, Joseph. A Review of Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children. The Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies.

Hart, Betty and Risley, Todd. R. Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children. Brookes Publishing Company, Inc. Baltimore. 1995

Rowe, Meredith L. and Kingston, Helen Chen. “Maternal Predictors of Three-year-old Children's Vocabulary Comprehension.”

Westberg, Laura. Connecting the World of Family Literacy. “A Parent is Worth a Thousand Words.” Family Literacy Alliance. Vol. IV, Iss. 2. Fall 2004. p. 7

Workplace Literacy – Level 4

The most effective workplace literacy programs use the workplace as the context for instruction and take into account workers' skills, knowledge and interests in training design and delivery. This functional context approach has benefits for both companies and employees:

- Increase in participants' motivation to learn, because they can see the value and applicability of the training;
- Increase in participants' ability to learn, because the concepts being taught are less abstract; and
- Increase in trainee's return to the company, because it is easier for individuals to transfer learning back to their jobs.

Best workplace literacy programs seem to share a number of characteristics:

- Link training objectives with company business objectives to reflect company, employee, and customer needs;
- Mirror workplace literacy training curricula, structure, and delivery methods to the workplace and its requirements;
- Tailor workplace literacy training to the trainee needs;
- Customize assessment to workplace requirements;
- Encourage flexible program delivery and employee participation;

Resources:

http://cls.coe.utk.edu/curriculum/esol_workplace.html

Tennessee ESOL in the Workplace: A Training Manual for ESOL Supervisors and Instructors: a collaborative project of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development Office of Adult Education and the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy Studies. There are four modules: knowing and presenting your adult education program to business and industry, knowing your community's needs and understanding the workplace, designing a plan to deliver and sustain services, and knowing your results by monitoring and evaluating progress.

http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/DMS/Documents/1062101599.5/LEP_brief.pdf

Center for Law and Social Policy: demographics and economic circumstances of low-income adults with limited English proficiency (LEP) as well as the language and job training services available to them.

www.foundationsskills.org

The Pennsylvania Workforce Improvement Network (PA WIN): In Pennsylvania, foundation skills are defined as those skills that workers need to be effective and safe in their work environment. PA WIN has developed a guide for growth and a series of training modules.

Health Literacy – Level 5

Health Literacy is defined by the National Health Education Standards (Joint Committee on national Health Education Standards, 1995) as ‘the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways which are health-enhancing.’

For adult literacy educators, some of the best health literacy classes employ these tactics:

- Introduce a health topic in which students have indicated an interest. Nutrition and stress are popular topics with adult literacy students;
- Let students choose the health topics;
- Teach each other (peer-to-peer) and teacher about what they have learned;
- Address cultural differences in health.

Resources:

<http://www.worlded.org/WEInternet/projects/ListProjects.cfm?Select=Topic&ID=18#2424>

World Education Health and Literacy Special Collection.

The Health & Literacy Special Collection is a Web-based resource for adult educators and health educators who are trying to bring clear and easy-to-read health information to low literate populations. It contains health curricula for literacy or ESOL classes, links to health information in plain English and languages other than English, and information about health literacy.

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/lowlit/7lowlit.html>

Food & Drug Administration: This Web site offers brochures and information on health written for low-level readers. Offered in both English and Spanish versions.

<http://www.nap.edu/books/0309091179/html/>

<http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=19723>

Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion

Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. The report recommends that health care systems should develop and support programs to reduce the negative effects of limited health literacy, and that health knowledge and skills be incorporated into the existing curricula of kindergarten through 12th grade classes, as well as into adult education and community programs. Furthermore, programs to promote health literacy, health education, and health promotion programs should be developed with involvement from the people who will use them.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorial.html>

The National Library of Medicine has added 14 new interactive health tutorials to its database. This site would be excellent for reviewing health or medical information with a new learner.

<http://www.askme3.org>

The Partnership for Clear Health Communication: a patient education program designed to promote communication between health care providers and patients in order to improve health outcomes.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/easytoread/easytoread_a.html

U.S. Department of Medicine - MEDLINE's "Easy to Read" pages available in both English and Spanish provide information on health topics and mediations.

Hohn, Marcia Drew. Empowerment Health Education in Adult Literacy: A Guide for Public Health and Adult Literacy Practitioners, Policy Makers and Funders. National Institute for Literacy. 1998. 5 May 2006.

<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/fellowship/reports/hohn/HOHN.HTM#suggestions>

Peyton, Tony, Mary Gwen Wheeler and Debbie Dalton. States Can Use Family Literacy Programs to Support Welfare Reform Goals. NGA Center for Best Practices. 4 June 1998.

Sullivan, Eileen. National Network of Libraries of Medicine. University of New Mexico, Health Sciences Center Library. <http://nnlm.gov/scr/conhlth/hlthlit.htm#Health%20Literacy>
Accessed 5 May 2006.

Civic Literacy – Level 6

The US Department of Education funds a program called English Literacy and Civic Education which incorporates civics into the ESOL curricula. The programs utilize contextual instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and US history and government as a complement to parenting, work skills and community membership.

Successful programs addressing civic literacy include:

- Figure out how a system that affects an issue works;
- Find, interpret, analyze, and use diverse sources of information, including personal experience;
- Strengthen and express a sense of self that reflects personal history, values, beliefs, and roles in the larger community;
- Reflect on and reevaluate your own opinions and ideas;
- Influence decision makers and hold them accountable.

A common framework for a civic literacy class contains:

1. Identify student concerns and the communities they care about. Select an issue to focus on.
2. Find out prior knowledge and understanding of students. Elicit student questions.
3. Reflect on your own role and experience of this issue.
4. Work with students to investigate answers to their questions and build knowledge. Analyze this information to develop informed opinions.
5. Help students identify what they want to communicate, to whom, and how.
6. Identify what needs to be learned and what you will look for to assess learning.
7. Develop student skills and knowledge needed to carry out the plan.
8. Carry out action and document learning.
9. Reflect on and assess learning with students.
10. Discuss with students how learning might transfer to other situations.

Resources:

<http://www.nelrc.org/VERA/index.htm>

Voter Education, Registration, and Action campaign 2004 (VERA '04) is a non-partisan effort aimed at adult literacy learners and program staff in the New England states. Its goal is to educate adult learners about voting and the topical electoral issues and mobilize them to vote in the 2004 elections. VERA is sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education.

www.urbanagenda.wayne.edu/index.htm

The Youth Urban Agenda/Civic Literacy Project is an international civic education program housed at [Wayne State University](http://www.waynestate.edu) in Detroit, Michigan in collaboration with the City Clerk of Detroit, Wayne County Government and numerous educational institutions. The heart of the program is the process of agenda building as a key method for preparing youth in their role as participants in a democratic society. The program is a means of sparking student interest for learning social studies, civics and communications.

<http://literacytech.worlded.org/docs/vera/index1.htm>

Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook: A resource for Adult Educators
Includes narrative accounts and skill-building activities that are organized around topics such as Finding Connections to Communities and Issues; Holding Decision-Makers Accountable; Expressing Ourselves and Educating Others; and Organizing for Change.

Nash, Andy. Integrating Civic Participation and Adult ESOL. New England Literacy Resource Center. January 2005. 5 May 2006.

<http://www.nelrc.org/publications/cpandesol.html>

Financial Literacy – Level 7

Financial Literacy is often a struggle for adult learners, because it incorporates numeracy. Learners from another country often need to learn a completely different financial system in order to feel numerically literate. Foreign-born residents may come from a culture that encourages community savings as opposed to building individual assets and financial literacy lessons should incorporate familiar concepts while explaining how to adapt those to current goals.

The best methods for teaching financial literacy include:

- Assess each individual's financial needs;
- Identify behaviors affecting the learner's financial circumstances;
- Instill confidence and broad understanding of financial literacy versus detailed and specific information;
- Reflect on the learner's difficult financial experiences to use as a learning tool;
- Use in conjunction with workplace training.

Resources:

Braunstein, Sandra and Carolyn Welch. Financial Literacy: An Overview of Practice, Research and Policy. Federal Reserve Bulletin, November 2002. 15 May 2006.
<http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/bulletin/2002/1102lead.pdf>

Bibliography

<http://www.nifl.gov/readingprofiles/>

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL): for adult education practitioners on the diagnostic assessment of reading. As an interactive site, teachers are able to find out about a learner's reading strengths and needs when they enter a learner's scores on a few reading sub-skills.

<http://www.ncld.org/advocacy/>

National Center for Learning Disabilities: the first guide written explicitly for those wishing to advocate for individuals with learning disabilities. A complete "how-to" reference on all aspects of public policy advocacy, this guide offers invaluable information for both first-time and experienced advocates.

<http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=44&TopicID=108&DocumentID=2504>

American Foundation for the Blind has a list of best practices for people who are visually impaired and have low literacy.

Eisemon, Thomas, Kari Marble, and Michael Crawford. Investing in Adult Literacy: Lessons and Implications. International Literacy Institute. International Literacy Institute, 1998. 1-12. 28 Apr. 2006 <<http://literacy.org/products/ili/pdf/TR9803.pdf>>.

Kutner, Mark, Elizabeth Greenberg, and Justin Baer. A First Look At the Literacy of America'S Adults in the 21st Century. National Assessments of Adult Literacy. Washington DC: National Assessments of Adult Literacy, 2005. 02 May 2006 <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006470>>.

LaLyre, Yvonne. Issues in Assessment of Native Language Literacy. Massachusetts Department of Education. 5 May 2006.

<http://www.sabes.org/resources/adventures/vol8/8lalyre.htm>

Sharan, Merriam B., and Rosemary S. Caffa. Learning in Adulthood: a Comprehensive Guide. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1999.

Yankwitt, Ira. In-depth Overview: Understanding & Teaching the New GED. Literacy Assistance Center. <http://www.lacnyc.org/resources/adult/GED/GEDInstitute/overview.htm> 15 May 2006.

Pending additions to this document:

- Edit based on feedback and Input from local adult literacy service providers
- URL for NAAL on pages 2 and 4
- Add references from 2005 pre-Campaign Research of CFMC Literacy Task Force
- Add reference from report on dyslexia and inheritance – Melton
- Add references from 2006 Workplace Literacy Report – Lang