

# The OLRC *News*

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## *Beginnings* Writers Honored - OLRC Gears Up for 2007



*Beginnings IX* Author, Doris Hernandez with Instructor Sameera Mohammed.

**E**ighty-three *Beginnings IX* authors and two artists were honored at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's Ninth Annual Ohio Writers' Conference held on May 12, 2006 at the Columbus Marriott Northwest.

Marty Lopinto, ABLE instructor, has had students participate in the conference since the beginning of the Writers' Conference. "The OLRC makes the day so special," Lopinto said. "Some of my students have never been recognized in front of a group of people! It is great for their self esteem! The students come away feeling VERY special," she adds. One can see the devotion Lopinto has for her students. She calls her classroom a "positive thinking area."

One of the celebrated authors, Doris Hernandez, wrote an incredible and compassionate story about learning life lessons from her mother, "If you give love, the world will love you." The language is warming to the heart. The experience she gains is evident and nostalgia overwhelms the reader with an inspirational elation. It is very uplifting, and her guidance takes the reader back to the days of childhood, when the words of a mother seem to be so much more prophetic and memorable.

Fumiko Adair, another celebrated author in *Beginnings*, shares her story about how her life changed when she had her daughter, Sarah. She gives the reader a day-in-the-life account of her trials and tribulations in dealing with a daughter who has Autism Spectrum Disorder. "My ASD daughter makes my life more interesting," Adair said, as it is in her piece entitled, *Denwa*. "It's sprinkled with thrills, suspense, horror and laughter. I'm glad to have a place to share her stories with you," Adair said.

Lyn Ford, nationally renowned storyteller, kicked off the Ninth Conference with a taste of her "Home Fried" tales, leaving everyone with a whetted appetite. The keynote speaker at the event, Eileen Moushey, a freelance writer and director from Kent, Ohio, won a regional Emmy Award for a children's series written for PBS station WNEO/WEAO in 1999. Her acting troupe, founded in 1986, performs her comedy/mystery scripts throughout the Midwest. Since 1996, those same scripts have been available for independent productions. Hundreds of theaters, colleges, and high schools around the world have performed *Mysteries by Moushey*.

After expressing a few points about her successful career, Moushey stressed the importance of dialogue in writing. She followed her speech with an interactive exercise, allowing students to role-play with the scenes she wrote. Afterwards, students received recognition for their writing, and accepted a copy of their published work, *Beginnings IX*.

Each year, the OLRC receives over 400 submissions, and a dozen or more reviewers evaluate writing entries based on a set form of writing criteria: content, organization, creativity, mechanics, and overall strength. The OLRC hopes for an even greater response at next year's Tenth Annual Ohio Writers' Conference on May 11, 2007 at the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

The 2007 conference will feature Poet, Lee Peterson as the keynote speaker. Her book entitled *Rooms and Fields: Dramatic Monologues from the War in Bosnia*, published by the Kent State University

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Press, brought tears to the eyes of listeners at her reading in the KIVA on the Kent State University campus. As soon as Peterson spoke, the audience fell silent in awe of her horrific tale. The imagery of a war-torn and divided country is very difficult to grasp until Peterson shares the graphic images in detail: "With her eyes she took the world apart in pieces, / pieces she held for a moment and then set down" (Peterson, 2004, p. 34). She will be a unique addition to the tenth Conference this coming spring.

The submission deadline for all ORIGINAL WORK, not copied from any other source, is February 9, 2007. This year, the submission process for all writing will be completed online. Information on how to submit entries will be sent out in November.

Artwork submissions must best represent the spirit of the *Beginnings X* publication, and will be judged on originality. Pencil, ink, marker, or crayon creations must be submitted on an 8 1/2 x 11" white sheet of paper to the OLRC no later than February 9, 2007. No computer generated artwork will be accepted.



***Beginnings X***  
***May 11, 2007***  
***Ohio Historical Society, Columbus Ohio***

*From the Desk of Sandra Golden, Ohio Literacy Alliance*



Greetings!

I am happy to announce that I have returned to the Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC) on a full-time basis as the Director of the Ohio Literacy Alliance (OLA). OLA, funded by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, is a joint effort between Kent State and The Ohio State Universities. These two institutions have collaborated as literacy change agents for the State of Ohio. Through the expertise of distinguished faculty and researchers at each institution, OLA will be the leader in the State of Ohio to address language literacy (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, and listening) challenges across the lifespan. The Alliance has been in existence since 2004, and its primary mission is to provide professional development support and resources to educators, researchers, and literacy specialist servicing family literacy, P-12, and adult literacy efforts.

I encourage you to check out the website at [www.ohioliteracyalliance.org](http://www.ohioliteracyalliance.org) to learn more about us and utilize the resources we have available for adult literacy teachers. Just by clicking on Adult Literacy Tradebooks and Teaching Ideas you will find one of the OLRC's most popular resources – the Eureka tradebook database. This tradebook database houses book summaries and teaching ideas on an array of intriguing and easy to read library books for your adult learners. Also, the database has a variety of topics from Art to History to People. And, coming soon you will have access to standards-based lesson plans. These lesson plans were made possible through the efforts of Judy Franks, Literacy Projects Coordinator, OLRC, to provide you with a valuable resource to use in your classrooms.

You may also join our listserv and receive our bi-yearly newsletter, government updates on literacy, funding and career opportunities. To sign up, go to [www.ohioliteracyalliance.org](http://www.ohioliteracyalliance.org) and click on Join the Ohio Literacy Alliance Discussion List.

We would love to hear your ideas, thoughts and challenges about being an Adult Literacy Teacher. You may send your messages via email to [ola@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:ola@literacy.kent.edu), or call me at 330.672.0758 or by U.S. mail to Ohio Literacy Alliance, Research 1 - 1100 Summit Street, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242.



Respectfully,  
Sandra Golden

## Helping Students Improve Their Writing Through The Peer Writing Conference

The Peer Writing Conference (PWC), students helping each other revise their writing, is an effective way to help students become more aware that they are writing for an audience. The PWC is also a way to help students write as readers.

Research in the field of education supports using the PWC:

- Knowledge is constructed through conversations with others.
- We can confirm we know a concept when we can explain that concept to a peer.
- Writers can develop more confidence in their writing after repeated input from their peers.

To make sure the PWC is successful in your classroom, follow these suggestions:

- Discuss the purposes for the PWC: to help writers see their writing as readers do, to share writing experiences with peers, to be supported by peers, to share ideas and strategies, to get ideas, and to learn that writers work hard to become better writers.
- Tell students the focus will be on revisions, not on editing.
- Model a peer conference to show what kinds of questions could be asked of the writer.
- Use pieces of writing from previous classes to guide students in the process.
- Keep groups small – no more than five in a group.
- Spend time in each group to answer questions and help students if they get stuck.
- Let peer groups decide if they will read their pieces of writing aloud or silently.

The following questions can be used as a guide for the peer group discussions or you can encourage students to develop their own questions. Warm up question: What did I enjoy the most about the piece of writing? Why?

1. Did I understand what the writer was trying to say?
2. Was I able to see the picture the writer was trying to convey?
3. Were there enough examples in the piece?
4. Was the writer's introduction interesting enough to make me want to read more?
5. Was the piece easy to follow or did the writer skip around?
6. Did the writer stick with one topic?
7. Was the writer's conclusion effective or did it leave me hanging?

The Peer Writing Conference is a great way for your students to support each other as they work to become better writers.

*Taken from The Peer Conference: A Key to Developing Writers as Readers by Constance Chapman in the Georgia Journal of Reading, Fall/Winter, 1991, page 20-25*

## New Website Promotes Storybooks for Families

The Harvard Family Research Project has a splendid new website called The Family Involvement Storybook Corner developed in partnership with Reading Is Fundamental and found at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/about.html>. The purpose of the site is to promote “awareness and practice of family involvement in children’s education through *complementary learning*, that is, consistent out-of-school opportunities that support learning and development from birth through adolescence.” The homepage has links to five self-explanatory sections: Using Storybooks, The Bookcase, The Reference Desk, Related Readings, and Feedback.

Using stories that illustrate supportive family environments, the site encourages the reading and sharing of storybooks. The Bookcase section includes a list of books, each with a Plot Summary and Family Involvement Summary. The Reference Desk has one complete set of guides for *Haimoni and the Picnic* for teachers, parents, and teacher trainers that serve as models.

The resources are just the tip of the iceberg. The Related Readings section contains publications on recent research on family involvement. On the homepage, the button marked “new” for Complementary Learning leads to a comprehensive *Guide to Online Resources on Family Involvement* that can be downloaded by section.



We are working to improve Eureka! and would like your feedback. What are two ideas you have about how it could be better? To see the resources go to <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/> Please send you answers to [dbaycich@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:dbaycich@literacy.kent.edu) or call 330-672-7841.



# Resources and Reviews

**Britto, P., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Griffin, T. (2006). Maternal reading and teaching patterns: Associations with school readiness in low-income African-American families. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41, 68-89.**

We know that parents are their children's first and most important teachers. We also know that a great deal of learning is supported through language. And we know that parents are encouraged to read to and play with their children from birth. Intuitively, these issues seem related. In a recent study, Britto, Brooks-Gunn, and Griffin (2006) sought to understand this relationship. Specifically, they recorded and analyzed teaching behaviors while parents and children read books and completed puzzles. They wanted to know what parents did and how parents' language might be related to children's vocabulary development and school readiness.

More than 100 parents and preschool children participated in the study. Mothers were all young (under 20), undereducated (no high school diplomas or GEDs), poor, and African-American. Each mother read the same book to her child, along with instructions: "All readers have their own way of reading books...So feel comfortable doing it your own way" (Britto, et al., 2006, p. 73). Mothers and children also completed two puzzles, one easy for the child and the second a bit more challenging. Mothers' directions in this case were to give "whatever help you think he/ she needs to do it himself/ herself" (p. 73).

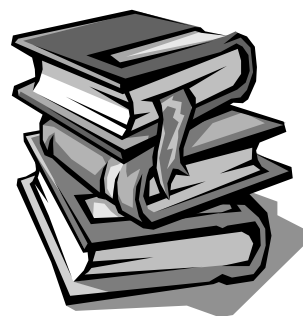
Sessions were videotaped, and mothers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors were analyzed. For story reading, about 2/3 of the mothers were classified as "story readers"; their rendition of the story stayed close to its text. The remaining 1/3 were classified "story tellers"; they labeled objects, talked with children about issues related to but beyond the text, etc., in addition to reading the text. For puzzles, about 35% of the mothers were classified as "Low Support/ Low Teaching," as they neither encouraged nor provided assistance or direct teaching for their children. About 45% of the mothers were classified as "Support/ Low Teaching," and the remaining 25% were classified "Support/ Teaching."

Children's expressive and receptive vocabulary and school readiness were assessed using standardized instruments. Researchers then looked for associations between mothers' patterns of interaction and children's vocabulary and school readiness. They found that both vocabulary and school readiness were linked with mothers' verbal guidance and language use:

Children's vocabulary appears to be associated with a more interactive maternal book-reading pattern (encouraging the child to participate in the activity, asking more questions, and extending children's knowledge beyond the pages of the book) and with a teaching pattern that combines both support and instruction... [such as] guided assistance, flexibility in giving instruction to match the child's need, and clear verbal cues that the child understands, while at the same time providing information to help the child learn and solve the task. (p. 81)

The results of this study offer several implications for family literacy professionals, here framed as questions to support conversation about these issues in staff meetings:

- Do you know why parents choose the reading and teaching strategies they do? If not, how could you find out?
- Does your work with parents' read-aloud include attention to how (and why) to elaborate while reading to children?
- Do you provide a variety of learning situations for parents and children? Do you work with parents to help them learn how (and why) to support their children's learning?



## Nancy's Number Notes

*Dear Nancy,*

*I know that group work is important, but my class has so many different levels. I don't know how to group them in order to help them learn a topic. How important is it that they are close to the same level in order to work together?*

*-Susan*

*Dear Susan,*

*The GED and most other high stakes tests aren't grouped according to subject. The problems are all mixed up. Determining what to do with a given problem is often the hardest part of a test. Your students need plenty of practice in looking at problems and deciding what to do with them. This is a perfect way to work in groups in a classroom. If needed, the students can use a calculator and work together on almost any set of diverse problems. Pull a page from any GED workbook, and give it to a group of two or four students to work on. You'll be surprised how different levels can work together on a challenging sheet of non-routine problems. This is an important part of every class session.*



If you have a math question that you would like answered in the OLRC News, email Nancy Markus at [nmarkus@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:nmarkus@literacy.kent.edu).



Fall 2006

## The OLRC News

# Tech Talk

### LINCS Update

Marie Cora

LINCS is the Literacy Information and Communication System, a project of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). LINCS combines a variety of resources including online discussions, technology training, and an extensive database of literacy materials. One of the key components of LINCS are the Special Collections. The LINCS Special Collections are peer-reviewed, content-oriented collections of high-quality literacy practices and materials for use in adult education and literacy programs. There are currently 11 topics covered in the Collections including English as a Second Language, Equipped for the Future, Literacy and Learning Disabilities, and Policy and Legislation. The homepage for the LINCS Special Collections can be found at <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/collections.html>.

The Assessment Special Collection (<http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/assessment>) launched in June of 2001 and funded in part by the Office of Adult and Vocational Education, provides individuals dealing with assessment and evaluation in adult literacy programs a means to access a variety of resources electronically. During the 2006 program year, the site was redesigned based on recommendations from users and from a focus group study that was conducted in 2004. The new site was launched in late summer of 2006.

The Collection focuses on assessment and evaluation topics for both program management and instruction. Research, contact information for test publishers, glossaries of assessment terminology, an extensive listing of online links and directories related to assessment, and current event information dealing with assessment are also included. The site resources are organized by literacy roles which include students, teachers, program administrators, and policy makers. Users are encouraged to explore all areas of the Collection and not limit themselves to a particular role, as there are many relevant and useful resources posted or cross-posted throughout each of the four roles.

Sites and online resources for the Assessment Special Collection are found through recommendations from

practitioners, postings on discussion lists, articles in various professional journals and newsletters, and web searches. Once sites are identified, they are evaluated for quality, usefulness of information, and organization of the site or resource using two sets of criteria: the General LINCS Selection Criteria and the Assessment Special Collection Selection Criteria. Resources being considered are sent to a Core Knowledge Group (CKG), which decides if they are suitable for the Special Collection. The members of the CKG are experts in the field of assessment in adult basic education and literacy and represent agencies such as the Ohio Literacy Resource Center, World Education, CASAS, Center for Literacy Studies, National Center for ESL Literacy Education, Missouri Even Start Reading First Evaluation, and the Center for Educational Assessment at University of Massachusetts, among others. The content of the Collection is developed and maintained by the Collection Coordinator, whose area of expertise is assessment and accountability in Adult Basic Literacy and Education.

Two areas of the Collection that are presently under-resourced are the area for students, as well as a section with hands-on, practical resources and lesson plans for the classroom. These areas will be the focus for resource development for program year 2007, in addition to continued resource development in general. We are always happy to receive site recommendations. If you have sites you would like to recommend or have comments or suggestions about the site, please contact Marie Cora at [mcora@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:mcora@literacy.kent.edu) or Tim Ponder at [tponder@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:tponder@literacy.kent.edu).



# How Should We Teach Comprehension?

Nancy Padak

If you were a successful student in school, you may have taught yourself to comprehend. In fact, if you were in elementary school before the 1980s, you probably had little opportunity to be taught comprehension. Research in the late 1970s showed that teachers in elementary schools spent more time assessing comprehension (asking questions about texts) or assigning reading exercises (skill sheets, etc.) than teaching children to comprehend (Durkin, 1978-79). Thus, many of today's teachers have had no models of comprehension instruction in their own educational pasts.

Given the importance of comprehension to the reading process, this lack of models is problematic. Fortunately, the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and the document based on it that was prepared for adult educators (Partnership for Reading, 2004) have provided some guidance about comprehension instruction. The Equipped for the Future framework (<http://literacy.kent.edu/ohioeff/>) also places importance on comprehension, or "Reading for Meaning."

From all these reports we are told, for example, that comprehension must be taught, that it's a mistake to assume that adult students can teach themselves to comprehend, either by simply reading or by working through skill books or other instructional materials by themselves. Moreover, we are told to concentrate instruction on helping students become *strategic* comprehenders—to help students learn how to think as readers, how to construct meaning from written texts of all kinds, and how to make connections between what they read and what they already know.

These reports provide some guidance, to be sure, but at least two important questions remain: What kinds of materials should students read? And what kinds of teacher support can enhance students' abilities to read strategically? The purpose of this article is to provide some answers to these critical questions.

## Materials

No one can learn to comprehend material that is too difficult. In fact, one guideline from scholars who focus on helping struggling readers (e.g., Allington, 2000) is that students must read lots of easy material. "Easy" is easy to determine. You can teach students to use the "five finger rule": Read several paragraphs from the middle of some new book or article. Put a finger down on the table each time you see an unfamiliar word. If all the fingers from one hand are on the table before you finish the paragraphs, the book or article will probably be too difficult for you.

Put it away and find something else that you are interested in reading.

This "five-finger rule" is based on an assumption about what makes something difficult to read: Too many unfamiliar words will hamper a person's comprehension. Surely there's more to comprehension than this, but the rule is easy to teach and easy to use.

Authenticity of materials used for instruction may also deserve

consideration. Most adult literacy programs rely on workbooks and other commercial materials rather than authentic materials. This is unfortunate because the little existing research suggests far greater benefit from authentic reading material. "Authentic" materials are real—books, newspaper or magazine articles, technical manuals/ directions, poetry, short stories, websites, etc. The primary distinction is that authentic materials are not designed for instruction, although they may be used instructionally. Rather authentic materials are designed to be read in real-life (i.e., out of school) contexts.

## Instructional Support

Finding appropriate material to read is necessary but not sufficient to effective comprehension instruction. The teacher has a critical role to play as well. And deciding which reading strategies deserve instructional focus can be confusing. In a recent article in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Reading*, Hock and Mellard, (2005) approached this issue by beginning with the strategies required for success on outcomes assessments, in particular several levels of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and the GED practice test.

Hock and Mellard assembled a panel of experts to begin their study. These professionals conducted a content analysis of the questions on the tests. The goal was to establish a list of the types of comprehension strategies students would need to employ in order to answer test questions correctly. The panel of experts determined that success on these tests required six types of strategic reading:

- Identifying and paraphrasing the main idea
- Summarizing
- Making inferences
- Generating questions
- Creating visual images
- Looking for clues

The next step in the study was to determine which types of strategic reading were required for each test. For the CASAS knowing how to look for clues and generating questions, both considered low-level comprehension strategies, would lead to success. For the GED practice test, summarizing and making inferences, both reflective of higher-level comprehension strategies, were most important. The authors concluded that summarizing and making inferences are "the most important reading comprehension strategies for adult literacy outcomes" (p. 198).

Several teaching strategies explained in the Eureka! database are useful for helping students learn to summarize and make inferences. The strategy list is located at [http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/read\\_with\\_understanding.html](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/read_with_understanding.html) These strategies will be especially useful:

### Summarizing

- Herringbone
- Manzo's Guided Reading Procedure (adaptation)
- Semantic Mapping
- Think-Pair-Share
- Summarizing

### Making Inferences

- Agree? Disagree? Why?
- Bleich's Heuristic
- Discussion Web
- Directed Reading-Thinking Activity



Thus, to answer the “what” of comprehension strategy instruction, teachers may need to consider the requirements of the task, or what readers need to do with the information they read. Although a focus on summarizing and making inferences would be wise, teachers are cautioned to remember that “proficient readers do not rely on just one reading comprehension strategy, but several” (Hock & Mellard, 2005, p. 198).

#### References

Allington, R. (2000). *What really matters for struggling readers*. New York: Longman.

Durkin, D. (1978-79). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 14, 481-533.

Hock, M., & Mellard, D. (2005). Reading comprehension strategies for adult literacy outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 49, 192-200.

National Institute for Literacy. (2004). *Partnership for reading*. Retrieved 11/21/05 from <http://www.nifl.gov/cgi-bin/lincs/search/dbsearch/dbsearch.cgi?record=NIFL:DC:1097265737349.909186853296>

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read. Report of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

## Search Eureka! for SBE Lessons!

There are several ways to find many standards-based education (SBE) lessons you can use immediately in your ABE classrooms. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the **Lesson Plan** <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/lessons/index> home page. Here you will find all the information and resources necessary for creating your own SBE lessons.

If you would like to search the whole database by keyword, follow these steps -

At the Agora, click on the *Bathtub Search Icon* and in the keyword box type **reading**, **writing** or **math**. These are the keywords for our Standards - we'll also be including **speaking** and **listening** soon with the inclusion of ESOL lessons. This search will also provide many adult-appropriate trade (library) books that can be used in your classrooms, as well as software and websites for that keyword. The icons are listed at the top of that page to help you find the appropriate document.

If you are looking specifically for a list of lesson plans, follow these steps -

At the Agora, click on *Lesson Plans*. Here you will find a lesson plan of the month that you can download immediately. These lessons will include the Ohio Standard and Benchmarks used in our ABE programs. Pay special attention to the section of the chart called “activity addresses COPs.” This will help you understand how the lesson was developed to include all the components of performance (COPs) of that standard. If you would like to find a complete list of the lessons currently in the database, click on the *Lesson Plan Advanced Search* link where you can find the lessons arranged alphabetically.

This is a project always in development, so check back often. If you have questions, please contact Judy Franks at 330-672-0753 or email [jfranks@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:jfranks@literacy.kent.edu). Good luck searching and enjoy Eureka!

## June Weddings at the OLRC!

Carrie (Spence), Communications Coordinator, and Brian White, GED Scholars Initiative Director, tied the knot in Niagara Falls, Ontario on June 10, 2006! Carrie's daughter, Noelle (age 6), served as Maid of Honor and Brian's son, Jackson (age 8) performed the duties of Best Man. Family, friends, and coworkers were on hand to witness the first OLRC wedding! The couple wrote their own vows - there wasn't a dry eye in the house! They honeymooned briefly in Niagara Falls after the wedding as they were saving money to put towards the house they've had built in Kent!

The following Saturday marked the wedding day of Ben Graves, OLRC student worker, and son of Penny Graves, who is the Business Manager for the OLRC! Ben and his new wife, Karen, were married in a beautiful and sentimental ceremony at the Kent Presbyterian Church. Ben has just graduated from Kent State with a Bachelors of General Studies, and will be attending Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the Fall. Karen finished her Master's in School Counseling this Spring and will be job-hunting in the Pittsburgh area!

#### Best Wishes

Brian and Carrie White  
Ben and Karen Graves



Are any of your colleagues interested in receiving the *OLRC News*, and other OLRC publications? If so, email us at [olrc@literacy.kent.edu](mailto:olrc@literacy.kent.edu).





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