The OLRC *News*

10th Annual Ohio Writers' Conference Honors Excellence

By: Erin Brady

The immense honor of being a published author does not come to many people; some people spend their entire lives striving for it. Adversity may have stopped many other writers, but it certainly has done nothing to prevent Ohio ABLE students from succeeding. The tenacity and heart of these students have led them to triumph over probability—a triumph worthy of celebration. For the student writers featured in **Beginnings 10**, the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's Ohio Writers' Conference on May 11, 2007 was an opportunity for them to be acknowledged and applauded for their efforts and accomplishments. Students come from many different countries, different parts of our country, and have diverse life experiences. They are mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons; some of them have grandchildren or even great-grandchildren. They are advanced students and they are beginners. Despite their differences, they share one commonality; each of them has been published in **Beginnings 10**.

For some writers, this honor is the validation of a life that strayed and then returned to the path leading toward success. For others, it is a validation of years of child-rearing and nurturing and a validation of the struggle to learn a new culture and language to provide a better life for oneself and one's family. No emotion is left untouched, as they share their triumphs and failures, joys and sorrows. This mark of distinction is one that not many can claim; it is a very rare occurrence for one to become a published author.

Honey Massey, a teacher from Mayfield Schools, has attended several Ohio Writers' Conferences, along with her ESOL students who have been published. Like most people who have attended a Writers' Conference, Massey understands the opportunity with which these students are presented, and the sense of accomplishment that they feel. "These celebrations give an opportunity for self-expression and recognition," Massey said, "and the awards ceremony allows GED and ESOL students to share their thoughts and their dreams."

The conference began with a continental breakfast then progressed to a welcome, given by storyteller Lyn Ford. Ford's ability to tell stories coincides with her ability to give those around her the confidence to do what they dare not. She urged the audience to turn to those near them and let them know that their "brilliance was show-ing." After encouraging and congratulating the published authors, she began to work her storytelling magic. Ford's tale of how the spider got eight legs illustrated her point that "you have to know who you are and what you need" in order to be a productive writer, storyteller, and person.

Following Ford was keynote speaker, Lee Peterson. Peterson opened with a quote from James Baldwin, urging the audience to "tell as much of the truth as one can bear, and then a little more." This was especially appropriate for both Peterson and the authors, as she described her poems about the horrors of the war in Bosnia in terms to which everyone could relate. Peterson read a few of her poems, which had a more somber tone and seemed to echo the lives of many of the authors in the audience. "To write is to fall in love with language," Peterson said. It was quite obvious that both speakers captivated the crowd, and each have a deep relationship with words.

After the keynote address Lyn Ford conducted a workshop. During the workshop, students were given an opportunity to share their responses to the workshop exercises. Students were also given the opportunity to share at the Awards Cere-

Beginnings author, Joanne Roach, accepts award certificate.

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mony which highlighted the achievements of the writers featured in **Beginnings 10**. Two GED Scholars, Heidi Bauer and Robert Rojc, delivered speeches during lunch, illustrating the importance of an education and the courage to define yourself instead of allowing others to define you. Students were encouraged to take advantage of the Open Mike after the Awards Ceremony. Many of the authors read their works aloud for the audience, and for some of them, this was a very difficult and emotional task. One author even apologized in advance, telling the crowd that she would cry at the end. Some of the writers remained stoic, even while recounting the most traumatizing life stories, but most expressed their emotions freely; tears flowed generously, and the occasional laugh was emitted. The Conference celebrates the achievements of ABLE students in their quests to further their educations and to better their lives. Despite their differences, these students are able to relate on a much deeper and more meaningful level. They embrace their differences and use them to forge relationships with one another. Massey observed that, "this event brings together two diverse strands of American society... [and] this mixture is indicative of what makes America so great. This communality is the miracle that America creates: opportunity for all." The Ohio Writers' Conference, based on the outpouring of emotion and gratitude from the writers themselves, was a success. The lives of these special people have been significantly improved by their desire for a better education, and their spirits have been lifted by the joys they have discovered in writing.

Student authors autograph copies of Beginnings 10.

Writing: A Necessary Tool

In an article with this name, Gene Budig (2006) summarizes a report from the College Board's National Commission on Writing(www.writingcommission.org; click on Reports) called "Writing: A Ticket to Work...or a Ticket Out?" More than 100 Human Resources Directors were interviewed about the importance of writing in the workplace. Among findings:

- People who can't write and communicate clearly are less likely to be hired than those who can. "Half of the responding companies reported that they take writing into consideration when hiring... and making promotion decisions" (p. 663).
- The vast majority (80%) of companies with the greatest employment growth potential (service, finance, insurance, real estate) assess writing during hiring.
- Two-thirds of employees in large companies must regularly write on the job. Nearly half (40%) of companies require employees with weak writing skills to take special training.

Budig's conclusion might be a good topic for discussion in an ABLE class: "Without question, most of the new and meaningful jobs that will be available in the years ahead will emphasize writing" (p. 633). Together with students, you might want to explore typical writing tasks for careers of interest. You might also want to help students learn to communicate clearly and concisely in writing. Students need to understand that writing is "a fundamental building block for designing and achieving professional success and advancement" (p. 663).

Budig, G. (2006). Writing: A necessary tool. *Phi Delta Kappan, 87*, 663.

Nancy's Number Notes

When I make a pie chart with my students using manipulatives, sometimes I can't get the items to go all around my paper plate pie chart. Does it matter if there are blank parts to the pie chart?

Actually, it does matter. A pie chart, or circle graph, represents the "whole." It is divided according to percents of the items that make up the whole. While there might be a section called "other," it still represents a part of the whole. A fun and accurate way to make a circle graph is to line your items (M&Ms ?) around the edge of a paper plate. Group the colors together and try to evenly space the items. By marking the sections, a student can color in the wedges and show the relative percentages of the items.

Another way to make an accurate circle graph is to color a bar graph with different colors, then cut out the individual bars. By taping these together into a circle, the student can put it on a paper and color the sections as indicated by the different colored bars.

Volunteer Training: Lessons from Research

A recent study (Belzer, 2006) examined methods of training literacy tutors in four different kinds of adult education programs and, most important, the extent to which the training transferred to practice with adult literacy students. The results of this study, which are summarized below, have implications for all ABLE professional development for new teachers, not just for tutor training.

Belzer attended tutor training and examined training materials for four programs. Two were associated with ProLiteracy America, but one resembled former Laubach training and the other resembled former LVA training. The third program, situated in a public library, aimed to integrate Equipped for the Future (EFF) content standards into instruction, and the fourth was a community-based organization that focused on student-tutor working relationships. The four programs served from 40-120 students; two focused on basic literacy instruction only (beginning reading through grade 4), and the other two also served ESOL students. Training times ranged from 4 hours (library program) to 20 hours (LVA-like program). Brief summaries of training follow:

> Library program (EFF): no instruction was addressed; trainer pointed out descriptions of instruction in training materials; tutors were told to "choose the topic or content [of instruction] based on students' needs and interests and apply strategies that are important using what they know already to build on" (p. 123).

> LVA-like program: "the training emphasized the importance of teaching word patterns and using the LEA [language-experience approach] and the importance of exercises and instructional techniques more than actual reading. This training could be characterized as eclectic" (p. 124).

> Laubach-like program: "oriented strongly towards phonics-based instruction and the use of graded instructional materials. If tutors adhere to the program's emphasis on these rather prescriptive materials, they need not make complex decisions about teaching reading. They can simply function as guides through the material" (p. 124).

Community-based organization: "emphasized goal-oriented, meaning-driven instruction. Although specific approaches to teaching were discussed in the training, little attention was given to how to provide direct instruction on coping with word-level difficulties....[T]utors are expected to create teaching and learning opportunities solely in response to student interests" (p. 125).

To find out about how this training transferred to instruction, three student-tutor pairs from each program audiotaped three consecutive sessions, which Belzer transcribed and analyzed. Follow-up interviews with both students and tutors were also conducted and analyzed. In a nutshell, Belzer found few differences in instruction that were related to tutor training. What she did find, however, was rather disturbing:

- Tutors nearly always selected reading materials.

- Although students nearly always spent some time reading during sessions, they never read silently.

- Very little material was written at an appropriate level. Student word difficulties ranged from two errors to 154 errors in a single piece of reading (average: 65.5 errors per passage read). Tutors nearly always responded to difficulties by providing words.

- Comprehension instruction consisted of tutors asking literal recall questions.

In all, tutor training appeared to have very little effect on how students and tutors interacted. This was true even in the Laubach-like program, although tutors were told to follow a scripted program. Belzer concludes that training for new tutors might have better outcomes if initial orientation sessions were kept rather brief and if "just-in-time" training sessions were designed to offer the support that tutors need as they begin working with their students. She notes,

> Rather than get mired in debates about best practices among a range of tutor training approaches, the data here indicate that it may be more useful to completely rethink the train-

ing model by investing less up front and shifting these resources to more on-the-job support and development. (p. 137)

As noted above, the results of this study may have implications for new teacher professional development in ABLE. Certainly, issues such as selecting reading material at appropriate difficulty levels, responding appropriately to word-level difficulties, and teaching (not just testing) comprehension should be addressed. Moreover, observations of new teachers interacting with students will likely provide additional topics for professional development. The "just-in-time" professional development model deserves our careful consideration as well.

Reference
Belzer, A. (2006). Less may be more: Rethinking adult literacy volunteer tutor training. *Journal of Literacy Research, 38*, 111-140.

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Resources and Reviews

Drago-Severson, Eleanor. (2004). *Becoming Adult Learners: Principles and Practices for Effective Development.* New York: Teachers College Press.

The book stems from a study conducted in part by the author. The study used Robert Kegan's constructive development theory to examine the learning experiences of adult shop-floor workers at the Polaroid Corporation who were enrolled in a high school diploma program sponsored by their employer. The book focuses on how the workers/learners perceived their goals for learning and their relationships with their teachers and how they perceived collaborative learning. This work also examines the different changes that the workers experienced during the length of the study. The last chapter focuses on how the findings from this very specific research can be applied to ABE/ESOL classrooms on the whole. The work provides a new way of looking at the challenges of teaching adults who come from highly diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Linder, Patricia E., Mary Beth Sampson, Jo Ann R. Dugan, & Barrie Brancato (Eds.). (2002). *Celebrating the Faces of Literacy.* Readyville, TN: College Reading Association.

This is the twenty-fourth Yearbook produced by the College Reading Association to serve as a reflection on the year in literacy education. The book is sectioned off into: presidential address, keynote addresses, J. Estill Alexander leader's forum address, research awards, faces of literacy teachers (comparing inservice and preservice teachers, using self-assessment in literacy practice, word identification software), faces of change (examining an urban charter school and a tutoring program), faces of diverse literacies (a multi-cultural look including Mexican-Americans and western Ukraine), and faces of children and families. The work serves as a good capstone to literacy reflection in the year 2002.

Sampson, Mary Beth, Patricia E. Linder, Jo Ann R. Dugan, & Barrie Brancato (Eds.). (2003). *Celebrating the Freedom of Literacy.* Utah State University: College Reading Association

In this twenty-fifth volume of the College Reading Association's Yearbook, the arti-

cles all reflect the idea that all learners should have access to literacy. The book is sectioned into: presidential address, J. Estill Alexander forum (focusing on mentorship), research awards, celebrating elementary and secondary classrooms, celebrating diversity (gender issues, expressive language skills, African-American students' test scores, a family literacy history), celebrating preservice and inservice teacher education, celebrating technology (word identification software, applications for literacy development), celebrating the process of change (portfolio reviews, joint doctoral reading program). This capstone to the year 2003 in terms of literacy provides a well rounded examination of the availability of literacy to all people.

Heimlich, Joe E. & Emmalou Norland. (1994). *Developing Teaching Style in Adult Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Developing Teaching Style in Adult Education provides an excellent framework for improving one's teaching skills. The book focuses on looking inward and examining one's philosophies and behaviors to discover whether the two are actually in agreement. This work encourages the reinvention of a teacher's philosophies if he/she discovers that they are no longer useful for productive teaching. The book explores these ideas by focusing on five of the primary elements of teaching (content, environment, teacher, learning community, and individual learner), devoting a chapter to each. *Teaching Style* claims that by examining one's personal feelings about each of these concepts, one can become the "good" teacher that everyone wishes they could be. Through a journey of self-examination, *Developing Teaching Style in Adult Education* provides the tools for self-improvement as an adult educator.

Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. *Money Connection* VHS; *Mutual Funds: Understand the Risks* VHS; *The American Currency Exhibit* CD-ROM; *Money Connection* Teacher's Guide; *Savers and Borrowers: Financial Markets in the United States* Teacher's Curriculum Guide.

The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco has developed a multimedia set just for you. *The American Currency Exhibit*

CD allows students to examine the evolution of currency in the United States and explores its ever changing colors, shapes, sizes, and historical significance. The *Mutual Funds* VHS is an eight-minute video that explains some of the financial risks involved with purchasing mutual funds and annuities.

The second VHS, *Money Connection*, works in conjunction with the Teacher's Guide. This set is developed for fourth through sixth grade level learners. The Teacher's Guide divides the lesson into five units: Early Money and Banking in America, Structure of the Federal Reserve, Manager of Money and Credit in the Economy, The Banker's Bank, A Bank Regulator, and The Money Connection Shuffle Game.

The *Savers and Borrowers* Teacher's Curriculum Guide is for high school level learners. It is divided into four lessons: Savings and Borrowing: The Circular Flow, Financial Markets: Where Savers and Borrowers Meet, Mutual Funds: Understand the Risks, and Surfing the Channels: Decisions and Choices on Saving and Borrowing.

Hoare, Carol (Ed.). (2006). *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning.* New York: Oxford University Press.

This book is precisely what its title states; it is a *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning.* Educators involved in adult education will be enlightened by the multitude of articles and studies within this book's covers. The chapters cover almost anything and everything that has an effect on adult development and learning from doctoral studies to parenthood to spiritual growth to the workplace environment. The *Handbook* takes a look at historical views of adult development and learning, as well as cutting edge research. It not only cuts across historical boundaries, but cultural boundaries, too, with several chapters devoted specifically to the effects of sociocultural influences on adult learning and development. *Handbook of Adult Development and Learning* takes a leap forward in connecting all facets of an adult's life to his or her learning experience.

Vocabulary: Questions from the Classroom

In a recent article about vocabulary in *Reading Research Quarterly*, Camille Blachowicz and her colleagues (2006) provide research-based answers to two questions that teachers frequently ask: Why is vocabulary knowledge important? And what constitutes effective vocabulary instruction?

Vocabulary knowledge is important because it influences readers' comprehension ability. Blachowicz et al. call this "one of the longest, most clearly articulated lines of research in literacy education" (p. 525). Knowledge of words in English is critical to ESOL students' academic success. Moreover, vocabulary knowledge is a critical correlate to phonemic awareness development, and inadequate vocabulary is a major factor in school failure among "disadvantaged" children.

Research provides seven guidelines for effective vocabulary instruction, which we summarize below. The Eureka! collection at http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategiesread_with_understanding.html provides descriptions of instructional strategies that embody these principles:

- Language- and word-rich environments, those in which "opportunities to read, hear, use, and talk about new vocabulary are many and varied" (p. 527) are important to effective vocabulary instruction.

- Incidental word learning, through listening or reading, is important. Read aloud to students at each class session. Provide in-class time for independent reading, and encourage reading outside of school.

- Intentional teaching of selected words is important, but no single method is uniformly effective. Research shows that asking students to select their own words for learning is effective.

- Learners must be actively involved in generating word meanings.

- Instruction should provide multiple exposures and multiple opportunities to use new words, as well as focus on both definitional and contextual learning. "Overall, then, the available research in this area suggests that having students make semantic connections among words, and verbalizing or explaining those connections, supports learning" (p. 529).

- Students who have extensive vocabularies also have knowledge of generative word elements (e.g., affixes and roots). Teaching word parts systematically improves students' abilities to infer meaning of new words, especially when instruction includes attention to context.

Blachowicz, C., Fisher, P., Ogle, D., & Watts-Taffe, S. (2006). Vocabulary: Questions from the Classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*, 524-539.

Learners must be actively involved in generating word meanings.

Fluency Instruction for ABLE Students

Since the Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000), teachers at all levels have begun focusing more instructional attention on helping students become fluent readers. Defined as the ability to read expressively and at an appropriate rate, fluency is thought to lead to greater comprehension, to enable synthesis, and to influence students' motivation to read (Kruidenier, 2002; NRP, 2000). Although research with younger students has shown the effectiveness of several instructional techniques, fluency research with adult students is limited.

A recent study (Winn, Skinner, Oliver, Hale, & Ziegler, 2006) provides some evidence about the effectiveness of two popular methods of fluency instruction: repeated reading and listening while reading. Twelve adults with TABE scores at the fourth or fifth grade levels participated in this 4-month study. Each read nine passages in three conditions:

1. Repeated reading. Passage was read silently and then again orally.

2. Listening while reading. Experi-menter read the passage aloud while the student followed along silently. Then the student read the same passage aloud.

3. Control. Student read the passages one time and aloud.

Oral reading in all three conditions was scored for words correct per minute. An analysis of variance showed that both fluency procedures led to higher performance than the control procedure. Thus, authors concluded that "both strategies enhanced rereading fluency across participants, but neither was more effective than the other" (Winn et al., 2006, p. 202).

This research shows that fluency instruction makes sense. Several OLRC resources can help teachers develop activities to enhance students' expressive reading:

http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/fluency_activities.pdf

http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/readers_theater.pdf

Chapter 3 in A Handbook of Effective Instruction in Reading (http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/handbookTOC.html) also offers a variety of fluency activities.

References

Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy, Partnership for Reading.

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

Winn, B., Skinner, C., Oliver, R., Hale, A., & Ziegler, M. (2006). The effects of listening while reading and repeated reading on the reading fluency of adult learners. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50*, 196-205.
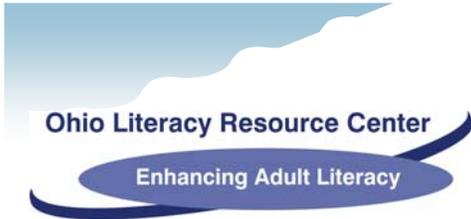
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