

LITERACY HARVEST

The Journal of the Literacy Assistance Center

FALL 2002

The NYC Literacy Community Responds to September 11

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Founded in 1983, the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) is a not-for-profit organization that provides essential referral, training, information, and technical assistance services to hundreds of adult, youth, and family literacy programs in New York. Our mission is to support and promote the expansion of quality literacy services in New York.

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In This Issue

by Jan Gallagher, *Editor*

As I write at the beginning of June 2002, the cleanup effort at the former World Trade Center has just ended. I suppose this could be another opportunity for New Yorkers to put the events of September 11, 2001, behind us and get on with our lives and our work. Perhaps some New Yorkers—at least those not closely affected by the tragedy—are managing to do just that.

But at the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC)—located six blocks from what we still call Ground Zero—we continue to be affected by last year’s terrorist attacks and their aftermath in ways large and small. We cannot escape the fact that the adult education programs we serve—and, more to the point, the poor, working-class, and immigrant students they serve—continue to be affected by the economic, political, and social consequences of living in a city that has been bombed and in a nation that is at war.

This issue of *Literacy Harvest* chronicles those consequences and what the New York City literacy community has been doing about them—or would like to do about them if we had all the money in the world. The authors are literacy practitioners of all stripes, from staff developers to administrators to teachers, working in a variety of programs throughout New York City.

K.C. Williams, the manager of an ESOL program in Queens, describes the immediate and lasting effects of the terrorist attacks on local immigrant communities. Jay Klokker adds a teacher’s perspective on the importance of creating safe spaces for learning in an unsafe world. Two articles by LAC staff members, the first by Ira Yankwitt, director of adult literacy services, and the second by Marguerite Lukes and Mariann Fedele, our instructional technology staff, describe the LAC’s staff development efforts in support of literacy programs and teachers. Paul Jurmo of the Consortium for Worker Education describes the devastating effects of September 11 on job prospects for adult learners and suggests ways in which education programs can support learners in their need for meaningful and gainful employment. The staff of the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) describes PASE’s efforts to reach out to young people and the programs that serve them, outlining recommendations NYC’s young people and youth practitioners made on their post-crisis and ongoing needs. Sidebars throughout offer perspectives from other parts of the country; excerpts of student writing about the attacks also appear in these pages.

The repercussions of last year’s terrorist attacks will most likely continue to affect literacy programs and literacy students, not only in New York City but nationwide, not only emotionally but economically, for years to come. Expenditures for “homeland security” have already pinched state and local budgets; increased defense and intelligence spending at the federal level will undoubtedly trickle down to curtail education spending along with other social services. We present this issue of *Literacy Harvest* in the hope that it will serve not only as a chronicle of local responses to the current crisis but also as an ideabook for addressing this crisis—or the next one—in other places around the country.

Fear, Desperation, and Hope in Jackson Heights

The Effects of the Terrorist Attacks on Immigrant Communities
by K.C. Williams

During the first week of September 2001, I believed that I was watching national attitudes towards immigration come full circle. I thought that we, as a nation, were shifting away from the most recent wave of negative attitudes and punitive policies regarding immigrants and immigration. But unfortunately, the events of September 11 pushed us in the opposite direction. We're scared and suspicious now—and we have good reason to be. We've found a new sense of nationalism, and along with it we've become increasingly suspicious of all things foreign.

Here at Forest Hills Community House in Jackson Heights, Queens, we serve immigrants from all over the world. The majority of our students are Spanish speakers from Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, Central America, and other countries. The second largest group are South Asians, mostly from Bangladesh and Pakistan, but also from India and Afghanistan. We serve Europeans as well, mostly from countries that were part of the former Soviet Union, such as Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, the Ukraine, and Chechnya, but also from war-torn nations such as Albania and Bosnia and Macedonia.

Students from the Middle Eastern countries, such as Iraq, the Sudan, Yemen, and Lebanon, and students from places in the Far East, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Thailand share classrooms with African students from countries such as the Congo, Mauritania, Somalia, and Liberia. Our students are Catholic and Protestant, Islamic and Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist and Sikh. Most have little formal education, but some have master's degrees or doctorates from their countries of origin. They have complex lives, full of family issues and low-paying jobs and the challenges of navigating an unfamiliar set of social systems. They came here to escape war or to escape poverty or to escape oppression. They came here because it is better to be here than to be where they came from.

In 1989, when I started working in this program, I enjoyed a more positive set of policies towards immigrants. It was the era following the amnesty laws of 1986. Long-term residents without papers who had been living, working, and raising their families in this country were allowed to apply for green cards and become legal residents. They could get jobs and pay taxes. They could stop hiding.

Then, in 1996, something very different happened. Two punitive pieces of legislation—the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (commonly known as “immigration reform”) and the Personal Responsibility Act (“welfare reform”)—articulated a nation’s frustration with an array of social and economic problems, and immigrants were scapegoated. Even most tax-paying, legal, permanent residents were denied basic services such as food stamps, disability insurance, and social security. Immigrant advocates said that the way the laws read, an applicant for citizenship could be deported for failing to show “good moral character” merely by accumulating too many parking tickets. Asylum seekers escaping war and oppression were being locked up in newly constructed prisons called “detention centers.”

Since then, there have been signs of positive change. Last year, a law known as the LIFE ACT allowed thousands of immigrants whose status had been pending for years to actually obtain green cards. But the most promising events took place less than a week before the terrorist attacks.

The New Beginning That Became an Ending

Monday, September 10, was a day I knew at the time I would remember. Of course, I remember it now for different reasons. On that day, as I was doing orientation for a new cycle of classes, I looked at our immigrant students with a new sense of optimism. Mexican President Vicente Fox’s visit to the U.S. the week before had, I believed, ushered in a new era. The previous Wednesday, in the White House Rose Garden and then again in front of a joint session of Congress, President Fox demanded that the U.S. reform its immigration policies before the end of the year—in three and a half months. Rather than being

outraged, Congress had been surprisingly receptive. Then President Fox and President Bush posed for the cameras in their jeans and cowboy wear and moseyed off to the president’s Texas ranch like the best of friends. Bush’s staff started scurrying around attempting to articulate the administration’s new stand on massive immigration reform.

On Monday, September 10, I believed that we were on the cusp of great changes. I have returned to that morning in my mind many times, trying to rewrite events from that moment forward. I wish that I were now writing a dry analysis of how the newly enacted immigration policies would affect the communities we serve. Instead, I find myself sorting through a whirlwind of very different images.

What the Newcomers Knew

I went downstairs to have a cigarette and look at the smoke rising from what had been the towers just a few hours before. Five miles and a river separated us from the chaos and thousands of personal tragedies that were occurring downtown. A Pakistani lawyer who has a private practice next door rushed by. He stopped when he saw me to ask if our office was still open. I explained that we were going to stay until all of our students had gone home. He said that he was worried about getting home to his family before the curfew. The curfew? I was confused. What curfew? Well, there’s going to be a curfew, right? There’s always a curfew. Always a curfew? I didn’t know. I didn’t have any point of reference. I had never been in a city under attack before. Was there going to be a curfew?

A little while later a Peruvian student asked if there was going to be a curfew, and I said I didn’t know. A Colombian student responded that the curfew probably wouldn’t start until sundown. Of course there would be a curfew. There is always a

curfew. I started looking at the people around me, our students, the immigrants who run businesses in our building and on our block. So many of them had lived through war. They suddenly seemed so much more prepared than I was for what was happening.

We work with immigrants from all over the world. We teach them English, but, probably more importantly, we also help them adjust to their new lives in New York. We address the practical things, such as how to read a subway map and why you get two phone bills and how to enroll your kids in school. We also talk about the more intangible things, such as the fast pace of the city, the way you have to focus your eyes on nothing or pretend to read the advertisements when you're riding a crowded train. But on that day I found myself looking to our students for guidance about what to expect from our city.

We didn't have a curfew, as it turns out. But the next day Manhattan was "closed." Then the city was shut down south of 14th Street, and later south of Canal. It was not a curfew, but it was just as inconceivable to those of us who had lived here all our lives.

Our program never stopped operating. We were open even the day after the attacks, the day Manhattan was "closed." I don't know how much English the students learned that first week, or the week after that. Not many came to class—well, about half. But my staff and I decided that we were providing a sense of community, not only for the students, but also for ourselves.

Fear of the Streets

On the morning of the attacks, about three hours after the first plane hit, two teenage girls in Muslim headscarves came running into the office. They were

both out of breath, and their eyes looked panicked. "We're looking for our mother," the younger one demanded. I asked who their mother was, and when they told me, I thought for a moment. "No," I explained, "she's not here." Mrs. Begum had left when her class had ended about fifteen minutes before. I looked at each of the girls. There was something very wrong. I asked if everyone in their family was all right. It was a day in which we expected to hear about personal tragedies, but they ignored my question. "You let our mother go out on the street alone?" the older girl said accusingly. I didn't know what to say. I wasn't sure what we had done wrong.

We had told our adult ESOL students about the planes hitting the towers and then the Pentagon. We had announced the collapse of the first tower and then the second. When we learned the trains weren't running, we opened the computer lab and told the students that they were welcome to stay in the school as long as they wanted. Most of them stayed until the end of class and then left. I hadn't seen Mrs. Begum leave, but, if I had, I would not have thought of stopping her. Why would I?

I had seen Mrs. Begum on the streets before. I know she lives in the neighborhood. A matronly woman with perfect posture, she wears long flowing robes that hide even her shoes. When she walks she looks like someone riding one of those moving sidewalks in airports, as if she isn't moving her feet or shoulders or any part of her body. In class she loosens her headscarf, exposing her face and perhaps a bit of her hair. On the street she pulls the scarf modestly over her mouth and nose, exposing only her eyes. In our program, staff members usually call students by their first names, and students call us by our first names. But there was something about Mrs. Begum that merited a little deference.

Mrs. Begum's daughters spoke to me in flawless English accented by frustration rather than foreign rhythms. Their shoulders and arms and legs moved unselfconsciously as they leaned forward and shifted their weight and flailed their arms. These girls were American teenagers, born of a foreign mother. But they knew something I did not yet know. Barely three hours after the first plane had hit, before any suspects had been named, before the words *al Queda* had entered our national vocabulary, these girls understood: Their mother was at risk—but not from the terrorists who had wounded our city that morning.

A few weeks later, Mrs. Begum would be the first Muslim woman to return to class in traditional dress. Some younger woman had returned to class the week after the attacks wearing slacks and blouses they had quickly purchased at \$10 stores, or jeans and tee-shirts from the Gap. The streets of Jackson Heights surrounding our office looked very different in those days, with everyone in Western dress. Well, a few Sikh men were still wearing their turbans, but they also wore big buttons with the American flag stating "I'm proud to be a Sikh and I'm proud to be an American." The Hindu women reminded each other to wear the *bindi*, the traditional red dot on the forehead, so that they would not be mistaken for Muslims—as if an angry hate-monger bent on revenge would be culturally aware enough to notice such a subtle cue. The Pakistani and Afghani and Punjabi restaurants and the halal meat stores and the Habib Bank all seemed to have entered a competition for the largest and most visible display of American flags.

The New War Mentality

Wearing her headscarf the week after the attack, Sara had been stopped on the train platform and searched. A man in a uniform demanded that she

empty her bag. It was just a paper bag containing her lunch and a few books and odds and ends. She told me she was embarrassed because she did not have a nice bag "like American women carry." She missed her train, and strangers stared at her suspiciously while she was being searched. Sara had been having a bad month. She had been downtown on September 11 and was injured and hospitalized for a couple of days. Now she was being looked at with suspicion, as if she might be responsible for the city's tragedies.

I had offered Sara a program assistant position back in June when we got word that we would be getting some additional funding. Sara was a great candidate. A native of Afghanistan with a Pakistani father, her *résumé* boasted five South Asian languages that many of our students speak. She had office experience and good data entry skills, and she was very enthusiastic about the position. I told her she could start as soon as we had cash flow. In July, I said we could probably hire her in August. In August, I said September. In September—well, the Mayor's Office of Contracts had been relocated, and disaster relief, not literacy, was now a priority. In October, when the U.S. started bombing Afghanistan, Sara told members of my staff that she knew I would not hire her now because of the war. I assured her that now, more than ever, her presence in our office was vital to the communities that we serve. In November, we still had no cash flow.

Our fiscal year had started in July. We had letters of intent from six different funding sources. We were providing classes from 9:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, paying teachers' salaries, counselors' salaries, administrative salaries, clerical salaries, and benefits. We were paying the rent, the electric bill, the phone bill, the photocopy maintenance; we were fixing broken computers and trying to skimp on office supplies. We were living on loans,

HOW TEACHERS RESPONDED

I feel very strongly that when this and other terrible events occur, we must give our students an opportunity to talk about them. A few years ago there was a shooting near where our classes meet; another time there was a suicide at a middle school which the children of some of my students attended. All of these events are extremely distressing to our students, as they are to us. To imply that they aren't is in some way to deny the humanity of our students. I teach high beginners. On Wednesday [September 12] I asked them to tell what happened. As they did so, I wrote on the board what they had said. In this way, the events were written in English which was comprehensible to them. They said this helped them later understand the language of the TV reports. In my intermediate conversation class, I asked them before class to write any comments or questions they had about the events. They wrote various things. Then I asked if they wanted to say more. Some did. I left a lot of "wait time" to be sure that everyone who wanted to could talk, but didn't force anyone. I feel that both of these strategies give students a chance to talk about what happened and to share their thoughts about it. To do less is a great disservice to our students.

Abigail Tom

Durham Technical Community College, Durham, NC
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waiting for cash to flow. I couldn't hire more staff until someone started paying us for the services that we were providing. In November, not a single public funding source had given us a penny in five months.

I kept telling Sara to wait. Yes, yes, I wanted to hire her, but we had no money. She was polite but seemed dubious. I invited her to volunteer a few times, so that she could feel like she was part of the office, even though I had no money to pay her. That made me feel like just another exploitive employer, asking a low-income woman who really needed a job to work for free. Finally, in November, the New York Women's Foundation gave us a small grant specifically towards Sara's salary. Shortly afterwards, the American Jewish World Services gave us a little funding to support Sara's position. Sara's presence in the office, especially at the front desk, has sent a clear message specifically to the South Asian community, but also to the greater Muslim community.

Dirty Hands

Nine percent of our total student population lost their jobs in September 2001, representing fourteen percent of our employed students. These students and others like them are the working poor: the guy who parks cars in the theater district, the woman who cleans hotel rooms, the woman who prepares food for the airlines, the midtown bartender. A lot of service industry jobs disappeared when city tourism evaporated and when city residents decided to stay home and watch CNN rather than going out for dinner and a show. Only one student lost a job below 14th Street but north of Canal, which made him eligible for limited emergency aid under the complex formulas designed to help those most affected by the tragedy. Money was pouring into the city from all corners of the planet—but it wasn't coming to our students, and it wasn't coming to our program.

So I was delighted when Andrea came bursting into my office around the first week in October. She started out by apologizing for having missed the past couple of weeks

of class, explaining that she had gotten a job cleaning up office buildings near the site of the former World Trade Center. She couldn't come to class because she had been working twelve hours a day, seven days a week. She really needed the work. They said they would pay her \$7.50 an hour, better than minimum wage.

But there were problems. They weren't paying her. Well, they paid her some cash under the table, and once someone gave her a personal check, but they kept holding back promised money and then saying that she hadn't worked on specific days. It was hard work, she explained. Inches of dust on keyboards and telephones, which she cleaned with a damp rag and then a dry rag. I thought about that dust: pulverized steel, melted plastic, asbestos, even vaporized human remains. But the worst part, she said, was pushing up the panels of the drop ceilings and having the dust pour down on her. She'd been coughing, she said, even spitting up blood. She showed me the rashes on her skin, and her colleague who had come with her showed me his rashes as well. I was alarmed. Wasn't she wearing protective gear? A mask? Well, she had one of those cotton masks they were handing out on the street downtown. She was really more concerned about getting paid. She had done the work and was entitled to get paid.

She really needed the money. Her seven-year-old son had been calling collect every night from Colombia. Since September 11, he called crying, saying that she was going to die if she stayed in New York and begging her to return to Colombia. She hadn't known that international collect calls were so expensive. The telephone bill was \$1,000. She could have flown to Colombia and back for less. Her son wanted her to return to Colombia for good. She desperately wanted her son to come to New York, far away from all of the kidnappings and bombings in her hometown. She came to New York for the purpose of bringing her son here, to keep him safe. But his immigration paperwork was buried in the bureaucratic process, and now the world seemed upside down. For the cost of his phone calls, she said, she could have flown him to Mexico and

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

September 11 was the most difficult day in my life. I was so afraid to walk home from the school. There only two blocks from my home and school. On that day I felt those two blocks were like two miles. I was afraid to go outside for two weeks because I am Muslim and I wear a scarf. I thought if I go outside someone will pull my scarf off or do something to me. People think bad things about Muslim people and Islam. They think that Islam is a religion of hate, but this is not true. Islam is the religion of peace. I feel sorry for the people that lost their lives and I wish for their families to be strong and happy. I wish for people not to use their religion to do bad things. I wish for people that are not Muslim to learn more about Islam.

Galila Twaiti

Student, NYC Board of Education

Office of Adult & Continuing Education, Region 9

had someone sneak him across the border. She was so desperate. She hadn't seen her son in nearly two years, since he was five years old.

Andrea had working papers, unlike most of the hundred or more Spanish speakers who lined up every morning to be marched into the frozen zone to clean offices. Someone had gotten the lucrative contract for cleaning up the buildings adjacent to the destruction. Rather than invest in the kinds of equipment appropriate to the job, they just exploited a readily available resource: immigrant labor.

From Afghanistan to New York

At just about the same time that Presidents Bush and Fox were riding horses together at the Texas ranch, Marjan was making the dangerous and illegal passage across the two presidents' respective borders. It was the last leg of a long journey from Afghanistan. Marjan was the last surviving male in his family. His brothers and father had been killed by the Taliban, but he had escaped. He arrived in New York on September 9.

I often find myself wondering what September 11 was like for Marjan. Was it a pivotal day in his life? Was it significantly stranger than September 9, his first day in New York? Or stranger than the days and weeks before, in which he journeyed by foot, by camel, then later hidden in the cargo hold of boats and still later on foot, running through the desert after crossing the Mexican border? Stranger than living his whole life through a series of wars? What did this young man from a farming family in rural Afghanistan understand of what was going on around him? His teacher later told me that Marjan had never seen a map before. He was confused because China was on both sides. The teacher folded the map, trying to show the continuation, but it did not click until the teacher ran to get a globe. All of a sudden it made sense. With his teacher's help,

Marjan found New York and then Afghanistan; he excitedly turned the globe around and around in his hands, reveling in the vastness of what he had just learned. As an intelligent adult who had recently traveled half the globe, he was absorbing a concept most of us are exposed to as children, when we are too young to appreciate its wonder.

Marjan had appeared at our program in the late fall, referred by a social service agency that was working to help him get political asylum in the United States. He was sleeping in a gas station where a family acquaintance worked the night shift. His first day in class, Marjan just looked angry. I had never seen a student who looked so angry.

On November 5 we started a new cycle of classes. As I did on September 10, I went into each class to do an orientation. My mood was quite different from the optimism I had felt during the previous orientation. But the routine was the same. Orientation in Level 1 is always a little light on content. The students, by definition, don't speak English. We try to provide support services and information in the students' native languages whenever possible, but in the classroom, even in Level 1, we speak English only. I go into the class and start my mime/monologue on "English Only in class," before moving on to more complex topics such as recycling and where to find the key to the bathroom. I write on the board, "English Only." I say the words, English, and point to the floor to indicate the room. "In class, English Only." I prompt the students to repeat the phrase, "English Only." "Good," I smile. "In class, [pointing to the floor again], English Only. At home, [pointing out the window], with your families [miming an embrace], with your children [miming talking to an imaginary child], speak [moving finger from mouth towards room] Spanish [point to Spanish speakers], speak Urdu [point to Urdu speakers], speak Russian [point to Russian speakers],

speak Chinese [point to Chinese speakers] . . . ” and when I said “speak Pashtun,” Marjan looked up at me and smiled. I don’t know what made him smile. Perhaps simply naming his language, acknowledging his culture, giving validity to his presence. After that, he always smiled warmly when he saw me. But from an angle, when he didn’t see me looking, he always looked . . . well, angry. Maybe frustrated, maybe just young and scared and defensive. None of us can understand what he has been through.

I think of Marjan often. He just disappeared one day in December—disappeared off the face of the earth. His lawyers, his caseworker, his distant relatives who lived in New York (but who got scared and ran off to Canada after the U.S. started bombing Afghanistan) are all looking for him. Anything could have happened to him. Most likely, he is in a detention center (or jail), like so many young Muslim men from his region of the world. His unfortunate arrival date just two days before the attacks, coupled with his country of origin, would make him a terror suspect, I suppose. The lists of the names of the more than one thousand Muslim men who have been detained since September 11 are incomplete, and the ACLU is fighting, as I write in spring 2002, to have all the names released. Marjan’s name does not appear on any of the lists we have seen. He entered the country illegally, so if they had detained him, interrogated him, and decided he was not a terrorist, then he would have been deported back to Afghanistan. Maybe he is there now. Or maybe he is dead somewhere. I will probably never know. Sometimes I find myself looking for him on the evening news, pasting his face onto the faces of the young Afghanis we see buying televisions and flying kites and whatnot now that the Taliban are no longer in power. I would so like to believe that there was a happy ending. But I don’t believe it.

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

. . . In a few seconds I dressed myself and ran down to Hudson Street to try to offer my help. I tried to give my help because in my country, Ecuador, when there is some kind of tragedy like an earthquake, everyone in the community tries to help each other. We make a team to rescue the people who have been hurt and immediately take them to the hospital. But when I asked a policeman if I could be a volunteer, he was very serious, and told me that I couldn’t because it would be too dangerous. I felt tired and sad, and I didn’t know what to do.

These kinds of acts make me feel all sadness in my heart, and make me create words of melancholy. And the way I like to express myself is by writing how I feel at that moment.

So I sat down on the sidewalk on Hudson Street, took out my diary, and thought about this disaster. Also beside me was an architect who was drawing the destruction of the Twin Towers. While he was expressing his thoughts and feelings with art, I started to write in poetry the story of the destruction of the Twin Towers of the City of New York.

Hugo Tito Sarango

*Student, Steinway Adult Learning Center
Queens Borough Public Library*

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

. . . I was crossing over the Triborough Bridge soon after and I looked over to the south and it was so empty. I felt really lonely until I got to school. The first person I saw was my teacher. I felt better already. A lot of people are still hurt by this, but we all got to go on. . . .

The Responses

I continue to watch with frustration so much that is out of our control. Yes, we are on the cusp of massive immigration reform, I suppose. But rather than creating policies that address the lives of the real people who are living within our nation's borders, government officials are contemplating reshuffling bureaucratic structures. As I write in early June 2002, there are a number of possible scenarios. One takes an enormous dysfunctional bureaucracy, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and divides it into two enormous bureaucracies, one focusing on legal immigration and the other on illegal immigration. Another scenario takes the opposite approach, placing the Immigration and Naturalization Service smack inside the newly proposed Homeland Security Department, where it would be combined with a bunch of other bureaucracies and entities in order to improve efficiency.

Whether we ultimately decide to merge dysfunctional bureaucracies into a new super-size bureaucracy, or take a single dysfunctional bureaucracy and split it into two (perhaps) somewhat less dysfunctional bureaucracies, I don't feel much optimism. Obviously the driving force in immigration reform will now be "enforcement" and "protecting our borders." I can't argue with the impulse to protect ourselves, but I know that the goal will be to ensure that future Marjans find themselves stranded in Mexican border towns and never cross over into the United States. I don't even pretend to hope for policies that might treat illegal immigrants humanely.

There continues to be talk of facilitating the process for legal immigrants. I will dare to be hopeful here. Perhaps I am being naïve, but a better system could help future families like Andrea and her son, who are stranded in limbo with so much time and space separating them. Perhaps the new system will work better for legal immigrants.

Our program survived September 11. We helped avert some personal crises. All of the staff worked hard. Some

Donald Green

Student, International Center for the Disabled

of our students who lost their jobs at least didn't lose their homes. Some successfully got unemployment benefits. Others got new jobs. Andrea is getting medical care, and the attorney general's office is investigating the company that exploited so many desperate immigrant workers. Andrea will get the back pay she is owed; she may even get time and a half for working beyond forty hours a week. We handed out phone cards to our students so they could stay in touch with worried family members far away. Sara sits at the front desk and answers questions in Pashtun and Urdu and Punjabi and Hindi and Bengali, and the speakers of those languages have returned to our program in their traditional dress. We have one class on Sara's shift in which more than half the students are Muslim women from Bangladesh, Mrs. Begum's country of origin. This is a major demographic shift for us, and we are proud that we have created an environment in which they feel safe and welcome.

Returning to Normal . . .

In late April 2002, a Peruvian woman and her fourteen-year-old daughter sat in my office. They had arrived in New York three weeks before on a tourist visa and had no intention of returning to Peru. The mother explained to me in Spanish that the fourteen-year-old had been kidnapped, held hostage, and ultimately released. The girl's eyes dropped as her mother told the story. I did not ask for details. To this family, our city where planes crash into buildings was not nearly as threatening as the home they had decided to abandon. In spite of September 11, I thought, New York continues to be a magnet for the desperate—and for the hopeful.

The mother wanted to enroll herself and her daughter in our English classes. They needed English, she explained, to start their new lives in America. I explained that we could not serve a fourteen-year-old. She would have to enroll in public school. I referred both of them to services for survivors of refugee trauma and recommended legal services that might be able to help them with an asylum case. I invited the mother to come back to register for our English classes. I explained that in our program students are selected by lottery. I told her that so many people want to learn English, only about one in four applicants get in. I wished her luck.

Creating a Haven for Learning

Dealing with Crisis in the Classroom

by Jay Klokker

Some moments of teaching are hard. This is one of the hardest. Last week you were teaching *Huckleberry Finn*, but after what happened—unprecedented, say the newscasters—your class couldn't care less about Huck. One young man announces he's dropping out of school to join the Army. Another keeps numbly repeating, "Those people are going to be sorry they messed with the USA!" A woman turns red and nods her agreement. "Let's nuke 'em flat!" she says. "Let's turn their country into a parking lot!"

You try to frame a thoughtful, defusing response but feel your own helplessness and rage lashing out. Banging the table so hard that your fist immediately aches, you say, "That's the most stupid thing I ever heard!" Later, you go to the woman to apologize, but she seems surprised that you thought she'd take offense. She says she never realized that someone could feel so passionately against a war.

That scene could have come in the wake of September 11, but it's actually from November of 1979, when I was a graduate assistant teaching freshman composition classes at the University of Washington. I was teaching a course called Writing about Satire when the U.S. embassy in Tehran was taken over and American hostages were held. The outbursts of my class were typical of a time, not unlike the recent past, when patriotic fervor and

anti-Islamic sentiment ran high. I recall, in particular, a pre-football-game rally in which flags were waved while brown-skinned students of various ethnic backgrounds were threatened and attacked. I was afraid that my students, who responded with insight to *The Misanthrope* and *Gulliver's Travels*, had turned off their intellects and traded in their compassion for the most narrow-minded sort of jingoism.

A few days later, after tempers had cooled, I was glad to be teaching *Huckleberry Finn* because Twain's attack on the logic of knee-jerk retribution was much sharper than my own. I directed my class to a passage about decades of murder committed by the Grangerford family to get even with the Shepherdsons and the other way around:

"Well," says Buck [Grangerford], "a feud is this way. A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man's brother kills *him*; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the *cousins* chip in—and by-and-by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow and takes a long time."

My class as a whole couldn't come to an agreement about what Twain would have advised the United States government to do, nor were my

students converted to my own pacifist position, but now they saw a range of defensible opinions. The possibility of discourse had been restored.

The situation in 2001 was immeasurably more difficult. Here was no distant, largely symbolic attack on America but a genuine atrocity that my class and I—we meet in downtown Brooklyn—were close enough to witness for ourselves. The impact was immediate and lasting. September 11 was the second session of a new term; my pre-GED students were still at the stage of ice-breaking activities and introductions. I had not yet handed out the course description or distributed books. I'd been planning to use Theodore Taylor's *The Bomb*, a novel about the relocation of the Bikini Islanders, as the centerpiece in a theme focused on life in the sea, but now we had a bomb of our own, and I felt as if my plans had been obliterated.

During the weeks of chaos that followed, I had neither the calmness nor time to see a connection between the events of 1979 and those I was facing each day. But now I see that the earlier conflict was often in the back of my mind. Like a dress rehearsal, it gave me a sense of what emotional responses to expect as well as how to gain intellectual perspective on the events. More recently, I have sought to articulate the lessons of those two experiences more clearly to myself.

Respecting Emotions

The first, and perhaps most important, lesson was to respect the emotional needs of everyone in the classroom, including myself. This was especially important in the first days. My class was harder hit than many. Two of my students lost close family members. Another had to stop coming to school so that she could take care of her niece, whose father was a policeman working overtime at Ground Zero. Even those not touched directly found it hard to come to class and harder still to concentrate.

On the first day after class resumed, I opened the session by briefly telling how I felt and then inviting the students to do likewise. This was by no means a therapy

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

At Two Jays Communications, an adult basic education and training (ABET) organization that offers facilitation and learning for adult learners in the fields of numeracy and communication in English, I have facilitated discussions regarding the United States and the WTC disaster. The South African learners are always interested in the States. South Africans have a great deal of exposure to American television, which gives us an idea—sometimes misperceived—of what life is like in New York.

Many South Africans with limited education do not follow the news very closely. The lives of such learners are threatened by violent crime, poverty, and a very real and daily threat of dying of AIDS. Yet the WTC disaster touched everyone's lives and imaginations in one way or another.

The general feeling expressed by the learners was something like this: If this can happen in the States, where can one possibly escape the threat of such terrible, deliberate destruction?

When one of my ABET classes discussed the WTC disaster, the learners—who are fairly advanced ESOL students—made the comments shown opposite.

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE cont'd

Jerome Shoba: “I was very upset about what happened at the World Trade Centre because they killed even the innocent. Although I am living in a country which has a high rate of crime, I don’t think that I can live in the USA because it seems as if the security is poor. Why didn’t they stop that accident to save thousands of people and the countries affected? It was not only American people who were there at the World Trade Centre.”

Alex Gumbi: “It was like a dream to me while hearing about the WTC disaster, especially because one of my relatives stays there, so I was shocked as I never knew whether she was involved in that terrible situation. If such a disaster took place in South Africa, I would feel very sorry, as resources could be in crisis, like banks and schools where we get knowledge for our future. I think if such a situation occurred in South Africa where I am living, surviving could be tough for me, because I might become a refugee to other countries which have different principles.”

Thabani Mpulo: “I was very shocked when I heard about the World Trade Centre disaster. The first thing which came to my mind was that the USA has no safety, or maybe they don’t have well trained security. I even still think that South Africa is better than the USA because South Africa has not had bad disasters like this one. It took me two weeks to forget about that terrible event—to see people dying like flies in a short space of time. I pray for nations to come together to prevent that kind of disaster from happening again.”

Jenni Slabbert
Two Jays Communications
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

session; we were simply acknowledging emotional realities—rage, agitation, numbness, fear—that would otherwise have made their presence known in other, more destructive ways. Some students felt a need to speak; others said little or kept silent. Some expressed relief when they heard that their own anxieties were widely shared. I know that another teacher might not have been comfortable with such an approach, but I found it invaluable. Never before (or since) have I had a classroom in which everyone listened so attentively to what their classmates had to say. I conducted these go-rounds every few days. The result was a spirit of mutual support that helped us get through the difficult weeks to come.

Dealing with Hate Speech

I don’t want to give the impression that our class was free from conflict. When I told of finding myself, for once, in support of Mayor Giuliani when he said that attacks on New York’s Muslim community would not be tolerated, several class members disagreed. Only one young woman, however, stepped over the line of acceptable speech by saying that it was right that a group of Muslim women had had stones thrown at them. As soon as she said this, I stopped the discussion and reminded everyone of the ground rules: no name-calling, no attacks based on a person’s religion or race, nothing that can be interpreted as a threat. I pointed out that there were people in the class who might be Muslim or mistaken for Muslim. Later, I met with this student and the counselor and persuaded the student that she owed it to herself to apologize to the class. For a while I worried that I had overreacted to a few ill-chosen words, but when several members of the class thanked me for my intervention, I realized it had been the right thing to do.

Writing, Reflecting— and Occasionally Escaping

Daily journal writing provided students with another opportunity to express and explore what they were going through. Dialogue journals have always been part of my class because they help writers develop ease in getting their thoughts down as words on the page. Sometimes I assign questions such as “Is New York a good place to raise children?” or give one-word prompts: “Courage,” “Patience” or “Music.” Other times I ask the class to freewrite about whatever comes to mind. During September and October of 2001, most of the class chose to write about the World Trade Center. By reading and writing responses to their journals, I was able to identify and address concerns that I wouldn’t otherwise have been aware of. For example, if a young mother wrote about her daughter being scared of anthrax, I would go to the World Wide Web and bring in material relating to that topic. If an entry raised issues that I didn’t feel prepared to deal with, I referred the student to our counselor.

Students found their own ways to make the journals useful. Some used them as ways to ask me questions they might not have been comfortable asking out loud. Others saw the journal as a book of memories that they planned to save. Keeping the journal inspired one woman to make a scrapbook of news clippings and photographs of Ground Zero that she plans to share with her son when he is old enough to understand.

Reading the journals helped me in another way as well. Thanks to them I saw when the class was eager to move on to other lessons. Math became a popular subject because it served as an escape. The same was true for grammar and map work (even when the maps were of Afghanistan and its neighbors). Reading *The Bomb* presented more challenges. For some, its descriptions of war and of the

American government’s betrayal of the Bikinian people struck too close to home. They would have been happier reading a book whose message was upbeat rather than one portraying strife and showing our country in a less than noble role.

Reaching Out and Closing Up

I remember this as the “God Bless America” time, when flags from lapel-size on up and “United We Stand” posters began appearing everywhere. While I understood the comfort that such symbols of unity gave, I was frightened that we seemed to be entering a period in which dissent would be squelched and liberties willingly sacrificed. With these thoughts in mind, I brought to class an anti-war open letter to President Bush that had been published in *The New York Times*. We analyzed and discussed the writer’s arguments for opposing the bombing of Afghanistan; then I asked the class to write their own letters to the president. The writing reflected a variety of positions and was probably the best writing of the term. Everyone had something to say, and, by using the letter from the *Times* as a model, the students were able to establish an appropriate tone and organize their thoughts into paragraphs. The problem came when I asked if they wanted their letters sent to the White House. Some said “Yes,” others “No” or nothing at all. Then, one by one, the yeses changed their minds. “He won’t read it anyway,” they said. “What’s the point?”

A similar reluctance arose in an email exchange between my class and a group of adult basic education students in South Africa. After trading introductions, the correspondents asked questions about each other’s countries. This was fine until the South Africans began wanting to know things like “Where do you think the anthrax came from?” and “How does Bush know that bin Laden is guilty?” Such inquiries elicited defensiveness. Although half the class continued to enjoy the exchange, the other half com-

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

That morning woke with a song of the birds,
 with the children's smile, with the
 happiness of the start of a new day.
 Above
 the sun wrapped up warmly and cheerfully
 on our home,
 Exalting the majesty of our buildings,
 parks and streets.
 Peacefully the birds played
 with the soft breeze.
 Suddenly,
 a thunderstorm to shock our sense,
 to shake our home . . . and
 eventually we were covered by the uncertainty,
 the tears, the anger,
 marking a profound pain in our lives.
 But,
 the effect of this pain was the national union, that
 encouraged the spirit, and forever will be
 present in our hearts.
 Now,
 we are ready to continue praising and working
 for this great Nation of Liberty,
 And
 It is the patriotic renaissance for this
 glorious Nation!

Sonia Villagomez
 Student, Lehman College Adult Learning Center

plained that email is boring. They wanted to use their computer time to type papers or surf the web. Peter, the teacher in South Africa, and I had thought that my students would find it liberating, even therapeutic, to share what they were going through. We were surprised find out otherwise.

Moving On

Looking back at the fall term of 2001, I see it as a crucible in which my assumptions about teaching were put to the test. If asked to describe my approach to teaching, I would call it learner centered and anti-authoritarian. Now I have a better sense of what that means to me. The primary success of the term was the creation of an emotionally supportive learning environment in the midst of a radically changed environment. Specific approaches, such as journal writing, helped make this possible, but the decisive factor, I think, was my willingness to respond to the emotional needs of the class as a whole, whether by enforcing rules of civilized discourse or by foregoing what I thought would be an exciting email project. What we constructed together was a haven. For sixteen hours a week, we were able to push aside a good portion of our anxieties and get on with the business of learning.

Where does that leave us now, eight months later? Five of my students from the fall are still with me, but the rest of my class is new. This group lacks the camaraderie of the fall but seems more energetic and open to taking on challenges. Our theme for the term is environmental activism, and our central text is Julia (Butterfly) Hill's *The Legacy of Luna*. I worried that Brooklynites would find it hard to identify with a woman who sat in a redwood tree for over two years, but from the first day, the class expressed admiration for Hill and enthusiasm for her quest. We are also developing a website, and when I asked if I should invite Peter's South African students to visit it and email their comments and questions, the class agreed that I should. It seems that we are ready to emerge from our haven and once again engage with the world.

Media Literacy in the Classroom

Helping Teachers Develop Critical Media Skills

by Marguerite Lukes and Mariann Fedele

On September 11, 2001, we were both in the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) office at 32 Broadway as the planes hit the World Trade Center blocks away. We went outside and watched in amazement as the buildings burned. Back indoors, we tried to communicate with other staff and with our families. We listened to the radio in disbelief and tried to get reception on our in-house TV. Some of the staff of POV (Point of View), the PBS collaborator and showcase for independent nonfiction films, came down from their office on the 14th floor of our building to offer us use of their DSL line to inform our families that we were okay. We spent time in POV's offices on their computers, writing and calling loved ones—still trying to make sense of what was going on outside. When we finally left to make our way home, we said, “Let’s talk soon” to the POV staff, thinking we might potentially do a project together.

As the LAC staff left the building and as the two of us walked together across the Brooklyn Bridge to our homes, we made a commitment to reconvene after whatever it was we were experiencing was over. (Despite our proximity to the event, we were not clear on what “it” was and what its implications were). We wanted to talk about our work and what we would do (or not do—would there still be work?) in the aftermath of something we knew would be life-changing.

The Relevance of Media Literacy

In the days after September 11, we came to the conclusion that we needed to address media literacy in our professional development work. As we watched the events we had been a part of that day being replayed again and again on network television, we felt that what we had experienced was different from what was being broadcast to national audiences. Its significance for individuals and for the nation was being transformed into something monolithic, something that did not reflect the complexity of the global issues as we saw them. We had a hard time finding alternative viewpoints to the one that was being promoted on the network news: “Attack on America.” Our experience and viewpoints were not being reflected in the media.

As our own critical media skills were being challenged by what we were seeing, hearing, and reading, we knew that teachers and students could benefit from exploring media literacy. We felt that, as adults and consumers of media, we needed first of all to develop our own media literacy skills. We needed to learn to be, not passive consumers of what is most readily and easily available, but critical analyzers of the mainstream media and its pervasive messages—so that we could teach those skills to others. The item on our workshop plan originally

called simply “Media Literacy Workshops for Teachers” became much more relevant and timely.

Professional Development on Media Literacy

In our conversations about ways to support the members of New York City’s adult education community as they dealt with the aftermath of September 11 in the classroom, we realized we needed to bring to light less-easily-accessed media sources and to match them with instructional methods for using media in the classroom. We wanted to provide forums in which adult educators could create frameworks for being media consumers that would then inform their classroom instruction.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA RESOURCES

Our first effort was the World Trade Center Crisis Forum that LAC professional development staff held in late September 2001, once the LAC was up and running again. In preparation for this event, knowing that lots of lessons and classroom talk would take place around the events of September 11, we considered ways to make each such conversation a learning moment. We had access to the *New York Post*, the *Daily News*, CBS (Channel 2), and CNN online. Were these sources, among the few others that we regularly turn to, enough to develop an informed and critical perspective? By searching for alternative media sources; exploring international and non-mainstream news and websites; and talking to experts from education, political, and media organizations throughout the country, we found a score of media sources that presented a range of perspectives on the crisis. This work became an annotated collection called “Alternative Media Resources and Media Critique,” presented at the forum and available on our website at www.lacnyc.org.

USING WEB-BASED ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN INSTRUCTION

Wanting to go beyond the dissemination of resources—and with our eyes now trained on media critique—we created a workshop in which participants could both explore ways to become critical consumers of media and work collaboratively on instructional strategies to introduce media literacy in the classroom. In our workshop on Web-Based Media Resources in November 2001, we asked participants to develop a conceptual framework for the critical analysis of media. The educators who participated felt that the mainstream media were in no danger of being underrepresented; rather, participants felt obliged to provide opportunities for students to explore a broad range of media perspectives and to construct their own meaning. We began by examining our own media sources of choice and why we chose them. For example, why do we read the *New York Times* and not *The Guardian* or *The Nation* or the *Christian Science Monitor*? Were our choices simply a matter of availability, or did they serve to affirm our own perspectives? Did we challenge ourselves when deciding what information to let in? Given that all media represent a specific perspective, which perspectives were we willing to entertain and which not?

Workshop participants discussed appropriate ways for educators to present media options to students and examined methods for integrating alternative sources into instruction. The teachers felt that their role was to identify and introduce alternative media sources, facilitate discussion around sensitive topics, and, most importantly, create a classroom environment of trust and respect that enables examination of diverse views. Several teachers said that discussions of current events are difficult and often heated, but that they provide an authentic way for students to build communication

skills. Some teachers felt it was important to let students know that they have the choice of “opting out” if a classroom conversation becomes too emotional or “heavy” for them. They agreed that, when addressing potentially volatile topics in the classroom, teachers need to help students develop ground rules regarding acceptable discourse style, language, and types of comments. Once students create their own ground rules and agree on them as a group, they have collective ownership of what is acceptable. Workshop participants said that the classroom is an ideal place to address stereotypes and other potentially sensitive topics, but that each teacher must know his or her own limits and abilities—and that there is no one tried-and-true technique.

**DEVELOPING CRITICAL
CONSUMERS OF TELEVISION
AND FILM**

While we focused on web-based media resources, we were also developing a workshop that applied some of the same basic principles—exploration of alternative media resources, development of critical media skills, examination of opportunities for instruction—to television. At the center of our workshop, Conventions of Media, was “Production Notes,” a video from the Center for Media Literacy. This video plays commercials and then replays each in slow motion with a voice-over narrating the advertising company’s production notes. After viewing the commercials, workshop participants collaborated on deconstructing the conventions of media—language, tone, images, sound, and so on—and on developing ways to introduce similar activities in the classroom. The workshop focused on developing the key questions that people should ask when playing the role of media consumer: “What are they selling?” “Who profits?” “What is the story being told and who is it being told to?” “What symbols and sensory stimulants are being used to convince us?” “What are the assumptions being made, and do they reflect our reality?”

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

. . . We cried for hours, days, weeks, and let me tell you something. I’m still crying. TV, radio, newspapers, had the impact news. The news that changed our life forever. The news that sent a lot of people to the hospitals. The news that buried many, many people. Innocent people, good people, hard working people, and responsible people. They didn’t deserve that. For me it’s a nightmare, believe me. Many people feared that this might happen again. The U.S. sent soldiers to Afghanistan. My son was prepared when the military called him. I pray to God that nothing bad will happen. I pray for those people that are suffering the loss of their family. My heart is with them. . . .

Margarita Lugo
Student, NYC Board of Education
Office of Adult & Continuing Education, Region 2

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

I was in Bangladesh when the World Trade Center fell down. . . . My younger brother said to us that the WTC fell down. He heard it from someone. When we heard this happened, I thought it was a dream. We could not believe it. My brother went to the main town and bought the newspaper. At last we believed this event and we were so surprised and upset.

We heard many rumors in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi newspapers published so many stories about Bangladeshi Americans related to jobs and religion. Example: we heard many Bangladeshi taxi drivers were killed. Many Bangladeshi were beaten by Americans because they looked like Muslims. My husband was afraid to return to America but there were not suitable jobs in Bangladesh for him to support his family. At last he came back to America.

I think September 11 affected so much in Bangladesh, like the development of the country. The Bangladeshi economy mostly depends on garments. Many workers lost their jobs after September 11. . . .

Afroz Khatun

Student, NYC Board of Education
Office of Adult & Continuing Education, Region 7

Next, we began to capitalize on the serendipitous connection we made with the staff of POV on September 11. We collaborated in a workshop centering around a preview of POV's feature-length documentary *Promises*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for best documentary. The film views the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the eyes of children on both sides, culminating in a meeting among some of the children. The curriculum materials POV developed for *Promises* (available on their website at www.pbs.org/pov) were designed for K–12 teachers and students. In the LAC workshop, adult educators discussed methods for using the film and the curriculum materials with their adult students. The film produced some tears; the conversation was urgent and even heated at times, but participants agreed on the need to create forums in their classrooms to discuss such emotionally laden issues. In addition, teachers agreed that, as hard as it is to address current events, documentary films can help students to bring real life into the classroom in ways that can be both healing and challenging.

Participatory Perspectives

Throughout these professional development efforts, participants discussed appropriate and sensitive ways of introducing controversial topics in our classrooms—a process made more delicate by current events. At the LAC, we model participatory education methodology in our workshops so that teachers experience the kinds of activities we hope they will use in their classrooms. Two points are key in this methodology:

- Building trust among participants
- Making connections to participants' lived experiences, cultural perspectives, background knowledge, interests, and needs

As teachers develop their critical media literacy skills, they experience and plan ways to help their students develop their own skills. In true Freirean fashion, “the world

becomes the word” and vice versa. Teachers in diverse classrooms must be careful to ease students into group work that involves sharing personal experiences; they need extensive knowledge of students’ backgrounds and lived experiences.

We have paid careful attention to our choice of materials to use in trainings. It would be easy to come up with an array of articles and video clips from mainstream sources such as *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, Fox, CNN, and so on. Yet we know that teachers use these media in their classrooms and that they and their students are already inundated with mainstream perspectives. This inundation has never been clearer than now, when the mainstream media have all but silenced alternative views on the conflict in Afghanistan, the war on terror, civil rights, the call for national security, and the war in the Middle East. In our staff development on media literacy, we sought to present teachers with contrasting views, sometimes opening them up to perspectives and sources that were new to them. Some may call this “biased.” We believe that all media are biased; however, the alternative perspectives we present do not get the same exposure as the mainstream views. Finding alternative perspectives and juxtaposing contrasting and often conflicting perspectives are in themselves valuable literacy skills.

Media literacy is an ongoing need, a critical skill that affects students’ quality of life. We are continuing our work on media literacy, incorporating Internet, television, video, and other primary sources into our professional development events, engaging in dialogue about contrasting views. As we delve deeper into this topic with teachers, we see a benefit for ourselves, for teachers, and for students. We’re heartened to be able to respond to current needs in ways that position everyone involved to function as both teacher and learner.

RESOURCES

Alternative Media

CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org

The motto of this bi-weekly muckraking newsletter is “We’ve got all the right enemies.”

BBC

<http://BBC.co.uk>

With a somewhat centrist alternative to U.S.-based mainstream media sources, the BBC is very strong on breaking stories.

EurasiaNet

<http://Eurasianet.org>

EurasiaNet provides information and analysis about political, economic, environmental, and social developments in Central Asia, Russia, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia.

Common Dreams

www.commondreams.org

Common Dreams works to bring progressive Americans together to promote progressive visions for America’s future

Media Critiques

Center for Investigative Reporting

www.muckraker.org

The Center for Investigative Reporting conducts investigations of topics that affect public life, providing a base for journalists in pursuit of hidden stories about American society.

Institute for Public Accuracy

www.accuracy.org

This national nationwide consortium of policy researchers seeks to broaden public discourse by gaining media access for those whose perspectives are not commonly heard.

FAIR

www.fair.org

FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) is a national media watch group. Its website offers well-documented criticism of media bias and alternative perspectives on mainstream media coverage.

AlterNet

www.alternet.org

AlterNet is dedicated to strengthening and supporting independent and alternative journalism.

Challenging the Readings, Reading the Challenges

A Staff Developer's Reflections on September 11

by Ira Yankwitt

Educational practice can never escape the political: The themes educators choose to address, the materials we choose to use, the questions we choose to ask, the points of view we choose to introduce, the words we choose to frame issues, and the tasks we choose to assign all reflect political perspectives and sensibilities. Through the choices and non-choices we make in our classrooms and programs, ultimately we either tacitly endorse existing policies, prevailing social conventions, and the dominant discourse or we actively call them into question.

In the days following September 11, 2001, my colleagues on the professional development program staff at the LAC—Mariann Fedele, Winston Lawrence, Marguerite Lukes—and I grappled with the question of what it means to be a literate global citizen in a profoundly interconnected world. As practitioners who strongly believe that the need for adult literacy education is created, in large part, by

social inequities and global injustices, we are committed to a vision of critical literacy education that includes questioning facile explanations for complex phenomena, examining root causes of global crises, and scrutinizing structural injustices and systemic abuses of power. In the classrooms we try to cultivate, teachers facilitate the democratic exchange of ideas, encourage oppositional voices, and reject intellectual conformity.

Challenging the Readings

The LAC is located six blocks from the World Trade Center. Approximately half our staff was trapped in our building for several hours immediately following the attacks. The fact that my colleagues and I were caught up in the events of that day later heightened our scrutiny of how the attacks were being interpreted. As the headline “America Under Attack” was replaced by the catchphrase “America’s

New War” within a few days of September 11, Mariann, Marguerite, Winston, and I became increasingly disturbed by the lack of critical analysis in the patriotic discourse of the moment. We believed that there were hard questions that needed to be asked, questions that challenged the prevailing reading of the crisis. How have U.S. policies contributed to hostility toward, and hatred of, the U.S.? How has economic globalization led to even greater desperation among the world’s poor? How might the terrorist attack be used to justify the curtailment of civil liberties and the use of racial profiling here at home? Is it moral to launch sweeping attacks on the already impoverished Afghan nation? And finally, how might the U.S.’s actions in response to the terrorist attacks come back to haunt us all again?

As we began to think about ways that we could support adult literacy practitioners in this crisis, we reached out to colleagues in the field to get a sense of their most immediate issues and challenges. We knew that some instructors would be reluctant to raise the types of questions in their classrooms that would challenge mainstream understandings; we knew that many practitioners and students would want to “get back to normal” as quickly as possible. The most immediate concerns would be supporting students and staff who were dealing with trauma, loss, anxiety, and fear; more effectively linking adult literacy programs with outside counseling services and other types of social services; and addressing the impact of the post-September 11 economy and job market on already economically marginalized adult students.

On the other hand, because we felt that practitioners should not only provide services but also promote critical engagement, much of our discussion focused on the need to create, identify, and disseminate curricula and activity guides on topics such as Middle East, South Asian, and Muslim history and culture; militarism and U.S. foreign policy;

bias, racism, and racial profiling; critiquing the mainstream media; immigrant rights, and civil liberties. We recognized that developing such materials would require building stronger relationships with human rights and cultural organizations. In our first forum on the crisis, held on September 28, the 40 or so adult literacy practitioners who attended were interested in curricular issues, but two more immediate concerns dominated the session. One was the dramatic drop-off in attendance of Arab, South Asian, and Muslim students, whose fear of bias attacks against them made them too frightened to leave their homes. The other was the economic impact September 11 was already having on many adult students, particularly undocumented immigrants.

Reading the Challenges

September 11 and its aftermath put into stark relief many of the overarching questions that are fundamental to the field of adult literacy:

- What is the purpose of adult literacy education? Is it solely to provide students with the basic skills necessary to better integrate themselves into the marketplace, or is it also to encourage them to scrutinize “conventional wisdom” and critically engage the world around them?
- What is the purpose of civics education? Is it to validate the political institutions and governmental policies of the United States, or is it to encourage students to question those institutions and policies, teaching students to actively challenge those they find misguided or unjust?
- What does it mean to promote “critical thinking” in the classroom? Does it mean only teaching students how to apply a discrete set of intellectual skills to the reading and construction of arguments and texts, or does it also involve having students and teachers alike examine their own underlying assumptions, biases, values, and beliefs, as well

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

... After reading the newspapers, I think that the American government made a lot of mistakes. Osama Bin Laden was promoted for the CIA's money when Afghanistan fought against the U.S.S.R. ...

I think the most important goal for the terrorists is to cause Americans to panic, to scare us. But they will never reach that goal!

as the assumptions, biases, values, and beliefs embedded in public discourse?

- What is the scope of our responsibility to our students, particularly those who are marginalized, disregarded, or vilified by the broader society? Is it simply to provide them with access to quality education and other social services, or is it also to stand behind them as they advocate for themselves, give voice to their own realities, and demand of society that they be seen and heard?

- To what extent is it possible—or wise—to separate instructional methodology from curricular content? If we strive to promote student control over the educational experience by engaging students in participatory instructional strategies such as project-based and collaborative learning, shouldn't we also strive to promote student control over the larger forces that shape their lives by engaging them in an examination of government policies, economic relationships, and global injustices?

For most adult literacy practitioners, including the professional development staff of the LAC, the profound questions and immediate issues raised by September 11 slowly gave way to more everyday concerns about NRS reporting requirements, the limits of standardized tests in capturing student progress, and the challenge of preparing students for the new GED. Discussions on the National Literacy Advocacy (NLA) listserv focused less on the rights of immigrant students than on the reading philosophies and professional backgrounds of the Bush administration's appointees to the National Institute for Literacy advisory board and on the potentially damaging impact of the Bush administration's focus on scientific research and evidence-based practice. While these issues are critical to our field, the need to devote so much time and energy to addressing them poses a challenge to those of us who believe that September 11 and its aftermath intensified the imperative to address current events and controversial subjects in our programs.

Yuriy Vernikov
Student, BEGIN #82

While the world changed on September 11, it also remained very much the same. As adult literacy practitioners, we have a responsibility to recognize that every aspect of our world—from the local job market to the global economy, from airport security to racial profiling, from government surveillance to wars in far-off places—affects students and programs in myriad ways. My colleagues and I at the LAC seek to help practitioners become effective instructors and managers; this means, in part, helping practitioners find the space and the means necessary to challenge established truths and raise difficult questions. To do otherwise would be not only to betray our vision of adult literacy education, but also to disregard the historic significance of September 11.

HOW TEACHERS RESPONDED

Here are a few things I learned from my first classes after September 11, as I tried to help students deal in class with their shock, grief, and outrage:

1. Not jumping into the conversation, but rather asking people whether they would like to talk about these events was useful. It ended up leading into a discussion, but I don't think people thought I was forcing them to talk about it. (In fact one student said that, in another class, the teacher didn't give them a choice.)
2. Abandoning my own plan for how to get into the discussion was important—that is, not orchestrating the discussion. I told them how I was thinking about this and what I had planned, sharing my thinking and my own uncertainties.
3. Trusting that they could bring a full range of perspectives to the discussion was important. I didn't need to assume I was the only one who had a critical analysis.
4. Not being “goal-oriented”—that is, not trying to work the discussion around to one perspective, to unanimity or “good feeling,” being comfortable with not resolving or clarifying things was important.

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The New (and Ongoing) Job Crisis for Adult Learners

How Adult Educators Can Respond

by Paul Jurmo

An estimated 100,000 or more New Yorkers lost their jobs in the months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The attacks closed down businesses downtown and in the entertainment, hotel, restaurant, and travel industries in and around the city. These job losses (or reduced work hours and a commensurate loss of income and benefits) occurred primarily in low-wage jobs held by lower-skilled workers.

A report from the Fiscal Policy Institute, *World Trade Center Job Impacts Take a Heavy Toll on Low-Wage Workers* (2001), indicates that the five occupational categories incurring the greatest layoffs were waiters and waitresses, janitors and cleaners, retail salespersons, food preparation workers, and cashiers. An additional 76,000 workers avoided layoffs by working fewer hours and taking cuts in their wages and benefits. These reductions in work hours hit the taxi and car service industry and apparel manufacturing—especially in Chinatown—hardest. Member unions of the Consortium for Worker Education report that:

- As many as 2000 members of Building Service Local 32B-J of the Service Employees Industrial Union lost their jobs as custodians, cleaners, elevator operators, and building superintendents.

- Workers at local airports—ranging from baggage handlers to mechanics to limo drivers—lost their positions when airline travel ground to a halt.

- More than 4,000 members of the Hotel Trades Council Union were out of work within weeks of September 11.

A report by the New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce (2001) states that, “while many of these jobs will return, New York City will still have a net loss of approximately 57,000 jobs attributable to the attack at the end of 2003” (p.3).

These recent job losses exacerbate longer-term trends. For example, the Fiscal Policy Institute’s report *The State of Working New York* (2002) points to the disappearance of manufacturing jobs in the city over the past two decades. Low-skill jobs that paid decent wages and benefits were thus already on the decline before September 11; the attacks and

the resulting economic downturn have simply made it even harder for a low-skilled person to find a job that pays a living wage.

Adult Learners' Ongoing Employment Needs

The recent crisis has thus diminished the employment-related prospects of New York City adults who have limited literacy and ESOL skills. The figures and examples given in this article come from our immediate experience in New York City because this is where the effects of September 11 have been disproportionately concentrated. However, low-wage jobs nationwide have been affected by an economic downturn that was exacerbated by the attacks. This effect in turn exacerbated an ongoing employment crisis. Well before September 11, adult educators knew—from local and national statistics and from their own interactions with adult learners—that the people served by literacy and ESOL programs tend either to hold jobs that provide low wages and few if any benefits or to be unemployed.

While a lack of basic literacy or ESOL skills is not the sole determinant of low income and unemployment, lack of basic skills is a significant factor that prevents people from getting decent jobs, staying in those jobs, moving to higher-level jobs, and getting access to the training and credentials they need for secure employment. Imagine yourself suddenly having limited English proficiency and/or no high school diploma. What kind of job would you expect to find?

Since the 1980s, U.S. employers have stated (Carnevale et al., 1990, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992) that they need employees with a broader and deeper range of skills. They say that changing workplaces are now requiring workers who can handle new technologies,

higher standards (for quality, safety, environmental protection, and so on), and more-demanding record-keeping and decision-making tasks now common in most industries.

Research by the Consortium for Worker Education, where I work, suggests that there is some truth in those claims. For example:

- Trucking company officials tell us that, to get a decent-paying job in a safe, clean shop, a truck mechanic now has to use a computer to order parts, read and log off on work orders, and communicate with other mechanics via email to get help in solving problems.
- Experts from the security industry state that, especially since September 11, security guards have to be able to question people wanting entry, communicate with emergency personnel, and log on to a building database to confirm visitors or deliveries.
- Housekeeping staff in major hotels now have to log on to computers to get work orders.

We also learned, in interviews with subway workers, that token booth operators need to be able to communicate orally with customers to give directions, communicate with customers and emergency personnel in the event of emergencies in the station, and prepare end-of-shift reports tabulating various categories of sales. While most clerks can handle those tasks satisfactorily now, many are also faced with the prospect of retraining for new jobs as many subway token booths are replaced by swipe-card machines. Those machines will require trained technicians to install and maintain them. Former token booth clerks will likely need retraining—and perhaps new basic skills like technical math—to move into those “higher-tech” jobs if they choose to pursue them.

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

. . . Since September 11, many people lost their jobs and many companies closed.

The restaurants had fewer customers in Chinatown, and had fewer tourists. New York City was very quiet. Many factories were closed. My factory had less work and eventually had no work to do. . . .

To take another example, food processing is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in New York City. Food-processing companies provide jobs to workers, especially immigrants, who, among other things, prepare the packaged meals that can be bought in neighborhood delicatessens. To move from entry-level food-preparation jobs to higher-level, better-paying positions, workers in these companies need a range of basic and technical skills. These skills include the ability to communicate with English-speaking co-workers or customers, to complete necessary paperwork, to understand health department regulations and safety procedures for cutting machines and other equipment, to read recipes, or to use computerized inventory equipment.

The bottom line is that, while a person with limited literacy and English language skills might still be able to get a job in New York City, that job is less likely to provide wages and benefits needed to support a family. In a September 2001 report prepared before the September 11 attacks, Public/Private Ventures recommended that New York City “launch an ambitious program to upgrade the education and skills of city residents. Otherwise, New York’s ability to compete economically will be severely hampered by its disproportionately large unskilled workforce” (p.1). Then in March 2002, a report from the United Way of New York City stated that training in basic skills and work-related skills will be necessary to help low-skilled workers, especially immigrants with limited English skills, get back to work.

Many persons with limited basic skills face an additional obstacle that blocks their access to decent jobs: a lack of “connections” to formal or informal mechanisms through which people typically get connected to jobs. For example, some new arrivals in the United States may not have friends or relatives who can tip them off about job possibilities. Also, people who are already struggling to make ends meet may not be able to put in the time to make the rounds of employers to fill out job applications, go through job interviews, and “get a foot in the door.”

Yan Yan Tan

Student, Chinese American Planning Council

Work-Related Curricula and Connections

This is probably old news for most adult basic education providers in New York and nationwide. They know that learners frequently want help upgrading skills and getting credentials, such as the GED, and that learners feel they need to move into more rewarding jobs. Programs have responded to those learner needs in two ways: *curriculum* and *connections*. That is, programs follow one or both of these courses of action:

- Focusing instruction on the job-related skills and knowledge learners need
- Using referrals and other means to link learners to jobs and work-related training opportunities outside the basic skills program

The following examples show how programs in New York City provide work-related services to learners who are already employed or who are looking for work.

WORK-RELATED CURRICULA

Henry Street Settlement House provides GED preparation, computer training, and job readiness workshops to Lower East Side residents. A case management course helps learners develop strategies for dealing with factors that block them from getting and keeping jobs. Interns from local university master's degree programs in social work or nursing facilitate discussions on such topics as time management, risk taking, anger management, choices and decisions, and conflict resolution. At the end of each session, learners write in their journals in order to solidify what they have learned, improve their writing skills, and give feedback to the facilitator about the effectiveness of the session.

Local 1199 of the Service Employees Industrial Union provides an extensive range of educational services to the city's healthcare workers. Local 1199

recognizes that better jobs in the changing health-care industry require not just solid basic skills but, increasingly, college-level credentials. ESOL, GED, External Diploma Program, computer, and college prep classes are geared to helping learners get the skills and credentials they need to move on to higher-level training, either in the City University of New York system—for instance, to become LPNs or RNs—or through other specialized training programs for such jobs as X-ray technician, medical records specialist, or alcohol and substance abuse counselor. The course content might not always be highly job-specific—that is, it may not entail reading or writing workplace documents—but the overall orientation of all courses is to help participants get the training they need to maintain job security and move up the career ladder.

The Fortune Society has been providing education and other services to ex-offenders and at-risk youth to break the cycle of crime and incarceration. Its education program provides instruction in ESOL, reading and writing, math, GED preparation, and computer skills. Those classes include work-related skills such as résumé writing and conducting job searches on the web. Most students actively searching for employment participate in Fortune's Career Development Program, a two-week workshop in which participants practice job interview skills, prepare résumés, and discuss how their criminal justice backgrounds can affect their employability. The Career Development Program is developing relationships with employers in order to help participants connect to jobs.

In the literacy and pre-GED program at the **Hudson Guild**, learners use newspaper articles and other sources to better understand the job market and other issues, such as budgets for public-sector jobs, that affect their role in the economy. The purpose is to arm learners with critical thinking skills so they can

WHAT STUDENTS WROTE

. . . My life has only changed in fear of what will happen next here in New York. Since the September 11th terrorist attack, I don't like what I see and hear on the news every day. I'm afraid of what will happen next. I am afraid to go out or travel anywhere. I am especially afraid to travel on an airplane to visit my relatives in Yugoslavia. Because of what has happened, I don't feel safe.

I fear for my son's safety in school every day since the terrorist attack. The war against terrorists hasn't stopped the terrorists. I still fear what might happen next because of the anthrax in the mail and the young boy who flew the plane into the building in Florida. I want to feel safe again. I want to feel secure about going on a plane. I want life to be like it was before.

proactively plan their careers and find rewarding jobs rather than just being "plugged into" whatever is available.

CONNECTIONS TO JOBS

Learners in the Brooklyn Public Library's GED Program practice writing résumés, doing job searches on the Internet, and writing letters to prospective employers. This helps them prepare both to pass the GED exam and to improve their employment prospects after earning their diploma. In addition, they go with their teacher, Althea N. Davidson, to visit the local Worker Career Center (WCC). There the learners meet employment counselors, learn about other available education and job-placement services, and become comfortable with the center and its staff. Ms. Davidson points out that these visits serve as an endorsement of the WCC by a known and trusted teacher. Learners are thus more likely to return to the WCC, make an appointment with a counselor, and use its services.

Transport Workers Union Local 100 represents over 35,000 workers in the city's subway and bus system. Last year a New Technologies Committee conducted focus groups and interviews with union members and management representatives, as well as reviewing research reports, to analyze how new technologies were impacting transit industry jobs and what training and education members needed to retain their jobs and move into better ones. The result of this half-year needs assessment was a new union education and training initiative. The union is now offering classes in computer skills, basic electronics, ESOL, writing, and preparation for the civil service exam. The union is also working with transit industry experts and the Transit Authority to clarify what skills workers will need in the future and how to ensure that training and education connect workers to emerging jobs.

On September 12, 2001, the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE) began planning a response to the job losses that CWE knew would result from this disaster. The result was the Emergency Employment Clearinghouse (EEC), a job-counseling and referral center based at CWE's

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midtown adult education facilities. People who lost their jobs after September 11 are eligible to receive job counseling and referrals either to job opportunities or, if needed, to education and training services to prepare them for jobs. CWE is also working with local unions and employers to find jobs for EEC participants. In one case, CWE is developing a test-preparation course for EEC clients interested in becoming utility workers. The course will cover relevant math skills, such as measuring, and the document-reading skills that are assessed in a test given to applicants for utility worker jobs. While the verdict isn't in yet on how effective these efforts will be, CWE can point to some early successes in placing people in jobs and in providing a safe place where people who lost their jobs can reorient themselves and begin reconnecting to the world of work.

Needed: A New Infrastructure for Work-Related Services

The massive job loss in the wake of September 11 underscores how vulnerable are the jobs and job prospects of the adult education population. The examples above show that New York City adult educators are willing and able to respond to employed and unemployed learners' work-related needs in creative ways, in a variety of program settings. However, adult educators must redouble their efforts to equip learners with options that will better prepare them for a changing work environment, as well as advocating for the resources that will enable educators to provide high-quality work-related services. Adult educators need to:

1. Be open to new ways of approaching work-related adult basic education.
2. Develop the expertise they need to plan and deliver effective work-related education geared to the particular needs of learners.

3. Advocate for the supports they need to do this work. These supports include:

- Appropriate (achievable, meaningful) expectations from funders about what adult education can do to help learners participate as workers.
- New funding and better use of existing resources to provide adult educators with the professional development, model curricula, evaluation and assessment tools, facilities, technologies, and other components needed for high-quality work-related education.

If we reconsider the potential benefits of high-quality work-related adult education and become active advocates for building the capacity of our programs to provide such education, we can serve our learners—and, by extension, their families and communities—and build stronger programs. The alternative is the current situation: a workforce that is underequipped to get jobs, remain employed, weather economic downturns, handle workplace demands, earn wages, support their families, pay taxes, and create stable communities.

WORK-RELATED EDUCATION RESOURCES

ABC CANADA

www.abc-canada.org

This Canadian organization pioneered a collaborative approach to workplace education that involved stakeholders—including learners—in defining how basic skills fit into the larger mission and culture of the workplace.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

www.ericacve.org

Click on Publications for a great collection of online resources for adult educators, including articles and digests on work-related learning.

National Adult Literacy Database

www.nald.ca

This website from Canada contains many documents on work-related basic skills. Search on “workplace.”

National Institute for Literacy

www.nifl.gov

The NIFL site includes not only the Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards—which focus on preparing adults for work, family, and citizenship roles—but also a listserv and a special collection on work-related literacy.

System for Adult Basic Education Support

www.sabes.org

The SABES site includes a number of publications from the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative, a national model for a statewide workplace education effort. Search on “workplace.”

Workforce Development Campus

www.jmu.edu/wdc

James Madison University offers an online training program for workplace educators.

Working for America

www.workingforamerica.org

The site of the AFL-CIO’s Working for America Institute provides links to union education programs and other union-related information. Click on Publications to order “Worker-Centered Learning: A Union Guide to Workplace Literacy.”

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Building the Capacity of Community-Based Youth-Serving Organizations to Respond to Trauma

by Belinda Passafaro, Adewale Oduye, Jennifer Paredes, Veronica Ceballos & Leanne Stahnke

As young people and their families struggled to overcome the emotional and social repercussions of the events of September 11, 2001, youth-serving agencies in New York City were challenged to respond in creative ways, drawing on the range of skills and programs that they have been offering through the years. This great tragedy brought out the best in youth programs and their staff as they responded to young people's desire to express themselves, to serve their communities, and to better understand other cultures and religions in order to foster healing, intercultural understanding, tolerance, and community.

New York City's youth-serving agencies, through their more than 1,700 school- and community-based after-school programs, offer programming in the arts, literacy, recreation, tutoring, community service, youth leadership, and peer education. However, the sheer scale and ferocity of September 11 challenged youth agencies to provide the intensity and quality of programmatic response appropriate to

the need. Agencies had to expand or strengthen certain program activities, and so they reached out to the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) and other groups for training and technical assistance. During the 2001–2002 program year, PASE reached out to the community of youth agencies, and, through them, to youth and their families, to launch four complementary and overlapping initiatives:

- Needs assessment
- Networking and sharing resources
- Strengthening program responses
- Youth to youth community building

Needs Assessment

During the first few weeks after September 11, PASE conducted a rapid needs assessment by calling youth-serving programs. Starting in October, we then more systematically surveyed 350 agencies to identify how families had been impacted and what resources youth agencies identified as priority needs.

RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In the weeks immediately after September 11, PASE conducted a rapid assessment of how youth, families, and youth agencies were being affected by the emergency. We systematically telephoned about 200 programs to determine what their needs were and what types of support they required. The following were the priority concerns of practitioners at that time:

Safe Places. Especially since schools were closed for the first few days, youth programs felt a strong desire to be open. Many reported that young people used their space as a meeting point during normal school hours—thus extending the programming hours that staff needed to supervise. However, staying open was a huge challenge since transportation, for both staff and young people, was extremely difficult.

Addressing the Emotional Toll. In contacting agencies, we heard many stories about individual families or agency staff who had suffered a loss. Programs reported that staff, young people, and families were struggling with the emotional fallout of the events. Almost every program we contacted created some opportunity for young people and staff to share their thoughts and feelings. How to talk to young people and their families about what was happening and how to be sensitive to the emotional consequences were challenges most programs needed to address.

Fostering Community Connections. There was an enormous desire to “do something” after September 11. In after-school programs, this desire frequently translated into organizing or participating in an event, whether it was a remembrance, a vigil, or a community “thank you.” Many of the agencies that have community service programs facilitated service projects for their young people.

Tackling Cultural Diversity, Bias, and Conflict Resolution. Many youth agencies were concerned about their young people being victims or instigators of bias incidents. They expressed enormous interest, therefore, in learning more about Islam. They felt a renewed urgency to develop or strengthen activities that stressed conflict resolution skills and promoted cultural diversity and tolerance.

SURVEY OF THE IMPACT ON YOUTH AGENCIES

To gather more information, we then collaborated with Anita Baker, a well-respected program evaluator who has worked with youth agencies for many years. She designed a survey instrument, and PASE established a phone bank to gather the data. Data was collected from 350 agencies, with balanced representation from all five boroughs of New York City. Some findings:

- 19% of the agencies reported that a substantial number of their families were directly affected by the terrorist attacks. 15% of the agencies reported that many or most of their families lost family members; 25% reported that many or most families lost friends or significant others.
- One in three agencies said that many or most of their clients experienced trauma from direct exposure to the events of September 11. Almost three-quarters said that many or most of their clients were indirectly traumatized—through the media, for example.
- The economic impact of the attacks was of great concern to families. The majority of agencies—57%—reported that many or most of their families faced probable job loss.
- 23% of the agencies reported that many or most of their clients had been affected by an upsurge in bias incidents.

- Safety issues were a concern for clients and staff of 35% of the youth agencies.

It is easy to see why 56% of the agencies added support programs such as counseling, and why 61% of the agencies said they needed additional funds to hire staff.

However, in moving forward, agencies indicated a number of key obstacles. Especially during the first two months after the attacks, 23% of the agencies reported a temporary loss of staff, and 52% indicated staff had lost focus at work. In addition, fundraising was greatly affected: 71% of agencies reported a definite loss in funding, with critical implications for programming. 56% of the agencies reported a hiring freeze, and 41% reported laying off staff.

These data provided PASE with a more complete picture of the priorities and challenges confronting youth programs. This information helped to further define the type of supports PASE should provide.

Networking and Sharing Resources

While surveying agencies to identify their priorities, PASE convened practitioners in each borough to further assess needs, provide resources, and allow for brainstorming around emergency-related efforts. These “Community Exchanges,” held in October through December, reached approximately 350 youth practitioners, who in turn work with an estimated 17,500 young people. The exchanges were intended to be of immediate help to practitioners, allowing them identify colleague agencies with specific expertise that might be of help them. The exchanges also helped PASE to identify training and technical assistance priorities for site-based assistance.

At every exchange, several expert facilitators led small group discussions on subjects that our needs assessment revealed were of concern to youth, families, and youth agencies. In addition,

materials were disseminated including information on September 11 emergency services and family benefits and on employment opportunities, as well as helpful articles and contacts.

Strengthening Program Responses

Using feedback from the community exchanges, surveys, and conversations with colleagues and funders, PASE designed an emergency response training and technical assistance initiative to meet the specific needs of programs seeking assistance. PASE developed a roster of consultants with expertise in the priority areas agencies had identified. By the end of April 2002, in collaboration with over fifty consultants, PASE was able to provide emergency training and technical assistance to about 100 youth agencies. Below are three examples.

Grief Counseling. The Coalition for Hispanic Family Services (CHFS) in Brooklyn is a Latino social services agency that serves a large African-American population. Following September 11, the agency provided grief and trauma counseling to its clients. However, due to the cultural differences between staff and clients in responding to grief, CHFS requested expert assistance. A team of two social work consultants facilitated a series of staff meetings to reflect on diversity issues, create greater awareness of clients’ grief responses, and help staff augment their services to be more culturally appropriate.

Addressing Trauma. Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center’s Post 5 Program in upper Manhattan provides support services to youth who are former “dropouts” enrolled in an alternative high school. The trauma of September 11, coupled with the American Airlines crash in Queens, affected student participation; some students, for example, stopped going to school because they were afraid to ride the subway. The staff sought expert assistance in devel-

Impact of September 11 on PASE

Since PASE is located two blocks from the World Trade Center, we were not able to access our office after the attacks. The home of Janet Kelley, PASE's executive director, became the staff meeting place. A temporary office was soon located in a law office in midtown Manhattan. While the office was not large enough to accommodate all staff, it functioned as a base of activity. This temporary office gave PASE a fixed reference point—a telephone number, fax, and address—which was critical for carrying out our work with the after-school field. Youth agencies and funders around the city made their space available for various small- and large-group meetings.

PASE's permanent office at 120 Broadway slowly became more accessible and usable over the next three months. For the first six weeks or so, there were no telephone lines; this was one of the two major hurdles to returning all staff to normalcy. The second was air quality. As the fires were slowly put out and the air quality improved, more staff were able to begin to use the permanent office on an occasional basis. By purchasing a high quality air filter and regularly changing the filters in our central air conditioning unit, we were eventually able to make it tolerable for even those staff members who suffer from asthma and allergies. Finally, by mid-December, we were able to close the midtown office and call 120 Broadway home once again.

oping short-term methods for addressing the fears and other emotions that students were experiencing. PASE matched Stanley Isaacs with Interfaith Neighbors, a nearby program that has expertise in working with young people around emotionally laden issues.

Conflict Resolution. MARC After-school Program, located in the Bronx, provides after-school services to 85 elementary school aged children. After September 11, the staff found that the children were getting into more conflicts. As the director explained, "Parents were concerned about job loss after September 11, and the kids were coming to my program with lots of stressors in their lives." Ramapo Resource and Training Center was brought in to work with the director and her staff on strategies to diffuse conflicts and promote positive communication among staff, children, and parents.

A number of agencies requested assistance in fund development, specifically accessing September 11-related funding, and in updating their safety and evacuation plans. These two areas were addressed through large-group, centralized training opportunities, since they were for only one or two staff at each site (usually a senior manager).

Youth-to-Youth Community Building

It was clear immediately after September 11 that the youth community in New York felt strongly that they wanted to "do something." Vigils, community walks, memorials, thank-you cards, and art work around the city expressed this need. Many youth agencies organized young people to create short-term community initiatives as a way of enabling them to turn a passive and often frustrating feeling into action. Building on this, the PASE Program Council, composed of some of the leading youth agencies in New York, created YouthConnect! The purpose was twofold: to identify and articulate the needs of the youth community in the aftermath of September 11, and to capture young people's related concerns and feelings. This

initiative was intended to lay a foundation for community action projects that might be launched as a result of the ideas that emerged from these discussions.

PASE identified five partner agencies, one in each of the five boroughs of New York City, to serve as satellite sites. Each partner agency solicited the participation of other agencies in its borough. Each partner agency was responsible for hiring three YouthConnect! Project Associates and one Project Supervisor. Since YouthConnect! is a youth-driven initiative, the Project Associates were required to be between the ages of 15 and 21. Each team was responsible for conducting outreach to youth agencies, facilitating small group discussions, and administering a post-September 11 survey. In total, YouthConnect! visited 59 youth agencies. Approximately 1,300 young people participated; 828 filled out surveys in whole or in part, and a smaller number took part in focus groups.

The youth-to-youth discussions and the young people's responses to the post-September 11 survey indicated several issues that were important to these young people. Some of these issues may have been important before September 11, but the young people indicated that they felt these issues had taken on heightened significance in the wake of the disaster.

- **Feelings of insecurity.** Many young people said they were afraid of other attacks and expressed reluctance to go to downtown Manhattan or to visit tall buildings.

- **Increased bias.** Some young people admitted to having turned their aggression on people who appeared to be Arab or South Asian. In response to a survey question, 28% of 782 respondents reported that they or someone they knew had been discriminated against due to the events of September 11.

- **Economic worries.** Many of the young people expressed concern about the changed job market in New

Diversity, Conflict Resolution & Mental Health

One way to measure the challenges faced by youth programs is to track the emergency-related training and technical assistance they requested. PASE received the following kinds of requests for onsite training and technical assistance:

Diversity/bias issues	35
Conflict resolution	16
Mental health	16
Fund development	10
Safety procedures	7
Special events	6
Community service	4

Slightly fewer than half of the requests for training in diversity sought a better understanding of Islam.

York City and their own prospects of finding summer or part-time work.

- **Perceptions of public servants.** Although many young persons expressed sympathy in focus groups for those lost in the line of duty on September 11, their comments indicate that sacrifices of a few have not changed the negative image of civil servants many hold.

- **Global awareness.** Many teens expressed in focus groups an increasing interest in foreign affairs. One young person commented, “9/11 made us look at the way we treat other countries, because we obviously did something to them for them to do this to us.”

Recommendations

To identify strategies for increasing the capacity of youth agencies to address the long-term impact of September 11 on young people, PASE brought together the experiences and insights of two groups: young people and youth practitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In focus groups and on surveys, young people recommended ways to support the connections they say are needed.

- **Peer training.** In the youth-led discussions, many participants stated that working in groups facilitated by their peers was effective and meaningful because all participants could relate to similar issues. The importance of peer-to-peer interaction was noted in discussing most of the other recommendations below.

- **Opportunities to be heard.** Many of the young people strongly stated that they need a variety of venues where they can express their opinions and ideas. Some said that they feel they have been

silenced by local power systems even though they are directly affected by budget cuts and limited resources.

- **Community service projects.** Many young people described the need to do something positive in the aftermath of September 11. They wanted to “give back” and help restore wholeness and hope in communities already suffering a myriad of social ills.

- **Skill development and job preparation programs.** Young people have already been adversely affected by budget cuts and will experience further impact as funds are diverted from education to defense and security. In focus groups, various young people suggested ways to improve their chances of finding meaningful work, including corporate partnerships, city-funded summer jobs, and training in basic employability skills.

- **Cultural exchange and diversity training.** Many young people suggested that the discrimination experienced by Middle Eastern and South Asian communities means that understanding among ethnic groups must be enhanced through such means as peer training and informal forums.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF YOUTH PRACTITIONERS

Youth practitioners expressed their own concerns about long-term needs in the aftermath of September 11.

- **Addressing trauma.** Youth workers expressed a need for professional development that focuses on “mental health for non-mental-health workers.”

- **Working with parents.** Youth practitioners are in a position to educate parents about helping their children to process emotionally laden events, but the youth practitioners say they need professional development in this area.

- **Cultural diversity and global awareness.** The events of September 11 awakened interest in Islam among young people and fostered global awareness. Youth practitioners say they need help in engaging young people in fun activities around diversity and the global community.

- **Community building.** Youth agencies have provided community service opportunities to youth for many years. However, effective approaches to community service need to be broadly disseminated, and practitioners need more opportunities to enhance their skills.

The tragedy of September 11 placed a premium on youth programs' capacity to respond to young people's desire to express their thoughts and feelings, to reach out and better understand other cultures and religions, and to serve their communities. To enhance the foundational skills they already have, youth workers need the new core skills outlined above in order to successfully create emotionally connecting, culturally sensitive community-building programs.

HOW TEACHERS RESPONDED

I teach in Knoxville, TN. The attacks on New York, Washington and Afghanistan have led to some interesting discussions in my classes, and, without devoting specific lessons to the murders, these events helped reinforce some of the things we were studying.

I taught a reading class for six weeks as part of a job preparation program. I had 30+ learners. We'd been practicing previewing, skimming for details, and scanning for the main ideas, and one day I brought in six pages about the war from U.S. News & World Report (Oct. 12). Finding the right material was a bit of a challenge, because I wanted something short, general, and accurate; also, the articles I first selected were rapidly obsolesced by events. These six pages briefly covered Afghanistan's long history, the current warlords, and the situation in Pakistan.

I had people count off by threes. Then we previewed the pictures, headlines, and pull quotes, plus some questions I'd listed on the board, in order to predict what this article might tell us. Then I assigned two pages apiece to each group, and gave them four or five minutes to read their sections. Then they got together in threes to exchange with each other what they'd read. Finally, as a class we discussed the articles, answering comprehension questions such as "Who is Mullah Omar?" and broader questions such as "Why is Pakistan important?"

HOW TEACHERS RESPONDED cont'd

Then I had the class write an essay responding to my question, “What has to happen to get rid of the causes of terrorism?” The responses varied from “I don’t like to think about it. It’s in God’s hands,” to our old standard, “Kill them all!,” to questions about the U.S. oil interests and underinvestment in low income communities in the U.S. I took a long time writing comments on each essay, including remarks about grammar and frequent requests for details to back up their broad assertions.

The following day folks were eager to talk about what they’d written, and a couple of learners who hadn’t finished their essays the day before handed one in, having completed it overnight. I’m always wary in these situations that, asking people to respond to big questions without a lot of good information, they might choose the easiest cliché and thereby freeze their story forever. But in this class, at least, they were eager to talk to each other and they did listen to each other. One woman said, “This whole thing was boring to me.”— which I took to mean “depressing” or “scary” —“but now I want to learn more about it.”

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Posted November 24, 2001, to the online forum Addressing
the World Trade Center Attack and Its Impact on the Adult
Literacy Community,
www.lacnyc.org/resources/workshops.htm.
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