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Community Literacy Center Website, Colorado State University

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Community Literacy Center Website, Colorado State University

<http://literacy.colostate.edu/>

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This website overviews the mission and activities of Colorado State University's Community Literacy Center, established in 2005 and housed in CSU's English department. The CLC mission is "to create alternative literacy opportunities that work to educate and empower underserved populations," opportunities that go beyond traditional schooling. The CLC claims to achieve this aim through both outreach and research, although a quick tour of the site suggests the center has made more headway in their outreach initiatives than in sponsoring or publishing original research.

The website itself is more informational than interactive, dominated by descriptions of the CLC's mission, its core projects, and links to community partners and to regional and national literacy-based organizations. Several pages of the site have not recently been updated (some for years); the site's one interactive feature (a blog) was last updated six months ago at the time of this review.

The **About** main page overviews three core projects and describes one of the CLC's major accomplishments: establishing a network of local literacy workers, agencies, and service providers who meet bi-monthly and have developed their own site (the link is not made available). The 20 or so regional partners are listed with site links on the **Partners and Networks** main page.

The Center's projects might be interesting to those who are just beginning community-university literacy partnerships and who wish to peruse the types of projects that might be possible. The site would be limited for this purpose, however, since it does not offer more specific information on the logistics of setting up these projects, nor does it provide detailed materials, workshop strategies, or outcomes.

The **Projects** page does offer brief descriptions of the three projects, however: *Partnerships for Literacy Success (PLS)* promotes literacy education for English language learners in the Fort-Collins area; an *Intergenerational Book Club* encourages shared reading and discussion among children and adults; and *Speak Out!* offers writing workshops for underserved populations in the region (targeting prisoners, at-risk youth, and women).

Partnerships for Literacy Success is a collaboration between the CLC and a community learning center serving English language learners (ELL). The goal is to supplement programs onsite, providing additional literacy courses and tutoring, reading material, publishing opportunities for writers, and professional development for staff. The subpage devoted to this initiative was somewhat ambiguous about the project's status; the language ("We plan to . . .") suggests it may still be in the planning stage. *The Intergenerational Book Club* primarily provides books and discussion guidelines for reading partners, presumably children and adults. The club also offers intergenerational creative writing workshops and publishing opportunities.

The *Speak Out!* project appears to be the centerpiece of the organization, offering onsite, weekly writing workshops at detention centers, half-way houses, and other community facilities. One goal of the workshops is to provide a comfortable atmosphere in which participants can use writing to reflect on past experiences and future goals, exploring their identities and roles in the community. The project also aims to give marginalized groups a public voice and to use a bi-annual publication and sponsored readings of the written work as vehicles for confronting stereotypes.

Overall, the project pages do not appear to target potential volunteers or participants; no sign-up forms, contact information, or events calendars are featured. Nor is it a repository for project materials: links to handouts or workshop guidelines are not included. A list of project anthologies is included, but visitors are not provided access to the actual documents or to recorded reading of the written work, features that might attract more viewers.

Although the CLC site does provide a main page for **Research**, the subpages and external links on the site are unlikely to be very useful to literacy scholars or other project directors looking for primary research, with the exception, perhaps, of the *research sites* sub-page. This page organizes a set of external links to national and regional research resources for literacy. Although users might have to do some digging through the linked websites, some of those sites include facts and figures on national and regional literacy, and some journal sites publish scholarship related specifically to gender and literacy and violence and literacy.

Aside from this subpage, the main **Research** page serves less as an archive of professional published research and more as a repository for CSU student research papers. The *annotated bibliography* subpage features student-complied bibliographies on topics such as "literacy and technology" and "literacy and gender." The entries also note key terms and questions, which could be useful for students first exploring the literature. Some of the bibliographies are scant, however, and/or contain dated entries. An *interview* subpage features interviews with CLC staff, community professionals, and CSU professors, local profiles of those doing literacy-related work, but none

of the interviews profile the actual community participants in CLC projects. A *publications* subpage lists only one research publication: a CLC blog that is more descriptive than research-oriented. Those who work in the projects explain some of the writing prompts used in a *Speak Out!* project and the kinds of topics that participants chose to write about. This kind of blog might be a useful tool for CSU student volunteering in the projects, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences. A *student research* subpage lists a handful of thesis titles on literacy projects with links to brief abstracts, but the full reports are not available.

Overall, this website serves primarily as an online brochure of the CLC's core projects, as a directory to local literacy partners, and as a repository for CSU student writing about literacy and/or their experience in the projects. External researchers or literacy center directors looking for detailed information on program development, research, workshop tools, or outcomes from other literacy organizations should keep on clicking.