# The Challenges Facing Adult Literacy Programs

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The field of adult literacy is complex. This complexity poses many challenges for literacy programs. This paper addresses the challenges of collaboration, diversity, attendance, assessment and professional development as they apply to adult literacy programs. Recommendations for increasing the success of literacy programs are provided.

According to the US Census Bureau (2000), more than 51 million adults, or approximately 23 percent of the United States adult population, do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. The difficulty that many Americans have with literacy skills is highlighted by the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003), which indicates that approximately 30 million adults in the US have below basic literacy skills and another 63 million have only the most basic literacy skills. This paper focuses on literacy programs designed to help these adults increase their literacy skills. As McNaughton (1999) explains, literacy programs are usually situated in informal places of learning. They usually procure little or no government funding, hire volunteer tutors and/or underpaid teachers, and spend much time and energy developing and implementing creative fund-raising opportunities.

For the sake of this paper, literacy is defined as "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (*The National Literacy Act of 1991)*. This definition is noteworthy for a few reasons. First, it stresses that literacy involves other skills in addition to reading. Specifically, writing, speaking, and numeracy are included in addition to reading. Second, the phrase "proficiency necessary" highlights that there are differences in what can be considered proficient. In other words, individuals do not need to become an expert in every skill. Third, it stresses learners' goals. Goals of adult literacy learners vary. Examples include functional goals (e.g., balancing a checkbook, reading bus schedules), spiritual goals (e.g., reading the Bible), pleasure-related goals (e.g., reading the newspaper, playing Suduku), family-related goals (e.g., reading to children, helping children with math homework), and/or economic advancement goals (e.g., completing job applications). Finally, the definition includes a focus on developing "one's knowledge." In other words, one may want to learn something just for the sake of knowing something.

The field of adult literacy is complex. This complexity is reflected by the heterogeneity of the people who are served, the skill levels addressed, the contexts in which literacy is taught, and the settings where the programs are housed. Adults who have difficulty reading belong to all races, religions, ethnicities, genders, and live in all types of neighborhoods. They include

people who are both employed and unemployed, high school graduates and dropouts, native and non-native speakers of English, as well as individuals as young as 16 and the elderly (Elish-Piper, 2007).

The abilities of adults who are trying to improve their literacy skills run a full spectrum. The range can be described as following the sequence of: conversational English skills, to preliminary literacy skills (roughly below the 3rd-grade equivalency levels), to functional literacy skills (roughly below the 6th-grade equivalency levels), to pre-General Educational Development (GED) skills (a transition between basic literacy skill development and GED content areas), to GED skills, and ending with post-secondary institution developmental/remedial skills. While some individuals start with the lowest level and proceed through the different levels, many begin at various starting points. Similarly, while some adult literacy programs provide classes that address all levels, others only address a few of the levels.

Adult literacy skill instruction can focus on a variety of skills: reading, writing, computer, and math are a few of the common ones. Some instructional classes teach literacy skills within very specific contexts (Belzer & St. Clair, 2007). A few examples include family literacy (both parents and their children's literacy skills are addressed), workplace literacy (literacy skills specific to the work environment are emphasized), community-oriented literacy (issues focusing on citizenship, driving licenses, and civic activities are highlighted), and health literacy (literacy skills focused on medical issues).

Finally, the settings of adult literacy programs vary. Classes can be found in places such as schools, libraries, prisons/jails, religious institutions, community centers, community/technical colleges, housing projects, homeless shelters, and workforce centers. Some programs are open daily from morning through evening, while others operate fewer days and fewer hours (Belzer & St. Clair, 2007). Class size can also vary from one-on-one tutoring, to small group, to larger class sizes.

The complexity of the adult literacy field poses many challenges for literacy programs, and this paper discusses some of these issues. Specifically, issues of collaboration, diversity, attendance, assessment, and professional development are addressed.

## Collaborative Partners

Adult literacy programs typically seek numerous partnerships. It is not uncommon for these partnerships to include a variety of players. Public libraries, bookstores, public schools, vocational rehabilitation programs, immigrant and refugee support groups, legal organizations, corporations, senior citizen agencies, religious groups, correctional institutions, local media, colleges, restaurants, labor unions, and social service agencies are all merely examples of the diversity in partnerships.

Partnerships are very important. Literacy difficulties affect the community; therefore the community should be involved in helping literacy programs address the low literacy skills of their participants (Weibel, 2007). Diversity

in partnerships is critical. Adult literacy programs that reflect "all segments of a community can put literacy on the government and business agenda better than any one program director acting alone" (Weibel, 2007, p. 253). Partners serve a variety of roles: financial support, publicity, and as a source of volunteers (Cooke-Cottone, 2001; St. John, 2006; Weibel, 2007). A variety of partners can help literacy programs serve a diverse group of students.

Corporations play a critical role for adult literacy programs by providing money, in-kind donations (e.g., software, materials, supplies), learner referrals, fundraising assistance, equipment, and volunteers (Chisman & Spangenberg, 2006). In a Web-based survey of literacy programs, at least 50 percent of the programs reported that they received money from corporations (Chisman & Spangenberg, 2006). Respondents indicated that they used the money to increase their technological capabilities and to make curricula and instructional methodological changes.

Partnerships between community/technical colleges and adult literacy organizations (Roberts, 2002) are growing and are considered crucial. Reder (2000) discusses the importance of collaborating with postsecondary institutions, and encourages linkages between the two organizations by the sharing of expertise. For example, as more GED graduates want to transition to community/technical colleges, it is important that adult literacy programs collaborate with community/technical colleges to help make their transition a smooth one. Another example includes adult literacy programs that focus on workforce issues. Community/technical colleges train their students in very specific job skills, and often have workplace equipment on their sites. Within the community/technical college classroom, the literacy programs can provide the staff to train the workplace literacy skills needed to operate the workplace equipment (Roberts, 2002).

Libraries have a long history of collaborating with the adult literacy field (Porter, Cuban, & Comings, 2005; Weibel, 2007). Libraries are accessible and welcoming places for adult literacy tutors and tutees to meet. The library is a wealth of resources, with books on many subjects written at different levels and free computer access. Libraries also have meeting room space where literacy programs can hold literacy-related events for the general public. Finally, it provides programs of interest to many adult literacy learners, such as story hours for their children.

## Diversity of Adult Literacy Learners

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to focus on the many and varied needs of English language learners who participate in adult literacy programs, it is important to acknowledge that this group is represented in many adult literacy programs. Their needs vary tremendously depending on many issues, including their country of origin, their first language, their refugee status, their financial resources, and whether their native language has a written script. Critical to their ease of English literacy acquisition is whether they are literate in their own language (Bowen, 2007).

Recently, there has been a significant increase in 16-20 year-old students attending adult literacy programs (Flugman, Perin, & Spiegel, 2003). Along with their literacy difficulties, many of these youth exhibit behavioral and social problems in the classrooms. They tend to have high dropout rates from adult literacy programs and inconsistent attendance. When they do attend, they often exhibit a lack of maturity, have difficulties staying on task, and tend to have unrealistic expectations about how long it will take them to attain the GED (Harting, 2006). These out-of-school youth need costly support: counseling and educational approaches that are distinct from other adult literacy learners. When supportive services are provided, young adults can succeed (Boulden, 2008). However, most programs do not have the resources to provide these special services. As Flugman and his colleagues (2003) state, "the presence of high-risk youth in adult literacy programs can be viewed as a significant source of fiscal and programmatic difficulty in every community" (p. 7).

Sitting next to the 16-year-old learner may be an elderly student. This student represents another group that exhibits specialized needs. The older adult often possesses knowledge, experience, wisdom, and motivation different from the younger adult (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Age-related changes, such as avoidance of small print and fancy/discursive fonts, adjustments of room lighting, and slower reaction times, are important to take into consideration (MacKeracher, 2004) when working with the elderly. They are also often afflicted by mobility issues (McKee & Blair, 2007), and available transportation gains a new importance. While many adult learners need computer literacy exposure, this is often a vital issue for the elderly. Many of them cannot purchase a computer or pay a monthly Internet fee. Access to public computers is essential for this group, and adult literacy programs can help in this regard. It is important that they are exposed to the Internet, because as McKee and Blair (2007) note, "if someone has never seen the Web and has no idea what it is, these references can often serve as a jarring reminder of one's dislocation from what clearly serves as an important spheres of social, cultural, and economic influence in American society" (p. 21).

A group that has not been studied within the adult literacy field consists of individuals with non-mainstream sexual orientation (D'Amico, 2004) and gender orientation. It is unknown how many adult literacy learners self-identify as gay or transgender; although, there are two plausible hypotheses. On the one hand, it is possible that adult literacy programs have a significant number of gay and transgender individuals because they dropped out of school if they did not feel welcome in high school. On the other hand, due to the paucity of adult literacy materials that include diverse sexual and gender orientation material (either as characters in stories or issues related to nonmainstream sexual and gender orientation groups), there may be fewer such learners because they do not feel welcome in the adult literacy classroom. D'Amico (2004) suggests that "more [adult literacy] journals should focus on class, race, gender, and sexual orientation in a way that speaks directly to what happens in the [adult literacy] classroom" (p. 63).

## Attendance

Consistent attendance is a constant struggle for many adult literacy learners. Porter and colleagues (2005) characterize learners' attendance patterns into five groups. The first group is characterized by learners who have few or zero attendance barriers. The second group has several barriers to overcome, but has significant support from an agency (such as a public assistance or law enforcement agency) and therefore can usually attend despite the barriers. A third group has many significant barriers and as a result, enrolls but either does not attend the first day of class, or leaves shortly thereafter. The fourth group also has significant barriers, but intermittently attends classes. The fifth group of learners can be characterized as individuals who enroll with short-range goals and leave when the goals are attained (generally very quickly).

Reasons for difficulty with attendance can be described as situational (student-related issues), institutional (program-related issues), and dispositional (internal student beliefs/feelings) (Merriam, et al., 2007). For example, situationally, a student who is juggling unstable work hours (common with minimum wage employment) cannot consistently attend class; institutionally, a student who relies on public transportation will have difficulty attending class if the program does not schedule classes with the public transportation schedule in mind; and dispositionally, if a student does not feel welcome s/he will have difficulty attending (D'amico, 2004).

Although male and female adult literacy learners share some situational, institutional, and dispositional obstacles, certain obstacles are more common for women than for men (Bowen, 2007; Greenberg, 2004). Both genders share such issues as shame regarding their low literacy skills, fear of not being able to learn, conflicting work issues, and transportation difficulties. However, in addition to these obstacles, women often have other difficulties. For example, many women do not have their family's support and have additional competing responsibilities, such as childrearing and housekeeping. These competing difficulties leave many potential female adult learners too fatigued to participate in classes. If they have young children, safe, affordable, and available childcare is often an issue. In some neighborhoods, it is not safe for women, without their own transportation, to walk alone to class. Some cultures do not permit women to be taught by male instructors or to participate in co-educational classes. Some women have partners who violently oppose their desire to increase their literacy skills. Finally, family literacy programs present problems for some women. Some women want to increase their literacy skills for their own sake. They want to spend their time on their own literacy needs, and not on their children's literacy needs. Other women do not have children and therefore often do not qualify for the literacy services.

Gender presents a complicated issue in the adult literacy field (D'Amico, 2004). In spite of the obstacles that many female adult learners face, the percentage of women attending adult literacy programs is slightly higher than the percentage of men. To explain this difference, D'Amico (2004) presents numerous hypotheses. Perhaps men are better able to procure jobs that do not require advanced reading abilities; perhaps women are additionally

motivated by their children's literacy needs; perhaps as children become older, their mothers have more time to attend adult literacy classes; perhaps, compared to male learners, female learners feel more comfortable with the high proliferation of female adult literacy teachers; perhaps, compared to women, men are more reluctant to seek literacy instruction. Further research is needed to explore these hypotheses.

During this past decade, researchers have studied two assumptions concerning adult literacy attendance. First, it has been a common assumption that as children, adult poor readers had negative experiences in school. Reder and Strawn (2001) warn that this may be a faulty assumption. In their study of high school dropouts, only 28 percent of respondents reported negative experiences in school. The students who reported negative experiences, report that as children they had repeated grades and/or they left early because of poor academic performance. Another assumption challenged is the notion of adult literacy "drop-outs" or "quitters." Although, many adult literacy staff consider learners who stop attending as "drop-outs," it turns out that the learners do not necessarily carry the same assumption. In Belzer's (1998) study, she found that learners who had stopped attending classes did not consider themselves as dropping out or quitting adult education. They all reported that they would return to class once they resolved various job, health, financial, legal, personal, and/or family related issues.

Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (2000) suggest that program staff talk to learners to help them understand the different forces exerting pressure on their attendance. Learners have both positive and negative forces, and programs should bolster the positive ones (such as a strong desire to obtain a GED), and help learners problem solve barriers (such as affordable and safe childcare). Learners and program staff should work together throughout this process. To help students problem solve, programs need to have relationships with other agencies so that learners can be referred to other programs as necessary (Porter et al., 2005). Comings and Cuban (2002) suggest that during intake, staff should investigate whether learners have supporters in their lives who can help them attend class. This support network can include family members, friends, caseworkers, and volunteers in 12-step programs. If learners do not have a social support network, program staff may want to help them find a supporter, whether it is someone affiliated with a religious organization, a recovery group, or a community watchdog group.

Porter and colleagues (2005) strongly suggest that programs customize educational plans for learners based on their attendance capabilities. One-on-one tutoring, computer-based independent work, and self-directed workbooks all are appropriate for participants who cannot regularly attend a classroom-based program. Porter and colleagues (2005) recommend that during intake, the different possible customized educational plans and their advantages and disadvantages be described to the learner. Belzer (1998) suggests that when learners are presented with materials for self-directed study, the materials should be reviewed thoroughly. In addition, learners should be encouraged to read and write daily.

Gongora (2006) encourages teachers to think about using technology for students who have to be absent from class. For example, she writes that those learners who can take advantage of podcasts would benefit from teachers who share lessons and activities, using podcast technology. If teachers can publish their audio recordings on the Web, students can download them onto a portable media product and follow the lessons and activities.

## Assessing Skill Attainment

In the adult literacy community, it is known that adults with low reading levels can improve their reading skills. For example, Greenberg (2008) reports that adults reading below the sixth-grade level, can improve their semantic, syntactic, fluency, comprehension, sight word reading, decoding, and phonological skills. However, potential funding organizations may not realize that adults who have difficulty reading can make significant progress. When talking to potential funders, program administrators should cite published works which support the fact that adult learners can make significant progress (for example, Greenberg, 1998; Greenberg, Fredrick, Hughes, & Bunting, 2002).

It is important to determine how one measures progress. This need comes from funding sources who want accountability and reassurance that their money is well spent, as well as from teachers and learners who want to know whether they instruction is making a change in learners' skill levels. Commonly administered adult literacy tests include the Test of Adult Basic Education, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, Basic English Skills Test, and the General Educational Development Test. Unfortunately, studies have not specifically addressed whether these tests are sensitive to adult literacy learning gains, or how predictive they are for those students who continue in postsecondary education (Mellard & Anderson, 2008). These tests also do not provide detail about specific strengths and weaknesses (Strucker, 1998). For example, readers with similar scores on a silent reading comprehension tests can vary greatly in their fluency, decoding, and vocabulary skills (Strucker, 1998). Knowing learners' specific strengths and weaknesses can help tailor customized reading instruction to maximize the most efficient use of class time.

Assessment findings should always be shared with learners and presented in language that they can understand. When sharing test score results, grade equivalency information should not be shared. Learners who are surprised by the news of their low grade equivalency abilities usually do not have access to the counseling necessary to help them digest this information. In addition, many researchers are critical of using grade equivalency levels to characterize adult readers because these units of measurement were developed on children's performance (Perin, 1991). In support of this criticism, Greenberg, Ehri, and Perin (1997) found that adult literacy students exhibit a more varied pattern of strengths and weaknesses as compared to typically developing child readers. Finally, grade equivalency scores are also widely criticized by educational statisticians and measurement professionals (e.g., Anastasi & Urbina 1997;

Crocker & Algina, 1986). Instead of grade equivalency information, learners should be provided with a profile of their relative strengths and weaknesses. From this profile, learners and program staff can develop realistic goals and instructional plans.

## Assessing Goal Attainment

In addition to skill-related assessment, learners ought to be asked about their goals. It is recommended that these goals be taken into consideration as instructional approaches are designed. Using the test results and their goal statements, adult literacy providers can work with learners to create an instructional plan that takes both into account. Program staff and learners need to remember that learning takes time, and therefore goal setting needs to reflect this. It is recommended that this goal-setting process take place at frequent intervals throughout the year, and that goals and instructional approaches be tweaked appropriately as learners progress through the program. The importance of taking into account learners' goals is highlighted by Lipnevich and Beder (2007):

> Learners are regarded as individuals who enroll in adult literacy education to solve specific problems posed by life. They are viewed as people responsible for their choices and who have prior experiences that can facilitate, not hinder, their goal attainment. According to this model, the mission of adult basic education is to help learners identify and clarify their goals and provide assistance to achieve their goals (p. 80).

Many learners and program staff view the GED as the end goal. Many learners believe that their life will improve upon receiving the GED. This message is reinforced by community recruitment efforts which often emphasize the importance of attaining this diploma. However, Tyler (2005) asserts that the real focus of adult literacy programs should be on post-secondary education. The GED should be viewed only as a key to get through the door of post-secondary education; it should not be viewed as the end goal. Reder (2000) suggests that adult literacy programs "advance the goal of adult education from high school equivalency to college preparation" (p. 144). To achieve this goal, adult literacy program staff would need to investigate the requirements of postsecondary academic reading and math (Mellard, & Anderson, 2008), and offer courses for their learners to help them in their transition to post secondary education.

Funding agencies also often view the GED as the end goal for adult literacy programs. As a result, they often tie their funding to a program's GED success rates. Tyler (2005) offers a compelling argument to counter this type of policy: "… because the largest economic payoff from obtaining a GED accrues to the least skilled, GED programs need to focus on helping those students succeed" (p.80). Funding agencies need to understand that if programs focus

on the least skilled, the annual GED pass rates will not look very good. Adult literacy programs need to educate funding agencies that learning takes time.

## Professional Development

There are no clear career paths that lead one to become an adult literacy teacher, and many do not stay in the field for long (Smith, & Hofer, 2003). Those teachers who stay often face many obstacles. Adult literacy teachers are classically part time, underpaid, benefitless, and not specifically trained to assess or teach adults literacy skills. The majority of states do not require professional training in adult literacy (Smith, 2007). As a result, many adult literacy teachers do not enter the field with specialized training in adult literacy, nor do they receive formal professional development while teaching their learners (Smith & Hofer, 2003). When teachers are asked how they acquire specialized adult literacy knowledge, they typically report that they learn on their own by reading journals and books or by surfing the Internet. Others report that they learn a lot from their students and from talking to their colleagues. Unfortunately, information gathered from commercially available books, the Internet, colleagues, and students vary in their degree of usefulness, accuracy, and timeliness. Some teachers are fortunate to be able to attend professional development activities in local, state, regional, and/or national conferences (Smith & Hofer, 2003), where they can receive useful, accurate and timely information.

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Smith and her colleagues offer very specific recommendations regarding support for adult literacy teachers (Smith & Hofer, 2003; Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003). They say that teachers should be full-time, paid well with benefits, and provided with time and incentives to attend professional development activities. It is understood that implementing their recommendations may decrease the number of learners who can be served, but it is strongly felt that these fewer learners would be served better (Smith & Hofer, 2003). All new teachers should be provided with an orientation to the adult literacy field, adult learning theories, and program specific issues. Professional developers in the field of adult literacy need to make sure that the professional development activities are of high quality, and that there is enough variety from which adult literacy teachers can choose (Smith, et al., 2003). In addition, universities should develop course work for adult literacy teachers to take (Smith & Hofer, 2003).

Teachers need to have frequent contact with others in the field (Smith & Hofer, 2003). One way to ensure discussion among adult literacy providers at no cost, is to encourage them to subscribe to the electronic discussion lists sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy:

Established in 1995, the National Institute for Literacy online discussion lists give thousands of literacy stakeholders opportunities to discuss the literacy field's critical issues; share resources, experiences, and ideas; ask questions of subject experts; and keep up-to-date on literacy issues. http://nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/discussions.html.

There are a variety of lists to choose from, including discussions on English language learners, professional development, assessment, family literacy, health literacy, learning disabilities, diversity, technology, and workplace issues. In an evaluation of the lists conducted in 2003, it was uncovered that subscribers included, teachers/tutors, state administrators, researchers, students (high school, college, and graduate students), and program directors. Seventy-two percent of the subscribers had been involved professionally with adult education/literacy for over five years and 57 percent for more than 10 years. Subscribers who completed the evaluation gave two major reasons for subscribing: to keep informed of developments in research and in practice, and to strengthen their subject knowledge and skills to improve instructional practice. Seventy-five percent stated that the discussions lists were important to improving their instructional skills (Taylor, Cora, Greenberg, 2007).

Professional development activities often stress the importance of translating research into practice. Although many consider this difficult, Perin and Greenberg (2007) describe an adult literacy program that implements research-based methods. In their visit to this program, they saw the use of research-based methods of direct, explicit instruction in areas such as word reading, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Interviews with staff revealed specific program characteristics that seemed conducive to the implementation of research-based methods. For example, the staff had felt a need for new instructional direction; they had a cohesive teaching team with a few highly experienced teachers (including one who had background in research-based instruction); there was a supportive director and state interest in the improvement of adult reading instruction; there was the availability of professional development and resources for curriculum development. When asked to provide advice to other adult literacy programs, the staff provided many recommendations. Staff recommended that professional development activities should provide an awareness of intervention research, should focus on practical strategies, and should give teachers opportunities and time to learn and practice the new methods. Teachers should be observed implementing the new methods in their classrooms and provided with feedback based on these observations. Finally, it was strongly recommended that teachers join professional organizations such as the International Reading Association.

## Concluding Thoughts

Programs which emphasize the needs of learners and staff are more likely to result in learner gains (Patterson & Mellard, 2007). This review of the literature provided a few recommendations that are thought to increase the likelihood of success. Teachers need to be paid well and provided with on-going, high quality professional development activities. Ideally, program staff should reflect the diversity of the learners they serve (D'Amico, 2004; Smith & Hofer, 2003). Learning materials should similarly reflect the race, gender, class, and sexual orientation of learners. Learners need to be provided with ongoing assessment on component skills, as well as measures that assess progress towards their specific goals. Based on these assessments, explicit instruction should be provided, as necessary, in areas such as word reading, spelling, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. Throughout the program, but especially during intake, attendance-related obstacles and support mechanisms should be discussed with learners and different instructional models should be offered to learners based on their specific obstacles and support mechanisms. The different approaches should include independent study options for times when attendance is too difficult.

To administer effective assessment and explicit instruction program staff need to be exposed to research-based practices (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). A national adult literacy research and development center would be the ideal repository of such information. As Comings (2007) describes, this center would "… provide advice on how to implement evidence-based practice in adult education and… pursue new research that expands the body of scientific knowledge on adult education" (p. 94). Ideally, this center would integrate this body of research with professional wisdom, to reflect Whitehurst's (2002) statement that professional wisdom should be integrated with empirical wisdom when instructional decisions are being made.

Adult literacy programs need strong advocacy. Strong advocacy involves listening to the needs of all. Programs need to hear, respect, and acknowledge the multitude of voices in adult literacy. These voices include learners, teachers, program site administrators, community stakeholders, and funding sources. Adult literacy advocacy groups may focus on strategic action steps for learners and staff, partnerships with employment and social service referral agencies, adult literacy public awareness campaigns, and an active involvement in public policy decisions. All of these issues are cited as being important for adult literacy programs (Chisman & Spangenberg, 2006).

Funding is critical for adult literacy programs to succeed. As Tait (2006) states:

> U.S. public policy does not provide resources commensurate with what is needed to address this problem. Even with additional state funding and philanthropic resources, literacy programs in the United States are serving only a small percentage of the overall population of potential adult basic education and literacy students (pg. 3).

D'Amico (2004) adds that "adult educators…must consider joining forces, both nationally and locally, with other organizations that serve those disadvantaged by race, class, gender, and sexual orientations" (pg. 64). This statement highlights the need for partnerships. Partnerships can help programs develop continuous advocacy efforts, provide quality services (with the understanding that often quality has to come at the sacrifice of quantity), offer effective professional development, and develop a list of the referral agencies as resources for learners (Comings & Soricone, 2005).

In closing, Weibel (2007) provides an eloquent description of partnership, which can be applied to adult literacy programs. Her vision of partnership includes:

> It must be a fusion of principles: a strong belief in the value of learning for each individual and the importance to a free society of a literate, informed, inquisitive citizenry. It must be a fusion of interests: the interests of students who need excellent, well-funded literacy programs to help them learn how to read; the interests of literacy teachers, who seek to provide the best learning opportunities for their students; … and the interests of the community, which works to use, build upon, and transmit that culture to future generations (p. 249).

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