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# FIELD NOTES

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## Helping the LD Learner Helps All Students

BY JANET ISSERLIS

Understanding how adults process language and literacy is a key piece of our work in supporting adult learning. Scientists' and educators' growing awareness of learning differences and difficulties has led to an increase in research on addressing these difficulties through multi-sensory approaches and other means of instruction. This increased awareness can benefit learners of all abilities.

In-depth analysis of their particular learning disabilities has enabled some adults to learn more about how they process spoken and written language. It has also enabled their teachers to adapt instruction best suited to help them learn. However, professional diagnoses are not widely available or easily affordable to most adults. And for many ESOL learners, the process of undergoing official screening for and diagnosis of learning disabilities is impractical, if not impossible, as these diagnostic processes are seldom available in languages other than English. In addition, academic preparation is usually not an immediate goal for basic level readers, yet accommodations usually focus on academic preparation. So even if an 'official' diagnosis of a learning disability is made, accommodations (such as extra time for a GED test, or special equipment for writing or calculating) are not necessary to those learners who are not yet poised to prepare for these high stakes tests.

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# FOREWORD

Attempting to “cover” the topic of adult learning disabilities (LD) in a 20 page issue of *Field Notes* was more than a daunting task. We could devote 20 pages alone to a discussion of the label “learning disability” and why some ABE teachers and learners are uncomfortable with the term. We could fill the 20-pages and more with a summary of the neurological bases of, say, dyslexia or dyscalculia. Or of an examination of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates and where LD fits in. Instead, I decided to focus on practical matters teacher face in the classroom. Some ABE students fail to progress past a certain point. They get stuck in their learning. They may be learning disabled, they may be sleep deprived, they may need glasses. Conventional (print-based) teaching methods don’t seem to reach them. What can programs and teachers do to help these students acquire language, literacy, and math skills they want and need?

It seems that when teachers modify their instruction to accommodate “stuck students,” they improve classroom practice. They expand their repertoire of classroom strategies, moving beyond worksheets and using materials and practices that draw from multiple intelligences and universal design. And it seems that the more teachers and programs discover the reasons their students are getting stuck, the better they can address the issues with the students and make referrals for medical, psychological, or other issues impacting learning.

This issue of *Field Notes* offers some ideas from practitioners for reaching out to all students. Janet Isserlis shares her experiences with using classroom rituals to help provide predictability and consistency in her teaching. Akira Kamiya discusses the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and how they apply to our classroom practice. Sylvia Greene offers a program and personal perspective on better serving the needs of LD students. And Nicole Graves outlines an approach called Teaching SMARTER, a method for reaching out to students with learning challenges.

To broaden and deepen your understanding of ABE students and learning disabilities, please be sure to read the most current issue of *Focus on Basics*. Many of the legal and medical issues beyond the scope of this issue are covered there. You can find it at [www.ncsall.net/](http://www.ncsall.net/), click on publications, then *Focus on Basics*.

—Lenore Balliro, Editor

## **Field Notes Mission Statement and Editorial Policy**

*Field Notes* is an adult basic education (ABE) quarterly, theme-based newsletter. It is designed to share innovative and reliable practices, resources, and information relating to ABE. We attempt to publish a range of voices about important educational issues, and we are especially interested in publishing new writers, writers of color, and writers who represent the full range of diversity of learners and practitioners in the field.

*Field Notes* is also a place to provide support and encouragement to new and experienced practitioners (ABE, ESOL, GED, ADP, Family Literacy, Correction, Workplace Education, and others) in the process of writing about their ideas and practice. Editorial support is always provided to any writer who requests it. Teachers, administrators, counselors, volunteers, and support staff are welcome to write for *Field Notes*.

## **Our Funder**

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## **Our Editorial Policy**

Unsolicited manuscripts to *Field Notes* are welcome. If you have an idea for an article or wish to submit a letter to the editor, contact Lenore Balliro, editor, by phone at 617-482-9485, by email at <[lballiro@world-ed.org](mailto:lballiro@world-ed.org)>, or by mail at 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. Submission deadlines for upcoming issues are published in each issue of *Field Notes*.

Opinions expressed in *Field Notes* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor, SABES, or its funders. We do reserve the right to decline publication. We will not publish material that is sexist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory.

## **Our Reprint Policy**

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## Helping the LD Learner...

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Because screening for learning disabilities is a complicated and expensive process, it seems far more useful for us, as teachers and programs, to understand multiple ways of assisting learners regardless of their official status in terms of LD. In doing so we strengthen every learner's ability to acquire spoken and written language.

## Ideas for the Classroom: Rituals and Repetition

Predictability, consistency, and recursiveness are keys to moving forward for anyone learning anything, but they are particularly important elements for students with learning difficulties. Building incremental challenges and offering opportunities to use what's been learned in new ways are also cornerstones of good teaching. I have used many of the ideas presented here in ESOL classes, but they have applicability to basic literacy learning as well.

It is fairly easy to plan predictable activities for sections of each class so learners come to know what to expect on a daily or weekly basis. These predictable chunks may take the form of rituals or recurrent events.

For example, in a beginning level ESOL class, a teacher can set up the blackboard in advance so at the beginning of every class someone will write the day and date in the top right-hand corner. Or the teacher can give a student a

Post-it Note to mark the day on a wall calendar. Another predictable activity is to write a question every day on the blackboard as a warm-up to the day's lesson, such as: Who woke up before 6 o'clock? Who took the bus to school? Where's the best place to buy rice?

These activities give learners opportunities to use knowledge and strategies (e.g., looking at the wall calendar to write the day and date, to review basic vocabulary, to

class and type the stories up into a one-page newspaper format. I take the newsletter to the next class and we use this as reading material.

## Using Language Experience

Because we do this language experience story each week, it becomes a predictable and consistent activity. Because we use the language over again (from oral to written to

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*It is fairly easy to plan predictable activities for sections of each class so learners come to know what to expect on a daily or weekly basis. These predictable chunks may take the form of rituals or recurrent events.*

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build an awareness of sentence structure, and to gain automaticity in using high-frequency words). Questions can also tap into learners' existing knowledge and start to build schema for the tasks ahead.

## Weekly Rituals

I've worked with several basic level ESOL literacy classes by beginning each week with a language experience story. We spend the class encoding the students' activities over the weekend. At first, learners tell me what they did over the weekend, and I write it down on newsprint. Increasingly, learners do the writing; other students and I help the scribe as needed. I then take the newsprint with me after

reading what we wrote), the activity is recursive. In addition, on the newsletter itself, I always include a small calendar for the month in the upper right corner, a word search, or a circling/underlining task at the bottom. I also include a masthead with the name of the classroom and the date (week of ...) at the top of the page. For students who finish quickly, I add a few questions for them to answer on a separate paper. (This helps keep a multi-level class running smoothly.) As you can see, I replay the literacy activities from my daily blackboard rituals onto the weekly newsletter. Over time, the familiarity of the task, the new bits and pieces of language from week-

*Continued on page 4*

## Helping the LD Learner...

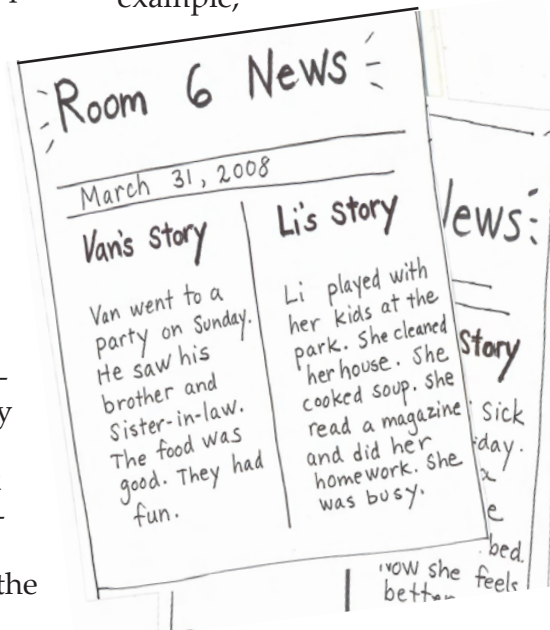
*Continued from page 3*

end stories, and the predictable format and content all work towards helping learners expand their abilities to read and write. These events also generate new topics of discussion as people begin to ask and answer questions about their lives beyond the classroom.

## Dialogue Journals

Another weekly activity I have used for literacy acquisition is dialogue journals. One day a week students enter some writing into a notebook and pass it to me. I then take the notebooks home and respond to them with roughly the same amount of language. Seeing learners' gradual progress, as well as noting errors, also helped shape subsequent classroom activities. For example, I could create mini lessons on grammar points and vocabulary based on the needs I saw from the journals. When one journal was completed, I photocopied it and returned the original to its owner. From this he or she could see how the writing developed over the 4–6 weeks of using the journal.

In many classes, some learners make strides more quickly than others. These students can be asked to do meaningful expansion exercises that become predictable over time. For example,



one student can write five questions about another student's weekend, and that student can write answers to the questions. For example, Anna could ask Juana: What was the food like at your party? Who went to the party? Having predictable formats for learning literacy helps learners develop skills by keeping the kinds of tasks constant while presenting new challenges in content.

Framing classroom activity in ways that benefit all learn-

ers—those facing learning challenges as well as those making more noticeable progress—is like the thinking behind universal design that led to having indentations in curbstones at street corners. While initially designed for people in wheel chairs, the smooth bits also work remarkably well for baby carriages, shopping carts, and skateboards. It's just all good.

## References

For more information on language experience approach, see *The Language Experience Approach and Adult Learners* <[www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/digests/LEA.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LEA.html)>.

For more information on dialogue journals, see *Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy* <[www.cal.org/resources/digest/peyton01.html](http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/peyton01.html)>.

*Janet Isserlis has worked with adult learners since 1980 in Providence, RI, and Vancouver, BC. She works with student-run literacy and prison-based programs at the Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University and also as a professional development specialist at the Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center.*

## Join the Learning Disabilities Discussion List

Did you know that the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) sponsors a learning disabilities discussion list? To subscribe, go to <[www.nifl.gov/mailman/listinfo/learningdisabilities](http://www.nifl.gov/mailman/listinfo/learningdisabilities)>. Teachers, administrators, and others participate in ongoing dialogue about teaching methods, recent research, and more.

# From Curb Cuts to Curriculum: Universal Design Helps Adults Learn

By AKIRA KAMIYA

*The concept of Universal Design for Learning is the intersection where all our initiatives—integrated units, multisensory teaching, multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, use of computers in schools, performance-based assessment, and others—come together.*

—Donna Palley, Concord, NH school system

Educators are hearing a great deal about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) these days. Universal design is a concept originally developed in the field of architecture. It arose from the need to provide greater accessibility in buildings and public spaces for everyone. A building reflecting universal design principles, for example, would allow someone with physical disabilities to get in and around as easily as those without physical challenges.

Universal design in architecture relies on innovative, original design from the ground up to incorporate accessibility needs. For instance, to accommodate those in wheelchairs, an original building design would be developed with this consideration. Such an approach is very different from one where accommodations are added on after the fact, like constructing a wheelchair ramp in a building that was originally designed with stairs only.

## Reducing Barriers

A good illustration of the universal design concept is the curb cut on a sidewalk.

The curb cut was originally created with wheelchair users in mind, and it successfully accommodates the need to get up onto a sidewalk. As it turns out, though, this design ends up benefiting many more than those using wheelchairs.



Skateboarders, bicyclists, walkers with canes, children, and people pushing strollers have all had an easier time navigating sidewalks and streets because of curb cuts. So what does this architectural concept have to do with us in ABE?

In the world of education, UDL concepts can be applied to reduce barriers to learning and to move beyond a “one size fits all” approach. So just as a curb cut opens access, a curriculum based on UDL opens up accessibility to many kinds of learners.

Through the use of UDL, curricula can and should be designed from the ground up to be accessible and expressible to all students. The intelligences involved with reading and writing should not be the only ones singled out for distinction. Teachers can draw from multiple intelligences (MI) theory and classroom approaches to increase the likelihood of reaching more students.

For example, in traditional pedagogy, text is emphasized over other media, and reading and writing are dominant teaching/learning approaches. Artificial points are established along

“levels” where some learners can succeed and others fail in a somewhat arbitrary fashion. Designing curricula based mainly on reading and writing to the exclusion of many other approaches is like designing sidewalks without curb cuts. Some people can jump up or down off the curb with ease and grace; others stumble without the supports they need to succeed. Students who read and write easily are often labeled as very intelligent or

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## From Curb Cuts...

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advanced while those who are not text-based learners may be labeled as “learning disabled.”

We know from research in psychology and neurology that the brain is composed of highly specialized areas or networks. The more we understand how our brains function the more we can start to appreciate the wide diversity of the human capacity to learn across a continuum.

So why not add curb cuts in the classroom; that is, why not design curriculum that reaches more learners? Through the use of universal design concepts in education, curricula can and should be designed from the ground up to be accessible and expressible to all students. The intelligences involved with reading and writing should not be the only ones singled out for distinction.

## Disabled Curriculum

UDL suggests that it is not the learner that is disabled, it is the curriculum that is. Proponents of UDL suggest that there is no exact point where we can definitively say that one learner is “disabled” and one is “very intelligent.” They also maintain that learners cannot be reduced to simple categories such as “disabled” or “bright.” A minor case of dyslexia may cause very intelligent students to flounder in class because they cannot parse the letters in a word as quickly as others. Yet if material were presented in a digital text or multimedia format they might

be able to excel. Similarly, students who have trouble with traditional math formulas may reach correct answers with manipulatives and more time.

## Example of UDL in Practice

A good example of the application of UDL can be seen in the work of the Center for

made me forget about what I had used before even if it had been effective. I think a lot of teachers tend to grab at the flavor of the month technology without enough reflection.

The concepts in UDL make us look at the root goals of the classroom first, rather than starting off with the technology and then planning around

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*Designing curricula based mainly on reading and writing to the exclusion of many other approaches is like designing sidewalks without curb cuts.*

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Applied Special Technology (CAST). For the last 20 years, CAST has been studying how technology can benefit teachers and students in ways that allow greater equity for all learners regardless of physical disability or learning styles.

They sponsor composition and reading initiatives that offer an apprenticeship approach, gradually reducing support as students gain competence and confidence in writing. Learning about UDL has completely changed the way I look at technology. Prior to reading about this stuff I would consider and use technology applications in a haphazard manner. If something new and shiny came out, it

it. UDL starts with the idea of teachers reaching the broadest audience of learners. It encourages us to ask: Are there people in our classrooms that we are not serving adequately? Can we implement forms of technology that reach the “others” and do it in a “universal” way that benefits everyone?

Using a UDL approach is ambitious and it may entail making changes to our present curriculum, but in the end it aims to really “teach every student.”

*Akira Kamiya is the regional technology coordinator at the ALRI, where he offers computer support and training. He can be reached at <akira.kamiya@umb.edu>.*

## New Resource

*Measures of Success: Assessment and Accountability in Adult Basic Education*  
Edited by Pat Campbell. Grassroots Press, 2007.

Watch for a review of this valuable new resource in the summer issue of *Field Notes*

## Spotlight Sylvia Greene Shares Her Expertise

INTERVIEW BY LENORE BALLIRO

Sylvia Greene has been interested in learning disabilities since the 1970s when she was a graduate student at Temple University. There she took classes in reading and was intrigued by the topic of dyslexia—especially its neurological aspects—and how that had an effect on the reading process. One of her first students at the Community Learning Center (CLC), Clem (not his real name), gave her an opportunity to put some of her recently acquired knowledge into practice and to try out some strategies and ideas of her own.

### Case Study

Clem was a bright and artistic student reading at a third-grade level who made his living as a skilled jeweler. One day Clem told Sylvia he had made a beautiful pair of earrings, but they were both made for the left ear! This manifestation of his dyslexia was apparent in his reading skills as well. Sylvia hunted around for materials that would suit Clem and decided to learn and apply the Orton-Gillingham approach. This phonics-based approach was originally designed in the 1930s for children, but worked well with her adult student. She studied the manual, designed her own materials, and worked through them with Clem step-by-step. By the time their tutoring ended two years

later, Clem was reading at a seventh grade level.

Sylvia has worked at the CLC for thirty years and also works with adolescents in another school in Cambridge. (See the article on page 8 for more the CLC's work.) For several years she was an active participant in and contributor to the work of the Young Adult with Learning Disabilities (YALD) project, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Education.

### Understanding the Reading Process

Sylvia wanted to stress that a prerequisite to understanding learning disabilities, especially dyslexia, is an understanding of the reading process. Many teachers enter the ABE field without background in how to teach reading, and that's really the first step in investigating the problems a student may be having in getting meaning from print. Understanding the patterns of the English language, and

understanding how readers make sense of text, are basic background knowledge areas all ABE teachers should have. She cited research-based findings from the National Reading Panel and the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, which suggest that the most important skills contributing to strong reading ability are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. These findings were corroborated by the work of the Adult Reading Research Working Group, sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), with the addition of several other critical factors like motivation, computer technology, reading assessment, and setting. All ABE teachers need an understanding of all these areas to teach effectively.

*Sylvia Greene can be reached at <[sgreene@cambridgema.gov](mailto:sgreene@cambridgema.gov)>.*

### **Understanding What Reading Is All About: Teaching Materials and Lessons for Adult Basic Education Learners**

[www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/uwriaa.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/uwriaa.pdf)

Thirteen lessons guide teachers and students through the reading process. Each lesson is clearly presented and includes valuable notes for the teacher. A balance of decoding and comprehension strategies makes this a balanced resource. Lesson 12 focuses specifically on learning disabilities.

# Working as a Team at the CLC

INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIA GREENE BY LENORE BALLIRO

Individual teachers across the ABE community often take it upon themselves to research the topic of learning disabilities so they can better serve their students with learning difficulties. They experiment with and apply a variety of teaching strategies that stretch beyond traditional pencil and paper approaches. The dedication of individual teachers, and the effect they have on struggling students, is necessary. But the turnover rate in ABE is high, and when these dedicated, creative teachers leave our field, their knowledge, experience, and even teaching materials often go with them. So, new teachers coming in often start from scratch once again. To have a lasting impact on meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities or learning differences, programs need to establish institutional support, policies, and ongoing staff development.

## Program Commitment

To discover how an entire program can make a commitment to serving LD students, I spoke with Sylvia Greene at the Community Learning Center (CLC) in Cambridge. Over the years, the CLC has recognized the need to address the issue of learning disabilities in a systemic way, not just through individual teachers and students.

Sylvia serves as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator and unofficial learning disabilities support person at the CLC, in addition to teaching ABE. She is uniquely suited for this position since she has honed her expertise in reading, dyslexia and other learning disabilities over the last 30 years. In the ESOL department are staff members who also have



expertise in ESOL and LD, and support their departments in a comparable way. However, there is no specific funding for this work in either ABE or ESOL, so only Sylvia has it in her job description. This position alone is a significant step toward institutionalizing support for LD students and goes well beyond a legal compliance role.

As LD support person, Sylvia works closely with teachers in a variety of ways. She does intake, testing, and follow-up with stu-

dents reading at a beginning level. She helps with designing Individual Education Plans (IEPs). She trains or oversees the training of teachers in administering the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR) and in analyzing students' profiles based on the results. Sylvia is available to provide individual staff development and technical assistance to all CLC staff to help them meet the needs of LD students. Since ABE programs are mandated to serve LD students under ADA regulations, Sylvia organizes an LD/ADA presentation every fall for the entire staff.

## Students Who Plateau

But the team effort at the CLC goes deeper than funding this position. For many years, the CLC has established work teams among all staff. One of these teams, the student progress team, focuses on students who are "stuck."

Sylvia notes that teachers felt in agreement about describing the students, rather than labeling them LD per se. They agreed that it was important to identify students who have plateaued or regressed in their learning and to investigate causes of, and possible solutions to, the inability to progress. Many of the students in the stuck category had been in the program for years without moving to the next level. As

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## Working as a Team ...

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the team began to discuss students, the issue of time limits arose.

Historically, community-based ABE programs have been reluctant to set time limits with “stuck students,” but in their research, the student progress team discovered that some programs are now instituting time limits, especially when there are so many students on waiting lists. CLC has not come to any decision about time limits at their program. However, they are interested in learning more about what makes students stuck and they are experimenting with a more intense investigation of possible reasons.

## Investigations

First, Sylvia collects information from teachers about students who are not progressing. Data include observational reports, test scores (REEP, MAPT, BEST), and other teacher input. The teachers and Sylvia discuss specifics of the students: Are they getting stuck? Regressing in their skills? Perhaps the most revealing source of information, however, comes from the students themselves.

Sylvia meets with each one of the students identified by their teachers. In interviewing them, she has discovered that some of the factors contributing to lack of progress are quite straightforward and may not necessarily require expensive, lengthy, neurological testing to pinpoint them.

## Lack of Sleep

For example, in three out of five students, lack of sleep was a possible causative factor in lack of progress. As we know, many adults try to balance the demands of school, work, parenting, and managing a household. Sleep is sometimes the only controllable factor in their daily lives, and many students feel they must cut back on sleep to keep everything else afloat. Maria, (not her real name), a single mother of four,

has on the learning process. In addition to the normal stressors adults carry around with them, many students carry the additional burden of being separated from loved ones who face natural disasters, poverty, and other dangers.

As a result of the interviews, the CLC decided to meet some of the issues head on. For example, they are now designing a sleep curriculum, written at a very low level. The curriculum looks at the results

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*Students will chart the number of hours of sleep they get and develop an action plan for making realistic changes that will allow them more sleep time.*

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gets an average of two hours of sleep a night so she can keep her house clean, do her homework, tend to her children, and hold down a job.

Sylvia notes that many students have vision problems. Because of the high cost of exams and glasses, they are reluctant to get services to correct their eyesight. This factor obviously affects learning. When Sylvia interviews students, she asks them for the date of their last eye exam. Some have never had an eye exam at all.

The same holds true with hearing loss. In addition, some students are taking medications that cause drowsiness; this factor inhibits progress in the classroom. Sylvia also notes the overwhelming effect stress

of sleep deprivation on health, including accident rates and the ability to learn and remember. Students will chart the number of hours of sleep they get and develop an action plan for making realistic changes that will allow them more sleep time.

The CLC would also like to look more closely at the type of lighting they have in their classrooms, the font size of text, and other factors that can help students maximize learning. Sylvia noted that the principles of Universal Design for Learning can be a big help in making learning environments more accessible and responsive to a wide number of students, including those with identified learning disabilities and those

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**Working as a Team ...**

*Continued from page 10*

who face some of the challenges already described.

When I asked Sylvia for advice to programs who want to increase their responsiveness to LD students, she made several suggestions. “Every program needs an LD support person, someone who crosses departments like ABE, ESOL, or GED,” she said. This person can give support to students who are not progressing within their classes, assess students, design IEPs with them, and offer ongoing follow up and support. An LD support person also could assist students with the health issues that impede learning, such as getting their vision or hearing checked. Finally, the LD support position could plan, design, facilitate, or oversee regular staff development for teachers.

Since the statewide initiative Young Adults with Learning Disabilities (YALD) ended a few years ago, it is more incumbent upon ABE programs to build strong systemic support within their own programs. No matter what labels we use—learning differences, learning difficulties, or learning disabilities—we all want to make our services as inclusive as possible. By establishing policies that create stability and can make change over time, increased responsiveness and inclusion becomes a possibility.

*Lenore Balliro is the editor of Field Notes. She can be reached at <lbaliro@worlded.org>.*

*Tools for the Classroom*

**How Much Sleep Do You Get?**

Ask students to chart the number of hours of sleep they get each night for a week. In pairs, have them compare their charts. They can also create line graphs with the information. Use this data to begin a discussion and readings on the importance of sleep on learning. For useful information, check out the following Web sites:

- GED lesson plan on sleep: <[www.floridatechnet.org/GED/LessonPlans/Science/ScienceLesson1.pdf](http://www.floridatechnet.org/GED/LessonPlans/Science/ScienceLesson1.pdf)>
- 5th grade reading level lesson plans <[www.nhealthyschools.org/docs/](http://www.nhealthyschools.org/docs/)>
- Sleep curriculum grades 9-12 <<http://science.education.nih.gov/>>

Day	Time you went to bed	Time you woke up	How many hours of sleep did you get?	How did you feel when you woke up?
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

*Sleep chart adapted from <[www.nhealthyschools.org](http://www.nhealthyschools.org)>*

# Teaching SMARTER

By NICOLE BEAUDOIN GRAVES

I have found that the best practices for teaching adults with learning disabilities are applicable to teaching all adult literacy students. One of the most valuable things I gained from participating in the Bridges to Practice training, sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy, was an approach called Teaching SMARTER.<sup>1</sup>

I found the Teaching SMARTER steps very helpful to keep me focused and on track when I plan and deliver lessons. The steps are effective for all learners but critical for our learners with LD. SMARTER is an acronym for a teaching approach first developed by Lenz and Scanlon (1998).<sup>2</sup> The steps are outlined below.

## S: Shape the critical question.

Teaching SMARTER suggests that teachers turn the goals and objectives written in a traditional lesson plan into questions that can be answered by students. For example, instead of writing an objective like: "The student will be able to read his phone bill," I can turn it into a question a student can pose: "How can I read my phone bill?"

## M: Map the critical content.

In this step, a teacher asks herself what students need to know before they can answer the question posed in the first step. In the case of the phone bill question, a teacher would

need to review critical vocabulary and phrases such as "last payment," "bill due by," and so on. A teacher also would need to introduce or review the conventions of forms, text, and numbering such as dates, amount of money, and so on.

## A: Analyze for difficulties.

Here, a teacher looks for possible difficulties students may have with the lesson. For example, what prior knowledge do they need in order to understand what you are presenting? I find that because we have so little time with our learners, we try to get to the main point of the lesson and often miss the elements that keep students from "getting it." Of course, this would be especially important to LD students, yet teachers often miss this important step. When I analyze a phone bill through a student's eyes, I notice that the layout is confusing and makes it difficult to sort out which information is the most important. Therefore, I plan elements of my lesson to make it easier to find the most important details.

## R: Reach instructional decisions.

At this step, teachers select what to teach and choose materials to use. They also make decisions about sequencing the lesson, figure out what piece to teach first, and determine why that step is the most important. When I consider this step, I analyze the materials I

have selected. Then I ask: Can I use materials that involve the senses or that can be handled, like manipulatives? Will the materials keep the students' attention focused on the learning goal? Another valuable thing to do at this step is to actually do one of the handouts you may have designed for the students. See if they work well or need to be revised.

Depending on the students I have in class, this step changes. With some groups I may have to work on how to read dates in the United States, since the order of numbers might be different in other countries. I might have to help students practice identifying coins and bills before even reading the bill. I might practice with a simplified bill focused only on the relevant information, then find the same information on authentic bills. I might choose to use calendars, workbooks, or teacher-made materials for reading dates. I can use play money. I can use index cards to reinforce vocabulary, and the cards can be turned into manipulatives, game pieces, and memory aids. Students can highlight critical information on a mock bill or an authentic bill with a highlighter, thus introducing kinesthetics.

## T: Teach effectively.

Here, teachers begin by telling students what they are going to learn and why. This step is important to learners with LD because they need to

*Continued on page 12*

## Teaching SMARTER...

*Continued from page 12*

see the connections between the learning aim and the steps you are taking to get there. The steps should be small and clearly presented. For example, you can introduce the skill or task, then teach one step of the lesson through direct instruction. You can then model the learning task, provide guided practice, and then move to independent practice. Additional practice helps LD students internalize new material and reflect on the learning process it took to get there. Learning can be done in small groups allowing you to work with those who need extra support or modified direct instruction. This process could take place with several short lessons over a period of time.

### E: Evaluate progress.

Now is the time to check progress. Teachers at this step can ask themselves: How is my lesson working? Do I need to step back, go more slowly, or repeat anything? By observing students as they practice, teachers can check for successes and difficulties and provide on the spot help as needed.

### R: Revisit outcomes and goals.

At this step teachers and students come back to the original objective. Can students now answer the original question developed at the beginning of the process? If not, what needs to be reviewed, retaught, rethought, or

redone? In this example, can students answer the question: Can you read your phone bill? If not, what's difficult now? You can backtrack and revisit steps as needed. If students can answer the question, celebrate success.

Although teachers may feel they do not have time to go through these steps for each lesson, I think many teachers already do a lot of the steps in Teaching SMARTER. Teachers can use these steps to help them sequence lessons in math, reading, writing, and language learning.

If you are wondering what you can do now to help your LD students, try going through the Teaching SMARTER steps. Think of an example from your own class, like teaching long division or percentages, teaching how to write a paragraph, or teaching an ESOL substitution drill. Focus on the critical content and analyze for difficulties. Once you see the benefit of the exercise, add all the other pieces. It might mean slightly modifying your approach and techniques, but your good practices will

become your best ones. And your students, especially ones with learning disabilities, will benefit.

### References

<sup>1</sup>*Bridges to practice: A research-based guide for literacy practitioners serving adults with learning disabilities*. Retrieved from [www.nifl.gov/nifl/ld/bridges/materials/bridges\\_docs.html](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/ld/bridges/materials/bridges_docs.html)

<sup>2</sup>Lenz, B.K., & Scanlon, D. (1998). SMARTER teaching: Developing accommodations to reduce cognitive barriers for individuals with learning disabilities. *Perspectives*, 24 (3), 16–19.

*Nicole Beaudoin Graves is the ESOL program coordinator and head teacher at the Center for New Americans in Amherst, Greenfield, and Northampton, MA. In 2006 she completed a two week Bridges to Practice training for learning disabilities and adults. She can be reached at <cnaamh@rcn.com>.*

## Massachusetts Adult Literacy Hotline

Free information on GED, ESOL, literacy, and citizenship classes for adults offered throughout Massachusetts. Information online at [www.sabes.org/hotline](http://www.sabes.org/hotline).

Call 800-447-8844, seven days a week, 6 a.m. to midnight.



## New SABES CRC Director: Luanne Teller

INTERVIEW BY LENORE BALLIRO

When Luanne Teller was competing in gymnastics and coaching a gym team in Connecticut, she wasn't thinking she was on the road to becoming a SABES director in Massachusetts. But over the years she developed an impressive set of skills based on the variety of jobs she chose, and her work path led her right to the position of the new SABES Central Resource Center (CRC) director at World Education.

Actually, Luanne wasn't even looking for a job when someone brought her the notice for the CRC director. "I had been working at Massasoit Community College for eight years as the director of an ESOL program," she said, "and



I loved my job and my staff. But when I saw the job description it was as though someone wrote the qualifications with me in mind! The job description reflected the "quirky combination of skills I developed from the circuitous path I have taken all these years." she said.

After reflecting for two weeks, she applied, and after several interviews with representatives from SABES, she was hired in September 2007.

### From the balance beam to the ABE world

Like many of us, Luanne entered the ABE/ESOL field almost by accident. She started out as a French and Spanish high school teacher, but when



she and her family relocated to Massachusetts because of her husband's work, she had to shift gears. "When we relocated, I tried to find work teaching, but it was right when Proposition 2 ½ had passed, so there were no jobs. A temp agency hired me in their human resources department. I learned a lot about the legal aspects of human resources, and this information has been really helpful in my administrative work in ABE."

Over the past 20 years or so, Luanne has worked in ABE and ESOL programs as a teacher, director, and trainer.

She started an office-training component in a job training program where she also taught job readiness and office skills for single moms on public assistance. As director of the Massasoit Stoughton ABE Program, she administered the



regular program as well as the Transitions to College project. As an ABE administrator, she participated in and gave trainings for SABES staff development activities.

"I benefited a lot from SABES," she offered. "One of the things I appreciated the most was that SABES acted as a conduit to convene programs and help them to network. Through SABES I got to meet other directors, develop my program, get ideas, and share my own experiences." She pointed out that even though programs compete for the same pot of funding, she never saw any unwillingness to share best practices, ideas, or strategies. "I had never worked

*Continued on page 15*

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# How Well Is Your Program Helping LD Students?

The list of questions below, drawn from multiple sources, may be useful as a reflection tool at a staff meeting or another forum where staff discuss program issues.

## **Part I: Program Level**

- Are we aware of the most recent research about learning disabilities and adult learners? How can we find out more? (Example: I can join the NIFL listserv on learning disabilities.)
- Do we understand the Americans with Disabilities Act and how it relates to our adult students with learning disabilities? How can we find out more?
- Do we recruit students for our program in various media?
- Have we ever had staff development events on learning disabilities at our program? Can we arrange for this? How?
- Does our program have policies in place about students with learning disabilities? Are we all aware of them?
- Do we have a designated staff member who can assess, place, and help support learning disabled learners? Is this possible?

## **Part II: In the Classroom**

- Is my classroom a clean, uncluttered, and well-lit place without too many distractions? Can I improve in this area? How?
- Are some of my classroom tasks predictable so students achieve a comfort level with assignments? How can I improve in this area? (Example: I can establish classroom “rituals” so students know what to expect at regular times.)
- Do I recycle and reuse new language and literacy (or math) skills so there is ample opportunity for reinforcement? How can I improve in this area? (Example: Do I stretch a topic over several classes and then review, or am I always trying to cover too much in one class?)
- Do I include multi-sensory approaches in my teaching? Can I improve in this area? How? (Example: I can integrate video or DVD clips and songs into my ESOL class.)
- Am I aware of assistive technologies to help students with various learning challenges? Can I improve in this area? How?
- Am I aware of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies and how I can draw from this area for classroom practices?
- Do I use graphic organizers like charts, grids, or mapping to help present information? Can I improve in this area? How?

## New SABES CRC...

*Continued from page 13*

anyplace where things were so collaborative,” she said. “Can you imagine a group of bank presidents getting together to share ideas with one another?”

## Thinking Ahead

Luanne retains a commitment to students in her new role. “I feel we always have to be mindful that our SABES work is for students,” she said. “We have to be careful not to get caught up in the details of rules and rates—it is important to remember that everything we do impacts students, and our primary obligation is to them.” She is also eager to continue her connection to the transitions work she started in the Masasoit program. “There’s a lot of transitions expertise out there that could be tapped and shared,” she noted, “and I’d like to see more of that happen for students and programs.”

What does she think of SABES after her first few months here? “I love being surrounded by people who are committed, passionate, and dedicated to the work they do,” she said.

I suspect her prior work as a gymnast will come in handy as she balances the needs, demands, and resources of her new position.

*Luanne Teller is the director of the Central Resource Center of SABES. She can be reached at <lteller@worlded.org>.*

## Get It Fast: LD Resources at Your Fingertips

### Fast Facts Series

<[www.able.state.pa.us/able/cwp/view.asp?a=15&q=121726](http://www.able.state.pa.us/able/cwp/view.asp?a=15&q=121726)>

The Fast Facts series, developed within the Learning Differences Project at the University of Pennsylvania, offers concise information about a variety of learning disability topics. These really brief papers, written with the busy practitioner in mind, include topics like multisensory input, visual perception, multiple intelligences, diagnostic and prescriptive teaching, and learning disabilities. The paper on instructional adaptations is particularly helpful and contains illustrations and concrete ideas.

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### Sam and Pat

By Jo Anne Hartel, Betsy Lowry, Whit Hendon  
<<http://elt.heinle.com/>>

This phonics-based series, based on story lines relating to the everyday lives of two adult main characters, is a useful tool for teaching adults with reading difficulties.

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### Sam and Val

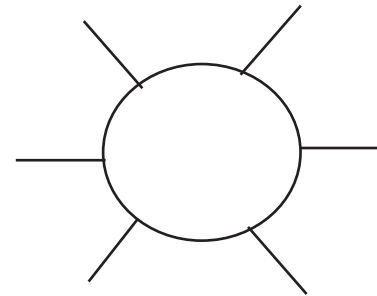
By Sylvia Greene

*Sam and Val* is a basal reader for 0–1.9 level adult readers. It follows the adventures of an urban family with two kids while introducing the beginning rules of decoding using 60 high-frequency sight words, 10 Freirean “generative words,” and comprehension skills. Accompanying guide provides teacher resources. For ordering information, call Basic Literacy Services at 978-369-8214.

**Tools for the Classroom**

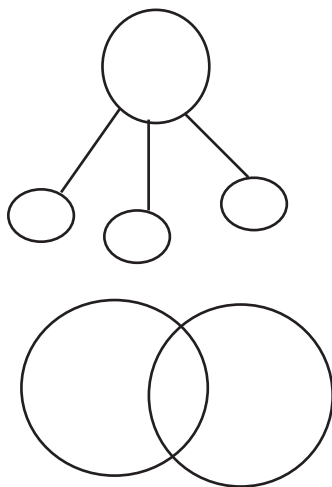
# Graphic Organizers

A graphic organizer is a visual aid used to structure ideas and concepts in manageable chunks. Graphic organizers often help show relationships among ideas or information. For example, a Venn diagram shows where two things differ and where they share commonalities. Graphic organizers are great tools for teaching and learning; they are especially helpful to learning disabled students who may have trouble with dense text.



## How can graphic organizers be used?

Before instruction, teachers can use brainstorming maps (spider maps) to help activate students' prior knowledge about a subject. Teachers can use T charts to collect information from a class discussion (our neighborhood has/our neighborhood doesn't have). During instruction, various charts and grids can be used to illustrate information (a time line for history, a character map for comparing characters in a story, etc.) Students can learn to create their own graphic organizers to help them understand information or to plan their work, especially in organizing ideas for writing. After instruction, graphic organizers can be used as summary tools or as comprehension checks.



## Other examples of graphic organizers

- Cause and effect organizers
- Character and story organizer
- Cycle charts
- Problem/solution chart
- Hierarchy charts
- Continuum lines
- Chain of events chart
- Story map
- Network tree
- Sequence chart
- Fact and opinion chart

## Where to find them

Teachers can find many downloadable graphic organizers on the Web. On one site, I found samples of graphic organizers I didn't even know about, like the herringbone organizer. Looking at the various charts gave me several ideas for their use. Find examples at

- [www.everythingsl.net/inservices/graphic\\_organizers.php](http://www.everythingsl.net/inservices/graphic_organizers.php)
- [www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/](http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/)
- [www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/GO/vocab\\_dev.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/GO/vocab_dev.htm) Concept Graphic Organizers
- [http://gotoscience.com/Graphic\\_Organizers.html](http://gotoscience.com/Graphic_Organizers.html)



## Resources for Learning Disabilities

**Focus on Basics Learning Disabilities Issue**  
[www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/fob/2007/fob\\_8d.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/fob/2007/fob_8d.pdf)

The current issue of *Focus on Basics*, available in PDF format online only, offers 43 pages of valuable information on learning disabilities and adults.

**Literacy and Learning Disabilities Special Collections**

<http://ldlink.coe.utk.edu/home.htm>

Sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) this site has resources for learners, teachers, and programs. Resources address classroom and policy issues.

**NIFL Bridges to Practice**

[www.nifl.gov/nifl/ld/bridges/materials/bridges\\_docs.html](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/ld/bridges/materials/bridges_docs.html)

There are four guidebooks in the *Bridges to Practice* series. The purpose of the series is to help literacy programs and their practitioners learn how to develop or improve services to adults with learning disabilities.

**Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Publications**

[www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/collections/ld.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/ld.html)

Find ERIC digests on the CAELA site on a variety of ESOL/LD topics.

**Understanding What Reading Is All About: Teaching Materials and Lessons for Adult Basic Education Learners**

[www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/uwriaa.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/uwriaa.pdf)

This comprehensive resource on reading should be on every ABE and ESOL teacher's shelf. Lessons on individual reading profiles, student goal setting, and comprehension round out the lessons on decoding and word analysis. Each lesson is clearly outlined with objectives, materials, and step-by-step instructions. Sidebars on "Tips for the Teacher" offer even more guidance. Lesson 12 focuses on learning disabilities.

## Working Conditions for ABE Practitioners

The summer issue of *Field Notes* will include a summary of findings from the 2007 Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) *Survey of Basic Working Conditions* in the field of ABE. Future issues of *Field Notes* will include a regular column about working conditions and strategies for improving them.



## Glossary of LD Terms\*

**Accommodations** Techniques and materials that allow individuals with LD to complete school or work tasks with greater ease and effectiveness. Examples include spellcheckers, tape recorders, and expanded time for completing assignments.

**Assistive Technology** Equipment that enhances the ability of students to be more efficient and successful. For individuals with LD, computer grammar checkers, an overhead projector used by a teacher, or the audiovisual information delivered through a CD-ROM would be typical examples.

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)** A severe difficulty in focusing and maintaining attention. Often leads to learning and behavior problems at home, school, and work. Also called Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

**Direct Instruction** An instructional approach to academic subjects that emphasizes the use of carefully sequenced steps that include demonstration, modeling, guided practice, and independent application.

**Dyscalculia** A severe difficulty in understanding and using symbols or functions needed for success in mathematics.

**Dysgraphia** A severe difficulty in producing handwriting that is legible and written at an age-appropriate speed.

**Dyslexia** A severe difficulty in understanding or using one or more areas of language, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and spelling.

**Dyspraxia** A severe difficulty in performing drawing, writing, buttoning, and other tasks requiring fine motor skill, or in sequencing the necessary movements.

**Learning Modalities** Approaches to assessment or instruction stressing the auditory, visual, or tactile avenues for learning that are dependent upon the individual.

**Metacognitive Learning** Instructional approaches emphasizing awareness of the cognitive processes that facilitate one's own learning and its application to academic and work assignments. Typical metacognitive techniques include systematic rehearsal of steps or conscious selection among strategies for completing a task.

**Perceptual Handicap** Difficulty in accurately processing, organizing, and discriminating among visual, auditory, or tactile information. A person with a perceptual handicap may say that "cap/cup" sound the same or that "b" and "d" look the same. However, glasses or hearing aids do not necessarily indicate a perceptual handicap.

**Specific Language Disability** A severe difficulty in some aspect of listening, speaking, reading, writing, or spelling, while skills in the other areas are age-appropriate. Also called Specific Language Learning Disability (SLLD).

**Specific Learning Disability** The official term used in federal legislation to refer to difficulty in certain areas of learning, rather than in all areas of learning. Synonymous with learning disabilities.

*\*These definitions are taken from the ERIC Clearinghouse, Digest #E517. The complete list of terms can be seen at <[www.nipissingu.ca/learningdisability/downloads/glossary.htm](http://www.nipissingu.ca/learningdisability/downloads/glossary.htm)>.*

*Try something. If it works, keep doing it.*

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

## Mark Your Calendar

Check the SABES Web site, <[www.sabes.org](http://www.sabes.org)> for local and regional activities. This list was prepared by Lou Wollrab.

### **April 2–5, 2008**

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 42nd Annual Convention & Exhibition

*Worlds of TESOL: Building Communities of Practice, Inquiry, and Creativity*

Location: New York, NY

Contact: TESOL, 888-547-3369

Web: [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)

### **April 4–6, 2008**

Radical Math, 2008 Conference on Math Education and Social Justice

*Creating Balance in an Unjust World*

Location: Brooklyn, NY

Contact: Jonathan Osler, 917-288-7364

Web: [www.radicalmath.org/conference/](http://www.radicalmath.org/conference/)

### **April 9–12, 2008**

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), 2008 Meeting and Exposition

*Becoming Certain About Uncertainty*

Location: Salt Lake City, UT

Contact: NCTM, 703-620-9840

Web: [www.nctm.org/conferences/content](http://www.nctm.org/conferences/content)

### **April 15, 2008**

Adult & Community Learning Services  
Massachusetts Department of Education  
*Integrated Curriculum Models Get Better Results*

Location: Marlborough, MA

Contact: Anne Holbrook 781-338-3830

Web: [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/mailings/2008/0208/savethedate.doc](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/mailings/2008/0208/savethedate.doc)

### **April 28–May 1, 2008**

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), Annual Conference

*Show Me Success: Empowerment Through Diversity*

Location: St. Louis, MO

Contact: MaryAnn Kramer, 314-367-5000

Web: [www.coabeconference.org/](http://www.coabeconference.org/)

### **May 16, 2008**

Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages (MATSOL), Special Conference:

*Developing the Academic Skills of English Language Learners: Strategies for Success*

Location: Leominster, MA

Contact: MATSOL e-mail <[matsol@matsol.org](mailto:matsol@matsol.org)>

Web: [www.matsol.org/mc/page.do](http://www.matsol.org/mc/page.do)

### **June 29–July 2, 2008**

National Educational Computing Conference (NECC), 29th Annual

*Convene · Connect · Transform*

Location: San Antonio, TX

Contact: NECC, E-mail, <[neccinfo@iste.org](mailto:neccinfo@iste.org)>

Web: <http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/NECC2008/>

### **June 30–July 2, 2008**

Adults Learning Mathematics (ALM), 15th International Conference

*A Declaration of Numeracy: Empowering Adults through Mathematics Education*

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Contact: Katherine Safford-Ramus, <[ksafford@spc.edu](mailto:ksafford@spc.edu)>

Web: [www.alm-online.net/](http://www.alm-online.net/)

## ***Got Conference Info?***

*Field Notes* is happy to publish information about conferences relevant to Massachusetts ABE and ESOL practitioners. Send your info to Lenore Balliro, editor, at <[lballiro@worlded.org](mailto:lballiro@worlded.org)>

## **Field Notes “Open Issue” Coming Soon: Here’s Your Chance to Publish**

The summer issue of *Field Notes* is an open (themeless) issue. Here’s your chance to submit writing on any topic relating to ESOL or ABE. Send us cool lesson ideas, book reviews, student writing, photos of a project you want to highlight. Questions? Email Lenore Balliro, editor, at <balliro@worldedorg>. And check out the Web site for submission guidelines at <sabes.org/resources/publications/fieldnotes/fnguide.htm>

### **Upcoming Themes for *Field Notes***

*Summer 2008*

#### **Open Issue**

Anything goes. Well, almost.  
Submit by April 15.

*Fall 2008*

#### **Transitions**

ESOL to ABE; ABE to GED;  
GED to college.  
Submit by June 15.

*Winter 2008*

**To be determined.**



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