NYLA/ESRT 2018 Program

Crafting a Literacy Solution that Works

- **Definition of literacy.** It is the ability to identify, understand, create, interpret, compute and communicate. In simple terms, literacy is the ability to read and write in a way that allows us to communicate efficiently (proficiently.) Literacy is critical to making important daily individual and family or community-based decisions for a person's economic, mental, physical well-being. Literacy and ESL classes for adults are transitioning tools that prepare learners for jobs, health literacy, assimilation into a society that functions mostly based on the English language, and a pathway to civics and citizenship. For the youth, the assimilation enables them to understand and participate in the social and academic learning experience. The different kinds/types of literacies all come together in crafting a good solid but, basic literacy program through the library for a growing, integral community. When most people talk about literacy, the focus is really on alphanumeric literacy. Begin with an ESL program, and incorporate numeracy, financial and economic, health, civics literacy, and computer literacy.

- **Types of literacy:** There are several types of literacies I’ve seen lists of 10 (Nickey Pietila of AvantageK12: [https://www.skyward.com/discover/blog/skyward-blogs/skyward-executive-blog/march-2017/the-top-10-literacies-in-education-today](https://www.skyward.com/discover/blog/skyward-blogs/skyward-executive-blog/march-2017/the-top-10-literacies-in-education-today), the Center for Teaching @ the University of Iowa recognizes 5 types (media, computer, digital, information, and technology), Pekka Mertala (University of Oulu, Finland)
identified 8 types (visual, media, health, literacy – I believe he means reading writing and arithmetic - digital, Adult, critical and information)’ and 30 (Mkandawire Sitwe Benson, https://sitwe.wordpress.com, University of Zambia. Though Sitwe’s analysis are based on his professional research and teaching experiences.) However, we will only deal with 6 common types:

- **Language**. How does ESL fit into the literacy program? ESL is an important/integral component in literacy programs. ESL programs are designed to improve the student’s command of English (i.e. vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, composition listening and writing skills.) Students enrolled in ESL programs are not native speakers of English. In other words English is NOT their primary language. Because they are not native English speakers. ESL students are often immigrants and need to have citizenship classes included as part of their literacy curriculum. The end result is that they become language and civic literate and are able to study and apply for citizenship. Literacy students, on the other hand, may be native English language speakers but do not have the skills to read, write and properly comprehend the written word, and may also need to learn other skills such as simple math or computation, filling out forms, applying for jobs, simple home/financial management, basic computer skills. Most libraries that I know subscribe to *Easy English News*, and ESL/Literacy catalogs, for easy reading titles ranging from Level 1 – 4, including teacher editions and workbooks.

- **Numeracy** – or mathematical literacy is another needed skill which results in an ability to reason with numbers in order to solve problems. It simplifies financial
management and planning. When it comes to numeracy, what I am trying to convey is that adult learners of English, especially, are often literate in their own native currency, and in basic arithmetic, in their own native language. The problem is having in having them assimilate/translate or transpose that knowledge into the new language that they are trying to learn. Many are not numerically ignorant. However, the recommendation is to start them with basic numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Nothing complex. They will figure out the rest, as they build their competencies. Remember, most can do rapid calculation but, just in their native language, not English. Teaching numeracy to an adult ESL learner is not an easy task. Then, they also need to be able to tell their age, birthdates of themselves and family members (especially, if they have to fill out forms for employment, benefits, etc.) Basic numeracy skills consist of comprehending fundamental arithmetic like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. For example, if one can understand simple mathematical equations such as, $2 + 2 = 4$, then one would be considered possessing at least basic numeric knowledge. Why do you need numeracy skills? Numeracy is important for individuals to develop logical thinking and reasoning strategies in their everyday activities. Workplace numeracy, literacy and employability skills are often used in conjunction with one another. These required skills often overlap and are necessary for any task.

- **Financial or Economic.** Is your library's literacy class taught by a staff member, or is there a guest tutor, or outside agency (such as BOCES or Literacy Solutions) instructor? Have you vetted this person for their knowledge in
providing simple instructions on money, budgeting and financial management?

Remember, however, to teach the basic math using simple or common economic factors as your practical examples. They don’t need to learn how to simply count. They need to learn how to count money, make change - in dollars and cents. They need to understand the cost of items, budgeting, to discern if they are getting change back, after they have proffered a dollar, etc. Do you have handouts at the reference desk (or the ESL classroom) for those who need it, and are you making them available to both instructors and patrons? I like to use personal anecdotes, so bear with me. My native country of Ghana has changed currency several times. From the British Pound to her own pounds, shillings and pence, to the cedi, new cedi and back to the cedi (which we now call GHS, to prevent confusion.) Currently, 1,000 cedis is equivalent to 1 GHS (or New Cedi) and 1 dollar is 4.74 GHS. Imagine my confusion when I went home a couple of years ago and I purchased something for 1 million! 10 New Cedis or approximately $2.11! Yet, it was no problem for the market woman who was trying to sell the product. She patiently did the math and translated for me! Obviously, she is financially literate – in her own language – but, from our perspective, she needs to be financially literate in English in order for her to blend into our society. Understanding numbers and how they function is the key, not currency.

After numeracy, we can say that financial literacy is very important. It’s not just about being able to perform simple mathematical functions but, being able to understand the implications of solid financial management is very important, as
a personal and household responsibility. Here are a few sites that you can introduce your students to:

**MyMoney.gov** – MyMoney.gov is the U.S. government’s website dedicated to teaching all Americans the basics about financial education. Whether you are buying a home, balancing your checkbook, or investing in your 401(k), the resources on MyMoney.gov can help you maximize your financial decisions. Throughout the site, you will find important information from 20 Federal agencies and Bureaus designed to help you make smart financial choices. Hotline (1-888-My Money)

**Knowledge Matters, Inc.** – Knowledge Matters is the leading developer and publisher of simulation-based business and personal finance curriculums for high schools. Founded in 1997 by Peter Jordan, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the company’s simulations have been used by over 1 million students in over 5,000 high schools.

**It’s a Habit** – The It’s a Habit! mission is to offer families, educators, trainers, and organizations wholesome, educational, entertaining, affordable, and easy-to-use tools and services that share strategic habits and important life skills like: getting in the habit of saving money, making smart money choices, setting goals, making plans, budgeting, etc. The purpose of these tools and services are to build and strengthen families around the globe regardless of their social, ethnic or economic
background. The organization publishes books, music, lesson plans, training guides and parent guides. It also conducts live, interactive author and character appearances, training and workshops.

Although it is established for youth, I have found that the mission and goal of this foundation can be adapted to the adult learner, as well. **Financial Literacy for Youth (FLY)** – Financial Literacy for Youth (FLY) is a non-profit foundation founded under the auspices of the National Heritage Foundation in the belief that every kid can grow up to be a millionaire. Its mission is to see that every child in the United States is taught everything he or she needs to know about money before leaving high school. This will include what money really is, how to make it, how to save it, how to account for it, how to plan for its use, how to keep from being cheated out of it, how and when to use other people’s money, and how to use money to make more of it. Concurrent with this learning, students will take part in activities that will teach entrepreneurship, strengthen responsibility, and help them set guidelines for the future that will allow them to measure their progress toward reaching their financial goals. 13220 SW 32nd Ct., DAVIE, AL 33330. (954)370-6776

**The Money Game®,** of course! Guess what? If you learn the simple, time-tested financial tools and habits that help people become financially free, you and your students can win The Money Game and be financially free, too. No, the game developer is not physically putting money in your hand as a prize but, you with
valuable tools and knowledge that will enhance your quest for understanding money, and financial management.

With *The Money Game®* you can teach kids and adults about money and investing in a way that is relevant, effective and as much fun to teach as it is to play! To learn more about this creative tool developed by Elisabeth Donati, visit her on YouTube.

There are several online money games but my advice to you is to invest in an AWE station and have your students utilize the money and math games.

- **Health Literacy**: Health literacy is important because it enables individuals obtain, process, and understand basic health issues, information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. It will also help in planning the complexities of health coverage and other benefits that works for the household or individual.

- **Civic Literacy**: What does it mean to be civic literate? Civic Literacy addresses how to understand government, and to actively participate and initiate changes in the community and society as a whole. It is the foundation by which society functions. Civic education is important in promoting civic responsibility and allows citizens ensure and uphold the values of citizenship. Are citizenship classes a part of the literacy curriculum? Of course! This is why it is very
important to know the makeup of the community you serve. There may be a concentration of immigrants in your town or district. Find out who the dominant ethnicities are (Spanish, Italian, French, Creole, Yoruba, Chinese, Yiddish, Akan, Bengali, Japanese, Korean, etc.) Take any of the boroughs in New York City, for example: the city itself, is a melting pot of hundreds of ethnic groups. However, there are, very often a concentration of specific ethnic groups in a particular area. The City is served by 3 public libraries with numerous branches. So, you can walk into Parkchester, for example, where you will find a concentration of Indians, Hispanics, and Africans (oh, there’s a challenge, because with Africans, you now have to separate them by country, then by region, then by ethnic groups and then by language groups.) The struggle for Africa luckily, allowed a division of power and so we currently have a continent that is sharply divided by Anglophone, Francophone, and Portuguese. Thankfully, there are so many resources for those languages. If you take advantage of TechSoup, order a few licenses of Microsoft’s Multilanguage Office edition, for just the administrative fee. While most literacy patrons are there to learn English and language proficiency, some are fluent in their own native languages. Your aim is not to let them forgo their languages but to speak and learn English in order to assimilate into the American society. Give them the added bonus of being able to write (or type) in their native or official languages. I believe there are somewhere between 20 to 36 languages in the Office Multilanguage version. Chances are, there are members of the community who are applying for citizenship, or desire to be citizens. You have citizenship exam books on your
shelves but, have you considered the fact that because some of the patrons are also literacy students, they may not yet be able to read and understand fully, what it entails to be a citizen, or how government works? The Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services offers several resources (including flash cards and pamphlets, posters, books, etc.) that you can order for free, for your library. Take advantage of it.

- **Digital/Computational.** Have you checked out the employment application process at various businesses, lately? Many of the low-paying jobs (supermarkets, department stores, hardware stores, etc.) now require applicants to apply for employment online. Are the residents of your community or library patrons computer savvy? Do you offer basic, organized computer classes? Don’t have, or can’t afford to offer computer classes? How about installing basic online computer courses, which include mouse and keyboard exercises, and basic computer glossary? In my library, I have an AWE station reserved just for adult learners. The keyboard is color-coded for the self-taught and some of the pre-installed programs are really very helpful to the learning adult. Invest in a couple of copies of Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing. Students learn to type at speeds ranging from 5wpm to 120wpm, and at their own pace. In my computer classes, I explain/demonstrate the parts of the keyboard, combination keys, shortcuts, etc. and provide 2 simple letter-writing exercises. The first includes punctuation, grammar, spelling and spell-check, capitalization, sentence construction, highlighting, underlining font-selection, and, of course, letter-writing. The second is the same letter but shows them how to insert, change, copy and
paste, numbers, and images, so that the outcome is a letter so different from the original. Nothing fancy. I teach them how to access the internet, and to do simple searches.

- **Know your community.** What is the makeup of the community that your library serves? When we mention literacy, we often think about the immigrant who just recently arrived at our shores - the African, the Hispanic, the Indian, Chinese, the Italian, Greek, Eastern European, etc. Yet, there are people in our society who, perhaps for economic or other reasons, are not literate, and cannot read nor write well. We are a nation of immigrants, and whether you like it or not, there are, also, people in your community for whom English is not their first language, and chances are there are, within that group, people who cannot speak English or speak it very well. In order for them to assimilate into our society, they need to learn English in order to communicate, go to school, or find jobs. They will need to learn how to fill out forms, do simple math in order to take charge of their finances, calculate their hours of work, know current events, etc.

- Is there a literacy program in your library/community? If so, what programs do you have in your library to serve that slice of your community? What’s in your collection? How relevant are they?

- What is ESL? Who are the students, who are native speakers?

- What/which agency conducts or coordinates the program? A lot of libraries, if not most, pair up with the local BOCES or Literacy Solutions/Literacy Volunteers to offer ESL and literacy classes. How involved is your library? Does your library
provide the tools (e.g. location, computers, copies of workbooks, audio visual materials, etc.?)

- What is/are the qualifications of the instructor(s)?

- How is the program advertised? Your library newsletter, an events page in the local newspaper, flyers, posters, community centers? I would also suggest arranging with the local school district to distribute flyers to go home with the students.

- Suggested methods and tools: What tools do you use: books, articles, flash cards, pictures, newspapers/newsletters, listening tools (CDs that contain recorded tracks that uses listening strategies to help, mostly with pronunciation), workbooks and kits, games, role-playing and special projects or assignments, electronic devices (tablets, other e-readers computers, apps, programs, etc.?)

Start with the alphabet, alphabet combinations, and numbers. Use visual aids such as flash cards and digital screens. Provide a glossary with culturally-unique vocabulary. As you progress into nouns, verbs simple sentence construction, look for common phrases that are easy to remember and practice. Repetition is important – practice makes perfect. Does your library have a dedicated ESL section? Do you own Inglés Sin Barreras which has a workbook, CD and a DVD?) Consider an AWE station. The color-coded keyboard and pre-installed software/apps makes this a useful tool for the beginner. Do you have old e-readers (nooks, kindles, etc. lying around? Maybe with a little upgrade in software or operating systems, they can be useful to the new learner.

Smartphones are not just for pictures, videos and telephony anymore. They
come with enough memory for downloads, for reading and literacy apps.

Tablets, laptops, oh, my!

- **Conclusion.** So, what are the requirements and tools for crafting a working literacy program at your library? Did you take a survey of the cultural/language make up of your community? Do you have the tools, right collection? Collaborate with the local BOCES or Literacy Solutions/Volunteers as you plan your programs.

The US Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education’s Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) administers programs that help adults get the basic skills they need including reading, writing, math, English language proficiency, and problem-solving to be productive workers, family members, and citizens.

Our office provides funds to states for adult education and literacy programs. The amount each state receives is based on a formula established by Congress. States, in turn, distribute funds to local eligible providers to develop, implement and improve adult education and literacy activities. Adult education and literacy activities include:

- Adult education;
- Literacy;
- Workplace adult education and literacy;
- Family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition activities;
• Integrated English literacy and civics education;
• Workforce preparation activities; and
• Integrated education and training.

Individuals and local providers should check with their state offices for more information on how to obtain funding for adult education and literacy programs. Visit the Department’s grant page for more information about other opportunities.

• For the latest news and information about career and technical education and adult education, see the OCTAE Blog and sign up for the OCTAE Connection newsletter. **1-800-USA-LEARN** (1-800-872-5327)

Speakers available in Spanish and more than 170 languages.

• **Mailing address:**
  U.S. Department of Education
  400 Maryland Avenue, SW
  Washington, D.C. 20202

• **Ask a Question:** www.ed.gov/answers

**Publications**

• The **Education Publications Center (ED Pubs)** is the Department's one-stop center for access to ED information products, including publications, videos, brochures, posters, and other mailings. Use the ED Pubs On-Line Ordering System (https://www.edpubs.gov/) or call ED Pubs at the toll-free number **1-877-4-ED-**

They provide language assistance, in more than 170 languages, as well.

- Immigration and Naturalization Service: has several free publications that you can request. I would suggest you get several copies, and put a set in your collection and make the pamphlets, flashcards, etc. available for patrons