

## **Research Note**

**November 12, 2004**

### **ProLiteracy Worldwide State of Adult Literacy and Advocacy for 2004**

#### **Tom Sticht International Consultant in Adult Education**

In October 2004 ProLiteracy Worldwide, "the world's largest community-based adult literacy organization" released a 14 page, double space report about adult literacy in the world and in the United States [Wedgeworth, Robert (2004, September). State of Adult Literacy 2004. Syracuse, NY- online at [www.proliteracy.org](http://www.proliteracy.org)]. In making its case about the condition of adult literacy in the world in 2004 the report states:

"ProLiteracy Worldwide is deeply committed to helping adults and families throughout the world improve their literacy skills and to supporting the U.N.'s Literacy Decade. This State of Adult Literacy report focuses on two literacy issues currently affecting the international and the U.S. communities: women's literacy and immigration. The growing interdependence of the world's nations makes it vital that we understand the local implications of global activities."

The report goes on to discuss issues related to women's literacy and notes that UNESCO's work on Literacy For All calls attention to the fact that investing in women's literacy development not only increase the lives of the women but also that "Educating women also ensures that their children will be healthier, better nourished and have a greater chance of going to school and doing well there."

Regarding issues related to immigration the report notes that "The number of immigrants in the European Union is up 75% since 1980." During this same period, the number of foreign-born in the United States rose by 145%, from 14 million to 35 million. The report states that "The demand for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) services is so high that many ProLiteracy Worldwide programs have ESL waiting lists." and also "1) the U.S. has the fifth highest share of foreign-born in its adult population; 2) one-third of the foreign-born adults in the U.S. did not complete high school; and 3) the majority of foreign-born came from non-English-speaking countries and have limited English speaking skills."

In the final paragraphs of the report, in addition to calling for the United States to adopt the elements of commitment to adult literacy in UNESCO's Education For All strategy, the report concludes by stating that "ProLiteracy also calls upon Congress to authorize programs for adult education through the development of an Omnibus Literacy Bill and through reauthorization of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act under the Workforce Investment Act."

However, the report does not provide information about an Omnibus Literacy Bill so it is not clear just what that might include. The National Coalition for Literacy at one time developed an Omnibus Literacy Bill (OLB) proposal which can be found online at [http://www.national-coalition-literacy.org/reports/oll\\_concept\\_final.pdf](http://www.national-coalition-literacy.org/reports/oll_concept_final.pdf).

Advocates for adult literacy education may wish to read and comment on the OLB and other ideas being advocated by ProLiteracy Worldwide. When the world's largest community-based adult literacy organization makes its recommendations for public policy in the United States known, the field of adult literacy education should be aware of this and respond with question for and/or support for the Proliteracy Worldwide efforts and offer any additional thoughts for advancing the field that they think might be useful.