

## **LITERACY FREES THE WORLD: A Vision of the Future Through a Prism of the Past**

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On February 13, 2003, the United Nations Literacy Decade was launched, with the theme of Literacy as Freedom and a focus on issues of gender for 2004. A few months later, in May, 2003 I completed 25 years as a member of UNESCO's International Jury that meets each year to select the winners of UNESCO's annual literacy prizes. As this was my final year of service on the Jury, the Director-General of UNESCO recognized my years of voluntary service and presented me with the organization's Mahatma Gandhi Medal.

In early 2004, I decided that I would celebrate my receipt of the Mahatma Gandhi Medal by offering to provide a series of speeches and/or workshops that would build on a number of activities that the United Nations and UNESCO are engaged in which bring together the ideas of literacy and freedom. I recalled that on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the U. S. Congress and gave what has come to be known as the "Four Freedoms" speech. In his speech, Roosevelt identified four freedoms that he considered to be rights of people world wide: Freedom of Speech and Expression, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. Later, Eleanor Roosevelt ensured that these ideas of freedom were included when she chaired the commission that ultimately produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I knew, too, that during the last decade of the 1940s, Mohandas K. Gandhi, the "Mahatma" or "Great Sage" of India had met at different times with Frank Laubach and Welthy Honsinger Fisher of the United States and convinced them to promote the spread of literacy as a non-violent method to advance freedom from colonization for the people of India.

Other activities of the United Nations that I was aware of included the fact that from 2000 to 2010 the international community is engaged in the International Decade for a Culture of Peace; 2005 to 2014 is the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development; and 2004 is the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition.

Putting these various activities together, I decided to develop speeches and workshops that would celebrate the work of adult literacy educators around the world and indicate how they have contributed in the past to the achievement of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, and how they will continue during the United Nations Literacy Decade to help adult new literates achieve these freedoms. This led to the idea of presentations entitled "Literacy Frees the World: A Vision of the Future Through a Prism of the Past." The presentations incorporated a focus on gender, as called for in the United Nations Literacy Decade, and addressed the work of outstanding women literacy educators from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In keeping with the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition this year, a particular focus was upon women who worked with slaves and whose work led to civil rights for the progeny of slaves in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Literacy Frees the World Tour**

In April of 2004 I decided to offer a series of speeches or workshops for which I would charge no fee and only request that sponsors cover my travel expenses. To my surprise I had a large response to my offer and I finally accepted invitations for the six month

period from May through October to present 18 speeches/workshops in 13 cities in three nations: Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The first part of this paper includes four sections which provide remarks regarding the work of adult literacy educators contributing to the achievement by adult learners of each of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. The second part of the paper discusses four contemporary ideas of sustainable development, life cycles education, teaching multiple literacies, and issues of globalization and adult literacy education.

## **PART 1. ADULT LITERACY EDUCATORS AND THE FOUR FREEDOMS**

### **FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION**

A String of Pearls: How Three Ladies of Adult Literacy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Stimulated the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s

Today, with readily available methods for printing our names on our notes, cards, and other expressions of ourselves, we run the risk of forgetting the deep meaning that being able to sign one's name has had in the history of adult literacy and the struggle for civil rights. A major part of this history of adult illiterates and their passion for learning to write their names can be traced by following the teaching methods of three great women leaders of adult literacy education in the United States.

This paper traces the influence of Cora Wilson Stewart of Kentucky on the adult literacy education practices of Wil Lou Gray of South Carolina and Septima Poinsette Clark, the civil rights teacher from the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. These three women are considered a "string of pearls" in recognition of their rarity, value, interconnectedness across time, and their extraordinary contributions to adult literacy education and the civil rights movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

First Pearl: Cora Wilson Stewart and the Moonlight Schools of Kentucky

When Cora Wilson Stewart wrote about the Moonlight Schools of Kentucky, which she started in 1911 to teach illiterate adults to read and write, she recalled the words of one middle-aged man when asked about why he wanted to go to school. "Just to escape from the shame of making my mark" (Stewart, 1922, p. 18).

Knowing full well the longing that illiterate adults had to write their own names, Stewart developed special Moonlight School tablets that were made up of blotting paper. This was soft, deep paper that was used to blot up the extra ink after writing with a pen. But Stewart had teachers use a pointed tool to carve the student's name deep into the paper. Then students traced over the indented impressions of their names over and over until they could finally write their names without using the tracing paper. (pp. 78-79)

According to Stewart, many adults learned to write their names the first evening of school. She recalled that, "One old man on the shady side of fifty shouted for joy when he learned to write his name. "Glory to God!" he shouted, "I'll never have to make my mark any more" (p. 19)

Second Pearl: Wil Lou Gray and the Write-Your-Name Crusade of South Carolina

The motivational power of being able to write one's own name was used later in 1922-23 by Dr. Wil Lou Gray, State Superintendent of Adult Education in South Carolina, as part of an anti-illiteracy campaign across the state. Called the "Sign-Your-Own-Name" campaign in one county and "I'll Write My Own Name" campaign elsewhere in the

state, the Write-Your-Name Crusade aimed to get adults into literacy programs to learn to sign their names when voting and in other important situations.

The method that Gray used to teach writing was similar to that used by Stewart, whose books called the Country Life Readers were also used by Gray in South Carolina literacy schools in the 1920s. According to Ayres (1988), Gray recommended to teachers that they "...use a thorn or hairpin to trace letters on copy papers prepared so students could practice at home." (p. 101). Ayers suggests that this may have been an early use of what Ayers calls the "kinesthetic" method of teaching reading and writing and that Gray may have been the first proponent of this method for adults. But the fact that Gray was acquainted with Stewart, her methods, and books suggests that Gray learned the method from Stewart.

### Third Pearl: Septima Poinsette Clark and the Citizenship Schools of Johns Island, SC

The magic of a person's name in writing, and of Stewart's tracing method of learning to write one's name was passed on from Wil Lou Gray to Septima Poinsette Clark, the great civil rights teacher from the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. On January 7, 1957, Clark and her teachers started the first Citizenship School serving adult African-Americans on Johns Island in South Carolina. Clark (1962) recalled that when the teachers asked the students what they wanted to learn, the answer was that, "First, they wanted to learn how to write their names. That was a matter of pride as well as practical need. (p. 147).

In teaching students to write their names, Clark used what she said was the "kinesthetic" method which she had learned from Wil Lou Gray. Teachers were instructed to write student's names on cardboard. Then, according to Clark, "What the student does is trace with his pencil over and over his signature until he gets the feel of writing his name. I suppose his fingers memorize it by doing it over and over; he gets into the habit by repeating the tracing time after time." (p.148)

She went on to say, "And perhaps the single greatest thing it accomplishes is the enabling of a man to raise his head a little higher; knowing how to sign their names, many of those men and women told me after they had learned, made them FEEL different. Suddenly they had become a part of the community; they were on their way toward first-class citizenship." (p. 149)

### May The Chain of Pearls Grow

Cora Wilson Stewart, Wil Lou Gray, and Septima Poinsette Clark all used the same simple instructional technique to teach adults to write their names. This technique was used by Clark in the development of the Citizenship schools which eventually taught 10,000 teachers and registered 700,000 thousand African Americans to vote in the South. Amazingly, a simple technique for teaching adults to write their names was instrumental in forging the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and 60s.

Today, in adult literacy classrooms around the world, men and women still take up pencils and work diligently to acquire the dignity brought by being able to write one's own name. Thankfully, tens of thousands of adult literacy workers form a string of pearls that encircle the globe, and they are still helping adults find their voices and give expression to their needs as dignified human beings.

## References

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Clark, Septima P. (1962). Echo in my soul. New York: E. P. Dutton & CO.

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## **FREEDOM OF WORSHIP**

(and Freedom of Diversity of Beliefs in General)

The Slave Girl Harriet Jacobs and her Work  
to Teach Slaves and Former Slaves to Read

Harriet A. Jacobs (1813-1897) was born a slave. But even though it was unlawful to teach slaves to read, Jacob's mistress, the daughter of her owners, taught her to read and write. As she reached puberty, Jacob's master started to make moves on her for sexual favors and subjected her to other abuses. So she ran away and hid at her grandmother's house. She hid in a garret between the ceiling and roof that was about seven feet wide, nine feet in length and only three feet high at the highest point. She hid there for seven years!

In 1861, Jacobs wrote a book entitled, "Incidents in the life of a slave girl written by herself." In it she tells the story of her work to help an older black man, a slave like her, learn to read so he could reach for a greater reward for himself at the end of his life. In Jacob's own words of her time:

Quote: "I knew an old black man, whose piety and childlike trust in God were beautiful to witness. At fifty-three years old he joined the Baptist church. He had a most earnest desire to learn to read. He thought he should know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible. He came to me, and begged me to teach him. He said he could not pay me, for he had no money; but he would bring me nice fruit when the season for it came. I asked him if he didn't know it was contrary to law; and that slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read. This brought the tears into his eyes. "Don't be troubled, Uncle Fred," said I. "I have no thoughts of refusing to teach you. I only told you of the law, that you might know the danger, and be on your guard."

He thought he could plan to come three times a week without its being suspected. I selected a quiet nook, where no intruder was likely to penetrate, and there I taught him his A, B, C. Considering his age, his progress was astonishing. As soon as he could spell in two syllables he wanted to spell out words in the Bible. The happy smile that illuminated his face put joy into my heart. After spelling out a few words he paused, and said, "Honey, it 'pears when I can read dis good book I shall be nearer to God. White man is got all de sense. He can larn easy. It ain't easy for ole black man like me. I only want to read dis book, dat I may know how to live; den I hab no fear 'bout dying."

I tried to encourage him by speaking of the rapid progress he had made. "Hab patience, child," he replied. "I larns slow." At the end of six months he had read through the New Testament, and could find any text in it." :End Quote

## The Freedmen's Schools

Later in her life, after achieving her freedom, Jacobs taught school for former slaves in what were called the Freedmen's Schools. These schools were set up after the Civil War when the U. S. Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands as the primary agency for reconstruction. This agency was placed under the jurisdiction of the War Department and was popularly known as the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau provided education for freed former slaves engaging teachers who were primarily from voluntary organizations such as the American Missionary Association. Collectively these organizations became known as Freedmen's Aid Societies. Between 1862 and 1872, fifty-one anti-slavery societies, involving some 2,500 teachers and over 2,000 schools, were conducting education for freedmen. The Freedmen's Bureau was disbanded in 1872.

In the Freedmen's Schools it was not unusual for both children and their parents to be taught reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic in the same classroom at the same time. This was an early form of "family literacy" education.

Special textbooks were developed for the Freedmen's Schools that emphasized practical affairs of life and the instilling of positive values. For instance, a lesson from *The Freedman's Second Reader*, published by the Boston wing of the American Tract Society in 1865 first presents a list of words for sight reading instruction, but with some attention to phonics (e.g., What letter is silent in hoe?). It shows a drawing of an African-American family gathered around a table listening while the father reads. Beneath the drawing the text says:

### "THE FREEDMAN'S HOME

See this home! How neat, how warm,  
how full of cheer it looks! It seems as  
if the sun shone in there all the day long.  
But it takes more than the light of the sun  
to make a home bright all the time. Do  
you know what it is? It is love."

Developing positive self-image and promoting religious faith was also a purpose of many of the Freedmen's Schools educators. As an example of how self-concept development and religious beliefs were approached, *The Freedman's Third Reader* includes a story about the poet Phyllis Wheatley. Like the example above, the lesson begins with a list of sight words. Then below that is a drawing of Phyllis Wheatley and this is followed by a brief story which tells how Wheatley was brought to the United States from Africa in 1761, who bought her as a slave, and her appearance when purchased. The story concludes: "The life of Phillis Wheatley gives most interesting proof of the power of talents and virtues, crowned with "the pearl of great price," – the love of Christ, - to raise one from the lowest position to the notice and the esteem of the wise and good."

In her life of writing and teaching, Harriet Jacobs, the former slave girl, helped many slaves and freedmen achieve the freedom to worship that comes by being able to read one's chosen spiritual and religious materials.

## References

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## **FREEDOM FROM WANT**

The Functionality of Literacy: Lessons From India

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and up to the present India has struggled to move millions of adults from illiteracy to literacy. This brief note calls attention to the work of four adult educators who have worked in India and contributed to contemporary ideas about adult literacy education.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Welthy Honsinger Fisher (1879-1980),  
And Frank C. Laubach (1884-1970)

In the 1930's in the villages around his own home Mahtma Gandhi promoted the teaching of literacy along with basic education in crafts, health, and preparation of the masses for political freedom.

On December 14, 1947 Welthy Honsinger Fisher, from the United States, sat with Gandhi in India reminiscing about times and hopes they had shared. As they parted, he took her hands and said, "When you come back to live in India, go to the villages and help them. India is the village." Just a year later, on January 30, 1948 Gandhi was dead from an assassin's bullet.

In 1952 Frank C. Laubach from the United States was invited to India to help in preparing materials and simple teaching techniques for adult literacy work. Welthy Fisher was asked to instruct the first group of trainees using the new methods and materials prepared by Laubach.

The first job was to produce charts of the Hindi language. Choosing from Laubach's 2,000 common household words, flipbooks made by Tagore for new literates, and a word list used by British government institutes, the teaching group organized by Fisher and Laubach made up their own vocabulary. Some members fanned out to villages to study what the villagers wanted most to learn about. The answer was agriculture, religion and, surprisingly, movies of which they had only heard but wanted to know more.

The objective from the start was "functional literacy." Villagers were taught not only to read and write, but through reading and writing to understand and face the problems and responsibilities of living. For instance, in an early version of what today is called "health literacy", one lesson in Laubach's materials was:

“Stop Mosquitos”

Mosquitoes carry malaria. Malaria makes many people very sick. Malaria may make you sick. It may make your child very sick.

The best way to stop malaria is to kill the mosquitos.

Mosquitoes grow in still water. In the Little streams and the lakes the mosquitos make their home. They like to live in The swamps too. Etc.”

## Malcolm Adiseshiah (1910-1994) and The Functionality of Literacy

Malcolm Adiseshiah was born in India. I worked with him while he served as President of UNESCO's International Jury that selected UNESCO's annual literacy prizes for meritorious work in adult literacy education. At one meeting of the Jury he mentioned that as a young man he had taught literacy to adults in India using Laubach's "Each One Teach One" approach. After that, he went to university and became an economist. For many years he served as a high level member of the United Nation's Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) management team. During this time he advocated for adult literacy education and in September of 1975 at the International Symposium for Literacy in Persepolis, Iran he delivered a paper entitled: Functionalities of Literacy.

In this paper he argued that the "functionality of literacy" is a relationship between an independent variable, in this case literacy, and various dependent variables. In general, and stated as an equation, which is in the tradition of economist's reasoning, some important Outcome = a function of Literacy; that is,  $O=f(L)$ .

In his paper Adiseshiah went on to discuss at length literacy's functionality to work, gender, age, individual and social values, and the fight for social justice. Later, in the work of the Literacy Prize Jury, the "functionality of literacy" came to have two meanings. One referred to the teaching of literacy in the types of functional contexts that Mahatma Gandhi, Welthy Fisher, and Frank Laubach had envisioned. The other meaning referred to the multiple outcomes that the acquisition of literacy could produce as Adiseshiah had formulated in his concept of the functionality of literacy.

It became a common practice from the late 1970s for the Jury in reviewing candidatures for literacy prizes to look for evidence that literacy was not taught in some abstract sense but rather in the functional contexts that adults could relate to and use. Attention was taken to notice if application documents referred to some of the multiplier effects that were achieved in the programs. In this regard, it was considered especially important to look for examples of how the programs had approached the functionality of gender, specifically the inclusion of women and their concerns.

Today the international community has once again emphasized the functionality of literacy education for women, and the United Nations Literacy Decade activities for the year 2004 are operating under the theme of issues of gender.

### Reference

The section on Gandhi, Fisher & Laubach is based on edited extracts from a biography of Welthy Honsinger Fisher available on the internet:  
<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/RMAFWeb/Documents/Awardee/Biography/whf01bio.htm>

Adiseshiah, M. S. (1976). Functionalities of Literacy. In: Leon Bataille (Ed.). A turning point for literacy: Adult education for development: The spirit and declaration of Persepolis. Proceedings of the International Symposium for Literacy, Persepolis, Iran 3 to 8 September 1975. New York: Pergamon Press.

## **FREEDOM FROM FEAR**

Liberatory, Participatory, Learner-centered, Adult Literacy Education

Millions of adults and their families around the world live in constant fear that they will not have adequate water, food, health care and security for their very lives. Many live in

conditions of economic and political oppression, and they may perceive that they have little chance in changing their lives in any significant manner. For this reason they may elect to stay away from literacy classes. They see no use for literacy in their lives.

### Paulo Freire (1921-1997): Pedagogy of the Oppressed

To instill a feeling of confidence in the adult peasants and other oppressed folk with whom he worked, Freire developed an approach to education aimed at helping adults liberate themselves from the oppression of others. To do this he first concentrated on teaching adults to “read the world” so they could then “read the word.” By “reading the world” he meant helping adults understand the differences between the world of nature and the world of culture. Nature is made by natural forces and is not subject to change by humans. Culture on the other hand is made by humans and can be changed by humans. We “read the world” to know what is nature and what is culture. Oppressive conditions are cultural and hence capable of being changed by humans.

Literacy is a technology for helping humans change the cultural contexts in which they live so that they can achieve social justice and is hence worthwhile learning. This line of reasoning was to motivate adults to learn to read and write. To start the process, Freire introduced the use of “multiple literacies,” though he did not call his practice that. But he used pictures that adult literacy students “read” to distinguish what in the picture was due to nature and what was due to culture, i.e., human actions. In discussing the pictures, the adults demonstrated that they possessed a lot of knowledge about the world, including both nature and culture. This knowledge was drawn on in teaching reading.

Freire listened to the adult learners discuss pictures depicting various situations and then chose words that the students used to start the process of teaching literacy. Words with a lot of emotional meaning, such as “favela” (slum) were selected to teaching decoding of the written language. The word was first discussed, along with a picture of a situation denoted by the word. Then the word was broken into syllables –FA-VE-LA. This was continued until the word could be read (decoded) fluently. This method of “reading the world” and then “reading the word” was used extensively to build on the knowledge that adults possessed and to teach them to read the language that they used to express their knowledge. Then new knowledge was introduced to stimulate adults to take actions to change their oppressive situations.

Freire contrasted this learner-centered, participatory approach in which the adults helped determine the content and direction of their own education with the more traditional, school-centered education in which teachers determine the content and direction of education and attempt to deposit and “bank” knowledge in learner’s minds even if they do not understand the value of the new knowledge.

### The REFLECT Approach to Adult Literacy Education

In 1975 Paulo Freire was awarded a UNESCO Literacy Prize for his work on the pedagogy of the oppressed. Over a quarter century later, in 2003, a non-governmental organization called the International Reflect Circle (CIRAC) was awarded a UNESCO literacy prize for its work which built upon the work of Freire. The acronym REFLECT stands for Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques.

The REFLECT approach to adult literacy development makes use of “multiple literacies”, much as did Freire in using pictures and other graphic tools to help adults “read the world.” To assist adults in capturing their own knowledge the REFLECT teachers show them how to make maps of their communities, construct matrices, flow



charts, and other graphics to analyze their needs and assist them in arguing for needed services and social justice.

REFLECT makes use of internet technologies and has formed an international network of some 350 organizations and individuals in 60 nations to facilitate sustainable community development using a participatory and democratic process of reflection by adults in the development of their own literacy education.

#### References

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. NY: Seabury Press

O'Malley, B. (2003, April). Voices of change: In Reflect programmes in India, learners are using literacy to challenge those who keep them poor. *UNESCO the new Courier*, pp. 60-61.

## **PART 2. CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS IN ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION**

### **ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Next year marks the initiation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. In adult literacy education sustainable development has at least two perspectives: one is the need for programs that lead to the sustained development of literacy outside the classroom or tutoring session. The second is the need for content in adult literacy instruction that considers the importance of pursuing development in the present in such a manner that it does not harm development by future generations.

#### *Cora Wilson Stewart (1875-1958) and Sustaining Literacy Development*

In the United States, a leading pioneer of adult literacy education, Cora Wilson Stewart, addressed both of these perspectives in the Moonlight Schools of Kentucky from 1911 to the 1930s. First, she recognized that for adults to continue their literacy development it would be necessary for them to engage in reading and writing outside the classroom. So she created materials with reading and writing activities that were related directly to the lives of adults outside the classroom, such as on the farm, health, parenting, and other topics. She also prepared a newspaper so adults could learn to read “real life” materials.

Sixty years after Stewart’s work research confirmed the value of her approach using “real life” materials. One study found that seven weeks after leaving a job-related reading training program and entering into work adults retained some 86 percent of their gains in job-related reading but only 40 percent of their general reading gains (Sticht, 1975). This suggests that their job-related reading skills were largely sustained by using them on their jobs, but the academic, general reading skills were not used as much and were hence not sustained as much. Additional research at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2000) found that adults in literacy classes that used “authentic,” “real world” materials engaged in more literacy activities outside the classroom than did adults instructed in classes using materials of an “academic” nature.

#### *Adult Literacy Education for Sustainable Development For Future Generations*

Stewart also addressed the issue of teaching for sustainable development of the environment so that future generations could meet their needs. For instance, in one lesson in her *Country Life Readers: First Book*, she addressed the need for preserving farm lands (Stewart, 1915). Using a dialogue approach she wrote:

“Look at the little brook!  
It runs down the hill.  
See, it is full of mud.”  
“Yes, it is taking away the soil. ...”

Then Stewart told how to conserve soil:

“Run and tell the farmer that the brook is stealing his soil.”  
“The farmer knows it.”  
“Then why does he not come and stop it?”  
“The farmer is too lazy and shiftless. With care he could keep his soil.  
He could sow this hill in grass and use it as a pasture. ... There are many  
ways to stop the brook from stealing the soil.”

While perhaps eschewing Stewart’s rather direct method of addressing the shortcomings of farmers who do not conserve the ecology for the benefit of future generations, it is important that adult literacy programs focus upon concerns for sustainable development.

#### References & Resources

Purcell-Gates, V., Degener, S., Jakobson, E., & Soler, M. (2000, November). Affecting change in literacy practices of adult learners: Impact of two dimensions of instruction. Report #17. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

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For information regarding the United Nations Literacy and Sustainable Development Decades see the Education pages at [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org).

### **LIFE CYCLES EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In 1980 I gave a presentation to the National Academy of Education meeting in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Later I prepared a report based on the presentation. Entitled “Literacy and Human Resources Development at Work: Investing in the Education of Adults to Improve the Educability of Children (Sticht, 1983). In the report I argued that although millions of adults with poor basic skills are employed, they are nonetheless in need of increasing their literacy to increase the productivity of workplaces. I also argued that a body of research existed to suggest that more highly educated parents transmit literacy intergenerationally via oral language skills and the modeling of literacy skills. Therefore if we could find ways to provide education for adults we might get double value from education dollars because investing in the education of adults could improve the educability of their children. Later I referred to this as getting “double duty dollars.”

This intergenerational “Life Cycles” policy perspective has been expressed by Rosa Maria Torres (2003) in an online internet article. In this article she maintains, “Adult Basic Education and Learning (ABLE) cannot continue to be viewed in isolation, as a separate educational goal ... but rather as part of the overall education, training and

learning system and policy at national and international level. ...To educate children, it is essential to educate adults, not only (illiterate, poor) parents and caregivers (including teachers) but adults in general. ...it is adults and the adult society who make the critical decisions that affect children's well-being and development, at home, at school.... This is the importance of educating adults, for their own sake and for the sake of children, for the present and for future generations. ...In fact, as we have argued elsewhere (Torres 1995a), the children's right to education should include the right to educated parents."

Recently, Feinstein, Duckworth, & Sabates (2004) of the London-based Center for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning published a research study which supports the Life Cycles policy. In their report they state that: "The intergenerational transmission of educational success is a key driver of the persistence of social class differences and a barrier to equality of opportunity. ...Parenting skills in terms of warmth, discipline and educational behaviours are all major factors in the formation of school success. ...We conclude that the intergenerational transmission of educational success is a key element in equality of opportunity."

### Mother's Education, Family Literacy and Life Cycles Education Policy

Cora Wilson Stewart (1875-1958) of Kentucky, is regarded by some as the founder of modern adult literacy education in the United States. Her work in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that of family literacy educators and those espousing Life Cycles Education policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century find an intercept in the understanding of the importance of the literacy of parents, especially mothers, on the educational achievement of children.

In 1930 Stewart published a book entitled, "*Mother's First Book: A First Reader for Home Women.*" In the introduction to the book, Stewart explains that, "This book is a first reader for women who cannot read or write....The lessons are centered around the home and the daily activities. Based as they are on simple everyday tasks – the care of the baby, cleanliness, proper foods for the family, cooperation with the school and similar subjects – they aim not only at teaching women to read and write, but at leading them to better home practices and higher ideals in their home and community life." (p. 5)

The idea that mothers need to be literate and that through the intergenerational transfer of skills and attitudes the mother's education can influence the subsequent educational achievement of their children, is a foundational belief of contemporary family literacy programs. It is also consistent with the views of those, like Torres, above, who are calling for a Life Cycles policy for education that argues for equal educational opportunities for children and adults.

### Life Cycles Education and Sustainable Development

The World Commission on Environment and Development's (the Brundtland Commission) report *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1987 <http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html>) defines sustainable development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

However, illiterate or poorly literate adults generally cannot meet their own needs for literacy and, because they cannot engage to a significant degree in the intergenerational transfer of literacy, they compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs for literacy. For this reason, sustainable development in adult literacy education includes:

- (1) Adult literacy education within a socio-cultural context for sustaining and further developing initial literacy ability (e.g., post-literacy; lifelong/lifewide education).
- (2) Adult literacy education that develops an understanding of and commitment to the concepts of sustainable development in environmental, economic, social, and political policies and practices within communities, states, and globally.
- (3) Adult literacy education within a policy and practice framework that recognizes and promotes the intergenerational transfer of literacy from adults (especially mothers) to children, i.e., a life cycles education perspective for literacy development.

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## **MULTIPLE LITERACIES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Generally, basic literacy in most alphabet languages involves teaching learners that the written language is, in many respects, a graphic representation of the spoken language. While learning to use the written language as a substitute for listening and speaking is the primary goal in acquiring the literacy of the alphabet, a secondary goal for literacy development is to learn to combine the written language with the unique features of graphic technology to develop tools for aiding communication, thinking and reasoning for developing new knowledge. Specifically, beyond reading and writing, sifting through and organizing the vast bodies of information being developed daily in contemporary knowledge societies demands that adult basic skills learners develop “multiple literacies” skills for using graphic tools that help them render large amounts of information comprehensible and usable (Sticht, 2002).

### The REFLECT Multiple Literacies Approach to Adult Literacy Education

As noted earlier, the acronym REFLECT stands for Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. The REFLECT approach to adult literacy development makes use of “multiple literacies” such as drawing and “reading” pictures and other graphic tools to help adults in capturing their own knowledge. Working primarily in developing nations, the REFLECT learning facilitators show adults how to make maps of their communities, construct matrices, flow charts, and other graphics tools to analyze their needs and assist them in arguing for needed services and social justice. This clarifies the use of graphics in teaching the mapping of oral language onto written language in learning reading and writing.

## Using Multiple Literacies in an Industrialized Nation

In a program of instruction in the United States developed for adults with reading skills from the 4th to the 7th grade levels on a standardized test, students were taught how to analyze paragraphs of complex information and to synthesize the information into new knowledge displays using different forms of graphic tools (Sticht, 1978).

To transform the information from a paragraph form to matrix form, students had to analyze the paragraph into its different parts, and then synthesize the information by constructing a matrix with labeled columns and cells containing the appropriate information. In the early stages of learning to use the matrix as a tool for information analysis and synthesis, students were provided with paragraphs and matrices that were mostly already completed. Students then went on to complete the matrix. Over practice trials, using different types of content, the information in the matrix was reduced and the students had to complete more of the unfinished matrix. Finally, students were simply given paragraphs to analyze and synthesize into a matrix of their own construction.

The matrix is a basic form of graphic tool for conducting a classification analysis of a complex body of information and synthesizing it into a more easily comprehended graphic display. In a study with 36 students in the adult literacy program who read between the 4th and 7th grades, it was found that pre- and post-tests scores on the matrix construction test increased on average from 65 to 95 percent correct following about five hours of instruction per week for four to six weeks.

In the same program, students were also taught to read detailed procedural instructions, analyze them and synthesize them into a new graphic form – a flow chart. Pre- and post-test scores for 36 students went from an average of 37 to 61 percent correct on the flow chart performance assessment in 20 to 30 hours of instruction spread over 4 to 6 weeks.

These data indicate that even adults with weak reading and writing skills can acquire, in a relatively brief period of time, considerable knowledge of multiple literacies for information processing and communication and use them to develop analysis and synthesis skills to render complex information more understandable and usable. It seems likely that with the rapid expansion of knowledge, the need for analytical skills and the ability to use graphic displays to synthesize the products of analysis into more communicable and usable formats take on added importance as components of the curriculum in basic skills for adult literacy students.

The processing of information from the types of graphic devices discussed here played a major role in the International Adult Literacy Survey of the mid-1990s, and a second survey is presently in the development stage. Given the importance of analysis and synthesis skills in international comparisons of literacy, it is important that adult basic skills teachers include the teaching of such “multiple literacies” in their programs.

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## **GLOBALIZATION AND THE URGENT NEED FOR ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION**

The concept of “globalization” has generally been interpreted within the context of international economics and refers to the world wide integration of markets, economies, communications and cultures. More broadly, the term has come to refer to the global movement of people, languages, information, knowledge, cultural beliefs, ways of thinking & behaving, religions, institutions, & organizations.

From the economic point of view, globalization has been widely discussed and debated within such forums as the United Nations and the World Bank in terms of what it has done in developing nations to reduce poverty and produce greater wealth within less developed nations and to produce less differences in the standards of living among developing and richer nations. Additionally, the downside of globalization has been discussed in terms of how it has increased inequality of wealth between socio-economic classes within a given nation and between nations that have benefited and those that have not benefited from the effects of globalization.

Within developed nations, such as Canada, the United States, United Kingdom, and other members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), issues of globalization have focussed upon the movement of jobs from the industrialized to the less developed nations and what this has done and will do to the job markets in the developed nations, and the issues raised by the immigration of millions of people of widely differing language and social backgrounds from less developed nations into the developed nations.

### **The Urgent Need for Adult Literacy Education in Labor Markets**

Within all the nations of the world, the consequences of globalization have produced an urgent need for adult literacy education. Within developing nations, moving into the world marketplace and benefiting from its economy requires that illiterate and poorly literate adults receive literacy and education at the beginning literacy, post-literacy and lifelong learning stages if they are to develop sustainable literacy skills and volumes of knowledge that will permit them to utilize the worldwide communications technologies that are so rapidly changing the distribution of information and knowledge underlying new economies.

Within developed nations, “outsourcing” of work to developing nations across the wide spectrum of jobs from unskilled to highly skilled is resulting in the continuing need for adult literacy education at levels ranging from beginning to advanced. The need is for focusing education and training upon jobs that have a low probability of being outsourced. This will include most jobs that are “hands-on” or that require immediate, close contact with other people. Such work commands levels of communication and interpersonal abilities that many native born and immigrant adults may lack and for which adult literacy educators can provide programming.

## Functional Context Education for Meeting Globalization Literacy Needs

Following Functional Context Education principles, which call for integrating basic skills education with important content area knowledge and skills, more rapid progress can be made in achieving sustainable development than is typical of sequential programs in which basic skills are first raised to some assumed necessary level before the adult can obtain the education and training needed. Functional Context Principles can be applied to sustainable development activities such as:

1. education on microenterprise development so adults can learn how to become entrepreneurs and economically self-sufficient,
2. job skills training so that displaced workers in unskilled jobs can be efficiently cross-trained into better paying jobs that do not suffer from outsourcing;
3. financial literacy so that once employment at a self-sufficiency level is achieved adults can be better consumers in various domains and manage their money better so they can begin to invest in wealth accrual,
4. health literacy so that individuals and families can take better care of themselves and access affordable, competent medical care;
5. workplace literacy so that employed and under employed workers can acquire skills for upward mobility or transfer into better paying jobs.

### Globalization and The United Nations Literacy Decade

The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2013) has as its primary theme Literacy as Freedom and as mentioned at the outset of this paper, in January of 1941 President Roosevelt gave a speech in which he argued that peoples of the world were entitled to Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech and Expression; Freedom of Worship; Freedom from Want; and Freedom From Fear.

Without literacy, hundreds of millions of adults will not secure these Four Freedoms and their lives and those of their loved ones will suffer. For this reason governments need to pledge sufficient resources to permit adult literacy educators to develop and sustain the educational systems they need to help turn on the light of literacy for those millions of adults, and their families, who remain in the dark shadows of globalization.

Governments must also understand that they must provide the extensive and intensive social services that will permit adults in need of education in literacy and economic development to actually seek out and participate in this education. That is, governments around the world must recognize that hundreds of millions of adults will need to gain an appreciable degree of freedom from fear and freedom from want before they can find their way into programs that will help them learn to tolerate freedom of worship for others and to seek freedom of voice and expression for themselves. It seems likely that without literacy and freedom globalization will ultimately fail to eradicate the social inequalities within and among nations that sustain a world without peace.

### Resources

For more on globalization see resources online at <http://econ.worldbank.org/prr/subpage.php?sp=2477>

For more on Functional Context Education and sustainable, economically self-sufficient education and training for underserved adults see Wider Opportunities for Women's (WOW) Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project online at <http://www.wowonline.org>

The LITERACY FREES THE WORLD Tour  
A Vision of the Future Through a Prism of the Past

Following is a chronological listing of dates, places, and contact persons who participated in making the arrangements for the Literacy Frees the World Tour. Their efforts made the Tour both possible and successful.

1. May 4: Nevada, Reno, International Reading Association Meeting, Contact Annual Conference at [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)
2. May 6: British Columbia, Castlegar, Canada, Contact Yvonne Chard at [yvonne.chard@dccnet.com](mailto:yvonne.chard@dccnet.com)
3. June 11: Pennsylvania, West Middlesex, Contact Joy Zamierowski at [jzamierowski@stairwaysbh.org](mailto:jzamierowski@stairwaysbh.org)
4. July 27: Kansas, Manhattan, Contact Diane Whitley at [dwhitley@ksbor.org](mailto:dwhitley@ksbor.org)
5. July 28: Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Contact Brenda Solomon at [bss1268@okstate.edu](mailto:bss1268@okstate.edu)
6. August 10: Texas, Austin, Contact Donna Bentley at [valctx@yahoo.com](mailto:valctx@yahoo.com)
7. August 16: New Jersey, Atlantic City, Contact Claudia Merkel-Keller at [Claudia.Merkel-Keller@dol.state.nj.us](mailto:Claudia.Merkel-Keller@dol.state.nj.us)
8. August 24: Maine, Orono, Contact Evelyn Bealieu at [evelyn.bealieu@umit.maine.edu](mailto:evelyn.bealieu@umit.maine.edu)
9. September 10: Ohio, Columbus, Contact Maureen O'Rourke at [morourke@ohioliteracynetwork.org](mailto:morourke@ohioliteracynetwork.org)
10. September 16: Michigan, Detroit, Contact Daphne Ntiri at [dntiri@aol.com](mailto:dntiri@aol.com)
11. September 21: Louisiana, New Orleans, Contact Peg Reese at [preese@loyno.edu](mailto:preese@loyno.edu)
12. October 8: Mitchell, South Dakota, Contact Kim Olson at [kimo.cclc@midconetwork.com](mailto:kimo.cclc@midconetwork.com)
13. October 18: London, England, Contact Ursula Howard at [u.howard@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:u.howard@ioe.ac.uk)