

# Meeting the Literacy Challenge: A Federal Perspective

---

ANNE J. MATHEWS  
ADRIENNE CHUTE  
CAROL A. CAMERON

An undetected hearing defect kept Michael White from learning to read as a child. When asked to read aloud in school, "I'd pretend to have something wrong with my eyes and I'd cry." As an adult he couldn't read well enough to decipher signs. "I was like a dog," he says, "I knew my way home and how to get food."<sup>1</sup>

THIS STATEMENT BY AN ILLITERATE MAN conveys some of the feelings of inadequacy and frustration of not being able to read and write, sentiments that are shared by millions of illiterates across the country. Many individuals and organizations are joining the fight against illiteracy. This article focuses on federal efforts to fight illiteracy through library programs.

Two federal programs have supported literacy projects in libraries for the past two decades: the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) Title I Library Services Program, and the Library Research and Demonstration Program. This article describes some of the projects supported by these two programs, examines current federal library-literacy activities, and discusses ideas for the future.

---

Anne J. Mathews is Director of Library Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.; Adrienne Chute is a Program Officer, Library Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.; and Carol A. Cameron is a Program Officer, Library Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND ON LITERACY UNDER LIBRARY R&D AND  
LSCA TITLE I

There are many ways to define literacy and estimate the number of illiterates. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett gave this definition in testimony in December 1985: "In functional terms [literacy] is the ability to read, write, speak, listen, compute and solve problems in situations that confront adults in everyday life." He estimates that there are 17 to 21 million Americans age twenty and above who are illiterate based on a 1982 Census Bureau English-language proficiency test.<sup>2</sup>

The Library Research and Demonstration Program, Title II-B of the Higher Education Act (HEA Title II-B, Library R&D), and the Library Services Program, Title I of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA Title I) have been the most consistent sources of federal funds for library literacy projects in the past two decades. The Library Programs (LP) office, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), in the U.S. Department of Education (ED) administers both of these grant programs. Although both the Library R&D and the LSCA Title I programs have supported library literacy projects for approximately twenty years, they have done so on a project-by-project basis without any particular emphasis. The grantees—state and local libraries, universities, and other library organizations—have determined the direction of individual projects.

The two programs use different methods of making awards. The Library R&D program is a discretionary grant and contract program. Libraries and other organizations develop proposals and apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education for funding under the program. LSCA Title I, on the other hand, is a state formula grant program. Each state receives a proportionate share of the amount of money appropriated by Congress for the program and develops its own activities in keeping with the statute and regulations. Local libraries design their own projects and apply for funding to their state library agency.

## THE EARLY YEARS—LITERACY UNDER LIBRARY R&amp;D

The Library R&D program has funded literacy projects since 1967, its first year of operation. Over \$1.4 million supported eight literacy projects from 1967 to 1985, about 5 percent of the total appropriation for the program during that period. Most of the literacy projects were funded between 1967 and 1976 with 1972 being the year of heaviest support—\$318,441 (12 percent of the 1972 fiscal year [FY] appropria-

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

tion) awarded to three literacy projects. In 1976 the program changed its emphasis to focus on projects that could help the library community adapt new technological developments to library services. The program began to emphasize literacy projects again in 1979.

The following is a summary of some of the early literacy projects under the Library R&D program, listed in chronological order. These projects cluster around several themes. The strongest emphases were adult basic education (ABE) and services for new readers. Other themes included literacy materials, planning and cooperation, and the development of manuals.

### EARLY LITERACY PROJECTS UNDER THE LIBRARY R&D PROGRAM

—*Library Materials in Service to the Adult New Reader (1967-1971)*.

The University of Wisconsin—Madison conducted a five-phase research project to develop criteria for evaluating materials that were available to the adult beginning reader. Twelve adult literacy programs in twenty-seven cities were surveyed and interviews were conducted with approximately 500 readers. The study provided a descriptive analysis of adult new readers' social characteristics and activities and their reading behaviors. One result of the study was the development of a checklist giving the criteria for a qualitative and quantitative analysis of adult literacy print materials.

—*The Right to Read for Adults: An Investigation of the Library's Role in a Cooperative Venture with the Model Neighborhood Program (1972)*. The Monroe County Library System in Rochester, New York designed the "Adult Right-to-Read" Project in cooperation with the Model Cities program and the Adult Basic Education Department of the City School District of Rochester. The project examined different ways to introduce people to library services. It used library facilities, materials, and staff and complemented an existing ABE program. The project trained staff, acquired materials, and emphasized cooperative efforts by the library, the Model Cities program, and the ABE program to show how cooperative efforts among agencies can provide efficient and effective services.

—*Cooperative Planning to Maximize Adult Basic Education Opportunities through Public Library Extension in Appalachian North Carolina (1972-1973)*. This project was designed by the Appalachian State University, the Maryland Technical Institute, and the Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library to improve the basic literacy

skills of dropouts and adults in three rural Appalachian counties. The project developed a means of measuring the strengths of various ABE strategies and established a profile of student personality factors and utilization patterns. An evaluation of the project indicators showed that: (1) libraries had little effect on the user in relation to literacy efforts; (2) a slight gain in self-concept was found in adults after several months of study in ABE programs; and (3) paraprofessional home visitors helped functional illiterates obtain basic coping skills.

- The Interrelating of Library and Basic Education Services for Disadvantaged Adults: A Demonstration of Four Alternative Working Models (1972-1973)*. This project at Morehead State University in Kentucky studied the relationship between the services of the public library and ABE. Demonstration projects in thirty-one communities in nine states were implemented and training sessions were conducted for public librarians. Some of the project findings were that outreach services and evening and weekend hours were important in providing services for disadvantaged adults; multimedia materials and advertising geared toward new readers were desirable; ABE classes in public libraries were an effective method of ensuring new library users; advisory boards involving undereducated adults were very important; and information and referral services filled a gap in community life.
- Research Reports—Ethnic Groups for Handbook on the Adult New Reader and His Readings (1973)*. The University of Wisconsin—Madison developed a handbook to be used as a guide to analyzing materials for new adult readers. The handbook emphasized materials for several ethnic groups.
- College Library Prototype Tutorial Program to Prepare Adults for College-Level Equivalency Program (CLEP) Examinations (1975)*. The Immaculate Heart College Library in Los Angeles, California developed a prototype tutorial program to prepare adults in the community for CLEP examinations. The project focused on adults who had the potential for getting a college degree but who were unaware of nontraditional avenues to enter college. The project used the college's library resources, faculty consultants, and graduate student tutors.
- Project to Develop a Manual on Programming for Literacy (1975)*. The American Library Association brought together nine librarians from public, school, and college libraries to develop a manual on planning and implementing local literacy programs. The project

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

also designed a program to demonstrate techniques of implementing literacy projects using the manual as a guide.

—*Libraries in Literacy (1979-1980)*. Contract Research Corporation conducted a survey of literacy programs in libraries to develop a base of information on the nature and extent of literacy activities taking place in libraries across the country. Five types of libraries were surveyed: community college libraries, public libraries, public school libraries, state library agencies, and state institutional libraries. The major findings were that libraries were generally reactive in responding to the needs of the functionally illiterate and that many were unaware of the needs in their communities and of other organizations that had literacy education programs. The study also found that libraries that were involved in literacy education were providing a wide range of services and that most literacy programs were in libraries in major urban areas.

In the 1980s the focus of federal support for library literacy projects shifted from the Library R&D program to the LSCA Title I program.

### THE 1980s—LITERACY UNDER LSCA TITLE I

LSCA Title I has funded literacy projects in libraries since the 1970 reauthorization of LSCA when Congress added several priority areas, including services to the disadvantaged. The first LSCA Title I literacy projects were funded under this priority area. In the most recent reauthorization of LSCA in 1984, Congress increased its emphasis on literacy making it a separate priority area under Title I and adding Title VI, a new literacy program, to the act.

Many states have given literacy projects increased support since 1980. The amount of federal, state, and local funds spent on LSCA Title I literacy projects has almost tripled in the past five years, increasing from \$1.5 million in FY 1980 to \$4.2 million in FY 1984. In that same time, the number of projects increased almost two-and-a-half times, from thirty-nine in 1980 to ninety-seven in 1984.

According to the Contract Research Corporation (CRC) Education and Human Development, Inc. survey, *Libraries in Literacy*, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, 53 percent of public libraries in 1980 were actively involved in literacy projects.<sup>3</sup> The Contact Literacy Center in Nebraska reports that 467 public libraries are registered in their directory.<sup>4</sup>

The number of states with LSCA literacy projects has nearly doubled from twenty-six states in 1984 to forty-seven in 1986. Several states have developed particularly strong literacy programs. For example, in 1984 California committed \$2.5 million in LSCA funds to the cause of combatting illiteracy. Other states with a strong commitment include: Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

### **General Trends**

Between FYs 1982 and 1984, 250 LSCA literacy projects provided a broad range of literacy services including tutoring in numerous settings from bookmobiles to prisons; courses in English for new Americans; and a high interest/low vocabulary books-by-mail program. The trend was away from smaller projects with a low commitment of funds, such as purchasing literacy materials, to larger projects with higher support levels, such as statewide projects. Another trend was a decrease in adult basic education projects for those with some reading ability and an increase in activities for those with no reading skills. Also, English-as-a-second-language classes decreased and projects using technology increased.

### **Literacy Materials and Software—Current Developments**

The identification of appropriate literacy materials and the development of computer software for literacy programs are two key areas of activities for which LSCA Title I funds have been used since FY 1980.

#### *Materials*

A persistent problem in adult literacy programs has been the lack of basic low-level (grades 0-4) reading materials that have the appropriate interest level for adults. Literacy experts have found that materials developed for young adults can be used with adults and that materials developed for adults can be used with children, but that materials developed for children often do not work with adults. It is found that adults are motivated to learn to read when they can link reading to a personal goal such as getting a job, reading the Bible, learning about prenatal care, or getting a driver's license. Also, new adult readers want to blend in with other adults; therefore, it is important that materials look "adult" and not be placed in the children's area of the library.

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

Selecting materials for literacy programs involves the same judgments of quality as in selecting other library materials with an additional concern about how to determine the level of reading difficulty of a particular book. Many libraries use LSCA Title I funds to acquire and disseminate literacy materials. The following are examples of such projects.

An Ohio activity, "Project Learn," produced and disseminated throughout the state 700 copies of an annotated, highly selective (400 titles) bibliography titled "Books for Adult New Readers: A Selection Aid for Librarians." A key feature of "Project Learn" was that all titles written at the seventh-grade level and below were evaluated by a panel of public librarians, teachers in Adult Basic Education programs, literacy experts, and most importantly, adult new readers before being included in the bibliography.

Connecticut devised a creative approach to the delivery of appropriate materials in their project, "Books by Mail Promotes Adult Functional Literacy." The project made materials available to students and teachers regardless of where they lived in the state. In cooperation with Literacy Volunteers of Connecticut, the project staff selected, annotated, and prepared a minicatalog of high interest/low reading level and English-as-a-second-language materials. The catalog was distributed to literacy volunteers throughout Connecticut. Seasonal supplements to the catalog are also planned.

Maryland's Literacy Resource Center took another approach to providing materials in a central location. Materials in the center were selected especially for adults whose skills were below fourth-grade level and for tutors. Material covers high interest/low level reading, phonics, grammar, basic math, English as a second language, survival, and coping skills. The center also provided assistance regarding teaching techniques and student/tutor motivation.

There is also a growing trend to develop literacy projects that match the culture and interests of the community from which the illiterate comes. While LSCA projects did not emphasize this trend, a few key elements of this type of community literacy approach were reflected in several projects. For example, the Broward County Division of Libraries in Florida developed its own literacy materials using volunteers to produce local literacy materials for projects and to publish literacy newsletters featuring student work.

### *Software*

Several LSCA Title I projects are developing software for use in computer-assisted literacy instruction programs. Software such as

PLATO—which offers testing, diagnosis, basic skills programs, drills, and retesting—is available for higher level readers such as those with eighth-grade reading levels or those preparing for the GED (General Education Degree), but adequate software for the basic level—grades 0-4—has been lacking.

In 1983 the Darlington County Library in South Carolina experimented with using microcomputers to assist illiterates learning to read. The project found that many commercially available software programs were too advanced for adult new readers. A computer program based on Laubach Literacy reading methods was developed in-house by two library staff members in cooperation with reading resource personnel. Students and tutors tested and evaluated the resulting software.

In 1984, another LSCA Title I project at the Jacob Edwards Library in Southbridge, Massachusetts had a computer-assisted literacy program that included materials for limited English-speaking persons since beginner computer software for the limited English-speaking was also lacking.

### **Program Approaches—Current Developments**

There are many program approaches used by literacy projects. Most LSCA Title I projects use the traditional one-to-one tutoring approach, though some LSCA Title I projects focus on community literacy and technology, the other two major types of approaches.

#### *One-to-One Tutoring Programs: A Model*

A number of the LSCA Title I projects have been quite successful in using the one-to-one tutoring approach. From our review of these projects over the past five years, we have put together a model of a successful one-to-one tutoring program. The model incorporates elements identified in LSCA Title I projects as key factors in their successes and some successful elements identified in a recent ED study, *Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*.<sup>4</sup> The elements fall into seven categories: (1) planning and administering literacy programs, (2) public and student recruitment, (3) volunteer recruitment and management, (4) tutor training, (5) materials and instructional methods, (6) evaluation, and (7) students. The source(s) from which the successful element was developed is indicated in parentheses.

#### **1. Planning and administering literacy programs:**

- A certified teacher or reading specialist in a key role in the project (Ohio, New York).



## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

- A full-time paid literacy coordinator to serve as the core around which the literacy volunteers are organized (Indiana, North Carolina).
  - Project planning that takes into account the fluctuating rates of enrollment, learners waiting, tutor recruitment and training, and that most projects require approximately three months' development to be ready to provide tutoring (California).
  - A community literacy partnership formed with adult education, social service agencies, other literacy groups, and the private sector (Indiana).
2. Publicity and student recruitment:
- Awareness that poor recruitment planning threatens the success of literacy programs if uncontrolled public service announcements create long waiting lists, or enrollment drops due to inaccurate program representation (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
  - Careful monitoring of phone styles since the first contact by illiterates is often made by phone (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
  - Radio, television talk shows, exhibits, and public speaking engagements that reach illiterates in the community. Creative approaches included advertising in the television supplement of local newspapers and on grocery bags (Oklahoma, Florida, Massachusetts).
  - Creative use of the private sector. For example, projects contacted local restaurants, bars, Laundromats, doctors, and optometrists to provide a brochure and to request permission to display a poster in their places of business. Literacy brochures also were used as food tray liners at fast food restaurants, placed in monthly welfare recipient checks and in food stamp offices; and posters were displayed on buses (Indiana, *Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
  - Former illiterates used to canvass neighborhoods or speak to community groups (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
3. Volunteer recruitment and management:
- Literacy volunteers recruited from the target community. Use of former illiterates to recruit students and volunteers. For example,

- Lois Gross, a former illiterate in Kentucky, recruited single-handedly 545 students and 456 tutors in one year (Florida, Kentucky).
- Volunteers recruited from many sectors—e.g., students, retired people, former illiterates, service clubs, and corporations—to meet the need for tutors as middle-class women, long the basis of the volunteer pool, become less available as volunteers (Illinois, New York, California).
  - Creative use of volunteers to support other project needs—e.g., child care and transportation for students, producing literacy materials, and fund raising (North Carolina).
  - Requirements for volunteers clarified by including specific expectations in a job description. For example, a volunteer might be interested to know that 60 percent of their volunteer time will be spent in direct tutoring and 40 percent in preparation and travel time (California).
  - Prospective volunteers and students interviewed to get a sense of their values and needs so that tutor and student are well matched (Illinois). (One tutor problem identified in an evaluation conducted by the Lutheran Church Women was that tutors sometimes talked too much and overwhelmed their students who were not used to verbalizing their thoughts.)
  - Monthly calls to each volunteer made to provide support and encouragement (Florida). (An evaluation conducted by the Lutheran Church Women found that 50 percent of tutors never got to the first tutoring session.)
4. Tutor training:
- Basic training for tutors, followed by periodic in-service training, to keep tutors up-to-date. A tutor training handbook developed for the project and a videotape of tutor training produced to serve as a refresher for tutors and to lend to groups in the community (North Carolina, Indiana, South Carolina).
  - A cadre of available trained tutors so students who ask for help don't have to wait for a tutor to be trained (North Carolina).
5. Materials and instructional methods:
- Lesson plans and individualized learning plans developed and used. A variety of teaching methods were used to adapt to the learning style of the student (North Carolina).
  - Development by project of its own locally oriented materials (Florida).

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

- Materials selected carefully and included in a catalog (Ohio).
  - Literacy materials evaluated and restocked regularly (North Carolina).
6. Evaluation:
- A needs assessment conducted prior to the beginning of the project with continual evaluation during the project (Illinois).
  - Testing of students before, during, and after literacy training to evaluate progress (New York, North Carolina).
  - Tutors evaluated by students as well as supervisors (Illinois). (An evaluation by the Lutheran Church Women found that some *tutors* were unable to read a tutoring manual written at the eighth-grade level.)
  - Student termination tracked and feedback used to improve the program (New York). (Projects have identified high dropout rates due to boredom with materials and lack of support—e.g., lack of child care and transportation services.)
7. Students:
- Students set their own goals and immediate attention is given to these goals. Instruction stops when the student decides (New Jersey, Ohio).
  - Orientation with peer counselors provided for new students to allow learners to express their concerns regarding returning to school and to allow fellow students to describe how they overcame obstacles (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
  - Group activities provided for students and former students to discuss problems and thoughts even if literacy training itself is one-to-one (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*).
  - Tutors develop supportive relationships with students (New York). (A meaningful relationship with the tutor is cited almost universally by learners when asked why they remain in literacy programs.)
  - Tutoring provided at locations and times convenient for students (New Jersey, Ohio).
  - Student materials featured in literacy newsletter (South Carolina, Indiana).
  - Preadult basic education classes to ease the transition from one-to-one tutoring to a group learning situation (New York).

- Contact students who have “stopped out” temporarily and demonstrate that the adult is missed and a place will be held for his/her return. Many adults will come back, often with renewed purpose (*Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner’s Guide*).

### *Community Literacy Programs*

Sociologist David Harman of Hebrew University in Jerusalem advocates going even further than traditional one-to-one tutoring. “It’s not just an issue of instruction in reading. It’s a matter of cultural transformation. Illiteracy is rooted in culture....If you teach skills to a culture in which written language plays no part, they will not learn to read and write.”<sup>6</sup> Nina Wallerstein of the University of New Mexico is also a proponent of what she calls “community literacy.” This approach assumes that education is inseparable from students’ lives outside the classroom. Rather than making literacy the focus of a separate group, preexisting groups in the community are offered literacy training.<sup>7</sup>

Community literacy, translated into actual classroom practice, is a three-step process: listening to student concerns; converting student needs, problems, and strengths into lessons that can be used in literacy programs; and taking positive action to address the concerns. The success of students depends on their overcoming a lack of self-esteem and doubts of their ability to change or to bring about change. Low self-esteem can block learning, but when it is raised the emotional power behind this change can drive and inspire learning.<sup>8</sup>

Several libraries used LSCA Title I funds for library-based programs to support community literacy programs through information and referral services. CLIC (Community Library Information Center) in Prince George’s County, Maryland, for example, set up a service to help adult new readers identify and utilize community information resources relevant to their literacy needs. CLIC provided materials and information for adults enrolled in Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and other literacy programs in the county.

### *Technology Programs*

The primary focus of technological literacy projects under LSCA Title I was the interactive use of computers. Some literacy experts regard new technologies as the best hope of reaching 95 percent of illiterates not being reached by current programs.<sup>9</sup> One key component of several successful projects was that they did not use computers to replace the

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

human element in literacy training. Several projects noted, however, that computers provided great assistance by handling the more routine testing, record-keeping, and other paperwork for both tutors and students, allowing tutors to spend more time teaching.

In 1982 the Wilmington Library in Delaware used LSCA Title I funds for a very popular PLATO project that focused on patrons who tested between third- and eighth-grade reading levels. Participants were tested before they used basic skills programs, were counseled while they used the programs, and were retested after the program was completed.

Another project in the Peoria Public Library in Illinois is currently developing software for the Laubach method of teaching adults to read and is testing three premises:

1. That completion of the Laubach course can be accelerated by using computers to reinforce tutoring.
2. That volunteers can increase the number of students handled by using computers for the repetitive practice portion of the lessons.
3. That the availability of computers will attract students who might otherwise not acknowledge any handicap in reading skills, and will help retain these students in the program.

Videodisc technology is another area being explored. One approach uses a self-paced videodisc that presents pictures and sound. The student does not have to know how to type but merely touches the screen to indicate his response to the instructions.

In 1987 the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners plans to use LSCA Title I funds to experiment with cable television as a teaching medium. As they stated in their LSCA Annual Plan:

Research indicates that there is a need for literacy programming for grade levels of 0-4. There is also a need to experiment with library outreach to the target group who, for a number of reasons, including work schedules or personal embarrassment, cannot or will not take advantage of tutoring at the local library. At the same time, outreach is needed to supplement the tutoring effort conducted at the local public library.

Cable television offers an attractive means to reach people outside of the library environment. People could watch programming in the privacy of their own homes at times more convenient than those offered by the library and the pool of tutors. However, we have not found (in an international search) an adequate series of programs aimed at the 0-4 level for CATV broadcast. Therefore, we will develop a series of between six and twelve half-hour programs for levels 0-4 for broadcast by cable stations in communities in Massachusetts with a large population of the target group.<sup>10</sup>

## Service to Special Groups—Current Developments

Large segments of the functionally illiterate population are composed of subgroups with special needs that require specially designed literacy projects. The LSCA program has shown leadership in responding to these needs with projects designed especially for families, young adults, disabled, institutionalized, and limited English-speaking.

### *Family Literacy*

Literacy training begins at home. A 1986 U.S. Department of Education publication, *What Works*, outlines commonsense steps that families can take to provide a good education for their children. While one might know intuitively many of these ideas, each has the benefit of being validated through research. *What Works* gives the following recommendations for preliteracy training for families to use as guidelines in their children's education:

1. The best way for parents to help their children become better readers is to read to them—even when they are very young.
2. A good foundation in speaking and listening helps children become better readers.
3. Children who are encouraged to draw and scribble "stories" at an early age will later learn to compose more easily, more effectively, and with greater confidence than children who do not have this encouragement.
4. A good way to teach children simple arithmetic is to build on their informal knowledge. This is why learning to count everyday objects is an effective basis for early arithmetic lessons.
5. In order to enrich the "curriculum of the home," some parents: provide books, supplies, and a special place for studying; observe routines for meals, bedtime, and homework; and monitor the amount of time spent watching TV and doing after-school jobs.<sup>11</sup>

Some examples of family literacy activities in LSCA Title I projects follow. In 1983 Framingham Public Library in Massachusetts set up an attractive Early Literacy Center in the children's room, well stocked with carefully selected materials, including references for parents. A knowledgeable parent advisory committee met monthly to contribute ideas about the kinds of programming that would be beneficial to parents trying to assist in the development of their children's reading and writing skills.

Lawrence Township Public Library in Illinois established a summer literacy reading program in 1985 for first through fifth graders who met the minimum requirements for promotion to the next grade, but who had reading problems. In 1982 the Dekalb Library System in Decatur, Georgia set up a Homework Center in this low-income Atlanta

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

suburb where traditional services had been ineffective. An average of sixty-five students came each afternoon to the center for a quiet place to study and some personalized tutorial help from professional staff. They typed their reports on the center's typewriter, viewed education programs on the audiovisual equipment, and operated the center's Apple II computer, the same kind of computer used by Dekalb schools. School officials provided copies of computer programs that the children used in class.

### *Young Adults*

Young adults have special needs. Adolescence is often a period of confusion, strong emotions, identity crisis, and challenges to adult values, words, and behavior. New roles are tried and discarded. Social workers have noted that the best access to young adults often is via peer groups that are influential in this phase of development. Group work can be far more effective than the traditional one-to-one approach. With LSCA Title I support, Englewood Public Library in New Jersey developed a young adult literacy project that took this factor into account. The project featured group tutoring experiences where students "dropped-in" at predesignated hours. An adult was always available to provide backup support, and a corps of teen tutors was trained. A teen advisory council was formed and teens helped in adapting or designing training materials.

### *Disabled*

There is a growing awareness that many physically handicapped persons have not benefited from special education and need special literacy efforts. For example, literacy is sometimes a problem for the hearing impaired since oral language skills must be developed prior to reading, putting a deaf person at a distinct disadvantage. In 1985 Nebraska installed a TTD (telecommunication device for the deaf) machine at the Contact Literacy Center to give deaf illiterates access to its hotline.<sup>12</sup>

The LSCA program funded several literacy projects for the developmentally disabled. The Mansfield-Richland County Public Library in Ohio extended services to 350 developmentally disabled and functionally illiterate adults identified by area agencies. Three in-depth staff awareness sessions were held. Materials were ordered and a catalog of the materials prepared and distributed to group homes, area agencies, classroom teachers, users living independently, and to the library. In another project in 1984, the Fairview Training Center in Oregon

planned to develop an alternative to traditional special education methods for the mentally disabled, using a combination of computer-assisted instruction and computer-assisted video instruction.

### *Institutionalized*

Illiteracy among prisoners in some states is estimated at 60 percent and the average youthful inmate reads at the 6.9 grade level.<sup>13</sup> Over \$6.5 billion is spent per year on 700,000 illiterate prison inmates.<sup>14</sup> The LSCA program has been very responsive to the need for literacy programs not only in prisons but in other types of institutions. From 1982 through 1984, forty-one institutional literacy projects were funded under the program. The major emphasis of these projects was new technology, GED preparation, purchasing high interest/low reading level materials, and tutoring.

Under LSCA Title I, the Oakhill Correctional Institution in Madison, Wisconsin developed a technology-based Literacy Center that is being replicated in other institutions and public libraries in Wisconsin and in some out of state. The major features of the project include:

1. A literacy librarian.
2. Resident volunteers trained as peer tutors.
3. Computerized literacy instruction for those with a reading level of grade 2 and up with an emphasis on reading, grammar, spelling, and math.
4. One-to-one tutoring for those with no literacy skills, using a phonetic teaching method.
5. A core collection of basic skills software suitable for correctional institutions.
6. An internal referral network comprised of teachers and social workers.
7. Written guidelines with annotations that can be used as an acquisitions model for similar projects.
8. An English as a second language (ESL) component.
9. Vocational and occupational computer software collection for pre-release training.

### *People With Limited English-Speaking Ability*

It has been found that speaking English precedes learning to read and write in English. Many LSCA Title I projects focused on people who cannot speak or read in English. No fewer than nineteen languages or language groups were covered in LSCA limited English-speaking programs in 1984: (1) American Indian dialects, (2) Cambodian,



## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

(3) Chamorro, (4) Chinese, (5) French, (6) German, (7) Hebrew, (8) Hmong, (9) Italian, (10) Japanese, (11) Khmer, (12) Korean, (13) Laotian, (14) Polish, (15) Portuguese, (16) Russian, (17) Spanish, (18) Vietnamese, and (19) Yiddish.

Roughly one-third of illiterates age twenty and above were born abroad and speak a non-English language at home.<sup>15</sup> Each year an estimated 1.4 million refugees and immigrants not literate in English are added to the pool of adult illiterates.<sup>16</sup> These individuals fall into four different categories, each of which needs to be approached differently: (1) those who speak a language for which there is no written form (preliterates); (2) those who speak a language for which there is a written form but who do not read or write themselves (illiterates); (3) those who are able to read and write on an elementary level in their native language (semiliterates); and (4) those literate in their native language but who must learn the Roman alphabet to learn English (non-Roman alphabets).<sup>17</sup> Some LSCA Title I projects are designed to reach people in these categories. For example, in their 1986 project "Pre-English as a Second Language: Literacy in Spanish as a First Step" the Universidad Popular and the Chicago Public Library are cooperating in a literacy program that teaches Spanish-speaking adults how to read and write in Spanish.

One of the problems identified in English-as-a-second-language classes is that it is difficult to deal with diverse literacy levels, cultures, and learning styles in one class. The LSCA program responded by funding a number of projects in which ESL tutoring was on a one-to-one basis. For example, Bergenfield Public Library in New Jersey successfully tutored 300 non-English speaking persons on a one-to-one basis. Some tutors worked with two students, often from the same family. A strong collection of ESL materials was developed and the library referred students who "graduated" from this program to the local Adult Education Program.

In 1985, the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts planned to use LSCA Title I funds to write a guide to library ESL resources, arrange for its translation, and distribute copies to the Hampshire County Cambodian community and to tutors. In 1986 Oklahoma hoped to videotape ESL tutor training sessions and make them available statewide.

### **Statewide Coalitions—Current Developments**

Secretary of Education William J. Bennett has noted that the states must play a primary part in addressing both the dropout problem and

illiteracy, indicating that these are two national problems that do not lend themselves to a Washington solution.<sup>18</sup> States have recognized this and are taking on a growing role in literacy efforts. One of the most notable trends in the LSCA program is the establishment of statewide literacy councils or coalitions in thirty-three states.<sup>19</sup> State library agencies are active partners in most of these statewide planning bodies, and in some cases library leaders were directly responsible for their creation.

Statewide coalitions are supported with LSCA Title I funds in many states. Some of the activities of these coalitions follow.

1. A statewide information and referral service on literacy (Minnesota).
2. Manuals for starting a literacy program (Kentucky).
3. A statewide literacy conference (Virginia).
4. A speakers' bureau with literacy experts (Indiana).
5. A statewide literacy newsletter (Indiana).
6. A ten-year statewide literacy plan (Indiana).
7. The development of a tool to help companies assess literacy needs of their employees, calculate the costs of illiteracy to the company, and identify appropriate instructional strategies (Indiana).
8. A directory of literacy-service providers in the state (Massachusetts).
9. A literacy program in the state government to match state employees who need literacy training with other state employees who can serve as tutors (Illinois).
10. Hearings across the state to gather information on the extent of the illiteracy problem, what the communities are doing to address the problem, and how the state council might assist (Illinois).
11. A statewide literacy hotline (Illinois).
12. Assistance to local cooperative literacy ventures to move from informal to formal structures via contracts and memoranda of understanding (California).
13. The requirement of local coordination as a condition of grant funding (Illinois).
14. A literacy logo for the state (California).
15. Literacy proclamations and resolutions by state and local governing bodies and officials from such organizations as the Boy Scouts, churches, service clubs, and ethnic associations (California).
16. Broad involvement of other state-level agencies—e.g., Indian Affairs, Mental Health, Corrections, Human Services, and Education (Oklahoma).
17. Presentations at state conferences of service groups—e.g., Lions Club, Urban League, Firefighters Association (Oklahoma).

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

18. Representatives of labor, the media, and corporations included in the statewide literacy council (Illinois).
19. Local military bases involved in literacy projects (California).
20. An application to the Library of Congress to become a local center for the book (Oklahoma).
21. Regional literacy programs in rural areas for illiterates who do not want to be recognized receiving literacy training in their own small local community (Oklahoma).

### EVALUATION AND RESEARCH NEEDS

The lack of adequate needs assessments and program evaluations contributes to the disagreement in the literacy field on the definition of literacy, the number of illiterates, and the best approach to the problem. Methods for evaluating program effectiveness are often poorly defined and the demand for tutors does not leave sufficient time to evaluate projects. Some experts advocate that needs assessments be conducted in localities nationwide. Most projects do not employ control groups to compare the achievements of groups of persons receiving training with groups of persons not receiving training. In its recommendations for a national literacy policy, the Coalition on Literacy notes that evaluation money is needed for community-based programs that reach adults who read at the 0 to 3 grade reading level.<sup>20</sup> Potentially, the LSCA and Library R&D programs could make significant contributions in these areas of evaluation.

Secretary of Education William Bennett includes "research that guides policy and informs practice" as a key part of the department's Literacy Initiative.<sup>21</sup> Several areas where more information is needed have been identified in this review of LSCA Title I projects. These areas could be researched and developed as part of LSCA literacy projects, Library Research and Demonstration projects, or through private sector research projects. Examples of these research suggestions include:

1. An online, computerized database of high quality literacy print and software materials with critical annotations. Access would be by subject as well as title and reading level.
2. Computer software with voice component developed for adults with 0 to 4 grade reading levels.
3. An impact study of how former illiterates' lives have been affected by becoming literate.

4. Research on the dropout rate in library literacy projects. What elements cause it? What can be done about it?
5. Development of a matrix of potential literacy target groups (poor, young adult dropouts, families, employees, children, new Americans, disabled, institutionalized, elderly, urban, rural); tutoring methods (phonics, etc.); materials (books, software, newspapers); settings (library, school, home) and modes (classroom, one-to-one, informal group); and types of tutors. Identify the most effective means of helping illiterate populations.
6. Research on the most effective and low cost marketing strategies to attract tutors and students.
7. Study of the applicability in the United States of other countries' successful approaches to adult literacy development.
8. Research on the most effective methods for training tutors.
9. Research on the interaction between illiterates and tutors to determine which tutors are most effective—i.e., how well do middle-class tutors relate to low socioeconomic status (SES) students?
10. Research on the most effective uses of technology in library based literacy projects.
11. Research on the difference between the way children learn to read and the way adults learn to read.
12. Research on how well literacy programs serve learning disabled illiterates. Volunteer tutors generally do not have the technical background needed to recognize and help learning disabled illiterates. A simple screening device could be developed that would distinguish learning disabled illiterates from those whose illiteracy stems from other causes and that could refer the learning disabled to appropriate help—e.g., special education teachers.

### MOVING AHEAD

Public and private organizations are actively pursuing new ways of meeting the literacy challenge. The Contact Literacy Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, for example, has formed a nationwide computerized directory of literacy organizations and maintains a toll-free phone number that can be used as a clearinghouse for potential students and tutors.<sup>22</sup> ABC-TV and the Public Broadcasting Service recently announced Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) which will operate in two phases: outreach and community awareness. So far, forty national organizations have pledged their support to establish activities on the local level, and local

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

television stations will set up literacy task forces in their communities. National network programs will begin in September 1986 after outreach programs have been set into motion.<sup>23</sup> Programs will include documentaries and spots on shows such as "ABC News Nightline" and "World News Tonight." Both networks will provide a continuous focus on illiteracy in public service announcements.<sup>24</sup>

The federal government has also set up several new initiatives. In April 1985, two bills (S.J. Res. 112 and H.J. Res. 244) were introduced in Congress for a second White House Conference on Library and Information Services in 1989 with literacy as one of its themes. In addition, the Federal Interagency Committee on Education (FICE), whose goal is to maximize federal resources through interagency cooperation, has sponsored a survey of adult literacy programs in the federal government to determine what the government was currently offering in support of literacy. The survey identified seventy-nine federal programs that in FY 1985 provided a total of \$347.6 million for literacy-related activities.<sup>25</sup> A directory of these activities was produced.

Fighting illiteracy is also a high priority of the U.S. Department of Education. Secretary Bennett has asked all ED offices to examine ways they can help support literacy activities, and he has directed the Adult Literacy Initiative staff to coordinate education programs that have adult literacy components and to promote literacy efforts at all levels.

The Library Programs office has two new literacy initiatives underway. The first is a contract awarded in 1985 under the Library R&D program to the University of Wisconsin—Madison to update the 1979 survey of library literacy activities. This new study will also assess the current status of libraries in literacy education, determine or project an expanded role for libraries in literacy education, identify and describe some literacy programs, and assess the application and effectiveness of new technologies in literacy educational services.

The second initiative is the new Library Literacy Program under LSCA Title VI. This program was established by Congress when it reauthorized LSCA in 1984. Under this discretionary grant program, state and local public libraries will apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education for grants to support library literacy projects. Basically, state public libraries can coordinate and plan library literacy programs and arrange for training for librarians and volunteers to carry out such programs. Local public libraries can promote the use of voluntary services of individuals, agencies, and organizations in providing literacy programs; acquire library materials for literacy programs; and use library facilities for literacy programs. Grants are limited by statute to \$25,000. FY 1986 was the first year of operation of the program

with 241 grants totaling \$4,783,410 awarded to state and local public libraries to support literacy projects in forty-six states.

### THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

It is important to remember that literacy goes beyond the ability to read and write. Once those skills are mastered, literacy becomes a way of enriching one's life and contributes to the enrichment of society. Jonathan Kozol, author of *Illiterate America*, says the real cost of illiteracy is that it is an insult to democracy. People who cannot read can neither "choose" in a restaurant nor "choose" in the voting booth. He purports that the "Art of War" is a national priority while the "Art of Living" is left to volunteers.<sup>26</sup>

The challenge is there for all—the federal government, state and local governments, the private sector, families, volunteers, and illiterates. Rather than dispute literacy figures, definitions, and methods, rather than debate who is doing more and who less, we must recognize that there is enough illiteracy for all of us. All our efforts are needed in the battle against illiteracy. The challenge is to work in partnership to win the war.

### References

1. Machalaba, Daniel. "Hidden Handicap: For Americans Unable to Read Well, Life is a Series of Small Crises." *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern ed., 17 Jan. 1984, p. 1.
2. Bennett, William J. "Testimony Before the Senate Republican Conference Task Force on Education and Literacy." Washington, D.C., 4 Dec. 1985, p. 1.
3. Smith, Ester Gottlieb. *Libraries in Literacy Volume I*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1981, p. 30.
4. Business Council for Effective Literacy. "Libraries and Literacy." *Newsletter for the Business Community*, Jan. 1986, p. 4.
5. Lerche, Renee S., ed. *Effective Adult Literacy Programs: A Practitioner's Guide*. New York: Cambridge, 1985.
6. "Adult Literacy Challenge Growing, Experts Say." *Education Daily*, 30 Jan. 1984, p. 4.
7. Wallerstein, Nina. "Literacy and Minority Language Groups: Community Literacy as Method and Goal" (prepared for the National Adult Literacy Conference, Washington, D.C., 1984), n.p.
8. *Ibid.*
9. McGraw, Harold W. "A Message to Corporate CEOs." *Newsletter for the Business Community*, Sept. 1984, p. 1.
10. Board of Library Commissioners. *Library Service and Construction Act: Annual Program for Title I* (project no. 12.01). Boston, Mass.: Board of Library Commissioners, 1986.

## *Meeting the Literacy Challenge*

11. U.S. Dept. of Education. *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1986.
12. Nebraska Library Commission. "Library Service and Construction Act: Annual Program for Title I (project no. 85.2). Lincoln, Neb.: NLC, 1985, unpublished.
13. Skaptason, Trish. *Library Services to the Institutionalized: Fiscal Year 1984*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Library Programs, Public Library Support Staff, 1986, p. 2.
14. California State Library. *Data Sheet-Adult Illiteracy: Selected Statistics*. Sacramento: California State Library, n.d.
15. Bennett, "Testimony Before Senate Republican Conference," p. 4.
16. Bush, Barbara. "Our Reading Problem." *Washington Post*, 2 Aug. 1984, p. A19.
17. Savage, Lynn K. "Teaching Strategies for Developing Literacy Skills in Non-Native Speakers of English" (prepared for the National Adult Literacy Conference). Washington, D.C.: 1984, p. 1.
18. Bennett, "Testimony Before Senate Republican Conference," p. 6.
19. Ibid.
20. Coalition for Literacy. *Recommendations for a National Literacy Policy*. Chicago: Coalition for Literacy, n.d.
21. Bennett. "Testimony Before Senate Republican Conference," p. 8.
22. "Literacy Awareness." *ODL Source: A Newsletter Published by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries* 9(April 1984):3.
23. "ABC, PBS Launch Campaign to Tackle Illiteracy." *Higher Education Daily*, 11 Dec. 1985, p. 2.
24. "PLUS on Prime Time." *American Libraries* 17(Feb. 1986):94.
25. Kahn, Mary E. *Literacy Management Information Project Report Volume I*. Washington, D.C.: Washington Consulting Group, Inc., 1986, p. iii (prepared for the Federal Interagency Committee on Education under Contract No.300-85-0185).
26. Kozol, Jonathan. "Illiterate America" (address at conference: "Building Partnerships for Literacy: Libraries and the Community," Richmond, Va., 9-11 Oct. 1985).

This Page Intentionally Left Blank