



LITERACY MATTERS

SEPTEMBER 2015

Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.



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WHEN BEGINNERS ARE NO LONGER BEGINNERS

(submitted by Barbara Fody)

When we last met in the August 2015 issue of Literacy Matters, we discussed our newest program, Small Group Instruction for Beginners (SGB). In this program, beginning English language learners complete a 5 week session in introductory and survival English. If they attend all 5 mandatory sessions, students will qualify to be matched with a tutor for extended English study. But what happens after annual testing when the student is no longer designated a beginner?

The beginning level of English has its own range, from low beginner to high beginner. Depending on where the student tests in the range and other factors, such as motivation and attendance, working with a tutor could be a one to two year process. Once the student has moved out of the beginning phase based on testing, the Literacy Specialist and the tutor will engage in a consultation regarding the next effective step for the student, taking many variables (not just the student's test score) into consideration. Unlike the battle going on in public schools right now, we do not consider our students to merely be test scores, but rather individual adults with many components driving their personal need to learn the English language.

In most cases, the student will be ready to move into small group instruction (SGI), our program for intermediate students. This is of great benefit to intermediate level students because now they can engage in a slightly more formal setting, led by a licensed NYS teacher. This is a healthy next step for students who wish to pursue post-secondary education, or who are looking to develop skills to use in the workplace, as the group dynamic of SGI is something you cannot get in the one-on-one setting.

In some cases, the student will continue with the tutor. This can be beneficial for those (less frequent) cases where a student has very specific goals and plans to exit out of the program once those goals have been met.

In either case, our commitment is to carefully consider each situation holistically and select the optimal route for the student to successfully continue engagement with the English language. That is our promise to both students and tutors.

Please join us at our First Annual Tutor Conference on Saturday, October 17th, to learn more about the evolution of student pathways at Literacy Nassau. Information about the conference is available online, and a brief outline is included on page 2 of this issue of Literacy Matters.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

Well, the time has come. It's officially back-to-school season and in my house, there is a new level of additional anxiety that I've never before experienced. My husband is a teacher, so we have the benefit of having him home for the whole summer. Every year, though, he faces the first day of school with just as much angst as a freshman starting high school. This year, our older daughter, Haley, will be joining those ranks as she starts pre-school this fall.

I am working very hard on managing my expectations. I am so incredibly nervous about her going to school (albeit half-day) 5 days a week. What if she and the teacher don't click? What if she doesn't like the other kids? Have I adequately prepared her for this next step?

However, much like on my own first days of school as a kid, I've got my game face on. Haley doesn't know I'm nervous because every time we talk about it, I bravely smile and tell her it's going to be amazing and that I'm so proud of what a big girl she's become. Going back to school means being brave - for all of us - parents and children alike. So, I leave you with this thought: How brave must a person be to go "back to school" as an adult who can't speak a word of English?

Karen



When I was pregnant, I was warned, "They grow up so fast!" I didn't realize how fast until now, as we face Haley's first day of pre-school.



TUTOR SPOTLIGHT: BOB LANZISERA

Bob Lanzisera grew up on Long Island and attended St John's and Fordham Universities. He spent 37 years in education as a middle school teacher and as a principal in Catholic Schools. After taking early retirement, he saw an article about Literacy Nassau in Newsday and followed up with some research on the Internet. Bob feels that becoming a volunteer adult literacy tutor for multiple basic literacy students was one of the best decisions he could have made.

1. When you first met your student, what were your initial impressions?

Since my experience was as a middle school teacher, I was apprehensive about meeting my first adult student. However, Harley was so outgoing and friendly that my fears immediately evaporated. I found him to be articulate and open about his strengths and shortcomings. He spoke freely about his family, his job, his hobbies, and his experience with a previous tutor. He blamed himself for his academic failures and considered himself "stupid." Yet as we talked, it became clear that Harley began having difficulty in the early elementary grades in the early 1960s, and that there was nothing done at home or at school to help him. His job requires him to make repairs on building systems (plumbing, electrical, carpentry, etc.), and he is good with hands-on tasks. He admits, "I can fix things."

2. Did your student have clearly defined goals? What were they and how have they evolved over the years?

Harley initially joined Literacy Nassau because he had been passed over for a promotion at work. He was conscious of his inability to spell and wanted to focus on that. He explained how even writing a short note was difficult because he would draw a complete blank on how to spell common words. At first we worked with elementary level spelling lists. We practiced letter sounds and Harley spelled words with Bananagrams' letter tiles to improve his visual memory. Now, four years later, spelling remains a component of each of our sessions, but we also work on sentence and paragraph writing, vocabulary development, and reading skills. Success is measured in small steps: Harley can now write his own thank-you notes and greeting card messages.

3. Working with a basic literacy student required you to establish a high level of trust and respect with your student – how did you accomplish this?

I think that the main thing I did was to listen to Harley and be open to his needs and concerns. We always meet in the evening, and I start each session by asking him how his day is going. I give him time to talk about anything that is on his mind. Sometimes I put aside the lesson that I have planned because he has something he needs to discuss or work on. We have spent sessions drafting an answer to a letter he received, completing a form required by the government, and updating his resume. From the start I made it clear to Harley that our sessions are for meeting his needs. I also make it

clear that I respect his knowledge and skills. I am a do-it-yourselfer and Harley has given me guidance on several of my home improvement projects.

4. Did your student have any residual negative experiences with school/learning that were holding him back and getting in the way of future learning?

Harley's school experiences were mostly negative. He began to cut class in 7th grade and attended sporadically thereafter. Somehow he managed to graduate high school, but he often describes himself as "stupid." Early on I explained that he probably has a learning disability that was not recognized when he attended school. I don't think he took me seriously at first. I'm sure he was told many times that his failures were due to laziness on his part. We have since read articles on dyslexia, and I think Harley has come to realize that there are things he can do to overcome his problems.

5. What's been your greatest learning experience working with adult students?

I have been inspired by the way the students I work with have persevered and overcome obstacles that I never had to face. When I taught middle school students I knew that some of them were struggling, but I lost touch with them when they moved on. I seldom heard how they turned out as adults. In working with adult students I can see the long-term result of school failure and why we need to support programs that help all students succeed.

LITERACY NASSAU'S FIRST ANNUAL TUTOR CONFERENCE

Please join us for our first annual tutor conference on Saturday, October 17, 2015, from 9:00 am - 2:30 pm, at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock! A brief overview of conference topics can be found below. Check in begins at 8:30 am. Tutors who register by October 1st will receive a free raffle ticket for our School Supplies Giveaway. Breakfast and lunch are included. The suggested donation (to cover the cost of meals and giveaways) is \$15.

9:45 – 10:45	11:00 – 12:00	1:15 – 2:15
Informally Assessing Your English Language Learner (Umama Pasha, Literacy Specialist)	Links to our Future Success: Making the Most of Library Resources (Ed Escoffier, Librarian)	Informally Assessing Your Basic Literacy Learner (Umama Pasha, Literacy Specialist)
Hands-On Pronunciation Tricks (Kim Nau, ESL Teacher)	Basic Literacy Roundtable (Barbara Fody/Ocaria Silva, Literacy Specialists)	How Are You Lesson Planning? (Digna Johnson, ESL Teacher)
Next Chapter Book Club: Promoting Literacy, Connection and Community for Adults with Developmental Disabilities (Karen Micciche, Executive Director)	Financial Literacy Education for Low-Level Learners (Anthony DeGuzman, Bethpage Federal Credit Union)	Beginner English Language Learners: It's Easier Than You Think (Barbara Fody, Literacy Specialist)
Breaking Bad Habits (Ocaria Silva, Literacy Specialist)	Stepping Into The Shoes of a Language Learner (Cindy Treminio, Literacy Specialist)	Speed Networking: It's All About Connections (Alison Orme, Director of Volunteers)

ARE YOU SET IN YOUR WAYS?

(submitted by Alison Orme)

I am forty-nine years old and I am set in my ways. I would like to say that this has only been the case as I have gotten older, but that is just not true. I have been like this since I was an obstinate two year old who refused to be potty-trained (at least that is my mom's side of the story). I still maintain that I was being rushed and that communication was not as effective as it could have been. (I also do not like to be rushed, but that is a whole other story).

You might ask where I am going with this.

When thinking about communication between two people, it is critical for each to continually assess for understanding in order to ensure the appropriate flow of information that leads to learning and social connection. This is especially true when working with an English Language Learner. Now, I am not comparing either students or tutors to obstinate 2 year olds; I am, however, asking the question, "Where have you or your student become set in your ways and how could this be impeding learning?"

One great way to assess understanding in communication is to ask open ended questions to facilitate conversation instead of simply "yes or no" questions. Instead of saying, "Do you understand?", try asking, "What did you understand?" or "What do you think about what I just said?" Another approach might be to ask your student(s) to summarize what they just heard. This will encourage the student(s) to articulate their thoughts, expand vocabulary and practice speaking.

When working with an English Language Learner, it is also important to become fluent in non-verbal communication and physical cues. While statistics vary as to how much of our communication is non-verbal, most experts agree that body language, facial expressions, and tone make up the vast majority of what we communicate. That is why using the telephone is difficult for many English Language Learners as they only have their vocabulary, tone and sound recognition to rely on in order to communicate. To help the beginning learner, why not role play a phone conversation with them to help improve these skills as well?

(continued on page 4)

Do You Have a Friend Who Might be Interested in Becoming a Volunteer Adult Literacy Tutor?

The team at Literacy Nassau wants to thank you for your hard work and dedication to our mission of improving adult literacy in Nassau County. As a current tutor, when you refer a friend who completes one of our Tutor Training Workshops, you will receive a \$10 gift card of your choice.

Contact Alison Orme at (516) 867-3580 x21 for details.



FRIENDLY REMINDER

Remember to submit your student's instructional hours MONTHLY!

Our New York State funding depends on our ability to show the state how much time our volunteers spending serving our students.

All hours should be reported to your Literacy Specialist, either through our website, by e-mail, snail mail or phone at 516-867-3580. Our e-mail addresses are as follows:

Cindy: ctreminio@literacynassau.org
Barbara: bfody@literacynassau.org
Umama: upasha@literacynassau.org

LITERACY NASSAU PROUDLY PRESENTS: A DAY OF BRIDGE!

Date: Friday, September 25, 2015

Time: 9:00 am to 2:30 pm

Location: UUCSR: Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock
48 Shelter Rock Road
Manhasset, New York 11030

Enjoy: Continental Breakfast
1/2 Hour Lesson with Aaron Silverstein of The Bridge School of Long Island
3 Hours of Duplicate Bridge
Catered Lunch from Ben's Deli
Goody Bags and Fabulous Raffle Prizes!

Play to Win: An iPad mini (one for each of the players on the winning team!)

Price: \$45 per individual player
\$160 if registering a foursome
Price includes a sheet of 25 raffle tickets!

All proceeds will benefit Literacy Nassau, a local non-profit that utilizes volunteers to teach illiterate adults how to read, write, and speak English. Your ticket is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

To register for A Day of Bridge, please complete the form below and return by mail to Literacy Nassau in the enclosed envelope. If you would like to register via e-mail, please scan this form and e-mail it to kmicciche@literacynassau.org.

Name: _____

I am registering for (please check one):
 Myself A Foursome

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Please make all checks payable to Literacy Nassau.

To pay by credit card, please provide the following:

Card Number: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Security Code: _____

Name on Card: _____



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SET IN YOUR WAYS (CONT'D.)

Remember that an understanding of the specific non-verbal communication of your student is essential as the tutor in assessing when your student is either grasping a concept or has "shut down." Very often, students (who admire their tutors and very much want to please them) will nod along when they don't understand - a cue to ask more questions - or will avoid eye contact if they're not grasping a concept because they are embarrassed or ashamed. Use your intuition to help navigate these kinds of situations.

We are all set in our ways to some degree and have our go-to strategies for communicating with others. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it certainly has an impact on how we work with our students. As tutors, we need to continually challenge ourselves to remain focused on our student's goals and learning preferences. We can also exchange ideas with other tutors on the Tutor Exchange on Literacy Nassau's website, during roundtables held at Literacy Nassau or at the upcoming Tutor Conference on October 17th. Doing so will enable us to grow as tutors and best meet our student's needs.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Over the past month, we've trained 19 new tutors! Congratulations, and welcome, to the following people:

Donna Bennett	Ana M. Blasucci	Carl Borruso
Joan Borruso	Elinor Brown	Carolann Ceraldi
Mary DiBennardo	Nancy Doyle	Leslie Feinberg
Lorraine Glover	Cheree Himmel	Mindy Kaiser
Angela T. Martino	Anne Murphy	Megan Murphy
Elizabeth Pessala	Natalie Postelnek	Eileen Rossi
Mary Roth		

JUST FOR FUN: September kicks off the season for mouthwatering soups and stews. Do you have a favorite recipe that you'd like to share with other Literacy Nassau tutors? Email it to Alison Orme at aorme@literacynassau.org. We'll taste test the submissions and share our favorites in an upcoming issue of *Literacy Matters*. We'll even award a prize for our all-time favorite recipe. Good luck!

Are you enjoying the new monthly newsletters? We'd love to hear your feedback and what you want to hear more about.

