Reflections

—by Margaret Horne Lindop, Editor

Hopes and Challenges
Those of us who contributed to this publication have done a lot of talking and thinking about the issue of learning disabilities. The experiences and reflections of the action research teachers were especially important, since they came from the living laboratories of their classrooms.

Some experiences energized them, affirming that they were “on the right track,” as they
• gained deeper understanding of a student’s struggle with reading and spelling,
• documented red-flags for possible learning disabilities during the screening process,
• worked with a student to discover her real needs and goals, and used strategies and tools that helped a student “get it” for the first time.

Other experiences frustrated them, raising questions as to how to implement Bridges to Practice, given some of the characteristics of the program in which they teach: inconsistent attendance of students, open entry/open exit programs, and multilevel classes. Many adult education classes face similar obstacles.

Promising Practices
We have seen some promising practices that we’d like to share with you.

To address adult-learner retention:
• Have an orientation for the opening course in adult education. Work intensely with learning skills and strategies, goal setting, and self-advocacy.
• Work for strong coordination of adult services: adult education programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies, One-Stop Career Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation, community colleges, and others, so that adults with undiagnosed LD are identified, diagnosed, and supported in reaching their potential.
• Consider short-term (6 – 8 weeks), closed-enrollment classes with specified goals. Anecdotal reports from teachers and learners in such
programs suggest that this practice has great promise! Attendance improves and goals seem to have more meaning when each session counts in a structured course with a syllabus.

To address adult educator/teacher retention:
• Work for creative ways to create full-time positions. While such positions are still the exception rather than the rule, more full-time positions exist than a few years ago. Some adult education programs are combining several part-time positions to make one full time position. Other programs are making a strong case for full-time AE teachers to their school systems.
• Be aware of federal and state funding efforts that support adult education.

To address the delivery of LD-effective instruction:
• Work for intensive LD training for all literacy/adult education practitioners.
• Work with volunteer groups that partner with adult education programs. Trained volunteer teaching assistants can provide small-group instruction that is intensive and systematic, ensuring mastery at each step.
• Consider short-term, closed-enrollment classes in which particular content and learning strategies are taught intensively.

At the end of this project, however, we were reminded again—in no uncertain terms—how essential it is that we work not only in the classroom, but for systemic change. If we are to honestly address learning disabilities in the adult population, we must examine what we are doing—and failing to do—at every level in adult education classrooms and programs; in the workplace; across agencies; and in county, state, and federal legislatures.

We invite you to join us and others at these meeting places of LD information and conversation:
NIFL’s Literacy and Learning Disabilities Special Collection of Online Resources
—Coordinated by Margaret Lindop, Editor, Keys to Effective LD Teaching Practice, and Coordinator of the LD Action Research Project.

LINCS LD Discussion Group
<http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/nifl-ld/learning_disabilities.html>