



# MAACE Messages

Issue I

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## Beginning ESOL Learners Advice to Their Teachers

*By MaryAnn Cunningham Florez, from Focus on Basics: Connecting Research & Practice, August 2001, NCSALL*

“They [the teachers] have a lot of ‘esfuerzo’.”

It seemed like an innocuous comment from a learner about a two-teacher team, and it was only one of many that I furiously noted as I talked with a focus group of adult learners from a beginning-level class in English for speakers of other languages. When I opened my notebook a day or two later, however, I realized exactly how much this learner and others were telling me. The word “esfuerzo” made me stop and think. The English translation from the dictionary – effort, spirit – might not seem that informative, but we were holding these discussions in the learners’ native Spanish and the implications of that word in Spanish and the comments it sparked provided a wealth of insights into the instructional process in that classroom. The learners were telling me what they valued in their teachers’ practices: not only their heart and dedication, but also the focus, pace, activity, and the sense of purpose in the lessons they conducted. It provided me with a wonderful window into what teachers need to know and do to support beginning-level English language learners, and also gave me valuable information for planning and implementing the training of their teachers.

In ESOL, we often talk about learner-centered instruction and the value of including learners’ perspectives in our program and classroom planning. I began conducting learner focus groups as a way of including learners’ voices in our program’s evaluation. These comments added enriching dimensions to the approaches, techniques, and information that are usually a part of training for teachers working with beginning-level learners.

Ours is a community-based volunteer program in Virginia. We have approximately 140 predominantly Central American learners working primarily on basic language development within a life skills context. The advice that follows – representing a collection of the most frequently heard statements – is drawn from three different focus groups conducted in Spanish.

### *The Learners’ Advice*

*Repeat, but differently.* One of the most consistent suggestions was that teachers need to create opportunities for learners to practice material repeatedly but in different ways

and in different contexts. For some learners, this meant a better balance of opportunities to engage in speaking, listening, reading and writing. For others it meant different practice structures: pair work, individual work, round-robin, choral response, etc. For still others, it meant changing the context in which the content or material is used: saying, copying, and printing lists of numbers as a first step for pre- or nonliterate learners and later practicing them again as times, dates, and prices.

*Continued inside*

## ***Legislature Still Considering Education Funding***

As the legislature continues to pound out issues in Helena, adult educators need to be pro-active and attentive to what is happening! MAACE has distributed many formats for you to use to contact legislators including post cards that your students can use to write to your local representatives and senators. You can log on to the LINCS website, [www.nwlincs.org](http://www.nwlincs.org), for more information on contacting legislators. Here are a few bills that could have an impact on Adult Basic Education: SB323 – a bill that would change how school districts contribute to retirement, social security and unemployment insurance; HB133 – Professional Retirement Option for TRS members – a bill that would affect people who participate in TRS; and SB279 – a bill that would allow a person 19 years old or older to enroll in public high school. You can look up current action on these and other proposed bills by logging on to this web site: <http://leg.state.mt.us/css/bills/default.asp>.

## New MAACE President-Elect

Welcome Donna Bakke, MAACE's new president elect. Donna was appointed by the Board to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Jim Baker of Cutbank. Donna and honorary MAACE "member" Shane Cornell, Becky Bird's son pictured here with Donna at the winter MAACE board meeting, practice a little hands-on learning.



## Renew Your MAACE Membership

Join MAACE! Renew your membership! Go to [www.nwlincs.org](http://www.nwlincs.org), click on Montana, and then click on MAACE. Download a membership form and return it to the MAACE secretary, P.O. Box 10724, Kalispell, MT 59901.

MAACE Messages is published quarterly by the Montana Association for Adult and Community Education (MAACE). Contact Kristin Bay regarding newsletter submissions, questions, copies: P.O. Box 10724, Kalispell, MT 59901, [kristinbay@centurytel.net](mailto:kristinbay@centurytel.net), (406)752-9087. The Montana Association for Adult and Community Education (MAACE) advocates programs and services that are responsive to student needs. The Association encourages life-long learning, from basic literacy through advanced education, in a safe, supportive environment so that individuals can become informed, responsible citizens, family members and productive participants of their community, state, nation, and the world.

## Cowboy Up! for MPAEA 2003

MPAEA's 2003 Conference will be in April 23-26 in Reno, Nevada. Early registration is due by March 21. You can find details and registration forms at [mpaea.org](http://mpaea.org) or at [nwlincs.org](http://nwlincs.org).

## MPAEA 2004 in Bozeman, Montana

This is a heads up to all Montana adult, community and literacy educators that the Mountain Plains Adult Education Association 2004 Conference will be in Montana. The location is the Best Western GranTree in Bozeman and the dates are April 29 to May 1. Hosted by MAACE, the conference theme is *Voyage of Discovery – The Journey of Adult Learning*. Plans are now getting underway to prepare for this eight state conference. If any of you want to volunteer to help, e-mail Gloria A. Gregg at [ggregg@montana.edu](mailto:ggregg@montana.edu). A contingency of Montanans will be attending the 2003 MPAEA Conference in Nevada this April. At that time, we will be engaging in several activities to promote the 2004 conference. **MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!** We want to have lots and lots of Montanans in attendance.

## Legislative Page now on LINCS

Check out the new Legislative Page on Montana LINCS!

- Go to [www.nwlincs.org](http://www.nwlincs.org).
- Click on Montana.
- Then click on the **Legislative Action** under MAACE - Montana Association for Adult & Community Education.

## Join the Montana Numeracy Network

Are you excited about some math materials or techniques that worked well for your students? Would you like to share dialogue with other colleagues teaching math? Kathie Daviau and Rose Steiner, both of Billings, are starting an email list and are inviting any ABLE teachers in Montana that are interested in ANY numeracy issues to join them. Together Kathie and Rose have a total of 50 years of teaching math at the Billings Adult Education Center and both are members of the Adult Numeracy Network (ANN), a national organization supporting those teaching math to adults. Rose and Kathie have decided to call this email list the Montana Numeracy Network. If you are interested in joining the email list, please send an email message to either Kathie at [daviauk@billings.k12.mt.us](mailto:daviauk@billings.k12.mt.us) or Rose at [steinerr@billings.k12.mt.us](mailto:steinerr@billings.k12.mt.us).

## Newsletter Deadlines

We have established regular deadlines for the MAACE Messages newsletter.

- Deadline for September issue: Aug. 10
- Deadline for December issue: Nov. 10
- Deadline for March issue: February 10
- Deadline for June issue: May 10

Your input is appreciated. Email Kristin at [kristinbay@centurytel.net](mailto:kristinbay@centurytel.net) if you have information to share or a story that could be covered.

## Learners' Advice, *continued from page 1*

*Spend more time on topics and go more deeply into them.* Learners were generally very happy with the topics and themes typically covered in beginning-level classes: health, personal information, jobs or shopping. However, they suggested that teachers spend more time on each topic, offering more and different ways to practice the material and exploring issues and situations associated with it.

*Don't fall into a vocabulary rut.* Many learners felt that teachers spent more time on practicing vocabulary than on actually using it. Flash cards and labeling of pictures, are useful, but they shouldn't constitute the whole lesson. The learners want to use the words in sentences, in dialogues and completing other tasks.

*Do more reading and writing.* The majority of learners felt that reading and writing are the skills most often neglected in their beginning-level ESOL classes. While most acknowledged that speaking and listening were the immediate needs in their lives, reading and writing were the areas in which they felt they needed the most practice. They wanted teachers to make concentrated efforts to incorporate level-appropriate reading and writing as regular parts of the class, as they did with speaking and listening.

*Let us know how we are doing.* A number of learners expressed a desire for more tests and quizzes in their classes. With further probing, however, I found that what they really wanted were more opportunities of any type that would help them to check on their progress. The challenge may be for teachers to introduce learners to the variety of forms that assessments can take and to the concept of self-assessment.

*Give us more than the "simple present."* As one learner put it, how can teachers expect learners to talk or write about important experiences, their homelands, or even their families when so many of these things are in the past and all students have to work with is the present tense? If teachers are going to involve learners in activities that ask them to use life experiences as their basis, the learners want at least a start on the language tools required to do so.

*Know when to say, "That's all you need to know right now."* These beginning-level learners respect when a teacher tells them that they do not need to know all the intricate explanations behind a common phrase, such as "May I help you?" They are sometimes relieved simply to memorize what they need to know and proceed to the practice that is more appropriate for their level. Teachers need to make it clear for themselves the knowledge they absolutely need to frame their lessons and the extend of information they actually need to impart to their students.

*Watch your "teacher talk."* Many of the learners reported that teachers used very complicated language that confused them in the course of presenting materials. Teachers often devote a great deal of time to determining what content is appropriate. In an ideal situation, they then spend additional time figuring out how to present it in an understandable way. Teachers need to be doubly aware of the vocabulary and language structures that they use to present, explain and "fill" the time in and around lessons.

*Talk to us about learning and the learning process.* Learners wanted their teachers to talk to them about what learners need and what helps them most in the classroom. They are willing to share their strategies for learning, their goals, and their difficulties in order to help the teacher adjust instruction. Teachers may want to look at ways in which pictures, role playing and similar techniques could be used to gather feedback.

### *Conclusion*

These comments are not necessarily innovative ideas for working with beginning-level learners. In fact, most are a part of good teaching practices for students of any level. They helped me focus, however, not only on what the learners need but also on what inexperienced teachers often overlook or forget about when working with beginning-level ESOL learners. These beginning learners have a great deal of useful advice to offer their teachers as well as to staff developers and trainers. It would be well worth the effort to find ways to tap that resource.

*For a full copy of this story, contact Kristin Bay at [kristinbay@centurytel.net](mailto:kristinbay@centurytel.net) or NCSALL at [ncsall.gse.harvard.edu](http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu).*

## ***President's Corner***

*Greetings!*

*Recently, the MAACE Board had the wonderful opportunity to meet for its annual winter Board meeting. Let me assure all members that the Board is a group of dedicated, hard-working individuals.*

*Board members spent Friday evening discussing options for the annual ABLE Summer Institute in Bozeman. Regardless of the final choice, the Summer Institute will prove to be a valuable professional development opportunity. Besides the Summer Institute, MAACE members also will soon have the opportunity to participate in workshops provided by MAACE mini-grants.*

*On Saturday the Board convened early for a long workday. Donna Bakke was appointed interim President-elect since Jim Baker had resigned. The Board has taken on several tasks: updating the brochure, refining the Constitution, marketing the organization, creating a conference handbook, developing a MAACE handbook, and continuing its legislative communication. Already plans are being made for the MPAEA 2004 conference, Voyage of Discovery: The Journey of Adult Learning, which will be held in Bozeman on April 29 to May 1, 2004.*

*MAACE is an active organization that continues to make changes for the future. Even our logo is new! Renew your membership or encourage others to join. Become involved in an organization that provides excellent opportunities for professional growth!*

*Norene Peterson, MAACE President*

# RECHARGE, SWAP IDEAS AND DEVELOP LESSON PLANS AT A MAACE MINIGRANT ACTIVITY NEAR YOU!

The MAACE Minigrant program approved three professional development activities for this spring. Find an activity near you and take advantage of the expertise and the support of your fellow educators. Bozeman Adult Basic Education is offering a chance to recharge and work on teaching math on March 6. Corrections educators can meet and “swap” ideas at Fairmont Hot Springs on March 24. And if you're near Missoula, work on a lesson plan for a favorite website on May 23.

Bozeman Adult Basic Education is offering a one-day seminar Thursday, March 6, entitled, “Connecting and Recharging – Strategies for ABLE Educators.” In this three-pronged, one day professional development workshop, participants will have the opportunity to share best practices, experience mind and body rejuvenation activities, and gain strategies for teaching in the math content area. For more information, contact Jessica Sweet at 522-6012 or [jsweet@bozeman.k12.mt.us](mailto:jsweet@bozeman.k12.mt.us).

Corrections educators will have an opportunity to build on their table chat discussion from last fall's MAACE conference at a “swap meet” of ideas on Monday, March 24, at Fairmont Hot Springs. Bring

your ideas for “best practices,” developing a corrections educator network and professional group, recruiting and retaining corrections educators, and dealing with the problems unique to corrections education. The deadline for registering is March 17. Rooms will be funded on a first come first served basis. Contact Jack Powers at 846-1320 ext. 2293 for more information.

Missoula is inviting ABLE instructors from the region including Missoula ABLE, Salish Kootenai, Bitterroot LVA and Flathead Community College to identify a favorite, productive website, develop a lesson plan using that website and relate it to other materials used in the classroom. It should have a learning objective that is relevant to the NRS guidelines. On Friday, May 23, Missoula will host a half-day professional development meeting to share the lesson plans. The lesson plans will be gathered electronically and published by subject area via the Northwest LINCS website and printed in a hard copy to share with all ABLE sites in Montana. For more information, contact Donna Bakke at 542-4015.



**MAACE**  
**P.O. Box 10724**  
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***MAACE Summer Institute is June 9-12***  
***Watch your mail for information!***

