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Adult Illiteracy and Literacy Volunteers: a report of the efforts of one organization to alleviate the problem of adult illiteracy in the United States

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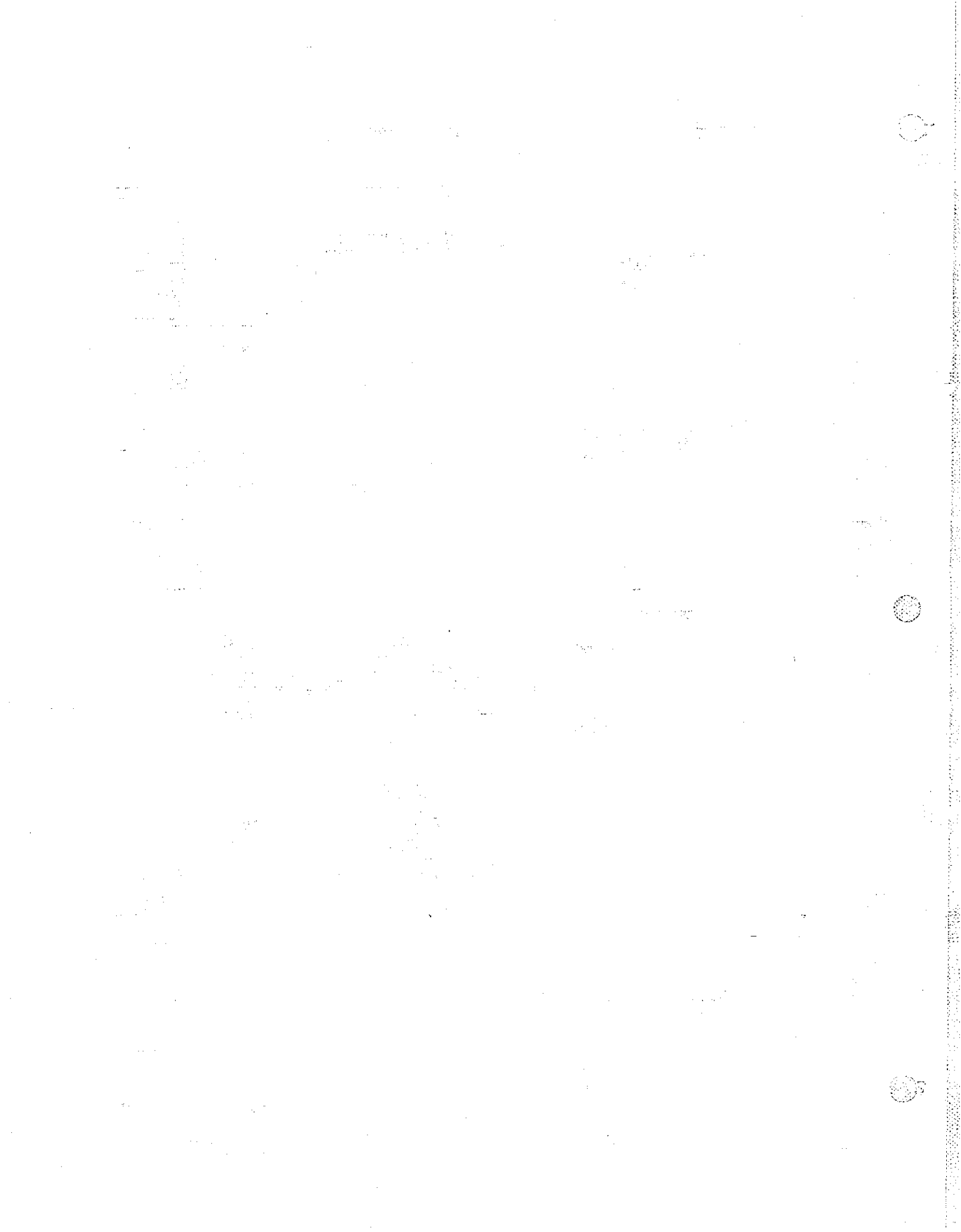
This report by Marilyn McGillen is accepted in its present form.

Date Aug 11, 1976 Principal Advisor Raymond C. Clark

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ADULT ILLITERACY AND LITERACY VOLUNTEERS

A report of the efforts of one organization to alleviate the problem of adult illiteracy in the United States

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

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Adult Illiteracy and Literacy Volunteers of America

Descriptors - Illiteracy, Adult Illiteracy, Literacy, Adult Literacy, Literacy Skills, One-to-One Reading Instruction, Reading, Tutorial Reading Programs, Adult Basic Education

Adult illiteracy in the United States is a grave national problem. One organization attempting to solve this problem is Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., a private, non-profit organization with affiliates in nineteen states. A tutorial approach to instruction through the use of volunteers trained in teaching basic reading to adults on a one-to-one basis is the method employed in this effort. Volunteers are trained in an 18-hour workshop highlighting four basic techniques and their effective utilization: experience story, sight words, phonics, and phonics-in-pattern. In-services, follow-up sessions, and consultations with volunteer reading specialists are available to tutors. A tutor training manual and a diagnostic evaluation have been developed and published by Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. Emphasis is placed on a description of Literacy Volunteers of New York City, Inc., an affiliate of the national organization. Administration and content of the program are discussed, including: tutor recruitment and training; student recruitment, diagnosis, evaluation and placement; tutor-student relationship; benefits, drawbacks and effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring of adults in basic reading by trained volunteers.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to present a description of (a) the problem of adult illiteracy in the United States and (b) the efforts of one organization -- Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. and particularly its New York City affiliate -- to combat that problem.

This report is the result of a combination of activities and sources: readings (those used as references are listed in the appendix); observations, discussions with students and tutors, as well as with professionals and others interested in the field of reading; my experiences as a Literacy Volunteer tutor; my experiences as a VISTA Volunteer serving as a program coordinator for Literacy Volunteers of New York City, Inc. -- experiences valuable from a learning as well as a teaching perspective. I am grateful to Dianne Kangisser, Director of LVNYC, and to Karen Griswold, my co-worker. Their influence, as friends and mentors, on my developing knowledge and understanding of the complexities of adult illiteracy and approaches to its solution, has been considerable.

While this report is not a personal statement or critique or an anecdotal record of my experiences, much of its substance is subjective because of my commitment to and affection for the program, its aims, and the people it serves and who serve it.

"It's no fun not being able to read."*

ADULT ILLITERACY

The problem of adult illiteracy in the United States is a grave one. It is a problem in virtually every area in the nation. A survey conducted for the National Reading Center, Washington, D. C. by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., in 1971, revealed that 15 per cent of the adult population (or about 21 million persons) lack the basic functional reading skills necessary to successfully deal with routine experiences: filling out application forms for a driver's license or Medicare, a personal bank loan or a job. These adults were unable to read instructions for long-distance dialing or classified ads for employment. They lacked the "survival" skills necessary in our increasingly complex society.

Semantic and quantitative inconsistencies make defining adult illiteracy an illusive task. In describing the American population, functional literacy has usually been defined in terms of the number of school years completed. In most current discussions, it has been set at five or eight years. The assumption is made that persons who have completed eight years of school would have the proficiency to confront everyday reading tasks with ease. By this

*according to an adult student in the Literacy Volunteers of New York City adult basic reading tutorial program

criterion, according to 1972 Bureau of Census data, over 14 million adults aged 25 years and over (or 13%) are functionally illiterate.

Although educational attainment is the barometer most often used in measuring reading performance, there are difficulties in describing functional literacy in terms of years of school completed. This is particularly so since this measure fails to account for (a) reading failure and lack of attainment of grade level established by standardized tests in school and (b) loss of reading skills in subsequent years. Actual reading ability in many instances would therefore be well below that inferred by the grade level label. Moreover, much of the reading material abounding in our daily lives employs vocabulary and grammatical complexity far beyond that of an eighth grade, to say nothing of a fifth grade, level.

Determining the level of proficiency that would make for a functionally literate person in our society has been a task of the Adult Performance Level (APL) study conducted over several years beginning in 1971 by The University of Texas at Austin under funding by the U. S. Office of Education.

Because the term literacy popularly connotes a low level of functioning, such as the ability to read and write one's own name, which may not have anything to do with functional competence, the APL study substitutes the phrase "functional competency."

Among the findings of the study are, one, that functional competency is culture bound, and, more particularly, bound to the technological state of the culture, with the implication that competency must be redefined as technology changes over time. A person who is functionally competent in one society may not necessarily be so in another. Second, it is a function of both individual capabilities and the requirements of society. Adult competency is two-dimensional: it is the application of a set of skills (communication skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening; problem solving skills; computation skills; and interpersonal relations skills) to a set of general knowledge areas (consumer economics, occupational knowledge, government and law, community resources and health).

A basic underlying assumption of the APL study is the positive correlation between competency and success in adult life, based on a composite index of income, level of education and occupational status. The measure of competency is taken from the milieu of adult life rather than from a standardized school frame of reference as often used to measure functional illiteracy. Competency levels based on the index of success mentioned above, have been determined by the APL study and are characterized by categories APL 1 (those who are functionally incompetent or who function with difficulty), APL 2 (competent adults or those functioning on a minimal level), and APL 3 (proficient adults). The results of the study suggest that far more adults are illiterate

in the sense of being able to apply skills to problem areas which are derived from pragmatic adult requirements than one might expect. Overall, approximately one-fifth of U. S. adults are functioning with difficulty, based on a representative sample of adults performing on indicators which cover the five general knowledge areas and four skills referred to.

The situation remains that those not functionally literate or competent, no matter how defined, experience a loss of self-confidence and personal dignity and satisfaction. Their lack of proficiency makes obtaining and retaining a job difficult, as well as providing for a family and successfully coping with domestic, social, and legal affairs.

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA, INC.

Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (LVA) is a private, non-profit organization supported by federal and state grants as well as contributions from business, industry, foundations, and individuals. It's purpose is to train volunteer tutors to teach basic reading to adults and teenagers on a one-to-one basis in an effort to alleviate the awesome problems of illiteracy. The essence of LVA's purpose is achieved when one more adult learns to read.

LVA has grown from its founding by one woman, Ruth Colvin, in Syracuse, New York, in 1962, working with Dr. Jane Root of Syracuse University, to its present operation consisting of Literacy Volunteers programs in fifteen states with well over 4,000 tutor/student couples.

States in which Literacy Volunteers are operating are: Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

LVA has three levels of organization -- local, state, and national. The national office, headquartered in Syracuse, sets the philosophy and direction of the organization, does research and development of materials and training, and provides local groups with the tools to set up programs. Local affiliates make up the operating arm of the organization; it is here at the community level that the strength of the organization lies. It is here that the teaching of reading takes place -- the purpose for which the

organization exists. Local affiliates joining together can create an umbrella state organization which acts as an intermediary between the national and local levels. Each local affiliate pays dues to the state organization which in turn contributes to the national headquarters. State directors and staff help maintain local programs and establish new ones. There are now four state organizations: Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut.

Literacy Volunteer tutors are trained to tutor in the community in general -- in locations mutually convenient to the tutor and student, such as one another's homes, a library, a church facility. In the case of New York City, tutors and students meet in a central location under staff and/or volunteer reading consultant supervision. In addition, many tutors work in the following program components:

Adult Basic Education (ABE) Centers - working with ABE students who need special help to keep up with their classes; with ABE dropouts; with students referred back to ABE when they are ready; with students unable or unwilling to attend ABE classes.

Corrections - tutoring inmates in correctional facilities and training inmates to tutor their fellow inmates.

Universities and colleges - The American Council on Education has approved LVA training and tutorial experience for three semester hours of graduate or undergraduate credit. Students enrolled in various university programs take the

LVA training and become Literacy Volunteer tutors, for which they receive credit toward their degrees.

Libraries - have adopted the LVA program as an integral part of their outreach programs and have become major sponsors of Literacy Volunteers in their communities.

Business and industry - Corporations and business firms have provided various resources, including in-kind services and release-time to employees to be tutored or to tutor.

LVA also has a technical assistance program through which the training, materials and expertise of the Literacy Volunteers organization is made available to agencies interested in developing their own literacy programs. The agency then becomes responsible for recruiting tutors and students if necessary, as well as training tutors.

Literacy Volunteers of America believes strongly in the concept of individualized teaching for the following reasons: (1) Many adults who are functionally illiterate have already met failure and frustration in classroom situations and associate these negative results with any group teaching. (2) It is difficult to find two or more adult students who are at the same reading level, who can meet to study at the same hour, and who can proceed at the same rate of learning. (3) Adult students respond well to materials adapted to their individual interests and abilities. (4) Adults who need basic reading help frequently have other social or economic problems. Personal concern as evidenced through a one-to-one relationship can be an important motivating factor in the student's ap-

proaches to solving other problems as well as in their reading success.

Basic to the LVA program is volunteer involvement. The millions of adults who have serious reading difficulties have not been or are not being reached through the traditional school structure. The problem is so great that there simply isn't enough money to pay reading specialists or other professionals, even if they were available, to reach everyone who needs help. A practical way to work toward achieving the right to read for all is through the use of trained volunteers working in conjunction with professionals.

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF NEW YORK CITY

Description

Literacy Volunteers of New York City, Inc. (LVNYC) is affiliated with the national organization, Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. LVNYC was established in 1971 with funding from a three-year HEW grant to test whether the LVA program could be replicated in a large urban center. The federal grant expired in 1974 with a small but viable basic reading tutorial program operating successfully. Since that time, LVNYC has been supported by the New York State Education Department, Division of Continuing Education and corporate contributions. LVNYC has just been awarded a large foundation grant for expansion of the program in the Borough of Brooklyn. There are presently about 175 tutors and students in the LVNYC program.

Because LVNYC was the first Literacy Volunteers affiliate based in a large metropolitan area, some adaptations to the basic national Literacy Volunteers program were desirable to meet the area's specific urban conditions. These adaptations include:

(1) centralizing location - Tutors are not scattered throughout the city, but report to either a central or satellite location.

(2) closer supervision of volunteers - a staff or volunteer coordinator is present while tutoring is taking place. A reading specialist is available to tutors on a regular basis.

(3) referral system for students - LVNYC assists interested students in finding appropriate available educational programs once their reading skills have improved.

(4) appropriate teaching materials - LVNYC maintains a library of basic reading materials suitable for adults and teenagers and looks particularly for material appropriate for adults living in an urban area.

The LVNYC staff consists of a project director, responsible to the national office, and two associates who are VISTA Volunteers serving as program coordinators. A third VISTA Volunteer serves as the office manager. The staff is assisted by volunteer coordinators, some of whom are reading specialists.

LVNYC operates a central reading site and office on the west side of Manhattan in space donated by the American Red Cross. A search for new quarters is now underway due to expansion of the program.

In addition to the central location, satellite programs are operating at:

(1) Teachers College, Columbia University. Graduate students in the Department of Psychology and Remedial Reading receive credit for LVNYC training and subsequent tutoring.

(2) New York Life Insurance Company. Over forty employees of New York Life have been trained and volunteers are tutoring adults at New York Life facilities.

(3) Brooklyn Public Library. Volunteers from the Brooklyn community have been trained to tutor adults in basic reading and writing in an LVNYC cooperative effort with the Adult Services division of the Library.

(4) Northside Center for Child Development. In a joint effort with the Northside Remedial Reading staff, LVNYC has trained volunteers for a special project to reach older adolescents in high schools in Harlem and East Harlem as well as parents of children receiving remedial assistance.

(5) South Beach Psychiatric Center. Senior citizen volunteers trained by LVNYC assist beginning students enrolled in an ABE class sponsored by South Beach.

Need for the Program

Literacy Volunteers of New York City is devoted (quixotically perhaps) to the elimination of adult illiteracy in New York City and was designed to supplement and complement existing educational programs. LVNYC works cooperatively with a variety of social service, community, educational and non-profit organizations in the city to serve the needs of educationally deprived adults.

According to the 1970 census, there are over 360,000 persons (7.7% of the population) in New York City 25 years or older with less than 5 years of school completed. Not included in these figures are persons between the ages of 16 and 25 and the additional thousands who

indicate they have completed five or more years of school but cannot read at the fifth grade level.

For those between the ages of 16 and 25 the problem is particularly acute. Thousands of New York City teenagers who have not acquired the basic skills for enabling them to lead productive lives endure frustration leading to truancy and dropping out of school. The dreariness of dead-end jobs, or unemployment and aimlessness follows, as well as, in some cases, drugs and criminal behavior.

Ironically, many adults who are high school graduates have reading deficiencies severe enough to seriously impede their successfully handling the exigencies of daily life.

It has been estimated that over half a million individuals in New York City can be classified by some means as functionally illiterate. In addition, according to the 1970 Census, there are well over 1,000,000 persons whose mother tongue is not English. Significant numbers of these persons speak little or no English nor can they read or write it.

While there are numerous reading programs for children, the adult seeking reading help in New York City has few options. Most of the tutoring facilities for adults that do exist, charge a fee -- sometimes a very high one -- for their services, and reach a very small portion of those needing help.

The New York City Board of Education had operated a vast network of adult basic education classes throughout

the city. Although many functionally illiterate adults could not or would not take advantage of these facilities for various reasons (about 50% of LVNYC students have at one time or another been enrolled in some form of adult basic education class with little or no success) there are others to whom these classes are vital. Unfortunately, the drastic budget cuts which the city has suffered has forced the reduction of many programs and the elimination of others.

Tutors

All tutoring is done by volunteers who meet with their students twice a week for a minimum of one hour each session.

Volunteers are recruited through various channels, including voluntary agencies; colleges and universities; business and industry; and the general public -- by word of mouth, public service announcements and interview shows on the radio, newspaper articles, posters and flyers.

To the extent feasible, each prospective volunteer tutor is interviewed by an LVNYC staff member. The volunteers represent a cross section of the city's population and there is no specific educational criteria for tutoring. Some tutors do have backgrounds in reading or related fields and have taught or tutored previously. However, many very successful tutors have had no prior relevant training or experience.

The major requirements for an LVNYC tutor are:

- (1) a desire to help an adult learn to read
- (2) a commitment to tutor two hours a week for a minimum period of one year, and
- (3) attendance at and successful completion of the tutor training workshop.

It is important for the volunteers to understand their role and responsibilities, on the one hand, as well as to receive on-going support and recognition for their contributions, on the other.

The Tutor Training Workshop (which will be discussed further on) is just the beginning of the tutor's relationship with LVNYC. Periodic in-service workshops are held as well as rap sessions for sharing ideas, problems, and suggestions. A reading specialist is available for consultation; help with lesson plans and materials is also available as well as a library of resource and reading materials for students and tutors, and the LVA Bibliography of Adult Basic Reading Materials.

Students

LVNYC students range from a minimum of 16 years of age to senior citizens and are from varied backgrounds. However, the common characteristic of the great majority is that they are native-born Americans who, for whatever reasons, have not learned to read or have not developed sufficient skills to read at a level necessary for successfully dealing

with the demands of daily life. There are some students in the program whose native language is not English but who speak English with reasonable ease and accuracy. LVNYC does not presently have an ESL component, as do many of the affiliates, but is planning to add such a program in the near future. (An outline of the LVA ESL training is included in the appendix.)

There is a waiting list at the present time of over 150 students seeking basic reading instruction. The students are from the broad spectrum of the city's population, representing varied backgrounds. The majority of the students are referred by various social and service organizations in the city. Others are referred by students already in the program, as well as through television and radio public service announcements, through friends or relatives who know of the program, through posters, etc.

For many students, the decision to seek reading help is a very courageous one. The majority of students are in their twenties, thirties, and forties and many have devoted over the years an enormous amount of energy and creativity to concealing their reading deficiencies. Students often refer to their being tired of "manipulating" or "conning" others in order to avoid being found out. In confronting the reality of their situation, they have eventually realized the importance of reading in order to achieve a sense of well-being. Students are often motivated to seek help for specific reasons -- for personal satisfaction, to get or keep a job

or find a better job, to read the Bible, to be able to read to their children, to pass the driver's test, to get elementary or high school equivalency diplomas, to be able to enjoy reading for pleasure, etc. There are students who are sophisticated, articulate people who have managed to succeed in various areas despite their lack of reading skill and want to further enhance their lives.

In order to determine the appropriateness of the program for each student seeking help, a personal interview is arranged with an LVNYC staff member. The interview consists of generally getting acquainted; obtaining educational history and the student's own assessment of his/her reading problem and specific reasons, if any, for seeking tutoring; explaining the nature of the program and determining the eligibility of the student for the program, i.e., the student reads at or below the 5th grade level, as determined by the LVA diagnostic evaluation (the READ test), and is available for tutoring at the locations and times available for this purpose. There are both day and evening programs. Exceptions to the 5th grade cut-off level are sometimes made, as, for example, in the case of a student who has the necessary phonic skills but can't apply them to decode effectively, thus interfering with comprehension.

If the student does not meet the conditions of the program, an effort is made to refer the student elsewhere for the services needed. If the student does join the program, a match with a tutor is made as soon as possible.

Students and Tutors

However subjective, an effort is made to match tutors and students according to compatible interests and personalities, as well as times available. It has been the experience of LVNYC that the personal relationship which develops between students and tutors has a profound effect on the progress of the student. Both students and tutors are encouraged to request reassignment if they feel the relationship is not a positive one.

The tutor is provided with background information on the student; the results, and their significance, of the READ test; and suggestions for materials and approaches for planning lessons. Tutors and students often use part or all of the initial meeting to get acquainted and to discuss the goals of the student. The tutor then becomes responsible for making lesson plans for future sessions; the student is responsible for doing the assignments (which are mutually agreed on), and both tutor and student share the responsibility of advising each other of confirmation or cancellation of sessions.

To motivate students by involving them in the formulation of their own learning objectives, tutors often work out a "contract" with their students. When the tutor and student have become acquainted and are comfortable with each other, the tutor explains the contract idea to the student. They agree to work together for a specific length of time, such as six or ten weeks; each one promises to

perform certain tasks to accomplish the short-range goals they have determined together. If at the end of the contract period, the contract has been deemed successful, new goals can be worked out and a new contract written. If not, modifications can be instituted or a termination of tutoring or reassignment can be discussed.

Benefits

As indicated earlier, there are many benefits to be derived from the tutorial approach. Some students have never attended school and find the prospect of so doing threatening, if not overwhelming. Others have met frustration and failure in the classroom and are reluctant or refuse to return to what for them is a damaging environment. The one-to-one relationship enables the student to receive individual attention to his specific interests and needs or learning disabilities. Students are encouraged to bring to the sessions any reading material they need or want to work on -- job forms or applications, cookbooks, manuals, Bibles, books or magazines for pleasure.

Beyond the improvement of reading skills, there are hard-to-measure intangibles of accomplishment which are highly significant. One-to-one tutoring is a two-way process in which the tutor learns as well as the student. In addition to experiencing the satisfaction of helping another person, the tutor becomes more aware of the student's life style and gains insight into a culture or way of life which may be far different

from his own. The tutor also experiences an appreciation of the challenge the student has accepted and a respect for the student's acceptance of that challenge. Such two-way exchange may go a long way toward lowering cultural barriers in both directions. The student experiences an improvement of self-image and a personal enrichment which helps alleviate the fear and shame associated with his reading problems. Positive effects on the families of students include imparting the value of reading to the children; a respect for and an understanding of the adult who is developing new skills, as well as respect for the volunteer tutor who is giving time and effort to others; and the security which can result from an improved position to initial or advanced employment resulting from improved skills and/or self-confidence.

Drawbacks

While the advantages to the one-to-one teaching approach and the use of volunteer tutors in the implementation of this approach are significant, the situation is not without difficulties. The two basic problems are retention of tutors and absenteeism of students.

Students are often beleaguered by problems other than their immediate reading difficulties. These concomitant problems can displace the reading sessions from a priority position in the activities of a student at a given time, with the result that a student may fail to contact his/her tutor and simply not show up for one or more sessions, or drop out. Students may

just lose interest or are not ready to take the responsibility for their learning or are prevented from making the sessions because of personal or other commitments. It is possible that the stumbling blocks encountered in the student's reading progress may be a reminder of other setbacks experienced in the past; the vistas explored in the process of reading may serve to remind the student of unrealized dreams or forgotten failures that threaten to crack a carefully constructed protective covering. The student may rather drop out of the program than risk facing painful reminders of his life's unfulfillment, or accept the vulnerability resulting from the beginning of an open relationship with the tutor.

In any event, the frustration that ensues on the part of the tutor due to erratic attendance or termination by the student is frequently the major contributing factor to tutor disenchantment and eventual discontinuance of the program. Even the most flexible tutors need a sense of continuity and accomplishment in the tutoring relationship in order to experience the feeling of satisfaction gained from helping another person, which, in most cases, is the prime motivation for becoming a volunteer tutor. Volunteers need to be reassured from time to time that their contribution is worthwhile and valued.

Personal or occupational commitments sometime interfere with a tutor's keeping a well-intentioned commitment to tutor for a year, and a certain amount of attrition can be expected in this regard.

From time to time, there are volunteers who, after attending the workshop or after tutoring briefly, find that they are not comfortable in their role for one reason or another or that they failed to realize the extent of the effort their commitment requires, and choose not to tutor or not to continue tutoring. Occasionally there are volunteers who have trouble understanding the basics of the training workshop and applying the workshop content to the tutoring situation, even after having repeated certain or all segments of the training. In rare instances, there are volunteers who are intolerant of the urban adult student population and its problems. In such instances, if it is appropriate to do so, other volunteer assignments can sometimes be arranged, such as helping with various administrative or clerical tasks.

Based on a survey of LVA affiliates, it was found that of the trained volunteer tutors, about 80% tutor at least one full year; about 65% tutor more than one year (but not necessarily with the same student). Of the students taught, about 25% drop out in less than three months; about 55% complete one full year of instruction; and about 40% complete more than one full year of instruction.

Training and Materials

The materials and format of the basic Tutor Training Workshop have been developed by Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. and are used throughout the LVA system. The workshops are given by trained volunteers and/or staff. Before being

placed with a student, the volunteer tutor must successfully complete the 18-hour training.

The core of the reading workshop is a concentrated, four session program, designed in segments and presented through slides and tapes with a detailed script in which the tutor is exposed to four basic approaches to the teaching of reading on a one-to-one basis and how to combine their use.

(1) The Experience Story is a technique which uses an expression in the student's own words or something from his own experience. The tutor writes down the story exactly as spoken by the student and then teaches the student to read his own words.

(2) Sight Words are words that are phonetically irregular or are so basic to reading that the student needs to be able to recognize them by sight, without the use of phonetic or other kinds of analysis.

(3) Phonics technique stresses the sounds of letters and letter groups.

(4) Phonics-in-Pattern teaches relationships between clusters of letters and the sounds they represent.

A more detailed description of these four techniques is in the appendix.

Demonstrations by workshop leaders and One-to-One (O-T-O) periods in which the trainees practice using the newly learned techniques are held throughout the workshop. The trainees also participate in an additional role play session in which they "teach" a segment of a complete lesson they

have prepared to meet the needs of a pre-assigned fictitious student in which they have incorporated the use of the various techniques into a comprehensive unit. Other major aspects of the workshop include lesson planning, student motivation, materials and their use, comprehension, testing, tutor attitudes, and discussion and question/answer periods.

TUTOR is the handbook used as the basic text in the Tutor Training Workshop and is kept by the trainees as a ready reference guide once they become tutors. The book gives step-by-step instructions for tutoring basic reading and corresponds to the material presented in the workshop. It is addressed primarily to those who have had no experience in teaching, although professional teachers also find it helpful. The appendix includes common sight words, functional reading word list for adults, useful words for filling out forms, signs in capitals, phonics-in-pattern word lists, and lists of endings added to base words.

READ (Reading Evaluation-Adult Diagnosis) is the test administered to all students who enter the program. While in the LVNYC affiliate, the students are tested by staff members rather than by their own tutors, some time is devoted in the workshop to familiarizing the trainees with the test and its implications. READ evaluates the student in three basic areas: Word Recognition (sight words); Diagnosis (word analysis); and Reading Inventory (word recognition in context, reading comprehension and listening comprehension). The range of reading skill covered

is from complete non-reader to that corresponding to a 5th grade level.

In addition to the pre-service Tutor Training Workshop, periodic in-service workshops are held on a variety of topics, including learning disabilities, techniques for tutoring more advanced students, developing comprehension skills. Other follow-up activities are held as well, including rap sessions and consultations with volunteer reading specialists and/or staff.

LVNYC also includes in its in-service training, a workshop in Glass-Analysis for Decoding Only which is concerned not with "reading" (i.e., meaning of words), but with the "process" of decoding (i.e., the way in which fluent readers group letters in clusters in order to be able to say words without regard to their meanings).

Evaluation

In order to evaluate quantitatively the student's progress, a post-test is administered after approximately 50 hours of instruction. The results of this READ post-test are compared with the results of the READ test given to the student at the time of his initial interview. On the average, LVA tutors are able to raise the reading level of students more than one grade level after 45 hours of instruction. The results of an independent evaluation of the LVA reading instruction performance is included in the appendix.

APPENDIX

Four Techniques for Teaching Basic Reading on a One-to-One Basis

(1) The Experience Story is a language experience approach to teaching reading which uses an expression in the student's own words or something from his own experience. The tutor tells the student he is going to write down what the student has just said, and as he writes in manuscript he repeats aloud the student's exact words. This text (which may be only a sentence or two) then becomes the reading material for that portion of the lesson. The tutor may read it first or the student and tutor read it together, and the student eventually reads it alone. Depending on the level of the student, he may also write the experience story or a part of it. The tutor asks the student what words he particularly wants to learn and puts those words, as well as one or more words the tutor may consider useful, on cards and teaches the student to learn those words by sight -- by first matching the word on the card to the word in the story and then by identifying it in isolation.

The advantages to this technique include the inherent interest the student has in reading his own words and the positive feeling resulting from having met so soon with success in reading -- a word, a sentence, or more. It can also serve as an icebreaker in getting to know the student. A possible disadvantage is that the student may have memorized, not "read," what he had said. This can be checked by asking

the student to identify the words in isolation or by having the student put the words, which the tutor has written on individual cards and scrambled, back in order to recreate the sentence. (Identifying a word in isolation and being able to write it is a confirmation to the tutor and the student that the word is actually "known.")

For a shy or reticent student, the tutor could initiate a discussion of a photograph or a picture from a magazine and incorporate the student's responses or reactions into a variation of the experience story. For a more advanced student, the tutor and student may read a newspaper article together or the tutor may read it aloud to the student and have the student dictate his comments to the tutor or write them himself and read them to the tutor.

(2) Sight Words are those learned by instant recognition of the whole configuration rather than by analysis of its parts. Words that are best taught by sight fall into these general categories: (1) the most common words that occur with very high frequency, (2) words which are phonically irregular, that is, they do not follow the expected sound patterns normally associated with the letters comprising them (3) words with particular immediacy, like: DANGER, and (4) those that pose special difficulties for the student, perhaps because they cannot be associated with a mental picture of an object, or because the student does not yet have the decoding skills necessary for deciphering them.

Tutors are first introduced to sight words through the experience story technique in which they isolate certain words from the story to teach by sight.

There are several important things to remember when teaching sight words. One, if the student doesn't know or forgets a word he should be told what it is rather than try to "sound it out" and that particular word should be put aside momentarily and returned to periodically until the student can easily identify it.

Second, each new word should be learned before the next one is introduced; similarly, the first two should be known before the third one is introduced, and so on. They should then be reviewed in that lesson as well as in subsequent lessons. The importance of review cannot be over-emphasized.

Also, dissimilar words are best taught together in order to avoid confusing the student. It is easier for the student to learn several new words at a time if they are easily distinguishable from each other -- semantically and physically. For example, it is wise to avoid trying to teach what, where, and when at the same time since all those words (a) are short, (b) share common beginning letters, and (c) are abstract, leaving the student little to help him remember the words and requiring him to make subtle distinctions he may not have the skills and confidence to make. To the extent possible, it is preferable to teach words that are physically unlike (short words and long words or words with distinguishing

characteristics like double letters) and to mix abstract words with concrete or "personality" words to which a mental picture can be attached.

Further, it is important that the student be able at some point to write his sight words, first by copying them if necessary, but eventually by memory. The goal of increasing the student's sight word vocabulary isn't really accomplished until he can write as well as read those words.

Finally, while it's true that with some beginning students progress is measured in excruciatingly small steps, most students have no real difficulty in learning sight words in the usual manner. However, for those students who experience genuine difficulty, there are several possible alternatives. For example, in the visual memory approach, the student is asked to form a mental picture of the face of a friend and then to try to form a mental picture of a word in the same way. Using the kinesthetic and tactile methods, the student can, for instance, be asked to trace the outline of the word or trace over the letters themselves, or trace the word in the air with his finger; sometimes a student will be helped by having the tutor trace the word with his finger on the student's back, or by the student tracing the letters of the word on sandpaper or wet sand.

(3) Phonics technique stresses sound/symbol relationships. Understanding the relationship between the written symbols and the sound or sounds they represent, is an extremely impor-

tant step toward the student's becoming an independent reader. It is the first step in developing word attack skills which enable the student to figure out new words. Non-readers and beginning readers are often not even aware that letters represent sounds and that there is a certain consistency to the relationship.

In the phonics approach the student first studies each letter individually. (More specifically, the consonants are learned individually with the vowels more advantageously taught in pattern.) He learns the name of the letter, the sound of the letter, how to write it, and a key word to help him remember the sound of the letter.

Some important considerations to be kept in mind regarding the phonics approach are:

a) being aware of and familiar with the sounds of the letters. (This is not as gratuitous a suggestion as it may appear!)

b) It is more helpful to the student if the tutor elicits the sound of the target letter from the student (through the use of his key word) than providing the sound for him. If the student cannot produce the sound, the tutor should, of course, give it to him.

c) The order in which the letters are to be taught is important. The tutors are encouraged to follow the sequential pattern of a workbook they choose to use with their students or the sequence suggested in TUTOR (the LVA tutor training manual). Whatever the rationale (frequency of

appearance in beginning reading material, for example, or discrimination difficulty), the important thing for the tutor to appreciate is the advisability of adhering to a sequential pattern -- generally not teaching digraphs and blends, for instance, until after the single consonant sounds are learned.

The TUTOR sequence begins by teaching the sustaining sounds of m, s, and f first; then d and t, followed by short a. Five more consonants are taught followed by another short vowel, and so on, leading eventually to digraphs, blends, long vowels, and double letter combinations. The sustaining sounds (those which can be held in isolation longer than other sounds can) are thought to be easier to hear and to produce. After learning the first five consonants and a short vowel /a/ cluster, there are various new words available to the student. For example, using the /at/ cluster: mat, sat, fat, tat; or, sad, dad, fad, mad with the /ad/ cluster, and so on.

The trend in teaching reading is toward the linguistic approach (described in phonics-in-pattern, the fourth technique) and away from teaching vowels in isolation. While the sounds of most consonants are generally consistent or subtly modified, vowels have many different sounds and are more drastically modified by their environment.

d) And, despite all that has been said about sequencing, ideally a sense of flexibility should be maintained which will enable the tutor to seize an opportunity spontaneously

presented in the course of a lesson to teach whatever is appropriate -- regardless of its order in the hierarchy!

(4) Phonics-in-Pattern teaches relationships between clusters of letters and the sounds they represent. This technique is also known as the word family or linguistic approach to teaching reading. Once the student has internalized the concept that groups of letters that look alike often/usually sound alike, he has made an important breakthrough in learning to read. He is able to begin making generalizations about words.

Central to using phonics-in-pattern effectively is the student's ability to rhyme. For most students this is easily grasped if not already possessed. For those students for whom this is difficult, practice in nonsense rhyming is often effective. Using a word like elephant, for instance, the tutor can begin the pattern orally with elephant, melephant, felephant, etc. asking the student to continue, giving the student sounds he already knows to put at the beginning of the word. The longer the rhyming unit, i.e., the more common elements in the pattern, the easier it is for the student to understand the notion of rhyming.

Once this is established, the tutor can begin using the technique which is simply the use of common ending elements to form word families. For example, for a beginning student who knows the cluster /ad/ and some of the words that belong to that family (mad, sad, fad) he has a tool with which to decode the unfamiliar word lad, or glad, or pads.

For another student, the word fright isn't necessarily a frightening prospect if he knows the family of right, sight, might, etc.

This technique is very useful for the student learning to decode larger words by breaking them down, alone or with the aid of his tutor, into manageable parts (not necessarily following the "rules" of syllabication) and applying the word family approach to identify the various elements. For example, a beginning student confronting the word winter could break it up into win and ter and proceed as follows:

- 1) knowing that i-n is in
- 2) and that t-i-n is tin
- 3) then w-i-n is win
- 4) and if h-e-r is her
- 5) then t-e-r is ter
- 6) and together they're win ter
- 7) winter

The same process can be applied to longer or more sophisticated words by more advanced students.

Again, some things to keep in mind when using the phonics-in-pattern approach are:

- a) It is not useful for teaching all words; some words, as discussed earlier, are better taught as sight words.
- b) The words to be taught in patterns should be listed vertically so the student can easily see the common elements the words all share.
- c) ~~The tutor should tell the student the first word in the pattern, and,~~
- d) as with the other techniques, constant review is important.

Evaluation

As part of a U. S. Office of Education demonstration project, LVA received an intensive independent evaluation. The November 1973 report shows the result of individual student progress as measured by probability sampling using random sampling techniques and the LVA reading test. In the data that follows, the average number of student hours taught was forty-two.

<u>What was tested</u>	<u>Students Sampled</u>	<u>Grade Level Improvement*</u>
Word Recognition	32	no improvement
	22	1 grade improvement
	18	2 grades improvement
	9	3 grades improvement
	2	4 grades improvement
	2	5 grades improvement
	3	6 grades improvement
	<u>7</u>	<u>7 or more grades "</u>
Total	95	66.3% improved one or more grade levels
Reading Comprehension	36	no improvement
	17	1 grade improvement
	18	2 grades improvement
	6	3 grades improvement
	7	4 grades improvement
	2	5 grades improvement
	3	6 grades improvement
	<u>6</u>	<u>7 or more grades "</u>
Total	95	62.1% improved one or more grade levels
Listening Comprehension	48	no improvement
	18	1 grade improvement
	12	2 grades improvement
	4	3 grades improvement
	3	4 grades improvement
	3	5 grades improvement
	2	6 grades improvement
	<u>5</u>	<u>7 or more grades "</u>
Total	95	49.5% improved one or more grade levels

Diagnosis

(Word attack skills)

Improvement in all students

* corresponds with 1/2 school grade

(Evaluation conducted by Richard Ford Associates, Inc.
Syracuse, New York)

English as a Second Language

Following is a description of the Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. English as a Second Language Tutor Training Workshop. This ESL component has not yet been introduced into the Literacy Volunteers of New York City program but its inclusion is anticipated in the future.

The ESL 11-hour workshop is in addition to the regular basic reading workshop and it, also, is presented through the use of slides and tapes. It is designed to enable a volunteer to tutor a non-English speaking student in conversational English. The student may or may not be literate in his own language.

The training includes segments on orientation and testing, listening comprehension, getting started (initial conversation, cues and signals, modeling), visual aids (objects, actions, pictures, stick figures), language skills (sentence structure and word order, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension), basic techniques (substitution drill, response drill, backward buildup, dialogue, teaching through situations), and citizenship and other cultures (sensitivity, cultural differences and similarities, citizenship requirements).

A detailed script accompanies the slides and tapes. A text for the workshop, I Speak English, is currently in the process of publication. Suggested materials are included in the Bibliography of Adult Basic Reading Materials.

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